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Islamic Religious Schooling – The North American Context

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Abstract: In recent years, the concept of Controversiality has been the subject of much discussion in various didactic discourses. This statement can undoubtedly also be applied to religious education, although the study of this topic has so far been rather selective and not very systematic. The article provides an insight into the current discussion in religious education. The focus is on current distinctions, didactic strategies and empirical research results. On this basis, analytical starting points for understanding the lack of controversy in religious education as well as further perspectives for overcoming this lack are discussed.
Keywords: controversiality, religious education, empirical educational research, plurality.

Zusammenfassung: In den vergangenen Jahren wurde in unterschiedlichen fachdidaktischen Diskursen mit großem Engagement über den Begriff der Kontroversität nachgedacht. Diese Aussage lässt sich zweifelsfrei auch auf die Religionspädagogik übertragen, wobei die Beschäftigung mit diesem Thema bislang noch eher punktuell und wenig systematisch erfolgt. Der Artikel gibt einen Einblick in die aktuelle religionspädagogische Diskussion. Der Fokus liegt dabei auf aktuellen Unterscheidungen, didaktischen Strategien und empirischen Forschungsergebnissen. Auf diesem Hintergrund werden sowohl analytische Ansatzpunkte zum Verständnis des Kontroversitätsmangels im Religionsunterricht als auch weiterführende Perspektiven zur Überwindung dieses Mangels diskutiert.
Schlagwörter: Kontroversität, Religionsunterricht, empirische Unterrichtsforschung, Pluralität.

1. Introduction

For most observers, accredited Islamic schools in the West struggle to provide strong academic results, to preserve the community's collective religious identity, to establish a balanced civic identity that is aligned with common national values and to prepare students for their academic excellence opportunities (Shatara, Barakat & Bourkiza, 2020; Saada, 2022; Brifkani, 2021). Memon (2019), for instance, asserts that most of these schools in North America were built by educated Muslim migrants, who usually modelled them after their own lived experiences back home, which were mostly shaped by educational institutions established by the coloniser in their countries of origin. In other words, this means teaching secular subjects from a secular perspective, then hashing the curriculum with a few hours of Islamic instruction. However, the challenge most of these schools face compared to mainstream secular schooling, which we are investigating in this study, consists primarily in the inculcation offered by the institutions' learning environment (i. e. like-minded students, lack of critical thinking, mostly first-generation staff, etc.) and not, necessarily, by the Islamic curricula they teach. In other words, as the latter model of schools does not embrace an authentic Islamic epistemology as a teaching approach, they do not qualify as religious Islamic schools, but, at best, as community schools for Muslims or schools for immigrant Muslim communities.

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In contemporary discourse, conservative Islamic schools have garnered significant attention, especially from Western media. Regularly, these institutions often became the focal point of public debates on faith-based education, being labelled as potential breeding grounds for hatred, indoctrination, radicalisation and extremism. Such negative generalizations have contributed to the formation of a phobia against anything labeled 'Islamic,' as highlighted by Al Kandari (2004), Zine (2008), further fuelling the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry. In this study, we use a descriptive qualitative methodology supported by outcomes of ethnographic fieldwork, to approach discussions on Islamic education with nuance, recognising the diversity within these institutions and challenging stereotypical portrayals that can lead to harmful biases.

This paper does not focus on the legal challenges these schools face. Instead, it examines how they operate in Western countries, particularly in non-Muslim societies. We explore their educational models, cultural integration, and the strategies they use to maintain their religious identity and values while engaging with the broader societal context.

2. What is an Islamic school?

In the context of this chapter, we employ the term 'Islamic schools' to define modern cultural and religious accredited schools that adopt the state's secular curriculum and add a few hours of Islamic instruction (Qur'an, Islamic studies, Arabic, etc.) to meet the school's confessional and cultural mission. In Arabic, we do not refer to an Islamic school as a Muslim school, or *madrasa muslimah,* because the adjective *muslimah* is usually restricted to portray living persons (i. e. a Muslim woman not an Islamic woman). According to Zine (2008, 7), whereas the term Islamic, which is less open to discursive manoeuvring, refers to adherence to a specific tradition, it is the term 'Muslim' that indicates the adherence to the Islamic faith. In any case, the meaning of the term, void of any political bias, is still ambiguous and useless unless it is employed in a specific context. Therefore, we conclude that an Islamic school is a full-time educational institution founded by and for Muslim communities, where the Qur'an is usually taught in Arabic and Islamic core values are instilled, along with the formal curriculum required by the state in which the school is accredited to legally operate (Tifli, 2020; Saada, 2022). In other words, to legally open their doors to their communities, Islamic schools are obliged to implement two parallel epistemologies, the first responds to the tradition and heritage behind the school's community (Shia, Sunni, Ahmadi, etc.), and the second strives to meet the academic requirements of the state.

