

ANALYTICAL REPORT

Radicalization leading to violence in
Quebec schools: issues and perspectives



CENTRE FOR THE **PREVENTION**
OF RADICALIZATION
LEADING TO VIOLENCE

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A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

An important part of the mission of the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV) is “to support and empower family members, teachers, professionals in the field and the community” in dealing with the phenomenon of violent radicalization. The examination and analysis of the situation at the Collège de Maisonneuve is a perfect illustration of this part of mission, given the numerous incidents linked to violent radicalization by which the college has been affected since 2015. It is therefore with great humility and respect that I submit to you this report designed to provide a thorough examination of the process of radicalization leading to violence. Due to the collective reflection it inspired, the concerted collaborative response it elicited from all participants, and the lessons we were able to derive, this analysis offers a starting point for a series of similar studies on the different aspects of violent radicalization in Quebec.



The most troubling aspect of all is the violent radicalism instilled in young people, as it affects a more vulnerable segment of the population—a group seeking self-expression, ideals, and a way of rebelling against a system it feels does not listen to, understand or respect it. Indeed, contemporary radicalization is more than strictly a religious phenomenon, as it operates on psychological, social, identity, political and geopolitical levels as well to the same—or an even greater—extent. In addition, we must now take into account the additional challenges of new types of engagement and the use of technology.

This report seeks to define the nature of the violent radicalization observed in the province of Quebec, especially among young people in schools. Its aim is to develop an understanding of the contexts, mechanisms, factors and events that caused not only a dozen young students from Collège de Maisonneuve but also other young Quebecers currently receiving counselling from the CPRLV to want to leave the province for Syria and possibly join jihadist groups on the ground there.

Before I conclude, I must first offering my warmest thanks to the staff and administration of Collège de Maisonneuve, whose extraordinary and crucial efforts provided the genesis for this document. It is also the product of the interdisciplinary collaboration of secondary schools and college/CEGEP administrators who kindly agreed to open their doors to us and share their experience. Being inspired by the individuals who have left or attempted to leave Quebec in order to reach Syria, this report is therefore beholden to their parents, relatives, friends and acquaintances whose patient testimony has enabled us to develop an accurate understanding and fresh interpretation of this phenomenon.

The unflinching cooperation of all the participants in the project is an eloquent example of the type of society that will eventually prevail over all forms of violent radicalization and many other troubles as well!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Herman Deparice-Okomba".

Herman Deparice-Okomba, Ph. D.



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Violent radicalization, in and of itself, is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, movements have called upon their followers to use violence in defence of an ideology or cause, whether for religious, social, political or other motives.¹ However, the current context is one of growing activity by violent radical movements that, although extremely diverse in terms of their ideologies and motivations, all eat away at the Promise of Togetherness and pose a direct threat to our collective security.

Quebec has not been spared in the emergence and proliferation of radicalization leading to violence, which is how it came about that in 2015 several young Quebecers left for Syria to join extremist groups on the ground there. Collège de Maisonneuve has been hit especially hard by this state of affairs; it was at the instigation of the college that the CPRLV undertook the present study to document the situation, produce a cross-sectional analysis and propose recommendations.

The report explores the following broad topics:

- Explaining radicalization leading to violence linked to jihadism and the situation in Syria
- Placing Quebec in context with regard to this phenomenon
- Understanding the radicalization of some students from Collège de Maisonneuve and other young people receiving counselling from the CPRLV
- Identifying strategies for preventing radicalization leading to violence in Quebec schools.

The different recommendations generated by this analysis (and presented at the end of the report) are directed not only at Collège de Maisonneuve, schools and government agencies but also at ordinary citizens affected by the question who would like to engage in a helpful and proactive manner with those around them.



JIHADISM

THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

1. JIHADISM THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

In light of the events taking place since 2011 in Syria and the Middle East in general, the international context could readily be described as “a fertile breeding ground for radicalization” with respect to the violent extremism of jihadism and the armed groups that purport to adhere to this ideological doctrine.² Described as “radical Islam”³ by some, ‘Salafi jihadism’⁴ by others, or classified under the relatively broad label of ‘religious radicalization’,⁵ jihadism subscribes to a political reading of the Muslim religion and the defense, by means of violent action, of a shared religious identity perceived as being under attack (from international conflicts, foreign policy, societal debates, etc.)⁶ While jihadism is not a new phenomenon, representing an ideological shift that has been present throughout the world for two decades,⁷ the conflict in Syria has indisputably breathed new life into the groups and ideologues who claim this political worldview as their own,⁸ resulting in unparalleled numbers of Westerners leaving for Syria.⁹

According to the most recent estimates, over 30 000 foreign nationals have left their home countries since 2013 to join the ranks of the jihadist groups in the Syrian conflict,¹⁰ the vast majority to work with the armed group known as the Islamic State (ISIS), a self-proclaimed Islamic caliphate¹ since June 2014. Of this number, over 6 000¹¹ appear to have come from Western countries. However, due to the difficulty of reliably enumerating the number of departures of such individuals for Syria, these estimates are approximations.

In Canada, estimates place the number of Canadian nationals having left the country to go to Syria at between 130 and 250.¹² Compared to European countries, Canada (including Quebec) seems to have been largely spared by the phenomenon, although not completely immune to it. The figures cited are relatively proportional to those documented for the United States.

However, it should be noted that such data is variable and extremely difficult to estimate from open sources. Nonetheless, enough is known to worry Canadian and Quebec authorities, both due to the security risks such individuals pose for the general public, as well as the impact they may have in terms of indoctrination and recruitment for jihadist groups in Syria. The attacks carried out in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Ottawa in the fall of 2014 following calls by the Islamic State (ISIS) for violent action served as a reminder for Canada that the ‘Syrian jihad’ is not simply a distant reality, but rather an issue directly affecting our country.

Similarly, although the movement initially kept a relatively low profile in Quebec, this does not mean the province was free from radicalization. Beginning at the end of 2013, and throughout 2014,¹³ a first wave of young Quebecers left for Syria and Iraq: this initial series of departures received little media coverage and went relatively unnoticed due to the small number of individuals involved and the fact that they were relatively spread out geographically.

At the end of the month of February 2015, what had initially been viewed as a minor incident suddenly took on a whole new dimension when the media revealed the departure of six young Quebecers, five of them students at Collège de Maisonneuve, suspected of having left to join jihadist groups in Syria.¹⁴ For the first time, Quebec was witnessing the phenomenon of clusters of departures for Syria; a small group of interconnected individuals seemed to have become progressively radicalized to the point of wanting to leave the province to join the Syrian conflict and armed groups on the ground.

The situation repeated itself in May 2015 when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) intercepted ten young people attempting to leave Canada for Syria at the Montréal-Trudeau Airport.¹⁵ Four members of the group were students at Collège de Maisonneuve,¹⁶ lending further credence

¹ i.e. a territory or political regime that recognizes the authority of a caliph—Mohammed’s successor and, by the same token, leader of all Muslims throughout the world.

to the hypothesis of a connection with the individuals who had previously left. In the meantime, two other students from Collège de Maisonneuve were arrested in Montréal by the RCMP in April 2015,¹⁷ suspected of initially also having wanted to leave to go to Syria before instead potentially planning to commit a violent act in Montréal.¹⁸

That said, such a concentration of radicalized youth coming from a single educational institution raises a number of questions. Had violent radicalization taken hold at Collège de Maisonneuve? If so, what were the conditions that allowed for its growth? How could the radicalization process have been detected earlier before becoming so strong?

In light of these various events, there is clearly an urgent need for better documentation of incidents of violent radicalization throughout the province in order to identify the prevention and intervention strategies best suited to different contexts. In truth, despite news reports on the topic,¹⁹ there is currently no empirical research that provides a comprehensive overview of the situation. That therefore is the objective of the present report focusing on radicalization in schools. In the wake of this study, further research will be conducted on the other aspects of radicalization leading to violence.



METHODOLOGICAL

AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2. METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research on which the present analytical report is based was conducted over several months. To collect the information necessary for a documented analysis, an empirical investigation was carried out by means of observation, the consultation of files, and numerous interviews with individuals affected, directly or otherwise, by the situation at Collège de Maisonneuve. Finally, the available scientific literature was used to further our reflection on the factors, mechanisms and processes involved in radicalization leading to violence. The highest ethical standards were observed in reporting the results of our analysis so as to preserve the anonymity of our human sources.

2.1. PRIMARY SOURCES OF INFORMATION

To optimize the potential impact of this report, an extensive empirical study of the path to radicalization taken by young Quebecers was conducted using data collected by the CPRLV over the course of its everyday activities. Constructive and extremely informative discussions were held with people (family, friends, etc.) close to individuals who had left or attempted to leave Quebec to go to Syria. The paths to radicalization examined in this report are therefore those of some of the students from Collège de Maisonneuve and of the young people with whom the CPRLV has worked.

In addition, interesting and highly illuminating interviews were conducted with college staff members directly or indirectly concerned by the events in question. Lively and extraordinarily productive discussions with an array of actors from different educational institutionsⁱⁱ enabled us to complete the collection of data for our analysis.

2.2. SECONDARY SOURCES OF INFORMATION

We were privileged to be permitted to consult both open and confidential sources on the events involving Collège de Maisonneuve that transpired in early 2015. We also examined scientific literature on different aspects of radicalization leading to violence—definitions, descriptions, explanations and prevention; this was an important source of inspiration and provided us with a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

2.3. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

The ethical research guidelines followed in the production of our investigative, analytical study are comparable to strategies employed in the social sciences.

- Obtaining the informed consent of all individuals consulted or questioned for this report was the first cornerstone of our study.
- Protecting the confidentiality of the collected data and the anonymity of the individuals cited in the writing of the present report was the second.

To this end, no names or personal information are mentioned in this report. Similarly, the individuals involved in the Collège de Maisonneuve events are never identified by name in order to protect their anonymity as well as that of their friends and families.

ⁱⁱ Principals, teachers, support personnel, counsellors, and students.



RADICALIZATION

LEADING TO VIOLENCE:

EXPLORATORY OVERVIEW

3. RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE: EXPLORATORY OVERVIEW

3.1. DEFINITION

There is no universally accepted definition of radicalization leading to violence.²⁰ However, it is defined by the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV) as a process whereby “people adopt an extremist belief system—including the intent to use, encourage or facilitate violence—in order to promote an ideology, a political project or a cause as a means of social transformation”.²¹

At the heart of the process of radicalization leading to violence lies a dynamic in which individuals are at odds with those in their immediate environment (family, loved ones, friends, etc.), and a process involving a gradual progression along a radical path that may eventually lead to violence.

Radicalization leading to violence is associated with the coexistence of two phenomena:²²

- The adoption of an ideology whose rationale becomes a way of life and a framework for meaningful action for the individual;
- The belief in the use of violent means to promote a cause;

Therefore, radicalization leading to violence is the result of the merging of ideology and violent action. Finally, radicalization leading to violence is not, in and of itself, associated with a particular cause, ideology or community: despite what is all too often heard—especially with regard to Islam—it is not exclusive to any religion. It is therefore imperative to avoid stigmatizing individuals based on their belonging to a group or community which may, unfortunately, have produced certain violently radical individuals.



“Violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief.”

United Nations’ Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General, p. 1.

3.2. DISTINCTION BETWEEN VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT RADICALIZATION

It is important to distinguish between violent and non-violent radicalization.²³ When people are entrenched in their own beliefs, they may adopt radical positions that may not necessarily be in contradiction with democratic norms and values. Radicalization cannot therefore always be considered to be violent.



Radicalization, when it does not lead to violence, can be considered a good thing.

Furthermore, radicals can play a very positive role, both in their community and in a larger political context. In fact, most of our progress is the result of different forms of radicalization: Martin Luther King, Gandhi and even the suffragette movement were all considered, in their time, to be ‘radical’ elements in terms of their demands and the contexts in which they existed.

Where radical viewpoints become problematic is when they legitimize, encourage or validate violence and violent extremist forms of behaviour—including terrorism—in order to ensure the victory of a cause, ideology or worldview.

3.3. EXPLANATORY FACTORS AND MECHANISMS

Why and how did a number of students from Collège de Maisonneuve and other young Quebecers become radicalized to the point of wanting to go to join violent armed groups in Syria?

No single factor, on its own, can explain the radicalization of young Quebecers. There is no one cause—social vulnerability, family problems, discrimination, feeling marginalized, exposure to extremist ideologies, etc.—able to explain radicalization leading to violence (the *why*), just as there is no uniformity in the paths taken (the *how*).²⁴

Although not necessarily linear, the process of radicalization leading to violence is gradual:

- It occurs in mini-stages that may cause certain individuals to progressively retreat into an exclusionary way of thinking that becomes a framework for life, action and meaning.²⁵
- While radicalization does not necessarily lead to violence, it can nevertheless be considered to be a risk factor²⁶ in that it shrinks the range of personal options open to the individual, thereby fostering a the potential slide into a universe of meaning in which violence is explicitly legitimized.
- By adopting an exclusionary worldview, such individuals become even more apt to reject, condemn, or wish to violently fight against any vision that does not conform to their own.²⁷

Similarly, the processes of radicalization leading to violence must be understood as a puzzle²⁸ involving a multitude of factors, mechanisms and contexts that come together in extremely varied ways. For example, what is a contributing factor, or piece of the puzzle, in one radicalization trajectory may not necessarily be present in another, and vice versa.²⁹ This is why there is no general explanatory model for the processes of radicalization leading to violence, but a variety of specific models instead.³⁰

