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### North African Muslim Immigrant Families in Canada Giving Meaning to and Coping With the War on Terror

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## **North African Muslim Immigrant Families in Canada Giving Meaning to and Coping With the War on Terror**

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*This article documents North African Muslim parent and youth perceptions about the war on terror, along with the relationship between families' assignment of meaning and coping strategies and Algerian and Moroccan histories. Results confirm the hurt associated with the negative representations of Muslims and Arabs in North America. Parents try to protect their children through avoidance and through the transmission of pride about their identities and traditions. However, differences between the Algerian and Moroccan families suggest that the recent political history of their respective countries of origin has a direct impact on these families' coping strategies.*

**KEYWORDS** *Immigrant, North Africa, Canada, terrorism, discrimination, identity introduction*

In the past 10 years, the negative effects of the war on terror (WOT) on Muslim communities in North America and Europe are unabated, particularly

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in terms of increased bias, negative stereotyping and discrimination towards Arabs and Muslims (Abbas, 2005; Bayoumi, 2008; Cainkar, 2009; Ewing, 2008; Nguyen, 2005). These effects are important for understanding the long-term implications for minority Muslim groups and, in particular, the negative impact on minority Muslim and Arab youth and their families, which some scholars have described as “collateral damage” (Balsano & Sirin, 2007). Research suggests that the strained sociopolitical context affects the negotiation of local immigrant identities and elicits coping strategies, which influence youth patterns of integration in the host country (Britto, 2008). Stereotyping and discrimination are associated with a tendency to see the targeted groups in a simplistic light. Migrant Muslim communities, although they share a religion, represent a wide range of cultures, national histories and social experiences. An understanding of the heterogeneity of Muslims migrant families’ experiences is important because it also shapes their positioning within the local host society. It is also relevant for intersectorial intervention and prevention programs, which are meant to support immigrant integration.

This article illustrates the heterogeneity of Muslim immigrant family experiences in North America by documenting the perceptions of Algerian and Moroccan parents and youth living in Montreal, Canada about the WOT. It focuses on how parents and children give meaning to the WOT context in the familial context, how they cope with it and what they perceive as the consequences of the global situation for the future of their families in Canada. Their views are linked to their understanding of the political histories of Algeria and Morocco, respectively.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A considerable amount of attention in the post-9/11 literature on Muslims in North America has been, understandably, on American Muslims because the polarization of categories of “us” and “them” has been prevalent in public discourses about the WOT and Muslims in the US. For many American Muslims, this polarization has challenged the hybridity of their identities and sense of belonging as Americans and as Muslims. For children and youth, the existing challenges of negotiating identity and belonging between family, peers, and community, which are part of the process of growing up, are intensified in the current sociopolitical context (Naber, 2005; Britto & Amer, 2007). For some second-generation Muslim youth, it has a fracturing effect. For example, young Yemeni American Muslim schoolgirls in Michigan felt that they had failed at all three of their identities (Sarroub, 2005). Teenage American Muslim boys expressed a wide gap in their self-identification as Americans and as Muslims (Sirin & Fine, 2007). In other cases, college age Muslim youth privileged a renewed self-affirmation as Muslims over their identity as Americans, demonstrating a more fluid form of identity negotiation (Peek, 2003; Ewing & Hoyler, 2008).

In contrast to the literature on American Muslims, less is known about Canadian Arab and Muslim communities in the post 9/11 context, as Canada has not occupied as central a role in the WOT, despite its military involvement in Afghanistan. Among the few Canadian studies, (Hamdon, 2010; Hussain, 2002) a qualitative study of Bengali and Pakistani Muslim immigrants in Montreal analyzed the impact of the WOT on families. It documented intermingled feelings of agency and powerlessness in how parents and children communicated and coped with the tensions created by the global WOT context (Rousseau & Jamil, 2010). In this study of South Asian parents, those who felt helpless avoided discussing the war on terror with their children, transmitting instead their unspoken feelings of threat and fear to them. Parents reporting a greater sense of agency were able to help their children make sense of the WOT and believed that their children's school could play a protective role as well. The study highlighted the significance of family and local school, family, and community relationships as part of the reaction to the WOT and the coping strategies in this group of South Asian Muslim immigrants (Hassan, Moreau, & Rousseau, 2010).

Some international studies have underlined the heterogeneity of meaning attribution and coping strategies in the communities targeted by the WOT because of ethnicity or religion. In a study of Middle Eastern Arab couples after 9/11, historical differences have been shown to influence how Christian Arab and Muslim Arab couples constructed meaning and coped (Beitin & Allen, 2005). A large comparative transnational research documents sharp differences in religious identification and perception of Al-Qaeda among Muslims in five countries (McCauley & Scheckter, 2008). However, beyond differences, Muslims in the five countries surveyed shared a common perception about the WOT, which they understood as being a political strategy to control Middle Eastern oil resources.