3. The history of Islamic education in North America: The first traditional madrasah

The inception of Islamic education, particularly the establishment of the first madrasah, poses challenges in pinpointing an exact date due to differing interpretations. If we adhere to a fundamental definition of a traditional learning circle as a madrasah, then it is likely that the first school existed in the house of the Prophet's companion, al-Arqam ibn Abi-l-Arqam. This location served as the setting for early Muslims' clandestine gatherings, where they received direct teachings about Islam from the Prophet. However, if we adopt a more contemporary definition of a school, some propose that the first recognized was constructed in Nishapur in 329 AH/941 CE, as suggested by Al Kandari (2004, 10). Additionally, various forms of schools emerged in Baghdad during the Abbasid period (750–1258) and the idrisid dynasty in Morocco. In fact, al-Qarawiyyin mosque and university located in Fez, Morocco was founded in the 9th century and subsequently became one of the leading educational centers of the Islamic Golden Age.

The evolution of the madrasah system took a significant turn in the 9th and 10th centuries, emerging as a systematic traditional center for religious education under the supervision of the state and possessing its own budget funded directly by the Caliph's diwan. According to Al Kandari (2004, 9), the curriculum

of these madrasahs encompassed the study of the Qur'an, traditions of Prophet Muhammad (hadith), jurisprudence (fiqh), and the Arabic language.

In his book titled "The History of Islamic Schools in North America: From Protest to Praxis," Memon (2019, 135) underscores two crucial points regarding the role of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) regarding the creation and emergence of North American Islamic schools. Firstly, MSA's founding members, who advocated for the necessity of Islamic schools, played a pivotal role in their establishment. They sacrificed their time, energy, and resources for that cause. Secondly, the MSA's active presence in both Canada and the United States contributed to the educational landscape, elucidating the similarities in the Canadian and American immigrant experiences involved in founding these institutions.

Expanding on this, it is worth noting that the Muslim Students Association served mainly as a catalyst for these institutions, not only advocating for the establishment of Islamic schools but also fostering the sense of unity, community, and the shared purpose among Muslim communities across North America. The MSA's efforts strived to transcend geographical boundaries, impacting, with different degrees, both Canada and the United States, and influencing the educational trajectory of Muslim immigrants in the two countries.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the roots of Islamic schools in North America extend beyond the immigration waves from Muslim countries. Contrary to common perception, these schools were first founded by the Nation of Islam in the 1930s, highlighting a historical dimension that predates the broader influx of migrant Muslims into North America. This historical context adds depth to the understanding of the evolution and diverse origins of Islamic education in the region, enriching the narrative of its development over time.

Besides these Islamic schools initiated by the Nation of Islam, 'immigrant Islamic schools' in North America were primarily established by young Muslim professionals, graduate students, and academics, as highlighted by Memon (2019). The beacon of Islamic schools was in the beginning learning circles with a limited curriculum, concentrated mainly on learning Arabic and Islamic education and morals, hosted by Mosques in the weekend for the kids of their fellow attendees. These learning circles are still mainstream in the Muslim Community and almost every Mosque has its weekend Islamic school. These institutions adopted an epistemological approach and a strategic framework distinct from 'black' schools. In contrast to the latter, they did not outright reject the form and structure of secular schooling. Instead, their focus centred on the perceived deficiency in imparting moral values within public and private secular schools and the growing disparity between the values of the Muslim community and Western societal norms (Brifkani, 2021; Brooks & Ezzani, 2017). Therefore, for the sake of academic clarity, we refer to the schools concerned with this chapter as 'immigrant Islamic schools' to differentiate them from "The Nation of Islam Schools" that didn't share the same vision and mission.

