

ISLAM AND EDUCATION IN PLURALISTIC SOCIETIES: INTEGRATION AND TRANSFORMATIONS

**FINAL REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP
HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTREAL
From May 6th to 9th 2008**

Amina Triki-Yamani, Postdoctoral fellow,
Chaire de recherche du Canada sur l'Éducation et les rapports ethniques,
Université de Montréal

Marie Mc Andrew, Professor, Département d'Administration et fondements de
l'éducation, Faculté des sciences de l'éducation, Université de Montréal
Chairholder, Chaire de recherche du Canada sur l'Éducation et les rapports ethniques

With the collaboration of

Patrice Brodeur, Professor, Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions,
Université de Montréal,
Chairholder,
Chaire de recherche du Canada Islam, pluralisme et globalisation

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Executive summary

In May 2008, the Canada Research Chair on Education and Ethnic Relations and the Canada Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism and Globalization organized a workshop on “Islam and Education in Pluralistic Societies: Integration and Transformations,” supported by Canadian Heritage. The main goal of the seminar was to better understand the dynamics of integrating Islam and Muslim minorities within the educational systems of older and younger pluralistic societies, by examining reciprocal transformations that occur during this process. It pursued three main objectives:

- 1) To draw up a comparative assessment of educational issues associated with the presence of Islam in different pluralistic societies in North America, Europe and South Asia, both with regard to the education of Muslim students and to teaching all students about Islam.
- 2) To identify innovative strategies and actions in this regard with a special focus on the contribution of Muslim transnational networks to the integration and transformation of Islam in pluralistic contexts.
- 3) To support the creation of a network of exchange on this issue, bringing together academics, students, decision-makers and representatives of Muslim minorities from different Canadian provinces and pluralistic societies.

To achieve this, the workshop organizers brought together 20 experts from Canada (Ontario and Quebec) and abroad (United States, France, United Kingdom, Spain, India and Lebanon), some of whom were academics while others (two teachers, a school principal) had more practical knowledge of the topic. The audience was composed of over 60 university researchers, graduate students, decision-makers at the federal and provincial levels, people involved at different levels of the school system, and NGO representatives.

The workshop contributed to a better understanding of the dynamics surrounding the integration of Islam and of Muslim minorities within educational systems in pluralistic societies. Resulting reciprocal transformations were also explored. These dynamics were illustrated in two different types of societies, namely, where the Muslim presence is longstanding, and where it is the result of recent immigration. A comparative approach was adopted when debating political norms, educational programs and innovative practices regarding ethnic and/or religious minorities in general, and Muslims in particular, with a focus on the school environment. A list of educational challenges associated with the presence of Islam in various Canadian provinces as well as in Western (United States, France, United Kingdom, Spain) and Eastern (India and Lebanon) societies was also drawn up. The most common challenges identified in the presentations were the educational outcomes of Muslim students, teaching about Islam, and taking into account certain religious requirements within the public school system.

1- More specifically, the first two sessions explored **adaptations that take place both in public and ethno-specific institutions**. In the first instance, the presentation explored a large inventory of institutional measures designed to adapt norms, programs and practices to meet the needs of Muslim minorities in a more or less inclusive manner, according to the society examined. Some presenters also explained how the inclusion of religious knowledge in the official curriculum contributes to the educational success and social integration into mainstream society of students belonging to religious minorities. In the second instance, academic studies as well as the testimony of the vice-principal of a private Muslim school explored the adaptation of ethno-specific schools to common civic values and the requirements of the society at large with regard to integration. The cases of Muslim schools in Ontario, France and Montreal were described. Moreover, an Indian researcher showed how the modernization of the madrasah in the province of

West Bengal contributed to improved educational outcomes for the Muslim minority. The sharing of ideas and expertise during this session generated many innovative ideas for the integration of Muslim students, whether they are educated in public or ethno-specific schools.

2- Major issues related to **teaching all students about Islam** were then explored through two consecutive sessions: the formal curriculum and textbooks, and the real curriculum. With respect to textbooks, the findings were similar for many societies. The researchers all noted a significant evolution in the qualitative and quantitative questions related to Islam and to the Muslim world in more recent textbooks. However, many omissions, factual errors and ethnocentric biases remain which led to the conclusion that Eurocentrism is still very present. The Lebanese case study showed how difficult it can be to introduce a balanced treatment of Islam and Muslim culture in the curriculum of a society so deeply divided, although the author concluded with a positive assessment of the interreligious challenges confronting Lebanon. In terms of the *real* curriculum, presentations focused mainly on the uneasiness and even the discomfort felt by teachers when teaching about Islam and religion in general. Their lack of expertise and training was especially stressed. Other presentations, however, showed that students appreciate their teachers' efforts in this regard despite their many shortcomings.

3- Lastly, the workshop addressed the **role of Muslim transnational networks** in supporting both the modernization of Islam and the adaptation of educational institutions in this regard. The three presentations showed that many of these networks have undergone important reforms both from a hermeneutical and an epistemological point of view, especially those influenced by a new generation of Muslim intellectuals who seek to link Islamic values and practices with secular Western ones (specifically the Turkish reform movement Fethullah Gülen and the Moroccan Sufi order that follows the ways of Al-Qadiriyya Boutchichiyya).

Introduction

Events related to 9/11 prompted a major shift in the debate on immigration and religious pluralism, especially with respect to Islam, both in European societies, where contact with the Muslim World is longstanding, often due to a history of colonialism, and in countries of more recent immigration, like Canada and the United States, which are receiving an increasing number of Muslim immigrants. In other contexts, where the presence of Muslims has little to do with the dynamics of immigration (e.g. India, Lebanon), the delicate balance between religions has also become more complex. Moreover, Islam is currently experiencing some difficulty in defining its relationship to secularism: in particular, the distinction between public and private space has been at the centre of numerous internal debates and conflicts with the institutions of pluralistic societies with a Muslim presence. In terms of education, research on the treatment of non-Western religions and civilizations in the curriculum has shown that there are more errors, omissions and ethnocentric bias when it comes to Islam and the Muslim world. Moreover, numerous conflicts related to the management of ethno-cultural diversity, most of which concern Muslim students, have affected public schools in secular societies, which are facing increasing demands to adapt their norms and practices.

It is in this context that the Canada Research Chair on Education and Ethnic Relations and the Canada Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism and Globalization organized, in May 2008, a workshop on “Islam and Education in Pluralistic Societies: Integration and Transformations,” supported by Canadian Heritage. The main goal of the seminar was to better understand the dynamics of integrating Islam and Muslim minorities within the educational systems of older and younger pluralistic societies, and examine reciprocal transformations that occur during this process. It pursued three main objectives:

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To achieve this goal, the workshop organizers brought together 20 experts from Canada (Ontario and Quebec) and abroad (United States, France, United Kingdom, Spain, India and Lebanon) some of whom were academics while others (two teachers, a school principal) had more practical knowledge of the topic. The audience was made up of more than 60 university researchers, graduate students, decision-makers at the federal and provincial levels, people involved at different levels of the school system and NGO representatives. One of the most original aspects of the workshop was the use of discussants belonging to other religious and/or ethnic communities, including Sikhs, Jews, Indians and Haitians. These discussants brought a cross-cultural perspective to the workshop by contributing knowledge of their respective communities and comparing the similarities and differences between the educational challenges faced by their communities and those facing the Muslim community.

The workshop was divided into five sessions: Adaptation of Norms, Programs and Practices of Public Schools to the Needs of Muslim Students; Adaptation of Faith-Based Schools to Common Civic Values and the Requirements of Mainstream Society; Teaching about Islam and the Muslim

World: Formal Curriculum and Textbooks; Teaching about Islam and the Muslim World: Real Curriculum; and Islamic Transnational Educational Networks. The principal part of the report presents a synthesis of the presentations and exchanges that took place in each of the five sessions.

Synthesis of the workshop and exchanges

Wednesday Morning, May 7th, 2008

Opening session

Justine Akman, Department of Canadian Heritage, Canada

Michel D. Laurier, Faculté des Sciences de l'Éducation, Université de Montréal

J. Ackman started by thanking the conference organizers for hosting the workshop on a theme that is extremely relevant for the Multiculturalism Policy & Human Rights Directorate of Canadian Heritage, especially since the Canadian government recently announced new multicultural program priorities. Regardless of the debate over public funding of faith-based schools, the public system will need to continue to respond to the many challenges faced by a diverse society. These include curriculum change to reflect the increasing visible minority and English/French-as-a-second language student population and to respond to the achievement problem experienced by Aboriginal and black students. Teacher education must also be improved so that they are better prepared to intervene in diverse classrooms. Finally, she expressed her appreciation that the conference sought a better understanding of the dynamics of mutual transformation between Muslim students and the educational systems of pluralistic societies. She was confident that the results of our discussions would contribute to successful social integration.

M. D. Laurier highlighted the importance of such an event for the Faculty of Education to which the Canada Research Chair on Ethnic Relations and Education is associated, especially since the timing of the workshop coincided with the implementation of the new Ethics and Religious Culture course, one of the consequences of the secularization of the Quebec school system since 1998. The Dean also expressed confidence that the presentations and discussions would contribute to the various teacher education programs in the Faculty concerned with cultural diversity and multi-ethnicity in schools. He especially welcomed the balance between national and international presenters and the comparative perspective of the workshop. From this point of view, it was especially interesting that the educational systems addressed in the workshop adopt models that take cultural and religious diversity into account, although to varying extents depending on their sociopolitical contexts. Finally, he was also confident that the workshop would illustrate how issues of cultural and religious diversity are important in a context where they are often downplayed in a secular, and even in some instances, antireligious, Quebec.

Session 1: Adaptation of Norms, Programs and Practices of Public Schools to the Needs of Muslim Students

The objective of this session was to explore current educational policies regarding ethnic tensions and conflicting values at a time when secularism, group identities and religious demands for accommodation in schools are at the center of the political debate. More specifically, we aimed to compare, at the international level, the experiences that various different educational institutions have had with regards to adaptations to the needs of Muslim students. In the three first sessions, we saw how these institutions modify norms, practices and programs in Quebec, France and the United Kingdom in order to achieve a better integration of Muslim students, and why these compromises sometimes lead to controversies in educational circles. The last presentation was

mainly based upon the participant's experience with the teaching of religious pluralism to Muslim and non-Muslim students in a high school linked to the Toronto District School Board.

Chair: Justine Akman, Department of Canadian Heritage, Canada

Panelists:

Marie McAndrew, Université de Montréal, Canada

Francoise Lorcerie, Institut de Recherche et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman, France

Julia Igrave, Oxford University, UK

Salima Bhimani, University of Toronto, Canada

Discussant : Manjit Singh, McGill University

MARIE MC ANDREW, Université de Montréal

The Muslim Community and Education in Quebec: Controversies and Mutual Adaptation

Marie McAndrew showed in her presentation how the adaptation to the specific needs of the Muslim community in Quebec, especially in the educational milieu, has become a hotly debated issue following the increase of this population at the end of the 1980's and the new attendance of Muslim youth to French schools. She began by giving an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the Muslim school population and its educational experiences, as well as some of the impacts of its presence in Quebec schools. 70% of the Quebec Muslim population has migrated since 1991 (North Africa, Middle East, Asia) and its members are often more educated than the general population. More than 90% of the Muslim students attend French language schools and most of them are in public schools. In general, they have positive educational characteristics and outcomes. The presenter then described three important controversies that have targeted the Muslim community in the last fifteen years. The first one concerned the teaching of Arabic in 1988 allowed by the Program for Study of Languages of Origin (PELO) in Quebec schools and showed how the public opinion does not always make the distinction between "Muslims" and "Arabs". A peaceful settlement was achieved nevertheless due to the leadership of the School Board and the "political" skills of Arabic parents. However, the hijab crisis of 1995 revealed a much more complex debate within Quebec public schools. The starting point was the exclusion of a young Muslim French-Canadian student from an elitist public school because of her refusal to respect the school's regulations. This issue rapidly became "national" in character and highlighted a division in public opinion, including a split within the Muslim community itself: some groups adopted a liberal position and called for tolerance, while others adopted a position against the wearing of these Muslim symbols which were seen as a threat to democracy and to gender equality. Even if the institutional response was rather adequate, the conflict gave rise to many racist slip-offs and stereotypical representations of the Muslim community. Finally, the "reasonable accommodation" controversy started in May 2007 with a non-Muslim issue (the wearing of the kirpan) and lasted for a full year as it was fuelled by the media. The politicization of the debate led to the creation of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences. Among the numerous mediated cases of "unreasonable accommodations", many concerned the Muslim community, but they were seldom linked to the educational sphere. When this was the case, universities were more often at the forefront than primary and secondary schools. Many Muslim stereotypes were reiterated and intensified in the public discourse. Finally, M. McAndrew stressed that on the ground, contrary to popular belief, adaptation seemed to be rather happening smoothly as revealed by many testimonies from School Board or academic studies. For example, the Fleury report has shown a situation that is far from dramatic: among the 2/3 of school principals who responded to the survey, only 1/4 had received some requests for religious, linguistic or cultural adaptations. Moreover, although most requests concerned religious diversity, Islam was not at the forefront.

