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Volume 64 • Number 3 • September 2017

Journal of
Religious
Education

ACU
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Springer

Springer

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Abstract In this multiple case study I use Foucault's theory of power/knowledge in exploring how Muslim students negotiate their religious and civic identities. Three themes are revealed. The first theme explores how Muslim students use their body and language in performing their religiosity and develop a counter-discourse of self expression and resistance in public schools. In the second theme I explain the liberating function of public education and the difference between dogmatic and non-dogmatic religious education. The third theme explicates how discourses of Orientalism and othering work in public schools, and how they affect the experiences and identities of Muslim students.

Keywords Islamic education · Public education · Othering · Orientalism ·
Identity politics · Foucault · Technologies of the self

1 Introduction

In this study I explored the stories of Muslim students and their struggles, conflicts, and accomplishments while they transfer from an Islamic to a public school. I investigated how this experience and their interaction with their peers, teachers, and family shape their Islamic and American identities. According to Hall (1994, p. 392) identities are socially constructed and they are influenced by multiple discourses within different times and places. He said, "we should think, instead, of identity as a "production" which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation".

Because of the unfixed nature of identities, and because I explored the change Muslim students experienced in their transition from Islamic to public school I found Foucault's

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theory of power/knowledge very helpful in understanding and analyzing how Muslim students view and understand this educational transition and how they narrate the development of their own identities. Following the work of Foucault and Hall I assume that identities:

> are both imposed and self-made, produced through the interplay of names and social roles foisted on us by dominant narratives together with the particular choices families, communities, and individuals make over how to interpret, and resist, those impositions as well as how to grapple with their real historical experiences. (Alcoff 2003, p. 3)

Also, it is assumed that Muslim students who make the transition from Islamic (private) to public schools experience two discourses of power with different regimes of truth (Foucault 1980). A regime of truth means that discourses in society work through power relationships and these relationships produce a disciplinary knowledge which dictates for individuals what is acceptable in terms of thinking, behaving, knowing and being in a given space, time, and conditions (Hall 2001). In other words, "the production of knowledge and the ways we relate to knowledge contribute to the construction of the subject" (Fendler 2010, p. 54). Accordingly we can consider religious and public education as two systems of power/knowledge with different moral expectations in terms of modesty, culinary habits, prayer times, the relationships between boys and girls, and the meaning of righteous life. However, very little is known about the experiences of Muslim students of these regimes of truth or how they deal with the possible continuity and change in their religious and civic identities.

Indeed, most studies on Islamic education in the U.S. cared about the representation of Muslims and Islam in social studies textbooks and standards (Jackson 2011); the significance of teaching against Islamophobia (Kincheloe and Steinberg 2010); and the teachers' perspectives on educating Muslim and religious minority students (Niyozov and Pluim 2009; Subedi et al. 2006). Also, scholars agree about the growing need to explore the life experiences of Muslim students and their needs in public schools in the U.S. (Callaway 2010; Merry 2006; Niyozov and Pluim 2009). The current study aims to fill up this gap in the literature.

The process of continuity and change in Muslim students' identities becomes even more complicated because of the growing Islamophobia among non-Muslim Americans who misunderstand or maybe do not know much about Islam (Niyozov and Pluim 2009; Kincheloe and Steinberg 2010). Islamophobia is defined by Driel (2004, p. 10) as "irrational distrust, fear or rejection of the Muslim religion and those who are (perceived as) Muslims". Islamophobia is viewed not only as a result of the terror attack on September 11, but also as a result of orientalism (discursive practices and patterns of knowledge) (Said 1978) through which Muslims and Arabs are viewed as the Other who is not civilized, is undeveloped, and is barbaric. The conception of Muslims as the Other contributes to the self-definition of the West, and this leads to the subjugation, oppression, and deprivation of Muslims' identities and their voice (Burney 2012; Said 1978).

I argue that our understanding of orientalism in western countries should not be limited to political, academic, or cultural production; it also needs to encompass practices within public schools and within educational systems as well. Few studies explored the status and the experiences of minority religious students in public schools (Jaffe-Walter 2013; Niyozov and Pluim 2009; Subedi et al. 2006). These studies are important but they are limited in terms of understanding the dynamic and socially constructed nature of religious

identities and they are less interested in highlighting the possible tensions, conflicts and struggles that Muslim students may face in their transition from Islamic to public schools.

Arguably, one may assume that the multicultural nature of public schools or the encounter between students from religious minorities and the secular and multi-faith environment in public schools has the potential of either oppressing or liberating (Abu-El-Haj 2010) these students, depending on how they interpret and view themselves within the power relationships of their schooling. Next, I explain the sociopolitical context of this inquiry and the status of Muslims and Islamic education in the U.S.

2 Islamophobia and the status of Muslims in the U.S.

Islam is a fast growing religion in the United States. This is because of the high birth rate among Muslim families, the increased number of converts, and the continued Muslim immigration to this country (Haddad and Lummis 1987). It is important to know that Muslims in the U.S. and across the world may belong to different social, cultural, language, and ethnic groups (Clark 2003). In addition, they are very diverse in terms of their educational levels, occupations, socio-economic backgrounds as well as geographical origins (Callaway 2010). It is estimated that there are three to six million Muslims who live in the United States, mostly in urban areas of the East and West coasts, the Midwest, and parts of the south, such as Texas and Florida (Haddad 1991; Haque 2004).

