Preface

1. The Muslim Presence in North America 1

2. Islamic Schools: An Overview 23

3. What Principals Told Us

4. What Parents Told Us

5. What Teachers Told Us

6. What Students Told Us

7. Putting It All Together

8. Prospects and Challenges for Islamic Education

References 46
1. The Muslim Presence in North America

*Will They Fit In?*

We start, without apology, with the question that lurks behind much of the discussion, in the media and among academics as well, of the growing presence of Muslims in the United States and Canada. Concern is rarely expressed about African-American and other converts to Islam, who are perceived as part of the churn in religious adherence so often noted by sociologists. Indeed, Muslim institutions in urban neighborhoods are seen as a source of stability and resistance to drugs and family breakdown. No, the concern is focused on immigrants from predominantly-Muslim countries, and on their children.

Will these immigrants or their children become loyal Americans or Canadians, as has occurred with other immigrant groups? Will they remain, instead, a permanently disloyal opposition? Or, in what could be called the liberal version of this concern, should they be required to abandon or adopt a radically liberalized version of Islam in order to fit in with the norms of the host society? Is Islam incompatible with democracy, or vice versa?\(^1\) Of course, as Danièle Hervieu-Léger points out, this last is a meaningless question, apart from asking how particular groups of Muslims in particular situations “live their Islam.”\(^2\)

The purpose of our study has been to engage with some of these “particular situations,” the Islamic secondary schools in which some Muslim adolescents are taught to navigate between American society and a religious tradition that comes late to the discussions and accommodations that have formed Western culture. We have sought to listen attentively and, so far as possible, without preconceptions. Inevitably, however, we have done it against the background of current events and of on-going developments within American society and also within the Muslim community in North America. This introductory chapter is intended to present, in summary form, the context within which Islamic schools are functioning in the United States.

A significant aspect of this context, and one of which those we talked with were very much aware, is suspicion in the general population about Islam and about Muslims. Seeking to de-bunk what he calls “the myth of the Muslim tide,” one recent author notes that it has “gradually become acceptable, in some establishment political and media circles, to assert that ordinary Muslims are the problem, that Islamic immigrants and their offspring may be disloyal, and that the religion and its followers should not be tolerated in the same way others are.”\(^3\)

While this is a much less acute concern than it is in Western Europe, where the Muslim minority deriving from immigration are commonly seen as “defective” Europeans, “less rational, less capable of separating knowledge from belief and religion from politics, and less capable of

---

\(^1\) Heclo 2007, 6.

\(^2\) Hervieu-Léger 2000, 80.

\(^3\) Saunders 2012, 31.
valuing democracy, freedom of expression and gender equality,“ some opinion-makers are not reassured by assurances that “Muslims are an American immigration success story.” The sense that Muslims are somehow different from all the other immigrant groups that have found their place in North American society, in ways that will inevitably place them in conflict with the prevailing norms, appears to be widespread. It has been said that “[i]n the perception of the Western community, Islam replaced Communism as the Evil Other.” For example, a survey of more than a thousand pastors of the Southern Baptist Convention found that 66 percent either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement: “I believe Islam is a dangerous religion.”

This concern was given its most influential expression by the distinguished political scientist Samuel Huntington in his 1996 book The Clash of Civilizations. While the book deals with many other matters, it is his treatment of Islam that attracted the most attention. Huntington challenged optimistic assertions that “the West does not have problems with Islam, but only with violent Islamist extremists. Fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate otherwise.” In fact, he insisted, the “underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power.”

At a more popular level, the Pew Research Center reports that 67 percent of the American public says they are at least somewhat concerned about Islamic extremism; “15% of the general public believes that there is a great deal of support for extremism among Muslim Americans, and an additional 25% see a fair amount of support.” This concern is reinforced by publications that warn of the “stealth jihad” through which front groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood are said to seek to impose Shariah law on American society. One claims, for example, that “nearly every major Muslim organization in the United States is actually controlled by the MB or a derivative organization. Consequently, most of the Muslim-American groups of any prominence in America are now known to be, as a matter of fact, hostile to the United States and its Constitution.”

Such charges have led to a national movement to adopt legislation or state constitutional provisions to forbid courts from using traditional Islamic law – Shariah – in their decisions. Such a provision was approved in 2010 by seventy percent of Oklahoma voters, though it was later struck down as discriminatory on the basis of religion. As one commentator pointed out, “anti-Sharia legislation harms the social fabric by its very premise: the presumption that the

---

4 Mavelli 2012, 63.
5 Barrett 2007, 5.
6 Malashenko 2004, 107; emphasis in original.
7 Starnes 2014, 162.
8 Huntington 1996, 209.
11 Shariah, the Threat to America 2010, 108.
deepest core values and convictions of religious Americans threaten the legal order by virtue of their source, without reference to their substance."\(^{12}\)

Nor are such concerns altogether imaginary. The North American public is subjected, almost daily, to reports of violence committed by Muslims, often against other Muslims, somewhere in the world, and of young Muslims and converts to Islam, born and raised in Germany, England, or the United States, who are seduced into joining violent movements.

It may help to put a little historical perspective on this concern about Islam to remember that earlier generations of American social commentators worried in a similar way about whether Catholic immigrants could ever become good citizens;\(^{13}\) those doubts were nurtured in a similar way by international developments, from the opposition of the Catholic Church to 19\(^{th}\) century republican governments in France to its support for Franco during the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s “Though in retrospect we regard the assimilation of American Catholics as inevitable, it would have appeared incredible in the 1920s or 1930s.”\(^{14}\) Catholics were not the only target of the widespread bigotry of the time – Jews came in for their share, not to mention African Americans and Asians – but it was Catholics who (like Muslims today) were perceived as a menace to American life:

The religious life of the United States turned sour during the years following World War I. Georgia’s veteran populist, Tom Watson, bounded back into politics with a campaign against Jews, Negroes, and Catholics. The Governor of Florida, Sydney J. Catts, stomped his state to warn against the Pope’s plans to transfer the Vatican there. The Oregon legislature banned parochial schools. Denver’s most popular restaurant attracted patrons with a big sign: "We Serve Fish Every Day–Except Friday." The Ku Klux Klan, fueled by the resurgent anti-Catholicism, spread like wildfire across the nation in the early 1920’s. In a decade marred by many hatreds – against immigrants, Jews, Negroes, radicals – anti-Catholicism was probably the strongest.\(^{15}\)

In words that one could readily find applied to Islam today, an editorial in the liberal New Republic described a conflict, in America, between a culture “which is based on absolutism and encourages obedience, conformity, and intellectual subservience, and a culture which encourages curiosity, hypotheses, experimentation, verification by facts . . . “\(^{16}\) An article in the influential North American Review by an apologist for the Ku Klux Klan warned, in 1926, that “there is a steady flood of alien ideas being spread over the country, always carefully disguised as American.”\(^{17}\) The editor of the American Standard warned that a heinous conspiracy to

\(^{12}\) Vischer 2012, 27.
\(^{13}\) The 19th century development of this prejudice is discussed extensively in Glenn 1988 and Glenn 2012a.
\(^{14}\) Jenkins 2007, 23.
\(^{15}\) Cuddy 1981, 236.
\(^{16}\) In Nussbaum 2008, 276.
\(^{17}\) Evans 1926, 41.
destroy America was afoot between Roman Catholicism and anti-Christian Jewry.\textsuperscript{18} Even in the 1940s, despite the national unity forged by war, “Catholics were proclaimed heretics from what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called ‘the democratic faith,’ one in which ‘theology and ritual . . . hierarchy and demonology’ would step aside for ‘intellectual freedom and unrestricted inquiry’.”\textsuperscript{19}

This conviction, in elite circles, about the negative effects of Catholicism on American life persisted into the post-war period until it seems to have been wiped away by adulation of the Kennedy Administration and its fallen leader.

The Catholic question was among the most discussed issues of the 1940s and 1950s. Liberals saw Catholicism as a dangerous element that had to be purged from public life. Behind this aggressive anti-Catholicism was the belief that the Church's hierarchical, authoritarian, and dogmatic structure stood opposed to American political values of freedom and individuality. The fact that Catholics were subjects of a foreign sovereign meant they could never be loyal citizens of the United States. Such views were not the province of an extremist fringe. The Catholic question filled the air of postwar political discourse. Paul Blanshard's \textit{American Freedom and Catholic Power}, first published in 1949, was a wildly popular bestseller that attracted praise from such luminous thinkers as John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein and Henry Sloane Coffin. . . . Many believed that the fate of American freedom stood in the balance. Opposition to Catholicism was as important as opposition to racial segregation, fascism, and Communism in defining "the terms of mid-twentieth-century American liberalism." . . . This fear of the Catholic Church directly informed the birth of postwar Establishment Clause jurisprudence, as liberals urged the use of the First Amendment as a tool to protect democracy from Catholic power.\textsuperscript{20}

Indian-American Muslim Eboo Patel has made the parallel between anxieties about Catholicism and anxieties about Islam explicitly:

Like the anti-Catholic movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the central argument of the forces of Islamophobia is that the very nature of Islam is in conflict with American values, especially freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. The problem is not with individual believers; the problem is with the belief system, which requires its adherents to adopt its policy of domination. Their secret weapons are overpopulation, conversion, and acquiring the mechanisms of political influence. The best evidence for this is in how that religion is wrecking other countries – Latin American nations, in the case of Catholicism; the Middle East, in the case of Islam. And the danger is not only in developing nations; ample evidence exists of the domination of the

\textsuperscript{18} Murphy 1964, 72.
\textsuperscript{19} McGreevy 1997, 99.
\textsuperscript{20} Calo 2005, 1038-9.
Catholic hierarchy or sharia law in Europe.\textsuperscript{21}

While of course Jews have been one of the most successful identifiable groups in American society, at one time opinion-shaping elites were concerned that Jewish immigrants were a highly undesirable addition to the American mix. An official commission on immigration reported, in 1911, that “63 per cent of school children with a Southern Italian background were ‘retarded’ – meaning two or more years behind the norm for their age groups in school – exceeded only by the children of Polish Jews, at nearly 67 percent.” Two years earlier, “almost 26% of American Jews were illiterate, compared with 1.1% of Anglo Americans.”\textsuperscript{22} We need not rehearse, here, the sorry history of bigotry and exclusion directed against Chinese and Japanese immigrants, or the long history of discrimination against African Americans.\textsuperscript{23}

The Reality

There is in fact considerable evidence that Muslims are in general fitting into American life at least as well as previous immigrant groups, most notably a study conducted in 2011 by the well-regarded Pew Research Center. This replicated a 2006 survey with the same questions, and was based on interviews with a random sample of 1,033 Muslim American adults 18 years old and older.\textsuperscript{24} Before turning to the results, a brief overview of the Muslim presence in the United States is in order.

First of all, the numbers and proportions are by no means as (apparently) overwhelming as was the case with Catholic immigrants during the 19th century. Even if, as some predict, the number of Muslims in the United States doubles by 2030, that should represent about 1.7% of the total population, “almost as numerous as Jews and Episcopalians.”\textsuperscript{25} The great majority of immigrants to the United States are Christian, including almost all of those from Latin America and a high proportion of those from Asia. Although the government does not record the religion of immigrants, José Casanova estimates that “Muslims constitute at most 10% of all new immigrants, a figure that is likely to decrease.”\textsuperscript{26} A survey of persons admitted to permanent residence in July and August 1996 found that eight percent were Muslim.\textsuperscript{27}

The origins of Muslim immigrants are very diverse; the Pew survey found that 37 percent of the adults who identified themselves as Muslim were born in the United States. Of those born elsewhere, the largest group (nine percent) was from Pakistan, with Iran, Palestine,

\textsuperscript{21} Patel 2012, 46.
\textsuperscript{22} Saunders 2012, 131.
\textsuperscript{23} See Glenn 2011b.
\textsuperscript{24} Pew Research Center 2011, 75.
\textsuperscript{25} Saunders 2012, 42.
\textsuperscript{26} Casanova 2007, 61.
\textsuperscript{27} Jasso, Massey, Rosenzweig, and Smith 2003, 221.
Bangladesh, Yemen, and Jordan accounting for five percent each; altogether, 77 different countries of origin were identified. Summarized in a different way, “the largest group is from Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa, representing 41% of foreign-born U.S. Muslims, or 26% of all Muslim Americans. The South Asian region – including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan – is second, accounting for about a quarter (26%) of first-generation immigrants, or 16% of all U.S. Muslims. The rest are from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and elsewhere.”

Despite the high proportion of immigrants in the Muslim American population, the vast majority (81%) report that they are U.S. citizens. Besides the 37% who are citizens by birth, 70% of those born outside the United States report that they are now naturalized citizens. The high rate of naturalization is even more apparent when citizenship is compared with year of arrival. Of those who arrived before 1980, virtually all (more than 99%) have become U.S. citizens. Of those who arrived in the 1980s, 95% are now citizens. Of those who arrived in the 1990s, 80% are citizens. And of those who arrived after 2000, 42% already have become citizens.