The report also strengthened and rendered more systematic a series of guidelines that had been previously expressed in various documents and training units. While reiterating some legal principles common to any type of institutions (the respect for democratic values; undue hardship), the document identifies elements that are specific to schools, such as the role that reasonable accommodation can play in bridging the gap between families and school, the importance of respecting the state of knowledge and the mandate of instruction that school carries in democratic societies, as well as the necessity to insure that the adaptation of norms and practices contribute to the integration of students to school activities. These principles received the support of the 26-committee members (among them were the main school principals and members of the teacher's unions, the Federation of school boards, the Central Committee of Parents) as well as of representatives of many religious and ethnic organisations.

FRANÇOISE LORCERIE, Institut de Recherches et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman

A French Approach to Minority Islam in Education? Normative Confusion

F Lorcerie started her presentation by describing the French republican model for schools. She argued that the normative model of the “Republican school” that school agents adhere to conveys no special ban against Muslim signs or clothes. She depicted the normative model of republicanism in education as impersonal. It is also focused on teaching much more than on learning. In the republican model, teaching is equated to the transmission of knowledge, as in the positivist epistemology. Hence equality of opportunities is supposed to be secured among pupils. The regulatory regime of this model organizes a distance between the parents and the school as well as between the pupils and the teachers in the classroom. Teachers usually display an authoritative style of teaching which allows them to maintain a distance between pupils. Though not all French school agents agree completely with this normative framework, the “Republican model” remains an important piece of French social cognition regarding school education. On the other hand, the presenter remarked that the conviction that social features have no relevance at school is counterbalanced by other convictions linked to minority processes that are occurring in French society. The visibility of the “second generation” has become a major factor of social processes in France and generated various kinds of reactions within school spaces. People with African and North African features have become *visible* minorities and in their case, Islam is racialized. F. Lorcerie explained the strong ethnic-racial categorisation against French Muslims by the colonialist past of France in African countries, the important size and the location of most of these immigrants in popular areas as well as the issue of juvenile unrest and delinquency are all factors that have contributed to shaping the current situation in France. But the inquiries that have been held concerning Muslim student's reactions did not confirm the apocalyptic accounts that may be read in certain media and essays during the intensive debate about the wearing of headscarves at school. F. Lorcerie stressed that in the society at large and in school, most Muslim youth do not react as Muslims in the extremist sense. They feel Muslim and strongly self-identify with Islam, but never to the detriment of other social memberships. They are very interested in certain points of the curriculum. They are especially curious about explanations about the colonial enterprise and the issue of the Muslim religion. The panellist declared that in the case of France there is a marginal adaptation to Muslims' demands in the field of “school life”, – a domain which is not the responsibility of teachers but of that of special categories of agents. For the time being, France is witnessing other types of educational reactions to the salience of ethnicity, namely erratic reactions from teachers and other school agents who are obliged to manage issues without having been trained to do so. Adaptations are basically arbitrary and personal. In this context, observers found a high degree of ethnic-racial “othering” against Muslim students among

these school agents who hold that Islam is a culture which separates students from “laïcité” and “normal” school behaviour. Coexisting with that widespread othering of Muslims in schools and partly in reaction to it, certain teachers display efforts to adapt to Muslim students’ expectations. F. Lorcerie concluded by mentioning the enduring contradiction in the French educational field between the ideological polarisation around the norms of the “Republican model” and the “Republican school”. While this ideology demands that individuals adapt to it and that students abstain from showing any signs of religious affiliation, teachers have developed unstable practices with the intent to address the new issues and expectations they feel emerging from the reality of their classrooms. Within the current French organisational conditions which prevail in schools, teachers are lead to improvise and may become trapped by commonsense language and explanations.

JULIA IPGRAVE, Oxford Brookes University

Including the Religious Viewpoints and Experiences of Muslim Students in an Educational Environment That is Both Plural and Secular

This presentation reflected upon factors in the educational inclusion and success of pupils of Muslim faith within mainstream education settings in England. Julia Igrave’s reflections are informed by fifteen years spent working as a teacher and a researcher with Muslim school pupils in the Midlands and by a broader awareness of issues relating to the education of young Muslims that have arisen in recent years across the country, including debates around the wearing of religious symbols, concerns with the segregation of some English towns and cities along religious lines and the low achievement levels of large numbers of Muslim pupils. The presentation began by setting out the following three reasons for the inclusion of pupils’ religion within the organisation and curriculum of the school: the current moves towards the personalization of learning in English schools, the underachievement of many students from Muslim communities and the right to the manifestation of religion as inscribed in European laws. Reading through the literature, it appears that the emphasis varies between a focus on practical cultural and religious needs such as prayer facilities, dress codes, dietary requirements, the use of musical instruments, the intermingling of girls and boys, and a more theologically grounded perspective that stresses the centrality of God to Islamic conceptions of the nature of knowledge. In the second part, the presenter showed how the community-oriented perspective with its focus on cultural identity has dominated English school strategies, while at the same time; she argued that the theological perspective should also be taken seriously by schools in the development of an epistemology-based approach to inclusion. J. Igrave described and assessed the identity-based approach to inclusion and suggested a distinction between permissive and affirmative stances to analyse practices. The permissive approach entails allowing pupils to manifest their religious identity within schools, or at least not setting up boundaries to that manifestation, for example: providing opportunities and spaces for Muslim prayer, allowing students to attend the local mosque for Friday prayer, adapting the school uniform policy so Muslim girls are able to wear trousers or *shalwar kameez* and hijab, etc. Affirmative inclusion involves a proactive move by schools to recognise the religion of their pupils in school events and in the curriculum through the following measures: recognition of different religious festivals, in primary schools in particular, through celebrations, parties, plays and activity days. To varying degrees across the country pupils’ religious culture has been introduced into a multicultural curriculum so that classes with Muslim students might, for example, consider past and present achievements of Islamic writers, artists, mathematicians and scientists, these examples consist in models of high achievement for young Muslims to aspire to. But, one of the difficulties is that the school ends up defining the religious culture of the students both within the permissive stance where school authorities decide what shall or shall not be permitted (hijab is permitted but not wearing the niqab) and in the affirmative

stance where schools select which aspects of a religion they are willing to promote. The presenter proceeded to argue for an epistemology-based approach that makes room for students' experiential and theological perspectives with regards to the contents of their learning. A school that is epistemologically inclusive is aware of the potential for tension between different conceptualisations of the world and makes allowances for different forms of knowledge to exist side by side within the delivery of the curriculum. Students should engage in the construction and acquisition of the factual and conceptual base needed to advance within the different school disciplines and at a pragmatic level they need too to learn to select forms of knowledge appropriate for assessment exercises.

SALIMA BHIMANI, University of Toronto

The Dialectical Practice of Religious Pluralism in a Toronto Classroom: The Journey of Muslim and Non-Muslim Students

S. Bhimani presented the process of creating religious pluralism in her work as a high school teacher in the TDSB through teaching grade 11 world religions, introduction to anthropology, psychology and sociology and various courses in grade 12 family studies. The presenter began by explaining her motivation to become a teacher and how she got involved in implementing religious pluralism as a critical dialectical process in the classroom. When she started to work on various projects concerning racial profiling of visible minorities and issues surrounding equity in the curriculum, she realized that teachers often did not know how to implement resources available in the classroom. Next, the presenter spoke of the dialectics of teacher student relationships by sharing her goals surrounding the practise of religious pluralism. Her classroom was to be a transformative space where students and she would take on issues that don't get talked about. For her, religious pluralism is not just a goal in the classroom, but a practise and a process which requires active involvement. S. Bhimani chose to give the World Religion course at Don Mills Collegiate, a very diverse school which included among its student population an equally diverse Muslim population from Central Asia, South Asia and Iran. A factor which led to the course's success was the support of the school's administration in implementing the course. What interested S. Bhimani was how youth of different religious backgrounds come together and engage with one another when talking about religion. It was an obligatory course and many students who just wanted to passively learn about religion had not chosen it. In S. Bhimani's perspective of religious pluralism, they were creating this class together. As a teacher, her role was to model behaviour for her students and to encourage them to become critically involved, to be honest, present and accountable for what they say, to be anti-oppressive, to take issue with racism and to allow her students to come up and deal with their beliefs while being compassionate. A healthy dose of self-criticism was required on the part of the students. Some students didn't want to meet these expectations as they found them too challenging. However, they began to appreciate the potential and the value in the process and they became excited as the focus shifted towards how to practise religious pluralism. With regards to the dialectics of religious pluralism between students, the presenter spoke of the specificity of Islam and the relationship between Muslim and Non-Muslim students. One of the practices that she encouraged was to get out not only the stereotypes, but what the students didn't know about Islam or what they *thought* they knew. They realized that Islam was for them the most misunderstood religion which had the most stereotypes and fears surrounding it and consequently, they had great difficulty talking about it. Finally, S. Bhimani commented on the limitations of working within broader discourses of multiculturalism and tolerance within school contexts. In her opinion, the celebratory multicultural approach forces the idea of tolerance and coexistence, but doesn't contribute towards the creation of religious pluralism in the school environment. This approach brings up concerns among students and teachers about creating tension and as a result some

students feel that they must not talk about religion for fear of creating conflicts. However, by adopting this critical dialectical approach, educators are engaging their students in collectively creating a space for learning together and participating actively in the process of religious pluralism.

Discussion period

MANJIT SINGH, McGill University, (discussant)

Manjit Singh suggested that the Muslim communities should not be taken as a monolith. He also spoke of the need for mutual adaptation between immigrants and the majority. The discussant explained that immigrants often go through an immense culture shock on many levels and they revert to what they know in efforts to stabilize themselves during the process of immigration. Therefore, policy makers should focus more on individuals.

Clarification questions

A number of questions were directed to the panellists in order to clarify their presentations. J. Bowen began by asking J. Ipgrave to comment on the freedom that religious private schools in the U.K. have to determine their own curriculum. He inquired as to whether there were specific guidelines for the teaching of Biology and in particular, how the topic of Evolution was treated in schools. In response, J. Ipgrave explained that there is a National curriculum in the U.K. and that publicly funded faith-based schools are subject to Government inspection, therefore they are obliged to follow the curriculum. Even when funding is not an issue, as in the case of private academies, the expectation remains that the National curriculum will be taught. J. Bowen then asked F. Lorcerie whether it was possible to compare within the French context the racialization of North African Muslims with that of the Black West Africans. F. Lorcerie responded that this is a difficult question to examine in France because there are few existing studies on racism and racialization in her country. Furthermore, universities do not finance the study of these topics and by neglecting to do so, they are perpetuating societal taboos.

F. Lorcerie also asked her fellow panellist, S. Bhimani, how she evaluated the students who took her course. Bhimani explained that the evaluation required creativity on the part of the teacher and that marks were given for the reflexive process, while the summative evaluation was a culminating point in the process of self-reflection. However, the panellist pointed out what she perceived as an even more important question: how will students allow themselves to participate in the self-reflexive process without reducing it to a question of marks? F. Lorcerie also asked J. Ipgrave whether she would be able to give any information about the possible link between the underachievement of Muslim students in the U.K. and their socio-economic status. In response, the panellist stated that comparative research has shown how on the lower end of the socio-economic scale, students from Pakistani or Bengali backgrounds actually perform better than their British peers, however, in the middle-class bracket, they are underachieving. Thus, the socio-economic situation alone fails to explain the problem. J. Ipgrave believes that researchers should focus instead on the resources of these communities and if religion is a key motivator, they should look at how it can be used to foster success in Muslim students.