Given the increased Islamophobia in American society (Esposito 2010) after the terror attack of September 11, many Muslims in the U.S. feel that they need to justify and explain their religious practices and perhaps their loyalty to the United States (Ba-Yunus and Kone 2006). From a Foucauldian perspective, Islamophobia can be considered as an orientalist discourse which has been produced by the media (Noakes 2000), academia (Said 1978), cinema (Shaheen 2001) and other cultural/political mediums (Burney 2012).

Perhaps the general atmosphere of hostility against Muslims and the mistrust between Muslims and non-Muslims in the U.S. explains the growing number of Islamic schools, and the desire of Muslim parents to let their children grow up in a safe environment (Haddad and Smith 2009). In reality, however, the majority of Muslim parents in the U.S. send their children to public schools (Haddad and Smith 2009; Merry 2007), and the very idea of Islamic schooling is debatable in American-Islamic communities.

For many Muslim Americans today, as explained by Cristillo (2009, p. 69), "the Islamic school represents an institutional firewall against the loss of religious identity by the wholesale assimilation of future generations of American Muslims". Other parents think that Islam is not represented adequately or correctly in public schools' textbooks, which perpetuate "old stereotypes forged out of centuries of imperialist western views of Islam" (Haddad and Smith 2009, p, 9). By contrast, other Muslim Americans express their concerns about whether sending their children to Islamic schools will isolate them from the American culture, which may not help in their future integration in the larger society (Haddad and Lummis 1987; Merry 2006).

In this study I suggest asking new questions about the possibilities and limits of Muslim students' education. Instead of asking whether Islamic schools are useful in preserving students' Islamic or cultural identities, we need to investigate what kind of Islamic identity is promoted in these schools and how this may facilitate Muslim students' engagement later in American democratic and multicultural society. This is particularly true if we recognize that Islamic schools in the west are very diverse and are influenced by the

politics of local communities, reflecting "varying degrees of orthodoxy, strictness, and ethnic affiliation" (Merry 2006, p. 51). In addition, instead of viewing public schools as "good" or "bad" for Muslim students, which is debatable in the academic literature as well (Callaway 2010; Niyozov and Pluim 2009), it is worth exploring how these schools accommodate the needs of Muslim students and let them feel welcomed or integrated in the larger society.

Also, the current discussion about Muslim students' education in the U.S. represents a static and deterministic understanding of identity construction and the purpose of schooling. They do not recognize that identities are plural, multiple, and fluid. They are missing the evolutionary and transformative nature of identities. Identities as described by Hall (1994, p. 394) "belong to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture". That is, identities are influenced by a constant process of relational positioning which reflects multiple patterns of knowledge, power, and representations. Accordingly, the current study explores how Muslim students' identities are developed and change overtime; how they negotiate their particular and civic identities; and how they manage the different expectations of private (religious) and public education.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Setting

I chose to conduct this study at one school which was the only Islamic school in my city. Also, I used my connections with the Islamic community leaders who helped me access the school and reach the research participants. The school was established in 1996 when some community leaders saw that there was a demand to teach Muslim kids about their religion. The school has 169 students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Students in all grades get, on a daily basis, lessons in Arabic language, Quranic studies (reciting and interpreting the Quran) and Islamic studies (learning about the life of the prophet Muhammad and his teachings). The school includes students from diverse backgrounds but the majority of them are Somali; more than half the students in the school qualify for free lunch. The school does not receive any funding from the state or the federal government and it is in the process of getting accreditation.

Students who complete their 8th grade move to different public schools in the city. These schools, according to the website of the city, have a diversified population with students from more than 50 countries, speaking more than 44 languages.

3.2 Participants

I recruited four male students who studied in the same Islamic school and then moved to a different public school. Their pseudonym names are Faris, Hamza, Dani, and Adam. Hamza and Adam were in ninth grade at public school when I interviewed them and Dani was in seventh grade. Faris was at eighth grade in Islamic school when I interviewed him. All participants were U.S. citizens. They were born in the U.S. and grew up there. Focusing on students in seventh to ninth grades is appropriate because this is the time when adolescent males seek to become more independent in their thoughts and behaviors and to develop their own identities (Erikson 1968).

The following table summarizes the descriptive information of the research participants:

Name of student	Grade	Years in Islamic school	Years in public school	Parents' origin
Hamza	9th grade	6	3	Father is from Egypt and mother is second generation Egyptian-American
Faris	8th grade	6	2	Both parents from the Middle East (from Palestinian and Syrian origin)
Dani	7th grade	3	4	Both parents immigrated from an African country
Adam	9th grade	4	5	Father is from Jordan and mother is second generation Jordanian-American

The students were asked questions such as:

– Tell me about your transition from Islamic school to public school. What did this mean to you?
– Do you think that your Islamic school has prepared you for the life and study at the public school? How come?
– How do you describe your relationships with other students, your family, your teachers, and your peers in your public school?
– Tell me about your life in the public school? What do you like, dislike, and why?
– Has your understanding of Islam been changed because of your transition to public school? How come?
– What have you learned so far about yourself as an American and a Muslim citizen in the U.S.?

