



Research Article

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The Youth of Muslim Diaspora and Identity Markers: The Crossroads of School, Religion, and Society

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Abstract

This study addresses the religious identification of young people from an immigrant background in the context of a sociological perspective. This study is essentially focused on young people's perceptions of their religious identities. We tried to understand the religious markers exhibited by young people attending a religious Muslim school in Canada. How do these students construct identity in the gears of religion, school, home society and parental culture? Young people are thus given the opportunity to express their identity-building perspectives. Through an ethnographic stay, the data collection took place in a private school located in Quebec, Canada. The data analysis allowed us to identify some religious identity markers developed by participants during their biographical and social paths. Participants are hence distinguished as a cultural group in a minority context. These religious markers also seem more adapted to the context of young people and more open to others.

Keywords: young, identity, markers, Islam, reproduction, ethnography

1. Introduction

The minority religious communities are heterogeneous in their national, ethnic, regional and/or linguistic affiliations. So, the study of these communities requires the use of constructivist and dynamic definitions of identity. Identity is versatile in a number of aspects since the social, cultural, religious and/or linguistic boundaries are not precisely defined. It is accordingly possible for one to define himself by his age, gender, socio-professional category, language, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, lifestyle, and many other criteria without being associated with stereotypes. Stereotypes generally differentiate and devalue members of ethnic, religious, social and cultural groups. Percheron (1982) concludes that children's preferences are inherited. In this sense, religious and cultural references are inherited preferences similar to social inequalities and domination.

In the West, cultural communities have recourse to private education in order to reproduce their value systems and to ensure an education that consolidates their social position. Resorting to private education does not necessarily mean the creation of a parallel school system, it is rather a response to the need of a socio-economic /cultural group that does not find its reproductive interest in the public system (Tavan, 2004). School is often considered as an agent that produces social classes and dominant values. Bourdieu and Passeron (1980) have already presented the school as an instance of social structures' reproduction enabling the domination of favored groups. Even if the school

system seems to offer equal opportunities to all, children from marginalized groups internalize social selection and self-eliminate. According to Dubet (2004), “losers in the school system” blame themselves for their failure.

In this context, a western young Muslim negotiates his identity according to two dimensions: temporal; linked to the individual's life story and relational; interacting in collective action (Castells, 2009). To have a better understanding of the identity references of young people in a diasporic context, we were interested in the experience of Muslim students attending a private ethnoreligious school in Canada. Recognizing that religion is one of the most powerful cultural features on which an identity can be negotiated (Essid, 2019), this study focuses on the identity markers of Muslim young people in the context of migration at the crossroads of society, school, and parental culture. Therefore we have attempted to understand if young new generations from this cultural community consider themselves as Canadians, Quebecers, Muslims or from their countries of origin.

2. Literature Review

The inquiry of identity often requires breaking with substantialist and essentialist conceptions. The study of cultural communities in the West requires the use of both constructivist and dynamic definitions of identity. Since social and cultural boundaries are not definitively drawn, identity is multiple and markers are hybrid

2.1 Identity in a migration context

In a diasporic situation, Vasquez (1990) explains that the person reacts according to the way he was socialized in the family, and then in the society. However, immigration generally causes a break within the environment where the individual was socialized. The individual is thus forced into a brutal change and a devalued perception of his identity compared to his identity in his original country (Vasquez, 1990). Being confronted with a value system different from his own could force a person to integrate some conflicting identifications, and a potentially devalued self-image linked to others' judgments. Generation conflicts, for example, take on greater importance in a context of migration. Young people's opinions about relationships between the sexes, career choices, or cultural affiliations, are radicalized compared to parents position. Hurrelmann & Engel (1992) explained that, in the western industrialized countries, young people are held accountable for their schooling, their professional choices, their economic autonomy and the separation from their parents. However, for immigrants' descendants there are other dimensions that come into play in their identity development and their autonomy such as culture transmission, family heritage preservation, and social access.

