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The Coverage of the Muslim World in Quebec French Language High-School Textbooks

Abstract

Several comparative studies have signalled the coverage of Islam and of the Muslim world in Western textbooks as especially problematic, both it regards factual errors and ethnocentric bias. Nevertheless, in Canada, where Muslim immigration has been thriving since the middle of the 90's, no recent research has explored this issue. An exploratory study of 21 French language history and geography textbooks used in secondary schools of Quebec was, thus, undertaken as a first step to a wider project on French and English language textbooks in different disciplines used in various Canadian provinces. The content analysis of 117 excerpts was based on an original methodology combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. This article describes the results pertaining to the coverage of the Muslim world at the international level, as it regards both, historical events and current economic and social situations of Muslim countries. As compared with research done in the 80's and 90's, it shows notable improvements (such as the disappearance of openly negative attitudes), but also the persistence of several shortcomings (superficial coverage, factual errors, ethnocentric presentation). In conclusion, the authors propose various hypotheses to explain those shortcomings, in a context characterized by the lack of centrality of the Muslim world in the prescribed curriculum, in opposition to countries with a direct colonial past.

1. Problematic

Although the impact of formal curricula on students' attitudes and behavior has been questioned (Ballantyne 1989; Banks 1991), it is widely recognized that textbooks represent an important cornerstone of education. Indeed, as a mediated form of the ideology outlined by the government in official programs, textbooks play a critical role in representing and fixing society and inter-group relations in the minds of future generations. They can be considered as 'composite mediating objects' that not only crystallize, but also translate, into a pedagogical form, the tensions that exist between the complexity of knowledge and the dominant ideological representations of ethnic or international relations (Choppin 1992; Johnsen 1993; Vinck 1999; Lantheaume 2002 2003). Textbooks also benefit from the prestige of the text written by experts and, in the case of many disciplines, from the objectivity and the rigor of the scientific approach. This makes their content ap-

pear more reliable and rarely questionable to teachers and students (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991). Therefore, the study of their content sheds light on the way society perceives the world, the image it wants to promote of itself and the values it aims to instil into its young learners.

While bias and stereotypes in textbooks are widespread phenomena, only partially counteracted by various national and international endeavours (Council of Europe 1986, OEDC 1987; Pingel 1999; UNESCO 1995), several comparative studies have signalled the coverage of Islam and the Muslim world in Western textbooks as especially problematic (Preiswerk & Perrot 1975; Ferro 1981; Mc Andrew 1986, 1987; Schultze 1994; Dunand 1998). This coverage appears, indeed, to be marked by more factual errors and ethnocentric biases, often less subtle than those encountered about other religions, civilizations or ethnic groups. This negative image traditionally fed on two important sources, the political perspective influenced by historical conflict and the cultural perspective based, from the 18th century onward, on the Orientalist tradition. The first constructed Islam and Muslims as the enemy, the symbolic frontier of otherness for the Western world (Hentsch 1988; Said 1997; Buruma & Margalit 2004; Goody 2004). The second, while romanticizing the "Orient", spread the view that it was a monolithic, homogeneous, backward entity, both oppressive of women and inherently incompatible with democracy (Lewis 2002). More recently, the media also played a critical role in reinforcing a biased and negative perception of Muslims in Western minds with a coverage more focused on stereotypes and sensationalism than on objective analysis and genuine information (Said 1997; Shaheen 1984, 2004; Karim 2000). In most extreme cases, this treatment amounts to a kind of cultural racism, now widely referred to as Islamophobia. The latter assumes the existence of an irreconcilable clash between Western civilization and values and the Muslim world, while, in the post 9/11 context and with the on-going war on "terror", Muslim immigrants have come to be constructed as security threats and as the enemy within.

On the textbook front, studies carried out in the 1990s and in recent years show some improvements, especially in the level of complexity, in the treatment of Islam and the Muslim world, when compared to the more simplistic or stereotyped presentations of the seventies and eighties. But they also confirm the persistence of problematic trends, such as the "essentialization", inferiorization or even demonization of Islam, now the significant Other. For instance, a large study of European, African and American textbooks points to a paradox between a positive presentation of the contribution of Islamic civilization to the advancement of humanity, on the one hand, and a negative description of Islam as an archaic religion imposed by the sword through a "Holy War", which denies equal rights to women, promotes slavery and terrorism and is responsible for the underdevelopment of Muslim populations, on the other (Al-Halwaji et al. 2004). The American picture is, nevertheless, not fully clear. In the nineties, a joint study by the Middle East Studies Association and the Middle East Outreach Council (MESA/MEOC 1994) identified important lacunae in the coverage of the Middle East: overrepresentation of exotic images, biased description of historical events (such as the Crusades and colonization) and an absence of Muslims' point of view and their legitimate

interests. In sharp contrast, in the post 9/11 context, some have denounced a presumed panegyric treatment of such topics as slavery, the status of women, polygamy and jihad in the Muslim world, attributed to an influence of the Muslim lobby in the US (Sewall 2003). In France, a large study has also shown a negative image of the Muslim world described as pro-slavery, oppressive of women and with a tendency for internal divisions (Nasr 2001). However, it did signal one positive development: deep differences emerged between more recent textbooks regarding the question of tolerance in Islam and the nature and importance of its scientific contributions to the universal civilization.