Exchanges and debate

A number of issues arose during the discussion period. In response to the discussant's comment about the diversity of the Muslim community, M. McAndrew stated that Quebec Muslim community is a good example of this diversity, as a result of Immigration policy. She spoke in particular of the strengths of the North African community, a French-speaking and vocal

community whose members are often committed to the public school ethic and well integrated into public life. Members of this community will often identify themselves as Muslim; however their relationship with religion may be very different.

With regards to J. Ipgrave's presentation, J. Zine inquired as to how the student's knowledge would be considered at school and whether it would be part of the formal or informal curriculum. She also expressed a concern that the students' knowledge would remain as a subjugated form of knowledge even within the approach of epistemology-based inclusion. J. Ipgrave responded by presenting some of the challenges inherent with the construction of knowledge and in particular, the linear and hierarchical dimensions of this process. Because the new knowledge assumes a hierarchical status above culturally-specific knowledge, the panellist explained that students often feel the need to make a choice. The panellist brought forth yet another limit of the current approach in the UK, the fact that knowledge is sometimes being linked exclusively to different types of people, as a result of the focus on identity groups in the multicultural context.

F. Lorcerie's presentation on the Islamic Minority in France also led to a variety of comments on the part of her fellow panellists, participants and audience members. J. Zine asked why Muslim youths were not reacting as Muslims within French schools and whether internalized racism and oppression were leading these youths to distance themselves from a socially devalued type of identity. F. Lorcerie specified that North African students strongly self-identify as Muslims, but that this identification is discreet and does not usually manifest itself within the school context. However, she remarked that when Muslim youth do feel the need to manifest their identity, it is often as a result of school policies which are discriminatory and thus the system itself is responsible for the aggravation. A Muslim woman in the audience made a comment about the lack of activity from various organizations and groups in France in response to the law that banned the wearing of headscarves in schools. She also characterized the French law as being unconstitutional and against republican values. In response to these comments, F. Lorcerie specified that the law was not in fact unconstitutional, but an exception that stemmed from an imagined notion of republicanism. The panellist also explained that organizations were split over conflicting interpretations of "laïcité"; some felt that religious freedom should be preserved while others saw a need to protect women's rights. This internal division within groups led to a lack of activity or response in opposition to the proposed law. Conversely, M. McAndrew commented on the French situation by remarking that "laïcité" is not always the argument used on the international stage. The discourse adopted there has a more liberal tone; community pressure on young women to wear the headscarf would have led to necessary limitations being placed on this practice.

The issue of the adaptation of pre-service teacher education was raised by J. Zine. She asked the panellist S. Bhimani what needs to be done within teacher education to foster the kind of inclusive, critical and self-reflexive pedagogy that was modelled in her presentation. S. Bhimani began by clarifying that a teacher's goal should not be to avoid tension, but instead to deal with the tension and to encourage self-reflexive dialogue. Concerning pre-service teacher education, the panellist commented that there is as a lack of critical pedagogical approaches and anti-oppressive education in these programs. In response to S. Bhimani's comment, M. McAndrew argued that changes have been made to these programs both Ontario and Quebec, and as a result, students are becoming more familiar with critical thinking. However, she stated that studies show that it takes several years for young teachers to apply what they learn in University in the classroom as they are initially in survival mode.

Finally, a woman from the audience suggested that the key to forming the citizens of tomorrow is to train teachers to be more open to cultural differences and to encourage them to build better

relationships with the students' parents. She would also like to see more critical approaches in schools and at the university level in teaching programs within the Quebec educational system.

Wednesday Afternoon, May 7th, 2008

Session 2: Adaptation of Faith-Based Schools to Common Civic Values and the Requirements of Mainstream Society

Just as it is desirable and necessary for public schools to adapt to the needs of their Muslim students, the ethno-specific Islamic schools have to reconcile their objective of promoting their faith and a particular identity with various normative and curricular requirements of the main society to which they belong. This adaptation can be mainly cosmetic, or, on the contrary, it can consist of a radical transformation of their mandates and of the kind of identity they transmit to their pupils. Testimonies from experts and from principals of publicly or privately funded schools permitted to contrast various case studies concerning Islamic schools in Ontario, France, India and Quebec.

Chair: Roger Boisvert, Ministère de l'Éducation, des Loisirs et du Sport, Canada

Panelists

Jasmin Zine, Sir Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada

John R. Bowen, Washington University in St. Louis, United States of America

Najma Akhtar, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, India

Eman Abu Hijleh, École Jeunes Musulmans Canadiens, Montréal, Canada

Discussants

Lucienne Azoulay, École Maïmonide, Montréal, Canada

Félix Meloul, Association of Jewish Schools, Canada

JASMIN ZINE, Wilfrid Laurier University

The Islamization of Knowledge and Social and Political Praxis in Canadian Islamic Schools

This presentation explored the Islamization of knowledge and praxis within Islamic schools. In her research, J. Zine examined issues related to integrating Islam into the official curriculum through the narratives of Islamic educators, administrators, parents and students. She also paid particular attention to how current global events and social justice concerns are addressed within the curriculum of Islamic schools as a means for promoting spirituality through social and political activism. For parents interviewed who wish their children to have a spiritually based education alongside more secular learning, immersion in an Islamic-centred curriculum was a drawing point. For them, a spiritually centred curriculum was regarded as a means toward inculcating Islamic values and developing an Islamic identity. J. Zine related then how Islamic schoolteachers in elementary and intermediate schooling share their strategies for Islamizing knowledge in their lessons and include Islamic knowledge and values in other areas of educational praxis. She gave the example of Al Safar School whose teachers made connections to the curriculum using Islamic knowledge as a base, such as finding *hadith* or *ayat* that have something to do with the water cycle in the Qur'an. The presenter reported that according to the principal of this school, the strategy of connecting curricular themes to Islamic knowledge was a means for children to see how science actually validates knowledge from the Qur'an rather than contradicts it. Moreover, for a teacher from the elementary level at Al Safar, the Qur'an became

the starting point for lesson planning. She used the index of the Qur'an to introduce a subject with an Islamic perspective. Another teacher also liked using opportunities to rupture the Eurocentrism in the curriculum and the dominance of Western hegemonic knowledge by emphasizing the contributions of Muslim scholars to scientific knowledge and civilization. J. Zine noticed that for many Muslim students, lessons like these were the first time their histories and knowledge (i.e. Muslim contributions to arts and science), occupied a central place within the school curriculum. However, she highlighted that teachers do not receive any formal training or skills in order to develop techniques for the Islamization of knowledge in the curriculum. Only one of the schools in Zine's study had an early childhood education program. For a pre-school teacher at the Al Shawwal School, the pedagogy was based on helping the children develop of sense of *taqwa*, or consciousness of Allah, and in doing so she implemented traditional methods of learning through play and song, featuring predominantly Islamic songs. But the presenter remarked that the use of music in Islamic schools was limited to Islamic songs only. A suggestion by a new principal in one of the schools in this study was to institute the national anthem and this suggestion has been met with mixed responses by parents, some of whom object on the grounds of overemphasizing nationalism. All of the teachers interviewed situated their approach to dealing with issues of social justice from within an Islamic framework. As one of them explained, addressing social and environmental concerns is an integral part of a Muslim identity. One of the most interesting and politically animating activities that the students at Al Rajab were involved in during the time J. Zine was conducting her fieldwork was their participation in a rally to protest the economic sanctions against Iraq, which took place in September 2000. The presenter ended her talk by explaining how this experience was a defining moment for these girls (wearing the *hijab*) coming into their politicization.

JOHN. R. BOWEN, Washington University in St. Louis

Can Religion Coexist with the French Republican School?

In his presentation, J.R. Bowen briefly considered the conceptual place of cultural and ethnic identity in French schools before turning to an analysis of the working of the first Islamic private school in France. He focused on the ways in which teachers in that school situate their students with respect to subjects that they find foreign. J.R. Bowen began his talk by situating his case study within two contexts: the first being the age-old debate around what Education should be, while the second concerns the French Republican sentiment and the policies that accompany it. For the presenter, the long-standing debate on the place of religion in France could partly explain the polemic elicited by the entry of a new candidate for funding as a religious school, the Muslim private school *La Réussite*. J.R. Bowen proceeded to retrace the history of the establishment of the first Muslim private school in France founded in Aubervilliers in September 2001, by Dhaou Meskine, a Tunisian-born educator. Since that ominous date, the school's administration has been able to add one class per year every year and as of 2007 they had a full college and *lycée*. In addition to following the Ministry of Education of France's curriculum, the school also offers Arabic classes for students and their parents, and tutoring. However, since the school's establishment in 2001, it has been plagued by founding difficulties, despite the good report card it has received from inspectors. The presenter stated that the very existence of this school in France incited a great deal of ambivalence. On one hand, some French citizens felt that Muslims should have their own schools if they have difficulty integrating into French ones. On the other hand, another citizens group thought that there was very present danger of communalism. J. R. Bowen had the opportunity to visit *La Réussite* on several occasions. In 2006, the presenter performed the fieldwork that led to the following description of two different lessons, one in Civics, the other in Science. During the first class, the Ministry of Education's brochure was used as a basis for the activity on the topic of civil union. A team of two students reported on a civil union undertaken

by a homosexual couple. Expressions of judgment were made by the students not regarding the nature of the union, but concerning practical elements such as the fee charged by the state for inheritances. The teacher explained that in French society couples often make a civil union first, and then marriage is later undertaken. She proceeded to explain inheritance laws for marriages and civil unions while giving examples that provided a contrast between Eastern and Western societies. During a second period of observation, the presenter viewed a Science class where evolution was discussed. The class had previously performed dissections and they were reviewing the internal organs of different species while comparing them to one another. The teacher reminded the students that some parts of organisms disappeared over the course of evolution. Then, she explained that the unity of all living things was a theory but that it was not an absolute truth. Following this class, the presenter had a conversation with the teacher who explained that she taught the national curriculum as though an inspector was always present. J.R. Bowen concluded by stating that teachers understand that their pupils must learn the official position in order to succeed and that the school must transmit the prescribed curriculum in order to receive funding. According to the presenter, this situation creates an ethical distance between the believers' source of certainty and particular norms of French society. J. R. Bowen did not encounter an Islamic framework for secular studies at the private Muslim school in France, essentially because of what he perceived as an existing social contract which creates a division and does not allow for the Islamizing of knowledge.

NAJMA AKHTAR, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, India

Mainstreaming Madrasah Education in India: A West Bengal Experience

This presentation dealt with how the West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education (WBBME) has been established to help the minorities, especially Muslims, by providing opportunities to mainstream them. N. Akhtar began by describing the Muslim minority and its literacy rate in India and the West Bengal. While the Muslim literacy rate (59.13%) is found to be lower than that of Hindus (65.09%), the majority in India, it is the lowest one (57.5%) in the studied province. The presenter described then the Madrasah education system in India. Since 1994, the WBBME has had an autonomous status and the same powers and privileges of the other State Education Boards. High Madrasahs follow the same syllabus and scheme of studies as followed in the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. In addition to this, Madrasah students read Arabic as a compulsory third language. The presenter highlighted that this equivalence in respect to the educational standard brings Madrasah students at par with students of General Education in West Bengal for their admission in higher studies as well as in the field of employment. She added that, for Higher Secondary Madrasahs curriculum and syllabus, the examinations are the exclusive authority of the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education. Then N. Akhtar focused more on the high Madrasahs selected in the West Bengal for her study (more than 20% of their total number). The presenter noted that these schools impart the same syllabus and textbooks as prescribed by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and that, besides Muslims, they also cater to non-Muslim students. She added that teachers were mostly from Muslim community and only three schools had female heads or principals from girls' Madrasahs. N. Akhtar explained the notion of the school complex which has been conceived with the aim of harmonizing the learning process, material and streams as well as effecting a balanced development of the learner's consciousness as much as possible. The panellist ended her presentation by enumerating some results of her research and recommendations. Madrasahs that provide free education solve the access problems of the rural, and lower socio-economic segment of the population. In the West Bengal Madrasah Board, women administrators are nominal. No boys' or co-educational Madrasah is headed by a women principal. Some studies reveal that to increase the enrolment in

the schools, it is encouraging to have female teachers and female heads of the schools. Madarsahs are government-aided schools. They receive aid from government only for the teachers' salary. They hardly get any other financial aid and in the absence of quality improvement funds, Madarsahs are struggling hard to compete with other schools. Furthermore, the heads of Madarsahs reported that the functioning of Madarsahs could be improved if they could get proper support from the Madarsah Complex. The headmasters also felt that the community could contribute and participate in the planning and the management of Madarsahs. Supervision, which is at the core of improving the teaching-learning process, could also be strengthened with the help of Madarsah complexes. Therefore, proper guidance and training are needed for developing the culture of the school complex. This initiative should be taken from the WBBME. Lastly, the most important step for the heads of Madarsahs would be to have exposure in the field of planning and management, therefore they need capacity building programmes. These programmes should be well designed and based on their training-need assessment. The capacity building programmes need to be organized at the complex level or at district or state level and fully funded and supported by the government of West Bengal.