In studies of immigrants to many countries, the rate at which they become citizens has often been taken as an indicator of the intention to become full and permanent members of the host society. Thus Huntington, in warning about what he presents as the dangers of loss of national coherence and its associated values in the United States, notes that the “overall naturalization rate for all aliens dropped from 63.6 percent in 1970 to 37.4 percent in 2000.” By this standard, at least, Muslim immigrants appear unusually committed to acquiring an American identity, whatever their reservations about various aspects of American culture. This contrasts with a much lower rate of naturalization of Muslims in Italy, Spain, and other European countries, where Turkey and North African countries of origin have sought to retain the loyalty of their emigrants, for both economic and political reasons.

The positive adjustment on the part of Muslim immigrants is in part no doubt because those who reach North America (in contrast with most of those who came to Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s) are relatively well-educated. The Pew study reports that the “percentage of Muslims who have graduated from college (26%) is about the same as among all U.S. adults (28%). At the other end of the educational spectrum, there also is no significant difference in the proportion who failed to finish high school (14% of U.S. Muslims, 13% of the general public). Muslim Americans – particularly those born in the United States – are more likely than Americans as a whole to have only graduated from high school.” This reflects, in part, the strong representation, in this US-born group, of African-American converts. On the other hand, reflecting the relatively youthful profile of Muslims in the United States, “a very high percentage

---

31 Saunders 2012, 76.
(26%) says they are currently enrolled in college or university classes (compared with 13% among the general public).”32 Another source claims that “[i]n North America, Muslims are educational successes, with attainment levels among the best of any ethnic group. In the United States, 40% of adult Muslims have earned a college degree or a more advanced degree, making them the second most educated religious group after Jews (61%), and far ahead of average Americans (29%).”33

Are American Muslims strongly loyal to the United States, or does Islam prevent them from making such a commitment? Is it a reason for concern that, according to the Pew survey, 49 percent of them place their Muslim identity ahead of their American identity? It is perhaps the unfamiliarity of the cultural elite with the religious convictions of their fellow-citizens that make such responses seem threatening; after all, 46 percent of American Christians (and 70 percent of evangelical Protestants) similarly say they see themselves as Christian first and as American second.34

Among both Muslims and Christians, people who say religion is very important in their lives are far more likely to view themselves primarily as a member of their religion. Among Muslims who say that religion is very important in their lives, 59% say they think of themselves first as Muslims. Among those for whom religion is less important, only 28% identify first as Muslim. Similarly, among Christians who place great personal importance on religion, 62% say they are Christians first, compared with 19% among those who view religion as less important.35

While 63 percent of American Muslims say that there is “no conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in modern society,” almost exactly the same proportion of American Christians find no conflict between their faith and their society.36 On the other hand, it is common for individuals with clear religious convictions, whether Christians or Muslims (or adherents to any other religion) to perceive conflicts between those convictions and elements of the surrounding culture. This may, in fact, make them better citizens, since they are more likely to press for positive changes than those who are complacent about the culture, the economic system, or the political order.

In another piece of good news,

[m]ore than eight-in-ten Muslim Americans (82%) say they are satisfied with the way things are going in their lives, while only 15% are dissatisfied. By this measure, Muslims express slightly higher levels of satisfaction with their lives than does the U.S. public overall (75% satisfied, 23% dissatisfied). The survey finds high levels of life satisfaction

33  Saunders 2012, 77.
34  Pew Research Center 2011, 34.
35  Pew Research Center 2011, 34.
across a wide variety of demographic groups. Among both men and women, for example, roughly eight-in-ten express satisfaction with the way things are going in their lives. And this sentiment is expressed by roughly comparable numbers of native-born (79%) and foreign-born Muslims (84%). Among native-born Muslims, second-generation Americans (those whose parents were born outside the U.S.) express higher levels of satisfaction with their lives (90%) than third-generation respondents (71%). More than three-quarters of U.S. Muslims (79%) rate their community as an excellent (36%) or good (43%) place to live, mirroring the level of community satisfaction seen among the U.S. population overall (83%). . . . Even among Muslims who report living in a community where there has been an act of vandalism against a mosque or a controversy over the building of an Islamic center, 76% rate their community as a good place to live. Satisfaction with their community is especially high among immigrants (83%) and second-generation Muslims (86%). Among third-generation Muslims, somewhat fewer, though still a majority (61%), rate their community as an excellent or good place to live.37

In addition, Muslim Americans rate their personal financial situations more highly than does the American public as a whole, and express optimism about the future.

Nearly three-quarters of U.S. Muslims (74%) continue to express faith in the American dream, saying that most people who want to get ahead can make it if they are willing to work hard. . . . Muslims endorse the view that hard work will lead to success at higher rates than the American public overall, among whom 62% say most people can get ahead if they are willing to work hard. The belief that hard work pays off is broadly held among U.S. Muslims. Similarly large numbers of men and women, young people and older people, and immigrant and native born express this belief.38

One other characteristic of immigrant Muslims in North America is that they have come a long way, unlike most Latino immigrants, and without benefit of refugee status, unlike many Southeast Asians. They were not, like the parents of most of Western Europe’s Muslims, recruited as a labor force; many came originally to do graduate or professional study at American universities. Even more than other immigrants, then, Muslim immigrants “are a highly selected group. . . . they have shown that they have the drive, ambition, courage, and strength to move from one nation to another. Their second generation offspring are, therefore, the children of exceptional parents.”39 This represents a crucial difference with the situation of Muslims in Western Europe, though we should not minimize the role of new media in creating a worldwide shared space of exchange among well-educated young Muslims on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. ‘These magazines as well as an increasing number of lifestyle web portals, sites, discussion groups and email lists explore issues such as ‘Halal Sexuality’, sex, sexual health and sexual etiquette, marriage and relationships, domestic violence, but also fashion and

---

37 Pew Research Center 2011, 38.
38 Pew Research Center 2011, 40.
beauty from an 'Islamic perspective'.

A high proportion of those immigrants, including Muslims, who come to the United States, to Canada, or to Australia come with the intention of becoming a part of those societies. While they may have every intention of retaining a variety of aspects of their previous lives, this intention is in most cases secondary to the project of fitting in, and practices that conflict with fitting in are quickly abandoned. The same process may be observed in France, where

the grandsons and especially the granddaughters of the immigrants have a French culture, learn English rather than Arabic, neglect their original religion, have a fertility rate that is rapidly conforming itself to that of the French, and demonstrate strong desire to adopt the local customs and ways of life.

A study of beurs--born in France, of North-African origin--found that 88 percent of them wanted to be fully integrated into French society.

Immigrants, it must be stressed, do not generally come with previous experience of being members of a minority group; they have usually been part of the majority in their homeland. Rather than acquiring the attitudes and habits that would sustain group existence as a minority, many simply integrate as families or as individuals into the host society, particularly if that society is reasonably open to persons who look like them. This is perhaps especially true in countries that have traditionally assimilated large numbers of immigrants, like Canada, Australia, and the United States, and is a reminder that the decision of some of these families to send their children to Islamic schools, especially at the secondary level, demands explanation.

Tensions

While there are many indicators of successful adaptation to American life, this is not to suggest that all is well with the Muslim-American community. Respondents complained to the Pew interviewers about the negative attitudes of Americans toward Muslims, “including stereotyping, being viewed as terrorists and distrust,” as well as discrimination and unfair treatment. It remains to be seen whether a sense of injustice will become a primary source of secular Muslim identity in North America as has been occurring in Europe, where religious practice among Muslims is generally as low as it is among those identified as Christians. For the second or third generation deriving from Muslim immigration, claiming a religion-based identity is not as automatically credible in Europe as it is in the United States.

Even in Europe, as sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger points out, those Muslim youth who

---

40 Sofas and Tsagarousianou 2013, 142.
41 Duhamel 1993, 100.
42 Duraffour and Guittonneau 1992, 211.
43 Sofas and Tsagarousianou 2013, 133.
are most vulnerable to social exclusion may find, in Islam, a source of self-respect through an identity freely-chosen and expressed in defiance of the prevalent secularism of the society. After all, she points out, Islam, like any other major religion under the conditions of modernity, can be seen as a toolbox of symbolic references and practices through which individuals can construct a narrative of beliefs within which experiences and relationships find significance.  

This self-selected or *bricolage* version of Islam may differ in significant ways from that held or practiced by the parents, but be all the more meaningful as a result . . . as indeed occurs as well with many Christians and Jews.

Only seven percent of the Muslim Americans surveyed by Pew identified religious or cultural problems with non-Muslims, and only four percent spoke of conflicts within the Muslim community. More seriously, 14 percent reported that there had been public opposition to building a mosque in their community, and 15 percent that “a mosque or Islamic center in their community has been vandalized or subject to other hostility in the past 12 months.” Deplorable as such incidents are, however, it appears that they have not been part of the experience of most American Muslims. In fact, 

[b]y a 48% to 16% margin more Muslim Americans say that the American people are friendly toward them rather than unfriendly; 32% say that Americans are neutral toward Muslim Americans. Native-born and foreign-born Muslims differ on this question. A majority of foreign-born Muslims (58%) say that the American people are friendly to them, including large majorities of those born in Pakistan, the Middle East and North Africa . . . . Older Muslims are somewhat more likely than younger Muslims to think that the American people are friendly – 56% of those 55 and older say this compared with 42% of those younger than 30. There are no significant differences in opinion by gender or education.

Although it appears that the great majority of Muslim Americans feel safe and at home in the United States, there is no evidence that they are simply abandoning any distinctive identity. While the cultural identities based upon their countries of origin are progressively attenuated, there may even be a certain renewed commitment to Islam as a source of identity and life-direction on the part of some of the younger generation. Peter Skerry’s analysis of the Pew survey data finds that the younger generation are more likely than their parents to agree that there is a fundamental conflict between being a devout Muslim and participating in American culture. “Among many Muslim-American youth, there is self-conscious rejection of their parents’ easygoing, traditionalist understanding of Islam, inevitably suffused with the customs of their homeland. The youthful response is frequent invocations of the *ummah*, the worldwide

44 Hervieu-Léger 2000, 80, 86.
45 Pew Research Center 2011, 46.
46 Pew Research Center 2011, 50.
47 Pew Research Center 2011, 45.
community of Muslims that ideally transcends all barriers of ethnicity, race, and nationality.\textsuperscript{48}

Unlike in the earlier case of Catholic immigrants, whose relationship with American culture was at least initially mediated under the authority of a hierarchical clergy, there is no such authority in Sunni Islam, and one result is mixed messages about how far Muslims should go in acculturating. As Mucahit Bilici has observed, “Muslim community leaders and clerics seek to promote two often contradictory imperatives. They want new generations to interact with the majority culture and be fluent in it, but they also want them to maintain their Muslim identity. In the absence of necessary community institutions and crystallized normative guidelines, there is a perception that Muslims are very chaotic in their practices.”\textsuperscript{49}

A more tactful way to put Bilici’s final point is that it is extremely difficult to generalize about the relationships – both individual and institutional – between Muslims and American society. For some (mostly African-American) their roots in this country go back three hundred years or more, but their adherence to Islam may be in the present generation. For others who have immigrated in recent decades, the level of religious practice may have been weak in their country of origin, particularly if, like many, they were part of the professional elite, but it may have become stronger as a source of identity and moral orientation in the American context . . . or, alternatively, have been abandoned altogether. The Pew study found that, in the United States, among “Sunni Muslims, 31% are highly religious, compared with 15% of Shia Muslims.”\textsuperscript{50} And, of course, Muslims from Yemen may differ greatly from Muslims from Indonesia or Lebanon. In short, generalizations that follow refer to tendencies, not to the attitude or experience of every Muslim in America!

It will thus not do to provide an entirely rosy picture of the integration of Muslims into American society. Bilici has suggested, recently, that an “immigrant Muslim choosing to become American and an American choosing to become Muslim often face the question: can a Muslim be American; and an American, Muslim? No wonder the anxiety that gives rise to this question clusters around the assimilability of the immigrant (and the idea that they are unlike other immigrant groups) and the loyalty of the convert (who is often seen as cultural traitor).”\textsuperscript{51}

A good example of this tension is the teenaged Yemeni-American girls in Michigan studied by Loukia Sarroub: “all of them felt the same optimism and desperation . . . all of them were attempting Yemeni lives they knew at home; all of them wanted to succeed at being good students and good daughters and wives; and all of them felt as if they were failing at being both American and Yemeni.”\textsuperscript{52} To one of the girls interviewed over the course of a year, “Yemeni meant wanting to get married; American meant wanting to go to college.”\textsuperscript{53} The researcher

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{48} Skerry 2013, 17.
    \item \textsuperscript{49} Bilici 2012, 39.
    \item \textsuperscript{50} Pew Research Center 2011, 27.
    \item \textsuperscript{51} Bilici 2012, 12.
    \item \textsuperscript{52} Sarroub 2005, 1.
    \item \textsuperscript{53} Sarroub 2005, 42.
\end{itemize}

Page 11
concluded that the “ambiguity with which the hijabat [hijab-wearing girls] faced their futures conflicted with their school’s goal of producing educated citizens who will contribute to society. . . . As long as the hijabat are constrained by the expectations of the Southend [neighborhood in Dearborn] and Yemen, they are unlikely to benefit from or contribute to American society.”

