

The Impacts of Britain's and Ontario's MEP on Muslim Students in Secular Schools

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In ethnically diverse societies such as Canada and Britain, the integration of minorities into the larger fold of society is a significant concern for governments. This issue has become increasingly more relevant in recent years for Muslim communities in the West, particularly after the 9/11 attacks in New York City and the London bombings on 07/07/05. These events left governments struggling to address the complex and sensitive issue of integration, as well as national security. It is for this reason that the discussions of integration in general and multicultural policies in particular have become increasingly more relevant. One area that multicultural policies address, and what many consider pivotal in the integration of minorities, is education. Both Britain and Ontario have adopted multicultural education policies (MEP) with the intent to facilitate a tolerant educational sphere as well as to instil students with a sense of respect and appreciation for all people regardless of ethnicity, race or religion in secular schools. These policies have faced scrutiny by scholars and the public alike, many of whom have criticized these initiatives for a number of reasons, one primarily being that they did not truly address the systemic and institutional racism inherent in educational institutions. In this paper I seek to determine how the ideological and legislative context has shaped the development of MEP in Britain and Ontario, and how well MEP design in these two jurisdictions addresses the specific needs of Muslim students. I demonstrate that the systemic discrimination underlying MEP design and implementation has failed to adequately address the inequality and discrimination many Muslim students face in secular schools, and indicates that MEP is not working for many Muslim students.

In analysing Britain's and Ontario's MEP, and their impact on Muslims, it is worth addressing why these two locales should be compared. First, the Canadian federal system delineates education as a provincial responsibility; therefore Ontario education policy will be examined as opposed to that in Canada as a whole. Further, both Britain and Ontario are primarily comprised of English-speaking populations, with Muslim minorities that are both numerous and on the rise.¹

With regards to Britain's and Ontario's MEP in secular schools, this comparison stems from two important factors. Both Britain and Ontario have actually implemented MEP, and Ontario has taken it further with an implementation of anti-racist policy in 1992. In comparing these policies we can first acknowledge that both governments have attempted in some way to address the diverse populations that comprise their state and province. This is in stark contrast to the majority of European countries, for example Germany, that have yet to acknowledge their large Muslim minority as German citizens.¹ Further, looking at multiculturalism and anti-racism policies will allow me to determine what catalysts were responsible for their implementation and the possible challenges or successes Britain and Ontario share in implementing those policies in the field of education.

I take a two-fold approach. I will first examine the implementation of Ontario's and Britain's MEP, as well as trace their development and implementation in secular schools. I will then analyse the impacts that MEP had in creating an equitable and inclusive sphere for Muslim students attending secular schools in these two locales. I will conclude by briefly

¹ In Britain alone the Muslim population is approximately 1.6 million with half of the population under the age of 17.¹ According to the 2001 census, the population of Muslims in Ontario is approximately 352,500, double the 145,600 a decade earlier. Ontario contains 61 percent of all Muslims in Canada, with 5 percent of Toronto's population comprised of Muslims, (up from 3 percent ten years earlier).¹ These statistical findings and trends highlight the importance of governments and schools in incorporating issues of religious diversity when developing MEP

touching upon what issues need to be addressed within both educational institutions in order to create a more equitable atmosphere for Muslim students in secular schools.

Multicultural/ Anti-Racism Education Policies

While it is important to reflect on how MEP and the anti-racism education policies have impacted citizens, it is also important to analyse the ways the governments in power have imposed their ideologies to change these policies. Thus, this section will examine not only the problems with MEP and Ontario's anti-racism policy, but also the influences of political parties in power have had in shaping these policies.

Britain

In 1976 MEP policies began to be implemented but with poor results. At this time the increasingly racially and ethnically diverse nature of British society made it clear that the need to address racism and discrimination within secular schools was necessary. The structure of the British education system was decentralised. The national government had primary control over funding and policy, however, the Local Education Authorities (LEA) were central for creating and implementing the curriculum, and therefore responsible for multicultural education. The problem with multicultural programmes was the 'cultural tourist' approach, where exposure to only "saris, samosas and steel bands" was the primary method of learning about ethnic minorities.² These programmes did not deal with the racism that was permeating schools on the individual, institutional or systemic levels. Not surprisingly, the performance and integration of ethnic minority students remained marginal. One alarming example of institutional racism within the education system was the government's refusal to provide more funding for multicultural education since it did not differentiate minority students from disadvantaged ones.³ This speaks to the "problem paradigm" rooted in multicultural education, where minority students are seen as

disadvantaged children who need 'special attention'. Therefore, because funding was divided between multicultural education and funding for disadvantaged children, neither group received sufficient funding.