For minority groups in pluralistic societies, as in Canada, school failure is synonym to social failure, integration difficulties, and risks of assimilation. Consequently, some minority groups attempt to protect themselves from the cultural, social and religious homogenization by using the private education system to bring back the right of minority communities to transmit their values in opposition to those of the dominant society. Some religious minorities in Canada, for instance, establish ethno-religious schools for their youth. The schools' aims are to preserve young people's identity and to reproduce it through distinguishing markers around which the socialization process takes place.

2.2 Identity markers

It is crucial to focus on the markers constituting the group to which one belongs in order to understand the identity phenomenon. Augé (1994) stated that “it is the symbolic logic that makes the relations between people possible and effective” (p. 53).

Identity markers are social and/or psychological traits to which a person gives a particular meaning in order to be distinct. The markers are neither the reflection of the group's culture, nor a "natural" reflection of the cultural content. Identity markers enable members of a group to preserve their distinct social identities and to guarantee their visibility (Parveen & Siddiqui, 2016). Barth (1969) presents them as a dynamic set of features selected based on relationships with other groups and used as a classification criterion (whether a group member or not) (p. 119). Peressini (1993) distinguishes between three stages within this assignment process: selection, schematization, and systematization/totalization (p. 92). It is particularly important to approach the markers as a system (open and dynamic) rather than as a series of separate and arbitrary features. According to Drummond (1980), if markers constitute a system, it is a system within a system, since their meaning does not come mainly from the relationships between them, but from the broader system of meanings in which they are rooted. To be legitimate in the eyes of the group members, the markers must be able to keep their supposedly "natural" character, or else undergo a process of renaturalization. The markers are constructed according to a generally implicit process, with a progressive crystallization of the consensus by the explicit intervention of collective actors of the community. Swann and others (2009) discuss a double aspect within this process of identification from which the markers emerge; subjective and objective. The objective dimension characterizes the group and can be internalized to be taken up as signifying subjective identity. The subjective dimension, such as discourse, mentality, cultural practice, can be objectified to prove the undeniable presence of the group. The dominant group produces identification markers by its "invention" of traditions and by the legitimacy that its symbolic power confers on these markers (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, p. 14). Calhoun (1993) brings an important precision to the concept of invented tradition, pointing out that its invented character does not make it less "real" or valid (p. 222), because, after all, all traditions are created, and none is essential. In this sense, Story & Walker (2016) state that markers are profoundly manipulated, shared, interpreted, and even misleading in order to initiate an identity construction process.

Immigration implies a change in cultural context, which places the social actor in a situation of eventual acculturation where he is facing a double challenge: preserve his identity traits borrowed from the culture of origin while adapting the new social and cultural environment. In this context, the identification process is the primary issue for minority groups seeking to ensure their reproduction. On the other hand, the dominant group seeks to guarantee its hegemony. For religious minorities, religious markers are at the heart of this challenge. For young people of immigrant origin, on the contrary, these markers can exclude them from the educational and professional paths leading to success.

2.3 *Religious markers*

According to Ruano-Borbalan and Halpern (2004), religion can constitute one of the main vectors of identification because it allows a person to build his individual identity, to find legitimacy in "an almost eternal symbolic body" (p. 7), and to draw his origin from a tradition which roots can go back to centuries. Smith (1998), in his study of American evangelism, underlines the preponderant role of religion in the construction of identity. He explains that by establishing symbolic borders between those who adhere to its creed and those who do not recognize it, religions contribute to maintain collective identities and to build specific social groups (Smith, 1998, p. 91). However, the author insists that the construction of symbolic borders is not specific to the religious domain and that these borders can be ethnic, racial, etc. Ensuring a collective and sustainable existence for the individual, religion thus constitutes an essential source for the constitution of identity.