3.4. MAPPING THE PROCESSES OF RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE

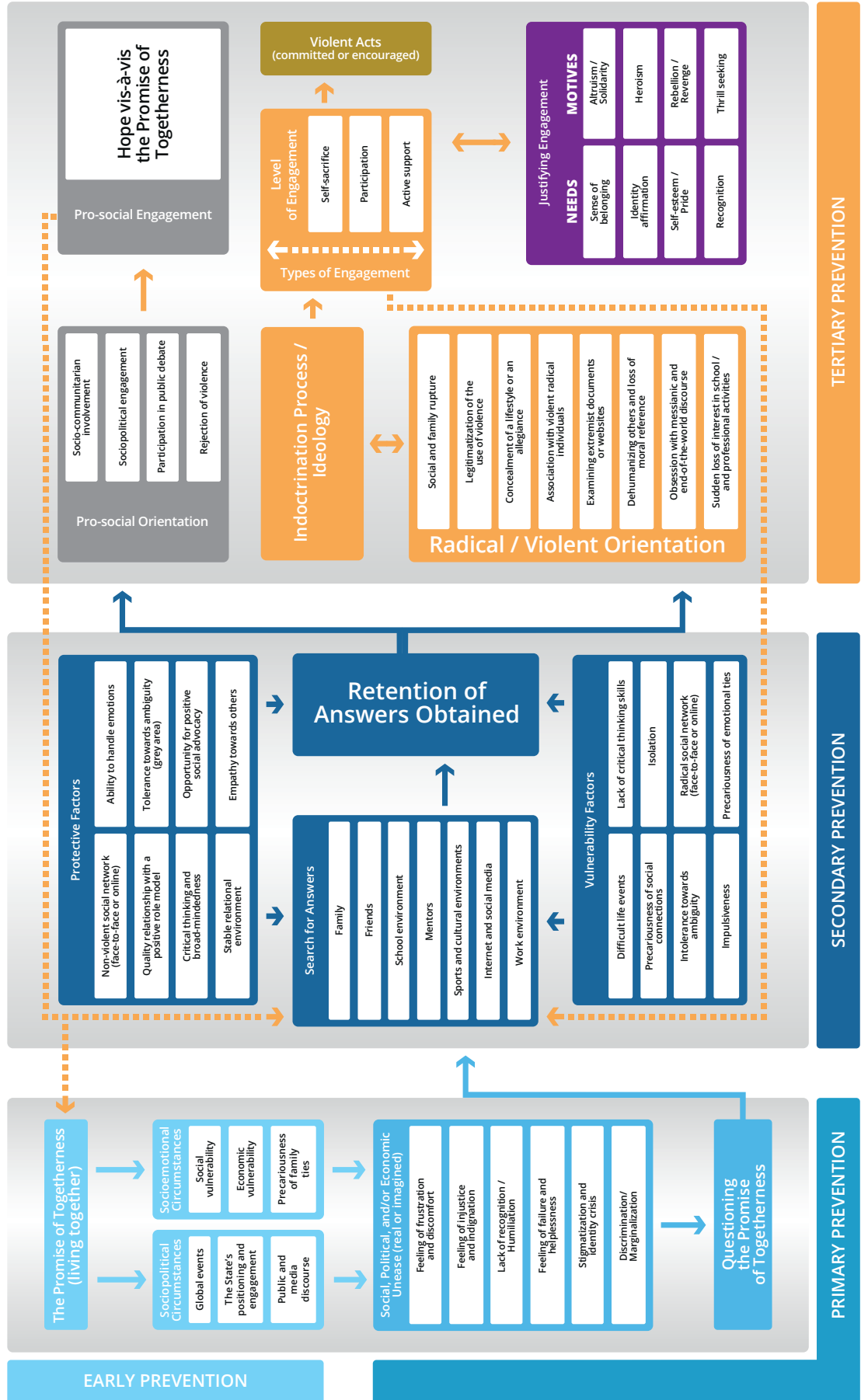
In order to better understand the processes of radicalization leading to violence, we can examine them from three different perspectives (see diagram below):

- Society as a breeding ground for radicalization
- The social environment as a barrier or driver for radicalization
- The motivations and personal dimensions of radical engagement



CENTRE FOR THE PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE

PROCESS OF RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE



3.4.1. SOCIETY AS A BREEDING GROUND FOR RADICALIZATION

A number of sociopolitical and socioemotional elements can play a part in shaping situations in which certain individuals experience social malaise. Global events (wars, conflicts, the political situation in a foreign country, etc.), the social and political positions adopted by the State (foreign policy, political decisions, social policies, etc.), and public and media discourse (social debates, controversies, etc.) are all factors that may indirectly contribute to the development of feelings of stigmatization, discrimination, frustration or humiliation. At the same time, social vulnerability, economic marginalization, and fragile family ties may reinforce feelings of failure and helplessness in those who experience them.

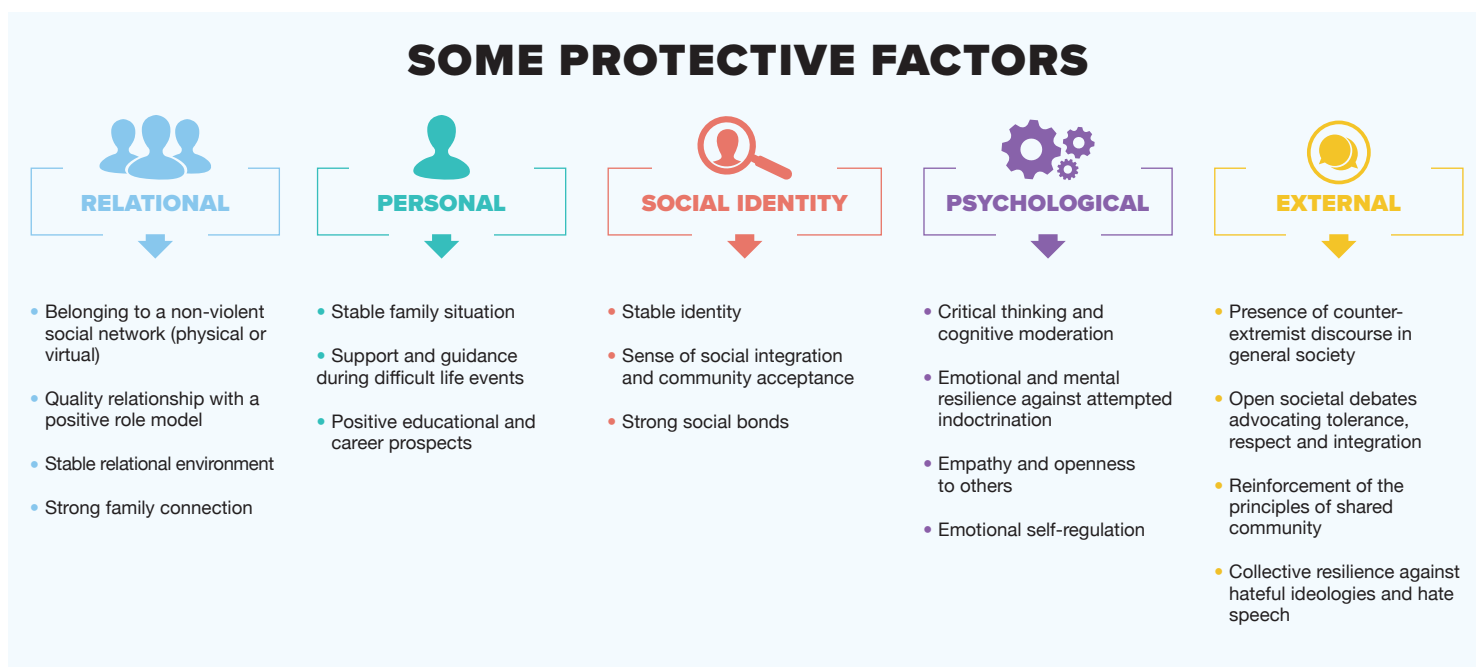
Often, it is the intersecting of these sociopolitical and socioemotional circumstances that ultimately leads individuals to question their place in society and their identification with the Promise of Togetherness. In addition, people and groups subjected to discrimination, Islamophobia, racism, or economic distress are more receptive to radical messages. In other words, because they resonate with an individual's personal experience, issues, social debates, and international and local events may all act as breeding grounds for radicalization.

3.4.2. THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AS A BARRIER OR DRIVER FOR RADICALIZATION

Individuals who experience identity malaise, or perceived injustice or marginalization, may sometimes seek answers and remedies for situations they deem to be unjust or in need of redress. Depending on the settings and social environments in which they find themselves, different factors may offer them worldviews with either a prosocial or, on the contrary, a radicalizing perspective—some even going so far as to espouse violent engagement. These factors include:

A. PROTECTIVE FACTORS

All individuals have protective factors that are either personal or environmental. All of these protective factors are separate levers that can be used to create a safety net around the individual:

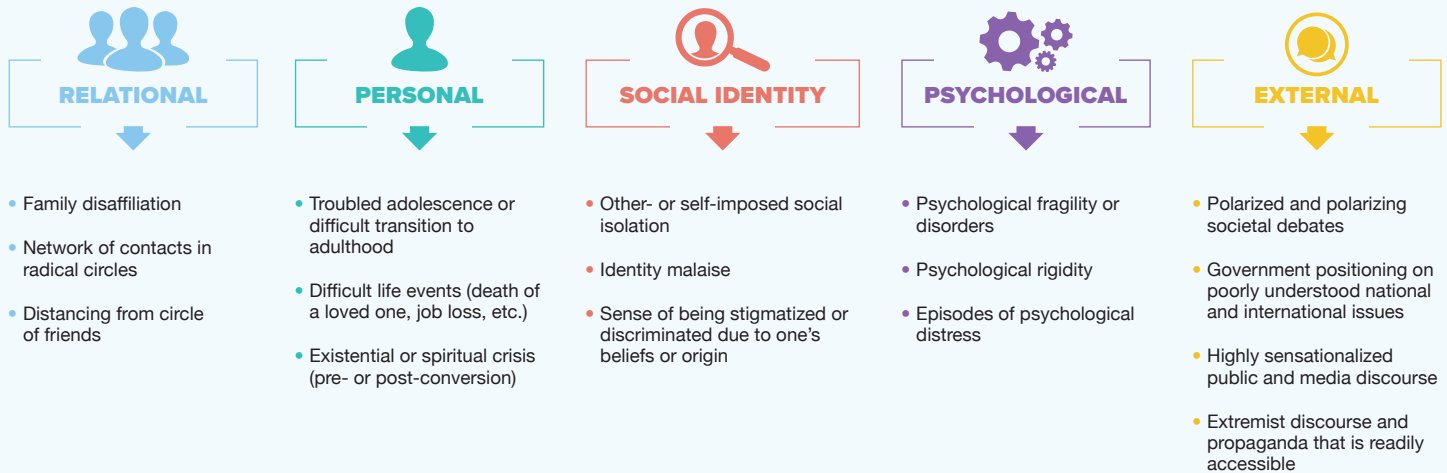


It should be pointed out that when vulnerability factors outweigh protective factors the imbalance can lead some individuals to adopt a simplistic ideological worldview with a reductive Manichean style of discourse.

B. VULNERABILITY FACTORS

Some people may exhibit different characteristics or be exposed to a number of environmental factors that make them more vulnerable to discourses of radicalization.

SOME VULNERABILITY FACTORS



3.4.3. THE MOTIVATIONS AND PERSONAL DIMENSIONS OF RADICAL ENGAGEMENT

For individuals undergoing a process of indoctrination, all interpretations of the world necessarily become ideological with a 'good' and a 'bad', an 'us' and a 'them', a 'pure' and an 'impure' group.³¹ Through this progressive dichotomization of the world, individuals start to dismiss systematically any competing explanations or alternative views of society. In the indoctrination process, ideology supplies the justifications and explanations that encourage devotees to take part in more radical forms of action, including active support for or participation in violent action.³² Thus, the radical shift some individuals make towards radical and sometimes violent engagement can be explained by their motivations and other personal dimensions.

However, it is possible to intervene even when the process is already underway. Violent radicalization is a polymorphous phenomenon, with different facets and multiple causes; as each case is unique, it calls for individualized interdisciplinary intervention, which must be aimed at building the individual's critical thinking skills and preventing withdrawal from the rest of the world.



Violent radicalization is a multi-stage process: individuals tend to break with their family and friends at the final stage.

In any case, it is important to differentiate between the radicalization process and the transition to violent action. An individual may very well be radicalized, and even believe in the legitimacy of violent action, without sliding into or actively taking part in violence.³³ Our experience shows that the factors that explain the process of radicalization are not necessarily the same as those that effect the transition to violence; this would seem to indicate that it is indeed possible to intervene even after the process is already underway.



BREEDING GROUNDS

FOR RADICALIZATION LEADING TO

VIOLENCE: THE SITUATION

IN QUEBEC

4. BREEDING GROUNDS FOR RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE: THE SITUATION IN QUEBEC

4.1. THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION: THE PLIGHT OF THE MUSLIM WORLD AND THE SYRIAN CONFLICT AS CAUSES FOR INDIGNATION

In the more specific case of the radicalization phenomena observed in the preparation of this report, the international context unquestionably carried a strong emotional charge for the young people in our study. For over a decade, international events have fed a repeated sense of humiliation, indignation, frustration, and injustice with respect to the way in which the Muslim world has been treated by the West,³⁴ a feeling widely shared by many young people of the Muslim faith throughout the world. A number of examples are regularly cited:

- the ‘War on Terror’ in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001;
- the ‘civilian casualties’ associated with military interventions or wars in the Middle East led by Western states, including the Iraq war of 2003;
- the Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prisons;
- the management of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Western states’ positions on the issue.

All these examples reinforce the narrative of humiliation and lack of recognition,³⁵ and are seen by some young people as symbols of the global oppression of Muslims. The emotions and moral outrage experienced as a result unquestionably serve as breeding grounds for radicalization.³⁶ This is compounded by the fact that the myths, misconceptions and dichotomous ideological discourses to which certain young Quebecers are exposed help reinforce the fantasy they hold of belonging to a victimized global Muslim community.³⁷

This perception of a moral affront is also the product of the program and ideological discourse disseminated worldwide by certain types of Muslim activism, of which the jihadist organizations are simply the most radical manifestation.³⁸ The beginning of the civil war in Syria—since transformed into a religious sectarian conflict—in early 2011 was no more than an additional catalyst for the sense of humiliation that was already very present for certain individuals.



The fundamental issue for Quebec is not the Caliphate, which will disappear sooner or later, but why these young Quebecers are feeling and expressing such outrage.

As evidenced by our interviews, as early as 2012-2013 these strong feelings of indignation and frustration were apparent in certain young people affected by the deterioration of the situation in Syria and by growing media coverage (especially on the Internet) of atrocities committed on Syrian civilians by Bashar el-Assad’s regime. At the same

time, the perceived leniency of political decisions by Western countries was taken by some as a further example of a Western ‘double standard’ regarding Muslim populations in the Middle East. Thus, for many, the perception of a lack of action by Western countries³⁹ helped reinforce a sense of abandonment and victimization, echoing the feelings of identity stigmatization, marginalization and disenchantment experienced by certain individuals in Western societies.⁴⁰

Similarly, while the international situation—especially the Syria-Iraq crisis—constitutes a particularly emotional state of affairs (and thus a favourable breeding ground for radicalization phenomena), the post 9/11 context has had a profound impact on the Muslim populations living in Western countries.⁴¹ The same is also true of debates on the place of Islam, and on the limitations of pluralism and of effective inclusion of Muslim populations in Western societies, all of which have contributed to the development of a climate of mistrust and Islamophobia,⁴² which has eroded certain individuals’ sense of inclusion and increased the defiance they may harbour towards the rest of society.⁴³

4.2. THE SITUATION IN QUEBEC: POLARIZED SOCIETAL DEBATES AROUND ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

In Quebec, a number of societal debates (for the most part, legitimate and necessary) in recent years have polarized public discourse around Islam and Muslims. The issues in question include:

a) Reasonable Accommodation

As the Bouchard-Taylor report notes: “The so-called wave of accommodation clearly touched a number of emotional chords among [...] Quebecers [...]. The result has been an identity counter-reaction movement that has expressed itself through the rejection of harmonization practices.”⁴⁴ In hindsight, the controversy surrounding reasonable accommodation and the heightened media coverage may well have represented the first time public opinion had focused so intensely on the place of Islam and Muslims in Quebec society.⁴⁵ Our research highlights the fact that certain individuals used the latent tension surrounding the debate on reasonable accommodations to promote their own militant agendas.

b) The “Charter of Quebec Values”

The “Charte affirmant les valeurs de laïcité et de neutralité religieuse de l’État ainsi que d’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes et encadrant les demandes d’accommodement”ⁱⁱⁱ bill (tabled in November 2013) also crystallized public and media opinions on Islam and Muslims in Quebec. Some popular beliefs were interpreted by certain young Quebecers of the Muslim faith as attacks against Islam, the fundamental cultural component of their identity.