In Canada, where the presence of Muslims in large numbers is a recent phenomenon (Helly 2004), few studies have specifically focused on the treatment of Islam and the Muslim world in textbooks (Abu Laban 1975; Kenny 1975; NECEF 1988), although research on the general coverage of immigration and/or diversity has touched upon the issue (McDiarmid & Pratt 1971; Mc Andrew 1986 1987; Blondin 1990). Overall, they seem to point in the same direction: a superficial coverage marked by factual errors, stereotypes and bias, especially when dealing with sensitive issues; a lack of recognition of Muslims' contribution to world heritage, almost exclusively limited to the material culture; and a tendency to present Western and Islamic civilization in a dichotomist perspective. Nevertheless, these studies are marked by two important limits: first, their conclusions are probably outdated, given that they all date back to about 20 years and secondly, given the bilingual and federal nature of Canada and the fact that education is an exclusively provincial jurisdiction, none of them can pretend to have drawn a "national" picture.

In the current national and international context, where Muslim immigration is thriving, making Islam the fastest growing religion in Canada (Statistics Canada 2001), and where the Muslim world is making daily headlines (Shaheen 2004) it, thus, seemed important to update our knowledge about the treatment of Islam, Muslims and the Muslim world in Canadian textbooks. Which is why we undertook, in 2003–2004, an exploratory study limited to French language textbooks in Quebec¹ in order to test a methodology and an analysis grid that we intended to extend to a wider sample of textbooks used in both languages in other provinces. This larger project, now supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) is underway. But, regardless of its limited scope, the exploratory study did reveal trends interesting enough, in our opinion, to be reported to a wider audience interested in the issue.

2. Research methodology

As outlined above, the study was undertaken to explore the coverage of Islam and of the Muslim world in a sample of Quebec high school French language textbooks and hence fill the gap in knowledge on recent developments in this area. More specifically, the contents of all 21 textbooks approved for the school year

¹ The Canadian province that receives the highest proportion of Muslim immigrants in relation to its total intake (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006).

2003–2004 by the Quebec Education Department in the following disciplines were retained for analysis: World History, World Geography, History of Quebec and Canada, Geography of Quebec and Canada and Economic Education, all of which are required to deal with certain aspects related to Islam and Muslims and, finally, Personal and Social Training², where the coverage of such issues may be relevant but is left to the authors' discretion. Analysis was conducted mainly on students' textbooks, but activity books as well as teachers' guides were examined in order to determine whether they added new information that would shed light on authors' positions and presuppositions.

Three main themes were investigated: the description of Muslim culture and of Islam as a religion, the coverage of the Muslim world at the international level (historical events and the current economic and social situations of the Muslim world) and, finally, the portrayal of Muslims living in Quebec and in Canada.

The analysis of the excerpts was based on an original methodology combining quantification, which allows determination of the relative importance of certain trends, and qualitative analysis, which is more adapted to the complexity of the object under study. More specifically, we developed an analysis instrument based on the grid used and validated by Mc Andrew on a large number of textbooks for her more general studies of the coverage of cultural, racial and ethnic diversity in the 1980's textbooks (Mc Andrew 1986, 1987). This instrument was adapted to our research object by examining other less systematic instruments used in national and international studies mentioned above (e.g. MESA/MEOC 1994; Nasr 2001). Using a general canvas as a starting point, the instrument was developed inductively through an iterative process as we progressed in exploring the excerpts. This procedure helped to refine the sub-themes and categories used in the grid. Its validity and reliability was also tested through a parallel analysis of a sample of excerpts by two independent coders. Inter-coder reliability was high and in case of divergence, this procedure allowed us to readjust certain categories of the grid.

The present article bears on the results pertaining to the second theme only³. In analyzing our findings, whenever relevant data from earlier studies of Quebec textbooks are available, these will be used for comparative purposes in order to bring out trends in the evolution of the coverage.

3. Findings

Overall, 117 excerpts were selected. These are distributed as follows: World History (57), World Geography (32), Economic Education (17) and Geography of Quebec and Canada (10). Muslims are absent in textbooks dealing with the history of Quebec and Canada and are referred to only once in Personal and Social Training

2 Under the current Quebec school reform, the disciplines of Economic Education and Personal and Social Training will disappear, while citizenship education will be combined with both history and geography.

3 The full research report *Le traitement de l'islam et des musulmans dans les manuels scolaires de langue française du secondaire québécois* (Oueslati, Mc Andrew & Helly 2004), with an English synthesis is available at www.cccetum.umontreal.ca. Another article *L'évolution du traitement de l'islam et des cultures musulmanes dans les manuels scolaires québécois de langue française du secondaire*, which describes the results of the first theme, will be published in 2007 in the *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal*.

textbooks. 18 of these 117 excerpts dealt with the first theme (the description of Muslim cultures and of Islam as a religion), 91 with the second (the coverage of the Muslim world at the international level – historical events and current economic and social situations –), while only 8 references were made to the portrayal of Muslims living in Quebec and in Canada. The excerpts of the second theme were divided as follows: 40 dealt with historical events and relations between civilizations and 51 with current economic and social aspects of the Muslim world.