3.3 Collecting data

This is a multi-case study (Yin 2009) which included one face-to-face interview with each student. Case study is defined by Yin (2009, p. 18) as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". Case study, as a research methodology, depends on the naturalistic paradigm (Guba and Lincoln 1982), which is unlike the positivistic approach that focuses on controlling variables, testing theories, and looking for prediction; instead, it gives priority to the setting where the study takes place, and the data is gathered in order to understand how human beings are functioning within a specific context, and how different social, political, and cultural circumstances influence their attitudes, values, beliefs, and actions. It also assumes that human beings are active exponents of the happenings around them, and they develop their own interpretations of the different events they encounter through their prior knowledge, interaction, and reflections upon these events.

I chose to focus only on the experiences of male students because many parents whom I contacted refused, because of religious concerns, to allow me (male) to interview their daughters. The recruitment of research participants was based on the logic of literal

replication (Yin 2009). This means the selection of few participants with an expectation of similar results. In explaining this logic Yin (2009, p. 56) said:

> Each individual case study consists of a "whole" study, in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case; each case's conclusions are then considered to be the information needing replication by other individual cases. Both the individual cases and the multiple-case results can and should be the focus of the summary report.

The recruitment of students relied on a purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling "so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed" (Bryman 2012, p. 418). That is, I contacted two parents by a phone call and they agreed to let their children participate in my inquiry. In addition, they gave me the name of other potential parents who agreed to let their children take part in my inquiry. Overall I had four participants.

In order to let my participants get basic information about the research procedures, I invited them all to a short orientation, in which I explained the rationale of the study and its purposes, and I let them read and sign the assent letters. Also, I answered students' questions about the study, and we discussed possible dates and times for the interviews. At the end of this orientation, I delivered the parents' consent letters and asked the students to ask their parents to sign them and to bring them to our first interview. The orientation was conducted in the Islamic Center, which was not far from my university.

All interviews, in accordance with parents' request, were conducted in one room in the Islamic Center. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed later for further analysis. Each face-to-face interview lasted 1.5 hrs and it included open-ended and follow-up questions, depending on the dynamics of our conversation, the research questions, and the responses of each participant.

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the students' educational life histories and their experiences in Islamic and public schools. I explored the meaning of making the transition from religious public education, and I learned more about the moments of struggle, misunderstanding, conflict, and dilemma that they faced in their adaptation to the new environment of public school. In addition, I wanted to understand how students' transition and their identities were influenced by their interactions with teachers, other students, the school's community and curricula.

3.4 Data analysis

My analysis included three stages. First, I read each interview transcript separately and wrote my comments in the margins of each interview. Here I wrote keywords that were related to students' understanding of their religion, academic identity, and interactions with non-Muslims, and of the strategies they used to adapt to public school, students' confusion, and their personal struggling. Second, I made a cross-case analysis, through which I conducted a comparison between these keywords or categories of meaning and came up with new patterns or themes which fit across all the interviews. Third, I systematically reviewed each interview transcript in order to collect the evidence which most richly supported the themes.

At this stage I contacted some of the interviewees via email and asked them to clarify some of the points they mentioned in their interview. The purpose of the member check (Guba and Lincoln 1982) or the respondent validation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) is to increase the accuracy of the data, and to let participants clarify their experiences; this, I believe, makes my analysis more plausible and valid. This stage of analysis helped me to see the similarities and differences between students with regard to each theme. Later in

my writing I used Foucault's critical theories in order to explain the connection between the different themes and how they are related to broader themes of religiosity, othering, and identity politics.

4 Findings and discussion

The analysis of the data revealed three themes. The first theme explored the struggles that Muslim students faced in their experience to adapt to the new environment of public school and, at the same time, to preserve their own Islamic identities. In the second theme I discuss the liberating function of othering in public schools and how it challenged the dogmatic education of Islamic schools. Finally, I explicate the processes of othering and Orientalism in public schools and how it affected the life and national identities of Muslim students in these schools.

5 Performed religiosity, and the struggle to stay in the 'right path'

In this theme I explain how Muslim students viewed and experienced the transition from Islamic to public school, and the technologies of the self they used in order to negotiate their religious and public identities. Technologies of the self were defined by Foucault (1988, p. 17) as the techniques that human beings use in order to communicate with and understand themselves. He argued that these technologies "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being… in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality". One can view "technologies of the self" as Foucault's effort to add the hermeneutic aspect to his theory, to recognize human being's possible agency within discourses of knowledge/power, and to make his theory more applicable and less deterministic. These strategies revolved around the performing of language and body, which helped Muslim students cultivate their subjective identities.