Dorais (2004) defines cultural and consequently religious identity according to two fundamental and complementary identity principles: similarity and otherness. Identity is a process by which a group of individuals share a partially common way of understanding the universe, acting on it and communicating their ideas and models of action "(p.5). It is built with the recognition that

other individuals and groups may think and act indifferent ways. From this perspective, Dorais (2004) considers that religion, like language, color or ethnicity, is not a representation of constant cultural markers inherent in a certain group, it is rather a collection of attributes around which certain actors are grouped. The absence of a given feature does not in any way mean the disappearance of the group that carries it. However, in order to maintain order and to preserve their domination, States monopolize the concept of cultural and religious identity to govern the relationships between populations sharing the same territory. For his part, Hanf (1994) states that the groups defining themselves initially with religion are not necessarily different from those who use linguistic or ethnic markers to find a certain historical depth. Identity production involves historicism: the group needs a history, preferably incorporating religious images. In the context of migration, Bastenier (1998) emphasizes the combination of religion and ethnicity in the process of identity reconstruction. For this reason, some communities reveal their ethnic-religious claims with determination and they respond, according to Schnapper (1993, p. 161), to the needs of identification and recognition. Among diasporic populations, religious rituals are important in the construction of identity and the process of negotiation. Clothey (2006), gives the example of the Tamil population in Canada, he demonstrates that the "Tamils' settlements outside their ancestral homes have used a variety of strategies by which they negotiate their identities, and transmit their heritage within not really hospitable cities. One of these strategies is ritualization in a variety of forms." (p. 13). For Hervieu-Léger (1998), religious identification is essentially associated with the transmission process. Identity, whether individual or collective, is built from a religious transmission both dynamic and complex.

Being a complex and dynamic, identity is the combination of multiple markers. We will, in short, discuss that religion in ethno-religious schools is recognized as one of the most powerful cultural features on which an identity can be negotiated (Essid, 2019). We consider that the young Muslim negotiates his identity in a dialectical context according to two dimensions: temporal and relational (Castells, 2009). To have a better understanding of the identity references of young people in a diasporic context, we were interested in the experience of Muslim students attending a private ethnoreligious school in Canada. Thus, this study focuses on the identity markers of immigrated Muslim young people in the context of migration at the crossroads of the host society and that of the origin one. Therefore we have attempted to understand if young new generations from cultural communities consider themselves as Canadians, Quebecers, Muslims or of foreign origins.

3. Methodology

For data collection, we have chosen an ethnographic stay in a private Muslim school in Quebec, Canada. The school is a primary institution, registered as a non-profit association. It began its services in 1999 and started receiving partial funding from the the Quebec Ministry of Education, according to Law No. 78 on private education. It delivers its courses in accordance with the official curriculum of the Quebec Ministry of Education, with a local program for teaching Arabic language and Islamic Education. 250 Muslim students were enrolled in 2015.

3.1 Ethnographic flavor

Creswell (1998) states that ethnography is a "description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system in which the researcher studies the meanings of behavior, language and interactions of the culture-sharing group" He also considers case study "as an examination of a system bounded (...) over time" (p. 61). According to Walters (2007), "ethnography provides a holistic view of a social group or culture, case study an in-depth study of a bounded system or case of set of cases" (p. 92).

As a data collection process, Ethnography has allowed us to take into consideration the social and cultural system in which the students belong. It has also given us the opportunity to facilitate the interaction with the participants in their daily lives, while participating in their daily activities as members of the social group. In our case, the ethnographic approach conducted in the school has

allowed us to associate the young participants and their migratory context with their real socio-cultural systems. For this purpose, the collection tools we used are:

- Field notes for the description of activities and interactions in the classroom, in the cafeteria, in the courtyard, during prayers, etc.
- Interview with the participants for exploring all themes directly related to our study. Eight individual interviews were conducted and three of them were in dyads, which lasted more than 11 hours.
- Ethnographic observations to reflect varying degrees of involvement. More than thirty seven hours of observation took place in the classroom, in the school hallways, in the cafeteria, and in the gym.
- Focus groups to provide the participants with the opportunity to express their representations of themselves and their social realities. Six focus groups that lasted for almost three hours, were conducted during our stay.

3.2 *The context of ethnographic action*

As a member of the Muslim community in Canada, we consider ourselves in a better position to approach this study. Milroy (1980) discusses the advantage of researchers undertaking a research project on their communities, linguistically in his case as: “They insist on the importance of the linguistic investigator understanding the general norms and values of the community” (p. 17). The researcher as a group member of the study is the one “who knows the culture of the inner city as full participants and shares a deep understanding of it” (p. 17). If this positioning reflects the subjectivity of the researcher about his research object, a reflexive approach is required to moderate this subjectivity (Essid and Essid Hamas, 2017).

