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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the ways in which secularism communicates with Islam both as a socio-political concept and as daily practice in the context of France. Most studies examine this process through the uses of the headscarf or within the framework of terrorism. This study suggests a fresh perspective by using an experimental spatial analysis with a focus on the major mosques and the practices of mosque congregants. It poses the question how French Muslims reconcile French secularism (laïcité) with Islam through the use of the mosque space. In this respect, mosques are transformed into alternative multicultural spaces where the secular and Islamic are given new meanings and negotiated by Muslims. I argue that the primary actors of this transformation are young Muslims with a dynamic and innovative approach to contextual interpretations of secular and Islamic practices. In this respect, they differ from their conservative counterparts who are bound to the Islamic teachings in Muslim countries regardless of their relevancy. This study concludes that young French Muslims have been undergoing a change from within, and its effects in the wider society are yet to be observed amidst the escalating negative views against Muslims in the West.

**RECONFIGURING FRENCH SECULARISM:
THE MOSQUE AS THE NEW MULTICULTURAL SPACE OF YOUNG MUSLIMS**

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Dedications

To my parents Mehmet and Berrin Özcan & my brother Emre Özcan

Reconfiguring French Secularism: The Mosque as the New Multicultural Space of Young Muslims

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It was a beautiful summer day, as I made my way to Argenteuil, a major *banlieue*¹ of Paris with a large population of immigrants. The holy month of Ramadan had just begun, and Parisians were well aware of this due to the billboards in metro stations and other major public spots depicting images of *iftar*² meals. In these advertisements Muslims were encouraged to eat *couscous*³ and break their fast in advertised halal restaurants. After witnessing this visibility of Ramadan in the streets of Paris, I took the train from St. Lazard Gare to start my 15 km-long journey to Al-Ihsan Mosque, very excited to see how French Muslims were spending a Ramadan day in their “religious space,” which is itself quite visible with its minarets and large dome.

Unlike my experiences during preliminary research in previous years, I noticed a different dynamism this time. There had been preparations to give free iftars to local needy people in the past as well, but most of these had been carried out under the supervision of the mosque administration. Mosque staff, along with some volunteers, had been given instructions on what to do. This year, however, a young leader named Amor had taken the initiative, hoping that this time things would be different.

Knowing the mosque and certain congregants’ delicacy on the practice of working in gender mixed groups, he decided to work with some young male congregants. Amor wanted to be systematic and he wanted to organize them by first explaining the incentives to take leadership this Ramadan. To meet this purpose, he arranged a meeting in one of the rooms, and invited Nabil, the 23-year-old French-born imam, to represent the mosque administration. Other

¹ Banlieue is the French term used for a suburb of a large city. Since the 1970s the term has been increasingly used to describe low-income housing projects (HLMs) for immigrant workers and French of foreign descent who live in the suburbs.

² Iftar is the Ramadan evening meal when Muslims break their fast at sunset.

³ Couscous is a traditional dish made of wheat and served with a meat or vegetable. It is a staple food throughout the North African cuisines of mainly Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

than the imam, there was only Amor's friend, to represent the administration, a volunteer in charge of financial operations of the mosque. The imam kept silent most of the time, and Amor told me later that he deliberately wanted to engage the imam this meeting to gain his support for future activities, and to change his mind set in his approach to educating young Muslims since Nabil was somewhat open to new experiences within the mosque. Approximately twenty men in their early twenties attended the meeting. This meeting was clearly small in scale, but the room where they gathered had symbolic significance for offering a platform to young congregants to voice their opinions, and position themselves differently from the rest of the people in the mosque.

Amor welcomed everyone who wished to take part in the iftar preparations, and it turned out that those who volunteered did not have pre-established strict opinions on matters about religion and social relations. Some of these men were friends from the mosque or the neighborhood, but each introduced themselves before forming groups to prepare the mosque for the iftar. Most of these were students raised in North African households in France. One was a Muslim convert. Maybe because of the composition of the meeting attendees, he first asked Amor whether Islam dictates men and women work and socialize separately to which Amor responded in the negative. Without going into details as to why there were only men in their meeting, which I knew, based on my informants' oral testimonies and my observations, was a consequence of the conservative standpoint of the mosque administration, he said Islam advised that everyone work together for productive achievements. This question was important in illustrating the difference between conservative leaders' approach to Islam, which usually involves conflation of culture and religion to the point where cultural interpretations lead to non-Islamic practices. In this respect, Amor's response demonstrates how Islamic practices were

understood by more progressive Muslims going to the mosque without being fueled by culture-based interpretations of Islam.

The meeting was held as an interactive session giving room to participants to express their thoughts and feelings. First, under the guidance of Amor, they articulated their motivation to come to the mosque, and specifically to be part of this initiative. Two young Muslim men explained their attachment to the mosque by giving examples from their everyday lives:

We were missing certain essential things in our lives. We had big brothers in our neighborhood who helped us through our daily issues at home, in school or elsewhere. When we started coming to the mosque, this role got fulfilled by the imam. We sometimes need guidance on religious, educational and social matters. In this sense, the mosque is a space where we seek support with all these issues. When I come here, I want to act, make a contribution, and develop a sense of responsibility.

This kind of statement, frequently articulated by many young Muslim people, is just an example to show the importance of mosques for Western Muslims contrary to the common belief that mosques are losing their significance especially in young European Muslims' lives. Amor then contributed to this idea by starting a brainstorming session on the meaning of the mosque space for the participants. His concept of the mosque was more than a place of worship. It encompassed a diversity of functions. He administered a roundtable to clarify what the mosque meant to them, and listed their collaborative statements:

1. Learning: Religion, Arabic, Islamic origins, workshops, academic education.
2. Respect and exchange: Introducing Islam to non-Muslims, mutual understanding between different Muslim or non-Muslim groups.
3. Good behavior: Applying universal values such as helping others, being honest and reliable, and French values that are engrained in every young French Muslim such as freedom of expression and religion, equality.
4. Construction: Islamic architecture and art to receive more visits from non-Muslims. Islam is not a religion of couscous.
5. Fraternity and community: Solidarity among different ethnic groups, overcoming ethnic conflicts and enmity.

6. Effective diversity: Not dividing but strengthening Muslims. Repairing the community based on mixing and plurality. Extending this to mainstream French society irrespective of religion and ethnic origins through visits to mosques. Learning from differences.

This list implies the combination of Islamic values with commonsense human values that cater to everyday matters. Amor talked about these one by one, asked the participants to claim ownership of the mosque, and encouraged them to hold on to these principles in and outside of the mosque.

Some young female congregants from different age groups whom I met in an Islamic education class offered in the mosque shared this vision. These women told me that they wanted to reclaim their mosque from its current administration. They came up with several ideas to understand various Islamic practices in other Muslim and non-Muslim settings in the midst of similar or different social challenges posed against Muslims. Lamia, a 21-year-old, and Samira, a 61-year-old, discussed their concerns with me many times, and expressed their desire to act as strong non-submissive women (as opposed to the current teachings at the mosque), go beyond the locality and privacy of the mosque, and to connect the youth to Muslims and non-Muslims both in France and other Western countries. Samira's project to connect Muslim women with Muslim men in the mosque was received with a negative response by the leaders. Her initiative to engage the mosque in social problems of communities in their neighborhood did not receive administrative support, either. Lamia was more assertive in her ideas. She thought it would be a very beneficial experience to start a project with American mosque communities. We started working on this project together using my connections in New York City. However, she was turned down when she sought permission from the administration, which left her disappointed. When I asked her what her next move would be, she said: "I am going to propose this project to another mosque, because the only way to reclaim our mosque will be when the old conservative leaders pass away, and leave the space to the young ones." When I asked her whom she meant by

“young” Muslims, she defined them as Muslims with a youthful mindset. Then, I asked her to elaborate on her perception of conservatives. She said they were those who brought their pre-established views on religion and therefore their planning and thought system did not address the concerns and needs of French Muslims.

This sequence of events exemplifies, in a nutshell, what this dissertation is about: The initiatives implemented by young Muslims to reclaim their mosque from conservative leaders to make it a relevant space to their everyday lives in France. These efforts, while manifesting the significance of religious spaces in French Muslim life, require a reconfiguration of French secularism and a remaking of the mosque as a major public space for Muslims, as evident in the list above summarizing the meaning of the mosque. Along these lines, the politics of inclusion is the organizing theme of the dissertation. I describe this through the invigorating communication between secularism and religion from a spatial point of view within the French context. In other words, I argue that an understanding of how young Muslims pursue politics of Islam-secularism negotiation cannot be fully captured without understanding their place-making efforts. I argue this because French Muslims have, to an increasing degree, been claiming and negotiating their religious particularities with a secular life through discourses and practices intimately connected to spatial belongings and practices in Islamic institutions in a communal way, as opposed to the argument that young French Muslims are living a private Islam visibly but individually. (Cesari 1998; Fadil 2005; Jacobsen 2005; Sackmann 2006).

I use the mosque as a productive entry into understanding this communication by arguing that mosques are major staging arenas of the interplay between Islam and French secularism, which has been the foundation of a nationalism that entails strict separation from any religious/cultural belonging. As a result of this dynamic interplay, where French nationhood is

being reworked, twisted, probed, and reasserted, the mosque has turned into a site of everyday multiculturalism where Islam, Muslim cultures, and French secularity operate simultaneously and establish a unique form of diversity: the existence of multiple cultures and religious groups in a society. In doing so, the mosque practices illustrate the possibility in French secularism to accept, include and even encourage (religious) difference.

So far, the French model of secularism has been widely studied by scholars of Europe (Brubaker 1992; Soysal 1994) who describe it as a unique form of dealing with worldly affairs as separate from religious matters. While secularism⁴ as a modern liberal concept is a contested term, it is usually used to signify a worldview that celebrates scientific advancement, placing itself distant to religion. And yet, it is not necessarily the antithesis of religion. Some scholars, like Taylor (2007), argue that faith cannot be divorced from one's life, even in the contemporary Western world. However, secularism in France is a product of the republican mindset, which is against all types of authority, including the monarchy (dating back to the French Revolution) and, more recently, religion. This mindset defended the state⁵ against church authority at the beginning of the twentieth century, so secularism has taken up a different meaning in France since then. As a result, French secularism, or *laïcité*, refers to science, progress, reason, and state neutrality with regard to religion (Kastoryano 2002, 47). It excludes everything that relates to religion, as well as all other particularities, from public life. Hence, France has developed a particular secular form of governance known as *laïcité* that takes a blind approach to religious, cultural, and ethnic difference while embracing everyone as being French in the public space (Joppke 2009). In this respect, although the accommodation of religious diversity in a secular

⁴ In this dissertation, I investigate the understandings of secularity in the Western context. It has different perceptions and practical outcomes in non-Western contexts. See Calhoun et al. (2001).

⁵ For the purposes of this dissertation I view the state as a black box without describing the inner workings of its different domains such as ministries.

nation-state has been one of the most surprising and challenging issues in contemporary Europe, it has taken a distinctly visible form in France where a top-down politics of inclusive nationalism is officially exercised.

Eventually, Islam suffered the most from this philosophy due to its public visibility and its problematic relationship with the Christian Europe throughout history. Despite a long-lasting tradition of extracting religion, particularly Islam, and pushing it to the edges of society, the state began to make Islam almost a property of France that can be twisted, reformulated, and fit into French nationhood in order to address the current challenges that Muslims pose to France. Therefore, the state began to integrate religion into the public sphere after first attempting to nationalize it by transforming it to “l’Islam de France” (Bowen 2010; Frégosi 2008). Despite these attempts to Frenchize Islam and make it less visible in French society, Islam has gained popularity among French Muslims and found more space in public life. Studies of this social reality have largely focused on the issues of headscarves and terrorism, reinforcing the rigid model of French secularism as an oppressive force against Muslims, and perpetuating the claims that there is a religious revivalism with a vengeance. In these studies, the headscarf is depicted as a Muslim practice of revolt against the state discourse of *laïcité*, and Islamic terrorism is thought to have emerged as a violent response to discrimination from the state and mainstream society. Fernando (2014), in her latest work, has taken up a new approach to understanding the Muslim perceptions of religion and secularism mainly focusing on the headscarf practices. While all of these studies are expressive in understanding the distinctiveness of French secularism, we need further research covering a wide range of organizational Muslim practices in particular places to understand how Muslim groups reconceptualize this long-standing tradition, and struggle to be included within the French model by reconfiguring it and practicing a religion-inclusive and

secular-friendly multiculturalism in their everyday lives, which is a new approach that I suggest based on my observations including the oral, and written accounts of my informants . Therefore, I have chosen the mosque and the multicultural practices of belonging within the mosque to investigate this particular multiculturalism, which I consider as a major site to examine the workings of religious identification as a process of both secular and religious becoming. In this respect, this dissertation investigates this productive tension through the use of the mosque space, which is both a geographic site and a social entity where religious and secular identities are negotiated.

However, a French form of multiculturalism is a hard task to achieve given the irrelevance of this model in the French context for centuries. Multiculturalism as a contemporary political and social term entails inclusion of differences into the political and social spheres, granting them a respected and dignified position in the mainstream tradition of a given society. As a prominent supporter of multiculturalism, despite inconsistencies in practice, the United States claims to recognize all particularities within American society and politics. Continental Europe seems to have a more reserved attitude toward politics of inclusion than the Anglo-Saxon tradition with internal differences, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

As a de facto multicultural nation, France, among all other European nations, has a distinct way of defining and applying politics of diversity. France has a notion of a unified nationhood that is based on the cultural and social standards as determined and imposed by its royal capital, Paris (Colin 2006). Paris has traditionally been the emblem of a dominant royal city culture against the rural culture, and that is why anywhere outside of Paris is considered a rural province in France (Roux 2003). The Paris culture has long represented the ideal nationhood, and ethnic populations from outside of Paris had a hard time gaining recognition for

their differences. As a major example of this exclusion, they had a hard time preserving their local languages and dialects, as in the cases of Bretons and French Basques (Judge 2000). French nationalist policies were applied to native minorities under the Parisian dominance in order to assimilate them. We see a continuation of this unfinished business against rural and urban Muslims in contemporary France due to religious and cultural differences and colonial tensions. It entails uniting all citizens under the overarching laic republicanism through the French language, culture, history, political foundations, and basic principles of *égalité*, *fraternité*, and *liberté*.

French equality is treated as a universal concept that grants everyone equal rights. Its social system, which accommodates everyone within its health, education, and social benefits system regardless of their legal status, is a practical example of this principle. However, this equality is based on the laic tradition, which enforces strict separation of religion and public life. In other words, one has to conform to this rule in order to benefit from the promised equality. By the same token, freedom of speech, expression, religious exercise, etc., also apply so long as they are not imposed by a religious authority. If one acts within these values under the above-mentioned norms, then one is welcomed as part of the nation and is a full citizen under the principle of fraternity. All of these basic tenets of French nationalism originate from the conflicting relationship between secularism and religion. Due to this dominance of French nationalism, multiculturalism, as a politics of diversity, is not recognized as a useful tool to deal with the different voices and entities within the nation, except for some pragmatic initiatives. In this climate, French Muslims have been struggling to reformulate this problematic relationship, and bring a particular type of multiculturalism into France by debunking the earlier versions of

rigid French secularism and opening up a possibility for difference through the use of the mosque space.

The mosque space in France has transformed over the course of years since the beginning of Muslim immigration. Earlier, the mosque was a place that organized religious affairs regardless of the changing conditions in migrant lives. The priority was not relevance of practices exercised within the mosque to real life matters, but was basically oriented toward fulfilling their religious obligations. Especially since the 1980s when France granted rights to foreigners to establish their associations, it has not only become more visible, but has also emerged as an everyday space where a variety of discourses and practices take place that connect congregants to real life. Mosques have gained a multifunctional role as their visibility in France has increased. Today, most of these mosques have two functions: religious and cultural. As a religious body their capacity is limited to providing Islamic services to their congregation, while as a cultural organization they offer a wider range of outreach possibilities, such as conferences, social activities, and public events (Laurence and Vaisse 2006). As a result, mosques in France have encroached upon domains that the dominant society considers public and visible when religion, construed as a private “invisible” affair in the French context, has entered the heart of public debates because of its growing prevalence in French society. In each of the two major French mosques, where I conducted this research, French Muslim youth and their conservative counterparts pursue different approaches to be included in French nationhood by embracing other Muslim and non-Muslim groups and engaging their young congregants in place-making decisions.

The first approach is that of the conservative leaders who primarily rely on preserving the role of the mosque as a religious space, which reproduces the state plan of assimilating the

mosque into state secularism. Their plan to connect the mosque with non-Muslim society is limited to inviting their neighbors from churches or schools in the vicinity to visit on particular days when the mosque is actually empty and without its congregants, except for the imam and the administration. In a sense, this way of incorporating Muslims into French life remains without actual representation. This detachment of the mosque from the French context is perpetuated through the training of young congregants. They are given an Islamic education based on the cultures of the Muslim societies from which their educators immigrated. Other voices, such as that of Amor, who promotes a gender-mixed environment; Samira, who wanted women to be free from a male-dominated structure; and Lamia, who attempted to introduce a project that would connect French Muslims with American Muslims have been silenced because of concerns about attracting negative reactions from some congregants, abandoning home country traditions, and losing power and stable relations with French officials.

This culture-based approach is challenged by the contextual approach of young Muslims who reinterpret Islam within the French context, and reconfigure *laïcité* both by appropriating its fundamental principles and by challenging the manner in which it is applied by the state and the French public. Kastoryano (2002) explains this process by claiming that the functioning of associations identifies with and mirrors national institutions (11). In other words, secularism compels most Islamic organizations to comply with national politics and common sense as defined by the state and appropriated by the public. Secularism here is taken up as a political necessity to find a space in French state and public discourses. I take the “mirroring” aspect of this process as a creative and productive process that forms my analytic entry into the field. I argue that it is primarily a cultural process that Muslims go through to be able to make secularism relevant in their lives. In this respect, my research moves this political approach

beyond the institutional structure by placing it into a larger context, and investigates how this mirroring is accomplished and how practices of mirroring may secularize mosques, engage them into French public spaces, and connect them to the values of French civil society while simultaneously preserving and transforming the secular values of French society and religious identifications of Muslims as members of this society.

As evident from Amor and the congregants engaging in iftar preparations, the actors of this place-making are Muslim youth. However, as in the example of Lamia and Samira, *youth*, in this study, is not treated merely as a cohort based on age, nor even as a cohesive group, but as a social construct (Pilcher 1998) based on willingness to receive new information and process it within multiple social, cultural, and political discourses within an innovative approach. Hence, those in their forties or fifties who are coming to the mosque to learn their religion without prejudice, and make sense of it in everyday lives will also be considered young Muslims. Samira, as an influential mosque congregant, as well as other mosque comers and progressive mosque leaders in their forties, irrespective of their ages, consider themselves young based on the dynamic nature of their mindset, which is open to new solutions and perceptions. Some of them expressed their discomfort with being considered old because of their ages, others told me about the nature of their identification as a young Muslim. I heard these remarks in different occasions one of which was at a weekly gathering of women, who were members of the youth center of one of the Al-Hidaya Mosque, which is one of the two major sites studied in this dissertation. A 37-old new member, Karima, told other women in a casual conversation about her cultural connection with Tunisia where her parents moved from. As she kept going into details, she got more and more intense in her uneasiness with being classified as an “old” woman who was supposed to adhere to the norms of the Muslim society back in Tunisia.

You know I was born and raised in France. My husband is from Tunisia. He is traditional, macho, so I try to negotiate his traditional manly attitude with my French ways. For example, I need to convince him to share the housework as we both work outside. In his view, men work and women take care of the house. I sometimes say things that I don't want to say because of this. This reflects the mentality in Tunisia. For example, when I pass by a café playing music that I like, I want to move with the rhythm but then I say to myself "control yourself!" The older I get the more covered I need to be and act within traditions there. Here in France I feel free and young. I can be active, live my life free from social restrictions placed on me on the basis of my gender and age.

Karima's self-reflections were not an answer to my questions as I was just sitting there listening to their casual conversations as a guest without really asking any questions, and they did not seem to be taking notice of my presence most of the time maybe because they had a lot to share and discuss about their family lives, challenges at work, or even in the mosque. At some point one of them turned to me and said: "You now know our secrets", in a friendly tone.

Karima's discomfort with the cultural constraints and age categorizations, and identifying as a young Muslim French woman was repeated by others many time during the conversation. Samira was another woman who mentioned the main problems with focusing merely on the youth just because they are physically young. She is an assertive character challenging the cultures of putting women in a submissive position, and trying to bring a fresh perspective to the mosque in her own way either by discussing with the individuals or proposing new ideas in the Islamic course that she is taking with some other Muslim adult women. During an interview, she expressed her frustration with the common tendency to work with and for the youth at the expense of neglecting the older people:

The focus of attention should not only be the youth, we need to think about the elderly as well. I don't want to end up feeling alone in a public nursery home. We need to be more organized, active, reach out, network and start initiatives. I might be getting old but I still feel young enough to do all these things. I am here to be involved.

Samira did not feel comfortable with being left out just because of getting older. In fact, her views on activism with an emphasis on having a progressive approach were complemented by other figures of Muslims close to her age. Walid, a 43-year-old educator, and a congregant of the Al-Hidaya Mosque told me how irrelevant being categorized within a certain generation was in their current context, but what mattered most was to achieve certain things as French Muslims, and that was all about how people's minds were working. He explained his position on that through the leaders of Famille92, the youth center of Al-Hidaya Mosque, who are above their forties:

It is not always about being born here, because Farouk, and Dr. Bachir were both born in Algeria and they have a progressive vision. It is about traveling, being multicultural, education, being professional, etc. They educate young groups because they listen, are more receptive, are easy to manipulate, and to shape. However, adults and older people usually do not listen to others with different opinions, they are more stubborn. That is actually the main problem within the Muslim community. We think we are right. We do not even listen to each other. But, as young leaders Farouk and Dr. Bachir are teaching people not to be like that.

In these remarks Walid uses two figures in his immediate social circle to make a point that where you were born does not determine your generational identity as to what it implies. Although they would technically be considered first generation Muslims in France with an implication that they had strict and very different worldviews from their children, both Farouk and Dr. Bachir are acting as young Muslims in their endeavor to train Muslims to be open-minded and better people for their community and the larger society. In fact, Dr. Bachir's remarks confirmed Walid's position: " Our comprehension and vision of Islam needs to be studied, improved and spread to larger groups, and the wider society. In these matters, I get along very well with my daughters who are both in their twenties. We do not have conflicts, we usually think in similar ways."

As will be explained further in the next chapters, their position on religion and French secularism is shaped by social histories and circumstances rather than age-based generational differences. Nevertheless, young Muslims do not make a cohesive group in any way. Therefore, they cannot be lumped together in one youth category sharing the same youth mindset. As described in the following chapters, I also encountered many young Muslims either with strictly traditional and literal interpretations of Islam, or with hesitations about their religious position. In other words, the youth category does not represent a monolithic group of Muslims, but it is more of a complex identity. In this dissertation, based on my informants' remarks, and self-interrogations, I suggest a new approach to youth by emphasizing its change-oriented, and youthful minded qualities and expanding it to even old aged people sharing this attitude. Understanding their motivations, vision, imagination, and efforts to be actively included into French state and public life is a major requirement in fully capturing the dynamics of political and social secularism as a lived experience in France.

While young Muslims of France reconfigure French secularism with a contextual revisit to Islam, the general French response on the part of the state and the public has been somewhat resistant to the new approach, despite individual local communities who are receptive to these new young Muslims in their efforts to negotiate their religion with a secular life in productive ways. It might be too early to evaluate the public outcomes of the reinterpreted version of *laïcité*, but it is a fair argument to claim that local responses have been quite promising, as is evident in communal efforts to organize interfaith events, social initiatives such as charity weeks, and cultural activities that include people from various backgrounds working together with mutual interests. However, these still remain one-sided efforts as is apparent in the ongoing issues of discrimination, unemployment, and Islamophobia as a consequence of the persistent

interpretations of laïcité by politicians and wider society. These problems exist at the local and national levels.

I was frequently told stories about physical attacks on Muslim women wearing headscarves in Argenteuil. And yet, as a Turkish researcher, I had not really grasped this reality until I found myself being chased by a random French man on the Paris metro only because I was speaking Turkish with my brother on the phone. When he approached me with threatening insults, I did not take him seriously, thinking that he could be either drunk or anti-immigrant. Unfortunately, his negative attitude escalated as I continued the conversation with my brother, and he almost hurt me physically as I ran away from him in the metro car in terror. I was very upset that no one else reacted to this horrible incident that *I* thought was a big event. My conversation with the police made me even more upset and angry, since they were totally indifferent to the point that they suggested I go to a coffee shop to drink something to calm down and get myself together. When I told this unpleasant experience to my French friends, they did not seem surprised, explaining to me that these things were everyday matters, and I should get used to them.

Despite the great visibility of Islam through Ramadan billboards, halal restaurants, and impressive mosques, public acceptance of intolerance to difference is still remarkably present. It is not only toward Muslims or women with headscarves, but to all kinds of difference that do not appeal to French people. As a response to this, French Muslims are struggling to introduce a cultural multiplicity within French society that includes Islam, and at the same time appropriate laïcité in their own way. How religion comes together with French laïcité, and eventually becomes part of an “inclusive secularism,” a social alternative suggested by Muslims, is an important facet of French society, as local responses could potentially expand to the rest of the

society and lead to socio-political change in France. In order to understand this process of “secularizing the mosque,” as described by a young mosque leader, this dissertation asks: How do French Muslims reconcile religion and secularism through the use of the mosque space, and how do Muslim youth experience this process differently from their counterpart conservatives by introducing an inclusive secular model unique to France?

Theoretical Context on Space, Multiculturalism, and Youth

In order to examine the three above-mentioned major dynamics of French Muslims who are young in terms of being open-minded and flexible in accommodating seemingly contrasting value systems in their lives, I build my analysis on the intersection between space/place, multiculturalism/diversity, and youth theories. My dissertation research connects space and religion by investigating on the one hand the politics of place-making, and on the other hand the negotiation of religion and secularization enabled through this process. In this respect, I include a religious site in debates of place-making and public/private space. I also suggest a comprehensive theory of multiculturalism by arguing that both religion and secularism gain different meanings throughout the process of negotiating these two seemingly opposite organizational systems. Last, but not least, this project opens up a new philosophical approach to the category of youth by largely divorcing it from age limits, and suggesting a socio-cultural understanding of youth in its capacity to embrace new ideas and offer innovative alternatives to existing perceptions. In line with this approach, I problematize the existing academic discourses on generational boundaries while studying European Muslims.

Space/Place

In the late twentieth century, the discipline of Anthropology began to embrace a comprehensive approach to explain the dynamics of locality for minority people by debunking

the earlier standpoint that was based on “isomorphism of place, culture and people” (Gupta and Fergusson 1997, 34), and which understood cultural characteristics and differences as contained in spaces/locales (Appadurai 1988). This new trajectory, which was initiated by the complexities of globalization, shattered the assumed divisions of local and global by suggesting a reconceptualization of locality outside of territorial boundaries due to increasing global networks, neo-liberal capitalism, political struggles, and power dynamics (Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1988). This approach was intended to question the equation of global and space versus local and place. Escobar and Massey bridge this dichotomy by holding that space is not abstract, but relational to the lived reality of our daily lives through global, political, social constitution of the world (Escobar 2008; Massey 2004). In other words, space can be understood as the conceptual entity or as a social site that is given meaning through embodied practice within a particular physical place where identities and cultures are produced and transformed constantly. In this respect, anthropologists should focus on the continued vitality of place as a source of culture and identity (Escobar 2008, 7, 30). The relationship between place-making and identity is crucial, as multiple scholars (Gole 2006, 29; Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 13; Jameson 1991; Soja 1989) have discussed over the last two decades. This approach puts emphasis on the spaces through which identity is both produced and expressed (Keith and Pile 1993, 9). Cultures are understood to be transforming by building new multi-local connections and attributing distinct meanings to physical attachments, which bear even more complex meanings for displaced and immigrant people.

Since this dissertation seeks to understand the minority politics of place-making, I look at local practices. Establishing a space is vital especially for minority populations due to their need to create belongings, discourses, and practices by using a space when these identifications are

hard to establish in everyday life for several reasons, such as cultural alienation, social segregation, economic hardships, or even personal dilemmas in a new society (Hall 1994). Among others, anthropologists have shown how imagining locality takes on a new and different meaning for deterritorialized people, such as refugees, who subvert assumptions about rootedness of identity in the particular territoriality of homeland (Malkki 1995). In her work examining the new identifications of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Malkki argues against the pre-given and naturalized link between people and places, and instead suggests new meanings and construction of place by displaced and immigrant people. In this dissertation, I show how the mosque takes on different meanings in France than in Muslim countries through the place-making mechanisms of French Muslims. In order to understand these meanings, and how the mosque space is used to address these current conditions of French Muslims, I start with Escobar's (2008) argument for using locality as a struggle for autonomy and self-determination, and continue with the concept of place as a site of negotiation (Massey 2004, 7) and a territory of meaning (Holt-Jensen 1999, 224). In this respect, the Muslims use the mosque space for their cultural and physical survival, as well as to produce new meanings of secularism and Islam. It is more than a place of survival, it is a site to make sense of religion in a secular environment. Hence, I extend theories that explain the process of using a particular space in different ways by unpacking these concepts I connect the use of a space to meaning-production and making sense of a variety of value systems simultaneously, as in the case of young French Muslims.

In this process, I understand the mosque as a site with local meanings, which are negotiated within the larger context. In her ethnographic study of Turkish immigrants in Marxlöh, Germany, Ehrkamp (2005) concludes that the production of space by immigrants teases out the complexities of multiple and possibly conflicting attachments of contemporary diaspora

populations and their engagement with the receiving society (362). Muslims juxtapose different scales of belonging without necessarily contrasting them. I see this as an ongoing process, and argue that the mosque is a place that is constantly being recreated, reimagined, and invested with new nationally circulating and locally produced meanings that can help us capture the emerging forms of identities that are produced and exercised by French Muslims. More concretely, their religiosity is negotiated within the secular French national and public discourses, which are also undergoing rapid changes. New forms of representation might be emerging from the interaction of these multiple processes, such as making the mosque a de-Muslimized site, and these are especially visible in the Parisian mosques due to their location in a cosmopolitan city.

Furthermore, it is in the mosques that both similarities and differences among different French Muslim communities become most visibly articulated. In this dissertation, I examine the spatial self-representations of North African populations in their distinct nature, because this distinctiveness will help us understand different cultural and political formations in Muslim spaces in modern France. In this respect, my project contextualizes the mosque with regard to its relationship to the French state and social discourses while building a differentiated identification with the French public. These discourses are predominantly based on the irreconcilable relationship between civic responsibilities and particular religious and cultural distinctions, which leads to the public and private nature of one's life and the spaces that determine the ways in which one organizes one's everyday affairs.

The majority of Western theories of the public sphere presuppose a distinction between the public and the private (Benhabib 1992, 92; Calhoun 1992). "Private" is understood to contain the "rationally irresolvable" domains of morality, religion, kinship, and ethnicity, as well as an intimate sphere of people included in the household, sexuality, reproduction, and domestic

family life (Ammann 2006; Benhabib 1992, 91). Exclusion of these concepts and experiences from the public sphere, which is thought to be an arena of participation and debate involving the rational subject (Habermas 1989), has generated criticisms from ethnic/religious/cultural studies scholars on grounds that minority rights are violated outside of their “private” homes to different degrees, especially in European liberal states, as they do not conform to Christian-originated value systems.

In fact, European liberal states are concerned with ensuring the revival and restoration of a spirit of citizenship with certain characteristics, particularly in the cities where diversity is to be organized by the state. The liberal states’ formulation of the public sphere rests on the principles of freedom and equality with a promise to provide a secular and universal space that prioritizes neutrality toward identities (Ismail 2008, 25). The public sphere is thus supposed to be a site of inclusion in democratic societies (Mitchell 1995). However, secularism as understood and implemented especially by Western liberal states does not generally include non-Christian cosmologies into the public domain, and acknowledges their practices to different degrees. As a consequence of this hierarchy in the acceptance levels of secularism, some subjects, regardless of their citizenship status, are inherently excluded from this contradictory formulation. Cultural practices that are not included in the universal criterion, or dressing styles that do not fall into the secular categorization, can easily be excluded from the liberal public space, so its neutrality remains highly questionable (Benhabib 1992; Fraser 1992).

Social practices that do not meet modern Western standards of cultural meanings and political systems are considered to exist within the allegedly irrational domain. Entry of these practices into the public sphere counters the universal, egalitarian, and progressive promises of modernity. This public/private distinction reinforces homogenized tastes and the social order

while also persisting within the formulation of our urban policies and planning (Harvey 1996, 418-19). In the post-socialist Budapest, for example, communist monuments were expelled from the city center based on ideological criteria, leaving no room for alternatives. Those who wished to see the statues had to go to Budapest's Statue Park Museum and mourn privately (Nadkarni 2003, 200-01). The exclusion of citizens with different backgrounds and expectations due to their particular relationships with a nation's colonial history is certainly relevant to France, where it has a distinctive character and an extreme form. French secularism rests on the principle of a strict separation between the private and public spaces, expecting that everyone be assimilated into the difference-free sphere of a homogenous French public under the protection of the state. In other words, every citizen should reflect the rational modern prototype French person free from the burdens of any religious, cultural, or ethnic belonging. Unlike other European liberal states, it requires full conformity to state-sanctioned doctrines with zero tolerance for divergence. Therefore, in France, certain practices of Muslim public self-representation, such as wearing the headscarf, are problematized in public policy debates and regulations (Ismail 2008, 26). The headscarf ban in public high schools is justified by the state on grounds that this practice is imposed upon Muslim women by their husbands or families, and is against gender equality as defined within national norms (Fernando 2010). Treating it as a religious private matter, it is dictated to remain outside of the secular public domain. Hence, it cannot be tolerated in a public institution that represents the social values of French society. By doing so, the liberal state perpetuates the public/private distinction by assuming that all cultural, ethnic, or religious baggage is to be removed from the public area, where one is expected to be in full conformity with widely shared norms. By homogenizing the public space in this way, the

state eradicates its democratic nature (Fraser 1992) and privatizes differences, which in fact have the potential to contribute to the diversity in the public sphere.

The fuzzy distinction between the private and the public spaces is problematized by some scholars (Modood and Kastoryano 2006). Authors argue that private and public are interdependent, as the public sphere is not neutral and the public order is not culturally, religiously, or ethnically blind (170). By the same token, the public order penetrates into private affairs and institutions. In other words, private and public are intertwined. Building on this theory, I trace the inapplicable nature of mosques as a private site of religious/cultural affairs. In this sense, Muslims in France challenge state discourse that reduces the mosque to a religious place to conduct Islamic affairs only. This can be explained by the efforts of its actual users, rather than those of the state, to make the mosque into a lived space with relevance to everyday life.

Space is a contested realm subject to multiple interpretations and planning by both power holders and its actual users. LeFebvre (1991) suggests a model to capture this complex container of people, objects, and ideas. He theorizes the concrete and abstract nature of space at large. McCann (1999) draws our attention to the articulation of the abstract space conceived through the dominant discourse of policy makers and the spatial practices of the people that create lived and concrete spaces through their imagination. Hence, abstract and physical spaces are products of mutually constitutive moments, although they seem apart at first glance (177). To be more precise, abstract spaces imposed by the state have material consequences over the imagination of citizens. Populations of immigrant origin need spaces *for* representation and organize these spaces as they imagine them. Their perceptions and physical organization may counter the abstract space designed by the political powers, yet their self-representation in the public sphere

depends on an appropriation of the state discourse as well as the ideologies of the home country. Accordingly, I contend that the material use of the mosque space mediates between contested ideological meanings. This process eventually creates a representation through space. I elaborate on this relationship between the material conditions and cultural politics of space (Harvey 1996) in the particular context of my research. These cultural politics run counter to the monolithic policies of the French state that do not recognize the diversity of Muslim presence. They also contest the public discourse that treats citizens as a single entity in their physical looks and worldviews without really leaving room for differences. Muslims introduce a new kind of diversity politics by appropriating French secularism. In this respect, theories of multiculturalism help us understand the actual situation of Muslim minorities in France.

Diversity

Multiculturalism as a policy discourse has emerged in response to the ascendancy of human rights, equal citizenship, intercultural exchanges, and recognition of group difference within the public sphere (Modood 2007; Taylor 1992). Although it is intended to address the demands and needs of culturally distinct groups, multiculturalism means different things in different places in both theoretical and policy discourses (Meer and Modood 2011, 5), as a variety of positions and interests exist in each social setting. In the next section, I will lay out the challenges that liberal-oriented models pose to Muslim minorities with an emphasis on Western Europe, particularly France.

Western models of citizenship often draw on the Greek and Roman traditions. The first favors the civic community over the individual, and the latter protects individual rights (Shafir 1998). Civic republicanism has its roots in these ancient traditions (Lister 1998, 228). It is a participatory approach that draws on obligations for the common good and that calls for active

participation of citizens in governance and politics. However, minorities are excluded from the civic virtues of wider society because of their differences. Classic liberalism, as an alternative to this approach, breaks down a sense of community in favor of competitive individual freedom. A challenge of liberal systems favoring individual self-interest over public good is the potential weakening of cultural groups who already have no or limited access to some of the social, economic, and political benefits enjoyed by the majority.

Both classic liberal and civic republican systems have their drawbacks (Hall and Held 1989) and modern nation-states apply an ambiguous concept of citizenship by trying to combine unity and difference in an unbalanced way, thereby embodying numerous contradictions (Kang 2010, 22). Most of the liberal democracies apply contradictory citizenship regimes due to the conflicting arguments of each system. Liberal democracies are inherently designed to sustain the relatively homogeneous composition of society based on particular cultural notions that must, at the minimum, be shared by all members of a given society (Ismail 2008). Therefore, a cultural citizen who “is a polyglot able to move comfortably within multiple and diverse communities while resisting the temptation to search for a purer and less complex identity” poses a challenge to liberal nation-states (Stevenson 2001, 2).

