Religious School in the West: the cultural black box

Souheil Essid (Corresponding author)

College of Education, Taibah University, P.O box 344, Universities Road, Medina 42353, KSA

Tel: 966-58-371-5512 E-mail: sessid@taibahu.esu.sa

Abstract

This study relates to private schools in Quebec, which primarily shelter Muslim immigrant children. In Quebec, although society is delighted with its public education, which has become officially secular, the number of religious school has quickly increased after the events of September 11, 2001. The ministry of education counts 252 religious schools, which, in 2012, served 126,000 students[1]. Often being called religious or ethno-religious schools, these institutions present the formal curriculum and claim to provide students with an educational environment that meets the requirements of the religious community in the land of immigration. However, Statistics Canada polls show that immigrant youth appear to be twice as likely to attend religious services as their Canadian peers[2]. Hence, the role of these schools is often questioned, causing great concern about their roles and goals in a secular society like that of Quebec. especially with the rise of Islamist terrorism in West We use participant observations to describe the religious character of these schools, particularly the Muslim schools faith, and to understand their role in Quebec society through the ethnographic accommodation.

Keywords: School, religion, Islam, Identity, immigration

The school, as a social institution, plays a primary role in the socialization of its members. The social integration of individuals is achieved through the interpretation of the codes of conduct and codes of thought, among others, directed to them by schools (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This process of cultural, social and religious homogenization often denounced by cultural communities in pluralistic Western societies (Fortin, LeBlanc et Le Gall, 2008). For example, confessionality or secularism of school discourse is at the heart of a heated debate among religious communities. This debate focuses on the right of cultural communities to transmit their values against hegemony of the dominant cultures.

In Canada, particularly in Quebec, being a pluri/multicultural and multiethnic society, the question of the transmission of values arises in schools persistently. Parents abiding by their original cultural values denounce the fact that the public school, which is taking the responsibly of educating their children, is secular in nature. Being inextricably associated with the collective and the individual, identification is at the center of this educational task, which is expressed in terms of cultural duality between dominated / dominant (Fortin, LeBlanc and Le Gall, 2008). For this reason, private education represents a recourse required for the reconciliation of academic success, the preservation of parental culture and the maintenance of faith for many cultural and/or religious minorities in the West.

In this context, this study aims to understand the role of the private religious schools in Quebec for preserving and transmitting parental culture. We mainly focus on a particular project of a Muslim school at the crossroad of the Christian culture / secular residence culture and the traditional and distant parental culture.

1. Muslim minorities in Canada

With the Muslim immigration flow to the West, especially to Europe and the United States of America in a first stage, then to South America, Canada and Australia in a second stage, the fact of Muslim minorities has arisen in Western sociological and academic annuals. In Canada, the Muslim community has experienced a significant demographic and social development, particularly since the end of 1980s (Helly, 2004b). In 2011, Canada has more than one million Muslim habitants, including 165,440 merely in Montreal (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census), being the fourth largest minority in terms of quantity. Helly (2007) and McAndrew (2009) believe that the Muslim community is experiencing a constant demographic increase. Having doubled its number since 2000, it is one of the largest religious groups in Canada (Lindsay, 2001). Helly (2004) divides the members of

---

[1] Quebec Minister of Education (2012) Le fait religieux dans les écoles privées du Quebec, Comité de recherche, ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, Quebec.

[2] https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/fr/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025b-fra.pdf?st=rZRDbLBX

this community into two essential groups in accordance with their country of origin: those from Arabic countries and those from South Asian countries. However, this Muslim community is even more diverse in terms of doctrines (Sunni, Shiite, Druze, Ishmaelite, etc.) rather than ethnicity, language and culture. With this constant growth, many associations and religious, cultural or ethnic organizations have emerged, which aim to serve the members of this community and defend members' interests in the event of a fragile migration, are doubly minimized and mostly threatened by assimilation and discrimination. Helly's studies (2004, 2007, etc.) in Canada clearly trace the various kinds of discrimination experienced by Muslims in Canada before and after the events of September 11, 2001. Helly (2004) states discrimination by name and appearance, denial of religious differences, negative stereotypes and hostility, etc. Some studies conducted after the events of 2001 show that Canadian Muslims are victims of a negative perception. In 2001, the Canada-extended Ipsos Reid survey reveals that the Muslim minority is the most likely to be a victim of racism; In 2007, so-called "the biggest survey for tolerance in Quebec" by Léger Marketing indicates that one in two Quebecers has a negative opinions towards Arabs (mostly Muslims). In 2007, another study was conducted by Borooah and Mangan comprising many Western countries including Canada as well: "Love they neighbour: how much bigotry is there in Western countries?" which is a confirmation for intolerance of Westerners against 5 social groups, including the Arab group mostly consisting of Muslims. This discomfort is often converted into legal and social conflicts. In Canada, one of the first conflicts took place in the 1970s between the Muslim community in the Greater Toronto Area on the one hand, and the Department of Education and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) on the other hand (Shaheen, 2001). This conflict focused on the growing religious needs of students in the Muslim community (halal foods, place of prayer, etc.), the hostile image against Islam in textbooks and the intolerant discourse towards them by the majority group. Some Muslims demanded some changes. However, the Toronto District School Board and the Ministry of Education declared that Muslim demands undermined the values of the Canadian society. In Quebec, the establishment of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Pertaining to Cultural Differences known as the Bouchard and Taylor Commission in 2008 represents the initial shock destabilizing religious communities in Quebec, especially the Muslim community, which has brought into light the social representation of Quebeckers of Islam and its followers, being perceived as a warlike, extremist and misogynist religion.