That said, there was a movement in the early 1980s by policy makers and educators to flesh out useful techniques within multicultural education and also "identif(y) the theoretical and research literature, guidance for teachers, and curriculum materials".⁴ Further, the Commission for Racial Equality and other organizations such as the National Union of Teachers, and the Runnymede Trust publicly condemned discrimination and racist actions by their members.⁵ This movement, however, was countered by the rise of right-wing groups such as the Salisbury Corporation that contested multicultural and anti-racism education in lieu of a more British nationalist approach to education. Eventually the anti-racism education movement was severely marginalised in light of the Education Reform Act (ERA) introduced by the Thatcher government.

The Conservative Party and the ERA

The Conservative Party's approach to MEP was controversial. In 1988 the Thatcher government unveiled the ERA, which completely restructured the education system. The Thatcher government took significant power away from the local education authorities (LEA) including those who had been "pacesetters in anti-racist development" and gave it to the central government.⁶ The ERA aimed to transform the education system in several ways: first by creating an education market by devolving funding to schools, allowing schools to sidestep the LEA and appeal to the central government for funding directly; moreover, the government was to publish information about schools, so parents could 'shop' around, as well as publish examination results in order to 'shame' poor performing schools into ameliorating.⁷ The purpose was to introduce more of a competitive edge to the education

system and create a highly competitive future workforce. Of course, this competitive, racist and individualist curriculum did not take into consideration the inequalities in society and education that left many students at a disadvantage. Under this system, barriers such as gender, class and race were seen to not hinder success if one asserted oneself.⁸

The National Curriculum also saw the marginalisation (but not the removal) of multicultural education, giving it a cross-curriculum dimension, thus significantly reducing its impact.⁹ Further, social studies and politics were absent from the National Curriculum, therefore indicating that there seemed to be no serious endeavour by the government to address racism.¹⁰ The ERA did introduce some positive features such as the Commission for Racial Equality to co-ordinate policy on race relations in schools, and there were a series of legal initiatives in the early 1990s that addressed equality, anti-racism and multiculturalism in schools to some extent.¹¹ Thatcher introduced a broad curriculum that encompassed an array of diverse and interesting subjects to expose students to different parts of life and culture. For example, the National Curriculum Council (established by the Act to monitor implementation of the National Curriculum) stressed cross curriculum dimensions that would address equality in a multicultural society, as well as a citizenship education theme.¹²

That being said, these initiatives did not outweigh the negative impacts of the ERA. Perhaps most disturbing was the re-interpretation of school subjects. For example, the history curriculum focused on British, European and world history. British history specifically focused on the might of the Empire and its imperialistic and civilizing mission, as well as downplaying the destruction caused by slavery and the exploitation of commonwealth economies.¹³ With the languages curriculum a hierarchical structure was introduced with European languages given precedence over any others. Religious education

² Education (Schools) Act of 1992, and the Children Act of 1989

was a statutory requirement and had to take a, “broadly Christian nature” and the mandatory collective act of worship had to be “wholly or mainly Christian”^{3,14}

Figueroa suggest that the curriculum was indicative of “dominant classes” using “dominant frames of references” with minorities having very little weight in the broader picture; therefore demonstrating the “greater cultural hegemony” that was entrenched in British society.¹⁵ With these changes came a near extinction of anti-racism education, and a step backwards from the developments made in anti-racist and multicultural education in the past.¹⁶ Figueroa draws on a 1991 and early 1992 study that examined multicultural and anti-racist education since the ERA.⁴ Not only did the findings indicate that there was a minimal understanding regarding anti-racism and multicultural education, which “seemed to be accorded a low priority and often to be perceived simply as an ‘extra’ and not as relevant in areas with few minority ethnic students” one third of advisors reported that things have stayed, “much the same or even slipped backwards”.¹⁷ And while the NCC did develop a report on the ‘Guidance of Multicultural Education in the National Curriculum’ interjection from a series of right wing think tanks interfered with the publication of the report.¹⁸ Finally, Figueroa points to an education conference held by the School Curriculum Assessment Authority (successor of the NCC) in 1996 to discuss the National Curriculum, where Chief Executive Nick Tate, emphasised the importance of articulating western cultural traditions as the primary focus of the education curriculum, as well as insisting to teachers and

³ It should be noted that as a requirement of religious education under the ERA, another principal religion was required to be taught to secondary students as well (Figueroa 1999:291)

