

Martin Patriquin: A sad end to Tracy Bounil's Montreal dream

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MARTIN PATRIQUIN, SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE ([HTTPS://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/MARTIN-PATRIQUIN](https://montrealgazette.com/author/martin-patriquin))

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Call it the sad end of a brief Montreal dream.

Eight months ago, in the dead of winter, Tracy Bounil moved her family to Montreal in search of decent jobs, affordable rent and bilingual schools — all of which were in short supply in Calgary, where they had previously lived. Within a month, she had secured a three-bedroom apartment in the schmatte district and a bilingual school for her two boys. Her husband found temp work while pursuing a career in holistic medicine. And she became a substitute teacher in the English Montreal School Board's adult education program. A few weeks ago, the EMSB offered her full-time summer work with benefits.

Instead, Bounil and family moved back to Calgary this week for the saddest of reasons: she wears a hijab. Due to Quebec's new so-called laicity law, which came into effect in June and includes elementary and high school teachers, Bounil would be breaking the law were she to accept the new position and teach while wearing it; the bill's grandfather clause apparently would not apply, given the change of status.

[I wrote about Bounil last April](https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/martin-patriquin-case-of-adult-ed-teacher-shows-bill-21s-absurdities) (<https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/martin-patriquin-case-of-adult-ed-teacher-shows-bill-21s-absurdities>), highlighting among other things the absurdity that the proposed law inflicted upon her life. She teaches adults, but because adult education institutions are considered high schools, she is would have to remove her hijab to save from religious intrusion all the allegedly impressionable high school students who aren't in her classes.

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Meanwhile, her departure from Montreal is a human reminder of the toll such cruelty inflicts on all of us. Had the Quebec government not pushed this law into being, Bounil and her husband would have started a business, just as they had in Calgary before. She had planned to do her Masters in linguistics at Concordia. Her children, partly schooled in French, would have flourished in Quebec's dominant language. And she likely would have secured a permanent teaching position and paid the associated taxes. (Bounil is the family's main breadwinner, thus exploding the sexism-ridden assumption that as an observant Muslim woman, she is her husband's supplicant.)

Today, Bounil instead finds herself back in Calgary, where she is working as a teacher's assistant for much less than she made in Montreal. She also has fewer benefits and less chance of full time work, but has the distinct advantage of being able to exercise her freedom of religion. She says she considered staying in Montreal, given the EMSB's declaration last April that it wouldn't enforce the law with its staff. "I'd still be breaking the law and working illegally," she told me recently. Besides, the issue is bigger than just a job. In the weeks after the law's passing, Bounil found herself scared to go outside alone, limiting these excursions to a park near her house. At mosque, she found herself full of awful thoughts about what she would do if

someone with a gun entered. "I don't want to raise my kids in that kind of society," she said. "You have to be ready to fight, and I wasn't. I came here to teach."

When I spoke to her, Bounil was already anticipating the comments her story would provoke. To anonymous trolls and the government alike, she will be proof of the law's effectiveness. Forget the contribution she makes by teaching — in the midst of a province-wide teaching shortage, no less. Forget the tax dollars she would generate by doing so. Forget how, instead of being a success story, Bounil and her family are instead among the many who desert the province every year, part of a legacy of outmigration that has gone on every year for nearly a half-century. (<https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/interprovincial-migration-in-canada.pdf>) at least.

Forget all this, because at least we have one less hijab in our classrooms, and our vaunted secularism is that much more intact.

What a sad, ridiculous farce.

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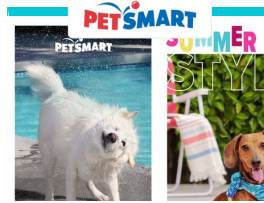
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