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Islamic Presence and Mosque Establishment in France: Colonialism, Arrangements for Guestworkers and Citizenship

Marcel Maussen

This article reconstructs the ways in which Islamic presence and mosque establishment have been represented in French public discourse. During colonial times, the French colonial state aligned itself with selected religious leaders and paid the salaries of imams and the maintenance of mosques in the overseas territories. In Europe, Islamic symbols such as mosques were displayed at colonial expositions and a monumental mosque was built in the centre of Paris between 1922 and 1926. The French state was also supportive of Muslim religious practice when Muslims sojourned in France as colonial workers and later as transient migrant workers. In the 1960s and 1970s, Islamic practice in France was largely hidden from view because it was practised in prayer rooms located in the cellars of apartment blocks where most of the migrant workers lived. During the period of citizenship the visible presence of Islam in French society became a deeply controversial issue. In the late 1980s the idea emerged to establish central 'Cathedral Mosques' in major French cities, which would stand as symbols of an 'Islam of France'. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, public authorities began to see the multiplicity of smaller and medium-sized mosques in French cities as illustrative of the emergence of a so-called 'neighbourhood Islam', and as an inevitable result of the diversity and independence of Muslim communities in France.

Keywords: Islam; Mosques; Colonialism; France; Marseilles

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Introduction

The history of Islam in France is usually represented in narratives about a migrant-origin religion, portraying the French Muslim population as postwar migrants and their offspring. Once migrant newcomers had abandoned the 'myth of a temporary sojourn', they started developing a community infrastructure to provide for their needs, and Muslim minorities mobilised to defend their rights to religious freedom as equal members of a culturally diverse society. Thus began the process of institutionalisation of Islam in France.[1] Though these narratives have been heuristically valuable, they have been both enabling and constraining for studies on Islam in France. By speaking of the gradual development of institutions which provide for the religious practices and needs of Muslim newcomers, Islamic presence in Western Europe is framed as an evolutionary process which begins with immigration and then moves through successive stages of settlement, emancipation and institutionalisation.[2]

However, in earlier times 'people who had Islam as their religion' also travelled to Europe and sojourned or settled there, be it as merchants, official representatives of Muslim states, independent travellers, students, workers or soldiers in the armies of colonial powers such as France, the Netherlands or Great Britain. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, contacts between Western Europe and Islam were profoundly influenced and shaped by imperialism. The intellectual fascination with the Orient and colonialism left many traces of Islamic presence in Western Europe, both in the form of texts and studies and of cultural artefacts, ethnographic objects and urban structures. Newly-built mosques were established in Liverpool (1887), Berlin-Wilmersdorf (1928), London (1926), Fréjus (1930), Paris (1926) and The Hague (1955). A Muslim cemetery was created next to the Muslim hospital in Bobigny (a small town close to Paris) in 1935, and others were also established in Fréjus (1930), Marseilles (1945) and The Hague (1932). While, at the time, these facilities and Islamic symbols were meaningful constructions, their meaning cannot be understood within the evolutionary perspective—implied by speaking of the institutionalisation of Islam as that of a 'new' religion—nor in terms of the emancipation of postwar Muslim migrant communities.

In this article I reconstruct the process of meaning production around Islam in twentieth-century France. Instead of looking at Islam exclusively from within a frame of postwar migration, I distinguish three different consecutive, though sometimes overlapping, regimes of regulation and representation to accommodate the Islamic presence in France: colonialism, arrangements for guestworkers and citizenship. Before Muslims in Europe became immigrants and new citizens, they sojourned in Western Europe as colonial subjects and—in the early days of postwar migration—as transient labour migrants. I use discussions on the establishment of mosque buildings as a prism through which to look at the wider picture of meaning production around Islam and cultural diversity. Specifically, I focus on discussions in the southern French city of Marseilles, where Islam and mosque establishment have been meaningful political issues since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Representing and Regulating Islamic Presence: Three Regimes

We usually think of the governance of Islam in Western Europe in terms of that of a minority religion, paying specific attention to different institutional arrangements for religious freedom and the separation between State and Religion. Different State–Church regimes have resulted in different patterns of institutionalisation of Islam as well as in varying degrees and forms of religious freedom for Muslims in different European countries. The specific implications of the French State–Church regime, based on *laïcité* and strict separation, on the development of Islam in France have been well documented.[3]

Even though this analytic perspective has contributed to our understanding of regulatory practices and policies towards Islam in France in the past two decades, it cannot account for many of the ways the French state and French society have dealt with Islam. For one thing, the Law on the Separation of Churches and the State dates from 1905, but principles of non-interference or equal treatment were never applied to Muslim religious practice while France still had a colonial empire. In understanding French secularism in relation to Islam we have to take into account the varying interpretations of Islamic religious practice in twentieth-century France, which varied according to the positioning of Muslims as colonial subjects, as transient migrant workers or as citizens.

Colonialism

With the intensification and extension of French colonial rule in North and West Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Islam became an increasingly important issue for colonial administrators. The recognition of Islam in the African colonies was ambiguous, if only because it intersected with the racist classification systems that the colonial administrators used to distinguish between different indigenous peoples. In Algeria, the so-called 'Kabyle Myth', for instance, suggested that the Berberophone Kabyle were a superior race because they displayed less religious zeal and could more easily be assimilated than the Arabised Algerians who were said to be 'fanatically religious' (Lorcin 1995). The Convention of Bourmont, which marked the beginning of French expansion and rule over Algeria in 1830, stipulated that the French would guarantee the right to Islamic practice. Nevertheless, the French expropriated most of the land and real estate of the religious foundations (*habous*) and, through the *Bureaux Arabes*—administrative bureaux— French colonial administrators had full authority over all matters related to Islam. In West African colonies such as Senegal, Mauritania and the Ivory Coast, the French thought that Muslims were culturally more advanced, arguing that:

> . . . it is universally recognized that the Muslim peoples of these regions are superior to those who had remained fetishist, in social organization, intellectual culture, commerce, industry, well-being, style of life and education (Quellien cited in Cruise O'Brien 1967: 305).

During the first decades of colonial rule over West Africa, French administrators used Arab as a *lingua franca* and gave a crucial position to Muslim leaders and *marabouts* (living descendants of saintly lineages) as intermediaries in negotiation and administration (Cruise O'Brien 1967: 304; Harrison 1988).