The literature on North African Muslim immigrant perceptions and reactions to the WOT is scant, in spite of the importance of these migrant communities in Europe and North America (Pew Research Center, 2007). North African Muslims differ from South Asian Muslims not only in terms of their history of colonization, but also in terms of their geopolitical proximity and involvement in conflicts that are central to the WOT (Iraq and Afghanistan; Jamil & Rousseau, 2011). Furthermore, North African Muslims are also markedly heterogeneous with regards to their recent collective experiences of war and terrorism. In Algeria, thirty years after achieving independence, the country has been struck by an internal armed conflict characterized by blind terror. It has resulted in more than 100,000 deaths and provoked a huge exodus of refugees in the 1990s (Harbi, 2002; Mekki-Berrada & Rousseau, 2011). The conflict pitted partisans from the army and the ruling party (FLN) against those of a then emerging political party, the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut) whose representatives were jailed

after winning the 1991 elections. The conflict has subsided in intensity in the last decade, leaving important psychological scars and a divided country (Diatkine, 2002; Mekki-Berrada & Rousseau, 2011).

In contrast to Algeria, which was colonized for more than 132 years (1830–1962) and considered by the 1848 French Constitution as a French territory (*Département français*) rather than as a colony, Morocco was a protectorate for about 44 years (1912–1956). While Algeria was almost entirely ruled by French politicians and the military, Morocco always preserved a certain degree of administrative autonomy and a monarch who embodied this relative independence. In recent decades, the degradation of socio-economic conditions in Morocco has led to the growth of slums and left important sectors of the population in extreme poverty. Contrary to Algeria, this did not result in an internal armed conflict. But it has been associated by some analysts with the fact that individuals of Moroccan origin have increasingly been involved in international terrorism (Alonso & Rey, 2007). The Casablanca attacks in 2003 marked the beginning of suicide terrorism in Morocco. This event provoked a wide social reflection on Moroccan society's position vis-à-vis the WOT (Salime, 2007). Simultaneously, Morocco saw for the first time in its history the inclusion of Islamist political parties such as the *Parti justice et développement* (Justice and Development Party, PJD) as the main opposition party in parliament. The PJD was democratically elected in November 2011 to become the ruling and governing party in Morocco (Union interparlementaire, 2011 and 2007). This inclusion calmed down the potential social and political violence that was about to explode in Morocco after the 9/11 attacks and during the so-called “Arab Spring” in 2011.

A similar political strategy was seen in Algeria where the *Mouvement de la société pour la paix* (Movement for the Society of Peace, MSP), an Islamist political party, obtained 10% of votes in the 2007 elections (Union interparlementaire, 2007). The MSP has recently been politically strengthened by the coalition it formed with two other Islamist Parties, *En Nahda* (Islamic Renaissance Movement”) and *El Islab* (Movement for National Reform). The coalition, called *L'Algérie verte* (Green Algeria; Apfel & Simon, 2000), will confront the present ruling party, the FLN [Front de libération Nationale (National Liberation Front)], in May 2012 elections (French Press Agency, 2012).

These two different histories of political violence and experiences of war and terrorism in their countries of origin may influence the current experiences of North African families as immigrants specifically in Quebec society and in the broader Canadian context, particularly in relation to how they understand and react to the WOT as parents and how they transmit, explicitly or implicitly, this understanding to their children. The principal aim of this article is to document the perceptions of Algerian and Moroccan parents and youth about the WOT in order to answer the following questions:

What are the perceived consequences of the WOT for North African Muslim migrant families in Canada? How do parents and children construct and negotiate meaning about the WOT? What are the family coping strategies? What are the differences and similarities between Algerian and Moroccan families?

## METHODOLOGY

### The Fieldwork Setting

Montreal is a very multiethnic city in the province of Quebec, Canada. The official language of Quebec is French, which is an asset for North African immigrants who usually speak French as a second language because of their colonial history. Their French proficiency helps North African immigrants to integrate relatively easily in Montreal and they used to report less discrimination experiences than most other major groups of Asian, Latino American, and Haitian immigrants in the city (Rousseau & Drapeau, 2002). Since 9/11, however, the perception of discrimination has sharply increased in all migrant communities and in particular in the North African and Middle Eastern Muslim communities (Rousseau, Hassan, Moreau, & Thombs, 2010).