This school was founded in 1999 by a group of Muslims who considered themselves concerned to preserve their minority religion in a Western society. The school is officially open to all children. However, only children whose parents adhere to the Muslim faith are enrolled, whatever their ethnic or cultural origins are. This school is multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual just like the Muslim religion. It is well equipped with excellent facilities, among other things, a place of prayer and rooms for ablution (action of washing body parts for prayer). At its inauguration, the school started with three grades: kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades. In 2003, all grade levels were offered. In 2008, a daycare center was added to the school. 250 students were enrolled in 2015. Students spend a large part of their day in the school where varied activities are conducted. For these young students, the school is thus a place where personal achievement, meaningful relationships with either peers or adults can develop.

The participants of this study sixth graders. 18 students, identified by the first letter of their first names, were selected. They were between 10 and 12 years old, which seems appropriate for the clear appearance of the identity aspects through their social interactions. Hepburn (1995), in his studies on political socialization, considers that this age constitutes a significant stage in the life trajectory and in the construction of identity for young people. They are usually more sensitive to socio-cultural conflicts and are often called upon to make important choices.

4. **Findings: Identity Markers between Difference and Otherness**

The data collected in the field demonstrate that religious beliefs have a relatively considerable effect on the choices of the young participants, on their worldview, and on the different aspects of their lives as boys and girls. The participants highlight religious identity markers developed by them during their biographical and social trajectory, and distinguishing them as a cultural group in a minority context.

4.1 Identity markers over time

Many paradigms are intertwined in the identity process during the biographical participant trajectory, namely the interaction with religious heritage and their position in relation to the legitimization discourse.

4.1.1 The inheritance reproduction

Six participants seem to reproduce a more conventional model of religious heritage. Thus, on questions relating to the choice of a future spouse and on the education of their future children, some responses take both the cultural and religious factors into consideration in their life choices. For example, K. confirms: *"My children have to be Muslims and live as Muslims, and I want them to be educated as real Muslims"*. A. also claims: *"Of course, my children will learn Islam and how to practice Islam. It is important to me. Allah wants us to do this."*

For I. and Z., the future spouse should adhere to the same faith, and the transmission of religious values is essential for them in the education of their future children. Z. ensures: *"My children will be educated in a Muslim school like me."* I. confirms: *"For me, I don't care if she's Algerian or Lebanese, but she has to be Muslim."* In this regard, I. builds his religious portrait on the desire to reproduce the parental scheme without joining on a cultural reproduction, which seems secondary. As for R., H., and K., they express a nuanced desire to stand away from the strict education that they receive. H. states: *"I don't really know, I'll definitely teach them to live as Muslims, but it will be different from what my parents taught me, because here it's different, and also my parents are too attached to the country."* K. explains in the same manner: *"I like the food of Morocco, I also like the djellaba (traditional dress), the wedding parties and especially the meetings with girls. I want my children to be too, but I can't force them."*

Religious anchors are decisive for young people, and religious variables are profoundly determinants in their personal and spiritual journey. Some prefer double consideration of cultural and religious variables in their life choices and in their identity choices. For this reason, it is important for them to get married with a person of the same religion, and to transmit heritage and denominational values onto their future children. For others, the model of reproducing religious heritage is more resilient and is accompanied by an openness to others.