Control over Islam in the colonies became increasingly important as the French fear of Islamic reformist movements and pan-Islamism grew in the course of the nineteenth century. In 1902 the French minister Emile Combes—author of the Law of 1905 on the Separation of Churches and the State—suggested officially making Islam into an established religion in the African colonies. He proposed:

> placing the spiritual and temporal heads of the religious brotherhoods under our direction. . . . We would thus establish a sort of regular clergy at the head of which we would place the *Chioukh-El-Islam*, supreme heads of the Muslim religion, who would be intermediaries with an interest in aiding our work of surveillance and moral reform (cited in Cruise O'Brien 1967: 308).

Even though Combes' proposal was not effectuated, the backing of an official Islam was further developed in Algeria. In 1907 a special decree was issued which laid down a modified application of the principle of separation of State and Religion in Algeria. On the basis of this decree, the French colonial authorities continued to sponsor the mosques and remunerate the 400 official imams in Algeria. Since the 1920s these imams were selected on the basis of an exam and a dossier, which helped determine whether the candidate had a sufficient degree of 'loyalty towards France' and whether he had some influence upon his fellow-believers (Achi 2005: 169; see also Achi 2006; Bozzo 2006). After World War II a new law was issued in 1947 to provide more guarantees for the independence of Islam *vis-à-vis* the colonial state in Algeria. A special commission on the regulation of Islam in Algeria was also established.[4] However, fearing that full freedom of religion for Muslims might jeopardise French colonial rule in Algeria, the French Ministry of the Interior issued a new text in 1950 which suggested that the principle of *laïcité* could not be applied in full when dealing with Islam in Algeria. Rather cynically, the continuation of the unequal treatment of Islam was justified by referring to 'certain resistances' amongst the native populations, who continued to support 'the concept of a theocratic State, which controls both earthly and spiritual matters, which is the traditional conception in Islamic countries' (cited in Achi 2005: 167, my translation).

However, in the West African colonies the French developed a different strategy to counter anti-colonial Muslim movements and the spreading of pan-Islamist ideas. According to the French, a specific form of Islamic practice had developed in West Africa in which Islamic rituals and beliefs had been fused with animist elements and local cultural traditions. This African Islam (*l'islam noir*) was shielded from further Arab and North African influences by the colonial administrators so as to ensure that it 'did not evolve in the sense of Turko-Egyptian nationalism nor in the traditions of Muslim states, but in the sense of French ideas' (cited in Harrison 1988: 97). The French also supported the particularities of African Islam by conducting a sensitive policy which was adjusted to local religious traditions. In the long run, the French

thought that under their tutelage a 'modern Islam' could be developed in Africa (cf. Harrison 1988; Robinson 2000).

Ideas about Islam and cultural diversity, which were part of French colonial ideology, were not limited to the ways in which the colonial administrators ruled their overseas territories. The regime of colonialism also informed the representations and practices of regulation applying to the presence of colonial societies and colonial subjects on the European mainland. Two key institutional arrangements in this respect were the colonial exhibitions and the barrack camps. The exhibitions were a specific way of introducing colonial society in Western Europe: 'Other cultures were brought piecemeal to European and American cities and exhibited as artefacts in pavilions that were themselves summaries of cultures' (Çelik 1992: 1). A second institutional arrangement was the camps and barracks that served to house colonial workers or soldiers who sojourned temporarily in Europe. Usually the management of these camps was given to military commanders who had served in the colonies, who were familiar with indigenous peoples and cultures, and who could maintain a behavioural regime based on military discipline. During their stay in Europe colonial subjects mostly lived at a distance from the European population.

As an ideology and as a set of regulatory practices French colonialism did not end with the vast majority of colonies attaining self-government. One of the key factors in the production of continuity from the colonial to the post-colonial period was the continued presence in France of people from the former French colonies in North and West Africa. In the 1960s, a substantial group of ethnic Algerians who had sided with the French rulers as soldiers or as civilians—the *harkis*—settled in France. It was mostly the continuing influx of labour migrants, followed by family immigration and chain migration, that led to the emergence of a substantial post-colonial migrant population in France. Generations of colonial workers were thus succeeded by a generation of transient migrant workers in the 1960s and 1970s.

Arrangements for Guestworkers

The term 'guestworkers' is generally used when speaking about German or Dutch policies for the recruitment of foreign labourers, known as '*Gastarbeiter*' or '*gastarbeiders*'. In France the term 'guestworkers' was not commonly used, and labour migrants were usually spoken of as 'foreign workers' (*travailleurs étrangers*) or 'immigrant workers' (*travailleurs immigrés*). Nevertheless, I find the term 'guest-worker regime' useful to distinguish a specific set of representations, regulatory practices and arrangements serving to accommodate labour migration. A guest-worker regime is characterised by the emergence of an indirect corporatist system, in which companies and governments jointly develop regulatory agencies and recruitment schemes to provide industries and agriculture with foreign workers (Cross 1983: 6). These kinds of regime were first developed in interwar France to provide for specific labour shortages. Between 1950 and 1974 many Western European countries, including France, developed similar guestworker recruitment schemes.

Guestworker regimes produced specific ideas about cultural and religious diversity (cf. Alexander 2003). The accommodation of a non-citizen workforce in Western European societies—mostly young men from Italy, Spain, Yugoslavia, Portugal, North Africa or Turkey who were seen as culturally different from mainstream society—was organised around two key principles. On the one hand, foreign workers were seen as temporary economic subjects or 'temporary mobile labour units, which could be recruited, utilized and disposed of according to market requirements' (Castles 1985: 519). On the other hand, practices of social and spatial segregation served to enable foreign workers to live a parallel and separate existence in an otherwise ethnically and culturally homogenous society. The active recruitment of foreign labour created obligations for companies and public authorities to provide minimum provisions for health care, leisure-time activities, housing and religious practices.

In France, guestworker regimes were developed while France still had a colonial empire. Both in the 1920s and 1930s, and in the 1950s and early 1960s, there existed parallel institutional arrangements for migrant workers from the colonies or protectorates (Vietnamese, Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians) and for Europeans (Italians, Poles, Portuguese, Spaniards). This created a differentiated and unequal treatment of the various categories of labour migrant. It also allowed colonial representations and regulatory practices to feed into newly emerging arrangements for labour migrants (cf. MacMaster 1997). This continuity was the most evident for North African workers. After Algeria became independent in 1962, Algerian workers were no longer 'colonial workers'; however colonialism still shaped prevailing ideas and regulatory practices to accommodate them. This trend was reinforced because many colonial administrators and war veterans, who were being repatriated after independence, were re-employed in the French public services that were made responsible for the implementation of immigration policies and for the reception of newly arrived migrant workers (Spire 2005).