5.1 Counter-discourse and the use of Arabic language

Language plays a significant component in defining the borders of students' religious identities. For instance, Hamza said that "cursing" was one of the behaviors that he adopted in order to fit in the culture of public school. He said, "I started cursing. Oh, sorry. I started cursing because immediately as soon as I walked in there, he said, how are you doing today? I was like, I can't say that. And so I thought, okay, first thing, I guess I guess first thing to fit in, talk like everybody else talks. Talk like you're ghetto. Cuz, talk like you're ghetto, cuz. So that's what most kids did so I thought I'd do that to fit in."

When I asked him about the meaning of "ghetto," he said "like everyone around you." Hamza argued that his Islamic school wanted him to be a perfect Muslim, which is something impossible to achieve. He added that the problem with Islamic education is that they want to develop a perfect Muslim, which means, according to the school, "do no evil, say no evil, hear no evil." But Hamza disagreed with their concept of the perfect Muslim because "there's no such thing as perfect Muslim, unless you're the prophet."

By contrast, Faris thought that it was important to keep up with the Islamic morals, even in public school. For him, "cursing" is strongly against his Islamic identity; therefore, he

decided to develop with other Muslim students a "cursing free" environment, "because sometimes they say bad words and stuff, like the other, my other friends, the non-Muslims, they sometimes say bad words in front of me. And in Islam, we can't say those bad words. We get bad deeds for it so my Muslim friends, we just say good words." In order to avoid the use of bad words, Faris and his Muslim friends developed a subculture with a new word.

> Faris: I'm like, okay. And then me and my Muslim friends, we say, like when we, like you know the S H I T?
> I: What's that?
> Faris: It's like another bad word. Instead of saying that, we say, like, sloop.
> I: What's a sloop?
> Faris: We don't know. We just made it up. So whenever someone gets hurt or something, we say "oh, sloop."

In another situation Faris said that he preferred to spend more time with his Muslim friends because they can use terms from the Arabic language in their conversations. For instance, "Like if something happens, I can say *wa-llahi* (by God) to my Muslim friends but then when you go to the American people, when you say *wa-llahi* they're like, 'what's that mean?'" In addition, Faris added that having Muslim friends in public school is empowering for him because students can remind each other about Islamic manners and acceptable behaviors.

Another example of the significance of the Arabic language in Muslim students' identities was expressed by Hamza, who was very frustrated to see that he was losing the Arabic language and therefore his Islamic identity. He reported that one day during his eighth grade he was shocked for not being able to spell the sentence *bismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm* (in the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful), which is the start of each chapter of the Quran. He expressed his frustration by saying:

> It scared me, to be honest, because if I didn't know how to write, "in the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful," how am I gonna read the Quran? How am I gonna write my name? How am I gonna be able to write Quran? How am I gonna be able to write the *hadith* [words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad]? How am I gonna be able to do all these things if I can barely speak it cuz my Arabic was very broken at the time. My writing wasn't gonna happen. I didn't know the alphabet letters, the little thing; I just spelled it to you. I didn't know any of that stuff. So when this happened, I took it upon myself to start speaking more Arabic, learning more Arabic, praying more often, so I did this and the end of the school year came, then summer, I slacked off the entire summer, and this year came. This year, I was probably the most unreligious person ever.

Also, Faris and Dani expressed their desire to learn Arabic as a second language in their public schools because this would help them maintain their Islamic identity. For instance, Faris said that he preferred to study Arabic and not Spanish or French as a second language in school. Also he considered to moving to an Islamic high school in another city because of this reason: "I want to go, I want to go there because everyone's Muslim over there. And I like, I want to learn Arabic as another language. I don't want to learn Spanish and French. I want to stay with Arabic. And I want to keep up with Islamic studies and Quran."

5.2 Communicating bodies as a strategy for resistance

Muslim students mentioned several strategies or technologies of the self that they used in order to stay on the "right path" or to maintain the perceived religious values and ideals that they have acquired in Islamic schools. In fact, students' bodies became a site for resistance to the non-religious practices and the secular culture of public schools. Through communicating and interpreting their bodies, they performed their religiosity and rejected the secular regime of truth in public schools. For instance, Hamza said that he decided to wear the *Kofi,* which he believed was what prophet Muhammad used to wear, and that this helped him to become a better Muslim. He said that the teachers and the principal allowed him to wear it in the school when he explained that it was a religious symbol. He explained why he decided to wear the *kofi*:

> The reason I decided to put it on in the first place was because I had to get my life back together, because I was messing up badly recently, so I'm trying to be a better Muslim, step by step, so for the past three weeks, praying every prayer, trying to… I want to prove to everyone that I'm serious about this religion. I want to prove to Allah I'm serious about this religion. I want to prove to everybody I'm serious about this religion. So I went to school, expecting to get made fun of, called a terrorist, all this kinda stuff, just tough it out throughout the day. Nothing happened, but just respected my space.

Also Dani reported that he tried to keep up with his religion in public school by getting the school's annual permit to leave his classroom and pray the *Dhuhr* (the second prayer of the daily five obligatory prayers in Islam) everyday in another room.

