UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

PERSPECTIVES SUR LES EXPERIENCES DES ÉLÈVES DES ÉCOLES ISLAMIQUES : IDENTITÉ, APPARTENANCE ET CITOYENNETÉ AU QUÉBEC ET AU CANADA

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude cherche à comprendre le rôle, positif, négatif ou neutre, des écoles islamiques dans le processus d'intégration sociale des jeunes musulmans à Montréal. Le volet empirique de l'étude examine la manière dont un tel enseignement construit ou renforce certaines identités (nationales, religieuses, ethniques, sociales et culturels) des jeunes. L'étude essaie, également, d'appréhender les liens pouvant exister entre les enseignements proposés dans ces écoles et le sentiment d'appartenance à une société francophone multiculturelle. L'objectif principal de la recherche est de comprendre comment, et à quel point l'école musulmane façonne l'identité de ses jeunes, et de quelle façon ces derniers traduisent ses enseignements dans la société. Cette étude s'intéresse principalement au type d'éducation qui est offert aux jeunes musulmans dans les écoles islamiques de Montréal, et s'interroge sur ses avantages et ses inconvénients directs ou indirects sur l'intégration des jeunes dans la société québécoise, sur le développement de leur sentiment d'appartenance, et sur leurs contributions en tant que citoyens à part entière. Afin de développer ces éléments, la recherche examine les particularités de l'enseignement scolaire musulman et analyse une variété considérable de données obtenues auprès des enseignants, directeurs, parents, et élèves des écoles musulmanes de Montréal. Les résultats de la recherche indiquent que, malgré les efforts entrepris pour favoriser une identité islamique, les établissements d'enseignement islamiques à Montréal font face à plusieurs défis de taille, tels que les ressources financières limitées et les dissensions internes. Les élèves de ces écoles ont tendance à développer une plus grande religiosité par rapport aux musulmans étudiants dans les écoles publiques. Ils expriment, également, leur attachement au Québec et au Canada de différentes manières, conciliant leurs identités musulmanes avec leurs identités québécoises et canadiennes. Le défi majeur, auquel ces jeunes font face, est principalement relié aux pressions des discours islamophobes, ou des stéréotypes sur l'Islam et les musulmans, diffusés en boucle par certains médias.

Mots-clés : Enseignement islamique, jeunes musulmans, identité, citoyenneté, appartenance, Québec, Canada.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways in which Islamic schooling serves as a barrier to, or vehicle for, young Muslims' social integration in Montreal, Canada. The empirical study examines and describes 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 focus of the research is to investigate how immigrant Islamic schools educate their youth, and how such schooling influences the integration process in society. In particular, the study examines the type of education offered in Montreal's Islamic schools, and investigates whether these schools directly or indirectly promote or dissuade Muslims from integrating with other Quebecers, developing a sense of belonging, and acting as full citizens. In order to assess the above points, the research considers school instructions, and analyzes data obtained from teachers, principals, parents, and graduates. The findings from the 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.

KEY WORDS: Islamic schooling, Muslim youth, identity, citizenship, belonging, Quebec, Canada.

INTRODUCTION

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, Senzai & Smith, 2009, p. 7) or for children's isolation and indoctrination (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 are being 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. For instance, in recent years in Quebec, controversies have arisen around the wearing of the hijab in public schools (McAndrew, 2006), the face veil in public spaces (Meena, 2011) and during citizenship ceremonies, about reasonable accommodations (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008), and the proposal for a Charter of Laïcité by the Parti Québécois in 2013. These issues reveal that Muslims are often portrayed as being problematic in Quebec and potentially in the rest of Canada, and that the subject of Muslims' integration remains problematic (Mancilla, 2009, p. 28). While much research has been done on Muslims' integration in Canada, only a handful of studies have addressed Islamic schooling and its role in shaping Muslim youth identities and their sense of citizenship in Quebec (Kelly, 2000; McAndrew, 2010; Tremblay & Milot, 2014; Essid, 2015; Ali, 2012). Hence, the importance of this study.

Muslim Migration

The increase in the number of Islamic institutions in the West is a direct outcome of the growing number of Muslim migrants; they have developed in response to cultural and religious needs from within the community. Nonetheless, this Muslim immigration has gone through several phases and stages. Although by the nineteenth century various groups of young men and women were sent from the newly independent Muslim countries to pursue higher degrees in the West, living in a non-Muslim society was thought to be non-permissible, or haram, for a number of ulemas of the time. Such attitudes were supported by traditional Islamic jurisprudence that divided the world into two opposite territories: the Abode of war and unbelief (*dar al-harb wal-kufr*) on the one hand, and the Abode of peace (*dar al-silm*) on the other. On the whole, most Muslim immigrants had no guidelines, plans, or intention for behaving as permanent residents in non-Islamic countries (Kelly, 2000, p. 30), and therefore no intention for establishing permanent institutions in order to preserve their culture and to transmit their religious and cultural heritage to their offspring in the long term.

"Domesticating" Muslims in the West. In the wake of 9/11, Muslims have been portrayed as the "official" new enemy of the West. Anxieties were expressed about Islamic values, homegrown terrorism, and the "inevitable clash" between the West and a form of Islam that is trying to undermine democracy and Western secular values (Winter, 2014). A clash of values and of civilizations was being perceived from both sides, which had, and still has, negative effects on Muslims, not only in minority contexts but also in the Muslim world. Some countries in the West choose to adopt aggressive policies towards immigrants which, no doubt, had negative effects on the host society and on those Muslims, particularly those who already consider themselves a part of the Canadian society (Bullock & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 45). The failure of these policies is obvious in countries that are known for their strong exclusive national identity such as France where social climates are being politicized and Muslims are

often being labelled as a problem rather than a challenge that has to be dealt with in rational ways (Bectovic, 2011, Antonius, 2008). In certain cases, resistance to assimilationist policies and to cultural imperialism by Muslims is viewed as a refusal to integrate and as a menace to social cohesion. Cultural imperialism is experienced when the majority tries to universalize its values through legislating laws, normalizing social customs, and labelling immigrants from non-Western countries as unfit to integrate into mainstream society (Bashir, 2008, p. 52; see also Beiner, 2013; Beyer, 2013), albeit the dominant's group values determining the normal social climate. Immigrants' integration is often judged by how they willing (or unwilling) they are to assimilate to dominant cultural practices of the majority (Kymlicka, 1998, p. 57). Moreover, Muslims in Quebec, and by extension in North America, consider themselves among the underprivileged communities that have less political presence and less social power to "engage in the decision-making process that affects the course of their lives or even to name the terms of their existence" (Blumenfeld, 2006a, p. 4).

Background of the Study

The study of religious schools in the West should not look at them within either utopian or dystopian outlook regarding their role in educating youth. Building on Zine's (2008) methodology, I am not setting out to uncritically valorize or de-valorize Islamic schools, but rather I intend to interrogate their role in conjunction with broader aims of the public education system of which they are a part. In particular, I am interested in how Islamic schools influence the goal of nurturing a sense of social belonging on the part of young Muslims – that is, of belonging to an ethnically, racially and religiously pluralistic democratic society. In short, I investigate whether, and if so how, Islamic schools contribute to the goal of the 'vivre ensemble', or living together, in such a society. Correspondingly, I intend to examine whether they are inculcating children in their parents' faith (Sweet, 1997, p. 149) in a way that may run counter to citizenry norms

and values; and whether they are prejudiced against women and girls compared to secular schools within the same context (Kelly, 2000, p. 45).

This study is initiated with a view of capturing the current religious, academic, spiritual, and cultural impact of these schools on their Muslim students in Montreal. It will examine how Islamic schools effect, influence, and shape the ways in which Muslim students see themselves and those around them in their society. This thesis will look at how an Islamic-centred education is guiding Muslim youth to select some values from the Quebecer landscape while diminishing or neglecting others, and whether this fosters, or not, their national identities, and, therefore, their greater integration into Quebec society.

The essence of Islamic education. According to Husain and Ashraf (1979), Islamic education trains the sensibility of Muslim youth in such a manner that affects their attitude to life, their actions, decisions and approach to all kinds of knowledge; it helps them grow up peace-loving, harmonious, righteous, and believing in God. Memon (2009, p. 240) suggests that the essence of an Islamic education is the development of a moral character that is 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 are trying to implement what seems to be a "double curriculum": besides the school day and year being equal to those of other schools, they need to teach a few supplementary subjects such as Arabic, 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 establishing these schools. Put differently, first-generation Muslims who built these schools believed in their role in transmitting the cultural and religious heritage 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 that often has aspects that are in contradiction with Western secular values, and what they consider the authentic form of Islam on the other hand, which second-generation Muslims claim is completely compatible with Western secular democracies. Nonetheless, there is no culturally neutral (i.e. "pure") Islam. The question is whether the cultural formations being advanced by second-generation Muslims are being 'reconstructed', from the sometimes illiberal cultural materials provided by their parents, in ways that represent new, and more harmonious, alignments between Islam and secular-democratic societies.

"Shopping" for the right school. Devout Muslim parents in Quebec face the dilemma of choosing between the Islamic school and the non-Islamic school (public or private). First, Islamic schools often lack the basic funds, as most of them are not subsidized[1] by the state and have to rely on the community's help (fundraising, etc.) to cover many costs, which affects the quality of the education they provide. Second, the public school as well as the private non-Islamic school does not adequately respond to parents' cultural and religious expectations. These schools lack religious and cultural values that devout parents look for, and are sometimes looked at as institutions that teach against these values. For Muslim parents, a sacrifice of values is inevitable in either option. On the one hand, if they enroll their children in Islamic schools, they think that the latter may not fully qualify them to compete at good universities, which may negatively affect their social and economic status. On the other hand, whereas public and private secular schools might help Muslim children acquire some social skills to integrate into the mainstream society, they will not contribute to the preservation and transmission of their religious and cultural values. Additionally, certain parents do not see the public educational system as a neutral, secular, and balanced system that promotes equality,

[1] There are twelve Islamic schools in Montreal: seven elementary schools and five high schools. Only three elementary schools are subsidized by the province.

citizenry, and human rights, but they instead believe that it mostly empowers a Euro-centric and Christian tradition (Blumenfeld, 2006b; Memon, 2009, 2012; Zine, 2008). I understand that the state does not have to recognize 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.

Why this study? A handful of studies, qualitative as well as quantitative, have explored Islamic schooling in North America (Zine, 2001, 2004, 2008; Memon, 2009, 2012; Timani, 2015; Ali, 2012; Ahmad, 2012), even fewer studies in Quebec (Essid, 2015; Kelly, 2000; Tremblay & Milot, 2014; Tremblay, 2012, 2014). None of them investigated Islamic schooling and its relation to identity and citizenship of graduates of these schools. The aim of this research is to fill that gap and to respond to that need. In this context, my study will examine the type of Islamic education offered to Muslim youth in Montreal. It will investigate whether these schools are implementing instructions, direct or not, which are isolating students from the larger society or the likelihood that they are using them as tools to shepherding Muslim youth into their parents' culture and beliefs. In order to assess these two different claims, I will look at Montreal's Islamic schools' instructions and will analyze data obtained from graduates, teachers, parents, principals, and founders of these schools.

The Problem

The role of the Islamic School. With concerns about Muslims' integration in general, and how Muslim youth are being raised in the West 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 about whether these schools are

teaching against integration and belongingness, and whether and how they are contributing to social cohesion through the formation of productive future citizens, especially regarding what is being taught in religion classes, and the internal climate of the school (i.e. the hijab being a part of the dress code, segregation in certain schools, mandatory prayers, etc.). Some Islamic schools even insist on an Islamic dress code for teachers, which means that Muslim women who do not wear the hijab and non-Muslim employees have to wear it while on duty at the Islamic school. These points raise serious questions about Islamic schools' role in preparing their students to live at peace in their secular societies. There are also concerns that Islamic schools are extending their influence outside of their religious boundaries and, therefore, indoctrinating students with behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs that do not conform to social norms and society's common values.

Practices at the Islamic school. Many Islamic beliefs and practices (i.e. niqab, gender segregation, guardianship, supremacy of men in inheritance) sound controversial and incompatible with western secular societies. If Islamic schools are loyal to such traditional teachings, students exposed to such beliefs might develop anti-western and anti-democracy sentiments, which will negatively affect their integration and their sense of belonging to their society. In her ethnographic study on an Islamic school in Montreal, commenting on how Muslims themselves perceived the hijab inside the Islamic school, 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 practised in certain Islamic cultures may be imported to Islamic schools through the communities behind them. Kelly (2000, p. 82) suggests that if segregation exists in Islamic schools, it is usually not perceived negatively, and it is not creating 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 a 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 teach secular subjects and not as mosques or Churches that tackle spiritual and metaphysical issues. Whereas proponents of faith schools believe that knowledge of this kind is special and sacred, critics consider it superstitious and unreal. Others (i.e. Cristillo, 2009; Ahmed, 2012) argue that, when it comes to the promotion of open-mindedness and multiculturalism, the private sector of education, including some religious schools, might be more progressive than the secular sector because it provides positive room to both secular and religious dimensions, whereas secular institutions neglect the religious dimension or reduce it to plain fiction.

Framework and Context of the Study

Problematizing Islamic education and Muslim identity. Outsiders often see Islamic institutions as entities that teach against 'living-together' (*le vivre-ensemble*) (Cristillo, 2009, p. 76) and that deprive students of an adequate civic education. Incidents in Quebec such as the hijab in public schools (McAndrew, 2010, p. 7), religious accommodations (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008), debates over the proposed Charter of Quebec Values (2014), and the radicalization of a few Muslim youth, these incidents reveal that Quebecer Muslims are still struggling for equality and recognition in Quebec society. They do so through dialogue, debates, and through challenging societal norms and, sometimes, by being visibly Muslim through their dress codes and their Islamic institutions. However, they are often perceived as problematic and as a source of malaise and conflict. In other words, Muslims' integration is becoming the subject of controversy and debate (Amiraux, 2016). This study is an examination of the role of Islamic schooling in shaping and influencing Muslim youth's multiple (national,

religious, ethnic, social, and cultural) identities in Montreal. Hence, a post-9/11 and post-ISIS conceptual framework is necessary to understand the current tensions surrounding such schooling. Post-September-elevenism puts Islam at the center of the debate, and generates discussions on Islam and its role in multiple venues of life, including institutional Islamic education. Furthermore, a post-ISIS framework is also important in understanding the Muslim community's positioning in Quebec.

Post-ISIS framework. Today, there is no shortage of tensions between Islam and the West. Gender discrimination, indoctrination, hatred of the West and of democracy, loyalty to a global nation or umma, radicalization, 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 in May 2015 international airport in Montreal because there were proofs these youth intended 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. The above framework sheds light on the mistrust and the imbalance of power between Muslim communities and the rest of society in a post-9/11 and a post-ISIS context. Quebec political and social framework is also important to my research because it is a component of what will be examined to understand how the meaning attached to Islam impacts the way in which Canadian and Quebecer Muslims see and defend themselves, and how others perceive them.

Identity and citizenship. Identity and citizenship are concepts used with a wide variety of meanings. According to Kymlicka (2003, p. 376), some of the sources of pan-Canadian identity are the common histories, the values, and the common political principles shared by all Canadians. However, he suggests that the above sources do not necessarily guarantee a solid foundation for nurturing a strong Canadian identity

amongst all Canadians, and amongst Quebecers more particularly. Kymlicka points out that the relationship between identity and values is contingent. For instance, groups who share no national identity at all nevertheless can share many values (e.g. Canadians and Americans, Swedes and Norwegians). Similarly, groups whose values diverge significantly can share a strong sense of national membership (e.g. sexual progressives and sexual traditionalists). Thus (national) identity and shared values would seem to have a complex and somewhat unstable relationship in general.

Presumably, this has some significance for debates about Islam, Islamic schools, identity, and citizenship. For example, when Islamic schools teach cultural-religious values that are specific to Muslims (e.g. hijab, Ramadan), does that mean in and of itself that these schools are deviating from secular-democratic political values? At the same time, it would seem that a robust sense of Canadian or Quebecois identity does not guarantee conformity to secular and democratic values (e.g. Alt-right nationalist groups in Quebec and Canada). Another point arising from Kymlickean cultural rights theory is that struggles for cultural survival are primarily about identity and not values (Bricker, 1998). Immigrants usually merge and integrate in the sense of learning to endorse secular democratic political values, so long as they have room for cultural practices and rituals that pertain to their inherited or adopted culture and identity.

Integration and social cohesion. Integration and social cohesion are terms that usually have multiple and misunderstood meanings. According to Rutter (2015), integration is about individuals and households; and social cohesion is about people, spaces and places. There is a direct correlation between the two. Rutter (2015, pp. 73-79) defines integration as "the ability of immigrants to achieve social inclusion and wellbeing," and sees social cohesion as the capability of communities and places to manage conflict and social change. When communities feel welcomed and valued, they are more likely to

integrate and engage in the national project. But when these communities are seen as different and alien, they struggle to identify with the mainstream society.

Integration is understood in many different ways. 1) Rights based, where citizens enjoy civil, political and social rights. 2) Outcome based, where migrants benefit from employment, education, health care, political participation, etc. 3) Socially based, by establishing a social contact between migrants and natives. 4) Participation based, where citizens are required to actively participate in their host society (Rutter, 2015, p. 79). Depending on whom you ask, social cohesion comes in different shapes and forms. According to Rutter (2015), social cohesion is employed on many fronts: it can be seen as tool to manage religious extremism, to tackle migration, racism, and intercultural education, community safety and hate crimes, social ties, collective identities, social solidarity and reciprocity and respect for diversity.

Throughout this thesis, by integration, I refer to the successful inclusion of Muslims into their societies by believing in unrestricted social association with their co-citizens. It is not only the process of becoming accepted (as individuals and communities) into society, but also accepting, adopting society' common values and norms, and developing a shared way of seeing and behaving in the world. In addition, by citizenship, I do not refer exclusively to the fact of being or becoming a citizen of a sovereign state, but to the specific feelings of pride in belonging to one's country to the degree of sharing society's collective consciousness. For instance, legally speaking, Quebecers are Canadian subjects and citizens. But when an old stock Quebecer states that he is not a Canadian, he is not referring to his legal status but to his roots, histories, and loyalty to the Quebecois Francophone nation.

Islamic or Muslim school? The use of the expression Islamic versus Muslim school is something I struggled with when I started working on my thesis. I felt, at the beginning,

that the term "Islamic" is politicized 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, Ahmed & Salvaterra, 2012, 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.

The 'Islam' in Islamic schools. Accredited Western Islamic schools struggle to provide and deliver high academic results, preserve and promote a collective religious identity, and establish a balanced civic identity. Memon (2009, p. 235) asserts that earlier Islamic schools in North America were built by educated immigrant Muslims, who modelled them after their own lived experiences, and which were mostly shaped by educational institutions established by the colonizer in their home countries: teaching secular subjects from a secular perspective, then hashing the curriculum with extra "boring" hours of Qur'an, Islamic studies, and Arabic. The challenge these schools may represent to mainstream secular schooling consists primarily in the indoctrination offered by the cultural environment (i.e. like-minded students, lack of critical thinking, mostly first-

generation staff, etc.) and not, necessarily, by the Islamic curriculum they adopt. In other words, as the latter model of schools does not adopt an Islamic epistemology as a teaching approach, this model does not qualify as Islamic schools, but, at best, as schools for Muslims.

The growth of the Muslim community in North America and the shift in social status from temporary academics and workers to citizens is, according to Memon (2009), one of the factors that led to a change in the mission of early Islamic schools. The mission of early immigrant Islamic schools established in North America centred on the preservation of the cultural and traditional heritage of the "temporary" immigrant community (Memon, 2009). 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, and were mainly imitating the educational system in Muslim countries in order to prepare their students to reintegrate in their societies once they return home.

The process of learning at faith schools differs from learning at secular institutions. At religious institutions, reference is usually made to revelation, to the sacred, and to certain creeds, which are considered divine (Thiessen, 2001, p. 91), either through the deep meaning they hold in themselves or based on the belief that divine knowledge circulated there originates from a higher being. Similarly, the God-centred epistemology of Islamic schools (Halstead, 2004) challenges the privileging of secular knowledge as the exclusive source for knowing (Memon, 2012; Sweet, 1997; Zine, 2008). This epistemology might be associated with the postmodernist camp that, according to Jackson (2004, p. 9), could go much further, i.e. 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 the reinterpretation of the Scripture, some Islamic and Evangelical schools would simply

reject these facts (e.g. evolution) and refer exclusively to their religious worldviews to understand what is (scientifically) true.

Significance of the Research

While much research has been done on Muslims' integration in Canadian society, only a handful of studies have been published on Islamic schooling in Quebec (Kelly, 2000; McAndrew, 2006; Tremblay & Milot, 2014; Tremblay, 2012, 2014); other areas such as Islamic schooling and its influence on individual and social religiosity, on the making of an Islamic identity, on societal affiliation, and on integration need to be addressed. The Quebec context is important for various reasons: Quebec is the only francophone province in North America; it hosts the second largest Muslim community in Canada, and the only Muslim francophone community in North America (McAndrew, 2010).

My research will answer questions pertaining to the extent to which the Islamic school is a social agent in forming and guiding students' religious, civic, and social identities. In other words, I am looking at the interdependency, if there is any, between Islamic schooling and integration as seen in social activities, and more generally as perceived by Muslim students themselves. The broader aspect of my work is religious education and its relation to social cohesion, civic participation, and social attitudes of Muslim youth in Montreal.

This study will make a theoretical and an empirical contribution to the knowledge related to Islamic schooling in Montreal, and to the integration of Muslim youth in Quebec. Its theoretical significance is that it will look at Islamic schooling in relation to identity construction, integration, social cohesion, and the making of the future Quebecois Muslim nationals. The empirical significance of my work lies in presenting the neglected Quebec context of Canadian Islamic education. Comparisons will be

drawn between my findings and the findings of other studies (McAndrew, 2010; Memon, 2009; Zine, 2001, 2004, 2008). Furthermore, I will also examine the rationale behind the establishment of Islamic schools and explore the labels put on them as tools of indoctrination and isolation that slow integration and affect social cohesion.

By talking to graduates of Islamic schools, I am seeking to learn and understand how these students behave after they graduate and attend secular colleges and universities, considering that academic secular institutions dismiss beliefs as human or cultural in origin and denigrate or deny them in the learning process (Douglass, 2009, p. 96). An understanding of Islamic schooling and the values it carries is drawn from spontaneous answers and activities of my participants. Interviews with administrators and teachers yield profitable academic information. The interviews were conducted at schools, Islamic centres, homes of participants, and public places. Interviews, structured as well as semi-structured, were intended to generate data, which will contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Peculiarities of the Quebec Context

Quebecers have often been described as a minority that is struggling to preserve its culture and that wishes to remain distinct but equal to the Anglophone North American majority (Juteau, 2002). Collective boundaries and identities have evolved in Quebec as a result of their ever-changing relationship to culture, ancestry, Church, State and territory. That said, Quebecers are Canada's main example of a sub-state national movement (Juteau, 2002; Kymlicka, 2003; Meer, Modood, & Zapata-Barrero, 2016) that succeeded in preserving its heritage and in surviving in an ocean of Englishness. The Muslim community in Quebec is thus a religious minority within a national minority. In my study, I examine the specificity of Quebec and of the Muslim community's positioning in this province.

Central research questions. The issues raised above lead to significant research questions: What cultural values and attitudes are central to Islamic schooling in Montreal? How do such values and attitudes affect students' views on integration and citizenship? Do they run counter to the values of integration, tolerance, civic education, students' autonomy, and citizenry? How are these Islamic schools implementing Islamic practice and instructions (i.e. rituals, scriptures, beliefs) to guide and shape their students' attitudes and opinions? Moreover, do these attitudes accompany students after they graduate from school? And finally, how are graduates of Islamic schools integrating what they have learned in their lives today as adults and responsible citizens? I look at the impact of such schooling on students' ethnic, cultural, religious, and national identities, their religiosities, and their sense of citizenship as Muslims, Quebecers, and Canadians. This research's central question revolves around examining the influence of instructions, curricula, and Montreal Islamic schools' environment on students' identities and sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada. I investigate the various challenges students face when they graduate from Islamic schools, and look at these issues from various perspectives.

Overview of the Chapters

This thesis explores the ways in which Islamic schooling serves as a barrier to, or as a vehicle for young Muslims' integration in Montreal. It is made up of two main parts. The first part, chapters one to three, covers literature review and research methodology. The second part, chapters four to six, looks at the data and examines themes and categories that emerged from it. Chapter One introduces and historicizes the phenomenon of Islamic schooling in North America and Quebec. Throughout this study, Islamic schooling refers to the kind of education offered at state-accredited full time Islamic schools in Montreal. In addition, the chapter contextualizes the main historic

phases of the creation and the evolution of North American Islamic schools from the Nation of Islam schools to 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 not, to the creation of unity and harmony among future citizens, and assesses parents' rights to educate their children at the school of their choice. The Second chapter looks at national identity and citizenship as vehicles for belonging to the nation and as tools for facilitating social cohesion between all citizens. It tackles integration in Quebec and the importance of studying identities in order to understand how such transition occurs. More specifically, the chapter looks at Islamic identity construction in French intercultural Quebec, which implies the construction of a minority religious and ethnic identity within Quebec, a minority nation. The chapter also looks at the challenges facing Muslim youth in reconciling their Muslimness with their Quebecness and Canadianness.[2] The discussion and analysis of identity are informed by the work of Charles Taylor (1992) and Parekh (1995). Chapter Three presents and discusses the methodology adopted in this study and investigates my experience as an insider 'Muslim and teacher' and as an outsider 'trained researcher' within my own community and within Islamic schools in Montreal. The chapter is an attempt to enlighten this insider-outsider journey as well as the subjective-objective dichotomies of ethnographic research; it tackles the challenges of pre, during and "post-native" research. I aim to (1) explore my native agency and the challenges I faced; and (2) to examine the concepts insider/outsider and objectivity/subjectivity while studying the Muslim community.

Chapter Four presents individual accounts of six "model" participants. These participants stood out by sharing the most about their experiences and perspectives on Canadianness, Quebecness, identity, and Islamic schooling. I include a brief description

[2] Throughout this thesis, 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.

of these model participants to help contextualize my analysis as well as their comments and views. I chose the participants whose interviews stood out from the rest of interviewees either for experiencing various educational systems, not just the Islamic, or for voicing unique perspectives about their experiences, etc. Chapter Five draws on the perceptions of teachers, principals, parents, and founders of Islamic schools. It looks at the experiences and motivations of these stakeholders for being involved with this kind of schooling. It explores the nature of Islamic education as found in Montreal and its role in shaping Muslim youth identities and sense of belonging within the context of Quebec's intercultural society. Chapter Six responds to my main research questions; it directly examines the impact of Islamic schooling on Muslim youth, and analyzes 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. In the concluding chapter, I contextualize and compare my findings with other studies in Quebec and English Canada. I look at similarities and differences between participants in my study and in other empirical studies that looked at Muslim and immigrant youth identities and their sense of belonging.

PART ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER I

MUSLIMS AND EDUCATION IN NORTH AMERICAN

Faith-based schools in general, and Islamic schools in particular are widely seen as purposely denying students exposure to alternative traditions in the wider societal culture in the West. Critics have accused these schools of exaggerating differences, intensifying resentments and building wedges between nationalities, cultures, ethnicities, and religions. They suggest that these institutions might be producing patterns of self-pity and self-ghettoization that harm students, create more divergences, and lead to cultural divisiveness. This chapter looks at Muslims' experiences with public schools and the role of the latter in pushing some of them towards communitarian schools. Broadly speaking, the rationale behind the establishment of Islamic schools is to preserve and protect an inherited traditional set of cultural and religious values and to construct an Islamic identity that is able to 'survive' in a Western society. That being said, these schools are not homogeneous in their nature; they enjoy a rich diversity in their students' body, their theological orientations, and their cultural background.

Historically, education has been primarily concerned with preserving beliefs and transmitting values. It has been the repository of the religious, cultural, political, and philosophical ideals, which have formed the core of today's educational endeavours in the West (Cairns, 2009). However, modern education in plural societies is being increasingly challenged in its capacity to successfully engage, educate, and guide all students (i.e. indigenous, immigrants, minorities, and those from non-Christian

backgrounds) in a particular form of enlightenment (ibid.). In the name of this enlightenment and for the sake of epistemological neutrality, most public schools in the West have been seen, especially from minority groups' perspective, as relegating religion and non-Christian cultures to either boring and unimportant areas of study (Sweet, 1997, p. 215) or to an out-dated heritage that lost its utility in the modern world. Non-Western cultures and traditions have also been relegated as irrelevant in the classroom, which encouraged cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities to seek other alternatives such as religious schools. Before tackling Islamic education in North America, I will talk about Muslims' arrival to Canada.

1.1 Western Muslims

Early Muslim immigrants had no (religious) guidelines or plans for behaving as permanent residents in the West (Kelly, 2000, p. 30), for developing a sense of attachment to their new country of residence, and, therefore, no clear or serious intent for founding permanent institutions that would represent them, preserve their culture, and transfer their religious and cultural heritage to their offspring in the long term.

Canadian Muslims. In the Canadian context, even though a few Syrians arrived in Canada at the end of the 19th century (Riikonen & Dervin, 2012), the early waves of Muslim migrants came from the Indian subcontinent during the 1970s and 1980s, most of them settling in Ontario (McAndrew, 2010, p. 3; Hussain, 2004; Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 101). Later waves that emigrated from North Africa settled in Quebec where around "90% of Muslims speak French: 25% claim it as their mother tongue, and 40% speak it at home" (McAndrew, 2010, p. 3). Canadian Muslims, from all ethnicities and nationalities, are distinguished from the general population by markedly higher levels of educational attainment and involvement with the wider society (Kelly, 2000, p. 40; Beyer, 2013; McAndrew, 2010; Hussain, 2004; Helly, 2008). Nonetheless, their economic achievements are lower than those of the general population. That being said,

this reality has fuelled feelings of stigmatization and otherness especially among second and third-generation Muslims whose expectations from their society are higher than their parents' expectation; most of them fully identify with Canada, speak French or English more fluently than their parents' language; therefore, they see themselves as natives and not as immigrants (Beyer & Ramji, 2013). Furthermore, post-9/11 narratives played a role in propagating Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice, whether real or imagined, and in convincing Western Muslims that they are, indeed, being perceived as outsiders and enemies, and not as equal co-citizens. According to Helly (2004, p. 28),

> "negative images of Islam in Quebec might be understood from five angles: (1) Islam's image as a negative intolerant and violent religion; (2) lack of democracy in Muslim countries; (3) considering religiosity as a non-modern phenomenon, particularly amongst « militant secularists »; (4) the perception that women are oppressed in Islam; (5) and the stereotype of Muslims as close minded individuals who are not engaged in their host societies". [3]

Two groups of immigrants. At the other side of the spectrum, Haddad (2009, p. 79) distinguishes between Muslim immigrants who came to North America before the 1960s and those who immigrated later. Muslims who immigrated earlier, she insists, were more flexible in assimilating into the host society's culture and kept their faith and tradition private in their homes. I would argue that their small numbers and their invisibility along with the lack of a strong community, and of community institutions and centres in their neighbourhoods or their city forced them to keep their religious practices private and to keep a low profile. Immigrants who settled after the 1960s, continues Haddad, carried values, attitudes, and an intellectual background different from their predecessors (Memon, 2009). Most of these immigrants were graduate students or academics with self-confidence, self-awareness, and a strong sense of identity. They were the founders of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) in the USA

[3] My translation from French.

and Canada[4], and other core Islamic institutions such as the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

In his thesis, entitled *The history of Islamic schools in North America: from protest to praxis*, Memon (2009, p. 135) emphasizes two facts about the Muslim Students Association (MSA) in the establishment of North American Islamic schools: firstly, those who advocated the need for Islamic schools were founding members of the MSA; and secondly, because the MSA was active both in Canada and the United States, its efforts in the realm of education explains the similarities of the Canadian and American immigrant experiences in establishing these schools. Nonetheless, Islamic schools in North America preceded the migration of Muslims from Islamic countries; they were first established by the Nation of Islam in the 1930s. In short, at first, Muslim migrants' intention was not to settle and build new lives in North America but to finish their studies, then return home to rebuild their lives and settle down. The decision to settle permanently was adopted many years after their arrival in diaspora.

1.1.1 Islamic Education in Diaspora

Various Islamic institutions have emerged in North America in the past few decades. These institutions are a natural outcome of the increasing Muslim presence on the continent. As these Muslims have in one way or another contributed towards the communities and the cities in which they have settled, one of their main contributions for members of their community is in the field of education through the establishment of Islamic schools. With tensions surrounding Islam and Muslim immigrants, especially in a post-9/11 and post-ISIS era, Islamic schools in the West have attracted much attention: first, because of the *status quo* of Western Muslims as a suspect community, and, second, because of the continuous debates over minorities' ways of integration in host

[4] For more on Muslim Students Associations in Canada and the USA see: http://msanational.org

societies, and the role that education might play in that transition. Debates over the role of faith-based schools in general, and over Islamic schools specifically are on the rise. However, Islamic schools are not a western invention; they have existed for decades and centuries in the Arab world and in the Indian Subcontinent (Haddad, Farid, & Smith, 2009, p. 7; Halstead, 2004).

Nevertheless, their presence in North America began with the history of Muslim arrivals and on the evolution of a Muslim consciousness as a distinguished, growing, and independent community. Their experience in North America is unique. Their story in the USA, for instance, ought to begin with the Nation of Islam and its founder Elijah Muhammad (d.1975) (Memon, 2009, p. 59). That being said, in the United States, there is a distinction to be made between the Nation of Islam and its schools and institutions and Muslim immigrants' institutions. This historical and theological distinction affects how each community embodies its role in society, how it plans its strategies for educating its youth, and how it engages in societal and civic participation. The purpose of what follows is to shed light on two main points: (1) the Islamic education phenomena in North America and (2) the confessional schooling struggle for societal acceptance and identity struggles.

Education in Islam. Islamic education is the legitimate and natural outcome of Islam and Islamic values as well as the main tool for preserving and transmitting the religion and its main components. It is characterized by two dual concepts: (1) it starts with the individual then expands to include the community at large; and (2) it begins with life and ends with the hereafter (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 92).

In Islam, seeking and propagating knowledge is seen as a form of adoration of God. In fact, it is narrated that the prophet Muhammad said: "Seek knowledge even unto China" (*utlub al-'ilma wa law fi-l-sin*). According to (Halstead, 2004, p. 520),

> "The Qur'an is full of exhortations to pursue knowledge (e.g. Q. 20:114); it proclaims the superiority in God's eyes of those who have knowledge (e.g. Q. 58:11 and 39:9), but also emphasizes wisdom and guidance rather than the blind acceptance of tradition (Q. 2:170, 17:36 and 6:148)".

For more than fourteen centuries, Islamic education has grown and advanced alongside the religion of Islam itself. It has adapted and evolved alongside the various cultural and temporal historical contexts (Al Kandari, 2004). According to Aslan and Rausch (2013, p. 15), Islamic education is conceived and investigated in four traditions: (1) a tradition of scholarly training; (2) a mode of academic enquiry at all levels of public and private education, including university; (3) a means of transmitting doctrine and practice to adherents in the family by family members; and (4) in religious centres by teachers. The last three serve as instruments of identity transmission, particularly in the case of minorities (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 3).

Education is the key to the preservation of communities' religious and cultural identities without losing pride and honour in their heritage (Al kandari, 2004, p. 105). Unlike Islamic schooling, Islamic education transcends time and space and aims to educate the heart, the soul, and the intellect of the human being. Proponents of Islamic ways of education (Zine, 2001, 2008; Memon, 2009, 2012; Al-Attas 1978; Cristillo, 2009) note that a faith-based curriculum provides a balanced and integrated education that strives to educate the whole person. Nevertheless, Islamic education is not exclusively reduced to teaching and learning about Islam; it is mainly about raising self-conscious devout Muslim individuals (Aslan, 2013, p. 58). When talking about Islamic education, Arabic terms such as *ta'lim*, or learning, *tarbiya* , or educating, and *ta'dib*, disciplining, as often used (Ali, 2012, p. 22). According to Halstead (2004, p. 522),

> "The different emphases of these three terms suggest a possible analysis of Muslim education in terms of (i) aiding individual development, (ii) increasing

> understanding of society and its social and moral rules and (iii) transmitting knowledge, though of course such an analysis is by no means exclusive to Islamic thinking".

Other expressions such as *tarbia islamiya* (Islamic education) and *tarbiya diniya* (religious education) are also employed to describe Islamic schooling in Muslim countries. However, as Western Islamic schools face a different reality; they need to prepare students to live, socialize, and function in a secular non-Muslim society. Thus they tend to be more realistic about providing "minimal" standards of Islamic education and meeting minimal requirement of their secular societies.[5]

The need for Islamic schooling. Concerns about raising Muslim youth in the West date back to the first years of Muslim migration to Christian lands. This concern became urgent upon the decision to settle permanently in the West. For instance, Khurran Murad, who was the Director General of the Islamic Foundation in London in 1986, perfectly described and voiced his concerns about educating Muslim youth in the West:

> "What future awaits Muslim youth in Britain, or, for that matter in any similar predominantly non-Muslim secular society? This crucial question haunts every sensitive and concerned Muslim mind. We are desperately looking for an answer, for a proper, viable strategy, an education strategy as we put it, to ensure that our children grow up and remain Muslims. This is a desideratum of the utmost urgency and importance. For the future of the Muslim youth is but the other name of the future of the umma here, of our families, traditions, and institutions..." (Khurran, 1986, p. 3)

Khurran (1986, p. 4) asserts that the key to the future is education, not in the narrow sense of schools, curriculum, and syllabuses, but education in the wider sense of

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[5] 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: http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2015/09/muslim-school-slammed-by-ofsted-as-former-pupil-says-the-college-was-utterly-cruel

changing hearts, minds and lives, and instilling them with ideals and norms which will direct and focus their aspirations and dreams.

I draw a clear distinction between Islamic schooling and Islamic education. The first, which is the focus of this thesis, abides by the rules of "industrial markets," prioritizes secular academic education, follows the guidelines of a ministry of education, while ensuring a minimum of Islamic education.[6] The second focuses on the holism of the individual and lies primarily on developing the spiritual alongside the academic, as portrayed in the scheme of the prophetic mission. Furthermore, Islamic education is not reduced to the simple fact of teachings about Islam and the Muslim tradition; it is a way of learning that supersedes religious instruction to orientate and influence not only other secular subjects but also behaviours and attitudes of students both in and outside of the school building (Khurran, 1986, p. 5). The need for such an Islamic epistemology became urgent when Muslim migrants decided to permanently settle in their new Western countries. Put differently, Islamic schools are institutions that aim at instilling an Islamic education in Muslim youth through Islamic instructions. Nonetheless, to 'aim at' is different from 'to successfully instill'. Educational institution may have multiple aims, even potentially conflicting aims. Public schools, for instance, may aim at promoting democratic citizenship values. But they may also aim at promoting values of consumership, which potentially conflict with and undermine values of democratic citizenship. Thus, Islamic schools may sometimes be places in which Islamic education is not promoted.

1.1.2 Black and Immigrant Islamic Schools

This section gives a brief overview of black Islamic schools in the USA that were founded by the Nation of Islam, and immigrant Islamic schools associated with migrant

[6] 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 (3 hours in the case of Montreal Islamic high schools) to teach Qur'an, Arabic, and Islamic studies.

Muslim communities. Then I will introduce Quebecois Islamic schools that have been established in the province in the last few decades.

'Black'[7] *Islamic schools.* The earliest Islamic schools in North America were a part of the Nation of Islam's (NOI) revival project. Establishing these schools was an act of protest against the absence of fair and equal educational opportunities in the American society and in the American educational system (Memon, 2009). Memon (2009, p. 177) differentiates between the indigenous[8] experience of Islamic schools, which relates to the University of Islam Schools (UOIS), and the immigrant experience related to the relatively recent waves of Muslim immigrants in North America. The first model of schools is "Qur'an-Based Model of Islamic schooling". The theorists of this model sought refuge exclusively in the Qur'an for instruction and inspiration. The second model is based on integration and Islamization of knowledge[9], the expression first used in its modern sense by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in his 1978 book *'Islamic and Secularism'* (Khalīl, 1991; Memon, 2009). In the Canadian diaspora, there are no NOI schools, as the Nation of Islam (NOI) did not establish any schools outside the United States.[10] This desire and need for Islamic institutions that preserve the "black" Islamic tradition emerged from the need to resist cultural assimilation and to promote racial and religious pride (Memon, 2012; Zine, 2008, p. 14). The founders of "black" Islamic schools believed that their mission was a "going back" to the tradition of their African Muslim ancestors. Put differently, the NOI schools protested the dehumanization to

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[7] I employ the term 'black' because the epistemology of early indigenous Islamic schools – i.e. that belonged to the Nation of Islam movement – was centered on the purity of the black race and was still adopting the 'evilness' of the White man.

[8] Because of the confusion that the term 'indigenous' may bring, I decided to employ the term 'black' for reasons mentioned above.

[9] The term 'Islamization' was first used in its modern sense by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in his 1978 book *'Islamic and Secularism'*. For more see : Khalīl, I. -D. (1991). Islamization of knowledge: Outline of a methodology. International Institute of Islamic Thought.

[10] 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 N.O.I. outside of the U.S. in history. The Nation of Islam of Canada is not affiliated with any branches of the N.O.I. in the U.S. and adheres to Islam as it was taught by the Hon. Elijah Muhammad. For more, see: http://www.noic.ca/history.php. [URL not working]

which African Americans were subjected. However, despite the fierce criticism that the Nation of Islam movement and its schools have faced,

> "what Elijah Muhammad achieved in forty-five years cannot be undermined in the history of Islam and Islamic schooling in America. Between nurturing black consciousness, challenging perceived inferiority, and embedding these within a unique religious discourse, he engendered an immense commitment to protest" (Memon, 2009, p. 185).

Immigrant Islamic schools. These schools were founded by young professionals, graduate students, and academic Muslim migrants (Memon, 2009); they adopted an educational epistemology and a strategy that were different from those of 'black' schools. Unlike the latter, immigrant Islamic schools have not completely rejected the form and structure of secular schooling. Instead, they have placed an emphasis on the lack of moral and religious values being properly taught in public schools, and on a divergence of the Muslim community's values with Secular values. These schools were not meant to be permanent when they were first established, and therefore early Muslims did not intend to create future Western Muslim citizens or to construct an Islamic Western identity. The plan was that Muslim youth studying in these schools would eventually return and live with their parents in their countries of origin. It is worth noting that full-time Islamic schools in North America were, in most cases, an extension of weekend schools and mosque night classes. By the mid-1970s, the urgent need for full-time Islamic schools pushed the education committee of the National Muslim Student Association (MSA) to envision two pilot projects for establishing the first two schools in North America, one in Mississauga, Toronto, and the other in Bridgeview, Chicago (Memon, 2009, p. 142).

That being said, early Muslim immigrants who founded and supported Islamic schools had two intentions: the first was to preserve the cultural and religious package they brought with them until they return home; and the second was to protect their heritage

from what they considered habits and customs that endangered their children's religion and identity. Nevertheless, the pedagogical practices of their schools were, unconsciously, shaped by their own experiences of colonization, decolonization, and immigration from their countries of origin (Memon, 2009, p. 253). For instance, most Islamic schools were similar to the schools that the colonizer had left behind in Muslim countries: main secular subjects with few hours of Qur'an, Islamic studies, and Arabic. Even today, most Islamic schools in North America are following the same pattern and functioning with no clear perspective or philosophy on how to teach all subjects from an Islamic perspective.

Conservative Islamic schools are the ones that get the most attention in the West, in particular from the media. They have become the scapegoats in public debates on faith-based education (Miedema, 2014, p. 374), and are sometimes seen as the nuclei for propagating hatred and forming extremists whose main goal is to destroy the West. These negative generalizations have helped create a phobia against anything labelled 'Islamic' education (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 129) and fuel increasing Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry.

Quebecois Islamic Schools. In 1983, a group of Muslim intellectuals from Montreal launched the project of establishing an Islamic school that would educate the children of Montreal's Muslim community. Thus, the first Islamic school in the city, Écoles Musulmanes de Montréal (ÉMM), was founded. On its website, the school states that it favours self-esteem, integration to the Canadian society, and the preservation of the cultural heritage (linguistic and religious) of the community.[11] The school opened its doors in 1985 with only 25 students in preschool and first grade; it did not become

[11] See their website here: http://www.emms.ca/dev/?page_id=318

subsidized by the Ministry of Education until 1989.[12] Further, it was not until 1996 that the school bought a new building to house students at the secondary level. Since 1990, all students were being taught at the elementary campus.

Quebecer Muslims are the only majority Francophone Muslim community in the continent: 75% of Muslims in Quebec adhere to the French culture and speak French at home (see: McAndrew, 2010; Triki-Yamani & McAndrew, 2009) The vast majority of them follow the Sunni tradition of Islam, which reflects the reality in the Muslim world (Brodeur, 2008, p. 98). Quebec Islamic schools, which are all Francophone, echo the heterogeneous aspect of this community (i.e. Sunni, Shia, *ahbash* schools). Quebec houses thirteen Islamic schools, twelve are in the Greater Montreal area and one in Quebec City. They fall into what the "Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec" (2011) calls ethno-religious schools (there are 61 of those schools in Quebec). Before being Islamic, these schools are all francophone institutions with a communitarian mandate, which is the transmission of the Islamic culture and the preservation of Islamic identity (Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 118). Table 1 bellow presents Quebec full-time Islamic schools.

[12] Even though the school hosts students at the elementary and secondary level, the ministry only subsidizes the elementary campus. According to a school's administrator, the secondary school applied many times for funding but was rejected.

Table 1 Quebec Islamic Schools

School	Level: Elementary and/or Secondary	Location	Year of Establishment
Dar Al-Iman,	E	Saint-Laurent	2000
Académie culturelle de Laval	E	Laval	2004
Al-Hudah	E	Côte-des-Neige	2002
L'École de l'excellence	E	Quebec City	2009
Le savoir	S	Pierrefonds	2009
Les École musulmanes de Montréal (EMM)	E / S	Montreal	1985
Jeunes musulmans canadians (JMC)	E / S	Saint-Laurent	2000
Ali ibn Abi Talib	E / S	Montreal	1991
Académie Ibn Sina	E / S	Montreal	1996

Note: In Quebec, there are seven elementary Islamic schools and five Islamic high schools.

1.1.3 The '*Raison d'être*' of Islamic Schools

Parents and Islamic education. The rationale for Islamic schools is not completely new but it intersects significantly with arguments made by proponents of Christian and Jewish schools, and also with philosophical arguments for parental control and authority over education that are not grounded in the tenets of any particular religion, but rather on long-standing modern secular and political principles. For instance, Thiessen (2001, p. 68) asserts that a say in educational choices should be kept in the hands of the parents. He argues that if we deny them parental rights in terms of their children's education, we will not be giving these rights back to the children, as they cannot exercise them. In other words, it is the state and the parents who are disputing over the ownership of children's education and not the children themselves, as they cannot speak for themselves. To avoid any cultural, religious, or axiological conflicts, there must be

congruence between the practices at home and those at school (Zine, 2008, p. 245). The home culture of all students must be, at least partly, observed in the classroom. To fail to promote dialogue, disagreement, analysis and criticism (between all parties) is to fail those young people and to fail to endorse their moral and spiritual development (Miller, 2013).

The school's epistemology. Besides arguments for parental control and authority over the education of their children, advocates of modern Islamic education argue for what they call "Islamic ways of knowing." Zine (2004, 2008), for example, argues for alternative ways of knowing other than the secular ones. As a guiding philosophy, she identifies four key elements of an Islamic way of knowing from an Islamic epistemology: these elements are peace, social and environmental justice, unity, and accountability.

The methodology adopted by Zine (2008) in her research is, as she defines it, a "critical faith-centred epistemology framework" (p. 51). She points out that the philosophical foundations of this epistemology centres around key principles related to religion and spirituality such as the philosophy of holism, the role of religion in shaping the understanding of academic disciplines, and the legitimacy of religion as a site of analysis of social and existential ideas. She suggests that, by providing a space for critical contestation and political engagement, religious and spiritual identities can represent sites of oppression as well as sites of resistance to this oppression. For instance, while men can use religion as an alibi to oppress women in certain societies, women can also refer to religion to seek their liberation. Finally, this faith-centred epistemology asserts that not all knowledge is socially constructed; indeed, for many, knowledge can emanate from divine revelation and can have a spiritual origin (Zine, 2008, p. 55; Arthur *et al.*, 2010, p. 99). This notion of 'critical faith-based' pedagogy is

an interesting attempt to explain how contemporary Islamic education can engage with and intersect with progressive, liberal educational values.

