
Can Islam Be French?

PLURALISM AND PRAGMATISM
IN A SECULARIST STATE

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Islam and the Republic

MY TITLE, of course, rests on an indefensible premise. Islam cannot be exclusively French any more than it can be American or Egyptian, because its claims are universal. Although inflected and shaped by national or regional values, Islam, like Catholicism and Judaism, rests on traditions that cross political boundaries.

Let me try another way to understand the question: Can Islam become a generally accepted part of the French social landscape? Of course, it will not have the background status of Catholicism anytime soon—Parisians may not notice a cross or a church; they certainly notice a headscarf or a minaret. But could it become accepted—more or less grudgingly, more or less intuitively—as one among many normal components of the normal social world? Quick off the mark there are signs that suggest yes, perhaps, and others that indicate no, maybe not.

Among the positive signs: A 2006 survey found that French people as a whole think Islam can fit into France. When asked if there is a conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society, 74 percent of all French people said no, there was not. Only about half as many other Europeans or Americans deny such a conflict. Indeed, French people are more positive about modern Islam than are people in Indonesia, Jordan, or Egypt! This positive answer may be related to an equally hopeful finding of the survey: French Muslims are about as likely to emphasize their national identity over their religious one as are U.S. Christians—and they are much more likely to do so than are other European Muslims.¹ So, at least when talking to pollsters, goodly numbers of French Muslims and non-Muslims seem to think that Islam could be French.

But increasingly, public figures criticize some Muslims as harboring values incompatible with French citizenship, even if they neither break laws nor contravene norms of public behavior. Two incidents from 2008: A court approved a request to annul a marriage on grounds that the wife had lied to the husband about something he judged essential to their marriage. The judgment was in accord with French jurisprudence, but because the “something” was the wife’s virginity and the couple was Muslim, public figures denounced Muslims who harbored “archaic” notions about women, and the annulment eventually was overturned. At about the same time, the government successfully kept a married woman with children from obtaining French citizenship because she wore a face covering and

stayed at home, proof that her “radical religion” had prevented her from “assimilating” French values.

And consider what Parisians read. I dropped into the Virgin Megastore in Saint-Denis, tucked in behind the famous cathedral and in a largely Muslim corner of town. Free for the taking was the store’s magazine, with a picture of a naked woman on the cover and with “pleasure” as the issue’s theme. When I entered the store I saw books on Islam, the Qur’an, and how to pray; we were in the month of Ramadan. But the table holding new, small-format books placed near the cash register featured thirteen titles, ten of which approached Islam and Muslims from quite a different point of view. *Dishonored* and *Mutilated* each concern violence by Muslim men against Muslim women. *Sultana* describes the horrible life of a Saudi princess. Both *The Sold Ones* and *The Fatiha* (referring to the first verse of the Qur’an, recited at a marriage) treat forced marriages. *Muslim But Free* is Irshad Manji’s story; *Disfigured* is Rania al-Baz’s, each about Muslim misogyny. *Gang-Rape Hell* tells of violence against women in the largely Muslim, poor outer cities of Paris. *Souad, Burned Alive* and *Latya, Her Face Stolen* complete the picture. (I do not count no. 11, a translation of *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, which suggests that without Nabokov, the Persians might have found themselves bereft of literature.)²

Things are not that different on the North American side of the Atlantic, from where Irshad Manji comes and where another denouncer of Islam from within, Ayaan Hirsi Ali (*Submission; The Caged Virgin*), sometimes lives, and where books on Islam’s threat to Europe have taken off: “they’re asleep; we’re next,” we, over here, are warned in *While Europe Slept*, *Eurabia*, and the latest, *They Must Be Stopped*.

Now, in the so-called “public sphere” dominated by such books and their sensationalist televised counterparts (Fox News, *Envoyé Spécial*), very seldom do we hear from Muslims who are *not* in the business of denouncing their own kind—save the well-intentioned but not very effective pleas that “Islam is a religion of peace,” as if that were a satisfying response to *Disfigured* and *Submission* and unceasing reports of terrorism training. (“Whom do you believe, me or your own eyes?”) Left largely to the side—either out of their own prudence or out of the “public sphere’s” decision that their voices are less interesting—is a broad middle group of Muslims who do *not* wish to renounce the possibility of just war (yes, *jihâd*) and *do* wish to remain true to Islam’s norms (yes, *shari‘a*), and who *do* tune in to scholarly opinions (yes, *fatwâs*)—and who, all the while, live ordinary, nonterrorizing lives. They do so at the same time that many of their Catholic fellow citizens subscribe to doctrines of the just war, wish to enter heaven, and listen to what the pope has to say (as do, *mutatis mutandis*, their Jewish and Baptist and Mormon neighbors).

It is a subset of *these* Muslims to whom I have been listening in France: scholars and educators and public figures who are trying to configure a set of teachings and norms and institutions that will anchor Islam in France, for now but especially for the next generation, and without renouncing the traditions of Islam. Theirs is the question that I intend in this book's title: Can Islam become a workable reality for Muslims who wish to live fulfilling social *and* religious lives in France? This book concerns some of their answers to that question.

In an earlier book, in some ways a companion to this one, I explored the ideas and anxieties of some non-Muslim French men and women about the visible presence of Islam on their soil. I did so largely through one particular lens, the conflicts over the wearing of Islamic scarves in public schools, but I touched on a broader array of issues, from racism (also aimed at non-Muslim people of color) to the shape of the urban built environment.³ That study posed the question of whether Muslims who wish to publicly practice their religion can make their way in French society without having to pretend to be something other than Muslims. Can they become *citoyens à part entière* rather than *citoyens entièrement à part*, “complete citizens” of France rather than “citizens completely on the sidelines”?⁴ Particularly thorny are the issues implied by the phrase “pretend to be something other than Muslims.” How far will the French state go in requiring not just obedience to the law and correct public comportment, but assimilation to a particular set of (post-) Christian practices and values?

Although in the final chapter I return to those issues, throughout most of this book I focus on the Islamic side of the same issue: what forms of Islamic ideas and institutions will enable those Muslims wishing to practice their religion to do so fully and freely in France? I explore the development of mosques and of Islamic schools and institutes and, simultaneously, the Islamic reasoning that subtends and suffuses these institutions as it answers such questions as the following: What should an Islamic secondary school look like in a secularist society? How does one teach Islam in a way that remains connected with global deliberations *and also* provides guides for French living? What should mosques do? Should a marriage be conducted in a religious manner or at city hall? May I borrow money at interest from a bank to buy my home?

As in my previous books on France and on Indonesia, I set out to practice an “anthropology of public reasoning.” The “anthropology” part of that phrase means that I look whenever possible at ongoing interactions in social life: at how a teacher reasons or an imam persuades or a city official justifies his actions. I bring in written texts when these enter into social life, when they are used in teaching or read widely, but I begin from social interactions in mosques, schools, public meetings, and

Internet exchanges. The “public reasoning” part means that I highlight the ways in which people deliberate and debate in these public settings. It is in these practices of deliberation—justifying one’s beliefs and seeking areas of agreement—rather than in a static notion of an achieved consensus that I find hope for pluralistic forms of civic integration.⁵

A critical component of the anthropology of public reasoning is the study of justifications: on what grounds do speakers advance one position rather than another? What kinds of argument do they pursue, and how are these received? In the Islamic context these questions often turn on sources of authority: which past authorities or scriptural texts are cited? Does an argument emphasize the distinctive demands placed on Muslims in France, the universal character of God’s call to walk along the straight path, or both? Through these questions I wish to highlight the specific forms taken by Islamic reasoning in these particular French social contexts.

This attention to Islamic justifications should, I believe, extend current social science analyses of how people in different societies justify their positions on policy issues. Some of these analyses have discerned distinct sociomoral conceptions of worth or value that underlie specific acts of justification and that, in weighted combinations, form national (or subnational) “repertoires of evaluation.” Parisians and New Yorkers may both recognize that material success, social solidarity, and personal morality are legitimate bases for judging the actions of others, but the two groups will assign different weights to these three values.⁶ Repertoires, therefore, can be mapped onto particular territories.