The North African community is one of the largest migrant groups in Quebec. Between 2004 and 2008, Quebec received 18,452 Algerians and 16,406 Moroccans, totaling 15.7% of all immigrants to Quebec. In spite of a greater level of professional qualification (35.7%) than the host society (14%), unemployment is much higher (28%) in these communities than in the general population of Quebec (7.9%) and Canada (7.2%; Lekhal, 2010).

For this study, recruitment took place in poor multiethnic neighborhoods welcoming newly arrived immigrant and refugees. Schools and health institutions voiced concerns after September 11th about increasing intercommunity tensions in these neighborhoods (Rousseau & Machouf, 2005). This study offered an opportunity to probe the complexity of the impact of the WOT and issues concerning the settlement and integration of local immigrants.

### Participants

Eligible families had to be Muslims of Algerian or Moroccan origin, with children between the ages of 8 and 18 years. Consent was obtained from parents and assent from the children and youth. Approval was received from the Research and Ethics Committee of the Montreal Children's Hospital. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, great care was taken to reassure

the respondents about the total anonymity and confidentiality of the whole process.

The sample set consisted of 20 North African families: 15 Algerians and 5 Moroccans. Parents interviewed were 13 mothers and 7 fathers, with ages ranging from late 20s to early 50s. They had all completed college or university in their country of origin, a finding that coincides with other studies describing the high educational profile of this community. Half of them were currently unemployed. All of the parents were married and living together as couples. They were all relatively recent immigrants, having arrived in Canada 2 to 7 years before the interview. Eleven children belonged to the 8–12 years age group (five girls and six boys), and nine to the 13–18 years age group (three girls and six boys). They were all born in their country of origin and attended French schools in their neighborhoods.

### Procedure

The procedure, summarized here, was similar to a study of Bengali and Pakistani families (Rousseau & Jamil, 2010). Families were recruited through a snowballing strategy, using as a departure point multiethnic and ethnic community organizations. The first participants were subsequently asked to refer other families, either neighbors or acquaintances. All of the interviews were qualitative and conducted at the family's home in French or Arabic by an Algerian interviewer who was a respected figure in her community. The parents' interviews were conducted first and their children or youth were interviewed subsequently. The interviewer tried to insure as much privacy as possible in the home setting for each of the interviews. In the case of younger children, the interview technique was adapted to the child's developmental stage introducing play and drawing in the encounter. The 8- to 12-year-old children were asked about their experience watching television. They were not questioned directly about the WOT or specific international events, but some of them mentioned it spontaneously.

### Data Collection

The qualitative interviews were designed to elicit responses on four different themes: (a) the family experience in the host country, probing at positive and negative experiences; (b) the communication strategies in the family with respect to international events, such as the ongoing wars (Iraq, Afghanistan), the WOT, and local terrorist events (the Hydra attack in Algeria in 2007 and the Casablanca bombing in 2003); (c) the family perception of the consequences of the present context; (d) the family coping strategies. The interviews were divided into two main sections. The first focused on

the experiences and adjustment process of the respondent as an immigrant in Montreal and in Canada. Speaking about daily experiences first partially avoided the contamination that could have occurred if the respondent's local experiences had been elicited after discussing the global context. This was particularly important to be able to assess the family's coping strategies when faced with daily hassles and adversities. The second section inquired about response to international events. To elicit respondents' perceptions, two different key events were chosen: the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq which were a key entry point to discuss the WOT, the Hydra attack (Algeria) against the United Nations office there and the Casablanca bombing in Morocco, which facilitated discussion of the North African contexts.

### Data Analysis

All interviews were taped and transcribed. Whenever the respondent shifted to Arabic, the narrative was translated into French. The data was analyzed using a grounded theory approach to avoid preconceived theoretical assumptions about the expected or emerging categories (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 2004). Team members read the entire corpus to identify key categories of information and to construct a coding grid. The analysis proceeded in three steps: first, parents' and children's discourses were analyzed as two different groups to identify the frequency of recurrent themes and to note the patterns or relations between these themes (Strauss & Corbin, 2004). Although children and youth interviews were analyzed as one group, attention was paid to developmental issues that could differentiate young children from the older youth. Second, a dyadic analysis was performed placing in parallel the parent and their child's perspectives to document interfamilial transmission (correspondence of themes and emotions) and dynamics (similarity in patterns.) Third, the Algerian and Moroccan family interviews were compared to identify similarities and differences. The respondents are anonymous, but the quotes were identified with a number attributed to the child–parent dyad.