4.1.2 Religious distancing

In total, 13 participants, 10 girls, and 3 boys, out of 18 take a distance from some religious and family traditions and insist on a personal and social Islam. For example, K. tries to distance himself from what he receives: *"I have a Muslim origin, my parents and grandparents are Muslims, I inherited Islam from them, but I'm not like them, I don't practice like them and I don't think like them."* It is particularly the girls who clearly testify to their own personal way in their relation to Islam; the inner way that I. and F. respectively call as *"evolution"* and *"modification"* as their spiritual approach should be changed. For many, Islam is not a tradition, but a religious way. R. insists on the hijab as a personal choice: *"After school, I wear the hijab, and I don't want to take it off. It's my decision."* As for Y., she states: *"Adults want us to live Islam in the same way as they lived in the country. But we are different."* M. also distances himself from the parental Islam concept: *"I am Muslim, but I'm not like my mother or the supervisors who forbid everything."* S. severely criticizes the attitude of the school supervisors, who, according to her: *"they think they are in their country of origin, they treat us as if we were in Algeria or Morocco. In Islam, it's not forbidden to talk to guys or talk to grown-ups."* For some young people like I., Y., F., and S., this distinction is important, even if it is not always externally noticeable from outside, as it allows them to distinguish themselves as Muslims regardless of the parental culture. Originally Moroccan, but born in Quebec, R. declares: *"I feel Muslim, a little Moroccan and a little Canadian."* She continues in another discussion: *"In front of others, I want to show myself as a*

Muslim, I wear the hijab and I behave well." The distinction between religious and cultural is essential because it enables some to combine "the Canadian being" with "the Muslim being" or "the Moroccan being" with "the Muslim being."

On a personal level, some participants raise a period of doubt and questioning in relation to some Muslim practices. According to testimony, a period of doubt is occasional and is caused by painful events encountered during the migration journey. Y. and Z. talk about difficult family experiences. For example, Y. mentions the divorce of her parents as a major event in her life. She states that their situation as immigrants is at the origin of their financial and social insecurity. Being a native doctor, her father wanted to return to the country after years spent in Quebec, while her mother directly refused the idea of return. The conflict resulted in divorce. On the other hand, K. explains that when his father became very violent when he lost his job. These events stimulate a religious vacuum among the participants. S. and Z. went so far as to cease their religious practices during this period. For example Y. expresses the feeling as "abandoned by God", and she experienced "a difficult time" with her family, during which she questioned: "Why do we pray and fast if it is not to live happy and contented." O. explains: "During that time (divorce) I always said to myself: it is useless to pray." She also adds that she experienced "a period of thinking on what I have learned." To the same questions concerning the choice of the future spouse and the education of the children, B., S. and R. did not favor religious and cultural variables in the way they consider the education. They do not plan to enroll their future children in a Muslim school, and rather prefer to give them the freedom to choose the school where they want to be educated. On the other hand, the variable related to the future spouse is more significant for girls and, not for boys. All participants exclude the possibility of having a non-Muslim spouse, while boys do not rule out such a possibility. S. and R. even admit that they prefer to marry a Canadian or a Quebecer, "because they are less tanned, less demanding and more beautiful," according to R. In the same direction, willingness of some participants to transmit parental values does not prevent them from questioning certain aspects of Muslim practice as confirmed by C: "Yes it's sure, my children have to learn the Quran, prayers, fasting, etc., but not as we do now, I will try to make it more fun and more attractive to them." and E.: "Islam is my religion and the religion of the whole family, and it will be my children's as well, but I am going to give them more freedom and more choice to do what they want." However, two participants, B. and S., reveal that their faith and religious implications are often part of a profoundly punctual belonging. S. says: "I often feel that I am gesturing and conducting orders without thinking and without soul." B. also states: "But, I have to do like them, otherwise the problems start with my parents, between my mother and my father, and especially at school." Distance from religious heritage can sometimes lead to deep thinking on daily practices and their relevance. However, all participants recognize themselves as Muslims in their own way, and all claim belonging to the wider community of Islam.

4.2 Identity Markers in Relationships

An identity is muslim because it is amongst others perceived so by others.. The negotiation of the conditions to access to the group is continuous, but the dynamics of social recognition leads young people to find themselves between the exacting expectations of the group of religious and cultural affiliation and the authenticity of an identity that aims to be personal. Our ethnographic stay allowed us to distinguish some variables that affect identity markers in interaction, namely relationships with the opposite gender, the distinctive veil of Muslim girls and the different dimensions of belonging to the community.