As of 2021, approximately 300 Islamic schools in the United States serve over 50,000 students. In Canada, while exact figures are less readily available, numerous private Islamic schools operate across the country, particularly in cities like Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, and Scarborough. Therefore, combining these figures, there are over 300 Islamic schools in North America (Azmat & Shatara, 2023).

4. The rationale behind Islamic Schools

The development of state-accredited Islamic schools in North America was driven by the realization among Muslim immigrants that they were here to stay, leading to a demand for full-time Islamic education. Early efforts faced legal, financial, and societal challenges before gaining accreditation. However, not all Islamic schools were founded by immigrants. The Nation of Islam schools, for example, were established by African Americans who converted from Christianity to Elijah

Muhammad's Islam. Additionally, the rise of Black movements in the 1970s likely influenced the broader push for Islamic education, challenging the notion that the need for dedicated schools emerged solely from immigrant concerns (Tiflati, 2020 & 2022).

It is important to investigate the nuanced motivations behind the establishment of these immigrant Islamic schools. Originally, as mentioned above, they were not conceived as permanent institutions; rather, they first served as a temporary solution to temporary academics and experts and their families. Early Muslim immigrants, including youth attending these schools, envisioned returning to their countries of origin to help build their communities (Haddad, Senzai & Smith, 2009). The underlying goal was not to cultivate future Western Muslim citizens or construct an Islamic Western identity, but to provide a transient educational experience for the community and familiarise youth with the religious culture awaiting them in their home countries.

Regarding the establishment and support of Islamic schools by early Muslim immigrants, there were dual intentions guiding their efforts. Firstly, they sought to safeguard the cultural and religious values integral to their identity, preserving this cultural and religious package until their eventual return. Secondly, there was a crucial concern about shielding their heritage from what they perceived as detrimental western habits and customs that posed a threat to their children's religious beliefs and overall identity.

Moreover, the evolution of full-time immigrant Islamic schools in North America reveals an interesting trajectory. These institutions, in many instances, emerged as extensions of weekend schools and mosque night classes. The pressing need for dedicated Islamic education became evident by the mid-1970s, prompting the education committee of the National Muslim Student Association (MSA) to conceptualise two pilot projects for the establishment of the first two full-time Islamic schools in North America. One was planned for Mississauga, Toronto, and the other for Bridgeview, Chicago, as detailed by Tiflati (2020) and Memon (2019). This strategic move marked a significant milestone in the development of Islamic education, emphasising the community's commitment to addressing the educational needs of Muslim youth in a comprehensive and sustained manner. Despite the legal and regulatory differences between Canada and the United States, where education is provincially regulated in Canada and state-regulated in the U.S., Islamic schools across both countries operate under a shared ethos united in their core mission: preserving the Islamic culture and values of the dominant community they serve, preparing students to navigate life in a western society, and cultivating a pious Islamic identity (Tiflati, 2020).

In other words, the paradox lies in the unintended influence of the founders' own ideologies and experiences—specifically, the impact of colonisation, decolonisation, and immigration from their countries of origin—on the pedagogical practices of these schools (Memon, 2019, 253). An unconscious replication occurred, wherein the structure and approach to education in these Islamic schools resembled the educational systems left behind by colonisers in Muslim countries. With a predominant focus on secular subjects, with minimal hours allocated to Qur'an, Islamic studies, and Arabic, mirrored the patterns ingrained during the colonial era. This led many Muslim immigrants to equate a school with Muslim students, Muslim teachers, and services for the Muslim community as inherently "Islamic," even if it lacked an Islamic ethos or epistemology. As a result, many so-called Islamic schools primarily follow Western pedagogical frameworks, with Arabic and Qur'an studies added as supplementary subjects rather than being central to the curriculum. A truly distinct Islamic school would integrate Islamic epistemology into all subjects, fostering a worldview where faith and knowledge are interconnected rather than compartmentalized.

Surprisingly, this historical echo and experience persists even today, as most Islamic schools in North America continue to follow similar educational frameworks without a clear perspective, philosophy, or

epistemology on integrating Islamic teachings across all subjects. The absence of a cohesive approach raises questions about the evolution of these institutions and the potential for a more intentional and comprehensive integration of Islamic perspectives into the broader curriculum. As the legacy of colonisation echoes in the pedagogical choices, there is an opportunity for a thoughtful re-evaluation that aligns more closely with the founders' initial intentions of preserving and transmitting their cultural and religious heritage.