The dilemma of how to treat girls in public school was repeated by three participants. The participants' answers represent different levels of resistance and adaptation. For instance, Hamza found it weird to have a friend who was a girl. He said,

> I don't really think it is *haram*[1] but it just felt weird at first, having a close friend that was a girl, and then eventually, in high school, [I] developed something called the "friend zone," where there's a girl, knows you for way too long, so you're officially just her friend, nothing more. So that's where I kinda put myself in. Most guys don't do that on purpose. I most [of] the time do that on purpose.

Hamza believed that dating or interacting with girls is not against his religion as long as he stays in the "friend zone," which fits well with his Islamic values. He argued that he could not have sexual contact with a girlfriend like other students in the school because of his religious duties, but he disagreed with the Islamic teachings that he cannot communicate or interact with girls at all. However, staying in the "friend zone" is not easy. Hamza clarified his struggles by saying:

> one girl tried to set me up with her best friend. So it's like, they're trying to push me into this culture that I'm not used to, so I kinda try to drift away. But eventually you get caught in there. So that happened to me, like eighth grade and beginning of ninth grade and then something happened where it clicked. I'm doing something bad. This is *haram*, I should not be doing this. So before I got a girlfriend, I came to the mosque more and more and more. And Alhamdulillah (Praise be to God), Allah (God in Arabic) saved me so I'm here.

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[1] Haram is an Arabic word which means sinful, or the things that are forbidden by God in the Islamic religion.

It seems that the mosque became an alternative institution that Hamza could attend in order to recover his Islamic identity and to resist the assimilation to what he perceived as the non-Islamic culture of public schools.

In another example, Hamza reported, "Like I remember the first, I told myself, I'm not gonna hug a girl, I'm not gonna do anything with a girl until I get married. Public school, my first year there, a girl hugged me, so I hugged her back. That was like basically for me, surrendering at the time." This statement shows that Hamza started to develop a new and perhaps a hybrid identity which encompassed elements of both Islamic and American cultures. Hamza added that Arab American teachers (compared to immigrant teachers) in his Islamic school were less satisfied with the separation between girls and boys because they view it as less representative of their (American) culture. Moving to public schools allows Muslim students to question the religious teachings of Islamic schools and to search for an Islamic identity which is more compatible with the life in American society. I explain this further in the next theme.

Adam agreed with Hamza about the dilemma of communicating with girls, and he criticized the openness of public schools by saying, "Girls, I mean, there's, I see people kissing, making out, and what they wear, too, is very loose and you can see much of a girl's body." Like Hamza, he put himself in the "friend zone," but this, he argued, did not solve the problem because he became more loyal and "wanted" in the eyes of girls.

Communicating the body became more demanding in the case of Faris, who struggled more than the others in maintaining his religious identity. Faris decided to stay away from girls as much as he could. He suggested the following advice for Muslim students, who will move from Islamic to public schools: "Because everywhere you look, there's gonna be like maybe a girl or something that's doing something bad or something like that so you have to tell them to watch out for that, lower your gaze, look down… For Muslims, they have to look down and they can't look and they have to keep on walking… because it's okay if you look once on mistake but you can't look again."

When I asked him how he spent his lunch break in the school, he said, "I just went and ate and I sat with the boys' table. And whenever there's a girl that comes to the table to sit next to me or sit next to someone else, I just finish, I get up, and I sit somewhere else." I asked him what if a girl was wearing the *hijab*? He answered, "If she was a Muslim and had *hijab*, she wouldn't come to the boys' table anyway."

The examples above show the technologies of the self that Muslim students use in order to negotiate their identities. Technologies of the self, as I explained earlier, are the techniques through which people police their "selves" within systems of knowledge/power. Practices such as wearing the Kufi, creating a subculture of peers' resistance, producing new words and slang, staying in the "friend zone", and praying during the school day all reflect how Muslim students try to maintain their Islamic subjectivities.

When Muslim students move from Islamic to public schools they become divided from inside (Foucault 1982) which means that they have the opportunity to recognize and perhaps revise the understanding of the self in order to adapt to the regime of truth of public schools. Being divided from inside, as I show in the next section, is the start of developing a critical and reflective identity which problematizes Islamic knowledge and the hegemonic and non-reflective teaching of Islam. Technologies of adaptation then help Muslim students in defining and redefining who they are to themselves and to people around them.

6 Dogmatic religious education and the liberating function of public education

The idea of dogmatic religious education presumes that religious studies are the best way to educate children for a moral and good life. Fienberg (2006, p. 18) clarified here that "religious morality is associated with a set of rules, principles, and virtues that from the inside appear divine but from the outside sometimes appear dogmatic and inflexible". Non-dogmatic education, by contrast, allows students to think critically about religious texts, to recognize multiple interpretations and attitudes among religious scholars, and to realize that religious understanding is context-based, can be biased, or may not fit life in a democratic society.

One example of dogmatic education was raised by both Faris and Dani, who mentioned several times that they wanted to memorize the Quran in order to become good Muslims. However, when I asked Faris if he knew the meaning of what they recited from the Quran in their classrooms, he said that the teacher usually does not explain the meaning "unless somebody's asked about that." The idea of memorizing the Quran or the rote learning of Islamic teachings has been criticized by several scholars of Islamic education in the west (Hussain 2008; Merry 2006; Ramadan 2004; Wilkinson 2013). They emphasize the need to develop an educational Islamic theory which provides Muslim students the critical tools to celebrate their religious identities and to contribute to the common good of their multi-cultural and multi-faith societies.