During the interviews conducted for our field work, we noted that the debates around the Charter of Values bill were used by some individuals to fuel a polarizing discourse that was echoed by some young people.

Many of these young Muslim Quebecers saw the public debate on State religious neutrality not as a neutral debate, but as a further attack on the Muslim community. Some teachers spoke of holding discussions on the topic in class, and how they had observed serious misconceptions in some young people about the historical and cultural context in Quebec that served as the backdrop for the debate on the Charter of Quebec Values.



“At the time of the Charter debate, we held a number of debates in class. What I noticed was that many students had a very poor understanding of the history of Quebec and the religious past of Quebec society, meaning they didn’t understand where the Charter was coming from, why the debate was taking place, or the context behind it... and on the other hand, they were asking themselves: ‘Why are they bothering me with this?’ ...They viewed it in terms of: ‘I was doing fine, I was minding my own business and all of a sudden, there are people who don’t want me to wear the veil to school anymore.’ They were generally poorly informed... They thought they weren’t going to be allowed to wear the veil, or to do this or that in the street. It went really far...”

(College professor)

ⁱⁱⁱ Charte affirmant les valeurs de laïcité et de neutralité religieuse de l’État ainsi que d’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes et encadrant les demandes d’accommodement – Projet de loi n°60 (présentation du projet de loi 7 novembre 2013), 1^{ère} session, 40^{ème} légis, (QC) ; thereafter “Charter of Quebec Values”

The misunderstanding generated by the context of the debate around the “Charter of Quebec Values” as well as its highly emotional impact produced a polarization between a population that did not necessarily comprehend the scope or impact of the debate and young Muslims convinced they were being singled out due to their cultural and religious heritage:



“At first, I’d say it was mostly about the Charter... At that point, a lot of people were wondering: ‘Why are we being humiliated?’ ‘Why are we being put down?’ ‘Why is it always Muslims who are targeted?’”

(Close friend of a young Quebec man from Collège de Maisonneuve who left for Syria)

c) Personal experiences of polarization around Islam and Muslims in Quebec

Added to these sociopolitical conditions was the victimization or stigmatization directly experienced by certain young people or those close to them in the course of their daily lives. In the interviews, for example, we were told of people being bullied or attacked because of the veil and the supposed identification with radical Islam:



“In the street, a man yelled at us aggressively in front of my daughter to go back to where we came from because I was wearing the veil.”

(Mother of a young Quebec woman undergoing radicalization)

Unintentionally, the debate around the Charter of Quebec Values gave substance in a way to a malaise, real or sensed by certain young Muslims, which in turn served to reinforce strong feelings of identification, in some of them, with a Muslim community they perceived as being stigmatized and under attack.

4.3. RADICALIZATION AGENTS: SHADY CHARISMATIC FIGURES WHO FEED IDENTITY MALAISE AND FEELINGS OF VICTIMIZATION

The interviews conducted during our investigation pointed to the importance of peer networks and the peripheral presence of agents of radicalization. Most often, the latter are charismatic figures who attract young people looking for answers and meaning or who are easily influenced. Offering an alternative, provocative discourse that may otherwise be given little voice in the public sphere, radicalization agents possess considerable powers of attraction for certain young people. Thus, although violent radicalization is not necessarily their aim, they may nonetheless take advantage of the vulnerability of certain young people to weave a web allowing for the dissemination of a particular worldview. By pinpointing the uneasiness these young Quebecers feel about their identity in Quebec society, they increase the latter’s attraction to a form of ‘pure Islam’.⁴⁶

In fact, the ‘radical option’ is an idealization of a pure Islam. The discourse of these radicalization agents, as well as of the propaganda reproduced and distributed on social media, presents a ‘purified’ vision of Islam that resonates with the experiences some of these young people have had of stigmatization. This ‘radical option’ offers a new ‘pure’ identity that strikes a chord in

these vulnerable young Quebecers who, because they do not see themselves as full-fledged members of Quebec society, are all the more receptive to discourses that offers them alternative forms of identification—including a pure and absolute Muslim identity.

In other words, the polarizing ideological discourse of radicalization agents revolves around visceral rejection of Western mass culture—clothing, dietary practices, the Promise of Togetherness, etc.—which are declared to be contrary to ‘pure Islam’. Moreover, it fosters and sustains a form of self-segregation and the adoption of a ‘pure Islam’ in which any element that might ‘corrupt’ the individual’s new identity is violently rejected.⁴⁷ By positioning itself as a radical critique of the West, this type of discourse therefore encourages the rejection of a pluralist society and the adoption of a Manichean interpretation of the world.

These radicalization agents, whose magnetism is indisputable, are all the more attractive because they appear to be marginalized or rejected by the majority. Paradoxically, it is their unconventional and unseemly side that makes them all the more attractive to individuals in search of non-consensus based discourse:



“In the beginning, I found a lot of articles on him online that said he was a terrorist. But I quickly saw that wasn’t true. He is really kind and patient with me. I realized that the media were focusing on him for no reason. If he isn’t in prison, it’s because he hasn’t done anything.”

(Young friend of several young people who have left or attempted to leave for Syria)

In many instances, agents of radicalization played a very active role in stoking the anger and ‘sowing hatred’ in these young people by emphasizing Quebec society’s rejection of Muslims and Islam in general, as well as the impossibility for young Muslims to affirm their Muslim identity in Quebec:



“After the Charter, when there was the whole debate, he started to be more... how can I put it... to be harder in what he said... He said that only happened to Muslims, because we are always targeted. It was clear to him that the Charter was unacceptable. He said we were in a “country of kufr (infidels)” and we couldn’t stay here. At one point, he started talking about making ‘Hegira’ (migrating). He was convinced it wasn’t possible to be a Muslim in Quebec with the Charter.”

(Close friend of a young Quebec man who left for Syria)

Where do these agents of radicalization get these powers of persuasion that enable them to communicate their vision of the world so powerfully? We know the extent of the hold they have over the young people they seek out, which is often due primarily to the fact that the agents seem charismatic to the “entourage of individuals” that get swept up in their wake.⁴⁸ By creating a welcoming environment that resembles a “big family”, radicalization agents offer a setting that provides recognition and in which strong bonds and emotional ties develop quickly between those who are part of it.



“Some friends took me to ‘X’, and I really liked it. I finally felt I’d found my place there. I would go every week. It really was my favourite day of the week. Over time, we became a big family. We were really, really close.”

(Young Quebec woman who had wanted to go to Syria)

The bonds that develop occupy an increasingly large place in the young person’s life, sometimes becoming not just complementary to the family of origin, but actually taking its place in terms of values and loyalty. Given this context and the considerable influence they exercise, radicalization agents often play on the alternative discourse they offer the young people. They take advantage of young people’s respect and admiration for them as well as of the intense distrust of the media and attraction to conspiracy theories some young people may have, using their words to rile their listeners up rather than to actually tell them anything specific:



“He never directly told us to go to Syria, but he inspired us to go with the things he said about religion. He focused a lot on battles and martyrs, which naturally winds up making you want to go.”

(Young Quebec man who had wanted to go to Syria)

Radicalization agents can be difficult to detect as they generally operate within the parameters of the law, not necessarily legitimizing violent action. They only share their most radical ideas with a chosen few, keeping their true mission hidden in public and displaying a reassuring façade that poses no implicit threat. Like certain sects and fringe groups, they adopt an elitist system in which only a ‘privileged’ few are permitted to know about the religious interpretations deemed too ‘radical’ for the group: these individuals then act as ‘intermediary agents’ between the radicalization agents and the rest of the group, circulating unofficial information. Thus, there is both a ‘public’ and a ‘private’ discourse.



In Quebec, as in other Western countries, radical theses and extremist doctrines spread very easily.

The information gathered during the course of our investigation reveals some of the manipulative strategies employed by radicalization agents. These include a strong tendency by radicalization agents (in both the physical and virtual world) to encourage ‘distancing behaviours’ with close friends and family, such as:

- Converting secretly by telephone or in a stranger’s home, without telling loved ones;
- Cutting ties with friends and family after a conversion in which the latter are condemned for their bad values and beliefs;
- Stressing incompatibility with certain everyday practices and the settings they are in contact with (schools, work, etc.);
- Stressing the incompatibility of a Muslim identity and Quebec society, and the necessity of choosing between them.

Our study also revealed how different preachers and public figures manipulate young people's feelings of victimization in order to generate empathy for certain causes (such as the situation in Palestine or civil war in Syria) and to instill hostility towards everyone who does not share their worldview. This type of ideological discourse plays on the indignation and susceptibility of young people who may have been deeply affected by watching—sometimes almost obsessively—Internet videos of Muslim victims, especially women and children, in Middle Eastern conflicts:



“There was a preacher who didn't stop telling us we were hypocrites for staying there without doing anything while our Muslim brothers and sisters were being killed in Syria. He didn't directly tell us to go there, but it was as if it was to make us feel guilty about doing nothing. I think hearing that had an impact on some people.”

(Close friend of young Quebec men and women who left for Syria)

This manipulation of feelings is combined with belligerent rhetoric that creates guilt about not being more actively involved in redressing the injustice of the situation. Hammered into their brains, the rhetoric causes some young people to want to join groups that legitimize violence (such as the IS) not only to fight directly alongside them, but also to take part in humanitarian efforts to protect the civilian population on the ground, even acting as recruiters or propagandists for the jihadist movements.

The issue here is obviously neither the empathy anyone may feel for victims of the conflicts in the Middle East or Syria, nor social or political activism, but rather the manipulation of feelings of guilt to incite people to break with the Promise of Togetherness.

4.4. THE DESIRE FOR IDENTITY AFFIRMATION AND THE ATTRACTION TO 'PURE ISLAM'

The radicalization trajectory of some Collège de Maisonneuve students and of other young people with whom the CPRLV has worked is characterized by a process of identity affirmation that takes the form of attraction for a 'pure Islam'.⁴⁹ This is corroborated by the research, which unanimously finds there to be no “radicalization without identification”.⁵⁰ Indeed, many such young people display the sudden desire for a sense of belonging to the Muslim community, not on a spiritual level but on an identity level.⁵¹ This need to identify with a group is normal in adolescence: however, when the thirst to be and to belong is contaminated with guilt and hatred (as we have seen above), it can lead some young people to want to transform Islam into an identity shield that both 'protects' and 'empowers' them.

During the course of our interviews, a common trajectory became apparent, that of a young person who does not start off coming from an extremely religious family or initially display any special interest in religion. Instead, those around them describe these young people as being not particularly serious Muslims, and even concerned with behaviours and practices associated with Muslim religiosity. The following description of a young girl by her close friend speaks to this distinction regarding religious identity:



“She was a Muslim like everyone else. She observed Ramadan with her family, didn’t drink alcohol, etc. For her, religion was a question of tradition... At one point, her behaviour started to change, and after that, it wasn’t the same anymore.”

(Close friend of a young Quebec woman who left for Syria)

As we observed in our interviews with young people, for many of them, their connection to religion initially has more to do with traditions tied to the cultural practices observed by the family.

- Consequently, knowledge of religious precepts is often superficial.
- For most of these young people, religion occupies a very secondary place in their lives until the end of their adolescence.
- Strict adherence to religious teachings is often not at all a priority in determining daily behaviours.

One young man whose friend had gone to Syria provided this description of how his friend had been during adolescence:



“He smoked joints with us from time to time. It didn’t seem to be a problem for him at the time. Then, he changed at one point. He began to stop smoking, and then he started telling us to stop saying vulgar things because it was “haram” (forbidden).”

(Close friend of a young Quebec man who left for Syria)

Despite sharing the same social environment, young people will sometimes respond differently to radicalization pressures based on their personalities, which are often shaped by their individual paths, social environments, and encounters and the personal contacts they may have in everyday life. Several vectors of vulnerability help explain how this reaction may vary from one person to the next:

a) Difficult life events

The attractiveness of a ‘pure’ Muslim identity model can be due to personal experience, such as tragic events (the death of a loved one, an assault or victimization incident, etc.) or complex social situations (family conflict, etc.) Individuals who have been deeply affected by a difficult experience may feel a strong need to subscribe to an identity they perceive as offering them protection or a meaningful way of viewing the situation in which they find themselves.

b) The need for acceptance

For others, their attraction to a ‘pure Islam’ has more to do with a desire to fit in with a group of peers, neighbourhood friends or students from the same school who share the same norms, way of life and beliefs; the need for social acceptance or to be heard. The group’s influence and role becomes vital to learning and integrating the ideology: selflessness and taking part in a shared adventure reduce feelings of abandonment, isolation and worthlessness.

c) The need to react or provoke

For some, the attraction of ‘pure Islam’ is linked to a desire to adopt a ‘reactive identity’⁵² or a ‘provocative identity’⁵³ in social contexts in which Islam and Muslims may be subjected to stigmatization in the public sphere⁵⁴—or, in the case of young converts, within the family:



“I think a lot of it was because she was trying to find herself. She was looking for an identity or something to belong to... You know, there are those people who are in the tradition and those who decide to give it all up. In her case, I think at some point she needed to come to back to Islam, because she was looking for something... She was trying to find out what she was.”

(Close relative of a young radicalized Quebec woman)

A similar observation can be made of the young people the CPRLV works with, for whom adopting a ‘reactive Muslim identity’ can be the result of feeling rejected by Quebec society as a whole or, more specifically, by loved ones after conversion to Islam. In some cases, family members’ lack of acceptance of young people’s conversion to Islam together with a very superficial understanding of religious precepts can lead young converts to view their new religious identity as a protective shell against an outside world they consider hostile.⁵⁵ In other cases, the adoption of a reactive identity is largely a response to the feelings of humiliation and identity-related stigmatization cited above as breeding grounds for radicalization: a pure Islamic identity becomes a means of erasing scars and reversing contempt.⁵⁶

Indeed, in the context of what some authors describe as highly secularized societies, identity markers associated with Islam become politicizing and polarizing issues in public debate,⁵⁷ resulting in the development in some Muslims of perceptible feelings of stigmatization or rejection of their identity.⁵⁸ These direct experiences of stigmatization and Islamophobia combine with feelings or perceptions of the collective victimization of the Muslim identity, especially as a result of the Syrian conflict. There are therefore a multitude of explanations for the trajectory that leads certain young people to want to reaffirm their adherence to what some call ‘pure Islam’.