The problem faced in this book is a bit different. Muslims who are engaged in deliberating about Islam in France must navigate between two spatially distinct realms of justification: a transnational one, based on the norms and traditions of Islam, and a national one, based on the civic values of France. The repertoires of evaluation at use in these two realms are not differentially weighted versions of each other but refer to entirely different foundations: God in the one case, the Republic in the other. Each repertoire is a distinct assembly of norms and values that delimits acceptable from unacceptable ways of explaining and justifying actions.

In much of this book, I focus on a handful of individuals, Islamic public actors who find themselves at the intersection of these two realms as they teach and deliberate about how best to create Islamic institutions in France. As *Islamic* actors, they find themselves engaged in exchanges with scholars who live in Syria, Senegal, Turkey, or Egypt, some of whom post articles on Web sites, have their books translated into French (and other languages), and appear in public discussions in Paris, Lyon, or Lille. Each of those scholars commands his own type of authority—the pro-

fessor at an established Islamic university, the scholar who commands an impressive range of scriptural texts, or the inspirational leader of a Sufi order—usually at a level far beyond that of any Islamic public actor living in France. As French Islamic actors formulate their own opinions, they must keep in mind the commentaries and judgments that might be delivered by those transnational authorities—and as we shall see, sometimes those authorities deliver quite negative judgments on certain opinions developed in France.

At the same time, these Islamic actors live in France and must respond to the experiences and exigencies of life in that country. On the one hand, they must craft their opinions to the lives of French Muslims, whose questions concern how to live in a secular society: how to worship, work, or marry in the absence of Islamic institutions. On the other hand, they must try and adapt what they say and do to French norms and understandings about religion and social life, lest they be attacked as insufficiently secularist or as overly communalist.

Now, if those French understandings were clear and unambiguous, this task might not be so difficult, but France contains a tension, if not a contradiction, between its Republican political model and the way religion-minded citizens organize their lives. In the ideal world of Republican France, everyone develops similar values and orientations by participating in public institutions, starting from their education in state schools. This direct, sustained contact between the state and the individual underwrites the dual capacity to live together and to deliberate in rational fashion, because everyone lives and reasons starting from the same first principles. On this view, intermediate institutions such as voluntary associations, private schools, and religious practices are to be discouraged, lest they nourish divergent values and create social divisions. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, perhaps the emblematic figure of this philosophy, affirmed the ultimate identity of citizens' interests in the general will, to be expressed through the state and reproduced through its institutions.

But Rousseau also upheld the rights of citizens to form voluntary associations in order to carry out their diverse interests. When in the first few years of the twentieth century the state got out of the business of subsidizing religions, it intended to turn religious life over to private associations of French citizens, who would then, in turn, leave schooling to the state. The Catholic Church resisted these measures, and a series of compromises led to new laws extending governmental support to religious buildings and permitting religious private schools—even financing them if they taught the national curriculum. These compromises never fully satisfied those who saw religious institutions as compromising Republican unity. Struggles for women's rights during the 1960s and 1970s were waged against a Church unwilling to allow freedom of control over

women's bodies. State support to religious schools continued to excite passions on both sides well into the 1980s.

When, beginning in the 1980s, Muslims sought to follow the example of other religions by forming religious associations, building houses of worship, and seeking state funding for religious schools, they encountered a double source of resistance and suspicion: as one more religious body threatening Republican unity, and as one element in a global movement threatening the West. Were they trying to resist integrating into the rest of French society? Did they harbor values distinct from those held by others in France? To some degree these questions imply a reluctance to acknowledge the degree of religion-based associative life already basic to France, but they also point to the special difficulties faced by Islamic public actors in finding a stable equilibrium between the French rules of the game and a respect for Islamic norms.⁷

Above, I narrowed the book's title question to, What can Muslims do to create a workable Islamic reality in France? And yet even in this reduced form the question opens up two more specific sets of queries: given the transnational nature of Islamic public reasoning, how far can or should French Muslims adapt the norms and institutions of Islam to local norms and institutions? And how far will they be allowed to follow a Republican path that is itself internally contradictory?

Neither question is limited to France. From Morocco and Nigeria to Pakistan and Indonesia, we find Muslims wrestling with how to adapt Islamic texts and traditions to local, contemporary ways of life. The issue is posed most profoundly for matters of gender equality, religious pluralism, and the right to choose to leave Islam.⁸ In Indonesia, for example (where I have worked for many years), some scholars have contrasted what they see as an overly Arabic-cultural and patriarchal bias in Islamic legal teachings to the more gender-equal nature of Indonesian life, and they have drawn on that contrast to develop a new code of Islamic law for Indonesia.

The second question, concerning the "fit" between Islamic traditions, on the one hand, and national norms and values on the other, arises most sharply in Europe and North America only because Muslims are relatively recent immigrants to these lands. The same questions once were asked of Catholics and Jews, and each time they emerge, they bring to the fore contradictions within each national political tradition. In the United States, for example, this contradiction lies between the formal claim to divorce matters of state from matters of faith and the less formal but often more powerful "commonsense" view that the country was based on a Protestant way of life, later expanded to a "Christian" one and (sometimes) today to a "Judeo-Christian" one. The positive challenge to each country is to make more precise the background conditions

of life in a country, so as to make clear what is required of new arrivals and therefore what is also required of people who have lived there longer. What precisely *is* the role of religion in U.S. public life? What precisely *are* “British values?” What *should be* the shared way of life of all who make their home in France? The relatively new presence of Muslim residents could provide an opportunity to revisit and perhaps to expand the meanings of living together in all these countries rather than remain an irritating reminder that such meanings are a bit cloudy.

If, as I suggest, the questions I have posed are by no means limited to one country, why focus on France? I find that in France, the general dilemmas and tensions I discussed above stand in particularly clear relief, because of two distinctive features of the French experience. First, Muslims have had a longer and deeper experience in France than anywhere else in Western Europe.⁹ They came to work in France earlier and in greater numbers than did South Asians in Britain (the next deepest Muslim-European presence), and the Algerians among them eventually became citizens of France rather than merely imperial subjects. Most Muslims arriving in France came from countries where large numbers of people spoke French to some degree, a feature that contrasts sharply with the histories of Muslims’ arrival in the Netherlands, Germany, or the Scandinavian countries. Not that this familiarity was peaceful: strikes, repression, and the brutal Algerian War characterized the long years of colonial rule, and the riots of late 2005 showed the world how little a part of French society many of the children and grandchildren of those immigrants now feel. But these have been conflicts and struggles occurring within a postcolonial Franco-phone space with a long history to its name.

Second, to continue the contrast with Britain, if Muslims from northern and western Africa have been in France longer than Muslims from South Asia have been in Britain, they nonetheless had a harder time gaining religious recognition. While their British counterparts formed local associations to promote halâl foods and Islamic curricula in local schools and to build places of worship, French Muslims were encountering strong legal and cultural resistance to these forms of local lobbying. British multiculturalism provided smoother pathways to creating Islamic institutions than did French traditions of secularism, and British localism allowed Muslims to make advances with local school boards and councils, while in France it took the much slower creation of national organizations to advance these agendas—and at that, slowly.¹⁰

The French specificity thus cuts both ways: a longer familiarity but a sharper set of obstacles in the way of Muslims seeking to create an Islamic way of life. Muslim religious innovators in France have been pushed harder and farther to find ways to simultaneously satisfy Islamic and Western ways of life than have their counterparts in Britain, Germany, Italy, or,

for that matter, the United States. Some of the French Muslim innovators today are looking for patches of convergence, if not explicit agreement: areas where at least some versions of Islamic norms overlap with at least some notions of French (or more broadly European and North American) ones. Some of these overlaps are on matters of legal interpretation—ways to see a civil marriage as already Islamic and to enforce an Islamic marriage contract in civil court. Others are overlaps achieved through tacit accommodations and through nuanced ways of speaking—how an Islamic biology teacher approaches evolution while wearing a headscarf, or how a municipal official finds a way to help build a mosque while proclaiming secularist principles. The results are, I believe, of general interest if they suggest pathways toward accommodation and innovation that do not sacrifice either accountability to secularist principles or faithfulness to the message of Islam.

Much, of course, has been written about Muslims in France, and even more about Muslims in Europe and in the West. Emblematic of work on France is the title of a 1997 publication, “Is Islam Dissolvable in the Republic?” Answers differ, but the question remains a common touchstone for most French students of French Islam: Can Muslims divest themselves of their older identities and habits such that they resemble others in France? Can Muslims coexist with others? Can they integrate, or assimilate? Can Islam become more like (privatized forms of) European Christianity?