Islamic versus non-Islamic schools. The 'one-size fits most' approach of secular curricula is sometimes criticized for not being genuinely neutral. Whereas outsiders argue that Muslim students in the West would be better off in public schools where they could learn civic values and assimilate into the host society (Cristillo, 2009; Cook, 1999), the founders of Islamic schools often state that Muslim students experience unwelcome attention when they are called upon to speak for Islam and for other Muslims. Other students are rarely, if ever, expected to speak for their religion (Blumenfeld, 2006b, p. 12). There is no shortage of Christian values, traditions, and holidays (holy days) in the secular educational curriculum. Christian values are considered a universal norm but devoid of religious significance. Moreover, Clauss *et al* (2012, p. 4) asserts that most teachers in public schools are not sensitized to Muslim children, and hence will struggle in providing them with an equitable balanced education that their peers from Christian backgrounds receive. Christian dominance and advantage is maintained by its invisibility. Its visibility is rarely analyzed, interrogated or confronted in democratic societies. It is looked upon as neutral and as the norm by which all citizens should abide; any types of challenges to this invisible dominance can be sometimes perceived as "subversive" or as "sacrilegious" (Blumenfeld, 2006a, p. 13). For instance, when peoples of faith demand a religious accommodation for a religious holiday, they are not being seen as asking for equality with their Christian co-citizens who already enjoy the "officialization" of their holy days as the State's holidays, but instead, they are considered as asking for a privilege and a special treatment.

Similarly, the issues of representation and interpretation are closely related. Edward Said's important work on Orientalism shows how aspects of Islam were constructed and represented stereotypically by Europeans in their own interests. For Said, Orientalist

interpretations were guided by stereotyped portraits of the "other" who was barbaric and less civilized by self-definition (Jackson, 2004, p. 89; el-Aswad, 2013, p. 41). To shed some light on these phenomena, Douglass (2009) discusses the coverage of Islam (in the US) in social studies books during the 1970s and the 1980s and shows some stereotypical aspects of the moment. Some of the inaccuracies in those textbooks included, but were not limited to, misconstrued names of important founding individuals, the representation of Islam as Mohammedanism, upside-down images of Qur'an pages and of Arabic script, the presentation of the geography of Islam only within the Middle East, and the reinforcement of stereotypes about the role of women in Islam. Textbooks that covered European civilization have often maintained the pretence that civilization is something that disappeared with Rome and only reappeared miraculously in Europe in the late middle age (ibid.). The period from Rome's dying glory to the Renaissance was often portrayed as though the human intellect has hibernated until Europeans suddenly and inexplicably rediscovered the classical arts and sciences and commenced their renaissance.

Critics argue that public schools are not value-free institutions because other epistemologies that differ from the dominant epistemology are not being equally reflected in these schools. In his defence for tolerance in schools, Thiessen (2001) insists that tolerance should be extended to all beliefs because "education deals with people who are more important than beliefs and because ethics supersede epistemology" (p. 47). However, it is often assumed that the only way to be tolerant is to adopt a relativist position with regards to truth. Religious knowledge has a relativistic nature and tolerance can be guaranteed by respecting the right to choose one's metaphysical truth. Nonetheless, the Christian share in the cultural heritage of the West is a part of its history and should have a significant place in religious education, but not on the grounds that there exists a fixed and unchanging culture or "way of life." Christianity and other religions need to be seen as living and internally diverse traditions, relating, responding

and reacting to one another and to the secularism they all encounter (Jackson, 2004, p. 31).

1.2 Debates around Confessional Schools

In what follows, I will investigate the experience of Islamic schooling in the light of the phenomenon of faith-based schooling in the West. With the exception of the accusations of radicalization and terrorism, most criticisms directed at Islamic schools (i.e. dogmatism, isolation, teaching creationism) could be applied to other faith-based schools.

Criticizing confessional schools. Islamic schools are one kind of faith-based schools in North America. Fierce opponents of religious education have repeatedly drawn our attention to the risks of faith schools, and even called for the elimination of denominational schooling altogether (Thiessen, 2001, p. 17). Opposition to these schools is often expressed in terms of an implicit or explicit appeal to state rights in education (Thiessen, 2001, p. 73) on the one hand, and the threat of divisiveness, intolerance, and indoctrination on the other (Tremblay, 2012). By isolating students from the rest of society and limiting their contacts to only those who share the same set of values, conservative confessional schools are widely seen as purposely denying exposure to alternative traditions in the wider societal culture (Maxwell *et al.*, 2012, p. 9). Concurrently, Maxwell *et al.* (2012, p. 14) claim that children who attend conservative religious schools are most likely to be at risk of not receiving the basic civic education that guarantees democratic citizenship. Gutmann (quoted in Zine, 2008, p. 39), for instance, argues that all religious or culturally based schools are part of a "separatist multicultural perspective" and are "designed primarily to sustain the self-esteem of students on the basis of their membership in a separatist culture." Likewise, Jackson (2004, p. 55) adds that the most convincing argument against these schools lies in their potential to erode social harmony by creating barriers between communities.

According to Sweet (1997, p. 179), certain "religious institutions, with their bureaucracies, their rules, and their misogynist, autocratic leaders can be incredibly oppressive." Again, generalizations should not be made because, I believe, Sweet is referring here to prestigious confessional institutions that enjoy tremendous economic and political privileges. Immigrant institutions are lacking behind in these regards. Most are self-funded, not subsidized by the state, and are struggling to preserve the identity of their students and enjoy nothing of the above privileges.

Critics have expressed concerns that confessional schools, by definition, abdicate the role educational institutions play in mediating the rights of the child against those of the family. Sweet (1997, p. 180) points out that, in these schools, the children are not the only ones whose rights are being violated; teachers also lack the legal protection that their colleagues in other schools enjoy. While some argue that religious education, shaped by an intellectual diversity, is naturally exploratory in nature and understandably interested in discovering the relationships of faith, belief, and culture (D'Souza, 2012), others believe that "pluralism and multiculturalism cannot survive unless they are sustained by practical measures like the ones that can be seen in the public educational system" (Sweet, 1997, p. 35). Furthermore, Maxwell *et al.* (2012, p. 12) insist that the promotion of exceptionalism in confessional schools lead to the minimization of intercultural contacts and to the inadequacy of civic education. The argument here is that through the adoption of exceptionalism, religious schools teach students that they are the only owners of the genuine and valid truth, which closes the possibility of dialogue and of accepting the other.

Debates about faith-based schools in democratic societies are usually about either their (in)compatibility with the fundamental political principles of liberalism (e.g. personal autonomy, citizenship, tolerance of diversity), or about their to public funds and support. One might argue that Islamic schools promote values or aims that are compatible with

liberal-democracy. But it does not follow from this that they should be funded by the state. Lots of separate, private (faith or non-faith) schools may be said to be arguably compatible with liberal principles, yet they do not receive state support. There may be practical reasons for this – e.g. the liberal state may judge schools to be failures with respect to promoting students' autonomy and citizenship, but regard them as rightfully permitted on grounds of parental rights. Or they may fund such schools on pragmatic grounds, reasoning that withdrawal of funding would be worse for children's welfare than providing some adequate level of funding, despite the schools' illiberal curriculum.

I understand that the state does not have to recognize 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 of public schools.
In sum, scholars who support dismissing or eliminating faith schools or who oppose the teaching of religion in public schools believe that religion has ceased to be relevant to issues of ethics, morality, and citizenship (Jackson, 2004, p. 136). In other words, because religiosity has dropped to low rates in secular societies, religion does not hold the same central status that it used to occupy decades and centuries ago. Nonetheless, there is also great support for this form of schooling from its proponents.

Supporting confessional schools. According to Beiles (2012, p. 103), confessional schools can meet the demands of liberal democracy by cultivating an identity that is grounded in their own traditions while at the same time oriented towards the requirements of democratic agreement. Beiles believes that, by promoting a common good such as the cultivation of shared values and identities, confessional schools can meet the demands of modern societies. Furthermore, Cristillo (2009, p. 77) points out that there is strong evidence that Islamic schools are fostering the development of social

capital for students, staff, and parents in their Muslim communities. He believes that the Islamic school is an active societal actor. By reaching out to other communities, and building a shared identity, confessional schools can promote living-together in their societies. According to Jackson (2004, p. 50), children's dialogue, whether within their own culture—in recognizing their internal dissent and diversity—or between cultures is seen as a key element in developing "metacultural" competence, which is an important competence for living-together among co-citizens from different cultures.

In his book *Faith in schools? Autonomy, citizenship, and religious education in the liberal state*, MacMullen (2007) insisted that religious schools should benefit from public funds as long as they contribute to the development of individual autonomy and civic virtues (i.e. tolerance, respect) in their students. According to MacMullen, autonomy is a neutral value and its endorsement is not only legitimate from the view of liberal educational policy, but also is in the best interests of students. MacMullen sees parents' right to transmit their ethical and religious convictions to their children as a fundamental right in liberal democracies. For those reasons, MacMullen argues that this right should be both permitted and funded. Religious schools should always encourage rational deliberation by contextualising their teachings to secular counter-arguments as well. They should make an effort to present both sides of any ethical or religious issue.

In order to contribute positively to diversity and pluralism, confessional schools should focus on the common good of their society (Cairns, 2009). Confessional schools should contribute and take part in debates surrounding their place in their societies rather than being the centre of the debates. On the one hand, and according to Jackson (2004, p. 54), the weakest argument for faith-based schools is the one that appeals to their high quality of education because they disadvantage other schools through selection procedures that "cream off the bright students." This statement made by Jackson cannot be generalized;

confessional schools are very diverse and heterogeneous; there are other schools that struggle to recruit students and accept almost everyone who approaches them.

1.2.1 Neutrality of the Public School

Public schools' culture. While the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the freedom of conscience and religion and prohibits religious indoctrination, it does not proscribe education about religion (Khan, 1999). In the North American context, Thésée and Carr (2009) state that even though neoliberalism favours the commercialization of the human activity through education and other means and neglects religion as a whole, it is, at the same time, promoting the dominance of the Christian heritage. When settlers first came to the New World, indigenous populations were "at times killed by the colonial Protestant establishment staunchly resistant to any diversity of religious beliefs or expression within its borders" (Blumenfeld, 2006a, p. 4). State schools have historically been used to assimilate the children of minority groups to the majority culture. Today, public schools in democratic and secular societies should serve and reflect the beliefs of all citizens. If they are truly the schools of the public, they should echo the public's culture and beliefs. In other words, public school cultures should be flexible and responsive to all citizens (Cairns, 2009, p. 4), not only in terms of academic expectations, but also in terms of cultural and religious coherence between the "home" and the "school." When the state curriculum fails to recognize the experiences and contributions of certain groups, it might increase their sense of marginalization and isolation within their society (Maxwell *et al.*, 2012, p. 9). Not just the school but the media also constitutes a major societal and institutional means of transmitting religious and cultural norms and beliefs of the majority, while maintaining the marginalization of others or, at best scenarios, ignoring them. For instance, until recently, students who are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, and of other faiths or with no faith saw few of their perspectives and few, if any, people who resemble them, people who hold their beliefs, or people who adopt their cultural expressions being introduced and discussed in their

public school. The school calendar is organized to meet the needs of many of the Christian faith communities (Blumenfeld, 2006b, p. 6; Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). As a result, the beliefs and values of dominant groups are normalized and transmitted (through hegemonic discourses), thereby rendering subordinated groups virtually invisible, while concurrently constructing labels about these groups. Not just individual students, but whole communities, have felt sometimes an institutional form of discrimination. For instance, in 1994, in response to a religious accommodation by the Jewish community, Ontario public-school boards adjusted their school year to accommodate the Jewish community's "holy" day, which was two days before the beginning of the school year. Nevertheless, the same request was rejected for the Muslim community two weeks later (Sweet, 1997, p. 200). The board's argument was that schools would have to shut down for an additional nine weeks if every "holy" day was to be observed for every religion in Canada.

Fortunately, these examples are not the norm in North America. In fact, most schools do their best to accommodate religious minorities. For instance, in Quebec, an Ethics and Religious Culture[13] program that was introduced in 2008, aims at contributing to harmonious social relations in Quebec society today. The course received praise as well as criticism from both secular and religious communities. I will expand more on this program in the next chapter.

Worries about the public school. In principle, Muslims and peoples of faith are determined, because of their religious commitment, to provide quality education that nurtures the heart, the intellect, and the soul. Some of them believe that "public schools can represent moral permissiveness and lower academic achievement" (Clauss *et al.*, 2012, p. 4). Similarly, they view the public educational system as "an unhealthy microcosm afflicted by violence, drug abuse, and sexual promiscuity" (Cristillo 2009,

[13] For detailed information on the ERC course, see the ministry's direct program at: http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/ethics-and-religious-culture-program/

p. 69), hence, come the need for Islamic schools for devout Muslims. Proponents of these schools believe that, in the absence of scholarly and rational proofs, it is unfair to suggest that they are more harmful to students (mainly immigrants) than secular schools within the same context (Kelly, 2000, p. 121). They insist that the social and cultural impact of the Islamic school environment must not be underestimated. Students' emotional and spiritual well-being is an important component of learning and growth (Zine, 2008, p. 286), and if we ignore adolescents' long-term self-interest, they will lack self-control, autonomy, and independence.

Many young Muslims and their families struggle to maintain their religious identity by avoiding un-Islamic social practices such as drinking, non-permissible mixing, engaging in premarital sexual relations (Zine, 2001), and any other inadequate social activities. These Muslims struggle with how to develop an Islamic identity that is immune from Western temptations that are seen by some as un-Islamic. Maintaining one's Islamic identity is seen as the solution and is the main reason for the establishment of Islamic schools in America (Clauss *et al.*, 2013). The founders of these schools believed that the Islamic identity of Muslim youth might be "at risk" if they attend the public educational system. They asserted that public schools do not promote or encourage religious and moral values, which might confuse Muslim students in an ocean of relativism. In this sense, Islamic schools are considered temporary havens that protect these youth from such temptations and loss of faith, at least, until they reach the age of reason.

1.3 Quebecois Public Education

This section gives a brief historical overview of education in Quebec. Islamic schools in Quebec have to adhere to the guidelines and report back to the Ministry of Education. These schools cannot open their doors lest they teach the Quebec curriculum and follow ministerial rules. Therefore, it is important to understand the "educational terrain" where Islamic schools function.

A number of previous studies have covered Muslim students' experiences with both public and Islamic schools (Zine, 2001, 2004, 2008; Memon, 2009, 2012; McDonough, Memon, & Mintz, 2012; Tremblay & Milot, 2014; McAndrew, 2010). None of these studies, however, looked specifically at Muslims' experiences and perceptions with both school systems. This section aims to (1) shed light on the history of public schooling in Quebec; (2) to assess the factors behind the parents' choices of school; and (3) to contribute to debates related to public and religious education in Quebec. Important questions related to reasonable accommodations, to neutrality in public schools, and to the politics of harmonization in education are also addressed.

In secular democratic societies, the public educational system is a supposedly unifying system that prepares future citizens to live in harmony and peace with one another on the same territory and to share the same resources. It also trains students to become productive individuals who are qualified to enter the workplace once they leave school. That said, education is also a means that serves other ends such as integrating and assimilating the children of newcomers into the majority culture. Alternatively, it may also be understood as a system of indoctrination or de-indoctrination as it influences students' points of view about almost all aspects of life (Van *et al.*, 2012, p. 9; Milot, 2002, p. 31). Likewise, secular education might serve as a tool for eliminating religious barriers and cultural differences, and for moderating political conflict and disagreement. While the proponents of public schooling see it as a positive pedagogy, as it suppresses ideological differences between fellow citizens, passionate opponents such as devout Muslims consider this type of education a threat to their religion, culture, and to their whole heritage. For instance, public schools in Quebec are perceived by some immigrant communities as dangerous agents of socialization that are uprooting their children from their culture (Kelly, 2000, p. 94).

In Quebec, state education has an interesting story that is worth narrating. Changes in recent decades have led to radical reforms. Since the 1960s, the public school system has been transformed from a confessional school system that adopts the majority's religious values to a secular school system that teaches, or claims to teach, common values and serves the entire population. Furthermore, in September 2008, mandatory courses on Ethics and Religious Culture were introduced in all primary and secondary schools. Yet, some parents are still not happy with both the mandatory status of the program and with how it is being implemented. On the one side, religious parents see it as not being religious enough as it does not adopt their views or, worse, it teaches beliefs that contradict their own; while, on the other side, militant secularists refuse the return of any religion in public education (Boudreau, 2011).

Because of immigration, Quebec has become a more diverse society in recent decades. Reform in education had to draw new goals and avenues to respond to the multicultural and the multiethnic society that the province has become. These objectives cannot be reached simply by identifying a set of goals that defines democratic citizenship, but, as McDonough (2011) suggests,

> "a major way of distinguishing between the aims of education in ethically and religiously homogeneous societies and the educational aims of pluralist liberal democracies is by noting that education for personal autonomy and citizenship in the latter requires rich and meaningful exposure to these various forms of diversity" (p. 227).

McDonough differentiates between homogeneous and heterogeneous democratic societies. He believes that, in a diverse and secular society such as the Canadian one, education should aim at promoting personal autonomy and at flourishing deep engagement across existing religious, ethnic, as well as political differences. Education should also encourage students to develop capacities for critical thinking and rational reflections, in particular by seeking a deeper understanding of the co-citizen's identity,

and through developing and mastering self-reflection required for autonomous living as a civic value and a civic virtue. In other words, education, while training students for personal autonomy, should also prepare them to coexist peaceably and recognize others who might hold different and opposing values. McDonough (2011) asserts that:

> "The attribution of a causal relationship between autonomy and peaceful coexistence is dubious at best. Far from being an inevitable or even a 'likely' outcome of individual critical reflection, the development of a citizen's critical perspective needs to be attended to consciously, directly, and independently of educational efforts directed to promoting personal autonomy" (p. 231).

McDonough affirms that the shift in educational instruction from tolerance of the other who is immigrant to his recognition will change the status of minorities from unwanted tolerated citizens to a recognized and respected component of the mainstream society.

The main key to understand Quebec's educational system is to attend to the historical changes that took place in the province from the arrival of the French, the Quiet Revolution moment (Behiels, 1985; Gagnon & Montcalm, 1990; Mancilla, 2009), the reformation of the public educational system and, finally, the introduction of the mandatory Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program in September 2008.[14]

As far as we go back in time, education has always been linked to religious life. It was mainly concerned with discipleship, the transmission of religious values, and the preservation of morals (Nouailhat & Debray, 2004, p. 25; Ouellet, 2005). Education has traditionally been defined as a moral activity (Cairns, 2009, p. 37) that nurtures the heart, the soul, and the intellect.[15] In order to understand the Quebec educational system, and therefore the reaction of many devout Muslim parents to this system, it is necessary

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[14] For the official introduction of the ERC course, see: http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/programme-ethique-et-culture-religieuse/

[15] For more on the "noble" goal of religious education from an Islamic perspective, see al-Attas (1979).

to examine some important events that have taken place in the last two centuries. In Canada, because of the disagreements between the Protestants and the Catholics in Southern Ontario (Upper Canada) over the place of religion in schooling, "the 1843 Act of the Establishment of Common Schools in Upper Canada was passed funding Protestant and Catholic schools" (McDonough, Memon, & Mintz, 2012, p. 3). Later, public education was introduced under provincial jurisdiction by the America Act of 1867, also protecting the rights of Catholics and Protestants to religious schools (Boudreau, 1999, p. 18; Thiessen, 2001, p. 13; Jackson, 2004, p. 14; Milot, 2002, p. 6). That said, the Canadian public educational system was first established as a confessional system that serves the majority's needs, by adopting the two major religions in the country.

According to Boudreau (1999), from the early days of colonialism in North America, "religious orders were involved in all aspects of life in the new colony" (p. 9). Religion was written into Ontario's School Act of 1850, even specifying that a teacher should be "a person of Christian sentiment" (Boudreau, 1999, p. 10). In 1855, a new version of the same Act stated that schools should teach the Ten Commandments and should begin and end with prayer and Bible reading (Sweet, 1997, p. 31). Catholic schools, which have been operating longer than any other Christian schools in Canada (Sweet, 1997, p. 97), were established to preserve, protect, and preach the Catholic faith, as well as to counteract anti-Catholic bigotry (Clauss *et al.*, 2012, p. 4).[16]

During the decades following the conquest of New France in 1760, the Catholic Church in Quebec faced serious setbacks. Approximately 30 of its 140 churches were either damaged or destroyed (Boudreau, 1999, p. 10). One of the famous religious leaders, following the British conquest of Quebec, was Bishop Bourget. Because of his efforts in

[16] We can partially draw the same analogy about 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).

the 19th century, the Church regained its influence in Quebec (Boudreau, 1999). This influence affected all aspects of life and lasted until the 1960s, which was a period of crisis and struggle for the Catholic Church (Boudreau, 1999, p. 22; Thésée & Carr, 2009). In other words, the Church has kept its firm control on education up until the Quiet Revolution. The "collapse" of Catholicism as a dominant force in Quebec has led to the creation of a Ministry of Education in 1964 and subsequently to the reform of the educational system (Boudreau, 1999, p. 18; Milot, 2012, p. 45; Mancilla, 2009). The Church lost its status as the only stakeholder of public education. In order to adjust itself to these new contemporary realities, it had to make some foundational changes. In 1988, for instance, the congregation for Catholic education in Rome issued guidelines that apply to situations involving non-Catholics in Catholic schools (Milot, 2012, p. 45) and creating options for non-confessional moral educational courses (Van *et al.*, 2012).

1.3.1 Public vs. Islamic Schooling: Muslims' Perspectives

According to their proponents, Islamic schools in the West offer friendly environments that help Islamic identities grow while resisting full assimilation to the mainstream culture. Some devout Muslim parents believe that Islamic schools offer alternatives to the hegemony of secular and Eurocentric public education by centring spiritually based knowledge and practice as a core component of learning (Daher, 2005). Zine (2008), for instance, suggests that "Islamic schools represent an anti-colonial move in that they offer a central place to subjugated knowledge in educational discourse and praxis" (p. 230).[17] Islamic schools are often seen as places where rebellious Muslim students are sent to be re-educated and, in this way, they serve the function of providing "behaviour

[17] 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.

modification.'[18] In other words, some Islamic schools, specifically high schools, serve as rehabilitating centres or as reform schools for those kids who might go astray (Memon, 2009, p. 157; Daher, 2005). Kelly (2000, p. 46) affirms, in a case study about an Islamic school in Montreal, how some families have chosen these schools as one response to the challenges of raising Muslim kids in the West. Islamic schools advocate a form of guided integration, which means that, whereas they are adopting (or claim to) most values and norms of the mainstream society, they would reject some cultural or secular norms that run counter to their beliefs.

Others may dwell on the secondary Islamic school's climate that provides an environment in which Muslim youths can freely practise and participate in Islamic religious practices. They see the public school as a threat and as an uprooting institution that erases cultural and religious identities. The concern is that children will be subjected to views that might make them question their values. As Daher (2005) suggests, religious parents consider secular education a threat to their culture and religion. He affirms that individuals change their minds when they are exposed to the beliefs and objections of their classmates. Parents expect religious schools to reinforce standards of behaviour that are familiar to them and meet their expectations (Kelly, 2000). In addition, whereas some parents can object to particular parts of the curriculum at the religious school, which they think are inappropriate (i.e. music, dance, etc.), public schools are most likely to disregard the family's concerns.

In her book *Liberalism's Religion*, Laborde (2017, p. 26) recognizes the challenge of the religious worldview to liberal and secular worldviews. She believes that liberal-egalitarian ideals are not limited to western contexts (historical, cultural, religious, etc.) but they have other transcultural origins and contexts. To secure the requirements of

[18] 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.

living together in a secular society, Laborde (2017) suggests that religion must meet, what she calls, "minimal secularism". She names three main tenets while examining whether religion meets the requirements of such secularism: religion as divisive, religion as comprehensive, and religion as non-accessible (p. 113). Minimal secularism assumes the autonomy of the secular from the religious and the human from the divine. She indicates that "those features of religion that are non-accessible, divisive, or comprehensive must not be accommodated, invoked or institutionalized by the state if it is to meet the basic requirements of liberal legitimacy" (Cohen, 2018, p. 4). Laborde concludes that when reasons are not clearly understood they should not be employed to justify state coercion:

> "Symbolic religious establishment is wrong when it communicates that religious identity is a component of civic identity – of what it means to be a citizen of that state –, and thereby deny civic status to those who do not endorse that identity, who are then treated as second-class citizens" (Laborde, 2017, p. 129).

Laborde (2017, p. 135) advocates for liberal values to tackle political and public debates about religion. She inserts that symbolic religious establishment (i.e. crucifixes in public spheres) should not consider religious identity a constituent of civic identity, and recommends that citizenship should not be associated with a collective religious identity because that will exclude other minority religious identities. Laborde sees religious symbols as markers of identity and indicators of inclusion and exclusion from society (Lægaard, 2018); she emphases the fact that when states endorse specific religious symbols, they privilege one identity over others. Religious identities associated with such symbols is privileged at the expense of other identities, which raises the problem of exclusion and inequality. To solve this dilemma, Laborde (2017, p. 231) suggests equalizing down symbolic representations rather than equalizing up by allowing all religious symbols to manifest in society.

Studies on Muslim citizenship and identity in the West assert that Muslims who are politically and civically engaged refer to their religion as a driver for civic participation (Peucker, 2018; Mustafa 2016; Vergani et al. 2017; Harris and Roose 2014; Jamal 2005; Fleischmann et al. 2016; Isin and Turner 2002; Bellamy 2010). Peucker (2018) looked at active citizenship in the lived experiences of Muslims in the West and examined the claimed irreconcilability of Islam and liberal democracies through the dimension of healthy democracies and active citizenship. He concluded that active involvement in mosques, for instance, tends to enhance their active citizenship. In other words, Islamic religiosity and practice are positively associated with civic and political involvement (Maliepaard & Schacht, 2018). I am aware that some intense forms of religiosity might deter citizenship, integration, and social cohesion. Nonetheless, other forms might encourage and internalize them as a part of one's faith. Religiosity is not a rigid state of being, but may evolve, increase, or decrease.

The Alternative School. Most parents struggle to pass on their values to their offspring (Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 114). To do so, religious parents, especially minorities, might feel obligated to look for other alternatives to educate their children outside of the public system such as private religious schools, weekend schools, afterschool programs, bible circles, or homeschooling. They may also demand exemptions from a course that contradicts their religious or cultural beliefs. To face the challenges of public schooling, Muslim parents lean towards religious schooling as it responds to some of their needs and concerns. Even though they seem to disagree on prioritizing elementary or secondary Islamic schooling, a primary concern for them is the doctrine of secularism that is permeating public school curricula (Zine, 2008, p. 10; Sweet, 1997, p. 9; Blumenfeld, 2006a). These parents consider public secular education a threat to their very existence, as it will eventually eradicate their children's religious heritage, identity, and, consequently, theirs. This explains the reasoning for separate

religious schools among those with a strong cultural, traditional, and religious basis (Sweet 1997, p. 72).

Although Muslim parents are aware of the challenges (financial, pedagogical, administrative, etc.) Islamic schools face, some of them nonetheless believe that these schools can respond to the demands of democratic societies by cultivating and constructing religious identities while promoting the requirements of secular democratic societies (Thiessen, 2001). To them, Islamic schools are spaces where identities are negotiated and contested in the general multicultural setting that surrounds them, or as a counter-cultural alternative to the alleged doctrine of the majority (Cristillo, 2009, p. 70; Merry, 2008). Either through religious or public schooling, a good question is what form of integration are we looking for in the West? Most Muslim parents insist on maintaining and transmitting their religious and cultural identities; any form of integration should not be at the expense of their heritage. Kelly (2000, p. 24), for instance, argues for what she calls a "distinguishable assimilation"; she believes minorities should at least keep their cultural heritage. In doing so, these minorities would resist societal norms that directly contradict their culture and religious tradition and adopt the rest, while reconstructing their imported heritage to fit in the dominant culture.

Devout Muslim parents will look for an Islamic milieu that protects their children from exposure to sex, drugs, and inappropriate behaviour, while ensuring the development of an Islamic identity (Sweet, 1997; Merry, 2008; Zine, 2004, 2008). Religious schools in general seek to preserve core values and beliefs of their communities through direct instruction, targeted socialization, and religious practices (see Khan, 1999). For years, a number of Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant parents have withdrawn their children from public schools to preserve their religious identity and cultural norms (Clauss *et al.*, 2012, p. 3; Blumenfeld, 2006a). Inversely, secular parents will strive for a milieu that is free

from confessional influence. They will fight for a *laïque* (meaning here strictly secular) school and make sure their children are not exposed to superfluous beliefs or indoctrination. In the best scenarios, they believe a good school should not teach religion as a doctrine, but, instead, "treat it as a crucial human impulse, a passion, and a personal quest" (Sweet, 1997, p. 102). Nonetheless, many parents worry that if they isolate children in religious schools or try to homeschool them, they will not gain the knowledge, experience, and wisdom necessary for surviving in a multicultural, multi-religious, and secular society (Haddad *et al.*, 2009, p. 9).

Conclusion

According to Zine (2008, p. 135), Islamic schools are viewed by some parents as temporary stages and paths towards mental and behavioural stability; these parents often speak about the challenges they face raising their children and helping them resist assimilation into (un-Islamic) mainstream youth culture. For other parents and teachers, exploring common grounds between Islamic values and secular virtues should be a central goal of educational programs at Islamic schools (Ahmed, 2012, p. 158; Cook, 1999). People involved with these schools insist that they should provide a positive environment for nurturing Islamic identity, beliefs, and practices. Narrating his personal experience as an Islamic studies teacher at an Islamic school in Ontario, Ahmed (2012, p. 214) even goes further and states that it was in Islamic Studies classes that students learned critical-thinking skills enabling them to understand and challenge the issues they might face when they enter society. On another scale, Memon (2009) does not consider full-time Islamic schools Islamic enough if they are teaching state curriculum with no modification or adaptation. If the teaching and learning in all subjects is not god-centred, he argues, they are similar to public schools with few more boring subjects like Qur'an and Arabic. In other words, Islamic schools are not Islamic enough without Islamizing subjects taught in them.

Additionally, Islamic pedagogy must widen its discursive boundaries to include alternative epistemological understandings that provide students with the opportunity to investigate these multiple truth claims on ideological, rational, and empirical grounds (Zine, 2008, p. 316). That being said, to reform the oppressive discursive norms of faith institutions, we might have to introduce counter-discourses that are capable of mediating and shaping ontological development.

CHAPTER II

MUSLIMS' BELONGINGNESS AND ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN INTERCULTURAL FRENCH QUEBEC

Canadian and Quebecois Muslims develop hybrid identities and heterogeneous religiosities (Helly, 2008; Le Gall, 2003). They vary along a relatively vibrant range from completely non-religious to extremely devout and practising individuals (Beyer, 2013, p. 12). Their religiosities and identities are also very diverse. Their internal cultural differences and ways of thinking are considerable, so that any critical analysis of their religiosity would reveal the absence of a uniform Muslim identity (Bectovic, 2011). As individuals, we are born into social groups, which then play a profound role in constituting and shaping our memories, behaviours, communication, reasoning abilities (Bashir, 2008, p. 51; Roth & Burbules, 2011), and our social identities. These groups define our identity in their terms, based on their perceptions and opinions of who they think we are or assume our identity to be, and this will not always match the identities we wish to adopt (Ross, 2007) or to assume for ourselves.

Furthermore, civic identity and citizenship, as multidimensional concepts, are complex terms that require deep and thoughtful analysis (Merry & Milligan, 2009, p. 320)[19]. The nature of our identities (i.e. ethnic, religious, civic) greatly influences our belongingness,

[19] Such analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, which mainly aims at looking at such concepts (identity and citizenship) in the light of Islamic schooling in Montreal.

civic participation, and citizenry in our society. That said, even though citizenship is understood by most individuals as the acquisition of more rights and freedoms as part of being or becoming a member of the nation-state (Nordberg, 2006, p. 525), it has recently turned into a status that must be earned, reflecting a general trend of increasing duties discourse related to a communitarian understanding of nationality as an obligation to contribute to the common good (Nordberg, 2006, p. 529). This led many nations to adopt new laws and strategies in order to promote diversity and social cohesion between all citizens.

Citizenship does not refer exclusively to legal rights and responsibilities, but it is also about feelings of belonging and recognition in one's society. It is often theorized as a form of belonging to a political community, which is the nation-state (Nordberg, 2006). We know little about how different people understand their own citizenship as both a national identity and a form of belonging to their nation (Nordberg, 2006). Citizenship can be understood as the core institution of the nation-state, the base for democracy, and for national identity. In this sense, we can differentiate between two kinds of citizenship: (1) legal citizenship that is earned either by birth or through naturalization, and (2) assumed citizenship that is manifested in citizen's willingness to fully participate in the democratic process. In other words, citizenship embodies the formal framework for social, political, and cultural integration; through it, nations instill forms of belonging, membership, privileges and expectations with regards to individuals' rights and responsibilities (Iacovino, 2015, p. 43).

Notwithstanding this complex backdrop, this chapter seeks to explore the sense of belonging to a religion, a culture, a society, and a nation; and to examine the socio-cultural and religio-political dynamics that inform attitudes towards Quebec and Canada. And since shared identity between all co-citizens in a nation is the assumed collective identity, national identity takes up the core of the discussion in this chapter.

My discussion and analysis of national identity is informed by the views of Charles Taylor (1992) and Bhikhu Parekh (1995).

This chapter looks at national identity and citizenship as vehicles for belonging to the nation and as tools for facilitating social cohesion between all citizens. It tackles integration in Quebec and the importance of studying identities in order to understand how such transition occurs. More specifically, I look at Islamic identity construction in French intercultural Quebec, which signifies the construction of a minority religious and ethnic identity within a minority nation. Keeping in mind that immigrants' national identity develops over time as they get accustomed to their new realities, and as they experience their love or dislike for their new country; this national identity sometimes contains disparate and, even, contradictory characteristics.

2.1 The Complex Nature of Identity

We live in a world of plural, diverse, and hybrid identities. Individuals living in the same place and with the same lived identity will construct and live the same religion and the same culture differently (Beyer, 2013, p. 14). In other words, because they have different experiences, people from similar backgrounds will develop different attitudes, religiosities and different religious identities. Identities in the West are undergoing daily processes of changes and negotiations (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 385; Brodeur, 2008, p. 98). That said, the notion that individuals have hybrid identities is now widely recognized; most scholars acknowledge that identities in modern societies are not static or fixed identifications (Mendelsohn, 2007; Kymlicka, 2003; Splitter, 2011; Fraser-Burgess, 2012). The complex, dynamic, and changing relationships examined in this section uncover the attributes and characteristics of Canadian and Quebecois Muslims' identities. My focus is not only on Quebecois Muslims' identity but also on the factors that contribute to their identification (by others) and their self-identification, and how

these aspects are articulated and/or suppressed in Quebec (Brodeur, 2008, p. 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 (Ross, 2007). There is also the concept of hyphenated identities, which mirrors the phenomenon of individuals identifying with two or multiple worlds (Hassen, 2013; Roth & Burbules, 2011; Splitter, 2011; Fraser-Burgess, 2013; Brodeur, 2008), such as the assertion of being fully Muslim and completely secular.

Furthermore, Hall (quoted in Ross, 2007) criticizes 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.

Additionally, identities are not formed by individuals alone but are also, at least partially, socially constructed by, with, and through the influence of others (Webster, 2005). In this sense, individuals' identities are, at least in part, constituted via the beliefs of the communities to which they belong. The community may not dominate the totality of the individual's identity, but it will partially influence it and lead to the adoption of shared values, attitudes, and beliefs. As Fraser-Burgess (2013) suggests, there is a distinction between being an identity group member and having a group identity that guarantees belonging. He recognizes that what defines our membership within our communities is our awareness that we intentionally share a set of beliefs, values, and attitudes with other members of the community. Identities, in this sense, become contingent (Ross, 2007) in a way that many individuals share and identify with the same characteristics, values, and customs. The philosopher Charles Taylor (2012) notes that self-identity involves references to a host community[20] from which frameworks are gained. Stated otherwise, building one's identity cannot be achieved outside of some sort of framework, be it religious, cultural, secular, etc. (Webster, 2005).

2.1.1 The Importance of Examining the Various Existing Identities

In general, identity is made up of various components: "nationality, gender, individual character, personality, psychological needs, social memberships, personal preferences, likes and dislikes, prejudices, projections and identifications, and personal uniqueness" (Verkuyten, 2005, p. 40). Identity can also signify standing out, being different and unique, and having distinct qualities (DesRoches, 2014, p. 359) that characterize individuals and communities. It is also a socially constructed marker that abides by the forces and stereotypes of the society in which it is being negotiated and framed. It is not something that we have, rather it is what we are; it is not a property but a mode of being (Parekh, 1995, p. 268).

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[20] 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 (i.e. communist Russia).

There is a correlation between individuals' identities and their sense of belonging to their nation or large community. We might even argue that identity is a helpful marker in measuring or categorizing citizens' integration; in other words, it can be considered a citizenry "belongingness meter" by which we can guess individuals' sentiments about being a part of their nations. Likewise, identity attributes might be considered a measurement device for determining integration, citizenship, civic participation, and social cohesion (Eisenberg & Kymlicka, 2011, p. 2). Nonetheless, as Merry and Milligan (2009, p. 320) argue, the complexity of studying identity in a national context lies in the fact that citizenry is not limited to a particular identity but instead it refers to spaces where identities and multiple conceptions and understandings of belonging, citizenship, and national identities are being debated and negotiated. For example, notions of identity are sometimes raised in correlation with the broader understanding of minority ethnic and religious citizenship (Nordberg, 2006, p. 527). In countries such as the Netherlands, Britain, Norway, etc. the state is positively contributing to the preservation of such minority identities. It is facilitating the cultural and religious preservation of identity for Muslim and other minorities through the funding of their Islamic schools, allowing the construction of mosques, and granting permits for Islamic cemeteries (Merry & Milligan, 2009, p. 314). Nevertheless, suspicions and anxieties still surround minority identities, especially Islamic ones. Concerns and fears persist about minorities' capabilities and willingness to develop a shared national identity, which is seen as the common ground and the guarantor for social cohesion. This brings us to our discussion of national identity.

2.1.2 Understanding National Identity

National identities are a work in progress, a conversation between where we are coming from and where we are going (Meer, Modood & Zapata-Barrero 2016, p. 17). This conversation usually leads to co-forming an inclusive and unifying identity among most citizens, an identity that contains aspects of cultural homogeneity in a sense that (1)

minorities' identities become similar but not a replica of the majority's, and (2) the majority recognizes minorities' identities rights to exist and flourish. To understand national identities, the emphasis should be on the social environments in which they are being defined, institutionalized, and assigned to people in all kinds of ways (Verkuyten, 2005, p. 55). The identities promoted by public institutions in these environments are, as Modood (2016, p. 15) suggests, "state-manufactured identities." He states that these identities, although shared with minorities, should not be expected to be everyone's most important and cherished identity that could constantly undermine all other identities. On the contrary, Tremblay (2010, p. 52) asserts that this inclusive civic collective identity should respect cultural and religious diversity, feed from cultural interaction and exchange, and identify with all identities of the communities that live in the country. For example, Tremblay (2010, p. 50) argues that "civic collective identity is united by respect for universal values codified in law, such as respect for democratic procedures and human rights".

Furthermore, national identities that are not merely understood in terms of laws, norms, and political frameworks but that also have other cultural aspects—such as a language(s), a specific history, religion(s), national memories, memorials and other symbols marked by these religions and histories; this culture is central to what state funded schools are required to teach (Meer *et al.*, 2016, p. 12). Conceptions of identities include border-crossing identity, transnational identity, hyphenated identity, double consciousness, and hybrid negotiated identities. Each of these identity manifestations includes the pressures placed upon marginalized individuals to acquire language fluency and the culture of the dominant group in order to properly function in mainstream society (Parekh, 1995; Tindongan, 2011). To be seen as a part of this society, they need to adopt and externalize shared traits of the common national identity. Keeping a foot in each of the two worlds is the job of a minority; the dominant group has no such burden (Tindongan, 2011, p. 75). Nevertheless, Parekh (1995, p. 255) believes that national

identity, as a collection of kinships and values, is constantly redefined and renegotiated in light of historically inherited legacies, present needs, and future aspirations. Quebecois Muslim youth, for instance, while keeping to their minority status as Muslims might also identify as Quebecers and/or Canadians. Their identity is subject to constant change, partly in response to the changes in their environment and historical circumstances, and partly as a result of the changing self-conceptions, goals and ideals of their communities (Parekh, 1995, p. 267). Nonetheless, in plural societies such as Quebec (and Canada), identity and community are involved in a love/hate dynamic: community is built upon a sense of shared identity while, at the same time, minimizing or even posing a threat to individual identity. For instance, *hijabi* women might feel obliged, based on their visible affiliation with their Muslim community, to abide by cultural practices (i.e. limited socialization with men) even though these cultural practices might go against their personal beliefs.

Lee and Hébert (2006, p. 505) suggest that there are four characteristics of national identity: "civil and societal culture, heritage, allegiance, and patriotism." To be consistent, since all processes of national identity are context-dependent, all analysis and understandings of Canadianness and Quebecness should fall within these four classifications. Alongside this line, Parekh (1995, pp. 264–265) also affirms that debates on national identity are always raised in a climate of fear and collective anxiety that focus on endangered values (i.e. language, heritage, norms, culture) and disregards unifying norms and attitudes, which eventually creates more division and mistrust between minorities and the majority. Nordberg (2006) points out that any debate related to national identity "requires a national political model or culture which enables rather than constrains claims-making by different groups with different positions and identities" (p. 526).

Furthermore, Ross (2005) asserts that of all the collective identities in which human

beings share and identify with today, national identity is the most fundamental and inclusive. Kymlicka (2003) also stresses that for a country to properly function, citizens must have a strong sense of identification with that country as a political community, an identification that stands over and above all other identities. However, Kymlicka also suggests that having a strong national identity is not a precondition for citizens to collaborate in the functioning of state institutions. For instance, to nurture sentiments of Canadianness among all Canadians, the focus should be on creating present and future "events" to which every Canadian can relate. It is difficult to persuade immigrants that being Canadian should be exclusively defined towards events (i.e. Canada Day, Quiet Revolution in Quebec, World Wars, etc.) that preceded their migration (Kymlicka, 2003) to Quebec/Canada. This is, I would argue, the key in helping all citizens identify with their nation regardless of their backgrounds and immigration histories.

Even though developing a shared national identity might guarantee some sort of loyalty to the nation state, scholars have not sufficiently distinguished clear correlations between concepts of national identity, attachment to a nation/community, and the sense of belonging. Questions of identity such as "Who am I?" are often answered by appeals to affiliations with a religion, a race, a nation, a region, etc., which does not indicate *per see* deep loyalties to such affiliations. Individuals can always upgrade and change these affiliations. For instance, if I am asked, who am I?, I may answer along the lines of my name is Hicham and I am a Moroccan male and a Canadian citizen, with an average height and a slim build, who is a husband, a father, a son, a teacher, and a Ph.D. candidate at UQÀM. However, these descriptors indicate what I am (affiliated with) rather than who I am. Similarly, if a young Muslim woman of Algerian background living in Quebec City was asked the same question, she might describe herself differently to her parents, to her friends, to an imam, to a judge, to a psychologist or to someone from the media. Her answers might be different if gathered before or after the proposal of the Charter of Values in Quebec or the emergence of ISIS, or if she was

asked to identify herself when on a visit to relatives in Algeria, and so forth. Questions regarding the adoption of a specific identity and identifying with one's nation, while they might seem obvious and straightforward, cannot be easily answered because they are subjective in nature.

2.1.3 Identifying with one's Nation

Meanings attached to national identity are the most prominent aspects that arise when we discuss obligations, duties, and rights of citizenship today (Lee & Hébert, 2006). The question of citizens' national identification is not a new trend in today's complex world, but has become distinctive in the context of post-modernity. To explain the socially constructed nature of national identity development, we recognize that Canada considers itself a diverse nation that hosts many sub-communities (Lee & Hébert, 2006) through shared language, culture, and histories. Nonetheless, Quebec, with the promotion of its distinct minority national identity, enjoys its distinct nature, heritage, culture, and language, thus 'complexifying' Quebecer's minorities' relationship and attachment with their distinct society.

Consequently, individuals and groups should have the autonomy to emphasize different aspects of their identity (religious, ethnic, sexual, national, etc.), which are differently and freely interpreted and allowed to change over time and through adaptations to new realities (Meer *et al.*, 2016, p. 15). For instance, Canadian youth, including Quebecers, identify more with their national identity than with any other religious, cultural, or ethnic identity. In a study tackling the question of being and becoming Canadian, Lee and Hébert (2006) analyzed more than 300 written responses of Canadian high school youth, of immigrant and non-immigrant origins in Calgary. The participants related a greater sense of national identity than of ethnic and/or supranational belonging. Findings indicated that youth of immigrant origins appreciated that their ethnic identities are recognized and protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and

the Canadian Multicultural Act (1985). Stated otherwise, by providing constitutional rights for maintaining distinct identities, and allowing for the reproduction of cultures and the establishment of religious institutions, Canada has become a better and safer abode for some immigrants than their countries of origin (Niyozov, 2010). For instance, most of those from immigrant origins utter statements showing their pride in being Canadian, such as best country, multiculturalism, patriotism, sense of belonging, or respected by others. Others from non-immigrant origin dwelled more upon national identity (60.3% and 27.6% respectively) (Lee & Hébert, 2006, p. 506). This explains the richness of Canadian identity in absorbing all sorts of diversity and the pride shown by immigrants in being Canadian. Likewise, in an essay about Canadian identity and how it differs from being American, Will Kymlicka (2003) observes that being Canadian is seen as morally superior to being American. He notes that Canadians look for differences with Americans wherever possible. In spite of the similarities between the two identities, he affirms that what defines being Canadian above all else is precisely not being an American:

> "Being Canadian is to be a good citizen of the world; to be committed to western values and anxious about possible threats to them, but hesitant to talk about a clash of civilizations; to celebrate the self-consciously modern and classless society that is possible in the New World, open to newcomers and new ideas; and to have a tortured relationship with the US, asserting moral superiority as a kinder and gentler country ..." (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 358).

It is worth noting that the construction of national belongingness starts at an early age through a process of inculcation in state schools, media, and the public sphere. However, even though all youth experience difficulties as they enter adulthood and start to construct their own identities, difficulties facing youth from immigrant descent are challenging when mixed with feelings of "outsiderness through the otherization of their religion, culture, names, and skin colour which may lead to internal conflict and external contestation" (Tindongan, 2011, p. 73). In the case of most Muslim youth, their status as

"brown" Muslim students of colour is sometimes perceived as problematic. The richness of their identity, or, more accurately, identities, is often tempered in favour of narratives of oppression or victimization (Selby & Beaman, 2016, p. 17), be it real or imagined. Hence the importance of the formation of proud Muslims who hold hybrid and fluid identities, the formation of such identity helps in the survival of the community and saves it from completely melting and disappearing in society (Elbih, 2010). It might also create balanced youth who are willing to positively integrate and participate in their societies. Nevertheless, Quebecois Muslim youth path to integration is complicated because this process is happening through a minority national identity (Quebec) within a diverse (Canada).

2.2 Quebec National Identity

For Quebec, its particular identity has always been a phenomenon that has to be described and explained to outsiders. In the 1950s, Quebecois identity was seen as an obstacle to modernization. But, this identity was reinvented during the Quiet Revolution, which led to a crisis from which Quebecers have not yet emerged from today (Beauchemin, 2009). According to Rocher (2004), national identity is strictly associated with social conscience. Thus, we have seen the emergence of a new language and a new mode of social analysis. Whereas identity is usually a personal issue, it is always attached to a collective memory (Beauchemin, 2009). In a sense, plural identities have become an unavoidable reality in our societies, and even more so in Quebec.