4.5. TOWARDS THE RIGIDIFICATION OF IDENTITY

For some, the identity malaise they experience evolves into difficulty affirming their identity as Quebec Muslims. Feeling more Muslim than Quebecer, they lock themselves into an increasingly rigid identity that results in a gradual acceptance of their inability to fully espouse their Muslim identity within the context of Quebec society. This increasingly rigid identity and adherence to a “pure Islam” leads them to adopt “a complete and total vision of religion that goes against the values of the democratic society and which are considered non-Islamic or anti-Islamic.”⁵⁹



He was afraid of everything that was a religious interpretation... At one point, he began saying one must not listen to people who try to interpret the Koran; one should only follow what is written. He also detested imams like Koné because, in his opinion, they were people who made modifications and didn't really follow Islam. He detested Tariq Ramadan as well, because he was convinced he wanted to change Islam.... After a certain point, he would only talk about religion... Everything, absolutely everything, had to do with religion.”

(Close friend of a young Quebec man who left for Syria)

As they become ensconced in this consolidated identity, some young people find the sense of having a duty to leave becomes twice as strong, due on the one hand to international events (such as the Syrian conflict) putting the security of fellow Muslims at risk, and on the other to their own daily experiences of stigmatization:



“He considered it necessary to go out of solidarity with the people being massacred in Syria. He seemed to feel that only the Islamic State was concerned about the plight of Muslims. At one point, he said they were the only ones really helping Muslims and that no one else cared about the Muslims being killed in Palestine, Myanmar and elsewhere... In his opinion, that really was the case. And he said that anyway, he couldn't live here as a Muslim... “

(Close friend of a young Quebec man who had left for Syria)

The experience of being stigmatized is reinterpreted as echoing the humiliation experienced by other Muslim populations around the world. As opposed to situations that can objectively be described as incidents of exclusion, what is involved here is not the direct experience of being a victim of exclusion, but rather the experience of feeling stigmatized on behalf of others who share the same identity. Moreover, far from heralding a more intensely spiritual focus, the increasingly 'rigid identity' results instead in increased politicization and militancy. It is no longer simply a question of feeling Muslim, but rather of feeling like standard bearers of the 'true' Muslim identity and social worldview that goes with it.⁶⁰



“For many of them, religiosity is more a question of identity than religion. Many of these young people don't even pray. Much of what they do, they do through unconscious imitation. The girls wear the hijab to fit in with the group. The boys have other ways of joining together or recognizing one another, but it's sort of like a fashion statement.”

(Secondary school administrator)

Thus, the transition to 'pure Islam' is expressed through changes in practices, positions and expressions. The process combines real adherence to a pure Islamic identity, bandwagon behaviour (doing what one's friends and other people do) and a 'rebel identity' (protesting the stigmatization of the Muslim identity). As several researchers have pointed out: “This ideologization does not

imply the beginning of a rigorous practice of religion, but transforms religious codes into ideological structures [and] leads, on the one hand, to the construction of boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims and, on the other hand, to a hierarchization between good and bad Muslims. This indoctrination leads young people to break more or less radically with the values of the surrounding society.”⁶¹



“At one point, we could see that he had changed. He became much more religious. He would only use religious arguments when he spoke. He told us tattoos were not good, that one shouldn’t be vulgar because it’s not consistent with being in the religion [...] He started to be distant with friends. He even stopped having anything to do with several of them because he felt they didn’t think the same way he did. He said they had ‘lost their way’... The opposite was also true: several of his friends began to distance themselves from him, because they didn’t want to hear his arguments.”

(Close friend of a young Quebec man who had left for Syria)

Considering themselves morally superior due to their new identity, and therefore on a ‘righteous path’ compared to other Muslims, some young people become increasingly rigid in their understanding of the social world, and less and less tolerant of anything that does not fit in with their worldview. Many change their habits with regard to sports or school, eschewing all participation in activities that involve both sexes or are multicultural:



“I don’t want to do karate anymore, because I would have to bow to a master, which I don’t want to do.”

(Youth undergoing radicalization)

This hardening of beliefs is also not unrelated to the emergence of conflict in certain families—including Muslim ones—who do not want their daughters to wear the veil, for example, or are unwilling to accept the introduction of more restrictive religious practices into the family.



“Religion became really important to her. She was on Facebook, and she would ‘like’ all the Islamic events that took place. It wasn’t that she was radical, but she’d changed. She started wearing the jilbab and no longer spoke to boys, and she really followed the religion... It had become the most important thing to her.”

(Close friend of a young radicalized Quebec woman)

This pure Islamic identity becomes so fundamental to some that it becomes their sole source of motivation, a comprehensive blueprint for daily life. It makes reconciliation of the individual's beliefs and social relationships increasingly complex. By infiltrating all aspects of their life, 'pure Islam' becomes a growing source of friction with the outside world, whether it be with family, friends, or school. Nothing is good enough or sufficiently Islamic for them: virtually everything is considered an attack or a perceived attack on the identity they have espoused. On a number of occasions, close friends of radicalized youth mentioned the latter's growing estrangement from old circles of friends and acquaintances:



“Being Muslim was everything to him... You can't imagine how big it was. So he could only see people as enemies [...] He unfriended tons of friends on Facebook because one day he posted something about how democracy was incompatible with Islam. All sorts of people responded that his post was ridiculous... but he just chose to unfriend everyone who disagreed with him.”

(Close friend of a young radicalized Quebec man)

A photograph of a stone wall with a sign that reads "COLLEGE DE MAISONNEUVE". The sign is made of dark metal with raised letters. The wall is made of irregular, grey and brown stones. There are some faint, semi-transparent overlays on the right side of the image, including a large white shape and a circular inset showing a close-up of the stone wall.

COLLEGE

DE

MAISONNEUVE

RADICALIZATION OF A GROUP
OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT COLLÈGE
DE MAISONNEUVE: UNDERSTANDING
THE PHENOMENON

5. RADICALIZATION OF A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT COLLÈGE DE MAISONNEUVE : UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON

Naturally, given that young people are one of the segments of the population most vulnerable to radicalization, the places they go to every day are ideal locations for radicalization agents to target. This of course applies to schools. Understanding the way in which Quebec schools have dealt with incidents involving radicalization or with the characteristics of the young people involved in such incidents helps us develop the means necessary to take pre-emptive action and actively prevent the phenomenon.

5.1. SCHOOLS AND RADICALIZATION: A TOP PRIORITY

On an international level, a number of cases involving the radicalization of young people in schools have been made public recently.

- United Kingdom – In February 2015, three fifteen- and sixteen-year-old schoolgirls from the Bethnal Green Academy in London left to join the ranks of the Islamic State (ISIS).⁶² The trio of young girls was following in the footsteps of another fifteen-year-old girl from the same school who had gone to Syria in December 2014.⁶³ In March 2015, the passports of five other young girls, also 15 and 16 years of age and who had expressed the intention of going to Syria, were seized and confiscated by British authorities at a judge's orders. The young girls were students at the Bethnal Green Academy, the same school attend by the girls who had left the United Kingdom in previous months to go to Syria.
- France. – Over 857 cases of suspected radicalization were documented in France in 2015 by the country's Ministry of Education.⁶⁴ These cases or potentials instances of violent radicalization were reported by primary and secondary school staff throughout the country.
- Canada. – Closer to Quebec, an Islamic school in Mississauga, Ontario coped with the departure of four of its female students for Syria in the fall of 2015.⁶⁵

Far from being a fallback option, schools are particularly vulnerable to radicalization leading to violence. In fact, given that they bring together young people in the process of building their social and personal identities and that they serve as venues for contact and interaction between young people, it is fairly normal that schools would be affected more than other places by the phenomenon of radicalization.

However, schools and the educational community are also front-line players in prevention with young people and vigilance concerning potential instances of radicalization leading to violence.⁶⁶ In light of students' daily interactions with school personnel (counsellors, teaching and educational support staff), one can readily understand why school staff members are in the best position to detect troubling behaviours and signs that individuals are undergoing radicalization—be it sudden withdrawal or self-segregation, brutal breaks with friends, school or family; or increasingly radical, dehumanizing, or even violent discourse.

This is the real paradox: if schools are the preferred venues nowadays for sparking radicalization movements, they also represent the ideal arenas for implementing prevention plans to actively counter such radicalization.

5.2. FROM EUROPE TO QUEBEC: A COMPARATIVE PROFILE OF RADICALIZED YOUTH

Most studies on radicalization trajectories emphasize the diversity and heterogeneity of individual profiles.⁶⁷ It appears virtually impossible to reduce the characteristics of youth undergoing radicalization to a simple series of sociodemographic, personal or psychological elements that would allow for the production of distinct, clearly identifiable profiles. However, although the scientific consensus is that, strictly speaking, there are no psychological, social, cultural or social determinants that distinguish individuals on a path to violent radicalization,⁶⁸ it may be helpful nonetheless to mention a number of aspects repeatedly observed in the current global context.

Examination of the scientific literature on violent radicalization shows that the Quebec context differs from the European context in a variety of ways. Sociodemographic elements that are highly visible in Europe may not necessarily be important in Quebec, and vice versa. However, despite the numerous differences, there are also similarities.

a) Similarities in Quebec and European Characteristics

One of the points of convergence between Europe and Quebec is the highly youthful dimension of the phenomenon.⁶⁹ This is in no way similar to profiles from previous decades, as the individuals currently identified as radicalized are far younger than those in the past.

It should be pointed out that profiles of radicalized individuals vary enormously in both Europe and Quebec—as much with respect to ethnocultural background as to sociodemographic characteristics or criteria such as level of education, family situation, or employment history. In both cases, the diversity of individual radicalization profiles speaks to the crosscutting nature of this phenomenon in our societies.

b) Differences between Quebec and European Characteristics

Until recently, the predominant model of radicalization in Europe seemed to be the so-called “disaffiliation”⁷⁰ model resulting from the high social marginalization of European immigrant youth in certain countries. This model is based on the social exclusion and feelings of victimization experienced by a significant portion of young people in European societies.⁷¹ In this model, violent Islamist or jihadist radicalization is shaped by the combination of hatred of a society the individuals experience as being profoundly unjust towards them⁷² and an identity seen as antagonistic to the rest of society.

There are considerable differences between the European—especially French—model of so-called ‘disaffiliation’ radicalization and its Quebec counterpart. First, the social positioning of individuals who undergo radicalization in Quebec is not, except in rare exceptions, that of individuals who are marginalized or who can objectively be said to be socially excluded. Second, while the presence of a prior history of delinquency has been repeatedly observed in the European context,⁷³ this element is practically non-existent in the Quebec context. In Europe, the ‘delinquency’ factor is also often accompanied by a ‘prison incarceration’ factor.⁷⁴ These two aspects do however appear to be evolving and becoming less and less significant in light of the Syria-Iraq crisis.⁷⁵

In Quebec, social marginalization and delinquency do not appear to be key elements in the radicalization trajectories observed to date by the CPRLV. On the contrary, our sociodemographic analyses point to a second model of radicalization associated with integrated individuals from middle-or even upper-class backgrounds.

5.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF RADICALIZED YOUTH RECEIVING COUNSELLING FROM THE CPRLV

The following sociodemographic elements stand out in the profile of young people with whom the CPRLV has worked since March 2015:

a) Barriers to conversion

While conversion is not, in and of itself a distinctive sociodemographic characteristic of radicalization trajectories, some converts seem more susceptible than others to violent radicalization. Limited religious knowledge, the lack of proper guidance from those around the convert, rejection by family members, and lack of access to positive, moderate religious role models often explain the significant number of converts undergoing violent radicalization.

b) Family conflict

Many of these individuals have conflictual or dysfunctional family relationships; some are due to long-standing issues while others may be directly related to the individual's conversion. The conversion of young adolescents to Islam may result in considerable family friction or conflict, laying the groundwork for misunderstandings and rifts between family members and opening the door to outside influences, which may make the convert more receptive to radicalization.

c) Personal fragility

The psychological fragility of some individuals makes them more likely than others to be susceptible to ideological discourse.⁷⁶ Episodes of depression or of other types of psychological distress constitute periods of vulnerability and possible occasions for radicalization.

5.4. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RADICALIZED STUDENTS FROM COLLÈGE DE MAISONNEUVE

Based on an examination of the group of radicalized students from Collège de Maisonneuve, it is possible to make a number of observations concerning the various sociodemographic traits characteristic of the group.

It should be remembered that this group of eleven individuals consists of:

- a) five young people who fled to Syria;
- b) four young people arrested at the Montréal-Trudeau airport;
- c) two young people in prison while awaiting trial for terrorist activities.

It will be apparent from the following observations that the group's characteristics are both typical and atypical of cases of radicalization observed elsewhere in the world.

a) Age

Although radicalization affects individuals of diverse backgrounds and origin, from a broad range of family or social situations, the one common element observed nowadays in the analysis of radicalization trajectories pertains to age. Radicalization leading to violence is an issue associated primarily with adolescence and early adulthood. Being a period of manifold questions and doubts, identity crises and, at times, increased vulnerability, this age bracket is particularly conducive to a whole series of major changes—including radical indoctrination. In the case of Collège de Maison-neuve, the students in the group were 18 and 19 years old, confirming the extremely youthful nature of the observed phenomenon.⁸²

b) Gender

The fact that the majority of the group is female—six women versus five men—is indicative of the growing role of young women in radicalization leading to violence. It also demonstrates the importance of paying greater attention gender in attempting to understand radicalization trajectories.⁷⁷

Indeed, while women may not necessarily become involved in violence itself, strictly speaking, or join up for the same reasons as men, they may still become active members of violent extremist groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS).⁷⁸ Without necessarily directly taking part in the violent actions of such groups, they may provide support or serve as recruiters. Thus, it is extremely important to consider that conditions, motivations and engagement factors may vary according based on gender.⁷⁹ It is essential that this dimension be taken into account especially as it continues to be under-investigated, even today, in academic and practical spheres alike.^{iv}

c) Marital status

Another element of interest is the presence in the group of several couples. Emotional contagion in couples is a well-documented factor in radicalization trajectories.⁸⁰ University studies on radicalization processes have long demonstrated the role played by family or intimate relationships in the dynamics of mutual contagion involved in ideological indoctrination—dynamics that can result in incidents of violent radicalization.

Likewise, the presence of siblings or members of the same family in the waves of departures for Syria has been amply noted by observers.⁸¹ It is important therefore to integrate this data into our analysis of the radicalization process.

d) Education

Contrary to an all-too-common belief, radicalized individuals do not always have low levels of education, nor have they necessarily experienced academic or professional failures.⁸³

While such situations do exist and may serve as catalysts for a radicalization process under certain specific conditions and situations,^v it is clear that virtually all the young people identified as belonging to the Collège de Maisonneuve group could, on the contrary, be described as examples of academic success: most had excellent grades and were enrolled in fields traditionally associated with academic success, primarily the sciences.