5. The 'Raison d'être' of North American Islamic Schools

The justification for the existence of Islamic schools is not entirely novel; it shares significant intersections with arguments put forth by proponents of Christian, Jewish and other private confessional schools. Moreover, it aligns with broader philosophical assertions advocating for parental control and authority over education, rooted not in the tenets of any specific religion but in enduring modern liberal and political principles. Thiessen (2001) underscores the importance of keeping educational choices in the hands of parents. He contends that denying parental rights in terms of their children's education would not transfer these rights to the children themselves, as they lack the capacity to exercise them. The contention over the ownership of children's education primarily involves the state and parents, rather than the children who cannot articulate their preferences on their own. To foster a harmonious educational environment, congruence between home cultures and school policies is crucial, as emphasised by Zine (2008, 245). Acknowledging and incorporating the cultural, religious, and axiological aspects of students' home environments into the classroom setting is essential. Miller (2013) stresses the importance of promoting dialogue, disagreement, analysis, and criticism among all parties involved, recognizing that failure to do so hinders the moral and spiritual development of young individuals.

In addition to arguments for parental control, proponents of modern Islamic education advocate for what they term an Islamic epistemology and 'Islamic ways of knowing.' Zine (2004 & 2008) contends that alternative ways of knowing, distinct from secular approaches, should be integrated into the educational framework. She identifies four key elements of an Islamic epistemology: peace, social and environmental justice, unity, and accountability. These elements serve as guiding principles, shaping the educational philosophy of modern Islamic schools. The emphasis on an Islamic epistemology not only underscores the importance of cultural and religious values but also strives to offer a holistic and well-rounded education that aligns with the broader principles of peace, justice, unity, and accountability.

6. Navigating Hostilities in Public Schools

Confessional schools might focus on challenging the Status Quo. For instance, despite the protection afforded by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, guaranteeing freedom of conscience and religion while simultaneously prohibiting religious indoctrination, a nuanced examination reveals that it does not proscribe the inclusion of education about religion within the educational framework (Khan, 1999). Within the context of North America, Thésée and Carr (2009) posit a fascinating paradox wherein neoliberalism, a force inclined towards commercialising various human activities, including education, concurrently fosters and upholds the dominance of Christian heritage. Unravelling the historical baggage unveils a colonial Protestant establishment that staunchly resisted religious diversity, often leading to the marginalisation of minority groups (Blumenfeld, 2006a). Beyond being mere conduits of academic and vocational knowledge, public schools historically operated as instruments of assimilation, imparting the majority culture onto the children of minority groups. In today's democratic societies, public schools are expected to reflect and serve the beliefs of all citizens, necessitating cultural and religious coherence between the 'home' and the 'school' (Cairns, 2009). The failure to acknowledge and

integrate the diverse experiences and contributions of different groups within the state curriculum exacerbates feelings of marginalisation and isolation among students (Maxwell, Waddington, McDonough, Cormier & Schwimmer, 2012). Moreover, the media plays a crucial role in shaping societal perceptions by transmitting majority religious and cultural norms, often side-lining or neglecting the experiences of minority groups. Examining public school calendars reveals a systemic bias, as they are traditionally organised around Christian communities, inadvertently normalising the beliefs of dominant groups and perpetuating a narrative that renders subordinated groups virtually invisible (Blumenfeld, 2006b; Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). This institutionalised discrimination is exemplified by specific instances, such as the disparate responses to religious accommodations for the Jewish and Muslim communities in the school calendar (Sweet, 1997). This intricate and multifaceted landscape calls for a profound re-evaluation of public education to ensure it genuinely reflects and respects the diverse beliefs and values of all citizens, fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

For example, in 1994, Ontario's public-school boards faced a challenge in accommodating religious observances. They made an adjustment for the Jewish community by altering the school year to honour their "holy day", which fell just before the academic term began (Sweet, 1997, 200). The school adopted that holy day and a holiday for the school board. However, when a similar request came from the Muslim community two weeks later, it was denied. The board justified its decision by arguing that accommodating every religious holy day would result in excessive disruptions, potentially extending the school year by nine weeks (Tiflati, 2020).