Identity construction does not happen in a vacuum but in a social, cultural, and political environment. It is important for me to cover the Quebecois and Canadian context because it is central to understanding how Muslim youth position their Islamic identities in relation to French intercultural Quebec and English multicultural Canada. According to Juteau (2002), Quebec has, since the Quiet Revolution, been on a mission for the

construction and implementation of a national identity that is distinct from Canada. Quebec's nationalist movement became stronger, had more support, and had been partially more successful than other similar movements in Spain, Belgium, or the United Kingdom (Mendelsohn, 2007). There is an attempt by the Quebec province to create a widespread collective national identity that would subordinate other identities (i.e. particularly federal identity). Quebec can indeed be analyzed from a comparative perspective (Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, etc.) as one example of a minority nation in a consolidated liberal democracy (Mendelsohn, 2007). In this sense, the politics of citizenship are acted out in a most unusual setting, where statehood is a goal and not a fact (Juteau, 2002), and Quebec's distinct citizenship is treated as one of the facets of belonging to Quebec society (Ross, 2007). The Parti Québécois, for instance, is still formulating most of its major speeches and strategies on the objective of independence from Canada. It appeals to its voters by presenting itself as the legitimate party that is able of carrying the project of a sovereign nation with a distinct national identity.

Even though most Francophone Quebecers defined themselves as either French Canadian or Canadian in the last two main surveys (Mendelsohn, 2007), polls show that the number of French Canadians reporting their identity as primarily or equally Canadian has dropped regularly (Kymlicka, 2003). According to Mendelsohn (2007), what is interesting about Quebec identity is that it is dating as far back as New France in the 18th century, emerging under British domination during the 19th century, and growing during the rebellions of 1837 against the British. In an article about belonging to Canada, Mendelsohn (2007) studied all publicly available polling data on questions of Quebec identity and belonging to Quebec and to Canada. According to the findings, a relatively significant 12–19 per cent of Quebecers deny their Canadianness; an even less significant 5–10 per cent gave up their Quebecness and claim to be only Canadians. The vast majority of Quebecers claim hybrid identities, which are clustered in two categories: (1) equally Canadian and Quebecer, and (2) Quebecer (especially among

Francophones) first but also Canadian. Mendelsohn believes that attachment to Canada has increased in the first years of the twenty-first century. He claims that hybrid identities remain the dominant choice for Quebecers, with the largest cluster of Francophone Quebecers defining themselves as Quebecers first and Canadians second. He went on to assert that the failure of a common understanding of Quebec identity to take hold is because Quebecers have a variety of conflicting and overlapping attachments (being Westerners, Canadians, North Americans, etc.).

Furthermore, the historical experience of Quebec suggests that a national minority can preserve its collective national identity by having legislative powers over language, education, and immigration (Kymlicka, 1998, p. 33). This shared national identity has been an important factor in strengthening the Quebec nationalist movement (Mendelsohn, 2007) and in empowering the sense of belonging to Quebec. Quebec identity tended to be predominantly cultural and partly political until the 1960s when political concerns became more prominent (i.e. the future of the French language, French Canadians, French nation, etc.). Eventually, a substantive transformation took place in the minds of Quebecers from a Franco-Catholic identity to a territorial Quebec identity, and concerns about Quebec identity and Quebec nation increasingly dominated politics and occupied the centre of social debates. Consequently, after the 1960s, the number of Quebecers who self-identified as Quebecois rather than Canadian did steadily increase; Quebecois identity gradually replaced French Canadian identity, but attachment to Canada remained strong yet weaker than attachment to Quebec (Kymlicka, 2003; Mendelsohn, 2007). Interestingly, the French term "Canadiens" was exclusively used to describe French-speaking Canadians and not Canadians from British descent. It was at later stages that this term became associated with Anglophone Canadians as well. The appropriate test for Canadian unity is to acknowledge that Quebecers will eventually privilege their national identity, and to assume that this identity coexists with an identification with the rest of Canada (Kymlicka, 1998, p. 172).

In a way, the best formula for living together, according to Kymlicka, is that Quebecers consider themselves Quebecer-Canadians, not just Quebecers who have no affiliation with the rest of Canada, an attitude that would create more division and would lead to more distrust between those who believe in a unified Canada and those that think that Quebec is better off as a separate nation. The latter camp's position can be understood through looking at how Quebecois identity changed and adapted in response to many historical challenges.

2.2.1 The Evolution of Quebecois Identity

In his book *Genèse de la société québécoise*, Fernand Dumont (1993) closely explores the historical myths, legends, and memories that embody the main landmarks of nation building. He suggests a quest for the foundations of Quebecois identity. According to Dumont (1993), each nation has its own values, beliefs, and peculiarities. The construction of Quebecois identity has a profound meaning only when it is positioned within a broader movement, which calls upon political and social ethics, and when it includes the construction of a national project. He asserts that histories, legends, and myths are important for the continuation of nations. "We should take into account the historical consciousness that gives meaning to power relations, to identity relations and to the way of doing and thinking of a nation" (Dumont, 1993, p. 86).

Identity and citizenship have become concepts used with a wide variety of meanings. According to Kymlicka (2003), some of the sources of pan-Canadian identity are the common histories, the values, and the common political principles shared by all Canadians. However, he suggests that the above descriptors do not necessarily guarantee a solid foundation for nurturing a strong Canadian identity amongst all Canadians, particularly between Quebecers and English Canada. Quebec has often been described as a minority that is struggling to preserve its culture, and that wishes to remain distinct but equal to the Anglophone majority (Juteau, 2002). Collective boundaries and

identities have evolved in Quebec as a result of their ever-changing relationship to culture, ancestry, Church, State and territory. That said, Quebecers are Canada's main example of a sub-state nationalist movement (Juteau, 2002; Kymlicka, 2003) that succeeded in preserving its heritage and in surviving in an ocean of Englishness. But how did Quebecness evolve in recent decades? And how did the Quebec government manage to nationalize and universalize Quebec identity on its provincial territory?

The national narrative in Quebec before 1960s was that a Quebecois is born Quebecois, she or he does not become one. Before the Quiet Revolution, not all residents of Quebec were to be included in the Quebec national community that was limited to those who shared a common history and a common political project (Juteau, 2002). The boundaries of this national community were narrow and impermeable. However, it is not an exaggeration to state that a self-definition as Quebecois is the choice of all Francophone Quebecers and that a majority is regarding itself as Quebecers since the 1960s (Mendelsohn, 2007). In fact, it was mainly immigrants and non-French Canadians who rejected the secession from Canada in 1995[21] and who succeeded in keeping Quebec a Canadian province. The reason behind their choice was their self-identification as Canadians first and, possibly, Quebecers second, and their rejection of a project formulated without their consent and that had never been considered as theirs (Juteau, 2002). Recent surveys in Quebec have shown that Quebecers see Canada as being composed of Quebec and English Canada; they do not see two monolithic and self-contained national communities, but rather feel a much more complex and nuanced membership in two nations (Mendelsohn, 2007). Quebecois has become a heterogeneous category. Today, most Quebecers endorse a non-ethnic definition of the term, and urge immigrants to integrate into the francophone society and to think of

[21] I only mentioned the second referendum because the first one in 1980 was defeated by a 59.56 percent to 40.44 percent margin.

themselves as Quebecers (Kymlicka, 1998, p. 96; McDonough, 2003; Waddington, *et al.*, 2012, p. 327).[22]

Quebec will be able to face its future as long as it does not disregard its past (Beauchemin, 2009). While recognizing the cultural links and similarities between Quebec and France, Rocher calls for the development of a more mature relationship between the two nations. He calls out how French Canada is naively enthusiastic and too eager to accept anything coming from France. Instead, in order to be an equal partner to France and not a mere follower, he recommends for the full adoption of North American identity (Rocher, 2004, p. 77). Nonetheless, the analysis of the destiny of French Canada and English Canada in North America and their search for identity always comes down to the approach of two national communities, historically united to one another, but committed to pursuing their future independently (Rocher, 2004, p. 82).

2.3 The Complex Relationship Between Muslims and the State

Let us now examine Muslims' positionality in Canada and Quebec and the complex narratives that affect their integration in their societies. After September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the American-led War on Terror, concerns with security have taken on a sharp dimension in most Western Muslim-receiving societies (Winter, 2012), with Islamic cultures and Islam in particular considered obstacles to integration, the debate about Muslims did, sometimes, involve anti-Islamic rhetoric (Jensen, 2011). Muslims replaced communists and became the official new enemy of the West; anxieties were expressed about Islamic values, homegrown terrorism, and the "inevitable clash" between the West and a form of Islam that is trying to undermine democracy and Western secular values (Antonius, 2008; Winter, 2012; Bullock & Nesbitt-Larking,

[22] This complex integration into Quebec remains social and cultural in a sense that immigrants are encouraged to embrace Quebecois culture, way of life, and to speak French, but not to become Quebecois citizens. There is no such thing as Quebecois citizenship.

2011). When some countries chose to adopt aggressive and assimilationist policies towards Muslim immigrants, this had negative effects, especially among those who already consider themselves a part of the mainstream society. The failure of this policy is obvious in countries such as France where social climates become politicized and Muslims are often labelled as a problem rather than a challenge that has to be dealt with (Bectovic, 2011). In certain cases, challenges to state policies and to cultural imperialism by Muslims are viewed as a refusal to integrate and as a menace to social cohesion. Immigrants' integration is often judged by how they are willing to assimilate to the majority cultural practices (Kymlicka, 1998, p. 57).

To advance integration, Castelli and Trevathan (2008) recommend that rather than ghettoizing and marginalizing minority religions, or disaggregating them into discrete communities in the hope that their religion and culture will dissolve, recognition of minorities will eventually lead to the construction of a new participatory public order. For instance, for many Muslims who represent the most visible minority in Canada and thus the most watched (Beyer, 2013, p. 293), Islam is a universal symbol of resistance to political and cultural imperialism, capitalism, racism, and Western dominated bureaucracies (Beyer, 2013, p. 295); it is also a source of inspiration that encourages their belonging and inspires them to contribute to their societies. Most of them show uneasiness with laws or legislations that are seen as directly singling them out from the rest of population. In fact, Quebecois Muslims expressed the negative impact the proposition of the Quebec Charter of Values had on them personally and on how they see themselves as Quebecers. Many believe it made them feel unwelcome in their own province (Bakali, 2015). Muslim youth insist that their strong Muslim identity or high religiosity does not prevent them from positively participating and integrating in their societies (Beyer, 2013, p. 60; Maliepaard & Schacht, 2018).). They feel they have to be like others in terms of rights and responsibilities of citizenship, but also distinct from them, sometimes considered as organized believers who are involved with, and actively

participating in a religious community (Bectovic, 2011). On another level, sentiments of frustration among Canadian Muslims are understandable. Even though their educational attainment is higher than the Canadian population average, such degree of literacy does not translate to high levels of economic and social life. They still face discrimination and systemic racism in accessing the job market. Their ethnicity and skin color play a major role in their racialization and "ethnicization" and therefore their exclusion. Even for Canadian-born immigrants, continued forms of discrimination are still a possibility as they will probably be disadvantaged economically in comparison with their generational peers (Beyer, 2013, p. 45).

2.3.1 The 'Ethnicization' of Muslim Identity

When Muslims migrate to the West, their social status shift from being a majority in their home countries to being a minority that struggles for survival in their host societies. The change from being a religious and cultural majority to having a religious minority status is an important factor in understanding the construction of the latter's religious and ethnic identities in the West (Duderija, 2008, p. 142). While Islamic identity is primarily seen as a religious-based identity through which individuals confess their belief in God and allegiance to the Prophet and to the Islamic tradition, it is important to note that this identity can also embody cultural and ethnic forms. Stated otherwise, despite their lack of belief or their agnosticism, cultural Muslims often identify with Islamic culture and proclaim their Islamic identity. However, notwithstanding their heterogeneous nature regarding their looks, beliefs, and practices (Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 101; Helly, 2008; Le Gall, 2003), Western Muslims are otherized and framed by Orientalist definitions and labels propagated by Western governments, media, and institutions (Tindongan, 2011, p. 75; Antonius, 2008).

That said, there is an irony in adding the "signifier" Muslim when mentioning Muslims

born in the West. The term Western Muslim,[23] for example, labels a person not only as a Westerner who happens to be Muslim, but defines that person by religion rather than nationality or ethnicity or any other way in which he or she wishes to be defined or described. This is problematic because it emphasizes the Muslim aspect of a person's identity in a way that is not done as much for peoples of other faiths (Tindongan, 2011, p. 77; Antonius, 2008; Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 108). Like all citizens, Muslims come in all sorts of races, ethnicities, colors, etc. Shared cultural values do not develop in social isolation. Rather, it is social interactions between migrants and natives that lead to cultural integration and to the development of shared values (Rutter, 2015). Hybrid identities do not have to involve the mixing and blending of meanings that result in the creation of a new identity (Verkuyten, 2005, p. 154). Rather, ethnic and religious identities coexist with notions of social cohesion, democratic values, and secular beliefs. This leads to the formation of what Merry and Milligan (2009, p. 320) call "healthy citizenship," which signifies respect for the rule of law and civil society, and the creation of a climate that recognizes the coherence and compatibility of Muslims' confession and their Western Identity.

At the other end of the spectrum, the confessional dimension of identity construction is often demarcated with the ethnic and the socio-cultural dimensions (Triki-Yamani & McAndrew 2006; Beyer 2008; Zine, 2008; Essid, 2015). As a survival strategy, and in order to identify with a host community, few second-generation Muslims sometimes show more attachment to their ethnic origins and inherited culture than to their nation. This form of identity construction may be the outcome of a defense and protection mechanism against the frustrations and struggles they face in society (Essid, 2015, p. 20; Verkuyten, 2005, p. 157). For example, the hijab is greatly affecting Muslim women's integration into the job market in Quebec. It is sometimes interpreted as an attack on secularism and an invasion of public sphere, and not as a genuine sign of religiosity (i.e.

[23] The term 'Western Muslims' here refers to Muslims from Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and North America.

Cross earrings and necklace). This attachment of Western Muslim youth to their heritage is also occasionally seen as a surrogate identity, rather than a genuine will to learn from one's cultural background (Amiraux, 2016).

2.3.2 Muslims' Integration and Social Cohesion

Integration is a two-way process (Brodeur, 2008, p. 102). It should not result in minorities completely losing their historical inherited identities or in the majority giving away its historic legacies and achievements. Elmasri's model (cited in Ali, 2012, p. 90) called "smart integration" might be the perfect formula for "living together" because it advocates that all parties (minorities, immigrants, and the majority) should adapt to their new realities. Unlike the assimilation or isolation models,

> "the smart integration model promotes the preservation of one's identity in matters of religion, culture, language and heritage, while simultaneously encouraging full participation in the country's political square, and promoting both individual and collective contributions in all fields to its well-being" (Ali, 2012, p. 90).

For example, with the 2013 proposed Charter of Values of the Parti Québécois, Muslims and other religious minorities in Quebec felt that the proposed Bill was not only about ostensible minority religious signs or about a neutral public space as was stated by the committee that proposed the ban, but, to these minorities, it was an attempt to ban their religious and cultural identities from being freely manifested in public institutions. This gave them the impression of being considered foreigners or second-class citizens as some manifestations of their identities were seen as problematic and needed to be hidden. Amiraux (2016, p. 42) asserts that a good citizen should not feel the need to hide any aspect of his or her identity in public spheres that are places where citizenship is constructed and symbolized.

Furthermore, home-grown terrorism and violent radicalization affect Muslims' integration. They raise concerns about Muslim youth being isolated and alienated in

their societies. There are worries that some of them are developing sympathies with terrorist groups, being self-radicalized, seeking to join violent jihad overseas or to commit violent acts here at home (Inglehart & Norris, 2011, p. 2). The challenge is not solely about these youth being drawn to radical violence, but it is also about Muslims in general and their belongingness in the West. Muslims in diaspora encounter cultural and religious dispersion, social alienation, and a form of detachment from their host societies as well as from their countries of origin. For example, in the following quotation, Tindongan (2011) describes Western Muslim's psychological state and social status:

> "Though many Muslim immigrants may not share the 'constitutive taboo on return,' often the sense of 'multiple communities of a dispersed population' rings true… Muslim immigrants are border-crossers living in the liminal space outside their homelands, and yet not quite at home in this country … Coming from nation states formerly colonized by European powers, the damaged social capital these Muslim immigrants bring makes their entry more problematic and complex" (p. 79).

In this difficult context, public education is employed to assist Muslim youth in their integration through finding common ground with their co-citizens. Public educational institutions are considered by most observers the ideal place for integration, where students internalize the values of citizenship and civic participation (see Maxwell et al., 2012). Studies on integration show how immigration, culture, and religion influence social integration and behaviour and the degree to which Muslims feel a sense of belonging in their Western societies, regardless of their formal education (Ali, 2012, p. 32). Nevertheless, a common education does not guarantee allegiance to the state or social cohesion between citizens. There is a strong correlation between economic integration and citizens' belongingness. Economic integration is usually a precondition for social cohesion, but it is not sufficient to guarantee it (Rutter, 2015). Stated otherwise, economic inclusion can also promote positive integration. For instance, in a study in Quebec about Muslim female immigrants from North Africa, Aouli (2011,

p. 89) found that those who hold matching jobs (with their academic skills) seem to be more integrated into Quebec society. Inversely, those who are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, and who were socially and economically downgraded despite being qualified and holding higher degrees, are more aggressive in voicing their feelings of discrimination towards their host society (Oueslati, Labelle & Antonius, 2006, p. 155). Even in 2015, the unemployment rate of recent immigrants (less than 5 years) was 18%, compared to 7% amongst native Quebecers.[24] The difficulty in Quebec is not just a matter of ensuring that immigrants find jobs, make contacts, join associations, or find their place within society, but the specificity of the province also urges that integration happens in French rather than in English and through Quebec culture (Taylor, 2012, p. 417). Furthermore, in English Canada, for example, recent research shows that the children of immigrant parents feel less integrated than their parents. They were born and raised in Canada and most of them have assimilated its values and customs, but their expectations have not been met because they feel a sense of otherness mixed with social and economic inequality. That being the case, economic integration offers by far the best assurance against cultural, social, and economic marginalization (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 227; Beyer & Ramji, 2013).

The majority's negative perceptions on Islam also affect Muslims' integration. Most non-Muslims often perceive Islam as an isolationist religion that restricts its followers' freedoms and liberties (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 124). Bouchard and Taylor (2008) observed prevalent sentiments such as the notion that Islam is inherently fundamentalist, the stereotype that Muslim Quebecers have no interest in integrating and wish to practise self-exclusion; and that Muslim citizens use the openness and accommodation practices of Quebec to gradually impose their values on native-born Quebecers in a sort of covert "Islamist project" (Iacovino, 2015). The media are the other key factor in shaping

[24] Immigration, Diversity et Inclusion Quebec. Accessed December, 2016 at http://www.midi.gouv.qc.ca/publications/fr/planification/BRO_RecueilStat_PlanificationImmigration.pdf

opinions. Throughout Bouchard and Taylor (2008) private and public consultations,

> "the media were constantly blamed for giving in to sensationalism, exaggerating, distorting and selecting, displaying a lack of responsibility by sowing discord, emphasizing stereotypes, kindling emotionalism, widening the gap between Them and Us, and encouraging xenophobia" (p. 74).

Manifestations of discrimination are worrying: from 2005 to 2008 almost 50% of minorities in Quebec have been, in a way or another, the victims of discrimination, mainly in the workplace; employees do not hire Muslims for fear of accommodation requests (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 232). Muslims, particularly visible Muslims, in Quebec often feel and experience biases that have emerged as a result of exclusionary practices, discourses, and perceptions predicated on conceptions of national identity, citizenship, and belongingness to the nation (Bakali, 2015, p. 43). For instance, Arabo-Muslims are the group hardest hit by various forms of discrimination and marginalization (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 234; Antonius, 2008). Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry have also increased during the times of the Parti Québécois's Charter of Values in 2013. This Islamophobia also emerged through the concept of race when Muslims were perceived negatively by virtue of assumed biological, cultural, and social qualities (Bakali, 2015, p. 49). This form of prejudice also affects Christian Arabs who are mistaken for Muslims (Oueslati, Labelle & Antonius, 2006, p. 54) based on their names, skin colour, and country of origin.

2.3.3 Christian Heritage and Secularism

The difficulties facing Muslims' belongingness in Quebec and Canada are not exclusively an outcome of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks, they are rooted in the historical relationship between Islam and Christianity. Modern secularism, for example, was produced in Christian lands through or in opposition to Christian theology. In Western societies, discussions about belongingness to the nation have changed from talks about the white and Christian nature of the State to debates about secularism,

which Beaman (2011, p. 239) considers a myth; she affirms that, in secular states, Christianity is shaping not only the interpretation of religious freedom and neutrality but also the space allowed to religion to interfere with citizens' lives (Beaman, 2011, p. 239). For instance, as the majority of Western populations are/were always Christians, legislations tend to respond to the ruling Christian majority. In fact, Bouchard and Taylor (2008) indicate that:

> "a number of seemingly neutral or universal norms reproduce in actual fact worldviews, values and implicit norms specific to the majority culture or population, e.g. restaurant, airline or cafeteria menus, which, in bygone days, did not take into account vegetarians or individuals with food allergies" (p. 161).

This would lead us to the conclusion that "reasonableness" is a society-constructed category that calls on common sense, which, from a Christian perspective, means that religion relates to faith more than to practice; so in historically Christian-based societies, reasonable might be reduced to what looks Christian or can be made to look Christian (Beaman, 2011, p. 253). Minorities usually show uneasiness with narratives that exclude their culture and worldviews, even though they ask to be represented, they do not intend to remake societal norms with "the majority in a zero-sum game" (Meer *et al.*, 2016, p. 18). They negotiate for their culture to be seen as local and not as strange or foreign. According to Taylor (2012, p. 417), "We need to give some expression to the new footing on which we want to be with each other, having set aside the inequalities and exclusions which characterized the old. We need a narrative of the transition we're trying to bring about."

When certain Western nations state that they do not prioritize one religion over another, and at the same time exclude looks and behaviours of non-Christian worldviews, they push minorities into creating their own cultural and religious institutions (Berglund, 2014). Certain scholars (such as Miedema, 2014) prefer to employ the concept "worldview" instead of religion to refer to peoples' beliefs, traditions, and cultures. In

this sense, religious understandings of life and society can be categorized as assumptions of a parallel worldview system. As a matter of fact, as Bouchard and Taylor (2008) suggests, what we refer to as secular, neutral, or universal norms and customs is in fact a worldview "specific to the majority culture and population" (p. 161), which means that minorities that fall outside of this common worldview are seen as a menace to the dominant culture or to social cohesion because they are challenging dominant discourses' power (Elbih, 2010; Antonius, 2008). For instance, in Quebec, during the months that followed the proposal of the Charter of Values to ban ostensible religious signs, the word "ostensible" came under heavy critique because, as is specified by the Charter, religious symbols such as *hijabs* and *kippas* were considered ostentatious while crucifixes on necklaces, that often indicate the person's faith and worn by practising Christians, were not. Similarly, even most militant secularists are against the removal of the crucifix from the National Assembly in Quebec because they consider it an integral part of the province's history and cultural heritage that needs to be preserved. Nevertheless, if a symbol identifies the State with a religion, it should be changed or removed even if it seems to only have heritage significance (Tremblay, 2009, p. 72). In keeping with this notion of the separation of Church and State, Bouchard and Taylor (2008, p. 20) also advocated the removal of such symbol as it pushes for one specific religion in a state that claims to be secular and religiously neutral. Nonetheless, Iacovino (2015) asserts that

> "The debate in Quebec cannot thus be reduced to whether or not the crucifix should be hung on a wall in the National Assembly as a matter of consistency, for example. This apparent contradiction—a secular thrust with a stringent defence of its Catholic heritage—reveals more profound forces at work here. Political actors latch onto and compete with more intensity in matters of collective identity because such concerns enjoy pronounced political traction in a context where citizenship itself is seen as a contested terrain" (p. 55).

In response to these lived experiences that challenge and problematize Islamic identities,

Muslims, consciously and unconsciously, develop coping strategies in order to adapt to the external realities in their societies. Among these strategies, we find the Westernization, individualization, and de-culturization of Islamic identity in Western contexts.

2.3.4 Westernization of Muslim Identity

Most debates about Westness focus either on ethnic or civic liaisons to the nation. The first supports biological ancestry that links individuals to the nation. Proponents of this approach see all immigration from non-western and non-Christian lands as a threat to their existence and wellbeing. The second, the civic approach, link belongingness to shared values, rights, obligations, and integration. Nonetheless, more emphasis is given to the cultural aspects of integration, mainly to identity and citizenship (Rutter, 2015).

The thesis of the individualization of Muslim identity rests on a dichotomy between tradition and modernity that is usually drawn as a linear development from tradition to modernity (Jensen, 2011). Muslim youth successfully absorb core values of the Canadian society, such as considering the individual the authentic centre of life (Beyer, 2013, p. 56). In addition, Canadian Muslim youth, including Quebecers, are adopting a "de-cultured" understanding and practice of Islam whereby their religious identity is influenced from both traditional and modern sources (Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 104; Hassen, 2013). They also tend to have strong boundaries as to what is religious and what is not (Beaman, Nason, & Ramji, 2013, p. 254). They are developing an interpretation of Islam that matches their Westness. These youth insist that by having a strong Muslim identity, they are capable of fully participating in society culturally, socially, and politically (Beyer, 2013, p. 60; Oueslati, Labelle &Antonius, 2006, p. 142). They consider themselves individually responsible for and capable of building their own, personal relation to religion (Beyer & Ramji, 2013, p. 11). In other words, they

ascribe different and personal meanings to Islam as a primary marker of their identity (Hassen, 2013), which signifies a new form of religiosity among Western Muslim youth.

Recent studies on second and 1.5 generation Muslims in Canada suggest a revealing fact: Muslim youth are increasingly taking their religiosity into their own hands. In a study on Canadian Muslim youth (ages 18 to 26), Beyer and Ramji (2013, p. 11) have shown that these youth consider themselves individually responsible for and capable of constructing their own personal understanding of religion. In another similar study in Australia, Hassen (2013) has noticed an emergence of a shift towards an individualized and a privatized religiosity. In other words, Muslim youth are not irrationally or blindly following religious leaders, or adopting their parents' position on religion, but, instead, they incline to follow what appeases their intellectual, generational, and spiritual needs as Western Muslims.

According to Jensen (2011), by revealing how people use religion in their everyday lives, private settings may represent the heart of religiosity. For instance, many Muslim females who wear headscarves as a religious sign see Islam as a global symbol of pride, modesty, and resistance to cultural and religious imperialism (Beyer, 2013, p. 295). They perceive their religious practices as attitudes that can be categorized as an Islamic form of feminism or as a way of resisting dominance and oppression. This de-territorialization (Hassen, 2013) and westernization of Islam, which is a partial outcome of migration, is fostering new forms of religiosity represented in a fluid frame of organized and non-organized as well as public and private forms (Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 104; Jensen, 2011).

At the other end of the spectrum, first generation Muslims seem to highly value the religious socialization of their children (Beyer, 2013, p. 61). They make sure their children are with other 'good' Muslim children, they tend to orient their children's

socialization by enrolling them in religious activities such as Qur'an memorization, Islamic knowledge competition, Muslim scouts, etc. They emphasize the importance of maintaining an Islamic identity within the secular context, and believe in the role of religious education in understanding the "true"[25] Islam that will provide them with values and morals (Beaman *et al.*, 2013, p. 252). However, even though religion is seen as occasionally, if not centrally, important, strong religious socialization of Muslim children does not necessarily lead them to be religious in their adult life (Beyer, 2013, p. 79) or to adopt their parents' religious values.

2.4 Canada's Multiculturalism and Quebec's Interculturalism

In the previous section, I examined Western Muslims' complex relationships with their host societies, and I investigated the coping strategies they developed in order to deal with these challenges. In this section, I turn to the complex, dynamic, and changing relationships and characteristics between Canadian and Quebecois plural models of managing diversity. As stated in the first section, the study of the political climate in French intercultural Quebec vis-à-vis English multicultural Canada is crucial to understanding how Muslim youth position themselves in Quebec and Canada.

Since the changes in immigration policies in 1967, which allowed immigrants from "non-white" countries to enter Canada, and the constitutionalization of multiculturalism in 1982, Canadians started experiencing other cultures and religious identities from non-Christian lands (Beaman, 2011, p. 238; Helly, 2008); even though this led to more appreciation and recognition of other cultures, it resulted in anxieties and uncertainties about diversity and pluralism.

Some of the core characteristics of the Canadian plural model include a policy of

[25] True Islam in this sense simply means the interpretation or doctrine they judge correct and valid to their lived or inherited way of life.

multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, a 1982 constitutionally based Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and an equal recognition of all communities. Quebec has chosen another policy to manage its diversity: interculturalism. While scholars and policymakers draw clear distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalism, most laypersons employ them interchangeably. According to Taylor (2012, p. 416), multiculturalism is not only about natives and immigrants, it also tries to tackle the historical inequalities suffered by other natives such as women, indigenous peoples, and national minorities. To put it differently, Canadian multicultural identity seeks to unify the various communities that live in Canada and to integrate new immigrants into this "unified, undifferentiated, and bounded territorial and political unit" (Iacovino, 2015, p. 44). Nonetheless, some might even find the concept of multiculturalism problematic as it does not really offer the minorities "a true sense of equality, it only offers benevolence to the 'Other' weak and foreign" (Bakali, 2015, p. 88). Multiculturalism does not come in one shape. For instance, Modood (2016) sees two forms of multiculturalism: liberal nationalist multiculturalism, which agrees to institutional privileges of the founding majority, and parity multiculturalism which sees all cultures as equal.

2.4.1 Quebec Political Project

From French-Canadian "survival" (*survivance*) to Quebec national identity, the road to citizenship in Quebec has been an interesting journey in the formation of a collective identity (Iacovino, 2015, p. 42; Waddington, *et al.*, 2012, p. 327). This history has been filled with negotiations and struggles where the concern for survival and continuity has been at the core of Quebecers' psyche (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 185; Taylor, 2012, p. 417; Bouchard, 2011). As a minority nation in Canada, Quebec has struggled to reconcile "unity and diversity through the development and revising of formative projects that address the twin pillars of social cohesion and diversity" (Iacovino, 2015, p. 42). Quebec political and social project is based on the interculturalism policy

(Waddington, *et al.*, 2012, p. 312), which is theorized as a sustained negotiation between coherence, diversity, commonality, and pluralism (DesRoches, 2014; Bouchard, 2011). The concern for survival and continuity has resulted in feelings of insecurity among francophone Quebecers, which still manifests itself at different levels such as "anxiety over values, language, traditions and customs, collective memory, and identity" (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 208). This insecurity, which Brodeur calls (2008, p. 99) "historical fear (*peurs historiques*)," affects living together and solidarity with minority groups in Quebec. In other words, as long as some francophone Quebecers experience this keen sense of insecurity concerning the survival of their culture they will be less sensitive to the problems of immigrants and ethnic minorities (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 35). However, it must be understood that for francophone Quebecers, the combination of their majority status in Quebec and their minority status in Canada and North America is not easy. This challenging project began in the 1960s and is still ongoing today. However, this duality is another invariant with which Quebec society will always have to cope while managing its internal diversity (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 187).

Since the Quiet Revolution, Quebec's political project was outlined through a need to distinguish itself from the rest of Canada, and to (re)establish itself as a separate political nation with all the prerequisites of an independent state (DesRoches, 2014, p. 36). In Quebec, the French language and Catholicism historically symbolized struggle to preserve the Franco-Canadian identity and fight against assimilation to the Protestant English majority. As a result of claiming a host society status by the French majority, minority Quebecers had to recognize a dominant culture and frame their negotiations according to majority-minority politics rather than on vague Canadian multicultural diversity (Iacovino, 2015, p. 57). In terms of integration, the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) of 1977 made it mandatory for all immigrants to enroll their children in French schools, which prevented the decline of the French language.

Whereas only 20% of immigrants in Quebec attended French schools before the Bill, that number rose to 80% in 2007 (Aouli, 2011, p. 6). Notwithstanding these ongoing debates about language, culture, and values, a continuous trend remains the promotion of a Quebec that is pluralist, secular, and democratic; while allowing minority cultures to flourish through cultural pluralism, it guarantees protection, respect, and, to a certain extent, adoption of the majority culture by all Quebecers (Iacovino, 2015, p. 45). In other words,

> "whether we speak of cultural convergence, common public culture, civic pact, Quebec citizenship, integrative pluralism, or Quebec Values, they are all manifestations of Quebec's project of affirmation—attempts to carve out a 'citizenship space' in Canada—in a scenario in which Quebec does not enjoy recognition as a constituted political community" (Iacovino, 2015, p. 54).

While Quebec does not control all forms of its citizenship, it has employed its extensive powers in the areas of immigration, integration, education, culture and language to shape and create a notion of citizenship that competes for identity space in Canada (Iacovino, 2015, p. 44). It is pushing for a Quebecer "citizenship" that equates being a citizen with integrating into the Francophone minority nation culture. In other words, Quebec is connecting the line between citizenship and integration through strengthening its politics of a distinguished form of citizenship (ibid.).

In theory, interculturalism allows for the creation of a coherent society; this is done through practical dialogue that fosters new forms of identity narratives based on mutual recognition and respect amongst all citizens, while allowing for the continuation of a host majority culture (DesRoches, 2014; Bouchard, 2011;Waddington, *et al.*, 2012, p. 312). In this sense, the intercultural model is viewed as a means of distinguishing Quebec from English Canada by securing a unique and coherent francophone culture and identity. Similarly, narratives of Quebecois identity are reflected in educational programs in order to involve all youth in this intercultural exchange (DesRoches, 2014).

While a full treatment is not possible here, the Charter of the French Language in Quebec was to become the main vehicle of integration and the construction of Quebecois identity, particularly through the francization of public schooling instructions (Iacovino, 2015, p. 45; McDonough, 2003, p. 10) in order to strengthen a francophone identity. Nevertheless, Quebec's attempts to address collective identity issues (i.e. language, culture, religion, ethnicity) through acts of national affirmation led observers from the rest of Canada to wonder about Quebec' refusal to dethrone its historical identity in a globalized world where identities are becoming more cosmopolitan (Kymlicka, 1998). Similarly, Quebec identity should not be conceptualized exclusively as a marker of Francophone culture and language, as this trivializes the role of other historical minorities (i.e. Anglophones), and "treats Quebec as simply an object of cultural policy" (Iacovino, 2015, p. 54).

It is important to note that all Quebec governments since 1981, as well as the Quebec population in general, have rejected Canadian multiculturalism (Tremblay, 2009, p. 37; Sharify-Funk, 2010; Riikonen & Dervin, 2012; Waddington, et al., 2012, p. 312). As stated above, Quebec interculturalism seeks to reconcile Quebec diversity with the continuity, the ascendency of the French-speaking core, and the preservation of the social harmony (Bouchard & Taylor Report, 2008; Riikonen & Dervin, 2012, p. 37). It is about integration in relation to a nation-state and not in relation to a minority nation within the Canadian nation. Francophone Quebecers see themselves as a nation in a federal state (Meer *et al.*, 2016, p. 4), not simply as one of Canada's provinces.

In his article "What is interculturalism?", Bouchard (2011) mentioned seven main points that are exclusively specific to interculturalism: (1) "majority/minority duality paradigm in society," (2) "a process of interaction and negotiations amongst citizens," (3) "the principles of harmonization as a civic responsibility," (4) (social and economic) "integration and the promotion of a Francophone Quebecois identity," (5) "the

precedence of the majority culture," (6) "the production of a common culture," and (7) "the search for balance and mediation between often-competing principles, values, and expectations". Others have argued that the differences between multiculturalism and interculturalism are solely political in nature: both are "politicized tools for constructing national subjects" (Bakali, 2015, p. 90). For instance, in "Two ways for promoting cultural and moral pluralism: interculturalism and multiculturalism", Taylor (2012) states that interculturalism and multiculturalism are quite similar when we spell them out but are driven politically to employ different terminologies. According to Taylor (2012) the "inter" story indicates a fear of minorities and a notion that they might be equal collaborators in remaking the common culture, which sounds alarming to all those who share this anxiety for the preservation of French-speaking majority within Quebec, yet a minority within English-speaking Canada. The result has been an identity counter-reaction movement that has expressed itself through the rejection of harmonization practices (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 18) and hostility towards reasonable accommodations. Similarly, while interculturalism is usually described as a policy of fostering ethno-cultural exchanges in a spirit of respect for difference and pluralism, multiculturalism is understood as taking into account both "recognition and affirmation of difference" and certain "integrating elements such as teaching national languages and intercultural exchange programs" (Tremblay, 2009, p. 37). Likewise, Tremblay (2010) does not see, either in theory or in practice, any major differences between Canadian multiculturalism and Quebec interculturalism; he argues that, in English Canada, unless there is

> "no common public language, no symbols, no mechanism of collective life and no national memory, it is hard to see why any of these avenues or spheres cannot also contribute to the development of an inclusive collective identity in a society committed to multiculturalism" (p. 63).

As stated above, many observers do not differentiate between Canadian multiculturalism and Quebec interculturalism. The distinction between both systems is political rather

than societal (Taylor, 2012). Both systems wish to equally integrate immigrants and create social cohesion between all citizens. Cultural cohesion and social socioeconomic stability are main tenets to the survival of nation states.

Nonetheless, in theory, Quebecer interculturalism offers a perfect formula for harmonizing various ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities to build a solid whole (DesRoches, 2014, p. 357; Waddington, *et al.*, 2012, p. 312). According to DesRoches (2014, p. 336), "Intercultural integration encourages all citizens to view themselves as part of, and contributing to, a dominant political community while at the same time maintaining their distinct cultural affiliations and identities". It can also be seen as a "moral contract" between the French-speaking majority and the minorities that live in the province, "which divides the responsibility for integration between immigrants and the host society—the former expected to participate and accept the terms of belonging in Quebec society and the latter ensuring that support and resources are made available for those ends" (Iacovino, 2015, p. 46). Interculturalism, as it is framed here, may result in a fluid identity that can evolve to adopt to the fabric of society, but it will always be linked to a common reference which is embodied in the culture of the dominant group (Iacovino, 2015, p. 40).

Furthermore, Modood (2016, p. 7) asserts that Quebecer interculturalism is framed in terms of a dichotomy of the majority "us" versus the minority "them" that are threatening social cohesion. Quebecers of French-Canadian ancestry constitute a minority in Canada and North America (Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 125): their members, to an extent, experience a profound feeling of "insecurity concerning the survival of their culture" (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008; Tremblay, 2009; Taylor, 2012; Bouchard, 2011; Brodeur, 2008), which affects the way they manage their internal diversity. Bad politics reinforce a climate of chauvinism and xenophobia by otherizing minorities' identities, ways of life, and casting them as outsiders and a threat to Quebec

laïcité. Iacovino (2015, p. 47), in "*A critique of Quebec interculturalism*", believes that the proposed Quebec Charter of Values (Bill 60) was an indication that Quebec was taking a new direction and adopting a new "normative framework" that sought to restrict citizens' liberties in the name of laïcité.

Conclusion

According to Taylor (2012), what attracts most immigrants into Western countries is the opportunity to better their socioeconomic and social status through benefiting from what the West has to offer. Taylor (2012) believes that immigrants are delighted to be a part of their new societies if they are economically integrated; nonetheless, they may show frustration, rejection, and even harsh criticism to societal culture when faced with discrimination, racism, rejection, and prejudice. He insists that when immigrants achieve their goals, they automatically show appreciation and attachment to the collective national identity. Furthermore, discussions about this identity, which refers usually to the collective identity of long-established communities, are generally dominated by "fears, dreams, hopes, and myths, and cultivates different qualities of temperament and character" (Parekh, 1995, p. 263) of the nation state and of the majority. Thus, Bouchard and Taylor (2008) propose a living-together strategy that they named "integrative pluralism"; plurality signifies respect for diversity, and integrative indicates the "interdependence of all of the dimensions considered and the need to consider all of them in analytical or intervention approaches" (p. 115).

At the other side of the spectrum, with the exception of the jihadi dimension attached to their situation (Taylor & Tiflati, 2015), the uneasiness and suspicion that Western Muslims, including Quebecers, are experiencing today is not unusual in countries with immigrant histories; it may only be a temporary passage to social cohesion, such that Muslims will sooner or later become a part of the mainstream just like all the other

communities that preceded them. Kymlicka (1998, 2003) affirms that much of the fears expressed regarding the integration of Muslims in Canada are virtually identical to the fears expressed more than a century ago regarding the integration of Catholics in an English Canada, who were seen as undemocratic and unpatriotic because of their refusal to integrate and their allegiance to the Pope. Further, we can argue that what Muslims experience today is very similar to what the Irish experienced in America in the nineteenth century, and what certain waves of Jews experienced in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, I argue that, in this context, there is a clear distinction between Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam. Judaism has become a part of the West and the Catholic Church is also situated within the West, despite trying to distinct itself from it. Western Muslims will remain othered, marginalized, and under suspicion as long as the clash with the Muslim world and the West is not resolved, and as long as sensitive issues (i.e. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, neo-colonization of Muslim countries, Muslim radicalisation and terrorism, etc.) persist. The Muslim problem is more complicated than those that preceded it. As long as Western Muslims are labelled as belonging with the "Rest," and not the West, I do not think Kymlicka's point stands. Work has to be done from both sides, the West should cease to 'otherize' its Muslims, and the latter should thrive to construct an inclusive shared Western identity.

Additionally, in the case of Quebec, it is also wrong to ascribe solely to the francophone majority group opposition to accommodations and to religious diversity. According to the philosopher Charles Taylor (2012), blaming multiculturalism and interculturalism for the failures of nations to promote pluralism, living together, and integration is a case of denial and "false consciousness". About 45% of non-francophone Quebecers were opposed to the granting of permanent prayer rooms in universities, and 56% disapproved of the wearing of hijabs in soccer fields (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). There was also strong opposition concerning menus with halal food and the rejection of coeducation in schools, voting by veiled women, and so on. Some 79% of non-

francophone Quebecers said they oppose the 2006 Supreme Court judgment concerning the wearing of the kirpan (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 66). Similarly, 36% of Canadians support banning the hijab in public schools (Iacovino, 2015).

Absolute neutrality is impossible as nothing happens in a vacuum void of cultures, morals, principles, and values. Some scholars and policy makers advocate for a more open and flexible form of secularism, a form of secularism that allows for the separation of Church and state while permitting the manifestation of religious identities in public spheres and institutions, and guarantees citizens' rights to adopt the beliefs of their choice (Tremblay, 2009, p. 53). Needless to say, Bouchard and Taylor (2008, p. 20) argue for the above form of secularism as well. They believe restrictive laïcité is not appropriate for Quebec for three reasons: (1) it does not truly link institutional structures to the outcomes of secularism; (2) policies directed against religion are not compatible with the principle of State neutrality in respect of citizens' worldviews; and (3) integration is achieved through exchanges between citizens, not by hiding identities from the public sphere (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 20). Open secularism allows Islamic and other minority identities to peaceably flourish alongside other dominant identities.

In sum, an examination of the "lived identity among French Muslim Quebecers" reveals important complexities in the ways in which they form and negotiate their identities as Quebecers and Canadians. Most importantly, a closer look at the 'lived' or 'subjective' side of identify formation from the respective of Muslim youth in Quebec defies conventional stereotypes as oversimplified and misleading. As such, commonly expressed fears or default attitudes about 'radicalization' of Muslim youth or about 'illiberal' religious identities need to be challenged and re-examined in light of these complex forces and dynamics. Such a re-examination reveals that the challenges or obstacles to citizenship and social integration on the part of Muslim youth in Quebec are

often exaggerated and rooted in unrealistic stereotypes rather than on the actual experiences and perspectives of Muslim youths.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My unique status as a researcher, a previous Islamic studies teacher, and a member of the Muslim community makes this work a personal challenge. This chapter is an endeavour to investigate my experience in engaging in research as an insider Muslim and teacher, and as an outsider trained researcher within my own community and within Islamic schools in Montreal and the methodology adopted in this research. I am not a provisional insider who is unfamiliar with the terrain and who would temporarily assume or adopt his informants' identities when in the field. Indeed, I am a permanent insider who identifies with his informants' occupation, faith, culture, history, and tradition. In what follows, I attempt to enlighten this journey about insider/outsider as well as subjective/objective dichotomies of ethnographic research, and the challenges of pre, during and post "native" research. I aim (1) to explore my native agency and the challenges I faced, (2) to examine the insider/outsider and objectivity/subjectivity concepts while studying the Muslim community, and (3) to present the methodology chosen to analyze my data.

Numerous anthropologists have raised the political, cultural, emotional, and practical issues faced by native ethnographers (Anderson, 2006; Brigg & Bleiker, 2009; Reed-Danahay, 2009; Cohen & Manion, 2011; Palriwala, 2005; Giampapa, 2011). Researchers who study their communities may be perceived as presenting a performance of their own identities. Consequently, because they may be careful to present themselves

and their communities in a positive light (Ryan, Kofman & Aaron, 2010), they face many challenges in validating their personal experiences as a source of academic knowledge, and in balancing their insider and outsider statuses when interpreting their data or navigating the field. In my case, I have struggled with the dilemma of insider/outsider status even before starting my "official" research. I was somehow looking at my personal experiences in Islamic schools and at my Muslim and ethnic identity as a challenge and an obstacle to understanding rather than as an asset that should be appreciated. I believed that, in order to produce academic and scholarly truths, the researcher and the research, the field and the fieldworker, and the subject and the object had to stay at a distance from one another in all stages of the research. In other words, to be objective, I was insisting that my personal traces must be erased from my work (Brigg & Bleiker, 2009). This is in part because most of my personal experiences are pictured as marginal in academia, on the one hand, and because of the difficulty of validating personal experience as a source of academic knowledge on the other hand (Brigg & Bleiker, 2009). Accordingly, and irrespective of my self-declared status as an academic researcher, my skin colour, my Arabic name, and participation in prayers entailed me the ascription of a qualified insider identity, which influenced my positionality in the field in a variety of ways (Dawson, 2010).

There is a challenge for the academic researcher to gain access, trust, establish rapport, overcome suspicion, and negotiate with community gatekeepers. The latter may try to block certain avenues of research because they may consider the issue too sensitive, irrelevant (Ryan *et al.*, 2010) or attempt to use the researcher to their advantage by only allowing access to "positive" material. Here, insiders, such as myself, have the advantage of the assumed trust of the community based on assumed shared identity and interest. If participants belong to a suspect community, being interviewed by outsiders or strangers may lead them to fear being labelled, misunderstood or being sold out for the sake of fame. Muslims often fear being accused of terrorism and radicalization.

During my research, I tried to shed light on what the researcher and researched means, and how it affects my positionality and the role-played by my identity among my participants. I became aware of how my insiderness, as a Muslim and as a previous teacher at Islamic schools, is influencing my research and my findings. I could not escape, in short, the fact that my research entails that I am both the subject and object of enquiry (Reed-Danahay, 2009). For the first time, I had to re-examine my thoughts about my religion, my community, etc. and wonder whether my observations and conclusions abide by academic standards.

Furthermore, data gathered by researchers who share a common identity or experience with their informants cannot be assumed to be richer or deeper based only on that assumed commonality (Ryan *et al.*, 2010). When participants are interviewed by someone from their community who is likely known to them, they usually have concerns about negative judgments, and, despite assurances of confidentiality, may worry about their privacy from local gossip. Furthermore, the researcher's status is usually framed around assumed doctrinal identities. For instance, although never ascertaining my faith, when some participants learned about my Moroccan background, most of them immediately labelled me as a Muslim, a Sunni, and a Maliki.[26] The dynamics involved in my ascription as a potential "real" insider also emerged directly from particular interpretations of the implications of participation in prayers (Dawson, 2010) and other Islamic practices.

Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, and class may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status (Dawson, 2010). My construction of the field through my inclusions and exclusions of informants were often based on pragmatic considerations of access and the social monitoring to which I was subjected (Palriwala, 2005). Because of the risk of creating and using

[26] Malikism in one of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence; the other three are Hanafism, Shafi'ism, and Hanbalism.

categories unconsciously, awareness of the process that I adopted in my study is of utmost importance (Hegelund, 2005). The critical ethnographic approach (Anderson, 2006) enabled me to probe the issues I was exploring in relation to marginalized voices within the Muslim community in Montreal.

In what follows, I first present a short review on autoethnography; second, I articulate the nature of sensitive research and the challenges of subjectivity/objectivity and insider/outsider dichotomies, and then I investigate the researcher's agency and identity in the field and how to validate personal accounts of native ethnographers. Then I discuss the difficulties in engaging in autoethnography. Finally, I discuss the challenges insiders face collecting and analyzing data in familiar terrains. Acknowledging my experiences as a native researcher, I critique the "essentializing" nature of insider/outsider or observer/observed dichotomies.