⁴ M. Taylor (1992) ‘Equality after ERA? Concerns and Challenges for Multicultural and Anti-racist Education (Slough, National Foundation for Education Research) as cited in Figueroa, P. “Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism in the New ERA” pp.293

headmasters in a 1995 education conference that multicultural education should be ignored, and that all children should be taught to be “British”.¹⁹

What this meant for ethnic and religious minorities was something altogether exclusionary. This policy further enforced the hierarchical structure of British society in terms of race and class, and perpetuated an unequal and hostile school environment. While there was a multicultural programme meant to cultivate respect amongst diverse groups, this was surely (more) symbolic than effective. Moreover, the curriculum imposed a belief system upon thousands of students. This is particularly pertinent for Muslim students (as well as other religious minorities) who were not only being taught a very narrow interpretation of history as well as other subjects, but also that their religious beliefs were inferior. Conversely, this reaffirmed to non-minority students that Christian Brits were dominant and superior, and it is not difficult to deduce what kind of attitudes would develop from these notions. These education policies put in place by the Conservatives are only indicative of how divisive British society truly was on the issue of race, ethnicity and religion, and the broader consequences this would have for religious minorities in ‘secular’ public schools such as Muslim students.

The Labour Party and Excellence for Schools

With the arrival of the New Labour Party election in 1997, there was some hope by multicultural education and anti-racism supporters that the Blair government would revitalise the programme. While Blair premised most of his platform on education change, added more strength to the multicultural education by promoting tolerance and equity amongst all students, and proposed a strategy to ensure equal access to education for all, most of his policies stayed in line with the neo-liberal flavour that Thatcher had enforced.²⁰

Archer and Francis draw on the Labour Party’s *Excellence for Schools* White Paper as an

example where integration was orientated more towards the individual responsibility of the student to excel in school. As the White Paper articulated, “our ‘Aiming High’ programme, focused on stretching the aspirations and achievements of Black and ethnic minority groups, has begun to tackle deep seated underachievement”.²¹ This emphasised the pressure on the student to push himself or herself, and failed to seriously address racism or discriminatory aspects that might hinder his or her progress. The White Paper made mention of the role of teachers in diminishing the aspirations of the students: “sometimes teachers or parents expect too little from young people. They think they won’t be able to get good exam results...sometimes those low expectations relate to racist stereotypes”.²² The White Paper suggested further that teachers, schools and society must think about ethnic minority students differently and combat stereotypes. While there was mention of racial equality and the promotion of tolerance, the multicultural education policy took a backseat to what Blair stressed as the promotion and success of the individual.

Thus, the status of multicultural and anti-racism policies in Britain seems tenuous at best. While they were rising in popularity in the 1980s, the neo-liberal movement within education espoused by Thatcher and reinforced by Blair ensured that multicultural and anti-racism education policies took a backseat in favour of a market ideology approach to education. With this in mind, it is not difficult to see the culmination of difficulties facing minorities within society and the school system over the past two decades. These approaches to education not only reinforce a competitive and unwelcoming atmosphere, they also emphasize differences instead of commonalities.

Ontario

Multicultural Education

The provincial government of Ontario enacted its multicultural education programme in 1979, and the approach that Ontario school boards took to multicultural education was very similar to that of Britain's. The structure of the education system was also similar as power was given to the school boards to develop the multicultural curriculum. However, the more pressing issue at hand was, once again, the MEP itself. Ethnic minority parents (primarily Black parents whose children were often victims of racism) complained that learning about cultural diversity was not adequately addressing the needs of their children.²³ Aside from the festival and heritage days that tended to dominate multicultural education, parents also complained the majority of teachers were white and did not understand the complexity and diversity of those minorities, therefore depended on stereotypes.²⁴ This approach ignored the racism endemic to Canadian society as well, and parents urged the government to re-consider its policy and contended that discussion should revolve around issues of racism, life chances and discrimination.²⁵

The anti-racism education movement emerged in response to the limitations of MEP. The movement starting in the U.S. and Britain caught on in Ontario, especially in Toronto that received the bulk of post-1967 immigration, and parents and community members began advocating the government to consider this approach instead of the multicultural one.