Some of the more interesting among these studies, most of them in political science or sociology, construct typologies of Muslims’ orientations toward the wider societies: Muslims are Republican, communalistic, or somewhere in between.¹¹ Others, with more immediate policy issues in mind, phrase the issue in quasi-quantitative terms: How far have Muslims managed to assimilate, or integrate?¹² Some draw insightfully on in-depth interviews to highlight specific questions: How do some Muslim women use their choices of dress to negotiate space for themselves vis-à-vis their families or vis-à-vis the religious traditions out of which they come? How do Muslims experience prison in religious terms?¹³

Still others stress that Muslims inevitably will become more like Europeans as they create privatized and individualistic versions of their religion.¹⁴ Hence the intense interest among some officials, journalists, and academics in estimating *how* religious they (still) are, manifested in polls asking “Muslims” (usually identified by last names) about regularity of worship, mosque attendance, and fasting, in order to sort respondents into categories of practitioners, mere believers, or neither.¹⁵

My starting point is a different one from that of most of these works: less “how are Muslims fitting in with France” than “in France, what do certain Muslim public actors propose to make of Islam?” My interest is

from *within* the religious tradition, and in particular from the broad set of concerns that we can call “normative” and that stretch from matters of worship and service to God (*ibâdât*) to matters of relations among humans (*mu‘âmalât*). But as my object is public reasoning and its social contexts rather than ideas per se, I want to see how some Muslims explain, persuade, and offer opinions to other Muslims, or, to use the analytical terms introduced above, I want to see how they develop and communicate new repertoires of evaluation within the Islamic realm.¹⁶

I begin by explaining how the historical trajectories of Muslims in France have shaped their strategies of adaptation and innovation. I refer to “Muslims” in the sense of “sociological Muslims,” that is, people whose background and traditions form part of the long history of Muslim civilization, regardless of whether they worship regularly or what they believe. It is very important not to ascribe a uniformity of religious observance to Muslims, and most “sociological Muslims” in France do not take active roles in debates about Islam. But most of them consider themselves to be Muslims, and they are seen as such by others around them. I do, for that reason, retain “Muslim” as a socially relevant characteristic applying to a broad category of French residents. But it does not mean that all Muslims always highlight that dimension of their identity in their everyday lives.

In subsequent chapters I narrow my focus to Islam and to what I call Islamic public actors, that is, men and women who engage in public activity with respect to Islamic concerns. In part two, I examine how some of these Muslims have developed mosques, schools, and institutes through which they convey certain ideas about Islamic knowledge and how it should be understood in contemporary France.

I start with a handful of mosques and their social and political environments. I do so because the creation of mosques has been a key concern of Islamic public actors, particularly since the early 1980s, and because some mosques have become centers for broader social activities. Although I discuss all the major Muslim populations in France, including Muslims who came from northern and western Africa, Turkey, and the Comoro Islands, most of what I write in this volume concerns first and foremost scholars and public figures from North Africa (the *Maghreb*)—Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Muslims from the Maghreb make up the great majority of French Muslims, and it is they who have tackled the problems posed above in the most direct and public way. As I describe in detail below, Turkish and West African trajectories have differed from those of North Africa in ways that are relevant to the study of Islamic public reasoning. Turks have focused on creating their own mosques and schools, most of which remain tightly linked to parties and movements in Turkey. West Africans show a more diverse array of patterns, in which Sufi orders

tied to West African teachers predominate. Both populations look toward authorities in their homelands to a greater degree than do North Africans, and therefore have taken a less predominant role in debates about what to make of Islam in France. (They also are relatively more recent immigrants to France.) But if the questions posed by the title of this book have been taken up most enthusiastically by North African Muslims, the answers and institutions that follow from them will sooner or later shape thoughts and actions of all those in France who seek to live by what they see as Islamic norms and values.

Across three chapters, I consider how some Islamic public actors have created Islamic teaching environments in France. I begin with the director of one of France's major Islamic institutes and his response to the challenge of teaching about Islam in a Western European country, then explore the contours of the Islamic educational field in France, and finally look at an early effort to teach the French national school curriculum in an Islamic private school. Here pedagogy is at the fore: do certain ways of teaching suggest certain attitudes toward religious knowledge and toward civic knowledge?

In part three, I turn from spaces to debates and focus on a small set of questions arising from everyday dilemmas facing Muslims living in France (and, with some differences, elsewhere in Europe and North America). In each of two discussions, I analyze the shape of reasoning and debate in specific public spaces, and the constitution of a socially embedded realm of justification. The first considers the issue of whether one should take out interest-bearing bank loans to purchase a home. The debate takes us toward a longstanding question: Should Muslims living in "non-Muslim lands" be exempt from certain rules? These debates have been continually transnational, and I consider some of the spheres in which they have occurred, including mosques, schools, and the Internet. The second discussion brings up the question of how to properly marry and divorce. These debates include interrogations among Muslims about the Islamic validity of civil marriages and parallel debates among French jurists about whether to recognize Islamic forms of marriage and divorce. With this discussion, I move toward asking whether it is possible to create a convergence of norms and practices *across* these distinct realms of justification.

These issues, and others not explored here in detail (ensuring *halāl* quality, carrying out sacrifice, limiting the wearing of religious dress), involve dialectical movements between institutional constraints and normative arguments. They all potentially involve Muslims and non-Muslims—even the debates over bank interest, although currently involving Muslims alone, could very soon involve non-Muslim financial institutions, as they have in Britain and the United States. Although these debates start from concrete issues, they also bring up longstanding issues in Islamic

reasoning: Should norms differ by region, or change over time, and if so, to what extent? How far may scholars move from the specific injunctions given in scripture to general principles that can be inferred from scripture? These last two questions structure much of the debates considered here, as they do in much of the world, as Muslims living in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and lands of more recent settlement in Europe and North America engage in global deliberation, and sometimes sheer confrontation, on how Muslims ought to adapt to new social exigencies.

I examine closely two lines of response to these broad normative questions, each possessing a long Islamic lineage. The first suggests that Islamic norms should be inflected across differing social settings, such that Muslims living in one place would be exempted from rules that otherwise would apply. The second, to which I devote more attention, urges Muslims to evaluate their normative statements over and against what they see as the overall “objectives of God’s revelations,” the *maqâsid ash-sharî’a*. Those who advocate this “maqâsid approach” draw on a long tradition of thinking about the interest and welfare (*maslaha*) of Muslims.¹⁷ But they also encounter objections from several quarters, both within France and beyond its borders. Some scholars, mainly in centers of Islamic learning, emphasize the importance of remaining within long-standing methods of legal reasoning and accuse those pursuing maqâsid reasoning of departing from those methods. Others, both ordinary Muslims and the scholars to whom they listen (many in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states), insist on keeping to the letter of the revealed texts. Of course, many who advocate justifications based on maqâsid also pay close attention to the study of scripture and to one or more older legal traditions (the *madhhabs*), and the controversies have to do with priority and emphasis.

The maqâsid approach continues to grow and develop in several directions: toward social engagement in broad, interfaith causes, toward pedagogical refinements, and toward daily advice to Muslims dispensed in mosques and institutes. Its emphasis on adapting norms to broader religious goals makes it particularly useful to Muslims caught in the twin dilemmas of religious accountability and secularist acceptability. In fact, many of the diverse approaches within Islam that are emerging in France, and across Europe, share a tendency to justify both normative innovation and resistance to such innovation on grounds that I call *socially pragmatic*. Whether an Islamic actor advocates reasoning on the basis of one or more legal traditions, or in terms of the objectives of the Qur’an, or in terms of principles derived from scripture, he or she often justifies the choice of style of reasoning in terms of the resulting benefit for Muslims. I examine the major objections to this form of reasoning, as well as its possibilities for adapting Islamic norms to French social conditions.

I end by returning to the question posed by the book's title, but now noting that for many non-Muslims in France, the critical issues may be less matters of secularism and public space than the perception that Muslims represent an undesirable source of value-pluralism. The spaces marked as Islamic provide young Muslims social and moral foundations for civic engagement, but they also produce anxiety among those in France who fear that some Muslims have not adopted, and may not adopt, "French values."