3.1 (Auto) Ethnography in a Postmodern Era

Autoethnography. An autoethnography is not an autobiography in which the author dominates the story; neither it is a narrative that removes the ethnographer's traces with his or her informants and terrain. Rather, it is a method for life writing and for social analysis, which depends upon the ethnographer's capabilities for observation, reflexivity, reciprocity, and critique (Reed-Danahay, 2009); and it falls squarely at the intersection of insider and outsider perspectives.

Much recent emphasis on the uses of the term autoethnography refers to scholarly work that conveys the emotional experiences of the ethnographer-as-individual who transcends a temporal and special context. One of these is the works of the native researcher, a term that calls into question the dualism of insider/outsider, object/subject, and of the researcher's positionality (Reed-Danahay, 2009) vis-à-vis his or her terrain.

According to Brigg and Bleiker (2009), by problematizing the object-subject separation that characterizes scientific legitimacy, autoethnography (re)introduces the Self as a methodological resource. The idea behind this methodological move is to bring the native researcher into a more fundamental relation with the empirical reality and to place his or her experience at the centre of the phenomenon under study.

While autoethnography has many advantages such as the researcher's familiarity with, at least, parts of the context, its major disadvantage is that it is sometimes difficult to reach new and deep insights when the context is so familiar (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 88). As a native researcher, I had a difficult time recording sufficient level of detail. Many expressions, events, and activities that would be novel and provide insights to outsiders were so commonplace to me that they were not well documented (e.g. prayers, holy days, religious celebrations, dress code, etc.). While the native researcher has a depth of understanding and knowledge others may never achieve, they might also bring certain biases of their particular place in a well-established society and can mistake "conventional wisdom" for data (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 168). That said, the most important skill the native researcher needs to develop is the ability to attend to details. Another disadvantage is that being interviewed by someone from their locality, who is likely to be known to them, may lead participants to be concerned about damaging their reputation within their community (Ryan *et al.*, 2010). That said, Brigg and Bleiker (2009) assert that there are three basic elements that facilitate and guide autoethnographic research: (1) openness and vulnerability to the field as a source of knowledge; (2) a willingness to draw upon a range of different faculties (i.e. sensation, intuition, personal experiences) and; (3) a process of selecting and analyzing the collected data that partly exposes, rather than erases the traces of the author. I believed a critical ethnographic approach would enable me to probe the issues I was exploring in relation to the marginalized phenomenon of Islamic schools in Montreal (Giampapa, 2011; Gulati *et al.*, 2011). This approach empowers unprivileged and marginalized

voices; it allow researchers such as myself "to make public those forces that pose as obstacles for individuals to participate in making decisions about their lives (Gulati, Paterson, Medves & Luce-Kapler, 2011, p. 525). The key to pursuing and evaluating the researcher's agency as a legitimate source of knowledge is to recognize that autoethnographic claims are a necessary part of a larger struggle over the scholarly production of knowledge.

Postmodern ethnography. According to Cohen and Manion (2011, p. 540), engaging in ethnography is like trying to read a foreign manuscript, embodied in the informants' behaviours, full of ellipses, incoherencies and tendentious commentaries. At first, ethnography and fieldwork were the key tools of the anthropologist studying non-Western peoples (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 120) and a tool for imperialism and colonization. Before the emergence of post-modern theories, the non-Western anthropologist or social scientist that ignored Western perspectives risked being seen as out-dated or as supplying unnecessary details for the community of scholars (Palriwala, 2005). In the process of decolonization, new methodological perspectives emerged and enabled a postmodern critique of classical research. Native ethnographers claimed scholarship and started challenging findings and standpoints of their Western colleagues. Ethnography is not only a process of learning the field, the Self and the body anew, but also a process of revisiting the assumptions and premises of one's own sense of assurance (Palriwala, 2005) and one's Western and formal education.

3.2 Sensitive Research and the Challenges of two Dichotomies

Sensitive research. Researching Muslims, who have in many ways taken on the status of a suspect community, is more complicated today than ever. All research involving Islam and Muslims becomes political, which lead to researchers facing difficulties overcoming distrust while studying Islam and Muslims in post-9/11 Western societies.

Muslims would reject cooperation with outsiders, including researchers, out of fear of being judged, stereotyped, and labelled in a way that will put them in danger.

According to Cohen and Manion (2011, p. 166), sensitive research falls into three main areas: (1) intrusive threat; (2) studies of deviance and social control; and (3) political alignments, revealing the interests of powerful persons or institutions, or the exercise of domination. This sensitivity might not only concern the topic itself but, more importantly, also the relationship between the topic and the social context or the specificity of the object under investigation (i.e. stigmatized communities, feminists, etc.). Likewise, all social research is sensitive; the question is one of degree and not of kind. The researcher has to be sensitive to the context, cultures, participants, and to the consequences of the research on participants. That said, Russell (2006) argues that leaving one's informants in ignorance of one's research findings is not an ethical choice. He believes that recognizing the importance of reciprocity enables the fieldworker to give back to his informants, to serve their purpose, follow, to his best, their agendas, and to support their aims, but without compromising his or her research. This gives them a voice where otherwise they would not be valued, heard or listened to. Research on marginalized groups should bring material of logistic benefit to them so that they do not continue to be exploited or marginalized (Cohen & Manion, 2011, p. 435).

In-depth studies of ethnic minority communities often reveal enormous levels of diversity and heterogeneity arising from socioeconomic status, immigration history, language skills, integration status, and contributions to the host society (Ryan *et al.*, 2010), which oblige researchers to take on highly interactive tactics (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 39). In addition, qualitative research always has a specific context and does not take place in a vacuum; it is conducted by, and on thinking and feeling human beings.

Subjectivity/Objectivity dichotomy. Researchers are actors in everyday life; they play roles, interact with others, negotiate situations, and interpret findings. Here, the nature of interaction is viewed as being shaped by the environment and by our agencies. When it comes to being influenced by our subjectivities, researchers are no exception. When researchers no longer see the possibility of objectivity as an option, one reaction has been to focus on their subjectivity and to turn it into a set of methodological concerns (Heshusius, 1994).

I am not a positivistic researcher. I do not claim or believe that, in social sciences, facts speak for themselves or that I, as a researcher, can discover facts without letting personal, political, moral, or religious judgments enter into my research, and, thereby, distort my interpretations. The only sure course for me is to express my values openly and honestly, and reject the myth of moral neutrality and complete objectivity (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 53). According to Hegelund (2005), the conventional meaning and dichotomy of subjectivity and objectivity are under attack by postmodern ways of thinking. Hegelund observes that it makes no sense to discuss what objectivity and subjectivity really mean without analyzing the different ways in which ethnographers are using these concepts. That said, recognizing the impact of the researcher's agency on the research enables a deeper understanding to be achieved when analyzing their field, participants, status within the field, and their subjectivities (Russell, 2006). Furthermore, we can differentiate between two sorts of subjectivity: (1) the first is when a researcher omits important data because it does not fit his or her agenda; and (2) the second is when the researcher employs his or her particular discipline in the process of collecting and analyzing the data (Hegelund, 2005). However, as Heshusius (1994) asserts,

> "The preoccupation with how to account for one's subjectivity can be seen as a subtle version of empiricist thought, in that it portrays the belief that one knows 'how to handle things,' that one knows what is 'behind' things and 'behind'

> oneself, and how to keep it under control, a belief that was taken to its extreme in the positivist, empiricist tradition" (p. 19).

Being objective can be defined as being free from personal opinions and judgments while analyzing facts (Hegelund, 2005) or as taking account of one's known or likely biases in research. The problem of objectivity in social and educational school-based research is essentially that of values and of trying to achieve value freedom and value neutrality (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 53). Objectivity represents a continuum of closeness to an accurate description and understanding of the observable phenomena (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 111). However, our subjecthoods cannot be ignored. For instance, even though I am considered an insider, I am also a messenger who records events and carries them to another destination, where they will be read and reinterpreted. Neither the voyage nor the framing should be erased. To erase my agency is to erase important insights, which affect our understanding of the phenomena under study (Brigg & Bleiker, 2009). That being said, I became convinced that to better understand my participants I should be concerned with more than my findings. I felt it is important to answer personal questions about religious beliefs and practices, values, opinions, and so forth truthfully. I have also attempted to provoke questions regarding the fieldworker's place and the evolving personas, including mine, in the research setting (Purdy & Jones, 2011). However, even though I supposedly resembled my subjects, I had to retain sufficient distance to be able to describe my sensations objectively (Palriwala, 2005). I am referring here to the issue of methodological detachment, which refers to taking the right distance and employing the right epistemological tools during all stages of the research. Concurrently, the real issue for me was not just being objective as a researcher but more importantly as a conveyer of data. I became aware that I had to create a distinction between the data and the interpretation of this data. I learned that there is very rarely, if ever, a straightforwardly one-dimensional objective/subjective spectrum across which ethnographers can act (Dawson, 2010). Furthermore, the irony is that once we believe we could be objective and we admire the distance we had constructed

between the subject and the object, then we try to cross that distance (again) and go native, while insisting that we can be in charge of the situation (Heshusius, 1994) and be the sole interpreters of data.

One frame of meaning can only be understood from the viewpoint of another (Jackson, 2011; Reed-Danahay, 2009). I had to enter, as a researcher, into a dialogue with the field and its occupants as well as with myself. This point was relevant to my involvement in the creation of meaning. A terrain may totally have different meanings for different ethnographers and in different times as every ethnographer brings to the field his knowledge, assumptions, cultural differences, experiences, and insights, all of which affect his interpretation (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 229).

Insider/outsider dichotomy. My status as a researcher was usually framed around assumed religious, ethnic, and cultural identity. Although never ascertaining that I am a Muslim Sunni, most participants categorized me as such based on my nationality and on previous knowledge of my status as a teacher of Islam in an Islamic school and an activist within the Muslim community in Montreal. Some of the assumptions were on the basis of an assumed shared language and insider identity (Ryan *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, my participation in prayers was not an attempt to demonstrate open-mindedness, willingness to engage in complete participant observation with my objects, or a credentialing process to establish an empathetic status (Dawson, 2010). Indeed, it was simply a part of my weekly rituals (Friday prayer, fasting during Ramadan, etc.) that I might sometimes perform either in my terrain or elsewhere. The dynamics involved in my ascription as a permanent insider emerged directly from particular interpretations of my ethnicity, my colour, my name, and the religious implications of my ritual participation (Dawson, 2010).

Nonetheless, there were those who regarded me as an outsider and saw my insider

identity as not complete. They did so on the grounds of my belonging at the same time to a secular and academic community (Dawson, 2010), which is a non-confessional religious studies department. Yet, my insider status increased as I gradually won more approval based on my culture, my Islam, my teaching profession,[27] which not only made my work more enjoyable but also made my participants more open in discussing potentially sensitive areas in subsequent conversations and situations (Purdy & Jones, 2011). To a large extent, whether researching one's terrain or entering a new one, external relations are central to how we conceptualize, analyze, communicate (Brigg & Bleiker, 2009), and build rapport in the field. It requires the researcher to invest in learning appropriate behaviour such as being a good and careful listener and being ready to reciprocate in appropriate ways (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 48). It is recognized that different insiders (and outsiders) might have varying understandings of the nature and scope of particular traditions. Having acknowledged the potential shortcomings and the benefits of insiderness, it is important to emphasize that, in a number of cases, my insider status gave me access to outstanding informants and knowledgeable insiders (i.e. founders of Islamic schools, Islamic centres, Muslim leaders, etc.).

3.3 The Researcher's Persona in the Field

The researcher's agency and identity. Fieldworkers and researchers should fully recognize the role of agency, acknowledge the communities' interests, and be sensitive to stigmatized and underprivileged communities that are desperate for recognition and support. The ethnographer's presentation of the social agency of his or her participants is a key role in understanding the research and its context (Reed-Danahay, 2009). Participating in the field forces us to place our particular focus of study within our terrain's context, and to acquire proper understandings and reactions while interpreting

[27] For instance, one principal was hesitant to participate in the study, but once he learnt that I was a fellow colleague at another Islamic school, he became very helpful and offered more help than what I anticipated.

our data (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 35).

Purdy and Jones (2011) point to the importance of acknowledging the necessity of valuing our participants' perspectives. In order to understand them better, we should be concerned with more than our data. In other words, we should be concerned with their well-being and find ways for the research to be beneficial to them as well. Certainly, the relationships we form with each participant influence the nature of our interaction and the subsequent information shared with us. My personal characteristics as a native researcher influenced the level of participation that participants chose to adopt (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 30). For example, those who are interested in the research and believe that it would benefit them personally and benefit their community or their school showed more concern and offered more help.

Irrespective of my self-declared status as an academic researcher, participation in religious practices and my professional qualifications (i.e. a degree in Sharia law from an Islamic University, former Islamic studies and Arabic teacher, etc.) entailed the acknowledgment of a qualified permanent insider identity, which influenced my positionality in the field (Dawson, 2010). My participants were aware that I am a permanent insider who identifies with his informants' faith, culture, history, and tradition. A question I kept asking myself is how far I should be involved and how much I should share with my participants. Not being able to get sufficiently close to my participants would defeat the purpose of the research. Contrariwise, getting too close to participants would also defeat the scholarly nature of the research. That is, within social situations, people rely upon an "idealized" identity that is consistent with their norms and principles (Purdy & Jones 2011).

Native researchers may be regarded as presenting a performance of their own identities and, in a way, they may initially be careful to present themselves and their communities

in a positive manner (Ryan *et al.*, 2010). My immigrant status identity is religiously, socially, and politically visible to my participants. It is also multiple and fluid as are the identities of most of my participants and, through the complex relationships in the field, impacted the research process as a whole. I sometimes felt that some of my adult participants were, unashamedly, using me to promote what they want. For instance, one leader suggested reinforcing only what is good about his school and his community. In other words, he saw me as a part of his project, as I considered him part of mine.

I saw my self-positioning as a Moroccan Muslim as an important link to accessing, understanding, and engaging in the lives of my core participants (i.e. Muslim Quebecois youth) and other key participants such as Muslim youth groups and organizations (i.e. MSA's, Islamic centres, etc.). My multiple identities as a recent immigrant, heterosexual male of Moroccan heritage, who has been working for many years in Islamic schools and who is active within the Muslim community, are embodied and clearly visible in my identity.

Personal experience. Native researchers struggle to validate their personal experiences as a source of knowledge (Brigg & Bleiker, 2009). The main challenge is the assumption that it is possible to be objective all the way, from the definition of the object of study through the collection of data to the analysis of the findings; the assumptions the researcher carries around can sometimes completely blind him or her (Hegelund, 2005). For instance, I did not believe that my so-called insider role (if such a fixed position can truly exist) would automatically lead to a closer understanding of the lived experiences of my participants (Giampapa, 2011) or of the terrain I am already familiar with. The belief that one can actually distance oneself and then regulate that distance in order to come to know is sometimes referred to as alienated consciousness, which leads to a kind of disenchantment of knowing (Heshusius, 1994).

Autoethnographers are caught in the dilemma of being empirical researchers trying to decode a field in which interpretation, understandings, and even solidarity can be seen as central notions (Hegelund, 2005). Moreover, introducing the personal may lead to the objection that autoethnography blind objectivity. Personal characteristics of the researcher may also influence the level of participation that an individual may choose or be forced to adopt (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 30). An important part of the articulation of my multiple identities included the ways in which I saw myself as a trilingual speaker. A speaker of accented English, that is, English marked by a Moroccan accent, a speaker of French, and a speaker of both a standard Arabic and most Arabic dialects. My self-identification as a Muslim immigrant and its multiple representations both linguistically and culturally allowed for some degree of access and connection to the participants' personal and daily experiences.

Teacher-researcher. Teachers engaging in educational research are already participants in the fields they wish to describe and uncover through their research (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 121). The major dilemma they or any insider researcher encounter is how best to avoid an exclusive reliance upon illustrative and anecdotal stories, and how to deal with ethical and moral dilemmas (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, pp. 45–99). For instance, the familiar terrain, language, customs and rituals are usually taken for granted. The challenge is to struggle to render the familiar strange in order to document all details. Here, the researcher disguises his aim and opts for a covert operation to secure the necessary data. My case was more profound. I held a "double-insider" status, which means that I belong to the community I was studying, and I worked at Islamic schools established by that community. Communities behind Islamic schools represent a fringe minority within the Muslim community in Montreal. Furthermore, the teacher conducting research about schooling and education will be forced with ethical and moral dilemmas (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 45) related to the school's code of conduct. I was not immune from such issues; in fact, they were more difficult to reconcile because

of the simple fact that I am part of the situation I was investigating.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Interviewing. The advantages of structured interviews lie in their approach to data collection, which can help in reducing interviewer bias and lead to easier analysis of data (Palriwala, 2005; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 157). However, the heavy reliance upon interviewing techniques is criticized for not giving due weight to the fact that the interviews are situated activities and the material produced situated data (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 160). That said, I chose not to rely exclusively on interviews but, instead, on other tools as well such as school websites and life narratives[28] with leaders and founders of Islamic schools. Life-history narrative rather than question-and-answer interviews worked best in enabling me to understand not just my field but also the challenges that Islamic schools encounter while preparing their students for society (Taylor & Tiflati, 2015).

Being truthful with informants does not extend to questions about others in the community. Researchers must not share personal information that may have been collected in doing fieldwork (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 48) even if other informants may consider it common knowledge.

Data analysis. Analysis may be described as an attempt to organize, account for, and provide explanation of gathered data so that some kind of sense may be made of them; it involves a move from the description of what appears to be the case to an explanation of why what appears to be the case is the case (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 139). Recognizing the fact that we are socially constructed beings directs the attention to what we research as well as on the ways in which we interpret and present our findings

[28] General circumstances, events, stories, etc. that led to the creation of Islamic schools.

(Giampapa, 2011). 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 organizing, analyzing 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, organizing, 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 analyzed each transcript individually, and then I sorted out 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).

Reflexivity. According to Bourdieu, reflexivity 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). Fieldworkers, including community researchers such as myself, are not passive conveyers of data; they are involved in a process of constructing and interpreting the information recorded in the field (Ryan *et al.*, 2010). I have my background of knowledge with me all the time; as this cannot be switched off, it affects what I see and select (Hegelund, 2005) and the ways in which I interpret my data. My interests and my academic background also guide what I include and what I decide to leave out from my material (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 90).

The validity and, more importantly, the generalizability of analysis depend on the extent to which the probabilities in the sample reflect the true probabilities in the population being sampled (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 128). To say that we just have to turn to the data to find the objective truth is an oversimplification, as the arguments from the philosophy of science against this empiricist teaching are quite convincing (Hegelund,

2005). There is the risk that, since data and interpretation are unavoidably combined, the subjective views of the researcher might lead him or her to be selective and unfair to the situation in hand in the choice of data and the interpretation placed on them (Cohen & Manion, 2011, p. 540). By omitting the data, one paints a picture of the observed reality that is less true than it could have been (Hegelund, 2005). Omission of crucial data would be a lack of objective correspondence. However, a level of subjectivity is always present. The real challenge for community researchers is not only about keeping to their objective standards while researching, but more importantly while interpreting and analyzing their data. A distinction between the data and its interpretation must then be made. The great tension in data analysis is between understanding parts of the interview and maintaining a sense of its holism, thereby not losing the synergy of the whole because the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts (Cohen & Manion, 2011, p. 427).

Conclusion

According to Dawson (2011), there is very rarely, if ever, a straightforwardly one-dimensional outsider/insider spectrum across which academic research enables the researcher to change his or her positionality vis-à-vis the subject matter. What is more important is to clearly state where we are coming from and to be aware of the personal experiences and the hidden traits we bring with us to the field and to academia. That said, the reality about what is going on in the field should come from both the point of view of the researcher and from the point of view of informants. This is the main reason I have chosen to use Jackson's (2011) interpretive approach,[29] which privileges subjects' views on matters related to their subjectivities. This approach is very helpful in analyzing discussions about faith, religion, spirituality, and religious instruction in schools. Jackson (2011, p. 190) asserts that his approach does not privilege the

[29] A detailed description of Jackson's interpretive approach will be presented at the beginning of part II of this thesis.

individual or the faith, but it emphasizes the deep relationship between the two, without neglecting the impact of external factors on the faith and on the individual. The interpretive approach is concerned with how religions are represented by stakeholders, the media, and by resources for religious education, etc. This approach will help me distance myself from my terrain while clinging to my academic and ethical standards. Additionally, the participant is not only the observed but also has a say in what should be observed, how it should be observed, and how it should be interpreted. To seriously consider their answers and interpretation is the most appropriate approach to get their insights about his or her research questions.

PART TWO: DESCRIPTIVE PROFILES AND DETAILED DISCUSSION

Population of The Study

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the influence of Islamic schooling on Montreal Muslim students' identities and sense of belonging and, therefore, integration into the mainstream society. In other words, I look at the impact of such schooling on students' ethnic, cultural, religious, and national identities, their religiosities, and their sense of citizenship as Muslims, Quebecers, and Canadians. Attention was given to the number of years graduates spent at the Islamic school, the number of years they lived in Canada, and whether they attended public or private secular schools as well. To ensure their high school experiences were still fresh in their memories, I strived to recruit those who graduated from the Islamic school in the last two years. Even though the invitation was open to all those who graduated from Montreal Islamic schools, participants were from three Sunni schools. Graduates were not all the same age; I was able to acquire a range of insights from younger graduates as well as from two older interviewees (30 and 32 years old) who were members of the same family.[30]

The participants consist of eighteen graduates and thirteen stakeholders. Few graduates attended more than one Islamic school. Some participants also had experiences with the public school or other private secular schools. My criterion for graduates was that they attended an Islamic high school in Montreal for at least two years at the secondary level. Two years seemed long enough to develop a clear understanding of one's experience at the Islamic school. I excluded those who only attended elementary Islamic schools because it was too remote for them to narrate their experiences at that time in detail.

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[30] These two former students graduated from the Islamic school over a decade ago, they were interviewed individually alongside their two brothers and mother.

I interviewed three categories of participants: Muslim youth who attended an Islamic high school for at least two years; Muslim parents who opted for Islamic schooling for their children; and the staff of Islamic schools (teachers, principals, and founders). I divide these participants into two main categories: (1) former students or graduates who were the product of Islamic schooling, and who shared their experiences about Islamic schooling; and (2) adult shareholders and stakeholders, which includes teachers, parents, principals, and founders.

As stated before, I am partly adopting 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 schools and community schools concerned with helping students gain a critical, modern, and reflective understanding of religions (Jackson, 2011). However, I believe its three main concepts will help me distance myself from my terrain while keeping to my academic and religious standards. In what follows, the interpretive approach is concerned with how religions are represented by stakeholders, the media, and by resources for religious education.

According to Jackson (1997), the 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 neither privileges the individual nor the faith, but focuses instead on the 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, transition to the researcher's experiences, and then navigate 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 presentation of the heterogeneity and 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 their informants. Reflexivity is employed to maintain the researcher's self-awareness in relation to the data, requiring thoughtfulness 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 as well as what is in 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, which allows them to collect data coded in the native language. Some details are not easy to translate and must be learned as the ethnographer becomes socialized 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 native speakers of Arabic, 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, eleven preferred English, and 18 opted for French – irrespective of their migration history. I thus translated twenty transcripts into English post-transcription. All graduates requested their interviews in French or English (for language of interview, see Table 2). The difficulty that I encountered involved my attempt to be as accurate and comprehensive as possible in transforming participants' responses from French and Arabic into English (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 35). Moreover, interviews were studied by analyzing each transcript individually at first, and then by separating them and creating themes and categories for each encountered new subject. As mentioned in chapter four, I depended heavily on the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to analyze, categorize, and understand my data.

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, time, and arranging a meeting was difficult. Some of them had to annul the meeting three or four times before deciding to postpone it to an indefinite time. It was easier with male participants as I could meet them anywhere and anytime. In fact, during the month of Ramadan, as Muslims usually socialize late at night, I conducted two interviews at 2 am with two male participants – 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 meant being available later in the evenings when it may be inappropriate for a male researcher to visit their homes.

As the principal core of my research involved issues of belonging, citizenship, religiosity, and identity construction, most of which fall under the heading of subjective concepts, I let my participants express their feelings about their experiences as Canadian 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 with elaborating on their Islamic schooling and their lived experiences (Bakali, 2015). Interviews with parents and staff were semi-structured through open-ended and direct as well as indirect questions. Founders of Islamic schools were engaged in sharing their life narratives, narrating their histories and struggles in establishing these schools. My role was limited to guiding questions or comments to bring them back to issues relevant to my research. All interviews were conducted on an individual basis. The reason for this was that I was not worried about power imbalances as all participants were adults. I personally knew some of the stakeholders who shared details they would not utter to other Muslims out of fear of gossip. Individual interviews gave them the opportunity and possibility to be more frank, open, and direct (Bakali, 2015, p. 136).

Before transcribing the audio files, and in order to get an idea of the holism of the various elements of the interview, I listened to them at least three times, then a fourth time after the transcription in order to compare participants' meanings with what I translated from French or/and Arabic into English. To show my engagement with participants, I refrained from taking extensive notes during the interview. I documented most of my impressions and important points right after each interview. However, three participants were not at ease giving their consent to audio-record our conversation; we did the interview agreeing that I would be taking extensive notes.

I conducted at least one semi-structured interview with each participant (for data on participants, see Table 2), each interview lasted from 30 to 60 minutes, over a time span that extended from January to September 2015. Interviews took place in community centres, Islamic schools, and coffee shops. Interviewed graduates were asked open-ended questions about their views on Islamic schooling, identity, citizenship, and integration in Quebec and Canada. They were also engaged in discussions about Muslimness, Western and Islamic values, and belongingness. Interviews with teachers and parents strived to get an understanding of the rationale, role, effectiveness, and shortcomings of Islamic schooling in Montreal.

Table 2 The participants

Type of participants	Gender	Language of interview
Graduates	11 males	7 English
	7 females	11 French
Parents	3 males	2 French
	1 female	1 English
		1 Arabic
Teachers	5 males	1 English
	1 female	5 French
Principals/	3 males	2 French
Founders		1 English

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVES OF SIX MODEL PARTICIPANTS

Before moving on to the general analysis and broader discussion of my data (the following two chapters), I will present and analyze individual accounts of six of the participants. Because a descriptive presentation of the 31 interviewees would be difficult (and boring), I chose a representative sample that reflects the reality of my participants in terms of gender, demographics, age, and experience with Islamic schools and/or secular schools. More importantly, these participants stood out by sharing the most of their experiences and perspectives on Canadianness, Quebecness, Muslimness, Islamic identity, and Islamic schooling. I included a brief description of each of these "model" participants to help contextualize my analysis in the next two chapters as well as their comments and views. I chose participants whose interviews stood out from the rest of the interviewees either through experiencing various educational systems, or for voicing unique perspectives about their experiences with Islamic schools and/or secular schools.

This chapter presents the narratives of two stakeholders and four graduates. It is mostly descriptive but introduces some of the individuals interviewed and sets the scene for the following two chapters on stakeholders (chapter six) and graduates (chapter seven) where I proceed to the analysis of all the data to identify and classify similarities and trends, then I will conclude the thesis with a review of major themes. The present chapter is divided into two main sections: female and male participants. In each section, I present the views of a parent and two graduates of Islamic schools. Students and

parents are integral for the continuation and survival of any community school; the survival of the Islamic school is dependent on parents being convinced by its mission and quality of education to the extent of entrusting their children to be there eight hours a day.

4.1 Female Participants: A Mother and two Female Graduates

Dunya: A former student. Dunya's case, as the only parent-student participant I recruited, is very interesting. She comes from a family of four children, two males and two females. All four attended Islamic schools and had no experience at all with the public schooling system in Montreal. Dunya also chose to enroll her eldest son in an Islamic school and intends to send her younger daughter there as well. My interview with Dunya was conducted in French, English, and a few expressions in Arabic. Dunya is a Lebanese-Canadian who was 32 years old at the time of our interview. Born in Montreal to immigrant Lebanese parents. She works as an ophthalmologist. Dunya attended Islamic schools at both the elementary and secondary levels. She identifies as Lebanese and then Quebecer:

> I feel like 80% Lebanese Muslim and 20% Quebecer. For me Quebecois and Canadian is the same thing [...] Honestly, I find Quebecers the best people. They are very accepting despite all what is happening.

She stands out from all other male and female participants because she is not a practising Muslim. She neither wears the hijab nor prays, but she fasts during Ramadan, the holy month of Islam. I categorize her as a "complete" non-visible[31] Muslim because she also holds a Christian name. I requested a clarification of why she chose a religious school despite being non-religious herself. She asserted that, from her experience and

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

the experience of her husband who also attended an Islamic school, these schools are efficient in guiding and mentoring Muslim youths as they provide (a minimum of) religious literacy and help in transmitting cultural heritage (Zine, 2008; Memon, 2009, 2012); both are important in avoiding the misinterpretation of Islam:

> First of all, because I wanted him to know Arabic and Islam, I wanted the mentoring and more discipline as well. There is no hijab on my head, so at least the minimum [...] Even my husband is not very (religious), just the basics you know Ramadan, etc. [...] The pubic school is out of question; I don't feel they have good mentoring, especially in ghetto neighbourhoods.

Dunya took the opportunity to talk about religious extremism and violent radicalization. As a parent, she was also concerned about Muslim youth being radicalized through religion:

> You know, before putting him in this Islamic school, I was discussing with my sister and you know my worst fear? I was afraid of radicalization. She said it is people that don't know about religion who have more chances of getting radicalized. Then I thought yeah that is a good point, and that's what encouraged me to go there [Islamic school].

In other words, Dunya believes that learning about Islam and its diversity will make youth immune from fanaticism and radical interpretations of their faith (Zine, 2001, 2004, 2008; Thiessen, 2001; Tiflati, 2016):

> I believe it is the narrow understanding of Islam that leads to it (radicalization). If you don't understand Islam, anyone can bring you (radical) ideas.

Dunya is a product of Islamic schooling. Even though she is not religious herself, she values Islamic education and traditional ideals. She added that her circle of Muslim friends and acquaintances, religious or not, insist on instilling religious values in their

children as well. She constantly relates to her personal experiences as proof that Islamic schooling is not what some people might think:

> I was talking to one of my patients, I was telling him I am sending my son to an Islamic school and he was completely against it. He was like: no don't do that. He said he wants his kids to be raised as Quebecers. I told him 'look at me and my husband'.

Some Islamic rituals and practices are an integral part of Islamic schools' curricula (i.e. hijab, prayers, morning supplication, Islamic holidays). There are concerns about the compulsory status of these practices and whether they infringe on students' rights and freedom of conscience (Sweet, 1997; Kelly, 2000). When questioned about whether her Islamic school intensifies or encourages religiosity through rituals, Islamic practices, and instructions at the school, Dunya agreed that the school should not oblige non-hijabi students to veil at the school, saying:

> I just don't want them (students) to feel obliged to do it. It didn't work with me though (laughs). But most of my friends I can say that it worked.

Nonetheless, strangely enough, Dunya also claimed that it was in some of her Islamic studies courses where she learned the obligations of civic participation, of serving society, and citizenry. She talked about how some religion teachers tried to deduce modern interpretations from Islamic scriptures to help students build a sense of belonging to Canada and be productive citizens:

> The way they talked to us was not on religious basis. I learned more about Islam in *halaqas* (study circles) than at my school [...] For example, as a school, or in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) classes, (they taught us that) you'll be a good Muslim if you get involved with the broader society, whether you volunteer to help people, whether the Palestinian cause, or whatever.

Similarly, she stated that her experience at the Islamic school taught her to be a good member of society (Castelli & Trevathan, 2008; Cristillo, 2009). She believes that citizens can positively contribute to the wider community without completely melting or adopting the majority lifestyle. In fact, Dunya gives credit to the Islamic school for her enlightened and modern interpretation of Islam:

> We can integrate without being assimilated. You don't need to be like them, follow their religion and look like them to be a good person in the community [...] this notion of serving back the community was present (at the Islamic school). If I didn't engage with Islam this way, I wouldn't be an active citizen.

I questioned Dunya about the claims we hear sometimes that Islamic schools do not prepare their students to face future challenges in society to which she replied:

> I had no problems; my husband too, he is an engineer. I don't know why people say that. I went to Vanier (college), so there are no Quebecers there (laugh), a lot of religious Jewish students, [and] a lot of Muslims obviously.
>
> *Hicham*: Some say that Islamic schools are sites of oppression and indoctrination, what do you think?
>
> *Dunya*: that's not true (laugh) people say that but I don't know why. Most people say these students will feel outsiders in the real world, even Muslim people say that. I don't get that. Does that mean I am not normal (laugh)? [...]

However, Dunya agreed that conservatism and radical ideas were sometimes present at her Islamic school's hidden or formal curriculum:

> They (certain teachers) used to tell us that we are the only ones who will get into heaven. I didn't think that way, even though they were teaching us that, but I never believed that (laugh).

Over all, Dunya seems partly satisfied with her experience and with the outcome of Islamic schooling in Montreal. She complained about the Arab mentality of her school's

staff; she is aware, however, that these institutions are evolving as more second-generation immigrants direct and teach at these schools, noting:

> I really believe they're now doing a better job because, as I said, most of them graduated from here, so they have the right training. Even my brother (attended Islamic schools) is doing great; and I feel he has a good sense of critical thinking in terms of religion. He turned out good and he is stable. They shouldn't just say this is *haram* and this is *halal*, they should teach values to integrate with society.

What she most appreciated at her Islamic school was discipline, values, politeness, respect, and "*encadrement.*"[32] She expects all educational institutions to teach and encourage universal values. My interview with Dunya took place right after the tragic attacks at the Canadian parliament and at St-Jean de Richelieu.[33] Tensions were high among some of my participants as one Islamic high school in Montreal was vandalized. Dunya was very worried about the safety of Muslim children attending Islamic schools. She confessed that her Islamic school was not trouble-free or a safe haven for all students, as some Muslim parents believe. But she insisted that the severity of issues in a small private confessional school is less intense than what is found in most public schools.

As stated above, Dunya stands out from all other interviewees because (1) she is not a practicing Muslim, (2) she enjoys the non-visibility and therefore does not usually experience the racialization or othering that her co-religionists might face from non-Muslims, and (3) she is the only parent-student in this study. She appreciates Islamic schooling and the religious training it provides Muslim youth, and does not believe such schooling teaches against integration or promotes isolation.

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[32] Framework and learning environment mentoring offered by teachers.

[33] On October 20, 2014, a Canadian named Martin Couture-Rouleau, inspired by ISIS, run 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.

Dunya's mother: Sameeha. I also had the chance to interview Dunya's mother. We will call her Sameeha. She is an early childhood educator who works in the public sector. She was 59 years old during the time of the interview. She immigrated to Canada 35 years ago to join her husband. Sameeha self-identified as a practising Muslim even though she does not wear the veil; she mentioned that she tried to wear it many times but felt uncomfortable because she is not used to it. The interview was conducted in French with a few Arabic expressions.

Community schools depend greatly on the help and support of the communities behind them. My initial question for all parents was about their choice of the school. As mentioned in the first chapter, the prevalence of Islamic schooling in North America is negligible. For instance, only a tiny minority of Quebecois school-aged Muslim students (less 3%) attend Islamic schools (McAndrew, 2010). The vast majority goes to public schools (over 95%) and other private secular schools (less than 5%) (Sharify-Funk, 2010, p. 541). It was important for me to discuss parents' motives for leaning towards this "radical" choice. The burden is often heavy on parents who have to pay tuition, drive for longer distances to get to the school, and be involved to help the school flourish and succeed. I asked Sameeha about the choice of the Islamic school in the first place, and she replied:

> For its secular and religious education and environment, and for networking with the community; we were not too many during the 80s and early 90s [...] there was only one Islamic school here.

Even though Sameeha sent all her four children to Islamic schools, she had different experiences with each child. I asked Sameeha about the effects of the Islamic school on her children's religious identities and whether the school enforces students' religiosity. She responded:

> We can't generalize. My oldest daughter is not veiled, the second one is; they both went to the same Islamic schools. [...]
>
> *Hicham*: How about making them pray at the school?
>
> *Sameeha*: Yes. I am for that; everyone should join the prayer if it is mandatory. However, prayer is a relationship with God; I don't want my children to pray just because I am watching them. I don't want them to do that. I teach them everything about Islam but I never push it on them.

Sameeha encountered some unpleasant experiences at the Islamic school of her youngest son. Most teachers are first-generation immigrants who did all or most of their schooling in their home countries. Furthermore, some religion teachers, who serve as imams as well, would import their traditional ways of teaching in *halaqas* (study circles) to accredited full-time Islamic schools; this created tensions between parents, who do not want their children to be taught as if attending a conservative madrasa. When asked about the shortcomings of Islamic schools, Sameeha voiced her discontent with certain unqualified teachers:

> A Qur'an and religious studies teacher used to beat them. So if my child doesn't memorize the Qur'an, he shouldn't force them. They should make them love the Qur'an. The administration is also responsible. They should equip him (teacher) with dos and don'ts of teaching in private schools.

Despite this horrible experience, Sameeha and her husband were not discouraged; the school heeded to their complaints, firing the coercive teacher. She insisted that these incidents are not the norm but the exception.

> Negative things were not major, just minor things, which exist in all schools. I never thought of changing to another school. My older son tried the public school for two months but he returned to the Islamic school after that. He didn't like the public sector. They loved the Islamic school.

Even though Dunya considers herself Lebanese first and then Canadian, her mother insists that her children are Canadians first. She believes that attachment and belonging to a nation develop from direct experiences with the country:

> They are Canadians first. Because of the civil war we were not travelling a lot, they are less attached to their country of origin.

Sameeha self-identified as a practising Muslim even though she does not wear the veil; her definition of religiosity is based mainly on faith and belief, not practice. She pointed out that the reasons for choosing the Islamic school were mainly academic and cultural, but not religious. Sameeha does not have a clear take on the Islamic school's role in developing a strong Islamic Identity. To prove that there is no straightforward answer, she gave the example of her two daughters (30 and 32 years olds) who both attended the same Islamic schools: while the first is not religious, the second is very devout and practising. Regarding the teaching provided by Islamic schools towards integration and belonging, Sameeha views the Islamic school as any other Quebec school, because children are taught the same prescribed curriculum by the Ministry of Education. She also insists that her children are Canadian and Quebecois first, primarily because they were raised and socialized here.

Dawlah: A former student. Dawlah is a 19-year-old Syrian-Canadian college student, born in Montreal to immigrant Syrian parents. She was attending her second year of CEGEP[34] during the time of our interview. Dawlah comes from a family of five children, three males and two females who never experienced the public educational system, who were placed in Islamic schools from kindergarten until secondary five. She repeatedly mentioned how she hated her Islamic high school and wanted to attend the neighbourhood's public school but her parents insisted they would never send her to a

[34] CEGEP is the French acronym for *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel.* It refers to pre-university French colleges in the province of Quebec. While discussing my data in the rest of this dissertation, I will employ college to refer English CEGEPs.

public high school. Dawlah identifies more as Canadian of Syrian origin but she never visited Syria. Our interview was conducted in English. I asked Dawlah about her parents' persistence in sending all of their children to Islamic schools. She said:

> My dad always wanted us to grow in an Islamic environment. As much as he believed the Islamic school itself might have some problems, but it is still not as revealing as the public school you know. It is not perfect but the stuff is more hidden at the Islamic school, and that's better for the education in general.

As she graduated from high school and went on to attend a secular public college, Dawlah came to realize the effects of her Islamic schooling on her and her siblings compared to other similar Muslims who attended public schools:

> *Dawlah*: We are different from those who attended public schools. Like I know people from the public school and we are really different.
> *Hicham*: How?
> *Dawlah*: Like if you look at my brothers and other guys I know from public schools, the same age and even the same environment at home you know, like parents who want you to pray and fast and things like that. I never thought I'd say this (laugh) but I credit the (Islamic) school for that [...] I know myself now that I am in college and I see stuff, I know that if I was at the public school I wouldn't wear the hijab or I wouldn't be the same person.

The hijab was mandatory in Dawlah's high school. It is an integral part of the dress code for girls. I asked about her school experience in terms of rituals and religious practices, she said:

> In terms of rituals, the school did help me. When I was in elementary school, I used to wear the veil six days a week (Dawlah attended Sunday school as well), because we don't go out, then I said what am I doing, so I started wearing it. I started wearing the hijab at the age of twelve.

In other words, Dawlah decided to officially wear her hijab once she realized that she was veiled all the time even though she was not, in practice, a *hijabi*, someone who wears the hijab. Her elementary school required girls to wear the hijab at school by grade 5.[35] She credits her school for providing an Islamic environment in which her Islamic identity and her religiosity could flourish:

> The best thing about Islamic schools is religion, Arabic, and the Qur'an. I know if I was in a public school I wouldn't have read Qur'an as much or I wouldn't have prayed *dhuhr* (noon prayer) on time. I think those additional courses and habits did [help] a lot.

Youths develop their cultural identity from their friends and the environment around them. In spite of being in an Islamic controlled environment, Dawlah is aware of her lived Canadianness:

> As much as I try to hide it, I do a lot of stuff like Canadians you know. We do a lot of things like them so we are basically Canadians. Canadian culture is there on TV and on the Internet.

I discussed certain Canadian values with Dawlah and the issues of their compatibility or divergence with Islamic values. She appreciated tolerance as a win-win strategy in society. She also seemed to adopt the motto "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." She had this to say about tolerance, equality, and diversity:

> I would like people to tolerate me so I tolerate others. (In terms of Islamic inheritance), equal does not mean fair. That's what I think. It is not always fair to be equal. Like if I give the example of taxes, it depends on the income right? So if people have to pay the same amount, they don't have the same income, it is equal but it is not fair.

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

She also appreciated her experience with diversity at her college:

> I am happy now at CEGEP with diversity, like after seeing the same things and the same faces for twelve years (laugh).

Dawlah also believes that the Islamic inheritance system, where a woman inherits half as much as her brother, is fair: "Men and women can never be (completely) equal. It is fair because the man supports the family." She also talked about social behaviours and practices in society she believed are compatible with her culture and her Islamic identity. She gave the example of drinking, clubbing, and *ikhtilaat*, or mixed gatherings, and mentioned that, even though it is a common practice, she does not hug her male friends and does not see it as a refusal to integrate or socialize. She limits her physical contacts to shaking hands. I asked her about whether her "social abstinence" affects her relationship with her friends or her integration in society, she said:

> No. Because I can be like a germ freak that doesn't hug or shake hands [...] it is weird but I have never been intimidated at CEGEP because of my hijab. It all depends on how you approach people because I see some girls who are all alone and don't talk to people.

Furthermore, Dawlah was frank about the failures of her Islamic school in preparing her for the outside world. Some of her classmates experienced a cultural shock once they transited to college:

> *Hicham*: did your Islamic schooling prepare you to fully participate as a citizen?
> *Dawlah*: No, like honestly no. I was prepared by myself but I saw other people (who attended Islamic schools) that were not prepared.
> *Hicham*: Now that you are an adult, what does the Islamic school represent to you?
> *Dawlah*: As much as I hated my life, the Islamic school had a positive impact on me. I would have never been myself if I weren't in an Islamic school.

Dawlah ended our discussion by sharing the shortcomings of her Islamic school. She believes that most of the school's problems are generational and that the main challenges come from first generation staff members that run the school:

> It involves people who run the school being stubborn. They should understand that we are in a different generation, like the age gap between us is a problem. Like most teachers are born and raised in Arabic countries, and they don't understand that we are Canadians (laugh) and that's a little bit of a problem.

Dawlah is solely the product of Islamic schooling in Montreal. She, alongside her siblings, never attended a non-Islamic educational system. She was placed in Islamic schools from kindergarten until secondary five. But, once she graduated from high school and went on to attend a secular public college, she realized the effects of Islamic schooling on her and her siblings compared to other Muslims who resemble them but who attended public schools. Furthermore, Dawlah confessed that her Islamic school education helped her normalizing the daily habit of wearing of the hijab (Le Gall, 2003). She credits the school for providing an Islamic environment in which her Islamic identity and religiosity could grow. With regards to integration, Dawlah was equally frank about the Inability of her Islamic school in preparing her for the outside world.

4.2 Male Participants: A Father and two Male Graduates

Amine: A former student. Amine is a 20-year-old Palestinian-Canadian college student, born in Montreal to Palestinian immigrant parents. He was finishing his last semester in college during the time of the interview. Amine attended an Islamic school all his life with the exception of the 3rd and 4th grades. He switched to a public school during these two years because, after the divorce of his parents, Amine moved out with his mother who lived far away from the Islamic school he was attending. He returned, however, when his father regained custody. Amine has two older sisters who also attended Islamic

schools, but they changed to public schools during the last two years of high school. I conducted the interview in English.

Amine voiced his admiration for the "superiority" of the public school vis-à-vis the Islamic school in its capacity to teach its subjects. He mentioned that the reason why his two sisters decided to attend the public school was to receive sufficient training in secular subjects prior to enrolling in a college.

We discussed the practice of religion at his Islamic school. Amine adamantly refused the notion than an Islamic school intensifies a student's religiosity:

> I say the school did their job. They asked us to pray, taught us Qur'an, etc. but outside of the school, I never saw a difference between students of the public school and us.

Amine appreciates his Canadian identity and the Canadian legal status in this day and age. To him, being Canadian guarantees legal protection and diminishes the chances of being discriminated against:

> My Canadian identity is very important in this era where there is a lot of racism and discrimination, especially with this ISIS thing, which is adding more to the discrimination. Our Canadian identity helps us a lot. Canadian identity protects us.

I discussed Canadian values such as acceptance, tolerance, open-mindedness, etc. with Amine; while he was very appreciative of living in a secular country, Amine was the only participant who openly condemned homosexuality and spoke unfavourably against gays and other non-Sunni sects. To him, a true Muslim should be a Sunni Muslim, and all other Muslims are mistaken:

> I won't lie to you I am homophobic. If the person doesn't manifest his sexuality in public I am totally okay with it, but if you're acting like a girl and trying to seduce

> me, no [...] I consider myself a Muslim Sunni. I emphasize that because when you say Muslim it means one thing: you have to follow the Qur'an. Shia don't follow the Qur'an. I don't consider them Muslims at all.

He did not mention any correlation between his Islamic schooling and his intolerance for homosexuals and Shias. However, Amine is not consistent with regards to his ideological and religious positions. Although he rejects non-Sunni Muslims and homosexuals, Amine nonetheless glorifies Canada's diversity. He describes his appreciation of Canadian diversity in relation to Palestine:

> Diversity is a very good thing. I went to Palestine; everybody was Sunni Muslim, nobody had a different mentality. Diversity helps you grow; it helps you understand different ways of living. Diversity gives you a lot of opportunities. You learn from it when you experience it first hand. It helps you grow within your own culture.

Furthermore, even though Amine was not politically engaged, this changed when he felt politics were invading his personal life. This was especially significant during the proposal of a Charter of Values by the Parti Québécois, which sought to ban ostensible religious signs (e.g. the hijab) for employees in state institutions:

> I voted but I hate politics; I understand it but I don't like it because it destroys a lot of things. I have never seen an honest politician. During the Charter of Values, it (voting) became personal; they wanted to take religious signs out; with this you touch my private space.

Embodying his Canadianness, Amine believed that the government has no legitimate stand in taking his right in wearing religious signs at the workplace or in the public sphere. Whereas he did not see a need to be politically active before the Charter, political engagement became an obligation to defend his rights as a Canadian national (Oueslati, Labelle & Antonius, 2006, p. 142).

Like Amine, most of my participants were engaged in what Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking (2011, p. 12) call "informal politics", which refers to "lobbying, activism on political issues, letter writing, petition signing, and attending rallies". Nonetheless, political abstinence among youth, Muslims and non-Muslims, is not merely a Canadian or a Quebecois issue, "concern at the lack of political engagement among youth is widespread in the West" (Bullock & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 5)

In spite of the appreciation Amine has for his Islamic school, he believes that public schools are better than Islamic schools in teaching academic subjects. Furthermore, he highly values his nationality because it allows him to move freely as a Canadian citizen and it grants him respect from his co-citizens in society. Even though he appreciates tolerance and the equal treatment of all religions under secularism, he denounced homosexuality and other non-Sunni doctrines. In terms of belongingness, Amine was the only participants who denounced his Quebecness and insisted on being exclusively Canadian from Palestinian origin. He stated that he does not like politics but he does not mind engaging in it to defend and protect his religious rights.