NDP and Anti-Racism Education

Pressure to deal with racism and discrimination in the school system came to a head in 1987 with the publication of a report by the Provincial Advisory Committee on Race Relations and Ethnocultural Equity. The report highlighted the inadequacies of multicultural education in combating racism and proposed that the government revise its strategy to address "racial discrimination and inequities which are systemic within policies and practises

of educational institutions”.²⁶ In 1992, in the wake of the Los Angeles police shooting of Rodney King, the Toronto race riots instigated the Stephen Lewis Commission that investigated the incident and made policy recommendations to the government. The Lewis report largely stipulated that the riots were spurred by the frustrations of black youth against white racism, and while other ethnic minority groups did experience systemic racism, it was incomparable to black communities’ experiences.²⁷ By July 1992 the NDP government of Bob Rae had amended the Education Act to include an Anti- Racist and Ethnocultural Equity Education Policy. This legislation required school boards to implement anti-racism and ethnocultural equity policy and programs to remove systemic barriers that hinder students’ access to a complete and equitable education.²⁸ A cabinet round table on Anti-Racism was created and the Ontario Anti-racism Secretariat staff was expanded.²⁹ The Toronto School Board, responsible for the largest ethnic minority group within its jurisdiction, implemented procedures to “deal with racial incidents, the assessment and placement of students, and the removal of biased material from the curriculum” all with the specific goal of reducing the high drop out rate of black students.³⁰

The steps taken by the Rae government demonstrate the dedication that the social democratic government had in eradicating racism within schools and nurturing a positive and equal atmosphere for all students. As well, it demonstrates how policies in Britain and Ontario had diverged at this point. However, as James and Wood contend, the interpretation of anti-racism education by the Rae government was inherently flawed, rendering the programme problematic.³¹ The primary reason for this was that anti-racism education implemented in Ontario was still premised on the ideology of multiculturalism.³² This reading of anti-racism education tended to only examine minorities in which racism hindered

their ability for academic success. What it did not consider were ethnic minorities who were struggling with factors other than race, due to socio-economic status, or linguistic abilities.³³

Lastly, the anti-racism approach did not address the ‘hidden curriculum’ that characterises systemic racism. For example, one key feature of the hidden curriculum is the holidays that schools decide to celebrate.³⁴ The Ottawa school board in 1994 did not allow Muslim students two days off to celebrate religious holidays, despite granting two days off to celebrate a Jewish holiday. This was despite the fact that Muslim students comprised 8% of Ottawa student population.³⁵ This incident highlights the institutional discrimination that religious minorities may face, and the actions that public institutions take that further emphasises difference and privilege on one particular group in society over others.

While anti-racism theory looks for the interrelationship between racism and other forms of oppression, the Ontario programme was particularistic and discounted the experiences of many other minorities in the process. In this case, the absence of religion is particularly pertinent, since many Muslim students were and are marginalised because of their religious beliefs. Thus, while anti-racism education did take off in Ontario, because of its failure to implement an intersectional approach to racism, did not address the totality of issues required for change.

The Conservative Party and the “Common Sense” Revolution

The election of the Conservative Mike Harris government in 1995 saw a drastic change to anti-racist education within the Ontario school system. Harris’ approach to education was similar to both Thatcher’s and Blair’s, so whereas before the two MEP had diverged with the implementation of anti-racism education, here the two policies began to converge. Harris first centralised education policy by removing much power away from the school boards (similar to the LEAs) to assert more control over the curriculum, report cards

and provincial testing.³⁶ The basic thrust of Harris's policies was to embrace global structural adjustments that characterised many corporations in the 1990s, which included a smaller bureaucracy, centralised government and a privatised workforce.³⁷ Again, the drive to create a highly ambitious pool of technologically savvy potential workers left many students at a disadvantage. The progress made with the anti-racism education and equity programme was soon gone with Harris disbanding the Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat, as well as many other initiatives regarding anti-racism and equity.³⁸ Harris did not completely eradicate the study of cultural diversity from the education system, but added it as a core element in his mandatory citizenship education course. The purpose of this course was to reiterate the responsibilities and duties that young Canadians had toward the state. The programme was also meant to address the low voter turn out of young people in provincial and federal elections.³⁹

The changes that the Tory government made to the curriculum are contentious to this day. By abolishing anti-racism from the curriculum, and filtering multicultural education through citizenship studies, issues of racism, inclusion and cultural diversity were severely marginalised. While Harris (unlike Thatcher) did not impose a 'nationalistic' agenda on the curriculum, cutting comprehensive anti-racism education, and shaping and creating a curriculum premised on market ideology, meant a significant set back to addressing racism in secondary schools.