The coverage of the research topic is superficial as shown by the length of the excerpts. Of the 51 describing the current economic and social aspects of the Muslim world, 17 are shorter than one sentence, 8 consist of a few lines while the remaining excerpts are statistics and maps. As far as historical events and relations between civilizations are concerned, 5 excerpts can be described as a developed analysis (one page or more), while 18 do not exceed a few lines and 16 are shorter than one sentence.

At the qualitative level, overall, the following observations can be made. First, in comparison with the results of earlier Quebec studies (Mc Andrew, 1986 1987; Blondin 1990), analysis shows one major positive development: the disappearance of the overtly negative coverage of Islam, Muslim leaders and countries. For example, we did not find any excerpt that would describe the Koran as antithetical to progress "... the Qur'an... prevents any progress when applied strictly"⁴ (*Notre monde actuel* 1976: 242) nor that describe any leader as Nasser was, as "an extremist nationalist leader (who) takes power and nationalizes the Suez Canal". (*Un siècle d'histoire* 1978: 85).

In the current textbooks, no author would dare describe Muslims, as did *Notre monde actuel* (1976: 230), as "illiterates who would deem it inconceivable that one of their wives goes out without wearing the veil" nor any Muslim country as did *L'Eurasie* (1974: 195) when discussing Oman in the following manner: "Little value is given to instruction and women are excluded from public life. Changes will have deep consequences given the way these countries perpetuate traditional Arab values dictated by the Qur'an. Even slavery subsists within the country".

As the description of the detailed findings that follows will illustrate, our analysis shows, however, a persistence of ethnocentric and selective treatments that neglects Muslims' perspective on historical events or their conceptions of development and underdevelopment. Muslims are viewed almost exclusively through the prism of the Western model. This is characterized by the frequent omission of the motivations behind Muslims' actions in such a way that denies their legitimate interests. A confusion between the Arab and Muslim worlds is also present in many cases.

3.1 The Crusades

The description of this critical historical event is made from an exclusively western perspective. While textbooks do not totally otherize Muslims as the incarnation of evil and as creatures alien to God, as Pope Urban II did at the time, the blame for

⁴ The translation of textbook quotations is ours.

the crusades is laid solely on them because of their "denial" of Christian pilgrims' access to Jerusalem and "control" of the tomb of Jesus. It is important to note, in this regard, that no explanation whatsoever is given as to the reasons why Muslims behaved in this manner, which leads to an implicit justification of the crusades' legitimacy.

Although the description of this major event is given in greater detail than all other topics, Muslims are mentioned only at the beginning as the cause and at the end after they drove the Crusaders out. Authors also fail to elaborate on Muslims' respect for the other monotheistic religions.

The Church launched the first Crusade because Turkish Muslims increasingly prevented the entry of Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land. In 1095, Pope Urban II called for the war against Islam in order to liberate Jesus' tomb in Jerusalem. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 220)

Jerusalem was under the control of the Muslim Arabs since the 7th century, but it had always welcomed pilgrims. However, at the beginning of the 11th century Arabs were replaced by the less tolerant Turks thereby worrying Christendom. (*De la pré-histoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 198)

The Crusaders were finally driven out of Palestine in 1291 by Muslims. (*De la pré-histoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 199)

In sharp contrast to the justification of the Crusades by Muslims' hostile actions, many modern historians⁵ identify other important internal factors: the desire to reform the Church, strengthening the Papacy's disputed authority and regaining control of the Greek Orthodox Church, the need to distract European chivalry from its internal wars and, last but not least, the interest of looting the rich East. This latter aspect receives a passing mention in one textbook.

Faith inspired the first Crusades, but other reasons soon took over: thirst for adventure, conquest and profits. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 220)

But *Enjeux et découvertes* (1995: 220) uses the title *The war for the re-conquest of the Holy Land* as if it belonged by right to Western Christians rather than to the local Christians who lived there for centuries.

Interestingly, whereas the consequences of the Crusades on Europe are described at length, the large-scale massacres of thousands of people, especially in Antioch and Jerusalem where Muslims, Jews and Christians were slaughtered, the expulsion of Armenians and Copts from Jerusalem (although their religious freedom was ironically among the Crusaders' stated goals), the sack of the Christian city of Constantinople... are totally absent from the purified historic narrative of Quebec textbooks.

⁵ See Thomas Asbridge (2004) for example.

The Crusades influenced Europe's social and political stability. They made numerous victims. By filling in the social gap caused by these losses, some women and men had an un hoped-for future. The crusades weakened the finances of the feudal landowners, thus paving the way for the re-establishment of monarchy... Christianity came out triumphant from its fight with Islam. At the end of the 11th century, Muslims' monopoly in the Mediterranean was broken. The Reconquista was progressing in Spain. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 221)

The textbook *De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* (1994: 199) enumerates other consequences of the Crusades such as the creation of the order of the monk soldiers and the territorial division of the East among European leaders following initial victories, but no attention at all is paid to the impact on the local population.