LAYLA SAWAF & EMAN ABU HIJLEH, École Jeunes Musulmans Canadiens
Students between Two Worlds: Testimonies of a Muslim School Principal

E. Abu Hijleh began her presentation by describing the JMC School as a private non-profit Canadian Muslim School which started with only 40 students in 2000. In the 2007-2008 school year there were 450 students enrolled. The school welcomes pupils from kindergarten to the secondary 5, the last year of high school in Quebec. It follows the Quebec Ministry of Education curriculum, but also teaches the Arabic language, the Quran and principles of the Muslim religion. The three major roles of this ethnic school are teaching, qualifying and integrating students. According to the vice principal, the main misconception of ethnic schools is that they are unable to integrate their pupils easily into Quebec and Canadian society because they focus instead on sheltering the students by preserving their religious and cultural roots. E. Abu Hijleh declared that, on the contrary, through various strategies and through its curriculum, JMC School enables its students to integrate into the mainstream society without losing their religious and cultural roots. The school also invests an important part of its human and material resources to support the children of immigrants who don't have French as their mother tongue. She added that when parents are not well integrated, they start to build a fear of the public system. In that case, schools in general could be a significant connection between the home and the main society. The vice principal affirmed that in JMC School, they use this connection that provides stability for immigrant parents, builds trust in the educational institution and works as an aid to integrate the students in the society they live in while providing an education. On one hand, public schools try to accommodate their Jewish or Muslim students, while on the other hand; ethnic schools try to adapt pupils to common civic values and the requirements of the main society. In this context, the presenter was also very interested in teaching the new course, Ethics and Religious Education. E. Abu hijleh pointed out also that for 99 % of JMC School's population, the maternal language is Arabic and she also remarked that many studies have shown that when pupils learn their mother tongue at school it is easier for them to master other languages (this is the principle behind the P.E.L.O. program in public schools). Furthermore, while prayers are practised by Muslim pupils, activities are organized for non-Muslims students. The presenter specified that, as there is not enough time to fully teach Islamic principles, they are integrated through day-to-day activities, in cultural activities as well as in ethic and moral ones. However, the school has had to meet many challenges such as the constant changing of curriculum requirements, the lack of textbooks, the availability of teachers with a teaching permit, the difficulty of evaluating teachers of optional subjects to grant them permission to teach as well as the budget constraints. In addition to the

teaching provided, the school also organizes educational outings, activities, visits to other schools and students participate in national and local competitions. E. Abu Hijleh ended by affirming that public and private schools must coordinate their efforts to achieve their primary objectives, education and integration, and as they have the same objectives, they should be allowed the same available resources. Ethnic schools should also be given the opportunity to preserve their cultural roots.

Discussion period

LUCIENNE AZOULAY, École Maimonide, FÉLIX MELOUL, Association of Jewish Schools (Discussants)

The two discussants, representatives of the Jewish community, attested that the first Jewish immigrants who arrived in the 1960's could not really express their religion. They explained that the main reason why Jewish schools exist now is that because in the 1960's, Catholic schools refused Jewish students. They added that ethnic schools were catering to a variety of needs and that the student bodies were representatives of many cultural groups.

Clarification questions

M. McAndrew intervened first by asking the discussants, L. Azoulay and F. Meloul how subjects such as religious studies and Hebrew courses are integrated into the main curriculum in Jewish private schools. L. Azoulay explained that while Hebrew courses are taught by rabbis or Jewish teachers, the rest of the courses are taught mostly by Québécois teachers. Moreover, they mentioned that in order to foster a better integration into Quebec society, a twinning program with other schools in Montreal had been in place for many years.

Next, P. Brodeur inquired about the degree of cooperation existing between the Madarsah school board and the West Bengal school board in India and more specifically with regards to curriculum development. In response, the panellist N. Akhtar specified that these two separate school boards share the same curriculum, except that the Madarsah school board has added two regional subjects: Arabic courses for Muslim students and a History of Civilization course for non-Muslim students. M. McAndrew also asked N. Akhtar to explain why on one hand up to 50% of students of Madarsahs can be non-Muslim, but in her study as few as 3% of students belonged to that group. The panellist specified that in India, by law, minority institutions which are started by any minority group may not reserve more than 50% of their enrolment list for their particular minority group. However, Muslim students may attend any school and Madarsahs may be attended by Sikhs or Christians or any other religious group.

F. Lorcerie asked whether prayers were compulsory in Muslim private schools. First, J. Bowen specified that at "La Réussite" school in France, all the students do pray and they are expected to do so. While the teaching of Islam is not present in the formal curriculum, an Islamic ambience reigns within the school. E. Abu Hijleh commented on the place of prayer within Montreal's Muslim schools by saying that they also expect the students to pray, however they do not need to enforce this practise as the students willingly comply.

F. Lorcerie asked J. Zine to explain how the faith-centred epistemology in her research is critical and whether this criticism applies towards Muslim society as well as the main society? In response, the panellist specified that critical pedagogy is not a theoretical framework, but a discursive framework used within her research. J. Zine added that this critical approach was not always observed within the Muslim schools.

Exchanges and debate

A discussion ensued about the teaching of legal schools of thought within Islam. J. Bowen commented that in French post-secondary schools, there is a pedagogical debate surrounding which school to follow or whether all four Sunni *medahib* should be taught. J. Zine stated that in her opinion it is not necessary to teach all *medahib*, but as when dealing with any problematic or issue, a range of views should be presented. E. Abu Hijleh commented on the topic by saying that she agrees with J. Zine at the post-secondary level of education, but for the primary or even secondary levels, the teaching of Islam is often limited to teaching how to pray and read the Koran, given time constraints. In response, J. Zine added that she believes nevertheless that some things can be taught at a high school level to broaden the students' horizons and to better prepare them to accept Islamic pluralism. In a similar discussion about the diversity of Islam, N. Sarfarozi asked whether Muslim schools in Toronto subscribed to a particular notion of Islam. In response, J. Zine clarified that Islamic schools are diverse and plural in an ethno-cultural way. However, when it comes to religious orientation, the majority of Muslim schools are Sunni and they usually choose a particular Muslim legal school of thought or madhab. E. Abu Hijleh commented on the diversity within Muslim private schools in Montreal by saying that there are Sunni schools and Shia schools and within these schools diversity exists amongst the Muslim student population. Also, in response to N. Sarfarozi's question about the obligatory nature of the hijab, the panellist explained that the headscarf is not compulsory, however it is encouraged and 90% of the working staff and students do wear it.

The impact of ethno-specific schools on the adaptation of public schools to ethnic and religious diversity was discussed by the panellists and participants. M. McAndrew also asked J. Bowen whether he considered that the existence of ethno-specific schools would have a negative impact on French public schools by keeping them from fulfilling their obligation to adapt to religious diversity. J. Zine responded first by specifying that despite the existence of private faith-based schools, the majority of Toronto's Muslim student still attend public schools. She argued that pressure should be maintained on the public system to become more accountable and inclusive, even though faith-based schools exist. Next, E. Abu Hijleh suggested that whether the students are attending private faith-based schools or public schools, integration is an objective that is shared by all schools, it is only the means of achieving the objective that differ. N. Akhtar intervened by adding that the same debate has occurred in India as some citizens suggested that by establishing the Madrasah school boards, the government was relieving itself from the responsibility of establishing accessible and, affordable schools for all citizens. Finally, J. Bowen explained that the French Republican model does not approve of private religious schools. According to Republican theory, integration requires all students to attend public schools, so the existence of these schools is not considered as an alternative to the attendance of public schools by religious and ethnic minorities.

Questions surrounding the Muslim identity and allegiance led to a discussion between audience members and the panellists. First, a female audience member asked how it was possible to promote awareness of the multiple affiliations and identifications of Muslims within the context of private Muslim schools that tend to place the Muslim identity at the forefront. Another female audience member asked how citizenship comes into play in these schools. She wondered whether the students would view themselves as Muslims *and* as citizens, or whether there would be a separation between these identities. E. Abu Hijleh was the first to respond to these questions by clarifying that while Muslims may have different ways of practicing their religion, but they are all Muslims. The panellist said that in her Montreal school, the students identify strongly as Canadians first and as Quebecers secondly. She believes that the students' Muslim identity will

be complementary to their citizenship and not opposed to it. N. Akhtar added that the identity issue is problem not only within the context of immigration, but using India as an example, she showed how minorities from within the country face the same questions about their identities and their allegiances. J. Bowen participated in the discussion by clarifying that the discourses about identity are influenced by the national contexts within which they occur. Finally, J. Zine completed the discussion by stating that the debate is really about post-modern identity politics and the ways in which identities are multiplying and shifting. The panellist stressed the importance of considering where minority groups fit in within plural democratic nation states.

Thursday morning, May 8th, 2008

Session 3: Teaching about Islam and the Muslim World: Formal Curriculum and Textbooks

During this session, a series of recent critical analyses of the curricular treatment of Islam, the Muslim world and Muslims were presented along with innovative approaches developed in this regard, both in Canada (Ontario and Quebec), France and Lebanon and in relevant disciplines at the primary and secondary level. In fact, in the complex context of schooling where pedagogical requirements pertaining to students' age and curriculum must be reconciled not only with the state of knowledge but also with the presence of many stereotypes in the larger society, textbooks play a crucial role in the teaching and the promotion of a better knowledge of the Other.

Chair: Rachida Azdouz, Université de Montréal, Canada

Panelists

Bechir Oueslati, Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman

Mehrunnisa Ali, Ryerson University, Canada

Mireille Estivalèzes, Université de Montréal, Canada

Andre Daher, Université Antonine and Université St.Joseph, Liban

Discussant

Ratna Ghosh, McGill University, Canada

BECHIR OUESLATI, Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman

The Evolution of the Coverage of Islam and Muslim Cultures in Quebec Textbooks

This presentation dealt with the construction of the image of Islam and Muslim cultures in Quebec's elementary and high school French Language textbooks. Based on three studies of the textbooks used in the 1980s, 1990s and those produced in the wake of the current reform, the presentation traced more specifically the evolution of the coverage of Islam as a religion and the coverage of Muslim cultures. B. Oueslati began by describing the first main theme, the coverage of Islam as a religion. He related that while the act of blaming Islam for underdevelopment in the 1980s textbooks was recurrent in the content analysis, this kind of excerpt seemed to disappear in the 1990s textbooks. However, he mentioned that there were still shallow descriptions of Islam with factual errors and problems with formulations instead of negative views. The panellist also noticed an important quantitative and qualitative leap in the new textbooks. In fact, much more space is devoted to the presentation of Islam. There are many direct quotes from the Quran (pillars, polygamy) and the Prophet's Hadith (good deeds) as well as a strong interest in defining

key words related to Islam. Furthermore, the link between Islam, Christianity and Judaism is depicted more substantially. The researcher also revealed new aspects covered in the new textbooks such as the schism between Sunnis and Shiites over the Prophet's succession, the status of the Christian and Jewish communities in Muslim lands, the veil, etc. However, Islam is still depicted as a religion of submission and prohibitions in History textbooks. Moreover, the absence of reference to the diversity of Islamic schools and to the importance of consensus and *ijtihad* gives the view of a monolithic religion. B. Oueslati described then the second main theme, the evolution in the coverage of the Muslim cultures and contributions to the universal civilization across the three key phases. While the 1980s excerpts were characterized by omission, underestimation and appropriation by the West, there was an emphasis on material cultures in the 1990s textbooks, but not a single Muslim scientist or philosopher was mentioned. In the new textbooks, there is a more substantial recognition of Muslims' multiple roles as scientists in History textbooks when talking about the rise of Islam. The contributions made by Muslim scientists, philosophers, sociologists and popular literature are present in many textbooks. However, the presenter highlighted the silence surrounding Muslim contributions when dealing with Renaissance, the confusion between Arabs and Muslims and the exclusion of many ethnic groups (Persians, Turks, Pakistanis...) Whether in history, language or cross-disciplinary textbooks, the absence of content regarding Muslim contributions in many domains is striking. B. Oueslati concluded by saying that the new context might have pushed authors to research and to treat the topic more carefully. He added that many of the errors might be explained by the reproduction of public discourse, the need to be brief in textbooks and a lack of research because of the lack of centrality of the topic. He finally suggested recommendations such a need for cooperation between various local and international partners to ensure the widespread diffusion of research results, a better teacher training as well as more interesting content and activities that would seek to develop students' critical thinking and help them to be able to understand the current stakes more appropriately.