It does not help that young Muslims are constantly presented, in the media, with images of their counterparts elsewhere in the world who are raging against the United States and the West in general. This may be especially potent for those who did not receive a strongly-Islamic upbringing and lack close connections with a Muslim community, but who are seeking for authenticity and finding it in through identification with an aggrieved movement of youth. Eboo Patel points out the London bombers’ “indifference to Islam as adolescents followed by an intense re-engagement.” The same could be said of the Boston Marathon bombers, who seem to have been motivated by a desire to be as “authentic” as the terrorists in Russia and the Middle East. It may be, indeed, that European or American converts to Islam, with “little religious training and no cultural bearings,” are especially prone to an Islam that is “abstract and absolute, an appropriated and prehensile devotion, divorced from the moderating influence of daily life in a traditional community in a specific place and time. . . . They are deracinated, looking afar for a set of principles that become a codified, deterritorialized religiosity.” Converts – “most are apprentices or novices in Islam” – are, in fact, over-represented among Muslims in the West who engage in terrorist activities.

Bilici quotes Imam Zaid Shakir, one of the founders of the Zaytuna Institute (now Zaytuna College, in Berkeley, California) in 2006:

As Muslims in the West, we may be approaching the day when we will have to “go it alone.” If our coreligionists in the East cannot respect the fact that we are trying to accomplish things here in the West, and that their oftentimes ill-considered actions undermine that work in many instances, then it will be hard for us to consider them allies . . . . No one from the Muslim East consults us before launching these campaigns. We have a generation of Muslim children here who have to go to schools where most of them are small minorities facing severe peer pressure. Their faith is challenged and many decide to simply stop identifying with Islam. Is that what they deserve? We have obedient, pious Hijab wearing women, who out of necessity must work, usually in places where they are the only Muslims. Should their safety, dignity, and honor be jeopardized by the actions of Muslims halfway around the world?

On the other hand, it must be admitted that some influential Muslims and Islamic institutions in North America actively promote alienation from the host society. In 2003,

---

54 Sarroub 2005, 117.
55 Patel 2007, 8.
56 Leiken 2012, 236.
57 Cesari 2004, 103.
58 Bilici 2012, 118.
“Freedom House, a watchdog group in Washington, D.C., sent Arabic-proficient researchers into fifteen major American mosques across the country . . .. The survey – which Muslim groups denounced as unscientific and unfair – found that all fifteen stocked publications produced or funded by Saudis that were hostile to Jews, Christians, and the United States.⁵⁹ Paul Barrett reports on a sermon that he heard in a mosque that seemed to reject any accommodation to American culture. "I asked him to clarify the message of his sermon, he said: ‘We should be proud of our Islamic heritage. Sayings of the Prophet show you don’t think about other cultures. You don’t take from other cultures to patch up your own culture. You should not imitate others. Be proud of your culture and stay within that’.”⁶⁰

It should be noted that a parallel message could be heard in many conservative Protestant churches or Orthodox synagogues, where the intention is to strengthen the ability of the hearers to resist the seductive dangers of American life, not to reject it altogether, much less to engage in hostile actions against it. Just as sermons in many mosques insist on the authority of shariah law, so the “majority of Americans want legislation to be drawn from the Bible: 46% said scripture should be ‘a source’ of laws, and an additional 9% said it should be ‘the only source’ of law,”⁶¹ and yet this is not generally (except perhaps by the secularized elite) perceived as a threat to the American political and legal system. That is not to say that there are not some mosques and some preachers who take a harder line; indeed, the Pew survey found that 21 percent of Muslim respondents themselves "see either a great deal (6%) or a fair amount (15%) of support for extremism in the Muslim American community."⁶²

Since our focus here is on the role of Islamic schools, it is worth noting that, in a survey of the websites of more than fifty such schools in the United States, we found a consistent attempt to communicate a clear Islamic identity while orienting this toward successful participation in American life. While this will be discussed further in the next chapter, it may be useful to cite the mission statement of an Islamic school in Arizona:

The mission of full-time Islamic schools can be thought of along two tracks: defensive and proactive. The defensive line strives to “shield” and “protect” the children from any harmful influences that are against Islamic morals and ethics. The proactive line seeks to nurture the intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual growth of Muslim children with the hope of producing confident, competent individuals who will be able to go out into American society and contribute positively without compromising their Islamic beliefs and/or practices.⁶³

---

⁵⁹ Barrett 2007, 149.
⁶⁰ Barrett 2007, 163.
⁶¹ Saunders 2012, 97.
⁶² Pew Research Center 2011, 68.
⁶³ http://www.azacademy.org/faq.html
Identity

In contrast with the secular stereotype of Muslims (and other religious believers) blindly following the beliefs and traditions handed down to them within an authoritative tradition, Hervieu-Léger notes that in France, “in general, the religious identity of these young Muslims is chosen rather than inherited.”

They manifest a fundamental postulate of religious modernity, that “authentic” religious identity can only be chosen. . . . it involves a global organization of life along new normative lines and incorporation into a community. Religious conversion is thus a remarkably effective modality of self-construction in a world of plural identities, where there is no longer a central principle to organize individual and social experiences.\(^{64}\)

In North America, as in Europe, “Islam provides a convenient new marker of group identity among second-generation immigrants . . .; it replaces pristine ethnic identities that are fading away, while giving a new sense and a new value to a ‘difference’ that is experienced in everyday life.”\(^{65}\) For many individuals, it is preferable to be considered a member of a religious than of a racial minority group; African-Americans who convert to Islam may find this a significant consideration. For society as well as for individuals, as José Casanova has pointed out, one “of the obvious advantages of religious pluralism over racial pluralism is that under proper constitutional institutionalization it is more reconcilable with principled equality and nonhierarchic diversity and therefore with genuine multiculturalism.”\(^{66}\) This is in large part true because religion has real and significant content while race is simply something to which different – and often pejorative – meanings are attached.

While religion can constitute a semi-casual group label, like “Jewish,” “Catholic,” and “Protestant,” for many it represents a more fundamental orientation or re-orientation. This choice is fostered by the assumption prevalent in modernity that, as Charles Taylor puts it, the only “fully significant life is the one which is self-chosen.”\(^{67}\) Thus young Muslims in France are not automatically and unthinkingly Muslim as they might have been if raised in Algeria or Tunisia, but make a choice which many of their peers of identical background do not make. Whatever the spiritual benefits may be, this choice to become a practicing “Muslim means both to access self-esteem and to acquire a socially recognizable identity. . . . Not only does the new coherence, stemming from a religious reading of the world, help to hold race at a distance, but it also involves a practical reorganization of the relation to time and space for those concerned.”\(^{68}\)

Olivier Roy makes a similar point, that “[o]ne is no longer a true member of a community

\(^{64}\) Hervieu-Léger 2007, 215.

\(^{65}\) Roy 2004, 133.

\(^{66}\) Casanova 2007, 72.

\(^{67}\) Taylor 1989, 383.

\(^{68}\) Hervieu-Léger 2007, 215.
simply by birth. One has to prove one’s faith and commitment. The community is not a given but a reconstruction.”

He describes “an individualization of Islam” which “parallels the same phenomenon in Christianity: the stress on faith and values, the quest for a universal community going beyond cultures and nations, the importance of local congregations as a basis for socialization, and alienation from a society seen as materialist and vain.” In Europe, he writes, what he calls “neofundamentalism attracts second-generation Muslims who have broken with the pristine culture of their parents but do not feel integrated into Western society, although they have mastered its languages and consumption habits.” New Islamic movements are thus unintentionally “working to adapt Islam to modern models of individualisation and the free market, as did the US brand of Protestant fundamentalism.”

In fact, newly-empowered Muslims in the West may find themselves allied with conservative Christians and Jews around issues of public morality and “family values.” As David Martin has pointed out, this can cause a dilemma for liberal multiculturalists who are eager to affirm the distinctive values of immigrants but are forced to question their “own commitment to pluralism and multiculturalism in view of the increasing Islamic presence, demographically and politically.” In France

a segment of the secular Left that in the 1980s defended the rights of immigrants against the Front National is indignant that the children of those immigrants display a Muslim identity and sometimes holds, despite itself, positions that were those of the Front National, but with the clear conscience of those who still see themselves as antiracist. Religious practices associated with an immigrant culture were tolerated . . . but became unbearable when they take their place definitively on the stage of French society as the affirmation of a faith detached from any foreign culture.

In other words, Liberals are fond of celebrating the persistence of cultural diversity, but become uncomfortable when it takes religious forms, especially forms that challenge the dominant liberal pieties. The result is that “the shift from the oppressed immigrant to the demanding Muslim has alienated the progressive Left.”

The actual content of Islam may be quite vague for many of those who identify as Muslim, as in the case of a 15-year-old boy from California who summarized his religious faith as, “I don’t know, just like, pretty much try to live life without regrets, try to take responsibility for what you do, ‘cause I don’t know, just don’t be a bitch about things. Try to make things fair, that’s

---

69 Roy 2004, 37.
70 Roy 2004, 149.
71 Roy 2004, 270.
72 Roy 2007, 100.
73 Martin 2011, 177.
74 Roy 2007, 4-5.
another thing, as fair as possible.”  

He was interviewed as part of a nationwide study of the religious life of American teenagers, a study which found equal vagueness on the part of many Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish youth: "very few of the descriptions of personal beliefs offered by the teenagers we interviewed, especially the Christian teenagers, come close to representing marginally coherent accounts of the basic, important religious beliefs of their own faith traditions." The researchers found, in fact, that “teenagers affiliated with minority religious traditions” tended to be somewhat better at explaining their religions because they did not have the luxury of taking their religion for granted." Similarly, among Muslim youth in the West,

\[
\text{[p]aradoxically, fundamentalism can be said to have a postmodern quality, in that it often proceeds from the deliberate rejection of worldliness and its excesses. In other words, fundamentalism is, more often than not, a freely chosen identity, not something imposed by the community, tradition, or the family. A puritan and separatist version of Islam is appealing to many young people, and in certain cases can even be a response to cultural and social ghettoization.}
\]

For many immigrant youth, their parents’ version of Islam may have little attraction or ability to give shape to a life. This is in part an instance of the classic inter-generational pattern that Oscar Handlin described among European immigrants of the 19th century: “Boys and girls who had never known the physical and cultural environment of their parents' places of birth made contact with tradition as a hostile, external, restraining force; and while bound to the family by emotion, nevertheless diverged in ways troubling to themselves and to their parents.” In turn, “the move to America . . . undermined the habitual modes of training and socializing youth,” leaving them unusually vulnerable to negative influences from the host society.

While this continues true of Muslim immigrant youth in the West, they face another influence that was not present for earlier immigrations: that of messages on the internet or in person by charismatic spokesmen for an understanding of Islam purified from the cultural baggage that youth had experienced in their homes and local ethnic communities. Thus immigrant parents who lacked experience of intellectualized or politicized forms of Islam, found their practices of religious transmission challenged by these upcoming figures. Their children perceived the 'traditional' Islam taught by their parents as the embodiment of corrupt cultural traditions, thus rejecting this notion in favor of the 'original' Islam – the only one capable of bringing them salvation . . . Presenting their codes as the Islamic orthodoxy and not as a specific political ideology, the influence of the exiled Islamists was much larger than the regular circle of activists they may have recreated.

---

76 Smith with Denton 2009, 136.
77 Smith with Denton 2009, 137.
78 Cesari 2004, 54.
79 Handlin 1982, 5.
80 Boubekeur 2012, 111.
These messages have in some cases radicalized youth in immigrant Muslim communities against their host societies and led some to seek to join what they perceive as the worldwide confrontation between Islam and the West. Muslim parents and religious leaders in the United States are deeply concerned that their teenagers may seek to slip away to Syria to join ISIS, while “lone wolf” attacks in Australia, North America, and Western Europe occur with depressing regularity.

Other forces within the Muslim community, however, have been seeking to “re-introduce an Islamic ethos into the various forms of leisure that they once shunned, including music, concerts, television, and the cinema. The old idea of the Islamist protest of cultural consumption has been replaced by pious artists who promote religious diversity as well as a commitment to the free market, consumerism and individualism in order to get empowered.” This has led to the “creation of a 'cool Islam', including: Islamic streetwear, Islamic soft drinks, Muslim pop idols and even Muslim comedians”\(^{81}\) like Azhar Usman, an Indian-American Muslim from Chicago.