Lastly, the Crusaders' final failure is blamed on their internal disunity rather than attributed to the military genius of Salah Uddin (Saladin) in the textbook *De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* (1994: 199) as well as in *Enjeux et découvertes* (1995: 221). The latter's well-known magnanimity towards the Christians⁶, which no textbook mentions, strongly disputes the excessive generalization made in the same textbook that the "Crusades jeopardized any harmony between Judaism, Christianity and Islam" (1995: 220). On the contrary, historical facts demonstrate that, all along the Crusades, which lasted for almost two centuries, Muslims lived more or less peacefully alongside Westerners and allied themselves strategically with the Crusaders to conduct wars against other Muslim rivals.

3.2 Historical relations between Western and Islamic civilizations

Relations between civilizations are described in the corpus as a religious conflict (16 excerpts), an economic rivalry (15), a collaboration and mutual enrichment (12) and a political rivalry (9). When the angle is economic, they are usually mentioned as positive, but when the religious and political dimensions are at stake, they are described as rather negative. On the positive side, Arabs' and Turks' tolerance of Christians in Jerusalem and Constantinople are mentioned very briefly.

[Jerusalem] was in the hands of Muslim Arabs since the 7th century, but it had always welcomed pilgrims. (*De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 198)

Renamed Istanbul, as a Turkish and Muslim city, it remained the home of the Greek Orthodox Church. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 259)

Despite conflicts of various natures, Muslims' influence on the development and enrichment of European cities as well as the emergence of the merchant bourgeoisie is also described in positive terms. Mentions are also made of the fact that the Muslim Dinar was used by the Europeans as an international currency until the 12th century.

⁶ Christians were given a choice between continuing to live and practice their religion in peace or leaving Jerusalem with their belongings, many of which were obviously stolen in earlier Crusades.

Venice owes its prosperity to its port and numerous traders who had fruitful commercial relations with European as well as Byzantine and Arab merchants. (*De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 209)

Through contacts with the East, Italian traders learned about the conditions of commercial prosperity: the circulation of a strong currency and tightly-controlled accounting practices. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 250)

The positive effect of contact with Muslim civilization on the development of science in Europe is also recognized.

Exchanging with Jews, Christians of the East and Muslims, monks spread new ideas in Europe in terms of technology, science and philosophy. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 216)

However, in other instances, not only is the recognition of Muslims' (and Byzantines') contribution to the Renaissance brief, but it is also described from an ethnocentric perspective that serves to highlight the West's creative genius.

Inspired by ancient works obtained from Byzantines and Muslims, Western artists slowly developed new literary and artistic forms... they proposed a more human vision of the world. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 295)

After indicating that mathematics occupied henceforth an important place in the search for understanding the world, one textbook claims that:

Seeking to understand the laws of the universe through reason and experience, science explored domains that were until then subordinated to religious beliefs. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 295)

While this was true for the Western Middle Ages when the Church persecuted scientists who challenged faith to the point that some of them took refuge in Muslim lands, Islam's relation to science has not been one of persecution nor of reserving some fields of scientific enquiry to religion. This explains the tremendous flourishing of sciences in the early Islamic era. Averroes' advocacy of the separation of religion and science centuries before served as a significant basis for the European Renaissance.

The exclusive description of Islam's expansion as a quick military conquest also puts an undue stress on religious and political conflicts. In contrast, history shows that commerce and peaceful contact with Islam played a much bigger role. No army was sent to Indonesia and yet trade and contact with Muslims led it to become the biggest Muslim country. Besides, both Egypt and Syria took centuries to become predominantly Muslim after slow conversion rather than military coercion. The verbs used to describe Muslim actions also often connote extreme violence.

From the seventh century on, Muslim armies tore the Middle East and Egypt out of the Byzantine Empire, wiped out the Germanic kingdoms of North Africa and Spain and, to the East, pushed their way till India. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 230).

Solidly implanted around Byzantium, the Turks also represented a serious threat to the West. They aimed for the control of the Mediterranean Sea and the conquest of Europe. It was a sort of response to the Christian Crusades, under the name of jihad, Muslims' holy war⁷. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 330)

Interestingly, no reason, other than religious hatred and revenge, is ever given in the historical narrative to explain Muslims' behavior. As a result, their acts appear as unfounded and irrational aggressions that cannot be accounted for by legitimate interests. Under the subtitle the "Turkish nightmare", we can read:

Triumphant in the Holy Land, and masters of Byzantium (Constantinople, 1453), the Turks blocked the terrestrial routes toward the East. They limited the Genoese and the Venetians to a few ports only. They charged them an annual commercial tax and set the prices for coveted products in the West, such as spices, perfumes, precious stones, etc. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 330)

Given the construction of Muslims as both a religious and economic threat, it follows logically that Western acts become portrayed as defensive measures aimed at stopping the expansion of Muslims' influence.