The Liberal Party- Present

The Liberal Party, under leader Dalton McGuinty, was elected into power in 2003. The Liberal government introduced Character Education as an expansion to citizenship education, which was meant to instill in students "that values such as respect, honesty, fairness, responsibility, empathy and civic engagement should be a part of their everyday program".⁴⁰ Again, there was no mention of anti-racism education or any suggestion that the

issue would be re-visited. And while there has been a general agreement amongst scholars that the issue of multiculturalism has waned over the years in government policy with a consensus amongst educators and policy makers that the “ideology of multiculturalism is to permeate virtually the entirety of educational theory, practise and administration”.⁴¹ A 2007 survey conducted by Evans of 17 high school teachers in Ontario and Britain confirms this. For example, Evans notes that most teachers in Ontario tend to discuss “diverse cultural values” as well as concepts of social justice in their classrooms.⁴² This, however, still brings into question how effectively this multicultural approach will work given its criticisms, and how this will impact the positive integration of Muslim students specifically into secular schools.

Muslim Students in Public, Secular Schools

After critically assessing both Britain’s and Ontario’s MEP, it is necessary to discuss how has MEP influenced the integration of Muslims in British and Ontario high schools and discuss the gap between these policies and praxis.

Britain

To first understand the struggle that Muslim students have integrating into the education system, and how effective Britain’s MEP is, I will first examine the socio-economic status of Muslim communities in the state. Most Muslim communities are in post-industrial cities, primarily London (607,000), the West Midlands Metropolitan County (Birmingham- 192,000), Greater Manchester (125,219) and West Yorkshire Metropolitan Country (Bradford-Leeds urban area- 150,000).⁴³ The Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (pre-dominantly Muslim) represent the highest unemployment rate, or are primarily on the lower end of the economic spectrum. In fact, 80 percent Bangladeshi and Pakistani households receive less than half of the national average income.⁴⁴ Not only this,

but these two communities are the most racially segregated group in England, and it is estimated that 6 out of 10 Bangladeshi and Pakistani women do not speak English.⁴⁵ Given the hierarchal class structure in Britain, which is further compounded by race, it is not surprising that these communities continue to struggle. Students who face oppression in wider British society do not escape it in the classroom either. Racism, discrimination, and disadvantage for those groups in society are reflected on a micro level in school as well.

A 2002 census survey demonstrates that the market ideology curriculum put in place by Thatcher and reinforced by Blair had the expected consequences of marginalising minority students, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds. Blacks, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were over represented in this area, with the survey stipulating that only 41 percent of Bangladeshis, 40 percent of Pakistanis and 36 percent of Blacks completed the required curriculum for high school; this is in stark contrast to the 52% of white students who successfully finished the requirements.⁴⁶ This is hardly surprising given that the neo-liberal ideology that has characterised both Thatcher's and Blair's policies which promotes self reliance of the individual and assumes that race, gender and class do not preclude students from success.

The lack of academic success is further compounded by the racism and religious discrimination that Muslim students face in school by their teachers and fellow peers. Contemporary Islamophobia in high schools was not triggered by the 9/11 attacks, but began with the Salman Rushdie Affair in 1989. After those riots, scholars detected a notable shift in the perception that teachers had towards Muslim students.⁵ Whereas before the Rushdie incident teachers had categorized Muslims and Hindu and Sikhs students as

⁵ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini Supreme Leader of Iran had issued a fatwa calling for the death of writer of Salman Rushdie after the publication of his book, *Satanic Versus*

“behavers and achievers” the Rushdie affair marked a separation between Muslim and Hindu and Sikh students where the latter were still grouped as “achievers” and the former were now seen as “believers”.⁴⁷ Teachers applied racialised terms to Muslim students in a gendered way; for example, Muslim boys were associated with fundamentalism and sexism, while Muslim girls were seen as being oppressed by their families and culture.⁴⁸ These racialised stereotypes coupled with low graduation rates have caused teachers to see Muslim students as “problem pupils”.⁴⁹

Those attitudes from teachers are not entirely surprising given that the curriculum advocated by the ERA was promoting a nationalistic agenda and Blair’s weak multicultural policy did not demand much from schools or teachers either. Teachers were not required to go through rigorous anti-racism training and could bring their own biased notions to the school. Further the notable marginalisation of extensive religious studies in these policies leaves space for ignorance to fester and balloon into outright racism. If teachers do not know much about Islam, and are influenced by stereotypes, it is likely that this will impact their teaching methods. The racism inflicted on students by teachers does not go unnoticed. In an interview, Muslim boys acknowledged that teachers tended to ignore them or speak over them when they asked questions in class and said that it would be difficult for them to do well in school and find good jobs since their teachers favoured their white peers over them.⁵⁰ Muslim girls noted that teachers did not take their work seriously, or help them with future career plans, since they assumed they would just get married after high school and not continue with their education.⁵¹ One scholar noted that when some Muslim students even expressed interest in higher education, teachers would tell them their goals were too unrealistic.⁵²

These facts reveal the systemic racism permeating the educational system. Sheridan also speaks of the hidden curriculum which colours the perceptions of teachers when relating to their students.⁵³ It is this mentality that teachers harbour towards a certain group of students that can perpetuate Islamophobia and racism. This is where a large problem lies with the marginalisation of Muslim students, and something that MEP, in all the forms it has taken over the years, has never addressed.