## RESULTS

### Perceived Consequences of the War on Terror

Although the topic of the interview was sensitive and elicited fears, all adult respondents expressed that the WOT had serious consequences for their communities and their families. Three common themes emerged: the hurtful impact of the negative perception of Muslims and Arabs, the global feeling of threat linked to a negative future outlook for children and the association of this overall climate with discrimination experiences in the local context.

The majority of parent respondents reported that they were affected by the negative perceptions surrounding Muslims and Arabs, which, according to them, had strikingly increased since 9/11. They noted repeatedly the fact that the public opinion in the host society and in the media now negatively associated Muslims and terrorists:

It is as if all Muslims are terrorists, and this, as I told you, this is not good for our society now, no, no. (Algerian mother, Respondent 11)

They developed a certain hate . . . a certain hate against Muslims. (Algerian mother, Respondent 7)

This perception was also present in the youth, who bitterly complained about the frequent profiling of Muslims in different social domains:

Always associating all Muslim with terrorist events, its really too much. . . . We are all targeted, it worries me a lot, I think it's going too far . . . at least this harassment should stop. (14-year-old Algerian daughter, Respondent 7)

The negative portrayal of Muslim in the media was also picked up by younger children who, although in a much less articulated way, expressed their discomfort about it. For example, a 10-year-old Algerian boy remembered a television program that he had not liked:

They were speaking of mosques with problems, problems with mosques . . . I did not like it, they said they were people there, saying bad things about Quebec people. (Algerian son, Respondent 17)

Parents associated the overall context of international tensions and negative portrayals of the Arabs and Muslims with diffuse feelings of helplessness and threat.

It is really worrisome what is going on in the world, because they want to solve everything through power and war and they forget about diplomacy and peace. . . . I see worries everywhere, an uncertainty in life, an uncertainty about what is going to happen in this life. (Algerian father, Respondent 16)

Although less directly expressed, worries for their children's future were also present. Some parents tried to minimize these possible problems, emphasizing the potential protective role of education. The following comment by a parent articulated his thought process, as if he was trying to convince himself that his children's future would be better than their present context.

It depends on the kind of job they are going to have. I give them the key for their future, they are in school, I . . . I have the feeling that there is a little danger because I, I did not . . . I did not . . . I did have problem here. . . . Maybe it will not be the same for them, they are born here. (Algerian father, Respondent 10)

Although half of the parents acknowledged that they or their families had suffered discrimination because they were Muslims or Arabs, the other half denied such experiences and rather underlined the fact that they felt secure in Canada. In this last group, a positive experience in the host society seemed to protect the family from their perception of global adversity. The families who had a very positive vision of Quebec emphasized that the host society population was open to cultural diversity and quite tolerant. They portrayed the schools as a safe and respectful haven in which children received a lot of attention, irrespective of their ethnic or religious origin. Some parents contrasted the reality in Quebec with their family experiences of discrimination in Europe or in United States. For example, a Moroccan mother reported that her daughter and a Tunisian classmate were not able to go on a school trip to New York because the U.S. consulate refused to give them a visa. She emphasized the difference she perceived with the Canadian institutions, which according to her, were not profiling people in the same way.

The parents who reported discrimination identified access to work as the main area in which they suffered from circulating negative stereotypes. They attributed most of their difficulties in finding employment to prejudices against Arabs and Muslims. Education was a domain in which they reported discrimination experienced by their children, although some parents reported being able to successfully protect their children. For example, an Algerian mother reported that her 8-year-old daughter was called “dirty Arab” by a classmate.

I asked her “Did you tell your teacher?” and she replied “No, I was ashamed, I did not” and I intervened immediately. I wrote a note to the teacher and she reacted well, she intervened and the girl apologized. Then they became friends! (Algerian mother, Respondent 9)

Stereotypical representations also emerged in very casual encounters on the street. Typically, strangers identified the family members as Muslims or Arabs because of their appearance, whether through clothing or phenotype, and made remarks associating them with terrorism. A Moroccan mother reported: “I have friends who have been mistreated. . . . Women wearing the hijab. People were insulting them in the street saying ‘Go away!,’ things like that.” An Algerian mother told the interviewer that she had been stopped

by a man who told her: "Madame, there is a bomb in your purse." Another woman shared an anecdote:

One day, I was walking with my daughter and there was a Quebecois with his dog. I told her "Come here" because she is afraid of dogs, then the man said "he is not bad" and I said, "OK, thanks sir," and after a few steps he added "he is not a terrorist. (Algerian mother, Respondent 14)

She then went on to explain how this had hurt her, sharing her feeling of helplessness in being able to protect her daughter. Interestingly, her 14-year-old son, who had not directly experienced this incident, expressed the wish that Muslims "stopped being treated like dogs," thus indirectly emphasizing how hurtful this day-to-day negative profiling can be.