Across these chapters, I trace real and potential pathways of convergence in normative reasoning from the two directions of French social and legal norms and from Islamic ones. But the convergence will depend on the acceptance of a certain measure of social pragmatism from both sides. Islam is more likely to "be French"—that is, to be a fully accepted feature of the French socioreligious landscape—when both Muslims and non-Muslims have developed convincing reasons to accept pragmatic forms of justification, ones that accept the social welfare of all as a good reason to support a policy, and that accept a pluralism of values as perfectly coherent with appropriate understandings of French secularity.

Fashioning the French Islamic Landscape

THE ENTRY OF ISLAM into France's public space touched two sharp nerves that had long run through the nation's history of contentious politics: the tensions generated by waves of immigration, and the thin, sometimes frayed thread of religious toleration. In one sense Islam was nothing new, in another it was wholly different, and its entry brought back into public consciousness fights and fissures that previously and otherwise could be more easily forgotten: colonial repressions, modern anti-Semitism, and the struggles between Catholics and Republicans.¹

France as a whole was shaped by immigration, and most of it was from elsewhere in Europe. Some in France thought that the Poles and Italians were too Catholic for France, and the Jews not patriotic enough.² But the arrival of many Muslims after the Second World War did signal something new: a dramatic transformation in the religious topography of France wherein Islam no longer marked the boundaries of "Europe" but was growing in its center.

This shift had been taking place for some time. When Charles the Hammer stopped the Moorish armies pushing north from Spain, or when Saint Louis sent Crusaders against the Saracens who had taken the Holy Land, Islam came to define the edge of Christendom as the dangerously close monotheistic cousin waiting on the periphery. But when France invaded Algeria in the 1830s and eventually took control of much of northern and western Africa, it brought a mass of Muslims under its rule and, when they were needed to work or to fight, onto its metropolitan soil. Islam itself became an instrument in France's dealing with Muslim rulers, with temporary Muslim workers, and with competing European powers. France billed itself as a "great Muslim power" with a population that included French citizens and Muslim subjects. Islam had become an *internal* periphery, a product of this colonial division of imperial France.³

By the mid-twentieth century, Muslims in the colonies had won independence and other Muslims had settled in France, now not as temporary workers but as permanent residents and citizens of France. Eventually, many of these new residents presented themselves in the public eye as Muslims: not as workers or North Africans or postcolonials but as practitioners of a new *French* religion. The idea that Islam would take its place alongside Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism as a recognized religion, with services in public places, and schools, and special ways

of marrying and burying—all this was very new for those French men and women who were either more or less Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish, or who had thought that religion was on its way out of public life altogether.

So now France would have to sigh and step back and form commissions to decide how best to “integrate” Muslims and their Islam, how to make Islam something visible to and thus controllable by the state, tolerable to non-Muslims, and oriented toward Paris rather than toward Algiers or Riyadh. Perhaps an Islam of faith and properly circumscribed devotions could be French, but an Islam of schools, mosques, and people whose everyday demeanor marked themselves off from others and who sought religious knowledge outside the country—that was a different story, one that was harder to square with those stories of Charles the Hammer and Saint Louis, and with the more recent stories of Jules Ferry and *laïcité* and the combat with the Catholic Church.

MIGRATION PATHWAYS

Let us look more closely at how the French history of colonial rule and Muslim migration has shaped Islam in France today. Most Muslims living today in France either came from, or trace their origins to, former French territories in northern or western Africa. Their stories are deeply interwoven both with the creation of the French Empire and with the demand for labor on French metropolitan soil. Out of these two histories has developed a particular set of locations and dispositions that distinguish the French Islamic landscape from others in neighboring parts of Europe.

Algerians were the first to come in large numbers to France, and they and their descendants still make up the largest population of Muslims. France began its control of this part of North Africa in 1830, encouraged European settlement, and by the 1870s had made Algeria into a part of France itself, rather than a protectorate or a colony.⁴ During the first half of the twentieth century the French government and private companies brought Algerian men to metropolitan France whenever unskilled labor was needed. During the Great War they were imported to replace French factory workers called up for active duty, and to serve in the military themselves. Labor migration continued during the interwar years, but it was the rebuilding of France after the Second World War that led to the most massive efforts to encourage labor immigration, much of it, again, from Algeria. As political repression and economic hardship increased in Algeria, particularly during the Algerian War (1954–62), families increasingly came to settle in France. They continued to do so until the global re-

cession of 1973–74, when France suspended labor immigration, leaving close to 900,000 Algerians in France. Algerians have stayed: today they are the least likely immigrant group to return to their natal land—one-half as likely as Tunisians, one-tenth as likely as Portuguese.⁵

By the 1960s, Algerians had been joined by other North Africans in hostels and in housing projects throughout France: in Lyon and its suburbs, in the fast-growing eastern region of Alsace and Mosel, across the broad northern arc of industrial cities around Lille and adjoining Roubaix, and in the cities and suburbs of Marseille and Paris. The Moroccans and Tunisians who joined them largely arrived after their countries had won their independence, although some had worked in France during the colonial period. By 1974, 260,000 Moroccans and 140,000 Tunisians lived in France, with students and professionals adding to early streams of industrial workers.⁶

These North African Muslims arriving in France included speakers of Berber languages and a range of Arabic dialects, but they shared the use of Arabic in religious life, common North African religious traditions, and an allegiance to the Mālikī legal school of Sunni Islam. They thus were able to worship together in the prayer spaces in their apartments or in mosques. Despite a lingering spirit of competition, particularly between Algerians and Moroccans, and the occasional dispute over mosque leadership across ethnic boundaries, the common heritage has meant that this largest group of Muslims in France has far fewer internal cleavages than is the case for Muslims in Britain, the Netherlands, or Germany.⁷

West Africans also came to France as laborers and soldiers, but most came later and retained stronger prior religious ties than did North Africans. Large-scale immigration from Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania began only after these countries had won independence and had signed formal labor agreements.⁸ Many Muslims from these countries preserved strong ties to their Sufi religious leaders and today welcome those leaders to centers in Paris or Marseille. Many West Africans are not Muslim, and in the French public eye the West Africans are not as closely identified with Islam as are the “Arabs.” But as the more recent arrivals, they are less likely than North Africans to be legal residents and to have permanent employment, and they are more likely to live in crowded quarters and, for cultural reasons, to live in polygamous families. Increasingly it is these Muslims rather than North Africans who are targeted by the larger society as insufficiently adapted to France, and whose problems and actions are most often framed in racial terms.⁹

Among major Muslim immigrant populations, only the Turks came from a country with no historical ties to France, and they have developed the most ethnic-specific set of religious institutions. Workers came from Turkey on labor agreements beginning in 1969, and settled in Paris or in

eastern France; by the late 1990s there were about 350,000 people from Turkey, including Turks and Kurds, in France.¹⁰ Few spoke French, and most relied on preexisting ties to find work, to agree on marriage partners for their children, and to shape their religious lives.¹¹ They are much more likely than are North Africans to marry someone from their country of origin, and much less likely to speak French to their children.¹²

Muslims from overseas French territories also make up important communities: by 2005, about 193,000 Muslims with their origins in Mayotte and 70,000 with origins in the Reunion Islands lived in metropolitan France.¹³ In addition, violence and political turmoil have brought asylum seekers to France from Bosnia, Lebanon, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, and elsewhere.

Because of the staggered time frames of immigration, some immigrant groups have much deeper roots in France than do others. Algerian immigrants are three times as likely as other Muslim immigrants to have arrived very young and therefore to speak fluent French. They also have a deeper history of engagement with France than even this statistic suggests, because many adults who arrived in France from Algeria were born in Algeria when it was part of France, and all Algerians *were* French until 1962. At the other end of the spectrum are the West Africans, who are the most likely to have arrived in France as adults.¹⁴

Contemporary immigration streams have by and large continued these historical patterns. In 2004–5 there were 4.9 million people living in France who had been born elsewhere (40 percent of whom had taken French nationality). Some 1.5 million of the total had come from North Africa, including 677,000 from Algeria, 619,000 from Morocco, and 220,000 from Tunisia. Another 225,000 were from Turkey, 67,000 from Senegal, and 56,000 from Mali. (Portugal, Spain, and Italy were the other large sources of immigrants.) Between one-fifth and one-third of each of the Muslim-majority country groups had acquired French nationality.¹⁵ These Muslims live mainly in city centers or peripheral ring cities in the regions of Paris, Lyon, Marseille, Lille, and Alsace. Paris proper is 10–15 percent Muslim, Marseille 25 percent, and Roubaix, near Lille, 50 percent.