MEHRUNNISA AHMED ALI, Ryerson University

The Representation of Muslim Canadians in Ontario's English Language Textbooks.

This presentation discussed the results of a qualitative study on fictional Muslim characters in English Language Textbooks for Grades K-12. Ali began by describing Canada's social policies of the last three decades especially in relation to Muslim immigrants, the extensive essentialization of Muslim identity, and the public discourse that has created a binary division between Western and Muslim societies in the aftermath of September 11th. She then outlined the discourse analysis approach used to analyze 21 excerpts, which were selected using two criteria: the character must play a main role in the narrative and there must be sufficient indicators to identify the character as a Muslim. Five characters from Elementary (Grades K-8) and sixteen in Secondary (Grades 9-12) level textbooks were selected. Eight characters were living in Canada or another Western country while 13 were living in Muslim or non-Muslim countries. M. Ali showed that Muslims were consistently portrayed as the "Other" by focusing on the foreign origins of immigrants, irrespective of their civil status or their perceived level of 'integration'. There was also a strong focus on Muslim immigrants' socio-economic decline and their exotic, primitive and oppressive traditions. Muslim characters located in their own countries were portrayed as living in poverty-stricken, war-torn and patriarchal societies, while Canada, US & UK were described as 'the benevolent West'. Ali found that Muslim children and youth, especially girls, were depicted as torn between two cultures. She added that while Muslim children were characterized as being pro-active, responsible, courageous and claiming locus of control, Muslim adults were portrayed as incompetent, servile, oppressive, unreasonable and violent. Finally, the presenter claimed that the grand narrative about fictional Muslim characters

in Ontario's English language textbooks is that Muslims are essentially different from and inferior to Western people. Muslim societies are characterized by violence, poverty, primitive lifestyles and beliefs. However, some of them have been 'saved' by Western societies through aid or immigration. Adults who migrated to Western societies cling to oppressive and/or archaic beliefs & practices, forcing their children to choose between competing affiliations and identifications.

MIREILLE ESTIVALÈZES, Université de Montréal

Teaching about Islam in French History Curricula and Textbooks

In this presentation, the treatment of Islam and the Muslim World was analyzed through a selected sample of French textbook. The survey of French curricula led to an overview of how the situation has evolved over the last ten years. The presenter began by outlining the specific context of education in France and particularly the challenge of dealing with both religious and cultural diversity. She reminded also that Islam was the second religion and that France's education system was laic or secular and did not include religious education in schools. This presentation focused on the way Islam is presented today in the educational programs and the History textbooks in France. Concerning the methodology, M. Estivalèzes mentioned that the representation of Islam as a religion and as a civilization in the History programs from 1996-2005 was analyzed by surveying six History textbooks designed for 12 year old students produced in 1997 and five textbooks for the same age group published in 2005. The findings were discussed and among the textbooks published in 1997, a certain number of inadequacies or even errors were identified. More specifically, six main problematic issues were identified by the researcher. M. Estivalèzes specified whether or not each aspect was improved in the more recent textbooks of 2005. The first situation is the presence of a confessional discourse. Formulations revealing faith with regards to religion were observed in some of the earlier textbooks. However, in the second series of textbooks examined, more precautions had been taken and this reveals a willingness to manifest a more distanced and objective discourse. Concerning the practise of the Muslim religion, the textbooks of 1997 placed a lot of emphasis on the five pillars of Islam. According to the presenter, this vision risks leading to a very limited and ritualistic approach to the religion. However, once again, during the analysis of the more recent textbooks, the Muslim faith was depicted more fully in this selection of textbooks by including elements of spirituality, practise, law and morality. M Estivalèzes mentioned gender in Islam as another problematic issue, principally viewed through the theme of polygamy. This practise is often presented as being part of the code of conduct prescribed by Islam and is taken out of context from the historical and social environment where it originated. The panellist outlined two main elements which lead to the representation of Islam as a religion of war. The first is the translation of the word « Islam » as submission and its negative connotation. The second element to consider is the proper definition of the term « jihad », often translated as meaning holy war. The presenter added that while the textbooks produced in 1997 revealed a vision of Islam as isolated from the two other monotheisms, the textbooks of 2005 clearly state the relationships between the three monotheisms. M. Estivalèzes concluded on a positive note, by stating that significant progress has been made in the 2005 textbooks. She also shared the two pitfalls identified in the representation of Islam. The first is the adoption of a critical attitude characterized by rejection and a negative perception having to do with the issues of immigration and fundamentalism. The second is the adoption of a defensive attitude characterized by the need to justify and the tendency to overvalue Islam as a religion or a civilization.

ANDRÉ DAHER, Université Antonine et Université St- Joseph

Islam in the Programme of Citizenship Education in Divided Lebanon

This presentation dealt with the representation, the acceptance and the recognition of Islam and the Muslim culture in the new citizenship textbooks in Lebanon. Inspired by the normative ideal of a Nation state, the Second Republic (1989) promoted a citizenship education based on a common textbook for all the schools in the divided Lebanese society. A. Daher began by presenting the context in which the new textbook for citizenship education was produced. According to the decision makers, the objective of this book was to constitute a national unity nourished by common principles in order to address the confessionalism found in old textbooks and the cacophony of knowledge that they transmitted. Three main weaknesses had been identified in the previous curriculum: the vision of individuals ignoring the national identity, the limited mission of the State to bring closer those individuals and the ghetto conceptualization. An analysis of the new *Education Civique et Citoyenne* (ECC) books showed that while transmitting the components of the civic society, the books don't recognize the presence of the Islamic community and its visibility through its institutions. For example, in the entire book, only one excerpt talks about diversity in Lebanon while citing main guidelines of the Constitution. Numerous parts of the last primary year's book underline the poles of belonging of the Lebanese people: family, house, land, neighbourhood, village, city, people, and nation. In contrast, in the books' chapter about «diversity and solidarity of people», only four pages are found where "the place of ethics in the various religions" is considered. Thus, the handbooks of the ECC course approach the concepts related to beliefs, the community dimension and the diversity that characterize Lebanon in an evasive way. Moreover, any reference to the religious communities that constitute Lebanon has been evacuated, and tellingly the handbooks quote the qualifiers "Muslim" or "Christian" only twice. Consequently, by positioning themselves against the policies of recognition, the authors of the handbooks avoided giving serious consideration to the place of Muslim community culture in Lebanon. Only one extract which approached Islam in a general way was found in the second year of the secondary cycle. The authors preferred also to adopt the "neutral" speech of statistics and the dry enumeration (population, surface, production of each area, confession) Furthermore, there is a certain screening of the very recent historical past, that of the war between the Lebanese communities, where the "living-together" was really threatened. As to the causes leading up to this conflict, many examples refer to a single cause, Zionism. The presenter considered that the omission in the unified textbook of the experiences and the values related to a sense of belonging to one community hindered any sense of common life apart from the sharing abstract qualities, such as freedom and rights. On the whole, the sense of belonging of the Muslim community is overlooked. The place of Islam in the Lebanese society is defined only by the remarkable unifying vision of the national identity. In conclusion, A. Daher revealed that, on a normative level, there exists an important movement in favour of a definition of the Muslim belonging based on a civic and republican identity in order to constitute a perfectly inclusive pole of national belonging. There is an inescapable resistance towards this conception that strives to mark the citizen identity of one of the cultural identities in Lebanon as "the Arabic identity". In addition, the data of the research corpus enabled the presenter to assert that the curricular treatment of Islam is done through denunciations, tensions, negotiations, arrangements, vortices of suspicion.

Discussion period

RATNA GHOSH, McGill University (Discussant)

R. Ghosh reminded the audience that since 9-11, the notion of terrorism has been strictly identified with Islam and that with regards to the Muslim world, there were problems of omission and commission. She affirmed a need to develop respect for other cultures among students by

cultivating and understanding difference. She also insisted on the capacity of teachers to critically analyse and implement the prescribed curriculum.

Clarification questions

A number of questions were asked to the panelists in order to clarify the content of their presentations. Regarding M. Ali's presentation on the representation of Muslim Canadians in Ontario's English language textbooks, S. Niyozov commented that the literature analysis appeared to be decontextualized and he asked the panellist whether there were textbook analysis focusing on the U.S. M. Ali clarified that her study did not look at the US textbooks. In response to S. Niyozov's comment about the decontextualized appearance of her study, the panellist specified that the extracts chosen were part of a larger story where perspectives shift and that she was particularly concerned with the negative images created and the impressions left on the readers. J. Iprgrave asked M. Ali if she had any ideas about how to encourage empathy and understanding towards Muslims without limiting the representation of them as the "others". She suggested that the development of a social conscience may achieve this goal. M. Ali responded by saying that it is not enough to create empathy; multiple discourses with regards to the Muslim minority must be present. She added that it is very problematic when textbooks reinforce media messages.

Next, J. Bowen commented on the difficulty for textbook writers to apprehend the nuances of spiritual life and at the same time render an accurate interpretation of religions. As a follow up to this comment, he asked if textbook writers were better equipped to present Christianity or Judaism. In response, M. Estivalèzes explained that even Judaism is being inadequately represented in current textbooks. She argued that the teaching of purely religious 'facts' forces students to remain 'outside the inside' and prevents them from gaining deeper knowledge of spirituality. She added that while it is important to develop quality textbooks as some teachers rely heavily upon them, it is essential to also consider the informal curriculum, or what is going on in the classroom beyond the textbooks.

B. Oueslati's presentation on the Evolution of the coverage of Islam and Muslim cultures in Quebec textbooks led N. Akhtar to inquire whether or not the textbooks had truly improved since 1995. N. Akhtar suggested that on the surface the texts may appear less controversial, but they may not be giving an accurate representation of Islam. She also argued that even if the textbooks are improved, it is important to look at how the teacher is using them and that critical thinking is an important skill to foster among the students.

The panellist A. Daher was also asked to clarify the contents of his presentation on Islam in the Programme of Citizenship Education in Divided Lebanon. M. McAndrew inquired whether the Muslim majority in Lebanon truly adhere to the civic ideology present in the official program. She also wondered whether the textbook writers were Catholics or Muslims. A. Daher specified that the dominant civic model is not the model of the majority of society. Instead of teaching about rights and liberties and dealing with conflicts, this model seeks to camouflage and pacify by arguing that power is shared among communities.

Exchanges and debate

The conception of textbooks in pluralistic societies was discussed amongst the panelists with particular attention being made to the decision makers and content providers. M. Estivalèzes and B. Oueslati commented on the dynamics of community involvement in the development of textbooks. M. Estivalèzes specified that in France, religious communities do not get involved in

the writing of textbooks, while B. Oueslati mentioned that networking between community and textbook writers does not always lead to positive outcomes. He stated Ontario as an example where cooperation with religious or ethnic minorities has been possible. S. Bhimani commented on the importance of considering the impact of national interests in the development of textbooks. M. McAndrew specified that in the case of Quebec, textbook creators are following government curriculum and that there are only five companies who produce textbooks, so this dynamic must be considered. B. Oueslati added that textbooks from Quebec have also been influenced by France, as the resources to research all religions are not available. He also commented briefly on the presence of the Muslim lobby in the US and its impact on the decisions of the American textbook council. P. Brodeur suggested a theoretical framework with seven points to consider, such as: who is in charge? How the texts are produced? The consumers, the reception of the texts, the evaluation process, the transformation of the texts and the links with the original decisions.