### Constructing Meaning About Terrorism in Algeria and the WOT

Almost all (15) Moroccan and Algerian parents, in one way or another, avoided the topic of terrorism and the WOT. Their answers were succinct; they often changed the topic of discussion or answered in very vague ways before acknowledging their uneasiness by stating their ignorance ("I do not really know") and their lack of understanding ("I do not know what I understand"). These statements appear to be a key formula to avoid engaging in a discussion about a very sensitive topic. A majority of parents also reported avoiding this topic with their children. They often evoked the young age of the children to justify the fact that they choose not to discuss terrorism and the WOT with them. They preferred that the school not discuss international events with their children either, expressing concerns about potential bias in these host country institutions.

The few (five) Algerian and Moroccan parents who directly acknowledged discussing the situation with their children or youth tried to undo the relation established by the media between Islam and terrorism and proposed a sociopolitical understanding instead:

Up to now, I try to explain to her [daughter] all of this. That it is the opposite, that religion is peaceful and is not about terrorism. It is not it. It is not at all linked to religion. It does not mean that these persons [the terrorists] are more Muslims than we are. (Moroccan mother, Respondent 4)

Her 15-year-old daughter put the emphasis on denial and distancing:

In all these films talking about terrorism, there is always a story about Arabs, something. . . . But it does not affect me, because it really does not have anything to do with me.

The recent Algerian civil war of the mid-1990s and early 2000s, was present in the Algerian subjects' narratives and evoked strong feelings of pain and meaninglessness in both adults and children. A few parents expressed their indignation and explained that for them, terrorists cannot be Muslims because this is against the spirit of Islam. However, when their children asked them who did this and why, they felt they had no adequate answer to give them:

What happened there [in Algeria] is barbaric, so these are not. . . . We are against what is happening. Against those acts, not only in Algeria but in the whole world. (Algerian father, Respondent 16)

I did not want to talk to my children about it because . . . they may find it strange . . . they may not like their country anymore. (Algerian mother, Respondent 9)

Her 14-year-old son confirmed that he did not know anything about the situation in Algeria and that he did not discuss it with his parents. While commenting on international tensions, he expressed the wish that people "stop thinking that we are all terrorists" and commented on the global perception "that they just think we are monsters."

There were a few exceptions to the silence and avoidance responses. An Algerian father explained that after the events against the United Nations office in Hydra:

I cried, because it is our country, it is our blood, when we see things like that, it is horrible, one cannot understand what can be their reasons. I even called the children. I told them to come and see, I told them this is your country. . . . They did not understand and I tried to explain it to them. (Algerian father, Respondent 10)

His 8-year-old son told the interviewer that "all of this" was not good and that the bombs would "destroy my country."

One of the Algerian mothers (Respondent 19) reported that her daughter, who was 7 years old at that time, was exposed to a terrorist bombing in her country of origin when their neighbor's house exploded. She explained that presently her daughter, who is now 12 years old, rejected Algeria. She was terrified, suffered from nightmares and was obsessed with death. Her mother tried to relieve her pain but acknowledged that she "has no answer" to give her about why this happened. Her 14-year-old son (Respondent 19) mentioned that he discussed the Algerian situation regularly with his parents. He evoked the poverty there as a possible explanation to the social and political turmoil. He then added: "I do not know what is their aim, why

they are doing this,” speaking indirectly of the perpetrators of terrorist acts in Algeria.

Even if they avoided the topics of the WOT and the associated international events (9/11, Iraq and Afghanistan war), this global context was easier to understand and to make sense of for some families. Most families who discussed these situations adhered to sociopolitical explanations and believed that power and economic issues (Vuorenkoski, Kuure, Moilanen, Penninkilampi, & Myhrman 2000) were at the heart of these conflicts. They felt that America was abusing its power by imposing its way on the rest of the world. They used repeatedly the word “unfair” to describe this situation, which was echoed by their children as well.

### Family Coping Strategies

Avoidance (not talking or discussing) was at the forefront of family strategies, in particular for Algerian families. The families also used a range of other strategies to face the adversity of the present political context: identity affirmation, communicating and explaining within the family and to others in society, and understanding and opening to the “other.” Many also expressed a feeling of responsibility to change the negative perceptions of Muslims and Arabs in the host country.