Labour migrants lived their lives at a distance from French society—socially, physically and culturally. Most of the foreign workers who were recruited since the 1950s lived in hostels (foyers), barracks or shanty-towns. The foyers were established at the periphery of French suburbs and the residents were subject to a discipline that was, in the words of the French scholar Michel Péraldi, 'a local continuation of the colonial status' (1990: 44, my translation). The hostels provided foreign workers not only with housing but also with canteens, meeting places and leisure-time activities. In 1975, 144 out of 151 hostel directors working for the main property management organisation responsible for workers' housing (SONACOTRA) were army veterans, and 141 of them had worked in North Africa (Ginésy-Galano 1984: 128).

Because it was commonly expected that labour migrants would return to their home countries once their work permits had expired, they were encouraged to maintain and develop their cultural practices. In 1976, the Under-Secretary of State for Migrant Workers, Paul Dijoud, developed the idea that migrants should have the opportunity to 'choose their destiny': they could decide to return to the country of origin, or they could decide to stay and be inserted economically and socially into

French society (Favell 1998; Kepel 1991). Particularly for those who intended eventually to return home, France would guarantee the right to maintain cultural identity. In 1976, the French government created special mother-tongue and culture classes for the children of migrants in state schools (the so-called '*enseignement de langues et cultures d'origine*' or ELCO). However, those who supported the idea of developing the 'right to cultural identity' into a kind of French multiculturalism would soon lose out to those who favoured a more Republican immigrant incorporation policy.

Citizenship

When it came to Islam and cultural diversity, colonial and guestworker regimes institutionalised and legitimised unequal treatment, segregation and hierarchy between Muslims and the host society. When Muslim immigrants became permanent residents and citizens, however, these representations and practices had to be redefined, because citizenship regimes are based on the principle of equal treatment. The state should treat all citizens equally, and citizens have equal rights and civic liberties, such as the freedom of religion. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, Western European governments developed new policies to regulate both immigration and the incorporation of migrant newcomers in their societies—by redefining naturalisation laws, and defining the social and political rights of non-nationals and the ways in which new forms of cultural and religious diversity could be integrated into Western European societies.

France is usually represented as an example *par excellence* of an immigrant incorporation model based on assimilation: migrant newcomers can be incorporated into society 'through a one-sided process of adaptation: immigrants are expected to give up their distinctive linguistic, cultural or social practices and become indistinguishable from the majority population' (Castles 1995: 297–8). Central to what French politicians and academics see as a uniquely French model of '*intégration*' is the idea that minorities should not mobilise politically on the basis of their cultural, ethnic or religious difference, but that they should participate as citizens in a neutral and secular public sphere. Within this perspective, the meaning of Islam and Islamic practice has been subject to contentious discussions in France in the past two decades.

Discussions on Mosques

I have broken down the image of the development of Islam in twentieth-century France as an evolutionary and linear process resembling 'the birth of a religion' into three different regimes of regulation. To analyse the ways in which Islam was perceived I focus on the imagery and the discourses around mosque establishment (cf. Maussen 2004). Discussions on mosque establishment can be used as a prism, because they highlight issues related to religious practice, the rights of Muslims in France, and the

meaning attached to Islamic symbols, and provide access to broader discussions on the Islamic presence in France. I focus in particular on discussions in Marseilles.

Colonialism and Mosque Establishment

Colonial Exhibitions in Marseilles

The second part of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century were the glory days of world exhibitions and colonial exhibitions in Europe. For the first time, at the universal exposition in Paris in 1878, an Algerian pavilion was built, which contained a Moorish café and a reproduction of a mosque in the northern Algerian city of Tlemcen, with a minaret standing at 30 metres. Small Islamic houses of worship were also displayed as parts of the Senegalese villages at the exhibitions in Paris in 1889 and in Lyon in 1894. Indigenous peoples would worship in the imitation mosques to stage religious practice as a part of daily village life in the colonies (Leprun 1986).

In 1906 and 1922 Marseilles hosted two national colonial exhibitions. The realistic evocation of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in the form of replica streets and pavilions owed its success in part to the fact that the Mediterranean sun and the mountainous landscape constituted the natural *décor* for a colonial exhibition. While walking around in the Tunisian pavilion, the journalist André Dubosque had the feeling of actually being on the other side of the Mediterranean (1922: 202). The Algerian pavilion of 1906 had a minaret, and in 1922 mosques could be seen in the Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan sections.[5] The exhibition displayed examples of prestigious mosque architecture, but also intended to show how French colonial rulers respected indigenous culture and religion. Thus, in the Tunisian section, a *muezzin* called out for Muslim prayer, and the functioning mosque was accessible only to the faithful (Simpson-Fletcher 1999: 136).

The story of the West African pavilion is also informative about the ways colonial representations and ideologies were being articulated at expositions in Marseilles. In 1906, the organisers erected a typical sand tower, 35 metres high, in the West African pavilion. However, in 1922 the organisers decided to build a larger construction, inspired by the mosques of Djenne and Timbuctu, as part of the West African Palace. These mosques had been renovated and rebuilt in the nineteenth century under the directive of French colonial authorities and engineers. The imitation tower was 57 metres high, and the building itself three times bigger than the original mosque in Djenne. Thus the French displayed their technical superiority over indigenous African architecture and craftsmanship three times: firstly, the mosque in Djenne had been renovated and improved with the help of the French between 1907 and 1909; secondly the replica mosque in Marseilles was designed by French engineers, even though the actual construction work was carried out by indigenous workers; and thirdly, the French replica was far bigger than the African original (cf. Simpson-Fletcher 1999).

Although the exhibitions served to display the success of colonial rule and to impress European audiences, the fact that the expositions took place in European

cities also created opportunities to protest against colonialism. In May 1922 a communist orator protested against the colonial exposition, by declaring that it 'symbolized all the thievery, all the murders, all the plundering [that took place] in the name of civilization' (cited in Simpson-Fletcher 1999: 143).