Post 9/11, the Iraq War, and the London bombings did not help with matters. After these events, an increase of hate crimes towards Muslims was recorded, and Muslim students in schools began to report an increase of racist remarks and attacks.⁵⁴ For example, one Muslim student was being taunted by her peers and when informed her teacher was told to expect “a bit of teasing at a time like this”.⁵⁵

Interestingly, a common response of many Muslim students is to form a homogenous circle of friendship. Sheridan states, “educational establishments can directly influence religious, cultural and ethnic association”.⁵⁶ This is exemplified with both Muslim girls and boys identifying that they prefer being with Muslim students and see this as a form of solidarity against the racism and oppression they feel in school.⁵⁷ This is an interesting insight into the way that Muslims have formed groups within British high schools, and suggests barriers to Muslim students’ integration. Clearly the MEP propagated by the government has had an adverse effect where Muslim students do feel marginalised to the extent of forming groups (and at the extreme, gangs) as a form of protection. The alienation that many Muslims feel within society is reflected in the interactions those students have with their peers in schools, since misunderstanding, alienation and violence permeates those encounters. Further, many teachers do not ameliorate matters with their own racist attitudes they bring to the classroom.

Given the assumptions underlying policy development such results are hardly surprising. Given the inadequacies of the MEP in the 1970s, very little was done to address the racism that permeated society and educational institutions. Thatcher's attempts at dealing with race relations and multiculturalism were ineffective and did not supersede the Eurocentric and Christian ideology that permeated much of the new curriculum she established. Blair's emphasis on the industriousness of the individual (despite his own acknowledgement of institutional racism within education) hardly addressed the issues of racism, particularly from teachers who supposedly were to be helping students the most. Moreover, little mention of religion was given within this context in order to address the misunderstandings, stereotypes and racist associations that are connoted with Islam. Thus, therein lies a significant gap of MEP and praxis. A significant review of MEP, and how to eradicate systemic racism throughout society and institutions, proper teacher training, and also address the absence of understanding various faiths within this framework, would be the only way to resolve marginalisation of Muslim students, and start working towards an equitable and integrated educational system.

Ontario

Similar to Britain, an understanding of the demographic, socio-economic and educational composition of Muslims in Ontario will provide for a broader understanding of how Ontario Muslims are integrating into Canadian society. Seljuk in his study *Religion and Multiculturalism in Canada*, reports that Muslims have the lowest individual income rate amongst Canadians despite, "having the second highest educational attainment in the country...and 10% above the Canadian average".⁵⁸ Further investigations reveals the validity of this statement: According to the 2001 Census, the average household income for South Asians (22% whom are Muslim) is slightly less than the average Canadian income, which

places South Asian families at a lower tax bracket than the average Canadian household. This is despite the fact that South Asian students are considerably more likely than other Canadians to be attending school. In 2001, 72 percent South Asians between 15-24 years of age were enrolled in a full time educational program, compared to 57 percent of all Canadian within this age group.⁵⁹

According to the 2001 Census, 43 percent of Arabs live in Ontario, and 44 percent are Muslims. With respects to education, “Arab-Canadians are also twice as likely as other Canadians to have a university degree”.⁶⁰ Close to 30 percent Arabs between the ages of 15 and higher had a bachelor or a post-graduate degree. This is in contrast to 15 percent of the overall adult population. Moreover, 74 percent of youth from Arab descent (between ages 15-24) were enrolled in a full time educational programme. This is in contrast to 57 percent of other Canadians within this age group. In terms of employment, the results were mixed. In 2001 56 percent of people of Arab origin were employed, in contrast to 62 percent of the overall population. Moreover, in 2001 12.3 percent of Arabs were unemployed in contrast to 7.4 percent of the overall population. In 2000, Canadian- Arabs had an average income of \$26 500, approximately \$3,000 less than the overall population.⁶¹

These statistics are helpful in shedding some light as to where Muslims stand socio-economically as well as their education status. This might also give us an indication as to the kind of educational institutions Muslim students attend, and the academic programs they have available to them. These are questions that researchers should consider in determining how issues of class affect the integration of Muslim students in Ontario high schools, and if whether it is in the same way they do for Muslim students in Britain.