Algerian and Moroccan families had similar positions in face of what they perceived as Islamophobia. Parents in both groups mentioned the need to explain and to reach out to the host society in order to change their monolithic negative image of Muslims and Arabs:

Not isolate ourselves, nor criticize. We should not try to change the world because everybody has ... the fact of speaking about religion, there is not need to speak, just the fact that one is Muslim and honest, serious, efficacious, with well educated children. This helps. But if we begin each time to criticize “oh you do this, and we are better than you! No! It will never change. (Moroccan mother, Respondent 5)

Algerian parents appeared however to be much more concerned about their role in promoting a positive perception of Muslims. Half of them mentioned the importance of giving a good image of Muslims, presenting it as a personal and collective responsibility, as position which was also endorsed by the youth: “We have to give a good image, us, as Algerians, we have to do this.” (18-year-old Algerian son, Respondent 6) Two Algerian respondents expanded on this theme, explaining that the images of Algeria and of Muslims have been damaged by the recent Algerian history of internal conflict. Strong images evoked by the use of words such as “stain,” “dirt,” and “blood” were associated with this theme.

It is not easy, I have to say. No, we are well, without problem and suddenly “Paf!,” there is a terrorist event. And who is hurt? Always the people, always the students, always the women who . . . who just happen to be there! . . . This is a stain on us. It is as if we were not humans. And when you think these are Algerians killing other Algerians, it is even worse. (Algerian mother, Respondent 20)

Terrorism come and then they . . . I think it is . . . people do not want this anymore. . . . I think this is dirt on Algeria image. (14-year-old Algerian son, Respondent 20).

Although the other Algerian respondents who commented about their duty to restore a positive image did not directly evoke Algerian terrorism, it appeared that the recent armed conflict might have generated in the Algerian respondents intense feelings of responsibility toward the global representations of Muslim and Islam, which were not present in their Moroccan counterparts. Their desire to convey a positive image was transmitted to their youth and children.

Most parents wished to transmit their religious values and cultural heritage to their children as a positive aspect of their identities. They felt that this would empower them by making them feel proud and strong. A number of them sent their children to the Saturday Islamic schools and taught them how to respect Islamic principles and practice their religion. This was also seen as a protection against some limitations of the education in the host country, which was perceived as sometimes too permissive or inappropriate, especially with respect to behavior related to gender issues.

Algerian parents tended to be more critical of their country of origin than the Moroccans, while insisting on transmitting the good things in their culture to their children and the pride of being Algerian. “Each culture has beneficial traditions for children . . . there are good things to transmit, and bad things that you should not transmit.” (Algerian father, Respondent 16). Being proud of themselves and of their origin was seen by parents as a way to buffer the impact of discrimination in the host society, by promoting and sheltering positive collective representations. A Moroccan mother underlined the peaceful coexistence of communities in Morocco and the associated safety:

Morocco do [*sic*] not have problems with Americans or Jewish people. Because where I live in Safi, there are a lot of Jewish persons who live with us in peace. . . . There are no problems, not like other countries like Egypt. . . . I even heard a French woman after 9/11, she told her son: “I am going to Morocco.” He asked: “You do not feel safe?” “No,” she replied, “but Morocco is more secure than France.” (Moroccan mother, Respondent 5)

She went on to insist on the need to protect democracy and plurality in North America.

Canadian multiculturalism was also presented in a positive light. Some parents and youth felt that it could be associated with a decrease in racism in future generations because it promoted positive perceptions of diversity and valued mutual respect. Commenting on the cultural diversity in her school, a 14-year-old Algerian girl (Respondent 16) said:

It helps to develop a social awareness, it is a way to learn, to learn new things. . . . For me growing up in Montreal, it is possible to keep my maternal roots while at the same time integrating into another culture or very diverse cultures. . . . I like this. The choices that one has. The liberty for example of religion.

Other youth alluded to this richness of diversity and the possibility of multiple ways of belonging in their multicultural schools and neighborhood. The construction of hybrid identities in local spaces where the minorities are the majority was presented as protective by the respondents. Although they did not elaborate much more, it may have been that these complex identities were seen as a response to the simplistic polarization of “us” and “them” in the media and in international relations.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, the results confirm the hurtful impact of the WOT and associated international events for immigrant Muslim families from North Africa. The respondents—parents, youth, and children—were all overly conscious of the negative representations of Muslims and Arabs in North America and of the association between those identities and terrorism. In general, they echoed the majority of the literature on American Muslim communities, which has documented the same types of responses to the external negative representations (Cainkar, 2009; Ewing, 2008; Maira, 2008). The parents and the youth discourses were also strikingly similar to their South Asian Muslim counterparts interviewed in the same neighborhoods, illustrating the pervasive avoidance and feelings of helplessness across Muslim immigrant communities (Rousseau & Jamil, 2010).