Accommodating Colonial Soldiers and Workers

During World War I, French military authorities multiplied their efforts to provide for the needs of Muslim Senegalese and North African soldiers: imams visited the military camps, a prayer room was created in the Muslim section of the hospital in Neuilly, and in the colonial garden of Nogent-sur-Marne a wooden mosque was established in 1916 (cf. Le Pautremat 2003: 328–33). In order to provide for Algerian workers who were recruited before and during the war, the Chamber of Commerce of Marseilles issued a report in 1916 entitled 'Preliminary Project for the Establishment of a Management Association for the Construction and Exploitation of a Muslim Village' (*Avant-projet de creation d'une société d'exploitation pour l'édification et l'exploitation d'un village musulman*).[6] A study carried out in 1916 and 1917 developed a detailed plan to build a copy outside the city of a Kabyle village on a plot of land some 39,000 m^2. The village was to exist for about 30 years, and accommodation would be rented out to workers for 100 francs a year. The village served to solve some of the existing problems in the housing of colonial workers, most notably the poor and unhygienic living conditions.

French architects and civil engineers had put much effort into making a true copy of the villages in the mountains of Northern Algeria. However, true to the civilising mission, the architects had also tried to make their version of the Kabyle village better than the original, by introducing a sewer system and streetlights. On the central village square a bathhouse (*hammam*) was to be established as well as a café and several shops selling food that would be prepared 'in accordance with Islamic religious prescriptions'. On the square a typical North-African mosque was to be built with arched windows and a 20-metre-high square minaret. Even the *minbar* (throne) and appropriate accommodation for the *muezzin* were included. The village—which in the end was never built, most probably because of the war—took its inspiration from the 'garden cities' and 'workers' villages' which had been built in France in the late nineteenth century. But the Kabyle village was also conceived as a genuine version of the replica complexes that could be seen at the colonial exhibitions. Here, 'Arabs' would sometimes pretend to live in the replica villages or worship in the replica mosques so as to create interesting *tableaux vivants*. In Marseilles, colonial Muslim workers would actually live in a genuine version of a 'Muslim village'.

France as a Great Muslim Power: Monumental Mosques

During the war France had tried to position itself as a 'friend of Islam' and as a Great Muslim Power, especially towards the governments of Arab nations and the

inhabitants of the African colonies. These efforts were meant to counter-balance, as Neil MacMaster writes, 'a well-organised German propaganda campaign set out to establish an image of imperial Germany as the global champion of Islam: under the leadership of the Emperor "Haj Guillaume", a holy war or *jihad* would drive the infidel French from the Middle East and North Africa' (2002: 72). One of the ideas that emerged was to establish a mosque in the French capital. In 1916 the *Commission Interministérielle des Affaires Musulmanes*, which oversaw French propaganda and relationships with the Maghreb and the Middle East, established a *Comité de l'Institut Musulman à Paris* (MacMaster 2002: 72). It was decided to let the initiative be carried out by a Muslim religious foundation called the *Société des Habous et Lieux Saints de l'Islam*, created in 1917 to facilitate the pilgrimage to Mecca for Muslims in the French colonies. The president of the foundation was the co-opted Si Kaddour Ben Ghabrit, who would become an ambassador of French interests and the voice of loyalist Islam in France and in Algeria. Ben Ghabrit also became the rector of the new Muslim Institute in Paris, which he remained until his death in 1954 (Kepel 1991; MacMaster 2002: 73; Sbaï 2006).

The Mosque of Paris was designed by two French architects and built in the fifth *arrondissement*, in the centre of Paris, between 1922 and 1926. It was built in Maghrebi style with 'an airy courtyard flanked by arcades of columned arches and a green and white minaret standing at 26 meters' (Bayoumi 2000: 275).[7] Besides a prayer room, the mosque complex contained a library, a bathhouse, a hostel and a Moorish café. As well as a gift of 500,000 francs from the French state and 1,620,000 francs from the City of Paris, the necessary funds were raised with the help of gifts from Northern Africa, Egypt, Lebanon and even India. The new mosque was represented as an illustration of the role of France as a 'global leader of Islam', and Ben Ghabrit declared:

> [F]rom this place of meditation, work or prayer, political agitation will be rigorously excluded because our thought is to bring together and not to divide (cited in Bayoumi 2000: 283).

A new discursive motive was also introduced by making the mosque into a symbol of gratitude towards the colonial soldiers. Municipal council member Paul Fleurot remarked in 1922 that the new Muslim Institute would be a neighbour to the Panthéon and would stand as 'a commemorative monument raised to the memory of those Muslim soldiers who died for France' (cited in Bayoumi 2000: 281).

Just like the colonial expositions, the new mosque was to be enjoyed by the Parisian *bourgeoisie*, who could visit the steam baths or drink coffee and mint tea in the Moorish café. Moreover, the mosque and the hostel could be utilised by travellers and the Muslim elites who visited Paris. By contrast, the vast majority of Muslims who lived in Paris, such as the 60,000 Algerian migrant workers, were discouraged from using the mosque—they were actually turned away because of their shabby clothing (Kepel 1991: 76; MacMaster 2002: 74). The leader of the nationalist movement *Étoile*

Nord Africaine (ENA), Messali Hadj, organised a protest against the mosque in 1926 which was attended by some 2,000 migrant workers. A communiqué proclaimed:

> The so-claimed mosque will be inaugurated. . . . The Sultan Moulay Youssef and the Bey Si Mohammed el Habil will banquet with the Lyauteys, the Saints, the Steegs, etc. All of them still have red hands from the blood of our Muslim brothers. We must unmask the game of imperialist France and make the treacherous leaders wither (cited in Bayoumi 2000: 287).

Given the great number of casualties among the colonial soldiers, the idea of honouring Muslim soldiers with a 'monumental mosque' also appeared in other French cities in the interwar period. In 1937 the founder of a real-estate group in Marseilles, Louis Cottin, created the *Comité marseillais de la Mosquée de Marseille*. The Mayor of the city, Henri Tasso, not only agreed to become the president of this patronage committee, but also offered real estate for the construction of the mosque next to the St. Charles railway station. In an effort to enlarge the support of public authorities for the project, Cottin wrote a letter to the prefect of the Bouches-du-Rhône department, in which he requested his approval and invited him to join the committee. He promoted the initiative as follows:

> Our attention has been drawn repeatedly to the miserable condition of Muslims who transit our city and we have thought that it was an obligation for Marseilles to offer our Arab brothers a testimony of our affection by reserving a hostel for them. Moreover, the 20,000 inhabitants in our city are deprived of the possibility of practicing their religion because of the absence of a sanctified building. . . . The Mosque of Marseilles will be a testimony of the French gratitude towards our Muslim brothers who have died for the fatherland.[8]

Interestingly, Cottin underlined that the initiative, which he had developed with two Algerians living in Marseilles, was primarily motivated by the will to improve the miserable conditions of Muslims who transited or sojourned in Marseilles. Cottin also argued that Islamic inhumation rituals had to take place in a mosque, mentioning that only those who had been purified in a mosque could have access to 'Allah's Paradise'.[9] Moreover, the mosque could help to 'morally unite the 22,000 North African indigenous people living by our sides'.[10] Nevertheless, the project was abandoned in 1937 because of local party political struggles, and because the president of the Paris Mosque had insisted that the Mosque of Marseilles be put under the aegis of the Muslim Institute in Paris.