As teenagers become young adults, they are faced with the challenge of making sense of such conflicting messages about what it means to be a Muslim in a culture for which often their parents are unable to serve as interpreters, making sense of their own religious tradition in this new context. Louay Safi has described the “profound transformation in the understanding and practices of Islam among Muslim immigrants.”\(^{82}\) Eboo Patel writes about growing up in suburban Illinois with a “vague sense of being Muslim from my mother without any real grounding in how that was relevant or useful to my life” and describes the crisis facing second-generation immigrant Muslims in the West. . . . our parents, whose identities were formed in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia half a century ago, have a dramatically different set of reference points than we do. . . . the identity we get from them feels irrelevant, . . . it is impossible to be a 1950s-era Pakistani or Egyptian or Moroccan Muslim in twenty-first-century Chicago or London or Madrid.\(^{83}\)

How Muslim-American youth come to terms with their dual identity, and what role community and educational institutions – both public schools and Islamic schools – play in this process will have significant consequences not only for them but also for society. As Rumbaut and Portes have pointed out more generally, “[w]hether this new ethnic mosaic revitalizes the nation or exacerbates its social problems depends on the forms of social and economic adaptation experienced by this still young population.”\(^{84}\) For many, Bilici’s observation seems to be accurate, that “America does not so much pose a threat to Muslims as it induces a sense of agoraphobia: it represents a disorienting open space.”\(^{85}\)

\(^{81}\) Boubekeur and Roy 2012, 9.
\(^{82}\) Safi 1999, 35.
\(^{83}\) Patel 2012, 11-2.
\(^{84}\) Rumbaut and Portes 2001, 10.
\(^{85}\) Bilici 2012, 40.
Muslim Community Institutions

Every immigrant group that comes in sufficient numbers – and sometimes even if those numbers are quite small – creates institutions for mutual support and encouragement, institutions that bring together those more experienced with the new environment with those for whom it is all strange and confusing. A study of the children of immigrants in the New York City metropolitan area, for example, found that “[w]orking class Chinese second generation youth acquire social capital because they are embedded in a social structure – the networks encompassing their immigrant parents – with educational and class diversity.” They were able to overcome the isolation from opportunities often associated with immigrant status by their connections through Chinese community institutions with successful former immigrants.

Commonly though not always, these immigrant institutions have a religious character. Will Herberg, in his classic Protestant, Catholic, Jew (1955) showed how earlier generations of European immigrants used religious perspectives and religious institutions to find a place for themselves in American life. This continues to be the case, with “religion, with its capacity to give rise to ethnically separate institutional structures, . . . supporting the continuation of various cultural practices.” Alba and Nee point out that this can be isolating, at least in the short run, though such isolation may be a necessary stage in the adjustment to a new society and its expectations. “For many of the new ethnic groups, even those that are Christian, religion will provide an institutional carapace protecting their cultural differences. But the scope of ethnic cultural difference will narrow, and cultural commonalities with other Americans will expand, thus allowing for more intergroup interactions.”

This has been the case with Muslim immigrants as well, and one of the results has been an evolution in the role of the mosque from simply a place for prayer and religious instruction to a center of community life and services needed by immigrants. “Even mosques that started their lives as simple prayer spaces have gradually become community centers with basketball courts, schools, libraries, and soup kitchens – and as such they create new roles and expectations for their imams.” Arguably, this represents a sort of ‘Protestantization’ of Muslim religious life, parallel to what has occurred with Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and other groups (including high-church Protestants), all of which have developed patterns of religious life remarkably like that of American Methodists and Baptists!

One of the clearest examples of the bridging function of some Islamic community institutions is provided by the “lighthouses” created and maintained in a number of countries by the Gülen movement based in Turkey, although its leader lives in Pennsylvania. Those in

---

86 Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, and Holdaway 2008, 362.
87 Alba and Nee 2003, 229.
88 Alba and Nee 2003, 268.
89 Bilici 2012, 39.
Germany, for example,

expect the students to pray and differentiate themselves from the more liberal and hedonistic German “ways of life:’ In one sense, the Gülen movement has played an important integrative role for young Turks in Germany by stressing education and public participation in German political and social processes. . . . The main priority is not to get students to believe in God, since they all come from religious family backgrounds, but more importantly [to] instruct them how to live as Muslims within the deracinating milieu of the modern age.  

Perhaps the most striking instance of the increased significance of religion in the immigration situation is that of Turks who came as guestworkers to Germany. Most were already well on the way to modernity before emigration; despite the common stereotype in Germany, most Turkish immigrants had lived in urban areas and held industrial jobs before they left Turkey. Rural patterns, such as the extended family, had already been abandoned by most of them while in Turkey. In response to widespread rejection by German society, however, many who had been highly secularized embraced Islam and asserted the superiority of Muslim ways. “Coming from one of the few Muslim countries which has a real secular tradition, the Turkish minority in Germany have become a stronghold of Islamic fundamentalism.” An objective measure of this reaction is provided by the rising birthrate of Turkish women in Germany, which by 1990 was higher than that in the west of Anatolia, from which most of them came.

Muslim immigrants to North America, like other groups before them, formed organizations that provided mutual support as well as the opportunity to come together for religious observances that, for some, became more significant than it had been in a homeland where a general Muslim background could be taken for granted. It has been suggested that their “frequent frustration in not finding a social group of other Americans with whom they could feel comfortable and accepted, or the satisfaction of sharing experiences that reflected their commonality with other Muslims, encouraged them to participate more openly in religiously based activities.” This was all the more important, for some, as they formed families and “became more aware of the importance of providing a social, cultural, and religious context for their children.” The most available model was that established long before by Protestant congregations in small-town America, combining worship with study groups, recreational activities for adults and children, community outreach, and personal counseling as needed. An institutional form emerged with no parallel in the homelands from which immigrants had come, while the role of the imam expanded into areas for which there were no previous models within Muslim societies. A study in Dearborn, Michigan, found that
the mosques and other religious organizations in the area are trying to help area residents become a part of American society. A consequence of this activity, one that was perhaps unanticipated, is an increasing interest on the part of area residents in keeping religion out of secular matters. Separation of church and state in the United States means for the Muslims that they are left to their own devices to develop their religious institutions free of governmental as well as religious control. In this sense, one can begin to see the emergence of a specific form of American or “Dearborn” Islam that is highly grass-roots supported and, to the extent tradition and theology permit, very autonomous in its self-definition. One can discern in these mosques an overt conflict between religious clerics who wish to import the homeland model to America and members of the congregation who do not.96

The study found that, while adults in the immigrant community of Dearborn “to varying degrees, voice interest in some day ‘going back home,’ the youth do not share in any such illusions.” While they “are not Arab in the way their parents would like and not American in the way that society may like,” this “does not mean they are ‘lost’ and do not belong anywhere. Rather, they constitute a new hybrid that is perfectly at home in the hybrid surroundings of Dearborn.”96

This conclusion contrasts with the frequently-expressed concern in Europe about the “failure of insertion” of the children of Muslim immigrant parents, where it is suggested that a society without clear ideas about citizenship will be unable to inspire immigrants to see themselves as citizens.97 It has been pointed out that “[w]hile there was agreement that many Muslims were failing to integrate into European societies, it was more difficult to specify what exactly immigrants are expected to assimilate to. . . . To quote a writer in the French Libération, immigrants in the United States threw themselves wholeheartedly into ‘the American Dream’; in contrast. ‘there is no French, Dutch or other European dream. You emigrate here to escape poverty and nothing more.'”98 This does not appear to be the case, at least to anything like the same extent, in North America.

The role of religion in the continuing experience of immigrant groups does not have to be based upon a group life that is a refuge from unsuccessful participation in the host society, as is assumed by many observers for whose secularistic perspective religious faith is a sign of failure to adapt to modernity. These observers may suggest that “it is as a result of the failure of their integration as a result of rejection by the host society that many of them have returned to an Islam about which most of them had not known much.”99 The continuing vitality of denominations in the United States that derive from earlier immigrations demonstrates how well religious organizations can adapt to new circumstances, changing as their members acculturate

95 David and Ayouby 2002, 133.
96 David and Ayouby 2002, 141.
97 Scheffer 2010, 55.
98 Jenkins 2007, 247.
to the host society.

In fact, religious institutions have stood the test of acculturation far better than have organizations with a primary focus upon ethnic language or culture, usually adopting the language of the host society for teaching and then for liturgical purposes in order to retain the second generation. In the United States, "for the [German] churches, ethnicity had been primarily a means to achieve religious ends; when it tended to hinder rather than to ease the attainment of their goals, they readily abandoned programs of language and culture maintenance."  

From an historical perspective, then, the rapid spread of mosques and Islamic schools across North America should be seen as reflecting not only religious devotion but also the social uses of religion as a source of community and mutual support. In the American context (contrasting with Europe), religion is a taken-for-granted basis for association, and carries with it no particular implication of separatism, much less fanaticism.

Efforts to provide bridges to the majority culture naturally create the danger that the influence will run both ways and that the religious institution will thereby lose its distinctive worldview and mission.  

Bilici has argued (though with scant evidence) that a process of “[i]nterfaith dialogue also takes its Muslim participants into the realm of American civil religion, which as an empty form is open to all religious contents. Through acquisition of its vocabulary and style, Islam becomes a civil religion, a generic American religion with an emphasis on diversity, moral universalism, and toleration. Islam becomes one color among many."  

While it cannot be excluded that such a development might occur in the future, it seems evident that religious practice and Islam-based worldviews remain sufficiently distinctive among those Muslims who continue to be religiously-committed that it is premature to speak of Islam as simply a form of civil religion deployed to support social and political goals.

Evidence of the continued functioning of Islam as a counter-worldview (parallel in some ways to that of Evangelical Protestants, Traditionalist Catholics, and Orthodox Jews) is its persistent critique of aspects of the prevailing culture. For some, this may be simply a sentimental evocation “of life back home, offering heavily mythologized versions of mid-twentieth century Karachi or Cairo,” and they may seek to make the institutions they create, including Islamic schools, “bubbles rather than bridges.”  

Others, following the lead of Tariq Ramadan, insist that “Muslims, as citizens, must make choices and find their way in the Western environment, within the vast range of what is permitted in these societies. They must decide, as Muslims, what they may do in conscience and what they should avoid,” without retreating into a ghetto or failing to participate fully as citizens in their new country.

As we have seen, entirely legitimate critiques of American life from a religious perspective

---

100 Luebke 1978, 68.
101 This issue is discussed extensively in Glenn 2000.
102 Bilici 2012, 170.
103 Patel 2012, xv-xvi.
104 Ramadan 2004, 96.
have fueled, for some in the majority, concerns that Muslims may be a disloyal “enemy within.”

Our Study

It is in Islamic schools that the most concerted efforts are made to help Muslim youth to learn to function in the wider society and economy while maintaining distinctive beliefs and mores, and it is to these that we now turn. After all,

In a climate of heightened security concerns, moral panic, and Islamophobic narratives, there is a need to understand the role of Islamic schooling in the diaspora. This can be an important means to dispel neo-Orientalist myths of a pervasive 'Muslim threat' while maintaining a critical focus on the social, ideological, and political dynamics of these institutions.105

As part of a wider project initiated by sociologist James Davison Hunter to study education for character and citizenship in a variety of American secondary schools, we have carried out a study of six Islamic schools with high school grades. In each school, we observed classes and assemblies, interviewed administrators, teachers, and students, and conducted focus groups. We also interviewed parents, sometimes by telephone. Our team included three researchers raised in Muslim countries (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan) and educated in Islamic schools, and three Americans with no previous exposure to Islamic schools but extensive experience researching public and private schools in the United States. Thus we were able to bring varied perspectives to bear and to check one another’s perceptions.

The next chapter provides general information about Islamic schooling in the United States, with some discussion of the parallels in Western Europe. The four chapters that follow relate what administrators, parents, teachers, and students had to tell us about the goals and practices of their schools, and particularly how these relate to preparation for participation in American society on the basis of Islamic norms and Muslim identity.

Some tentative conclusions are then offered about the schools that were the focus of our study, followed by a chapter seeking to predict the future of Islamic schooling in the United States, and the challenges that it is likely to face.

A Canadian researcher has pointed out that, “[r]ampant Islamophobia makes many individuals and institutions in the Muslim community wary of outside scrutiny.”106 Conscious of this understandable wariness, we are all the more grateful to the school communities that welcomed us so warmly and spoke with such frankness about the challenges that they face.

---

105 Zine 2008, 8.
106 Zine 2008, 81.
2. Islamic Schools: An Overview

What is at stake?

Children of immigrant families always face challenges in negotiating between the messages they receive in their home and those they receive from the wider society, though of course much depends on the degree of disconnect between the two. Observers have noted an almost complete lack of interest in the “homeland” on the part of those who have known it only through half-understood stories by parents and grandparents, whose own experience may not include dramatic changes that have occurred in their country of origin since they emigrated. The culture that the children of immigrants acquire from their everyday experience is not that of the country of origin of their parents, but rather a variation on that of the host society. Even the "Re-Turkishing" of some younger Turks in Germany, it has been pointed out, is not a genuine cultural import but something made up out of fragments of a shattered tradition; teenaged girls who adopted the headscarf as a means of showing pride in their identity would have rebelled against it in Ankara or Istanbul as a symbol of repression.