Another issue which arose during the discussion was how to achieve balance in the representation of Islam and Muslim minorities. S. Niyozov cautioned that Islam should not be overvalued in textbooks; it must be shown with its positive aspects *and* negative issues. M. Ali agreed that the goal is not to represent Islam as entirely non-problematic. She added that the underlying contexts such as colonialism, neo-colonialism and U.S. imperialism are absent from the current textbooks. M. McAndrew agreed that balance is difficult to achieve and that this is an important methodological problem. She explained that fieldwork has demonstrated that teachers did not rely entirely on the textbooks and that students were able to use different texts to get a multiple perspective on Islam. M. McAndrew also cautioned that it is important not to increase the negative impression of students who are already disenfranchised by portraying all the negative elements of their culture/ethnicity.

B. Oueslati commented on the French debate which occurred when a textbook editor included images of the Prophet Mohammed in textbooks. B. Oueslati remarked that the inclusion of these images may in fact help students to understand the diversity of Islam as some Muslims in Turkey have produced images of Mohammed, while Muslims in other countries are against these images. He argued that providing students with experiences to contact the *other* may help to avoid the “cultural vacuums” that are sometimes created in classrooms. N. Akhtar questioned the authenticity of the images portrayed and suggested that they may have been published and then omitted in order to create a controversy.

Finally, Quebec’s new program for the teaching of Ethics and Religious Education was brought up for consideration during the discussion. F. Ouellet (an academic from the University of Sherbrooke) questioned how teachers would respond to the new program. He also mentioned some of the challenges that the program will face, for example the response of teachers towards the new program, the interest of the students and the simultaneous implementation of at the primary and secondary levels. He suggested allowing up to 10 years for the program to be sufficiently implemented.

D. Lussier (an academic from McGill University) commented that Islam is a difficult issue to consider because of its complexity. She suggested that the focus be placed upon the students and on the means of encouraging them to be aware of other cultures while avoiding the marginalization of other forms of knowledge. Another female audience member suggested that the emphasis be placed on classroom practices such as presenting a variety of texts and encouraging students to research and look critically at the information presented.

Thursday afternoon, May 8th, 2008

Session 4: Teaching about Islam and the Muslim World: Real Curriculum

Beyond the formal curriculum, the main vehicle for the transmission of knowledge and attitudes relating to Islam lies in the real curriculum, i.e. actual learning situations where teachers transmit knowledge, its reception by students as well as the "teacher-pupil" relationship, which lies at the heart of pedagogy. More specifically, this session explored two issues: on the one hand, how Muslim and non-Muslim pupils react to formal and actual curricula relating to Islam, and on the other hand, to which extent teachers are able to actively relate to the prescribed curriculum, especially correcting the ethnocentric biases it may contain. The cases of real curricula in Quebec, Ontario and Spain were treated during this session.

Chair: Valérie Amiraux, Université de Montréal, Canada

Panellists

Solange Lefebvre, Université de Montréal, Canada

Lluís Samper Rasero, Université de Lleida, Spain

Amina Triki-Yamani, Université de Montréal, Canada

Sarfaro Niyozov, University of Toronto, Canada

Alnaaz Kassam, Toronto District School Board and University of Toronto, Canada

Discussant

Henri-Robert Durandisse, Centre Haïtien d'Animation et d'Intervention Sociale, Montréal

SOLANGE LEFEBVRE, Université de Montréal

Religious Diversity in Quebec Public Schools: New Practices of Management and Awareness – Results of a Qualitative Study

This presentation discussed the results of a qualitative study that was conducted in both multicultural and homogeneous primary and secondary schools in many regions of Quebec. S. Lefebvre first described the main structural changes that came about due to the transformation of formally denominational school boards into linguistic ones in 1998. Among these modifications, the creation of linguistic school boards permitted students of all cultures or religions to be grouped in classes based on language of instruction and each school was able to offer the choice between moral instruction and Catholic or Protestant confessional instruction. The researcher noticed then that a non-confessional service of spiritual care and community involvement was set up for all students in 2000, regardless of their religious convictions. S. Lefebvre related that, in her study, she paid special attention to the relationship that Spiritual care and Guidance animators had with Islam and to the strategies and actions that they carried out in order to meet both the specific needs of Muslim students and those of the entire student body. She identified especially two aspects, the reception of the secularization and the relevancy of the new practices around the service of spiritual care and community involvement. 54 semi-structured interviews (25 teachers, 16 animators, 13 administrators), 27 at the elementary level and 27 at the secondary one, were conducted in 4 different areas: multiethnic milieus in Montreal, homogeneous areas in certain neighbourhoods of the greater Montreal area, a multiethnic area near Quebec city and a rural area far from Quebec's major urban centers. The presenter mentioned that 50% of the interviewees were uncomfortable with the manifestation of religious symbols and practices in the context of school. She added that most of them agreed with the acknowledging that the actual meaning of the term spirituality remained rather vague. Because of potential sensitivity on the

topic of religion, most people seemed to think of religious issues as rather taboo. S. Lefebvre also related that some school principals have forbidden discussions about religion and accommodated few demands. According to the respondents, three attitudes have been adopted by the students with regards to religion. While most of them were indifferent to the notion of religion, other pupils were exhibiting a healthy curiosity towards religions and spirituality. Only a few individuals were more militant (among them, Evangelicals, Jews and Muslims). Educational professionals expressed fears towards any type of religious education which could open the door to proselytism and provoke a multiplication of the demands for religious accommodation. The presenter explained these apprehensions by giving four important key aspects. First, there is tension between spirituality and religious orthodoxy. Secondly, there is a growing need for expertise on the issue of religion and diversity in schools. Thirdly, the fruitful relationship between values and religion makes it easy to gain knowledge about the system of beliefs and values of religious students. Finally, a basic religious culture is a factor which may lead to openness towards another. S. Lefebvre concluded by stating that the group of animators interviewed believed in tolerance and respect with regards to religious symbols even if they were often faced with strong reactions on the part of the teaching staff regarding this topic. For the presenter, a better training with regards to the significance of certain religious symbols within religious cultures would help to eliminate prejudice in the school system.

LLUÍS SAMPER RASERO, Universitat de Lleida

The Muslims in Catalan Schools: Presences and Absences

This presentation dealt with the representation of Islam, Arabs and Muslim cultures in Catalonia's pre-school, primary, secondary and post obligatory secondary levels. The study presented by Lluís Samper Rasero had an empirical base consisting of 20 in-depth interviews with Muslim mothers and fathers who had sons and/or daughters at school, 20 interviews with teachers in these schools and an analysis of the content of 264 materials. The presenter began by outlining that the 1990 Law of Religious Freedom has permitted, with the recognition of non-Catholic religions, the existence of Islamic classes in the public schools and the creation of private Muslim schools. However L. Samper Rasero mentioned that the current dominant trend was the exclusion of religion from the public sphere since the Spanish Socialist Workers Party had been in power. In fact, teachers interviewed in his study had supported the secular trend and stated that religion should be kept outside school. Moreover, the Muslim families, also interviewed in this study, showed no particular interest in whether the school taught religion. Generally, these families placed their trust in themselves and with in the associations or prayer centres of which they eventually became members. Concerning the content analysis of the textbooks, the presenter showed that almost half the excerpts analysed did not contain a sole topical reference of Islam and among the remainder, the predominance was documents that contained just one representation of Islam. L. Samper Rasero interpreted such a staggering absence of references as an ideological strategy founded in suppression (*null curriculum*). According to the presenter, this suppression of content relating to Islam, the Arabs and Muslim cultures, the relationships between civilisations, as well as the presence of Muslim people in western societies was even more shocking in the lower levels of the education system. These scarce references were concentrated in the texts of the obligatory contents that assumed such themes. The researcher noticed that the excerpts came almost exclusively from Social Sciences books- "*History*"- in Post Obligatory Education, "*Social Sciences*" in Compulsory Secondary Education and "*Social and Environmental Studies*" in Primary School. He added that the references were very scarce amongst the subjects where contents did not appear to be explicitly linked to Islam. Moreover, the representation of Islam as well as Arabs and Muslim cultures were mainly concentrated in the Primary School levels, with a great abundance of iconic representations (pictures, maps and

drawings). Excerpts relating to the Muslim World were more present at the Post Obligatory level and tended to focus on specific historical events with adopting the format of short mentions. Finally, the topic of the presence of Arabs and Muslims in Catalan and Spanish societies was almost nonexistent. Furthermore, among the scarce references identified, half of these excerpts referred to Muslim immigration as a problem. Furthermore, the predominant perspective in the majority of the analysed texts, for example concerning the Crusades, was biased and incomplete. The presenter concluded by mentioning that four aspects should be emphasised: the aforementioned null curriculum of content, the predominance of short mentions usually accompanied by images as cognitive support, the overrepresentation of material culture as well as the lack of proportion between historical contents and the scarce references to the current world and everyday life (absence of Arabs and Muslims in Catalan society). According to L. Samper Rasero, these four biases contributed to reproduce an exotic, anti-modern and anti-western image of Islam, Arabs and Muslims. The presenter ended by outlining that the secular dynamic that governs Spain nowadays does not favour the development of stimulating speeches about the presence of other religions beyond Catholicism in schools and that in the case of Islam, it is translated by an insufficient presence and revision of the existing materials concerning this topic.

AMINA TRIKI-YAMANI, Université de Montréal.

The Treatment of Islam, the Muslim World and Muslim Minorities in Quebec's Curriculum: The Perceptions of Muslim CEGEP Students

This presentation explored the perceptions that Muslim junior college students have of the curricular treatment of Islam, the Muslim World and Quebec's Muslim minorities. The results are based on a thematic analysis of twenty semi-structured interviews that help to better understand how the teacher's transmission of their vision and knowledge of Islam sometimes create conflicts between Muslim youth, educational institutions, and the social majority. History was the subject that was most often cited by the participants, not because of its complete treatment of religions, but because many respondents reacted to the leading question of the interview concerning the three excerpts of texts used as a starter for the discussion and dealing with the history of Islam and of Muslim civilization. The factual errors and ethnocentric bias identified by the majority of the participants concerning the three excerpts were similar to those denounced and analyzed by the research team in the exploratory study. Furthermore, the students often commented on the vague, incomplete and exclusively Western perspective with which certain historical events such as the Crusades and the Ottoman period are treated. Muslim students learned most about religions in general and Islam in particular in the Ethics and Religious Culture program in high school. Although some of the students described the treatment of religion as being rather vague and limited in its scope, much like in the History program, other participants depicted a methodical course that is organized to encourage in-class debates. Five conflicting situations have been identified between Muslim students and representatives of the educational institution (teacher, monitor, principal). Two of these situations were directly related to the relationship with knowledge of the protagonists (teacher/student). Few students perceived their teachers as being apt to transmit knowledge about Islam and other religions as well as they could teach about Christianity. Many students even questioned the aptitude of their teachers to transmit knowledge on Islam. Some of these students questioned their teachers' abilities while others believed that it is simply not the school's mission to transmit knowledge of religions. However, the majority of the students felt that it is interesting for schools to continue to spread such knowledge, and among these students, they insisted on the fact that the teachers must remain neutral. Ten participants entered Quebec schools reinforced with private knowledge of Islam gained in their family environment and with institutional knowledge spread by the educational systems of their country of origin or from their first country of emigration. For the ten other participants who had only

acquired knowledge of Islam in Quebec schools, it is parental know-how and for some the knowledge transmitted by religious institutions and community organizations with Quebec that complete their relationship with knowledge. Finally, the analysis of the discourse of the participants demonstrates a link between the bipolar relationship with knowledge of the Muslim respondents, both private and school-based, and, the situation of their identity which is torn between two realities. The testimonies of the Muslim students on their perception of the treatment of Islam and Muslim World in Quebec schools are marked by opposite reactions, on one hand denouncing the majority and, on the other hand, understanding it. On one hand, the Muslim students seem to adopt a positive attitude regarding their acceptance of the normative majority. On the other hand, the Muslim college students refuse to assimilate into the Quebecois majority group by assuming the status of a minority.