Another example of dogmatic education was reported by Faris, who thought that he could judge non-Muslims based on his Islamic values. He argued that non-Muslims are not on the right path "because first they do stuff that we don't do. Like they drink beer and all that stuff which is *haram* and they have parties with girls and everything which is *haram*. And they say bad words and they act bad. They don't pray and make Dua [personal prayer or supplication] and read Quran and stuff like that." This kind of education represents what Hull (2000) described as religionism or moral absolutism (Saada 2013). This means holding to your own religion in order to evaluate the attitudes and behaviors of other people.

Judging other people's beliefs was repeated by Faris, who said, "See, Christians, if they were still like following Jesus, then like if they, like when Jesus came and, and he was told them, like that was the right religion. If they still followed it until today, they would probably go the *Janna* (heaven) but they messed it up. They changed the Bible and they changed everything." When I asked him why he believed so, he said, "That's what my Islamic studies teacher said. They said the Christians, they changed the Bible so that's why they're, they're doing the wrong, they follow the wrong path. But if they just listened and they didn't change the Bible, they would be like Muslims, good believers and everything." When I asked him what was changed in the Bible, he said he did not know, and that the Islamic studies teacher did not explain that for them.

This kind of dogmatic education makes me wonder about the potential of Islamic religious education in helping Muslim children communicate, accept, and live respectfully with people who follow a religion different from their own. According to Nord (1995) and Kunzman (2006) students in a multicultural and democratic society should be encouraged to question other people's religions, and to try to understand how and why their religion is different from others, but this is part of learning about diversity within their society, and how to deliberate in a democratic way the meaning of good life and not to judge if other people are on the right or the wrong path.

Moral absolutism may lead not only to judging people from a different religion but also to judging people within the same religion. For instance, Faris said that the Islamic studies teacher told them that if they are not praying three times a day, then they are not Muslims. In addition, he said, "If he's not acting it [the prayer], he doesn't care. Let's say he says, 'oh, no, it's okay. I don't want to do it. It's okay if I only pray once a week,' then I'll say, 'okay, he's not acting like a real Muslim and he's not doing what he's supposed to do, even though he knows he's supposed to do that, that means he's not a Muslim." This is another example of a dogmatic teaching about Islam where students think they have the right to judge the religiosity of other Muslims.

In addition and unlike critical scholars who believe that Othering leads to an automatic feeling of oppression (Burney 2012; Kumashiro 2000) this theme shows that a transition from one regime of truth to another may lead to a "better" understanding of the self and one's religious identity. For instance, Hamza said that the encounter with students who do not believe in God lets him think about his own faith and to try to reason why he believes in what he believes. For instance, he met a student who believed in the Big Bang theory, and in order to justify his own faith, he said, "Eventually, I'm like, there has to be a creator to all of this. So to say you believe in God for a second, God created the atom. The atom created the chemical. And the chemical created your Big Bang that you keep talking about. And then the dust of the earth was formed."

But this process of questioning or having critical thinking about Islam is not an easy mission, and Hamza reported that he felt guilty in doing that. He said, "I didn't, I never fully said, 'oh, I'm gonna be Christian.' I started thinking this and this happened but in Islam, this and this and this happened. They're similar but not the same. I just started questioning it and I knew as soon as I questioned it, it was bad. It was really bad." Also, Hamza started to question other Islamic practices and why he was doing them, "Like oh, why do you guys pray five times a day? Said I honestly don't know. Now that I look back on it, I should've said, 'oh, to remind us that there's always a God, he's always watching us and that there's always gonna be a hereafter that we have to prepare for.' So mostly just prayer and my view on religion that was questioned."

Another dilemma in the encounter between Muslim students and the secular environment of public schools was raised by Hamza, who told a story of one female Muslim student who decided to take off the *hijab* when she moved to public school. He said, "She wanted to fit in. She said she never liked the *hijab*, whatever you want to call it, and she said, 'oop, I don't like it, I'm not gonna wear it, cuz no one else is wearing it. Very few people were wearing it.'" Adam added, in this regard, that the idea of wearing the *hijab*, although it was mentioned clearly in the Quran, should be a personal decision and should not be forced on females, as it happens in Islamic schools.

It seems that the encounter between Muslim students and public schools let them think beyond the collective nature of their religious education, where they used to practice their own religion in order to meet the cultural and moral expectations of their parents and other believers. In other words, the transition from Islamic to public schools endorses Muslim students to develop some kind of critical religiosity where they feel that their religion can be open for discussion and revision and that human beings in a democratic society have the freedom to choose or adapt their religion so it makes more sense to them. By reflecting on their own religion Muslims might be able to explain to others and for themselves why Islam is a good and perhaps a "rational" religion.