The idea of building a mosque in Marseilles reappeared in October 1942 when the issue was discussed by the municipal council of Marseilles. Interestingly, once again, the mosque was first and foremost intended to provide for ordinary North African Muslims who sojourned in or transited Marseilles. This was in contrast to the Paris Mosque, which was to be enjoyed by both the Parisian *bourgeoisie* and Muslim elites. An image was created of Marseilles and North Africa as two mutually dependent entities, connected through relations of commerce, trade and a common history.

In 1949 the mosque architects mentioned to the Mayor of Marseilles that they had refrained from consulting the leaders of the Paris Mosque. They feared that the rector, Ben Ghabrit, would once again insist on controlling the mosque project in Marseilles.[11] Apparently Ben Ghabrit did not like being side-tracked because, in November 1950, he himself organised a meeting in Marseilles with representatives of the municipality. To these officials he said that it was 'against the Islamic tradition' to establish a mosque on real estate that had been leased by 'a non-Muslim association'. According to Ben Ghabrit, the municipality should reconsider its gift and, further pursuing his strategic interests, the rector suggested that the *Société des Habous et Lieux Saints de l'Islam* might establish a mosque in Marseilles instead.[12]

The municipality now faced a problem because the establishment of the mosque by a committee of non-Muslim Frenchmen was said to be 'against the Islamic tradition'. However, an Algerian shopkeeper, Talmoudi, who had been a partner in Louis Cottin's mosque project of 1937, had founded a new *Comité Musulmane pour la Mosquée*. The municipal council of Marseilles now decided to give the land to the new committee, together with a subvention of 2 million francs. This was a far-reaching decision, which meant that the mosque project in Marseilles was now in the hands of local Algerian Muslims who were not part of the co-opted Muslim elites. At this point the national government decided to intervene directly. It was now said that the municipal subvention violated the 1905 Law on the Separation of Churches and the State. Behind the scenes, Ben Ghabrit also tried to use his influence. A report by the French Secret Services, dated 21 April 1951, mentioned that the French authorities feared that nationalists might abuse the mosque project in Marseilles. A mosque that was not controlled by the co-opted Ben Ghabrit might become an enclave where 'Arabs' might engage in 'non-religious activities' that would be against French interests. Only the personality of Ben Ghabrit, '*ami de la France*', was a guarantee against such developments (Renard 2000: 152).[13] When, in addition, the secretary of the Muslim Committee fled to Tunis in August of the same year, to escape his creditors, the last chances of establishing a Grand Mosque in Marseilles during colonial times vanished.

Arrangements for Guestworkers and Facilities for Islamic Practice

Most migrant workers who arrived in France since the 1950s lived in foyers. Portuguese and Italian workers had been able to celebrate Christian religious feasts there, and in the foyers that were populated with North and West African workers, Muslims also demanded provisions for their religious needs and daily customary practices. In 1975 a movement of strikes developed when Muslim workers who lived in a foyer in Saint-Denis refused to pay their rent until ritually-prepared food and prayer rooms were provided. The strikes spread to other foyers in France (see Kepel 1991). The administrators of the foyers owned by SONACOTRA hastily decided to give in to the demands of the strikers. The company developed a pragmatic 'mosque policy', thinking that compliance with this relatively cheap demand for prayer rooms

would be perceived as a significant symbolic gesture by the Muslim residents, and would thus reinstate social peace in the foyers (Kepel 1991: 126). Other foyer-owning companies soon followed SONACOTRA's example and, between 1976 and 1986, 80 per cent of all foyers in France were equipped with prayer rooms. Muslim migrant workers invested time and money to make prayer rooms into cultural and religious safe-havens in an otherwise inhospitable social and physical environment (Diop and Michalak 1996: 82).

French public authorities were on the whole supportive of the will of migrant workers to maintain their cultural and religious practice during their stay in France. In 1971 a French social commission advocated support for cultural activities in the foyers (De Galembert 2005; Diop and Michalak 1996: 81). The *Nouvelle politique de l'immigration* (1977) spoke of respect for the cultural identity and religious practices of the migrants—the so-called '*promotion culturelle*'—and mentioned that North African migrants should be able to practise Islam. Houses of worship would allow migrant workers to 'recreate, in France, one of the important rituals of their daily life' (cited in Kepel 1991: 141, my translation). In 1976, the Under-Secretary of State for Migrant Workers sent out a *circulaire* to the prefects which laid down a departmental programme in favour of the cultural life of migrants and which included public support for the establishment of houses of worship, given that 'traditionally, for Muslims, their cultural life cannot be separated from their religious duties' (Kepel 1991: 143, my translation). It was suggested that departmental and municipal authorities would make spaces available to create prayer-houses in the neighbour-hoods where many Muslims lived. They were asked to contribute financially to the decoration and equipment of those spaces. Moreover, French authorities asked the countries of origin of the migrant workers to send religious books and imams, and to help set up houses of worship in France. Public funds of municipal and regional authorities were to be used; the government would add extra subventions if necessary. Nevertheless, not much came out of these ideas because, from 1977 onwards, French politicians decided in favour of more restrictive policies towards labour immigration. When it was acknowledged that many of the migrant workers would not return to their home countries, ideas about support for the cultural rights of immigrants became rapidly outdated (De Galembert 2005; Kepel 1991: 142).