Priests traveled to spread the Gospel, to increase the influence of the Church and to counter that of Islam. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 332)

Portugal deployed the necessary means to attain the sources of African gold by sea and thus eliminate Muslim middlemen... while evangelizing in the process the populations of the Sahara and Asia. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 333)

3.3 Colonization

The coverage of colonization is no exception to the general trend of ethnocentric and superficial narrative. One must, nevertheless, note the disappearance of the justification of colonization through various arguments (such as keeping order, improving living conditions and "civilizing" the colonized) that were identified in earlier textbooks. The following quotes from the 1980s textbooks illustrate previous justifications of colonialism:

The history of the European penetration of Africa is an example of missionary work, commerce and domination. (*Les continents du Sud* 1977: 96)

⁷ There is no such notion as Holy War in Islam and jihad in the military sense is restricted by several rules: it must be defensive and proportionate and civilians and their sources of livelihood must be spared.

Admittedly colonization has, on the whole, improved the living conditions of indigenous populations; the ravages of the looting tribes, clannish quarrels in which people mutually exterminated each other disappeared. (*Histoire générale de 1789 à nos jours* 1975: 170)

... these 7 small Arab states... were used to permanent looting, war and piracy... a treaty was maintained by force by the British administration. (*L'Eurasie* 1974: 187)

But this evolution has not gone as far as providing a critical and thorough analysis of the phenomenon. It is thus through relatively recurring bits and parts that one gets a glimpse of what could be the ideological representation that current authors hold of colonialism. First, in some textbooks, it is described as almost a "natural" or an unavoidable result of Europe's economic and industrial development. For instance, we are told that Europe's supremacy

gave rise to a new imperialism, an expansionist push by the West into Africa, Asia and Oceania. Western powers took over new sources of raw materials essential to their civilian and military industries. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 445)

Also, the language used to describe colonization often makes it look more benign than it actually was. At no point are colonial military violence and the death of millions that resulted from it mentioned.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the West transformed almost all the countries of Africa and the majority of the countries of Asia, including India, into colonies. (*De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 497)

In this regard, the definitions of imperialism, colonies and colonization offer interesting insights into the role of the vocabulary in the obscuring of local populations and the nature of colonial actions. Imperialism is defined in the following terms:

Policy of a State aimed at increasing its power by dominating foreign territories culturally, economically and administratively. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 548)

A colony is described as a:

Settlement founded by the inhabitants of a country in a foreign territory subjected to their dominance. (*De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 517)

Colonization is said to be a sort of:

Development and exploitation of territories that have become colonies. (*De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 517)

fight for independence but never directly with the act of colonization and the repression of grass-root movements for independence.

One after the other, the colonized countries of Africa and Asia rebelled and gained, often through the use of arms, their political independence. (*De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 498)

Furthermore, the effects of colonization on the colonized populations are ignored by most textbooks or are described as some sort of "collateral damage" as in the following commentary on a map describing competition between colonial empires.

Depending on national interests, the four great powers rivaled with each other... and the rest of the planet bore the brunt. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 445)

3.4 The two World Wars

The most troubling aspect about the coverage of these landmark historical events is its general brevity and shallowness. This results in the omission of significant facts, some of which still have far reaching impacts both on the Muslim world and on international relations as a whole today. For example, there are no references to the Mandate system that divided the Middle East into French and British areas of influence and that contributed to the emergence of Israel as well as to the creation of new Arab countries following the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. The closest the textbook *Enjeux et découvertes* (1995: 504) gets to touching on these subjects is this excerpt:

The armistice sanctioned the victory of the Alliance, dismembered central Empires and imposed heavy war reparations on the vanquished.

The Arab revolt against the Turks encouraged by the British is also absent. Besides, textbooks fail to report the participation of hundreds of thousands of Muslims in the two World Wars beside the British and the French. Furthermore, the fact that the Muslim world was a field for many battles, some of which marked a turning point in the course of WWII, is recognized only very briefly in *De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* (1994) which names the battle of El Alamein in Egypt on a map. For its part, *Enjeux et découvertes* (1995: 504) refers to the WWI battlefields in this way:

The first major conflict of the 20th century mostly took place in Europe, but also in the North Sea, in the Middle-East, as well as in the colonies in Africa and Asia.

Based on this coverage, it is seriously doubtful that Quebec students will learn anything significant about these major historical events as they relate to the Muslim world both historically and in terms of its present-day realities.

While slightly more balanced and sometimes critical of western powers, the coverage of this event is still largely marked by simplistic and selective explanations and factual errors. For example, in some textbooks, the only reason put forward to explain the price increase is Arab countries' desire to take revenge against the West because of its support for Israel.