4.2.1 Gender Relationship

Relationships between peers are an essential aspect of the young people's self identification. The school is organized according to the principle of gender separation. On a practical level, supervisors and teachers make every effort to ensure that the separation between girls and boys is effective on the

ground. Children spend their time with their same-gender peers. Interactions with the opposite gender are reduced and above all, controlled. Boys and girls raise the separation principle with a rather critical view and some participants even consider it as anti Islamic. R. states: *"It is not Islam which prohibits girls and boys from rubbing shoulders."*, and Y. ensures: *"My father told me that in Islam girls and boys can study together, but a girl and a boy can't stay alone in a room or in a hidden corner."* Criticism of the school is quite serious. The participants accuse it of hypocrisy and exaggeration in its practice of separating young people. The observations collected highlight how the difference between genders manifests and stages itself in the playground and in the classroom. In practical terms, mostly the girls and boys we have observed do not socialize, and they play separately in different games in separate places. In the schoolyard, girls move less than their male peers; the spirit of dynamism and mobility is not encouraged. They walk together and hold hands. They favor discussions and conversations during breaks. They talk quietly among themselves, often in pairs or in small groups in an intimate place. On the other hand, boys are distinguished from girls by their mobility by occupying most of the schoolyard. When they move, they walk with big steps, run with long strides within the courtyard and are often mobilized around balls.

Thus, the relationships between boys and girls are mostly structured in a mode of avoidance. In general, girls seem more concerned with respecting the established order and complying with this avoidance principle. They spread and control standards in behaviors appropriate for their gender. These standards relate in particular to physical appearance (wear the hijab well, always be alert if the hair of one of them appears, make sure not to show parts of their bodies) and behavior with boys. At this stage of the identity construction, some young people, girls or boys, strive to position themselves actively as conformist Muslims, while others are more critical of certain requirements that they find unjustifiable.

The practice of girl/boy separation is strongly recommended in the school in an implicit way. This practice is not an internal regulation of the institution, rather it is highly emphasized by the 6th-grade teacher and one of the oldest teachers. This practice reflects the expectation of many parents who often demand that their daughters are separated from boys, and *"That's why they enrolled them in a Muslim school."* Social mix is controlled, and the rigorous separation of genders refers to the partition of women and men in the mosque during daily prayers.

4.2.2 The veil and the others

Giddens (2004) already claims that the debate on the hijab is intense, passionate and universal. Heavily loaded culturally and religiously, it is often questioned by its detractors. Overall, the participants do not consider their veil as a sign of identity. Although this sign is visible, the participants refuse any categorization or stigmatization in the name of the veil. For example, F. refers to it as *"a sign of worship."* For S., it is *"a religious obligation,"* and for A. *"a duty."* In the same meaning, R. explains that *"wearing the hijab here is a real challenge."* But this challenge helps to further build her character in order to respond intelligently to the prejudices and stereotypes surrounding the veiled woman in the West. E. states: *"I think you should show everyone that having a hijab doesn't mean that you are ignorant or submissive, and that success or failure is individual."* As for S., she insists on self-appreciation: *"I'm only wearing it at school now, but after, I don't know, my dad told me that if I decide to wear it, we should honor it."* In her opinion, Z. admits contemptuous looks on her hijab, but she is careful not to accuse the whole population of it. She makes the media responsible for arising distrust for Muslims and their religion.

Hence, the meaning of the veil is associated with the legitimacy and authority of God. The participants claim it as a one-way relationship with God and they denounce its manipulation and consider it as part of the female dress repertoire just like a skirt or a shirt. Thus, it reflects the diversity of women's experiences and aspirations all around the world.