The Canadian legislation and the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, which guarantee the absence of discrimination based on gender, religion, race or ethnicity at school level, have provided to ethnic and religious minorities with the opportunity to establish ethno-religious private educational institutions. Perceived as an appropriate solution for the schooling of their children and often run by non-profit organizations, these schools provide children with education consistent with parental values and beliefs. As an example of Jewish, Greek or Italian schools, the number of private educational institutions targeting children of the Muslim community has increased over the last 40 years: weekend classes to promote the culture of origin, Arabic or mother-tongue classes, full-time schools and programs enriched in terms of culture and religion of origin, etc.

If the province of Ontario has more than 40 full-time schools in Quebec, the only francophone province in North America, and remarkably sensitive to cultural and identity issues, has a dozen full-time Muslim schools according to the Quebec Ministry of Education and dozens of weekend schools serving as members of the Muslim community. Having proceeded to the secularization of its school system since the 80s of the last century, the growth of ethnic and faith-based schools has been causing many fears within Quebec society.

2. The Quebec School

The educational situation in Quebec is part of a certain historical context initially marked with a dual confessional and linguistic tension: Francophone / Catholic and Protestant / Anglophone, having structured both the school administration and the official curriculum. However, another cultural / identity tension intensified between Quebecers and immigrants after the events of September 11, 2001 has led to an increasingly visible conflict between the dominant culture feeling threatened and the dominated cultural minorities in the public sphere.

The control of educational institutions is a key issue in the province's religious and community dynamics. Since public education in Canada is under the auspices of the provincial authority, the school system in Quebec has been divided into two networks: an Anglo-protestant system and another Franco-catholic system (Mc Andrew, 2001). Nevertheless, in the mid-1980s, Quebec embarked on a political and social process of deconfessionalizing public education. In 1998, the statutes of school boards changed from religious to linguistic -

French or English. However, private education has largely preserved its religious vocation. In 2005, Quebec has completed the deconfessionalization of its school system with the installation of the compulsory course of Ethics and Religious Culture (ECR course) which replaced both the religion course and the natural moral course. Thus, the model of the Quebec school is qualified as "secular" with respect to its relation with the religious facts. According to the Committee on Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports (2012), the notion of "secularism" refers to respect for freedom of conscience and religion, equal treatment for all in matters of religion, neutrality of schools in management of religious plurality, as well as its educational role in the student's spiritual journey and questioning of a religion.

Quebec's legislation on private education is less specific about religious practices in private institutions. Although the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports (MELS, 2014) has 270 private schools of which 174 (65%) receive a grant, these schools are not classified according to their religious affiliation. Hence, the terminology is sometimes problematic: Sercia (2004) defines these schools as "ethno-specific" or "ethno-religious" (p. 24). Tremblay and Milot (2014) use two qualifiers "denominational" and "religious" to distinguish between these qualifications. Lincourt (2012) identifies religious schools in Quebec with their websites and with their educational programs, as described in the reports of the Consultative Commission on Private Education (2016) of the Quebec Ministry of Education. Sercia (2004) lists 61 ethno-religious schools in Quebec, 38 of which belong to the Jewish community, 12 to the Muslim community, 6 to the Greek community, 4 to the Armenian community and one to the Turkish community. In 2004, about 10,200 students attended to Jewish schools, 1,610 to Greek schools, 1,360 to Armenian schools and 990 to Muslim schools. Certainly the curriculum provided in these schools is conforms to the requirements of the MELS (Law on Private Education, Regulation Implementing the Law on Private Education, 1992). However, the methods how schools adjust courses, as well as the rather wide margin of maneuver given to schools in terms of the number of hours and the content of learning related to their "particular project" reveal how religious dimension is reflected in the discourses and practices of each school (Sercia, 2004, p. 23).