Fortunately, such instances are exceptions rather than the rule, and they do not reflect widespread hostility toward religious accommodation in North America. Generally, schools strive to accommodate religious minorities. For instance, in Quebec, the introduction of the Ethics and Religious Culture course[1] in 2008 aimed to foster social harmony within Quebec society. This course elicited both praise and criticism from secular and religious groups alike, which will be explored further in the subsequent chapter.

7. Public Schooling as an assimilation tool

Numerous young Muslims and their families grapple with the challenge of preserving their religious identity amidst Western societal norms that may contradict Islamic teachings. This struggle often involves avoiding behaviours such as alcohol consumption, non-permissible social mingling, and engaging in premarital sexual relations (Zine, 2001; Brooks & Ezzani, 2017). For many, the quest to develop an Islamic identity that remains steadfast against perceived Western temptations is paramount. Concerns regarding the public school system among Muslims and other religious individuals stem from their commitment to providing comprehensive education that nurtures not only intellect but also the heart and soul. They perceive public schools as potentially promoting moral permissiveness and lower academic achievement, reflecting a broader societal context (Clauss, Ahmed & Salvaterra, 2013). Furthermore, they view these institutions as environments plagued by issues such as violence, substance abuse, and sexual promiscuity. Consequently, there arises a demand for Islamic schools among devout adherents who seek an alternative educational setting.

Advocates of Islamic schools argue against the notion that these institutions are inherently detrimental to students, particularly immigrants, compared to secular counterparts in the same context (Kelly, 2000). They emphasise that the social and cultural environment of Islamic schools plays a crucial role in shaping students' emotional and spiritual well-being, which are essential aspects of holistic learning

[1] For detailed information on the ERC course, see the ministry's direct program at: https://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/dpse/formation_jeunes/ecr_secondary.pdf

and development (Zine, 2008; Brifkani, 2021). Ignoring these factors, they contend, could result in adolescents lacking crucial attributes such as self-control, autonomy, and independence in the long term.

Expanding on this perspective, it is important to recognize that the desire for alternative educational options, such as Islamic schools, reflects a broader societal concern about the values and environment in which children are educated. This highlights the complex interplay between religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and educational philosophies in shaping citizens' perceptions of the ideal learning environment. By acknowledging and addressing these concerns, educators and policymakers can work towards creating inclusive and supportive educational systems that cater to the diverse needs of all students, regardless of their religious or cultural affiliations.

Therefore, the establishment of Islamic schools in America reflects a response to this struggle (Clauss et al., 2013). Founders of these institutions were motivated by the belief that attending public schools could jeopardise the Islamic identity of Muslim youth. They argued that public education often lacks the promotion of religious and moral values, potentially exposing religious students to a sea of relativism that could erode their faith. Consequently, Islamic schools are viewed as temporary sanctuaries safeguarding young Muslims from such dangers until they are deemed mature enough to navigate them.

It's also essential to recognize the multifaceted nature of identity formation among Muslim youth in Western societies. Beyond the dichotomy of Islamic versus Western influences, factors such as cultural integration, generational differences, and individual autonomy play significant roles. Moreover, the role of Islamic schools extends beyond mere protection; they also serve as nurturing environments where students can explore their faith, develop a sense of belonging, and acquire the tools to navigate the complexities of modern society while remaining grounded in their religious convictions. By acknowledging and addressing these complexities, educators and community leaders can better support Muslim youth in their journey of identity formation and cultural integration.

8. Citizenship and Identity in the Context of Islamic Schooling

Immigrants usually merge and integrate in the sense of learning to endorse liberal democratic political values, so long as they have room for cultural practices and rituals that pertain to their inherited or adopted culture and identity (Tiflati, 2017). Citizenship, identity and belongingness are terms used with different meanings. While national identity is usually linked to the histories, values, and the political principles shared by the citizens of a specific nation, citizenship is a legal status that does not necessarily guarantee a solid foundation for belongingness amongst all citizens (e. g. Canadians and Quebecers). Many scholars (Kymlicka, 2003; Tiflati 2020; Bouchard & Taylor, 2008; Brifkani, 2021) insist that the link between national identity and citizenship is contingent. For instance, while many groups that share a legal citizenship don't have a common national identity, different nations might share the same values and identity despite belonging to different nations (e. g. Canadians and Americans; Swedes and Norwegians). Furthermore, groups whose values diverge significantly can share a strong sense of national membership (Americans and the French). Thus, national identity and shared values have a complex and unstable relationship in general.