^{iv} The Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV), the Secrétariat à la Condition Féminine and the Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF) will submit a report to the Government of Quebec in the summer of 2016 dealing specifically with the topic of gender-based analysis of radicalization leading to violence.

^v Contrary to the “disaffiliated youth” profile developed by some European researchers, which associates radicalized individuals with experiences of academic or professional failure, the young people in our group of studies were not socially marginalized and did not have history of delinquency. See: Farhad KHOSROKHAVAR, “Les trajectoires des jeunes djihadistes français”, *Études*, no 6, June 2015, p. 34-38.

Several of the students wanted to become doctors or nurses. It is important to draw attention to this altruistic, medical vocation, as it may have made Syria even more attractive to these young people. The opportunity to put a passion for humanitarian work into practice by applying previously-learned skills is an incentive for engagement that must be taken into consideration when analysing drivers for radicalization. From this perspective, it is important to reiterate that involvement in violent activity itself was not necessarily the primary objective of these young people, even though some may have joined violent groups.

e) Religiosity

All of the students in the group either were born in Quebec or immigrated to the province at an early age. They came from relatively stable family backgrounds with moderate Muslim religious practices. This sociodemographic element is important: it helps illustrate the complexity of the identity positioning some young people undergo when navigating between a family/community culture and a societal culture that may at times present them with contradictory models and make demands on them that are difficult to reconcile.⁸⁴

Through our interviews, we were able to observe the extremely high identity anxiety experienced by some Quebec adolescents of Muslim faith—an anxiety that can be aggravated by awareness of negative views adopted by society and the media.⁸⁵

Since 2006, Islam and Muslims have been viewed in Quebec through an often unfavourable media prism of controversy, as has been the case in Europe. All too often, they are associated with international situations (conflicts in the Middle East, terrorism, etc.) and local issues (demands for accommodations, honour killings, etc.), that reinforce prejudices and spread negative stereotypes about Muslims.⁸⁶ The populist tack taken by certain elements of the Quebec media—that raise the specter of the “Islamist threat” or of Islam jeopardizing religious neutrality⁸⁷—has helped create a climate that is uncomfortable for many citizens of the Muslim faith who may feel targeted by this frequently overly simplistic discourse. As was Rachad Antonius pointed out by in 2006: [Translation] “Such media representations have an enormous, generally underestimated, impact on the sense of belonging and dignity of citizens from Muslim and Arab communities across the political spectrum.”⁸⁸

Feeling misrepresented and, above all, singled out in the media, members of the Muslim community may have the impression that their voice is heard only when they are obliged to explain acts of violence perpetrated by individuals claiming to be loyal to Islam, or to apologize for terrorist acts they have neither supported nor committed.

In the course of our investigation, several young Quebecers of Muslim faith spoke of the pressure they had to endure as a result of malicious media reports about Islam and Quebec Muslims. This identity vulnerability then translates into questions about their place in Quebec society, the compatibility of Muslim and Western identities, and how to reconcile the identity demands of one’s family circle and community with those of the public sphere, in particular, one’s school.⁸⁹ Indeed, almost all the radicalization trajectories studied contain a break of sorts with religious

identification and practices of the subject's family.

5.5. CONTEXTUAL ASPECTS OF RADICALIZATION IN SCHOOLS: WHY THE COLLÈGE DE MAISONNEUVE?

It must be clearly stated from the outset that we have absolutely no intention of putting Collège de Maisonneuve on trial here: all the school staff members involved acted in good faith and with professionalism to resolve an increasingly difficult situation. The tension experienced was the same as that encountered in many other settings. Unfortunately, numerous internal and external factors combined to intensify the radicalization process. The aim of this study is to understand these factors and put them in the proper perspective so we can be better equipped in the future.

5.5.1. DEALING WITH RELIGION PRACTICES

Our investigation revealed how religious practices and institutional neutrality may sometimes come into conflict with one another in schools. These two opposing poles are a source of debate and friction in many Quebec schools.

This raises the following questions: What exactly should be the place of religious expression in schools? What guidelines should be used to regulate it? How should the situation be approached to ensure disagreements are peacefully resolved? It should be noted that unfortunately these questions are not always addressed in as calm and depoliticized a manner as they should be.

However, it is essential that religious practices be treated in a coherent and transparent manner based on criteria established by the government. Proper management of elements that may appear incompatible is crucial to the preservation of the fundamental principles of the Promise of Togetherness. As examples, we shall examine the following requests for adaptations, which were at the heart of the tensions at Collège de Maisonneuve.

a) The transformation of a meditation space into a venue for ideological preaching

In recent years, there have been repeated requests for accommodations due to the legitimate desire, expressed by a significant number of young people, to be able to observe their religion practices more fully within the context of the college. The Collège de Maisonneuve has traditionally responded to these requests on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the different constraints each accommodation would entail.

This led to the creation of the 'Source', a space for meditation and renewal that was set up in a stairwell in 2012 and was open to all students at the college. Despite its peaceful vocation, the Source gradually became the focus of considerable dissent and a major point of tension in the school community.

Despite the presence of two animators, the Source does not appear to have had any specific operating guidelines. This allowed for its unrestricted use by a small group of students who turned it into a denominational gathering place, gradually transforming the Source into a venue for ideological preaching. Many mentioned witnessing dogmatic discourse and toxic discussions tinged with radicalism. The change in the Source's vocation heightened tensions within the institution among students and certain members of the college's personnel.

Some staff members report that the Source gradually began to open its doors to people from outside the Collège de Maisonneuve (including individuals who were neither students nor members of the educational community), especially during Friday prayers. The same sort of

freedom of movement has also been observed in other institutions in Quebec.

Unquestionably, the appropriation of the Source's space by a small group of individuals wanting to turn it into a denominational area only increased some staff members' feelings of being presented with a *fait accompli* in the form of what was perceived to be an unauthorized religious accommodation inside Collège de Maisonneuve.

b) Tensions around the provision of a room for Friday prayers

Given the growing commotion around the Source, in 2013 a small group of Muslim students asked to be provided with a room for Friday prayers. In the spirit of accommodation and based on a consensus, the college's administration agreed to allow the group to use an unoccupied classroom, which was intended to provide them with a space similar to the Source. However, this concession also came with an obligation to renew the request at the beginning of each term.

Some staff members responded angrily to this measure, feeling that the provision of a denominational space, albeit temporary, in a public educational institution contravened the religious neutrality Quebec schools are expected to maintain. This reaction generated more friction in the college, some of it generational. People we spoke with described a rift of sorts in the school community between a group of students convinced they were within their rights to ask for accommodations from the school (a denominational space) and a part of the Collège de Maisonneuve's personnel who refused any compromise with respect to the principle of religious neutrality in schools.

After the events of the winter of 2015, the administration decided not to renew the prayer space, citing problems resulting from the departure of a certain number of Collège de Maisonneuve students for Syria, the security issues posed by the gatherings, as well as both the acrimony generated by the use of the space for faith-related purposes and a number of inconveniences occasioned by this use (the noise level during prayers, the comings and goings, etc.)

5.5.2. THE DETERIORATION OF THE CLIMATE OF THE PROMISE OF TOGETHERNESS

As well as the frustrations around spaces for faith-related practices in the Collège de Maisonneuve, the deterioration of the Promise of Togetherness also played an important role in the radicalization of certain young people at the college. Some students who felt their rights and identity were not being respected gradually entered into open conflict with staff members and other students, thereby compounding existing tensions. This deterioration in the climate at the Collège de Maisonneuve can be explained by a number of factors, particularly the following:

a) Intolerance and bullying

A small core group of more militant students that spent time at both the prayer room and the Source seems to have played a role in the radicalization of other students at the college. Comprised primarily of boys (despite the notable presence of a small number of girls), the group tried to impose its more militant reading of Islam on other students, and its members stated that the tensions around the Source were another example of Islamophobia aimed at them. Their attitude towards certain staff members and other students became increasingly intolerant.

b) Outside influences

The more militant students had been influenced by people outside the school who had played a key role in their identitarian closure and indoctrination. By encouraging the students' view of themselves as victims of discrimination at the Collège de Maisonneuve, and by linking this situation to the stigmatization of certain Muslims in North America and Europe or with the plight of Muslim victims in the Middle East, the agents of radicalization manipulated these young people and led them to adopt behaviours that were increasingly intransigent and incompatible with the Promise of Togetherness.

c) The paradox of communion and antagonism

As they became increasingly isolated, some of these young people developed a heightened sense of solidarity and complicity inspired by a shared vision of the world (both inside the Collège de Maisonneuve, and on the outside), which resulted in a number of changes, including the adoption of some very radical views. This progressive communitarianization along ethno-confessional lines also served to reinforce the prejudice that some of the college's students held about one another: it increased distrust and highlighted differences, causing the Promise of Togetherness to further deteriorate.

d) The reaction of the Collège de Maisonneuve community to the wave of departures for Syria

As more and more students left for Syria, the Collège de Maisonneuve community found itself in a unique situation. This is why it was difficult to immediately comprehend the issues at play in these events, or especially to know the proper response to offer the student population. Some teachers and other staff members did not know what to do, and did not feel heard or supported. This was clearly the cause of considerable suffering, with teachers stating they felt powerless to deal with the drama affecting their college.

The administration of the Collège de Maisonneuve did not stand idly by. It implemented a variety of initiatives to provide support for its personnel, but clearly the best educational methods, like the best preventative measures, may sometimes not be sufficient to restore inclusiveness to the community.



“When the first wave of students tried to leave Quebec, we were given a lesson on the jihad in class. Even the final papers were on the jihad. I didn't feel good in class any more, and I felt as if my religious beliefs were under attack.”

(Young student from the Collège de Maisonneuve)

5.6. INFLUENCE OF PEERS AND THE BANDWAGON EFFECT

The Collège de Maisonneuve students who are the subject of this report were extremely consistent from a moral point of view, which is what led them to distance themselves from everyone who did not think the way they did. Gradually persuaded they were on a righteous path and living a sort of “truth”, they retreated into a bubble in a form of “self-segregation”, distancing themselves from any competing, divergent or different views.

Given that the radicalization process within an existing network is reinforced by the solidarity and trust that progressively develops among its members,⁹⁰ it seems logical to believe that some vulnerable or undecided students may have been influenced by more ideological young people (either enrolled in the college or from outside it) with whom they had developed bonds of trust and friendship, as little by little they embraced their discourse and beliefs.

The observation that family ties and personal relationships are key drivers of radicalization appears repeatedly in the literature. Several close friends of radicalized youth from the college stressed the strength of the bonds between them. It is clear that most of the young people who left for Syria or attempted to do so knew each other and had been friends since high school. Others met at the Collège de Maisonneuve or through a network of mutual friends that exists to this day.



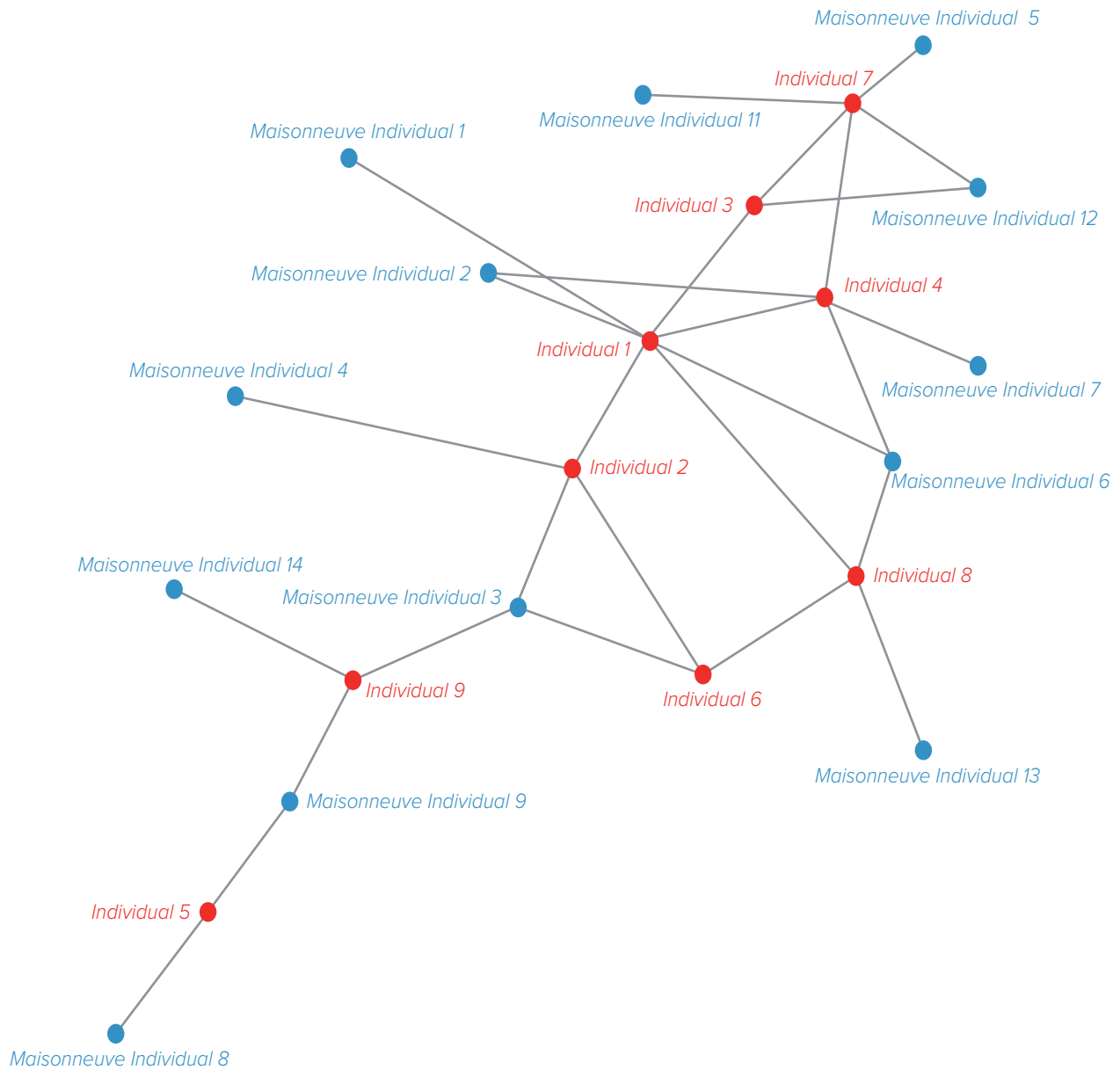
“Those guys were always together. That’s why they left together. They knew each other, they went to the same places, and that’s why they decided to leave at the same time.”