The treatment of Muslims within secular, public schools has varied. For example, Zine has noted some Muslim girls in high school experienced racist remarks from their

teachers. In one case, a teacher had said, “Karima, I know that where you come from women don’t get educated, but you should go to high school” while this student had every intention to enrol in university.⁶² Likewise, another Muslim student (who wore a hijab) had been encouraged to take general level courses by her guidance counsellor, but after a re-evaluation she was placed in an advanced stream.⁶³ The student commented that the counsellor did not look at her grades as a standard for evaluation, but rather, “my whole outer appearance, and that meant ‘dumb’, ‘ignorant’, or ‘oh we don’t want them to succeed’ that’s what I felt”.⁶⁴ Zine also notes that one Muslim student (who wore a hijab) has dealt with teachers who have been shocked that her parents have allowed her out of the house, and speak English to her very slowly until they realise she speaks like other native Canadians, and then speak to her normally.⁶⁵ Interestingly enough, despite this treatment, this student did feel she was treated fairly by her teachers once they got to know her, and took it upon herself to address these stereotypes as the year went on.⁶⁶

With respect to the curriculum and student life, students commented that exposure to minority cultures was limited and superficial, with one student commenting she learned more about India from watching Bollywood films than anything at school.⁶⁷ Some Muslim students lamented that at their secular school only Christian clubs were allowed to form, while Islamic groups had to be organized under names like “literary group of Muslims” and were not allowed to develop a club solely based on their Islamic faith.⁶⁸ Muslims have been successful in addressing their concerns regarding particular aspects of the curriculum. In one example, a world religions teacher had very basic knowledge about Islam and was confusing various concepts and definitions, as well as feeding into certain stereotypes that were angering Muslim students.⁶⁹ The teacher was very receptive when approached by Muslim students to address their concerns and was, “open to debate and discussion on the matter”.⁷⁰

Collett argues that there have been some positive changes instigated by the education authorities in order to address the needs of Muslim secondary students. For example, in 2001, the Toronto School Board made it official policy for all high schools to provide a prayer room for daily and Friday prayers.⁷¹ While Collett notes that this initiative was in line with multicultural ideology, the Board's support of integrated physical education as well as sexual education despite the complaints of some conservative Muslim families, suggests that the Ministry, "reflects a position much more in line with orthodox liberalism" papering over the cultural particularities usually connoted with multiculturalism.⁷² This has inevitably made secular schools a site of contestation and contradiction for Muslim students, and it is reflected in their experiences. For example, many of the students Collett interviewed felt the prayer rooms provided were essential in promulgating acceptance for religious diversity.⁷³ However, the 'hidden' curriculum of some teachers and administrators did actively work against this policy. Some Muslim students commented that teachers within their schools were not comfortable with the idea of leaving class to pray, and in one case, a teacher refused a Muslim student permission to leave the class and pray, creating a source of tension.⁷⁴ Zine also notes that in one incident, a principal at a secular public school refused to provide Muslim students with a prayer room despite it being Board policy. It was only when the students threatened to take him to court that he relented.⁷⁵

With the 9/11 attacks came a wave of xenophobic remarks towards Muslim students, increasing their precarious position within the school system. Reports of girls having their hijab grabbed off their heads, Muslim students being called 'terrorists' as well being told by other students to change their "Muslim sounding names" dominated the news and television. Scores of complaints from Muslim parents about the discrimination and harassment that their children were experiencing also increased exponentially since 9/11.⁷⁶

The experiences of Muslim students in secondary secular schools have been fraught with contradiction. While schools have taken steps to provide prayer rooms for Muslim students, there are still many Muslim students (as well as parents) who feel that secular schools have not properly addressed the issues of inclusion, religious and cultural diversity that would eradicate ignorance and racism. While there are attempts to accommodate Muslims to some extent (and this seems to be positively received) this does not necessarily address all stereotypes, or discrimination against Muslims in the school sphere, or create communication or understanding between peers. While secular schools in Ontario have indeed taken small steps to address the needs of Muslim students, this does not mean the treatment that many of those students face on a daily basis is the same as non-Muslim peers.

Conclusion

This paper raises more questions than answers. Ontario and Britain's MEP both these policies aimed to promote equality and acceptance at the micro-level, primarily in schools. However, in varying ways, these policies did little to address power structures in societies (and schools), which favoured some groups of people (primarily, white, middle-class and male) over other groups of people. Instead, those policies focused on superficial cultural dynamics that hardly scratch the surface in understanding one's background, values and beliefs.