SARFARAZ NIYOZOV, University of Toronto & ALNAAZ KASSAM, University of Toronto and Toronto District School Board

Teachers' Perspectives on Teaching about Islam and Muslim Students in a Pluralistic World

This presentation dealt with teachers' perspectives on teaching about Islam and Muslim students in a pluralistic society. While A. Kassam demonstrated how the English literature classroom could be used to both integrate and to question students' identities and citizenship, S. Niyozov presented the preliminary results of his study concerning teachers' perspectives on the education of Muslim students in the Greater Toronto Area. A. Kassam, a high school teacher in a multiethnic milieu of Toronto, started her presentation by describing her students. Even if they were from different ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious backgrounds, they spoke the same language which includes code words. But the presenter outlined that their concerns, their need for a sense of belonging and understanding as well as their thirst for knowledge and success were universal. A. Kassam explained then her approach to literature as being four-fold in character. First, she advocated a personal and communal response to the text so that the reader may have some active role in the process. Second, she tried to choose multicultural texts with multiple discourses that then allowed her to engage students at multiple levels in terms of a student own and other identities. Third, while she could not cover all cultures present in her classroom, she used literature from one cultural heritage to absorb and engage the cultural identities of many different types of students. Finally, using literature, she moved beyond government policy that speaks of the binaries of the dominant and the multicultural. The presenter stated that her pupils found and created new spaces for the interpretation of their faith, their religious and cultural identities, while respecting the wisdom of tradition. She added that the Muslim student, as with all other students, used the texts they studied together as grist to work out his own identity. A. Kassam stated that, in this process, she was the guardian of the students' critical literacy development. The second presenter, S. Niyozov, began by enumerating some of the blames and accusations made by researchers, media and community activists about how non-Muslim teachers and public schools teach and treat their Muslim students, while also presenting teachers' perspectives. Some of these views blame teachers of being racist, prejudiced, islamophobic, insensitive to Muslim students' faith and religious practices. The researcher then presented follow ups to these charges. While Niyozov data confirms that instances of the above charges exist at individual and structural levels, there is also a plenty of examples when teachers meet their Muslim students needs going more than an extra mile to make these students successful and fight against racism, Islamophobia, cultural insensitivity, low expectations, and so on. Niyozov argued that due to the polemicized and politicized nature of the issue of Muslim education, the good works that many non-Muslim teachers and public schools do for their Muslim students is usually not highlighted in the research and media. Ignoring the positive work of teachers is a recipe for failure of education change, because of teachers' centrality to reform. Niyozov brought examples

of the positive works by the teachers as well as problematized the blames laid against the teachers. The teachers interviewed by S. Niyozov suggested that education in pluralist and globalized communities required that racism needs to be tackled across the spectrum, in a fair-minded manner. The researcher noticed that, in the context of pluralist education, minority racism could not be seen as part of resistance of the powerless and that every student's feelings, knowledge, and identity, however minor they were, counted in such a context. Moreover, teachers interviewed mentioned that Muslim educators committed to equity in particular, should also bring forward the inverse racism toward non-Muslim in the Muslim countries and Islamic schools. The two presenters concluded by stating that teaching about Islam in today's schools means teaching *about* religion and not teaching religion, with using a cultural studies approach with a focus on diversity and multiplicity of perspectives and with respecting secular spaces.

Discussion period

HENRI-ROBERT DURANDISSE, Centre Haïtien d'Animation et d'Intervention Sociale, Montréal (Discussant)

The discussant, a representative of the Haitian community in Montreal, suggested two points to start the discussion. First, he affirmed that accommodation is a natural extension of the respect and honouring of students belonging to cultural and religious minorities. At the same time, schools and communities have to allow *visible* youth to assume a Quebec identity so that they may feel they are part of society. In this context, and as a high school teacher, H.R. Durandisse stated that Montreal schools were places of learning in how to deal with religious pluralism where individual and collective rights were respected.

Clarification questions

A Muslim woman from the audience began by asking for clarifications about L. Samper Rasero's presentation on the Muslims in Catalan Schools. She asked the panellist to specify the historical knowledge that was emphasized and whether or not the contributions of Muslim scholars were recognized in Spain as they are now in North America. In response, L. Samper Rasero specified that his work is based in Catalonia and that after more than 8 centuries of Islamic presence in Spain, the history of Islamic civilization still does not play an important role in education.

Next, D. Lussier (an academic from McGill University) asked A. Triki-Yamani to explain the use of the term "assimilate" in her study. She suggested that "integration" would be a more appropriate term and briefly defined this term as a process through which newcomers "maintain their own identities, but also adopt new cultural norms." The panellist agreed that the term "assimilation" is problematic, but she specified that within the context of her research its use was appropriate as the participants were already part of Quebec society, but they feared becoming too deeply transformed by it.

F. Lorcerie inquired about the origins of the new non-confessional service of spiritual care and community involvement which was set up for Quebec students in the wake of the deconfessionalization of the school boards. S. Lefebvre explained that a variety of public discussions around spirituality and the place of religion in the education system have occurred in the past decade. She characterized the process as being democratic while conceding that the pace of implementation of the changes was perhaps too rapid.

J. Celemencki (a graduate student, McGill University) asked A. Kassam to talk about the events that occurred after the administration of the Toronto school where she worked refused to allow her to alter the curriculum to better reflect the demographics of the students. The panellist replied

that she simply left the school as the administration would not budge on the issue. During an interview with the school principal, A. Kassam learned that discomfort with Indian novels which this administrator viewed as self-abnegating led to the refusal.

With regards to S. Niyozov's presentation on teachers and teaching Islam and Muslims in pluralistic societies, J. Zine inquired about the parameters of the panelist's study and the content of the analysis. S. Niyozov specified that his study is in the preliminary stage. Concerning his approach to the analysis, the panellist explained that he is not imposing a particular ideological framework on the data and that the focus will be on interaction between students and teachers.

Exchanges and debate

S. Lefebvre's presentation led to discussion between the panellists, the participants and members of the audience was framed around the concept of spirituality and its place within the education system. P. Brodeur defined spirituality as a way of providing an inclusive language for those who are non-religious. He suggested that the current approach towards including spirituality in education was strongly influenced by the context in the US. J. Ipgrave added that in the UK, schools are responsible for spiritual development, in music, art and religious education and that spirituality is part of the formal curriculum. I. Miller, a spiritual animation program director with the English Montreal school board explained that in the current context in Quebec where secularism, pluralism, and religiosity coexist, spirituality is viewed as a safe term. She made reference to the conflicting relationship that Quebec has had with Catholicism and its impact on the current situation. I. Miller explained spirituality as being relational, not individual, with a transcendent dimension. M. McAndrew specified that when there are objections to spiritual education and to the newly proposed program for Ethics and Religious Education, these have not come from religious minorities; resistance comes from either catholic parents or parents who are secular. S. Lefebvre expressed some concern with regards to the implementation of the new program. She wondered whether the documents would be produced in time for the start of the 2008-09 school year and if the texts would be useful to the teachers. With regards to the teaching of spirituality, A. Kassam said that she would not want to be responsible for teaching that concept; however she feels that the emphasis should be placed instead on ethics, multiple perspectives and criticality in the class. S. Niyozov added that it is important to engage with teachers in terms of where they are coming from, and where they are leading their students; he cautioned that spirituality is a heavily charged social construct.

A. Triki-Yamani's use of the term "assimilation" led to a debate during the discussion period. S. Niyozov suggested that assimilation was not necessarily negative and that word should not be considered as pejorative in every situation. F. Ouellet (an academic from the University of Sherbrooke) talked about two types of assimilation occurring within Quebec: the first is to assimilate into the academic culture of modernity; the second is the ethnic/Roman catholic French Canadian culture. On the other hand, J. Zine focused on a more negative type explanation of assimilation as she equated this concept with visual minorities "performing whiteness" in order to assimilate into Canadian culture. A woman from the audience also had a more negative view of assimilation. She suggested that even integration was a negative because it is never required on the part of the majority.

Friday morning, May 9th, 2008

Session 5: Islamic Transnational Educational Networks

The development of modern education systems in Western pluralist societies is largely influenced by the participation of various social actors, both secular and religious. Many Muslim organizations get involved in the educational arena, both at the public and private levels. In this session, we investigated more specifically how the teaching and educational contributions of certain transnational Muslim movements influence the conception and the application of school curriculum in Canada and other western countries. While P. Brodeur presented a general theoretical framework to analyze those contemporary transnational networks, A. Antepi and K. Ben Driss respectively focused on two modernist-traditional networks: the Fethullah Gülen branch of the Turkish Nurcu movement and the Moroccan Sufi Tarîqa Al-Qadiriyya Boutchichiyya movement.

Chair: Denise Helly, Institut National de Recherche Scientifique, Canada

Panelists

Patrice Brodeur, Université de Montréal, Canada

Abdullah Antepi, Hartford Seminary, United States of America

Karim Ben Driss, Institut Sufi de Montréal, Université de Montréal, Canada

PATRICE BRODEUR, Université de Montréal

The Spectrum of Contemporary Transnational Islamic Education: A Framework for an Initial Survey

This presentation outlined a framework which was developed in order to survey the rapid growth, in the last two decades, of a broad spectrum of contemporary transnational Islamic educational networks. It sought to reflect globalized trends affecting the Muslim World as well as other religious communities. P. Brodeur began with a definition of the term “religion” as provided by Mark Taylor who stated that an adequate theory of religion must among other things aim to “Clarify the dynamics of the emergence, development, and transformation of different religious networks”. The presenter situated his topic within the context of the Quebec educational system by stating the threefold mission of its schools; to instruct, to socialize and to provide qualifications. He then related the significance of education from a Muslim perspective and gave examples of three main learning institutions of Islam; the mosque, the *kuttab* and the *madrasa*. According to P. Brodeur, Transnational Educational Networks are defined as groups of individuals who self-organize into local institutions with more or less centralized global links and decision-making processes between them, based on shared interpretations of what (Islamic) education means. He examined next some of the factors contributing to the rapid growth of these networks, such as the increase in demand for education linked to high rates of population increase, the opening up of education due to new privatization, the presence of new technologies, etc... According to P. Brodeur, Transnational Educational Networks may be located from various perspectives; their geography, their epistemology, their pedagogy and their orientation. Furthermore, he distinguished them from one another along the following lines: their historical viewpoint, their sources of authority, the age of their pupils and the different worldviews that they present. P. Brodeur referred to “10 Key Drivers to Understanding the Dynamics of Multiples Identities & Power” in order to clarify the concept of “Inter-worldview dynamics”. He proposed a number of vectors to take into consideration when surveying these networks, including the following examples: formal vs. informal, visible vs. invisible and centralized vs. decentralized. He also provided examples in order to demonstrate the hermeneutical variety co-existing today across the Islamic world, such as the modernist-traditional approach used by the Fethullah Gülen

branch of the Nurcu movement; and the age-old mystical currents embodied in a wide variety of old and new Sufi tariqas (mystical orders), such as the Tariqa Al-Qadiriyya Boutchichiyya. Furthermore, he discussed the limits of most of the existing framework, such as national/provincial boundaries of reference and the dominance of national discourses. In conclusion, P. Brodeur commented on the power that these networks have to “usurp, upset, challenge, negotiate with, accommodate, integrate or assimilate within dominant regulatory national systems of education”. He also predicted that as these networks increase, competition with national educational systems will likely increase. Finally, P. Brodeur reflected upon how these transnational educational networks influence the competing definitions of education in a rapidly changing world.