Religious minorities and particularly Muslims are excluded from multicultural policies, especially in Western Europe, which is home to a liberalism that is conceptualized as an escape from religious oppression and dogmas for a unified national and public culture (Modood 2007, 30). The motivation behind this exclusion is based on the assumption that Islam’s public nature is not compatible with Western secularism, which requires religion to remain in the private sphere for a binding civic culture to flourish and dominate the public sphere. As a matter of fact, this motivation also has roots in Anderson’s (1983) imagined community, which is “both

inherently limited and sovereign” (6). According to this formulation, the decline of religious community paved the way to a culturally reductionist nationalism (Ozkirimli 2000). The official demise of multiculturalism and the normalization of right wing nationalistic policies in some liberal states, such as France, over the last decade (Joppke 2004) has largely caused the state and people to react against the religious awakening among Muslim immigrants and their assertion of broader civil rights to foreigners (TNS Sofres 2012). That is because this awareness, which was fostered by socio-economic inequalities, is perceived as a threat to Western liberal values.

France has a long-standing tradition of civic republicanism that entails the assimilation of individuals who have become French citizens by choice. This tradition is based on the ideal of uniting as one nation, sharing a common destiny and common objective. Accordingly, French understandings of nationhood have been state-centered and assimilationist, which require full conformity to basic tenets of the French nation, such as *laïcité*, equality, freedom, and democracy. Brubaker highlights the ambiguities of nationalism despite the rhetoric of inclusion and the lack of an ethnic belonging in France (1992, 112-13). Assimilation and xenophobia exist simultaneously, and they both hinder and contribute to an inclusive definition of citizenship. Xenophobic sentiments require the assimilation of foreigners by breaking up solidary communities and turning immigrants into Frenchmen/citizens. Even in this scenario the inclusion of migrants remains problematic, as can be witnessed in the claims of nationalists. It is argued that immigrants do not want to assimilate and this supposed failure is attributed to the discourse of “the right to difference,” although it was actually due to the state’s shifting policy in the early 1980s that granted recognition of different communities even at the symbolic level (148). The second argument is that French institutions are losing their assimilatory power. The third and most contested argument is that Muslim migrants cannot be assimilated due to the

incompatibility of Islam with the West in every respect. Muslim immigrants with French citizenship are still facing exclusionary attitudes in the job market, in formal institutions, and in their social relations. As education is a powerful medium to spread nationalism (Anderson 1983), the French school system is tailored to meet the national discourse of the state. As French ways cannot tolerate the Islamic dress code for women on the grounds that secular French women cannot have their dignity taken away by being subordinate to men, the state banned the use of the veil in pre-college public schools. Nevertheless, today the French state implements new policies that recognize Muslim groups at the institutional level. This can be seen as a forced attempt by the state to pursue a distinct multiculturalism tailored to the French tradition of civic republicanism, in order to respond to the “Muslim challenge” seen as a threat to the French nation. In the following paragraphs, I will present the contemporary debates on multiculturalism with respect to how they can be applied to today’s French Muslims.

According to the contemporary understanding of multiculturalism as a political and sociological project, the cultural dimension of social membership, which has long been neglected, should be addressed in liberal countries that are hosting populations of immigrant origin (Stevenson 2003). While culture cannot be seen as a platform of confinement that isolates minority individuals and groups and prevents them from participating in the national society, a community’s right to its culture, which has a dynamic character through constant change, must be recognized (Parekh 2006a; Taylor 1992). This cultural embeddedness of human beings, with its liberating potential, is not based on a dogmatic liberalism. Rather than viewing multicultural societies from a purely liberal mindset, giving voice to other values and traditions with a religiously sensitive form of secularism (Parekh 2006a, 370) differentiates contemporary multicultural theories from earlier versions. In other words, an absolute universal liberalism,

which is intended to hold each member of a society together based on the uniform criteria of secular democracy and individualism, is replaced by critical multiculturalism, which includes religious groups and their demands in the national composition. Recent theories of multiculturalism recognize the role of religion in public life, along with the necessity to bring religion into the public realm (Modood 2007; Parekh 2006a, 370). This includes placing non-native religions on equal footing, thereby challenging Western secular principles, which have originated from a Christian society. It is even harder to apply this model in France, since there is a very strict separation of religion and public life as a century-long tradition. In this project, I use this recent diversity approach with an anthropological gaze, and extend it to French Muslims to understand how they view French secularism. A careful analysis of Muslims' diverse everyday practices needs to be conducted to be able to detect how the relationship between secularism and religion works for and through these people. Recent theories are both backed by the current Muslim practices in France, and also give Muslims a chance to reevaluate Islam in their context. In this respect, I suggest a more comprehensive theory of diversity, one that includes how a context-based secularity informs and activates Muslims who live in a non-Muslim setting. In their particular context, Muslims perform secularization, which ironically provides spaces for religion to claim a public spot both by challenging and reinserting the existing boundaries and ideologies. This kind of an analysis suggests a comprehensive model in which Muslims revisit Islam and French secularism through their practices. Also, such practices cannot be crammed into a single categorical practice, for each individual or community has a different approach to negotiating religion with French secularism. In order to get at these differences in the multicultural experiences of North African mosque leaders and congregants, we need to

understand how plurality is lived and embodied among these people. This level of understanding diversity requires an anthropological approach.

Although anthropology had long remained distant from public debates and the politics of multiculturalism (Turner 1993; Vertovec 2007), there is a growing literature in anthropology with a critical approach to culture and migration. Most of the ethnographic work that centered on issues of migration was motivated by the desire to understand the socio-economic transformations due to rapid urbanization within the colonial context. This emergent interest in migration processes was led by the Manchester School during the 1940s and 1950s (Vertovec 2007, 962). The research that followed this tradition in the next few decades studied cultural change and adaptation resulting from migration through the questions of identity and ethnicity (Brettell 2000, 98). Most of these ethnic studies were conducted within the urban settings of Europe and North America until a conceptual transformation in the early 1990s. Increasing levels of globalization and transnationalism entailed new ways of understanding notions of culture. Ethnicity was never abandoned as a topic of interest, yet it was no longer perceived from an essentialist point of view. Instead it was analyzed as a mixed, changing, and dynamic category due to global flows, hybridization, and deterritorialization (Appadurai 1996; Çağlar 1997; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Hannerz 1996).

Its multi-sited methodology and anti-essentialist approach (Mandel 2008) challenges reified and monolithic notions of culture (Watson 2000), along with the ideological philosophies and policy measures of multiculturalism (Asad 1990; Prato 2009). As discussed earlier, a major shortcoming of the project of multiculturalism is its tendency to reinforce a hierarchical ideology in which minorities are viewed as essential entities constrained in their ethnic identities (Mandel 2008, 323). Anthropology has just started using its great potential to overcome these fallacies

with rich ethnographic accounts and a capacity to think outside of Western hegemony. Along these lines, it investigates the production of a particular culture within a global historical conjuncture and the universal category of the struggle to gain rights to claim cultural belongings (Turner 1993, 424, 428). To complement this diversity approach, the anthropological theory of pluralism has recently taken a new direction that contributes to current debates on social mobilization by taking into account socio-economic conditions, state politics, public discourses, and institutionalized practices, and combines them with everyday dynamics of diversity through descriptive and detailed ethnographic accounts of migrants' meanings, values, social relations, and experiences (Gilroy 2004; Vertovec 2007, 973).

It should be noted that recent studies of multiculturalism investigate the everyday practices of minority groups in order to capture various tendencies within and across groups. In this research, I explore how French Muslims establish and use vibrant spaces on an everyday basis in which they can think and act critically with respect to their socio-political and cultural conditions. Harris (2013) illustrates this dynamism through young people from different backgrounds who share a civic space in Australia. Her ethnographic work reveals the ways in which they navigate and live with differences. Her particular focus on young people raises the question of who qualifies as young and what makes them a particularly interesting focus group in multicultural studies.

Youth

Youth studies in anthropology have taken different forms since the first half of the twentieth century. Since this research does not solely focus on youth per se, this paper does not attempt to give a comprehensive analysis of the anthropological literature on youth. Rather, it presents an overall picture of anthropological debates on youth cultures with a focus on the

cultural practices of young people with ethnic and religious distinctions. “Youth is just a word” (Bourdieu 1993, 94), but the definition of youth is highly contested given the diversity of social circumstances and power regimes (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; Perrot 1997; Scheper-Hughes and Sargeant 1998). Categorizations that describe the early stages of an adult, considered as a finished human being, are in fact products of a social context. Therefore, biological foundations of youth that assume a fixed identity with definite social roles and experiences are at the heart of early rigid distinctions among childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

These are not context-free constructions, but rather productions of a given society (Honwana and De Boeck 2005) subject to structural forces such as the school system, unemployment, poverty, health system, and diseases (Honwana 1997; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998). Therefore some studies investigate the role of socio-cultural transformations on young people. According to this model, rapid and/or large-scale social changes result in resentment among young people who undergo an identity crisis between tradition and change. Conflicts between young people exposed to modernity and tradition-minded adults are also considered to be the outcome of vast social changes (Bucholtz 2002). Although these studies put the experiences of young people within a particular cultural context, most of these nevertheless treat them as temporary conditions oriented to adulthood. This adolescence literature perceives groups of a certain age within a passage of transition to adulthood (Herdt and Leavitt 1998).

Recent youth studies recognize their identity as flexible and innovative. Youth agency was first recognized within culturally specific ways through an approach introduced by the Birmingham School in the second half of the twentieth century. The Chicago School in the United States shares this approach with its British counterpart, though with more emphasis on ethnographic research (Willis 1977). However, this approach mainly focuses on class-based

identities and treats youth as internally bounded. In that sense, it has a limited understanding of youth subcultures, because it largely ignores the cultural identifications of the youth, and the use of various sources from different cultural forms. Stuart Hall has introduced a new approach that remedies such limitations (Bucholtz 2002, 537). This viewpoint includes new minority groups and considers young people as agents of complex cultural innovations that are manifested by blending and appropriating multiple cultures (Hall 1997). This appropriation is also defined as new configurations of race, ethnicity, religion, and culture that recognize multi-cultural youth identities (Amit-Talai 1995). Further, this multidimensional outlook on youth supersedes the focus on sensational and psychological traumas of young people in earlier ethnographies by investigating their everyday activities and the meanings attached to these ordinary engagements. Youth are viewed as actors capable of bringing social change to their communities and the larger society.

Many anthropologists study social change brought through a variety of youth practices (Azuwike 2012; Weiss 2009). Weiss introduces the hip hop barbershops of Tanzania as new public sites where young men appropriate Western hip hop styles and integrate them into their local lives to deal with the tough urban street conditions. In this sense, they do not imitate American styles of hip hop but tailor them, making them meaningful in their everyday lives where their pains and sorrows are different from American youth. They imagine and put these styles into practice, and by doing so introduce a new public place in their urban setting. Azuwike (2012) describes the night-time animal hunting practices by young boys on the streets of Owerri, Nigeria. He examines the contestation between generations over the use of public space, which is being transformed by the young boys.

This research approach in anthropology, which perceives youth as innovative cultural

agents, informs my project that seeks to understand Muslim youth involvement in the place-making process, and how youth perceptions and practices of religious and secular values shape the understandings of public/private spaces within Muslim groups as well as for non-Muslim French citizens. I also benefit from these studies, as the North African Muslim youth use the mosque and assign new meanings to it far from their places of origin by appropriating both Islam and secularism in their everyday lives. Through a variety of cultural practices, they transform the allegedly private place into a public one with a distinctive definition. In order to better understand their unique ways of doing this, I examine the literature on the Muslim youth of Europe with a special focus on France.

Muslim youth of Western societies have been the focus of major debates in youth scholarship. The perception of impoverished banlieue youth of immigrant origins as deviant groups inherently prone to violence due to their cultural differences characterizes the political and social models used by some of the mainstream media and policy makers (Terrio 2009). In her ethnography of the court system in France, Terrio holds that the delinquency of French youth of immigrant origin stems from the criminalization of insider others and undesirable outsiders. A new form of racism with an emphasis on the cultural deficits and pathologies of Arabs and Muslims lies at the heart of the biased portrayal of this group of youth. Terrio questions the abstract equality of the French system, which promises equal treatment in the courts and constitution to everyone regardless of ethnicity and race. Accordingly, the judicial system operates based on the assumption that underprivileged communities have access to the same resources as the mainstream French society. Without addressing the distinct socio-economic conditions that they live in because of their ethno-cultural backgrounds, the eventual economic failure and criminal activities are attributed to their “flawed” cultural particularities. Terrio is

critical of such cultural determinism, which has shifted its focus from socio-economics and individual psychology to cultural pathology and collective origin since the 1990s. Within the Chicago School tradition, the author argues that culture of poverty was selectively used by state officials to explain poverty in racial and cultural terms rather than focusing on structural inequalities to understand youth violence. Youth of Algerian origin especially are blamed for their ethnic difference, cultural gap, and hatred due to their colonial history. These views, however, are questioned by a counter approach that seeks to understand Muslim riots as a reaction to socio-economic conditions and legal mechanisms, along with their discriminatory implications (Franz 2007).

Youth resistance to such cultural biases is depicted in ethnographies of young Turkish migrants in Berlin with their capacity for change (Kaya 2002; Soysal 2004). Drawing on both authors' investigations, one can argue that these semiotic expressions of identity have material outcomes for them and for German society. While the Berliner hip hop youth change the framing of the urban space, Turkish rappers in Germany implement a unique cultural production using new music technologies and reach out to the German audience. Fernando's (2009; 2010; 2014) ethnographies within the French context mainly deal with the issues of headscarves and how wearing religious symbols are interpreted and made sense of by young Muslims in France. While these studies bear significance in understanding the diversity practices of Muslim youth, they study particular age groups, and treat youth within the generational categories as belonging to the same age group with common experiences. While this Mannheimian approach (1952) is helpful in taking the socio-historical environment into consideration as a context that shapes identities, it lumps people together that come from the same background, such as immigrating to France in their mid-thirties to work. Alternatively, I suggest a comprehensive approach to youth by

defining them as people from any age group sharing a flexible, open-minded, and innovative attitude to new discourses, and I argue that such a worldview is shaped within a context including social networks, religious background, cultural connections, and the political climate of the country. I also do not treat youth as being within a particular generation, and will therefore avoid such classifications due to a lot of exceptional cases where people do not share the supposedly shared characteristics of their generation. By focusing on Muslim youth, I examine the new diversity culture that is introduced in the French mosque.

The theoretical framework presented in this dissertation raises some questions: How do young French Muslims perform religiosity in the mosque and take it into the public space against the state and the public expectations? How do they organize and use the mosque space differently than their traditional counterparts? What are the new dynamics of diversity that they suggest in France?

Methods and Materials

In this section I describe the methodologies used in answering my research questions about the use of space in different manners by young Muslims of two major mosques in the Paris area.

The Research Sites

I made my choice of field site based on its suitability for addressing issues and debates that matter to the discipline (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 10). The meaning and use of a religious site by a minority group that is increasing in number, and its relations with another religious space of native and immigrant populations, may be best analyzed in Western Europe, which has recently encountered riots from minority groups and an attack by a native militant in the name of

religion. Mosques are sites where both social and cultural activities take place beside religious practices.

I conducted research in two North African mosques: a major predominantly Algerian mosque, Al-Ihsan, and a more ethnically mixed North-African mosque, Al-Hidaya. The mosques are located respectively in Argenteuil and Asnières-sur-Seine, both of which are largely immigrant suburbs in the Paris area. Furthermore, both mosques reflect the multicultural aspect of French banlieues. The rationale behind my selection of these mosques is their dynamic character and different approaches to the issues of secularism and religion.

The Algerian mosque has an ongoing relationship with the Algerian state and decision-maker leaders are mostly older Muslims, while some young Muslim leaders who came to France as adult immigrants from Algeria also volunteer. The other mosque tends to be politically more independent with a wider range of followers, and the leaders are often young educators who grew up in France. While Al-Ihsan Mosque is run by Muslims with a traditional approach to religion, Al-Hidaya has a more dynamic structure with an established youth center run by younger people with a flexible approach to living as Muslims in secular France. In this sense, I have examined the different dynamics of youth involvement in place-making and connecting to the public space. These two mosques with distinct approaches also illuminate different perceptions of the private and public space among various Muslim groups. Parisian mosques are crucial in this research, as a variety of religious groups are concentrated in the capital city with greater access to government agencies and local officials and a high level of proximity to the urban secular public space in the capital, which is the microcosm of French *laïcité*.

In order to get at the nature of their relationship with the non-Muslim society and their understanding of diversity at the institutional level, I looked at their interfaith dialogue with other

faith institutions and I visited the churches with which they are engaged in an interfaith project. These are Catholic churches with native congregants, as well as those from a variety of ethnic origins. In this sense, they have a multicultural composition that represents cultures from across the globe. These churches are located in the vicinity of their partner mosques. Both churches are engaged in socio-cultural activities through partner organizations which particularly target young people from a variety of backgrounds. They provide training, public events, and recreational activities for young congregants and non-Christian groups. In each church, the interfaith dialogue is promoted by the institutional leaders in order to build peaceful relations with the other cultural communities within a religious body.

There are two major groups of focus across both mosques. The majority of the first group of participants were Muslim immigrants who came to France for employment purposes. They were in search of creating a space for them to feel at “home.” The second group was composed of French Muslims, born and/or raised in France, or those who immigrated to France for educational or employment purposes usually in their twenties or thirties. The first group administered the Al-Ihsan Mosque, and the latter group were those with opposing views to this administration. In the Al-Hidaya Mosque, the first group consisted of managers of the mosque school and activities, whereas the second group led the youth center affiliated with the mosque. Most of the second group were well-educated citizens. In both mosques I was able to communicate with both men and women participants, and this helped me to receive responses expressing the different concerns and interests of both gender groups. Although there were participants from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, the majority of my focus group were those of Algerian origin due to the high number of Muslims with Algerian heritage. My major focus groups were young Muslims who came to France at a later stage in their lives, and the native

young French Muslims, or those who were not born but raised in France regardless of their physical ages.

Research Approach

A key aspect of this research is the use of space by religious groups of immigrant origin. In this sense, I focus on the intersection of religion and secularism through spatial identities and their practices. In order to enhance my apprehension of religious space through mosques, I have adapted Knott's (2005) spatial methodology by including a variety of methodological tools. Knott suggests a spatial approach by arguing that all places, when examined spatially, have something to reveal about processes of migration and/or consciousness of diaspora. He contends that information about diasporas inheres in all types of places. Drawing on this argument, I explore how the mosque space informs the Muslim minority experience and accordingly influences the manner in which its users design a multicultural site. Meanings and use of religious space are central to my research. A spatial approach that offers an in-depth analysis of particular religious places and their implications for different Muslim groups enabled me to grasp their connections to the wider society.

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) highlights the importance of connecting the physical, social, and mental fields of space. Although these three seem to lead to different experiences, they all configure in unique ways to form a meaningful unity that operates as an institution. The physical dimension of a religious institution is crucial in understanding its representational quality. The physicality of the mosques cannot be differentiated from their social functions and meanings. Nor can these be separated from the mental dimension of these spaces, which refers to the ways in which administrative and participant folks imagine the space of the mosque. These three dimensions may be combined, leading to a representation of cultural

diversity in France. I needed to analyze how people imagine mosques as multicultural spaces, and how they use and connect the mosque to the secular public domain. These findings helped me explore mosques as religious sites with social, cultural, and political functions that are both real and imagined in dynamic ways. In this sense, my findings also contribute to my argument that religious sites are places of cultures that are formed through dialogue with other cultures (Benhabib 2002). Benhabib contends that cultures are not pure and fixed, but rather in constant formation through ongoing dialogues. Likewise, locality is also undergoing a continuous change along with the cultures that both shape and are shaped by the locality. I find Appadurai's (1991) commitment to the changing nature of locality, as a lived experience in a globalized, supposedly deterritorialized, world relevant in this regard. I follow an approach with an "attentiveness to social, cultural, and political location and a willingness to work self-consciously at shifting or realigning our own location while building epistemological and political links with other locations" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 5). Therefore, observing interfaith relations and institutional and conceptual similarities between mosques and secular bodies enabled me to reveal this dynamic nature of religious and cultural discourses and identities for socio-political ends (Yudice 2004), which have consequences for determining the private and public use of the mosque.

Methods of Data Collection

As England (1994) holds, the field is not stable and enduring, but constantly changing, requiring the researcher to deal with unexpected circumstances by being flexible. Moreover, the spatial approach that emphasizes the physical, social, and mental dimensions of a space along with its complex relations and representations calls for a variety of methods to understand these different components of space. Scholars (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1988; Opie 1992) suggest that the

researcher should be open to the challenges of fieldwork, with a flexible approach to using a variety of methods that allow him or her to understand the complex dynamics of the field. By drawing on this suggestion to gain a broader perception and benefit, I chose an array of methods to investigate the research question in order to achieve valid and reliable findings.

Participant Observation

Participant observation entails immersing oneself in the everyday activities of the people that are researched (Malinowski 1984). Being one of the main methods of qualitative research—experiencing and engaging in the reality of a particular society—participant observation contributes to the anthropologist’s understanding of that social reality (May 1993). In this sense, participant observation allows the researcher to obtain data that are left out by the interviewees during interviews (Agar 1980, 107-111). This method thus requires careful observation and a great deal of flexibility to accommodate the dynamic nature of the field. Knowledge about a culture requires engaging in it through interacting with people in their own environment in which a particular culture is practiced (Casey 1996). It also involves perceiving and sensing its various qualities, such as sounds and visual looks (Altorak 2007; Feld 1996; Jackson 2011).

Dominant discourses of culture attribute certain cultures to particular communities, yet the use of a discourse by different social groups demonstrates the flexibility of cultural belongings. Assumptions of culture-community coupling do not capture the changing nature of a culture through dialogues, interactions, and outside influences. Baumann (1996) advocates observing the interplay between dominant and local discourses of identity and culture as indicators of the process of meaning-making in *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London*, where he investigates five essentialized cultural communities in a town near London, and explores their dynamic nature. I find his argument relevant to my research for

its treatment of culture as an incomplete process through which identities are formed and meanings are made. Mosques in France have changed their meanings and functions as some of them have taken up a variety of approaches to connecting their religious space to the secular public culture by making the mosque a multicultural site of articulation.⁶ I was able to analyze these dynamics of culture only by participating in their activities and witnessing what they really were doing within the space of the mosque. In this sense, the changing aspect of culture can be examined through observing the rituals, symbols, and other culture transmitters that are handed down in an institutional space and that are routinized; this includes the physical conditions as well as the social actors' experiences in using their bodies while moving through a familiar space (Duranti 1997, 45).

Accordingly, I employed participant observation in my research by partaking in the mosque life in order to get into the mindset of the mosque people who use religious spaces to connect to the wider society. My focus was on the two mosques, and on youth and their daily life activities. I tried to explore the reflections of their diversity approach in their activities. Therefore, I recorded both ritual and non-ritual bodily practices by observing the everyday codes entailed in dress, bodily movement, and body language. This data helped me understand how religious identities were working, along with other identifications that were making the mosque into a complex site where the meanings of private and public are negotiated. I audio-recorded secular, cultural, and religious public events organized by the mosque, and analyzed how the mosque people interacted with Muslims from various national groups, as well as with non-Muslims. I also observed the interactions of mosque leaders with municipal authorities to illuminate the

⁶ I am using the term "articulation" to mean "the form of connection that can make a unity of two different elements under certain conditions," as Stuart Hall explains in an interview. See "On Postmodernism and articulation: An Interview with S.Hall." (Grossberg 1986).

dynamics of mosque relations with the local state. These interaction observations allowed me to document the intra-religious and multicultural aspects of the two mosques.

These mosques are rich research sites for the politics of difference and belonging, and I have focused a good part of my research on youth activities in the mosques since young congregants are those who really connect the mosques to the wider public. Muslim youth engage in multicultural practices through daily performances, acts of speech, and social activities in and outside of religious spaces, which affect the way they relate to religion, ethnic, cultural, and national belonging (Hall 1997; Rampton 1999), thus generating novel ways of being a modern French person. I observed how they take up French political and secular discourses in their activities through participant observation, then asked them to reflect on these practices in one-on-one and focus group interviews (Miller and Glassner 2004, 134-35). I observed their engagement in the educational and cultural activities run by the mosque, in their own initiatives, and in their leisure activities in and outside of the mosque such as social clubs and religious groups. Some of the questions I sought to answer during these observations were: How much time do they spend at the mosque and how do they spend this time? What motivates them to come to the mosque? What are their expectations of the mosque? Do they actively engage in the institutional activities? How do they contact non-Muslim groups? What kinds of activities are they involved in with their non-Muslim friends within and outside of the mosque?

Keeping in mind that these mosques are not isolated from outside influence, I also included their relations with their immediate communities, with political powers in France and abroad including those in the homeland, with global cultural materials, other institutions, national media and the public all in my observations. Among these, interfaith dialogue constitutes a key set of practices for examining how members of mosques enter the public space

through constant interaction with non-Muslims and reposition themselves among other religious groups in French civil society. Hence, I also spent some time visiting their partner churches and observing their practices of diversity, which affected their relations with the mosques.

Participating in their praying rituals, listening to the messages given by the imams and the pastors, paying attention to the language used by the people in formal and informal communication, taking part in their social work and other related activities, all of these helped me gain a well-founded understanding of their social reality. I also visited these churches to find out the differences and similarities in the ways they define and experience the privacy and publicity of a religious site, and how these groups mutually influence their views on space.

Participant observation also enabled me to understand how religion was institutionalized in places where socio-cultural services were provided and political ideologies were reinforced through regular activities. These also reflect the representational aspect of mosques as places of diversity. Ethnic, national, religious, socio-economic, or cultural concentrations of these activities reveal institutional approaches to diversity. I carefully observed these activities to extract multiple and non-static perceptions that exhibit explicit discourses in documented work.

Complementing work at these formal sites, I participated with Muslim congregants in a variety of daily life activities—shopping, family meals, and summer holidays when the mosque is only active at prayer times. I explored Muslim and non-Muslim interactions, and paid particular heed to differences in conversational practices about religion, secularism, and culture in their everyday lives (de Certeau 1984) outside the mosque. I was invited to a variety of events and hang-outs a short time after arriving into their community. Through these social gatherings, I was able to observe their daily interactions and practices without any pressure. They also invited me over for iftars during Ramadan, which enabled me to observe their family structure and

mechanisms, as well as connect to their family members to learn about their thoughts on the mosque, religion, and France. Getting to know individual families through daily observation and life histories allowed me to see how their relationship to mosques changed over time and to visualize how the mosques fit into the lives of individuals and households, which will be described in greater detail in the narrative analysis section.

Discourse Analysis

Ethnographic studies can benefit from discourse analysis, especially within an analytical framework. In other words, ethnography deals with the exact moment of fieldwork as well as the historical conditions (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 62). Ethnographers benefit from the different layers of a social practice: its physicality, social relations, processes, value systems, ideologies, and beliefs, which all provide the context for their analysis. Since discourse analysis with a critical approach examines how the discourse works in relation to such non-discursive moments, this multi-layered perspective provides an insight to researchers doing fieldwork.

In order to research the presentation of the mosque as a multicultural public site, I examined the everyday uses of diversity discourses (Bernard 2006, 484) by using a discourse-centered approach to culture (Urban 1991). I charted how the ideas and languages of diversity translated into their context and filtered into these spaces. The use of a variety of discourses by the mosques reveals an eclectic knowledge that is produced and/or reinforced by certain power systems and applied in these two religious institutions. Foucault's (1990) understanding of the strong relation between discourse and knowledge production is relevant to my research in the sense that Muslims employ particular discourses that change perceptions of their communities through knowledge-production, which can be captured with a careful analysis of the language used by the mosque leaders and organizers. Language is a system that is actively defined by

socio-political processes, including different types of institutions (Duranti 1997, 45). Drawing on this argument, I employed discourse analysis by analyzing the use of language in relation to the socio-political influences besides cultural definitions. Representations of diversity and interfaith dialogue might have similarities and differences among “North African” mosques. The socio-political and cultural motives behind these choices are included in my analysis of institutional discourse. In order to gain an understanding of these complex institutional discourses and their material effects (Foucault 1977) on place-making, I employed different strategies while collecting various forms of discourse.

Discourse analysis involves a careful examination and decoding of a written text. After collecting these data from a variety of sources, I analyzed the discourses that were utilized in these written documents. I needed to decipher the meanings behind the language used in the documents and examine how people attached themselves to these discourses. Duranti (1997) contends that “the view of language as a set of practices emphasizes the need to see linguistic communication as only a part of a complex network of semiotic resources that carry us throughout life and link us to particular social histories and their supporting institutions” (49). In relation to this approach, I spent considerable time researching written documents. I collected and took notes from reports, textbooks used in language teaching, religious training pamphlets, posters, newspapers, and brochures. External sources helped me understand how outsiders such as the national media respond to these discourses. I examined these texts within the context of each institution and their relation to the national context. For example, training the youth is a shared discourse in both mosques, but was interpreted differently by each; this affected the ways of organizing space. Collecting such discursive data helped me understand the workings of

religious and cultural discourses (Foucault 1981) that are in effect in the process of transforming the mosque into a public space.

Spoken language demonstrates a great deal of a discourse as the leaders give speeches to their communities based on the discourse of their own institutions. The dissemination and internalization of these discourses is a vital part of this research to understand the unity and cleavages within the institution. Therefore, listening to people as they speak, and paying attention to the very language that they speak, constituted an important part of my methodology. I audio- the speeches at events open to the public and analyzed the language used whenever possible (Spradley 1980), including at prayer times, sermons, and religious conversations among the congregants.

Power mechanisms, beliefs, value systems, and social relations are all embedded in social practices, which are mediated through discourse in different ways. Semiotic elements other than language are crucial in understanding and explaining the use of discourse (Chouliaraki and Fariclough 1999, 38). These include nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, gestures, and body movements, and visual images such as architecture, photographs, decorations, etc. I started with the context of these means of communication including setting, decorations, design, gender relations, and participant profiles. I first started collecting visual data (Collier and Collier 1886; Pink 2007) by taking pictures of mosque architecture, the organization of prayer rooms, classrooms, decorations, and paintings. This data helped me understand the workings of religious and cultural discourses (Foucault 1981), such as the social hierarchies that are embedded in a religious institution. I then asked both mosque members and non-Muslims in the neighborhood for their opinions on their interpretations of these physical representations. This data contributed to my understanding of how these people imagine, use, and represent these

religious spaces, and make sense of the local and national discourses through these images. In order to research the institutional organization, spatial practices, and the everyday uses of diversity discourses (Bernard 2006, 484), I observed religious practices while paying particular attention to spatial relationships and practices of the body. Discourses are also reflected in body language, so I observed the social interactions of mosque people with non-Muslim individuals and groups to find out their perceptions on human and gender relations, and how these affect their use of a religious space and the ways in which they connect it to the public sphere. I audio-recorded secular, cultural, and religious public events organized by the mosque, and analyzed the articulation of the language and bodily practices in them to complement my understanding of the imagining of a religious space by its congregants.

Interviews

Going back to my earlier point about the need to understand the extent to which people internalize institutional discourses and the individual aspect of a culture, I found interviews a necessary method in my research. I interviewed people during and after the mosque events to obtain their reflections. I asked them how they identified with the mosque activities and speeches given by the mosque leaders and the French and Algerian/Moroccan public authorities. My goal was to capture the working of these events for the mosque people as I sought to find out how they related to the mosque events. These findings enabled me to discover how the mosque was imagined, experienced, and represented by its congregants. For example, I discovered that some people were not quite satisfied with the mosque activities designed for young congregants, so they took their kids to church activities to engage them more with the wider public. Interviewing helped me hear their voices about such things that were not articulated by congregants in

everyday life. Moreover, interviewing is useful because what is directly observed in the field may not truly reflect what people have on their minds.

I conducted structured and semi-structured in-depth interviews throughout the entire fieldwork period. As May (1993) suggests, the latter method allows flexibility on the part of the interviewee as they are asked to talk freely about their experiences and opinions in their own frames of reference. Using the latter method often, I interviewed the administrative people to make sense of what I saw as a religious and cultural institution. The people who took active roles in the projects of the institution were also worth listening to in order to capture their relevance to the dominant discourse of the administration. Regular congregants also informed me about their own perceptions of diversity and use of space. I interviewed old and young people, men and women, French-born and immigrants, to understand how they made sense of the mosque events in different and similar ways. I sought to interview the church people and non-Muslim French people living in the neighborhood to examine how they viewed a religious site in relation to the secular public sphere. This data informed me about the ways in which the church people's perceptions of a religious site influenced the mosque people through the interfaith dialogue interactions. It also made me realize how non-Muslims' perceptions of the mosque influenced the use of the mosque by its participants. I did not necessarily conduct these interviews at the mosque, in order to set the participants free from any pressure that would possibly hinder their excitement to participate in the interviews or share their honest opinions and feelings. I also interviewed political leaders, local authorities, and officials at Algerian and other North African countries' embassies, selecting (Le Compte and Schensul 1999) those who maintained the most regular contact with the mosques under study. The goal of the interviews with these experts was

to determine how they conceived of the mosque as a public space, and how their perceptions influenced the congregants' views on space.

I conducted the interviews in French at the North African mosques. With few exceptions, the people at both mosques, old and young, administrative and congregants, were all French speakers.

Narrative Analysis

Narratives can be described as structured representations of events in a particular temporal order through which we comprehend the world and communicate our sense of it to others (Jaworski and Coupland 1999, 30-32). These authors highlight the different functions of the narrative discourse, ranging from informative to entertaining. Some of the storytelling could also strengthen group ties. Narrative analysis is a major component of the methods I have employed in order to understand the level of spatial belongings of the congregants to the mosque in multiple ways, such as religious/cultural, communal, and social. It is also a useful tool to capture the extent to which they share these accounts within their community and how they make sense of these experiences. The narratives that I collected were diverse in content and included narration of social/cultural events and religious rituals at the mosque. These accounts enabled me to understand the meanings and implications of the mosque in relation to the secular environment for different Muslim groups.

I also collected personal narratives (Ochs 2004) and life histories (Buechler and Buechler 1971; Buechler and Buechler 1996;; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006) through one-on-one and informal focus group interviews (Strand et al. 2003) to make connections with the congregants' personal lives and institutional belongings. Life histories produce a biographical account of a person and constitute a variety of elements such as events, encounters, emotions, relationships,

interpretive judgments, and evaluations (Handel 2000, 13). Thus, they reflect the positionality of a person vis-à-vis his or her physical and social environment, which is made of a variety of networks and relations. In this respect, I utilized Buechler and Buechler's (1996) approach to social networks, which connected the life histories of people to the individuals, institutions, and communities that they were associated with throughout their lives. In my research, I sought to find out how the French Muslims' commitments to a particular place were shaped by a variety of factors, which I traced through life histories and social networks. It was important to know about where these people came from and ended up, since this information unraveled the role of the mosque and its relationship to their lives. What the mosque means to French Muslims is very much related to their perception of a private and public space, which is a product of their past experiences and current social networks. By hearing and analyzing their life histories, I attempted to discover such subjective perceptions and insert these histories into the networks of the people under study.

To accomplish this task, a careful analysis of those social networks even outside of the mosque was necessary. In order to detect the ways in which the mosque had gone beyond being a religious space to turning into a multicultural center where families gathered, interfaith groups interacted, and everyday life events took place, I viewed the mosque congregants' lives in the context of the individuals and social/cultural/religious groups they interacted with, and explored the manner in which they placed themselves and constructed identities with reference to the people around them. Hence, I interviewed not only mosque people, but also their families and friends with whom they interacted. Accordingly, I examined how the mosque people developed distinct and shared conceptions about a public/private space based on their relationship with the Muslim and non-Muslim groups. In this respect, it was helpful to listen to past experiences even

before coming to France for the immigrants, and their quotidian accounts that included friends, families, neighbors, colleagues, or even strangers for the non-immigrant French Muslims. Both earlier and contemporary historical events are crucial in investigating the current positionality of individuals (Gergen 1980). With respect to that, such histories allowed me to uncover the routine and/or unexpected patterned ways of using the mosque space.

Since narratives can also be musical, pictorial, or sensory, I have paid attention to how people get involved in recounting a story through other channels than verbal. Therefore their use of images and sounds were essential components of my narrative analysis. I started by collecting spatial narratives that describe how people used space, and asking them to draw maps which revealed their perceptions of private and public, and its implications for the Mosque space. Through life histories and personal narratives, I sought to find out how mosque discourses and the congregants' experiences in France have shaped their identities and spatial-belongings.

It should also be noted that these constructions do not represent objective realities since every individual may experience a similar event in a different way. In doing so, he/she might recount the event as a re/construction of what actually has happened in a selective manner (Goffman 1974). However, the listener/researcher is not immune from the selection process (Crapanzano 1984; Rabinow 1977). As a matter of fact, narrative analysis is a combination of the narrator's point of view and the listener's filtering actions. While the former is significant in that it reflects the space-based identification of congregants through multiple belongings, the latter is an awareness that the researcher needs to develop in her analysis, which has made me reflect on my positionality.

The Researcher in the Field

The positionality of the researcher largely shapes his/her interaction with the researched population, as well as possible findings and their interpretations (Pile 1991; Smith 1988; Warren 1988). Knowledge-production is determined by power relations of several conditions such as social status, gender, and class, and identifications. The researcher's awareness and mindfulness of his/her position vis-à-vis the researched is critical for the data collection and its interpretation. Ethnographers collect and assemble data material to construct a particular perspective on the social world. In other words, their data are discursive formations that reflect their point of view on social realities (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 62). It also provides the reader with an ethnography written from the standpoint of the researcher. In this respect, the researcher needs to critically reflect on his/her positionality as well as the informant's subjectivity. The inclusion of self-reflexivity in the research process has been a major concern in the literature (England 1994; Lennie 1999; Nelson 1991; Wolf 1996). In this section, I will lay out the influence of my positionality and self-reflexivity in my research.

Fieldwork in Western Europe with a Muslim population has its own complications and benefits. My relations with the North African Muslims are largely driven by a shared knowledge of religion, which enabled me to access their community as an insider. Being a doctoral student in the United States further contributed to my access, as they had an image of an open-minded liberal American researcher. In this regard, an outsider researcher identity combined with an insider position helped me build an effective communication with the North African mosque community. In other words, my acquaintance with both European culture and Muslim societies facilitated my communication with and understanding of North African populations in France. These personal advantages helped me establish trust with people in the field in order to conduct an ethically-informed and thick ethnographic study (Geertz 1973). For example, my familiarity

with gender relations was crucial, both in terms of being aware of its influence on the nature of my fieldwork (Geiger 1990; Herod 1993; Oakley 1981; Warren 1988), and for maintaining a fruitful communication with the mosque community, as some sites are male spaces where I needed to be very careful, cautious, and sensitive. These male spaces would be judged as highly gendered fields for some people, so I negotiated with this mentality, which accrued a degree of gendered otherness to me. Due to this insider role, I sometimes found myself acting as an advisor to the mosque leaders, especially when some congregants and Amor asked for my opinion and advice about their personal matters and future activities to be carried out at the mosque. Hence, my role as a researcher blended with an advisory role on these occasions, and helped me develop a sense of responsibility for communities marginalized by the state (Castro and Brokensha 2015) or the mainstream society.