And this presumably has some significance for debates about Islam, Islamic schooling, and citizenship. For example, one obvious implication regarding Islamic schools is their obligation to teach cultural-religious values that are specific to Muslims (e. g. hijab, Ramadan, Islamic values), as well as forming citizens who believe in the common values of the host country. The challenge for these schools is the obligation to maintain, or at least not teach against, liberal-democratic political values such as democracy and individual and minority rights. At the same time, teaching a robust sense of national

identity does not guarantee conformity to democratic liberal values (e. g. alt-right and far-right groups in Western nations).

Attending Islamic schools is different from learning at secular institutions. At religious institutions, reference is usually made to religious values and to 'sacred knowledge', and to certain creeds, which are considered divine by the school's community[2], either through the beliefs they hold in themselves about Islam or based on the belief that Islamic knowledge circulated there originates from Allah and there is truer, better or superior to any other forms of knowledge. Therefore, the God-centred epistemology of Islamic schools challenges the privileging of secular knowledge as the exclusive source for knowing (Memon, 2019; Sweet, 2000; Zine, 2008). This "postmodernist" epistemology might be associated with the camp that, according to Jackson (2004, 9), could go much further to the extent of adopting anti-realist epistemological stances, and of rejecting modernist and rationalist ways of thinking. For instance, instead of reconciling scientific facts with divine knowledge through reinterpreting scripture, some Islamic and Evangelical schools would simply reject these facts (i. e. evolution) and refer exclusively to their religion to understand what is (scientifically) true.

The growth of the Muslim community in North America and the decision to permanently settle as citizens rather than temporary residents was one of the factors that led to the change in the mission of Islamic schools in the 1990's and early 2000's. The mission of early immigrant Islamic schools was mainly centred on the preservation of the cultural and traditional heritage of the "temporary" immigrant community (Memon, 2019). The efforts to create future Muslim citizens and the struggle to defend the community's interest as a minority came at a later stage. Put differently, early Islamic schools in North America were meant to be temporary institutions and were mainly imitating the educational system in Muslim countries for the sole role of preparing Muslim youth to reintegrate in their societies once they go back to their parents' countries.

The impact of this change in the mission can be felt in the discourse of the young generation. In this discourse, there's a question of full-fledged citizenship but one that's further enriched by a posture of being 'global citizens.' When young people who took part in a community event on citizenship in Lasalle on November 21, 2014, were asked about their citizenship, one of them replied, "they're not just us in the world. We must try to get to know all these peoples based on brotherhood and peace". The expression 'citizens of the world' was also heard two weeks before at the November 7, 2014, meeting-causerie organized under the theme: "Casse-têtes identitaires, deuxièmes générations dans un Québec pluriel" (Identities' challenges: second generations in a plural Québec). This time, there were not only Muslims, but young Christian Arabs too. The posture of citizens of the world can be seen as an attempt to come to terms with the multiple identities with which these young people are in contact (Hmimssa, 2018, 223). "I'm Quebecer, Canadian, Muslim and Moroccan at the same time!", as one of them expressed this multiplicity.

9. Citizenship, assimilation and terrorism

A similar position to the above mentioned "citizen of the world" posture is very much expressed in evidence with youth. The theoretical discussion mentioned above is well supported by the outcome of interviews with young Muslims in the field. For instance, Chaimaa, a young Muslim Quebecer whose parents are originally from the Maghreb region: "We were born here and yet they treat us as if we were immigrants". She and many other young women and men of the same generation were participating on Friday, November 21, 2014, in a conference about citizenship in an activities' centre belonging to the