3.   The Muslim school in Quebec

Considered as the battlefield for the preservation of culture, the school is often perceived by cultural minorities in Quebec as a threat to the culture and religion of origin in the face of the hegemony of the dominant culture. Vatz Laaroussi and Rachédi (2006), Helly (2004), Helly and Oueslati (2006) in Quebec, reported the problems encountered, for example, by Muslim students attending the public school: incompatibility between religious family education and secular school education, feeling of anxiety by parents and confusion by their children, exclusion of Muslim students and their parents from school administrative areas, restrictions on freedom of religious practice, etc. Thus, the control of the school and the type of citizen it should produce becomes the main concern of certain cultural communities, including Muslims. The challenge was all about school: curriculum, teacher adaptation, funding and instruction manuals, etc. In this context, the choice of private education seems justified, and several private / independent Muslim schools have emerged during the last three decades to protect the religion and culture of the attending children. For some parents, public education is discriminatory and assimilative. They prefer to offer their children an education and a way of life that is consistent with their religious, moral and spiritual values. These children, being heirs of a minority religion and responsible for its survival and continuity, are already at the crossroads between a welcoming culture that seems unfair and unequal and a distant, but protective culture.

In terms of terminology, there is generally a confusion between the adjectives "Muslim" and "Islamic" in the qualification of the schools in question. The terms "Islamic school" and "Muslim school" are often used interchangeably in contemporary literature. In the British case, a differentiation between the two terms is possible. Parker-Jenkins, Hartas and Irving (2005) define Islamic schools in England as institutions that define themselves by the philosophy of Islam: mission, vision, curriculum and pedagogy are inspired by traditional sources of Islam: the Quran and the prophetic traditions. As for the schools called Muslim schools, they are institutions where the learning environment is compatible with Islamic practice and tradition: clothes, foods, observance, etc., without the teaching itself being structured from the Islamic doctrine. As for Douglass and Shaikh (2004), they propose a typology of Islamic education in North America in accordance with its form and objectives. This typology consists of four components:

> The education of Muslims as a long religious training regardless of place and form;
> Education for Muslims, known as Muslim schools that children attend for both formal schooling and religious learning;
> Islam education in the form of manuals and resources for non-Muslims to learn about Islam;

➢   The education of the Islamic spirit with the objective to train specialists of faith and Muslim worship.

The definition of Douglass and Shaikh (2004) is closely related to the North American context, however their proposal refers to Islamic education in its broad sense, and they do not present a typology of Islamic educational institutions.

In Canada, Shaheen (2004) proposes a structural typology of Muslim schools. He made an inventory of Muslim schools in the Toronto area and presents three categories:

➢   School "Type": similar to the model of public education at the structural and academic level (formal school curriculum, qualified teachers, learning methods, etc.). The teaching takes place on a full-time basis in a setting that esteems the values and beliefs of Islam. This means the Arabic language and Quran recitation courses offered with the official program.

➢   Madrassah schools: traditional denominational residential schools that aim to teach the Arabic language, Quran and the saying of the Prophet, theology, etc., often in prayer rooms. The teaching takes place at the end of the week or after the official school. The aim is to preserve "authentic" Islam and to prepare young people to face the "vices" of the Western culture.

➢   "Madrassah Like": schools where leaders and parents try to reconcile between the schools "Type" and the "Madrassah", between modern education and traditional education, focusing on religion classes in a traditional way while incorporating English, Math and Science courses as well.

Shaheen (2004) deduces that all these institutions claim to offer authentic Islam, which explains the conflicting relationship among all these institutions. However, they reflect the will of some members of the community to preserve their religion, as the main sign of identification, and to lead to integration into the host society with the risks of assimilation due to exposure to the dominant culture.

To understand and analyze the religious character of these schools, we preferred in this study to stay in a Muslim school according to the typology of Parker-Jenkins, Hartas and Irving (2005), located in Montreal and governed by the Private Education Act of the Quebec Ministry of Education. A full-time school offering the province's public education program, but as part of a Muslim vision of the world and its creation.

4.   Methodology

We have chosen to grasp the reality of our school through an ethnographic observation. The term "ethnographic observation" is used instead of "participant observation", since this concept can be confusing. DeWalt and DeWalt, (2002) refer to "participant observation" when the researcher aims to achieve a full involvement in the study group. He proposes an immersion within a group without there being work of collection of data. In other words, the researcher fully participates in the daily life of the participants by eating, chatting, laughing and doing fun activities with them. It is in this sense that we tried to observe the students by sharing dinner with them and sometimes by playing soccer with them. However, other researchers like Junker (1960) qualify any observation on a field as a participant. In this study, like Junker (1960), we prefer, , the expression "ethnographic observation". This tool allows us to report both varying degrees of involvement depending on the situation and different modes of observation (including informal interviews with participants and the use of diverse materials), while promoting the point of view of the actor to trace how social action is formed,, according to Blumer (1969).