Murad: A parent. Murad is a 55-year-old Moroccan activist who works at an Islamic community centre. He immigrated to Montreal sixteen years ago after having completed an MBA in the United States. Murad's narrative is especially fascinating, having experienced both Islamic schooling and private secular schooling in Montreal. He first sent his sons (fourteen and eleven) and daughter (sixteen) to Islamic schools, but later transferred them to a private school once he discovered serious flaws in the Islamic school's pedagogy. His daughter thus spent nine years in Islamic schools and his son seven years. His youngest son was still in elementary Islamic school during the time of the interview. Murad preferred to do his interview in Moroccan Arabic.

Islamic schooling is a recent phenomenon in North America. When Murad moved to Quebec, there was only one Sunni[36] Islamic school in Montreal.[37] It was difficult for most committed parents to commute twice a day to the school. Nonetheless, Murad talked passionately about his commitment to Islamic education, saying:

> We (myself and my wife) want our children to be in an Islamic environment, a clean environment. Should there be no Islamic schools, I would have chosen another private school but never the public school.

I questioned Murad about the media's discourse, which usually depicts Islamic schools as sites of oppression, indoctrination, and incubators for radical beliefs. He slightly disagreed and insisted that the practice of faith should not be seen as a sign of disintegration:

> No, that is not true. Students there can be open-minded and liberal while keeping their Muslim identities at the same time. They can be fully integrated in their Quebecois or Canadian society while keeping to their Muslimness. My son can be a practising Muslim and engage with everyone in society. So here I am talking about positive integration.

To tackle the same question from another angle, I responded that Islamic schools are widely seen by outsiders as purposely contributing to cognitive radicalization, they do so by denying exposure to other alternatives in society (Maxwell *et al.*, 2012, p. 9; Tiflati, 2016). Murad does not believe, however, that his children are isolated from the rest of society, or that their contact is limited to only those who share the same culture. He responds:

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[36] Islamic schools in Montreal do not openly affiliate with any specific sect. People make judgment based on the community (Shia, Sunni, *ahbash*, etc.) behind the school.

[37] The first elementary Islamic school in Montreal was established in 1985.

> Even though they are in Islamic schools, they have Quebecois friends that visit them at home. These are non-Muslim friends from the neighbourhood; once they finish school, they have other activities: Taekwondo, soccer, etc.

He insisted that we "should not put a label on these Muslim youths" because "they are normal kids." Murad asserted that maintaining a balanced Islamic identity is the main reason for sending his children to Islamic schools, which is a viewpoint reflected in the literature on Islamic schooling (Clauss *et al.*, 2013; Memon, 2009, 2012; Zine, 2004, 2008). Preserving a specific culture in a diverse society, Murad argues, is very difficult. He believes that his children's identity might be at risk if they attend public schools, which he feels dismiss religious and moral values. Murad believes Muslim youth will consequently feel confused and lost in an ocean of relativism, adding:

> So I believe that staff at the Islamic school should help students with the development of their religious identities, but they should do it in a responsible way.

Now that he has two children at a non-Islamic school, I asked Murad about his experience and impressions with his children attending a private secular school. Because of his disappointment with the pedagogical frameworks of his Islamic high school, he seemed very pleased with how things are at the new private secular school, accrediting the Islamic school however for his children's balanced and strong Islamic identity. He said:

> When we enrolled our 14-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter in a private school [...] we were very concerned about them missing their prayers, missing Friday sermon, and so on. But *Alhamdulillah*[38] when it's prayer time, he waits for his break and does his prayers in a corner.

[38] Praise be to God.

Although Murad abandoned the Islamic school and chose instead to educate his children in a private secular school, he remained a believer in elementary Islamic schooling, but maintained that Islamic high schools need radical reforms in terms of their pedagogy. He insisted that children whose identities are under construction are more fragile and receptive to almost anything. Parents who share this view, thus, contended that Muslim youth are safer in an Islamic school because they can be easily indoctrinated and de-Islamized elsewhere. Otherwise stated, a student's identity is shaped at a young age, a time when they are most susceptible to the ideological axioms of their environment:

> What's more important to me is the elementary Islamic school. I think it's there when the child's identity is being built. My son at the private school now, despite being outnumbered, is able to defend his identity among his peers [...] so I am not frightened now as before because his identity is figured out.

This is a concern shared by most devout Muslim parents in the West. They are aware that Muslim children are usually asked by peers or teachers to speak on behalf of their faith and their co-religionists (Blumenfeld, 2006a). Murad's preoccupation with his son's capacity to defend himself at his school reveals some of the fears parents have about non-Islamic schools.

To back up his opinion about the public school, Murad also gives the example of students at his children's previous Islamic high school. Dividing the school's student body in terms of elementary Islamic education, Murad says, about 50% attended non-Islamic elementary schools. Others would also transfer from public schools to this Islamic school in the middle of their high school years:

> At the secondary Islamic school, teachers are noticing the difference between those who came from Islamic schools and others who studied at other (non-Islamic) schools. (There is) a difference in terms of morals, principles, *adab* (good manners), and *tarbya* (good upbringing).

Parents usually look for schools that are friendly to, or at least do not contradict, their home culture (Thiessen, 2001). Muslim parents are no exception. Even though Murad changed schools for pedagogical reasons, he is not convinced that academic subjects are more important than Islamic moral development during elementary and secondary years. He only agreed to transfer his children to the private school once he was assured the environment would not threaten his children's religiosity. Nonetheless, even though private schools were not Murad's only option, he added that public schools were never even under his consideration.

I asked Murad about his children's identity and sense of belonging to Quebec and to Canada. Murad elaborated on the importance of Muslim youth adopting a Quebecois and Canadian identity to be capable of competing socially, culturally, and economically with others. Put differently, he does not want his children to be passive members in society. He says:

> I teach my children that they are Quebecois and Canadian Muslims. They are not like us because they are not immigrants. These issues of belonging came to the surface recently, [...] we have concerns about them when they are in a multicultural classroom, and their teacher is not Muslim. We want them to speak their minds and not just follow orders. For instance, if they discuss terrorism in class we want them to discuss and talk as Canadians, as Quebecers, and as Muslims.

Nonetheless, he seems very happy with the Islam-friendly climate that the Islamic elementary school provides for his children. He supports environments that encourage Muslim youth to love their religion, rather than imposing it on them. However, Murad is realistic in understanding that the Islamic school does not have the magic wand to discipline wayward youth:

> But we cannot generalize. I have seen graduates of Islamic schools (morally) fail in their life. And I have seen very good Muslims who only attended the public

> sector. In our case we are doing what we think is right for our children but we can't guarantee a (positive) result.

We also discussed the Islamic school's role in enforcing religiosity. I cited examples of the hijab as mandatory within the dress code, praying at school, and celebrating Islamic holidays. He adds:

> The hijab is not mandatory at my children's school [...] this is not my experience at (name of school), they encourage religiosity but they don't force it upon the children.
>
> *Hicham*: Some say that Islamic schools are sites of oppression and indoctrination, what do you think?
>
> *Murad*: No. That is not true; they can be open-minded and liberated while keeping their Muslim identities at the same time. They can be fully integrated in their Quebecois or Canadian society while keeping to their Muslimness.

Murad seemed anxious about the political climate in Quebec. Our interview took place after the Quebec elections, which the Parti Québécois lost, thereby annulling the proposed Charter of Values. Murad sadly admits:

> It is getting harder for them (young Muslims); you remember the Parti Québécois and the Charter of Values. We never tell them this but they question the values of their society. We want them to feel integrated here..

Finally, I asked Murad to reflect on his experience with both Islamic and private secular systems. He says he is very appreciative of the new private secular school. He juxtaposes his appreciation with the Islamic school's incompetence in their interactions with parents:

> I will cite just one thing. They [private school] deal with parents with professionalism and no stress [...] My child is not as stressed as before. I would say public schools are better funded and they are able to keep good teachers who are experts in their subjects.

Murad is the only parent-participant in this study, and one of the few in Montreal, who experienced both the Islamic school and the private secular school. He was ready to sacrifice academic excellence at the elementary level in order for his children to be in an Islamic environment, where they are at ease being Muslim at school at this young age. He only agreed to transfer to a non-Islamic environment once he was certain that his children would not have to compromise their Islamic identity at the new non-Islamic school. He credited the Islamic elementary school for his children's balanced and strong sense of Islamic identity. Nonetheless, he insisted that Islamic high schools in Montreal must improve their pedagogy in order to compete with other schools on the academic level. Similar to Sameeha, Murad elaborated on the importance of Muslim youths adopting a Quebecois and Canadian identity, to help them strive and act as equal citizens in their society.

Ismail: A former student. Ismail is a 19-year-old Canadian-Egyptian who was attending college during the time of the interview. Born in Montreal to a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother, his family had to relocate to Egypt for three years when Ismail was three years old due to his father's occupation. They then returned to Montreal when his father found work here. Ismail attended both an elementary public school and an Islamic high school. I conducted the interview in English. Ismail never related to his Sudanese descent during the interview, and I complied in the avoidance as he exclusively raised Egypt as his country of origin. As stated in Chapter Four, I am employing Jackson's (2011) interpretive approach, which privileges participants' narratives and points of view.

Ismail stated that the Islamic school was not at first a priority in his family. In fact, his two older siblings went to public schools – elementary and secondary – but his mother was worried about the bad influence of a culturally diverse public school. He said:

> Basically my mother had experienced my other siblings going through the public school over here, and she was concerned about a lot of things like drugs and things like that might happen in larger schools at the secondary level where there is less control.

Contrary to Murad's position on the Islamic elementary school, Ismail is more in support for Islamic high schools for Muslim youth:

> I think given my experience at the Islamic school and the friends that I know I would say that I would be more in support of Islamic schools for high school because this is the moment when your identity is starting to be built.

We discussed issues of identity and belonging for Western Muslims. Ismail adopts multiple identities embodying all cultures and customs around him. He had this to say:

> I am Muslim by religion, Canadian by nationality, Arab by culture, and so on and so forth. That's the thing; I mean 21st-century man is really a melting pot of different identities.

Similar to most Muslim youths in the West, Ismail was against doctrinal labelling (i.e. sunni, shia, ahbash) or divisions among Muslims. Religiously speaking, he solely identified as Muslim.

Despite his appreciation for the Islamic school's environment and climate, Ismail is critical of the way Islamic studies course is taught without a basis in critical thinking. I asked him whether he thinks the Islamic school intensifies religiosity, he said:

> To be honest from my own personal experience I feel like it hasn't. I feel that many things cause the confusion between culture and religion to just increase more.

Ismail also struggled with the way rituals were addressed at school. He yearned for a rational analysis of religion and metaphysical concepts. Religious practices in Islamic schools center mainly around the establishing habits and familiarizing students with their faith. Montreal Islamic high schools offer three hours a week of religious instruction:[39] one hour for Islamic studies, Qur'an, and Arabic respectively. Thus, only one hour per week is dedicated to reflecting on the Islamic faith. The remaining two hours are for memorizing Qur'an and learning Arabic.

Additionally, Ismail showed his frustration with not knowing enough about his religion despite spending a few years in an Islamic environment. He narrated an experience of an interfaith dialogue at his Islamic school with Christian youth, where Muslims found it difficult to explain basic Islamic concepts.

> I think we took a lot of things for granted like we had the interreligious discussion with the Christian school, they asked us basic questions and I found that many students including myself had such difficulty you know answering those questions.

As youth approach adulthood, they experience shifts in their identities, which provoke questions about their religious experiences. Ismail showed frustration with how the school's staff was not approachable for such questioning, or did not respond adequately to his concerns:

> As soon as very much they (students) hit puberty (laugh) that phase you know when they start to rebel and ask all of these questions and this is when they shouldn't be met with resistance like: oh you should because our religion just said so, just like that and there is no other explanation. Or, you just have to do it because we say so.

[39] 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 Islam in their high school.

Developing a strong sense of identity is a part of becoming a grown man or woman. I asked Ismail about his belongingness and his Canadian identity. He asserted that he had an ambiguous understanding of Canadianness and Muslimness when he was in his early teenage years; it was not until college that he started to reconcile all his multiple identities:

> I remember going to a workshop here in Montreal with other students my age of high school and the speaker said can you be Canadian and Muslim just to get us to think. And I remember having trouble answering that.

Like all participants in this study, Ismail admires Canada and its multicultural values. Nonetheless, he does not see these values as a product of secularism; there are many countries that are secular but did not produce acceptance, open-mindedness, and diversity. Ismail considers the Canadian society as a model in the world in terms of its diversity and multiculturalism:

> I wouldn't credit exactly these things (acceptance, diversity, tolerance, etc.) to the secular society but I would credit them to the Canadian society.

Contrary to Murad's position on the Islamic elementary school, Ismail believes that parents should not compromise on the Islamic high school for Muslim adolescents. He insisted that this Islamic environment is much needed when youths' identities, religiosities, and sexualities are being developed. Ismail adopts a fluid identity that corresponds to his lived experience and to his heritage. He is very proud of his Canadian identity. He sees himself as equally Canadian and Quebecois from Egyptian origin. Unlike Amine's position on non-Sunni sects, Ismail is against any doctrinal or sectarian labelling or divisions among Muslims.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I chose to approach my data by presenting individual accounts of six model participants. It serves as an introduction of my main participants, and remains a keystone in understanding the following two chapters on stakeholders and graduates. As it is neither practical nor realistic to examine individual profiles of all thirty-one participants, I believe the narrative of these six model participants is enough and relevant to get an idea about representative individuals of each of the participant groups of this study. Parents and students, I would argue, are the main "fuel" for the continuation of community schools. Their commitment and loyalty are important to these schools' image within the community. Overall, there seems to be a consensus among stakeholders and graduates on the importance of Islamic schooling for the preservation and transmission of an Islamic identity. Both also valued the urgency of developing a national (political) identity, which is Islamic but also Canadian and Quebecois. This identity would serve as a defense mechanism against discrimination and prejudice, and would make Muslim youth immune from being otherized and categorized as immigrant foreigners, as they are natives as well.

In terms of identifying with the Muslim community, whereas my participants did not deny or underestimate this identification, they agreed on the importance of embodying Quebecois and/or Canadian identities through engaging in social interaction, participating in a complex social reality, and contextualizing their understanding and interpretation of Islam to fit their western reality. By disregarding certain cultural practices of their parents, most graduates are developing what looks like secular interpretations of Islam. For instance, all of them appreciated Canadian secularism and considered it better for their Islamic identity than all other forms of secularism. They built on their experiences and the freedoms they enjoy in a secular society here

compared to autocratic societies either in their countries of origin or the type of secularism applied by other European states (mainly France). Participants are aware of how their Muslimness is being problematized but, nonetheless, they all agreed that these difficulties and obstacles are manageable through negotiations, education, and the legal protection of religious rights.

CHAPTER V

STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON ISLAMIC SCHOOLING

5.1 Population and Sampling

This chapter discusses and analyzes the interviews conducted with teachers, principals, parents, and founders, drawing on their perceptions of the nature of Islamic education as found in Montreal and its role in shaping Muslim youths' identities and sense of belonging within the context of Quebec's intercultural society. These adult shareholders and stakeholders consist of the architects of Islamic schools, who established these institutions to preserve their cultural and religious identity in Montreal (see Table 3). Most shareholders and stakeholders I interviewed held two or more identifications related to the study. For example, the two founders were also parents, one of whom also served as a principal for five years. Another principal was a full-time teacher and still teaches part-time at his Islamic school. These participants primarily shared their perspectives as stakeholders with different roles at the Islamic school. Others who only had a single identification (i.e. parents) were also unofficially linked to the school via other activities (i.e. volunteering, fundraising, donating, etc.). Data analysis and presentation of their views are guided by the following general research questions: What are the motives of the Muslims involved with Islamic schooling? What are their views about religiosity, culture, identity, belonging, and Islamic schooling in Montreal? And what are the main challenges (i.e. academic, cultural, financial) facing Montreal Islamic schools?

Table 3 Shareholders and Stakeholders

Pseudonym	Age	Identification	Language of Interview	Country of Origin
Kamal	49	Parent	E	Tunisian
Zayd	56	Teacher	F/A	Moroccan
Nabil	47	Teacher/parent	F/A	Algerian
Zouhir	54	Parent/Principal/founder/ Former teacher	F	Tunisian
Hamid	46	Principal/teacher/parent	F	Algerian
Saïd	50	Parent/Founder/former	E/A	Lebanese
Dunya		principal		
Sameeha	32	Student/parent	E/F	Lebanese
Idar	59	Parent	F/A	Lebanese
Murad	42	Teacher	F	Algerian
Mathieu	55	Parent/activist	A	Moroccan
Patricia	59	Teacher/P director	F	*Quebecois*
Maha	65	Pedagogical director	E	*Quebecois*
	32	Teacher	E	Palestinian

Note. Language of interview: E: English, F: French, A: Arabic. More than 50% of participants hold two or three identifications with regards to their Islamic school.

Many stakeholders believe that Islamic schooling offers alternatives to what it viewed as the dominant secular, "Christian," and Eurocentric public education. It does so by establishing culturally or spiritually-based knowledge and practice as a core component of learning (Daher, 2005; Cristillo, 2009; Memon, 2009, 2012). Zine (2008), for instance, suggests that "Islamic schools represent an anti-colonial move in that they offer a central place to subjugated knowledge in educational discourse and praxis" (p. 230).[40] In a case study of a Montreal Islamic school, Kelly (2000, p. 46) affirms that

[40] 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

some families have chosen to enroll their children there as a response to the challenges of integration and assimilation. Many shareholders believe that these schools advocate a form of 'guided integration,' which means adopting society's common values to the exception of those that are contrary to Islamic beliefs. Moreover, others see Islamic schools as places where rebellious Muslim children are sent to be re-educated, thereby providing a form of "behaviour modification" (Daher, 2005). In other words, Islamic schools – especially high schools – might sometimes serve as reform schools for youth who might go astray (Memon, 2009, p. 157; Merry, 2008).

5.2 Religion, Religiosity and the Islamic School

Religiosity and belief. Teachers, especially those who already taught at public schools contended that students at Islamic schools are more religious than their Muslim peers in public schools. Teachers at Islamic schools expect more sincerity, tranquillity, and a higher capacity for learning. However, religiosity is primarily fostered in students' homes. Nabil, who teaches mathematics at an Islamic high school and sends his two children to an elementary Islamic school, said:

> I think when it comes to education, religious or not, the basis for everything is the family. But I also believe that the community school's help is crucial to parents. There are parents who believe in academic excellence but they also believe in religious education and in preserving the religious aspect (*my translation*).

Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Thanksgiving are holidays associated with Christian rituals. Newcomers and individuals of other faiths who have lived for a long time in Quebec hope to have the space to celebrate their own religious holidays as well (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 91). Islamic holidays and holy days are celebrated at the Islamic school. Nonetheless, other religious practices (i.e. hijab, prayer) are also

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colonized; the education system in these countries is no more than a duplicate of what we have in the West.

observed. Concerning this point, all teachers agreed that most parents come to the school knowing these rules with the intention to put their children in an Islamic environment and surround them with others who resemble them. When asked about his thoughts about obliging girls to wear the hijab inside the school, Kamal said:

> I am neither for nor against to be honest with you. But I think the school was created for many reasons, and one of them is this one. When parents come here, knowing these rules, it means that this is what they are looking for.

Intensifying religiosity. I discussed the idea of developing students' religiosity through repetitive rituals and religious practice with teachers. They were divided about the mandatory status of religious practices in Islamic schools. Female students have to veil in Islamic schools that consider the hijab a part of the uniform. Inside the school, most teachers do not differentiate full-time *hijabi* students who cover all the time from those who only wear it because it is a part of the school's dress code. Zayd, who teaches mathematics and ERC at an Islamic high school, said

> In a conference, I was surprised to see one of my students with no hijab outside the school (*my translation*).

As Islamic schools compel students to engage in certain rituals and practices, there is a concern that they are enforcing Islam against their will. Nonetheless, Maha, an English teacher, insisted that the source of students' religiosity is their families – not the Islamic school itself. She said:

> Most of our students are already well-behaved and religious before entering the school.

Furthermore, teachers believe that graduates of Islamic schools are more devout and religious than others who attended secular schools (Triki-Yamani & McAndrew, 2009). The reason behind this may lie in their conservative families who chose the Islamic

school in the first place. In fact, it is not the norm among Muslim youth in public schools to exhibit high levels of religiosity. In their study about Muslim youth, Triki-Yamani and McAndrew (2009) concluded that Muslim students who studied at Quebec schools do not display intense religiosities in CEGEP. One principal, Hamid, whose Islamic high school obliges female students to wear the veil (not the staff however – there were two non-*hijabi* Muslim teachers during the time of the interview) insisted that the veil has nothing to do with religiosity. Even in their dress code, they insisted on calling it a veil and not a hijab. Still, the daily act of wearing a veil at school would reinforce the habit thereby normalizing it outside the school context.

Saïd, another stakeholder – a founder, parent, and former principal – insisted that the Islamic school is not intensifying or creating new forms of religious practices, but is simply trying to meet some of the cultural and religious needs of the parents:

> We are only cloning some of the practices at home. But I cannot confirm that the school will intensify the religiosity of a non-practising student, no I don't think so. We have very few hours of religious instructions.[41]

What surprised me most was the position of a Muslim teacher, Zayd, discussing religious practices in his classroom. Even though he is a Muslim believer himself, he draws a clear distinction between learning time and praying time. Muslim teachers often pray with students during noon prayer, he realized some students were not serious in their demands to leave the classroom to pray or perform ablution; the same students usually miss or come late to group prayers. Consequently, he refused to accommodate his students for religious reasons during class time:

> Once they wanted to pray during class time but I refused. They kept insisting until the principal arrived and took my side. They have a course, they should finish it and then they can pray (*my translation*).

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

Zayd also abrogated the tradition of starting each day with a morning supplication, which is a habit in most Islamic schools. He stated it disturbs the normal routine of the class and makes it hard to calm down most students back to begin the teaching process:

> The second thing is the habit they brought from the elementary Islamic school. They wanted to start each morning with *du'a* (supplication), I also refused because they waste 15 minutes of my time. And it is hard to re-engage them (*my translation*).

Instead, Zayd made a deal with his students:

> So we agreed to do the supplication only on Friday mornings. Even when they forget, I remind them every Friday. I am having no issues with this class now (*my translation*).

Zayd insists that his full focus is on secular subjects and does not let the religious aspect of the Islamic school affect his classroom or his way of teaching.

> For me it is only academic success. I don't talk religion with them and I don't allow religious debates in my classroom (*my translation*).

Islamization and the nature of Islamic schools. Devout Muslims use specific language, dress codes, rituals, and shared history to identify with their group members and distinguish their identity from outsiders (Elbih, 2010). Religious behaviour signifies how to interact with others, what to eat, whom to marry, and more importantly how to be in society (Akgönül, 2013, p. 72). Nonetheless, if Islamic schools aim at teaching the Islamic faith or at "Islamizing" students' thoughts and behaviours, this raises the following question: can belief be learned and taught? Put differently, can we teach the vertical and personal relationship (Akgönül, 2013, p. 71) between the Divine and the human being? And can we Islamize Muslim youth through Islamic education?

Islamization, void of political definitions, is a social movement that seeks to inculcate Islamic societies with the values, traditions, legacies, and cultures of Islam (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 97; Halstead, 2004, p. 522). This movement employs Islamic education to cultivate "dispositions and patterns of behaviour that are based on the values and teachings of Islam" (Rausch, 2013, p. 103). For its proponents, Islamization basically means that Islam should be the main reference of knowledge for Muslims in all aspects of life. They see education as a vehicle for transmitting Islam-based culture, encouraging the Islamic spirit, and forming an Islamic environment that reflects viewpoints and attitudes inspired by the Islamic culture (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 18). For example, an ideal Islamization of education model would infer that Islamic studies courses will not be taught separately along secular courses but instead, they would be infused with the whole curriculum to develop a Muslim student identity, as well as Islamic values and lifestyle (Ali, 2012, p. 27; Elbih, 2010).

Principals and founders were reluctant to admit the Islamic nature of their school. To those from an Arab descent who lived in Islamic countries, an Islamic school is the "madrasa-style" school where all subjects are Islamized and taught from an Islamic perspective. Respectively, Zouhir and Saïd, who are among the first founders and principals of Montreal Islamic schools, had this to say about the Islamic nature of the schools they established:

> The climate here is not Islamic, strictly speaking, I can say it is a conservative climate in terms of values [...] In terms of values they are conservative; in terms of practice they are liberal; they mainly have family values (*my translation*).

> They are not Islamic schools. They are community schools that belong to the Muslim community.

What we call modern Islamic schools in Montreal are regular schools with secular subjects and Islamic instruction taught on the side. Regarding the Islamic studies course,

stakeholders' opinions align with those of graduates; they all agreed that the course is not being taught as it should be in an Islamic school. Zouhir, who is a parent, a founder and previous principal at an Islamic high school, as well as the current principal at an Islamic elementary school, argues:

> The less stable, less structured and more problematic subject at Islamic schools is the Islamic studies course. There is a lack of qualified Islamic studies teachers and in manuals. It is our seventeenth year here, and we don't have a formal Islamic studies manual that responds to our expectations (*my translation*).

Zouhir insisted that the climate at his school is not Islamic, strictly speaking, but can be described as conservative in terms of values and beliefs. Saïd, a founder, parent, and previous principal asserted that we should cease calling them Islamic schools; instead he used the term community schools. He suggests his choice of words are based on the premise that such schools do not Islamize their curriculum, but instead follow the program of the ministry of education.

> Personally I prefer to not call them Islamic schools. They are community schools. The term Islamic gives the wrong impression that doesn't match reality.

However, regardless of their true nature, in terms of the law, Islamic schools in Quebec fall under the category of confessional schools. Both Saïd and Zouhir confessed that they chose this legal status to enjoy the right to teach religious beliefs and transfer a specific culture at their school.

> We chose the confessional status to have the right to transmit a religion, a culture, and to serve a community.

Despite this focus on the communitarian and cultural aspect of their Islamic schools, all teachers, parents, and principals mentioned the cultural barriers these schools face. Whereas they want the modern version of Islam to be properly taught there, they agreed

that the cultural baggage they imported from their countries of origin has to be filtered and restructured in order to face the internal and external challenges (i.e. internal diversity, finances, pedagogical challenges, etc.).

5.3 Parents, Teachers, and the Islamic School

Parents and Islamic schooling. As stated in the previous section, an Islamic school is a community school. In a sense, the school reflects and responds to the needs of a specific community (Merry, 2008). The three Islamic schools reflected in this study could be considered Arabic schools (Middle Eastern and North African, MENA, schools); the vast majority of students and staff come from these regions. Put differently, despite their Islamic label, these schools can also be considered schools for Arab children. Students find their home culture and dialects at the school and usually make friends who come from the same region.

A community school that is not subsidized by the state cannot function properly without the help of the community behind it, its insufficient staff (halls' surveillance, librarians, lunch supervisors, etc.) means parents are obliged to get involved with the school. The school's success thus depends on the parents' direct involvement with the school's daily activities.

However, students, teachers, and principals of all three Islamic schools involved in my research agreed that parents are not having a positive impact on their schools. Most parents' contributions are limited to paying school fees. Very few attend school meetings, volunteer, or help in any other way. In one high school of 120 students and about 70 families, only one mother was active during the time of this research. Hamid, the principal of the school mentioned that they tried everything from e-mails, letters and phone calls to involve parents, but to no avail. He confessed that most parents "just

don't care" as long as their child is in a safe environment free from drugs and promiscuous acts. Some teachers even said that parents never make an appearance at the school, even when they are requested to. Nabil, who teaches mathematics, gave the example of a failing student whose parent promised, three times, to attend a meeting to discuss her son's case, but never came.

Parents' choice of the school. It is important for many devout Muslim parents to find an educational environment where their children can be educated, not only about Islam through an ethics and religious culture courses /or program in secular schools, but also through confessional and Islam-centred courses in Islamic schools (Berglund, 2014). To some, Islamic schools can also offer safe environments free from racism and religious discrimination that Muslim students experience in some public schools (Oueslati, Labelle & Antonius, 2006, p. 58). They believe these schools also focus on protecting students from the negative influence of the West by guiding and monitoring their socialization (Ali, 2012). Subsequently, the choice of the Islamic school might be a way to avoid discrimination and obtain acceptance of difference (Berglund, 2014). These Islam-centred environments facilitate the promotion of Islamic etiquette through repetitive rituals and practices (Ahmad, 2012, p. 19). The greatest concern for parents however seems to be the socialization and formation of an Islamic identity that will not only protect youth from negative "ungodly" influences but also serve as a foundation for them to lead righteous, devout, and successful lives (Ahmad, 2012). Kamal, a parent who sends all his four children to Islamic schools, said:

> If our students are in a public school, they will either let go their religion or become very attached to Islam and very religious. Most Muslims there pick this extreme or the other. They either become agnostic like everyone else, or radicalized. I see modesty here at this Islamic school.

Furthermore, Mathieu, a pedagogical counsellor who directly deals with parents, shared his opinion about their needs and concerns. He said:

> I talked to enough parents to understand their needs. They want discipline, obedience, and respect. Anything that is a must in the religion, I recognize that because they are our clients (*my translation*).

Most parents hope that their children's school culture is compatible with the home culture. Data gathered in this study reveal that there are two kinds of parents at the Islamic school: (1) a concerned religious majority and (2) a conservative non-religious minority. On the one hand, the majority of Muslim parents believe the Islamic school gives their children a minimum of (the required) religious education (Arabic, Qur'an, and Islamic knowledge) and protects them until they reach adulthood. Those who are truly interested in their children's Islamic identity would follow up and ask for homework in religious instruction; and then they would complain about the quality of Islamic studies course and about their children not learning enough about their religion. To them, it is a religious obligation to transmit their Islam to their children.

The minority non-religious parents, on the other hand, send their kids to the Islamic school solely for protection. This minority is not demanding in terms of Islamic instruction, nor are they interested in the religious curriculum or the Arabic course load; they are exclusively looking for a clean and safe school setting. Most parents who mentioned protection from society and the clean environment as the reason behind their choice of Islamic school are non-practising Muslims. They are concerned with protecting their children from drugs and engaging in sexual relations, not because it is haram (non-permissible in Islam), but because it will distract them in their lives. In a sense, they are looking for a clean environment and for mentoring that will help their children lead successful lives.

This non-religious minority would sometimes bail out of the school if they fear the latter is too religious, or if they sense that it is Islamizing their children. Some parents are

concerned that Islamic schools focus more on Islamic education and pay less attention to the standard curriculum, which results in below-average achievements in these subjects (Merry, 2008). Zayd, who teaches mathematics and Ethics and Religious Course (ERC) said:

> Many of my friends sent their children to Islamic schools at the beginning; then they went back to public schools. These families are not practising Muslims, they found out that what is being taught at the school [religion course] didn't go with what is at home (*my translation*).

Others would also sometimes transfer to another school for academic reasons. Contrariwise, parents who feel that they are losing their children to society would opt for an Islamic school solely for the conservatism it provides. Hossam said:

> Some parents who stay at the Islamic school are very concerned about religion. And it is very legitimate. A friend of mine, from a modest family almost lost his mind when his daughter, who is sixteen, left the house to live with her boyfriend of twenty-three (*my translation*).

In other words, some social norms and cultural practices in society (dating, clubbing, drinking, etc.) discourage parents from sending their children to the public school. They serve as push factors for devout parents who want they children to refrain from such promiscuous acts.

Teachers' choice of the school. All interviewed teachers stated that their choice of the Islamic school was not a priority; they insisted that they had no intention to work there, but rather it was one choice among others. Indeed, most of them were looking to develop their work experience or earn a living. Despite appreciating the cultural and religious aspect shared with their Islamic school, the main reasons behind their teaching position were thus financial and economic. When asked why they chose to work at the Islamic school chosen, they answered:

Idar: I had to work and earn cash (*my translation*).

Nabil: It is pure luck. I could not find work elsewhere so I sent my application to this Islamic school (*my translation*).

Patricia: There was no point of it being Islamic or Arabic. If I had an offer somewhere else, I would have taken it.

Hamid: I will say it is luck and destiny. Honestly I did not choose to work in an Islamic school. I was a newcomer at the time and as was still waiting for the validation of my degrees, the only place that accepted me was this school (*my translation*).

Hossam: I will tell you the truth. It was not a choice; I was obliged to. I didn't find work at the beginning because I wasn't certified to teach by the ministry. While waiting for my teaching permit, I was hired by an Islamic school. It was my first job here (*my translation*).

From these answers, it is clear that the Islamic school was not a priority for staff members; the Islamic school might be considered a training stage for new arrived teachers. With few exceptions, most teachers would leave the Islamic school once they find a better opportunity elsewhere.

5.4 Main Challenges Facing Islamic Schools

The academic challenge. Islamic schools face various challenges: financial, cultural, academic, communitarian, etc. For instance, the Islamic school faces the challenge of how to mobilize and involve parents and stakeholders to help the school. Idar indicated that only a tiny minority of parents is actively engaged in volunteering and helping in any way they could. Teachers still expect more from parents however, beyond tuition payments and teacher-parent meetings. Idar asserts that:

To be honest, my expectations are very high. Their part doesn't end once they pay the tuition. They have to work with us, visit us often, attend meetings, etc. It is a

> community school; we as teachers do more than others in other schools; we overwork and we are underpaid; parents have to do the same to show more support (*my translation*).

Another teacher, Hossam, outlined the discrepancies between two Montreal Islamic schools where he taught. Whereas he spoke positively about his current school's pedagogical programs, he insisted that his previous school's academic performance is bellow-average to an extent that affects students' achievements in CEGEP. Other teachers also talked about the financial deficit and the academic challenges; these two are affecting the quality of teaching at some Islamic schools. First, Islamic schools cannot afford to hire qualified teachers because they cannot offer the same lucrative benefits found in other schools. Second, as stated in the previous section, even if they succeed in hiring qualified teachers, there is always the possibility they might seek opportunities elsewhere if the Islamic school does not offer comparative financial settlements. When asked what are the main challenges Islamic schools face, few teachers answered:

> *Hossam*: This (other Islamic) school, for instance, some years ago, they left students without a teacher for two or three months, with not even a substitute. They did that in order to save some money (*my translation*).
>
> *Mathieu*: The budget is our biggest challenge. Everyone is committed to the school but we are very limited. We need more activities, more spaces, more rooms, a bigger gym, and a bigger computer room (*my translation*).
>
> *Idar*: Many challenges. We might disappear (laugh) if we continue like this. The first is teachers' training. We need teachers who are qualified and certified to teach. We need creative pedagogical counsellors. There is an enormous lack in finance but it is not only money (*my translation*).

The cultural challenge. As mentioned in previous chapters, Islamic schools are not homogeneous. They enjoy a rich diversity in ethnic communities and also experience a great deal of internal dissent (Mintz *et al.*, 2012). Even though most

Islamic schools in Canada can be identified within specific communities (i.e. Pakistani, North African, Turkish, etc.), these schools experience diverse cultural traditions from within. Saïd, one of the founders of two Islamic schools in Montreal, insists that Muslim migrants are more educated, committed, and effective in "having things done the right way" despite issues of internal dissent they may cause. He said:

> There are huge shortcomings because you have people coming from different backgrounds and suddenly they are in one association, and have to work with the same understanding. Sometimes even the issue of language is a barrier. But let me tell you something, this mentality [sic] is very educated, very committed, and very effective in having things done than the second generation.

However, Saïd contended that first-generation Muslims built schools, mosques, associations, etc. with the enduring education needed to succeed. Facing these challenges, stakeholders were nonetheless divided about the Islamic school's main priority: whereas most parents prioritized the preservation of culture and good upbringing, staff in general prioritized academic education with a cultural and Islamic flavour. Principals and teachers were careful not to emphasize the religious and cultural component of their schools. All of them spoke in favour of integration and civic participation of Muslim youths in their societies. Although they recognized the Islamic aspect of the school as a marketing tool to attract "clients," they insisted their priorities are mainly academic. The principal Hamid had this to say,

> My expectations are aligned with what the ministry of education requires: academic and ethical excellence. What would be considered a bonus for me is if teachers help in preserving these (cultural and Islamic) values but not at the expense of academic subjects (*my translation*).

Hamid also affirms that his goal is to balance between the parents' and the ministry's expectations. He is aware of the parents' concerns about preserving their culture and the challenges that come with that; he also believes that Muslim youth should develop

social skills in order to succeed in their society:

> But the ideal is to balance academic, cultural, and religious expectations, which means creating a professional Muslim who keeps to his cultural and religious values (*my translation*).

Even in an Islamic school, some teachers refused to abide by cultural norms and accommodate the religious needs of their students during class time. While noon prayer always coincides with lunch break, afternoon prayer usually falls during class periods. The administration usually acquiesces to teachers accommodating the afternoon prayers of students, who then pray at the back of the classroom or in another empty room.

The financial challenge. When asked what is the main challenge your Islamic school faces, all shareholders and stakeholders (teachers, parents, principals and founders) mentioned the financial challenge that is affecting the Islamic school's performance:

> *Hamid*: The budget is our biggest challenge. It is the priority in every enterprise, but *Alhamdulillah*[42], the community is helping out to cover a part of the deficit (*my translation*).
>
> *Maha*: The main obstacle of success is funding. Everyone is committed to the school but we are very limited. We need more activities, more spaces, more rooms, bigger gym, and bigger computer room.

Responding to the same question, others also indicated their frustration with the province rejecting their funding proposals. One pedagogical counsellor admits they applied more than ten times:

> *Mathieu*: We have to be subsidized by the province. And the host society has to put aside its stereotypes. By subsidizing the school, we will contribute to bringing the community closer to the host society. They have to treat us like they treat all

[42] Praise be to God.

private schools (*my translation*).

> *Hamid*: We are not subsidized; we cannot raise the tuition, which only covers a small part of the fees, it is like running a non-for profit Islamic business, in which you have to prove your proficiency. There is only one elementary Islamic school that is subsidized in Montreal. Not even one secondary school. It is very hard.

Hamid, principal and teacher, also voiced his discontent with his school's stagnant financial situation. All three Islamic high schools in this study depend entirely on students' tuition fees and on annual fundraisings to balance their deficit, which grows every year.

5.5 Culture, Identity and the School's Mission

Preserving a culture. Public schools are not seen as institutions for transmitting minority values and cultures. In fact, some parents view them as a threat to their ethnic identity and culture. Various studies suggest that public schools are institutions where Muslim youth face multiple social challenges as they struggle for recognition and legitimacy (McAndrew, 2010; Memon, 2009; Zine, 2008; Ali, 2012). Most devout Muslims believe public schools encourage immorality, promiscuous behaviours, and disrespect for religious principles (Aslan, 2013, p. 60).

As stated in previous chapters, the Islamic school is a community school with a specific (majority) culture. For instance, a few parents showed their appreciation for having their culture of origin reflected at the Islamic school. One Tunisian parent, Kamal, stated he appreciated his son learning new elements of his Tunisian culture from his Tunisian friends and teachers. Other parents echoed the same response about the cultural specificity of their Islamic school:

> *Nabil*: Culturally speaking, I chose the Islamic school for the Arabic language and religious education; I didn't want my children to live in parallel societies. For

> instance, we teach them to behave in a certain way at home, halal, haram, etc. and if they were at a public school it would be paradoxical for them (*my translation*).
>
> *Sameeha*: We live in a multicultural and multiethnic society. I know that my children will see conflicts in their societies. So at least when they are young or adolescents, I want them to have a basis (*my translation*).

Parents' rationale for choosing the Islamic school can be summarized in three keywords: identity, environment, and culture. They see their children as an extension of themselves and look for an environment (school) where their cultural identity can flourish peacefully and be transferred to their offspring. Zayd stated that:

> Parents are here for the Islamic culture. They fear that their children would lose their culture. Parents are very demanding (*my translation*).

Another teacher, Hossam, summarized his understanding of the cultural reasons behind the parents' choice of the Islamic school by saying,

> I was teaching the whole school from elementary one to secondary five. Parents want their children to be watched and monitored, in a moral sense, which means respecting adults, following Islam, and not completely melting in Western society (*my translation*).

In this case, the Islamic school is a site for the preservation of an Islamic "Culture" that is not specific to one Muslim country or region. Islamic cultures and traditions interfere, coexist, and sometimes compete for recognition and space at the Islamic school. When asked about whether their Islamic school has a specific majority ethnic culture, a teacher, Idar, said:

> Yes, it is true that this school is majority North Africans, students and staff, but even in North Africa there are differences between (religious and ethnic) cultures, not in a sense that a culture is better or worse than another, but in terms of differences in open-mindedness (laugh) (*my translation*).

Sameeha also added:

> It (the Islamic school) is an institution to preserve an (ethnic) culture, which is hard to preserve elsewhere in Quebec (*my translation*).

Students may find a part of their culture embodied in some of their classmates or teachers. They will also experience diversity by experimenting other Islamic cultures that are different from theirs. Idar, for example, states,

> There are some cultural and religious aspects here such as starting the day with a supplication, noon prayer, saying *bismillah* (in the name of God), sharing with others; other than this, the Islamic school is not different from other schools. It is very hard to draw the line between the religious and the cultural (*my translation*).

However, two teachers asserted that the parents' heritage and culture should be revisited to fit the Western context. In other words, parents should not expect their children, who are born and raised in Canada, to fully embody norms and attitudes of their countries of origin. Nonetheless, students will pick up a few cultural norms, as the Islamic school's culture is influenced by the community behind it and by the student body that make most of the school. Here is what they have to say:

> *Mathieu*: Normally a school does two main things: prepare students to be active citizens without, completely, opposing the parents' expectations and cultural customs. However, we have to revisit this culture and narrate it in a different way (*my translation*).
>
> *Hamid*: There is a correlation between the Islamic school, the place where it is situated, and the community behind it. We teach Arabic because most students are Arabs. If I had Pakistani students, for instance, I would teach Urdu or another second language, and so on (*my translation*).

Preserving an identity. Many studies show that secular marginalization is a cultural phenomenon in which religion is ignored or labelled as a boring subject in Western secular societies (McAndrew, 2010; Helly, 2008; McAndrew, Helly & Oueslati, 2006; Ali, 2012). There is a debate regarding the representation of the history, culture, religion, and contributions of Muslims and other minorities in school curricula (Niyozov, 2010; Memon, 2009). Therefore, while there is a need for religious and cultural spaces for minorities within the Western education system, a faith-based education that minimizes the impact of alienation and isolation of students and helps in preserving their identity could be a viable choice for some parents (Ali, 2012, p. 29). Most of staff members contribute to the preservation of the school's religious and cultural identity, including converts and those from non-Arab descent. Mathieu, who is a pedagogical counsellor, said:

> Yesterday I, the "pure laine" (not an immigrant) Quebecer, was in an Islamic studies classroom trying to convince students of the importance of not losing one's identity. You don't have to be completely invisible, it is a bad idea and you cannot be invisible anyways (*my translation*).

To him, preserving one's cultural or religious identity is not a sign of disintegration or a rejection of the majority culture. Instead, he argues, it is a contribution to pluralism, adding:

> I don't want to lose my identity, not because I am refusing to integrate but because I want to contribute. I just don't want to disappear. Asking people to assimilate and asking them to be folkloric, which signifies (cultural) death (*my translation*).

Like my graduate participants, stakeholders consider the Islamic school a second home to staff and students alike, representing thus an extension of the home culture that is friendly to their identities. Hossam mentioned,

> The way I see it is that there is no rupture between the school and the home for the majority culture (of the school). But I had Pakistanis who felt strangers because they didn't fit the Arabic norm. We had cases of bullying against non-Arabs (*my translation*).

The heterogeneity of Islamic schools. As discussed in previous chapters, the immigrant Muslim community is divided along ideological, linguistic, and ethnic lines. Most Islamic schools in North America were established through cultural community initiatives associated with a mosque or an Islamic association (Memon, 2009, p. 233; Antonius, 2008). Zouhir, one of the founders of a Montreal's Islamic school – served as a principal for over twenty years – asserted their heterogeneity. He insisted his viewpoint should not be generalized, but rather should only be interpreted as a reflection of his particular school:

> The way Indo-Pakistani Muslims think of schooling is different from the way we see it here. That is why I mentioned culture before. So a Muslim community school in Toronto is different from another in Montreal.

Teachers also emphasized, based on their personal experiences, the heterogeneous status of Islamic schools in Montreal. Even in terms of academics, one teacher, Idar, praised his Islamic school for the quality of its secular instructions, blaming his previous Islamic school for its graduate students failing CEGEP and university. He said:

> Unfortunately, at the academic level, most of those I met are not doing well at the university. If you ask me whether the school is responsible, I would say it is responsible for 90% of its students' failures. Here I am referring to the other Islamic school I worked in before, which should not exist at all. I know I am harsh, but it is the truth (*my translation*).

The same point was made by a previous principal, Saïd, that blamed parents for not differentiating between Islamic schools and for opting for any school despite its weakness in teaching secular subjects. He said,

> Parents are also responsible because some of them assume that their children can always catch up with secular subjects. It is a big mistake. Some students don't learn anything there (the other Islamic school) because religious subjects overtake secular ones.

Islamic schools are not only heterogeneous in the communities behind them; they also differ in their pedagogy, quality of education, and in the version of Islam – modern or conservative, interpretations – they teach (Daher, 2005; Tiflati, 2016).

5.6 Socialization, Indoctrination and Values.

Socialization and the Islamic school. Stakeholders denied that Islamic schools limit socialization by restricting students' contact to like-minded students and adults. They insisted that as their children are born here, their activities outside (the Islamic school) put them regularly in contact with non-Muslims, facilitating their socialization with the outside world:

> *Hamid*: We have many programs in our school: field trips, intercultural dialogue with a Jewish and a Catholic school, visits of politicians, we have volunteering activities, we host blood donations yearly. It is an event organized by our students, they call volunteers; prepare the place, and everything (*my translation*).
>
> *Zouhir*: Most of those I know are perfectly fitting and socializing with others (*my translation*).

I previously emphasized the lack of internal diversity and the fact that students socialize exclusively with other students who resemble them. Hamid insisted that:

> To socialize is one of the objectives of Quebec schools. The Islamic school is a private school (that follows the ministry's curriculum) so it is working on that as well [...] In a history class that I taught, there is a lesson that covers specifically students' socialization (*my translation*).

Similarly, Hamid contended that one of his school's missions is to prepare Canadian and Quebecois citizens who hold Islamic values that are compatible with the values of their society. He displayed confidence that his youths are ready to engage in society once they leave school. He contended that the school's graduates are participating in civic life like all other Quebecers. He gave the example of a field trip to the Grevin museum in Montreal, where statues of known celebrities are displayed. Most traditional Islamic denominations consider statues of human beings non-permissible, or haram, in Islam.

> Last year we took our students to Grevin museum where they took pictures with statuses. We received some complaints from certain parents. One parent said it is not acceptable that they enroll their children in an Islamic school, and then the school encourages them to do un-Islamic things. Students were very happy with the experience though (*my translation*).

He also mentioned other mandatory subjects at his school that teach students diversity and acceptance.

> We teach civic education and citizenry courses of the ministry of education. Among these courses there is the Ethics and Religious Course (ERC) that prepares students and introduces them to diversity in their society (*my translation*).

Nonetheless, having these mandatory subjects on the curriculum does not mean they are being taught properly to students. Zayd, who teaches at the same school as Hamid talked about his experience teaching Ethics and Religious Course (ERC). He said:

> I teach ERC and I discuss each religion as it is described in the textbook, without taking sides. Sometimes they ask questions such as why do we have to learn about Catholicism. I said you live in a province with a Catholic majority and you have to know what they believe so that you can respect them, even though they are different (*my translation*).

Although Zayd was careful to follow the ministry's mandatory curriculum, others might leave out what goes against their faith or briefly mention it without emphasizing its importance.

Indoctrination and the Islamic school. According to stakeholders, systemic indoctrination is not the norm at Islamic schools. Exceptionally, one might find an individual staff member that pushes for teachings which go against pluralism and democracy. A male teacher, Idar, who taught in two Islamic high schools in Montreal insisted that, based on his professional experience, he never once observed any systemic attempts of indoctrination or ghettoization. He said,

> Were there individual attempts to indoctrinate? Yes, I cannot cite names but we had a teacher who even tried to control other teachers, but no one took him seriously. I am a living example; I left an Islamic school because I did not want to be controlled (*my translation*).