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

city of Lasalle, Montreal. In their discourse, they were expressing a full citizenship stance and rejecting any attempt to treat them as immigrants or 'second-class' citizens. This generation sees absolutely no contradiction in proclaiming themselves "citizens of the world" while at the same time claiming Canadian citizenship and making Quebec identity their own. One of the researchers was invited, and at his side were two social activists, coming from different backgrounds. He realised that behind the success of the meeting there was the effort of these second-generation young people (aged between 16 and 25). They benefited from the support of a few older people, but most of the work was done by them. Also, as the conference was held in response to the attacks on Canadian soldiers in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu by an alleged fanboy of ISIS, young Muslims held two presentations, one on terrorism, the other on what it means to be a citizen. In the audience's wake, and at the end of the event, the researcher asked them a few questions to better situate the meaning of their discourse and its cultural underpinnings. Conclusion based on their explanations was that they were more rooted than their parents in the local social reality of Quebec, while at the same time enjoying a great openness to what's going on around the world as well as the inherited identities from their parents. Hence, the consistency of their rejection of any attempt to see them as second-class citizens by the French-Canadian majority (Hmimssa, 2018, 142).

In the fall of the "charter of values" bill, demonstrators, most of them youths, were storming the streets of Montreal, marching from Place d'Émilie-Gamelin to Place des Arts. During the exchanges between one of the authors and Sa'ad, one of the activists and well-known figure in the Muslim community, Sa'ad was keen to show his delight at the success of the event and the "awakening" that was perceptible, especially among young people, despite the record short time to react to the proposed bill. People's responses were so spontaneous that "no effort was needed to convince them to come", he said. The spontaneity of the demonstration was indeed evident in the placards and slogans or symbols displayed (Hmimssa, 2018, 132). In this event and others during the tension surrounding the above controversy, the participation of young people was broad, but without evidence that this is the result of "indoctrination" by Islamic schools, since the latter only cover a negligible percentage compared to Muslim students enrolled in public schools.

10. Preserving Muslim Identities

A significant body of scholarship concerning Muslim youth in Western contexts concentrates on the process of navigating their blended and occasionally conflicting identities. Dialogues about identity often revolve around concepts like flexible identities, dual identities, national identities, and adapted identities. In the paragraph above, the concept of "citizen of the world" can be seen to deal with this plurality by Muslim youth. In pluralistic societies, individual social identity is shaped by their lived experiences within the community. However, Modood (2016) contends that the growing Muslim population in the West, along with the tensions surrounding their presence, has sparked severe criticism of multiculturalism, which facilitated the flourishing of Muslim identities in Western societies. Western Muslims face challenges in harmonising their national, religious, and cultural identities. This reconciliation becomes increasingly urgent and significant as numerous Western nations find themselves embroiled in conflicts with certain Muslim-majority countries (Modood, 2016; Brooks & Ezzani, 2017).

11. The complex nature of identity

Our contemporary world is characterised by a rich history of diverse and hybrid identities. Even individuals who share the same geographical location and cultural background will interpret and practice religion and culture in unique ways due to their distinct life experiences (Beyer & Ramji, 2013, 14). Put simply, people with similar backgrounds will exhibit varying attitudes, religiosities, and

religious identities because of their diverse personal journeys. In Western societies, identities are in a constant state of flux and negotiation (Kymlicka, 2003; Brodeur, 2008). It is widely acknowledged among scholars that modern identities are fluid and adaptable rather than static or rigid. Within this context, the examination of complex and evolving relationships sheds light on the complexities of Canadian and Quebecois Muslim identities. Our analysis not only examines the identity formation of Quebecois Muslims but also explores the factors influencing how they are perceived by others and how they define themselves. Additionally, it investigates how these elements are expressed or suppressed within the distinct socio-cultural contexts of Quebec (Brodeur, 2008, 96) and Canada.

According to Mendelsohn (2007), identity can be understood in two different ways. The first is collective or group identity. It refers to communities possessing an identity and seeking to collectively define its qualities and characteristics. The second is the personal identity that is related to how individuals define themselves and name the communities and groups they feel attached to, and how they resolve or deal with multiple loyalties and contradictory feelings towards their nation, community, and religion. In this context, identity can be seen as having two distinct meanings: (1) being the same as others and having racial, religious, or national continuity with them, and (2) being the holder of a distinct identity of difference and alteration. There is also the concept of hyphenated identities, which mirrors the phenomenon of individuals identifying with two or multiple worlds such as the assertion of being fully Muslim and completely secular.