However, there was a more complex relationship between their perceptions of the host society and their position as North African immigrants. While all parents were aware of the negative external representations of Muslims and Arabs in Quebec and Canada, some also maintained a positive view of Quebec as a host society. The need to preserve a positive vision of the host society could also be seen as a strategy used by these parents to reassure themselves and to minimize their worries about the future of their children.

By constructing a safe space in a globally adverse world, the parents may have been trying to shield their children emotionally and to protect their own hopes for their future (Dekel & Tuval-Mashiach, 2004; Lutz, Hock, & Kang, 2007; Possick & Sadeh, 2008).

This may be, in part, attributable to the shared francophone identity between these North African countries, which were formerly colonized by France, and Quebec, which is sensitive to its minority francophone position in a predominantly Anglophone country. As a result, as francophone immigrants, they are, in theory, in a more advantageous position in terms of their settlement and integration process in contrast to nonfrancophone immigrants who do not share Quebec host society's language.

However, in addition to the challenges of settlement and integration posed by the global political context, the parents spoke readily of experiences of discrimination on the basis of both their religion and ethnicity, similar to the case of the South Asian families in the same neighborhoods. These parents felt that prejudices against Muslims were worse after 9/11, a finding which replicates a large survey of U.S. Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2007) and an epidemiologic study of perceptions of discrimination by immigrants in Quebec after 9/11 (Rousseau et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the perception of discrimination and the associated hurt appeared to be avoided, transmitted, and shared within families. This also replicates the previously mentioned South Asian families' study which documented how explicit worries of parents were mirrored in their children's feelings of threat, but also how anxious avoidance of the parents provoked diffuse fears in their children. Thus, there are multiple levels within which responses to perceptions of discrimination are understood, communicated and reinforced: locally within families and within Muslim immigrant communities and globally across communities.

Beyond these similarities, some differences emerge in the ways in which Moroccan and Algerian families made sense of and coped with the WOT. The first difference relates to the parents' capacity to address the WOT and related events with their children. For the Algerian parents, the recent internal armed conflict in their country of origin appears to influence the interpretation of present terrorist events and the WOT. The burden of this history may lead to an internalization of both the victim and aggressor positions and may interfere with the possibility to protectively split between "us" and "them." Recent Algerian history provides paradoxical messages which may interfere with the capacity to give meaning to the WOT. The war for independence in the sixties is a symbol of strength and represents the collective capacity to overcome the alienation imposed by the colonizer, or the external enemy. In contrast, the conflict in the nineties is a fratricidal fight in which the enemy is internalized and cannot be projected onto an external other. This creates a feeling of intense confusion because the generation of the parents (born mostly after Algerian independence) was raised with the idea of the

heroic nation, which had conquered the promised land. This same nation became the object of its own destruction, thus shattering the founding myth. The resulting ambivalence makes it very difficult to communicate to their children events that evoke shame and meaninglessness, and, as one parent directly said, may lead to the child rejecting his or her country or origin. This may also partially explain why Algerian parents did not spontaneously mention conspiracy theories, which reflect the “us” and “them” polarization and the unilateral projection of the negative elements onto the “other” (Jamil & Rousseau, 2011; Rousseau & Jamil, 2008). This heightened ambivalence was not present in the Moroccan respondents who, although they have experienced the fight for independence at about the same period as Algerians, were neither directly confronted with terrorist attacks in the same way nor recently caught in organized violence and internal armed conflicts.

Parents’ coping strategies shared some similarities, but also revealed significant differences. Both Algerian and Moroccan families mentioned that they had a responsibility to present a positive image of Muslims and Arabs, which could help to shift prevalent prejudices in the host society. This finding coincides with research on young Muslim American women living in New York after 9/11, which showed that these women felt responsible for giving a positive image of Muslims and educating others to dispel the negative myths. This responsibility was simultaneously a burden and a structuring mission (Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). This same feeling of responsibility is also found among middle-class Pakistani parents in Montreal (Jamil, 2010).

However, in the Algerian case, it may come from their personal history in their country of origin. The duty to restore Algeria’s image was a dominant theme for the Algerian respondents. Although duty and responsibility (*taklif*) can be seen as directly linked to Islamic principles and may have been reinforced by the recent past, the feeling of duty has been described as a feeling of collective symbolic debt in Algerian migrants in Montreal (Lekhal, 2010). This social debt could be seen as the duty to consolidate the community as a place of safety and belonging (Ammar, 2007). The recent violent conflict in Algeria profoundly shattered the society, provoking both feelings of relief and guilt in the migrants who escaped the social turmoil. Thus, it is possible that these feelings of guilt may confer a particular strength to the duty to restore a positive Algerian image among these parents.