This history of immigration, determined largely by colonial control and labor recruitment, thus gave a very specific profile to Muslims in France. The large majority of Muslims trace ties to three northern African countries, and they share broad patterns of language, culture, and religious affiliation, along with a relatively long-term familiarity with France. The two populations next in size remain more tied to religious organizations in their countries of origin: West African Muslims to specific teachers and mosques in Mali or Senegal, and Muslims from Turkey through one of two competing transnational organizations. This profile in turn has

shaped public deliberations in France: the most visible Islamic public actors in deliberations and activities in France come from a North African background and share a common religious frame of reference. These features have made it easier for them to form national umbrella organizations and to work across country boundaries than would otherwise have been the case (and than is the case elsewhere in Europe). Put another way, the fissions and quarrels that do surface among public actors have been due more to competition between individuals (and sometimes between mosques) than to differences in religious ideas and histories or in background language and culture.

Residence and Boundaries

Where Muslims have settled also has shaped how they interact and think about identity and interests. In the 1950s the state built hostels and low-rent apartments for single workers near factories and away from city centers, a decision that was intended to neutralize Algerian nationalist recruiting drives as well as tightly link immigration to specific labor needs. France also began to build “moderate income residences” (*habitations à loyer modéré*), the now infamous HLMs that have come to stand for peri-urban decay and violence. Low-income families gained access only slowly to these projects, but when they did they heartily welcomed the opportunity to live in clean, new apartments with indoor plumbing. Following the modernist style of the day, projects were built as separated islands of 500 or more apartments, often far from public transportation.¹⁶ By the 1990s, the average project in the Paris region held about 9,000 residents; the very largest, Val-Fouré in Mantes-la-Jolie, has held as many as 28,000 people in 7,600 apartments.¹⁷

Eventually, as factories closed down and the more upwardly mobile families moved away, the projects became unemployment traps rather than starting points on the escalator to success. People in the outer cities generally have high unemployment rates, but the official numbers understate the realities faced by youth in the projects. A town may have a 20 percent unemployment rate, twice the national average, but for younger residents the rate may be 30 percent, and for those who left school and through the projects the rate may be 50 or 60 percent.

It is the children who grew up in the projects who burst onto the front pages of newspapers throughout the world in the November 2005 riots. They are likely to be young people of color: about 18 percent of all people in France live in HLMs, but 50 percent of North African immigrants, 37 percent of other African immigrants, and 36 percent of Turkish immigrants live in these projects.¹⁸ Dark skin color makes already poor

chances at employment even worse. A 2005 report on employment is one of the rare studies in France to have examined the difference that ethnicity makes. The authors conclude that having a North African background makes you two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than if you are (or, more important, if you look and sound) “native French,” controlling for level of education, and that this difference has changed little in fifteen years.¹⁹

But at the same time, and somewhat counterintuitively, the low-cost housing projects have served to counteract ethnic self-segregation even as they have reinforced social and economic segregation. If you apply to an HLM company you end up wherever the housing office sees fit to put you. As a result, blacks, North Africans, and “native” French live in the same buildings. Although in some housing projects the majority of residents are immigrants, French citizens make up a majority of all HLM residents, as well as a majority of residents of the so-called “dangerous” suburbs. (The boys and young men who were arrested during the riots of late 2005 included “French with roots” [*Français de souche*], “blacks” of West African ancestry, and “northern Africans” [*maghrébins*], with parents from Algeria, Morocco, or Tunisia.) Mixing has its limits, though: young people observe ethnic boundaries, particularly between blacks and North Africans. You date across those lines at your own risk, and in 2005 one black-brown relationship led to a conflict and a killing, and prompted the Interior Minister at the time, Nicolas Sarkozy, to make unfavorable remarks about the residents that some say heightened social tensions.

There are some bright spots in the poor ring cities where institutions and associations thrive, but also gloomy spots where they do not. Within the département of Seine-Saint-Denis, where the 2005 riots were concentrated, the cities of Saint-Denis and Clichy-sous-Bois at first glance seem similar: high unemployment rates, subsidized housing, foreign residents, and poor schools. Saint-Denis, however, has a bustling market center with easy access by subway or train to the center of Paris, a campus of the University of Paris, private Islamic schools and associations, and the Basilica, a major tourist attraction. Clichy-sous-Bois (where the riots began) has few such advantages: isolated housing projects, few cafes, no educational institutions beyond the mediocre public schools, and difficult access by public transport.²⁰

These projects are not, then, ethnic enclaves, nor are they museums to the past; they are populated by recent immigrants as well as the descendants of older ones, because immigration continued, even after the 1974 halting of most labor migration.²¹ The sense of exclusion some of them feel is based on a sometimes volatile combination of economic stagnation or decline, on the one hand, and ethnic or racial discrimination on the other. The latter is apparent on all fronts: in seeking jobs and housing, in

treatment by the police and other state agents, and in everyday attitudes exhibited by others in France. These are not young Muslims wishing to separate themselves from France but young citizens of diverse origins wishing to fully join it.

Immigration trajectories and settlement patterns thus have created a population of immigrants and their children and grandchildren less segregated by ethnic identities and religious tendencies than in some other European countries and whose rage, when it breaks through, comes from anger at denial of equality within France, not from a desire to create a separate Islamic existence. But Islam has provided an increasingly important sense of identity and attachment for many of these French men and women: if it is not an Islam of separation, in what ways is it an Islam of France?

RELIGION RISING

By the 1980s, the children of North African immigrants were seeking equality and respect as new members of the French political community, as had European immigrants before them. They called themselves the *Beurs*, a term that comes from the slang transformation of *Arabes*. No longer thinking of themselves only as Algerians, Moroccans, or Tunisians, they had developed a sense of sharing a North African identity, in large part through their everyday interactions with others.²² But above all they wished to obtain social and economic equality. And whereas in the 1960s and 1970s their parents (meaning usually their fathers) may have participated in trade union associations intended to ameliorate their living or working conditions, the new generation sought more public and civic ways to achieve equal rights and recognition as French citizens.²³ Many of them formed local associations concerned with sports, after-school tutoring, or Berber-language radio. In the early 1980s some of these associations organized marches to protest the treatment of the “second generation,” most notably in the 1983 March for Equality, quickly dubbed the “Beurs’ March,” in which 10,000 people participated. But the bitter legacy of the Algerian War, the long-term suspicion of Islam, and the visible difference that “native French” thought they saw between themselves and these new strangers remained as obstacles to acceptance and equality.²⁴

At this point the Beur generation took two divergent paths. Some of the movement’s leaders followed the route of previous immigrant groups and joined the Socialist party, where they campaigned for color-blind equality, notably in the organization SOS-Racisme founded in 1984 by Harlem Désir. (Another organization, France-Plus, emphasized “integration.”) Others, less hopeful that standard socialism-plus-unions could

close the identity gap with the French, looked for new sources of meaning. Some of these men and women thought that Islam would offer an identity that would distinguish them both from their parents and from the native French society that did not seem to want them. They attended lectures sponsored by nascent French Islamic organizations and read books newly translated into French. They thought they had found a new way toward living in France.

The growing sense that “true Islam” could provide a third possibility for constructing a subjective identity, beyond the undesirable “North African” and the unattainable “French,” also led some Muslims in the late 1980s to demand that they be allowed to practice their religion in a public way, by building mosques, carrying out collective rituals, and dressing in an Islamic way. These public actors were largely of North African origin or heritage and also included some French converts to Islam—as I noted earlier, Turks and West Africans were more likely to focus inward on their own communities, or to look beyond the boundaries of France to their countries of reference.