I also taught English as a part-time teacher at a private educational institution in Argenteuil, where the Al-Ihsan Mosque is located, and this gave me a chance to better comprehend the meaning of being a Muslim in a banlieue since most of my students came from a Muslim background. Most of them were young Muslims born into North African families. Communication with them outside of the class helped me better comprehend life in Argenteuil and being part of a Muslim community outside of the mosque.

With each population, I became aware of my belonging to several communities simultaneously, meaning that I needed to deal with what Rosaldo termed a “multiplex subjectivity” with many crosscutting identifications (Narayan 1993, 676). My choice of subjectivity that defined my identity changed in each context (Hall 1994). Moreover, my native-insider and foreign-outsider anthropologist position was blurred in a fieldwork with global flows

and multiple strands of identity (Narayan 1993). This multitude of shifting identities in a variety of contexts results in a production of knowledge that is situated and self-reflexive.

This switching back and forth between different identities helped me be more flexible and position myself accordingly and develop mutual trust with my informants. Building a fruitful trust between the researcher and the researched is the key to fieldwork, as it leads to sustainable data collection. In this research, I very occasionally had problems of mistrust due to the complexity of political power mechanisms, and I was respectful of people's choices of sharing or not sharing information with me. Even with those who publicly shared their opinions about very critical issues, I was very careful about keeping their identity confidential and used pseudonyms in order to avoid any future complications, except for those who asked me to use their real names in my dissertation.

I was also aware of the potential risks of empathy due to my shared background with the Muslim societies. To avoid this threat, I drew on Geertz's methodology when he was concerned with attempting to determine how the Javanese, Balinese, and Moroccan people defined themselves as persons in terms of words, institutions, and behaviors through which they actually represented themselves to themselves and to one another (Geertz 1983, 58). In other words, I listened to them without assuming that I already had an idea about what they thought and how they represented themselves. This also helped me shatter my pre-established views on Islam as I witnessed different interpretations and practices that catered to a particular context.

Significance of the Research

This research with a spatial focus is intended to add to the research literature on Western European countries by examining the relationship between diversity, secularism, and religious space, with detailed descriptions of the private and public make-up of the mosque. This project

will also contribute to the growing presence of anthropology in debates on multiculturalism. The scholarship on Europe's Muslim residents draws on multiculturalism as a policy discourse of recognition within the public sphere (Kymlicka 1995; Parekh 2006a; Rawls 1993; Taylor 1992; Young 1990). Scholars of multiculturalism in Europe deal with the liberal challenges multicultural policies pose for Muslim groups (Cesari 2004; Joppke 2004; Kastoryano 2006; Modood 2007; Muhic 2004; Parekh 2006b). My ethnographic research addresses multiculturalism as a differently lived experience and interaction at two religious sites. From this perspective, this research opens a new paradigm into the concept and the exercise of secularism among European Muslims by bridging the allegedly irreconcilable secularism and Islam.

My study contributes to discussions of the public/private space by articulating sites of private worship to public cultural developments. By doing this, I seek to problematize the ambiguous distinction of public/private space (Benhabib 1992; Habermas 1991; Habermas 1992; Harvey 1996) through minority religious institutions in urban France. I also wish to explore different perceptions of the private and public spaces within Muslim groups, and between Muslim and non-Muslim populations.

This project also offers insight into the anthropology of youth through my ethnographic study of young Muslims in mosque spaces and beyond. Many anthropologists analyze the socio-cultural experiences of minority youth in European states (Soysal 2004; Vertovec 1998; Yalcin-Heckmann 1998). These studies are crucial in understanding how Muslim youth negotiate and resist dominant social discourses in their everyday lives through complex identifications. The contribution of this research to the discipline of studying youth is two-fold. First, it suggests a comprehensive categorization of youth, and it also problematizes generation classifications by illustrating the fuzzy nature of the boundaries between the supposedly determined generations.

Second, this study exhibits the connection of young people to spaces they re/create by focusing on the role of youth in place-making through transforming the mosque into an alternative public space. It also sheds light on the influence of the mosque on the Muslim youth as they build new identifications at the mosque and position themselves in French society. Accordingly, it also opens a window to observing the changes in French society resulting from the efforts of Muslim youth.

The Organization of This Study

As mentioned earlier, this dissertation is organized around politics of inclusion as the fundamental theme, which I illustrate through the dynamic dialogue between secularism and religion within a spatial framework in France. Having laid the groundwork for an understanding of the role of mosques in this chapter, the organization of the remaining chapters is intended to reflect a flow of themes around this central theme.

In Chapter 2 I describe the general European context, and argue that France employs a special kind of secularism due to its particular historical and social dynamics. I also introduce the two mosques with different approaches to Islam and secularism as the focus research sites of this dissertation. In Chapter 3 I argue that the mosque space is a unique setting where public and private distinctions are fuzzy, and that the use of the mosque space can be different in each mosque. I also explore the internal differences within these mosques. I introduce different individuals and leading groups as actors in a variety of multiculturalist politics.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine these groups in detail. The first explores the conservative leaders in a mosque as to how they understand secularism vis-à-vis Islam and use the mosque space accordingly, while the latter forms the core of the book in many respects by presenting a new approach to understanding the ways in which young leaders conceptualize and practice

multiculturalism within the mosque by appropriating French secularism and even interpreting Islam in new ways. I argue that they imagine and organize the mosque space based on these processes. Chapter 6 is a continuation of these chapters in the sense that it describes the practical steps that the different Muslim actors take in and outside of the mosque. Chapter 7 sums up the entire discussion of the Islam and secularism relationship from the French Muslim youth point of view as they understand and process it in a unique way using the mosque space.

Chapter 2

Contexts of Laïcité and Multicultural Spaces in France

Overview

Mosques are important sites of migrant experience and crucial points of reference for people who want to learn about Muslim presence in France (Bowen 2010). It is necessary to distinguish between different groups in order to capture different experiences and meanings vis-à-vis the state and public perceptions of these groups. Youth experience is, in this sense, worth examining as they are the future of Islam in Europe. It is also through the experience of young persons that state and public perceptions of Islam and Muslims of immigrant origin are being transformed. These perceptions affect their level of acceptance and integration to a more radical stance or a more submissive attitude toward French culture. In order to get at the complexities of how groups use mosques and affiliated institutions differently to negotiate Muslim identities and French secularism, what kind of multicultural and religious spaces they re/produce, and finally how youth act and respond to these processes and connect themselves to the non-Muslim French public through mosques, both a broader and particular contextualization is needed. This way, we can put the particular French secularism into context.

In this chapter, I contextualize the Muslims' immigrant experience in Western Europe with a focus on the particular case of French Muslims. I argue that Islamic institutions not only signify Muslim presence in France, but they also transform the nature of this presence, contributing to the Muslim diversity within the context of French secularism. First, I briefly present a broader framework of Western Europe to provide an integral picture of Muslim immigration with its diverse composition, challenges to the state, and migrant and/or citizen practices as a response to state policies. This context will identify Euro-Muslims in their socio-

economic and cultural diversity as well as their migratory patterns, including integration practices. Then, by engaging the literature on Islam in France and the Muslim youth, I introduce the case of French Muslims, with emphasis on youth with North African heritage, through their particularities within the dynamics of French nationhood and secularism, which contribute to the understanding of their identity formations and claims for cultural rights. In the final section, I explain the motives behind building Islamic organizations, which I describe as spaces of multiculturalism, and introduce the two particular mosques that are the focus of this study.

Muslims in Western Europe

Muslim immigrants in Western Europe have been studied from different angles (Buechler 1987; Gole 2006), and current studies focus on the Muslim identities in different nation-states of Europe (Western 2012). The shift from economic and social policies to the issues of religion and cultural integration may be explained with the permanent settlement and increasing numbers of newborns in Europe, and the newcomers in the era of post-labor migration of the 1960s and 1970s (Mandel 2008). Identity politics entered into the state agenda due to higher numbers of Muslims with permanent status. By identity politics, I mean the management of sub-identities through identity-based approaches such as integration by accommodating them in a *communautarisme*, known as existing within segregated communal groups, or assimilation into the national principles and institutions at the expense of the public recognition of their religious, ethnic, and cultural particularities (Faist 2003). Muslims of immigrant origin continue to receive attention, and the focus on them perpetuates states' integration concerns and their contested immigration policies (Modood and Kastoryano 2006; Shavit 2007). Conflicts arise due to economic deprivations, cultural disparities, Islamophobic views, Islamic terrorism, and state policies. Such conflicts result in a variety of responses within the distinct realities of each

Muslim population. Any kind of assumption based on the generalizing practices of Islam that disregards generational, socio-economic, and cultural differences would lead to false representations.

There are approximately fifteen million Muslims residing in Europe, with three big subgroups: Muslim Turks and Kurds predominantly in Germany; Maghrebis in France by majority; and South Asians predominantly in the UK (Tibi 2002, 36). There are also minor subgroups. While each ethno-national group has distinct characteristics, internal differences among these groups are also evident. In other words, Muslim immigrants in Europe do not represent a homogenous group, but rather they diverge in their backgrounds, perceptions, religious attachments, daily practices, and institutions. Hence, it would not be useful to analyze the multifaceted Muslim presence under the large umbrella of Islam. Wieviorka (2002, 131) explains the diversity of Islam in Europe under three rubrics. First, Muslims come to Europe for different reasons and the practice of Islam is diversified due to these different reasons. Those who came in search of a new life in the former colonizer country have other incentives and ways of practicing Islam than those who came as migrant workers or as political asylum-seekers. Second, national and local contexts in the countries of origin are different. For example, state policies and levels of inclusion/exclusion of Muslim immigrants greatly affect the practice of Islam in each country. In other words, people discovered and rediscovered Islam in different contexts. Finally, immigrant profiles are diverse within and between countries. Individuals and groups diverge in their ethnic, socio-economic, cultural, and personal backgrounds within each nation and in Europe overall. Ethnic ties blended with religious belongings take different forms of identity in each population. One may not assume a single Islamic identity among Indonesian and Somali immigrants in Britain, for example. Overall in Western Europe, as the descendants of

labor migrants constitute the majority of Muslims, generational differences also influence their identity formations (Kaya 2000). In the context of France, the new generation which has developed a unique attachment to the French norms and values have found ways to higher education and respectable jobs. They, accordingly, may have different concerns and identifications than their parents stuck in poverty in the banlieues—suburbs--of Paris, who embraced Islam as a cultural identity marker (Franz 2007). It is important that one take these different perceptions and attachments to Islam into consideration while examining their religious organizations, in which multiple identities—religious, cultural, ethnic, secular, etc.—are negotiated.

State Policies Toward Euro-Muslims

State policies toward Muslims in Western Europe should be treated differently than those elsewhere, and especially those in the United States, which is home to a significant Muslim population. Different diversity policies are applied, and Meer and Modood (2011) distinguish between different forms and meanings of multiculturalism in North America and in Western Europe. While all groups excluded for their marked particularities, such as gender/sexual preference or racial difference, are officially included in the multicultural politics in North America (Young 1990) due to its history as an immigrant nation, in Western Europe multiculturalism refers to post-immigration politics designed for newly settled groups, which are mostly Muslim populations (Meer and Modood 2011, 5). In other words, theories are developed within the context of each nation and state.

The term multiculturalism emerged as a policy discourse in countries like Canada and Australia (Meer and Modood 2011, 6) in the 1970s (Rawls 1971), and a political theory was developed in the 1990s led by scholars (Kymlicka 1995; Raz 1994; Shafir 1998) in Canada and

the United States (Triandafyllidou et al. 2006, 4). Most of these theories were formulated as liberal responses to diversity, so liberal principles were central to multicultural philosophy. Parekh (2006a) is critical of these models for their liberal bias in their treatment of other cultures without considering their particularities. Despite their drawbacks, the American tradition of diversity rests on a differentialist model that unites its citizens by accepting and promoting their cultural specificities within the national community (Kastoryano 2002). This is quite a different approach from those applied in Western Europe. It should also be noted that there are certainly different forms of multiculturalism within Western Europe. In this section, I will present the Western European approaches to treating Euro-Muslims with different policies through the exemplary cases.

Regardless of the complex dispersal of various Muslim groups across the continent, Islam has changed the identity of Europe through Muslim immigrants for a number of reasons as described by AlSayyad and Castells (2002, 1). It has become an integral part of the nation-states, as evident in its public visibility and the debates revolving around the issues of Muslim presence in political, social, and cultural life. As a result, the states are required to configure their policies to cope with the changing demographics of the nation, along with other local, national, and global dynamics. As the authors describe in detail, state sovereignty is threatened by the European Union policies, economic globalization, flow of ideas, and the spread of terror. Immigration is another factor that challenges the nation-state and its identity politics. As a result, the state enforces numerous laws and integration policies leading to eventual citizenship in order to maintain its power and national integrity.

As Muslim immigrants, most of whom came as workers, are understood to be permanent residents and not temporary migrants, new policies have been applied to Muslim immigrants and

citizens (Freeman 1995). Different countries exercise different policies due to their distinct long-lasting traditions of nationhood, historical composition of immigrants, and cultural dynamics. Some countries like Germany give ethnic preference to citizenship, meaning that ethnicity is a precondition for becoming a national (Soysal 1994). While proven blood ties to German *volk*⁷ allow easy and quick access to citizenship, those who do not meet this ethnic criterion are subject to a long list of strict requirements that demand long-term legal residence with possession of a residence permit, language skills, proof of economic resources to support the family without state benefits, etc. Dual citizenship is granted only under exceptional conditions (Federal Ministry of the Interior 2014). Although political and social membership are granted to non-citizens to a large extent based on legal residence as argued by Soysal (1994), I argue that strict requirements for legal citizenship have a symbolic meaning in the sense that they reflect the exclusionary practices of the state against immigrants. In other words, citizenship is a privilege reserved for certain residents who meet specific criteria, which symbolically exclude certain other members of the society even if they may enjoy extensive social, cultural, and political rights. In fact, Merkel's earlier declaration that multicultural policies have failed in Germany jeopardizes cultural rights of both citizen and non-citizen residents as it confirms the state's determination to homogenize the public. In the aftermath of recent protests against Muslims, and due to concerns for the rise of ultra nationalist politicians and their followers, she has switched her discourse to a more inclusive rhetoric that embraces all differences, including Muslims in the country. However, this sudden shift seems to be a political strategy rather than a sincere change in integration policies as there has been no practical outcome of this inclusive rhetoric yet.

⁷ The concept of *volk* has been a binding identity marker in Germany since the early nineteenth century to signify the feeling of superiority of German culture.

Countries with civic-territorial approaches, which entail an allegiance to the country of birth and an active participation of each citizen in governance and politics for the good of the wider community, allow a comparatively easier access to citizenship (Lister 1998). France, host to the largest number of Muslim immigrants in Europe, deserves special attention as it has a strong long-lasting nationhood tradition, which rests on the postulates of civic-territorial universalism (Koopmans et al. 2005). It favors an assimilationist perspective (Brubaker 2001) based on universal rights and republican values intended for all citizens equally regardless of their different backgrounds. However, as will be seen in the following pages, this “inclusive” policy rests on the exclusion of certain groups who do not fit the idea of the ideal Frenchness. It could also be argued that France, as a difference-blind liberal democracy, has the dilemma of providing universally agreed equal treatment at the individual level while being agnostic about cultural identities (Stevenson 2003, 47). In other words, equality is granted to citizens on condition that they display common cultural patterns, at least in the public sphere (Rosaldo 1999, 254).

Other countries, such as Britain and the Netherlands, follow a multicultural policy with a more open attitude to immigrants and differences. It has long been argued that multicultural policies make life easy for minorities with different cultures and religions than those of the host society, as the state recognizes group identities, and their issues are resolved through consultation between migrant organizations and the state (Soysal 1994, 118). However, the growing visibility of Islam and of negative views reinforces the idea that Muslims pose a challenge to national integrity. Even countries known to be multicultural havens to Muslims are not immune from normalization of extreme right-wing politics and the spread of laws banning religious and cultural practices over all of Western Europe (AlSayyad 2002). Recently, a draft

law was proposed that restricts the slaughter of animals with halal methods in the Netherlands. A strong proponent of the draft is the head of the Liberation Movement Party, already known to have an anti-Muslim discourse. The proposal has received negative reactions from the Jewish and Muslim communities. It could be concluded that both ethnic and civic approaches seek to construct citizens with relatively homogenous culture that is thought to be compatible with the founding principles of the nation, be it ethnic origin, civic values, or secular norms. Further, legal citizenship does not guarantee social and cultural membership. Put more precisely, “A passport does not provide a citizen identity if the cultural underpinning is lacking. Most importantly, it does not convey membership in 'The Club' ” (Tibi 2002, 34). Partial or full removal of religious and cultural identities is required to enjoy full citizenship.

Numerous studies have shown that Europe’s Muslims are subject to politics of discrimination and relative deprivation (Franz 2007). The hardships of dealing with difference are evident in the experiences of Muslim residents as they face xenophobia, racism, and a growing Islamophobia (Modood 1997). These negative attitudes are based on prejudice and religious intolerance for Muslims due to a worldview that assumes a fundamental incompatibility of Islam with Western culture (Bunzl 2005, 502; Roy 2009). Cultural difference is the basis of “neo-racism” (Balibar 1991), which originated from biological foundations to racial categories but shifted the reference of difference to cultural identities and belongings that are assumed to be immutable and radically distinct (Silverstein 2005; Wikan 2002). This new form of racism has social and economic consequences for the Muslim minorities. Access to the educational system and job market on equal terms as the dominant society is largely restricted, which results in social stigmatization. There are multiple factors that reinforce these degrading conditions and negative sentiments toward European Muslims, among which state policies can be considered a

notable driving force. Integration policies have remained insufficient in properly addressing the needs and concerns of the immigrants, as is obvious in the above-mentioned conditions. As a matter of fact, state officials are well aware of these issues, and their responses to immigration-related tensions are similar, despite contextual differences. Multiculturalism is declared to have failed in Germany and the UK by the prime ministers of both countries respectively. Sarkozy echoed those comments in condemning multiculturalism (France24 2011), as the republican French discourse does not favor this political approach. These three cases suggest that a common concern about Muslim integration in different contexts is remarkable (Triandafyllidou et al. 2006). In other words, states with distinct approaches to immigration seem to come closer in their integration regimes. However, the private and public spaces have different roles, and each state implements its own policy to accommodate religious, ethnic, and cultural particularities within the nation. In order to capture the commonalities and differences among European states as to how they approach their Muslim residents of immigrant origin and contextualize the experience of French Muslims, I have chosen the UK, Germany, and France as comparative cases in Western Europe. The British case is worth discussing in terms of presenting a different kind of multiculturalism than its counterparts, with its unique colonial experience. Germany is also significant in this study due to its large numbers of Turkish immigrants that will provide a comparative perspective to the North African populations in France. For the purposes of this study, I will briefly introduce the differing national positions in the UK and Germany in order to present a comparative perspective to the French model to better comprehend the French particularity.

The UK is home to over 1.5 million Muslims from ex-colonies as well as less-developed countries due to labor shortages in the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, immigration is not a new

concept in British history. The British immigration policies largely entail an Anglo-Saxon tradition of liberalism with little state intervention in the private sphere, although it went through several transitions throughout its colonial and post-colonial history. The transformation of ex-colonial subjects to British citizens has a long history configured through multiple layers of political decisions made in various cultural, institutional, and public settings (Hall 2002, 44). Despite the particularities of these policies that were implemented to turn the colonial subjects to British citizens, it could roughly be argued that the British integration regime largely rested on racial trajectories. Put differently, minority rights are granted on racial/ethnic/national grounds. Therefore, Muslim groups that do not identify themselves within racial categorizations are in conflict with the state policy, which does not recognize their religious identities and does not accommodate these populations as religious minority groups (Koopmans et al. 2005). It should be noted that these rights granted mostly along racial lines do not guarantee inclusion, but they rather re-inscribe relations of subordination through marginalization.

British liberalism that prioritizes private choice over public claims, and British multiculturalism that lacks a public dimension (Joppke 2009, 83), also conflict with the public domain of Islam. The insufficient capacity of the structural forces to accommodate Islam in the public setting came to the foreground with the rise of religious identifications. The Rushdie Affair, Islamophobia discourse fueled by terrorist attacks, and lack of socio-economic integration all contributed to the rise of religious affiliations of Muslim immigrants, which in turn led to increasing demands for exceptional rights and assertive claims that questioned the basis for national identity. As the public/private distinction of British multiculturalism (Modood 1997) dissolves with the insertion of Muslim practices into the public sphere, state officials seem to be

more skeptical of their laissez-faire approach that was highly valued in the past. It seems that there is a search for better tools to “integrate” Muslims and make them British citizens.

The traditional British political system recognizes certain minorities and implements anti-discriminatory policies to protect their rights. Most of these interventions take place at the local level and through the judicial system rather than through direct state enforcement, unlike the imposition of the French state. Levinson (1997) criticizes this narrow nature of British “multiculturalism” for creating divided communities based on their ethnic, religious, cultural, and other differential particularities (340). The public nature of Islam even complicates the situation for Muslims further in the UK as they are not recognized with reference to their religious affiliations and most of their claims center around public matters. In France, such a possible internal division within a nation is hindered by establishing *égalité* (equal rights and obligations) through suppression of the private in the French republican tradition, which rests on fulfilling civic responsibilities for the wider society (as will be discussed in the next section).

These policies influence the way British Muslims organize. It is argued that new generation Muslims are more assertive than their parents in terms of claiming the recognition of their equal rights as the majority population. They, however, face the difficulty of not being recognized as a religious group organizing in the public domain (Koopmans et al. 2005).

Germany has long resisted defining herself as a country of immigration. However, ongoing influx of immigrants changed this self-perception and forced the state to create integration policies. This influx began as a movement to work in distant lands for financial gain, but continued as a way of attaining a better and a more secure life for political refugees, of searching for better educational opportunities for young people, and of reuniting families through subsequent immigration of spouses and children. (Abadan-Unat 2002) Numerous people in

developing world countries left their villages to make and save money in Western European countries in the 1950s and 1960s. The majority of labor workers in Germany came from Turkey through bilateral agreements between the two states. The temporal nature of this labor movement did not necessitate integration policies designed for immigrants. Therefore, the already exclusionist policies toward membership were harshly applied to guest workers. As a result, the first immigrants who faced a different culture, religion, and unknown language were disillusioned by the anti-immigrant German policy. The German government did not compensate for the workers' culture shock. Instead, it designated the newcomers in a negative sense, enacted laws to get rid of these "hopeless case" figures, and even supported them financially to return to their homeland right after the decline of the need for foreign workers. Immigrants were supposed to live in their isolated space until they returned to where they came from. Once they were understood to be permanent residents rather than temporary workers, various modes of integration began to be applied by the host countries to avoid the threat presented by the immigrant communities. Despite some minor changes in these policies over the course of the worker immigration history of the country, the overarching approach was based on a segregationist model that distanced the "foreigners" even further from the mainstream society (Faist 2003).

The fact that the German state and society identified Muslim Turks as a foreign community and that there was a German emphasis on ethnicity as the basis of citizenship both channeled migrants and their descendants into ethnic-based organizations (Warner and Wenner 1996, 460). It is no wonder that these organizations retained strong ties with the homeland, which politically influenced them and provided them with financial support. One of the main problems of these associations was the lack of unity and conflicting interpretations of Islam. This

problem has been tackled through state interference in France, as will be discussed in the next section.

France and its Muslims

While the Muslim presence in France dates back to the eighth century when Moors governed the Iberian Peninsula, and there have been Muslims in the country since the colonization of Algeria in the 1830s (Brubaker 1992), massive flows of migration were seen following World War II when France, like most other Western European countries, needed guest workers to compensate for the shortage of labor in the reconstruction process. Muslim immigrants came primarily from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, while a moderate number of workers came from Turkey, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East (Soysal 1994). Political repression, economic hardship, and the Algerian War (1954-1962) contributed to the Algerian families' immigration to France. Industrial workers were legally allowed to stay only until the termination of their contracts. But contrary to the expectations of the state, most of them remained and settled down. These workers lived in the suburbs of the major industrial urban cities such as Paris, Marseilles, Lyon, and Lille. The majority of migrant workers lived in poverty and crime rates were high because of their poor living conditions (Franz 2007).

Compared to other western European countries, Muslims in France have a longer history with greater numbers. They nonetheless had a harder time gaining religious recognition (Bowen 2010). The French government was not sensitive to their integration and the difficulties of life for Muslim migrants, most of whom were semi-skilled or low-skilled workers. They remained as marginalized communities for decades (Maillard 2005) until the latest reforms of Sarkozy, the previous President of the French Republic. With the rising riots in the banlieues of Paris in 2009, the Sarkozy government implemented a set of anti-discrimination reforms to ameliorate the

economic conditions of suburban immigrant residents, with affirmative plans for employment and more opportunities in education (Emilie Project, Final Report 2009). The intent was to calm down the tension of “angry young Muslims” by reducing discrimination in the job market and education without, however, identifying racial/ethnic/cultural/religious discrimination as a problem (De Wenden 2006).

Despite its multicultural demographics, France has a Jacobin-Republican assimilationist tradition of turning immigrants, including Muslim peasants, into Frenchman. The state often followed this policy except for the differentialist turn in the 1970s and early 1980s, which usually occurred at the symbolic level without actual recognition (Brubaker 2001). The basic tenets of the state, *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, were indeed applied to assimilate immigrants into single French identities regardless of national, ethnic, religious, or cultural background. The state has imposed an understanding of equality based on a liberal system that recognizes individual citizens but not members of a group (Modood 1997), because group membership with particular interests and concerns is seen as a threat to national unity. This reasoning is an outcome of continuing policies in France, which are based on universal liberalism and the *laïcité*. France expects Frenchness from its citizens, and in this sense the citizens are expected to embrace nationhood and citizenship at once. With its civic-territorial model, the French rhetoric is an inclusive one, accepting everyone who wishes to be French in France. However, this inclusion comes with its own limits and selective mechanisms. Citizenship regulations are much looser than in Germany, as everyone who is able to prove at least five-year-residence is eligible to apply for citizenship, and yet this does not guarantee social integration. At this point one has to be cautious with the “universal liberalism” and the meanings of *liberté* and *égalité* that are necessary conditions for *fraternité* in France.

Universalism is a charged concept and it is a very tough struggle to find common ground based on universally acclaimed principles. Everyone has the right to claim his cultural or religious beliefs to be universal, yet one dominant group sets the rules for the game. As Western nations have been the predominant powers in the world since the Age of Exploration, they defined the universal philosophies as “enlightened” figures of mankind. Hence, the application of these principles to others was also left to their discretion as they determined the relations between “the West and the Rest” (Hall 1996a). In fact, the universalism that is celebrated in France was founded on Western ideals, and anyone that challenges these notions will be singled out from cultural membership. Again, as in Germany, legal citizenship does not automatically guarantee social integration, although France encourages immigrants to absorb French nationhood unlike Germany.

Today’s immigrant Muslims and their descendants in France are subject to a political stand that is based on French *laïcité*, which entails state protection of individuals from any religious group pressure (Bowen 2007; Fernando 2010). This blind approach to group differences dictates an erasure of cultural and religious symbols (Brubaker 2001) in the public sphere while restricting such values to what the state considers to be the private sphere, a sphere that includes religious institutions. This tradition of dividing public and private spaces has been in effect since the 1905 law, which enacted the strict separation of church and state (Laurence and Vaisse 2006). Despite the republican promise of an egalitarian society with individual freedom (Fernando 2009), Muslim immigrants faced the socio-economic disadvantages and the challenges of their religious/cultural difference (Kepel 1997), which were to be contained within the private sphere. In line with this principle, the state dictates the right to assimilate in the public sphere and the toleration of difference in the private sphere. It is for this reason that the use of

headscarves was banned in schools and *burqas*⁸ have recently been prohibited in public space as a counter-attempt from the state to defend the basic tenets of France, namely, liberty, equality, and fraternity (Khosrokhavar 2009).

The state policy of recognizing and nationalizing Islam in the interest of maintaining control over Muslim groups that are dispersed across the country with different agendas can be seen as a contradictory move considering this public/private divide. Mosques are now backed by the state, which facilitates their establishment in the country. In other words, their public presence as religious institutions is encouraged. Religion, which was intended to remain in the privacy of individuals, is being taken to the public sphere after being configured to have a republican character, with an emphasis on the common good for the whole nation and that it be “l’Islam de France” (Bowen 2010; Frégosi 2008), a shift from Islam in France to Islam of France (Kastoryano 2006, 64). A major reason for this attempt to institutionalize Islam in France is to unite the ethnically and nationally separated mosques under a common logic, which is paradoxical. On the one hand, it treats religion solely as a private affair to be exercised either in the mosque or at home without any interference into the public sphere. On the other hand, it certainly contributed to making mosques into public entities by granting them a nationally recognized status. This effort is a political reflection of the French *laïcité*, which appoints the state as the administrator of religious particularities that pose challenges to its secular character.

French *laïcité* requires protection of individuals by the state against any religious group pressure (Bowen 2007; Fernando 2010). This is different from Anglo-Saxon secularism, which guarantees protection of individuals from any state coercion. As discussed in the British example,

⁸ An outer garment worn by women in some Islamic societies to cover the entire body from head to feet when in public. There has been a huge debate on not allowing the burqa in public space throughout many countries in Western Europe, and especially in France, on the grounds that it is a form of women’s oppression since it is interpreted as a clothing practice imposed onto women by Muslim men and thus violating women’s freedom.

the Anglo-Saxon regimes treat private matters, including religion, ethnicity, race, and other identifications, as legitimate rights under protection by the state without interference from public authorities. In contrast, French identity is the only one that is promoted, and is supported without any cultural or religious components. This is why there are no hyphenated identities in France, and yet one cannot be truly French unless one is culturally and racially French, which is manifested by the phrase *Français-Français* (French-French) (Michalak and Saeed 2002, 154). The racial and cultural basis of citizenship make Muslim nationals incapable of fulfilling requirements of Frenchness to be a full citizen (Fernando 2009). Therefore religious identity is always in the foreground in discussions of migration and citizenship.

This discussion is prominent in the French media through the representations of the Muslim people who are depicted as living in the margins of the society without any wish to integrate into French society and culture. These images oftentimes include women wearing burqa, multiple mosques with tall minarets, and men praying on the streets. These images are supplemented by relevant discourses of communitarianism, Muslim occupation, and an inherent opposition between *laïcité*, and republicanism on the one side, and Islam on the other. Interestingly enough, these discourses are challenged by activists who use these two principles to claim their presence as respected citizens, and safeguard their position within French society. In other words, instead of using a universal discourse of human rights (Soysal 2001), they use a national discourse, which is more relevant in their context. During my fieldwork, the Ministry of Education passed a law banning mothers with the headscarf from accompanying their kids on school trips on the grounds that children belong to the Republic. This received negative reactions from many Muslim women, and some in the Al-Ihsan mosque started a campaign and joined a protest against this law to criticize the new regulation by claiming it unlawful for being against

the principles of *laïcité*, which is supposed to distinguish religion from state affairs and guarantee freedom of worship and exercise of religion. They opened a banner in which they used the words “*Laïcité and Islam*” together describing them as systems serving the same purpose of accommodating Muslims in France as equal citizens. They claimed their kids by advocating their right to educate their kids within the framework of their religion without violating republican values. Such laws imply that Muslims are unable to raise their children as proper French citizens, so the state has the right to take over and fulfill this mission on behalf of parents.

Muslim presence in France, especially that of persons of North African origin, known as Maghrébins in France, has been studied by social scientists and analyzed in anthropological work. Their colonial experience has been the driving force that complicates their relationship with the French state. Scholars have different views on how North African Muslims integrate into the French public domain. Kepel (1997) examines the increasing public visibility of Islam through some Muslims from the Maghreb, who he argues threaten the French republic and *laïcité* by asserting a communal-type Islamic identity. The socially excluded Muslim immigrants in the impoverished banlieues and Algerians who have a passion-filled relationship with the ex-colonial power have failed to assimilate into French culture. Based on her extensive ethnographic data in France, Kastoryano (2002) takes a different approach than Kepel by claiming that the state policies constitute the only identity frame of reference for the North African Muslims, which requires religious, cultural, ethnic, and secular identities to be negotiated. In her view, recognition of difference is achieved through reconfigured religion, ethnicity, and culture that conform to the state secularism and democratic values. Unlike Kepel, Kastoryano is, thus, optimistic about this new form of negotiating identity with a potential of building mutual trust

between states and immigrant groups by providing recognition of religious and ethnic identities within the framework of national legitimacy.

Muslim Youth in France

First arrival Muslims in France are predominantly North African immigrants who came mainly as industrial workers. They share common North African traditions, language, and allegiance to the Maliki school of Sunni Islam. These commonalities allowed them to deal with the challenges of poverty and cultural segregation through religious ties and practices. Their prayer spaces, thus, were sites of refuge where they escaped the social traumas of living as poor Muslim immigrants in an ex-colonial and highly secular country. The immigrants' response to state policies is nowadays more assertive than ever. While first comers defined their identities within their class, their children identify themselves with cultural or religious differences as they try to form a sense of pride by breaking away from their colonial past (Kastoryano 2002). First arrival Algerian Muslims especially do not distinguish between religious and national identities due to their painful history with French domination (Cesari 2002). This perceptual difference makes youth an especially fruitful domain of study.

Islam represents a cultural marker and an identity category for youth, as most of these, particularly those of Algerian origin, are non-observant Muslims yet they differentiate themselves through religion (Adamson 2006; Franz 2007). They manifest the use of religion as a mechanism of differentiation and protest. There are diverse concerns, interests, and identifications among Muslim youth in France. Therefore, the motives behind their protest and their identification with Islam may not be the same. The suburban youth are facing discrimination, xenophobia, and socio-economic deprivation at a higher level than any other immigrant group. They consequently express their resentment by using religion as a political tool

and claim their agency through riots in order to attract attention from the government to cause some change (Western 2005). Many of these groups do not easily consider themselves both as Muslim and French due to inapplicable principles of the French Republic in their environment of unemployment, racism, poverty, and stigmatization (Franz 2007).

On the other hand, significant numbers of Muslim youth are well-educated and receptive to French cultural practices. They choose to preserve their integrity by being modern Muslims and French at the same time, by suggesting an alternative citizenship that provides their cultural inclusion into the larger society (Bouzar 2006). These in a way challenge the state discourse of failed integration of Muslims (Bowen 2007). The constant interplay between religion, culture, ethnicity, and nation complicates their identities. Their political and social mobilization through everyday practices using the cities' resources is increasing in their efforts to integrate into French society. Street protests; public campaigns; wearing headscarves, yet speaking accent-free French as a business-women with higher education; ongoing communication with state officials; these are the broad range of practices through which they seek social transformation.

While young people, most of whom hold French passports, seek recognition and respect as French Muslims and thus maintain their personal integrity, their demand is blocked by the French *laïcité*, which is intended for individuals that are thought to be in need of state protection from religious pressures. Thereby religion is decoupled from national identity. This is what Muslim youth are challenging by building a new form of citizenship that encompasses their religion and national loyalty at once. In other words, they defy older cultural notions of France and the homogeneous nature of French liberalism, not the political framework of the Republic, which is "based not on a shared faith but on a faith in the possibilities of sharing a life together" (Bowen 2007, 249). This new trend is known as "*Vivre Ensemble*" (Living Together), a principle

that values the practice of living in peace under a shared French identity by acknowledging differences and engaging in common projects to improve this vision. In other words, while secularism would be a common reference of a shared life with other fellow Frenchmen, they expect their religious particularity to be recognized as a legitimate and respectful part of their identity and their religious demands to be accommodated by the state as long as they do not violate the democratic and secular nature of the French society. They reappropriate Islam and make it fit into the French context. In her ethnography of Maghrebin Muslims in Marseille, Cesari (1994) discusses the secularization of Islam. She contends that the cultural view of Islam by second generation Maghrebins leads to a secular form of Islam which positions religious practice in the private sphere, and thus conforms to the separation of the public/private spheres in the French secular tradition. However, she also concludes that the prejudice and discriminatory practices suffered by Maghrebins solidify a collective ethno-religious sub-identity that seeks public recognition to be used as a political resource. However, this rhetoric is yet to have actual consequences in the social and political setting.

Although some of these groups are highly political with anti-Western agendas, in this study I will focus on Muslim youth who aspire to a common future with cultural recognition and religious acceptance based on the civic values of France without conforming to the dictated norms onto each citizen. Differing from Cesari, I examine how they revisit their religion through a meaningful way in their context by using a “religious space” and taking it into the public sphere with a unique negotiation of Islam and secularism. In the next section, I will contextualize their organizations with a brief historical account.

Islamic Organizations and Mosques

Muslim organizations play a major role in providing a site of agency and identity formation in the process of integration. In fact, religion is the main and long-standing difference that enjoys institutional recognition as an organized entity in France (Modood and Kastoryano 2006, 174-75). The recent efforts to recognize Islam institutionally situate Islam on equal footing with other religions.

As discussed earlier, labor migration started in the 1960s, and Muslim immigrant populations continued to rise with family reunions in the 1970s. Initially workers were expected to return to their home countries after the targeted economic progress was reached in host countries, yet most of them never went back. Permanence of migrant workers created the incentive for the migrants to establish associations in host countries. Most of these associations were faith-based, as religion set the perfect stage for the immigrants to deal with their economic problems and exclusion. In other words, on first arrival immigrants sought shelter in their communities without raising their voices. The primary concern of numerous organizations, which were run by the first comers, was limited to providing social services to immigrants by helping them with their basic needs such as housing, food, and religious practice. Later, in order to meet the needs of the Muslim populations in Europe in a general sense, many Islamic foundations with various particular objectives began to operate.

It was not until the liberalized association law in 1981 that Muslims in France set up formally recognized organizations (Laurence and Vaisse 2006, 99) that were publicly identifiable locations (Nielsen 1995, 16). Until that date, Muslims were represented at the state level by the Grande Mosquée de Paris (the Paris Mosque), which was founded by the French government in 1926 as a religious sanctuary for the Muslim immigrants. Beginning in the 1980s competing organizations began to flourish, addressing a variety of Muslims of different national origin.