Two founders, Saïd and Hamid, blamed the media and politics for falsely accusing Islamic schools of terrorism, radicalization and indoctrination. They denied their school has any systemic attempts to indoctrinate students or to propagate radical ideas:

> Saïd: Unfortunately the media and certain politicians spread that. They say the same thing about mosques and radicalization but they have no statistics. If you have evidence then let us see it. I have been running Islamic schools for more than twenty years and I see the opposite: more indoctrination in public schools.
>
> *Hamid*: I don't think that we are indoctrinating our students. It is true we are unique as a community, but we follow all instructions of the ministry. It is a false idea 100%, which was circulated by certain media outlets. I would say that we are open-minded and we are exchanging with our society (*my translation*).

Patricia, a pedagogical counsellor in a different Islamic school was hesitant about employing the term "ghetto" when asked about in Islamic schools. She contended that

most devout Muslims isolate themselves just by following the basic ABCs of their religion. She said:

> Well, by definition I would say, practising Muslims are a little condemned to [...] ghetto is a big word, (but) by the fact that all the food has to be halal means that you won't buy everything from one place, by that fact it means you won't come to my house and have a nice evening because of the food. If I have a glass of wine, you won't have yours and you may not want to sit with me at the same table, so that condemns Muslim people to live in their community in isolation based on certain religious principles.

Values and Islamic schooling. One way of measuring integration is looking at individuals' values and examining their compatibility with majority society. Still, it is always hard to judge individuals' integration in a society based on their beliefs and behaviours. While discussing integration with Zouhir, a principal and founder, he suggested that if we hypothetically accept that integration is based on adopting society's values, his school falls in the middle:

> The issue is how to measure this (integration)? By rejecting society and its values? It looks like we are in the middle; I am talking about my school (*my translation*).

Nonetheless, Saïd, another founder who is also a parent and a previous principal insisted that the values and norms of a country are the same values of the communities living in that country:

> I don't believe there are exclusively Canadian values. Canadian values are the values of the communities that live in Canada. When the media differentiates between Canadian values and Muslim values, they divide us. We are Canadians; our values are part of Canadian values.

In the same line of comments, another teacher and pedagogical counsellor, Mathieu, stated that it is all a matter of perspective. To him, parents' struggle to transfer their

values and customs to their children is very legitimate; he insisted that minorities should strive to protect their heritage and not be ashamed of it.

> We say the same thing about Quebec vis-à-vis the rest of North America. Quebec is a francophone ghetto because we couldn't assimilate. We failed in creating American-like individuals who are like everyone else in North America (laugh) (*my translation*).

This Quebecois teacher is fully engaged in helping his students integrate into Quebec society as Muslims while preserving their religious and cultural values. As someone who lived outside Quebec for three decades, he values diversity, despite having personally experienced living in a minority context. Yet he emphasized that the role of the Islamic school regarding values is limited to helping parents in the transmission of their cultural and religious beliefs.

5.7 'Benefits' of Islamic Schooling

While recognizing the indoctrinatory harm that we might expect from full-time Islamic schools, Merry (2018) conjectures that these schools, given the other harms faced by Muslim youth, are able to mitigate many problems (Islamophobia, stigmatization, racism, etc.) visited upon Muslim youth. Merry (2018) asserts that Muslim parents who opt for Islamic schooling to avoid stigmatization in public schools are justified in doing so. In the real world, options should not be between harm and the absence of harm, but rather between different kinds and degrees of harm.

Minority communities have specific needs that must be met in one way or another. All stakeholders indicated that Islamic schools provide environments that respond to parents' cultural and religious needs. They believed that the benefits, of attending Islamic schools, outweigh the shortcomings. For instance, teachers who were asked what are the benefits of attending Islamic schools suggested that these schools also

provide small class sizes, individualized instructions, cultural sensitivity training, and protection from social ills:

> *Hossam*: It is a double salvation: a protection against neoliberalism and society's problems; and they (Islamic school) give many chances to students (to succeed) (*my translation*).
>
> *Nabil*: There are many (advantages) that I can mention, from my experience, I would say class size which is a factor and an advantage that you can't have elsewhere [...] There is also the cultural and religious components from qualified staff. What I also noticed is that our students master at least three languages (*my translation*).

Four main terms were repeatedly mentioned during my discussion with stakeholders: religion, culture, environment, and socialization. In their first few years of immigration, new immigrants usually lack the necessary social skills to dive and contribute in their host societies. Muslim parents see Islamic schools as integration-assisting institutions: upon arrival, immigrants require culturally appropriate support from within the community to respond to their needs. Socialization starts by nurturing individual needs, otherwise integration will be delayed or diverted. Education and culture are one of these needs that the community can tackle. Idar shared his opinion on why some Muslim parents prioritize the Islamic school:

> If a Muslim wants his daughter to get an education that is similar to his; he wants her to learn about Islam and his culture; and he doesn't want her to wear miniskirts [...] The Islamic school is the only institution that can rectify this need. It helps the parents and assists them a lot in integrating their children (*my translation*).

Idar, who spent twelve years in France before immigrating to Quebec, explained, based on his personal experience in Europe, the benefits of having full-time Islamic schools that are accredited and monitored by the ministry of education:

> In France for instance, there are families that are in urgent need of Islamic education. As they don't find a place in Islamic schools, they send their children to Islamic associations, which are not monitored or accredited by the state. Do you see what I mean? If you don't fulfill their needs, they will go somewhere else (*my translation*).

Idar insisted that devout Muslims see religiosity as a basic need that requires nourishment. Muslim parents want their children to learn about religion, and the safest place to do that is in a state-accredited Islamic school. Otherwise, there is a risk of them being taught Islam by other less qualified individuals. Hossam, a high school teacher at a public school, who taught for three years at two Islamic schools in Montreal, also elaborated on some of the benefits of attending an Islamic school. He said:

> It (the Islamic school) is a necessity. I am a believer in cultures anyway; to me it is a school in which cultural identities can be safeguarded. We teach Arabic and we cultivate the home culture. It allows parents to escape the public school's indoctrination (*my translation*).

5.8 Why is Islamic Schooling a Minority Phenomenon?

Curiously, only a minority (less than 3% in Quebec) of Muslim youths attend Islamic schools. There are rumours and negative stereotypes about the Islamic school even from within the Muslim community: the academic education is poor, teachers are unqualified, and the Islam of most Islamic schools is conservative and not compatible with the Canadian way of life. Additionally, most families cannot afford the school's tuition, nor are they able to commute to the school if it is located in a distant neighbourhood. Nabil notes:

> Based on my discussions with parents, I see it on two levels: firstly, money-wise. Many families can't pay the school's tuition; secondly, they believe their child would not have the quality education of the public sector. They think that students here lack academic excellence. Also because they know that teachers at Islamic

> schools are underpaid compared to their peers and they think that they are less qualified (*my translation*).

Furthermore, Islamic schools might be a minority phenomenon because of the lack of support from the community. Even parents who opt for Islamic schooling are usually not helping out to assist their school succeed. Whereas parents agreed that teachers in Islamic schools are exceeding expectations, the teachers in turn revealed disappointment with parents' involvements at their schools. Parents are not solely clients whose duty ends once they pay their children's tuition. They are partners who should contribute to the success of the school. Community schools differ from public and secular private schools in that they benefit greatly from the community behind them. In fact, if the community is coherent, organized, and strong, these attributes will reflect the school's performance as well. Many teachers showed their frustration with the parents' performance at the school. Nabil says:

> They should be more involved. From my experience, only a minority of our parents are helping out at the school. They are trying to get rid of their responsibilities, that's why they send their children here (*my translation*).

Another hypothesis is the rumour that Islamic schools are teaching against integration, which scares parents away from these schools. Nonetheless, as we have seen, teachers interviewed in this study believe that their Islamic school is not teaching against integration but it is preparing Quebecers and Canadians, who happen to be Muslims, to effectively fit and contribute in their societies.

Conclusion

The establishment of Islamic schools in the West reflect a need for social recognition and a search for supportive and friendly environments for Muslim children (Berglund, 2014). Nevertheless, when the groundwork for schools were initially drafted, there was

more emphasis on subjects that will be taught rather than the pedagogy that will be adopted (Memon, 2012, p. 79). Even though Islamic schools are usually seen as having a positive impact on students' attitudes, they should not be considered institutions for wayward students who failed in other schools as a last hope to be rehabilitated. Some parents eventually opt for an Islamic school after discovering that their children have become "unmanageable" either at home or at their public school. However, schools are not, and should be, behaviour modification facilities. Stakeholders did not appreciate having students from public schools transfer reluctantly to their Islamic school – especially during high school. Some of them import negative attitudes that are not appreciated at the Islamic school (smoking, dating, verbal aggressiveness, etc.), which may negatively impact other students and teachers.

Most parents agree and support the controlled environment in Islamic schools. Yet, most of them state that, as their children have other activities such as sports, they would eventually interact with other non-Muslims and receive a glimpse of life outside the school environment. They insisted that their Islamic schools are not teaching against integration or civic participant. Parents would like to see improvements at the school but are generally very satisfied with the education their students are receiving at the Islamic school. All of those whose children are currently at the Islamic school and who had other younger children mentioned that they would enroll the younger ones there as well. All stakeholders were supportive of the idea of Islamic schooling in general, but they insisted on the urgency of change and reform. They asserted that the Islamic school is a necessity but not in its current format. Whereas they stated much of what needs to be done to improve their school (i.e. better teachers, larger buildings, more activities), they linked most of the challenges to the financial deficit of the school.

CHAPTER VI

ISLAMIC SCHOOLING'S IMPACT ON RELIGIOSITY, IDENTITY, AND BELONGING

This chapter discusses the interviews conducted with graduates of Islamic schools in Montreal. The overall goal is to reveal and analyze the impact of Islamic schooling on Muslim youth in Montreal in terms of the formation of their identities and their sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada. The complex, dynamic, and changing relationships examined here reveal a number of the attributes and characteristics of my Quebecois graduate participants. My intent is to look at their national and religious identity as well as at the factors that contribute to ascribed identification (by others) and their self-identification (Brodeur, 2008).

Moreover, a closer look at the "lived identity" of my graduate participants disclosed significant complexities in how they construct and negotiate their identities as Quebecers and Canadians. Most importantly, this subjective side of identity formation, from the perspective of Muslim youth in Quebec defied oversimplified and misleading conventional stereotypes. As such, commonly expressed fears or prevalent attitudes about illiberal religious identities need to be reexamined in light of these complex forces and dynamics. The challenges to citizenship and integration addressed to Muslim youth in Quebec are usually rooted in idealistic expectations rather than on the actual experiences and perspectives of Muslim youth.

In order to examine the impact of Islamic schools on the graduates' identities and sense of belonging, I divided the chapter into six main sections. The first section, "Canadianness, Belongingness, and Self-Identification" examines graduates' understanding of citizenship as a form of belonging to their society. I discuss their views about being Muslim, Quebecois, and Canadian, and I investigate the respective experiences of males and females graduates with diversity and Secular values. The second section, "Socialization, Civic Participation, and Diversity" tackles graduates' daily experiences and interactions with non-Muslims. I examine questions of visible Muslminess in a time and an environment hostile to Islam and its adherents.

The third section, "Opinions about the Islamic School", looks at the Islamic school from the graduates' points of view. I discuss and examine positive, negative, as well as challenging aspects of being in an Islamic high school. Similarly, the fourth section, "The Islamic vs. the Public School", looks at how graduates perceive the public school. As a third of my participants (six out of eighteen) attended Islamic and public schools, I discuss their lived experience in both systems. I mainly examine participants' views about morals and principles at these institutions. The fifth section, "Islamic and Canadian Values", examines graduates' take on gender equality, tolerance, and secularism. The sixth and final section, "Identities, Religiosities, and Life after the Islamic School", discusses graduates' post-Islamic school experiences. I look at their religiosities and life in college and I campare them to other studies on Muslim youth who did not attend Islamic schools. Before moving to the general disussion of the data, I will present my female and male graduates.

6.1 Population and Sampling

Female graduates. All female participants are second-generation Canadian-born Muslim graduates from one of three Montreal Islamic high schools (see Table 4). They were interviewed individually. Two of the seven Muslim women were in their early thirties. Four of them never attended a non-Islamic school. One was divorced with no children and the other was married and had two children. Apart from one participant who is not religious and restricts her Islamic practice to fasting during the month of Ramadan, all other females wore the hijab and embodied a strong sense of religiosity.

Table 4. Female student participants

Pseudonym	Age	Generation	Years at Islamic School	Country of Origin
Dawla	18	2nd generation	11	Syrian
Zeena	18	2nd generation	11	Tunisian
Sanaa	18 (Spent 3 years in Egypt)	2nd generation	5	Egyptian
Lubna	26	2nd generation	8	Egyptian
Catherine	30		11	Lebanese
Hanan	20	2nd generation	3	Turkish
Dunya	32	2nd generation	11	Lebanese

Note: All females are second generation.

Male graduates. Out of eleven male graduates, one was born abroad but immigrated at an early age from Algeria. Another participant, who has been in Canada for only four years (at the time of the interview), newly immigrated with his family from Iraq. Participants came from eight different countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq (see Table 5). They all identified as practising Muslim men who try their best to follow the teachings of Islam. They also pray at least five times a day, fast the month of Ramadan, and most of them engage in other non-obligatory rituals to show their commitment to Islam.

Table 5 Male student participants

Pseudonym	Age	Generation	Years at Islamic school	Country of Origin
Ahmad	19	2nd generation	11	Algerian
Hani	19	2nd generation	11	Algerian
Ismail	22	2nd generation (Spent 4 years in Egypt)	5	Egyptian
Bashir	18	2nd generation	11	Lebanese
Idriss	19	1st generation	2	Iraqi
Walaa	19	2nd generation	11	Moroccan/Lebanese
Bassem	19	2nd generation	11	Lebanese
Habeeb	18	1.5 generation	11	Algerian
Amine	20	2nd generation	9	Palestinian
Majid	20	2nd generation	11	Tunisian
Saleh	20	2nd generation	11	Lebanese

Note: Ismail and Idriss only attended the Islamic secondary school.

6.2 Canadianness, Belongingness and Self-Identification

In this section, I examine female and male graduates' sense of belonging to Canada, Quebec, and to their countries of origin. I also discuss Canadian and Islamic identity as well as males and females experiences in Quebec society.

Citizenship as a form of belonging. Traditionally (at least in contemporary, post-enlightenment contexts in the West), nation and citizenship have not only been viewed as linked, but were singularly connected in such a way that one nation meant one citizenship; but this has changed, especially since the last two decades of the 20th century. As stated in the fourth chapter, the term nation as a historical concept means different things to different people (Modood, 2013; Taylor, 2012). It is sometimes used to refer to a homogeneous, a "self-conscious ethno-cultural community", and an ideal that shapes the psyche and identity of its members (Parekh, 1995, p. 256). In the past, manifestations of citizenship have mainly centred on national identity and belonging to a nation with borders, a flag, a national anthem, a common language(s) and, in some cases, a religion. Yet, like all other forms of belonging, the representations of religious beliefs are unstable, they depend on the believer's and the outsider's perceptions of the religion under scrutiny (Amiraux, 2016, p. 41). Furthermore, citizenship provides the conceptual grounds for understanding and examining the sense of shared identity and psychic connection to the nation. Some scholars therefore argue that there should be more focus on "a multiple-levelled citizenship" (Watson, 2004, p. 264) through which citizens can have fluid identities or adopt multiple allegiances, including religious and cultural ones. Citizenship surpasses the legal status of holding a birth or a naturalization certificate: it refers instead to various levels of belonging. Some consider another form of citizenship, which is community-based citizenship within a national boundary. Yuval-Davis (2004, cited in Nordberg, 2006, p. 525), for example, states that:

> "belonging is not just about membership, rights, and duties [...] Nor can it be reduced to identities and identifications, which are about individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labelling, myths of origin and destiny. Belonging is a deep emotional need of people."

This being said, instances of discrimination can affect one's sense of belonging to his or her nation. The weakest members in society may not consider themselves full citizens if they feel they are not experiencing full acceptance and recognition (i.e. lack of social acceptance, economic inequality, systemic racism, lack of representation in schools' curricula, etc.). In other words, despite their willingness to integrate, feelings of marginalization, real or imagined, may weaken Canadian Muslims' trust in the dominant majority and slow their integration in their society (Ali, 2012, p. 40).

Appreciating Canadian multiculturalism. Questions of Canadianness, as any other form of national identity and belonging, are influenced by the socio-political aspects of globalization and their impact on the national level. Unlike in some European countries (i.e. France, Belgium) where youth radicalization, unemployment, and riots have dominated debates on integration, "minority and cultural rights are legally recognized within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the Canadian Multicultural Act (1985)" (Lee & Hébert, 2006, p. 498), which is very appreciated by cultural and religious minorities in Canada.

Nonetheless, multiculturalism has never been formally accepted in Quebec, neither by its governments nor by the majority population (Tremblay, 2009; Taylor, 2012; Riikonen & Dervin, 2012); " it is, on the whole, a dirty word in Quebec" (Waddington, *et al.* 2012, p. 315). Quebec political and social projects are based on the interculturalism policy (Waddington, *et al.*, 2012, p. 312), which is theorized as a sustained negotiation between coherence, diversity, commonality, and pluralism (DesRoches, 2014; Bouchard, 2011). In terms of rights and freedoms, Canadian Muslim

youth show an appreciation for Canadian multiculturalism and for what they are enjoying here compared to what they could have had if their parents had not immigrated to Canada (Bullock & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 33). Most of my participants come from devout and conservative families that value religion, culture, and tradition. In fact, four interviewees, three males and one female, are children of Imams in the greater Montreal area. To keep the cultural liaison with their countries of origin, parents do their best to have their children visit their homelands and experience the culture and dialect directly in their normal habitat. Graduate participants voiced their gratitude for being here and for the privileges and rights they enjoy. Some of them gave specific examples and compared the open-mindedness of Canadians with the close mindedness of Muslims and Arabs in their countries of origin.

By the same token, most participants did not differentiate between multiculturalism and interculturalism when praising the "multicultural climate of Quebec." Instead, they were referring to the diversity of the province and the cohesion between the communities living here – something they deeply appreciated. When asked how important is their Canadian and Quebecer identity to them, some stated that:

> *Bassem*: Being Canadian is very important to me. Muslims here are well accepted; I am always going to be Canadian. In France, it is different; if Muslims dislike the government, it is because the government is not easy on them. It restricted their liberties a lot.
>
> *Dawlah*: Honestly, I find Quebecers the best people. They are very accepting despite all what is happening.

Dawlah then elaborated on her close relationships with Quebecois friends who do not treat her any differently than they treat one another. Like many other participants of her generation, she voiced her appreciation for Quebecois multiculturalism. Based on Jackson's (2004, 2007, 2011) interpretive theory of privileging participants' perspectives, I did not engage in terminological debates on the meaning of

multiculturalism and that it is not a welcomed term in Quebec. Instead, I let my participants elaborate on their thoughts once I understood what they meant by "multicultural Quebec": a plural, diverse, multilingual, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic society.

Canada vis-à-vis country of origin. Religion and culture are considered unifying identity markers for immigrant communities living in minority contexts. Immigrant youth who experienced, either directly or indirectly through their parents' narratives, undemocratic conditions and intolerant cultures in their countries of origin usually provide comparisons between Canadian democracy and the horrible conditions of their countries of origin. These youth show pride and appreciation with regards to being here, finding internal peace. Their experiences and their awareness of their rights here allow them to express multiple identifications without fear of public alienation, thus increasing their sense of belongingness to their host society (Lee & Hébert, 2006, p. 514). Participants who were born in Canada or arrived at an early age, and who are less connected to their countries of origin insist on the fact that they are not foreigners because they never lived anywhere else, and never experienced another culture.

Idriss, my only first-generation participant, is an18-year-old male who showed a great appreciation for being in Canada. He was ambivalent in terms of belongingness however, having only been in Canada for three and a half years. He thus equates being Canadian with holding Canadian citizenship. He also had a hard time internalizing Canadianness as a state of belonging to a nation as you flee from war and conflict. Another participant, Habeeb, immigrated with his parents when he was four years old but does not remember much of his Algerian experience. He is a 1.5[43] generation who identifies as being Canadian of Algerian origin.

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[43] 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 experience.

Canadian Identity. First generation immigrants do their best to transmit their culture and religion to their offspring. These cultures will eventually change and evolve, as they will be affected, confronted, and mixed with other cultures in their new environment (Parekh, 1995). The transmission of a culture that was produced and flourished in a far away country is very hard in a new foreign environment; most 1.5-ers and second generation youth only relate to their parents' culture through memory, short visits to the country of origin, and through what is transmitted at home (Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 117; Le Gall, 2003, p. 138).

As stated in chapter three, identities are not formed by individuals alone but are also, at least partially, socially constructed by, with, and through the influence of others (Webster, 2005). In this sense, individuals' identities are, at least in part, constituted via the beliefs of the communities to which they belong. Most of my graduate participants embody fluid and multiple identities, and resist categorizations (Lee & Hébert, 2006). They see the roots of their identity in all facets of their backgrounds (i.e. parents' country of origin, host society, Islamic and Arabic culture). The following statements show how some of my participants reflected on their Canadian (and Quebecer) identities:

> *Bassem*: To build up my identity I have to take from all the cultures I frequented: Canadian culture, Lebanese culture, Quebec culture, etc.
>
> *Zeena*: My parents are Tunisian and I went to a Muslim school, so it's (my identity) a mix of everything, like the way I think is more Canadian, the way I dress is more influenced by the Canadian society, I am not gonna lie. How I also eat, poutine, not everyone eats poutine (laughs).

By embodying multiple identities, these youth challenge the assumption of the "homogeneous Muslim" we usually see in Western Media. They are also aware of their parents' worries about transmitting their religion and culture. Nonetheless, they also

realize that by living in Canada and in Quebec and being exposed to Canadian and Quebecer culture, they are *de facto* Canadians and Quebecers:

> *Catherine*: As much as I try to hide it, I do a lot of stuff like Canadians you know, we do a lot of things like them so we are basically Canadians. Canadian culture is there on TV, on the Internet, it is there even though we are in a Muslim school you know.
>
> *Hani*: When I talk to Quebecers they see me as an Algerian. But if I look at myself I feel more Canadian. I already visited my country of origin and didn't feel a connection (*my translation*).

Identifying with a nation. Philosophers and other scholars who study the phenomenon of nationalism often write as if a nation-state is linked to common histories, values, language, and, to some extent, religion (McDonough, 2003). In other words, being a full citizen of the nation-state was viewed through citizens' contributions in historical narratives such as legacies of war, shared religious values, culture, race, and language (Nordberg, 2006, p. 536). In this sense, immigrants are sometimes perceived as citizens who lack this historical legacy and thus represent populations who stand in need of 'acculturation'. Such a stance need not imply a commitment to thoroughgoing 'assimilationist' conceptions of education, but can be understood in ways that embrace the value of diverse cultural origins as providing important resources for enabling social integration. Thus "multicultural" citizenship theorists (Kymlicka and his ilk) argue that immigrants' national and cultural affiliations can also provide citizens with their primary sense of belonging, regardless of the immigrant experience. Stated otherwise, minority ethnic groups can engage in argumentative logic to demand full recognition in their societies. This is usually done through societal culture, which refers to everything that characterizes prevalent lifestyles of individuals in a society such as values, norms, cultures, and language(s) (Nordberg, 2006, p. 527; Lee & Hébert, 2006, pp. 501-516).

Today, citizens' belongingness to the state is not exclusively expressed based on

religion, colour, race or ethnicity, but on assumptions of the common good, common values, and a shared collective life. This form of belonging in a *société d'acceuil*, or host society, such as Quebec is the main nuclei for negotiating and framing the main ingredients of a shared national identity between all citizens. According to Lee and Hébert (2006):

> "the concept of national identity determines how specific belongings are recognized in that society whereas the effective system of rights is linked to the recognition given to specific forms of belonging, national identity, and participation in civil society" (p. 502).

Nevertheless, multiculturalist accounts of citizenship and civic integration may overlook or underemphasize the complexities and difficulties faced when immigrants are required to adapt and integrate within the 'host' nation.

What does it mean to identify with a nation and to adopt its histories? On the one hand, non-immigrant citizens or descendants of settlers, who consider themselves a part of the host society, usually talk about preserving the country and the freedoms that their parents fought for. On the other hand, immigrants are often asked to be proud of legacies that their ancestors did not contribute to or, even worse, that were at the expense of their countries of origin (Lee & Hébert, 2006). In other words, citizens in Western societies have different feelings and experiences about past histories, and cannot be proud of every historical event in their nation's inception. For instance, while a French citizen from North African descent looks with pity at his country's colonial atrocities in Africa – and how it affects the conditions of the land today – a native Frenchman may assume the normality of it all. Furthermore, in countries where whole indigenous nations were wiped out to prepare conditions for new European settlers, it is difficult for self-conscious citizens to be proud of such atrocities. "They killed Aboriginals, I am not gonna be proud of that," said Bashir when asked about his pride in his Canadianness. Then Bashir added that citizens should not blindly adopt or be proud

of all their nations' past.

Muslimness and Canadianness. Muslim is a heterogeneous category (Selby & Beaman, 2016; Fortin, LeBlanc, & Le Gall, 2008, p. 120). Religions and cultures are not fixed sets of values and norms that operate outside of any historical or territorial context. They evolve according to the circumstances around them. Even those participants who experienced minor conflicts between their Islamic values and their Canadian identity did not see it as a serious dilemma (Bullock & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011). In fact, individuals make compromises every day between their personal preferences and surrounding societal norms. Islam, Ismail argues, allows for the preservation of cultures while adjusting them to the obligations of the faith:

> The way I view it is that Islam comes and draws boundaries; yes, you can have a cultural identity but there is a certain limit to what you can and cannot do. For example, if you think about it, Arabs before Islam used to burry their daughters alive (laugh), but Islam came and didn't say aww you can't be Arabs anymore, but you can be Arab within these certain boundaries. And I think that's what Islam is doing, yes you can be Canadian but within these certain boundaries.

Ismail's comment reflects a limit and boundary to his willingness to identify as a full Canadian. It can also be interpreted as a (perhaps unconscious) participation in the very process of becoming Canadian, which includes participating in the process of redefining and reshaping what it means to be Canadian. Furthermore, while Islamic identity is primarily seen as a religious-based identity through which individuals confess their belief in God and allegiance to the Prophet and to the Islamic tradition, it is important to note that this identity can also embody various cultural and ethnic forms.

Males' experiences. Young participants in my study have given up the illusion of the superiority of Muslims in terms of principles, values, and morals. They are aware that it is one's education, good manners, and upbringing that make them a good person, not

just the fact of being Muslim. Those who visit Muslim countries see and experience the "moral decay" of those societies. After living in the West all their lives and fantasizing about Islamic societies, a few graduates expressed their shock about the catastrophic conditions they saw when they first visited their countries of origin. They say they did not find true Islam there, outraged by the corruption of public employees (police officers, border patrol workers, employees in city halls, etc.). These experiences usually strengthened their sense of belonging to Canada and pride in identifying with a 'nobler' country. They argue that even some attributes of the diversity of Muslimness (e.g. freedom of religion, sectarian diversity, niqab or face veil, etc.) that are allowed to freely flourish in certain liberal secular democratic societies such as Canada are banned in some Muslim countries. These youths inherit a minority religion and feel responsible for protecting and transmitting it to future generations. They find themselves at the crossroads between their heritage and the majority secular culture that some feel is endangering their religious identity development. Some of them (Bashir, Ahmed) also compared Canada to Muslim countries and to other Western countries where Muslims face discrimination, racism and Islamophobia. When asked "Is it hard to reconcile your Islam or Muslimness in terms of practices, behaviours and attitudes with your Canadian/Quebecois identity and way of life?" a few male participants replied:

> *Bashir*: To me it is very easy; it is very surprising I never experienced racism. I am happier to grow up here than in a Muslim country. Being here is more beneficial but more challenging.
>
> *Ahmed*: Not 100%, there are exceptions. Even in Muslim lands there are exceptions as well. Honestly when I visit Algeria and I compare myself with people there, I can say without judging them that I am better, in terms of morals and values of Islam.
>
> *Majid*: Not really. If there were really a problem with Muslims, the Charter [of Values] would've passed. The proof is we are still okay.

Whereas participants acknowledged the challenges they sometimes face in their host societies, most of them agreed that living in Canada as a religious and an ethnic minority is a lot easier compared to living in their countries of origin, or in other Western countries that adopt strict forms of secularism (i.e. France).

Females' experiences. Female participants gave answers that are similar to male participants in terms of their appreciation for being here and for the liberties they enjoy. At the same time, they all discussed how the Charter of Values of the Parti Québécois made them question their identification and belongingness to Quebec (issue of visibility). Female participants felt personally attacked in their identities when their (or their mothers') hijabs became politicized during public debates about ostensible religious signs. Some female participants (Dunya, Sanaa, and Zeena) emphasized, when I enquired about being Muslim in Quebec, that being *hijabi* is different from being Muslim in the sense that some outsiders may consider you too Muslim or, even worse, think *hijabis* are making a political statement by invading the public sphere via their religious signs. Here is what they had to say:

> *Dunya*: For me it is easy but you should ask others [who wear a hijab]. I am not visible (laugh).
>
> *Sanaa*: Hmm, well you go through a lot of things when you are Muslim, of course. Like not everybody agrees and not everybody understands.
>
> *Lubna*: But over all I don't think it is hard. You expect things to happen such as people giving you dirty looks and saying bad stuff, you just get used to it sometimes I think. You just brush it off (laugh). But then I see all the nice people who say and do nice stuff; I am a very optimistic person (laugh).

Even though these young Muslim women experienced difficulties with their visible religiosity (i.e. hijab), the heated debated about the proposed Charter of Values negatively affected their sense of belonging to Quebec. As indicated in chapter three, Iacovino (2015, p. 47), in "*A critique of Quebec interculturalism*", believes that the

proposed Quebec Charter of Values (Bill 60) was an indication that Quebec was taking a new direction and adopting a new "normative framework" that sought to restrict citizens' liberties in the name of laïcité; the same feeling was echoed by female participants. Naturally, Muslim males do not experience the same level of Islamophobia as they can go unnoticed without ostensible religious symbols.

Divergence of values? Some male and female graduates experienced conflicts while trying to be steadfast in their commitment to their religion. Islam and Muslims do not abide by everyday prevalent norms in the West, daily life in the West (i.e. Christian holy days, the school's calendar, the weekend) being tailored to the Christian heritage. Like other religious traditions, the Islamic tradition is seen as a foreign imported culture that is incompatible with Western ways of life and values. Habeeb noted,

> I think it is difficult to be Muslim in Canada because Islam is not perceived as a good religion. I saw a lot of views of people acting in a bad way to someone who look like a Muslim.

Other participants are aware of this reality and believe that most of the difficulties they personally face are related to the way Islamic culture and values are perceived by the majority, like Ismail who said:

> I feel that other non-Muslim Canadians view us as a threat to the culture like [...] because our values are different.

My sense in talking to graduates is that, despite confessing to have experienced conflicts while navigating the public space with their visible identities, female participants asserted that rejecting some values in society is not an indication of isolation or disintegration. No one adopts every single value and attitude in his or her society. Lubna, for example, states:

> Yes, I do feel that sometimes there is a clash between the two (Muslimness and

> Canadianness) but nonetheless I don't feel that it compromises neither my Muslim nor my Canadian identity.

In fact, citizens, participants argue, have the liberty to choose what in agreement with their individual and communal identities, as long as they respect Quebec's common values. For instance, for Ismail, this meant adopting a Canadian identity while respecting the boundaries of his culture and refraining from what is non-permissible in Islam. He said:

> I have also the freedom to give and take you know, to take what I please as any other Canadian does, to take what I want from Canadian values as long as it does not oppose my Islamic values and the same for Islamic values.

It is for this reason, as mentioned in chapter one, that in order to contribute positively to diversity and pluralism, Islamic schools should focus on the common good of their society (Cairns, 2009). They should contribute and take part in debates surrounding their place in their societies rather than being the centre of the debates.

On Quebecness. I also discussed Quebecois identity with my participants. As mentioned in chapters two and three, Quebec has its unique language, religion, culture, and history that is quite distinct from English Canada. Only one male graduate (Bashir) denied his Canadianness and acknowledged the unique status of Quebec and his exclusive Quebecois-Lebanese identity. He said:

> Not too much, Canadian No. I am more Quebecer; since I grew as a Quebecer I have more attachment. Quebec is different, different mentality, it is bilingual, different educational system, and it is not the same culture as Canadian.

Bashir underlined the bilingual status of Quebec; nonetheless, Quebec is the only francophone province in Canada. My sense is that he was reflecting on his experience attending a multiethnic and multicultural college and neighbourhood in Montreal. The

reality he is living tells him that Quebec is a bilingual and multicultural province. By excluding Canadian culture from his self-description, he reflects a different sense of identity from other graduates. Moreover, another male graduate (Amine) denied his Quebecness and insisted on being exclusively Canadian. While talking to Amine, I felt that he was equating being Quebecois with being white from Catholic origin, and being Canadian with being diverse and multicultural. However, the vast majority of graduates (16 out of 18) embodied a type of Quebecness that is infused in Canadianness. To them, being Quebecois meant being Canadian. Furthermore, participants did not differentiate between multiculturalism and interculturalism. They used the two terms interchangeably to refer to diversity and pluralism (Tremblay, 2009; Modood, 2016). A female participant (Dawlah) insisted on not seeing or considering any differences between being Canadian and Quebecer. From her perspective, both societies are equally diverse and plural. Others, like Walaa, considered their Canadianness a precondition to their Quebecness:

> I am Canadian from Quebec, I watch hockey, I eat Poutine; I love it (laugh). These identities shouldn't be in contradiction because I take from all the cultures to add into my identity.

In other words, these youth emphasized the fact that Quebecois identity is infused into Canadian identity in such a way that you cannot be Quebecois without being Canadian (Oueslati, Labelle & Antonius, 2006, p. 132). Two graduates mentioned their Canadian passport and every Quebecer's passport, including militant separatists who hold Canadian citizenship because "Quebec belongs to Canada", as Walaa, a male participant, puts it. Another male participant, Bassem, states that he sees himself as equally Quebecois and Canadian because he was socialized in both cultures despite acknowledging their differences. He loves the Quebecois culture, the language, and the hospitality of the people; he also adores Canadian multiculturalism and inclusiveness.

6.3 Civic Participation, Diversity, and Socialization

Measuring integration can be very difficult, if ever possible. We cannot determine solely on the basis of loyalties, affiliations, or conceptions of civic participation, whether individuals are fully, partly, or not integrated at all in their societies (Merry & Milligan, 2009, p. 320; Oueslati *et al.* 2006). In this section, I discuss graduates' civic participation and daily interactions in their diverse society. Additionally, I talk about the visible traits (i.e. hijab) of females' Muslimness in the public sphere.

Civic participation. Does political activism necessarily indicate a strong sense of citizenship, more attachment to the country, and a healthier integration? Do those who boycott elections, for instance, show unwillingness to integrate or to participate in the democratic process? I had these questions, and others, in mind while conducting my interviews, making sure I discussed political opinions and involvement with graduates.

Involvement in politics is strongly related to the personal and communal interests of individuals. In fact, citizens become politically engaged in order to change a *status quo* that does not reflect their interests or to protect a *status quo* they believe satisfies their personal needs (Bullock *et al.* 2011, p. 29). In this case, Muslims are no exception. During the times of the Charter of Values in Quebec, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, and other concerned citizens lobbied and campaigned very hard to push and encourage everyone to vote against the Parti Québécois and therefore against this Charter that sought to ban ostensible religious signs for employees in public institutions. When I asked my participants about political activism such as voting, joining political parties, etc., none of them was a member of any political party. However, some were active once in a while, but most of them stated that they became politically active during the campaign of the Parti Québécois and its leader Pauline Marois whom they considered a threat to social cohesion and to their cultural and religious identities.

One graduate, Bassem, did actually work for the government during the 2014 elections. He stated that he got his job through his Islamic school where a Muslim activist spoke to those of eligible age, encouraging them to apply to this temporary position to work for the elections. Most other graduates, who are not politically active, do community work; they mentioned volunteering with cultural Islamic organizations and other Canadian organizations (HEMA-Quebec blood drive, nursing and rehabilitation centres, Islamic centres, etc.). The same finding is echoed in the study of Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking (2011, p. 19) on Canadian Muslim youth and political participation:

> "Our interviewees display an impressive commitment toward civic engagement and community volunteerism. Fourteen of the twenty are involved with volunteering for one or more non-profit organizations consistently; three volunteer on an ad-hoc basis; two are available during summer holidays only; and only one does not volunteer at present".

My interviewees challenge some general labels from outsiders about Muslims being anti-democracy, anti-elections, and anti all forms of civic participation in Western societies.

Experiencing diversity. Second-generation Canadian Muslims resist discrimination and "otherization". Even though they are proud of their origins, they insist on being Canadian and on having a fair and equal share with the rest of their co-citizens (Beyer & Ramji, 2013). For example, while discussing immigration, and integration with participants, unlike stakeholders, most graduates (Bashir, Dawlah, etc.) repeatedly stated that they are not immigrants – they were born here. They emphasized that they should not be tolerated but accepted and recognized as equal citizens. Others even opposed the idea of labelling themselves or adopting a static non-fluid identity that is similar to the majority's. They also stated that integrating does not mean melting in society:

> *Ismail*: To be honest, that's one thing I always try to avoid doing: labelling myself. And I feel a lot of Muslims my age; so many of them feel like this labelling is what's causing division.
>
> *Lubna*: We can integrate without being assimilated. You don't need to be like them, follow their religion and look like them to be a good person in the community.

As I indicated in chapter two, some families have chosen to educate their children at the Islamic school as one response to the challenges of integration (Kelly, 2000, p. 46). Islamic schools advocate a form of guided integration, which means that, whereas they are trying to adopt values and norms of the mainstream society, they would reject some cultural or secular norms that run counter to their beliefs, which is echoed in their students' beliefs and attitudes. These beliefs and attitudes surely affect youth's daily socialization in their societies.

Daily interactions and socialization. There is a lot of complexity and controversy over the role, impact, and influence of schooling. Schools are micro societies that should and could make a difference in learning, in creating social cohesion, and in teaching harmony between all co-citizens (Miedema, 2014, p. 364; Jackson, 2004; Thiessen, 2001). In other words, as entities that prepare youth to face society's challenges, schools are assumed to be the main contributor in building a plural and just society; many scholars (DesRoches, 2014, p. 36; Watson, 2004) suggest that educational bodies are responsible for familiarizing youth with the requirements of citizenship. Pedagogically speaking and from a societal perspective, students should experience diversity and pluralism before reaching adulthood. They should experience, confront, and become accustomed with other children's "backgrounds, ideas, experiences, and practices including the ones related to religions and worldviews in the embryonic or micro society of the school" (Miedema, 2014, p. 365).

At Islamic schools however, there is guided and limited interactions with the outside non-Islamic world, which might be seen as an indication of very limited engagement with non-Islamic environments. A few graduates from the same school mentioned their experience with an inter-religious dialogue group with a Catholic school.[44] Though appreciated, they all agreed that these inter-religious dialogue meetings were not enough as the dialogue only happened twice – once at the Islamic school and once at the Catholic school. Other students never had any similar activities. Zeena expressed her frustration with the lack of interfaith activities. She said:

> We need to interact more with people. We had some interreligious dialogues but it was only one class. For instance, our group never had guests. We should do something, how about a partnership with the Peace (pseudonym) public school near us.

Furthermore, Dawlah showed her appreciation for having a non-Muslim teacher in her Islamic high school. Her interactions with this teacher challenged her preconceived knowledge and pushed her to reflect more on her faith and her culture. She stated that it was an enlightening experience because it brought an outside non-Islamic perspective to the school. She said:

> In my secondary five, I had a non-Muslim teacher and that was good because we had a non-Muslim point of view about how we were acting. I like it when non-Muslims ask us questions such as why you guys do this, why you do that, why you think like that. By them asking you these questions they make you think again about your perspective and your religion. And that's when you are prepared to be exposed to non-Muslims.

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[44] 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 to be a good opportunity for his students to learn about other youth their age from other confessional schools.

In my view, most students were eager to interact and socialize with non-Muslims, but their Islamic schools did not offer many opportunities for such interactions. However, not all students appreciated having non-Muslim teachers at their Islamic schools, Ahmed, for instance did not like having non-Muslim teachers who are not sensitive to his faith and his culture. Non-Muslim teachers often have limited knowledge of the Islamic culture and are usually not supportive of the parents' cultural needs. While students could approach any Muslim teacher with a personal or a religious question, non-Muslim teachers at Islamic schools would sometimes advise against an Islamic practice they might think is harmful (i.e. fasting during exams period, etc.). Ahmed had this to say:

> I didn't like having non-Muslim teachers. They are not the same when you approach them. I won't ask them personal questions; these teachers don't know about how our parents are raising us [...] For instance, in secondary five I had a meeting with my teacher during lunch breaks. Then there was prayer time and I forgot about it. If I were with a Muslim teacher, he would have absolutely told me that we have to go pray (together).

This is not unique to non-Muslim teachers at Islamic schools. Muslim youth at public schools might also experience the same challenges. In a study about Muslim students in Quebec CEGEPs, Triki-Yamani and McAndrew (2009, p. 74) found out that teachers' understanding of their Muslim students' images and knowledge of Islam sometimes created conflicts between Muslim youth and educational institutions. Biased images of Arabs and Muslims in the curricula negatively affect students' perspectives on themselves. For instance, certain historical facts such as the Crusades and the Ottoman Empire period are taught exclusively from a Western perspective through a Judeo-Christian lens (Triki-Yamani & McAndrew, 2009, p. 79). Other perspectives for the study of Islam are secular such as portraying the Quran as a historical document, and Muhammad as a product of his time. Other attitudes are orientalist and imperialist such as considering the Islamic tradition barbaric, anti-Western, anti-women, deficient and

contradictory to the modern world, etc. These attitudes contribute to the negative image devout Muslims have about the public educational sector (Rausch, 2013, p. 100; Oueslati *et al.* 2006, p. 58). As discussed in chapter one, these issues of representation and interpretation are closely related to Edward Said's important work on Orientalism, which showed how aspects of Islam were constructed and represented stereotypically by Europeans in their own interests. These Orientalist interpretations are still affecting Muslims, either in Muslim countries or in the West.

Socialization with non-Muslims. For all youth, school is the ideal space for socialization and interaction with other peers. As participants had limited access to non-Muslims before graduating from their Islamic school, most of them did not have any close non-Muslim friends. Many male graduates had acquaintances that they made in soccer or in other sports activities. Only two females, Sanaa and Hanan, out of seven had a few non-Muslim friends before graduating from the Islamic school. They knew them when they attended elementary public schools before transiting to the Islamic high school. Nonetheless, contact and socialization outside of the Islamic school and interactions with different-minded youths were limited and usually guided by parents. Even though most graduates stated they made some non-Muslim friends in CEGEP or at the university, two male graduates, Majid and Hani, limit their interactions exclusively to Muslims. They indicated that it is not a priority or a preference but it just happens that they socialize with people who resemble them.

There are debates about whether Islamic schools can develop, in their students, strong Islamic personalities that are able to respond to challenges in their societies (Elbih, 2010; Zine, 2008; Memon, 2009, 2012), despite being isolated with like-minded students. There are also debates in the literature (see chapter One) about whether Islamic schools segregate Muslim students and inspire religious intolerance and refusal of social pluralism ideals. Nevertheless, some Muslim educators may suggest that segregation of

Muslim students is necessary for the reproduction of the Islamic culture, on the one hand, and for their safety and protection from un-Islamic behaviours that are widespread in society such as drugs, premarital sex, and negative peer pressures on the other (Elbih, 2010). Yet, as suggested throughout this thesis, the Islamic schools in my sample seem to primarily focus on preserving students' Islamic identities, while trying to teach towards an inclusive national identity.

The hijab and Muslim visibility. The hijab is the most visible Islamic sign in the public sphere. Most Muslim women who wear it are aware that their actions and behaviours in the public sphere are seen as representative of all Muslims. The visibility of their Muslimness adds emotional burdens on them in a way that they are expected to behave according to Islamic morals and principles. A female student participant in Bakali's (2015, p. 154) study about Islamophobia in Quebec schools said:

> "You know, when you're a teenager you feel the world is always staring at you. And you know there were random things that happened here and there but overall it was smooth, except for the fact that I felt that I had to be a spokesperson for the entire Muslim ummah of the world. Like every time there would be a debate that would happen in class everyone would just sort of look at me and I was 14, I was supposed to justify everything."

According to Bakali (2015, p. 158), once a Muslim female becomes a *hijabi,* outsiders start seeing her as qualified to answer on behalf of her religion, unlike before she put on the hijab. A question I had for all graduates was whether it is easy to be a Muslim in Canada. Sanaa, a female participant, asked, while laughing out loud, "do you mean Muslim or *hijabi?*" Sanaa knew and experienced the effects of being a visible Muslim in her society. Another female participant, Zeena, stated that Muslim women feel obligated to auto-supervise their behaviours in public. She said:

> For girls, you have to watch everything you do because of the scarf you know, if you do wrong they'll go oh my God she is a Muslim and she is doing that. There

> are things that I can't do because of the scarf.

Being a *hijabi* Muslim creates a specific image in the minds of others, whether non Muslim or Muslim. Certain behaviours of some *hijabis* (i.e. limited socialization, position with regards to social or political issues, etc.) would be interpreted as an outcome of their intense religiosity, which is not always the case. For instance, few females stated that the reason for their "social abstinence" has nothing to do with non-Muslims in their CEGEPs or universities but it is simply related to their shy personalities and to the fact that they are not sociable by nature. Lubna, who does not have any non-Muslim friends in CEGEP insisted that she was shy since her high school years with her Muslim peers and that is just who she is. She said:

> Since secondary one, I kept asking myself why I am so shy, I have known this people (classmates) for so long, then I noticed that that's who I am and I can't change that. If you are comfortable with the people that surround you, it's gonna make things a lot easier.

My sense in talking to female graduates is that they all agreed that their lives, as *hijabis,* is difficult in Quebec. Four stated that they personally faced verbal assaults in the last two years, especially the period during the debates over the proposed Charter of Values. And the only non-*hijabi* participant, Dunya, who is non-visible as she also has a Christian name and a Caucasian look, confessed that life is easy for her because she is not veiled. Similarly, even male participants confessed that veiling makes women's lives more difficult. Bashir, said:

> I know there are issues (of discrimination) I just didn't experience them. My sister is experiencing difficulties, of course because of the hijab.

At the other side of the spectrum, Dawlah shared her positive experience in college: "It is weird but I have never been intimidated in CEGEP because of my hijab." Even though she wears the Islamic veil and practice her religion, she never experienced any

form of discrimination or bullying from peers or teachers. She explained that it is the person in question who sets the rules of the game. Stated otherwise, those who are self-ghettoized will not make new friends and will most likely stay isolated from their college mates (Maxwell *et al.*, 2012).

In sum, Muslim women, with their visible religiosities, face more challenges in the public sphere than men. Whereas Muslim men can occasionally go unnoticed, veiled women cannot hide their Muslimness in public. The next section will discuss graduates' opinions about their Islamic school.

6.4 Opinions about the Islamic School

This section tackles critiques and praises of Islamic schools from graduates' point of view. I will discuss their perspectives about their teachers, religiosity, Islamic instruction courses, the school's environment, and about the institution's role in educating them during and outside of school hours.

Functioning with no clear strategy. Most graduates mentioned that their Islamic school had no future plans or great ambitions to excel as a private school in the long run. Despite agreeing that many factors (i.e. shortage in funds, amateurism of staff members, lack of the know-how of managing schools, etc.) slow down the school's achievement, they mentioned that many of the problems Islamic schools face are related to the Arab and first-generation mentality. Sometimes staff members would run the school as if it were a third world country school: doing things through pleasing either the old-appointed principal or a member of the administrative board, without allowing other stakeholders to help, advice, or even volunteer at the school. Graduates mentioned the old mentality of their schools' staff members. Many (i.e. Hanan, Bashir, Walaa) stated that they personally knew people who wanted to volunteer their time at the Islamic school but the administration denied their help, without giving a clear explanation.

When asked "what are the main challenges facing their Islamic school?" some replied:

> *Hanan*: It involves the people who run the school being old fashion. They have to understand that we are not from the same generation.
>
> *Bashir*: It is not always money. There are people who want to volunteer but they don't let them. They should engage with the community.
>
> *Walaa*: We shouldn't blame it all on money. We should work hard to make it as good as possible.

I interpret these comments to mean that the Islamic school is not doing things efficiently. Graduates' expectations were a lot higher than what their school had to offer.