Following the Arab-Israeli war, Arab countries flexed their oil power in order to punish Western countries for their support to Israel. The immediate consequence of this measure was the fourfold rise in oil prices, going up from \$10 a barrel to close to \$32. (*Cours circuit* 1993: 440)

This simplistic account ignores two important facts: first, it was Iran, a non-Arab country, that initiated the call for the increase in oil prices and, second, this proposal was supported by other non-Muslim and non-Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) such as Venezuela and Mexico. In contrast, the textbook *Géographie générale* (1998) provides a more objective and logical account that takes into consideration the legitimate interests of oil-exporting countries when describing OPEC's foundation:

Thirteen countries grouped together and agreed to all sell oil to Western countries at the same price: these were poor countries that did not want to be exploited by rich countries. (113)

Both Economic Education textbooks examined in this study also identify the rise in oil prices as the root cause for Third World debt while sidestepping the more important effect of the unfair rules of the current international economic system.

It was after the first oil shock (1973) that Third World debt began to increase. The hike in the price of black gold allowed oil-exporting countries to earn additional revenues, which they deposited in the banks of the industrialized countries. The banks placed the petrodollars in loans lent out in low interest rates. Many Third world countries were among their clients. Some of these countries became heavily indebted. (*Indices* 1993: 476)

In a similar vein, *Cours circuit* (1993: 440) quotes a newspaper article that agrees wholeheartedly with this explanation of the debt while adding a factor: the falling prices of raw materials that represent the major export items of poor countries:

Oil exporting countries found themselves with financial surpluses that they invested in Western banks. The latter, in turn, started giving easy term loans to underdeveloped countries, which were very happy to find money to finance their growing agriculture, industries and infrastructure. Things were going well until the late 1970s. In 1979, the second oil shock coincided with the fall of raw materials' prices.

Finally, in contrast with the 1980s textbooks, those in use in Quebec classrooms in the 2003–2004 school year do not refer to the failure of Arab countries to take full advantage of their sudden new wealth because of backward traditions and inadequate social structures, as the following excerpt implied.

The increase of oil prices had destabilizing effects in the Third World: the brutal influx of capital did not necessarily allow it to free itself from traditional deadlocks, in particular those related to social structures. (*Géographie du monde actuel* 1980: 24)

3.6 The 1991 war against Iraq

The war against Iraq is described from a Western perspective that excludes any other contesting point of view. This one-dimensional description is not surprising if we bear in mind the extensive one-sided media coverage of this event and the demonization of Iraq and its people by reducing them to their dictator. More specifically, excessive focus is laid on Western technological superiority. Under the subtitle “The technological war” the textbook *Enjeux et découvertes* (1995: 507) states that:

Of all the conflicts in the current century, none has been more technological than the Gulf War. The allied military deployment crushed the ill-equipped and ill-fed Iraqi troops...

The same textbook adds this following comment to a photo showing a triumphant George Bush senior with an easily recognizable Patriot missile in the background. The only reservation expressed by the authors on the American perspective is the use of the brackets when talking about “smart” weapons:

To win a decisive and swift victory during the Gulf War, the West mobilized a sophisticated arsenal: stealth bombers, “smart” weapons, electronic jamming measures and counter measures, cruise missiles, etc. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 507)

The second world history textbook *De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* (1994) deals exclusively with the technological aspect of the war that ensured a quick Western victory. It offers the following comment on a photo of a tank in the desert:

The Gulf War, a blitzkrieg that lasted only from January 12 to February 28, 1991[...]. Americans used their latest weapons and tested their efficiency in “real situation”. (1994: 466)

As far as the causes of the war are concerned, we are told that it was led in order to:

Liberate Kuwait and relieve Saudi Arabia, whose oil reserves are vital for the industrialized countries. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 507)

The claim that the war was meant to relieve Saudi Arabia from an imminent threat posed by Iraq has been disputed following the examination of commercial satellite images that contradict the American argument that Saudi Arabia was next on Saddam's expansionist designs list. Iraq's arguments (both historic and related to Kuwait's violation of agreements regarding pumping oil from disputed border fields and overproduction...) are left out completely left of the textbooks.

As for the consequences, they are described in a very limited way. For instance, *Enjeux et découvertes* (1995: 507) states that:

Kuwait was liberated and some regions of Iraq were placed under international surveillance.

In all textbooks, the Western perspective is so predominant that Iraqis are almost absent from the narrative. Even when victims are mentioned briefly, this is done in a comparative context that stresses Western technological superiority.

Iraq suffered around 100 000 deaths and almost as many prisoners, whereas the Coalition declared less than 200 persons killed⁸. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 507)

Other noticeable omissions in the coverage of this event include the impact of the deliberate destruction of the infrastructure by the Americans and their allies on Iraqi civilians as well as that of the economic embargo on civilians that lasted until the American invasion in March 2003.

3.7 Current economic and social situation of the Muslim world

The discussion of this theme is no exception to the largely ethnocentric standpoint that projects Western schemas on the understanding of Muslim realities. It is also superficial and fails to take into account the variety of economic and social situations across the Muslim world. Obviously one finds the usual reference to the Gulf States and the wealth generated by their oil, but overall the general tendency is to describe the economic realities of Muslim countries as characterized by underdevelopment and poverty. In some instances, it led to astonishing generalizations that put Pakistan (a nuclear power) on the same footing as Chad, Mali and Somalia.