Since the 1980s these organizations have been tackling issues other than being a religious shelter, such as taking a strong stance against the negative implications of Islam among the Western populations. Starting in the late 1980s Islam drew attention as an identity category and boundary marker in European societies (Adamson 2006; Franz 2007, 110). In line with this new approach to Islam and in the aftermath of 9/11, Muslim populations in Europe were subject to discriminatory actions and hostile attitudes. These recently emerging issues inevitably led to the construction of new migrant identities manifesting themselves in Islamic foundations, as Yasemin Soysal puts forth in her extensive work on migrants in Europe, *Limits of Citizenship*: “The late 1980s then saw the emergence of newly defined migrant identities and collective existences” (Soysal 1994, 111). Muslim NGOs, in line with this new identity formation, encouraged the immigrants to be active actors in the cultural and political sphere by negotiating their Muslim identities within the universalistic discourse of human rights. Therefore, numerous organizations have set up transnational networks to seek international support (Nielsen 2003). The European Union is a major institution with which they aim to collaborate. Transnational ties are often used by Muslim groups as means of support in their search for recognition. These networks are vital in providing financial (Portes 2000) and social resources. Muslims retain their cultural differences and strong ties with their homelands as well as with global Islam and thus undermine nation-states’ attempts to assimilate migrants to national politics and culture (Koopmans et al. 2005). Their simultaneous participation in multiple cultural arenas and ethnoscapes (Appadurai 1996) enables them to escape the confinement of nation-state borders (Silverstein 2005, 376). Some scholars interpret such transnational maneuvers as an emergence of an Islam adjusted to European ideas, namely Euro-Islam, which is directed against

ghettoization and assimilation (AlSayyad 2002; Silverstein 2005, 375). In France, these attachments are visible in civil society organizations that seek global support.

Most Muslim youth in France, regardless of their physical age, make their own choices in a non-Muslim setting where religion and national identity are decoupled. They tend to use their personal autonomy to find true self in the absence of social pressures of the home country and reconcile their subjectivity with religious authority (Fernando 2010). They perform a different type of agency by performing their interpretations through social and religious authority but not against it. Within the framework of this analysis most scholars try to understand what headscarves mean for pious women, and I have applied this approach to the Muslim youth in my study to find out what it means for them to go to a mosque. This approach let me go into the mindset of the Muslim youth in understanding their use of the mosque as a space of private and public intermingling.

Muslim immigrants attach multiple meanings to these spaces through everyday practices performed collectively. Algerians, the largest Muslim group in France, use mosques in different ways from other Muslim immigrants due to their colonial history, ethno-national distinction, and social position among the public. Young North African Muslims are both shaped by and respond to these forces with new forms of belonging different from each other and their parents. In other words, North African youth do not necessarily represent a homogenous Muslim youth in France. This difference is evident in various types of organizations established by young Muslims in France.

In order to capture these differences, I will briefly contextualize mosque organizations with an emphasis on the predominantly North African ones as my next focus in this section.

Mosques

France is home to citizens of different origins without defining herself as a multicultural society. Different groups represent their distinctiveness through a variety of institutions. While some of these are religion-oriented, as Islam is integral to the majority of immigrant cultures, some have non-religious orientations such as work-related issues, education, discrimination, etc. Religious demands and identities are gaining power even in the younger generation, and mosques continue to be major places of representation in which a variety of discourses—religious, national, ethnic, cultural—are reconciled at the institutional level. Mosques and community centers, with local, national, and global connections, are still influential in representing Muslim populations as evident in their increasing numbers. They provide a setting where people preserve their cultural values and religious belongings and negotiate these with Frenchness. While first-comer parents with low education were busy working in tough conditions, they regretted not having transmitted their religious and cultural values to their children (Diop 1997). Mosques and community centers, in this sense, are used to educate the youth in religious and cultural matters (Diop 1997, 114). Nevertheless, the administrators of mosque organizations complain about the lack of interest on the part of the young people in taking responsibility for organizing events, and they wish to attract youth to the mosque by designing activities oriented to their needs and interests. Therefore, religious centers take on new meanings and functions. Bowen (2010), in his extended ethnography on French Muslims, highlights the significance of mosques with their multiple functions and their role in shaping the Islamic presence in France. After a careful analysis of mosques, most of which are run by the North African population, he concludes that mosques and their imams offer social, religious, and educational service as well as political representation. By doing so, they cross ethnic lines and normative traditions with a sense of flexibility. As they develop social and educational branches and become representative bodies for Muslims,

mosques take on some degree of congregational character suggesting that they focus more on the social services than strictly on worship traditions (Bowen 2010, 37-62). During my fieldwork, I discovered that mosques fulfill several roles at once, and providing religious service is a major component of this along with many others. The people I talked to mentioned that they come to the mosque to learn religion, socialize, make new friends, spend time with Muslim fellows, seek support, and be part of the community. In this sense, Islam and Muslims are predominantly represented at the mosques, which have been conditioned by several legal applications throughout the history of France (Nielsen 1995).

The Catholic Church has been the major religious institution in France for centuries, also exerting a political influence until the separation of the church and state at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its role was already diminished by the 1901 Law of Association, granting people permission to create an *association culturelle* where they could perform activities that pertain to cultural practices without any religious reference. Anti-clerical government implemented a laic character into the constitution with the Law of 1905, which reduced the power of the Catholic Church with its separation from the state (Bardi 2006). This law also confirmed the freedom of establishing an *association cultuelle (religious)* to perform worship practices to all residents of France regardless of their citizenship (Nielsen 1995). This law not only confirmed even non-citizen residents' right to represent their cultural difference at the institutional level but extended this right to the religious domain on condition that such associations had to be registered with the authorities. Although the law only mentions Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism, which were the most significantly represented religions at the time (Ferjani 1992, 76), Muslim residents also benefited from this law. The Paris Mosque remained the major representative Islamic institution in France for decades. However, this was

predominantly an Algerian institution, recognized by the Algerians due to its strong ties with the Algerian state, and far from represented the Muslim community in France. The number of mosques proliferated, especially after the law of 1961, which allowed local authorities to provide financial support to cultural and religious associations on condition that they have a national character. Permanent settlement of migrants and transnational support from homelands and international Muslim organizations reinforced the accumulation of mosques. Particularly since the 1980s, the growing public presence of Islam has been more visible than ever (Bowen 2007). In 1981, when France facilitated the process for foreigners to establish their associations (Nielsen 1995, 122), mosques became formally recognized (Laurence and Vaisse 2006, 99; Warner and Wenner 2006) and even more visible in the public sphere than their earlier forms as *salles de prière*, (prayer rooms), which were mainly located in apartment blocks and in unpleasant conditions.

Competition among these associations increased along with their proliferation due to their national differences. The state's initiative to control and administer these numerous organizations under the Conseil Français de Culte Musulman (CFCM) project did not end the rivalries. Due to the increasing number of mosque organizations, the French government initiated the CFCM in 2003 to institutionalize Islam in France under an umbrella organization, which was intended to be an interlocutor of the state (Laurence and Vaisse 2006). However, given the competing national and ideological interests of diverse groups, CFCM does not represent a unified institutional body of practicing Muslims in France (Laurence and Vaisse 2006). The three main umbrella organizations under which the majority of mosque organizations have joined are the Algerian-dominated Grande Mosquée de Paris (GMP), the Moroccan-dominated Federation Nationale des Musulmans de France (FNMF), and the Union des Organizations Islamiques de

France (UOIF), known to be loosely associated with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. My research suggests that foreign influences, generational differences, national agendas, and the mosque leaders' backgrounds and projections influence and render different discursive practices at each mosque despite their common North African heritage. However, most of these follow the Sunni tradition. Their colonial past and accumulation make them more assertive and influential in their relations with the French state than other Muslim immigrant groups, such as the Turkish populations, who manifest distinct ethno-national formations (Yukleyen 2012).

The ensuing state policy recognized and, to an extent, nationalized Islam in the interest of resolving emerging tensions among Muslims. The state supported the development of mosques and encouraged a Muslim private sphere while it simultaneously fostered *laïcité*. State policies began to integrate religion into the public sphere after attempting to nationalize it with a republican character and transforming it to *l'Islam de France* (Bowen 2010; Frégosi 2008).

Today, the French state is managing cultural diversity by clinging to the republican principle of one and indivisible unity (Soysal 2002, 276). Government and local authorities encourage Islamic institutions to reposition themselves by establishing new alliances and connections among both Muslim immigrant and French native communities. For example, the interfaith dialogue (Akgonul 2005; Lamine 2004; Yukleyen 2012) enables mosques to expand and connect to other spaces of worship in pursuit of peaceful relationships with the non-Muslim population. Lamine traces the transformation of the rigid French *laïcité* through the emergence of interreligious movement in France in the last twenty years. She contends that the interfaith dialogue has also changed religious organizations in their relationship with the French public. This finding confirms the changing nature of the religious and public spheres, especially for religious minorities due to their greater visibility and increasing communication with the public

authorities (Merdjoneva and Brodeur 2009, 25). As discussed by Akgonul (2005), this dialogue rests on a mutual cultural understanding rather than focusing on merely religious matters. The integration of mosques into French public life can be witnessed in their relationship with the wider society, although some of these tend to follow a radical path with fundamentalist agendas. It should be remembered that most associations promote stability and peace in the presence of discrimination and stigmatization (Diop 1997, 119). While young people interact freely with their friends from other faith groups, one of the major problems with the interfaith dialogue between the mosques and the churches is the lack of involvement by the ordinary believers (Ramadan 2005). During my field research, I also discovered that mosque and church leaders are the main actors of this dialogue, which is usually running at the administrative level. Hence, interaction between the mosque and church congregants is missing in this interfaith project; it keeps taking place through other means such as community outreach and organizing local festivities.

Through these initiatives, a significantly growing trend is reconciling the Muslim particularity with the French secular demands. Mosques, in particular, have emerged as productive sites where people build networks, negotiate the relationship of religion and culture to French secularism, and eventually construct and perform new forms of national identity and citizenship in the particular context of France (Cesari 1994), as well as in the broader setting of Europe where many other countries are also struggling with their Muslim immigrants (Eade 1996, 231). Parisian mosques are crucial when it comes to understanding their transformative role on the “French Islam,” as a variety of religious groups are concentrated in the capital city with greater access to government agencies and local officials, and a high level of proximity to the urban secular public space in the capital, which is the microcosm of French *laïcité*. In this

sense, mosques and mosque affiliated institutions play a major role in providing a site where religious identities co-exist with largely secular environments (Nyiri 2007). This is quite obvious in France, where Islam is being nationalized by the state through the creation of CFCM. Along these lines, it could be argued that the foundation of CFCM was intended to control the collective organization of Muslims under a group identity and its representation in the public domain to ease this process of nationalizing Islam. Therefore, the attitude of most of these organizations is reactive while defending their group rights against the state's public enforcement of *laïcité* (Koopmans et al. 2005, 173). In other words, while they take up the secular discourses of the state, they are transformed into a multicultural secularism that does not exclude religious identities and their demands.

While most of the mosques pursuing this goal have open door policies to anyone regardless of his/her religious, cultural, or ethnic affiliation, their institutional practices, such as educating youth, tend to differ. The two mosques where I conducted my ethnographic research use different strategies and methodologies to educate the children and young people. In the Al-Hidaya Mosque, although the mosque school follows a traditional approach in teaching Islam, at the youth center, where French Muslims with a young spirit and mindset are influential at the administrative and organizational level, the pupils are given a multi-dimensional perspective ranging from religious to cultural and social that should help them connect to the French society and value system. However, in the Al-Ihsan Mosque, where a Muslim with a mindset imported from the homeland administers the mosque activities, the education is mainly focused on Arabic and the Quran. That is to say, different mosques have different approaches to the private and public nature of religion, culture, and society. In the next section, I contextualize these different approaches to operating the mosque by introducing two North African mosques in relation to the

suburban towns in which they are located. These are Al-Ihsan Mosque in Argenteuil and Al-Hidaya Mosque in Asnières, both of which have a negotiated and accepted standing in their relations with the French authorities and the public, and both follow a Sunni tradition.

Al-Ihsan Mosque

Al-Ihsan is a major predominantly Algerian mosque and is located in Argenteuil, a large banlieue town in Ile de France. It is accessible to Paris by regularly operating trains. It takes about 15 minutes to get to the mosque from Gare St.Lazare.

It is located in one of the poor regions of town, which are known as *cité*. Argenteuil, with its *cité* neighborhoods, is a significant place for local and national French politics, social projects, and the Muslim community, since it is ethnically mixed and largely populated by Muslims who first immigrated to France to work in factories. Hence, the majority of Muslim populations in the banlieue are lower or lower middle class residents who have been inhabitants of their neighborhood for decades and established their communities. There are halal restaurants, clothing stores selling Muslim outfits, youth organizations targeting unemployed and uneducated youth with personal or social difficulties, and education centers, in one of which I taught English. The multicultural aspect of Argenteuil is remarkable due to its diverse demographic structure, and it comes with its own problems and local solutions. Due to economic, social, and cultural hardships that Muslims residents of Argenteuil face, they rely on their community networks. Much effort is put into educating and training youth who have been undergoing family problems as well as social traumas. In the education center, where I taught part time, most of my students were descents of North African grandparents or parents who were not educated themselves, and counted on these institutions to educate their children on all levels including academic, social, cultural, and religious. Some of my students with this background did not even know how to

behave in public and had issues with their manners in society. Their parents sent their kids to these institutions not only to receive academic support, but also civic education. Al-Ihsan Mosque, in addition to its Islamic education, plays a major role in giving this kind of a civic education—teaching kids and teenagers how to become well-behaved members of society.

Al-Ihsan Mosque was first founded to meet the religious needs of Muslim workers, then developed into a larger structure giving intensive religious education. The mosque has long been known as the Renault Mosque because there used to be a Renault garage on the land where the mosque was built. In this respect, it marks the industrial background of the Muslim community of Argenteuil. Mr. Achebouche, 81-year-old President of the mosque, was a first comer immigrant who fled the coup d'état in Algeria in 1965. Since then, he has been actively involved in improving the conditions of the Muslim communities in Argenteuil. He defines himself as “very much attached to Argenteuil” (Al-Ihsan Mosque Website). His progressive approach led him to establish the two mosques that are the focus of this research. Al-Ihsan Mosque has been operating since 2001, and was officially opened for service in 2010 by the Prime Minister, which signified the French government’s support of mosques in France as long as they operated against radical groups. It was constructed on a large parcel of land, and the construction has still been ongoing. Decorations have an Islamic character, and the mosque looks like a “cathedral mosque” (Maussen 2007, 994) with its minaret. The mosque is declared the largest mosque in Europe. This is one of the major reasons why it attracts so many Muslims not only from the vicinity, but also from distant neighborhoods. The mosque can accommodate up to 2300 congregants. Mr. Achebouche is proud of this physical aspect of the mosque as well as the high number of its congregation.



Figure 1 A view of Al-Ihsan Mosque from across Val d'Argenteuil train station (Photo: Ayse Ozcan)

It is indeed very visible thanks to its location right across from the train station. There are two main entrances to the building. As I entered the mosque from either one, I had a feeling of comfort due to being able to see everything on the ground level, and without any worries about what might be there in the basement. This was a feeling that I had developed from visiting many big and small masjids with secret or hidden corners that usually turned out to be dirty, stuffy, or not women-friendly. In this mosque, everything is out there at first glance such as the parking lot across the mosque, small security cabinets, and even seats for people to sit, relax, and chat in the front yard. These are all in an open space, which is another quality that contributed to my comfort. Then, there is a kitchen on the right next to the prayer room entrance. The mosque looks like a welcoming place for anyone to stop by to pray or just to visit. There are two big prayer rooms inside. The prayer room downstairs is used mainly by women, the one upstairs is used by men and for conferences. Classrooms for religious education are located on the second floor. These rooms have desks and posters showing technical details on how to pray, dress properly,

etc., with relevant illustrations, while some give instructions on how to behave in public as good Muslim citizens, such as keeping their houses and surroundings clean. Administrative offices are located across from these classrooms in the same hallway, so anyone can know on the door and talk to the imam, teachers or the managers. On the third floor is another large room used for public events.

There are two main bodies, a mosque, which is primarily used for praying, and the Islamic Institute, where Quran, Arabic, Islamic education, and civic education classes are held. Education is mixed for children, and separated for youth and adults. While the imam appointed by Algeria has insufficient knowledge of French or French culture, there is also an unofficial young imam, born and raised in France. The educational approach of the Institution has changed over time with each director of the school, which is the major part of the institution. There have been times when there were directors such as Dr. Tahar Mahdi, who I also interviewed, trying to bring modern methods and approaches into teaching religion to young Muslims. However, he resigned due to pressure from certain members of the mosque for these approaches. The current director is Hamza, a Math teacher. He is an Algerian immigrant in his forties, who is responsible for designing and organizing the mosque school with a more traditional approach to managing the institution by merely focusing on a context-free and text-based education. There are also interfaith events through regular visits from a partner church located a few blocks away. The mosque is promoted as a space of integration into French society through these interfaith events, as well as trips to downtown Paris, and a close relationship with the local authorities. However, most events for adults and young congregants are not gender mixed. In this sense, it preserves the cultural understanding of Islam that promotes women and men preferably not mingling. This was interesting for showing the limits of diversity among genders.

Al-Hidaya Mosque

This mosque is located in the industrial banlieue town of Asnières in the outskirts of Paris, and is accessible by metro. The mosque is also known as the Asnières Mosque to signify its importance as a major religious institution in town.

Asnières is a northwestern suburb largely populated by immigrants who first came to town mainly from North African countries in the 1970s to work. They gradually established a presence in town, creating their neighborhoods and local communities through local stores, grocery shops, religious centers, and other facilities. In Asnières, there are multiple socio-cultural formations specially oriented at addressing the needs of the local youth, who are mostly coming from lower middle class families. Municipality centers have been established to engage young residents in social, educational, and cultural activities, and to train them to gain organizational skills as well. Some of the young congregants of the Al-Hidaya Mosque were also members of these centers. These are places where they socialize, find self-value, and actively participate in life in a meaningful way, as Imane, a young community member declared to me:

I live in Asnières. It is an active neighborhood with lots of things to do for young people. I usually come to the médiathèque (social center) where there are sports and social activities like ateliers, drama classes, and trips. I am engaged in social activities with my friends but we are usually in Asnières. We don't have time to go to Paris very often, and we actually like our neighborhood as it has everything we need, and we feel good here.

These centers and the neighborhood are places of belonging, and young residents also create their own spaces not necessarily as comfort zones but as a way of connecting to their roots, the larger society, and their ideals for their future. The mosque fulfills this role more vividly through its cultural association called ACELA, in which Famille92, as a subdivision of this formation, functions mostly as a youth center:

I have been regularly going to the mosque for 5 years and I like it. The youth have been active for 10 years. Fifteen to twenty members are regularly involved in its activities. The objective is: Remaining active all year long through trips, activities for children, etc. We collect food from stores like Carrefour and their customers and distribute them to poor people in the neighborhood. We organize conferences. We do ice-skating, come to the mediathèque, go to the movies, parks, etc. Nasira, our leader, is oftentimes with us. We also organize trips to other Muslim countries to learn about Islamic civilizations and how Islam is practiced among other Muslim people. We have regular conferences once a month at the mosque. Themes vary from fraternity to science in Islam, and good behavior.

Apart from other centers, the mosque plays a significant role in engaging youth in real life, although it first started as a primarily religious institution. Mosques were, in this sense, the essential component of the community formation as religious institutions that were meant to meet the religious duties of the first comers, and these were eventually turned into large bodies to fulfill the interests of immigrants in a wider range of areas. Al-Hidaya Mosque had prayer rooms at first, and these rooms were transformed into a mosque in 1975. The mosque can accommodate up to 2500 congregants for Friday prayers. Construction work is still going on to enlarge the physical capacity of the mosque. This marks the growth of the mosque through many years. Mr. Achebouche is proud of this mosque, as the founder, due to its physical and institutional growth. During my yearly visits for my preliminary research, he proudly showed me the new constructions, larger rooms, technical facilities, and the artistic decorations such as authentic tiles and marbles. At the beginning of my year-long fieldwork, he again walked me around both mosques, explaining to me each step in the process of designing and constructing the mosque.

Al-Hidaya has a big dome representing its physical quality as a traditional mosque. It is located on a street in the heart of town, so it easily captures the attention of local residents. The mosque is divided into two physical sites on both sides of the street. On the one side, there is a courtyard where public events are held, and the prayer room for men, which looks old and relatively small. During the Friday prayers, this courtyard is filled with men as they do not all fit

in the room inside. Therefore, there is an ongoing project to turn this open space into a larger and fancier courtyard, and the construction of a new prayer room is almost complete. This room is very large, shiny, and beautifully decorated with colorful tiles reflecting the authentic Islamic architecture. Across the street is a continuation of the mosque, with several buildings attached to one another in which there are administrative offices, classrooms, a kitchen, and rooms for youth activities. These places are being renovated each year because they are quite old. They have already started to use a large hall renovated recently for public events. The mosque has physically gone through major changes throughout all those years of my preliminary research trips. They are renovating the classrooms and the bathrooms located downstairs, which are the only places that are not visible at first sight.



Figure 2 Al-Hidaya Mosque on an open house day (Photo: Ayse Ozcan)

One of the major downsides of this mosque is the lack of a proper prayer room for women. This forces them to squeeze into several different classrooms by removing the desks and chairs to be able to accommodate everyone willing to pray at the mosque. Classes and other

events are held in gender separated groups, with the exception of the activities of Famille92, which is the basic unit of the mosque that focuses on a variety of activities to connect the youth to an active life through sports events, drama activities, cooking classes, monthly lectures, trips, and community work. There is also academic help offered by ACELA, the cultural center, to students who may need assistance with their homework and courses. ACELA offers Arabic and Quran classes for men and women of all ages. In the women's class that I attended regularly, there were old women who immigrated to France in the seventies trying to learn the Quran properly, as well as classical Arabic to be able to read and understand the Quran better. Most of them spoke dialectical Arabic. Young women attending these classes had similar motivations, but they also wanted to connect to their parents' countries through language. Some of them even wanted to get jobs in a Muslim country to experience how it would feel living in a Muslim society.

Older women especially find the comfort and companionship they need in their lives in these classes. Most of them have a basic education from their home countries and do not have the means to communicate even with their local communities, let alone with the larger society. The mosque, in this sense, is a space where they find support on various levels. One day, one of these women approached some other women and told them about her appreciation for the friendship offered in the mosque, as she is a reserved person herself and suffered from family and other personal issues for a long time.

These kinds of examples for elderly congregants are numerous, but for younger participants motivations are not limited to building friendships, but also involve constructing a meaningful future for them as Muslims of a secular nation who descend from formerly colonized countries. This requires a pluralistic approach to life. In this quest, the mosque gains a public

character that engages in society actively. In the next chapter, I introduce the mosque space as a private, public, and multicultural space that reflects some of its congregants' worldview.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented an overall context in which France exercises its policies on immigrants and minorities, described the particular French context where Muslims have been struggling to build a dignified life for their communities, and introduced the mosque organizations as a major component of this quest. I have argued that France has a distinct way of approaching its Muslim populations, and Muslims have appropriated national discourses of *laïcité* and republicanism as a response to state policies, media representations, and social prejudices that exclude them from the public sphere. In the next chapters, I examine how different groups, and particularly the youth, achieve this by using the mosque space. In this respect, the next chapter describes the mosque as a diverse space with a variety of Muslim practices that function to make it a part of the French society.

Chapter 3

The Mosque: A Multi-reference Space

The first time I entered the Al-Hidaya Mosque three years ago, it was the end-of-the year celebration day. I was already informed of the event by the President of the mosque, Mr. Achebouche, an 81-year-old incredibly energetic and active person. He greeted me with joy, and introduced me to dozens of people: the Mayor, his team, Algerian diplomats, the priest of the nearby church, academic people, his personal friends, and many others. I was truly astonished to meet all of these people at this event, which I had expected to be a small local celebration.

It was a summer day, so people gathered in the big multi-purpose area right in front of the prayer room. The area was decorated with colorful balloons and ornaments. There was a big stage banner where the performances would take place. The messages were written in large letters on the banner: “Science is a ship, its commander is the teacher, its destination is success,” and “Union and brotherhood for an Islam of peace and progress.” These messages were repeatedly mentioned in the speeches given on this stage during the celebration, even during the private talks between the mosque leaders and the guests of the French authorities such as the Mayor and his team.

Most of the big crowd facing the stage was composed of the children’s parents and families of older aged students. Parents were competing with one another to take pictures of their children as they were reciting from the Quran by heart or saying their part in Arabic in a short sketch, and at the end of the performance the parents applauded proudly. Then a group of hijabi women of older age came up to the stage to perform poetry or to carry out a casual conversation in French. This time it was their children’s turn to applaud, because their parents who immigrated to France with almost no French were now sufficiently competent, if not fluent, in

this language. As these activities were taking place, young organizer congregants were busy directing and presenting each event with particular attention. They were running around to make sure everything was going smoothly. Apart from their organizing responsibilities, a room was reserved for them where they presented their hand-made art or crafts or posters each introducing a different theme, such as their academic achievements, the national flags of the countries in the Middle East, or their charity work in the neighborhood. Soon after I realized that these were the young members of the Cultural Association affiliated with the mosque that was actively functioning at the local level. One of the young leaders told me that they were preparing their young members for the future, to be responsible and active Muslim citizens of France. This was the moment when I first realized the importance of the mosque for young Muslims. It was a space where they could actively produce and express their identities within their ethnic, cultural, and religious particularities as they marked their contribution to the common good of French life by integrating these differences into modern secularism, and introducing them as an integral part of France.

Within my observation, this annual celebration was the first event that clearly marked the multicultural nature of the mosque, thereby superseding the public/private distinctions as the major factor that determines the secular or sacred characteristic of a given space in the Western tradition (Cesari 2010). This occasion was a practical demonstration of the mosque as a lived space where religion, French value norms, daily life, and long-term objectives intermingled. In this multi-dimensional space, young Muslims have been venturing to establish an identity and taking a position within French society. Despite increasing efforts to bring more diversity into the mosque through personal and group encounters, exchanges of ideas, presentations of

different philosophies, and non-religious daily activities, monolithic religious politics still persist. This chapter reveals this transition with its complex mechanisms.

Introduction

Most of the research on young Muslims in Europe has dealt with the question of carrying religion into the public space through the issue of the headscarf (Fernando 2009; Scott 2010). Scholars like Gole (2006) even argue that “Islam today is constructed, reinterpreted, and carried into public life through political agency and cultural movements, not through religious institutions” (125). In this dissertation, I show the growing importance of religious institutions, such as the mosque, especially for the Muslims who have a receptive mindset, and thus are considered young in this study. Those who, when they complicate the religion/secularity and private/public distinctions, take a contextual stand, valorize authority as well as individual skills, and act according to their immediate or long-term needs in their daily lives. In order to understand how Muslim youth imagine and design the mosque space and extend it into their everyday lives, we have to explore this space in its totality so that we can grasp the dynamics that the youth are subject to. This chapter will outline a particular context for the Muslim, a context that has not been studied at length in the literature. The chapter is intended to serve this purpose by revealing its various dynamics through the following questions: Who is coming to the mosque? What does the mosque mean to them? What are the religious and other events carried out by the cultural association functioning within the mosque? How do various groups and individuals use the mosque space differently within the private and public domains? What are their local and transnational frames of reference? What kind of an interaction is there between Muslims and non-Muslims through the mosque?

I draw upon my contextual analysis in the previous chapter, where I have provided an overview of the Muslim population in France, the challenges of *laïcité*, and their response to living as an ethno-religious minority through place-making in the form of constructing their Islamic institutions. In this chapter, I investigate the place-making processes that take place in the mosque, and present the uses of the mosque as a private and public space within a theoretical perspective starting from socio-political implications in the French context. Understanding the French approach to spaces is essential because the mosque cannot be divorced from the country in which it functions. By the same token, young French Muslims are bound to the value systems that operate in all the social, educational, economic, and other types of institutions they engage in such as schools, banks, national or private companies, hospitals, etc. Overall, based on a wide array of dynamics within the mosque, I will suggest a multicultural model combined with the French *laïcité*, which benefits from both private and public aspects of life for different purposes, and with a mixture of several philosophies, which makes it a diverse space. I call the new mosque site where this novel model is exercised a “multi-reference” space. I illustrate this model primarily through the youth center of the Al-Hidaya Mosque where there is an active group of leaders and members involved in a variety of activities that are experimental, innovative, and engaging. Such an organized structure, however, does not exist in Al-Ihsan Mosque, where there is only a mosque school in which Arabic and Islamic education are being taught systematically in a home country-based traditional sense. There is no equivalent to the Al-Hidaya’s multi-purpose youth center in this mosque. Some individual congregants and Amor, an informal leader of the mosque, come up with novel, fresh, and applicable ideas, and even attempt to initiate new programs within the mosque, most of which get declined by the school directorate. This chapter essentially puts forth the practical outcomes of this basic difference between the two

mosques through concrete examples within their theoretical foundations. Given this contrast between the prevailing dispositions inherited from the first arrivals, and the recently developing tendencies of the congregants with open-minded attitudes, the mosque has been undergoing a spatial and temporal transformation. In other words, the historical conditions and people's interpretation of these conditions cannot be divorced from the place-making mechanisms within the mosque. Before getting into the process of making this new space, it is necessary to look at the wider dynamics of the public/private spheres in the country.

Contextualizing the Public/Private Dichotomy in France

As discussed in the theory section, the majority of Western theories of the public sphere presuppose a distinction between the public and the private (Benhabib 1992, 92; Calhoun 1992). Religion is treated as a private affair that must be confined to the boundaries of the household or religious centers. Treatment of cultural diversity varies in countries with immigrant and minority groups. Some scholars argue that the public/private distinction has been integral to multicultural societies. John Rex's (1985) distinction between plural and multicultural societies is based on the restriction of cultural diversity to a private sphere in the first model and equal treatment with universally recognized public norms in the case of the latter. Habermas's (1989) public/private discussion confirms this rigid difference between political and cultural identities and argues for the state's neutrality in developing a public culture that is ethnically, morally, and religiously universal. Nevertheless, the practicality of this neutrality has been questioned by scholars of multicultural politics and anthropology (Parekh 2006a). These researchers argue that the public sphere reflects the dominant culture's moral, religious, and ethnic orientations, and the negligence of this approach problematizes the participation of minority groups in the public order.

Although France does not follow a multicultural policy, French society, with its residents and citizens of different backgrounds, is culturally diverse (Fuga 2008). The French model of immigration policy is directed at maintaining the public/private distinction through universally accredited principles of French citizenship, which rest on a republican individualism that does not recognize any communitarian particularity at the public level. This distinctly liberal approach requires each individual who freely chose to be a French citizen to assimilate into the unitarian, universalist, and egalitarian norms of the French nation. Hence, the common public good is to be achieved at the expense of erasing individual or communal differences.

The most remarkable example of this policy can be witnessed in the hotly debated headscarf ban, which was intended to reinforce social cohesion under the secularist law of the republican state (Kastoryano 2006). The law simply prohibits students from wearing any ostentatious religious signs in public schools. Apparently the law has predominantly affected veiled Muslim girls, as the most visible bearers of a religious sign. Since the school is a public institution that embodies the laic character of national ideology, such a religious difference is not to be tolerated. Treated as a religious private matter, it is banned in the secular public domain (Kastoryano 2006). The exercise of a ban law of this sort runs counter to applications in other liberal multicultural states in Western Europe. For example, in Germany the treatment of the headscarf issue has been at the discretion of each municipality. Kastoryano holds that the ban in France caused debates about stigmatizing Islam through legislation, and the danger of pushing young people to resort to their families, Islamic organizations, and a banlieue culture that offers a moral community to those seeking refuge from exclusion. An expectation to assimilate into a political identity at the expense of one's religious/moral/cultural/ethnic identity may distort one's integrity. Such a scenario may lead to distancing from the public order while identifying with the

private sphere of families, religious centers, or extremist groups. In fact, the interdependence of the private and public domains lies at the heart of this possibility. In other words, the denial of one leads to an embracement of the other at an extreme level, and paves the way for the emergence of extremist groups. Increasing levels of enrollment in radical organizations can be partially explained by the suppression of differences and the feeling of alienation from the mainstream society culturally, economically, socially, and physically. Denial of private identities in the public sphere results in retreatment to the private, and this retreat combined with violent actions causes public trauma on the local, national, and global scales. So, both private and public interact with one another, resulting in wider consequences.

Since the 1980s, Muslims have been demanding recognition of their difference on the individual and communal level, while preserving the right for civic participation in the national culture, and this demand has been on the rise more than ever due to the increasing number of religious and cultural centers flourishing across the country. This demand to express particularities within the framework of French *laïcité* and social responsibility entail engagement in both private and public spaces. In other words, difference and uniformity coexist in (de facto) multicultural societies. In the case of religious differences, France has shifted its policy to recognizing Islamic organizations in the public sphere since religion is based on a group identity. An institutional approach to religion has replaced the individual treatment of the early 2000s through the project of orchestrating a genuinely French Islam, which is intended to be free from foreign influences with full adherence to the basic pillars of French republicanism (Bowen 2010). Muslim organizations are expected to conform to institutional assimilation with its representative bodies: the mosques.

Place-Making within the Mosque

The enthusiasm to build ever more mosques with increasing levels of belonging manifests the challenges of living in nuanced conformity with the mainstream society, which may be overcome by reterritorialized (Malkki 1992) identities who maintain their religious/cultural particularities while embodying a belonging to the country of residence through politics of place-making, which entails using and organizing the mosque.

These place-based identities, however, are not static but rather fluid and flexible, as they develop under multiple power mechanisms of the state, society, community, and the (global) market. In this respect, diasporic spaces are not static sites where differences are embodied with in a simple and coherent form. They are rather subject to transformation within the process of place-making (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) as identities produced and performed in spaces seek to both challenge and appropriate the structural relations of power and inequality. More concretely, challenges of physical and cultural displacement that French Muslims face are alleviated through the creation of new places in a new setting where identities emerge through interactions with other Muslims as well as with the larger community (Metcalf 1996, 2). Mosques in France, as in many other non-Muslim countries including Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain, are places that are made into spaces of self-representation, which are not fixed, but are in constant transformation due to the changing conditions of the political and social climate in France, in the home countries, and in the wider world. Public attitude, as well as the state's relationship with French Muslims, vary at different times due to elections, economic decline, allegedly Muslim originated terrorist attacks, etc., which significantly affect social relations and political decisions that may target immigrants as a whole. These have positive and negative consequences on the lives of French Muslims in the job market, and in terms of social respect and cultural recognition. Some individuals or groups adopt a strategy of dealing with these new dynamics by claiming and

resorting to “their” space. This constant production of spaces and subjectivities that are subject to reconfiguration due to multiple forces is salient in mosque organizations where French Muslims perform multiple and sometimes conflicting identities.

My quest to explore these dynamic processes of place-making is informed by theories that complicate the commonly held perceptions of religious and secular identities as separate spheres. As Muslim minorities claim their political and cultural rights through spatial identifications, they move beyond the privacy of the mosque space to the wider public. In other words, for French Muslims, mosque space is needed to represent the distinct articulations of Algerians, Moroccans, Muslims, and French citizens, and to connect them to the wider society via interfaith dialogue, public events, seminars, etc. In this way, the mosque becomes a marked site in which difference and sameness coexist. “It is a Muslim site to be recognized by the French state,” as one of the staff members of an Algerian mosque in Paris told me. The same person defined her institution as an open site for everybody regardless of their religious orientation. A woman congregant described the mosque as a refuge and a shelter where they find peace and comfort free from social and daily troubles. Building on these statements, I examine the mosque space as both a religious/cultural (private) sphere and civic (public) space. Privacy of the mosque extends to the public space via processes of multiple discourses that connect it with the larger society. I also see the mosque as both a physical and ideological site. In order get at the complexities of the mosque as a discursive place, I first investigate its public and private domains and how these blend through its physical and socio-cultural qualities, drawing on the relevant literature.

Arendt (1958) argues that the public space has a political and social character that is determined and put into action by its users. Her focus is centered around the performative aspect

of spaces when people use, (re)design it, and make it into a concrete place of their own. French mosques currently fulfill both public and private roles through a wide range of events, alliances, practices, and discourses. Leaders and congregants imagine, organize and use the mosque space in various ways that changes its social character, which is a process that has been shaped by the performers of these actions. These performers are examined at length in the following chapters.

Private and Public Intersection at the Mosque Organizations

Mosques as "religious" institutions complicate discussions of the public/private by articulating sites of private worship with public cultural developments. Through this multidimensional aspect, I seek to problematize the ambiguous distinction of public/private space (Benhabib 1992; Habermas 1991; Habermas 1992; Harvey 1996) within minority religious institutions in urban France.

As faith institutions, mosques are used for daily prayers, religious instruction, and Islamic teaching that address the demands and concerns of their congregants in the privacy of Muslim life. However, there is an increasing tendency to make the mosque into a space where both private and public qualities of life are incorporated and religious and non-religious events take place. For example, interfaith dialogue extends this privacy and connects them to the Christian communities. The mosque opens its doors to the Christian public in hopes of being properly introduced to and recognized by the non-Muslim faith public. During my summer research, I observed the regular visits from the churches, and how the privacy of prayer rooms, classes, kitchen, and their uses were opened up to the Catholic French public through sight-seeing tours within the building, question/answer sessions, and displays of religious practices. In fact, their use of space is also becoming similar in many ways such as using the mosque/church as an educational, multicultural, and community center, all of which have a public dimension. As

Lamine (2004) states, this dialogue also connects the minority religions to the wider secular public, and this argument will contribute to my analysis of different descriptions of public space by two mosque communities in my research.

My research suggests that mosques are also being secularized by organizing cultural, social, and intellectual events, for example, food festivals, discussions of faith and secularism, sports contests, etc. Through these various events, mosques are being transformed into multicultural “lived spaces,” turned into public spaces and integrated into the French context. As will be discussed at length in the next chapter, this is achieved by incorporating a religious philosophy into these secular events, such as the significance of feeding the poor regardless of their religious orientation, or maintaining good health through physical exercises in Islam. Nevertheless, there are many ways of doing this, and my research suggests that each community has different approaches to taking up multiple discourses and performing these in unique ways, which might result from socio-cultural, economic, educational, and political differences. According to a young mosque leader responsible for social activities at the multi-ethnic North African mosque, visits to the city center and involvement in the French social life, its culture, history, and art, are of high importance to take active roles as citizens. However, there are also those who claim to be active citizens by transferring the home country Islam to France, as is done by following a more traditional approach with its focus on the religious and Arabic instruction. At the end of the day, it will be a fair argument to claim that there is a growing tendency to leave this vision behind for one more tailored to the French context. In the next section, I will examine the private character of the mosque and how the administration and congregants contribute to this structure.