Graduates talked about the school's incapability of hiring good teachers, and then in keeping the good ones already hired. Furthermore, they insisted that the school should make more efforts to hire staff who graduated from Canadian universities and not depend entirely on newly arrived teachers whose only experience is in their home countries. A few graduates also revealed that in some of their high school years, they had no classes for a few months because the school could not retain the teacher or hire a new one to take his place.

Educating outside the school. Islamic schools' mission is not limited to teaching and learning inside the school's building; they often extend their mission outside of the school.[45] Whereas some students appreciated staff members supervising their behaviours outside the school as if they were their parents, others furiously disagreed and insisted that Islamic schools should not extend their authority to control or monitor students' behaviour outside of the institution's building. For example, Bassem noted:

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[45] There is no school policy related to this matter. The school's supervision of its students outside is based on cultural issues and on personal relationships with parents.

> Another time, two students had a fight outside and they were about to get suspended. It was shocking. That's a little too much (laugh).

A few male graduates from the same Islamic school mentioned an incident that happened to a group of their classmates during their last year of high school: while they were preparing for their graduation and an outing in a cottage, they went shopping for groceries, for fun, two students took pictures with sets of beer on their shoulders and posted them on Facebook. The post went viral among their peers at the school. Once the school's administration knew about it, the students were called to the principal's office and suspended for three days. These incidents confirm what was mentioned in Chapter one and two about Islamic schools being community schools that help parents "supervise" their children in and outside of the school building. Nonetheless, a few students were against this type of monitoring outside the school. They believed that a school should limit its duties to teaching and not to supervising its students' behavior outside.

Preparing students for society. Islamic schools in the West are the first choice of most devout parents in helping their children construct an Islamic identity and maintain their faith and cultural heritage. These parents want schools to be friendly, open to issues of religiosity (hijab, halal food, prayers, etc.), and able to teach academic programs while ensuring basic religious values (Ali, 2012, p. 28; Merry, 2008). The main challenge facing Montreal Islamic schools is the preservation of an Islamic identity while abiding by the ministry of education's academic expectations. The first general question that comes to mind is: Are Islamic schools capable of helping youth develop a strong Western Islamic identity that will help them face future challenges in their societies? Merry (2008) argues that the majority of these schools are not fully equipped to successfully build or transfer a strong Islamic identity able to survive in front of society's challenges. Most young graduates in my study, aged 18 to 22, agreed that the

school did not prepare them to face the after-graduation challenges (i.e. university, work, diversity). When asked if their Islamic school prepared them to face the outside society, Habeeb said:

> I think they prepared me but they could have done better. Their job could be improved. They should teach us how to talk and interact with people who have different opinions, to respect them and to be more tolerant, because there are people that don't see the world the same way as we do.

Participants were divided about whether their Islamic school prepared them to face life and university challenges. Dunya and Catherine, the two adult-student participants[46] who graduated from high school over a decade ago had different viewpoints about their Islamic schooling experience than the other sixteen graduates aged 18–22. None of them mentioned having any social or academic difficulties when they exited the Islamic high school and entered CEGEP. They stated that most of their cohort stood out in CEGEP and in professional life in general as they have good careers today.

> *Dunya*: I had no problem; my husband too, he is an engineer. I don't know why people say that.
>
> *Catherine*: It was the Islamic school that made me a good citizen.

This begs the question of whether Islamic schools were doing a better job a decade ago, or whether graduates develop a more positive image about their school as times passes by. Others complained about the change of teachers during the school year, the (under) performance of some teachers, and the authoritative style of some of them in their classrooms.

Furthermore, eight students out of eighteen insisted that their academic training at the Islamic school was not sufficient to make them successful in their first year of college.

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

They stated that they experienced challenges in their post-secondary institutions, academically and socially. Most revealed having problems with self-organization, study load, and keeping up with the college pace in general. Zeena said:

> In my school not really, I think the school should send us to do internships in other schools, something like 15 hours, it is really good I think.

Some participants reported being ridiculed in their CEGEPs by other Muslims for attending Islamic schools. Moreover, there is an assumption that those who are products of confessional schools are "weirdos" with less social skills than those who attended "normal schools." Saleh said:

> I wasn't prepared, I felt like a stranger when I went to college, I felt like I was too much of a Muslim. The way I was thinking, the way I was socializing with people.

Graduates' testimonies show that they had varying experiences at their previous Islamic schools. Nonetheless, as many of them faced challenges with diversity and socialization at their CEGERS, Islamic schools have real shortcomings in preparing students to face their society.

Praising the Islamic school. Islamic schools provide a space, an environment, and a lifestyle (Elbih, 2010) where "otherized" Islamic identities are allowed to flourish and be maintained. These spaces exist in a zone between two worlds: the student's culture at home and the dominant culture in society (Tindongan, 2011, p. 79). Strengthening Islamic identity and cultural heritage is an important component of the Islamic school's mission. As indicated by interviewees, the school should not only contribute to the wider Canadian society, but also help students enhance their Islamic identity and cultural background, by enhancing their self-esteem in practising Islam, and help them maintain their Islamic identity (Mohamed, 2012, p. 84). Graduates saw the Islamic school as a place where basic Islamic knowledge is available and accessible to everyone.

Even though Islamic studies courses were limited to the basics of the Muslim faith, all students, including those from non-religious households, agreed that they were taught the ABCs of their religion. Saleh, for instance, mentioned, "What's good is that you get to know more about your own religion". Others, like Walaa, also added that this kind of knowledge acquired at the Islamic school is always beneficial, particularly when believers decide to re-embrace their faith. He said:

> At the Islamic school, I see Islam like a flower that grows from secondary one to five, you just plant the seed, you let it grow with time, then you choose to take it off or leave it there as a beautiful flower. It is like we give you the tools and you choose if you wanna build something or not.

What they most admired was the friendly environment and the teachers; as they shared the same cultures, they could each relate to one another; a kind of environment that they considered a second family, which is certainly important for youth especially during adolescence when they need a friendly and secure milieu to safely and smoothly construct their identities.

Teachers as role models. Compared to teachers in public schools, teachers in Islamic schools bear other (non-official) responsibilities such as developing their students' religious and cultural identities (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 133). As a former Islamic studies teacher puts it: "we attempt to provide a comprehensive understanding of Islam to make certain that students would continue to practise and believe in Islamic teachings throughout their lives" (Ahmad, 2012, p. 215). Having teachers as role models is an expression echoed by all graduates. Many felt that their teachers were like mentors to them. Majid mentioned that "one of the biggest advantages in my previous (Islamic) school is to have a role model". Teachers understood the struggles students might have had vis-à-vis their religion or their identity. Students were able to share personal stories with their teachers. Many graduates mentioned that, at Islamic community schools, teachers do more than just teaching, they are like parents, mentors, and role models to

look up to. Habeeb said:

> Teachers there are very good mentors, they treat students like their children, which is a very good thing for me. They really contributed in shaping my identity. If I were in a public school, it wouldn't have been the case. What I found interesting is this family climate.

This shows that graduates appreciated the family atmosphere of their Islamic schools. However, other teachers who did not master French or had a heavy accent had trouble managing their classrooms. In one Islamic school, students would compete on which group will get more detentions this week, or have the most visits from the principal for creating problems for their teachers. Bassem reported that:

> Like we used to make fun of the teachers and the way they're speaking. This time we had this poor teacher, man we did all kinds of stuff to him, we threw chalk at him. When the principal used to come to our class and say we are the worst class at school, we took pride in that (laugh).

This shows that not everything with Muslim teachers was great. In spite of their appreciation for having Muslim teachers, graduates talked about cultural barriers between them and most of these teachers. Students cherished having teachers who spoke their dialect and understood their home culture; nonetheless, first-generation teachers do not usually bond with their students because, besides the age gap, they are a product of another far away culture that is different from, and maybe incompatible with, the Canadian and Quebecois culture. Many first generation teachers in Islamic schools are a product of colonial educational systems (Zine, 2008, p. 288; Memon, 2009, p. 157). Their performance in these schools is not very different from the performance of teachers in Muslim countries. Sanaa noted that:

> The understanding was a big one; even the relationship between the student and the teacher was kind of close, sometimes the understanding was hard. I think they didn't really understand us.

Additionally, appreciating Muslim teachers as role models is also part of the experiences of some Muslim students in public schools. For instance, Yasmeen, an interviewee in a study about Muslim girls in Toronto public schools, indicated that she felt very relieved and happy when she learned on her first day in public school that one of her teachers was a Muslim who shared the same ethnic origin as her: "Seeing herself reflected in a teacher, who also showed genuine interest in Yasmeen, put her at ease" (Ali, 2012, p. 112). By bridging differences between Muslim parents and the school, Muslim teachers at public schools can also embody the role of positive facilitators between cultures and traditions (Niyozov, 2010). Nonetheless, the assumption that Muslim teachers are in a better position to teach Muslim students about history and culture appears unfounded; the right question may be less about who teaches whom, but more about how does one teach, to what end, and with what ethics and interest (Niyozov, 2010).

Religiosity at the Islamic school. 9/11 attacks in New York and other events in Canada and Quebec (e.g. Parliament shootings, Saint-Jean de Richelieu in 2014, Muslim youth joining ISIS) had tremendous effects on debates concerning the place and role of religion in society and in education (Miedema, 2014, p. 364). Most Muslims believe that Islam is not just a state of mind in which they only have to believe with their hearts. Instead, it is a way of life with mandated rituals and daily practices. Devout Muslims pray at least five times a day, fast during the month of Ramadan, and follow the tradition of the prophet. These rituals necessitate years of practice to become an integrated part of a Muslim's life. In order to instill Islam and to transfer their Muslimness to their children, parents usually start the inculcation process at an early age, usually before the elementary school. Once Muslim children start attending school, the latter's environment and philosophy would shape and restructure their identities and religiosities. This is often the reason why devout Muslim parents insist on finding an

Islam-friendly school.

Fostering and developing religiosity is also about building the habit. At Islamic schools, students engage in prayers and other religious practices for months and years till they become normal daily activities. Even the hijab can be inculcated through daily habits. For instance, Sanaa who attended an elementary public school and then joined the Islamic high school, as she was not veiled, she used to take her veil off once she left the school, but after the first semester she decided to keep her hijab and become a full-time *hijabi*. The same can be said about prayers. Two participants, Walaa and Saleh, said that the reason why they still pray today is because of their education at the Islamic school. Their parents did not push them to practise but, instead, they developed the habit of practising the ritual during their years at the school:

> *Walaa*: The Islamic school made me constantly surrounded by people who do the same thing, so I am constantly reminded that I should do this, which is good: prayers, fasting, etc.
>
> *Saleh*: I do give a lot of credit actually to the Islamic school because in another school you can forget to pray, but at the Islamic school you're always reminded of your religion, to behave well, to not do this or that.

This shows that the schools' religious environment and requirements, and not the Islamic curricula itself, had the most effect on students' religiosities. Additionally, graduates seem to agree on the communitarian status and family environment of their Islamic schools. Some appreciated praying in groups, unity and solidarity amongst students and staff, the brotherhood climate at the school, and the "low level" of temptations compared to the public school:

> *Lubna*: We start the day on a good basis, on a positive state of mind you know. Then we had to pray at lunchtime, which unites everybody. The public school, if I can say, is a bit free for all you know what I mean? All they ask from you is that you attend class.

> *Sanaa*: I was surrounded by Muslims; my friends and I were always trying to become better. I learned a lot about religion at the Islamic school.
>
> *Idriss*: At the public school there are lots of temptations. Students can easily be taken. It is difficult to stay on the right [path]. So the Islamic school is better religion.

Others gave full credit to their Islamic school for keeping and intensifying their faith and practice, and for keeping them on the right path. These were the participants who came from non-religious households or disturbed[47] families. When queried about the Islamic school's impact on their religiosity, some noted that:

> *Saleh*: I do give a lot of credit actually to the Islamic school because in another school you can forget to pray, but at the Islamic school you're always reminded about your religion, about how to behave well, to not do this or that.
>
> *Habeeb*: Yes it definitely did. I know if I didn't attend the Islamic school I would have been different. Life at the Islamic school was always a reminder for praying, doing rituals, Eid celebration. No one would remind me in a public school.

It is obvious from these testimonies that the environment at the Islamic school allowed many students to practice their faith and, therefore, to build habits that would intensify their religiosity. The secular and "Christian-based"[48] nature of the public school do not allow for Islamic identities to similarly flourish and grow. Nonetheless, Hanan, who is a full-time *hijabi*, voiced her opinion against the obligation of religious rituals at the school: "they shouldn't force us to pray and put hijabs." She indicated that other females who did not wear the hijab outside of the school also were not treated as equals by other students: "those who removed hijabs outside the school were discriminated against."

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[47] By disturbed families I mean those living in verbal abuse or suffering from problems related to divorced parents.

[48] As stated in chapter two, the Canadian public educational system was first established as a confessional system that serves the majority's needs, by adopting the two major religions in the country. Even though educational institutions are secularized, traits of the Christian faith are still visible.

Even though none of my hijabi participants stated that she was forced to veil, the latter example begs the question of whether peer pressure might also lead students to adopt intense religiosities or to wear religious signs to prove that they belong to the group.

The Islamic school as second home. Schools are micro societies in which personalities, attitudes, and values meet, interact, socialize, compete, and shape one another. Even though most students agreed that the Islamic school *per se* does not automatically boost religiosity and religious practice, they all revealed that the school environment had a great impact on their personalities in a way that shaped who they are. Sixteen out of eighteen students described the Islamic school as a second home where their home and parents' culture are reflected. They appreciated teachers' support and sacrifices that are similar to their parents'. This point was shared by many when asked: what does the Islamic school represent to you?

> *Ahmed*: They affected me a lot because maybe if I was in another school, I won't even have Muslim friends. I would have been someone else. My parents guided me and the Islamic school supported me.
>
> *Hani*: I appreciated teachers' involvements despite their low salaries, there were teachers who offered free martial arts classes; it is something I really liked.
>
> *Sanaa*: It is really amazing that we were such a small group. Everybody knew each other and the relationships between teachers and students were amazing. I have a lot of good memories. It represents a good image.

Two students did not consider the Islamic school as a second home, but just as a normal school, they felt the environment there was more conservative than in their homes. For instance, while students may not pray at home or skip prayer with parents, most Islamic schools compel students to abide by religious practices while they are at the school, including memorizing the Quran, praying, fasting, etc. (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 108). Even non-*hijabis* are obliged to veil in certain Islamic schools.

Frustration with religious instruction courses. Because of low salaries and lack of benefits, Islamic schools struggle to retain qualified and certified teachers. Students' experiences with the Islamic studies course are different, as the course depends on the teacher, the school, and the subjects chosen to be taught in a specific year. Most Islamic schools in Montreal do not have prescribed or fixed Islamic studies curricula that students follow throughout the years. In fact, most Islamic schools only provide general guidelines and it is up to the teacher to choose his or her own curriculum. That being said, most graduates stated that it was the school's environment and the friends around them that helped in developing healthy and balanced religious identities, and not Islamic instruction courses. For instance, Ismail, Amine and Sanaa, two male students and a female student whose fathers are imams showed their disappointment with Islamic studies course at their Islamic school. They stated that the lessons were poor, unstructured, and not challenging enough for high school students. Moreover, Majid and Amine had this to say about Islamic education at their school:

> *Majid*: You know it's not structured; there is nothing to follow. I am talking about the Islamic education. It is not like we have a plan, we don't have a structure.
>
> *Amine*: In Islamic studies, we should be able to create scholars in these 11 years of Islamic schooling, but we barely teach it.

This may be true for two reasons: the first is that teachers who give the course are usually not specialized or experts in the field; they often teach regular courses (Math, sciences, English, etc.) and are assigned extra few hours of Islamic studies. The second reason is the language issue: most qualified Islamic studies teachers do not master foreign languages, especially French; they find it hard to transmit religious knowledge and to manage students who would make fun of their accent, or their ways of teaching.

A school culture? As Western Muslims are very heterogeneous, so are their centres, institutions, mosques, and schools. They are also separated along national and ethnic

origins. Most "mosques and Islamic schools are usually organized around a particular ethnic group" (Merry & Milligan, 2009, p. 314). There is always a cultural context to practising any religion. Even when we are studying Islam, we have to bear in mind that the Quran was revealed in Arabic and that the religion itself is grounded in historical and cultural circumstances. Unity is not uniformity since different cultures have contributed to Islam and made it more like a mosaic. It is not only the Arab culture we think of when we speak of Islam but of other cultures as well. In his study of an Islamic school in Montreal, Essid (2015) is critical of internal dissent in Islamic schools. Some of his participants spoke out about the internal stigmatization they face within the school's walls. For instance, staff members in general do not necessarily transmit religious knowledge but, instead, they transmit cultural components and cultural identities that are more visible than religious ones (i.e. obedience).

Islamic schools, like any other educational institution, have a culture of their own; a culture that shapes the *façon de faire*, or the "way to do things", and the school's ideology. Schools in this study can be categorized as Arabic schools and therefore reflect and propagate the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) culture. As Islamic cultures have differences and similarities, Islamic schools with staff and students from MENA countries are also very heterogeneous. In fact, this heterogeneity is obvious when we look at Montreal Islamic schools (Kelly, 2000; Essid, 2015) and Toronto Islamic schools (Zine, 2008). The differences stem from Quebec's francophone Arabic Muslim community and Toronto South Asian Anglophone Muslim communities. This does not infer that a culture is superior or inferior to another but just reflects the fact that there are main differences between a Pakistani Islamic school, a Turkish Islamic school, and a North African Islamic school. These differences stem from variances found in the home countries of these cultures. Yet, this does not preclude many cultures from flourishing at the same Islamic school (see Tables of participants' profiles). These

cultures can be a learning experience for many students and teachers. When asked if students had found their culture at the Islamic school, some said:

> *Zeena*: Yeah here for instance we mainly have the Middle Eastern and the Maghreb culture. I personally learned many new Middle Eastern words that I didn't know before [...] Coming from the Maghreb, I learned many things from other countries, even from the eight Pakistani students that we have.
>
> *Ahmed*: I did find a kind of Arab culture here. I spoke Algerian with my Algerian teacher.
>
> *Idriss*: I found Syrian students, I spoke the dialect and I made other Syrian friends.

Students from MENA regions found teachers who resembled them and who reflected not just their religious beliefs but also their cultures, traditions, and spoke and acted like their parents: they associated school staff with their parents. They also felt a direct connection with teachers who came from the same country. Majid explained:

> Teachers, the principal and everyone there have been raised in a similar environment [as my parents], so it is kind of the same.

Students' testimonies also challenge assumptions about Islamic schools being merely religious homogeneous entities. Inversely, this does not entail that public or other private secular schools are culture-free. Public schools nowadays are very diverse, particularly in big cities and in underprivileged neighbourhoods. Students from the same race, culture, religion, etc. would form subgroups in the same public school. As we find like-minded groups in many schools, we also see like-minded students forming their own groups in public schools.

Minority cultures at Islamic schools. As stated above, the majority of graduates and stakeholders in this study come from MENA. The official language of Montreal Islamic schools is French. The languages spoken within the schools are mainly French, and to an

extent English and a number of Arabic dialects. Students who are not from MENA region felt excluded, otherized, sometimes bullied, and discriminated against. One participant from Turkish origin, who chose to transfer to the Islamic high school to join a good friend of hers, mentioned the amount of discrimination and racism she was subjected to because of her Turkish ethnicity. Hanan spent three years at the Islamic school and then decided to return to her public school, where she felt accepted and tolerated.[49] She described her experience at the Islamic school as horrible. She said:

> Students would be like: Ohh you are not even an Arab, you don't speak Arabic, and our prophet was Arab and things like that [...] They feel superior to non-Arabs at the school.

The school's environment. One of the main points made by all participants (graduates, shareholders, stakeholders) is that they view the Islamic school as a refuge from the negative values of the outside world (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 101; Zine, 2001, 2008; Memon, 2009, 2012). What differentiates an Islamic school from other schools is the cultural and Islamic environment it provides; students realize that it is this unique environment that incited their parents to opt for this choice, in spite of the shortcomings of the Islamic school, parents believe that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. For example, Dawlah mentioned:

> My dad always wanted us to grow in an Islamic environment. As much as he believed the Islamic school itself might have some problems, but it is still not as revealing as the public school you know.

Even though the Islamic school provides cultural and religious support, Islamic education is, and remains, the family's responsibility. Parents who are sincere about raising Muslim children who follow Islamic morals and principles inculcate them with this kind of education since infancy. More importantly, they act as role models at home

[49] Hanan mentioned that the school did not take any serious steps to tackle this intra-cultural bullying.

by practising the faith themselves. When asked why they think their parents chose an Islamic school, some replied that:

> *Bassem*: My parents thought that it is a better environment for a Muslim; they wanted me to maintain the Arabic language and the Islamic heritage. They started teaching me Arabic at three.

Ismail and Sanaa, who attended elementary public schools, stated that they were sent to the Islamic school against their will. Based on their parents' experiences with their two older siblings, their parents were very concerned about the public high school where students can easily go astray and loose their faith. Ismail had this to say:

> It was chosen by my parents actually, against my will (laugh). Basically my mother had experienced my other siblings going through the public school over here, and she was concerned about a lot of things like drugs and things like that might happen in larger schools at the secondary level where there is less control. So she felt that a small school and also a community school would be better as there is more supervision to prevent those certain things and also are obviously the Islamic values that the school can offer.

Another male participant, Bashir, the youngest amongst his siblings, stated that the Islamic school became the norm for his family. His three older siblings that also attended Islamic schools, ages 27, 30, 32 at the time of the interview, have good careers and are successful in their lives.

6.5 The Islamic vs. the Public School

This short section tackles Graduates' perceptions and experiences with the public educational system in Quebec.

Graduates' perceptions. A third of my participants (six out of eighteen) also attended

public schools; we discussed their lived experience with both systems. I asked about what they think the similarities and the differences are between the two. Most mentioned discipline, class size, religion, and culture. Ahmed and Amine, respectively, who attended the elementary public school said:

> *Ahmed:* The discipline that I had in elementary and secondary school is not the same compared to others, you know. When I talk to my friends who switched to public schools at secondary level, I feel something different about them.
>
> *Amine:* First of all the [Islamic] school is really small and everybody knows each other; like if I meet somebody, I know their religion, I know their culture, we share a lot of similarities. I mean like we have prayers, Quran, and Arabic classes, it's different.

To understand their opinions about a school they never attended, I also discussed the public school with students who spent all their pre-college life in Islamic schools. They usually got their perceptions about the public sector either from observing other youth who attended it, or from stories they heard from their soccer or hockey friends. All participants recognized that there are differences between the Islamic school and the public and the private secular school. Differences stemmed not only from the Islamic nature of or the extra Islamic courses taught at the Islamic school, but more importantly from the environment and the culture of both schools. Those who attended the public high school stated that they found more warmth and brotherhood at the Islamic school. Walaa noted:

> The public school is just you and yourself and how you see religion. I found most of my culture at the Islamic school, because I am Arab and most of my friends and teachers are Arabs as well. Sometimes I would speak in Arabic or Moroccan to them and I would feel great about it you know.

In terms of morals and Islamic values, everyone agreed that their Islamic schools were not perfect or a haram-free environment. They denied the flawless image parents and

staff like to propagate about the school. Yet, to them the severity of un-Islamic behaviours that was taking place in Islamic schools was not as bad as in public schools. Students shared stories about dating, smoking, and even drugs in their Islamic school. They insisted that the main difference was that those behaviours were hidden and not practised openly, which was something they appreciated.

As stated in the previous section, the Islamic school sees students as its children and subjects that are under its authority everywhere, not just on school grounds. In comparing the public and the Islamic school, Bassem and Ahmed had this to say about an incident that happened at their Islamic school with the picture with a box of beer (mentioned earlier) some students posted on Facebook:

> *Bassem*: They weren't wearing the uniform also so there is no way to relate them to the school, yet they were about to be punished. If I did the same at the public school, they wouldn't give a damn about it.
>
> *Ahmed*: The principal of the school called him and he got suspended. This example shows us that the Islamic school focuses on our education just like our parents.

As stated in the previous section, students also mentioned that they were aware that if a school staff member finds any of them engaged in a disrespectful or an un-Islamic behaviour, their parents would be notified even though the incident did not happen on school property. At the other side of the spectrum, most participants knew that public schools had more financial resources and were, therefore, more focused academically speaking as they were able to hire and retain qualified and certified teachers. Ismail and Sanaa, who attended elementary public schools, shared good memories about their experiences. They appreciated the teaching and learning methods, the open-mindedness of teachers, the school's diverse character, and the richness of the curriculum. However, Idriss who immigrated recently to the country also attended a high school in Laval for almost two years. It was his only choice, as most private schools do not have inclusion

classes for new immigrants who do not master French. His parents had to move to another neighbourhood closer to the Islamic school so that all his three siblings could attend the school. He described these two years at his public school as the worst experience of his life, he said:

> First of all, there are many gangs there, it is not normal, and hats are forbidden there because they point to which gang you are a part of. Lots of students take drugs; they push others to take drugs also. There are fights between blacks and Arabs.

Other students who only attended the public school for a semester or a year after being at the Islamic school had similar experiences. These students often pressured their parents to send them to a non-Islamic school so that they can acquire academic or social skills that are helpful in their life, and that are usually lacking at Islamic schools (i.e. greater diversity, advanced science programs, various sports clubs), or they had problems at the Islamic school. For instance, Walaa failed a few classes at his Islamic school and had to retake them the following semester at the neighbourhood's public school, something he could not do at his small Islamic school. He had this to say about his experience in the public school:

> I didn't like the environment; I didn't like the relationship that students had with teachers. In our school, we have this special relationship. It is kind of a huge family you know.

Moreover, all graduates agreed that the public school is very different from their Islamic school. Those who attended both systems built on their experiences to pinpoint differences and similarities. Others compared themselves to other Muslim youth who resemble them in terms of religion, culture, ethnicity, etc. and who are solely the product of the public school. All participants stated that in terms of morals, principles, conserving one's religion, and practising the faith, the public school might not be the perfect place for Muslims' religious identities.

Living in denial. Nonetheless, it is culture that rules at the Islamic school. Many taboos are not tackled or addressed because parents and staff are either in denial or fear that tackling them might send a message to the community that the school is facing serious problems, which will harm the school's image and reputation. Drugs and pornography are two of these taboos. For instance, Ismail and Hanan mentioned that they tried to approach the administration to discuss ways to help others who are facing pornography addiction or drug use, but the staff was in denial and insisted that things are not as bad as these two students might believe and there is no need to make it public by introducing Sex Education or counter-drug programs, as time will heal it for Muslims. These students insisted that Islam does not view sexuality as taboo and that proper Sex Education can and should be applied and taught from an Islamic perspective to help youth understand their sexualities. Ismail commented that:

> Just our sexuality in general it could've been addressed in a proper way. Especially in secondary one they weren't any talks about puberty or things like that you know. So Muslim parents would say oh I don't want them learning about that and at the same time they wouldn't teach their children about it [...] For example, if you take a look at the statistics, the top countries that consume pornography are Muslim countries, why? You know, it's because when you don't talk about something important, it starts to be manifested in a non-proper way.

Furthermore, Hanan talked about some hidden problems at her previous Islamic high school. Some students come from dysfunctional families and had serious issues at home. As she came from a public school, she was more vocal against any injustices or wrongdoings. She described how she was outraged by the culture of denial at her Islamic school. She said:

> I told this teacher that one of our friends has drug problems; he just ignored me and said: oh no she is just telling you that to get attention. She is Muslim and Muslims don't have these kinds of problems.

Other students also said that their parents live in a fantasy world and assume that their children are angels that would never deviate from the path they draw for them and would never be troublemakers:

> *Ismail*: I think a lot of parents need a reality check (laugh), really I am sorry for saying that. They are unaware of so many things that are going around and a lot of them think that they can drop their kid in an Islamic school and (say) fix my kid, and by the way I don't want you fix him how you think he should be fixed, I want you to do it how I think he should be fixed.
>
> *Habeeb*: I think parents should be involved as well. At my previous Islamic school, there was only one parent who was helping.

The generational gap is clear between parents who were born and raised in foreign countries and their Canadian children, who are accustomed to Western culture. The culture of denial is also an imported phenomenon from some Muslim countries. Out of shame, many Muslims would hide or ignore problems (i.e. addiction, depression) assuming that they will disappear as time passes by.

Morals and the public school. Living within an Islamic or Western society has a far stronger effect on citizens' values than individual level religious identities (Inglehart & Norris, 2011, p. 4). 50% of my graduate participants, especially those who never attended a non-Islamic school insisted that there are absolutely no morals in public and private secular schools. My understanding is that these youth have a preconceived notion of what is moral and what is not; their judgment of any practice or behaviour is framed by their Muslimness. In other words, when they say or label a practice as immoral, what they really mean is that they see it as un-Islamic because to them, anything that is not permitted by their faith should not be encouraged or adopted because it is not good, ethically speaking.

Furthermore, being at the Islamic school does not mean students would not be negatively influenced or that negative behaviours are non-existent there. Behaviours are like ideas; they can be copied, imitated, or transferred from a place to another. For instance, a few participants (i.e. Zeena, Bashir, Bassem) voiced their opinion against accepting students with behavioural problems and who were dismissed from public schools. Otherwise stated, when students come from some underprivileged public schools, they bring their attitudes, which might influence others who have never been in a non-Islamic institution.

Conversely, those who join the Islamic school during their high school years, and who had serious behavioural issues, might be rehabilitated and learn that doing things at the Islamic school is different from the ways things are done at their previous high school (Zine, 2008; Memon, 2009). For the first time, they will have to, in a school environment, abide by Islamic cultural and religious values.

6.7 Islamic and Canadian Values: Gender equality, Tolerance, and Secularism

According to Inglehart and Norris (2011, p. 18), the main differences between Islamic and Western societies are found in religiosity, gender roles and sexual norms. This does not mean that migrants are constructing a subculture that is entirely separate from mainstream national cultures of Western societies; instead, Muslim migrants living in Western societies are located roughly at the centre of the cultural spectrum, located between Islamic and Western societies. Similarly, Canadian Muslim youth are constructing their own interpretations of Islam (Fortin, LeBlanc & Le Gall, 2008, p. 105), which allows them to adopt what is compatible with their Canadianness and reinterpret what seems contradictory (i.e. homosexuality). They are actively separating the cultural aspect of their religion from what they consider to be the universal values

and principles of Islam in a process, which some view as westernizing Islamic interpretation, and disregarding the cultural practices of their parents (Duderija, 2008, p. 146). In other words, creating a personalized version of Islam is how second and third-generation Muslims might navigate through internal and external tensions related to their religion. Muslims are increasingly identifying themselves with a loving and peaceful version of Islam that is absent in media coverage (Ali, 2012, p. 185). Stated otherwise, these youth redefine, reinterpret, and contextualize Islam in order to make it compatible with their Canadian environment, something that would be reflected in their identities. This process can be described as "the individualization, privatization or Protestanization of Islamic faith and practice" (Duderija, 2008, p. 148). This was reflected in the responses of many of my participants who believed that certain Islamic rulings cannot and should not be applied in the 21st century. Gender equality, tolerance and secularism can illustrate this process. However, they agreed that it was not their Islamic school *per see* that pushed for such reinterpretation of Islam. In fact, it was their own lived experiences in Quebec and their own western identities that allowed for reconciliation between faith and modernity. The school itself does not have an official position on how students redefine their religious identities or how they reinterpret Islam. The school only allows for a preservation of Islamic identity or its attributes (praying, hijab, fasting, etc.).

Gender equality. While discussing gender equality with graduates, I made sure we touched on some controversial Islamic positions that seem discriminating against women (inheritance laws, men's guardianship over women, polygamy, etc.). None of the participants (men and women) rejected these claims or denied the divine origin of these laws. However, they all tried to contextualize their interpretations and understandings of those Islamic rulings, which are viewed as discriminating by many, not being applied. Some graduates asserted that Muslims are cherry picking from the

Quran and each individual adopts what serves his or her personal needs while disregarding the rest,

> *Walaa*: Most people will only go with that argument when it is good for them. If they say we'll apply all the laws of the sharia I'll go for it, but if we only use it when it's good for us (men), it is not equality.
>
> *Zeena*: In inheritance, they forget that in order to do that (men inherit twice as much) women shouldn't spend any money; the money that they earn is for them.
>
> *Sanaa*. Well. For inheritance, I know the reason, so I kind of understand it. Equality is good but to a certain extinct, and we have to see the context also.

Others, like Habeeb, pointed out that these laws are out-dated and were meant for another time and context:

> The Islamic system of inheritance is based on a time when men had to do more than women, that's why they inherited more.

By denying the validity of Islamic law in the 21st century, Habeeb defies religious authority and challenges the notion that the sharia is valid for all times and all places: a belief held by most Muslims.

Tolerance. Graduate participants understood that tolerance is a two-way process between minorities and the majority on the one side, and amongst minorities on the other. As they appreciated being tolerated and recognized as equals in Canada under the protection of the law, they also acknowledged that they should adapt and accept everyone, whether they agree with them or not. Likewise, some of them mentioned that conditions in their countries of origin are far worse for minorities than in the West. So, when asked what were their thoughts about tolerance in a secular society like Quebec, some replied that:

> *Sanaa*: I mean, of course, tolerance is very important. We wanna be tolerated because we are Muslims (laugh) and we wear hijabs. But it doesn't mean we have to agree with everything but we have to respect it. Respect is very important.
>
> *Ahmed*: When we tolerate people, I think it's something important to human beings. In Muslim countries, they judge you and they won't tolerate you.

Graduates' opinions about tolerance fall under the win-win situation. Most participants who voiced their support for tolerance also added that they are for tolerance for everyone because they want to be tolerated by everyone as well. In my view, graduates' appreciation for tolerance is not a value they learned at the Islamic school. The example of Hanan, the Turkish girl who was bullied at school, presented earlier show that her classmates were not tolerant of her non-Arab background. I believe that they learned about tolerance and acceptance when they entered the adult life of college and recognized the need for it in a diverse society.

Secularism. All participants, with no exception, showed great appreciation for Canadian secularism. Some of them draw comparisons between other forms of secularism (i.e. French *laïcité*) and proudly declared that the Canadian version is way more superior to all other forms of secularism. Participants built on their experiences and the freedoms they enjoy in a secular society here compared to autocratic societies either in their countries of origin or the type of secularism enforced by other European states (mainly France) (Oueslati, Labelle & Antonius, 2006, p. 137). When asked what does it mean for you to live in a secular society, here is what some had to say:

> *Hani*: I like it. It permits me to be stricter in my religion; it pushes me to do more research on my religion.
>
> *Saleh*: I think a secular country would work if they allow me to practise my religion.
>
> *Habeeb*: I think to have a lot of cultures that are equal in front of the law is a good thing. I don't think having only one culture and one religion is a good thing.

For these participants, a secular society is a plural, diverse, and multicultural society where everyone is equally respected and equally given the freedom to practice his or her faith or lack thereof. Furthermore, one participant, Ismail, shifted the discussion from the benefits of living in a secular society to emphasizing the positive aspect of the Canadian society. To him, so-called Secular values are not exclusively Western, and secular societies are not free and *de facto* inclusive. To make his point, he gave the example of Stalin Russia and Saudi Arabia:

> I wouldn't credit exactly these things (acceptance, diversity, tolerance, etc.) to the secular society but I would credit them to the Canadian society. Stalin Russia was secular but not good.

As I mentioned in chapter one and two, exploring common grounds between Islamic values and secular virtues should be a central goal of educational programs at Islamic schools (Ahmed, 2012, p. 158; Cook, 1999). By reaching out to other communities, building a shared identity, and teaching Canadian values, Islamic schools can promote living-together in their communities. Additionally, I agree with Zine (2008, p. 316) that Islamic pedagogy must widen its discursive boundaries to include alternative epistemological understandings that provide students with the opportunity to investigate these multiple truth claims on ideological, rational, and empirical grounds. Also, by promoting a common good such as the cultivation of shared values and identities, confessional schools can meet the main demands of modern societies (Beiles, 2012).

6.7 Identities, Religiosities, and Life after the Islamic School

This sections discuses students' experiences after graduating from the Islamic school. I discuss their daily lives in CEGEP, university, or work. I also tackle their religiosities and religion in Quebec.

Entering life. Graduating from high school is a major event for all youth. College, university or any other higher education institution is considered the adult world that students need to face and prepare for before leaving high school. No matter how diverse students' high school is, they will face more diversity, choices, and responsibility once they graduate; they will face adulthood. Identity-wise, graduates of Islamic schools in this study experience a strong sense of religious and national identity after their high school. After experiencing the same culture and being with like-minded students during their adolescence years, now that they exited that friendly environment, they not only have to face more difficult life choices, but also defend their faith that is embodied in their names, skin colour, practices, behaviours, worldviews, and, for some, clothing. Most of them never had to explain the rationale behind wearing a hijab, fasting, and praying. They took everything for granted. In other words, they never had to rationalize rituals so that outsiders can understand the wisdom behind them the way these young Muslims see or believe it. In this lengthy quote, Bassem explains the evolution of his identity from adolescence in high school to adulthood at the university, he said:

> Just recently, after high school basically, I started to have a very strong sense of identity as a Canadian. In the past I thought that it was either Canadian or Muslim, because I thought if culture and religion were mixed it was either one or the other. And I remember going to a workshop here in Montreal with other students my age of high school and the speaker said: can you be Canadian and Muslim just to get us to think. And I remember having trouble answering that. And it was silence all over the room. And I thought no I don't think you can be Canadian and Muslim. And only now that I realize that wow, why did I have trouble answering this. It's not that I said I couldn't be Canadian and Muslim I was just confused a bit and so was everybody you know. If he had said can you be Arab and Muslim or Pakistani and Muslim there would've been a whole uprising you know (laugh), what do you mean, of course, I am Arab and I am Muslim; I am Pakistani and Muslim. If anything this shows just how my ideas of culture and religion were mixed.

Ross (2005) asserts that of all the collective identities in which human beings share and identify with today, national identity is the most fundamental and inclusive. For Ismail, Islam does not erase national identities but, instead, it reframes and Islamizes them to give them a new accepted shape. He insisted that Canadianness as a national identity is compatible with Muslimness. National identity as a collection of kinships and values is (ss stated in chapter three) constantly redefined and renegotiated in light of historically inherited legacies, present needs, and future aspirations (Parekh, 1995, p. 255).

Life in CEGEP. Most French CEGEPs follow a strict interpretation of secularism, or *laïcité*, which infers a complete separation between Church and State. Religious associations are not allowed on a *laïc*, or secular, campus that is supposed to be (religiously) neutral. Not surprisingly, according to all student participants, religion is more accepted and tolerated in English colleges. Those at English colleges were more active and more involved in their Muslim Student Association (MSA) activities than those in French CEGEPs. They were members of the school's newspaper, journalism club, Islamic *shura*, i.e. the delegation that makes important decisions, club, etc.

Students enrolled at Anglophone Colleges are granted a prayer room where they do their daily prayers and attend Friday prayers and sermons. As all of these interviewees were active with their MSA, I asked about the activities they provide on campus; they cited an Islamic Awareness Day once a semester. During this occasion, members engage with other students at their college and explain Islam, prophethood, the Quran, open discussions, and Q & A sessions. They had this to say about those activities:

> *Ismail*: We give out a lot of things. We also present our club and hope that other people can know more about it. For Muslims, there is Friday prayer, we have a room. That's another thing why I am very grateful for our school.
>
> *Idriss*: During awareness day, we give free books, CDs, popcorn, just to tell them about Islam.

> *Zeena*: We have *dawah* (preaching) tables, *halaqas* (study circles), Friday sermons, aid dinners, goodbye dinners. Everyone is welcome; there are no restrictions.

As MSAs are not allowed in French CEGEPs, two students mentioned that they have a cultural association that help them organize some activities (i.e. cultural events, fundraising) and stay connected with one another. Nonetheless, they all mentioned and praised the privileges that their co-religionists enjoy in English colleges. My sense in talking to graduates was that they believed, based on what they considered discriminatory policies, that their Islamic identity is more otherized in francophone CEGEPS. What these students feel and experience could be clarified by looking at (the nature of) religion in Quebec.

Religion in Quebec. According to Meer *et al.* (2016, p. 12), no state can be culturally neutral because all societies have symbolic histories that they employ as a cultural reference while legislating for the country. As all democratic societies tend to legislate for the majority, legislation is never truly neutral (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 63). As a matter of fact, even secularization, which is erroneously regarded in Western societies as a universal process of societal development, is a historical and an ideological process (Aslan & Rausch, 2013, p. 16). For instance, debates around religious signs are, most of the time, framed to normalize the dominant point of view that is employed to measure or interpret how the behaviour of Muslims is judged, understood, and shaped by policy makers and society at large; judging which acts are illegal through the hierarchical positioning of secular versus religious behaviours explains the views about how the veil is seen as a sign of gender inequality (Amiraux, 2016, p. 41).

The Islamic problem or, as Selby and Beaman (2016) call it, the "Muslim Question" is an increasingly referenced notion that portrays Muslims and Muslimness by problematizing their integration within a Western secular public sphere. Quebec is one

of the latest, if not the last, Western countries to secularize its public institutions. For centuries, the Catholic Church kept its firm control on the province's institutions until the Quiet Revolution. For instance, public schooling maintained its confessional status (with Catholic and Protestant educational boards) till the year 2000 when two linguistic boards, English and French, were created, as a result of a long *déconfessionalisation* of public education (Boudreau, 2011). As a result of this history, Quebecers have a unique relationship with religion in general and with Catholicism in particular. It took decades to finally severe the ties with the Church and modernize Quebec society. That said, most francophone Quebecers are sensitive to new manifestations of religion in the public sphere, including in schools, because they revive memories and are looked upon as a return of that dark past. Nonetheless, Bouchard and Taylor (2008, p. 21) point out that even though French-Canadian Quebecers had an unpleasant experience with Catholicism, it would be unjust to project this fear on other religions. Still, whether we like it or not, accept it or not, religion occupies a central part for devout Muslims who see Islam as a way of life, not just as a private personal faith that has to stay hidden (Bullock & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 32).

Most youth, Muslims and non-Muslims, are not literate about Quebec's history with religion and, therefore, do not have a deep and clear understanding of why certain things are the way they are in Quebec. While many scholars (Taylor, 2012; Bouchard & Taylor, 2008; Tremblay, 2009) provide profound analyses of Quebec's relationship with religion and how it affects policies and relationships with the "Other," my participants' first impression was to compare Quebec with the rest of Canada. They complained about how their Islamic religion is approached in French vis-à-vis English CEGEPs:

> *Idriss*: So the message it sends is that Quebec is not very accepting of Muslims while English Canada is more accepting by giving these accommodations (prayer rooms, MSAs, etc.). A lot of my friends say they don't feel "*appartenance*" (a sense of belonging) to Quebec. And to a sense that's what I also feel. It feels that Canada is more accepting vis-à-vis Quebec, you know.

> *Bassem*: You don't want any religion to be shown? If I follow that logic, so you don't want to see hijabs at the CEGEP, you don't want to see Muslim names, how far can we go?

Graduates of the Islamic School insisted that any college or university should be able to respond to this essential need of their Muslim students. They mentioned that it is not a matter of money or rooms as most colleges, including francophone CEGEPs, give funds and space to many other clubs, but at the same time refuse to grant Muslim students a room to pray and perform Friday prayer and sermon. While Quebec intercultural model is viewed as a means of distinguishing Quebec from English Canada by securing a unique and coherent francophone culture and identity, narratives of Quebecois identity are included in educational programs in order to involve all youth in this intercultural exchange (DesRoches, 2014). It is pushing for a Quebecer "citizenship" that equates being a citizen with integrating into the Francophone minority national culture. In other words, Quebec is connecting the line between citizenship and integration through strengthening its politics of a distinguished form of citizenship.[50] But the challenge to this policy centers on Quebec's version of secularism and its historical relationship with Catholicism that is affecting Muslim youth belongingness to their nation. Which brings us to graduates' religiosities.

Graduates' religiosities. The vast majority of my participants can be considered devout and practising Muslims as they pray five times a day, fast Ramadan, and insist that Islam occupies a central part of their life. Let us not forget that these schools are where some Imams send their children. Similar to identities, religiosities are not static and fixed states of mind or practice; they change and fluctuate according to individuals' circumstances and religious events. For instance, believers tend to get close to their religion in times of hardship and calamities. Likewise, devout Muslims become more

[50] See chapter three for a more detailed discussion on interculturalism and multiculturalism.

religious during the time of Ramadan. Besides the five daily obligatory prayers, all participants mentioned that they pray the *taraweeh*, or night prayers during the month of Ramadan, read the Quran daily, and attend religious study circles in the mosque.

In their book *Growing Up Canadian*, Beyer and Ramji (2013) used a scale from 1 to 10 to categorize their participants' religiosities, one being non-religious at all and ten very devout in terms of practice and belief. Adopting the same scale, with the exception of one female participant who is not religious, all my participants fall within the higher range of religiosity, from 7 to 10 in terms of their religious practices and beliefs. The ones with the lowest religiosities do follow basic religious commands such as fasting and praying five times a day, but they often do not pray on time or do not engage in other non-mandatory rituals (fasting other days during the year, non-mandatory prayers, etc.).

Conclusion

This chapter presented the main topics and the central themes that stood out from the data extracted from interviews with graduate participants. The major points discussed included their perspectives about their experience with the Islamic school, post-secondary interactions with classmates and coworkers, questions of belonging and citizenship, aspirations about Muslimness in Quebec and Canada, and issues of religiosity and religious identity. Results partially reflect findings of other research studies on Muslim's belongingness, identity, and civic participation in Quebec and Canada (Oueslati, Labelle & Antonius, 2006; Antonius, 2008; etc.). Interestingly, graduates' Islamic schooling experience, while clearly manifested in their high religiosity compared to other Muslim youth at non-Islamic schools, did not directly affect their sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada. However, their Islamic schooling did make them very proud of their distinct Islamic identity.

Furthermore, the various negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Quebec also affect young Montreal Muslims' integration. Many non-Muslims often perceive Islam as an isolationist religion that restricts its followers' freedoms and liberties (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 124). Muslim youth in my study felt that their identity is rendered problematic in Quebec society by the media and certain politicians. This 'problematization' is an increasingly referenced notion that portrays Islamic identity and Islam as barriers to integration into the Western secular public sphere (Selby & Beaman, 2016). Muslim youth are in the midst of a reality they did not create and did not want to be a part of. The adoption of Jackson's interpretive approach allowed me to investigate the ways my participants perceived this reality and to see what identity and belonging meant through the eyes of my participants. I looked at their sense of belongingness and identity, based on their own perspectives of their lived experience. In other words, this approach allowed me to privilege the views of these 'racialized' and 'ethnicized' individuals in matters of Muslimness, Quebecness, and Canadianness.

Most of the graduates are aware that their religious and cultural rights are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 and the Canadian Multicultural Act of 1985. Almost all of them (seventeen out of eighteen) acknowledged their belongingness to Quebec, and internalized their Quebecois identity. Only one graduate denied his Canadianness. All others stated that they see the same form of pluralism and diversity in Quebec and the rest of Canada. By the same token, they all considered Quebec a "multicultural province," therefore not distinguishing between Quebec interculturalism and Canadian multiculturalism, and not realizing that the term 'multiculturalism' has never been cherished in Quebec, neither by its latest successive governments nor by many of its francophone majority. To them, multiculturalism simply meant bilingualism, diversity, and cohesion between the communities living here – something they profoundly appreciated. Additionally, most participants considered

Quebec (the only francophone province in Canada) a bilingual and multicultural province.[51] The realities these youth are living also tell them that Montreal, where most lived, and by extension Quebec is a bilingual and multicultural province. Furthermore, graduates are proud of their Canadianness; they resisted being otherized and denied their Canadianness and Quebecness. Most of them indicated repeatedly that they are not immigrants – they were born here, insisting on being recognized as natives and as equals, not merely tolerated.