Lyon was once again the starting point for the new associations. The Union des Jeunes Musulmans (UJM, Young Muslims’ Union)—originally with “of Lyon” added—was founded in 1987 to demand that France recognize the right of Muslims to “live our spirituality in the open and not in a reclusive way in the private sphere.”²⁵ The union was created in reaction to the nonreligious character of the Beur movement. As one of its founders said, “We were the radicals; we did not fear crying out ‘*Allahu Akhbar*’ at our demonstrations.”²⁶ The movement started its own bookstore, Tawhid (an expansion of the Tawhid cultural association, founded the year before the UJM), which began publishing the writings and lectures of the Swiss scholar Tariq Ramadan.²⁷ The UJM and Tawhid developed links to regional associations elsewhere in France and distributed its publications through bookstores and at national or regional meetings of like-minded associations. These from-the-ground-up organizing activities also developed links to antiracism and antiglobalization movements.²⁸

At about the same time, other groups began developing projects to construct “cathedral mosques”—usually meaning a large building with a minaret—in Lyon and Marseille. These demands were not always welcomed by other French residents, and the resentment over economic competition that had fueled the Far Right in the 1970s now was reinforced by resentment over visible cultural difference, an unalterable newness on putatively ancient French soil. Many in France saw large mosques as incompatible with the French built landscape, and late that summer one mayor even bulldozed buildings used by Muslims for prayer.²⁹ Others were offended by the sight of Muslims praying in the street on feast days, when the available buildings did not suffice.

But above all it was the appearance of three schoolgirls in headscarves in September 1989 that revved up collective anxiety. Elsewhere I have examined at length the mixture of political philosophy, media-fueled fears, and political opportunism that made a few headscarves into a problem claimed by a few left-leaning intellectuals to constitute “the Munich of the Republic,” meaning a threat to France comparable to the Allies’ capitulation to Nazi demands.³⁰ The girls’ actions symbolized something new: publicly claiming an identity as a Muslim in the “temple of the Republic,” the school.

The new attention to these girls stimulated a series of sociological studies of French Muslim women’s life choices.³¹ Some of the scarf-wearing girls interviewed by these sociologists emphasized the distinction between the traditions of their parents and the “true Islam” they now were discovering on their own. “I became a practicing Muslim thanks to France,” said one young woman, “for it provides structures so that we might learn Arabic and our religion. I am glad to have come to know my religion, true Islam, because, ‘back there,’ it is too traditional and troublesome.”³² Others spoke in very different ways about their past, considering their Muslim identities to be part of identities as Moroccan or Algerian, and some resented the lectures they received from some Muslims about how they should change and how their decision not to wear a headscarf meant they were not Muslim. Some born in France nonetheless called themselves “Algerians who live in France” and used “the French” to refer to non-Muslims.³³ Others said they maintained a private Islam, that whether or not they prayed regularly, they refrained from marking themselves off publicly as Muslim men or women.³⁴ Many of them began to seek out a new kind of Islamic pedagogy, a way to study religion that would go beyond the simple inheriting of a tradition from Morocco or Algeria. They attended talks at mosques or in lecture halls by new, younger Muslims who spoke French as their first language, as well as lectures by preachers from Egypt and Syria who came to the annual gatherings of Muslims at Le Bourget, north of Paris. They bought books and cassettes, and when the first Islamic institutes opened, some of them signed up.

By the late 1980s, then, some younger Muslims who were either born in France or came to study or to work sought a more systematic basis for their religious practices and beliefs. They did not abandon other identities, of course: Muslims did and do continue to think of themselves in multiple, complex, and contextually sensitive ways, just as non-Muslims do. But some among them became more likely to think about Islam in a way that did not intrinsically link religion to the traditions of a particular country of origin, and to look for guides outside their immediate circle of family and friends. This shift in thinking created a demand for new teachers, schools, books, lectures, and forums of all kinds about Islam.

Those who began to teach them included both slightly older Muslim men and women born in France but more often Muslims who had been born elsewhere, who had grown up with some religious education, and who now found a new set of opportunities to spread an understanding of Islam. Some had served as imams or teachers in Muslim-majority countries; others had been trained in secular subjects and engaged in a kind of Islamic pedagogical bricolage to construct a suitable way of teaching their new students.

These characteristics would favor the emergence of Islamic institutions that presented Islam in French and with respect to problems that surfaced in France, because the new students would be young French women and men from diverse origins. But these institutions would also take account of global debates and deliberations about Islam, both because students would have access to a world of Web information and because their teachers were trained in a broad array of Islamic schools and universities. The challenge for both then would be, how to build an Islamic knowledge that would be legitimate in transnational terms and also pertinent to the situation in France.

Authorities

Who are the people who have stepped into these roles as religious authorities for French Muslims? Because the traditional Islamic institutions that define specific authorities are virtually absent from Europe, it is difficult to use the Islamic vocabulary of *muftis*, *ʿulamâ*, and *faqîhs* (juris consults, scholars, and jurists). I prefer to speak of different types of Islamic public actors, each with specific claims to legitimacy and specific bases in social institutions, particularly religious schools, mosques, and Islamic associations.³⁵

Among these several types of authorities, teachers usually work in private Islamic schools or institutes, offering classes on weekends and evenings for Muslims who wish to learn more about their heritage. Those who occupy the principal positions at these schools usually also contribute to public discussions about Islam, for example by writing for magazines or speaking at gatherings. Sometimes they are experts on Islamic jurisprudence, and sometimes they have taught themselves its elements. They are evaluated by younger Muslims more in terms of their abilities to plausibly represent themselves as learned in Islamic matters than in terms of their formal training. In any case, few or perhaps none have the kind and level of training that would earn them a position as a jurist or expert in a Muslim-majority country.³⁶ In the 2000s, some of them are developing plans to teach at a higher level of knowledge in order to train future scholars and teachers.³⁷

Mosque officials may be called *imams*, a term that in the European context often means the person in charge of a mosque, who may or may not lead collective prayer. (Sometimes *recteur* is used to refer to the administrative head of the mosque.) Those who are in charge of the two largest cathedral mosques in Paris and Lyon have the ear of the state and the French media. They speak in very Republican ways. Several other leaders of major mosques in Paris, Marseille, and elsewhere have remained somewhat outside the state's orbit and have large and stable followings. These leaders usually have an array of associated activities: classes, neighborhood associations, women's groups. Many other imams come and go in the smaller mosques, sometimes seizing the right to give Friday sermons for a matter of months, or longer. In what sometimes resembles a market for imams, groups of mosque-goers champion one or another of these (usually young) men; some of these imams may have brought "Salafi" ideas from Saudi Arabia to France.³⁸ Because mosques now have become the basic electoral unit for the national Islamic representative body, the control of mosques has taken on some degree of political importance.

Finally, there are leaders of local associations and leaders of the national federations. The legitimacy of the latter in the eyes of the state rests on the number of followers or affiliated mosques they can claim; their legitimacy in the eyes of those followers has to do with their ability to show themselves as having a political voice in France and to present an attractive version of Islam. Among the most important are the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF, Union of French Islamic Organizations); the "Great Mosque" of Paris, controlled by Algeria; a shifting confederation of mosques allied with Morocco; and two competing groupings of Turkish mosques.

Outside of these institutionally based Islamic authorities in France are independent speakers (such as the Swiss-born Tariq Ramadan), networks of students and activists, and the many Islamic scholars and public figures in Muslim-majority countries, accessible through the Internet but also through books and lectures in France. I will refer to a number of these people in the following chapters.

STATE RESPONSES

As Islamic visibility grew in the 1980s, state and municipal authorities began to respond to new demands, often in experimental ways or by drawing on colonial experience.³⁹ But the colonial administration of Muslims itself had operated on the basis of unresolved questions concerning the citizenship of Muslims and the role of the French state in controlling Islam, and particularly so in the case of Algeria. From the 1830s on, Algeria

was considered to be an extension of France and its residents were considered to be full national subjects. And yet successive generations of French administrators worked to ensure that Muslim residents would not have the same political or legal rights as other residents. As part of France, Algeria was to experience the separation of religion and state, yet Muslims largely remained under a separate legal regime that included elements of Islamic law, and the state continued to regulate Algerian imams and mosques.⁴⁰

This ambiguity in French colonial policy toward Islam and toward French Muslims has left its traces in most recent policies, making the “French rules of the game” difficult to pin down. Islamic institutions remain a matter of both domestic and foreign policy. When in the 1920s France built the Great Mosque of Paris, it did so as a state project, developed through private associations (to avoid violating the 1905 law on secularity) and with active participation from Morocco and Tunisia. Today, Algeria appoints its director, but the French state seeks funds for its maintenance from foreign states. Periods of crisis over the presence of Islamic headscarves in public schools came when French public intellectuals became simultaneously anxious about global political Islam and the state of domestic cohesion.⁴¹

Anxieties about security and integration underlie the series of state efforts to manage Islam. Models were available in bodies that consult with the state regarding matters affecting Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, and after a series of efforts, in 2002–3 the Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, brought together the leaders of the main Islamic federations to form the French Council for the Muslim Religion (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman, CFCM; hereafter the Islamic Council).⁴² Sarkozy directed that the first president be the head of the Paris Mosque, Dalil Boubakeur. The Paris Mosque had long been a favored partner of the state, and it leads one of the major networks of mosques and Islamic cultural associations. When competing for seats on the council the mosque could claim some degree of allegiance from Algerians, who represent the largest number of Muslims in France, and from some other Muslims who mistrusted other, more “religion-minded” Muslim organizations.⁴³

Although Sarkozy created the Islamic Council in his role as Interior Minister, he consulted representatives of those foreign states that had large numbers of Muslim nationals resident in France. Moreover, although the council was supposed to provide an alternative to foreign interference in French Islam, it in fact has had the opposite effect. The Algerian, Moroccan, and Turkish consulates saw the 2003, 2005, and 2008 council elections as opportunities to ratchet up control over “their” constituents by promoting slates associated with each of the home countries, and they did indeed mobilize these residents of France to vote for “their” slate.