Although they are only partially or little industrialized, some oil-exporting countries are considered as rich ones; they are the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar... (*Cours Circuit* 1993: 432)

Other countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have accumulated great wealth thanks to oil exports. However, all these countries are still considered as developing ones because they have not achieved their industrialization. (*Indices* 1993: 458)

8 One should note the omission of the agent through use of 'dead' for Iraqi victims, mostly civilians, and the use of 'killed', which necessarily requires an agent, when referring to the Coalition's military casualties.

But there are still many under-developed countries that are completely impoverished... like Chad, Mali, Somalia... and Pakistan. (*Une planète à découvrir: la terre* 1993: 325)

Although not focused primarily on Muslim countries, the treatment of development and underdevelopment, also marked by bias, often takes them as examples. In most textbooks, the predominance of a Western income-based model of development under the guise of such "objective" criteria as the Gross Domestic Product is obvious. Under-development is widely attributed to endogenous factors (population growth, mentalities, lack of productivity) while exogenous factors (e.g. colonization, the unfavorable current economic system and policies imposed by international institutions, the decrease of prices of export-based agriculture...) are mentioned less often. Nevertheless, *De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* offered a more complex description by mentioning the role of colonization and of current unequal relations in underdevelopment.

... This gap has historical foundations. Before even being colonized by the West, most of the developing countries had only attained a low level of economic and technical development. However, colonizers reinforced this reality by limiting these countries to the role of exporters of raw materials in order to keep for themselves the monopoly of industrial production... Later on, when countries from the South became independent, they had to face numerous problems: demographic explosion, illiteracy, malnutrition, lack of capital, high costs of new technologies, debt and difficult access to the international market. (*De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 507)

As for development, it is mostly described as the result of external human and technical expertise as well as foreign capitals. Speaking of Mexico, Algeria and Thailand, *Une planète à découvrir: la terre* (1993: 325) states that:

the aid provided by developed countries allows them to exploit their natural resources and to buy the equipment destined to improve the living standards of their inhabitants.

Some authors are, nevertheless, more critical of the concept of development or of foreign aid. But, even in textbooks that recognize that Western views of development should be put in perspective, no further steps are taken to dwell concretely on the point of view held by more traditional societies, including Muslim ones:

[...] The type of development that is suggested rests upon western values, such as the quest for profit, individualism and the improvement of living standard; these values are sometimes far removed from those that are preferred in those countries. (*De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 507)

In the second instance, foreign aid is sometimes openly criticized as a tool partly responsible for underdevelopment.

Proud of its success and anxious to preserve its advantages, the West imposes its own model through the aid it provides. In exchange for what it gives today to the countries of the South, the West takes hostage their economic and political future. (*Enjeux et découvertes* 1995: 526)

The absence of a clear explanation of how the international economic system functions (rules for setting prices, distribution of production tasks, debt payment, economic domination by international institutions and companies) puts the burden on teachers to complete the very partial critique provided in textbooks.

Beyond this treatment of economic aspects or short mentions of demographic issues, the present day situation of the Muslim world at the social level is almost totally absent in the textbooks. Indeed, we found only one excerpt dealing with the conditions of women accompanied by a stereotypical photo of Iraqi women carrying water containers on their heads.

Two vital feminine tasks

These two photos illustrate two traditional female (and very ancient) tasks in underdeveloped countries. Photo A was taken in Iraq (ancient Mesopotamia). It shows two women carrying containers full of water over their heads. Photo B was taken in the Ivory Coast, a relatively prosperous country of West Africa. It shows an interior courtyard where two young women prepare manioc flour. (*De la préhistoire au siècle actuel* 1994: 503)

In fact, Iraqi women are among the best educated in the Muslim world. Besides, tap water was very largely available to Iraqi households before the impact of the 1991 war. Furthermore, even though the socio-cultural factors mentioned in the excerpt are founded (preference for boys and monopoly over the political power by men), this latter aspect is not exclusive to the Muslim world: a similar situation, though less marked, still prevails in the West. The authors also forget to mention some positive developments in the situation of women in the Muslim world, such as the fact that a woman – Benazir Butto – was elected to the highest post in Pakistan as early as the late 1980s, something that remains to be done in Canada and the United States.

4. Conclusion

This exploratory study has permitted us to identify both some improvements (disappearance of openly-negative attitudes) as well as several shortcomings (persistence of ethnocentric views, superficial treatment and errors) with respect to the coverage of the Muslim world in Quebec French language textbooks from relevant disciplines. Several factors can be suggested to account for the shortcomings.

The fact that the coverage of the Muslim world is made mainly when dealing with historical events that involve the West might offer a partial explanation for the predominance of widely-held ethnocentric views that conflict with solid West-

ern and Muslim scholarly works. Moreover, the lack of centrality of the Muslim world in Quebec's and Canada's history, which limits its importance in the prescribed curriculum, in opposition to countries with more direct colonial past, does not encourage textbook authors to conduct thorough research when discussing aspects related to this issue. As a result, many end up reproducing, often most likely unconsciously, many widely-held simplistic assumptions and opinions spread by Western media.