Likewise, Adam argued that he did not recommend that Muslim students stick with their friends from the Islamic school, and he wanted Muslim students to think of their transition as a learning opportunity. He said, "When I hear Muslim, usually Muslims usually have,

usually, the same theories as each other. But non-Muslims, they, they have different theories than us. So my theory and their theory, when they get combined, it's a great theory." Adam added that moving to public schools challenged his limited understanding of Islam's moral teachings. He explained, for instance, "…But in Islamic school, they just say drinking is *haram* and I don't, I don't understand why it's *haram* and what kind of consequences it can get you into. When I go to public school, I see what consequences it can get you into and the kind of trouble and I thank Allah [God in Islam] for making it *haram* in that situation…. and I also, I also learn new ideals and new thoughts, new reasons."

In short, the different examples above illuminate the tension between human agency and collective religiosity in understanding the Islamic teachings which pushes Muslim students to rethink, evaluate and rationalize the ethical teachings of Islam. Being the religious other in public schools not necessarily oppresses Muslim students but allows them to think critically, revise, or deepen their understanding of Islam and its moral instructions.

7 Islamophobia and ideological stereotyping in public schools

Two of the research participants explained that they faced several discriminatory incidents because of their status as minority students in their public schools. For instance, Adam told the story of being othered because of his religiously sanctioned diet and because of his beliefs, and this led to bullying against him. He said, "Bullying, because I'm a minority. I'm from a different… people think, people think I was not born in this country. People think that I'm… actually, people think I'm stupid and I don't know what." He added that one of the students wanted to fight him because he was different. He said, "Yeah. A kid wanted to fight me because he called me a terrorist and I ended up fighting him. I don't, I'm not, I believe it's wrong to fight but I had to fight in that situation because it was something I stood up for and I believe in and I wouldn't let it be talked down upon."

These examples show how Islamophobia and the fear of Islam lead to ideological stereotyping against Muslims in public schools. Adam added, "Muslims these days are considered terrorists. I mean, if you look up the definition of terrorism, it's a group of people that try to change government or economic ways… And most people think Muslims are terrorists, or jihadists, or *Jihād*[2] [to struggle in the way of God] is when you fight for the sake of God. Only in a war, that people are killing other people, not just to go out and like 9/11, not just to go out and bomb people. Those are not, they may say they're Muslims, but they're not Muslims." This statement shows that there is a misconception and misunderstanding about Islam in American society, and that Islam needs to be clarified, not only for non-Muslims but also for Muslims who misinterpret the meaning of *Jihād*.

In another occasion, one social studies teacher in the fifth grade—who was the leader of the students' council—wanted Adam to play Osama Bin Laden in the talent show of the school. When I asked him why the teacher chose him for this role, he said "because of my Islamic name." Adam involved his parents in this incident and they contacted CARE (Council on American-Islamic Relations), who came and talked about Islam in the school's

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[2] According to Ayoob (2008), the term has been conventionally interpreted as armed struggle by Muslims to defend or Advance Islam against unbelievers. After a saying of the Prophet, some traditions emphasize "greater *Jihad*," which means struggle against one's inner temptations, as opposed to "lesser *Jihad*," which connotes armed struggle.

assembly. Besides, the teacher was requested to write a letter of apology to Adam and his parents.

Another student (Dani) reported "There's a couple people here at my school, like they're always coming up to me, they call me like terrorist and stuff." He added, "I think I have two hours with them but like whenever we interact in the hallways or maybe at lunch, there'd definitely be like some discrimination. And there was actually one point where they called me a terrorist and I showed them the definition of terrorist in the dictionary and it said nowhere that you had to be, it didn't say that you had to be a Muslim to be a terrorist." He complained that he asked the intervention of the teachers and the principal but "nothing really happened".

In another situation, after the Boston bombing, one of his classmates said, "Where's Dani at cuz he didn't see me that day and he said you guys heard about what happened in Boston, right? And that's the reason he's not here right now. Cuz he was presuming that I was being, like I was the one that bombed it." When I asked him how he dealt with this problem, he said that he did not fight them because violence will make the situation worse, and he preferred to solve this problem verbally. He continued that he tried to talk to these students in order to explain why they were wrong in their views about Islam, but few were listening to him, and this was, he argued, because of ignorance or arrogance.

In another incident, Dani said, "There was something on Facebook. My friend, well, not really my friend but he put a picture of a camel sitting in a parking lot…And then he wrote as the caption, this is when you know Dani's at an airport. So I got really mad about that. I've blocked him and done everything I could to stay away from him." The use of the camel can be viewed as a metaphor of the primitivism and backwardness of the east in the eyes of western people and an indicator of orientalism in the American larger society. When I asked Dani where these behaviors or racial discrimination came from, he said,

> Well, I think it's the way that the Western society's media portrays how Muslims are acting because of a few occasions that they've actually been like tied to. For example, the 2001 terrorist attack, after that example, a lot of media sources in the United States have been targeting Muslims as their like prime topic and you hear a lot on the news about something Muslims have done. And sometimes, like I wonder why it is always Muslims that they're blaming. There has to be like other people in the world besides Muslims that are doing something.