1. Sacred, Private, and Uniform

Al-Ihsan Mosque is an interesting site as it is unevenly divided between a strictly religious site and a more encompassing place that embraces non-religious activities while linking them to Islam one way or another. The first approach is a place-making project of the people who actually run the mosque, while the latter is more of an individually driven initiative that is not a strong trend within the mosque. Interestingly enough, these two different approaches to making the mosque into spaces with quite distinct qualities take place side by side. The traditional approach entails minimum gender mixing, a focus on Islamic teaching, and prayers only. The tendency to keep it merely an Islamic site is encouraged by the mosque administration and most of its leaders through Quran, Arabic, and Islamic studies. By doing so, it is presented as a refuge that protects Muslims from the non-religious environment outside. This communal perception of the mosque is circulated to young age Muslims born and raised in France through the discourses of foreign-based religious authorities or immigrants who came to France at a later age. Hence, it is gaining popularity among Muslims with insufficient knowledge of Islam. I realized this for the first time through an unpleasant experience in the mosque when I was trying to access men's space with the help of the imam. Imam Nabil invited me to his Sunday Arabic class, and introduced me to his students by explaining my research and asking for their participation in my study. There were young and middle aged people in the group. Two men, one young and bearded, and one older, told me that as a Muslim I should know that men and women are not allowed to sit and talk, and because of this it would not be possible for them to take part in this study. The young guys who had initially given consent also went silent and I had to leave disappointed. Imam Nabil then told me that he was going to introduce me to his Saturday group, which included more open-minded congregants. Luckily, I had a number of volunteers who were willing to talk to me from that class. Gender segregation is what some congregants expect of the

mosque, and most of the mosque leaders encourage this structure and even promote it through speech or exercise in the form of women or men only classes, or other formations.

Separation of genders in prayer rooms and conferences hinders the exchange of ideas, and does not allow for the sharing of experiences. It also usually works against women, causing them to have unequal access to resources. Approaches imported from home countries or foreign-based ideologies to separate genders were carried to the mosque during events. Whenever there was a speaker who came to give a lecture in the mosque, women and men were allocated separate rooms to listen, and since it was always a male speaker, women were supposed to listen to him from behind a screen with no access to personal communication to pose questions or make comments. They were the silent listeners. To my surprise, it was only after I asked the women their opinion on this silence that they became aware of this and began to think of the segregation critically. They internalized this in the mosque whether they were accustomed to being silent in their private lives or not. It was usually the converts who challenged this ongoing stigmatization within the mosque by coming up with suggestions only to be smoothly turned down, as will be discussed in the next chapter. This circulation of traditional approaches to Islam that do not apply to the French context runs the risk of absorbing young Muslims into this model. This eventually could lead them to detach themselves from the French values of democracy, women's active role in the society, and creating an environment for public debates and exchanges, which are also among basic principles of Islam (Ramadan 2005). Hence, this traditional model is bound to ignore the intellectual advancement principles of Islam. It also does not consider the embracing and interactive qualities of religion, assuming that it should be detached from the realities of life. In fact, both secular demands such as scientific education or

social responsibilities, and communication across different faith groups are indispensable practices of Islam, like all other religions.

On the other hand, this seemingly limited way of defining the mosque is not necessarily a negative attitude toward Muslim life in France. In other words, despite its shortcomings and limiting consequences, it still presents the mosque as a site of action and involvement for Muslims who are marginalized from their religious communities as well as the mainstream society.

There is a group of women in the mosque who appreciate the opportunity given by the administration for them to take an active role in their communities. One solid example that Hamza, the director of the Al-Ihsan Mosque school, gave me while explaining the equality of men and women in the mosque was that there were more women in charge of teaching than men, and that the mosque administration was working closely with them, which proved their active involvement in teaching. Most of these women came from their home countries at a later stage of their lives and could not find jobs outside for various reasons, such as wearing hijabs or educational accreditation problems, and teaching in the mosque actually helped them get out of their homes and reconnect to the Muslim community. Hamza's wife, who is one of these educators, told me that she did not make enough friends to keep her busy because of her inadequate French, so the mosque helped her be social again like she was back in Algeria where she pursued a professional educational career. Teaching in the mosque could be empowering for women, to assume an active role in their communities on an equal basis with men, while at the same time it bore the risk of placing them in a religious and cultural cluster where they would not mingle with the mainstream society. In fact, a young instructor from Algeria teaching Arabic in the Al-Hidaya Mosque once told me how she felt disconnected from French culture by spending

most of her time in the mosque, and she needed to get a real job to prove to herself that she was capable of doing something on her own in France while retaining her religious identity. This need to be recognized as self-sufficient and respected Muslim individuals with a sense of belonging to the wider society is very common among the Muslim populations of France. In the next section, I will explain how these demands are processed within the mosque when the mosque is taken beyond its monolithic dimension and carried into the public space, and furnished with secular characteristics in different forms through multiculturalist policies.

2. Moving into the Public

The mosque is taken into the public space through a variety of philosophies and means. In this section, I reveal this growing tendency, as well as different approaches to connecting the mosque to the wider society with some of their related challenges, by focusing on the contradictions within each mosque and the contrasting attitudes across both mosques. Making the mosque a part of the public space entails both the extension of the mosque into the mainstream society, and the accommodation of a wide array of cultures, including other faith groups or secular populations in and outside of the mosque. Since the mosque is a physical entity in the most visible form, I start with material and mental uses of the mosque, continue with the intercultural/interfaith dialogue, and end with the attempts by different groups to transform the mosque into a republican multicultural site.

2.A. The Mosque Beyond its Physical Walls

In response to practices of exclusion, marginalized populations either live in their designated ghettos out of sight, or take on a risky strategy by choosing open presence in the city (Castells 2010). This dissertation investigates those who struggle to occupy a public space to represent their distinct position and claim rights. As Moore (1998, 347) and Mitchell (1995)

suggest, partaking in the public sphere requires struggles over territory where rights are to be gained. For example, Muslims of France struggle for inclusion into the public sphere by constructing new mosques that are publicly visible and recognized. In an interview with me, the rector of a prominent Algerian Mosque in suburban Paris confirmed the significance of public space for survival and membership by expressing the desire to increase the number of mosques and have more Muslim cemeteries in the city. According to him, these two spaces represent Muslim presence in a secular city.

Mosques in France are products of a migratory experience. They are means of self-representation for ethno-religious identities in a non-Muslim setting. The physical use of the space complements its social character. Building on Mitchell's (1995, 123-124) argument on the necessity of material public spaces, I argue that the materiality of the mosque is essential for providing a physical public site of belonging and representation. For example, mosque architecture is seen as an emblem of diaspora Islam as distinct from the homeland and the surrounding culture (Metcalf 1996). Also, there is a growing tendency to build cathedral mosques, usually with domes (Maussen 2007; Michalak and Saeed 2002, 161), thus showing the mosque as a distinct site in its physicality. Mosque architecture as a significant visible physical characteristic exhibits a representation in the public sphere. Also, the objects used in the decoration of mosques, their organization and representation, need to be carefully analyzed in order to capture the cultural meanings attached and the expression of a religious, ethnic, cultural, and political identity through these objects. For example, Islamic decorations were predominantly used in North African mosques, and the physicality in terms of the architecture was distinctively Maghrebian with modernized patterns. The inclusion of Muslim and non-Muslim activities in the mosque events are also indicators of how the mosque is imagined to be a multicultural public site

by its leaders and congregants, as different from what the state expects. What motivates and explains this production of difference? Unpacking these observations is necessary to identify “the importance of material conditions in the formation of subjectivity” (Miller 2007, 5).

Due to political, social, and cultural pressures of institutional and everyday discrimination, mosques in the banlieue, where the majority of Muslim populations live, attract Muslims from different backgrounds as a place of refuge that offers almost a comfort zone or a central place to establish a meaningful connection with French society to produce alternative discourses. Given this significance of the mosque for Muslim minorities, it appears as a material space that has public presence. In fact, this physical dimension of the mosque, as described above, is combined with the desire to make it a lived space connected to real life, which makes it imperative to act beyond the walls of the mosque.

The Muslim religious difference, which is supposed to be contained within the mosque space, extends to the larger society via religiously and culturally marked practices, such as praying on the streets or protesting the burqa ban. Even the mosque-oriented activities are connected to the wider society through conferences, interfaith dialogue, and mutual organizations with non-religious institutions. “Private” affairs are lived inside and taken beyond the mosque. Family and communal networks are formed and reinforced at the mosque events, and these are carried to the public domain through helping members get a job, with immigration paperwork, public education, etc. Culturally appropriate youth romances are also taken to the wider society through performative teachings. During an end-of-year public celebration of a North African mosque, a short spectacle with messages about how a proper Muslim marriage should be was performed by the young congregants. In other words, the religious and cultural particularities that belong to the private sphere are transferred to the public sphere by “locating

religion in ostensibly secular places” (Knott 2009, 156). This way of claiming cultural and religious rights in the public sphere challenges the homogenous nature of French liberalism, and calls for a public space, in its true sense, that is open to expression and dialogue.

2.B. Intercultural Dialogue within Politics of Recognition

The delicate balance between unity and diversity can be accommodated differently in each society, yet the ultimate goal should strengthen a common sense of belonging and citizenship without disregarding and assimilating cultural and religious pluralities. In Charles Taylor’s (1992) approach, human dignity necessitates equal treatment while cultural recognition requires accommodation of difference. Multiculturalism is capable of reconciling these demands, in his philosophy. Reconciliation of these two supposedly contrasting positions requires a constant dialogue and a fruitful interaction between dominant and minority cultures. Taylor highlights this dialogical relationship between one’s self and his recognition by others to emphasize the necessity of intercultural dialogue (1992, 25-26). An individual’s identity depends on both his self-worth and the attitudes of the wider society. In this respect, communication is central to one’s cultural existence in a society. Parekh (2006a) favors intercultural dialogue for its intrinsic value in challenging people to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their own cultures. This aspect of multiculturalism is central to my project, as achieving a recognized diversity is contingent on building and enhancing intercultural dialogue with the non-Muslim society. The proliferation of mosques in France and Western Europe proves the growing role of religious sites in building and maintaining this dialogue for Muslims, and eventually for non-Muslims.

Ehrkamp and Nagel (2012) discuss the significance of places of worship in understanding diversity in liberal democracies. Their ethnographic research on Hindu temples and Christian

churches in the United States South suggests that while religious spaces might clash with secularism, they offer alternatives by introducing diversity into political life and mainstream society. In one example given by Ehrkamp and Nagel, recent attendance of undocumented Latino workers in a predominantly white and affluent Catholic parish caused tension between these different groups, but at the same time this routine interaction and negotiation introduced multicultural co-existence not only within that particular Catholic community, but also in the wider society. This co-existence translates into multiple identities for people with immigrant backgrounds. This type of interaction between immigrant and mainstream societies through religious spaces is missing in France because the biggest portion of Muslims is comprised of populations with immigrant origins, and the majority of native French people are Catholics, and the rest belong to other Christian, Jewish, or minority faith groups. Therefore, Muslims use the mosque as a space of outreach to mainly Christian communities in their neighborhood on the basis of religious commonalities in order to unite in bringing diversity to French *laïcité*, and replace prejudices and stereotypes with mutual understanding and recognition.

Interfaith Encounters

Relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim faith groups are crucial for this study as they are a good indicator of public/private interactions through reestablishing the mosque and the church as multicultural spaces within a secular state. Through interfaith events, religious dialogue and mutual understanding are reinforced and integrated into French diversity. In this way, religious groups intend to safeguard their position within the laic society, and the Muslims in particular urge to reassure their respected belonging in the French public life as a minority population. During my research in two major mosques, I noticed that the immigrant Muslims rely on interfaith dialogue (Akgonul 2005; Lamine 2004; Yukleyen 2012) and relations with the

local authorities to reinforce their religious identities in a particularly secular country. To achieve this goal, the mosque opens its doors and introduces its space to other religious groups. As Akgonul maintains, the main objective is not necessarily to explain the religious doctrines and get into theological debates, but rather that the Muslim life and culture in a given country be able to put the *vivre ensemble* discourse into practice. That is why the growing interfaith dialogue between mosques and churches is more of a cultural project rather than a religious one (Akgonul 2005). This cultural aspect is at the core of the interfaith movement in Western Europe and other non-Muslim countries. Hence, this initiative is a continuation of this global project designed to build a peaceful dialogue between different faith groups with a focus on three Abrahamic religions, as will be explained in the next paragraph.

Although the interfaith dialogue is not a recent concept but dates back to the sixteenth century, it started as a solid and systematic project in the early twentieth century between Abrahamic religions, mainly Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. In 1965, thanks to the efforts of Pope Paul VI, the Roman Catholic Church Regular issued a document instituting Vatican's policy changes towards practitioners of other religions (Fitzgerald and Borelli 2006). Since then, especially in the last twenty years, interreligious dialogue initiatives have become increasingly visible and pervasive (Heft 2011, 6). Despite the inclusion of all major non-Christian religions and faith systems into this project, Muslim and Christian encounters are the most common form of dialogue, mainly because of political tensions between Muslims and Jews on the issues of Israeli politics toward the land of Palestine. During my fieldwork in the two mosques, I did not observe any visits between mosques and synagogues, which hinders communication between the believers of each religion at the institutional level, potentially influencing their relations in a negative way for some individuals who have close ties with radical groups purposefully or

unintentionally. Therefore, interfaith visits are largely conducted between the churches and the mosques within the framework of the dialogue project, which is also promoted by the local authorities depending on the political climate. The reason why visits are usually held from the mosques to the churches but not vice versa is that the main objective is to smother already existing Islamophobia or prevent future sentiments of fear and hatred directed against Muslims in France since they make up the largest minority population in the country.

A major common issue with these interfaith encounters in both of the mosques where I conducted my research was the insufficient interaction between Muslim and Christian groups. Both mosques that I examined collaborate with the Catholic churches in their vicinity. However, the congregants of both mosques are not really engaged in this dialogue, as these visits usually take place during times of inactivity. Hence, church groups do not really interact with the Muslims when they are at the mosque. During interviews with mosque congregants, I noticed another impediment to a fruitful interaction. Most of the informants during our interviews declared that they refrained from talking about their religions in their daily interactions due to fear of causing tension. Whenever they started a conversation on Islam, Christianity, or Judaism, it ended with an unpleasant debate over extremism, politics, or mutual accusations. Connecting people of different religious backgrounds under common principles is important. However, despite the critical significance of this connection, interfaith meetings are usually destined to be failed attempts in achieving this overarching goal. During organized events to establish interfaith dialogue in the mosque through regular visits or monthly meetings, church people are the target population to be introduced to a Muslim space when it is empty. That is, the mosque space as a preexisting container (Rodman 1992) is presented and valued over a dynamic social space (Lefebvre 1991) in which there are people with different backgrounds and ideas about using the

mosque space. A dialogue is contained within an institutional setting and targeted with no actual relevance to real life. Based on religious commonalities, the private becomes more public through “empty” interaction between different spaces considered as private. Becoming public is achieved by constructing a shared religious public space (Holder 2009). This kind of a space gives rise to certain possibilities besides its drawbacks, as will be manifested through contradicting approaches within the same mosque and between the two mosques.

Interfaith dialogue takes place in two forms with different approaches in each mosque. In Al-Ihsan Mosque, a group of interested church congregants visit their partner mosque on a regular basis every few months. The mosque leaders are the only interlocutors who show the church visitors around, inform them about the basic activities at the mosque, and take questions. These hour-long visits do not provide Catholic participants with sufficient information on Islam. Rather, they take place in the form of a guided museum visit introducing the visitors to the physical basics of the mosque such as the number of classrooms, prayer room designs, and other facilities, along with the basic activities of the mosque. Visitors seem to be curious about deeper matters such as Muslim clothing and family lives, but due to lack of engagement with the congregants their curiosity is usually left unsatisfied with brief explanations by the imam and the administrative staff. When confronted with detailed questions, they respond in a formal way without really going into details. This also manifests itself in their body language, which lacks the embodiment of being a French Muslim, such as praying, communicating using gestures, and interacting with non-Muslims in an informal way. The personal aspect is missing in these interfaith encounters. Hence, a superficial portrayal of Muslim is being depicted and integrated into the Catholic public sphere.

In order to minimize this impersonal aspect of the dialogue project, Amor individually

invites non-Muslim groups to the mosque and connects them with the Muslim groups with a focus on young congregants as they are usually less prejudiced towards meeting with Christians, Jews, and other faith groups, especially in a religious setting. In hopes of achieving this interaction, Amor coordinated a mosque visit for an organization called Coexister Paris, which is a multi-faith movement organization that also welcomes non-believers. They aim at contributing to the vivre-ensemble (living together) discourse with real consequences in daily life. During this gathering, there was an exchange of ideas between the mosque and Coexister Paris members for future projects. They took photos together as a gender-mixed and a multi-faith group. This certainly created a more lively atmosphere in the mosque as a microcosm of a multicultural society than the “empty space” of the church visits. This place-making discrepancy is growing in the Al-Ihsan Mosque due to contradicting attitudes toward making the mosque a public space, as is obvious in the interfaith meetings.



Figure 3 Members of the Coexister Paris with the Al-Ihsan Mosque congregants (Source: Al-Ihsan website)

In Al-Hidaya Mosque, there are monthly meetings between the mosque and the church

groups, which consist of leaders who discuss a common topic from an Islamic or Christian perspective to reach a common approach. These topics usually revolve around issues of prejudice, everyday dialogue, sharing experiences, exchanging stories, and living as religious citizens of France. The venue alternates between the mosque and the church every month. In this respect, the interaction becomes more real with a possibility to attract congregants. Medina, a 60-year-old Algerian woman, just started to attend those meetings. She explained to me her reluctance to attend until recently by pointing out that she had felt offended by the presence of so many Christians talking about their religion. She told me about her resentment over coming from the ex-colonized Algeria, and how this resentment has been relieved through sincere efforts from both sides. Mosque leaders, however, fail to reach out to youth and attract them to these events. In fact, youth absence in interfaith events is not specific to Muslims, but even Christian groups are unable to attract their youth to their conferences or encounters in churches or other institutions. In other words, this is a common shortcoming on both sides.

Dr. Bachir, head of the Al-Hidaya Cultural Association (ACELA), declared that he intended to include more people, including youth groups, in their monthly meetings as their next agenda due to the significance of such encounters in introducing religion to the French republican model of achieving common good through secular recognition. He also perceived interfaith visits to the mosques as an opportunity for them to establish a greater multi-faith community against the harsh secularism of the Republic (Fassin and Mazouz 2009, 56), and introduce real Islam to their Christian neighbors. Real Islam, as will be discussed later, entails universally celebrated characteristics of good behavior and human ethics such as respect and tolerance for difference, peaceful relations, honesty, generosity, etc.

Dialogue with the Local Society

The mosque suggests a Muslim space in a traditional sense. However, the mosque in non-Muslim countries has a wider meaning and responsibility. They are the façade of the Muslim population living in the country, especially in the wake of the recent violence exercised globally by groups that define themselves as Muslim. The mosques are seen as either a site of unity with the nation, or places of radical Islam that promote enmity and violence against non-Muslims and even Muslims that live in peace with the wider society. Hence, it is of particular importance that mosques be in regular contact with society.

France is a particularly interesting example of this dialogue project due to its long-lasting laic tradition, which has recently begun to include the Muslim religion into its philosophy as the biggest foreign religion. In both Al-Ihsan and Al-Hidaya Mosques, *journées portes ouvertes* (open house days) are given attention every year to connect Muslims with other religious or non-religious groups. These visits play a significant role in turning the mosque into a multicultural space in its true meaning. Due to ethnic divisions, Muslim communities from different cultural backgrounds do not mingle, and in the case of the mosques where I conducted my research, they preserve their particularly North African character in terms of food preferences, daily conversations, religious practices, and clothing habits, and their translated forms into French culture for the younger congregants. Through these visits, the mosque reemerges as a site of diversity where more could be shared than North African-centered life in France. However, the recurring problem of hosting visitors in the absence of congregants and welcoming them only with the administration recurs as one of the major problems of this dialogue project.

Despite its shortcomings, these visits eliminate fear, worries, suspicion, and lack of trust directed against Muslims on a local level, which bears wider consequences. During one of these two-day-long visits I observed a high level of attendance from the primarily Christian groups

visiting the mosque within friend or family groups. Marcel, (47), one of the non-Muslim visitors of the Al-Hidaya Mosque during the annual open house days declared his pleasure of being in real contact with the Muslims in their worship site:

We live in the neighborhood, and I pass by the mosque almost every day but I thought we were prohibited from entering the mosque, because we could not enter some of the mosques in the past. This mosque is just like a mosque in a Muslim country. There is nothing threatening here. We were actually expecting an underground prayer room. We saw the open house ad in the municipality magazine and came for our kids to see this place. They are playing with our Muslim neighbors. We have no problem with them. Our neighbors in our building are mostly d’Afrique Sud. But we wanted to know about the religious component of their lives, and we did not want to look at them with suspicion because of not having access to their religious sites, or media-driven fear fostered by the current acts of violence by some Muslims in different countries.

In fact, most of the visitors that I interviewed mentioned similar things by telling me that that was their first time in a mosque despite being residents of the neighborhood for a long period of time. They all came out of curiosity aroused after living side by side with the Muslims in their buildings or town. Their reason for not visiting a mosque before was the assumption that they were not allowed to enter, not being Muslim themselves. This was, they argued, where the role of the mosque begins. Making it a transparent and accessible site was the start of a dialogue that had deeper implications than a sheer getting to know each other know type of an encounter.

Both the Muslim communities and the mainstream society have expectations from the mosque leaders to make it into a site of understanding, respect, communication, and belonging, which is defined with the concept “integration” that involves uniting in common values, and expressing religious difference, even in public space, as long as a commitment to live together with respect is maintained. In contrast, falling into detached communities that do not mingle with the mainstream French society is not tolerated due to concerns about potential rifts within the nation. This kind of a statement was made by Marcel during his visit:

Education of the youth, and poverty appear as a Muslim problem but it is a problem in itself. Also, communitarisme and radicalism, which hinder a shared citizenship are not specific to Muslims. No matter what, you need to integrate and play by the rules to make such projects (referring to the mosque construction), so it is a sign of integration. We (non-Muslim French people) assume that people here are integrating. If people cannot find ways of expression, then they find other ways like praying in the basement. So, mosques like this also help reduce isolation. It is an opportunity to express faith, so you don't have to hide or fight in the form of praying in the basement or in the streets of Paris.

He then went on to explain the function of the mosque in educating its congregation as fellow citizens who value diversity, and preventing separation from French society in public space while retaining their religious difference.

One day I went to a fast food restaurant to order a pork sandwich and the waiter said "we serve halal food only, there is no pork here." This is bothering me to have public places reserved for only specific groups. Big mosques like this do not bother me as they have an open door policy, but small things like I can't order food in my country is bothering me. I will tell you another one. On a day-out school day, they took the kids to a picnic, and a Muslim kid said to another kid "Don't go with that boy (pointing at my son), he is eating pork. They were putting him aside, excluding him just because he was eating pork. But it's not the kid's mistake. Their parents are responsible for this. Rejection is being taught, and it causes separation. Education is given to kids by their parents, to the crowd by the imam. This is where the role of the mosques begins. These mosques are expected to teach respect for diversity and unity. They should attract people by turning into welcoming places with a library, bookshelf, gift shop, etc. We should feel good in the mosques as your non-Muslim fellow citizens.

Marcel is suggesting a diversity-based model without necessarily excluding religion from the public life. He, nevertheless, is cautious of any practice that would divide the society into distinct groups. This way, the republican pledge to keep the society intact and determined to pursue a route for the common benefit could be carried out. However, this is not the ideal diversity that the entire French society shares as a social concept and reality. I interviewed a good number of visitors who declared their support of the policies that dictate a public/private divide in social life for different reasons. However, all of them announced their sympathy for mosques in the name

of diversity as long as they work in conformity with the basic principles of the French tradition openly and systematically:

I think the state is right in its policy of prohibiting the veil at work for example. Everything has a limit. When you are teaching you have a teacher identity, which is one of your identities. You can pray, exercise religion or dress up as you want at home, but when you are outside we should be equal. There is a clear separation between state and religion. But, if there are other religious centers, then why not mosques? In this neighborhood we have a diverse population, and we respect each other because we share the same values of equality, solidarity, democracy. Before, this was a building that did not really look like anything, but now it has an architecture meaning that is displayed as a visible space of difference adding to our diversity, and it is better this way than an unidentified shabby building (Bouquet 47)

I think the state is right in its policy of prohibiting the veil in public institutions. I am personally against the headscarf in general because I see it as an oppressive practice on women. As woman with a Catholic background I am against all kinds of oppression over women in all religions including Catholicism. I am a big supporter of women's rights. Having said that, I think the main problems with Muslims in France are lack of communication, and mutual respect. Muslims are causing fear because they are not known, and Islam is thought to be incompatible with the French values of democracy and equality. So, coming to the mosque to learn more about their religion, how Muslims spend their time in their place of worship, and to personally witness their commitment to our core values, are important to me. I am not against Islam, like other religions as long as it conforms to the core values of humanity, which are equality and freedom. (Marielle 37)

What is common in these statements is the dedication to stick to the basic pillars that bind the French nation and keep it in unity. These fundamental principles of equality, freedom, and fraternity are not to be abandoned, but the presence of Muslims is not denied or ignored either. Despite their previous knowledge or presumptions, they are seeking to include the mosque into the public space rather than pushing it into hidden corners where they have no idea what is taking place.

In fact, the Muslim youth seeking to transform the mosque beyond a religious site share this vision of holding on to the republican principles by including and incorporating religion into the public space. To fulfill this objective, they open the doors of the mosque to non-Muslims not

necessarily within the physicality of the mosque. They attempt to gain recognition and be part of the society through local and translational initiatives without constraining the dialogue in the physical building of the mosque.

2.C. The Secular Republican Mosque

My research indicates that Muslims both challenge and accommodate the public sphere as organized and imagined by the French government. By accepting and exercising this policy, they take part in the state's imposition on and control of spatial interaction through the creation of Conseil Français de Culte Musulman (CFMC).⁹ However, the use of the mosque does not echo the state's imagination of restricting the mosque's role to providing religious service to Muslims regardless of their cultural distinctions. It can be argued that Muslims offer an alternative public space to the abstract space dictated by the French state, which eliminates difference and stimulates commonality among Muslims. State-recognized religious institutions including the CFMC accentuate difference, isolate, and integrate at once. Building on Lefebvre's analysis (1991, 52), this particular example manifests the contradictory character of abstract space, which "can be achieved and maintained through a state-sponsored process of fragmentation and marginalization that elides difference and thus attempts to prevent conflict" (McCann 1999, 171).

The organization of mosques by the state to homogenize and integrate Islam into the French public sphere marginalizes differences in an attempt to push them into "the private" spaces of identity, in order to prevent conflicts that could pose challenges to the secular public order. The statist French nationalist ideologies that require absolute separation of church and state (Laegaard 2008, 161) have reformulated this policy by institutionalizing Islam, and thus

⁹Conseil Français de Culte Musulman (CFCM) was created by the Sarkozy government in 2003 to institutionalize Islam in France under an umbrella organization, which was intended to be an interlocutor of the state. See Laurence and Vaisse 2006.

created abstract spaces populated by abstract people who do not have actual representations in the lived space as defined by Lefebvre (1991).

CFMC has a limited public role in representing the Muslim religion in the public sphere (Laurence and Vaisse 2006), yet observing Muslims that go to its member mosques are engaged in ethno-cultural activities besides religious exercises. Their religious identification blends with other affiliations. The use of mosques in ways that are different from what the state initially intended is the manifestation of concrete space that is lived and experienced by self-defined and state-defined Muslim subjects. The French mosque is not an isolated entity itself but “the mode of organization is integrated into existing institutional structures” (Kastoryano 2002, 11), which necessitates that French Muslims adopt the discursive structures of the state, sometimes with conscious consent (Gramsci 1971), sometimes as normalized routine practices (Foucault 1977).

However, partaking in the state organization does not necessarily lead to an unquestioned acceptance of its agenda—rather, the mosque public space is used in different ways from those envisioned in the state planning. Organizing conferences dealing with the questions of laïcité and Islam revolve around the issue of reconciling these two value systems even at the mosque. The use of the mosque as a cultural and educational center within the limits of the secular system beyond the state’s policy of keeping it a religious space posing no threat to French secularism reveals a way of negotiating multiple systems of thought. It may also be a response to the state’s attempts to discipline Muslim bodies through the control of religious space. In this way, the mosque becomes a site of an ideology that differs from the dominant discourse, but also shares certain values such as equality and freedom. Most of the people I talked to at the mosques expressed their conformity with French secularism and their desire to integrate. They also complained about discrimination and wished to increase their public visibility by gaining more

space where they could perform citizenship, which involves their particularities. This diversity approach includes new alignments with non-Muslims by seeking commonalities with the Christian population. In this approach, as Knott suggests, religious space is not seen as the passive container in which certain activities takes place, but a site of social and cultural life (Knott 2009, 156) that is lived locally with wider connections to the French state and society, homeland, and the outside world. This life is not static but dynamic. As ideologies change, public spaces undergo a constant transformation, as in the case of the French mosques.

As discussed earlier, *laïcité* in France guarantees equal treatment of religions, while the state does not get involved in religious affairs. The mosque offers a space which is neither favored nor disfavored by the state, but in fact benefits from the state promise of granting it an equal position as other religious institutions as long as it respects the core republican values of the French state. Hence, the mosque reappears as a site to simultaneously claim religious recognition and belonging to republican values. It values the civic virtue of working for the common public good, without highlighting its difference from the mainstream society (Béland 2003, 66). However, serving the general interest does not necessarily clash with the right to perform religiosity and claiming recognition. The mosque space reveals this contradictory nature of French republicanism, and suggests an approach that both values common good and religious recognition. Muslims also support this argument using *laïcité* as a political model that promotes equal treatment of religious groups. By doing so, they engage a religious component into French laic tradition by refuting the public/private dichotomy.

If private is associated with religion and particularity, public is an emblem of the secular demands of the French society and politics. Young mosque leaders not only pursue an approach that maintains the private quality of the mosque space as a religious site, a widely shared

perception within the French society and politics, but also one that problematizes fuzzy distinction between the private and the public spaces (Modood and Kastoryano 2006). According to these scholars, private and public are interdependent as the public sphere is not neutral, and the public order is not culturally, religiously, or ethnically blind. In this sense the mosque is a particularly interesting site where Islam is presented as part of the French public culture, and the French civic virtues are also presented as inherently existent in the Islamic foundational culture.

Within the French context, *laïcité* is transmitted to the mosque through “institutional assimilation” (Kastoryano 2002, 173), and thus made into a public space. According to this model, the state integrates Islam into state institutions on the same footing with other religions to create a genuinely inclusive public sphere (2002, 109). “Mirroring” suggests that voluntary associations’ activities combine community tradition and interest, and the integration into the civil society (109). In this section, I investigate the working of this mirroring for young Muslim congregants. I suggest extending the discussions of public space by including the Muslim experiences of religious practice and secularization of Islam into the equation from a spatial point of view. While addressing the issues of public space and secularism along these lines, I observe how private and public spaces are intermingled and made into a *laïcité*-integrated multicultural experience in different ways at two mosques that are home to multiple clashing approaches to being a site for French Muslims. In a nutshell, the public character of the mosque entails French *laïcité* with a republican character while maintaining its religious aspect. But, how?

The mosque is a site in progress because Muslims of immigrant origin are in constant transformation as they reconfigure their positioning by articulating their histories, national ties, religious orientations, and French norms and culture in unique ways within the space of the

mosque as a multi-reference site beyond its physicality. They have been changing the mosque into a public site that connects the religious life to educational institutions, work life, art, French history, and many others by giving an Islamic touch. For example, secular education is promoted by linking academic achievement to the teachings of Islam in the sense that Islam promotes science. This was the reason they put the science message on the big banner right on the stage during the end-of the year celebrations. Visits to museums such as the Louvre are organized within the idea that Islam encourages learning, beauty, and integrating into the country of residence. Although Nabil, the young imam, finds such Western originated artistic ways such as sculpture, non-Islamic music, and painting inappropriate and futile, there are ongoing activities within the mosque engaging these into mosque life.

Individual Initiatives

Al-Ihsan Mosque is an interesting site for being in constant transformation as it is a battlefield between different discourses, mainly traditional and situational. The first one is a leading factor to keep the mosque as a mainly religious site, as discussed earlier. The latter, however, incessantly reoccurs through individual efforts to open up the mosque beyond its Islamic character by offering a multi-referential strategy. Amor, as an informal leader, occasionally introduces educational initiatives at the mosque to raise intellectual awareness among young followers. In the absence of a formal body within the mosque that functions as a bridge between Islam and French secularism, and connects these two in a meaningful way, Amor takes the initiative and acts as a catalyst to achieve this goal. He continuously produces new projects, and we discussed several times how to introduce and improve these without offending participants with rather traditional views. Amor collaborates with a variety of organizations, and using his personal networks, he organizes conferences, workshops, and lectures in the mosque,

each of which address a different aspect of Muslim life in France. Topics have included the necessity of academic education, how to come to terms with laïcité and benefit from its discursive promise to accept Islam on an equal footing with other religions, and Muslim awareness of issues, along with many opportunities to overcome those challenges and be a beneficial member of their society. There are a few other congregants who come up with ideas to start social projects at the mosque only to be turned down by the administration. Amidst the ongoing tension between traditionalist approaches of the mosque administration and more contextual resolutions of individuals within the mosque, there are also those who refuse to give up and wish to make the mosque an integral part of the French Muslim society.

However, interaction with non-Muslims is still minimal in Al-Ihsan Mosque. In fact, this is a shortcoming that is well noticed and criticized by some congregants who imagine a mosque as an extension of their daily lives where Muslims and non-Muslims are in constant communication through everyday matters and relations such as shopping, studying in school, making friends, interacting with neighbors, working outside, receiving service on public buildings, and reaching out to non-Muslims through social events. In Al-Ihsan Mosque, I heard some young congregants, who grew up in France, criticizing the lack of socio-cultural activities for the youth and the exclusive focus on religious training. One of these congregants expressed her desire for youth involvement in mosque activities, which then would be oriented to socializing their children and younger ones. I met her during a non-religious activity at their partner church with which they are running the interfaith dialogue project. The activity was organized by young Christians and designed for children from all backgrounds. This interaction with the church youth through a non-religious event suggests that her desire to connect to the public space is not met by the religious privacy offered at her mosque, and she has found an

alternative way to enter the public by participating in the church activities that welcome everyone regardless of their religious background.

Cultural Centers: Famille92

In contrast to Al-Ihsan Mosque, Al-Hidaya is home to a great diversity. People from different backgrounds come to this mosque for different purposes; some come to learn Arabic and receive Islamic education, others to share their stories and discuss a variety of their daily issues, still others come to seek financial advice, social solidarity, or psychological support. There are also those who participate in the youth outreach center of ACELA called Famille92 as an alternative body within the mosque where both religious education and social work are offered. Since the formal imam of the mosque does not speak French, and the informal imam is another younger man imported from Algeria, and he does not have the charisma of Imam Nabil in terms of approaching and interacting with the congregants, the cultural center fills this gap with its well-educated and charismatic leaders. ACELA is the cultural center of the mosque where Arabic and religious education is offered. Famille92 is an active body that functions through systematic activities within this cultural center. Interestingly, they operate as different units with different agendas despite being part of the same structure and sharing the same physical location. The absence of an influential French-speaking imam like Imam Nabil in the Al-Ihsan Mosque is a major reason why this cultural body has gained great popularity among youth who do not even share similar viewpoints on Islam as the organization administration and other members. Even girls wearing the *jilbab*,¹⁰ who do not approve of gender-mixed groups, work together with young men who socialize with girls and boys in their private lives.

¹⁰ Jilbab is an Islamic loose-fit garment for women covering the entire body except for hands and face. It is worn in some Muslim countries as a traditional religious outfit.

Interestingly enough, these seemingly polarized Muslims unite to learn their religion and engage in social work under the guidance of Famille92 leaders.

The extent to which Famille92 has been playing a role for Muslim youth is evident in everyday life. In their free time, the members of the organization get together and hang out in a gender-mixed setting, sharing their career plans, love affairs, and other daily matters. They dress casually, and do not feel disobedient to their religion while engaging in such conversations in pants and t-shirts. They also celebrate national holidays such as the French National Day¹¹ on July 14th, along with their fellow citizens. They gathered in a park in the vicinity of the mosque, and started playing the guitar, chatting, chanting, eating, and enjoying the day. They talked about the virtues of democracy and freedom as national values that are also part of an Islamic tradition, so it was an acknowledgement of these principles as common in their French and Muslim identities.

“The Mosque is a Pillar of the Republic”

The mosque imagined as a republican site by the Muslim youth may not always result in the same type of redesigning and reorganizing. So far, I have discussed the reorganization of the mosque by the Muslim born youth. In this part, I will demonstrate to what extent the mosque has been transformed by Muslim converts. Muslim born youth share similar values with converts, yet have different ways of connecting to the mosque and making it either a part of their everyday lives or moving beyond its limitations. Although converts are not the central focus of this research, it is necessary that they be introduced in order to understand the dynamic that they bring to the mosque and the outcomes of this dynamic. Therefore, this section will help us better understand the Muslim born youth in their uniqueness in relation to the mosque space.

¹¹ The French National Day or the Bastille Day is celebrated on July 14th each year to commemorate the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789, and the unity of the French people in 1790.

There is a growing body of literature on European converts to Islam, and these recent studies indicate that converts experience being a Muslim differently from their Muslim born fellow citizens for a variety of reasons (Allievi 1998; Kose 1996; Ozyurek 2014; Rogozen-Soltar 2012). Among these, women conversion has also begun to be extensively studied (van Nieuwkerk 2009). Some argue that increasing levels of conversion to Islam among women reinforce Islamic feminism (Zebiri 2007). Despite different particular focuses of these studies, researchers agree that convert Muslims distance themselves from the migrants and produce a different space for Muslims in Europe. This is a crucial finding for my understanding of the converts that regularly come to the mosque. In fact, the ways in which converts relate to the mosque is not given enough attention in the literature, and even though this section will not cover an extensive analysis of this, it still contributes to the literature in unpacking this relation within the scope of their place-making strategies, as far as it affects the mosque.