To realize the observation, it is important to understand how the actor see the situation and observe the elements that influence the choices he makes during his social experience. The observations mainly focused on the informal interactions between the participants and their vision of their identity constructions. More specifically, the construction of their religious identity, in the classroom, in the cafeteria where participants gathered, in the gym, in the outer courtyard during breaks and lunch hours, in the prayer room where students were going every day after dinner, and especially every Friday when they have to attend a prayer, preceded by a preach pronounced by a preacher. Then, these observations were made on the dynamics within the group, as well as on the relations between the groups. They thus provided information on the social context and the practical experience of the actors. The ethnographic approach adopted in this study aimed, among other things, to know and describe in an explicit way the construction of young people's religious identity and the context in which their experiences were written. The two-and-a-half month observations (April 2012 to mid-June 2012) are the cornerstone of our methodological approach. These observations provided a first-hand knowledge of the local context and also favored best acceptance of the researcher by the members of the school

To achieve these ethnographic observations, we chose discretion in taking notes (Sanjek, 1990). During the exploratory phase, we noticed that some participants were confused or more discreet when it was very apparent that we were taking notes in prepared observation sheets. Then, we proceeded by short notes or scratch notes at the same time as the observed action took place. More detailed observations and reflections were recorded in a daily logbook. This diary was usually written during breaks and in the evening so as not to disrupt the regular activities of the students. One week after the start of the observation, we found that the cafeteria was not appropriate for this exercise: during dinner, all the students of the school gathered in the cafeteria and it was impossible to distinguish and understand the words and interventions of the members because of the noisy atmosphere characterizing the place. Deconfessionalizing. Consequently, we gave up the observation of the participants in the cafeteria during dinner to avoid the risk of taking incorrect notes.

In sum, the observations mainly focused on the formal and informal interactions between participants and their identity manifestations and their visions of the construction of identity, particularly those relating to religion.

The following table shows all the places where our observation took place, as well as the approximate time spent by the researcher at the observation:

Table: Locations and durations of observations

Observation Location	Observation Duration
Classroom	19 hours
The corridors of the school	1 hour
Cafeteria: during dinner	1 h 30 min
Gymnasium: during daily prayers and Friday's sermons (20 prayers)	5 hours
Outside: After dinner	6 hours
Total	37 h 30 min

According to the table, we spent more time in the classroom, but the most efficient moments of observation were in the hallways of the school, in the gymnasium, in the school's outdoor courtyard and during Friday's sermons. The spontaneity of the participants and our invisibility in these places were decisive.

5.   The research fields

Inspired by the "Outcropping" method of Fetterman (1998, p. 57) which consists of recording all the relevant information on the ethnographic field, which can attract the eye of the researcher, we started by doing a sweep of the school where many details appeared. We took this approach in order to refine our investigation, by noting the presence of religious markers at our school. A group of Muslims who consider themselves anxious to preserve their minority religion in Western society founded the school in the late 90s. This group was already running a charitable educational association and a weekend school offering courses in Arabic and Islamic culture. In an informal discussion, a founding parent explains that they wanted to create an "institution that operates according to Islamic values," but that is not detached or isolated from society. The school is located in a residential working-class area, with strong Muslim concentration. This neighborhood has three mosques, two Muslim schools and a Muslim community center. The school is officially open to all children, but only children whose parents adhere to the Muslim faith are enrolled, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. Similar to the Muslim religion, this school is also multicultural, multiracial and multilingual. It contains excellent facilities, among other things, a place of prayer and rooms for ablution (action of washing body parts for religious cleansing purposes). At its inauguration, the school started with three grades: kindergarten, 1st and 2nd year. In 2003, all levels were offered and in 2008, a daycare center was added to the school. The school currently has 250 students.

At the beginning, the school was funded by donations from the local community and eventually received partial funding from the provincial government in accordance with the Law No. 78 of Private Education in

Quebec. To be admitted to this school, children must pass a placement test that allows the school to fill vacancies. Access is not automatic and many parents, who fail to register their children after several attempts, challenge the community aspect of the school, and claim the right to enroll their children due to being Muslims.

In addition to the curriculum of the Quebec Ministry of Education, the school teaches local programs in Arabic language, morality and Muslim religion. According to its website consulted before 2011, the school "instills in its students the taste for knowledge and faith. It is not only a provider of knowledge, but rather promotes an integral and balanced development of the individual ". On the website (before the 2011 update), the school explicitly displays its membership in the Muslim religion and announces its guidelines as a school institution that aims to: "Preserve the original language and religious heritage of our children". The reference to education as an Islamic obligation is often highlighted in order to emphasize the religious and academic mission of the school. However, references to the Muslim religion are less explicit after the update of the website: "The school aims as a goal the love of knowledge as a religious obligation". In 2017, the school's board unanimously decided to change the name of the school to a more "French" name. The principal justifies these changes by changing objectives and vision. At its foundation, the initial challenge of the founding members was to preserve the Muslim culture and religion: "The concern of a newly installed immigrant," said the principal of the Institution. However, with time, "*We do not see the school of the eye of an immigrant, but of a new Quebecer who must contribute to build a stronger Quebec* ", continues the principal. This change of purpose and vision reflects the integration with the dominant global discourse. However, these changes can also be explained by a media storm in which a Muslim School in the Montreal region found itself a few months before the website was updated. Journalists reveal that a Muslim school indirectly contributed to the transfer of funds to a Palestinian organization. Although the Minister of Education at the time refuted these allegations and the school condemned "these fanciful theses", the case has taken on a lot of importance. The school's administration and teachers were targeted by the media and public debates for at least 3 months. This event could explain why several schools refused to collaborate on our research and the fear that often marked the interviews we conducted with adult participants in this research.