(Close relative of some young women and men who left for Syria)

The close ties between these individuals who had known each other for a long time— some of whom were dating one another—caused the small group to forge ahead, caught up in what some researchers call a “spiral of encapsulation”⁹¹ and self-persuasion. Thus, in the case of the young people from the Collège de Maisonneuve, internal ties played a more important role than ideological factors in their taking action and leaving for Syria.

The following diagram^{vi} shows a tight knit network of individuals interconnected by both physical and virtual relationships. The network includes, on the one hand, young people from the Collège de Maisonneuve having left Montréal for Syria or attempted to do so (in red). Other students (in blue) may not necessarily have wanted to leave for Syria, but have nevertheless been in very close contact with the group of radicalized students at the college.

^{vi} **Important** : The data on which the diagram is based are incomplete as not all the ties between certain young students at the Collège de Maisonneuve (identified above) are known. The diagram is purely descriptive in nature, and designed to illustrate the type of network that may exist among such young people..



The primary effect of the progressive encapsulation of this small group of ideological individuals was to make its members increasingly interdependent. The more such a group closes itself off from others, the more important the role personal ties, friendships and relationships^{vii} play in radicalization. One does not become radicalized just because of the worldview one espouses, but also out of consideration for the personal ties one has with a network of individuals one trusts, and to whom one is attracted. In the case of the young people from the Collège de Maisonneuve, these relationships of trust and friendship played a crucial role as the process of collective radicalization took hold.

^{vii} As was previously mentioned, there were several couples in the group studied.

5.7. THE GRADUAL SLIDE INTO RADICALIZATION: SELF-SEGREGATION AND BREAKING TIES WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Radicalized individuals keep their radicalization hidden, and avoid discussing their situation. However, the gradual encapsulation of self-segregation is readily observable in the distancing behaviours associated with radicalization. In retrospect, several families noted a growing tendency in their children to hide activities and certain outside associations. Suddenly secretive, the adolescents elude their families' influence. Friends may also sometimes notice sudden changes in friendships:



“He stopped playing soccer with non-Muslims. He only wanted to play with people like himself, “good Muslims”. He was so intense he sort of cut himself off from his old friends... In the end, he wound up only spending time with people like him, because his old friends didn't want to be seen or associated with him.”

(Close friend of a young Quebec man undergoing radicalization)

Another symptom of an ongoing process of radicalization: all the young people who left for Syria or expressed a desire to do so suddenly dropped out of their classes before the end of the school term. This type of behaviour illustrates how the priorities of such individuals change. What were once regular activities suddenly become of secondary importance, completely peripheral in the lives of the young people concerned. The sudden loss of interest in school activities can be explained by the young people's belief that education is an inconsequential aspect of their lives that prevents them from fully committing to their new identity or quest for identity.

It is clear from all the testimony collected for this study that the individuals who underwent radicalization at the Collège de Maisonneuve had developed a near absolute loyalty to the ideology they had adopted. Its discourse served to legitimize a whole series of behaviours symptomatic of radicalization, from the breaking of ties with one's family, friends or school to the moral validation of discourses that were dehumanizing or extremist, or advocated the use of violence. All of these distancing behaviours are common to the various radicalization trajectories observed in individuals counselled by the CPRLV.

5.8. LEAVING FOR SYRIA: THE ONLY POSSIBLE OUTCOME

For many of the Collège de Maisonneuve students, the ultimate aim of the radicalization process was not so much violent action as their planned departure for Syria. Although our interviews confirmed that many of the young people had concealed their desire to leave for Syria, we also observed that some had not hidden their intentions from friends they trusted.



“My girlfriend knew about my plans. She would justify my absences when I couldn't go to class.”

(Young Quebec man who had wanted to go to Syria)

Reasons for leaving can therefore consist of a mixture of escape-related and attraction-related motivations inspired by the Syrian conflict and the seductive narrative employed by groups like the Islamic State (ISIS) or the Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN). It is often not possible to determine which factor takes precedence over another in the decision to leave for Syria. However, we have been able to identify the following motivations:

a) The need to experience “pure Islam”

Convinced that the only place they would be able to live the “pure Islam” they espoused was in the Islamic caliphate declared by the Islamic State (ISIS), departure for Syria became the primary motivation for some of the young people from the Collège de Maisonneuve – as a coherent expression of their identity. In other words, the young people chose to go live in Syria with jihadist groups because they were convinced they would not be able to fully express their new identity in Quebec. They hoped leaving would permit them to escape a situation they considered humiliating from an identity point of view:



“He left because he said he could not be free to practise Islam in Quebec. He didn’t stop saying how humiliated and put down he felt, and that was why he wanted to emigrate to a Muslim country. For him, going to Syria was a way of becoming closer to Allah. It was to go to a place where there was ‘true Islam.’”

(Close friend of a young Quebec man who went to Syria)

For many of the young people, the Islamic State (ISIS) is synonymous with justice, a safe place where, regardless of one’s differences and origins, one can freely practice one’s faith without having to accept the restrictions imposed by Western governments.

b) The desire to help

The testimony gathered during our investigation also points to the generous and altruistic nature of these young people: in other words, the radicalization process was not geared primarily towards violence, but rather towards willingness to help women and children who are victims of the Syrian conflict. Others envisaged assistance in terms of defending, even through the use of weapons, their religious ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’: this reflects a more militant element, more concerned with justifications of the fighting and the desire to defend against what they perceive as aggression against fellow Muslims in that part of the world.

The desire to defend other Muslims was very prevalent in the justifications given by the individuals themselves or cited in comments reported to us during interviews with friends and family. There was however a distinction between the girls and boys, in that the former spoke about going to Syria more in terms of providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of war, while the latter might also wish to fight and take part in the war:



“She didn’t feel good here, but what played a major role was that she wanted to make the ‘Hegira’ (migration) to go help the brothers and sisters who were being killed in Syria.”

(Close friend of a young Quebec woman who went to Syria)

Our study underscored the deep-seated—albeit erroneous—belief held by all these young people that going to Syria was a way of actively participating in humanitarian efforts. Thus, the young people from Collège de Maisonneuve had a range of motivations having to do with identity malaise and the altruistic need to join Syrian armed groups to offer their assistance. The feeling of being victimized due to their identity intersects here with the ideological discourse of mobilization in the name of ‘pure Islam’. Because they view themselves as ‘real’ Muslims, such young people cannot not see any other solution than to mobilize in order to put an end to the persecution of fellow Muslims in Syria, a situation they obviously consider unacceptable. Moreover, the thousands of young Westerners who have gone to Syria and Iraq have become role models for other radicalized youth: this serves as further motivation for leaving Quebec.

c) A strict interpretation of jihad

In a small number of cases, radicalization is embodied by a more explicit attraction to violence in the name of a narrower interpretation of the Islamic concept of ‘jihad’ and its application. For some individuals, violence becomes a form of legitimate defence against anyone who attacks Islam or Muslims:



“There was a video, I’ll tell you about it, where you could see Muslim young people from France defending the prophet; and the person it had to do with was a Christian who was insulting the prophet. As for them, at the beginning they were calm, but then they started hitting him. And [name of the young man] posted the video. He said: ‘That is how our prophet should be defended.’ And it started a whole debate. People said things like there’s a way of talking about it, it’s not by attacking people and everything; but he didn’t agree at all. He said they have to be killed; we have to do this, and that, and that. And that’s it.”

(Close friend of a young Quebec man who left for Syria)

The legitimization of violence can take different forms ranging from active support for violence to self-sacrifice in defence of one’s community. For individuals entrenched in a militant literal understanding of Islam and convinced that ‘jihad’ is a ‘personal duty’, leaving for Syria is an appropriate form of action. However, departure requires careful preparation in order to be successful.

5.9. HOW TO GO TO SYRIA: AN INTRODUCTORY COURSE

Based on our interviews, we were able to make a number of observations about planned departure for Syria. First, the number of young people who had experienced the desire to go to Syria was greater than the number who had actually left or who had made plans to do so at a later date. This can be explained by a number of factors—such as a lack of time, money or serious motivation (for some, travel plans)—that may have acted as obstacles even if the individual expressed the firm intention to leave. We also noted that the presence of a natural leader in the group meant that some were more involved in the planning than others; some young people were even in direct contact with international terrorist groups, and shared their contacts with others. That said, it is readily apparent that the young people who left Montréal for Syria (or attempted to do so) had painstakingly planned out their departure. They employed a variety of means to hide their financial and administrative preparations from the authorities and their parents (and often even their closest friends):

- Plane tickets were bought at the last minute, often the day before the departure, so as not to attract the attention of the authorities.
- One or more stop-overs were included to muddy the waters, or the flight was booked to a European tourist destination such as Italy or Greece.
- Part of the trip was made by boat or train.
- Luggage was packed at the last minute, although the materials brought with them were purchased several months ahead of time.
- A conscious effort was made not to make any changes in behaviour or habits in the final weeks before the departure. For example, some continued to do their schoolwork up to the very end.
- Excuses were invented for leaving the family home (a sleepover at a friend's house, a trip to the United States, going to a chalet with friends) so they could get away without any trouble and with no questions asked.
- To keep their parents from suspecting anything, the last day or evening at home was spent normally; they were careful not to be too 'nice' or 'affectionate' with family members.
- Some had two Facebook accounts, one for family and friends, the other exclusively reserved for the small network of individuals involved in the plans.

Several different financial means were used by the young people to pay for the trip to Syria. The most common strategy seems to have involved the use of a credit card: they would apply for a credit card, and then use a cash advance to obtain cash. Cell phones were obtained free of charge, either for resale (and ultimately, money) or to take with them overseas. Selling personal belongings was another means of quickly acquiring money but was less widely used as it might attract the parents' attention. Once all these steps had been taken, it was very difficult to turn back:



“Once you get to that point, if you don't leave, you're stuck with a ton of debt and stuff there's no way you can pay for; you can't go backwards.”

(Young Quebec man who had wanted to go to Syria)

5.10. THE DEPARTURE OF CHILDREN—THE SUFFERING OF PARENTS

Given the above, although each situation is unique, it is clear that the parents of these young people had no idea of what was being planned. They found out much later on, with considerable dismay, that their children had a secret second, virtual, secret life. Yet these were parents who had imagined a future for their children. They found themselves unable to explain this change. On top of everything, they also had the painful impression of being judged and blamed by the rest of society.



“I’ve always fulfilled my duties as a parent and my social responsibilities properly. I didn’t give birth to a terrorist. I should be seen as a victim... like the other parents.”

(Parent of a young Quebec man who had wanted to go to Syria)^{viii}

Like other Western countries, Canada as a whole continues to be concerned about the phenomenon of jihadism-motivated departures (especially for Syria), a tendency that is not likely to change in the near future. Furthermore, while the departures are cause for concern, returns are no less so: when these individuals come back to the country, they may in fact constitute a real threat to our security. However, even if the parents are aware it is essential to ensure their children do not represent a danger to society, they wish the ‘prison’ option was not systematically applied to young people who have gone to Syria and wish to come back to Quebec.



“He is suffering there and wants to come back. But society offers him two options: either be treated as a traitor by Daesh and be killed, or prison awaits him in Quebec. I don’t think that’s where the solution lies. “

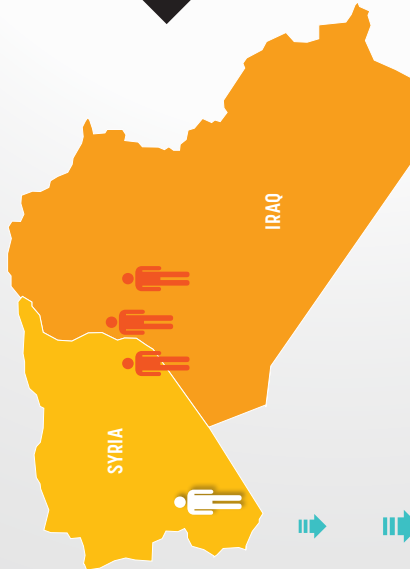
(Parent of a young man who has gone to Syria)

These young people made a deliberate choice, and it would seem normal that they take responsibility for their actions if they return to Canada. However, the conviction of radicalized individuals cannot be society’s end goal. No conviction is of value unless it is accompanied by rehabilitation and reintegration measures. Our system of justice has long recognized the importance of working towards the social reintegration of offenders.⁹²

Contrary to one misconception, rehabilitation with regard to violent radicalization or terrorism is not a naïve or ‘soft’ recidivism prevention measure.⁹³ On the contrary, such strategies are pragmatic responses to a contemporary issue and are no different than the reintegration strategies that already exist for other types of crime.⁹⁴ Moreover, the studies available to date show that individuals who renounce violent extremism are statistically less likely to reoffend than regular offenders.⁹⁵

^{viii} In light of the parental suffering, it is vital that the CPRLV establish a talking circle for such families, who currently feel isolated. It is especially important that they be provided with support for recreating family and social connections.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES REGARDING QUEBECERS RETURNING FROM SYRIA/IRAQ



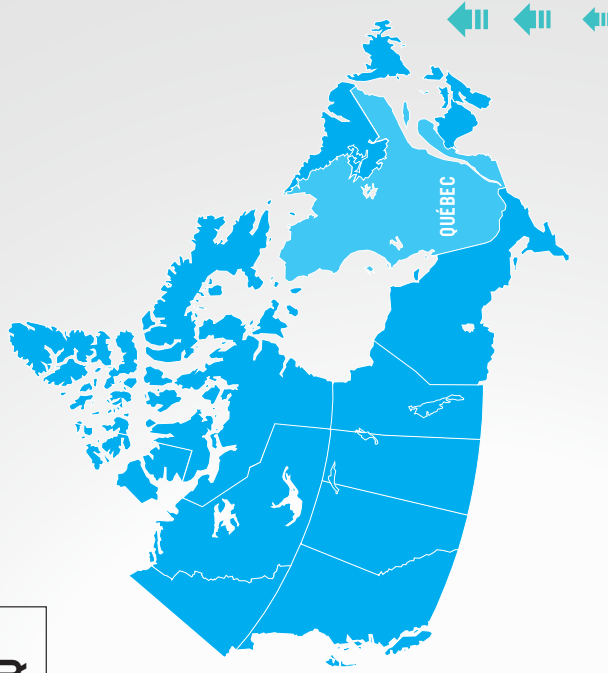


130-250

 CANADIANS OF WHOM

20-30

 ARE QUEBECERS



REASONS FOR RETURNING

- Remorse concerning family / pressure from family or friends
- Disillusionment regarding initial expectations (monetary or symbolic) and with the brutal reality of war
- Disgust at abuses committed by armed groups on the ground, especially towards civilian populations
- Inability to tolerate highly rudimentary physical conditions (lack of drinking water, medicine shortages, etc.) any longer
- Fear of allied bombing or of the consequences of military retreat by the Islamic State or other armed groups
- In some cases, strategic reasons aimed at committing acts of violence



OBSTACLES TO RETURNING

- Arrest (or execution) for «desertion» by the armed groups to which returning individuals belonged
- Capture by Kurdish forces or Syrian rebel groups, which may result in imprisonment, torture, or even execution
- Being physically unable to reach a secure area outside Syria or Iraq (especially Turkey) due primarily to injuries or the presence of young children
- Lack of legal documents (passport) and fear of being arrested upon return to Québec



DIFFICULTIES TO BE OVERCOME IN QUÉBEC

- Identification as a potential risk to national security
- Financial difficulties (debts due to loans obtained prior to departure)
- Obtaining recognition of children born in Syria or Iraq
- Fragile psychological state and broad range of mental health issues (post-traumatic stress and potential desensitization to violence)



INTERVENTION / REHABILITATION

- The fundamental underlying principle is public safety
- Accepting accountability for one's actions abroad
- Individualized psychosocial support for persons returning from Syria or Iraq, based on their situation and needs (psychological, social or other)
- Approach (punitive or otherwise) tailored to each individual's profile

5.11. THE ADDED STRAIN OF THE INTENSIVE MEDIA ATTENTION CONCERNING THE COLLÈGE DE MAISONNEUVE

After the public revelation of the first wave of departures of young people from the Collège de Maisonneuve for Syria, there was considerable media pressure on the institution, which contributed to the deterioration of the climate within the school. Many students found it extremely difficult to cope with the presence of the media at the school during the winter of 2015:



“There were journalists and cameras everywhere in the CÉGEP. Some came to talk to us to find out whether we knew the kids who left. Others absolutely wanted to do interviews with us and wouldn’t stop pestering us.”