The state later was to draw on council leaders to negotiate with terrorists in Iraq who had taken two French reporters hostage.⁴⁴ Its creation may have given Sarkozy a stronger bargaining position when, in 2003, he consulted the director of Cairo's al-Azhar University to see if the ban on Islamic headscarves in schools could be seen as Islamically correct. (The Egyptian scholar responded that Islam recognized the right of the French state to pass such a law.)⁴⁵

If the state's governance of Islam has retained something of the colonial-era ambiguities—Is it foreign or domestic? Does the state regulate its institutions or consider them private?—the state has firmly adopted rhetoric and policies of domestication. Successive prime ministers have proposed schemes to give imams more training in French institutions and values and to make available, through a French foundation, funds that might in part come from overseas sources. As Interior Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie said on July 6, 2007, echoing her predecessors, her ministry was committed “to build and control a French Islam” (*de construire et de maîtriser un islam français*),⁴⁶ even as the state plied its own transnational political trade regarding Islam. Islam remains a security problem in the eyes of many in government. Deportation, harassment, delays in renewing residency permits—these weapons remain available to the state when it needs to deal with recalcitrant imams, those who speak in a way that is judged to be inconsistent with French values.

At the same time, many Muslims do not see the borders between France and the rest of the world as bearing religious significance. Muslim scholars teach obedience to the state's laws, but Muslims seek religious guidance wherever they find it—“even in China,” as the Prophet Muhammad is supposed to have said, and certainly from sheikhs of personal renown or at celebrated institutions in the Middle East and North Africa. The notion that Islam should be taught by Frenchmen in France, a notion that has entered the realm of bureaucratic common sense, is an attempt to cut those very pathways to seeking knowledge globally that many Muslims see as intrinsic to Islam.

Where to Sacrifice?

Underneath these high-profile policy measures, the state and municipalities have found themselves responding in practical ways to Muslim demands. In a halting and experimental fashion, government agencies have tried to create institutions that would meet legitimate demands made by Muslims yet remain within politically acceptable boundaries. The deep entanglement of the French government with religious concerns provides the somewhat counterintuitive and essential context for what follows in this book.

Let me illustrate this entanglement with two practical challenges that have effects on normative thinking: arranging for the massive distribution of properly slaughtered meat on the Feast of Sacrifice, and providing space for congregational prayer.

On the tenth day of the “month of pilgrimage” (*dhul al-hijjah*), Muslims celebrate the Feast of Sacrifice (*Īd al-adhâ*), also called the “great feast” (*Īd al-kabîr*) and, vernacularly in France, the “sheep festival” (*fête du mouton*). In the Qur’an (37: 83–113), God describes the prophet Abraham’s trials, first when his people turned against him for smiting the idols they worshipped, and immediately thereafter when God ordered him to sacrifice his son. God provided a substitute victim in the form of a ram, and blessed Abraham’s descendants. The Prophet Muhammad urged his followers to sacrifice an animal on this day (or one of the two following days) in the tradition of Abraham; he also urged that they distribute some of the meat to the poor. In those regions of Africa from which most Muslims have come to France, the sacrifice is a deeply embedded, family-focused ritual.

Although carrying out the sacrifice is feasible in rural societies, or if sheep, goats, or other animals are in plentiful supply on nearby farms or ranches, it is a logistical nightmare in large urban centers such as greater Paris, and in particular since the early 1980s, when slaughterhouses were moved into rural areas. A few Muslims slaughtered sheep in their apartments or in parking areas, neighbors complained, and the state stepped in, asking mayors to try and find a way for Muslims to carry out the sacrifice appropriately. A series of experiments followed throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and into the early 2000s, most involving cooperation among city authorities (who provided space), private entrepreneurs (who provided sheep), and mosques (which provided certified sacrificers). No solution lasted, particularly after campaigns by the Far Right and by Bridget Bardot to end all animal sacrifice.⁴⁷ As of 2009, the most likely longlasting solution is a set of partnerships involving the state, the larger mosques, and the major supermarket chains.

The officials overseeing these operations have seen their task as one of facilitating Muslims’ tasks, but some also think that Muslims should adapt to modern French norms. The head of veterinary services for the Seine-Saint-Denis department, which has many Muslims but no slaughterhouses, drew on his twenty years of service in Africa to argue that even though he tried to arrange things for Muslims to sacrifice, they needed to change their ways of thinking. In 2004 he told me, “Many of these Muslims have no idea how to slaughter an animal, they grew up in an urban environment, but they continue to want to do that. I consider it to be a festival, a tradition, and not part of religion. The young don’t give a damn about Abraham’s act; it is much more about identity than religion.

I am now a convinced atheist but I had a Catholic upbringing and I know that communion is a sacrifice; but we can transcend that; the Protestants rethought that, for example. All religions have to evolve, and the Muslims need to do that in order to adapt to France.”

This official’s attitude, one of sympathetic disdain, combines his experience in Muslim-majority countries, his sense that therefore he has a pretty good idea of what is and is not Islamic, and his conviction that Muslims simply have not yet understood what would be involved in providing sacrificial animals to all. His attitude was not unusual. Just before the Feast of Sacrifice that occurred in February 2003, the subprefect of Mantes-la-Jolie, the site of one of France’s largest mosques, issued a statement “reminding” officials (including Muslims on the Islamic Council), that “the Muslim religion authorizes sacrifice over the three days,” and that instead of sacrificing, Muslims were permitted to send money to “their countries of origin,” implying that all Muslims were immigrants. Many Muslim leaders objected to the Interior Ministry that this statement was out of order, and the minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, denied that any state officers would usurp the prerogatives of religious authorities. And yet Sarkozy had written to Muslim leaders a week earlier asking them to “remind the faithful that that ritual sacrifice is part of tradition and not among the obligations pronounced by your religion.”⁴⁸

As the state took on the task of arranging for the sacrifice, then, it also sometimes succumbed to the temptation of entering into Islamic debates about what is or is not required of Muslims—and, as we shall see later on, the practical difficulties of sacrifice have also led some Muslims to reconsider their obligations.

Where to Pray?

French officials also have reacted to Muslims’ demands for prayer space, as well as taking initiatives to create politically symbolic mosques. It is worth recalling that mosques were built in southern France as early as the eighth century (in Roussillon), and that Muslims have prayed on French soil at various time ever since. When the state brought large numbers of African Muslims to France during the Second World War, they also built temporary mosques at military camps, as did some companies employing Muslim workers. But these efforts were sporadic, and aside from the construction of the Paris Mosque in the 1920s, the state did little to create permanent places for Muslims to worship.⁴⁹

In the mid-1970s, however, men living in workers’ hostels in the Paris region went on strike to protest rent hikes and the constant intrusion of hostel employees in their daily lives. At the same time, workers at the

Renault factory at Billancourt outside Paris went on strike over wages and job security. Included among their demands was having space to pray on the factory grounds, and they won that demand—largely because the factory owners and hostel managers saw it as a relatively inexpensive way to quiet down the workers at a moment when French industry was under considerable economic pressures.⁵⁰ The men who ran the hostels often had been state employees in the colonies, and it was natural for them to transfer the colonial notion of Islam as social control to post-colonial life in France.