Like any school, the place of our research is a fertile ground for cultural events. Students spend much of their day in the school and there are many activities there. In this field of personal achievements, significant relationships with peers or with adults are crucial.

6.   School actors

Although the management of the school seems to be collective, the pyramid structure is striking. the principal, the teachers, the secretaries and the supervisors are inserted in a structured administrative and religious hierarchy. The situation of each actor is due to his position within the organization. However, this position is often defined by the relationships of spiritual dependence with other actors in the school. In this section, we present the relationships between the main actors, namely the principal, the teachers and the supervisors, as well as their effect on the socialization of the participants.

The principal and spiritual authority: He embodies a double authority: legal and religious. The teachers are delighted to talk about "*chief*" or "*boss*", but also "*sheikh*" (with strong religious notoriety). These appellations refer to a professional order without doubt, but behind the figure of the boss is drawn that of the religious leader. A part-time teacher says: "*We have a boss, there are employees who depend on this boss. Everyone has their place, that's good. But he is also a counselor. He gives us a lot of religious recommendations on certain aspects of our lives*." Another teacher who refused to disclose more details admits, "*It is thanks to him that I wear the hijab today*". The symbolic authority of the direction is also perceived during the Friday prayer. Many times, a member of the school board takes charge of the Friday sermon or designates someone to do so. In a predominantly confessional configuration, the other actors of the school consent to the superior position occupied by the principal, because they are part of a "relational acceptance" of superiority, according to Boltanski and Thévenot (1991, p.206). This relationship of order and power that can only exist with the consent of those support who support it. Several actors at the school often draw inspiration from a very popular speech of the prophet Mohamed to justify this balance of power within the school: *Each of you (Muslim) is like the shepherd who is responsible for his flock (...). Each of you is therefore responsible and we will ask him about its responsibility* (Al-Bukhari, 2005, p. 853).

Supervisors and commitment to the group: In a global way, supervisors have little existence in their own right and have low institutional visibility at school. However, they are all university graduates in their countries of

origin (engineer, doctor, biologist, etc.). Poorly paid and untrained for this job, they are very devoted to accomplishing their tasks. This dedication can be explained by the sacralization of the educational task within Islam. This vision creates a collective dynamic at the school, and seems to give to see a daily report, where all appear to integrate into the same team. However, two supervisors, one volunteer and one part-time, play a rather special role in relation to their statutes. They organize spiritual and religious activities outside the classroom.. Thusly, they organize recitation and learning contests of the Quran, they deliver monthly certificates to honor the best behavior and to value Muslim behavior (serving someone, donating, cleaning a room, etc.). All these activities are built around a religious theme, a Quranic verse or a prophetic word selected as appropriate for the occasion. These supervisors are highly appreciated by most participants and by the teachers as well for their role in building the "good Muslim". They have a moral authority to interrupt classes or intervene in children's private lives. Outside the school, the supervisors and the teachers maintain close relations: family and social meetings are frequent, according to several of them.

The teachers: Field observations show apparently strong cohesion of teachers, which was perceptible daily during breaks in the teachers' room, in the cafeteria and in particular through group outings and publicly organized trips. These moments of conviviality maintain and reinforce the links between the teachers and the supervisors, and contribute to the socialization of any new staff. Teachers also live this cohesion as a factor of mobilization in their work and involvement in religious and school projects. This cohesion is voluntarily visible to students as highlighted by observation in class.. This visibility aims to show students the religious example to follow in the cohesion between Muslims. This exemplarity seems primordial for the direction and "a foundation of the Islamic education" on which the Quran and the prophet insist.[1]

The school actors also confirm that the group cohesion is mainly based on the respect of the divine laws, and teacher must concretize the Muslim values in his daily life and particularly in his relations with others in front of the children.

In Islam, the teacher has a prophetic role, because his mission is in line with the prophet Mohamed whose main message was to teach the meaning of God. The teacher must therefore be honest and sincere and behave thus, and cultivate faith in absolute values such as justice, mercy, truth, charity, love and justice, which are inscribed in the names of God.