Dani mentioned several times that he was frustrated because of the lack of intervention by the teachers and staff in preventing the discriminatory comments and behaviors against Muslim students. Therefore, he expressed his desire to move to an Islamic high school in another city. He explained "racial discrimination just gets worse with age, especially in high school where there are like people that would really bully you for your religion. So I think it would be safer to go to an Islamic high school."

However, Adam was less pessimistic in terms of how to change the stereotypes against Muslims in public schools. He viewed his transition to public school as an opportunity to let non-Muslims learn about his own religion and to meet Muslims who are nice, humble and down to earth. He believed that advocating for Islam should not be limited to Muslims, but also non-Muslims who will get to know good Muslims, will learn about this religion, and will advocate for Islam as well.

8 Conclusions

Relying on Foucault's theory of power/knowledge (Foucault 1982; Hall 2001) I have argued that religious and secular education represent two different discourses, apparatuses of knowledge, and forms of normativity that naturalize certain concepts of being and of living. In addition, I explained that identities are socially constructed, and they are positioned within a specific time, place, and context (Hall 1994). Exploring the meaning of being educated in both Islamic and public education adds to our understanding of how Muslim students negotiate different regimes of truth, how they advocate for themselves, and how they establish a balance between their religious and civic identities.

The findings of this study challenge the essentialised and the orientalistic understanding of Islam (McLoughlin 2007) in both Islamic and western communities. In other words, it is appropriate to understand the construction of Muslim identities as influenced by structures of power/knowledge which are shaped by the politics of religious interpretation and acknowledge the possibility of diverse expressions and improvisation. The study shows that Muslim students used several strategies or technologies of the self in order to preserve their particular identities and not to be completely assimilated in public schools. That is, Muslim students used the Arabic language, their bodies, and interaction with peers in order to create a counter-discourse of resistance to the secular values and habits of public education. In addition, when Muslim students moved from Islamic to public school they experienced different modes of disciplinary power (religious versus secular system of knowledge and power) which pushed them to view their subjectivities (and their religiosity) as objects for self-inquiry. As explained by Foucault (1985, p. 29) technologies of the self are "models proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for deciphering the self by oneself, for the transformation one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object".

Technologies of the self then expressed in the second theme when students started to question the meaning of Islam, its moral teachings, and why they believe what they believe. In other words, they started to revise their understandings of the self and to reflect upon their religious subjectivities. The second theme clarifies the limitations of Islamic education and its inadequacy in preparing Muslim students for life in multicultural, secular, and democratic society. Moving to public schools encouraged Muslim students to challenge the collective and essentialised sense of religiosity (or becoming a member of a community of believers in Islamic schools) and to claim a self-reflective agency in developing some kind of critical religiosity.

This finding demonstrates the possible tension between chauvinistic religious education and democratic liberalism (Feinberg 2013), individual autonomy, and independent thinking. It highlights the constraints of confessional religious education and the need to educate for "a thinking faith" (Selcuk 2012, p. 221) in Islamic schools. It is a faith informed by skills and virtues of critical thinking, open-minded discussion, self-critical reflection, and moral reasoning. Wilkinson (2013, p. 439) explains "in a multi-faith, rational, educated democracy, it is not good enough to just say that Islam is the truest faith because God says so. Believers… need to be able to justify why, in a democracy, when all human beings are (in theory at least) morally equivalent to one another, it is still possible to select and be committed to one tradition of faith as opposed to another".

The struggles, confusions, and conflicts that Muslim students faced in their transition from Islamic to public schools highlight the significance of education for strong rationality (Tan 2014). Strong rationality means "the ability and willingness to justify one's beliefs

based on the internal as well as external questions" (p. 330). Put simply, Muslim students in secular societies should be encouraged to reflect critically upon their religion and to find out justifications and evidences for their practices which go beyond the conventional and taken for granted reasons in their tradition. What is important is to recognize that exercising autonomy and rational thinking in a democratic society is not limited to religious reasoning and it can be motivated by one's adherence to a convictional community. It is worth adding that rationality and autonomy are not foreign to Islam and that Islamic philosophy and epistemology value disputations based on intellectual and independent reasoning (Tan 2014).

The third theme of this inquiry illustrates how discourses of orientalism and Islamophobia work against Muslim students and the lack of knowledge about Islam among non-Muslim students and teachers in public schools. This theme confirms that there is a need for more attention about Islam and Muslims' cultures, diversity, and worldviews in public schools' curricula. Jackson (2011) argues, in this regard, that the coverage of Islam in social studies textbooks in American schools is very limited in terms of content or the representation of the moderate and multiple voices in the Muslim world.

Obviously, more work must be done in public schools in order to balance the biased and stereotypical conceptions of Islam in the media and the American popular culture (Kincheloe and Steinberg 2010; Noakes 2000; Shaheen 2001). For instance, public schools may cooperate with local Islamic organizations in order to produce appropriate educational materials and perhaps to challenge the negative or inaccurate images of Islam in the larger society. By the same token, both Islamic and public schools need to work more collaboratively through listening to the cultural, ethical, and religious needs of Muslim students.

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