Furthermore, many criticise the idea that individuals are fully aware of themselves and their consciousness. Instead, he sees identity as a "mishmash" of several contradictory and unresolved allegiances. Here, we can draw on our understanding of hybrid identities and on our understanding of our moods, our lived and felt circumstances contribute to our sense of feeling happy, sad, joyful, depressed, etc.. By the same token, individuals have hybrid and fluid identities that shift and turn in taking the lead and in dominating our personalities. For instance, while national identity dominates during elections or Canada day, religious identities manifest during religious holy days. In other words, the human self is single, but its attributes are multiple.

Stets and Burke (2000) provides evidence that identities are not solely shaped by individuals but are also, to some extent, socially constructed through interactions with others. In essence, individuals' identities are partially formed by the beliefs and norms of the communities they are part of. While these communities do not dictate every aspect of an individual's identity, they do exert influence, leading to the adoption of shared values, attitudes, and beliefs. Fraser-Burgess (2013) underscores the difference between mere membership in an identity group and possessing a group identity that fosters a sense of belonging. He emphasises that our awareness of intentionally sharing a common set of beliefs, values, and attitudes with fellow community members defines our membership within the group. Consequently, identities become contingent, as many individuals identify with and share similar characteristics, values, and customs. Philosopher Charles Taylor (2012) further elucidates that self-identity is intertwined with references to a broader community framework from which individuals derive their sense of self. Put differently, the construction of one's identity invariably occurs within a certain framework, whether it be religious, cultural, secular, liberal, or otherwise (Webster, 2005; Saada, 2022; Brifkani, 2021).

12. Conclusion

It is worth noting that second-generation Muslims in the West do not inherit a well-defined Islamic identity with clear social and cultural boundaries, unlike their parents. They are tasked with reconstructing their negotiated own identities, thereby re-evaluating Islam within their new sociocultural context. This challenge contrasts with the experience of first-generation Muslims who must navigate a minority status within a dominant cultural framework, a context unfamiliar to them in

their countries of origin. The Islamic schools examined in this study, however, do not seem to facilitate this process of reconstruction and re-evaluation. Instead, they primarily serve to perpetuate the traditional Islamic identity inherited from parents. This may limit the students' ability to critically engage with their faith in contemporary contexts. Consequently, participants in the study developed coping mechanisms, such as adopting a more flexible interpretation of Islam, to address issues of belongingness outside of their Islamic educational settings. This highlights the intricate interplay between cultural heritage, religious identity formation, and adaptation to new sociocultural environments among second-generation Muslims in the West.

In Western identity politics and public discourse, Muslims' lifestyles are often depicted as posing a threat to Western culture and societal cohesion, imbued with notions of danger and social disorder (Brooks & Ezzani, 2017). This perception is echoed by individuals interviewed in many studies (Tiflati, 2020; Bakali, 2015; Hmimssa, 2018) who discussed experiences of Islamophobia, anti-Muslim prejudice, and reactions to the Quebec Charter of Values. The hijab, for instance, is commonly associated with fear and cautioned against as something not to be emulated or appreciated in Western contexts (Amiraux, 2016, 43). Many Westerners view it as a symbol of gender inequality, reflecting notions of inheritance, women's subordination to men, allegiance to Islam, and detachment from secular norms (Ali, 2012, 90). However, such framing of identity politics does not foster the integration of Muslims; rather, it alienates them and scrutinises their way of life. Proposals to ban the hijab, as seen in Quebec, would effectively exclude a significant aspect of Muslim identity from the public sphere, exacerbating the marginalisation already experienced by Muslim women in Quebec. Moreover, it would impede the integration of Muslim youth into mainstream society. For instance, one parent cited in our research decided against enrolling their daughter in college due to rumours of its lack of acceptance toward hijab-wearing individuals. The introduction of the Charter of Values in Quebec in 2013 had particularly profound repercussions for hijabi women, with many reporting feeling unsafe venturing outside alone due to increased harassment following the proposal (Bakali, 2015, 106). Such prohibitions would reinforce the assertions of radical and extremist groups that the West is engaged in a conflict with Muslims and Islam, perpetuating the narrative that Muslim identity is incompatible with Western culture. Additionally, it would validate the belief that Muslims are perpetual outsiders who will never fully assimilate into mainstream society. The role played by Islamic schools to overcome all these challenges is still limited based on our study and encounters with young Muslims.

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