Their imagination of the mosque leads to efforts to produce their own religious spaces without necessarily making an attachment to the immigrant Muslim communities. I have encountered a lot of converts who occasionally or regularly came to the mosque, but ended up quitting for similar reasons. The primary reason for their abandonment is the disappointment that came sooner or later because the mosque could not accommodate the cultural diversity that they represented. Eventually, they resorted back to the foundational principles of French society and pushed religion further to the private sphere.

Lucie, a 34-year-old convert, regularly came to the Al-Ihsan Mosque for a number of years to learn Quran. The mosque was a particular place to fill an existential gap in her life, to find the support she desperately needed over the course of the transition period she was going through from atheism to Islam. It also served to compensate for the harsh secularism that has no

place for religion. Her vision of laïcité was a diversity-based “open laïcité,” in her description, which allowed everyone to express their religion freely. This definition mirrors those of other Muslim youth active in the mosque. She was critical of the French laïcité, which she considered “closed” because it confines religion behind closed doors. That is part of the reason why Lucie came to the mosque in search of a religion-inclusive multicultural space. In her opinion, the Mosque as a space of dialogue, community support, and Islamic education combined with civic values fighting against extremism, ignorance, and fanaticism was supposed to be a “pillar of the Republic.” She enjoyed learning about religion while at the mosque, and identified with this space even more when it reflected her vision of life as a dignified and strong woman. She was a working woman who lived alone, and she was certainly imagining the mosque as a site protecting and defending women’s rights. Any suggestions or experience that fit in this mindset would draw Lucie even closer to the mosque and make her want to go there more often.

As a matter of fact, Lucie built genuine trust in religious instructions and suggestions given by the imam. The imam was a quintessential authoritative figure who she could consult to resolve Islam-related personal issues in her life, one of which was making a decision on whom to marry. She was introduced to a Muslim Algerian man by a couple she knows well. After a series of email exchanges, she wanted to get to know more about this man by conversing one-on-one. Then she discovered that he was not interested in such communication, as he thought it would be inappropriate in Islam. Lucie had serious concerns about her future with this man because she had a job, she enjoyed learning, reading, and improving herself in every possible way, whereas this Algerian man presented as her potential future husband had a very limited approach to life, did not like traveling, and had never even talked to women before. Lucie had serious concerns about his view of religion and her interpretations of Islam, but her friends who tried to set them

up sided with this man, which made Lucie even more nervous. She told me about all this as she was returning home from the mosque after a long consultation with the imam about how to resolve the issue and proceed with this Algerian man, because she needed to reassure herself that her approach to this matter was actually in accordance with Islam. Nabil gave the confirmation she asked for by suggesting that they talk and share opinions before marriage without any mediator, because it was important for couples to get to know each other before marriage and there was nothing wrong with that in religious terms. This was the relief she needed: “He confirmed what I already knew.” However, this was not the end of the story. In fact, this was an exceptional bond she made with the mosque, but no matter how hard she tried, it did not last too long. She eventually became wary of the rule-based teachings of the imam, negative views on women, and suspicious attitudes towards converts.

While sharing similar views as Muslim youth of immigrant descent, the people who ran the mosque and her acquaintances were people with an old mindset. She felt distant from the mosque despite regularly attending the Quran courses:

I do not understand why they do not hire a cleaning lady to clean the bathrooms. I talked to mosque administration many times, and when I received negative response, I tried to do the job myself as a volunteer. Even so, they did not agree, and asked me to stop because some male congregants were annoyed with my presence in the evening!

I was first scared of going to the mosque. In this mosque, they looked as if what I was doing here I was doing as a French woman. I saw the good behavior before I converted and after I converted I saw their bad behavior. They didn't learn Islam, they are egoist, arrogant, and mean. They look at me as if I would steal their territory and cultural heritage. These negative attitudes towards me including the bad personal and communal qualities inside and outside the mosque in Argenteuil stop me from wanting to be a part of the Muslim community. They do not follow the basic hygiene rules, talk vulgar, treat others with no respect, and interfere in others' private lives with bad intentions. These cannot be the qualities of a Muslim.

Interestingly, Lucie kept going to the mosque despite her negative views on the Muslim community in her neighborhood, and criticism of the mosque administration. She was in search of a place to identify with, and clearly her conception of a mosque did not match with its people. Therefore, she was very critical of the mosque for not being welcoming to converts, promoting gender-segregation, being male-dominated, and dirty. It did not really surprise me to receive an email from Lucie six months after I completed my fieldwork giving me news that she was not a Muslim any longer. She wrote about her present tranquility free from the strict compliance with religious codes that often exclude those who do not follow them. Her statement was a declaration of her desire to resort to spiritual liberty without submitting to any religion. This kind of a disappointment was common among the converts, and even Muslim born youth who turned to the Sufi order groups to escape the bad looks and criticism at the mosque, which they heard about from other people or experienced themselves. This unpleasant reputation of the mosque as a space where converts were not welcome resulted in a situation where the mosque was either left to the mercy of its members who followed a traditional approach or was challenged for an eventual transformation by its persistent youth. Converts like Lucie who abandon their attempts at inclusion reproduce the century-old laic tradition of France that bears a strict separation of religion and secular lives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the different makings of the mosque space. By focusing on its young congregants, I have built on anthropological debates on everyday diversity, and investigated how the mosque is fashioned into an everyday multicultural and public site of encounter for both Muslims and non-Muslims through its uses of diversity strategies and “secularization;” how these seemingly distinct culture groups communicate; and how their value

systems are negotiated through dual processes of convergence and differentiation inside French society, which is perceived as excessively secular. The younger mosque congregants especially appropriate *laïcité* by attributing it new meanings as they incorporate a religious component to the secularization of the mosque. I have attempted to unpack this complex formation by using an interdisciplinary literature on multiculturalism.

As Ehrkamp and Nagel suggest (2012, 632), further research on religious spaces is needed in order to explore the ways in which religious leaders might be shaping understandings of cultural diversity within ordinary congregants and especially the younger generations. My research intends to address this dimension by investigating the old and young Muslim leaders' approaches to the religion/secularism dichotomy, which influences the everyday politics of their wider congregation. In the next chapter, I will explain the major tendencies of the traditional mosque leaders through representative figures before moving on to the transformation that the mosque space goes through and that young Muslims experience in their everyday lives.

The main actors of this remodeling of the mosque are the Muslim youth congregants, whom I discuss in the next chapters, starting with the leaders. I reiterate that for the purpose of this study, youth constitute people with no strictly established approaches to applying Islam in daily life, but are rather situational identities who position themselves based on the context. Hence, they do not necessarily belong to a particular age group.

Chapter 4

The Mosque as a Religious Space and its Traditional Leaders

Introduction

We were attending one of the Islamic education classes in Al-Ihsan Mosque when I first met Fatiha, a 42-year-old congregant. She was not wearing a traditional Muslim outfit, which would usually be a hijab and a long dress that covers the body without revealing one's body shape. Instead, she was wearing a hat to cover her hair, a relatively long shirt, and cotton pants. Despite the fact that her clothing was "unfit" for the mosque compared to most other women attending courses, Fatiha came to her Quran and women's Islamic teaching classes regularly, without even skipping one.

She responded in a very friendly way when I first approached her. In our first interview, she expressed her desire to visit her daughter in the UK where she studied English as an au pair. Fatiha was, however, a reserved person and did not have the courage to travel alone as a single mother. A few months after this interview, a chance came for her when a woman in her Islamic teaching class organized a sight-seeing trip to London for the weekend. She was excited about the trip to see a different country and visit her daughter. Her excitement did not last too long though, because a week after the announcement of the trip, the Islamic education course instructor, Dounia, explained that a Muslim woman is allowed to travel long distance on condition that she travel with her *mahram*.¹² Fatiha, like many other women, changed her mind and decided not to go because she was divorced and could not find a man in the family to travel with her. Eventually, the trip was cancelled.

¹² In Islamic law, a woman's mahram is defined as a male whom a woman cannot marry at any time in her life such as her father, brother, son, or uncle.

Fatiha puts the mosque and the education she receives there in a central place in her life. This place is so central that she organizes her daily life based on its *fatwa*¹³-like teachings. Mosque leaders, regardless of their physical ages, have a certain authority over the congregants, especially when they are learning religion through these institutions and perceive the mosque as a place of supportive socializing, as in the case of Fatiha. Fatiha, regardless of *her* age (42), is a young Muslim because she does not come to the mosque with heavy baggage regarding Islam. Instead, her encounters with Islam are through multiple experiences and networks with diverse understandings of religion. Hence, she has been exploring alternatives to the forms of Islam she was born into. For her and other young congregants, the mosque functions as a space of many dynamics in life. Formulating the relationship between Islam and French secularism lies at the heart of these dynamics, and the mosque is a redesigned space where these are reframed to be applied in everyday life. Mosque leaders and how they design the mosque are among the major factors that determine this relationship through discourses, activities, and events. I have detected two models of leadership in this context, traditional and young. While the first promotes an imported Islam, which puts youth in a passive position, the latter suggests a religiously inclusive model of French *laïcité* giving autonomy to young Muslims. In the first model, the mosque leaders follow a traditional approach that favors a traditional Islam as applied in home countries over an Islam as practiced in France. In this chapter, I will focus on Al-Ihsan Mosque as a setting where this kind of Islam is preferred and disseminated by the leaders, including the imam, the president, the director of the school, and instructors. However, putting this mosque and its leaders into a cardboard category would be a simplistic way for understanding these dynamics because there are also internal contradictions in the mosque, which make this mosque a complex

¹³ A fatwa is an Islamic religious ruling, issued by a recognized religious authority on a matter of a specific issue, usually at the request of an individual or a community where Islamic jurisprudence is unclear.

space of Muslim presence. Even the imam and the president sometimes produce paradoxical discourses. In fact, the imam is a very influential religious figure in the mosque, maintaining good relations with almost everyone attending the mosque regularly. However, due to the strict Islamic education he received, the persistent structural limitations that the young people have constantly faced, and the expectations of some families as to what needs to be taught in the mosque, he usually instructs particularly the young followers based on an Islam reduced to rule-based textual meanings. The president, likewise, is restricted to official discourses and relationships, leaving the hard work of making the mosque a socially relevant space to Amor. Amor, as an assertive voice amidst these challenges, is acting as an informal leader, and disrupting the mainstream tendencies to follow a strictly religious approach detached from its context. This will be dealt with in the next chapter where I illustrate examples of individual and organized mosque leaders with progressive attitudes to making and using the mosque space. In Chapter 5, I switch to Al-Hidaya Mosque where there is an organized structure that experiments to reconcile Islam and French secularism in a meaningful way. In that chapter, I also present the case of individual leaders as a challenge to the administrative and other pressures in Al-Ihsan Mosque through the example of Amor. Despite his ongoing efforts, he is often kept back from engaging in new initiatives by forces like the school director, resistance from some families, and personal hesitations of some congregant.

To this end, in the next two chapters I will analyze how Islam interfaces with secularism through these leaders in how they use the mosque space and influence Muslim youth in terms of their relationship with French secularism and Islam. Within this framework, this chapter is devoted to understanding this process under the leadership of the traditional mosque leaders. I will ask the questions: What kind of an Islam is introduced in the mosque under traditional

leadership, and how does it play out in designing the mosque space? How does this design impact the ways in which young Muslims reconcile Islam and French modes of secularism and republican values within the mosque? How does religious authority play out for Muslim youth in this process? Do these processes offer an alternative to French *laïcité*?

Living as a Muslim in a non-Muslim Secular State under Muslim Religious Leadership

Scholars have been theorizing the growing public visibility of Islam in modern life from different angles (Bowen 2007; Gole 2006; Kastoryano 2002; Kepel 1997). Gole questions the characterization of Islam as private, arguing that it has entered the secular public space in non-Muslim countries. According to her, the public presence of Islam is transforming the public sphere of Islam, which has always been defined by the nation-state and by institutionally defined religions. However, she, along with some other scholars, also considers institutional religious belonging to be diminishing in the modern world (Gauchet 1999; Gole 2006; Taylor 2007). These theorists argue that among younger generation Muslims, Islam has become a matter of personal choice, and it has been carried into public life through political agency and socio-cultural movements, not through religious institutions. In other words, religion as an institution that gives meaning to life in physical and spiritual terms by organizing it according to certain principles is still very much valid in the modern world, but the ways in which this institution is defined and lived in different domains of life has significantly changed over time. These scholars argue that the public character of Islam is no longer primarily based on the French state, nor on the traditionally acknowledged religious institutions such as the mosques and the imamate, but on personal interpretations and social practices. While these theoretical debates are useful to explain the increasing public component of Islam in modern Western societies, they do not address the complexity of the ongoing relationship between people and institutions in explaining

how Islam is dis/engaging with the secularist regimes of governments as well as the norms of a given society. I argue that mosques play a central role in developing a mindset for this interplay within Muslim communities and individuals, and religious leaders primarily determine this process.

Religious leaders as part of an Islamic institution in France are yet to be explored in depth in the literature because of their supposedly decreasing role among youth, and in relevant studies where religious leadership was examined, only imams were really covered (Bowen 2010) to explain the dynamics within the mosque. Although most of the attention of this scholarship has focused on the role of the French state and the mosques in hiring imams, in fact, religious educators who are giving Islamic education to young and old congregants play an equally important role in designing the mosque space either as a strictly religious site or as a setting more integrated with the wider society. Religion instructors within the mosque are also among the driving forces of a mosque, whether there is a French-speaking imam or not. The imam cannot reach the entire congregation by himself, so the instructors of religious education play a significant role in re/designing the mosque and influencing youth in the way they connect with the mosque. In most cases, instructors of religious education come from a Muslim country through marriage, for graduate studies, or to work. They usually volunteer in a mosque to teach the Quran, Arabic, or Islamic education. They may have different reasons to volunteer, but one thing in common is their enthusiasm to educate the youth in Islam, so that they will not become detached from their religion and will instead live in France as dignified Muslims.

My research suggests that institutional belonging and recognition of religious authorities are still powerful forces among young Muslims. In this research, I take the mosque space as a vital space in Muslim youth life because the Mosque is a place in which parents and people with

deep cultural connections to the homeland have confidence. This confidence stems from the amalgamation of culture and religion in the mindset of these people. Algeria or Morocco, the homeland is considered a source of safety, familiarity, and loyalty, and is associated with being a good Muslim, ethnic belonging, and a sense of belonging to homeland culture. Hence, children and youngsters are sent to the mosque without hesitation to take up these values, develop an ethno-culture-based religious identity, and live according to the homeland norms. This naturally has concrete consequences in their daily lives, especially in countries with a high level of state intervention against Muslims. In the case of France, the state rhetoric of *laïcité*, which promises an equal indifference to all religious groups, is not applied properly on the practical level. Muslim groups are subject to more limitations and exclusion than other religious groups, resulting in a reactive strategy to identify with institutional Islam and its leaders. Some individuals strictly adhere to these authorities and their teachings while others contribute to this institutional religion by suggesting their own authorities, and interpretations. In sum, places of worship where institutional religions are circulated and performed play a significant role in their lives in terms of how they grapple with French secularism as Muslim citizens. In this chapter, I demonstrate the existing significance of religious institutions through a spatial analysis of mosques and their traditional leaders as to how they use the mosque space to maintain and reinforce the Muslim/secular divide.

In fact, my research shows that some leaders, whom I call conservative and traditional, foster a homeland culture-based Islam rather than a contextual approach, and give advice to young congregants to apply this model into their daily lives. This starts with designing the mosque as primarily a religious site, as promoted in the official discourse of the state as well as the commonsense social rhetoric of the French public. In the next section, I will explain this

process through a culture-based understanding of Islam within the mosque, as evident in the practices of leadership.

A Religious Space Made of an Imported Islam

Islamic culture is a controversial term because of the difficulty in suggesting what it really refers to. The term bears the possibility of lumping all Muslims together in a package and labeling them as having a common Islamic culture. Although the term has gained popularity, especially among the public after the latest debates on whether violence is part of an Islamic culture, I argue, like many other scholars, that like culture as a whole, Islamic knowledge is subject to change (Aslan 2011; Tibi 2009, 67) depending on temporal and spatial variants. According to some scholars (Olivier 2010; Ramadan 2009), religion is usually blended with the cultural traditions of a given society, so religion is usually equated with the cultural norms of a given society. Therefore, Islam is understood and practiced within societal norms and value systems, and eventually people form a distinctive Islamic culture that is informed by their society's historical and geographical conditions.

Most of the mosques in France have been designed to ignore this plural nature of Islamic culture. Within this framework, the founders and leaders of these mosques organize the mosque space based on an imported Islamic understanding that transfers Islam as it is applied in their home countries. When Islam is imported from the homeland to the French Mosque, then the Mosque is similar to the homeland and produces Muslim youth as if they lived in Algeria or Morocco, but not in France. Although some changes, such as the use of the French language in explaining Islamic doctrines so as to be understood by French-speaking young Muslims, are inevitable, the mosque is still kept an Algerian or a Moroccan Mosque as much as possible. Most of these efforts are geared toward communicating Islamic values to French Muslims in such a

way as to ensure a life in compliance with the religious norms in the homeland, which is mainly an idea transported through non-European normative teachings and cultures. In the Al-Ihsan Mosque, there is an interesting dynamic of maintaining this process through official leadership and very few young leaders attempt to redesign the mosque as a “French” Mosque, where reinterpreted religion and a revisited laïcité are reconciled, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Keeping the mosque strictly a religious site is an affirmation of the state discourse, and interestingly, the official discourse of the mosque counters this approach in order to be a part of the secular France as a recognized institution and gain public visibility in the form of the mosque. However, on the practical level, it remains a religious space for Muslims.

A Failed Discourse of “no foreign ties but respecting French values”

In Al-Ihsan Mosque, there is a strong tendency toward maintaining the status of the mosque as a recognized and legitimate site by keeping imported Islam away from the mosque. For the mosque leaders, imported Islam signifies unwanted radical influences that run counter to laïcité, democracy, equality, and the republican values of common good and a balance between authority and individual choices. This has, in fact, been the general policy of “French” mosques for decades. Although the discourse was geared toward constructing a French mosque that embraced the above-mentioned principles, the practical validity of this discourse has always been a challenge.

Throughout my fieldwork, I looked for some practical evidence of their discourse valuing French laïcité and civic values of democracy and equality. In the following paragraphs, I will trace this process through the institution of the imamate and religious instructorship in France and within the mosque to better understand how imported Islam is still dominant within the mosque at the practical level, given the increasing role of traditional mosque leadership on

designing the mosque space and influencing the young congregants. To this end, I will first introduce the development of the imamate institution in France, and explore the continuation of the “keeping away from foreign influences” discourse without its actual application.

The history of imams in France starts with the first massive migration flow of industrial workers in the 1960s. To accommodate the religious needs of this population, each community established its prayer room and the man who knew the Quran best took charge of leading the daily prayers. This was the time period when Islam was imported from the home countries (Godard and Taussig 2007).

After 1981, when Muslims were given rights to found and administer their own associations, the establishment of religious institutions and construction of mosques began to increase in France, resulting in the appointment of more imams to serve in these mosques. The first practical attempt to unite the imams in France was carried out by Cheikh Abbas, an old Algerian diplomat who was in the administration of the Grande Mosquée de Paris. However, the dominant role of the Algerian government in representing French Muslims was challenged by other ethnic groups, and opponent representative bodies were founded such as UOIF and FNMF, both of which developed counter arguments against the Grande Mosquée de Paris at several conventions. Dalil Boubakeur, the Recteur of the Grande Mosquée de Paris, created a charter to identify the responsibilities of the imams and presented it to the Interior Minister, who was also in charge of religious affairs. However, as this attempt reinforced the institutional authority of the Grande Mosquée de Paris over all other Muslim organizations, it was not appreciated or recognized by other Muslim groups. There were other efforts to define the fixed roles of the imam and give him a prestigious status within his community by a variety of institutional bodies that were created for this purpose, including Le Conseil des Imams de Marseille (CIME),

Associations des Musulmans de Strasbourg (AMS), Coordination Nationale des Imams et Guides Religieux (CNIGR), and Conseil National des Imams (CCNI). However, none of these survived long enough to secure the position of imams within Muslim society due to ongoing competition between local federations, external interventions from the Gulf region countries and Saudi Arabia, and *Salafist* groups, who follow an ultra-conservative form of Islam. The French public authorities were also engaged in granting a well-defined social and legal status to imams in France for the purposes of keeping Islam in compliance with republican values out of security and political concerns (Frégosi 2008). In fact, this ideological rivalry among French Muslims on the issue of forming a representative body as an interlocutor between Muslim society and the French government has been the major obstacle in assigning a unifying status and a valued image to the imams serving such an important role in France (Godard and Taussig 2007).

Imams in France have a different role than those in Islamic countries or in secular countries where Islam is the mainstream religion. In such countries an imam is mainly in charge of leading the daily five prayers and the *tarawih* prayers during the month of Ramadan. In France, however, an imam takes on additional responsibilities for educating the community in religious terms, giving fatwas and consultations on social, personal, religious, and even political affairs for the Muslim community to be in conformity with religious principles (Binebine 2009), and transforming the community morally and intellectually to better contribute to their societies as fully engaged citizens. They are also expected to be accessible full-time in order to respond to their communities' psychological and familial problems (Oubrou et al. 2009). In order to achieve these missions, a French imam is expected to possess certain qualities such as being competent in both Islamic and French value systems. Holding double cultures, Islamic and European, is the key to fulfill the role of an imam properly in a non-Muslim country (Oubrou et al. 2009).

However, this is quite a difficult quality to possess when the imam coming from the homeland does not have the same references as Muslims of the West.

Since the first attempts to institutionalize the imam status in French mosques, imams have been imported from their home countries. Each ethnic community has appointed imams in order to accommodate their social and educational needs, and to manage religious affairs. Algerians constitute the majority of the Muslim population in France, and they have a long history with France that dates from colonial times. Beginning from the 1980s, imams have been imported from the Algerian state under the supervision of the Grande Mosquée de Paris, which has long enjoyed a special status with the France state as a representative body of Islam of France. Other North African societies usually receive imams locally without any official representation. Turkish mosques in France, however, are managed by different religious groups, and the most powerful ones are those that are directly affiliated with the department of religious affairs in Turkey (DITIB) (Yukleyen 2012). Imams are appointed by the Turkish state, and they are highly respected regardless of their poor language skills in French. Turkish imams are respected figures in the mosque, and they pose an obstacle to mixing with the non-Turkish populations because of the language barrier. They also reinforce the ethno-nationalistic discourse of the Turkish diaspora. Hence, the French mosque discourse is compromised by its Turkish oriented counterpart.

Despite the differences between each Muslim community in their perception of the imam, employing an imported imam comes with its own problems. In the Algerian case, they are given an official status by the Algerian state, but most of the time they do not speak French fluently and cannot connect with the young congregants. A similar situation exists in the Turkish mosques, and it becomes even more problematic when the imam is appointed locally and does

not enjoy an official status. In such cases, the imam works on a voluntary basis and is paid through donations. More important than this, it hinders the official and social recognition of the mosque as a respected institution, and can also have overarching outcomes on the mosque communities such as disconnecting youth from the mosque or leading them to radicalism.

Due to these possible repercussions, in Al-Ihsan Mosque, breaking any possible ties with the homeland or any other Islamic country and making the mosque an integral part of France is the predominant discourse of the administrative and religious leaders of the mosque. However, most of the time this discourse remains as rhetoric without any practical consequence. Mr. Achebouche, the president, who presides over both mosques and relegates power to certain individuals, always presented the mosque as open to everyone from all religions and to non-believers. Mr. Achebouche mentioned to me many times that the mosque had open doors so that Muslims could mingle with non-Muslims. Despite these progressive remarks, as the president of the mosque, he seemed more interested in making the mosque recognized by the politicians, the media, and the society at large. Mr. Achebouche, despite his age, has a very young spirit with excitement to start innovative projects in the mosque. According to him, his main responsibility is to introduce the mosque to the wider society, and this is where his job ends. Other young leaders should take over from there to support, expand, and implement new projects. To this purpose, he has appointed Amor to conduct such projects as Amor can, to change things as far as the mosque can tolerate. As a dedicated university student with so much passion to serve his community, Amor is responsible for working with and educating the youth to make the mosque a vibrant space for French Muslims, within the existing power dynamics. In other words, Amor cannot go beyond certain limits imposed by the conservative elements and figures within the mosque, who are well-organized as a formal body. In this respect, Amor is also suffering from

the lack of an organization that would support him and his projects. Most of the time he is organizing events using his own networks without any formal support from the mosque. In contrast, Mr. Achebouche's system of transferring the hard job of transforming the mosque to someone else seems to work well enough in Al-Hidaya Mosque. There Dr. Bachir, as a respected and charismatic medical doctor, is managing the cultural center of the mosque, which is practically an independent body and so relatively free from administrative pressures and has a team of progressive leaders. Mr. Achebouche thinks he does his part by securing a respected status for the mosque within French society and with the local officials. To meet this objective, each event is catered to a specific target group in Al-Ihsan Mosque.

He initiated interfaith trips for the neighbor churches and Catholic schools to the mosque within the scope of Muslim-Christian encounters to make the mosque a recognized religious place by the Argenteuil society. Since there were never Muslim congregants around to meet the Christian groups, these visits were more of an attempt to seek acknowledgment from French society rather than to really connect Muslims to their non-Muslim neighbors. In fact, they are already connected to their neighbors through daily encounters at work, in their neighborhood, or in public schools where children with different backgrounds mingle.

Within the frame of these recognition strategies, Muslim events in both mosques targeted the politicians. French local authorities were invited to major Muslim events in the mosque such as Eid or the end-of-the-year celebrations. They were not advertised to the larger French public, but mainly officials were expected to attend these events. Mr. Achebouche valued their participation so much that every time a group of representatives from the office of the mayor, or the mayor himself/herself, joined these events, he personally greeted his official guests in Western style suits, treated them respectfully and in a friendly manner, and served them

authentic appetizers and beverages in his office after the event. In return, they made a short speech announcing their support to the Muslim communities and praising their achievement in successfully integrating into French society.

These remarks reflect the necessity of adapting French Muslims into the mainstream society while also marking the integration of religion into excessively secular France as discussed earlier. On a more practical level, through these events the Mayor would secure the votes of Muslims in the next elections, and in return the mosque as a Muslim space would be officially recognized, and the Muslim presence would be assured on a psychological level through first-hand announcement instead of regulations listed on a piece of paper. The importance of being recognized by the local and national authorities was evident in the hosting of the prime minister during the opening ceremonies. This is a source of pride not only for Mr. Achebouche but for all of the mosque administration and volunteers, as his participation is considered to be an official acceptance from the top of the government. It is because of this desire for recognition and acceptance that Mr. Achebouche was excited about my research, expected to result from an American institution, and he was always willing to help me through my research in every possible way by granting me extensive permission to conduct interviews, take photos, and meet people who were not easily accessible.

Within the framework of his area of responsibility, Mr. Achebouche turns the mosque into an open public space only on certain occasions for the purposes of being known, recognized, and accepted. This public space, however, lacks the essential quality of bringing people from different backgrounds together who respect each other and act on shared values without overtly highlighting their differences that would disturb others. He temporarily turns the mosque into a public space of interfaith activities or laicist discourses without embodying them. In other words,

the multicultural quality of the mosque is reserved for interfaith event days and official visits by local and national authorities. His concern for gaining public recognition causes him to pursue a pragmatic approach in his relations with the public authorities regardless of their party affiliations. Even when the former mayor from the PS¹⁴ lost the 2014 municipal elections to the candidate from UMP, Mr. Achebouche never changed his official neutral stance, which necessitates a balanced distance and stable good relations with whomever is elected.

Besides the search for recognition, as pointed out earlier, another motivation behind this open-doors strategy is the worry that some might associate the mosque with Islamic extremism in any way. To avoid any possible connection with Islamists and Salafists, Mr. Aoucoubche repetitively mentions their open-door policy, especially to non-Muslim people visiting the mosque. During an interview in Al-Ihsan Mosque with a journalist from a mainstream French press in September 2013, he mentioned the role of the mosque and their position vis-à-vis these groups and the French Republic several times:

Journalist: Do extremists have their own mosques in Argenteuil?

Mr. Achebouche: No, they come here as well. Salafists and other religious groups with extremist tendencies circulate their ideas through social media, and they live in this society despite being few in number. Their misunderstanding of Islam poses a great a danger to our youth. This is why Islamic education in the mosque is critically important.

J: How is the recent climate in Argenteuil regarding Islam?

Mr. Achebouche: Things have calmed down since June (referring to the physical attacks against two headscarved Muslim girls by pulling off their scarves and cutting a piece of their hair). Three thousand three hundred Muslims live in Argenteuil. French people are scared of this number and their alleged violence. Not all the violence committed in other Muslim countries has to do with Islam. It is not easy to explain this though. We, as Muslims in France, are open, and tolerant despite being usually victimized as in the case of

¹⁴ PS stands for *Parti socialiste* (The Socialist Party), which is the largest political party of the French center-left. UMP stands for *Union pour un mouvement populaire* (The Union for a Popular Movement), which is a center-right political party in France. They are both two major contemporary political parties.

the Argenteuil violence. We have open house days. We do that in the Al-Hidaya Mosque too.

Journalist: Can Arabic be a way to connect the kids to the extremists?

Mr.Achebouche: No, it is the role of the imam during the *jumma khutbas* to explain and educate the youth on how these extremists are committing crimes against humanity and Islam. We don't do politics here otherwise.

Journalist: Are Arabic and religious education offered in colleges in Argenteuil?

Mr.Achebouche: No, only Arabic is offered in schools. Speaking of colleges, student groups especially from Catholic schools periodically visit our mosque. Certain things are misinterpreted. They have fear. We organize open house days and these field trips to overcome these misinterpretations about Islam and Muslims.

Imam Nabil, the imam of the Al-Ihsan Mosque, also encourages the importance of education each time he talks to the press, and condemns taking part in any of the recent violence exercised by terrorist groups who present themselves as Islamic groups. At the time when ISIS (An extremist radical militant group) attacks were just rising in Syria, a 14-year-old French Muslim teenager from Argenteuil fled to Syria illegally to join the armed forces of the terrorist group in their endeavor to establish an allegedly Islamic state. A correspondent from a national French press appeared in front of the Al-Ihsan Mosque the next day to ask the imam about this local Muslim girl. Imam Nabil, in his usual religious outfit, did not panic when the correspondent approached him with his cameraman, but welcomed them with dignity and confidence. He explained the Islamic approach to violence to them, and the false connection made with Islam to terrorism. He then went on to explain the problems of the banlieue youth, who, he said, were challenged with stigmatization, poor education, and family issues. He spoke about the false image of Islam in Western societies and Muslim youth problems in suburban Paris to another French journalist who came to the mosque to write an article on suburban mosques in the Paris

area. According to Nabil, he is responsible for helping those young Muslims with their challenges, putting them on the right track, keeping them busy with their academic education, teaching them the right religious education, and encouraging them to reach out to their non-Muslim fellow citizens:

We aim to improve the image of Islam as a tolerant religion. Our objective is also to teach real Islam. Young Muslims in the cité know about their religion only by name, they are totally ignorant about Islam. The problem lies in the miscomprehension of religion and the conditions we live in. Their parents want to transmit their heritage and values but they can't succeed. There is a lack of communication because their parents don't speak French or their dads are exercising violence over their sons and daughters so it's normal that the youth indulge in bad actions under these conditions. It is easy to label them by saying they are like this because they are Arab or Muslim. The media is also responsible for that. Because of this misinterpretation, the actors of terrorism are Muslims by majority. In Muslim countries and in occidental countries, this is our image. These are failed guys and they seek to legitimize their actions with religion. This can be overcome by education so we are trying to improve and share this knowledge here in the mosque by helping our youth with their school education, teaching them our religion, and encouraging them to be in constant dialogue with their non-Muslim peers.

The main idea is to keep the youth away from foreign-originated extremism, and connect them to their immediate surroundings through useful means within the mosque. It is particularly essential for the banlieue youth, who are more vulnerable to falling victim to foreign-based violence. However, the job that Mr. Achebouche has started is left undone by the leaders, such as the young imam, who reiterate this discourse without really putting it into action. Imam Nabil, in his statement to the French journalist cited above, focuses on the false images of Muslims in the media, the necessity of giving the Muslim youth a proper religious and academic education, and importance of effectively connecting to the mainstream society while making public speeches. He, however, pursues a more dogmatic attitude toward interpreting religion when he mentors

Muslim born youth in the mosque. In other words, the official discourse designed for public interests does not correlate with the practices within the mosque.

As part of their administrative policy, the mosque is also detached from all foreign influence, including hometown connections. Mr. Achebouche rigorously denies receiving financial aid even from Algeria, although the mosque is known to have close ties with the Algerian state:

Journalist: Do you receive funding from Algeria?

Mr. Achebouche: Nothing, all the money and resources we need is provided by the volunteers and the congregants through donations except for the imam, who is sent and paid by the Algerian state. Neither the municipality nor the government is funding our courses or other religious activities. It is only the congregants who are donating. We receive financial aid only for cultural events. This is normal and expected because there is laïcité in France.

In their communication with non-Muslims the mosque administration is using an official discourse that involved operating within the norms of the French state and society in order to survive as a recognized Muslim institution, yet they never explain how they would apply the seemingly conflicting norms, laic and religious or civic and Islamic:

Journalist: How do you teach Islam here?

Mr. Achebouche: We teach basic Islam, things like how to pray, how to read the Quran, the pillars of Islam, etc.

Journalist: You also teach how to adapt to laïcité in France, right?

Mr. Achebouche: Yes, of course. Islam is not incompatible with laïcité. There was a little girl here asking how to be the president of the republic. (laughing).

Hamza, the 42-year-old director of the mosque school, also mentioned that they taught the kids how to behave properly in the society by respecting the republican values, and in civic life as equal French citizens regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender, or economic status. In fact, he is one of the leaders Mr. Achebouche holds responsible for applying the rhetoric of adhering

to the French principles to be able to make an Islamic space a part of the French public. Hamza is a powerful figure as the official director of the mosque school, since Mr. Achebocuhe trusts him and his team on managing and running the Quranic, Arabic, and Islamic education classes offered to children, youth, and adults. And yet, Hamza, being an educator himself, maintains the religious quality of the mosque without any references to fundamental principles shared in Islam and French philosophy such as gender equality, democracy, and thinking with a free mind, let alone preparing an agenda to find common grounds with French secularism through protection of religious rights and equal distance to all religious groups by the state.

As the journalist was leaving, they said their goodbyes, and Mr. Achebouche's last words were: "You can come whenever you want. We have nothing to hide here." This left me wondering what was in the mosque that was not hidden but accessible to everyone. All I heard in this interview, and in his other statements elsewhere, was the teaching of Islam by conforming to the laic principles of France without really explaining what was meant by this and how they were achieving this hard task given the widespread polarizing discourse of Islam against laïcité among the French public and political discourses. After the journalist was gone, I asked to see the pedagogical tools to teach all these values since their focus was primarily on Islamic teaching. I was told that civic education was more about teaching the administrative structure, which I could not really make sense of since there was not really any relevant materials in textbooks or other means of teaching. The conclusion that I derived from this observation was that the pro-laic and pro-republican discourses given by the mosque administration did not really have practical grounds in the mosque.

This reminds me of Levebre's (1991) abstract space, which has no reference to real life as we see and experience with actual representations. Laïcité certainly exists on the discourse level,

without being truly connected to institutional and daily practices within the mosque. I see this as a replication of the French state's initiatives to recognize mosques through official discourse without really engaging them into applying it on the decisions that would affect the everyday lives of Muslims. As much as imported Islam is still valid because the discourse does not apply to practical life in the mosque, purely Islamic training with no reference to political and social context received and given by the mosque leaders also contributes to keeping the mosque as a religious space based on the teachings imported from Islamic settings. In the next section, I will examine the implications and effects of a particular type of religious education received by mosque leaders on their instruction content and methods for the congregants.

Out-of Context Islam through Religious Education

Obviously, in France the predominant tendency when hiring an imam or religious instructor for a mosque is to import them from a Muslim country. Another strategy, which is more recent, is to appoint a relatively young imam or religious instructor educated in France. There are particular reasons for both strategies. In the first case, it is easier to connect with the first arrival Muslims who follow the traditional Islam learned in their home countries. The latter approach, however, is preferred as a better solution to reach out to younger Muslims who come to the mosque to learn Islam primarily from the imam or a trusted instructor as their first reliable source of knowledge. However, there are certain obstacles to applying these models such as providing the imams with religious education. This problem is valid both for imams coming from the country of origin and for those born and raised in France.

The training of imams has been a major problem, and remains a controversial issue despite many attempts to introduce a unified religious education for them. The challenge lies in recruiting imams with better French language skills, who do not radicalize French Muslims, and

have an adequate understanding of the young Muslims in the French context (Roustouil 1998). It has been a concern for Muslims to better serve the needs of the Muslim community, and for the French government to better integrate Muslims into the republican tradition (Amiriaux 2004; Bobineau and Bouharb 2010; Chebel and de Solemne 2003). To fulfill both missions, an excellent Islamic training received in Europe, and preferably in France, is necessary to be able to comprehend the national and local context and respond to French Muslims' needs. There have been attempts to initiate imam training in French universities or Islamic institutions catering to French republican norms of working for the common good and by doing so, detaching imams from the home countries' influences. However, there are currently few imams who received their training in these France-based institutions.

In the case of religion instructors, most of them received their religious education in their home countries. Religion instructors do not necessarily have pedagogical credentials to teach in any institution, but they are preferred over others who were raised in France for being native speakers of Arabic and having grown up in a Muslim country, which make them native to the language and the Muslim culture. They did not really expose themselves to other cultures and religions until they came to France, and they usually choose to remain within their zone of safety after immigrating. Hence, these instructors focus on religion within the context of a Muslim country. While this is the general tendency, as I observed in many mosques that I visited besides the two I focused on, there are individual exceptions. Although their physical ages range from early thirties to sixties, I will not treat them as young leaders because they usually come with heavy baggage from their home countries and perceive the mosque as a sanctuary where religion imported from a Muslim country is taught and lived at the expense of potential and ongoing conflicts with the French norms and values.