(Student from the Collège de Maisonneuve)

Managing media requests and journalist access to the school created further upheaval for the administration of Collège de Maisonneuve. As it was impossible to keep the journalists away, the administration had to try as best as it could to protect staff and students, which it did primarily by reaffirming their right not to respond to journalists’ requests for interviews no matter how insistent the latter might be. The media frenzy changed the atmosphere at the school considerably nevertheless:




“After the first person left, there were journalists everywhere. People thought there was like a network at Maisonneuve, but it wasn’t that at all... The atmosphere changed a lot at Maisonneuve. Now, it’s gone back to how it was before, I’d say. People listen to music and dance in the hallways.”

(Young Quebec man who had wanted to go to Syria)

The media’s focus on the situation at the Collège de Maisonneuve also provided an outlet for certain staff members who saw it as a way to settle scores around the various tensions and internal issues: this resulted in orchestrated leaks, sometimes of information on sensitive topics, which only heightened the deterioration of the climate in the school which was already being spurred on by the spreading of all sorts of rumours and the excessive media coverage.

It is important to remember and reiterate that while the media must always provide a forum for commentary and criticism concerning events that affect our society, they also have a responsibility to place these events in their proper context so as to clarify their true significance. The following quote is very relevant in this context: [Translation] “the public’s right to information translates into an obligation on the part of the media to provide information that helps citizens form an enlightened opinion.”⁹⁶ Whether it be in their coverage of the debates around reasonable accommodations or the Charter of Quebec Values, or their treatment of international events (such as the conflict in Syria or terrorist attacks), journalists must take greater ethical responsibility for the discourses they disseminate and construct in the public sphere. The goal here is not to tell journalists how to do their job, but to raise their awareness of the impact their reporting on Islam and Muslims may have, especially on our youngest citizens.

A photograph of a person's hands writing in a spiral notebook on a desk. A white coffee cup sits on a saucer to the right. The scene is brightly lit, possibly by a window. The image is overlaid with several semi-transparent white circles and a white text box.

**RADICALIZATION LEADING
TO VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS
IN QUEBEC: PREVENTION
AND INTERVENTION**

6. RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS IN QUEBEC : PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

The province of Quebec made the decision to intervene as quickly as possible to prevent the dynamic of radicalization from taking root, or to attempt to reverse it at least. In fact, the prevention of situations that may generate a sense of grievance plays an important role in precluding violent radicalization and polarization. However, implementation of such prevention efforts requires the mobilization and involvement of a host of actors, including from the school itself. Most of the professionals working in schools are in direct contact with young people in a variety of contexts where it is possible to watch each of them as they evolve over time, debate and socialize.

Now more than ever, adults working in schools have a key role to play in promoting the Promise of Togetherness and preventing radicalization leading to violence. By exercising pre-emptive vigilance and becoming involved in intervention with young people who are at risk or undergoing radicalization, schools make a profound and fundamental contribution to the protection of every member of their community, to ongoing harmony in the school community, and to the collective goal of the Promise of Togetherness.

Similarly, schools must offer young people a social vision that includes everyone. By fostering a positive and inclusive atmosphere, schools serve as forums for calm debate and as intercultural meeting grounds in which the beliefs of all are respected.



Prevention requires patience and tenacity, as results generally take time to materialize.

Other components of prevention of violent radicalization are media education and information designed to help young people be better equipped to recognize the dangers of social media and of information available on the Web. This must be accompanied by a sustainable prevention strategy aimed at raising youth awareness of the different types of manipulation and ideological indoctrination methods to which they may be subjected. Intellectual resilience and the development of critical and methodical thinking skills in our young people are key components in prevention of all types of radicalization that may lead to violence. In a word, given that they are in direct contact with young people, school personnel must be the kingpin of radicalization prevention in Quebec.

6.1. PRE-EMPTIVE VIGILANCE AND INTERVENTION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE AT RISK OF OR UNDERGOING RADICALIZATION IN SCHOOLS: A COMPLEX CHALLENGE

As traditional law enforcement approaches are inadequate for dealing with violent radicalization, a more ambitious strategy is required to prevent and combat this phenomenon. It is important to review the strategy's two core elements:

a) Training for school professionals

As this is a relatively new phenomenon, school administrators and staff have not necessarily been trained or equipped to be able to recognize the early warning signs of the distancing behaviours associated with young people who are vulnerable or at risk for violent radicalization. Preventive vigilance is crucial, as the earlier intervention occurs in the radicalization process, the easier it is to deconstruct radicalization framework, and to reconstruct a more moderate reading of the social world, a positive identity tied to the individual's place in society, and an awareness of a protective environment around the individual.

In our meetings, school administrators as well as staff stated that they currently feel ill-equipped to understand and prevent the development of certain radicalization dynamics. It is therefore vital



It is essential that we give school professionals the tools necessary to differentiate between a young person who is seeking attention, and one who is truly susceptible to radicalization towards violence.

to train members of the school community to be vigilant, to teach them to identify and interpret the signs of radicalization, and to provide them with the necessary basis to be able to determine the appropriateness of intervention. This empirical knowledge must also be complemented with heightened awareness of good practices and appropriate behaviours for dealing with potential incidents of radicalization (e.g., a non-judgemental attitude, compromise, open-mindedness and dialogue), as well as situations that jeopardize the Promise of Togetherness.

Given the above, it is important to mention that the aim here is not to question the expertise of school administrators and staff in Quebec, but rather to underline the urgent need to better equip them to deal with violent radicalization properly.^{ix}

It is crucial that preventive vigilance around radicalization not turn into public denunciations, stigmatization or profiling: any detection that comes with stigmatization will produce the opposite of the desired effect, and fuel the process rather than preventing it. As in the prevention of suicide and bullying, the important thing is to be aware and to watch for any situations—regardless of the personal characteristics of the individuals involved—that might lead more vulnerable youth to find themselves in the process of becoming radicalized.^x

6.1.1. INTERVENTION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE AT RISK OF OR UNDERGOING RADICALIZATION

Like pre-emptive vigilance, intervention with young people vulnerable to or at risk for radicalization is a challenge for numerous reasons:

a) The dilemma between confidentiality and data sharing

While it is important that the information collected during intervention with young people at risk for or undergoing radicalization be confidential, there is also a conflicting need to share such data with the various professionals involved (from both within the same institution and outside it) and to obtain users' consent to do so. This makes intervention an extremely delicate process, as the trust of the young people and their families is based on the certainty that their anonymity and the secrecy of what they say will be respected. It is incumbent on us to create mechanisms for communication and data sharing between workers, schools, families and outside professionals involved in cases, while at the same time establishing strict guidelines governing the type of information exchanged.

^{ix} It is with this objective in mind that the CPRLV offers training workshops specially designed to meet the specific needs of the human resources in Quebec schools throughout the province: Everyone, from administrators to teachers to teaching assistants to counsellors, must be trained to deal with this new reality.

^x the behaviour barometer—available on our website (www.info-radical.org)—is based on both our observations in the field and the scientific literature. It provides as complete a list as possible of behaviours that may be signs of radicalization leading to violence, grouping these behaviours by their seriousness. The barometer is a key tool for early vigilance, and is used as a tool for prevention and raising public awareness. It is not designed to push users to jump to conclusions or to take the place of a more thorough assessment by professionals, and must not be used as a screening tool or for denouncing individuals. All behaviours must be interpreted by taking the individual context and situation into account. The barometer is therefore intended to help develop a general behavioural impression of both the virtual activities of the individual concerned as well as of the person's interactions in the real world.

b) The increasing number of institutional actors

The increasing number of institutional actors (school, youth, social service and CPRLV workers) involved in intervention with young people may lead to poorly coordinated efforts in the field with counter-productive results. In more serious instances, this lack of coordination may have an extremely negative impact on efforts to gain control of a situation involving a young person at risk of or undergoing radicalization. It is important that the sharing of responsibilities and consultation be key components of all intervention.

6.2. STRENGTHENING THE PROMISE OF TOGETHERNESS AND IMPROVING THE RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN SCHOOLS

The prevention of radicalization in schools also involves reinforcing the principles of shared community and, to a certain extent, clarifying the response to religious issues in Quebec educational institutions.

6.2.1. REINFORCING THE PRINCIPLES OF THE PROMISE OF TOGETHERNESS

Radicalization is always the result of not feeling a part of shared community. School serves as a primary arena for the socialization of young Quebecers. Its mandate is to teach and socialize all students entrusted to it, in a spirit of mutual respect and tolerance and ensuring the protection of the rights and freedoms of all.

An essential part of the mission of educational institutions is the recognition of and respect for ethno-cultural and religious diversity.⁹⁷ However, this can give rise to a whole series of questions, frictions and even tensions when dealing with requests for accommodations or adjustments from certain students or families. Reinforcing the principles of living together means ensuring that all students and adults present in schools share a sense of belonging and are able to remain true to their different beliefs and cultural heritage as a result of a spirit of mutual respect.



Schools must encourage genuine educational dialogue with students on the Promise of Togetherness principles.

In order to strengthen the sense of living together, it is also essential to give history, sociology, ethics and civic education courses greater importance in school curricula. Such classes should not only permit our young

people to be better prepared for the complex, pluralistic nature of our society, but also provide them with forums for the discussion of issues and topics of interest to them. Strengthening the sense of the Promise of Togetherness in schools means ensuring that there is room for the expression of all points of view. Naturally, if school professionals are to foster the values inherent in shared community, they must also be permitted to benefit from them as well.

In short, the Promise of Togetherness does not mean silencing all protest or opinions that run counter to those of the majority but rather, on the contrary, encouraging the expression of differences and opinions on the sole condition of mutual respect. The respectful voicing of worries, fears and demands is a means of ensuring all points of view are taken into account and of identifying concerns that should be submitted to professionals who have received radicalization training. It would therefore be important to increase initiatives in Quebec schools designed to give students a voice in non-restrictive but structured environments.

6.2.2. RESPONDING TO RELIGIOUS ISSUES

a) The presence of religion in the school curriculum

Although Quebec’s school system became secularized in the 2000s,⁹⁸ religion is still a part of education, primarily in the course on ethics and religious culture introduced in 2008.⁹⁹ It cannot therefore simply be ignored, which makes dealing with it a bigger issue. The issue of religious practices opens the door to a whole series of debates that must be tackled head on.

b) Accommodation requests: myth or reality?

The interviews conducted for this report indicated this issue affects a number of educational institutions. In fact, Quebec public schools have been receiving requests for accommodations or adjustments for religious reasons (festivals, holidays, dietary restrictions, etc.) for several years. These requests aimed at making certain adjustments to codes of conduct place increased organizational pressure on schools and may, in some instance, give rise to tensions that undermine the Promise of Togetherness.

In 2007, the Bergman-Fleury report, a flagship document on these issues, underscored the importance of not underestimating the number of requests for accommodation or adaptations for religious reasons in Quebec elementary and secondary schools.¹⁰⁰ Little additional data has been made public since then. What is the situation now, nearly 10 years later?

c) Responding to adaptation requests

In preparing this analysis report we inventoried a broad range of requests for accommodation made to the schools involved in our study—requests that were sometimes made by parents, but frequently by students themselves (sometimes without their parents’ knowledge). They included the following religious requests:

- Permission to wear a religious garment or symbol;
- Permission to miss school for a religious festival;
- Access to certain types of foods at schools;
- Use of premises for a confessional or prayer space;
- Sex-segregation during certain educational activities.



“We had students who would disappear from classes at the lunch break to go pray off school grounds. Some came back late or were simply absent for the afternoon. We had to notify some parents who weren’t even aware that their children were going to pray outside the school at lunchtime.”

(Secondary school administrator)

Despite the need expressed by those working in the field to be better equipped to respond to religious accommodation requests, there is little institutional or educational literature on the phenomenon. Thus, school administrators and staff are not always aware of documented, conclusive mechanisms for making prudent decisions in such instances.

Quebec schools are caught up in tensions and complex debates around the proper attitude to adopt regarding the accommodation of religious and denominational requests received in the course of day-to-day operations. There are two competing attitudes:¹⁰¹



Some school administrators view accommodation requests as attempts to reintroduce religion into schools, which is contrary to the religious neutrality they are obligated to protect.

A tolerant interpretation of religious neutrality. – This broad understanding of religious neutrality in schools adopts a pragmatic approach aimed at taking personal religious needs into consideration in the school setting, while respecting the existing legal framework. The objective of this perspective is to avoid excluding students due to their religious practices, while at the same time exercising some control over the parameters of the religious practice.

A strict interpretation of religious neutrality. – A second more restrictive understanding of religious neutrality in schools also exists. Requests for accommodations may be viewed by some school administrations or staff members as attempts to reintroduce religion into schools: from this perspective, such accommodations are a threat to the secularization of schools established under Quebec law. This is why its proponents feel students' religious practices must not be a part of the school landscape and that requests for religious accommodations or adaptations should not be considered in the course of the school's daily operations.

This attitude of non-accommodation, legitimate though it may be, may become a problem when it causes students to adopt 'clandestine' practices in order to fulfil daily religious practices. This finding was reported to us on numerous occasions by school administrations faced with the dilemma of, on the one hand, not wanting to set up a denominational space in their school while on the other not wanting to encourage students to hide or to use inappropriate locations:



“We decided not to give the students a room where they could pray together... We considered it to be a question of neutrality. On the other hand, this gave rise to problems: we found some of our students praying in a stairwell. We told them they couldn't do that, and that it was dangerous for their safety... We even found several of them on the school roof, on a small platform they were able to access...”