Student participants: As a central part of the school, there is a close relationship between participants. They all defend the essential role of a school that transmits Muslim values, some participants express a rather critical opinion of certain practices that reveal some forms of humiliation and are considered non-Muslim they really express the feeling that teachers and supervisors impose a logic of verbal abuse to get the upper hand. However, young participants show an obedient and sometimes assimilating attitude towards the forced inculcation of Muslim values and in relation to this violent socialization. This attitude can be explained in particular by the strong influence of peer relations on school experiences. Therefore, the power of the group appears as a collective entity able to manage the tensions between group integration and school religious norms. Of course, the peer group has as much power to integrate as to exclude, but it seems to be the main, if not the only, category of actors that can do so. In this regard, students express the absolute need to have affinities with many of their peers to feel comfortable at the school and in their classrooms. From this point of view, the participants' experience can be read in the mirror of the experience of the school actors: they integrate and identify with the collective entity, built by students and dominated by peer interactions. At this level of analysis, the role of the Islamic school is, in its fullest sense, to provide the children of the Muslim community with a foundation for this collective entity which responds to the values of Islam and which does not contradict itself with its precepts, despite the challenge of some participants. Socialization and construction of a young participant take place in a context where he acts as a majority actor, part of the dominant discourse, able or forced to interact with all the clans in his/her classroom.

7.   School between production and reproduction

Huge references to the Muslim religion appear clearly in school: tables of Quranic verses, often prepared by students, hanging on the walls in almost every room; a daily invocation that brings together all the students of the school with their teachers before entering the classroom; a daily prayer after dinner that brings together all the students and the school staff in the same room (cafeteria turned into a place of prayer); wearing the veil by all the female staff at the school. The school therefore seeks to update the denominational character of its

---

[1] The Quran: "Indeed, you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent model [to follow], for anyone who hopes in Allah and the Last Day and invokes Allah frequently. " (Sura 33, verse 73)

educational project and, therefore, no economy is made of activities that promote the spiritual and religious awakening of children. Teachers and supervisors often seek to develop religious activities that stand out from the classical model of religious instruction (a preacher and apprentices), whether in forms, pedagogical modes, the environment or places in which they take place. The field observations reveal some examples:

➢ The celebration of Muslim holidays and highlights of the Hegira year through lively festive meetings.

➢ Activities related to the discovery and appreciation of authors, scientists and Muslim historical personalities (classroom presentations, plays, occasional posters).

➢ Learning by imitation and functional engagement: activities where children will have the opportunity to invest themselves: choir and anasheed (religious songs), community engagement, collecting donations for mosques in the city.

The principal cites an example of extracurricular activities of which he is proud and which reflects the integration of Islamic values into the Quebec culture: the Sugar Shack that has taken a rather Islamic form. Very popular in Quebec, the centerpiece of the event is a meal with bacon foods and maple products. To make the event accessible to Muslim children, the school has agreed with a farm to celebrate the sugar shack, but with a *halal* dish, that does not contain any pork products. The activity is described by the school as educational and Islamic.

The school offers children an explicit Islamic environment. In the morning, before entering into the classroom, they gather in the cafeteria and make the morning supplications called by them as "*Duaa*". The prayers of midday are realized mutually in the same room, turned into a prayer room. Children shoulder each other and form lines. Supervisors ensure the alignment of the students and the teacher; sometimes the principal takes the role of the imam and directs the prayer. On Friday, the holy day in Islam, students attend prayer, preceded by a sermon called "*khutba*", a mandatory ritual in Islam. This sermon is delivered by the principal or by a guest from outside, but not a recognized imam. Although all the actors of the school are called to come to the place of prayer to perform group prayers, some participants, especially girls (Julie, Bochra, and Zakia), claim that they are sometimes forced to participate against their will to participate in this obligation. However, according to the dominant discourse in Islam, for these prayers to be accepted, the faithful must give his/her body and soul to his/her activity. It should be noted that the school does not celebrate any cultural event referring to any particular country. Although their manifestations differ from one country to another, celebrations are organized around topics on which there is no divergence between different schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