Even imams born and raised in France may not be sufficiently equipped with the religious education to be able to negotiate Islam and French secularism to the benefit of the Muslim populations and the wider society at large. Although an imam may receive a religious education at a France-based institution, the mindset of the sheiks and instructors who train him play a crucial role in shaping the mindset of the learners who are the future imams of French mosques. For example, Imam Nabil studied normative Islamic teaching from a Tunisian sheikh. Learning Islam from a Tunisian sheikh, who studied traditional Islam within the context of Tunisia, is certainly a different experience than studying at a French institution where native Muslim scholars teach. Both trainings lead to distinct interpretations and practices. While the Western-based Islamic education better captures the situation of Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, religious training in a Muslim country is usually informed by Islam as applied in that society.

There is truth in claiming that most of the mosques in France are still run by old people where in fact, the “old” does not necessarily refer to old age, but a mentality that is imported from the country of origin. This mindset is the source of an imported Islam. Understanding Islam from a perspective developed in a Muslim country is the common tendency among mosque leaders in Al-Ihsan, whereas in Al-Hidaya Mosque, religious leaders come from different backgrounds and embrace an approach that caters to the needs and expectations of Muslims in the French context.

In the Al-Ihsan Mosque, the official imams come from Algeria and they lead the daily prayers. However, they are not competent in French, and they always need a translator while communicating with the young congregants. To resolve this issue, the president of the Al-Ihsan Mosque decided to have a second imam, Imam Nabil. He is known as “the young imam” in his

community, and the administration is advertising him, rather than its officially appointed Algerian imam, as the public image of the mosque. In all formal and informal events or in the public media, Imam Nabil represents the mosque as a French imam, born and raised in France. However, having received his Islamic education from sheiks and resources in an Islamic context, he usually advises his students to comply with the norms of a Muslim country. Despite his vision of a culture-based Islam, Imam Nabil is enjoying a great popularity especially among the young congregants. Both men and women have particular respect and admiration for him. Everyone I talked to in the mosque expressed their appreciation of having Imam Nabil in their mosque due to his exceptionally good communication with the young learners of Islam.

Religious instructors are also quite popular among youth regardless of their strict and restrictive position that usually reduces Islam to religious obligations. Dounia, an Algerian woman instructor in her sixties, for example, is considered a reliable source on Islamic matters, and very much respected due to her pure devotion to applying Islam to its fullest, without taking into account the challenges or the necessity of reexamining some interpretations in the French context. This leads to a total rejection of French laïcité by fully embracing Islamic norms as they are practiced in Islamic countries, or rather as they were practiced in the past. This causes a temporal and spatial rupture as well as a social disengagement while constructing an identity and positioning oneself in a society.

Muslim women show a high level of interest in Islamic education classes in the mosque. Despite their different fashions of clothing, all the women exchange ideas within the classroom. Yet they sit and socialize with those who share similar views on Islam and living Islam in France. Obviously they have different family backgrounds, education levels, and socializing habits. As a common experience, all of these women in all classroom groups, except for one, grew up in

France, so they mostly learned about Islam from their parents and friends. As a matter of fact, they came to the mosque to take these classes in hopes of learning about Islam purified from ethnic and cultural interpretations. Interestingly enough, Islam taught in these courses was also blended with cultural practices, as defined by prominent Islamic scholars (Olivier 2010; Ramadan 2009). This, however, has long-lasting effects on the mindset of the young learners coming to the mosque to learn about Islam. As in the example of Fatiha, and other women who canceled the trip after hearing that it would be *haram* to travel without a mahram, most of them were not comfortable with this fatwa, and although they complied with it, they were puzzled. When I followed up on this by inquiring about their feelings on the last minute cancelation, most of the women gave me contradictory and evasive statements such as “I do not like traveling alone anyway,” “Well, she may be right, but I don’t know...,” and “It is kind of hard to find a mahram to travel with me, so it will not be easy to apply this rule in my life.” I view these statements as evidence of a discomfort in internalizing the imported Islam on the part of the young Muslims, who are open to receiving new information without a prejudiced mind.

This religious education mirrors and perpetuates the culture of a society governed by a particular type of Islamic regime. This applies to a variety of socio-cultural exercises within a given society. I will introduce the case of gender relations as a specific example to clarify my point with a vivid anecdote. For example, if gender separation is the norm in a society where Islam is politically or socially dominant, then similar patterns may apply to current conditions in a non-Muslim society as a result of direct transmission of such value systems by immigrants or people of immigrant origins. Along these lines, the mosque space can be designed accordingly as a religious space based on the Islamic culture of a particular society. The Al-Ihsan Mosque organized daily iftar dinners during the month of Ramadan for humanitarian reasons and all the

food and the equipment were provided through donations; volunteers were in charge of cooking. Most of the guests were poor residents of Argenteuil, who were all grateful for such public service. Everyone was welcome whether they were fasting or not. Although Amor, a young leader, was the head of the organization coordinating and instructing the young volunteers in every step of the preparations, he was not the decision-maker for logistics, which was actually bothering him. When I first went there to observe the preparations and talk to the volunteers, I was surprised to see that there were only young men preparing the food, setting the tables, and carrying around chairs. Women were either reading the Quran or praying in the prayer room (and some of them had already left the mosque after their religious education courses), but they did not even offer help, as if they knew it was not appropriate to do so. I was literally the only woman around those men helping them. Young men were all over the mosque busy with work. They were peeling onions, chopping potatoes, preparing tables, and doing all other types of work that would usually be assigned to women at home. Division of labor within their household was based on their homeland culture and in most North African countries, where Islam is practiced as the major religion, it is the woman's responsibility to arrange the kitchen-related work. Here even that was sacrificed to maintain the gender separation in the mosque since it would be difficult to keep men and women separate during this event when everyone was walking up and down to finalize the preparations before the fast break time. Hence, the few women left in the mosque were out of sight in the prayer rooms. I asked Amor whether he was content with this, although making young men work and take responsibility was a good start in transforming the mosque space with its new users. Amor said he was not happy with isolating women from this work, but he did not have a voice in making these decisions, because he needed Hamza's authorization.

When I asked Hamza the reason why they did not include women congregants in this iftar, he mentioned that there were some conflicts and confusion in the previous years, so this year they had decided to go with only men. My further inquiries to receive details and learn about the nature of these conflicts did not provide me with concrete examples, nor did he give me a sound explanation regarding this gender segregation in the mosque. It was interesting to realize that the young men did not question physical gender separation when I asked them their opinion on this matter. They did not seem to be bothered by working in their men-only cluster, as most of them were introduced to mosque education in certain periods of their childhood or youth up until today. So, gender separation that did not have any place in the French society remained the norm within the mosque.

It is particularly important to receive a France-based Islamic education due to the unique secular regime of the French state, and the commonsense perception of secularism in France. It is also a necessity to approach Islam stripped of its cultural understandings to take an active role in the society. Islamic education as directly borrowed from an Islamic context and strict French secularism may possibly cause a dilemma between being a Muslim *or* a secular, without the possibility of a compromise. In the next section, I will investigate the implications of being educated in purely religious terms, and the dominant understanding of French secularism in relation to making the mosque into a Muslim space in opposition to secular France. I will argue that this way of designing the mosque perpetuates the state discourse and the societal norms that contrast Islam, more than any other religion, to French *laïcité*.

A Matter of Selection: Muslim or Secular?

It is an indisputable fact that state policies and social norms influence the way being Muslim and secularity are experienced in non-Muslim countries. Mosque leadership, in terms of

giving advice and organizing congregants, functions within the framework of these policies and norms. In some cases, where exclusionary secularism is applied, leading to a choice between being a Muslim or a secular, a context-based religious approach gains more importance than in another setting.

The imamate in France has a different position on religious and worldly matters than in other European countries where Christian traditions are still powerful in public affairs and government regulations. In these countries, such as in the UK and Germany, communitarian structures are not denounced as they are in France (Kastoryano 2002). That is also the case in the UK and in non-European countries that apply the Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism model, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, where, in theory, the state accommodates all religious communities under a common citizenship without having to leave their cultural baggage. Also in these countries, traditionally there is a more lenient approach to religion in public debates on separation of religion and public life, as opposed to the very strict position of the French state against religions, and especially Islam, in public debates. France's position poses a major challenge for Muslims, since in Islam there is no separation between private and public spaces. Hence, the undisputed division causes traumatic experiences and a defensive tone among French Muslims. Followers of an imam or a sheikh in the countries listed above do not generally experience the religion and secularism dilemmas as in France. Imams do not have as much difficulty in giving fatwas in accordance with the state policies and social values as in France.

Oubrou (2009) suggests a contextual analysis by making a comparison between the American multiculturalism and the French republican model. He concludes that imams in France are facing more hardships than those in the United States, since in the US multiculturalism provides Muslims with the freedom of religious expression, while the French freedom protects

its citizens from religious influence. On the basis of these two different models of freedom, in the US Islam is well-structured and presents similar tendencies as in the Muslim world in terms of Muslims not being in conflict with the political system of the state. Islam in France, however, has its own challenges in struggling with the system and finding its place by making legitimate claims. I find this contextual analysis useful in explaining the diversity of viewpoints and activities among religious leaders in France, even within the same age group. Islam in France, with its political and social implications, affects the ways in which Muslim leaders strategize and act as active figures in their communities. To unveil these influences, I will connect the state policies and public attitudes toward French Muslims to the making of the mosque into either a strictly cultural and religious site or into a more dynamic site where multiple reference points inform each other and mingle.

Imam Khalid (US): “A woman can be family-oriented while at the same time sustain a career or pursue higher education”

Imam Khalid, the young Muslim Chaplain for the Islamic Center at New York University and New York City Police Department (NYPD) recommends women be active members of their society through education and by pursuing working careers while carrying on their family responsibilities (Ramadan Reflection day 3, 2012):

It’s important to realize though that a woman can be family-oriented while at the same time sustain a career or pursue higher education — these values are not mutually exclusive. Many women whom I know have advanced degrees and are committed to their jobs do so because they become another means of support for their families. If anything, this shows dedication to a family rather than indifference towards one.... No woman who has decided to follow her ambitions and pursue a career should be made to think that she was wrong for doing so and that her being single is a deeper sign of that wrongness.

In his advice to Muslim women, he says they do not (have to) make a distinction between being hijabi or non-hijabi women in their decision to pursue a career because hijab does not pose

an obstacle to work in the US as opposed to France. He also does not suggest that committing to their jobs is an obstacle to marriage and being a responsible wife/mother. He gives the Prophet's first wife, Khadijah, as an example, who was a businesswoman when she married him. He finds it unfortunate for a young woman to find herself in a social environment where society expects her to be a wife at the expense of abandoning her dreams to pursue a business career. Working as a secular activity is given a religious character without losing its worldly capacity, so Islam is matched with a secular act of working at a job. Obviously, reconciling religion and the liberal democratic values of the American society is made easier by state regulations and the relatively open-minded public opinion toward Muslim citizens in the US. For example, Muslim women are expected to contribute to the society in the same degree as other religious groups. They are not subject to systematic institutional discrimination in schools as young women, as opposed to young learners in French schools who are not admitted to high schools with their hijabs and are discouraged from pursuing a university education by their teachers because of their Arab/Muslim background. Many Muslim women have told me of their traumatic experiences caused by this unjust attitude. As a state policy, a hijabi woman is allowed to work in US public and private institutions whereas in France she is obliged to remove her hijab, which is considered an ostensible religious sign at work.

Imam Nabil (France): "You should not give up on your hijab"

As a reaction to this headscarf ban, Imam Nabil recommended that the young women taking his Islamic teaching course in the mosque not sacrifice their hijab for work:

Unless you are in financial need, you had better not take off your hijabs in order to work. You can pursue higher education, but you should not give up on your hijab.

In a casual conversation with these young women after a weekly class, he began to answer their personal questions, and encouraged them to hold on to their hijab despite the state attempts to hinder their religious practices systematically. The young women, all veiled, were sitting at a table listening to him with excitement. After his criticism of the French state and the mainstream public acting against French Muslims, he went on to portray an alternative model to such hardships. His model included a life at home, or among other Muslims in their comfort zones, preferably as a married woman under the wings of their household and the protection of their religion. In order to convince me, he turned to the young women and asked what they thought of this model. They all seem to be satisfied with his explanations, so upon receiving their approval, Imam Nabil questioned my being single in my mid-thirties, and showed me these young women wearing jilbabs as ideal candidates to get a possibly wealthy husband and live peacefully. When I asked him what he meant by living peacefully, he replied in full confidence that he meant a life in fulfillment of religious duties without having to make any sacrifice or taking the risk of working with people who might misjudge Islam and cause distraction from practicing Islam properly. By doing this, he made a connection between wearing a hijab, practicing Islam, pursuing a career, and marriage. According to this model, wearing the jilbab is the sign of being an intact Muslim, and a good way to attract potential husbands, which is an ideal route to take because a husband will provide for his family so the woman will not have to work and put herself in presumably unpleasant situations and sacrifice her hijab. In this scenario, working outside is seen as a contracting act to practicing religion.

Excessive secularism and social discrimination lead him to stick to a conservative and cultural interpretation of religion and to advice the young Muslims accordingly. By doing so, he is contributing to the widely recognized political and social discourse of the public/private

distinction. In other words, hijabi women as visible practicing Muslims are expected to remain in their privacy, and not take active part in the non-Muslim society socially, economically, and culturally, and it is only by giving up their Muslim identities that they can be fully part of the French social life (Bowen 2007). This is a sheer submission to the commonly agreed upon way of pushing religion, and particularly Islam, to the peripheries of society as opposed to what Amor and the leaders of the Al-Hidaya Mosque have been trying to do, which is to fully engage Muslims in life in every domain without contrasting Islam with secularism, as will be discussed in the next chapter. In fact, I have met only a few France-based imams who declare such interpretations as merely cultural by arguing that Muslim women should continue taking part in social, economic, and political life even at the expense of taking their hijabs off while at work, but still preserve their Muslim identities and live up to their Islamic values in a way compatible with French values. As a matter of fact, the perception of Muslims within state policies and societal norms is influential on the relationship between Muslim and secular identities as promoted to their congregants by the imams and other religious leaders. Islamic education given at the mosque has no less impact though.

Imam Nabil: “Look at all these French people”

Imam Nabil was teaching Islamic education and giving advice to his young female students every Sunday. At the end of the year, he assigned them a final project and asked them to write a report on women in Islam. The group came up with a booklet with the title *Women through Islam* (Al-Ihsan 2014), which they presented in the annual end-of-the year celebrations of the mosque. This was the first time they officially launched a mosque-sponsored written report under the supervision of the imam. All of them were excited about this project, which they worked on for almost four months.

In this project, where they investigated the role of Muslim women in different settings of France, France is defined as being home to an occidental society that poses a number of threats to its Muslim populations. Among these are music, television, the Internet, social media, and other means of distraction. Music, and especially rap music, is almost demonized for having vulgar lyrics and video clips with obscene images. In TV shows, a woman's body is presented as an object of desire, and women are depicted as happy characters enjoying their freedom. As far as I know from our casual talks, interviews, and course lectures, these descriptions echoed Imam Nabil's views on women, Islam, and France. Nabil considers all of these false images of women, the product of French mindset, and at odds with the Islamic portrayal of women as faithful wives and pious personalities. When I asked him the reasons why he condemned the social life and cultural values of French society as an obstacle to living Islam, he replied:

Music, art, museums, television shows, and such distractions are all futile to mankind. They do not serve any good purpose but only to put people in misery. Look at all these French people. They are all hopeless, desperately seeking happiness and meaning in life, but they fail to find comfort even for a minute. They are using these tools to forget about their misery and making themselves insensitive to their true nature, which can only find comfort by connecting to their Lord and living in Islam. Look at us (pointing at himself and his students), we are all happy free from worries and troubles of life thanks to our religion.

These are the recommendations given in the French context where the majority of the population is non-Muslim. He draws the line between French Muslims and French non-Muslims with these contrasting descriptions. Interestingly, this approves of the state discourse of clearly disengaging Islam from national belonging (Feldblum 1999). This line may even have detrimental effects by dividing people on an everyday level, causing resentment and negative views over non-Muslims. The contrast also applies to the dominant discourse of the private and public distinction in a visible way in the mosque.

Perpetuated Public/Private Distinctions

Going back to the issue of dealing with the private and public representations of Islam, the homeland culture-based Islam complicates the process even more than the state policies. As mentioned earlier, in Islam, religion is applied complying with its rules and values irrespective of the public or private nature of the circumstances. This, however, is applied in a restrictive and divisive sense within the mosque when it is used as a teaching site to apply Islam within the building, and extended to the public sphere. Whether religion is encouraged to appear in the public sphere rigorously, or used to keep particularly women in their safety zones, these teachings will only contribute to the public/private distinctions already prevalent in France.

Women Through Islam: “Do not attract others’ attention”

In *Women through Islam*, Imam Nabil’s students examine the role of Muslim women as wives, mothers, and students in different settings such as at home, in school, in the mosque, and in other public places within the context of secular France. All of these statements reflect Imam Nabil’s teachings, as he instructed them in these matters throughout the year in the religious education classes every weekend. At the core of this report lies the Muslim woman’s responsibilities as a pious and faithful wife and mother in her home. Women are not encouraged to spend time outside in public due to potential islamophobic treatment and unwanted contact with perverted people. Women are allowed to go out for reasonable purposes such as for shopping, taking their kids to school, and going to the mosque where they are expected to learn their religion and share with their Muslim neighbors. Overall, they are recommended to stay at home, and whenever they really need to go out, they are instructed to wear their hijab, keep contact with male strangers to a minimum level in order to preserve their purity, and not attract other people’s attention. Paradoxically in this report, although Muslims are encouraged to change the bad image of Muslims and Islam as presented by the media by acting on the Islamic

principles such as education, helping others, being respectful of differences, treating others with honesty, mercy, and justice, etc., women are advised to stay at home or the mosque and refrain from communicating with the rest of society unless needed.

Interestingly, this is not only about women, and breaking ties with the non-Muslim population, but this mindset applies to everyone and within the Muslim communities. For example, there was an initiative offered by one of the congregants about engaging the mosque in a nursing home project targeting elderly Muslims. Imam Nabil rejected this project by arguing that the mosque is a place for religious affairs. By excluding a project to secure the future of elderly Muslims in this life, he, in fact, confirmed that the mosque was a space reserved for a restrictive form of religion detached from the worldly realities. By doing this, the mosque is becoming irrelevant in social life, and distancing Muslims in and outside the mosque.

All of these statements, in fact, reflect Imam Nabil's views on how to organize one's life as a Muslim man or woman in a non-Muslim setting. By restricting the use of the mosque space largely for religious purposes, reserving the mosque as a site where women would not be seen by strangers unless a necessity came up, and imagining the life within the mosque as detached from life outside, the imam adheres to the commonsense distinction of private and public space, although this discourse has even started to change among some non-Muslim populations.

Dounia: "We don't accept any law that is against our religion"

The themes of Dounia's teaching revolve around the issues of living as a good Muslim woman in France. Dounia explained everything within the frame of what is banned and allowed in Islam irrespective of the context, however she suggested different approaches to applying these rules in the public and the private space. She suggested living as a patient and obedient wife in one's relationship with one's husband, and yet promoted assertive manners in the broader

French society as a dignified Muslim. By giving examples from religious women figures, she valued patience for the husband's unpleasant treatment toward his wife as a prominent characteristic of a devout Muslim woman. In her opinion, persisting on religious obligations in all conditions, such as wearing the hijab and maintaining distance between men and women, is an essential quality of Muslims in France.

As a response to a learner's question about the hardships of wearing the hijab, however, she responded in stark contrast to her previous emphasis on patience and obedience:

Ilham: I don't always put my hijab on, but when I do, I care about the looks of other people on me. Once a colleague insulted me for wearing my hijab.
 Dounia: Why do you care? You are not doing anything bad. There is no reason for caring and worrying about what others think of you. You can't please people no matter what you do. Your only concern should be pleasing God. Even if you dress like a French person, and do what they ask you to do they will never see you as French. I watched this on TV: There was a Tunisian girl and she said although she dressed just like the French they would still say, "You are an Arab" (Dounia gives a degrading face). We respect, but do not accept. However, influence is risky and possible, so we don't sit with people who are drinking. Don't shy away from saying: "I don't believe in your religion. I have French nationality. We respect the law, but we don't accept any law that is against our religion." Why do you take up French ways? Who are you afraid of?

By doing so, Dounia seems to challenge the distinction between home as a private space and outside home as a public space. However, the assertion of a public space is based on a challenging and divisive visibility rather than one that welcomes diversity. Islamic law and French law are presented as contrasting rivals, and Islamic doctrines are prioritized over other religious values such as maintaining peace and being good examples to non-Muslim by acting as active, responsible, and respectful citizens. As a major principle, she encourages Muslim women to preserve their integrity by adhering to Islamic rules inside and outside their homes. However, she argues for being submissive women to their husbands at home, and yet being overtly assertive to the French society and laws in public to the extent of rejecting them. In other words,

women are reduced to a passive position vis-à-vis their husbands while they are put in a reactive position against French values and norms. This way of non-conformity with the French system as suggested by a religious leader goes against the claims of Oubrou (2009) and Ramadan's (2009) arguments to act within the context and abide by the laws of the country in which one lives by negotiating and sometimes compromising religion and secular laws. Most of the instructors in the mosque share Dounia's vision of allocating the mosque as a strictly religious space where Muslim youth need to be trained to live their lives in full conformity with Islamic doctrines. While they value and admire respect for hard work, honesty, and the social security system in France, they encourage Muslims to disobey the laws that do not agree with Islamic values such as wearing the hijab in public institutions, and not mingling with the non-Muslim French if they exercise non-Islamic practice like drinking alcohol on the grounds that French people and the government will never accept them as equal citizens anyway.

As a matter of fact, this approach serves to perpetuate the state policy of the religious/secular and public/private divide by withdrawing Muslims from public life and reinforcing their "failure to integrate" impression among state authorities as well as the wider public. Then, this negative image encourages Muslims to counteract French laws even more, and eventually the imported Islam and state policies feed into each other in favor of maintaining the de-facto system and mindset. It appears this divisive attitude of Muslims may hinder any possible paradigm shift in the political and social sphere when it is so detached from present life and the conditions of the geographies in which European Muslims live. In other words, disconnection from present time and space as encouraged by Muslim leaders only replicates the current system.

Which Muslim?

Interestingly enough, this rupture poses a more profound disintegration than the Muslim/secular divide by posing a separation among Muslims. If being a Muslim is associated with complying with the norms of an Islam practiced in a particular place at a particular time, then it is reduced to a single understanding and form. The mosque then is designed as a mono-value space without offering room for alternatives. This derives from having a vision of Islam that is focused on applying an essential Islam immune from any reinterpretation. For example, when I asked Imam Nabil his opinion about the sufi groups operating in France, he reacted with frustration, and declared them illegitimate because they have deviated from the authentic form of Sufism that dates back centuries ago. His concern stems from their being women-inclusive and oriented toward universally celebrated principles of being honest, generous, tolerant, etc., rather than toward Islamic laws.

This kind of an approach runs the risk of keeping some Muslim youth away from the mosque or even radicalizing others. Safia, a young French Muslim woman, who attends a weekly Sufi order gathering, told me that she had never been in a mosque before because she did not feel comfortable going there due to its strict image of being hostile to differences. I first thought that her attitude was exceptional only to realize that it was quite common among Muslims who did not identify with a strictly practicing Muslim prototype. Inevitably this divide places the mosque as a distant space to some Muslims, a space where harsh rules apply such as gender segregation. When I received a negative reaction from the young man sitting in Imam Nabil's class after he introduced me to his students to ask for their participation in my survey, I, myself, felt uncomfortable and came to realize the unintended consequences of such a divisive strategy to impose a particular understanding of Islam. Lucie also told me how frustrated she felt when men showed discontent as she was passing through their prayer room to be able to get to the main hall

while construction was going on. These men were angry with her because she was violating the rules of physical segregation between genders by entering their space. Obviously, that was an extreme reaction that Imam Nabil did not approve of, and tried to change to a more inclusive attitude between genders despite his traditional approach to women. However, these are the outcomes of teaching Islam from a single perspective. More importantly, this attitude will potentially extend to the public sphere and put Muslims with this approach to gender in a radical position vis-à-vis French society, as well as the Muslim society in France.

The opposition between religion and secularism, and even within Muslim society, is the outcome of many factors including imported Islam and the strict religious education offered at the mosque as discussed in this chapter, but the reason why this mindset persists is the wide gap between authority and submission, which does not allow room for a different perspective on these concepts. Just as the French state's dominant rhetoric, oftentimes using public schools, perpetuates the rigid division between *laïcité* and religion in all domains of life, the religious authority within the mosque nurtures this perception based on irreconcilable forces. In the following paragraphs, I will explore the ways in which this attitude of traditional leaders contributes to the French rhetoric of state authority.

Religious Authority

In this section, I will discuss religious authority as a guarantor of the religion/secularism divide within the mosque. To explain this process, I will look at the making of the youth into subjects yielding to religious authorities, and primarily cultural Muslims over French identities. In this respect, I will examine how the mosque administration and religion instructors, who come from their homelands to France for different purposes, educate the young learners at the mosque with this limited approach to youth.

According to this approach, youth is considered to be a biological categorization whose members need to be educated to be adults under certain value systems with full authority. This, in fact, mirrors the earlier understanding of young people. Biological foundations of youth that assume a fixed identity with definite social roles and experiences are at the heart of early rigid distinctions among childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Studies on adolescence examine the hardships and liminality (Turner 1969) that young people go through on their way to adulthood. Anthropological work on youth in the second half of the twentieth century (Worthman 1987) was influenced by this adult-centered approach of Western psychologists to a large extent. This approach was based on a universalistic assumption that similar traumas may be experienced by individuals of the same age group regardless of cultural differences. Youth studies have taken up different approaches throughout decades of research. The problem-centered perspective in the second half of the twentieth century strips young people of their constructive agency by considering them illegitimate or unsettled members of society. Deviation from the social norms results in violent acts that lead to self-destruction of youth. Young people are treated as incapable, needy, and passive figures who are required to abide by socially approved criteria through a variety of public institutions such as schools, courts, and training centers (Thomas 2000). However, these are not context-free constructions, but rather productions of a given society (Honwana and De Boeck 2005). In other words, categorizations that describe the early stages of an adult, considered as a finished human being, are in fact products of a social context. In the following examples, I will present the mosque context as a major factor in carrying a particular kind of Islam to the mosque, and maintaining the mindset derived from this Islam through educating youth under authoritative leadership.

Dounia's Authority in the Classroom

Dounia used to teach biology back in Algeria, and now she has committed her life to educating young Muslims in France according to the textual doctrines of Islam. She always came to class well prepared to give a lecture on a different topic every week. Based on her repetitive remarks in the classroom, Dounia's primary goal is to live as a diligent Muslim in France without losing the authentic spirit of religion. Her position was clear in not making compromises to adjust certain practices to comply with the mainstream society because "Even if you follow their way, and dress like a French person, they will never see you as French, and will say that you are an Arab." Dounia gave us an unpleasant look while uttering her last words. In this statement she referred to non-Muslim citizens as French, but what about Muslim citizens who considered themselves no less French than non-Muslims?

Dounia is a serious and disciplined teacher, and she has a notable authority over the learners regardless of their physical age. As most of the learners declared, her authority derives from her profound devotion to Islam transmitted with sincerity. For this particular reason, everybody listens to her with full attention, and seems to be satisfied by the answers they receive.

Dounia's authority is in conformity with the classroom design. The classroom is a regular one with desks and chairs placed one after another. The instructor addresses the learners in the front of the room just behind the blackboard, and most of the course is reserved for lecturing. The room design reflects the authority of the instructor over the learners. The subject matter is taught with respect to applying Islamic rules in one's life by strictly observing the "haram" and "*halal*." This way of teaching puts the learners in a passive position where they are expected to accept and obey the teachings.

These teachings go unchallenged in the classroom most of the time. It is only at the end of the lecture that questions and concerns are articulated. Most of the time, those concerns did

not last too long during class time but they continued to be discussed afterwards in the absence of Dounia. It was interesting to witness different ways of challenging Dounia's instructions. There was only one woman who spoke out assertively, questioning some aspects of the teaching, while others who did not agree on certain points of the teaching preferred to remain silent or pretended to agree while not practicing in their everyday lives what they had learned in the class. When Dounia claimed the weekend trip to England haram without a mahram escorting each woman, they cancelled the trip with no on-the-spot opposition, although some declared their objections to me during our private discussions, and most of them travel to other countries with their female friends. In a similar situation where Dounia did not approve of blending with men on certain days held within the mosque to strengthen ties with other congregants outside of class, Samira, a 50-year-old congregant, declared her objection out loud. She argued that there should not be gender segregation in the mosque, which has been a common problem within the mosques as declared mostly by Muslim communities living in Europe, Canada, and the United States (Sayeed et al. 2011; Aly 2013) The silence of Samira's classmates came out of respect to Dounia, Samira stood up to challenge both her views and the use of the mosque space solely for transmitting a traditional interpretation of religion. However, Dounia's response to this attempt to change the prevalent discourse circulated within the mosque was "not receptive," in Samira's words. Dounia challenged her back without even giving her a chance to express herself clearly. It was an interesting moment to witness this disagreement between a highly respected religious instructor and a learner almost her age. Dounia, being familiar with Samira's blatant oppositions, let her speak, but not too long. She stopped her after a few sentences, and started to deliver a longer lecture on the Islamic grounds for such separation between men and women. Samira was sitting next to me in one of the back desks, and she was so upset that she could not even wait

until the end of the class to express to me her discontent with being stopped every time she voiced a different viewpoint. She told me about her frustration in a silent tone, and showed me some sections from her self-reflective journal. This was the moment she was sharing her feelings with me when being silenced by the instructor. This temporary comfort lasted only for almost half an hour until she ventured another attempt to reiterate her point on gender mixing. She turned to other women and asked their opinion on getting to know the men congregants and exchanging ideas with them, only to hear similar responses as Dounia's. They basically echoed the instructor's lecture by arguing that it would not be appropriate in religious terms, and they would feel more comfortable with women while discussing religious issues.

Hamza: "Discipline"

Hamza thinks of the mosque as a place where the youth should be educated with strict pedagogical tools. The way he manages the mosque is very much built on this principle. He defines their objective with one word: "Discipline." The teacher has full authority and the students are expected to treat their instructors with full respect and obedience. His views on discipline mirrored Dounia's authority in the classroom, where young Muslims whose opinions on matters are just takingshape, are seen as adolescent persons in need of advice and teaching without their taking the initiative. During the interview with the French journalist, a young man interrupted us entering the room to ask for some documentation. Hamza reacted to this interruption with anger, telling the journalist that he was supposed to come in with appointment and it is this type of disrespect that they are trying to eliminate using discipline.

Hamza: "No, you cannot do this. It is patently dangerous!"

I had several discussions with Lamia, a 21-year-old student and also an active congregant in Al-Ihsan, about how the mosque could reach out to Muslims in other Western countries. We both

agreed that the young mosque attendees could connect to their peers in American mosques. We talked about this several times during my fieldwork, and she mentioned that those types of transnational ties would help the youth to partly break away from their parents' Islam, and provide a global reference point for their religious and social lives. One of the intentions of this project is to introduce other ways of living as a Muslim to young congregants, and to help them discover the advantages of the French *laïcité*, as well as the potential contribution they can bring to the French Muslim population by selectively adopting the American multicultural model and American Muslims' mindset and strategies.

Despite her disagreement on a variety of issues with the mosque administration before, Lamia claimed to never give up on the mosque because it was their own space where they would find comfort, relax, connect with their Muslim peers, and seek recognition as active members of the wider society. Upon my return to the US, she reached out to me and asked me to initiate this as soon as possible. After several Skype conversations and email exchanges, we came up with a decent plan to initiate this project thanks to my contacts in New York. In the meantime, I asked her to obtain permission from the mosque administration. She said Mr. Achebouche was excited about this proposal, as he liked the idea of making his mosque internationally known and for the youth to have international connections. As we were just ready to take action after all the planning, Lamia sent me an "unexpected" email apologizing and expressing her frustration over Hamza's decision to stop this initiative immediately on grounds that it would be "overtly dangerous." I asked Lamia why he thought it would be dangerous, and to whom? Lamia was clueless but she said he was mad at her and walking in the hallway repeating the words "overtly dangerous" angrily. Lamia told me that the "old" wanted to retain their power at the expense of

youth involvement. She said: “We need to get rid of the old people to claim the mosque and make it a place that resonates with our lives.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the reinforcement of the long-standing political and social tradition of the religion/secularism divide in France by Muslims through the use of the mosque space where leaders apply the homeland-based traditions into the French context. By using the example of Al-Ihsan Mosque, I argued that the mosque is treated primarily as a religious space under the authority of these leaders. This, in fact, is a replication of the state authority in religious structures, leaving almost no room for youth active engagement and initiatives to introduce a different paradigm on both Islam and laïcité. In the next chapter, I will present an alternative mode of thinking with respect to the ways in which young leaders use the mosque space in Al-Hidaya Mosque.

Chapter 5

Laïcité and Religion: Young Leaders of the Mosque

Introduction

Amel, a 19-year-old woman who is an irregular attendant of the Al-Hidaya Mosque and its cultural center Famille92, first caught my attention with her traditional Islamic outfit, covering her entire body with a dark-colored jilbab. She was talking with her friend in a similar jilbab across the mosque. I then learned that she usually hung out with this friend and shared similar ideas about being a proper Muslim woman. Amel wanted to study at university, but she was not sure about her decision as her friend oftentimes told her of the dangers of doing so due to gender-mixed education. Amel's friend had dropped out of high school in order to live her life as a pious Muslim woman based on the teachings of her Middle-East-based sheikh, whom they defined as a true Salafist. At that moment, Amel started complaining about the gender-mixed policy of the Famille92 cultural center by giving examples from their sheikh's teachings. Amel was upset with the French education system, forcing her to study in the same classroom as male students, and she was upset twice with the mosque leaders who made her work with male congregants in social aid projects. Amel told me that she was thinking of quitting attending the mosque because she did not feel comfortable working with men. It was not a coincidence that her friend almost never came to the mosque for the same reason.

However, in another interview without her friend, she told me about her desire to keep coming to the mosque to be a part of the community as an active Muslim. Amel seemed torn between her desire to be active in public life and her friend's tendency to live "true" Islam safe from external influences including the mosque. Her dilemma was obvious in her statements from March when she was hanging out with her friend, and from a month later when we were alone:

We are wearing the jilbab. This is the basis of religion. We need to cover up our bodies and faces more. We follow a Salafi sheikh from the Middle East. He speaks the truth about Islam. We don't follow other schools, actually I don't know what they are. I follow the Salafist movement. Our priority is to practice our religion. So, covering our bodies and not going out of our houses are good ways practicing religion. It is good to come to the mosque but it is not obligatory for women. Our families are not very religious. They are cultural Muslims. We need to learn real Islam. I got interested in religion because God inspired me. (interview with Amel and her friend on March, 2014)

It is good to work for the service of people under the leadership program in the mosque. When I am part of the mosque community I feel that I am a part of something that is beneficial to other people, and I am doing something worthwhile. I want to study at university, and get a job. However, schoolwork keeps me too busy and I don't find time for other things oftentimes. For example, I don't know how to read the Quran. I would like to learn though. (one-on-one interview on April 2014)

Although Amel desired an Islam more engaged in the society, she said she stepped back and distanced herself even from her community for a while left with confusion. Indeed, her ideas from our first interview echoed her friend's views. Amel had conflicting ideas about the mosque as to whether it was solely a place of worship or had a public character. Interestingly she started to question these issues only after becoming a member of Famille92. Despite her rigid ideas about gender segregation, she still took part in the organizational activities actively by interacting with French society, accomplishing a charity mission, and attending the meetings where men and women work together. She was wearing her jilbab, but still participating. Her thoughts seemed still to be in the process somewhere between imagining the mosque primarily as a sacred and private site, or as a space with larger implications. Even this process might help these young Muslims infected with extremist ideas. In particular, Muslim women who are enjoined to stay at home and be disconnected both from their communities and the larger society remain more vulnerable to these extremist groups. There are many Muslims who are in a similar position as Amel in the Al-Ihsan Mosque, but those who are involved in Famille92 activities, and in

dialogue with the leaders, do not limit their lives to their homes at least during these activities. They go out and work with their peer Muslims, with the possibility of meeting new people who have different ideas and approaches to Islam and life. This way, they may even start questioning their ways of applying Islam in their lives. In other words, they give more space to their individual intellect than before, amidst the authoritative climate of their context. I have encountered many young Muslims who have been undergoing such an internal transition.

Amel's case suggests that the mosque leadership plays an extremely important role in transforming the mosque space, its young congregants, and eventually the wider society as to how religion plays out in a secular setting. In this chapter, I will examine this dynamic process through the ways in which young mosque leaders use the mosque space in relation to French secularism and republican values. In this sense, understanding the young Muslim leaders, and their use of the mosque space, is vital for several reasons. First, they influence Muslim youth in their understanding and practicing of Islam vis-à-vis the secular demands of the French state and society. They inform young congregants on how to negotiate modern secularism with being a Muslim starting within the mosque, and introduce a secular-friendly Islam to their communities.

Second, while negotiating religion and secularism using the mosque space in different ways, Muslim leaders connect their mosque to the wider sphere, and transform the meaning of the secular as an epistemological category and secularism as a political concept. In doing so, they suggest a diversity-based *laïcité* model to France. As a result, they take religion out of a private cluster, and make it an integral part of this new thought and political system, eventually contributing to social, cultural, and religious diversity in France.

Third, through mosque-based activities, they empower Muslim youth to take leadership, and encourage them to act on their religious, cultural, and national values as responsible

individuals who balance out religious and societal authority and individual autonomy. In this sense, the mosque turns into a republican space, as pointed out in Chapter 3 where I argued that the mosque becomes a site of a common good project. In this chapter, I will illustrate another aspect of republicanism through an interplay of authority and autonomy by reconciling the Islamic norms, national commitments, and individual choices. This balancing mechanism is particularly influential in imagining the Muslim youth to be the leaders of their society with a free mind, and the mosque to function as a school where leadership is taught and applied to train Muslim actors who are loyal to their country, religion, and community at the local, national, and global levels. In this respect, youth leadership in the mosque plays a vital role in the formation of such actors, in the lives of young Muslims who are trained by the leaders, and in French social life at large. This is one of the core points, which distinguishes this project from others.