(Secondary school administrator)

d) Accommodation of religious practices: a real need

In the absence of a legal framework and clear guidelines on accommodation and adjustment measures regarding religion in public secondary schools and colleges in Quebec,¹⁰² approaches to dealing with religious issues are highly variable.¹⁰³ Requests are treated on a case-by-case basis depending on the school, with major differences in the strategies and accommodation initiatives employed.

The contemplative space at the Collège de Maisonneuve. – The creation of a multi-faith contemplative space at Collège de Maisonneuve provided numerous benefits, including that of meeting the legitimate expectations and requests of a part of the student body that wished to be able to engage in religious practices at the school.

The Source may well have been the only place available to Collège de Maisonneuve students wanting to practise their faith at school. However, it was the lack of oversight and guidelines (devoid of any malicious intent, of course) that allowed for the change in the essential nature of the space and fostered the deterioration of the Promise of Togetherness at the school. This illustrates the fundamental importance of the manner in which religious issues in schools are addressed to the prevention of radicalization.

Multi-faith spaces in French-language public schools and colleges. – In 2007, the Bergman Fleury report highlighted a number of religious accommodation initiatives in Quebec public schools and colleges, such as the “temporary authorization granted to students to use a small, closed room in order to pray during Ramadan or to all students to use a room for the purpose of meditation or contemplation.”¹⁰⁴ The current situation is far more nebulous and there is little consistency from one institution to the next.

Most public secondary schools and colleges, with only a few exceptions, do not provide their students with rooms for religious contemplation. However, a handful of French-language public educational institutions have in fact chosen to provide their students with spaces for contemplation in accordance with guideless they have established, in an effort get around the complications created by the lack of religious facilities, i.e. prayer gatherings in public areas or gatherings off school premises in areas with little school oversight.



Diversity in and of itself does not lead to or increase vulnerability towards violent radicalization.

6.3. IMPROVING INTERVENTION BY PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN CASES OF RADICALIZATION

6.3.1. ISSUES REGARDING INTERVENTION IN CASES OF RADICALIZATION

Intervention in cases of radicalization outside the school setting comes with its own set of challenges. Based on daily practices at the CPRLV, we are able to make a series of general observation.

First, certain public institutions (such as police forces or social or health services) are increasingly called upon to deal with and intervene in cases of radicalization. However, intervention best practices are still not widely known or applied. It is therefore essential to build the practical knowledge and skills of field workers so they are able to tailor their approaches to the situations they encounter.



The greater an individual’s mental resilience, the less vulnerable the person will be to violent polarization and radicalization.

Second, the widespread lack of knowledge about the phenomenon can be explained by the fact that workers are still largely unfamiliar with the empirical and clinical conclusions of studies on the topic. They are therefore unable to detect the first signs that a person or group may be becoming radicalized, or to adapt their behaviour when dealing with such situations. On the contrary, many tend to base their assessments on indicators having to do with a person’s outward appearance (beard, shaved head, clothing etc.), while completely ignoring the individual’s personal history, psychosocial profile or social context. This practice can increase an individual’s feelings of marginalization and stigmatization, thereby accelerating the radicalization process.

By allowing their responses to be guided by personal judgments and clichés rather than scientific observations and clinical reflections, workers may wind up adopting behaviours that cause situations to escalate instead of calming the flames. This creates a distance between the worker and the individual or group in question that breaks any trust—which it then becomes difficult to rebuild. The social safety net around the person (or group) is weakened and mutual distrust ensues. The effectiveness of subsequent intervention strategies also is reduced. This challenge has caused some institutions to become more reluctant to deal with an issue whose political, social and clinical ramifications are too difficult to manage. Thus, field intervention tends to focus on overt symptoms and not the underlying causes unique to each situation.

It is vital that cases of violent radicalization no longer be viewed exclusively as a security issue. The fear certain professional milieus or communities of practice harbour about addressing the issue of radicalization can be counterproductive. We must widen our perspective: radicalization is not only an evil that must be fought, but also, and especially, a malaise that must be prevented. An approach based on psychosocial prevention would enable us all to avoid the possible pitfalls of treatment based solely on security concerns and law enforcement.

As the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, pointed out in the United Nation's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, "there is a need to take a more comprehensive approach which encompasses not only [...] security-based [...] measures, but also systematic preventive measures which directly address the drivers of violent extremism."¹⁰⁵ It is important that the police privilege a preventive approach and request intervention by other professionals trained in this phenomenon. While investigations into criminal activities are indispensable, it may also be highly advantageous to complement them with the expertise of other actors from the milieu.

Improved intervention in cases of radicalization also helps improve coordination among the various actors involved in dealing with it collectively. All too often, when situations require the involvement of different institutional communities, they become occasions of conflict and jurisdictional disputes. We must rethink the involvement of all partners (health and social services sector, education sector, de-radicalization intervention specialists, etc.) in order to optimize the process while respecting the mandates and skills of each of them.

6.3.2. PLACES OF WORSHIP AND THE ROLE OF IMAMS: AN UPSTREAM APPROACH

When we analyzed the trajectories of some of the Collège de Maisonneuve students and young people who received counselling at the CPRLV, we noted that (official) Quebec mosques were not a determining factor in the process of violent radicalization. Radicalization occurs outside mosques, be it on the Internet, via radicalization agents, within a group of friends, or through contact with young people who have already left for Syria. International experience also proves that mosques are not explicit loci of radicalization, as they are watched by the police.¹⁰⁶ In rare cases, they may serve as contact points where individuals who are radicalized or in the process of becoming so may recruit other individuals.

While our analysis clearly shows that our imams are not directly responsible for the radicalization of the young Quebecers, it seems crucial that they feel concerned by the phenomenon and that they become actively involved in its prevention and in developing a counter-discourse.¹⁰⁷ Above all, it is essential that the leaders of the mosques assume the following responsibilities:¹⁰⁸

- Ensure that sermons are given in French as well as English. The use of French ensures that young francophone Quebecers have access to religious services in their own language.
- Encourage imams to come out of the mosques and reach out to the young people who are deserting the mosques. It is vital that imams have direct contact with young people who are hungry for answers and need support in dealing with all their questions.
- Ensure imams have theological training, social skills, and civic capabilities, as well as the necessary recognition from the community to establish their legitimacy. This is essential in order to dispense with self-proclaimed imams who deliver much more radical sermons or who have neither the legitimacy within the community nor the necessary knowledge to occupy such a position.
- Enable imams and religious leaders to become better informed about contemporary realities (religious neutrality, social and community issues, national and international political debates, etc.)
- Use the Internet to refute misinformation or polarizing discourse, develop teaching tools and adapt to the needs of young people who have questions about Islam and often turn to the Web for answers.



“The real problem with our mosques is the fear some imams have of discussing sensitive questions that young people may ask themselves. For example, due to societal pressure, we are afraid to even address the issue of ‘jihad’ for fear of being quoted out of context. This fear makes it difficult for us to contribute to the production of a counter-discourse, or to enter into ideological confrontation with those who spread radical discourses.”

(Imam from the Montréal area)

It should be noted that there are areas of Quebec where places of worship are not regulated; these deserve special attention. In many cases, it is readily apparent when a place that is intended for community activities has been transformed into a venue for preaching where preachers preach hatred and either directly or implicitly encourage their listeners to reject the values of living together. This is why, now more than ever, the imams and theologians have a key role to play in actively listening to these young people with their perpetual onslaught of questions. These valuable theologians must continue to serve as knowledgeable spiritual guides for people who are vulnerable or seeking direction.

It should be noted however that the training of religious leaders and imams is not an issue unique to Quebec, but is in fact the subject of international debate.¹⁰⁹ Thus, comparison with foreign reflections and current initiatives might serve as a good starting point for Quebec.



CONCLUSION

7. CONCLUSION

Violent radicalization in Quebec is a social issue that urgently requires the exploration and implementation of innovative, comprehensive and lasting solutions.

Although it is a multi-faceted reality, the segments of Quebec society most directly affected by violent radicalization today are Quebec young people and schools. The example of the radicalized students of Collège de Maisonneuve discussed in this report reveals the complexity and diversity of the reasons for radicalization: the quest for identity due to feelings of humiliation or stigmatization, the desire for personal fulfilment, the urge to defend a cause, or the wish to overthrow the status quo and remedy what is perceived as an injustice. In some cases, there may also be a humanitarian component inspired by a sense of compassion, or a visceral identification with the suffering of the Syrians and Iraqis.

The current report is far from comprehensive, and is designed to provide a preliminary assessment of the scope of radicalization in Quebec schools. It clearly highlights the fact that a young person undergoing radicalization is a young person in danger.

However, cases of radicalization are neither a coincidence nor a foregone conclusion: they are always the result of a weakness in an individual's personal makeup that is rapidly exploited by propaganda. The jihadist activist movement cannot be combatted with passive tolerance: Instead, Quebec must develop a prevention model rooted in a proactive, inspirational, and multisectoral approach, thereby ensuring the coconstruction of our collective security. Above all, it must seek to stem support for agents of radicalization by fighting all forms of stigmatization and reaffirming our shared commitment to promoting the principles of the Promise of Togetherness.

Such action is not solely the government's responsibility, but quite the opposite. It is up to each of us to create an inclusive society where everyone feels welcome as a Quebecer regardless of personal, cultural or religious origin. We must convince ourselves and others that no one deserves to be imprisoned by discrimination and marginalization.

These therefore are the platform on which we must build our responses and solutions in order to dissuade our young people from joining the ranks of radical groups—here or elsewhere—and thereby jeopardizing the very foundations of our pluralistic society and collective security.

In short, our interviews show that if young Quebecers turn to radical discourse or violence as acceptable solutions to their malaise, it is because our society is unable to properly understand their demands and hopes or to respond to them in a way that permits our young people to channel their needs towards constructive solutions. Self-segregation must never be considered acceptable, not only because it is symptomatic of unbearable social exclusion but also because it opens the door to a very dangerous path—for the individual in question and society as a whole.



Quebec must continue to set an example by investing in the prevention of radicalization leading to violence rather than restricting itself to financing purely curative measures.



RECOMMENDATIONS

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

COLLÈGE DE MAISONNEUVE

1. Create a committee composed of personnel, parents and outside resources that is mandated with fostering dialogue initiatives within the college.
2. Implement measures aimed at encouraging and recognizing contributions by all Collège de Maisonneuve personnel to the collective educational project and the sense of the Promise of Togetherness (living together).
3. Encourage information-sharing among workers to ensure coherent action and intervention with regard to the educational and psychosocial support provided to students in difficulty.

CITY OF MONTRÉAL

4. Ensure that the Montréal Police Service (SPVM) documents hate incidents and crime in order to assess the situation and enable the SPVM to implement the necessary measures to prevent and combat such phenomena.

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION ET DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR

5. Set up a provincial working committee under the ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur on the strategy for preventing radicalization leading to violence.
6. Reinforce the principles of the Promise of Togetherness and improve the consistency of the response to and guiding principles governing the presence of religious practices in Quebec secondary schools and colleges, including guidelines for space allocation and relevant activities.
7. Develop a legal framework to enable school administrators to regulate the provision of psychosocial support to students deemed to be vulnerable to or at risk of violent radicalization in order to protect said persons and the community.
8. Implement a communication and monitoring procedure for use between secondary schools and colleges, as well as between colleges and universities, to ensure ongoing intervention with highly vulnerable students.
9. Implement a provincial research funding program to be funded through the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) focusing on the prevention of radicalization and hate incidents, as well as on shared community and peaceful coexistence. Encourage research partnerships between Quebec universities and their Canadian and international counterparts.
10. Encourage the school system to promote and recognize intercultural and community involvement by students.
11. Urge educational institutions to provide students with forums for discussion so they may discuss societal issues in the context of extracurricular activities.
12. Raise student awareness and foster the development of critical thinking skills and the thoughtful use of media and cyberspace to teach students how to recognize potentially dangerous uses of manipulation and indoctrination on the Internet and in social media.

13. Implement curricula aimed at strengthening student resilience in dealing with hateful speech and ideologies.
14. Provide training for all school personnel in the prevention and detection of violent radicalization as well as referral to specialized resources.
15. Provide professionals forums for discussion around shared community.

MINISTÈRE DE LA JUSTICE DU QUÉBEC / DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE OF CANADA

16. Define the terms and parameters of a legal framework that would enable judges to propose psychosocial care to individuals or their loved ones in cases linked to terrorism.

N.B. – This measure would permit organizations like the CPRLV to engage in activities designed to foster the reintegration and prevent the recidivism of such individuals in order to minimize the danger to the individuals themselves and the public.

17. In the context of the preventive legal measures provided for under certain situations (ss. 810.01 and 83.3 C.Cr.), establish a legal and procedural framework for preventive psychosocial care or intervention.

N.B. – Current regulations already provide for a certain number of administrative or technical preventive measures (such as electronic security bracelets, or bans on access to certain computer-related tools), but this new framework would make it possible to add ongoing psychosocial counselling of the individuals involved as an additional measure from a public security perspective.

MINISTÈRE DE LA SÉCURITÉ PUBLIQUE DU QUÉBEC / PUBLIC SAFETY CANADA

18. Ensure that Quebec police forces develop an ambitious strategy for preventing and fighting hate crimes and incidents, which are a breeding ground for violent radicalization.
19. Provide all police officers with training in radicalization prevention from an upstream perspective, which would thereby differ from current training on national security and terrorism that focuses on the identification of individuals likely to engage in actions rather than on prevention.
20. Introduce into the police recruit curriculum a course on the prevention of radicalization leading to violence with training aimed at permitting future police officers to better understand and intervene in potential cases of violent radicalization within the context of their public security mandate.
21. Create annual budgetary funding to provide support for community organizations wishing to develop local violent radicalization prevention initiatives directly in line with the action priorities set out in the Plan d'action gouvernemental 2015-2018 – La radicalisation au Québec : agir, prévenir, détecter et vivre ensemble.
22. Establish parole mechanisms and safeguards (Commission québécoise des libérations conditionnelles and the Parole Board of Canada) to ensure follow-up and re-integration of radicalized individuals.

MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX

23. Establish the necessary guidelines so that the expertise developed by the CPRLV in terms of psychosocial intervention and monitoring be put to use in the health and social services network.

24. Avoid duplication of support and intervention services pertaining to violent radicalization within the health and social services network and established organizations.

MINISTÈRE DE L'IMMIGRATION, DE LA DIVERSITÉ ET DE L'INCLUSION

25. Continue to provide support to community organizations for activities encouraging shared community and mutual respect and tolerance (to better understand the host society).

26. Develop a strategy aimed at fighting all forms of stigmatization (such as Islamophobia) and promoting acceptance of Quebec's ethnocultural diversity and racialized minorities.



NOTES

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