Comparatively, the underlying systemic discrimination in MEP design and implementation in Britain and Ontario has had negative consequences on Muslim students. By tracking the legislative back drop to MEP in both jurisdictions, and documenting the impact of neo-liberal governing ideologies on MEP, I have shown that the key differences in policy design and delivery between Britain and Ontario reflected in both of these contextual factors. Both Ontario and British Muslim students have suffered egregious forms of racism

and discrimination at the hands of their teachers and peers that have impacted their academic success, as well as their integration within the school atmosphere. Ontario Muslim students, however, have been able to negotiate a more inclusive terrain for their religious beliefs, which included a policy by the Toronto school board for the provision of prayer rooms in all secondary schools. Therefore, while Ontario Muslim students do suffer from racism in their schools, some have been able to mobilise and in specific ways address the forms of oppression they receive from their teachers and peers. This could stem from the acceptance of multiculturalism as intrinsic to Canadian society by Canadians in general. Conversely, British Muslim students tend to retract into homogenous groups, and have little positive interactions with their teachers.

I have only been able to scratch the surface on this fascinating and complex issue. This paper demonstrates the significance of issues of racism, inequality and disadvantage for a large minority of people in British and Canadian societies, and that political scientists as well as policy-makers need to take heed in order to develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of discrimination and exclusion in the school system and its growing importance in the field of political science. In particular, the treatment of Muslim students in Britain and Ontario in secular schools is worrisome, and does raise a plethora of questions about the values of equality, inclusion and respect that these liberal democratic societies purport to uphold. Muslim students, like all other students in Britain and Canada, are the future workforce and future drivers of cultural, social and artistic development. By marginalising an entire group of people solely on their religious affiliation, and denying them the substantive rights they are entitled to as human beings and citizens, Canadian and British governments and institutions will only continue to perpetuate the inequalities that have

haunted and mired their histories, and snuff out the incredible potential of groups of people to contribute to their respective societies.

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² Zine, J. “Safe Haven or Religious ‘Ghettos’? Narratives of Islamic Schooling in Canada” pp.74

³ Tomlinson, S. *Ethnic Minorities in British Schools* pp.22-3

⁴ Tomlinson, H. “International Perspectives on Education: The Response of the Mother Country” pp.326

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Tomlinson, H. “International Perspectives on Education: The Response of the Mother Country” pp.330

⁷ Archer, L and B. Francis. *Understanding Minority Ethnic Achievement: Race, Gender, Class and ‘Success’* (NY, NY :Routledge, 2007) pp. 19 and Figueroa, P. “Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism in a New ERA: A Critical Review” *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 2:2 (1999) pp.289

⁸ Archer, L and B. Francis *Understanding Minority Ethnic Achievement: Race, Gender, Class and ‘Success’* pp.19

⁹ Tomlinson, H. “International Perspectives on Education: The Response of the Mother Country”pp. 329

¹⁰ Tomlinson, H. “International Perspectives on Education: The Response of the Mother Country” pp.329

¹¹ Figueroa, P. “Multiculturalism and Anti-racism in a new ERA: A Critical Review” pp.289

¹² Figueroa, P. “Multiculturalism and Anti-racism in a new ERA: A Critical Review” pp.290

¹³ Tomlinson, H. . “International Perspectives on Education: The Response of the Mother Country”pp.331

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Figueroa, P. “Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism in the New ERA” pp.292

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Figueroa, P. “Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism in the New ERA” pp.293

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Figueroa, P. “Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism in the New ERA” pp. 294

²⁰ Figueroa, P. “Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism in the New ERA” pp.295

²¹ Archer, L and B. Francis. *Understanding Minority Ethnic Achievement: Race, Gender, Class and ‘Success’*pp.118

²² Ibid

²³ Henry, F et al., (2nd ed) *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society* pp.187

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Henry, F et al., (2nd ed) *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society* pp.188

²⁶ McLeod K. “Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education: Human Rights and Human

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- ²⁸ James, C and M. Wood. “Multicultural Education in Canada: Opportunities, Limitations and Contradictions” pp 104
- ²⁹ Carrington, B and A. Bonnett “The Other Canadian Mosaic- Race Equity Education in Ontario and British Columbia” pp.416
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- ³¹ James, C and M. Wood. “Multicultural Education in Canada: Opportunities, Limitations and Contradictions”pp.105
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- ⁴⁰ Lewis, J.P. “Why Civics? Adopting Policy Causal Stories for Citizenship Education in Ontario” pp.15-16
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- ⁴³ Peach, C. “Muslims in the UK” pp.28
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- ⁴⁵ Henry-Layton, Z. “Britain: From Immigration Control to Migration Management” pp.310
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