

Introduction

Marie Mc Andrew, Amina Triki-Yamani, Falk Pingel

Textbooks play a critical role in representing and fixing the desired view of society and of intergroup relations in the minds of future generations. As such, textbooks crystallize and translate into a pedagogical form existing dynamics involving the complexity of knowledge and the dominant ideological representations of ethnic or international relations.¹ Studies of teachers' use of textbooks show that teachers tend to rely heavily on textbooks when teaching less familiar topics, particularly topics dealing with international aspects and dimensions of education.²

The study of textbooks also sheds light on the way in which dominant majorities present images of themselves in relation to various minorities and their cultures and religions. One of the main questions about this issue is whether the formal curriculum reproduces traditional biases and stereotypes or whether it allows students to be exposed to new and more balanced perspectives. Given the enhanced visibility of debates concerning the integration of Muslim students into immigration societies and school systems, it seems important to explore the extent to which a negative image of Islam and of Muslim cultures, a symbolic frontier of "otherness" for the Western world,³ still prevails in textbooks. Indeed, although some content analyses carried out since the 1990s⁴ show improvement in the treatment of Islam and the Muslim world when compared to the more biased or stereotyped representations which prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s, the full impact of the post-9/11 dynamic in this regard has not been ascertained.

The main goal of this volume is, therefore, to examine the evolution of the curricular treatment of Islam, the Muslim world, and Muslims in Canada and Europe, as well as to identify innovative approaches towards counteracting bias and omissions in this regard. Thus, a series of recent critical analyses of textbooks in Quebec, Ontario, France, Germany, and Catalonia are presented and discussed. We hope to shed light on how mainstream teachers react to this formal curriculum, using as a case study the Quebec school system, a school system marked by increasing religious diversity and growing numbers of Muslim students.

The first article, "Islam and Muslim Cultures in Quebec French-language Textbooks over Three Periods: 1980s, 1990s, and the Present Day" (Béchir Oueslati, Marie Mc Andrew, Denise Helly), recounts a positive evolution of the image of Islam and Muslim cultures in Quebec French-language textbooks from the 1980s and 1990s to the present day. This



reflects significant changes not only on the level of curriculum but also in society. The second article, "The Reduction of Islam and Muslims in Ontario's Social Studies Textbooks" (Mehrunnisa Ahmed Ali, Nashwa Salem, Béchir Oueslati, Marie Mc Andrew, Lisa Quirke), focuses on the representations of Islam in Ontarian high school social studies textbooks, portraying a dehistoricized view of a religion which is disconnected from other monotheistic religions. The third article, "Teaching about Islam in the History Curriculum and in Textbooks in France" (Mireille Estivalèzes), analyzes the portrayal of Islam and Muslim world views on the basis of a sample of French textbooks, highlighting existing biases and stereotypes, and concluding with an overview of the evolution of these portrayals over the past decade. The fourth article, "Caught in a Nutshell: 'Islam' and the Rise of History Textbooks in Germany (from 1700 to 2005)" (Gerdien Jonker), highlights the dominant narratives about Islam in German history textbooks from the eighteenth century to the present day, and reveals many interesting ideas regarding the evolving thoughts about Islam. In the fifth article, "Muslims in Catalan Textbooks" (Lluís Samper Rasero, Jordi Garreta Bochaca), the analysis of a very large number of Catalan educational materials reveals the abundance of curricula with little or no mention of an Islamic, Arab, or Muslim presence in Spain. In the final article, "Perceptions du traitement de l'islam et du monde musulman dans les manuels d'histoire par des enseignants du secondaire au Québec" (Amina Triki-Yamani, Marie Mc Andrew, Sahar El Shourbagi), focuses on the ways in which Francophone high school teachers in Quebec understand and transmit knowledge about Islam and the Muslim world as portrayed in textbooks in their history and citizenship education classes.

Most of the articles included in this special issue were presented at the colloquium on "Islam and Education. Integration and Transformations in Pluralistic Societies," held in Montreal in May 2008, which was supported by The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Department of Canadian Heritage. They elicited significant interest as well as many exchanges between university researchers and a varied audience composed of decision-makers at the federal and provincial levels, people involved in different levels of the school system, and NGO representatives. Thus we are confident that the present special issue, comprised of improved versions of these preliminary papers and a few additions, will significantly contribute to a better understanding of the role that education can play in the transmission of accurate knowledge about minorities, their cultures and religions, particularly through formal curriculum and textbooks. We also hope that curriculum developers, teachers, and civil society stakeholders will find some inspiration here in their search for improved approaches and practices.

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Notes

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2. Michael Suleiman, *The Arabs in the Mind of America* (Brattleboro: Amana Books, 1988); Avon Crismore, “Rhetorical Form, Selection and Use of Textbooks,” in *Language, Authority and Criticism: Readings on the School Textbook*,” in Suzanne De Castell, Allan Luke, Carmen Luke, eds. (London/New York: Falmer Press, 1989); G.P. De Bolt, “Consumers of textbooks: Concerns from the classroom,” in *The Textbook Controversy: Issues, Aspects, and Perspectives*, J. G. Herlihy, ed. (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1992); Yves Lenoir, Bernard Rey, Gerard-Raymond Roy and Johanne Lebrun, eds., *Le manuel scolaire et l’intervention éducative: regards critiques sur ses apports et ses limites* (Sherbrooke: Éditions du CRP, 2001); Carlo Spallanzani, Johanne Lebrun, Diane Biron, Yves Lenoir, Gérard-Raymond Roy, François Larose, and Guy Masselter, *Le rôle du manuel scolaire dans les pratiques enseignantes au primaire* (Sherbrooke: Éditions du CRP, 2001); Johanne Lebrun, Yves Lenoir, Mario Laforest, François Larose, Gérard-Raymond Roy, Carlo Spallanzani, and Mary Pearson,

“Past and Current Trends in the Analysis of Textbooks in a Quebec Context,” *Curriculum Enquiry* 32, no. 1 (2002): 51–83.

3. Thierry Hentsch, *L'Orient imaginaire* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1988); Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); Jack Goody, *L'Islam en Europe. Histoire, échanges et conflits* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004).
4. Marlène Nasr, *Les Arabes et l'islam vus par les manuels scolaires français* (Paris/Beyrouth: Éditions Karthala/Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2001); Gilbert T. Sewall, *Islam and the Textbooks* (New York: American Textbook Council, 2003); Béchir Oueslati, Marie Mc Andrew and Denise Helly, *Le traitement de l'islam et des musulmans dans les manuels scolaires de langue française du secondaire québécois (histoire, géographie, éducation économique, formation personnelle et sociale). Rapport de recherche* (Montréal: Chaire en relations ethniques, Université de Montréal, 2004); Mustapha Al-Halwaji, “The Image of Arabs and Muslims in Textbooks around the World” (paper presented at the Cairo Conference on Euro-Arab Dialogue: The image of Arab-Islamic Culture in European History Books, December 2004).