The nature of what Canadianness, Quebecness, and Muslimness means – as categories of being and belonging – is greatly influenced by the socio-political climate of society. However, belongingness of Muslims is not a static state of mind, but it changes and fluctuates based on local (e.g. Quebec Charter of Values; Quebec mosque shooting), national (e.g. Islamophobia, terrorism), and international (e.g. war on terror, ISIS, Trump's ban on Muslims) events. Citizens' belongingness to their country is also articulated through their civic participation and belief in the common good and common values of their co-citizens. This belongingness is also recognized by the feeling of being accepted and acknowledged by society. In other words, vulnerable members of society may doubt their status as full citizens if they experience discrimination based on their race, colour, or religion (i.e. lack of social acceptance, economic injustice, systemic racism). Marginalization and racism, real or imagined, can weaken their trust in the promises of 'living together' promoted by their governments (Ali, 2012, p. 40). While some of them complained about being racialized, they seemed to engage in the same type of behaviour when they were talking about other Quebecers, i.e. in terms of a homogenous category (Antonius, 2008). Noteworthy is the fact that all graduates embraced fluid and hybrid identities, and resisted sectarian categorizations. They identified with the collective culture of Canada and Quebec, which offers them a strong sense of belonging regardless of their immigrant history. Stated otherwise, immigrant

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

minorities can share many of the main tenets of the host culture and develop a sense of 'nativeness' similar to long established communities.

Furthermore, most young participants, aged 18 to 22, agreed that the Islamic school did not prepare them to face the challenges of diversity in their society. In addition, eight students out of eighteen insisted that their "academic training" at the Islamic school was not sufficient to make them successful in their first year of CEGEP. They complained about the change of teachers during the school year, the "laziness" of some teachers, and the authoritative way some of them apply in their classrooms. At the other side of the spectrum, even though most graduates agreed that the Islamic school does not automatically boost religiosity and religious practice, they all revealed that the school's environment had a great impact on their personalities in a way that shaped who they are. Moreover, they all considered the public school to be very different from their Islamic school, mainly in terms of moral norms and principles. Those who attended both systems built on their experiences to pinpoint differences and similarities. Others compared themselves to other Muslim youth who resemble them in terms of religion, culture, ethnicity, etc. and who are solely the product of the public school. While fourteen participants denied that the public school offers better academic instructions, all participants stated that in terms of moral norms and principles, conserving one's religion, and practising the faith, the public school might not be the perfect place for nurturing Muslims' religious identities.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore, and in exploring to describe and to shed light onto the impact of Islamic schooling on Muslim youth's identities and sense of belonging in Montreal. It was first motivated by my experience as a previous teacher who taught Islamic studies and Arabic in two Islamic schools for four years. My main research question directly tackled Muslim youth identities and their sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada in an educational – Islamic school – environment of like-minded students who share the same religion, faith, and, to some extent, culture. Throughout the study, I attempted to convey the influence of Islamic schooling on Montreal Muslim youth's sense of Canadianness, Quebecness, Muslimness, and their sense of belonging to their religion and to their countries of origin. The goal of the study was to paint a portrait of students who attended Montreal Islamic schools and, in doing so, to give readers a glimpse of how such schooling attempts to reconcile religious and cultural values with academic competencies on the one hand, and Islamic values with Secular values on the other hand, and how this shapes those students' Canadian Islamic identities.

To shed light on the rich, complex, and unique experiences of being a Muslim youth in Montreal's Islamic schools, I investigated Islamic identities based on participants' educational trajectories, societal experiences, and their personal perspectives (Jackson, 2004, 2011). As I mentioned in chapters four and seven, the adoption of Jackson's (2011) interpretive approach allowed me to investigate my participants' reality and to see identity and belonging through their eyes. In other words, this approach permitted me to privilege the views of these 'racialized' and 'ethnicized' individuals with regards to their Muslimness, Quebecness, and Canadianness. Jackson (2011, p. 190) asserts that

his approach neither privileges the individual nor the religion, but it emphasizes the deep relationship between the two, without neglecting the impact of external factors on the religion and on the individual.

Thus, my findings suggest that, most Muslim youth who attended Islamic schools in Montreal have positive views towards being Canadian and Quebecois. Although these feelings are often tempered by a sense of estrangement and exclusion, they felt proud of being Canadian, valued the country they live in, and perceived the positive and welcoming image of Canada in their daily lives. In addition, these youth are fully aware of the rights they 'enjoy' as Canadian citizens compared to what they could have had if their parents had not made the journey to come here. None of my participants plan to or dream of returning and living in their parents' countries of origin. However, they do hope Islamic identity, and Islam, becomes normalized in Canada and Quebec so they do not feel estranged anymore.

Even though Islamic schools in this study show, to an extent, a commitment to an integrated Islamic education, they seem to be primarily focusing on learning (*ta'lim*), or transmitting knowledge and skills (i.e. Qur'an memorization, prayers), and focusing to a lesser degree on other components (i.e. mastering the sciences of Islam, Islamic theology, etc.). These are definitely not madrasas that will train religious scholars. Nor do they serve as incubators of religious indoctrination or extremism. Whereas Islamic educational institutions are making a notable effort to create an environment that fosters an Islam-friendly culture, they also struggle to create an environment that is relevant to the lives of their students in secular, pluralistic societies. Additionally, these schools need to work together to define a unified social, religious, and educational role for themselves (Elbih, 2010). They usually work independently with no common plan or vision for the future.

This being said, at the heart of this research lies participants' personal narrative, the goal being to unearth how Muslim youth understand their daily-lived experiences as Quebecois and Canadians, and whether their education in Islamic schools has shaped the way they see themselves and interact with others around them. While some scholars have shared more positive accounts of Muslim students in public schools (Niyozov, 2010; Sirin & Fine, 2008), others argue that Islamic schools provide a space for an Islamic identity to flourish and grow (Zine, 2004, 2008; Memon, 2009, 2012). Since schools are spaces where youth mindsets are shaped, the way Islam is taught and approached there affects Muslim students' identities and sense of belonging to their societies. Parents' awareness of this reality guides their choice of school for their children. Furthermore, some of the push factors for establishing Islamic schools are not central to stakeholders' Islam, but are driven by the negative and biased perceptions of Islam, the neglect of certain cultural and religious sensitivities (i.e. diet, Islamic dress, prayer, fasting, etc.), unfounded or prejudiced religious education (Memon, 2009, 2012, Zine, 2008; McAndrew, 2010; Blumenfeld, 2006a, 2006b), and exposure to non-Islamic behaviours and practices in public and private secular schools (Berglund, 2014). In this Chapter, I will lay out the three major findings of this research, present a few limitations of the study, and suggest areas for future research.

Main Findings of this Study

What is the influence of Islamic schooling in Montreal on students' identities and sense of belonging? was the main question of this research. I looked at the impact of such schooling on students' ethnic, cultural, religious, and national identities, their religiosities, and their sense of citizenship as Muslims, Quebecers, and Canadians. This central question revolved around examining the influence of instructions, curricula, and Montreal Islamic schools' environment on students' identities and sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada. I investigated the various challenges students faced when they

graduated from Islamic schools, and looked at these issues from various perspectives. In examining this principal question, my research has arrived at three key findings.

The first key finding relates to issues of belonging and immigrant identities: participants appreciated Canadian multiculturalism and had a positive sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada. The vast majority of them valued secularism, diversity, tolerance, and other Canadian and Quebecois values. Nonetheless, they did not believe in compromising their faith for the sake of their national identity.

The second key finding relates to religion in public schools: many of the challenges Western Muslim youth face today are related to their immigrant status and their (self) identification (real or assumed) with a suspect religion: Islam. These youth have to reconstruct their own identities (different from their parents' ethno-religious identity), thereby re-interpreting Islam in a new sociocultural context to deal with belongingness issues outside of their home and their Islamic schools; furthermore, Muslims take note of how their religion is being approached in public schools.

And the third key finding relates to the appreciation of Islamic schooling: there is a great appreciation for the Islamic school from all participants. Graduates and stakeholders consider this religious institution a second home that embodies and transmits their values and customs, in spite of some of the shortcomings (e.g. financial, organizational), a number of them were able to identify and relate to the school. In what follow, I will deconstruct each one of these findings and contextualise it with other similar studies in Quebec and Canada.

Belonging to Canada and Quebec and Identifying with Common Values

My first major finding relates to Muslims' sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada. Most Graduates and stakeholders in this study did not see, were not aware, and did not know the differences between Canadian multiculturalism and Quebecois interculturalism. To them, mentioning multiculturalism meant referring to plural systems that did not suppress their religious and cultural identities, and that allowed them to flourish and develop a positive sense of belonging to Quebec and/or Canada. So, when they stated that they are happy and satisfied with the multicultural climate of Quebec, they meant to show their appreciation of the diversity and pluralism of the province.

In terms of accepting and adopting Canadian values, the vast majority of graduates believed that Canadian values are Islamic values as well, saw no divergence between the two systems of values, or found an Islamic interpretation that allowed them to embody their Canadianness and Quebecness while keeping to their Muslimness, which echoes the results of Tremblay's (2012) study on citizenship and religious schools in Montreal. Many of them found ways to stay true to their religion and culture while feeling fully Quebecois and Canadian. In agreement with Ali's (2012, p. 151) findings, my participants' Islamic identities flourish through friendships with other Muslims, involvement in ethnic cultural activities, and through maintaining various religious rituals and beliefs (regardless of school or social pressures). Even though Muslim youth agree that Canadian multiculturalism is not being put into practice properly, they are supportive of it (Beyer, 2013, p. 14). My data supports this picture. My participants felt comfortable about their Canadianness to the extent of refusing to adopt an exclusive Quebecois identity. However, I did have one participant whose perceptions and positions were quite different from other participants. Though he appreciated Canadian multiculturalism and the empowerment he is receiving as a Canadian national, he was

openly homophobic and "Shia-phobic." This motivated me to explore more deeply the motives of this young man's positions, as these are not directly taught in Montreal Islamic Schools where students (at least in my sample) are more tolerant on these issues. One explanation would be that the inculcation of these views originates from his family, as he comes from a very conservative and traditional household. His father is an Imam who adheres to strict and literalist interpretations of the religion and his mother is an Islamic studies teacher.[52]

Similar to other studies (see Triki-Yamani & McAndrew, 2009; Oueslati, Labelle, & Antonius, 2006; Tremblay, 2012) about Muslim youth in Quebec, participants from North African and Middle Eastern origin in this study seem to befriend one another. Most of them do not socialize or make friends with individuals who belong to the Quebecois majority. They have a tendency to mingle with and befriend other minority groups, either Muslims or other visible minorities. For example, Moroccan students' close friends are often from Algerian and Tunisian descent. This may be explained by their common language, customs, and cultural interests. Further, my graduate participants were more attached to Canada than to Quebec (except one male participant who denied his Canadianness and insisted on being exclusively Quebecois). This conclusion is echoed in the study of Triki-Yamani and McAndrew (2009, p. 85) whose participants from Quebec affirmed being more attached to Canada than to Quebec. This surprised the researchers because 75% of these students' parents are North Africans who adhere to the francophone culture.[53] In the same study, only four (20%) out of twenty interviewees declared being attached to Quebec, ten (50%) to Canada, and six (30%) to their countries of origin. While Muslim students tend to make efforts to integrate and learn about Quebec culture, they insist on keeping their cultural and religious identities (Triki-Yamani & McAndrew, 2009, p. 9). Inversely, participants in my study were more

[52] Another explanation might be a social circle outside of the Islamic school or the Internet.

[53] Because of French colonialism in North Africa, most North Africans in Quebec speak French fluently and are more familiar and accustomed to the Francophone culture.

attached to Canada than to their countries of origin. For instance, they labelled themselves as being Canadian or Quebecois from a Moroccan, Tunisian, or Egyptian descent. None of them, however, identified exclusively with his or her country of origin. In spite of not identifying exclusively with Quebec culture, none of my participants questioned Quebec's culture or the status and the primacy of the French language in the province. The same observation is echoed in Essid's (2015, p. 173) about identity construction in an Islamic school in Montreal.

Moreover, although identity can be understood in sociological or psychological terms, questions about the existence of a community-based or a nation-based identity are more directly political, and reveal, for instance, that most Muslims in Quebec do not see themselves exclusively as members of a Quebecois nation, but rather as members of both the overlapping Canadian and Quebecois nations. According to Oueslati, Labelle, and Antonius (2006), Quebecois Muslims' choice to identify as Canadians, and not Quebecers, lies in the politicization of Canadian identity and citizenship in Quebec. Oueslati *et al.* (2006) argue that the choice of Canadian identity amongst Muslim youth is used as a "defense mechanism" in front of 'old stock' Quebecers. In the case of my participants, it seemed that they opted for the larger (Canadian) umbrella, preferring to be a part of the greater, more inclusive Canadian community, mainly because they transcended this political dichotomy and believed that "you cannot be Quebecois without being Canadian" as one participant put it. Ultimately, I argue that the dynamic and complex character of identity construction is one in which Muslim youth are best understood as attempting to 'build' or 'construct' a sense of identity that combines Islamic and Quebecer 'ingredients'. Any attempt to understand this (political) identity construction process should not disregard the correlation between national identity, belonging, and citizens' immigrant histories.

Preserving an Identity. A significant body of research on Muslim youth in the West

focuses on the experience of negotiating their hybrid and, sometimes, conflicting identities. Discussions on identity are often framed by concepts such as fluid identities (Giampapa, 2011), hyphenated identities (Sirin & Fine, 2008), national identities (Parekh, 1995; Taylor & Gutmann, 1992), and domesticated identities. In multicultural societies, social identity is the outcome of the individual's lived experiences in his or her society (Verkuyten, 2005, p. 42). Nonetheless, Modood (2013) asserts that the increasing numbers of Muslims in the West and tensions that surround their presence fuelled harsh criticism of the multiculturalism that allowed for Muslim identities and cultures to flourish in the West. Western Muslims struggle to reconcile their national, religious, and cultural identities. Such reconciliation becomes more urgent and significant as many Western nations are engaged in conflict with some Muslim countries (Modood, 2013).

Whereas first generation Muslims in the West have to operate in a minority context with a minority culture that is surrounded by a dominant narrative, something they were not accustomed to in their countries of origin (Duderija, 2008, p. 145), second-generation Muslims do not inherit a well-defined Islamic identity with clear social and cultural boundaries. They do not reproduce the "ethno-religious identity" of their parents but have to reconstruct their own, "thereby re-evaluating Islam in a new sociocultural context" (Duderija, 2008, p. 146). That being said, Islamic schools represented in this study do not seem to contribute to this re-construction and re-evaluation of Islam. Their role is limited, at least partially, by the transmission of the traditional inherited and imported Islamic identity of the parents. My participants developed coping strategies (i.e. adopting a flexible interpretation of Islam) to deal with belongingness issues in their society outside of their Islamic schools.

At the other side of the spectrum, Western identity politics and public debates frame Muslims' ways of life as threatening to their culture and society; they usually attach to

them a notion of danger and threat to social cohesion and incompatibility with social order (Lépinard, 2011, p. 201; Bakali, 2015, p. 79). Unsurprisingly, my informants echoed this reality when discussing Islamophobia, anti-Muslim prejudice, and the Quebec Charter of Values. For many Westerners, the image of the hijab, for instance, conjures up images of dangers and of what should be feared and never imitated or appreciated in the West (Amiraux, 2016, p. 43). It is also perceived as a sign of gender inequality (i.e. inheritance), subordination of women (men's guardianship oven women), loyalty to Islam, and isolation from secular ways of life (Ali, 2012, p. 90). Such identity politics does not facilitate Muslim's integration into Quebec society; instead, it 'otherizes' them and problematizes their ways of life. Banning the hijab in Quebec would result in the exclusion of a part of Muslim identity from the public sphere. It will *de facto* result in greater marginalization of veiled Muslim women who are already facing many difficulties in Quebec. It would ultimately affect a number of Muslim youth's integration into mainstream society. As mentioned in chapter seven, one parent decided not to enrol his daughter in a college after hearing rumours that it is not hijab-friendly. Furthermore, the 2013 proposal for a Charter of Values in Quebec had greater impact on *hijabi* women, as many stated not feeling safe leaving their homes alone as a result of increased harassment in the aftermath of the proposed charter (Bakali, 2015, p. 106). Outlawing the veil would confirm the claim of radicals and extremist groups that the West is somehow at war with Muslims and Islam, and that Muslimness is somehow incompatible with Western culture. It would also validate the claim that (more religious) Muslims, who are permanent immigrants, could never be part of the mainstream society.

Immigrant and second-generation youth. Recent immigrants have another homeland, which for later generations becomes an imagined legacy and an inherited heritage. This imagined homeland is important, in different ways, for second and third generation immigrants because it represents a dimension of their "self-understanding, self-

definition, self-presentation, and their location in the world" (Verkuyten, 2005, p. 116). Given their multiple identities as youth, immigrants, and Muslims, my young participants face hard choices because of who they are and where they come from. The status of those who are Muslim youth of colour has often been problematic. They invariably encounter difficulties as they grow into adulthood with growing feelings and sense of "outsiderness" linked to their (real or assumed) association with a religion that is marginalized, misunderstood, and seen as linked to terrorism and backwardness (Tindongan, 2011, p. 73).

Non-Muslim Canadian youth from non-immigrant backgrounds do not face the same challenges; in a study about belongingness to Canada, over 60 per cent of them tended to adhere to national identity, which they presented with more passion and confidence than those from immigrant descent (Lee & Hébert, 2006, p. 512). As their citizenship has been passed on through the generations, it is relatively normal for non-immigrant youth to feel at home[54] and identify with the national narrative. With ancestral origins in French, British or European countries, it is easy for them to be part of Canada and/or Quebec, given their invisibility, religion, culture, and long settlement, all of which fall within the mainstream.

That said, the voices of Muslim youth in my study reveal that, in practice, the diversity of Montreal's Islamic school, Muslim youth's ethnocultural identities, their high religiosity, and their adoption of hybrid identities do not, in general, diminish their sense of national association with Canada and/or Quebec. The same result is echoed in the study of Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking (2011), and Lee and Hébert (2006, p. 517). As I showed throughout chapter seven, a number of my participants experience more convergence with Quebec and Canadian culture: they speak the language, participate

[54] It is worth noting that, despite being here before the settlers, indigenous people do not enjoy this privilege of feeling at ease with national identity. Their experience is not so comfortable in the Canadian Nation. In fact, we can argue that their situation is worse than that of immigrants.

and socialize in society, seek positive integration, and campaign to defend their rights. However, this does not necessarily negate the potential influence national and global events may have on them (i.e. Quebec Charter of Values, 9/11, terrorist attacks in Canada or abroad, violent radicalization, ISIS, etc.).

Nonetheless, theories of cultural integration suggest that immigrants, despite the kind of schooling they receive, gradually absorb the values and norms that predominate in their host society, especially on an intergenerational basis (Taylor, 2012). By contrast, theories of divergence suggest that distinctive social values and norms are enduring and deep-rooted within each nation, shaped by collective histories, common languages, and religious traditions, so that immigrants are unlikely to abandon their cultural roots when they settle in another country (Inglehart & Norris, 2011, p. 3).

By the same token, second generation Muslims in my study, while keeping to their Islamic values and culture, are gradually absorbing Quebecois and Canadian values. All of them value diversity, tolerance, and secularism, as long as these values do not come at the expense of them losing their religion. I would argue that this would be the norm in a postmodern multicultural society where most individuals adopt hybrid identities as a personal choice and do not believe in a static form of identity. Heidegger (quoted in Selcer, 2003) asserts that identity does not refer to an empty uniformity stripped of difference; it is the richness of real determinations and compatibility without conflict. In other words, it is not the negative concept of the absence of all difference that makes us unique, but it is the idea of unifying what is different based on commonalities with one's personal identity (*ibid.*). The formation of authentic personal identity requires the person to adopt the identity she or he thinks fit her or his inner needs (Webster, 2005). According to Lee and Hébert (2006),

> "Social, cultural, and global affiliations refer to how citizens may define themselves in terms of their feelings with regards to social and cultural belonging within a society, as

> well as cosmopolitan belonging, according to demographic, geographic, social, or cultural attachments and demands for recognition flowing from this diversity" (p. 500).

Thus, we should be more attentive to the complexities of identity formation as it is experienced by Muslim youth. This is especially true as young Muslims seek to construct identities as Canadian/Quebecer often face resistance from the various external social forces that promote the 'otherization' of Muslims and Islam. Young Muslim participants in this study have complex and sometimes diverging attitudes and feelings. However, I think that in this respect they are probably not all that different from other non-Muslim youth. Most Quebecers, including most Muslim Quebecers, experience their identities in ways that cannot be categorized in a single uniform definition. They fall on different points of a spectrum. But, the important thing is that all the Muslim participants have some attachment to Canada and/or Quebec. Moreover, they do not believe that their Muslimness is, or should be incompatible with their Quebecness and/or Canadianness.

At the same time, because of tensions related to Islam and Muslims, they have to negotiate their place in society and in a socio-politico-cultural climate that makes it hard for them to embrace a clear sense of belonging and citizenry. This negotiation gets difficult when these youth feel and experience the two opposite poles of the 'right' and the 'left.' Those on the right may exaggerate the religious/faith aspect, while neglecting the ways in which Muslim youth are seeking to reconcile their faith with values of Canadian and Quebec citizenship, and to forge a sense of social membership and belonging. Those on the left may overemphasize the determining forces of Islamophobia and racism, with (perhaps ironically) a similar result: emphasizing the ways in which external/communal/social forces exclude and marginalize Muslim youth can, if overemphasized, also work to foreclose potential pathways by which a sense of membership and citizenship might be forged. The main lesson of this point, I argue, is that an understanding of the complex and dynamic forces of identity construction can help us avoid both 'exclusionary' alternatives, and understand the challenges that Muslim youth face while trying to reconcile different elements of their emerging and evolving identity:

Muslim, Canadian, Quebecois, etc. Stated otherwise, we need to consider seriously the evolving and hybridized nature of identity in modern pluralist societies, and the 'anatomy' of the complexities and dynamics of the (lived experience) processes of identity construction. The advantage of this perspective is that it provides a more realistic picture of the lived experience of Muslim youth and, helps educators and policy makers to make sense of this experience within the framework of intercultural and multicultural citizenship that guides and structures educational policy in Quebec and Canada.

Religion in Public Schools

My second key finding relates to my participants views regarding the public school as one of the push factors in the creation of, and enrolment in, Islamic schools. Under the premise of secularism, public schools do not, and are not supposed to allow for the transmission of one specific religious identity. Some devout Muslim parents see this as a threat to their children's religiosity and Islamic identity. Parents' religiosity affects the educational choice they make for their children, a choice that also affects their children's identity and sense of belonging to their society. Most parents who turn to Islamic schools are devout or conservative parents who are looking for a specialized form of education that responds to their religious, cultural, and academic needs. They request a friendly milieu that is not hostile to their children's immigrant, cultural, and religious identities (Ali, 2012). Stakeholders in my study insisted that attending public schools for Muslim youth might pose numerous challenges that require either confrontation or compromise. The social environment and demographics in public schools affect what is considered and accepted as normal. In this sense, Muslim students' values do not always fit the norm from the perspective of their peers and teachers (i.e. hijab, prayers, fasting, religious diet). Other disagreements related to several behaviours (i.e. dating, clubbing) can also occur.

My participants stressed that their religion is not, and will not, in the near future, be appreciated in a secular educational environment. Many studies (McAndrew, 2010; Memon, 2009, 2012; Zine, 2004, 2008, Helly, 2008; McAndrew, Helly & Oueslati, 2006; Ali, 2012) show that, even though religion is not openly condemned in Western democratic secular societies, secular marginalization is a cultural phenomenon in which religion is ignored or labelled as a boring subject. There is a debate regarding the representation of the history, culture, religion, and contributions of Muslims and other minorities in states' curricula (Niyozov, 2010). Some of the arguments which have been raised about the public school system revolve around religious accommodations in schools (religious holidays, prayers, halal food, etc.), exclusion from the administrative sphere of the school, and incompatibility of the school's culture with the home values (Essid, 2015, p. 63.).

My participants, who considered the Christian and Euro-centric approaches in Montreal public school a threat to their Islamic identities, repeatedly echoed these same sentiments. Therefore, while, there is a need for a religious space within the mainstream education system in Quebec, an Islamic education system that minimizes the impact of alienation and isolation of Muslim students was the choice for stakeholders and shareholders in this study. Other Muslim parents are left with multiple choices and ways of responding: militant Muslims might employ this charge to call for a boycott of public schooling altogether and to urge for isolationist strategies. The majority of Muslims would, however, negotiate for a more plural and open approach in public schools curricula as a possible solution for greater inclusion (Niyozov, 2010). For instance, shareholders in my study, who also sent their children to non-Islamic schools, insisted that they made sure beforehand that the new environment was Islam-friendly, permitted hijabs and prayers in their schools.

Nevertheless, other Muslims have positive opinions about their experiences in public schools. Mariam, an interviewee in a study (Ali, 2012) about Muslim girls in public schools in Toronto, asserted that the secular nature of her public school allowed her to take her religion at her own pace. She preferred this to being in an environment where certain religious values were non-negotiable, such as in a segregated schooling environment where all the girls have to wear the hijab (Ali, 2012, p. 184). My data is partially in agreement with Ali's study. While the few participants in my study who attended elementary public schooling had a great appreciation for such experience, they were also thankful for their Islamic school experience. In terms of practicing religion in Islamic schools, whereas one of my participants was annoyed by the strict enforcement of religious practice in their school, most of the participants in my study seemingly agreed with the fast-paced religious practice in their Islamic schools.

Contrariwise, while most public schools encourage students to think critically, to express their views, to question their ideas and concepts, and to engage in debates, Islamic education classes, as found in some mosques and centres, promote the exact opposite. Students in these classes are taught to be good listeners, obedient learners, and respectful of what they are told without critical thinking. Such an approach drives young Muslims to develop a double personality (Zine, 2008), where they are able to express themselves on every subject with non-Muslims, but become passive when it comes to speaking about Islam or interacting with their Islamic studies teachers (Ramadan, 2004, cited in Ali, 2012, p. 24). Whereas graduates in my study did not appreciate the lack of critical thinking in their Islamic schools, parents seemed happy that these schools are producing 'polite' students that do not harshly question their home culture and values.

Appreciating the Islamic School

The third key finding relates to the positive image of the Islamic school. All teachers in

my study appreciated working at the Islamic school and contributing to the transmission of an Islamic culture that cannot survive by itself in an ocean of social and cultural relativism. These teachers expressed sincere concerns about their school's project and showed empathy for the well-being of their students. In addition to the deep interest in their students' religious and cultural roots, they cared about their academic and professional success in life as well. Similar to Ali's (2012, p. 192) study, teachers in my study cherished integrating Islam with the school's daily routine and being allowed to pray and practise their religion alongside their students. This is not the case in public schools, where minority religious and spiritual aspects are relegated to particular times and places, if not eliminated altogether (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 94). However, a few teachers insisted on emphasizing the heterogeneous quality of instruction found in Islamic schools. For instance, one male teacher, Idar, who taught in two Islamic schools in Montreal, mentioned that his previous Islamic school does not meet the ministry's pedagogical standards and should have its permit revoked. This teacher decided to leave the school after witnessing unethical, un-pedagogical, and unprofessional behaviours towards teachers and students.

Furthermore, teachers in my study believe that graduates of Islamic schools are more devout and religious than others who attended secular schools. One reason behind the high religiosity of Islamic schools' students may also lie in their conservative families who chose the Islamic school in the first place. Another reason is the habit they built by practising religions in their school; whereas in public schools, where the environment is not religious, high religiosity and practice of rituals are not the norm for Muslim youth. In their study of College Muslim youth, Triki-Yamani and McAndrew (2009) concluded that Muslim students who studied at Quebec schools did not embody intense religiosities while in CEGEP. As for all graduates in my study, they observe minimally the basic obligations of the Islamic religion. All of them pray five times a day, fast during the month of Ramadan; and most of them (15 out of 18) engage in other non-

obligatory rituals such as performing extra non-mandatory prayers and fasting on other days throughout the year.

Consequently, I would argue that it is not the Islamic school *per see* that intensifies religiosity or ritual practices, but the Islam-friendly environment at the school that allows and requires this religiosity to grow and flourish. One principal, Hamid, whose Islamic high school obliges female students to wear the veil while at school insisted that the veil has nothing to do with religiosity but it is just a "piece of cloth;"[55] even in their dress code, they insisted on calling it a veil and not a hijab. Employing the term veil detaches, from this principal's perspective, the religious connotation from it and treats it like any other form of clothing mentioned in private schools' dress codes (i.e. ties, skirts, blue shirts). Nonetheless, wearing a veil at school is intended to build the habit and normalize the act for some females who will eventually adopt it outside the school and become full-time *hijabis*.

The Islamic School as a Second Home. Visibility, be it religious or cultural, presupposes the possibility of being allowed a voice in the public sphere. To access places of visibility one must also be able to make a place for oneself on public and political stages; people must participate in their society to be evaluated by others and be recognized (Amiraux, 2016, p. 44). The Islamic school and "home" were two concepts that went hand in hand in discussions with the Muslim youth in my study. These schools are seen as safe spaces for Muslims with strong religious and cultural identities. Graduates appreciated the fact that being Muslim was the norm at their Islamic school. *Hijabi* females especially loved the hijab-friendly environment, which they saw as a space where their veil was the norm and not the exception.

On the other hand, some Muslim leaders in Quebec are becoming increasingly aware

[55] The exact term used by the principal was "morceau de vêtement".

that there should be a compromise between Islam and secular values. They are realizing that it is unreasonable for Muslim youth born and raised in the West to develop an Islamic identity that is detached from western and secular values. This new Islamic identity must be shaped in accordance with the ingredients of Quebec and Canadian society, and must exist, at least partially, in harmony with local values. In other words, Quebecois Muslim youth are not obliged to adopt every single value in Quebec, but in order to be a part of the mainstream society they should adopt and internalize common values (i.e. secularism, equality, diversity). Additionally, allowing Islam to properly flourish will make it easier for Muslim youth to construct an identity that makes them Muslim Quebecois, rather than Muslims in Quebec, and will produce a in the full sense of the term (Timani, 2015, p. 15). Quebecois Islam, while it would not be detached from traditional Islam, would develop in Quebec, by Quebecers, and in accordance to Quebecois culture.

It all starts at home. Most stakeholders in this study see the Islamic school as an institution friendly to their culture. They do not completely depend on it to morally educate their children; instead, they appreciate the school's Islamic culture for not directly and openly contradicting their home culture. They send their children there for, as one participant puts it, "that special touch of Qur'an, Arabic, and Islamic studies." Some practising parents confessed to being aware that the school does not teach their children to be religious, but that it allows for a continuation of what they are teaching them at home (praying, fasting, Islamic values, etc.). Put differently, forming an Islamic identity starts at home with the parents inculcating a sense of Muslimness in their children. When these children reach school age, parents who are concerned with preserving the home culture look for educational institutions that adopt similar moral and religious viewpoints. Islamic identities we see and experience in Islamic schools are not, I would argue, solely a product of these schools. They were born and flourished first at home. The school only allows them to thrive alongside other like-minded Muslim

identities, which is unlikely[56] to happen in a public or a private secular school.

Why the Islamic school? Muslims' choice of Islamic schools should be studied in the broader context of the educational choices available to them. Many researchers have looked at Muslim students and Islam in Canadian, and specifically Quebec public schools. Their studies help us explain and understand the role some of these schools play in pushing devout Muslim parents to opt for Islamic schools by confirming certain negative views they have about Western public schools. For instance, McAndrew, Oueslati, and Helly (2006) assert that there is a clear lack of adequate instruction when it comes to teaching Islam in Quebec public schools and CEGEPs. Textbooks are full of stereotypes and inaccuracies about the Muslim faith and its peoples.

Conflicts sometimes arise between Muslim students and teachers about social studies and history courses. For instance, an interviewee in the study of Triki-Yamani and McAndrew (2008), who is a college student from Turkish origin, entered into a conflict with her history professor because she felt the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim world were not fairly taught, treated, and covered in the curriculum. Another student complained that most of what was taught about Islam in class was related to violence and mistreatment of women by certain Muslim fanatics (Triki-Yamani & McAndrew, 2009, p. 80). Others questioned the academic qualifications of their professors to teach about Islam; they either excused the lack of competencies or insisted that the school should not attempt to teach religion in the first place (Triki-Yamani & McAndrew, 2009, p. 81). Furthermore, in a study about Muslim youth in Canadian schools, numerous students stated that the school staff placed them in an inferior academic status based on the stereotype that they were ESL (English as a second language) students or that they are not interested in education (Zine, 2008). Moreover, a female interviewee in

[56] Here of course I am not talking about Muslim students being friends with other non-Muslims, which might and it does happen in any setting, be it educational or not, I am mainly referring to the collective religious activities and rituals (i.e. making ablution and praying in groups, celebrating Islamic holy days) that create a spirit of brotherhood at Islamic schools.

another study about Muslim girls in public schools in Toronto stated that the main reason for leaving the public school is that the hijab is considered the norm in Islamic schools and is an exception in public schools (Ali, 2012, p. 106). *Hijabis* feel at home in Islamic schools where most females are veiled and those who do not veil are not fierce opponents of it[57]. These examples confirm some of the fears echoed by my informants. As most of my graduate participants never experienced pre-college public schooling, they did not elaborate on the treatment of Islam and Muslims in curriculum of public schools[58], but they were aware that an Islamic environment in an Islamic school is friendlier to their identities and religiosities than a secular environment.

Limitations and Future Research

This work fills a gap in the field of religious education in the West. By presenting a narrative of the daily negotiations of identity and belonging of Muslim youth in Montreal, and the attempts of Islamic schools to guide these negotiations through steered socialization and Islamic instruction, my work underlines the effects, or lack thereof, of Islamic schooling on students' integration in Montreal. Although I have tried to present an objective and accurate depiction of what the daily-lived experience of Islamic schools' graduates in Montreal looks like, and the effects of these schools on their identities and sense of belonging, the study inevitably has some limitations that impact my conclusions. While my inclusion criteria was open to all graduates of Islamic schools, the collection of my data as well as its presentation in this dissertation was limited to three Sunni Islamic high schools in Montreal. As much as I may wish to

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[57] This does not mean that because public schools do not insist on the hijab that they are automatically fiercely opposed to it. In Canada, there is no law against the wearing of the hijab in public schools. While there are examples of attempts at this kind of law in Quebec, none has been successful, unlike in France. Subsequently, just because the majority of students in public schools do not wear hijabs, this does not mean that they are fiercely opposed to it.

[58] It is important to note that all Quebec elementary and secondary schools (public, secular private, confessional) adopt the same curriculum, the treatment of Islam here mainly refers to the hidden curriculum and teachers' take on the lesson. For instance, documentaries and films projected in class about Islam differ based on teachers' understanding, opinions, biases, and priorities.

believe that I provided a sound study, no project is flawless, or complete. In addition, this study does not have the pretension of being representative of all Montreal Islamic schools.

My study is based solely on interviews with stakeholders and graduates from these three Sunni Islamic high schools in Montreal. The focus was on the latter in order to understand how their Islamic education has affected their identities and sense of belonging to their societies. Thus, an ethnographic study of a few more Islamic schools would shed light on the daily-lived experiences of Muslim students in a greater number of Islamic schools. Such study would also provide additional narratives for comparison that would be useful in critiquing or supporting my conclusions.

As my project was limited by the logistics that I described above, it was also limited in content. While I am familiar with Islamic schooling in Montreal and Toronto, I am not aware of the differences between such schooling in other Canadian provinces. With the exception of the few studies mentioned throughout this dissertation, I do not know how many or which of my conclusions about identity construction could be generalized to other provincial contexts[59], and how many would be specific to the Francophone intercultural Quebec context.

Another possible future avenue of research that grows out of the conclusions of this data is the exploration of the internal differences between Islamic schools. I stated multiple times that these schools are very heterogeneous because they enjoy a degree of cultural, doctrinal, and ethnic diversity. A study of this diversity would help deconstruct and challenge some of the prevailing stereotypes about Islamic schools as homogenous entities. A comparative study of Islamic schools in Canada could reveal potentially helpful insights into the role of these schools in preparing, or lack thereof, their youth to

[59] Could be representative of all Islamic schools in Canada and North America.

participate in their secular societies as active citizens, as well as their role in identity construction.

Another similar possible future avenue for research would be to look at Islamic schools in different secular contexts. For instance, to look at what sorts of pressures might Islamic schools encounter in a different secular context that adopts strict laïcité (i.e. France) or that does not guarantee freedom of religion (i.e. Russia). It would require investigating any correlations between religious rights of minorities in any given society and the performance of Islamic schools. Another avenue of research would be a comparative study between Muslim stakeholders who opt for Islamic schools, and minority Christians (outside of the Catholic school system) or Jews in Quebec who also choose Christian or Jewish schools for their children. Finally, more research is needed on the state's role, through financing and supervision, in helping private schools improve the quality of their education, and in pushing for approaches to teaching that are more open to living-together and secular values.

My conclusions suggest a number of policy prescriptions are needed to stabilize and assist Islamic schools in promoting democratic and pluralistic educational goals. The Quebec ministry of education currently subsidizes three elementary schools, out of thirteen in Quebec. The state's financial support for Islamic schools could include stronger supervision and regulation by the Ministry of Education, ensuring better quality of Islamic and secular education, and better livelihoods of students. Most notably, perhaps, the state also could step in and help with financing and orientations, the state's funding adding credibility to these schools and freeing them from donors' mercy. Research studies on how the state's financial assistance has resulted, or not, in more stability for confessional schools, staff, and students (Elbih, 2010) would fact-check the validity of these claims.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A CONSENT FORM

UQÀM **Faculté des sciences humaines**
Université du Québec à Montréal

ADULT INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Title of Project: Islamic schooling, identity, religiosity, and citizenship in Quebec: How is Islamic schooling shaping Muslim youth identities and their sense of citizenship?

Investigator: Hicham Tiflati
Supervisor: Dr. Roxanne Marcotte, Université du Québec à Montréal.
Co-supervisor: Dr. Kevin McDonough, McGill University.

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the role that Islamic schooling plays in shaping Muslim youth identities and in the process of their integration. I want to listen to what people like you have to say on this topic.

I hope to gather information from you and others on this topic, to help me come to some conclusions about the lives of Muslims in Quebec, especially how Islamic schooling has affected or is affecting their identities or their sense of citizenship. The information I collect and the conclusions I propose will eventually be included in my doctoral dissertation project.

I am a student in the Department of "sciences de religion" at the "Univetsité du Québec à Montréal." I am in a Ph.D. program that requires me to do original research, and to prepare a major research project, or dissertation. The interview I would like to do with you today is part of that project, and what you tell me will help me to make the project more accurate and meaningful.

I thank you for your time, and your willingness to speak with me.

INFORMATION

I have a few prepared questions to ask you, and I expect this interview to take about an hour of your time. I intend to ask these same questions to everyone I interview. Please feel free to raise other issues as we talk. I hope to interview 40 to 50 people here in Quebec.

I am here to listen to your views, and to the issues that matter to you.

RISKS

This interview should offer minimal risk to you. As you can read below, under "Participation," you are free to stop the interview whenever you want, and I will respect your every wish on this matter. You should also know that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questions I ask: I am looking for your point of view, and I have come to learn from you.

BENEFITS

I hope that you will find the interview process pleasant, and thought-provoking. I also hope that your answers will help researchers and the general public to understand more clearly the points of view of Quebecer Muslims concerning matters of Islamic schooling, identity, citizenship, and integration. I hope that by examining the views of people like you, I will be able to identify common issues for Muslims in Quebec as they attempt to live their lives as full citizens.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will not use any information you do not want me to use, and nobody will have access to what you say except my Ph.D. supervisor, Dr. Roxanne Marcotte and myself. Whatever you say will be kept confidential. After our interview the information will be kept secure, and when I return home it will be stored in a safe place in my home until my research on this topic is complete. Then it will be destroyed. I will not identify you by name, or by other means, unless you give me permission to do so.

While I anticipate using this information in my dissertation project, it is difficult at this time for me to know exactly how I might use the information I gather from you today. In anticipation of several possibilities, I would appreciate your answers to the following questions (please feel free to answer honestly):

1. May I refer to you by name in future publications and presentations, or would you prefer to remain anonymous?

a. Yes, feel free to use my name if you think it is helpful _____
b. I prefer to remain anonymous _____

2. Could I use direct quotations from what you tell me today, or would you prefer that I not use your words in this manner?

a. Yes, feel free to use direct quotations if you find them helpful _____
b. Please do not quote directly from what I tell you today _____

2. If you answered "a" to Question 2 above, would you prefer that your name (and any other identifying trait) not be linked to the quotation(s)?

a. Yes, feel free to attribute the quotation(s) to me by name _____
b. Although I am comfortable with you quoting directly from my words, I would prefer that my name not be linked to the quotation(s) _____

4. May I make an audio recording of this interview so that I can listen to you without having to worry about note-taking? I will not share this tape with anyone else.

a. Yes, feel free to record this interview _____
b. I would prefer it you did not record the interview _____

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher:

Hicham Tiflati

Département des sciences de religion
405 Rue Sainte-Catherine Est,
Montréal, QC H2L 2C4
E-mail: tiflati.hicham@courriel.uqam.ca
Cell: (438) 938-4334

You many also contact my research supervisor, Dr. Roxanne Marcotte, at marcotte.roxanne@uqam.ca, or (514) 987-3000 extension 8441.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the Board's president, Anick Bergeron, at 514-987-3000, extension 3642, or by E-mail at: bergeron.anick@uqam.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are under no obligation to answer any question, you may withdraw from the conversation at any time, and you may also ask later that the information you have provided here be destroyed.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

I am at the beginning of my dissertation research project, which I expect to have completed by the end of 2017. During the time I am working on this project I expect to make academic presentations, publish journal articles, and eventually prepare a book length treatment of the subject that brings together all the material I have gathered.

If you would like to know how the research is progressing from year to year, feel free to contact me at the e-mail address listed above. I will be happy to let you know.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's name (if you wish to give it) _____

Participant's signature_____

Date _____

Optional Questions

Age_____

Gender: Male_____ Female_____

Contact Information (address, phone number, e-mail address):

Researcher's signature_____
Date _____

APPENDIX B ETHICS CERTIFICATE

UQÀM **Faculté des sciences humaines**
Université du Québec à Montréal

Certificat d'approbation éthique

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche pour les projets étudiants de la Faculté des sciences humaines a examiné le projet de recherche suivant et l'a jugé conforme aux pratiques habituelles ainsi qu'aux normes établies par le *Cadre normatif pour l'éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains* (juin 2012) de l'UQAM :

L'enseignement islamique, l'identité et la citoyenneté : le cas du Québec
Hicham Tiflati, étudiant au doctorat en sciences des religions
Sous la direction de Roxanne Marcotte, professeure au Département de sciences des religions

Toute modification au protocole de recherche en cours de même que tout événement ou renseignement pouvant affecter l'intégrité de la recherche doivent être communiqués rapidement au comité.

La suspension ou la cessation du protocole, temporaire ou définitive, doit être communiquée au comité dans les meilleurs délais.

Le présent certificat est valide pour une durée d'un an à partir de la date d'émission. Au terme de ce délai, un rapport d'avancement de projet doit être soumis au comité, en guise de rapport final si le projet est réalisé en moins d'un an, et en guise de rapport annuel pour le projet se poursuivant sur plus d'une année. Dans ce dernier cas, le rapport annuel permettra au comité de se prononcer sur le renouvellement du certificat d'approbation éthique.

Certificat émis le 29 octobre 2014. No de certificat : FSH-2014-91.

Thérèse Bouffard
Présidente du comité
Professeure au Département de psychologie

APPENDIX C STAKEHOLDERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographics

How old are you?
Where were you born?
Where did you receive your teaching qualifications?

Islamic Education

Why did you choose an Islamic school?
How many years have you been involved with the Islamic school?
Have you been involved with a non-Islamic school before?
Do you think a Muslim's experience at an Islamic school differs from his or her experience at a public school?
What do you expect from the Islamic school? How is it different from other schools?
What do you expect from other stakeholders at the Islamic schools?

Identity/Citizenship

What does the Islamic school represent to you?
Do you think the Islamic school affect students' cultural identity? How so? In what way?
Can you give examples?
Do you think the Islamic school affects students' religious identity and religiosity?
[By making them practice the faith, offering a clean "Islamic environment, etc.]
Do you think the Islamic school shapes students' sense of citizenship (the way they think about civic participation, i.e., voting, volunteering)

a. How so?
b. In what way?
c. Can you give examples?

How about the way they socialize or integrate in public spaces?
Some say that Islamic schools are sites of oppression and indoctrination, what do you think?
What would you say are the best three things about the Islamic School?

a. [then—probe for more explanations or examples of the benefit or advantages of the Islamic school]

What about three things that you don't like about the Islamic school

[then—probe for more explanations or examples of the shortcomings of the Islamic school]

What are the main challenges these schools face?

How can their (Islamic schools) education be improved?

Recap question:

If I give you a magic stick what are the two most important things that you will improve in your Islamic school?

Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience with or at the Islamic school?

APPENDIX D GRADUATES' QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographics

How old are you?
Where were you born?
How many years have you lived in Quebec?
What is the occupation of your parents?
What is your marital status?
Are you employed?

Islamic schooling

Have you ever attended a non-Islamic school? If so, when and for how many years? Can you tell me about the other school (s)?

Why (do you think) was the Islamic school chosen in the first place? *[Why not a public or a private secular school]*

[Cultural or religious reasons, avoiding the public school, etc.]

How many siblings do you have?

Were you the only child in your family who attended an Islamic school?

a. Yes. Why is that?
b. No. Can you explain?

From your experience, what are the differences between the two? What are the reasons for the switch?

[*Family, cultural conflicts, value conflicts, personal choice, incident etc* idem]

a. Can you explain?

What do you think about (Muslims) attending public (elementary and secondary) schools?

a. Completely for
b. Completely against
c. Neutral

Can you explain why?

Identity (cultural aspect)

How would you describe your "ethnic/cultural" background? [*e.g. Moroccan Berber, Pakistani, Indonesian, Egyptian, Iranian Kurd, etc.*]

Do you see any links between your ethnic/cultural identity and your Islamic school culture? How so? In what way? [Encountering the parents' culture at the Islamic school]

Can you give examples?

a. Have you met students with whom you share more than just Islam? [Culture, dialect, country of origin, etc.]

Identity (religious aspect)

How would you describe your religious identity? [e.g. very religious, atheist, liberal, traditional, Salafi, moderate, etc.]

Do you consider yourself a practising Muslim?

a. Do you pray 5 times a day?
b. Do you fast/pray the *sunna* (additional days, prayers)?
c. Has the Islamic school anything to do with that?

From a scale of 1 to 10. 1 being not religious at all, and 10 very religious. Where do you picture yourself in terms of your religiosity?

Did the Islamic school affect the intensity/of your religious practices and beliefs? Or shape it in any way?

For instance by:

a. Enforcing sentiments of belonging to the Umma
b. Praying at the school
c. Celebrating Islamic holidays
d. Having the girls wear the hijab as [school] uniform?

Identity (national aspect)

Do you think of yourself as Canadian?

If yes/if no—what does that mean for you?

How important is your "Canadian" identity to you? [for those who answered yes]

What do you think of living in a secular, diverse, and plural society such as Canada?

What does tolerance mean to you?

[I will look for view on homosexuals, Jews, atheists, etc.]

What does equality mean to you?

[I will look for view on inheritance, polygamy, guardianship, etc.]

What are your views on diversity (religious, cultural, ethnic, etc.) as you are experiencing it in Quebec/Canada?

Do you see conflicts between Islamic values and the values of diversity, equality, and tolerance? Explain. Has the Islamic school anything to do with that?

Is it difficult or easy for you to be Muslim in Canada?

What are some of the most important difficulties as far as you are concerned?

Do you think these difficulties affect your integration into Canadian society?

Do you have non-Muslim friends? Where did you meet them? What kind of activities do you do with them?

Civic participation

Do you see yourself as an active citizen?

[Are you active politically? Are you a member of a political party? Did you campaign for a party? Are you a registered voter?]

How well did your Islamic schooling prepare you to participate as a citizen in Quebec/Canada?

Do you think the Islamic school has shaped your sense of citizenship (the way you think about civic participation, i.e., voting, etc.)

d. How so?
e. In what way?
f. Can you give examples?

Islam/Islamic activities at CEGEP/university

Do you have an MSA at your CEGEP or university?

What kind of activities is offered? [Religious, cultural, political]

What is your relationship to the MSA

[Member, attendee, activist, etc.]

Are you a member of any other organization or association? [Islamic or non-Islamic].

What are some of the values you acquired at the Islamic school and you still hold till now?

Students' reflections on the Islamic school

What does the Islamic school represent to you?

What would you say are the best three things about the Islamic School?

[Can you explain more or examples?]

How about the things that you do not like about the Islamic school (that should be changed)

[Can you explain more or give examples?]

From your perspective, how can their (Islamic schools) education be improved in order to better prepare students to smoothly integrate?

Recap question:

Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience at the Islamic school and about integration in Quebec society?

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