While the trajectories followed by the immigrant generation are relatively predictable, taking into account the extent of cultural disconnect and also the educational background and professional training of the immigrant; those of the second generation show more variation, based upon individual decisions and happenstance as well as social pressures and opportunities. Some retain highly traditional values and relationships with their families, while others adapt eagerly to the host society, leading to sharp divisions within the second generation itself. When asked, the children of immigrants will often say that they are "simply themselves: a little bit of this, a little of that". It is possible to identify useful patterns in this confusing picture, however, provided that they are not applied rigidly or deterministically. As a French anthropologist has noted,

[t]hree distinct situations of dominant socialization – the family, the school and the street – can lead to three different destinies: the predominance of the family favors retaining certain traditional economical or anthropological behaviors; the victory of the school implies the complete assimilation of dominant French values and upward social mobility; the choice of the street leads into a hazy world which includes the possibilities of unemployment and of delinquency.

Those youth whose education is the focus of this study do not, in general, fall neatly into a single one of these categories. The fact that they are attending Islamic schools which function, in some ways, as an extension of the family and the immigrant group would imply that they will

---

1 Luchtenberg 1984, 420.
2 Tappeiner 1990, 41.
3 Todd 1994, 315.
follow the careers and life-styles of their parents. On the other hand, as we will see, the schools they attend play a double role, oriented toward the wider world of American society in a way that could attenuate the connection with family and immigrant community. The parents themselves are in most cases determined that their children will be successful in the terms understood by the society: they are to go to university and on to professional careers that will require a very substantial measure of assimilation, while remaining loyal (the parents trust) to the beliefs and behavioral norms in which they have been raised at home.

Of course, we can’t dismiss the possibility that personal failures or an increased hostility toward Muslims in the wider society would frustrate these expectations. Rejection by the host society can lead in either of two directions: toward hyper-conformism, a compulsive assimilation, that seeks to remove all traces of the behavior that is presumed offensive or that serves as a ready label of "otherness," or (particularly when physical characteristics make the first impossible) toward a defiant rejection of that society through an affirmation of distinctiveness and retreat into the safety of the immigrant community. Under such circumstances, frustration of the project of success in the adopted society might lead to a revival of awareness of distinctiveness. Characteristics that seemed impediments to successful adjustment to American life would come to have a powerful symbolic importance. "Many immigrants who have experienced a strong cultural assimilation discover their ethnicity in the face of difficulties of economic inclusion and of racism and discrimination. Ethnicity functions in such a case as the rationalization of a disappointed love."

Accepting a self-definition as members of a group who will inevitably be discriminated against and can do little to improve their prospects is one way of handling the "affective dissonance" that accompanies failure in the process of achieving success in the host society, a process described by the late John Ogbu. Another way is to retreat into the ethnic group at the cost of accepting limited prospects. For many immigrants, especially those forced to accept low-status employment, the language and culture of their homeland, or that of their parents, can come to enjoy increased significance even as the homeland itself recedes in time, enabling them to retain a sense of personal worth; these may indeed become central to an "oppositional cultural system or cultural frame of reference that contains mechanisms for maintaining and protecting the group's social identity." Precisely because the society in which they must live and work offers them few satisfactions beyond (scanty) material goods, the parents of these pupils may have little inclination to adopt its values with enthusiasm. It is particularly excruciating when the society seems to invade the sphere of private satisfactions, the home and family, through alienating children from the values of their parents. While the media and peer influences have much to do with this acute generation gap, parents can to some extent, if they choose, keep those at bay in the private sphere of life. It is through compulsory public schooling that the values – or lack of values – of the society are most powerfully inculcated in the children of immigrants, and thus the demand for alternative forms of schooling can take on

---

4 Dubet and Lapeyronnie 1992, 93.
5 Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi 1986, 94; emphasis in original.
great significance to them.

And this brings us, of course, to Islamic schools, which can serve as both an instrument of hope and a hedge against disappointment.

**Islamic Schools in North America**

Although the unhierarchical nature of Islam makes it impossible to establish a definitive list, there is evidence for well over two hundred Islamic schools in North America. The Islamic Schools League of America is an invaluable source of information about these schools, though it does not exercise authority over them. The most recent statistical summary by Karen Keyworth of ISLA was in 2006, and reported between 23 and 27 Sister Clara Muhammad Schools serving African-American Muslims, and 212 schools based in immigrant Muslim communities. The schools were predominantly small: more than half of them enrolling fewer than 100 students, and 85 percent enrolling fewer than 150. The great majority were then less than ten years old, and most were in the process of expansion to meet demand. It is interesting to note that half of the Islamic schools reported that they employ some non-Muslim teachers, generally between 10 and 30 percent of the faculty. There has been a similar development of Islamic schools in Canada: over 60 across the country in 2010, about half of them in Ontario.

While Islamic schools serve only a very small proportion of children from Muslim families in North America, it seems likely that their number and also the size and grade span of individual schools will continue to grow. Muslims are exhorted to make this a priority.

Even though it appears certain that most Muslim children will be at the mercy of the public school system until quite sometime into the next century. American Muslims must not neglect the educational challenge. It is our prediction that the issue of education and the educational agenda will move to the forefront of debate as the crisis of culture and identity depends and the Muslim community begins to strike deeper roots in America and acquires greater institutional sophistication.

As with other faith-based schools, it is necessary to distinguish between supplemental Islamic programs for religious instruction late afternoons or weekends and enrolling students who attend public schools (or, perhaps, non-Islamic private schools) for their regular academic program, and full-time Islamic day schools. While the former are free to focus exclusively on religious themes, the latter are faced with a challenge of providing the full range of knowledge and skills that students will need for higher education or employment. Often they are subject to state or provincial regulation as to curriculum content, and their students to external

-------

6. [http://www.theisla.org/page.php/AboutUs](http://www.theisla.org/page.php/AboutUs)


8. Memon 2013, 73.

examinations that have serious consequences for their future.

This last point calls for further elaboration, since the extent of government supervision of non-government schools varies widely across North America, and between North America and Western Europe. In some parts of the United States, there is virtually no supervision, in others a non-government school is under oversight of local or state authorities to ensure that the education provided is generally equivalent in quality and scope to that in local public schools (which themselves may vary greatly, even within the same state), while in yet other cases teachers and curriculum in non-government schools must meet extensive standards set for public schools. The sanction invoked for non-compliance with whatever requirements are set is generally that children attending a non-compliant school do not meet mandatory school attendance laws; the fact that all fifty states allow homeschooling (under varying degrees of government oversight) tends to undermine this threat. The gradual spread of public funding arrangements for non-public schools has created – as in most of Western Europe – the additional threat of denial of such funds.

A significantly stronger impetus for quality in Islamic, like other non-government, secondary schools is the mandatory external testing that has been imposed in recent years by most states, along with voluntarily-taken tests for college admission. Such external standards, with very significant consequences for higher education or for employment, cannot safely be ignored by schools or by the parents who choose them.

The lighter supervision of non-government schools in the United States as compared, for example, with in the Netherlands, where they are fully-supported with public funds and are correspondingly publicly accountable, has the consequence that inquiries into the nature of their non-academic outcomes are infrequent. This is sometimes deplored, as when the President of American Atheists, quoting Pope Leo XIII in 1897 calling for Catholic schools to permeate every subject with Christian piety, warned that this “certainly describes what is going on in many private religious and so-called ‘charter’ school experiments that are operated by Protestant fundamentalist, evangelic, and yes Islamic groups.” American government officials and courts are very reluctant, however, to inquire about the beliefs and loyalties developed by schools with a religious character, or indeed by any non-government schools.

Such inquiries have occurred repeatedly in the Netherlands, by contrast, despite strong constitutional protection for the richting (worldview character) of schools. The results of these inquiries have generally been positive.

Several recent investigations by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 1999, 2002, 2003) have concluded that almost all of the Islamic schools have an open attitude towards Dutch society and play a positive role in creating conditions for social cohesion. Furthermore, the schools' instructional approach is culturally sensitive,

10 See Glenn and De Groof 2012 for detailed discussion of these provisions in 65 national systems of education.

11 United States Commission on Civil Rights 2007, 25; emphasis in original.
Dutch language instruction is prominently featured.\textsuperscript{12}

It should be noted that, even with full funding from the government, Islamic schools enroll fewer than ten percent of primary-level pupils from Muslim families in the Netherlands, and have not been spared from public sentiment against Islam in the wake of the assassination of Theo van Gogh and political appeal to anti-immigrant fears. Similarly in the United States since 9/11 “Islamic education . . . has been intensely scrutinized out of fear that Muslim institutions may be producing young radicals. Much of the alarm is raised in online articles claiming, for example, that Islamic schools may be sleeper cells or that they are teaching hatred of America.”\textsuperscript{13}

One scholar has suggested that most Islamic schools in the United States are “influenced by the very conservative Salafi movements, inspired by Saudi doctrine,” contrasted with “those, still very much in the minority, that are more receptive to American society and culture.”\textsuperscript{14} Since our study is concerned precisely with how Islamic schools prepare youth to participate as American citizens, we have been aware of the potential criticism that our research sites fall exclusively into the latter group. While it is obvious that the willingness to cooperate with us required a degree of openness, and that we cannot prove that we have included the full spectrum of attitudes toward the West, our interviews and observations have found considerable variation among the schools we have visited. The fact that the initial contacts were in most cases made by Muslim educators on our research team and that we have benefitted from endorsements by leading American Islamic educators has no doubt helped us to gain access to schools that otherwise might have been closed to us. In any event, we will note variations among schools in the chapters reporting on our findings.

The same scholar has pointed out, in another context, that “contrasting ‘Muslims’ to undifferentiated ‘non-Muslims’ or the ‘general public’ is a misleading way to capture the specificity of Muslim religiosity. The relevant comparison would be between self-declared Muslims and other self-declared religious or non-religious groups.”\textsuperscript{15} If we applied this principle to evaluating how “separate” Islamic schools are from the mainstream of American society, we would need to compare them with Evangelical Protestant or Orthodox Jewish schools, and might find that the conservatism of the Islamic schools was by no means unprecedented, nor their students so far out of line with significant numbers of other American youth. Sociologist Alan Peshkin found, in his study of a “fundamentalist” Protestant school in Illinois, that the parents “knowingly send their children to a school that provides an intentionally deviant experience, one that is at odds with public schools and not ‘a better expression of a common

\textsuperscript{12} Merry and Driessen 2005, 422.
\textsuperscript{13} Smith 2010, 164.
\textsuperscript{14} Cesari 2004, 47.
\textsuperscript{15} Cesari 2013, 26.
form’.”

His survey of students in this school concluded, however, that they compared favorably on tolerance and other civic virtues with local public high school peers. Aware of such parallels, we reserved judgment until we could talk with students about the effects of religious teaching.

**Expectations**

I think we can safely assert that immigrant parents are not sending their children to Islamic schools so that they can learn to hate America, though they may well hope that their children will learn to be critical of aspects of American culture that conflict with the religious and moral convictions of the parents. In this it seems likely that Muslim parents will share the expectations of many parents who send their children to Evangelical Protestant or Orthodox Jewish schools.

Usually the parents who are choosing (and paying) to send their children to faith-based schools are concerned that the academic results not be inferior to those that would have been obtained in the public school alternatives. As a Canadian author observes,

> quite frankly, the varied expectations stunted possibility in pedagogy, and what resulted was a curriculum that was starkly similar to a public school. In trying to appease the largest number of parent supporters, especially those who were concerned whether their children would receive an education commensurate to that in public schools, the aspect of faith in most early Islamic schools remained appended to, as opposed to integrated into, the curriculum. . . . many Muslim immigrants who supported the first Islamic schools were not keen on any attempt to radically alter the conventional curriculum. They entered with the assumption that the public secular “curriculum is basically sound, needing only a bit of infusion of Islamic ideas here and there.”

What these parents were seeking was, above all, a safe environment where their children could master the secular curriculum without being shaken in their faith or their connection with the values of their families. “Islamic schools provide many Muslim students with a culturally congruent space and a more seamless transition between the values, beliefs, and practices of home and those of schools. . . they function as sites for the social reproduction of Islamic identity. Also they provide a spiritually based environment that allows the development of religious values and practices.”

Many parents, and not just Muslims, for whom a religious perspective is life-defining do not experience public schools as safe environments for their children. For the students themselves, public schools have often “meant wholesale confusion about moral values: learning to question values they have scarcely acquired, unlearning values taught at home, and concluding that

---

16 Peshkin 1986, 259.
17 Memon 2013, 84, 89.
18 Zine 2008, 14-5.
questions of right and wrong are always merely subjective.”