4.2.3 The circles of affiliation

The field data reveal that participants are exhibited by their home groups. Two dimensions are often combined and affect the identity practices of the young people: the cultural dimension and the socio-community dimension. The resultant social and symbolic markers allow the members to define their boundaries and their membership groups. The cultural dimension brings the elements of religious practice together. Properly speaking, it is all about the profession of faith, especially the pillars of Islam as the attestation of the oneness of God ("Ashahada" in Arabic), daily prayers and respect for fasting. All participants confirm that their belonging to the Muslim religion begins with the declaration of the oneness of God. For example, according to R. "All those who pronounce Ashahada are officially Muslim". Z. confirms: "For example, it is the shahada which indicates entry into Islam for a convert". Some participants reveal a double dimension in this religious pillar: an individual dimension directly linking the Muslim with his God and another collective, relating to the link among all Muslims in their confirmation of a single god and a prophet - messenger. As the individual testimony of the oneness of God and the fulfillment of the monotheistic revelation, the *shahada* converts the believer into a Muslim (becoming a Muslim), and may incorporate him into the community of believers in the Quranic revelation. The participant claims himself as a Muslim, but this testimony attaches him to a larger community.

Invocation to God (*salat*) is also fundamental to confirm membership to this religion and its followers. In direct contact with the Creator, the faithfuls fulfill their existence through their moral and gestural submission to God. The prayers, performed collectively at school once a day, bring all the students, teachers, and staff of the school together. This ritual incorporates the participants into the universal Muslim community once again and provides them with a source of safety and stability. As for fasting in Ramadhan, it is sacred in Islam. During this month, spiritual activities are increased: fasting, additional prayers during nights, frequent reading of the Quran and daily invocation to God. The month also represents a festive activity related to fasting and constitutes a pretty crucial socio-community dimension. The month now refers to very lively Ramadhan nights and in-family culinary competitions. At school, the participants talk about the weekend nights in the month of Ramadhan and during which they meet, pray and chat.

So, being a Muslim means adopting and exhibiting certain markers, which position the individual in a local and global circle of Muslim traditions. In the Western context, these markers are not fixed, and sometimes can be subject to pressure of the dominant discourse to be modified by other markers that better adapt to the values of young people.

5. Conclusion

The Muslim perspective of identity is neatly essentialist and chronological, but most of the participants (15 of 19) constitute their identities from the dynamic interaction with their cultural and social environments. A believer of the Muslim faith is judged as "Good Muslim" or "Bad Muslim" according to their level of observance of the practice (prayers, fasting, good deeds, readings, etc.), and the exhibition of its distinctive markers as Muslim. In a minority environment, especially in the European or North American context, the diversity of the representations of Islam forces the believer to reposition himself in accordance with a universal belonging relating to the dynamics of divine creation. Obviously, the religiosity of young people with a Muslim background seems assertive. All participants firstly define themselves as Muslims, and secondly by their socio-cultural affiliation either in the country of adoption or in the country of origin. Their identification with Islam is an important element in their identity construction process. At this stage, the work of inculcating and socializing the religious capital contributes to the reproduction of an incorporated religious habitus. Thus, young people do not tend towards an indifferentiation of their cultural and religious heritage. Nevertheless, they claim their right to be themselves as they see appropriate. Indicating contradictory trends, they are open and perceptive to the experiences of others, and seem to integrate other ways of

seeing the world without any denial of themselves. They display multiple identities, but are not fragmented. This identity is articulated to a set of religious and cultural experiences, past and present, lived over time, then thought to produce the meaning that we call Muslim identity. In spite of a dominant internal discourse legitimizing a “religiocentric” identity, they claim to be Muslims and Canadians simultaneously. Belonging conceived in terms of cultural binarity, refers both to the culture of their original country where Islam is often valued and sacred, and to the culture of the country of residence where Islam is a part of the private domain and often overlooked.

This study has focused on the claim of the youth for an Islam registered in the world. Most frequently born in Canada or having spent most of their lives there, the majority of these young people refuse to lock themselves into the community enclaves. Through its social roots and its mastery of the Canadian culture, this new generation expresses itself publicly and consequently acquires visibility. It does not consider itself in exile, but lives and claims to be both Canadian and Muslim. Their Muslim identity wants to be trivialized through values, recognized and shared among humans. Several young people attempt to reform Islam by incorporating it into the major Canadian religious matrices, by putting forward their cultural and political positions publicly and freely. These positions generally intersect with the major themes of the political field and the global public debate. Thus, the reference to Islam and its reproduction passes through new ways, sometimes completely opposed to those mobilized by their parents.

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