ABDULLAH ANTEPLI, Ministry candidate at Hartford Seminary

The Turkish Fethullah Gülen Movement and its Transnational Islamic Education Network

This presentation dealt with the Turkish Fethullah Gülen Movement which has replaced the rigid approaches, rhetoric and discourses that dominated in Turkey during most of the twentieth century. A. Antepi began by describing Gülen giving details about the size of the movement, its influence on media and its financial power. He credited the movement with helping the Turkish people come to terms with modernity. The presenter explained that modernity in Turkey was not home-grown; it was state-imposed by the Turkish government. According to A. Antepi, in the 1920's in the course of 5 or 6 years many things changed overnight, such as alphabet of Turkey which was modified in just a few hours. The government of this time period was characterized as powerful, nationalist, idealist and it sought to reject the past in all its forms. Consequently, the radical changes brought forth so rapidly caused a profound trauma among the Turkish people. The response to this unwelcomed process was the rejection of modern life as evil or wrong and these responses were both violent and non-violent in character. In this particular context, Gülen inspired people to reconcile with the present and to agree to coexist with the Western World. The presenter identified the three main diseases in the Muslim World that required attention: the first was illiteracy or the need to bring education to Turkey, the second was poverty or the importance of redistributing wealth more equitably and the third was disunity or the goal of re-establishing the “umma islamiyya” (community of believers). A. Antepi related that Gülen established secular schools belonging to the Gülen network which aimed to co-exist with and to supplement national schools. He specified that the place of religion in Turkish society is paradoxical and may be explained by a sort of love-hate relationship. According to A. Antepi, the government dislikes religion but exerts a strong control on this aspect of society as mosques are all government property and imams are government employees. Despite this fact, Gülen, a faith-based network, achieved success without being officially sponsored and succeeded largely because of the charisma and intellect of its founder who dared to assert that one could coexist in a modern world as a Muslim. This message was inspiring to many, including the presenter. Today, Gülen has transformed its successful private schools into public ones where medals in science are earned by its students, among other honours. The presenter argued that the strength of the movement lies in its openness and dynamism. This organization is also a vital and growing transnational Muslim movement that has spread well beyond Turkey by learning the World's languages, foods, cultures and aiming to connect people based upon their similarities instead of focusing on their differences. It is particularly strong in Central Asia, China and Burma. The presenter specified that although Gülen is an Islamic Transnational Educational Network, religion is not taught as a subject in its schools. The responsibility for the teaching of Islam is left up to the countries institutions as the Turkish members of Gülen do not aim to export their version of Islam but only the Universal values of Islam shared by all Muslims. In conclusion, the presenter called for Western academia to take Gülen seriously by objectively criticizing the movement. He claimed

that internal criticism is scarce and that healthy constructive criticism is required in order further the growth and success of this network.

KARIM BEN DRISS, Institut Sufi de Montréal

Educational Characteristics in a Transnational Mystical Islamic Order: The Case of the Sufi Tariqa Al-Qadiriyya Boutchichiyya

This presentation reflected upon the educational content of a *zawiya* in one Sufi order based in Morocco, with branches in many other countries, including in Montreal, Canada. It aimed to demonstrate how the very internal organization of both past and modern-day *zawiya* reflects an educational mission. It also described how contemporary transformations in the functioning of the *zawiya* of this particular order are helping propel a transnational Sufi revival. The presenter began by situating Sufism within the context of Islam. According to the Qur'an, the human being has no other perspective on Earth than to reach the truth. Sufi education has the particularity of reaching inward instead of outward in the quest for spiritual knowledge. K. Ben Driss noticed that the spiritual education in Sufism is explained with the spiritual leader or *shaykh* playing a central part in the transmission of knowledge and the seeker forming a pact with his spiritual leader. The invocation of the names of God and the singing of mystical poems are the two major tools in the educational program of the spiritual guide. He added that the Sufi brotherhood includes all the people, men and women, who are affiliated with the teaching of a particular spiritual guide. Thus, the companionship between members of the brotherhood becomes a relational space where spiritual education takes on a concrete shape. The presenter asserted that Sufi brotherhoods have attested to their capacity for adaptation and this in turn allows them to expand beyond the borders of their original home base, whether they existed in traditional, modern, or postmodern societies. He attested that in a certain manner, transnationality has been a defining characteristic for most Sufi brotherhoods over time. During the Umayyad period in Andalusia, Sufi brotherhoods played a supporting role in relation to the official educational system. The educational system of this period included a program of study for transmitted or traditional sciences such as the Qur'an, Jurisprudence and Sacred Law which was complemented by a program for the study of learned sciences or philosophical and intellectual sciences such as Physics, Geometry and Astronomy. The Sufi brotherhoods, up till the nineteenth century, preserved this educational link with the official educational system in traditional Muslim societies. However, during the Enlightenment Period, Western rationality began to present itself as the Truth, often to the exclusion of all other truth claims. The presenter argued that the emergence of rationality within Islam usually resulted in the disenchantment of the religion through evacuating its spiritual dimension without making the required epistemological move of leaving behind religion. He stated Wahabism and Salafism as forms of Islamic rationalism or more specifically positivism, which emerged from this time period. K. Ben Driss then reflected upon the current conditions for the contemporary renewal of Sufism in Morocco. The crisis of reason characteristic of postmodern times is viewed as a central condition for this renewal. In the current context, Sufism defines itself as a wise return to the spirituality of Islam. The wisdom is displayed, through the adaptation of the pedagogical means of the spiritual education of Sufi brotherhoods such as the *Tariqa* al-Qadiriyya Boutchichiyya. The transnational expansion of this brotherhood from approximately 300 persons in the 1970's to more than 120, 000 today responds to the fundamental need for meaning beyond that which can be called "murderous identities". According to the presenter, it gives rise to a new identity which transcends every kind of external allegiance, including national border and age. It is also a permanent and on-going spiritual education that helps the seekers transcend many identity boundaries and learn how to relate to others with compassion, love and respect.

Discussion period

Clarification questions

A variety of questions was directed to the panelists in order to clarify the content of their presentations. With regards to the *The Turkish Fethullah Gülen Movement*, M. McAndrew inquired about its sources of funding. A. Antepli specified that the money comes from the founder of the organization himself as the Turkish government does not recognize the movement because of its religious nature. A. Akhtar also asked for specifications about funding for the Gülen movement on the international scene. The panelist explained that funding comes from Turkey and Europe and that his movement is very active in Pakistan and Bangladesh. F. Lorcerie asked A. Antepli to explain why Gülen identifies itself as an Islamic movement, but does not teach about Islam. The panelist specified that within the Turkish context, the Gülen movement is not allowed to teach Islam. As for the Islam that is transmitted informally, A. Antepli stated that it is universal in character; it is not formal sharia Islam. N. Akhtar asked whether the Gülen movement's international presence is only in the form of schools. In response, the panelist commented that the movement is not limited to schools as youth centers, sports centers, and community centers are all part of the underlying educational philosophy of the Fethullah Gülen Movement. He also added that the schools are not only open to Muslims or to boys.

Exchanges and debate

The presentations on Islamic Transnational Networks led to debates among panelists, participants and audience members on a number of issues. A. Yamani-Triki began the discussion by raising the issue of equality between men and women. She asked the panelists to comment on the role of women within transnational educational networks and, in particular, within the context of modernization of Sufi education. In response, K. Ben Driss explained that equality in a religious context is often varied based on social contexts, however in terms of power relationships in Sufism, personal transformation is equal, but in terms of power, inequality remains. In the case of the *The Turkish Fethullah Gülen Movement*, A. Antepli admitted that there is a real imbalance between the sexes. On one hand, there has been success in terms of educating millions of Muslim women in rural areas of Turkey, but on the other hand women are not welcome in the decision-making mechanisms of the country. In a similar line of questioning, an audience member (graduate student) asked A. Antepli to comment on the inherent contradiction between the mandate of the Gülen Movement to make education more accessible and the reality which exists within the communities where formally educated women are discouraged from holding positions of power. The panelist responded that indeed the situation is perplexing.

The issue of internal criticism among the Islamic Transnational Networks was also discussed. S. Niyozov asked the panelists to comment on the lack of critical empirical studies in the presentations and also on what he perceived as an "anti-atheist" position. Furthermore, he suggested that because of Islamization, transnational movements are becoming increasingly localized and rigid. A. Antepli explained that while Islamic norms are at the centre of the Gülen Movement, in terms of interactions between the faiths, there is an expectation to act morally towards people who do not share the same beliefs. K. Ben Driss commented that Sufism as opposed to Islamism allows for a different understanding of Islam; an Islam that is tolerant, compassionate and open to others. P. Brodeur added that just because Sufism doesn't articulate itself in an overt political and critical language does not mean that these forces are not present. N. Akhtar asked A. Antepli whether critical engagement was present with the Gülen Movement and whether he felt that this criticism should be invited or imposed. In response, A. Antepli specified that critiques from external agencies are being done in the U.S., but that this criticism is not

sufficient. The panelist stated that he would welcome additional external criticism and he hoped that the University of Montreal would take interest in playing this role. S. Bhimani inquired about critiques from within the Muslim World. The panelist explained that a great skepticism exists and that here are mixed levels of acceptance in different countries, for example Gülen has strong ties with South Asian communities in Pakistan and Bangladesh, but the movement is not accepted in Saudi Arabia.

Concerning P. Brodeur's presentation on the Spectrum of Contemporary Transnational Islamic Education and his proposed framework for surveying these networks, J. Bowen brought up the issues of the public opinion and visibility. He remarked that in the US, involvement in certain controversial Muslim transnational educational networks, such as the Islamic Brotherhood movement, may lead to accusations. P. Brodeur explained that some networks chose to operate in a decentralized manner in response to a climate of suspicion and that some to operate underground using informal patterns of transmission such as the Internet. He commented that the in general, Islamic networks are decentralized.

Closing session

General comments and follow-up

Marie McAndrew first thanked the various organisations which supported the workshop (The Department of Canadian Heritage, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Faculty of Education of the University of Montreal) and expressed her appreciation for the quality of the presentations and discussions. She then informed the audience that as a follow-up to the workshop, proceedings would be published in the form of an integrated book containing approximately twenty articles, scheduled for publishing within the next year.

This positive evaluation of the workshop was widely shared and many suggestions to keep the network alive were put forward. For example, S. Niyozov expressed his satisfaction with the complexity and the complementarities of the topics explored during the sessions. He remarked that it was one of the most relevant conferences he had ever attended. A. Kassam commented that new technologies did not play an important role in the presentations. M. McAndrew suggested enlarging the group by making efforts to include more doctoral and postdoctoral students. J. Bowen expressed interest in maintaining contact with the researchers in Quebec; however he cautioned that comparative analysis has its limits. He suggested that the emphasis be placed upon research questions instead. Mc McAndrew argued that comparisons are justified and she proposed, as an intermediate project, that the presenters consider cooperating by writing common articles for publication in journals. J. Bowen proposed that the content of the proceedings be made into a website. McAndrew reminded the presenters that their preliminary papers will be available on the Heritage Canada website and that a book will be published instead of an electronic format. Finally, J. Bowen suggested that important documents should be sent by mail instead of e-mail.

Establishing research links

The participants also exchanged information regarding research projects in progress and upcoming projects. They agreed to circulate the list of these projects to all the participants in order to provoke collaborations based upon common interests. The list, as posted on board, comprises existing research projects, topics needing to be explored as well as new projects some people are willing to start.

Existing Research Projects

Teacher's perspectives on the education of Muslim students in Toronto's public, Islamic, Catholic Schools (Sarfaroaz Niyozov, Alnaaz Kassam, et al.)

REDCO – Religion in Education Dialogue/ Conflict (European comparative project) (EC funded. 9 European Universities. Director Wolfram Wesse, Hamburg)

Comparative study of history textbooks in India and Pakistan: reading the Other (SSHRC, Ratna Ghosh, McGill)

Educational and mental health of Bangladeshi students in Montreal (FRSQ, MUHC, McGill)

Cultural representations, ethnic identity and intercultural Education (SHHRC, Denise Lussier, PI, McGill)

Teaching about (Islam) pluralistically? What does it mean? (Salima Bhimani, PhD Dissertation, Ongoing, OISE)

Curricular treatment and teaching of Islam in Quebec, Ontario: textbooks and teachers' perspectives (SHHRC, McAndrew, Ali, Helly, Oueslati, etc)

Image of the Other (GEI, Germany)

18 National UNESCO Commissions (European and Arab)

Topics Needing to be Explored

Hijab at University, comparative perspectives in Quebec and France

The development of students in the private Muslim school sector

Schooling choices of Muslim Students and parents r.e. private mainstream or religious schools in various countries

How Muslim girls benefit from government programs of Girls' education (e.g. KGBV) in India.

Difference between the Identity of the Muslims who have been educated in public schools or in Muslim schools in Montreal

Ideological and Epistemological issues of implementing critical thinking and constructive pedagogy in Muslim contexts

Inclusion of pupil's individual religious perspectives in teaching and learning

Teacher conference in handling religious/interreligious issues in classrooms

Similarities between Islamic and democratic values

New Projects or Ongoing Projects open to new participants

Identity, Ethnicity, and citizenship in the educational system (Ratna Ghosh is willing to take the lead, McGill University)

Designing curriculum for Islam and Muslim Communities (ASCD, USA)

Comparative pluralistic societies, (Patrice Brodeur)

Open, Islamic Schools in the US and Canada, International Study through Hartford Seminary, US (see Abdullah Antepli)

Open, Access to Higher Education to Muslims in India, Ministry of Human Resources Development MHRD, India, (see Najma Akhtar)