For young Muslims and other immigrant youth, in Canada as in the United States, the deliberately “neutral” education in public schools may not provide a solid foundation on which to stand as they seek to negotiate the transition between the world of their families and that of the host society. In Ontario, “it is not at all clear that the public schools can provide an entirely adequate learning environment, especially as they do not seem to have any built-in ways to help young people from widely diverse backgrounds to find their cultural and religious ways, and build appropriately diverse and distinct identities.”

The dominant perspective of many (probably most) public schools, despite the claims of neutrality, is one that “is not equally hospitable to all ways of life or to all subcommunities. Ways of life that require self-restraint, hierarchy, or cultural integrity are likely to find themselves on the defensive, threatened with the loss of both cohesion and authority.” In such schools, as political scientist Stephen Monsma wrote recently, “[c]hildren coming from a secular family background will find the perspectives and values they have absorbed from their family accepted and affirmed. Children coming from religious families will be immersed in a secular system of belief that is opposed to that of their families.” This cannot be said to be an even-handed accommodation worthy of a pluralistic society, a society that frequently proclaims its respect for diversity of beliefs and perspectives.

A Muslim scholar argues that Canadian public schools cannot do justice to the Muslim minority since they “impose a singular moral hegemonic viewpoint based on secularism and Eurocentrism. . . . these masquerade as universal ways of knowing, but are culturally situated viewpoints that are in opposition to faith-centered worldviews and also engage fidelity to a particular partisan worldview or view of ‘the good life’.” In other words, public schools, for all their pretense of neutrality, are just as sectarian as religious schools in promoting a distinctive view of reality.

In such public schools, some Muslim youth seek to limit contact with American peers, as was the case with a group of hijab-wearing Yemeni-American girls in a high school in Dearborn, Michigan. Although these girls were actively engaged with the academic aspects of school life, and participated in class discussions with non-Muslim classmates, they avoided any such contact in the school cafeteria and corridors, and did not take part in any extra-curricular activities. They were warned, by teachers at the mosque, “to look down when they walked in the hallways of the Dearborn public schools; otherwise, boys would look directly in their eyes and have evil thoughts.” The Yemeni community in Dearborn “feared the social aspects of

---

19 Kilpatrick 1992, 16.
20 Ahmed 2013, 162.
21 Galston 1991, 293.
22 Monsma 2012, 38.
23 Zine 2009, 43.
public schooling and limited their children’s experiences there. Social life in school was monitored and curtailed by family members.” Male Yemeni students “had a subtle but potent surveillance role – they were the ones who reported girls as having bad reputations to parents and the community. Bad reputations consisted of certain behaviors, such as being too loud, talking with boys, and participating in after-school activities.”

Like Muslim students in England, these girls faced “the ever-widening gap between traditional values in the home and peer-group pressures found in a secularist state school system.” The goal of maintaining religious and cultural distinctiveness in private life while learning to navigate the mainstream for the sake of educational and economic success may prove elusive. It is possible to start out with every intention of remaining true to a religious and cultural heritage, and to the ethnic community through which that is expressed and reinforced, but to “underestimate the seductiveness of American culture and, in particular, of the individualism and materialism that permeate American life.” Many Muslims in England have come to feel that the beliefs which they want to pass on to their children are under attack: “the overpowering western ideology is not only taught in school but pervades the media – television, radio, videos. These values are perceived as a concrete threat moulding the ideas and behaviour of Muslim children and which cannot be counteracted by traditional methods of reading the Quran.”

If this is a general problem of modernity, it is especially so for those who come, as immigrants, to a society based on extreme individualism, and on their children. Eboo Patel, the privileged son of Indian Muslim immigrants to the United States, describes his restless, almost comical, search for a stable identity until he ends by affirming, at last, his Ismaili heritage. Patel’s story is that of an individual with abundant resources and opportunities to explore alternative ways of understanding his place in society – including a succession of Mormon, Jewish, and Hindu girlfriends – but more typical members of immigrant communities are less interested in such exploration, which is forced upon them in any case by the need to adapt to the host society, then in preserving some anchoring in significant aspects of their heritage. Ironically, the “acids of modernity” work more powerfully in liberal societies dedicated to individual freedom and self-definition than they do in more traditional societies, where minority communities often occupy distinct social and economic niches persisting over many generations. For immigrants to an open society,

if they cannot use education to maintain their distinctive beliefs and values, then their culture is vulnerable either to gradual erosion as a result of sustained exposure to liberal

---

26 Alba and Nee 2003, 218.
27 Joly 1988, 45.
values or to a more direct assault by liberal laws and social policy. Such an approach seems to undermine the claim of the liberal state to be based on the values of pluralism, tolerance, and respect for diversity.\footnote{29}

In the United States and other Western societies, the children of Muslim immigrants may be more self-consciously Muslim in contrast with the surrounding secular and Christian mainstream than are their parents. This trend was picked up by Pew pollsters who reported in 2007 that Muslims older than 30 were much less likely (28 percent) than those aged 18-29 (42 percent) to agree that “there is a natural conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society.” When it surveyed Muslims again in 2011, Pew asked if “there is only one true way to interpret the teachings of Islam”: 31 percent of foreign-born Muslims agreed, but 46 percent of native-born Muslims did. Also that year, Pew found that 58 percent of foreign-born Muslims agreed “the American people are generally friendly toward Muslim Americans,” compared with only 37 percent of their native-born offspring.\footnote{30}

What comes across in both on-the-ground studies and national surveys is that, for many young Muslims, successful integration into a Western society can be accompanied by an enhanced sense of alienation from some of its beliefs and norms. This should not be a surprise; it is only as one becomes intimately familiar with a culture that one comes to understand the ways in which it is fundamentally alien to one’s own values, and may become concerned to keep one foot, as it were, in an alternative sphere of meaning. There is thus no reason to believe that involvement in the religious and other community institutions serving immigrant populations has a retarding effect on integration and participation in the host society in general. Perhaps the wisest comment on this phenomenon is by Tariq Modood, in what he refers to as “the ethnicity paradox: one needs a certain amount of conservative autonomy in order to create the psychologically and sociologically secure identities which will be open to change and synthesis and will be able to contribute something of their own to the wider society and not be swamped by it.”\footnote{31}

In this process, ethnic institutions themselves undergo a transformation of adaptation to the demands of the environment. Thus in the Netherlands, where nearly fifty Islamic schools are publicly-funded,

Integration into society and the labour market seems to be the priority for Islamic schools, at least for those who actively promote social cohesion. The Islamic environment of the school is no longer seen as a means of protecting children’s religious identity against the un-Islamic influences of the mainstream society, but rather as a tool to prepare them for their role as active citizens. . . . Islamic Studies within Islamic schools adapts to the context that Muslim children are living in and the subject does

\footnotetext{29}{Halstead 2003, 283.}
\footnotetext{30}{Skerry 2013, 17.}
\footnotetext{31}{Modood 1992, 84.}
have the potential, and is often used, to promote democratic citizenship.\textsuperscript{32}

In response to this dissatisfaction with the perceived normlessness of public schools, some Islamic schools place a particularly strong emphasis upon the Islamic dimension of their mission, as indicated by their on-line mission statements; for example:

Al-Amal School is a full-time, accredited school \textit{established for the sake of Allah (SWT)} to help Muslim families by providing an \textit{Islamic educational environment}. This educational choice strives to provide the highest academic standards in all subjects with a special \textit{focus on the Qur’an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), Arabic, and Islamic studies}. Al-Amal School’s mission is to produce a generation of Muslims who:

- Have a solid understanding of \textit{Tawheed} (oneness of the Creator)
- Have a strong \textit{Islamic moral character},
- Have leadership skills superseded by \textit{Taqwa} (piety),
- Have a strong sense of responsibility and realize that Islam is the only solution,
- \textit{Interact with community and global issues} with an Islamic frame of mind, and
- Are \textit{academically equipped to succeed and excel} in an increasingly competitive and challenging world.\textsuperscript{33}

The mission statements of most Islamic schools represent attempts to find an appropriate balance of secular academics and Islamic perspective. Experience in a Canadian Islamic school suggests that the religious studies program, properly conducted, may in fact be an occasion for developing citizenship skills: “[i]t was in Islamic Studies that students learned critical-thinking skills, enabling them to understand and challenge the issues they might face when they left the Islamic school. I believe that the task of an educator is to help students to critically analyse the world around them and work to make positive changes in society, as opposed to conditioning students to fit into that society.”\textsuperscript{34} This is consistent with the argument of some supporters of faith-based schools that these provide a better standpoint for critical engagement with the dominating culture than can a public school swamped by that culture. The teachers in this school “believed that providing a comprehensive understanding of Islam served as a starting point for autonomous ethical reflection, enabling children to revive their religion and adhere to it, rejecting alternative identities. . . . we did not do so in order to insulate our students from the wider society, and we actively sought to develop students’ capacities for critical thinking.”\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Niehaus 2009, 125.
\textsuperscript{33} \url{http://www.al-amal.org/?page_id=493}; emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{34} Ahmad 2013, 214.
\textsuperscript{35} Ahmad 2013, 216.
Ahmad urges that Islamic schools should not be concerned with preserving and passing on the cultural patterns of the homelands of immigrant parents, but instead should be clear about the universal dimensions of Islam and how these apply in the host society. Teachers “need to be aware of the difference between cultural practices and what the religion of Islam says; religious traditions can be part of a culture, but what is practised in a culture is not necessarily part of the religion. It was their responsibility to ensure that they knew the difference and advocated for the correct view in matters related to religion and daily life.”

Some Islamic schools, in fact, articulate their mission in terms quite consistent with progressive private schools, though with an Islamic flavoring:

The spirit of discovery and exploration has always been part of the Islamic legacy; the curriculum of Al-Huda School is based on this precept. It combines the high standards of the Montgomery County curriculum with Arabic, Qur’an, and Islamic Studies. Using proven instructional methods and the latest educational technology, such as computers and multimedia, teachers provide students with an enriched academic experience. The mathematics program caters to each student according to his ability; students who need reinforcement in basic computational skills can get additional help, while students who show an aptitude for higher level mathematics are given advanced instruction. Science classes are centered around the creative process. Experiments and labs keep students guessing, trying, and learning. Art lessons encourage children to explore their imaginations within an Islamic framework. A high emphasis is placed on student reading in the Language Arts program. The Arabic language curriculum is unique in that all of its teachers are native Arabic speakers who have degrees in the Arabic language or related fields. In the Qur’an and Islamic Studies classes, special care is taken to ensure that students gain a comprehensive understanding of the basic principles of the Islamic faith and the Islamic way of life. As with all other subjects at Al-Huda, the teaching of Islam is integrated throughout the curriculum. Math, Science, Social Studies, and all other subjects draw from Islam to reinforce the idea that all knowledge is a continuum, and that all of it comes from Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala. Al-Huda takes great care in selecting teachers who not only have knowledge and experience in the education field, but have also infused the Islamic character into their personalities. Many of our teachers were born or raised in the United States and therefore have unique insights into the experiences of the Al-Huda student body. Our teachers are professional, dedicated, and innovative. They care about the children, and the children care about them. Our instructors are all degree holders from some of the finest universities and institutions in the area. However, this is not the only qualification that makes our teachers what they are. It is their dedication to the Islamic lifestyle that makes them much more: role models.

Ahmad 2013, 221.

http://www.alhuda.org/alhuda-high/92-as-general-information/264-as-educational-philosophy
Another Islamic school touts the opportunity for its students to cross register at a secular and a Catholic university:

MAI's mission is to provide students with the best possible environment for spiritual and academic excellence. The School of Knowledge is committed to excellence in education and the development of a strong sense of Islamic identity and values in its students. The school curriculum, while primarily based on the state of Indiana's educational standards and required curriculum, also incorporates Islamic principles and values in all academic subjects. For example, the language arts, science, and social studies curriculum encompasses themes based on Islamic moral development. High school students are required to complete the core-40 course sequence before graduation, in addition to completing 100 community service hours. High school students often co-register in the high school honors program (SPAN-Special Program for Academic Nurturing) at the Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis to earn credit in transferable college-level courses.