These Muslim workers now had their own social spaces, islands of meaning and spiritual order in lives increasingly full of economic and social stress.⁵¹ In the hostels, residents decorated the prayer spaces with rugs on floors and often on walls, and took charge of assigning the tasks of imam (in the sense of prayer leader) to the more knowledgeable among them.⁵² Often it was people from the same country or ethnic group who took over the care of a particular space, and it was (and is) not unusual to find two prayer spaces in one housing complex, with one used by North Africans and the other by West Africans. Eventually most of these prayer rooms became affiliated with a Muslim association that depended on either the Algerian, Moroccan, or Turkish state, or with a group that was opposed to the regime in power in one of these states, or with a transnational Sufi order. Many of the associations then became part of the larger federations of mosques described earlier, and thereby part of the broad Islamic Council structure in partnership with the Interior Ministry.

Between 1970 and 1985 the number of prayer rooms in France jumped from about 100 to about 500, largely as the result of the responses to the strikes. Some 80 percent of the hostels had prayer rooms. Catholic priests also had made prayer space available in several churches or in buildings no longer used for services.⁵³ By that time, new political processes were under way that once again multiplied the number of prayer rooms, but now beyond the limits of workers' hostels. In October 1981, under the new Mitterrand government, Parliament had passed a law that made it much easier for noncitizens to create associations for social or cultural purposes. The state-sponsored Social Action Fund (Fonds d'Action Sociale, FAS), which once had focused on creating new housing for Algerian workers as a way of countering nationalist activities, now began to disburse subsidies to immigrants' social and cultural associations, funds that many Muslims were able to combine with their own limited monies to convert one or more first-floor apartments into prayer spaces. Their newly registered "cultural associations" often provided Arabic classes and after-school tutoring, as well as places to worship. Sometimes an imam was able to procure a municipal salary as an after-hours tutor and coach for the children.⁵⁴ These cultural associations were largely responsible for

the second major increase in the number of prayer spaces in France: from about 500 in 1985 to 1,279 by 1992 and to about 1,600 by 2003, in effect tripling the number of prayer rooms in eighteen years.⁵⁵

Until the early 1980s, most of the larger structures used for congregational prayers, and thus called mosques, were located in large warehouses, houses, or apartment buildings. Things changed in 1980, when the mayor of Mantes-la-Jolie, northwest of Paris, decided to support the efforts of an Islamic association to build a dome-and-minaret mosque, and again a few years later in Évry, south of Paris, when the right to construct what came to be called a “cathedral mosque” was granted to a group of Moroccan Muslims as part of an overall urban plan. In the early 2000s, Nicolas Sarkozy as Interior Minister let it be known to his prefects that Muslims’ efforts to build mosque-looking mosques were to be supported. Since that time, some mosque associations have worked in partnership with municipal authorities.⁵⁶ Their stumbling blocks have been less often purely financial than political, and on both sides: ambivalence in the mayor’s office about risking attacks from the Far Right for aiding Muslims, and difficulties among Muslim groups in agreeing on a mosque project.⁵⁷

Marseille illustrates the imbrication of religious and political debates over projects to build a large-scale mosque. Discussions about building a city mosque for North Africans in Marseille began in the 1930s, not long after the inauguration of the Paris Mosque.⁵⁸ But serious discussions about building a central mosque came in the late 1980s, when the general idea emerged in France that creating “cathedral mosques” in each city would provide a visible (and easily monitored) place for Muslims to worship. Although the initial plan was shelved in the face of Far-Right opposition, it resurfaced in the late 1990s, and again after the attacks of September 11, 2001. It is worth noting that support for this idea grew along with anxiety over political Islam at home and abroad. The two tendencies might seem contradictory: one promotes Islam in public space, the other combats it. But in fact they grow out of the specific historical policy of the French state toward religions: support religion by facilitating worship in properly built houses of worship but strictly control any “leakage” of religion into those domains where Republican unity requires secularism, of which the primary concern remains with the schools.⁵⁹

Subsequent debates in Marseille have turned on a conflict between two conceptions of what a mosque should be in France: Should it be the visible symbol of Islamic culture or the practical neighborhood prayer space? The Paris Mosque argued that Marseille should have an Islamic cultural center that also would contain a mosque. Mayor Jean-Claude Gaudin supported this plan on the grounds that it would underscore Marseille’s position as France’s window onto the Mediterranean world. Precisely because

this conception of “Islam as culture” dominated the early city plans for a cathedral mosque, some Muslim leaders argued against building such a mosque, seeing it as a vestige of colonial-administered Islam, and argued instead that worship was best done in mosques placed throughout the city, in districts where Muslims lived. The conception of the mosque as a place for worship eventually won out, but so did the idea of a single main mosque for the city. This combined outcome came about largely because several Islamic associations came together to create a new, unified mosque association (and their representatives won the 2005 elections for the Marseille region’s delegates to the national Islamic Council). In July 2006, the mayor signed a contract with this new association. The city agreed to lease land for a new citywide mosque for ninety-nine years at an annual rent of 300 euros, and the association promised to keep the proportion of foreign donations to “20–30 percent” of the total cost.

The mayor long had hesitated to take this step for fear that any cooperation with Muslims would be seized on by the Far Right in local elections. And, indeed, Far-Right groups immediately sued to stop the mosque project on grounds that the nominal lease constituted a hidden direct subsidy to the mosque in violation of the 1905 law separating religions from the state. In April 2007 they won their case before an administrative court, which annulled the contract. In July 2007 the city responded by signing a new contract, this one with a lease of fifty years and an annual rent of 24,000 euros.⁶⁰

Most mosque creating taking place in France today resembles the Marseille experience in that local Muslims raise money and attempt to enter into partnerships with municipal authorities, who sometimes, perhaps out of electoral calculations, support these projects. The fear of foreign control of mosques has been overplayed in France, notes the person most centrally placed in the Interior Ministry’s Islam desk over the past decade, Bernard Godard: “The generosity of the faithful long has been a major part of a process, one that some people thought was the result of miraculous manna sent from the East.”⁶¹

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

At this point we can tentatively identify certain distinctive features of the French Islamic landscape. First is the active role played by the state and by certain municipalities in seeking to organize religious life for Muslims, usually in response to a perceived problem: bloody sacrifice in public, disorganized prayer spaces, or electoral pressures. Although governments throughout Europe engage in the governance of religion in one way or another, France is striking for the coexistence of explicit and legally en-

shrined secularism, on the one hand, and equally vigorous state and municipal engagement with representatives of religious groups, on the other. Other European states generally allow a greater public role for religion and play less of a direct role in regulating religion than France, even where they grant recognition to religious groups (as in Belgium and Germany). I have discussed this tense coexistence elsewhere, but it should be reiterated here as a key dimension of the opportunity structure faced by the Islamic public actors we meet in subsequent chapters.

Second is the dominance of North Africa as the public and political Islamic reference in France. France's long colonial engagement in and with North Africa leads many non-Muslims in France to think of people from a North African background as the prototypical Muslims. To some extent the state also treats Islamic issues as concerning first and foremost people from this region. The demographic and political dominance of North Africans reinforces this tendency.

Third, despite some degree of country rivalry and some degree of tension between Arabic and Berber speakers, differences across Muslims of North African background are less acute and explicit than are those dividing major Muslim populations elsewhere in Europe. Muslims who moved from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh settled in Britain in such a way as to reproduce not only ethnic difference but also those between villages or lineages. Furthermore, strongly felt theological or juridical oppositions among Islamic religious institutions in South Asia often were reproduced in Britain, most notably between various offshoots of the Deoband school and those tracing Sufi-oriented Barelvi backgrounds. Elsewhere divisions are more often among two or more distinct immigrant populations: in northern Belgium and the Netherlands between Moroccans and Turks, for example. No one group is in a position to dominate the landscape, nor do any groups have the long historical ties that North Africans have to France.

We must be careful not overstate the case: Tunisians may think of their traditions as superior to those of Moroccans; Moroccans and Algerians may fight for mosque leadership; and, certainly, racial tensions emerge between North and West Africans. But France's sociohistorical Islamic landscape (migration trajectories, colonial history), together with its formal opportunity structure (the state's active role) favors the emergence of institutions and forms of reasoning that are capable of subsuming differences of ethnic, national, or religious background. And, as we have seen, such was the type of institution that younger Muslims were demanding in the 1980s and 1990s. What has emerged in response?