In 1953 Algerian workers established a small Islamic house of prayer in Marseilles. Most migrant workers had found lodging in foyers and large public housing complexes. Prayer rooms were established there and remained largely hidden from view. By 1985 there were about 30 Islamic houses of worship in Marseilles. A larger house of worship had been established in 1977 in a former post office in the centre of the city. In the early 1980s the Algerian owners of the mosque—which was colloquially known as the Grand Mosque of Marseilles—asked the municipality to enlarge the mosque and to add a façade to the building which would give the mosque a more 'Islamic appearance'. The response of the Mayor of Marseilles, Gaston Defferre, was illustrative of the growing climate of rejection of immigrants and Islam in the city. In this new context, mosque establishment had become a contentious

issue. As rumour has it, the Mayor said to the chairman of the Mosque Committee: 'Make a place ... but don't make it here ... it is the entrance of the highway ... I don't want the tourists who come to Marseilles to see the Arabs leaving the mosque'.[14]

Citizenship and Mosque Establishment

Cathedral Mosques

It was only at the beginning of the 1980s that France began to acknowledge that a new form of permanent Islamic presence had developed in the country. In the late 1980s a number of notions about the future of Islam in France came together around the idea that in each French city a central Grand Mosque should be established. In institutional terms the so-called 'Cathedral Mosque' would function as the seat of the main representatives of Muslims in the city. Moreover, the Grand Mosque would symbolically represent an 'Islam of France' (*un islam de France*) or a 'French Islam' (*un islam français*), and would illustrate the recognition by French society of the presence of Muslims in France (cf. Bowen 2004).

In Marseilles there existed three larger mosques in the late 1980s. Just like the smaller houses of worship, the larger mosques were located in existing premises and were largely hidden from view. In October 1989 the Mayor of Marseilles—Robert Vigouroux—declared that he favoured the establishment of a 'real mosque of the dimension of a Cathedral or the one in Paris'. He added:

> I want it to be beautiful. In the first place for the city. Moreover, such a mosque must be a symbol for the Muslims of Marseilles. A bit like the Cathedral is for the Christians. *Mosquées-hangars* are perhaps still necessary, but they are disgraceful. I want that the people, the *Marseillais*, the tourists, the foreigners will go and see that mosque, and not only the Muslims. That it will be an object of curiosity.[15]

In the context of Marseilles, the idea of establishing a Grand Mosque could invoke local discourses about immigrant minorities who had been able to emancipate and become accepted because of their religious organisations. This could be said, for instance, about the Jewish community—which established a beautiful synagogue in the centre of Marseilles between 1862 and 1863—or about the Armenian community—which built an Apostolic Church between 1928 and 1933. But one could also argue that the new mosque would enable Muslims in Marseilles to become 'French Muslims', who would worship in a mosque where French was spoken and where secularism was respected. The new mosque was to become a place of 'integration' (*intégration*) not of 'fundamentalism' (*intégrisme*).

Less then ten days after the Mayor had opened this window of opportunity, a local Algerian businessman, Mustapha Slimani, presented a project for a mosque which comprised a religious, commercial and cultural complex. The project planned for the establishment of a huge mosque with a total ground surface of 9,000 m^2 and a minaret rising 50 metres into the sky, and which would provide for 15,000 to 17,000

worshippers. Slimani's megalomaniacal project seemed completely out of touch with the ideas and expectations of the Muslim associations' representatives in Marseilles. However, somewhat unfortunately, within public opinion this project became understood as illustrative of the future 'Cathedral Mosque' of Marseilles.

Public and political protest against the new project grew rapidly. Representatives of the extreme-right *Front National* argued that the Muslim newcomers threatened the Christian identity of Marseilles. Against the background of polemical discussions in 1989 on whether Muslim students were allowed to wear the headscarf in French public schools, the *Front National* presented the slogan 'Chador, Mosque, Enough!' (*Tchador, Mosquée, Assez!*). Residents' committees and local journalists protested against the mosque by arguing that the city was already 'overburdened with problems caused by immigration'. Confronted with public protest, the municipality argued that the Muslims in Marseilles were not able to come up with a joint project and decided to call off the project in 1990.

The Islamic Cultural and Religious Centre of Marseilles

In the second half of the 1990s mosque establishment still figured high on the agenda of discussions on Islam in France. Building mosques was represented as something that was simultaneously about creating adequate spaces for worship, the visibility of Islam in public space and mitigating feelings of injustice and exclusion among Muslim populations. Moreover, given the ongoing debates on the need for legitimate Muslim interlocutors and representative institutions, the figure of speech 'Cathedral Mosques' continued to function as an important trope in public debate.

In 1999, local politicians of Moroccan and Algerian origin issued a petition for the establishment of a 'real mosque' in Marseilles. Muslims were said to be forced to worship in cellars and in 'unworthy and degrading religious shelters', said to be emblematic of the marginalisation of Islam in Marseilles.[16] A journalist of *l'Humanité* represented the current situation in a provocative headline: 'Marseilles: 117 church bells . . . zero minarets'.[17] A figure of speech such as 'Islam in garages and cellars' also helped to construct an image of Islamic religious practice as invisible and taking place within sombre spaces. According to Soheib Bencheikh—a *protégé* of the Mosque of Paris who, since 1996, claimed to be the 'mufti' of Marseilles,[18] but who was not recognised as such by most of the local mosque committees—Islamic fundamentalists and radicals tried to spread their ideas in houses of worship where no daylight could enter. He referred to these activities as being inspired by the 'forces of darkness' (*l'obscurantisme*).[19] A Grand Mosque would make Islamic practice more transparent and 'get Islam out in the open, to leave the forces of darkness behind and to go towards the light so as to organise our religion'.[20]

In 2001 the municipality of Marseilles decided to start a series of hearings between representatives of Muslim associations in Marseilles and other local stakeholders. The idea was that a central mosque would be built that would be administered by a council of local Muslim representatives. The religious centre would be combined with

a cultural centre, which would stimulate dialogue and be subsidised by public authorities. The hearings in Marseilles took place against the background of wider discussions about the future of Islam in France. The French government had begun a consultation process in 1999, which was well under way in 2001 and which eventually amounted to the establishment of a French Muslim Council in 2003.

After the first series of hearings it appeared that a wide consensus was growing around the need to build a Grand Mosque in Marseilles. The new mosque would be built in the northern part of the city and would be combined with an Islamic Centre. However, in the autumn of 2001 two factions emerged, both claiming to be the incontestable interlocutors of the Muslims in Marseilles (cf. Cesari 2005). On the one hand there was a faction of local mosque committees that were affiliated with the Paris Mosque. These mosque committees[21] had joined forces with the 'mufti' Soheib Bencheikh, who spoke out in favour of a mosque that would be 'transparent', would stand for a liberal Islam and would be combined with a local cultural institute, resembling the *Institut du Monde Arabe* in Paris. On the other hand there was a faction of local Muslim associations and imams who founded a Council of Imams of Greater Marseilles (CIME). This faction claimed to represent the younger generations. The CIME wanted the new Grand Mosque to contribute to the unity of Muslims in Marseilles, and insisted that the mosque should primarily become a religious place, a centre of meditation and religious instruction, and not some kind of 'cultural centre' to be enjoyed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