Also, MAI's students enroll in Marian College dual credit courses. Academically outstanding students accepted to the Advanced Study Program may enroll in Marian College for selected credit courses on the 100-level during their senior year of high school. Under the Advanced Study Program (also known as a dual credit program), a student may accumulate up to 24 credit hours prior to enrolling as a full-time college freshman. MAI's students significant performance in all SPAN at IUPUI and their outstanding achievement in post high school academic life at IUPUI have prompted the university's admission office to establish a separate division for MAI. This division specializes in recruiting MAI students directly from high school and publishing college brochures just for the students of MAI. MAI has also established friendly relationship with the ICEE (Indiana Council for Economic Education) at IUPUI, which in its turn provides teachers and the school staff with appropriate training and workshops in social studies and other high school related subject areas and designates necessary school funds for developing certain academic areas at MAI. The school has also succeeded in establishing academic enrichment program with IUPUI and the University of Indianapolis. This program helps the school to host guest speakers, scholars, and professionals to talk to students, teachers, and staff members at MAI in various subject related topics and curriculum development programs.\(^{38}\)

**Criticisms of Islamic Schooling**

The issue remains, whether the connections between an Islamic worldview and the contemporary subjects in the curriculum have been thought through sufficiently and implemented effectively. Louay Safi warns that the “increased secularization of the autonomous spheres of knowledge simply means that the Islamic school curriculum that

---

\(^{38}\) [http://www.isimti.org/the-university-connection.html](http://www.isimti.org/the-university-connection.html)
haphazardly combines subjects produced by secularist schools with Islamic subjects does not go far enough towards producing a balanced Islamic personality.”\textsuperscript{39} This is not, it should be noted, an issue for Islamic schools alone; even Catholic schools, with hundreds of years of experience behind them, are finding difficulty in consistently applying a Catholic perspective to the entire curriculum, and Evangelical Protestant schools are very far from achieving this in a sophisticated way . . . though there are notable efforts to do so.\textsuperscript{40}

In the case of Islamic schools, which bring a perspective from outside the Western tradition, Zine points out, the “Islamization of knowledge involves more than simply remaking Western knowledge with a different 'spin' and inserting Islamic referents. It also involves examining the contributions and transformations that Islamic thought can make in mainstream public discourse and praxis.” This would require those designing Islamic education for North America to be, as described by Tariq Ramadan, “[s]ustained by faith, strong in reasoning ability, and guided by ethical injunctions, a believing consciousness must live within his own time, at the heart of his society, among other human beings, and put his energy into this constant dialectical movement between the essential principles determined by Revelation and actual circumstances.”\textsuperscript{41}

Unfortunately, as Zine notes based on her study of Islamic schools in Ontario, although “Islamic studies is meant to be a seamless strand of knowledge that connects all subjects as they are taught from an Islamic perspective . . . few teachers are able to follow this approach effectively; most of the time, Islamic studies and Arabic (the language of the Qur'an) are merely 'add-ons' to an otherwise mainstream Eurocentric curriculum.”\textsuperscript{42}

Jasmin Zine is not alone in suggesting that the pressure to provide a full program of secular academic studies can have the effect of relegating the religious subjects to a supplement which is not necessarily taught effectively. A case study of a Canadian school asked, in a similar vein, “How is such variety to be accommodated within an Islamic school or single classroom? . . . Is the school – its teachers, officials, curriculum, and culture – to accept family expectations in this regard, or should Islamic schools in Ontario and elsewhere in the West encourage progress toward higher stages of Ramadan's model [of Islamic education]?”\textsuperscript{43} The researcher discovered that “there was a feeling that [the school] provides a compartmentalized Islamic education – as one parent called it, an “add-on” – as opposed to a more interwoven, holistic Islamic education. . . . with respect to religious instruction, the curriculum is felt to be not as interactive as the core subjects. It does not encourage critical

\textsuperscript{39} Safi 1999, 44.
\textsuperscript{40} See Glenn 2000, Glenn 2012c.
\textsuperscript{41} Ramadan 2004, 37.
\textsuperscript{42} Zine 2008, 19.
\textsuperscript{43} Ahmed 2013, 150.
thinking about, or a deep understanding of, the religious instruction presented in class."\(^{44}\)

Clearly, this would fall far short of the sort of worldview-informed instruction across the curriculum that is at least the goal of most faith-based schools. As with other faith-based schools, the "separation of secular and religious subjects in Islamic schools is antithetical to the goal of centering divine knowledge within every subject . . . yet little work has been done to move this project forward."\(^{45}\)

This tension is of course not limited to Islamic schools; similar problems were experienced by a Jewish "community school" in Toronto, leading to a high turnover of administrators: "some parents’ desire for an arts-based education clashed with the pursuit of academic excellence sought by others, or the cultivation of strong Hebrew language skills desired by some was presumed incompatible with a more child-centred Jewish-values education preferred by a different minority."\(^{46}\)

Many of the Muslim immigrants to Ontario "who supported the first Islamic schools were not keen on any attempt to radically alter the conventional curriculum. They entered with the assumption that the public secular ‘curriculum is basically sound, needing only a bit of infusion of Islamic ideas here and there’."\(^{47}\) This is another example of the ambivalence felt by many immigrants, between wanting their children to fit in to the host society and wanting to preserve in them what they consider distinctive and valuable about their own beliefs and traditions. Thus, when the issue of public funding for faith-based schools was raised in the 2007 provincial election, the Muslim Canadian Congress issued a statement strongly opposing it on the grounds that “every child has the right to learn Canada’s culture ... and how we interact with each other formally and socially. Immigrants who have chosen Canada must allow their children to become Canadian.”\(^{48}\)

The fact is that articulating a consistent worldview and then defending it is hard work; when a school does manage to infuse its curriculum, instruction, and school life with a coherent perspective on reality, this is characteristically the result of strong leadership by an administrator backed up by a demanding board. A study of the longer-established Islamic schools in England concluded that “[t]here are no ‘secular’ subjects within a Muslim world view. Every aspect of study should be permeated by Islamic values and the divinely ordained harmony should be brought out by the educational process.”\(^{49}\) Such consistency is certainly what many promoters of faith-based schools desire, and it can be a great enrichment to the education provided, but simply giving a school a religious label does not ensure that it will

\(^{44}\) Ahmed 2013, 154-5.
\(^{45}\) Zine 2008, 28.
\(^{46}\) Pomson and Schnoor 2013, 181.
\(^{47}\) Memon 2013, 89.
\(^{48}\) Mintz 2013, 239.
\(^{49}\) Ahmad 2013, 216.
convey a coherent worldview.

Zine quotes a critic “of the status quo in Islamic schooling, which he regards as having 'short term; and 'backward looking' approaches that all too often seek only to preserve the traditions from 'back home' instead of articulating a 'clear vision' of sustained purpose for Islamic schooling in a diasporic context.” The great diversity of self-presentations in the mission statements of Islamic schools on their websites – though of course we are not in a position to test how accurately these reflect actual practices – suggest that the development of standards for Islamic schooling in a Western context is still at a preliminary stage.

One writer who has sought to contribute to a clearer definition of such standards is the Canadian Nadeem Memon. Drawing upon the theoretical work of the philosopher of education AI-Attas, Memon distinguishes four Arabic terms that are most commonly used to describe the “purpose and process of education in Islam: ta’lim (direct instruction), tarbiyah (nurturing wholeness), tazkiyah (personal development), and ta’dib (comportment),” and singles out two terms that are most often used to define the purpose of education in Islam, then, are tarbiyah and ta’dib, of which AI-Attas is resolute that the latter is more accurate. AI-Attas defines education as “recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence: . . . teaching knowledge in relation to putting things in their “proper places” is manifested in many ways. In relation to human relationships it is about adhering to ethical norms in social behaviour. It manifests as respect, humility, and love for one’s parents, families, communities, neighbours, teachers, and so on. In relation to the natural world, proper place is about maintaining’ and cultivating the natural environment and being conscious of personal actions and choices that can harm nature. Similarly, intellectually and spiritually, proper place is defined by recognizing one’s ultimate purpose and essence.”

In summary, the “two aspects of recognition – knowledge (ilm) and acknowledgement or action (‘amal) – are captured in the Islamic conception of ‘adab (comportment) and therefore in the process of ta’dib (cultivating of ‘adab).”

It is not so obvious how these concepts are to be operationalized in the curriculum and practice of a school, nor does Memon attempt to spell that out, but one can see that at least an attempt is being made to stabilize a vocabulary that will facilitate discussion within the circles of Islamic educators. This is part of a wider project for Muslims living in the West, which has been described as the need for “a philosophical and ideological basis to co-exist with other religious

50 Zine 2008, 11.
51 Memon 2013, 75-6.
52 Memon 2013, 77.
communities and act with them for the development of the society.\textsuperscript{53}

Part of the debate within the Muslim community, Memon informs us, has been whether Islamic schools would contribute to this task of integration without loss of identity, or whether they would hamper it. “Islamic schools, some feared, would reinforce the very religious and cultural practices that would highlight their differentness. At the same time, some parents wanted the rigour and strict code of conduct that they were accustomed to in education systems from back home.”\textsuperscript{54} Would it be enough to create schools that were culturally and morally “safe” without a strong emphasis on Islam as a distinctive and often oppositional worldview? After all, “[m]any of the issues cited by Muslim parents that served as rationale for taking their children out of secular public schools are similar to the concerns expressed by most faith-based school supporters.”\textsuperscript{55} This might lead to a “light” version of Islamic schooling:

The aim of an Islamic school for these parents, then, is to create a learning environment conducive to teaching from an Islamic perspective or at least one that does not counter the religious and cultural values nurtured at home. One participant who enrolled his children in the first Islamic school in Canada expressed the overarching fear “that if you throw them [our children] out [into public schools] without the proper guidance about the religion, they might completely get lost, lose their culture, their religion ...”\textsuperscript{56}

This would not satisfy those who are concerned to nurture a distinctive Islamic worldview in relation to the entire curriculum, however, with the hope (eventually) of making a similarly distinctive contribution to the public discussion of culture, society, politics, and economics. Those who have such ambitions (which they share with many thoughtful Catholics, Protestants, and Jews) must contend with the primary concern of parents which, as Memon points out, “is beyond the formal curriculum. The school ethos and values – in particular the acceptability of values and behaviors related to gender relations – was and continues to be one of the driving forces behind establishing faith-based schools.” This might include some “for whom faith was not even a primary marker of their identity but who felt Islamic schools could reform delinquency.”\textsuperscript{57}

The inevitable result is that “for many Muslim educators in the field, both Islamic studies textbooks and a permeated school environment remain superficial appendages that are insufficient in defining an Islamic pedagogy. As one Canadian Islamic school principal said in an interview, “apart from that [basic religious education], it’s just a regular school.”\textsuperscript{58} Memon concludes, in his thoughtful essay, that

\textsuperscript{53} Ghazi 1999, 301.

\textsuperscript{54} Memon 2013, 81.

\textsuperscript{55} Memon 2013, 82.

\textsuperscript{56} Memon 2013, 82.

\textsuperscript{57} Memon 2013, 83.

\textsuperscript{58} Memon 2013, 87.
The need for rethinking the purpose and pedagogy of Islamic schools has come from two overarching concerns: first, the recognition that current practices in Islamic schools are relatively conventional – implementing a comparatively untouched secular public-school curriculum with an external Islamic ethos; and second, a concern that what is integrated from an Islamic world view is approached in a manner that is stale, irrelevant, and decontextualized.\textsuperscript{59}

\textit{Encouraging Civil Participation}

One of the accusations brought against Islamic schools has been that they tend to undermine, in their students, the qualities that will make them good citizens of the host society. Thus we are told that many “are run by Islamists who teach children that their primary loyalty is to Islam rather than to their countries of citizenship.”\textsuperscript{60} As with other religious groups, such as Evangelical Protestants, it is quite common for Muslim educators to teach that a primary loyalty is owed to God without this competing with the requirements of good citizenship; indeed this emphasis can arguably contribute to being the sort of engaged and critical citizens that a healthy society requires. This does not mean, however, that there may not be Islamic schools – or schools in other religious traditions, or in none – that inculcate messages harmful to society and to the participation of their graduates in political, social, and economic life. The Dutch government, for example, has been vigilant in monitoring Islamic schools, and found that one of the fifty was in fact having a harmful effect and should have public funding discontinued; it should be noted that no such effect was found in the other schools. There can be no question that some groups within the Muslim community have been actively promoting separatism, seeking to enjoy the economic benefits of life in the West without being affected by its concomitant expectations for democratic participation.

When appealing to Western officials and other non-Muslims, Islamists couch their demands for a separate parallel Muslim community in the . . . rhetoric of diversity and cultural rights. The Arab European League, a Muslim advocacy group operating in Belgium and the Netherlands . . . demands specific rights for Muslims that would allow them to “coexist” separately but equally with their non-Muslim fellow-citizens; integration into mainstream society on the basis of a shared national citizenship is contrary to this goal. Its founder, Dyab Abou Jahjah, has vociferously attacked this notion, calling assimilation “cultural rape,” because “it means renouncing your identity, becoming like the others.”\textsuperscript{61}

All evidence suggests, however, that this is very much a minority position, especially among Muslims in Canada and the United States. As we have seen, parents choosing Islamic

\textsuperscript{59} Memon 2013, 91.
\textsuperscript{60} Baran with Tuohy 2011, 195.
\textsuperscript{61} Baran with Tuohy 2011, 128.
schools for their children are very concerned that these schools not be inferior to public schools in preparing their children for successful participation in the host society, and reassurances to that effect are a common theme in the self-descriptions of Islamic schools. As we have seen, in the provincial elections in Ontario in 2007, when it was proposed to extend public funding to non-Catholic faith-based schools, one Muslim organization strongly opposed this, arguing that “separate Islamic schools fail to cultivate Canadian citizens because they isolate students from the wider community and culture.” Thus. “within the Muslim community – just as in communities of other faiths in Canada – uniform support for separate, faith-based education cannot be assumed and often does not exist.”