However, it is impossible, at this stage, to draw any firm conclusions either about the extent of sound knowledge about the Muslim world that textbook authors may have, or about the factors that may influence their choice of sources in this regard. We also don't know how teachers actually use textbooks. Indeed, while expert teachers may recognize bias and balance their teaching by providing alternative information or inviting students to explore resources that offer different perspectives, non expert teachers may rely heavily on the textbooks as a way of reassuring themselves because of their limited knowledge of the issue at stake⁹.

In the following years, we intend to explore these issues as well as to dwell on some of the aspects of the content analysis, using as a corpus new English and French language textbooks of various disciplines adopted in the framework of curriculum reform currently undertaken in Quebec and Ontario. This will allow not only for a comparative analysis between the two largest Canadian provinces, but also offer insight into how the treatment of Islam has evolved in the post 9/11 context. Did the latter contribute to reinforcing widely-held assumptions about Islam and Muslims or, on the contrary, to placing them in a more critical perspective? With regard to teachers' use of textbooks and their perception of the relevance and accuracy of their content, focus groups will be held in which training needs with regards to questions related to Islam and the Muslim world will be particularly addressed. We will also conduct interviews with textbook authors to better understand their underlying logic for content selection and presentation.

The research carried under these various components aims at contributing to a better understanding of the dynamic of curriculum construction and classroom instruction on contested issues, especially as they relate to ethnic relations. It would greatly benefit from international comparisons and discussions, a process we wish to initiate with this presentation of some of the findings of our exploratory study.

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Zusammenfassung

Mehrere vergleichende Studien haben gezeigt, dass die Darstellung des Islam und der muslimischen Welt in westlichen Schulbüchern problematisch ist, und zwar sowohl in Hinsicht auf faktische Fehler als auch in Hinsicht auf ethnozentrische Sichtweisen. Nichtsdestoweniger gibt es bisher in Kanada zu diesem Thema keine neuere Untersuchung, obwohl die muslimische Einwanderung sich seit der Mitte der 1990er Jahre stark entwickelt hat. Eine Probeuntersuchung von 21 Büchern in französischer Sprache für Geschichte und Geographie für den Gebrauch an Schulen in Quebec ist daher als ein erster Schritt durchgeführt worden; sie ist Teil eines größeren Projektes zur Untersuchung von englisch- und französischsprachigen Büchern verschiedener Fächer, die in unterschiedlichen kanadischen Provinzen benutzt werden. Die Inhaltsanalyse von 117 Exzerpten baute auf einer eigenen Methode auf, die einen quantitativen und qualitativen Zugang verbindet. Der Aufsatz beschreibt die Ergebnisse zur Darstellung der muslimischen Welt im internationalen Zusammenhang, und zwar sowohl in Hinsicht auf historische Ereignisse als auch auf die gegenwärtige wirtschaftliche und soziale Situation von muslimischen Ländern. Im Vergleich zu Forschungen aus den 1980er und 1990er Jahren zeigen sich bemerkenswerte Verbesserungen (so das Verschwinden offen negativer Einstellungen), aber auch die Beharrlichkeit einiger Unzulänglichkeiten (oberflächliche Darstellung, faktische Fehler, ethnozentrische Sichtweise). Schlussfolgernd legen die Autoren einige Hypothese vor, um diese Unzulänglichkeiten auf dem Hintergrund zu erklären, dass die muslimische Welt im offiziellen Curriculum keine zentrale Stellung genießt – im Gegensatz zu Ländern mit einer direkten kolonialen Vergangenheit.

Résumé

Plusieurs études comparées ont montré que l'image de l'Islam et du monde musulman véhiculée dans les manuels scolaires occidentaux est particulièrement problématique et que ces derniers contiennent en la matière des erreurs factuelles et des préjugés ethnocentriques. Au Canada, où l'immigration musulmane s'est pourtant bien développée depuis le milieu des années 1990, aucune étude récente n'a encore exploré ce sujet. L'étude de 21 manuels scolaires d'histoire et de géographie de langue française utilisés dans l'enseignement secondaire au Québec a donc été entreprise, comme première étape d'un vaste projet portant sur les manuels de langue française et anglaise de différentes matières en usage dans diverses provinces canadiennes. L'analyse des contenus des 117 extraits retenus a reposé sur une méthode originale combinant des approches quantitatives et qualitatives. L'article présente les résultats se rapportant à la représentation du monde musulman au niveau international, des événements historiques et des contextes socio-économiques actuels de pays musulmans. En comparaison avec les travaux de recherche effectués dans les années 1980 et 1990, les améliorations sont notables (telles que la

disparition de positions ouvertement négatives), mais on constate aussi la persistance d'insuffisances (traitement superficiel, erreurs factuelles, présentation ethnocentrique). En conclusion, les auteurs proposent plusieurs hypothèses pour expliquer ces déficits, dans un contexte caractérisé par le manque d'importance du monde musulman dans le programme d'enseignement en vigueur, contrairement aux pays marqués par un passé colonial.

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