In classroom, the separation model is respected. Students are placed individually but the classroom is divided into two sections: the girls are at the right side of the teacher and the boys are at the left side of the teacher. The students' uniform is Western style, often similar to those who dominate in the countries of origin; white shirt and blue pants for boys and white shirt, blue pants and dress for girls with a white hijab on the head. In the classroom, the emphasis is often on integrating Islam into the learning act. Observations showed that the goal of the school was not to replace the Quebec education model, but to support and realize it in an Islamic atmosphere conducive to the religious development of the child. Textbooks, for example, are those used in Quebec public schools. The teacher commented: "The Qur'an tells us to find knowledge where it exists". The teachers and the management confirm that teaching materials inspired by the Muslim religion and respecting the requirements of the Quebec Ministry of Education are non-existent in French. In English, there is more efforts at the Canada level. To fill this gap, the teacher often makes comparisons between the concepts and themes of the curriculum and their parallels in Islam.. In course design, for example, the teacher always introduces to the students the Islamic point of view on divergent topics such as sexuality and the existence of God. Being aware that some of the ideas behind school curriculum have a direct conflict with Muslim beliefs, the teacher treats them as they are. The teacher integrates them into his/her lessons to show students both aspects of a subject, one secular and the other Islamic. The teacher mentions as an example the theory of evolution as a subject that often poses challenges, since it is considered as contradictory to the foundations of Islamic thought, which attributes the creation of the human to the divine power. She also uses cultural connections. In a social study course on Amerindian history and culture, the teacher has established a link between Amerindian and Arab tribes at the level of the concept of nomadism, to explain the Arab way of life at the time of the revelation of Islam. The teacher frequently refers to Muslim history in her class: urban development, scientific discoveries, Muslim scholars (Algorithm, Avicenna, and Averroes), the prophet, and his companions. However, it should be noted that the teaching strategies of the homeroom teacher are consistent with the educational recommendations of the

Ministry of Education. According to the official Quebec program[1], history and geography courses will allow students to name and describe their home groups and the religions practiced in these groups. On the other hand, during the art courses, the teacher usually offers activities directly related to Muslim civilization. Scheduled often on Friday afternoon, after Friday prayer, artistic projects are always Islamic and often linked to significant religious events: Arabic calligraphy on construction paper, posters with quranic verses, greetings or congratulations on religious holidays: "*Ramadan Karim and Eid Mubarak*". Some projects refer to Islamic themes related to the pilgrimage: building Mecca and practicing the *Hajj* ritual. In addition to the direct action in the classroom, the schedule of participants includes sessions devoted to courses directly related with the Muslim religion: one hour of Arabic language, one hour of Qur'an practice and one hour of Islamic education. These activities develop students' self-esteem and awareness of their Islamic identity as a fundamental reference. In summary, religious activities in the classroom are numerous and diverse. However, the reality with participants and students, in general, is a huge challenge for teachers. They have to deal with students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, for whom French has a different status. They must deal with students whose French may be a first, second or third language and whose affiliation is multiple. As for the students, they carry a different cultural background from teachers and parents and, in addition, have to face some parents who denounce the hours of plastic art at school, because they are illicit for them and demand them to be replaced by additional Arabic and quranic courses.

Conclusion

In the West, the Muslim school sets itself the goal, among other things, to play the role of maintaining and reproducing the Muslim religion in a minority context. In this context, the school adopts social and educational practices inserted into an operating framework where Muslims represent a majority. It also provides an environment where students do not seem excluded for their origin, ethnicity, or religious beliefs. They are free to exercise their religious duties without having to resist the interpretations of the dominant group in the society of residence, however, on the other hand, submit to the demands of mainstream discourse at school without being able to exercise a considered choice.

As an important way to promote the culture of origin, The Muslim School displays a strong religious mark, both organizationally and conceptually. The school offers a rich and sustained religious framework for young people in their personal and collective faith approaches. The teaching provided is primarily aimed at preparing the Muslim to become a servant of God. The educational act is often carried out in terms of reminding God, and the young person learns at school how to constantly be prepared to recognize, in himself and in all that surrounds him, the presence of God. This perspective fundamentally affects Muslims' conception of their religiosity, their relationship with the community and their role in the world. According to some parents, religious guidance nourished from childhood finds an extension in the future life of young people in the community, and many "good Muslims" today have benefited from this religious framework. However, perseverance in the Muslim way is not possible without a religious offer that maintains, supports and stimulates faith and interacts with its environment. The principal states that the Muslim school seeks less to reproduce a religion, and more to "*suggest life paths to young people*". However, these paths remain subordinated to the determining role that falls on families. Their symbolic relationship with the school is built in the convergence of family and school expectations, focused not only on religious behavior, but also on school results, that means on which party (school and family) is entitled to actually reach a Muslim student living in Quebec.

Ultimately, new avenues of research may emerge following this study. On the one hand, comparative analysis between different religious schools in Canada and elsewhere in the Western countries can explain the role of religion, essentially Islam, in the integration, insertion or exclusion of young people in Quebec and Canadian society. On the other hand, longitudinal studies could focus on different life periods of these young people as well as on the processes of their socialization. Thus, at the end of their school career, they will be called upon to make important decisions: university choice, professional choice, relationship with the dominant group and with its home group, etc. Such studies could analyze the role that these schools can play in the educational and professional development process of these young people.

---

[1] http://www1.mels.gouv.qc.ca/progressionPrimaire/geoHistoire/index.asp?page=conn_org

Bibliography

Al-Boukhari (2005). *Sahîh*. Translation. Chakroun, Paris. Al Qalam.

Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books, London

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Borooah, V.K. et Mangan, J. Love thy neighbour: how much bigotry is there in western countries? *Kyklos, International Review for Social Sciences*, 60, (3), 295-317.

Bouchard, G. et Taylor, C. (2008). *Fonder l'avenir. Le temps de la conciliation*. Consulted 05/04/2010: http://www.accommodements.qc.ca/documentation/document-consultation.pdf

Comité sur les affaires religieuses (2012) *Le fait religieux dans les écoles privées du Quebec*, Comité de recherche, ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, Quebec.

Commission consultative de l'enseignement privé (2016) *47e Rapport annuel,* ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, Québec: http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web /documents/ ministere/organismes/CCEP_Rapport_Annuel_15-16.pdf

Douglass, Susan L et Shaikh, Munir A (2004) Defining Islamic Education: Differentiation and Applications. Current Issues in Comparative Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, Vol. 7(1)

DeWalt, Kathleen M. & DeWalt, Billie R. (2002). *Participant observation: a guide for fieldworker*s. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press

Fetterman, D. M. (1998). *Ethnography Step by Step* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage Publications.

Fortin, S., Leblanc, M.-N., et Le Gall, J. (2008). Entre la oumma, l'ethnicité et la culture : le rapport à l'islam chez les musulmans francophones de Montréal. *Diversité Urbaine*, 8(2), 99-134.

Ghosh, R. (2004). Public education and multicultural policy in Canada: The special case of Quebec. International Review of Education, 50(5/6), 543-566

Hartas, D. Parker-Jenkins M. , Irving, Barrie A. (2005) *In Good Faith. Schools, Religion and Public Funding*. 1st Edition, London, Routledge, 243 p.

Helly, D. (2006). Diaspora : Un enjeu politique, un symbole, un concept? *Espaces, Sociétés et Populations*, (1), 17-31.

Helly, D. (2004). Are the Muslims discriminated against in Canada? *Journal of Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 36(1), 24-47.

Helly, D. (2004b). Flux migratoires des pays musulmans et discrimination de la communauté islamique au Canada. Dans U. Mançco (Dir.), *L'islam entre discrimination et reconnaissance. La présence des musulmans en Europe occidentale et en Amérique du Nord* (p. 257-288). Paris : L'Harmattan.

Helly, D et Oueslati. B. (2006). *Traitement de la différence musulmane : Demande de lieux de prières*. Montréal, Centre de recherche interuniversitaire de Montréal sur l'immigration, l'intégration et la dynamique urbaine, Montreal

Ipsos-Reid. (2001, September 24). *Strong majority (82%) worried that people of Arab decent or Muslims in Canada may become the target of unwarranted racism or personal attacks because of terrorist attacks* [Press Release]. Ottawa: CTV-The Globe and Mail

Junker, B. H. (1960). *Field work: An introduction to the social sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Leger Marketing, (2007). *La grande enquête sur la tolérance au Québec*.

Lincourt, M. (2012). Qu'en est-il aujourd'hui du fait religieux dans les écoles québécoises? Site web consulté le : 24 octobre 2012 http://www.michellincourt.com/2012/09/ecoles-religieuses/

Lindsay, (2001). *Les minorités visibles au Canada*. Statistique Canada, Ministre de l'Industrie. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/85f0033m2001007-fra.pdf

Mc Andrew, M. (2009). *The Muslim Diaspora : Gender, Culture and Identity*, in H. Moghissi (dir.), Routledge, Royaume-Uni/États-Unis, p. 153-166.

Mc Andrew, M. (2001). *Immigration et diversité à l'école*. Montréal : Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

Sanjek, R. (1990). *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.

Sercia, P. (2004). *L'intégration sociale des élèves fréquentant des écoles ethnoreligieuses au Québec*. Thèse de doctorat, Département d'éducation option administration et fondements de l'éducation, Faculté des études supérieures, Université de Montréal.

Shaheen, A. (2001). Muslim Educational Institutions in Toronto. *Canada Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 21(2), 259-272.

Shaheen, J. G. (2004). *Arab and Muslim stereotyping in American popular culture*. Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding: History and International Affairs, Washington: Gergetown University.

Statistics Canada (2013) National Household Survey (NHS) Profile presents information from the 2011 NHS for various geographic areas, Ottawa. Accessed September 21, 2018.

Tremblay, S. et Milot, M (2014). Les écoles religieuses et la formation du citoyen : le cas des écoles juives du Québec, in *Éducation et sociétés* 2014/1 (n° 33), 137 – 152

Vatz Laaroussi, M. and Rachédi, L. (2006) « Les migrants de la mémoire et de l'histoire : des témoins de la culture arabo-musulmane », *Insaniyat / إنسانيات* , V.32-33, p. 69-85.