Concerns about the effects of Islamic schooling are indeed one of the common themes of those who warn of Islamist subversion of Western societies and their democratic values. Bat Ye’or, for example, criticizes Strategies and Structures for Presenting World History, published by the Council on Islamic Education (since re-named Institute on Religion and Civic Values) in 1994 for its assertion that “Western teaching victimizes immigrants and espouses an elitist worldview that inculcates a myopic view of other societies, thus spreading old ideas.” Of course, anyone familiar with the textbooks on “multicultural education” or “anti-racist education” used in mainstream teacher training would not find such views so far out of line . . ..

Others have urged that Islamic education should be re-conceptualized in a manner which is consistent with Western liberal democratic values. Bassam Tibi in Germany is an advocate for such an approach, arguing that “there is a need for a new education based on enlightened, reformed Islam to promote the global aspiration of liberal democracy,” and that “we need to ask: Can education in Islamic values be made compatible with the global aspiration of liberal democracy?” Tibi is of course writing from within a German situation where "Koran schools" have for several decades provided a rigid and backward-looking form of supplemental education. The mission statements of full-time American Islamic schools indicates that most of them are seeking to grapple with precisely this challenge. To take one almost at random:

Our mission is to provide an excellent Islamic and academic education within an Islamic environment to produce well rounded Muslims and strong leaders. We seek to promote a safe, caring, and supportive environment where our children can attain the knowledge that would enable them to perform as effective citizens of the world, especially in today’s world of Globalization. Our students will be attaining such worldly knowledge in a spiritual environment rich with Islamic teachings, values and practices. We strive to have our parents, teachers, and community members actively involved in our students' learning.

Mission & Vision

63 Ye’or 2005, 255.
64 Tibi 2004, 204, 206.
Our vision is that children leave school with:

- A set of spiritual and moral values -- honesty, integrity and good judgment.
- A complement of basic skills -- linguistic, mathematical, scientific, artistic, physical and social.
- An enquiring and discriminating mind and a desire for knowledge.
- Strong self-esteem and high personal expectations.
- Tolerance and respect for others.\(^{65}\)

As noted previously, such statements cannot tell us what actually occurs in a particular school, but they provide a reliable indication of what the parents, who are often making a considerable financial sacrifice to enroll their children, are looking for. It does not appear that they are seeking an education that will prepare their children only for a Muslim ghetto within the wider society. Zine, while warning that a “trend towards divisive ethno-politics and tribalism within the Muslim community is threatening to disrupt the goal of Islamic schooling,” urges that it should “allow students to see beyond the binary opposition between believers and non-believers,” and asks, “[w]hat pedagogical choices do Islamic schoolteachers make to help students experience and interact within a pluralistic society?”\(^ {66}\)

This is consistent with the urging of many Muslim leaders, including Agha Saeed, president of the American Muslim Alliance, who wrote in 2002 that “Muslims need generations who ‘not only speak without accent but also think without accent’. . . . Criticizing immigrant generations for being too much invested in goings on in their countries of origin, Saeed finds hope in new generations of Muslims who instead regard America as both home and homeland.”\(^ {67}\)

This does not seem unrealistic. On recent national polls, “Muslim respondents expressed strong trust in American legal and civic institutions, showed relatively strong trust in the American media and courts, and had more confidence in the fairness of elections than any other religious group.” Nor was this, as some might expect, the result of secularization and weakening of ties with Islam and the Muslim community; in fact, according to a 2011 Gallup poll, “American Muslim respondents who reported high levels of political participation were more likely to attend mosque services on a frequent (45 percent at least weekly) or regular basis (68 percent at least monthly). Muslim respondents who declared low levels of political participation were more likely to never or seldom attend mosque services (49 percent).” This is consistent with focus group discussions conducted by Cesari in Boston, which suggested that active commitment to Islam often correlated with active citizenship, which “seems to converge with a broader trend abundantly documented among other religious groups in the United States, which is the positive influence of religion on political participation.”\(^ {68}\)

Of course, what we may have here is the phenomenon that those who are actively

\(^{65}\) Darul Arqam School, New Jersey http://www.darularqam.org/#!mission--vision/c1cf0


\(^{67}\) Bilici 2012, 114.

\(^{68}\) Cesari 2013, 68, 72.
engaged in one sphere of life tend to be actively engaged in others, and thus a correlation rather than causation, but it suggests at least that developing the habit of participation at the face-to-face level of a religious community (a habit that can be promoted by school as well as family experience) may have a positive effect on the willingness and ability to engage in the wider sphere of civic engagement. This was most notably demonstrated by political scientist Sidney Verba and his colleagues, who found it particularly true among marginalized social groups. “Religious institutions are the source of significant civic skills which, in turn, foster political activity. The acquisition of such civic skills is not a function of SES but depends on frequency of church attendance and the denomination of the church one attends.”

Thus attending a Catholic church was less likely to result in civic skills and engagement than was attending a Protestant church, as a result of the greater role of the laity (until recently, at least) in the latter. The fact that, in the American context, mosque leadership is generally in the hands of local Muslim business and professional men who employ the imam, sometimes from abroad, would tend to create a similar pattern of ample opportunities for development of civic skills.

But isn’t it likely that active engagement in a religious community will make individuals less willing to be in relationships with those outside that limited circle? Not necessarily. Protestant theologian Miroslav Volf places this question of belonging, identity, and openness in context:

> People and communities with dynamic identities will have firm but permeable boundaries. With such boundaries, encounters with others don’t serve only to assert our position and claim our territory; they are also occasions to learn and to teach, to be enriched and to enrich, to come to new agreements and maybe to reinforce the old ones, and to dream up new possibilities and explore new paths.

Arguably, the security of a well-supported identity can serve as a basis for encounter with others who do not share that identity. This may help to explain why inter-faith cooperation including Muslims at the local level in the United States seems to be much more common than cooperation between secularized Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe, where “forms of social and cultural activity that are based on religious principles are frequently seen as illegitimate, and certain types of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, such as interfaith dialogue, are frowned upon.”

**Prospects for Islamic Schooling in the United States**

The title for this section is, of course, ridiculously ambitious, but it is worth attempting to ask whether the experience of other immigrant groups with distinctive religious beliefs can throw any light on whether and how Muslims might take their own distinctive place within the “denominational” structure of American life. Bilici makes the interesting observation that a

---

70 Volf 2011, 133.
71 Cesari 2004, 176.
strategy of much of the Muslim leadership in the United States is to employ what he calls “Abrahamic discourse” that seeks to associate Islam with the post-war linkage of Christianity and Judaism as a third element of that monotheistic and strongly moralistic tradition, now widely cited as the basis for American civic life. The leadership thus acknowledges the fact that (legal) citizenship alone is not enough to protect Muslims from public sentiment. If civil rights work is an appeal to the state, interfaith work is an appeal to the public. In the post-9/11 era, Muslims have gravitated more toward Abrahamic discourse than liberal pluralism. They rely on the tropes of genealogy and kinship to legitimate Islam as an American religion. As such, interfaith work becomes an emotional plea for inclusion in the nation. . . . they see secular pluralism as merely an extension of citizenship discourse, which in their eyes has proven inadequate for protecting Muslims. Abrahamic discourse, on the other hand, is a discourse that works on the “nation” rather than the “state.”

This inter-denominational alliance is facilitated by the fact that, as then-Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out, Muslims “feel threatened, not by the foundations of our Christian morality, but by the cynicism of a secularized culture that denies its own foundations.” It might be noted in this connection that the first publicly-funded Islamic school in the Netherlands was launched under the sponsorship of a Protestant school association.

One of the lessons that can be drawn from the history of religions in the United States, in contrast with the far more secularized Europe, is that competition is healthy for religious groups. More accurately, it is stimulating for some and causes them to become more clearly-profiled and more attractive to potential adherents as well as more capable of retaining their members and the children of their members. To put the point in sociological jargon, “religious groups and subcultures may more readily construct meaningful distinction through symbolic boundaries that strengthen their morally orienting collective identities.” On the other hand, “religious groups that have difficulty constructing identity distinction in a pluralistic environment will grow relatively weaker.”

It is for this reason that the question of the distinctiveness of Islamic education is of more than academic interest. It seems likely that the ability of Muslim theologians, political and cultural critics, and – above all – educators to articulate a distinctive perspective in a way that is convincing to youth will have a significant impact on their loyalty. An “Islam light” that is mostly concerned with regulating gender relations and continuing family customs is likely to have little holding-power.

Tariq Ramadan has asked, “[a]re Muslims truly capable of living in secularized societies? Are their values compatible with those of democracy? Can they live side by side and mingle with

---

72 Bilici 2012, 169.
73 Ratzinger 2006, 33.
74 Smith 1998, 97.
their non-Muslim neighbours? Can they combat the shocking behaviour exhibited in their name, in the form of terrorism, domestic violence, forced marriage, and the like? Can they free themselves from their social ghettos, those breeding grounds of unemployment, insecurity, and marginality? These are certainly relevant questions, though the last more for Western Europe than for North America. But it seems likely that, for most of the second and third generations deriving from the Muslim immigration, the more important question will be whether Islam continues to be perceived as a significant way of understanding and reacting to the experience of life in a culture dominated by consumerism and individualism.

It is not that Islam cannot adapt to the pluralistic denominationalism of North America; “in every civilization where Islam has flourished it has done so through the interaction of timeless spiritual teachings and time-bound cultural contexts.” Precisely how it does so, as Olivier Roy points out, is inevitably a reflection of how other religious groups are treated in the particular society: “in every Western country, Islam is being integrated and not following its own traditions but according to the place that each society has defined for religion, from Anglo-Saxon indulgence to Gallic suspicion, although the former needs to be less naive and the latter less pathological.”

This is why the adoption of what Bilici describes as the Abrahamic connection with Christians and Jews, in contrast with the more confrontational civil rights model, seems strategically wise. Both Canada and the United States (though in different ways, and with much variation across Canada in particular) have accorded a significant place to voluntary religious associations in public life, without seeking to define or control what religious groups believe or how they organize their associational life. This seems particularly well-adapted to the decentralized nature of the Muslim presence in North America.

Of course, the consumerism and individualism characteristic of North American life also extends to religion, and, as Roy observes, “due to the lack of social authority and pressure, any form of recomunitarisation is in the end based on a personal choice. Muslims are those who say they are Muslims, and who define the ways in which they are Muslim by choosing what is available on the religious identity market.” The second and third generations, no longer requiring in most cases the support of ethnic community institutions, will either choose to adhere to Islam in a purposeful manner, or drift away. This is a challenge for Islamic schools.

Muslim leaders like Umar Abd-Allah of the Nawawi Foundation rightly speak of “the importance of indigenizing Islam in America,” but if this delicate task does not manage to preserve a distinctive, even compelling, perspective on life, if American Islam becomes a sort of

75 Ramadan 2010, 125.
76 Safi 2011, B18.
77 Roy 2007, 94.
civil religion with no flavor of its own, it will have little convincing power for the younger generation derived from the Muslim immigration. That is another challenge for Islamic schools.

These are not the only challenges, however. In addition to a way of understanding and interacting with American culture that is distinctively Islamic, Zareena Grewal argues, it is essential, for the sake of Islam itself, to develop a form that is distinctively American, a “Muslim American exceptionalism [that] signals both the belief that Muslim Americans are culturally distinct from (unlike, different from) the global umma as well as being morally distinct from (superior than) the global umma.” Grewal and others contend that, just as the transformation of Roman Catholicism’s relationship with the modern world began from its encounter with American religious pluralism, culminating in the decisions of Vatican II, so Islam may undergo a similar transformation through adaptation to life in a liberal democracy where it is neither furthered nor hindered by government.

If so, Islamic schools (like Catholic schools for earlier generations) will be where this vital process, in large part, plays out. It is in Islamic schools, along with families and mosque communities, that the relationship between tradition and modernity, between culture and culture, will be negotiated. Muslims and their schools are not alone in facing this challenge; “many Americans are asking similar questions about their own institutions and whether they can maintain religious, ethnic, or other cultural distinctiveness without cutting themselves off from the American mainstream. In other words, these are questions, at some level, about the nature and future of American pluralism.”

What Muslim parents expect of these schools, how school leaders and teachers seek to balance these expectations with their own convictions about the goals of Islamic education, and to what extent students believe they are being well-prepared for their lives as Muslims in a society where secularism and Christianity compete, as James Davison Hunter has described, over the “institutions of culture formation and transmission” . . . that is the focus of our study.

80 Grewal 2014, 339..
81 Quoted by Cesari 2004, 181.
82 Steinfels 2003, 110.
83 Hunter 2010, 46.
References