In the post-September 11 context, when public opinion in France was increasingly concerned about Islamic radicalism, the diverging ideas of the CIME and the mosque committees affiliated with the Paris Mosque were increasingly framed in terms of a tension between liberals and extremists. A journalist of the *New York Times* wrote:

> One of the city's main advocates for the grand mosque is Soheib Bencheikh, an Algerian cleric who is clean-shaven and wears a suit and tie. He wants a big, beautiful mosque that will teach what he calls 'true Islam,' not distorted 'radicalism'. Alongside will be a cultural center that he says will show 'the beautiful face of Islam' with poetry readings, concerts and dance performances. In recent years, however, Marseille has witnessed a surge in fundamentalist clerics who preach a strict interpretation of the Koran that opposes activities like music and dancing. One increasingly popular movement is led by Mourad Zerfaoui, a bearded Algerian biologist who wears clerical garb when he preaches and lay clothes when he teaches (...) Zerfaoui's followers try to lure teenage boys toward the cause of conservative Islam.[22]

In July 2003 the Director of the Mayor's Cabinet, Claude Bertrand, suggested that the representatives of the CIME might be extremists precisely because they seemed so well integrated: 'They are very well educated, very refined. It is the profile of the people of Al Qaeda. But I do not say that is what they are'.[23]

In 2003 it became clear that the municipality intended to sign an agreement with the mosque committees affiliated with the Mosque of Paris and the 'mufti'. However, when the CIME and their allies came out victorious in the elections for a regional

Muslim council in the Bouches-du-Rhône, municipal authorities could no longer afford to bypass these associations. Faced with the new situation, the municipality of Marseilles argued that perhaps the idea of establishing a Grand Mosque was outdated anyhow. Many of the existing houses of worship in Marseilles had been renovated or enlarged. Besides, a number of new projects were under way which foresaw the establishment of middle-sized mosques and Islamic centres in Marseilles. Perhaps it was better to think of the future of Islamic houses of worship in terms of a 'neighbourhood Islam' (*Islam de proximité*).

Islam *de Proximité*

The idea that, in each major French city, a single Grand Mosque should be built had been voiced in France since the late 1980s. However, now that a greater number of middle-sized mosques exists, the concept has perhaps become obsolete. A leading scholar on Islam in Marseilles, Vincent Geisser, suggested that Islam in France was an 'Islam of parishes', practiced in different neighbourhoods where each ethnic and religious community has its own houses of worship (cited in Frégosi 2004). Whether this was a good thing was questioned by some, however, and those who insisted on the need for an 'Islam of France' worried that the establishment of private Islamic centres in France—notably by associations affiliated to the *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (UOIF)—would contribute to the further isolation of Muslim populations in what was spoken of as 'ethno-religious ghettos'.

Representatives of the UOIF argued that the will to establish autonomous and private mosques was illustrative of the emancipation of Muslim communities, who rejected both the tutelage of French public authorities and that of foreign governments. The concept of 'Cathedral Mosques' was seen as alien to, and incompatible with, Islam. Moreover, the fact that non-Muslims enthusiastically welcomed beautiful mosques, and wanted to visit the Islamic Centre out of an interest in 'Islamic culture', was also seen as a dubious merit of these buildings. A representative of a local Muslim association in the Lyon region declared:

> The sociologists who want to establish beautiful and visible mosques do not interest us. We know what they want: beautiful monuments which remind them of foreign countries, which remind them of their holidays in Morocco ... This gives them the impression that they have accepted us. But we, we want something which is functional; adequate in terms of hygiene, safety, and where there is enough space to receive women, that is all. Why should there be a minaret when there is no call to prayer? (cited in Bouzar 2004: 129, my translation).[24]

These arguments displayed a striking resemblance to the protests of anti-colonial Muslim leaders against the establishment of the Paris Mosque in the 1920s.

Representatives of the UOIF also rejected a proposal from the Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, to establish a public financial fund, which would be available for the construction of Islamic houses of worship in France. In September

2005 Sarkozy suggested that elected officials, such as municipal council members, could become members of the association that would manage this public fund. These political representatives could then constitute a guarantee against foreign influences and the spreading of Islamic radicalism within French mosque committees.[25] The president of the UOIF at the time, Fourad Aloui, objected to this idea which—so he argued—came down to the patronising of Muslim associations by French public authorities. According to the UOIF, it would be better for Muslims in France to establish private, middle-sized Islamic centres, in order to avoid the control of either foreign donors or of the French state.[26]

In the meantime the Mayor of Marseilles, Jean-Claude Gaudin, had declared in June 2004 that he had decided to acknowledge the need for a multiplicity of houses of worship and for an *Islam de proximité*. The plans for a Grand Mosque were relegated to an indeterminate future. The municipality still wanted to support the establishment of a cultural centre, now renamed the *Institut Culturel du Monde Arabo-Musulman de Marseille*. The new centre was to be established in cooperation with the *Institut du Monde Arabe* in Paris and with the future *Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerannée* in Marseilles.[27]

Conclusion

In 2005, France celebrated the centennial of the Law on the Separation of Churches and the State which forms the basis of the French model of strict separation of State and Religion. One often hears that Islam has difficulties adapting to Western-style secularism or to the separation of State and Church. However, it can also be argued that the French state has, until recently, refused to apply principles such as equal treatment, non-interference or religious freedom to Islam and Islamic religious practice. In colonial times the strategies of control and surveillance were most prevalent, as the French tried to secure support for their rule over the North and West African colonies and protectorates by backing co-opted leaders who represented an official and loyalist Islam. The motive behind keeping Islam under French control was the fear that Islamic reformist movements constituted an inspiration for resistance against Western rule. Moreover, the French wanted to develop a 'modern Islam' based on 'French ideas', which would be an alternative to Arab 'fanaticism'. One of the mechanisms to ensure surveillance and control of Islam was through the provision of financial support. The French helped to establish mosques in several African colonies and, in Algeria, colonial authorities paid the salaries of imams. A key institution in this respect was the Paris Mosque, perceived as a symbol of France as a Great Muslim Power. The Paris Mosque continued to function as the privileged interlocutor for political authorities in the post-colonial period and was financially supported by French public authorities until the early 1980s. Islam could also exist in France in the form of exotic objects and exhibits. At the colonial exhibitions a European audience could both admire the accomplishments of French colonialism, and enjoy

displays of Islamic architecture and of Muslim religious practice staged as a *tableau vivant*.