Also, ascribing meaning to the recent conflict has been very difficult. Mekki-Berrada and Rousseau (2011) showed that the violence evoked strong feelings of absurdity and meaninglessness in Algerian refugee families who struggled to restore some meaning, trying to ground themselves in tradition. The mission of restoring the image of Algeria in the present WOT context may thus also be a way to put at the forefront the Algerian history of resistance to colonization and to merge it with the present resistance of the Muslim world against Islamophobia, erasing the painful recent Algerian past partially, through this discursive strategy.

The Moroccan families put forward the need to educate the host society by explaining the context. This balanced discourse may be in line with the key concept of “moderation” (*wassat*), which is central to Islam. As a “discursive tradition” (Asad, 1986, 2006) made up of the Quran and other canonical texts such the *ahadith*, Islam includes a constellation of key concepts (Izutsu, 1966, 1980) that are used by many Muslims for hermeneutical, social and political purposes (Mekki-Berrada, 2010). Among these concepts, *wassat* is a very popular maxim attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, that *kbair-u l-umur-I awsatuba*, which is to be understood as “the best attitude and behavior are those which are in the middle.” The concept of the *wassat*, which situates Muslims as the people of the middle way (Quran, 2:143), is so popular in Morocco that it goes beyond the sacred texts and is integrated into the local ethos/ethoi and *weltanschauung*.

The central cultural-religious concept of *wassat* also dominated the official Moroccan discourse on the WOT after both 9/11 and the Casablanca attacks (Salime, 2007) and was used as a political-religious argument by the Moroccan government to define its position in the WOT. It is possible that the parents choose to echo it, as a way to avoid being labeled as extremist Muslims since it is the religious identity that is under attack in the WOT context. Thus, if on the Algerian side the national political history interferes with how parents give meaning to the WOT, on the Moroccan side the parents find meaning in the moderation argument to make sense of what they are dealing with here. The Moroccans, by virtue of their political and cultural history, may rely on their widespread use of the concept of moderation, which happens to be also widely used in government’s official discourse, to make sense of the WOT. The parents reappropriate the moderation argument based on religious principles to counter the prevailing negative views of Muslims, reinforce their connection to their country of origin and promote a positive Muslim identity to protect their children. Protectively maybe, the Moroccan families downplayed Morocco’s internal history of terrorism, a position that was not possible for their Algerian counterparts.

In summary, this discussion highlights the complex ways in which the global political context created by the WOT intersects with the local experiences of Muslim immigrant families and communities in terms of how they give meaning to these broader political events in relation to their current and past experiences. On one hand, these North African families share the global experience of being the subjects of increased bias, negative stereotyping and discrimination as Muslims and as Arabs. On the other hand, Algerian and Moroccan families are two different groups because their political histories in their country of origin and their position as diasporic subjects add another layer to their experiences as Muslim immigrants living in North America in the post-9/11 context. Further complexity comes from the double-layered host society of Canada and Quebec in which they live and interact.

This study has some limitations. First, the number of Moroccans and Algerian families are unequal and the small size of the Moroccan sample limits the comparison. Second, given the past history of tensions between Morocco and Algeria, the fact that the interviewer was Algerian could have evoked more distrust in the Moroccan respondents, even if the interaction between the families and the interviewer appeared to be good. Third, the families were all relatively recent immigrants. This may have heightened their feeling of precarity, which needs to be interpreted as partially influenced by their migration context.

## CONCLUSION

In spite of these limitations, the results of this study contribute to the literature on the present upsurge in discrimination experienced by Muslim migrant communities by showing how variations in the recent history of their country of origin modulate the families' capacity to attribute meaning to the WOT and shape their coping strategies. This heterogeneity of experiences may be important to consider at a time in which security discourses tend to portray the "other" in simplistic terms and to minimize the harmful effects of the WOT. This study shows how family coping is organized around preserving valued national and religious identities, transmitting them to the next generation and feeling responsible for projecting them positively to their children and to the host society in order to counteract the negative stereotypes. This has direct implications both at the media and at the education system levels, which are spaces which need to promote a more balanced image of minorities and to give them a voice to represent themselves (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010). For the media, the results suggest that the Muslim migrant communities would benefit from not being portrayed mainly as potential perpetrators or as victims, but rather as having multiples identities and a rich legacy of values and traditions, while being simultaneously strongly anchored in modernity. The education system would also benefit from cultivating a complex awareness of the other which can protect from a polarizing split between "us" and "them" (Apfel & Simon, 2000). This empowering process may improve intercommunity relations between Muslim minorities and the host society, which are presently challenged by the WOT context.

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