Islam was also a part of French society when Muslims sojourned in France as colonial workers and later as transient guestworkers. Migrant workers lived their lives at a distance from French society, and Islamic practice—in barrack camps and foyers—was largely hidden from view. French public authorities encouraged transient workers to maintain their cultural and religious practices, and were willing to contribute—also financially—to the establishment of minimum provisions for Islamic practice, such as ritually-prepared meals and prayer rooms. When it became clear in the early 1980s that Muslims were permanently settling in France, issues such as equal treatment, visibility and religious freedom became subject to heated public debate. An important idea was to develop an 'Islam of France' which would be fully compatible with French secularism and modern values and which could function as a counterweight to 'fundamentalism'. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, mosque establishment was talked about in terms of the need to establish 'Cathedral Mosques', which would show that there was a place for Islam in French society, but which would also be illustrative of the emergence of a 'French Islam'. In several French cities these City Mosques have been established and several projects are under way. However, in recent years a new urban reality of 'neighbourhood Islam' and a growing number of private, middle-sized Islamic centres have emerged. Some fear that private Islamic religious centres constitute a threat of further segregation and self-imposed isolation of migrant communities in France (the so-called 'communitarian retreat' or *repli communautaire*). One can also argue that Muslim communities in France which establish their own religious infrastructure seek to liberate themselves from the tutelage of French public authorities and foreign governments. It remains to be seen whether France is willing to make a place for an Islam which is not under the control of the French state.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1]   An example of this narrative is being produced in the titles of academic studies, which use the image of the 'birth of a religion' to speak of Islam in France (see Cesari 1995; Kepel 1991).

[2]   John Bowen points to a different, though in my view related, narrative which was drawn upon by French political scientists and sociologists writing on Islam in the 1990s. These researchers used a common analytical framework and studied the development of Islam in France in the light of processes of assimilation or the integration of migrant newcomers. The significance of Muslim religious practices, or the fact that some Muslims abstained from certain practices, such as praying or wearing a headscarf, was framed as an indicator of the willingness of immigrants to 'integrate' and adapt to French culture, and of the degree of 'assimilation' of Muslims (2004: 44–6).

[3]   See, for example, Bader (2007); Fetzer and Soper (2005).

[4]   This commission suggested the creation of a single council representing Algerian Islam, and in charge of the places of worship and the management and financing of Muslim religious practice. However this idea of an official Muslim Council established and supported by the colonial state was rejected both by Muslim scholars in Algeria (*Ulemas*) and by the French Council of State as an infraction upon the principle of the separation of State and Religion (Achi 2005; 2006).

[5]   For images of the colonial exhibitions in Marseilles see Leprun (1986), and especially the recent book by Blanchard and Boëtsch (2005).

[6]   This account is based on a study of the original file of the 'Avant-projet de village arabe et kabyle' in the Archives of the Chamber of Commerce of Marseilles. Série ML 4274, 1916–1917. The texts refer to the village as 'Arab', 'Kabyle' and 'Muslim'. See also Leprun (1992).

[7]   See Bayoumi (2000) for a detailed description of the mosque and the website of the Muslim Institute for pictures of the construction of the mosque: www.mosque-de-paris.com, accessed 28 June 2006.

[8]   Letter of the '*comité de patronage*' dated 22 June 1937, my translation.

[9]   See 'Cette mosquée qui ne vit jamais le jour . . .', *Le Méridional*, 13 November 1989.

[10] Cottin, interview of 27 August 1937, cited in *Le Méridional*, 13 November 1989.

[11] Municipal Archives, Marseilles: Dossier sous série 423. Number of the article: W 34. 'Projet d'Édification d'une mosquée à Marseille'. 'Note pour monsieur le Maire', directeur des services administratifs, 25 March 1949.

[12] Municipal Archives, Marseilles: 'Délibérations conseil municipal', 9 April 1951.

[13] Renard argues that this was part of a strategy of the Paris Mosque to keep control over mosque projects in the 1940s in Marseilles, Lille and Bordeaux (Renard 2000: 152).

[14] Interview with the son of the former president of the Mosque Committee, Mohand Alili, Marseilles, 22 March 2002, my translation.

[15] Interview with Robert Vigouroux, *Profession Politique*, 29 October 1989.

[16] 'Pétition pour une mosquée à Marseille', *La Marseillaise*, 11 January 2000.

[17] 'Marseille: 117 clochers . . . zéro minaret', *L'Humanité*, 17 March 2000.

[18] When he arrived in Marseilles in 1995, Soheib Bencheikh had, together with a befriended architect, developed a project for a Grand Mosque and a Muslim Institute in Marseilles. However, nothing much ever came of these plans.

[19] Interview with Soheib Bencheikh, 20 March 2002, my translation.

[20] S. Bencheikh, Minutes of the Hearings by the municipality of Marseilles, October 2001.

[21] These associations were represented by the *Fédération des Musulmans du Sud de la France,* a platform that was established in the late 1980s.

[22] See 'Muslims remaking old France', *New York Times*, 10 April 2003.

[23] See 'Marseilles rejette son islam officiel', *Libération*, 1 July 2003, my translation.

[24] On websites for a Muslim audience in France one can read statements arguing that 'according to Islam' it is more important to make 'one's heart beautiful' than to decorate mosque buildings. See 'Construire de belles mosques: d'accord mais . . .' on www.maison-is lam.com/article.php?sid =61, accessed 9 December 2005.

[25] 'Sarkozy veut associer les maires à la gestion des cultes', *Le Figaro*, 22 September 2005.

[26]   See interview with Fouad Alaoui, *Le Monde*, 1 December 2004, available at www.uoif-online. com, accessed on 28 October 2005.

[27]   In July 2006 events in Marseilles took a new turn when the municipality signed a long-term lease (*bail emphytéotique*) of 99 years for a plot of more than 8,000 m^2 with a newly founded association called 'The Mosque of Marseilles'. This new association was created in the same year on the initiative of the new president of the Regional Muslim Council, Abderrahmane Ghoul, elected in 2005, and the regional representative of the UOIF, Mohcen N'Gazou. It seemed that finally the Grand Mosque of Marseilles would be built. However, in April 2007 a new problem arose when a magistrate declared before the administrative tribunal that the long-term lease for the symbolic sum of €300 per annum was 'unusually low' and should be seen as an indirect form of public subsidy for the mosque, and therefore as a violation of the 1905 Law on the Separation of Churches and the State. When this article went to press it was not yet clear what the significance of this new complication would be.

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