The starting point is claiming their mosque from the excessively conservative leaders. Therefore, mosque leaders stand out from all young leaders because not only do they fulfill the aforementioned functions using a primarily religious site, but they also make the mosque a reference space to achieve those missions in their agenda. Furthermore, they address their young followers and the larger community through the mosque space, which they eventually transform into a *laïcité*-informed religious platform. Configuration of a brand-new space where religion and *laïcité* meet is designed and applied primarily by young leaders.

In this section, I connect the aforementioned aspirations within the spectrum of diversity and *laïcité* concepts, and investigate the changing interplay of private and public spaces and republican principles from an authority/autonomy perspective, along with the implications of these within the context of French secularism. Before explaining these through young leaders' thinking and acting, I will first present some theories of Muslim youth leadership, then describe

the meaning and significance of being a young leader in the mosque with its distinct opportunities and challenges compared to other forms of Muslim leadership.

Some Muslim Youth Leadership Theories

Although youth studies which treat young people as cultural actors have gained a momentum since the 1990s, and youth leaders and their organizations have been the focus of attention since the 2000s along with programs geared toward empowering youth worldwide (United Nations), young Muslim leaders have yet to be analyzed in relation to their roles within society. I will not introduce all the youth leadership theories, but only mention some of them that are relevant to Muslim mosque leaders for the purposes of this project in hopes of contributing to the leadership literature by including mosque leaders in the discussion.

Unlike the traditional view of leadership from an individualistic standpoint, contemporary theories define it as a collective mind that draws people sharing the same desire to achieve a common goal (Northouse 2010). In line with this approach, I will treat the concept of “youth leader” as a collective being who works to empower young people as responsible individuals in response to personal, social, and cultural issues to affect positive change (Kahn et al. 2009, 18)

Young people are engaged in leadership projects due to a variety of reasons such as supporting their transition into adulthood, or, more importantly for this research project, to equip them with the necessary skills to be used in making positive contributions to their communities and the wider society. The first motivation matters especially for the economically, socially, or culturally disadvantaged groups. The idea is to keep them away from potentially damaging routes, and help them develop self-confidence by providing them with productive opportunities as a preparation for the future (Kress 2006). This objective is shared with the churches that have

similar agendas for youth involvement. The partner church of Al-Hidaya is working with young people to teach them how to cope with basic hardships, and to spend their time in a meaningful way. In this respect, the mosque and the church administration exchange ideas about possible activities within and across their own communities. The other incentive for including young people in leadership programs has broader implications. The main objective is usually to bring social change during times of crises, hardship, or a challenge that influences the community or the society at large. Young Muslim leaders focused on community work and social projects with the big agenda of introducing greater diversity and making it an integral part of the secularist regime at the political and social level have not captured deserved attention in the literature.

I argue that these leaders have a remarkable potential in bringing social and even political change to the current system in their countries through space-based politics within an organizational structure. France, as an exclusive example with a strict laic regime, can be evidence that illustrates the increasing potential of young Muslim leaders within their communities as well as in the wider society using a religious site as an organized institution. There has been some interest in Islamic institutions to explain their roles within the French politics and society (Bowen 2010; Koopmans et al. 2005; Metcalf 1996). However, none of these studies combine young Muslim leaders, space mechanisms, and mosque institutions to unpack the laïcité vs. religion problematic. In this chapter, I connect these dynamics to explain the ways in which the mosque space is used by young leaders based on contemporary theoretical debates and concrete examples from my fieldwork.

One of the reasons why Muslim leaders are very enthusiastic about establishing their organizations can be attributed to the state's failure to apply the laic system, which requires the state to keep equal distance to all religious groups and protect their civil rights based on the

principles of equality. In the absence of state dynamics to include Muslims into the national agenda, young people resort to their religion as the driving identification to cope with the hardships of their lives in France, which is their home. That is why religious organizations are increasing in number. As much as the power of the state rhetoric, “the inequality of treatment and the feeling of the non-protection of citizenship by the state” have functioned as a catalyst for the young leaders to establish and strengthen their own organizations using their own resources:

.....and for the young generation the feeling of inequality reveals mistrust towards the state. Studies on the disappointment of the young generation emphasize the inequality of treatment and the feeling of the non-protection of citizenship by the state, which leads to taking refuge in NGO or transnational networks (even if they don't have a legal setting) each of which tries to promote an identification with Islam on these territories of identities since there is no identification with national territory, neither with the territory of reference of the parents. (Kastoryano 2006)

The proliferation of civil society organizations to represent and seek recognition of ethnic, cultural, and religious rights at the social and political level is an outcome of the contradiction between rhetoric and politics in France. Recent studies (Fernando 2014; Soysal 2004) show that Kastoryano's argument that lack of identification with the French nation is evident among young Muslims has lost its validity as young Muslims are relating to France and its values more than ever. Youth leadership within religious organizations proves this ongoing process of identification. When the French institutions such as schools are not fulfilling their function of assimilation and promotion of equality, young leaders establish their own institutions to fill this gap by producing Muslim youth as loyal to their nation as to their religion. Interestingly enough, institutional recognition appears as an exceptional form of recognizing difference by the French state, which contradicts the republican ideology of being blind to difference (Lochak 1989). This is another motivation behind organizing within an institution for Muslims. Taking advantage of this contradiction, young leaders redesign and transform mosques in lieu of state institutions,

which put Muslims as a target group to make them invisible in the society instead of promoting equality.

Mosque Youth Leadership

Youth leadership within the mosque has been gaining more popularity than ever. It is used as a new institution coming into existence from a still alive and powerful traditional mosque. Different visions and mindsets of leaders inevitably cause conflicts of interest and methodologies. However, the mosque as a dynamic site maintains its value and significance for Muslim youth, for various reasons.

Youth are attracted to the mosque because of their parents' encouragement from early childhood, which continues to older ages. Some of them even prefer to go to the mosque independently from such disciplining strategies. Tietze's ethnographic study of Turkish youth in Germany and North African youth in France reveals that while ethnicity, national identification, and Islam are connected in the first arrival immigrant identities, religiosity supersedes ethnic or national identifications among North African youth in France (Hoerder 2005; Tietze 2006). Hence, the mosque can be a familiar place, a haven, a refuge, a shelter, and a community center to escape from prejudice, racism, and challenges encountered in society, especially for those who live in the banlieues. In the absence of a formal institution that offers a similar kind of familiarity and organic allegiance as the mosque for the banlieue youth, who have limited options to socialize and are subject to more socio-economic problems compared to urban youth, the mosque becomes a place where they feel secure and at home away from real life troubles. It started to function as an escape space from religious-based hardships in society, then turned into a comfort zone that includes all aspects of life such as socializing, finding life partners, eating, studying, and reading. This real life aspect of the mosque makes it a central space to access youth, since

consequences of using this space in particular ways is not restricted to religious functions but has a broader influence in the lives of young people even outside of the mosque.

When the young congregants who live in the banlieues come to the mosque to pray and do not find a French speaking imam, or someone to address their problems from a religious standpoint, or activities that are both Islamic and have a social value in France, they initiate their own organizations to satisfy their needs and fulfill their interests. Some others, however, while looking for alternative solutions end up on the streets wasting their times with drugs or futile activities. For this latter group of young people, organic leaders have emerged within the religious centers to help them through the process of finding a dignified place in French society individually, and eventually being active citizens maintaining their Muslim identities. These leaders fulfill an alternative leadership to imams or religious instructors in the mosque. Most of these alternative leaders operate their activities in the cultural center, as a separate entity from the mosque in their understanding and application of religion. In the absence of an organized cultural body apart from the religious structure of the mosque, they operate independently, trying to attract and organize youth within the limits of their individual capacity.

Youth leadership is the basis of efforts within the mosque. Young leaders see the importance of using the mosque space effectively for the development of youth leadership. Amor, a young leader in the Al-Ihsan Mosque, at the end of an iftar organization of the mosque, praised young congregants for their efforts and encouraged them to claim their mosque and organize future events:

You are the new Muslims and will serve your community by being active. You are of great importance to Islam. France is a great capital for Islam. You need to act on certain values even outside of the mosque, and religious sites. You are responsible ambassadors of Islam here. The mosque needs you all year long, not only during the month of Ramadan. The mosque cannot find young Muslims who

know how to lead groups, manage the mosque, and how to communicate with non-Muslims. That is why mosques are still run by the elderly.

As is clear in this message, young congregants need to be actively involved in redesigning the mosque space. Young Muslims are given credit for their enthusiasm and public recognition through acting on their philosophy responsibly. Most mosque leaders with whom I spoke told me that their main aspiration to get involved in mosque activities is to elevate Muslim youth to well-educated standards in accordance with Islamic principles and French values. It comes with its challenges but they keep working.

Dr. Bachir: “Working in harmony with French values”

Dr. Bachir is a medical doctor in his early forties also serving as the head of the ACELA Cultural Center, and is a charismatic and a highly respected leader of his community. His medical doctor title has contributed to his reputation and value within the mosque congregation, as well as among other local Muslim communities. He first came to France to study medicine twenty years ago. He has been involved in mosque communities ever since because he thinks the mosque has a social function to reinforce cohesion between different families and generations under the principles of Islam, as they follow the rules of the country they live in. He also values educating the youth in Islam in accordance with French norms and law to uplift the intellectual vision of Muslim youth, and the mosque is a perfect place to implement this model of teaching. By doing so, the mosque will be made a safe place from radical influences, and fulfill its role as a place of living together in peace as long as “they keep working in harmony with the values of their country.”

Although the mosque is a perfect place for leaders to access youth and initiate change, it is not exempt from obstacles that hinder the harmony that Dr. Bachir mentions. Since the mosque is a contested space between traditional leaders and their alternatives, and the first group

is still the major decision-makers, their policies determine even the most essential part of the mosque such as the hiring of the imam. Dr. Bachir's vision of imam starkly differs from the official authorities of the mosque. The essential condition of serving as an imam in France is the capacity of knowing and living within his community. Analyzing the problems and necessities of his community is an indispensable quality of a French imam, so Dr. Bachir disagrees with the mosque administration in hiring an Algerian imam with no adequate French language skills and knowledge of Muslim youth and people in general in France.

This rift in mentality between leaders poses great challenges to the activities operated by young congregants as mentioned in the previous section. It even presents difficulties for recognized leaders such as Dr. Bachir as they start working with their local communities and move into the national society, and aspire to build transnational connections with Muslims in other countries. They face the challenges of receiving administrative permission from the mosque, and convincing families to start transnational activities with the young congregants, especially for those who are still teenagers. As a matter of fact, compared to non-mosque youth organizations, most of which are free from such pressures to be able to build global networks, mosque organizations are usually focused on community work at the local and sometimes national level. There is also resistance from a good number of young congregants, such as Amel, to take part in youth initiatives because of their traditional upbringing and influences of friend circles with extremist tendencies. Those who migrated to France from another country might also pose a challenge to projects run by leaders. Dr. Bachir explained to me the difficulty of engaging them into their activities:

The French mosque is a great place to experience diverse cultures. The French mosque, unlike those in Muslim countries, is a site of diversity where Muslim populations from all over the world gather and share their experiences in life. While they adapt their lives to the French norms by making some cultural

compromises in their daily lives, when they get together here, they return to their cultural practices, and move away from the French context.

The challenge is even greater for leaders working within the mosque itself rather than a cultural center. I call them self-appointed leaders since they do not have a representative body, but struggle through hardships with individual efforts. They do not have a systematic way of practicing their discourse, so the congregants with highly traditional backgrounds may not have any opportunity to embody new discourses through experience when there is only the individual leader lecturing them on how to think from a different perspective. Amor told me many times about his desperate efforts to convince especially young women to participate in events like inter-religious visits to the mosque. They refuse to participate either because they do not believe in the value of these encounters or refrain from interacting with non-Muslim groups and especially men.

These self-appointed leaders are also more vulnerable and subject to suppression from the mosque administration for being risky or unnecessary for the community. In other words, their projects are not perceived as promisingly innovative attempts, but rather a threat or a waste of time to Muslims. Due to these impediments, which take up lots of much needed time and energy, young leaders can hardly focus on a wide array of activities. In most cases, they focus on a single aspect such as community work or interfaith dialogue through which religion and secularism, private and public, could meet in a meaningful way. Despite the challenges, the mosque is a meeting site for young people, where they negotiate religion and *laïcité* as well as privacy of faith and public endeavors in a unique way. The mosque is particularly imagined as a space, which contains both religious and worldly components of life and blends them into a new form through which it becomes a 'lived' space for its congregants and non-Muslim populations. In other words, it contains embodied practices of Islam and worldly affairs. This is still a project

and a process in-progress, yet the initial attempts have been made as will be discussed in the next section.

How Does Religious Diversity Meet Laïcité in the Mosque Space?

Young Muslim leaders promote the transformation of the mosque as a dynamic living space that includes both religious and secular aspects of life, which are not contradictory but rather complementary, and this process can only be grasped through a thorough analysis of how such leaders perceive secularism and religion, and how they function and influence the youth accordingly. This analysis is vital due to their growing presence in the mosque, and influence within the Muslim youth and the larger French society as they suggest a different model, which will be explained in this section at length. My major point will be that when divine and worldly matters are reconciled in a productive way, then a revised version of French laïcité and the classical version of republicanism become political tools to actually help this process take place effectively in a de facto multicultural society.

From Secular-Friendly Religiosity to Religion-Friendly Secularism

Beside the imams and the language instructors, there are other influential leaders in the mosque. Young leaders of the mosque have gained power in recent years as they attempt to transform the mosque space into a site where religious diversity and laïcité meet. Their agenda is based on several philosophical directories. First, they challenge the treatment of the secular and religion as mutually exclusive domains of life. By incorporating Islamic values into modern secularism, they struggle to make peace between these two “opposing” concepts. This is an endeavor that rests on modifying the political norms of the monolithic universality of modern secularism imposed by the state and the commonsense ideals of the French public. This is, however, not an acknowledgment of a Western secularism imposed on non-Western societies. It

is rather an attempt to establish the grounds to lead a meaningful life in a non-Muslim secular country. This attempt is in fact relevant to daily life as the secular is already ingrained in Islam in the sense that people function in some common structures that organize their lives such as academic education, or the construction of buildings for different purposes. The intention of the mosque leaders is to find a way to make these worldly affairs coexist with Islamic values without violating their essence. Hence, secularism is not necessarily seen as a conceptual property of the West, but as more of an ongoing project that is subject to constant change to address the conditions of various societies differently in each context. It might not even be applicable in certain societies, yet minority Muslim populations have constantly been in a philosophical and practical dialogue with secularism in Western societies.

As Hallaq (2013) rightfully argued in *The Impossible State*, the modern state is a bad fit for Muslims mainly because of the different philosophies behind modes of governance in the Islamic tradition and the history of the European modern nation state. While the former is organized around a God-centered cosmos, the latter is based on a universality dictated by the state, which promotes a secular model in public life and pushes religion to the private and invisible corners of society with no influence on politics, economics, social norms, or other common domains of life. This secular neutrality is a precondition of the modern nation-state, and it is only possible for Muslims to gain equal representation equal to that of other citizens on the condition that they leave behind their particularities and internalize the universality of the state-sanctioned policies. Rejecting this biased neutrality of the secular, Asad (2003) claims that secularism as a pattern of political rule represents neither political nor legal neutrality because of the false assumption that the secular is an epistemology that is neutral to all communities

regardless of their religious belonging.¹⁵ In this sense, secularism that is based on the secular is an exclusive form of political system that prioritizes a certain value system over another. Asad argues that secular is not a religious concept, so it excludes all religions, and particularly Islam because of its greater public visibility and need for public recognition such as wearing a headscarf. In this respect, Asad confirms that although European secularism does not denote a religious system, it is far from being neutral but is based on the European Enlightenment, which makes a universal definition of religion that relies on a distinctively Christian or Judaic epistemology and ontology (Fernando 2014, 132). This is why liberal secularism is more resistant to accommodating Islam than any other major religion. Smith (2003), in his criticism of Asad's argument, maintains that the liberal secular myth is essentially religious, although it might not be covertly Christian. By the same token, Taylor (2007) argues that faith is embedded in the secular mind of the modern age person. Whether religious or not, whether Christian-based or not, the liberal myth does not have room for Muslim cosmologies.

In this context, the young mosque leaders are in search of a model that shatters this epistemological concept and political model by suggesting a religion-friendly secularism that does not counter religious values but incorporates them into its essence, and allows them to contribute to the society on all levels. This could pave the way to a state that promotes diversity and cultural richness. I argue that this would be a paradigm shift that changes the meaning of secular from a strictly no-religion or no-Islam zone to a religion-friendly sphere that welcomes all religious or non-religious groups. In this way, the French state could really keep its promise of exercising *laïcité* properly by protecting its citizens from all kinds of pressure, and being a guarantor of individuals to practice their religions freely by keeping equal distance to all religious and non-religious groups.

¹⁵ In this dissertation, I use the term "secularism" both in the political and social sense

In fact, this perception of *laïcité* is encouraged by young leaders who attempt to establish a novel understanding of this form of secularism among Muslim youth. To better examine this perception, I visited a number of religious institutions that work closely with mosques. Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines de Paris (IESH) is a private educational institution founded by a group of Muslim leaders to give Islamic education on a professional level. It is officially recognized by the French state as a religious institution that grants higher-level degrees. During my visit to IESH, where Latifa's father, a young woman from Dounia's class, works as a manager, I talked to the him and his team to examine their understanding of implementing French *laïcité* in religious institutions. During our interview, Mr. Abdeslam Hafidi, the administrative director, highlighted the importance of understanding French *laïcité* in its philosophical meaning, and the possibilities of implementing it in Muslim life in France with its advantages and hardships. Contrary to the dominant public discourse of denouncing Islam as incompatible with French *laïcité*, he considers even this excessive form of secularism as an opportunity for Muslims to claim their presence and rights as equal citizens on grounds that *laïcité*, in its very definition, entails the state maintaining equal distance to every religion and religious group. Hence, Muslim citizens, in theory, are entitled to equal rights with non-Muslim citizens in social, cultural, political, and religious domains. He encourages every French Muslim to know this and act accordingly. He values *laïcité* over Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism as being a guarantor of equality since the latter model might let the state favor one group over another or cause tension between groups. His remarks on using *laïcité* to Muslims' advantage mirror the thoughts of many other Muslim youth leaders whom I encountered in the mosque. Although the mosque administration does not really explain the benefits of *laïcité* in legal terms, young leaders often emphasize this quintessential French form of secularism for the youth to be able to relate it

to their daily lives. In this sense, the mosque is intended to function as part of the secular system in the actual lives of Muslims rather than merely being a political discourse.

To meet this purpose, Kastoryano (2002) proposes “institutional assimilation,” which rests on including Islam in the institutional framework of the state as a proper path to integration in, de facto, multicultural countries, especially in countries applying rigorous secularism such as France (173). She holds that institutional assimilation consists of a reconceptualization of secularism from neutrality, the strict divide of public/private, and sameness, to a moderate and evolutionary secularism by incorporating respect for difference through institutional adjustments (Modood and Kastoryano 2006, 173-74). In this section, I reverse this model and contend that young Muslim leaders are beginning to introduce a new form of religion-friendly secularism in France by first integrating secular matters into their religious space. In other words, the starting point is a secular-friendly religiosity that emerges within the mosque. As discussed earlier, I find Kastoryano’s (2002) mirroring concept useful as a starting point in the sense that Muslim associations take up a national identity, through political participation as well as community activities, by engaging in civil society. Kastoryano is very much interested in unpacking the working of this political behavior for Muslims and the French state. Although this helps us understand the incorporation of cultural, ethnic, and religious components of an individual or communal identity to be part of the French nation, I will take this model out of its political context and develop it into a socio-cultural sphere from a spatial standpoint in order to comprehend the ways in which this model changes their vision of life and daily practices by suggesting a new relationship between private/religion and public/secular. Moreover, while making life more meaningful for themselves, they also wish to bring a political and social change rather than merely gain representation within national institutions.

In order to bring a long lasting change in French politics and society with an established republican tradition in theory, Muslim leaders start with themselves and incorporate the principles of laïcité into their religious institutions by giving them a religious touch. In this reverse model of institutional assimilation, secularism is integrated into religiosity. Leaders do so by challenging both the dominance of traditional ways of organizing the mosque as a strictly religious space, and the inapplicable separation of private and public domains in French secularism. The main principle is to blend religion and secularism, and contextualize the private and public qualities of a given space, rather than perceive them as fixed categories as theorized within the French laïcité more than in any other secular model. According to this model, secular and religious are not treated as mutually exclusive epistemologies, but are seen as complementary units of life. By doing so, the mosque becomes a site of real life activities rather than remaining merely a unit of worship. Islamic values are connected to secular components of life, and the philosophical values, which are often discarded in favor of ritualistic practices, are taken to the foreground to maintain Muslim integrity and stay connected to the French life.

For example, academic education, which is considered to be within the secular educational framework, is treated as an integral part of Islam and integrated into mosque programs. If modern education provides students with better education, then its methods should be taken up, harmonized with Islamic philosophies of progress, and presented to youth as two value systems which are interdependent and intertwined—not contrasting at all. In a nutshell, modern scholarly education enters the private space of the mosque. This is achieved by ascribing a religious value to academic education. Designing the mosque space as a gender-mixed environment outside prayer times is also a challenge taken by young leaders. Despite opposition from some congregants with conservative views that are cultural rather than religious, they work

in gender-mixed groups for young members to understand the value of sharing and complementing each other as men and women. Introspectively, this helps them distinguish culture and religion, and make the mosque a lived space that is relevant to their lives. From a social perspective, they follow the principle of gender equality from an Islamic standpoint, for example, by respecting religiously dictated physical distance between men and women, display this French Muslim image to the public, and make themselves part of the society as active citizens. In this process, each seemingly secular aspect of life is given a religious character as long as it serves a progressive and humanistic purpose. Hence, this process changes how religion is interpreted and imagined in one's life.

According to the well-known and respected intellectual and imam of Bordeaux, Tareq Oubrou (Oubrou and Babès 2002), an imam's teachings should be informed by the social and cultural values of that non-Muslim society. He suggests a harmony of Islamic theology with the secular nature of France in this context. He extends his claims to the legal system, and argues that any foreign influence or a sharia that do not meet the conditions of contemporary matters and of the French legal system should be replaced by French rules of law (Crone 2010), which is already the general attitude among the broad European public (Rohe 2014). This has earned him the epithet "Republican imam" (Joppke and Toroey 2013). In fact, Oubrou encourages a reinterpretation of religious rules in accordance with the secular norms in a non-Muslim setting. Ramadan (2009) also favors a reinterpretation of Islamic rules within French secularism, not just for instrumental reasons but in order to embrace them as part of their lives as French citizens, with dignity and shared values that should not be ascribed only to non-Muslim French society. According to Ramadan, by internalizing values such as democracy, gender equality, and freedom of religious exercise, Muslims will in fact rediscover the knowledge-based and human rights

focused nature of Islam. These qualities have long been dissociated from Islam by the Western colonial mindset (Said 1979), which has been reinforced since the 9/11 attacks. Such a view has been exacerbated by recent violent episodes by terrorist groups, which are usually attributed to Islam. Both thinkers' ideas on how to approach Muslim leaders inform my research in the sense that context is the key to take a position. In France, a Muslim needs to make his decisions based on the French notions of the civil code, gender equality, freedom of expression, and human rights. This does not mean a rejection of the Muslim culture, which is formed through a variety of sources and networks such as parents, associations, books, mosques, and friends. Rather it is based on a deeper understanding of Islam, taking multiple dynamics into account. It is a way of challenging the "ideal of value-monism" imposed by the French state on its Muslim citizens (Bowen 2010; 198). In other words, secularism, being the dominant value system in France does not have to undermine the fundamental qualities of Islam throughout this process of reinterpretation.

Dr. Bachir: "Respect the law.... adhere to the major principles of Islam"

Dr. Bachir appreciates a moderate blending of French values with Islamic ones. When I asked him to talk about how he viewed the differences between life in Algeria and France, he told me about his personal experience as a student and a family member in a religious and non-religious setting:

In the Muslim culture we look after our kids until they finish their studies. The Quran promotes familial ties and solidarity. Taking care of parents and children is a religious obligation. Even after childhood it is recommended that the family take the responsibility for supporting young members until they get a job and a place to stay. I came here as a medical student, and had to work until I graduated because my family stayed back in Algeria. That was a lot of work. But I did it like all other students in France. It was tough but I learned a lot. However, these days even in Algeria, family ties are not as strong as before. Human relations are more personal like in France. We need to fix this by incorporating family and community ties into our daily lives. The mosque helps us reinforce social

cohesion between families, communities, and generations within the Islamic principles.

When I asked him to tell me more about what he appreciated in France most, he went on to describe them in Western terms:¹⁶

One has to respect the attributes of Western civilization, such as respect for others, law, neighbor relations, work ethics, punctuality, shopping style, well-ordered life patterns, etc. The Western world is more advanced in social administration, election regimes, technology, and science. In Islam, politics, economics, and social life are all intertwined. But this is not valid in non-Muslim countries, especially in France. Even in difficult situations, French Muslims are obliged to respect the law if they do not want to be isolated from the society, and they should certainly adhere to the major principles of Islam while doing this.

Secular virtues are appreciated within a religious framework. He does not shy away from valuing Western modes of living that offer an advanced way of organizing life while criticizing Muslims and holding them partly responsible for their isolation, unlike Imam Nabil, who primarily holds the French state, society, and media responsible for Muslim stigmatization. Dr. Bachir mentions the importance of mingling with French society based on these Western values and on principles of Islam, and his training of youth is based on this mindset. Secular and religious come closer and become complementary across different domains such as family ties and technology, as Dr. Bachir mentions. He recognizes the public/private divide in France without blindly submitting to it. He keeps mentioning the necessity of complying with Islamic principles in the sense that families should play a more important role in our daily lives, and we need to be less individualistic by appreciating our communal affiliations. Dr. Bachir's statement is a clear indication of a negotiation of the public/private aspects in many components of life in order to function efficiently in a non-Muslim society.

¹⁶ Although grouping countries under a one cardboard category is problematic in terms of discarding the inner differences within the major category, this umbrella categorization includes countries within the similar modern secular traditions as France.

Interestingly enough, this does not lead to a combination of public and private within the Muslim life in a classical sense. In the Islamic tradition there is no explicit separation between secular and religious or public and private in its modern understanding (Kadivar 2003). In other words, public and private lives are both administered by the same sharia-based rules. However, my young French Muslim leader respondents told me that they are simply attempting to make peace between the secular, which entails worldly affairs, and the religious, which involves divine matters, through a contextual and comprehensive model that is intended to give room to diverse cultures and faith systems. The main point is that when a secular concept or practice is incorporated into Islam by attributing religious qualities to it, it preserves its worldly and public character. Nevertheless, it becomes acceptable and available both for the Muslim and non-Muslim populations of France to be exercised in the long run. The model suggested by the young Muslim leaders is geared toward functioning within the French context without challenging its fundamentals, including the state's equal indifference to all religious and cultural groups as well as its role as a protector of each individual from any religious-related pressure, as evident in their discourses during mosque lectures or remarks made on different occasions.

Double Discourse/Double Culture

In response to a question on whether lying would be allowed under certain conditions given the actual challenges of living as a Muslim in France, Farouk, a prominent leader of Famille92, suggested: "We don't have to reveal our religious views and practices to other people if we feel that they are against us. We can simply tell them that it is our private life. The law protects us." Farouk obviously encouraged the young Muslims not to clash with society because of religious reasons, and to use the public/private distinction to their advantage by appropriating the commonsense approach that considers religion as a private affair. The state discourse that

separates religion from secular public life was presented as a guarantor of their right not to disclose their religious identity. In this sense, Farouk appreciates the French *laïcité* as being equally distant to everyone, and the law as applied equally to everyone, because it protects Muslims vis á vis anti-Muslim people and serves a good purpose of preventing social conflict. However, in a different context, he geared his discourse towards the public visibility of Muslims: “I also work at the Conseil Municipal de la Ville (City Municipality). We, as Muslims, are all French, we need to be visible, and fight for our country if needed.” This time, he argued for not shying away from being visible as a Muslim, but to fight for their rights as French citizens who are also ready to fight for their country. By using the phrases “being visible as Muslims” and “fighting for our country,” Farouk is suggesting that the seemingly contrasting identities of Muslim and French can meet for the common public good, which is to live in harmony as a unified nation.

In these two ostensibly opposing remarks, where he argues that religious affiliations may not be disclosed publicly, and where he treats Muslim visibility and patriotism as complementary and public, religion can be both a private affair and a public statement of identity depending on the context. In both cases, France is described as their home. Farouk’s “double discourse” resembles Tarik Ramadan’s in giving seemingly contradictory messages. Ramadan has been criticized by some Muslim groups for taking side with French secularism against Muslims while simultaneously backing French Muslims against *laïcité*. Oubrou (Oubrou et al. 2009) also maintains that an imam in a non-Muslim country needs to have “double culture” in order to serve his community as a religious and intellectual leader. Dr. Bachir, Farouk, Oubrou, and Ramadan as influential leaders, follow a similar approach by taking different positions depending on the current situation. In their discourses, neither French culture, nor the supposedly Muslim

subculture, is transmitted by any fixed traditionalism, as this culturalist approach leads to essentialism (Holland, et al 1998, 131). Because cultural norms and values are not fixed and innate, they are not taken up as a full package, and thus they do not turn individuals into *culturalized selves* (Ewing 1990; Murray 1993). Rather, they are transformed, nuanced, translated, and appropriated differently in each context. A religious leader, for example, might give traditionally acknowledged advice in one occasion, and revised advice tailored to meet the needs of the same group in a different context. In this sense, positioning oneself through actions is marked not by ascribing to double cultures in essentialist terms, but rather by acting on new affiliations, power mechanisms, and situations. (Caughey 1984) The ultimate goal is to claim their dignified presence within French society, and this is only possible by taking an active role in politics and society while avoiding any conflicts with people who have anti-Muslim attitudes, which is also an Islamic virtue.

By adhering to these basic principles, young leaders maintain a positional approach in order to avoid practical contradictions of *laïcité* when it is applied to Muslims in the job market, in schools, in the media, or simply on the street. This might evoke a similarity with Kastoryano's argument that the idea behind institutional assimilation is developing a contextual and pragmatic approach to dealing with controversy and conflict in order to provide a basis for dialogue and agreement (Kastoryano 2002). However, this model may have only short-term beneficial consequences on the part of the state and Muslim citizens. Departing from Kastoryano's standpoint as I reverse this model, I see the inclusion of *laïcité* into religious institutions rather as a comprehensive position, which is both contextual and conceptual, rather than only as a predominantly pragmatic strategy to reinforce dialogue and avoid conflicts. Their position has both individual and wider social implications, which reconciles their Frenchness with

Muslimness. This is more about establishing a conceptual basis for their own identity formation, communal existence, and national unity, than merely finding a dignified place for their communities within the French society. In other words, it has broader consequences in the long term. Otherwise, Islam would be destined to exist only within the body of an organization, and it would be confined to institutional recognition in France.

Mosque: A space with multiple reference points

The mosque is a space where real life matters are discussed, and the principles that are communicated to young attendees are embodied in social events. These matters include religious concerns, social responsibilities, economic issues, and many others.

Working at the local *conseil* himself, Farouk always encourages young people at the mosque to study, work, and be leaders of their community. When asked about hijab, he places the responsibility on the French law for making women take off their hijabs at public work. Likewise, he holds the financial system responsible for regulating an interest-based monetary system, which is not permitted in Islam. Hence, women should keep working even without their hijabs, and taking bank jobs if offered. As much as maintaining good relations with their employers is important, succeeding as an accomplished individual to benefit the society in the long run is crucial in making a compromise between religious norms and social roles. Farouk does not get into the debate about halal and haram, but instead encourages people to keep contributing to the workforce by respecting the national law. The mosque may be an inappropriate space to give these advices literally against religion, but Farouk does not appreciate these context-free interpretations of religion. Avoiding conflicts, abiding by the law, blending Islamic and French values by making compromises if needed such as taking off the hijab at work or working at a bank, claiming a Muslim and French identity, and taking part in social, business,

and political life actively by maintaining peaceful relations with non-Muslims are the basic principles taught in the mosque. In this respect, he envisions the mosque as a space of all of these references, rather than being reduced to religious teaching. By the same token, mosque leaders take responsibility for advising the youth in every aspect of life for long-term solutions to their issues at work, in the family, and in their social networks.

This model does not imply distinct identities that are subject to maneuvering to fit in the conditions of a particular context. This is about taking a position vis-à-vis each context rather than maintaining a situational identity (Holland et al. 1998). This does not imply that each individual has multiple identities that flourish almost independently from one another on different occasions. Rather it helps them maintain their integrity by first taking up and then appropriating a relevant discourse within a particular context without opposing either their French or Islamic values. In doing so, Muslim leaders are encouraging youth to take part in the society based on Islamic premises and civil responsibilities, which are not mutually exclusive but complementary to produce religiously informed active citizens. If a person's integrity is at stake during this negotiating process, then s/he could complicate the state discourses or comply with it, at the risk of violating a religious obligation, for the purposes of attaining a major change in the restrictive application of French secularism.

For example, their approach to wearing the headscarf runs counter to state restriction of this religious practice into the private space, which is usually home or the mosque. By organizing non-religious public events such as educational activities at the mosque, they welcome non-hijabi women outside of the prayer rooms. They also encourage young hijabi Muslim girls to keep their hijabs on during mosque-involved community events in a public setting in hopes of changing the negative image of the headscarf among French society and the local authorities. In

the first case, women not wearing the headscarf are welcomed within the physical space of the mosque. In the latter case, wearing a headscarf could gain a public character by being in the forefront of a community event, and a mosque organization leaving its physical space to participate in the public sphere maintains its religious particularity. However, sometimes one needs to be made a priority over another. For example, my young leader respondents never discourage hijabi girls from working, even if they have to remove their headscarves in the workplace, arguing that it is an Islamic duty to obey the laws of the state and be productive individuals. This way, one does not have to go through an identity clash because of having to choose between being part of the public life and remaining in their privacy. In this example, wearing a headscarf could be considered a private affair as a religious obligation, and accordingly one could go invisible in public when necessary by removing it at work. In other words, although in Islam wearing a headscarf is an obligation to be exercised in the public space, the violation of this obligation is treated in the context of other Islamic duties, which are obedience to state law and contributing to society by working. As Ramadan maintains, this is about making priorities between Islamic details as he calls them, and bigger agendas such as uplifting the status of Muslim populations in Western countries (2005). Hence, this positioning model requires maintaining integrity through a contextual reading of the dominant discourse of laïcité in order to bring a major change in both Muslim's lives and the French society at large.

The main objective is not to save the day using short-term strategies, but rather, instead of applying an abstract model to all individuals as dictated by the state, to treat each event in its context for real life solutions in the long run. As discussed earlier, this abstract model offered by the French state is designed to produce a single type of individual without leaving any room for difference. In fact, this model has no actual reference in real life, given the differences of each

individual on social, cultural, economic, linguistic, and political levels. In this respect, young leaders envision a diversity-based ultimate change in social and political spheres, which they attempt to initiate within the mosque.

As they incorporate *laïcité* into a religious space, Muslim youth attempt to make religion an integral part of French society through the mosque. In other words, they move on to the next step by suggesting a religion-friendly *laïcité* to a rigid application of French political and societal norms. Young leaders motivate their followers to focus on virtues that are common in all religions and celebrated as universal.

According to Tietze (2006), young Muslims achieve this by putting religion into an acceptable form in France. He argues that religious identifications are culturalized in order to enter the public sphere without risking exclusion. This way of integrating Islam into a safer cultural model is intended to safeguard religious assertion in the context of French *laïcité*, which does not recognize public visibility of cultural distinctions, such as religion and race, as they are believed to threaten the republican unity that relies on the common good of French society. He discusses hip-hop as an example of an expression of Islamity in the disguise of a suburban culture. In line with this argument, he also holds that young Muslims generally restrict direct public expression of their religiosity to mosques. As I draw my arguments on this culturalizing strategy of religion, I extend it to a “secularizing” strategy of religion using commonsense cultural norms. I argue that mosques are sites where religious identities are not only declared directly but are also blended with other forms of expressions such as social, cultural, and political statements and activities that reflect the secular principles of France in order to enter and change the public sphere to be more religiously inclusive. Amor’s advice to young congregants, “The mosque is not only for praying. We will change this. We will make this into a

space where diverse groups are engaged in a variety of projects,” is a clear indication of this step to be taken on how to use the mosque space. In its current position, the mosque is kept as a strictly religious space, and separates Muslims from the mainstream society, which eventually reinforces the communitarianism accusations by the French media and the state (Deltombe 2005). Amor and other young mosque leaders challenge this with a practical approach to make Muslim populations a part of French society through the use of the mosque space in multiple ways, using Islamic, secular, and republican values.

The above example of letting young women congregants wear their headscarves and even jilbabs during a community event organized by the Al-Hidaya Mosque is an application of this model. In these events, young members collect food from volunteer stores and distribute it to needy people in the neighborhood. Every month they visit major chain stores, spend the entire day introducing themselves to random customers, and ask them to make food donations. They set up a stand with pictures from their previous activities and empty boxes to be filled with donation food. These events are particularly important because they put the Muslim youth in direct contact with the local society under commonly shared values using the mosque affiliation.



Figure 4 A Famille92 member in her jilbab asking for a donation from a random grocery store customer (Photo: Ayse Ozcan)

During one of these events at a major local grocery store, I witnessed unfriendly reactions by some customers as one of the organizers approached them in her jilbab to explain their event and ask for donations to feed the poor. When I asked her how she felt about receiving such

treatment from people just because she was wearing a jilbab, she declared her willingness to keep her jilbab on as she interacted with the customers:

I know the challenges of wearing a jilbab while talking to non-Muslim French customers. I also know that this is a laic country. I am well aware of that. But, this is also a chance; a chance to show them that I am wearing a jilbab but I am here for a good cause, and I am not a threat. I just want them to understand this, and to not associate my jilbab or Muslim identity with something negative. They first view me as a threat or a misfit in society, but as we continue to talk and communicate our intentions, they begin to appreciate this community work intended to help poor people. This interaction actually breaks the prejudice against practicing Muslims.

This can be read as a declaration of young Muslims' desire to normalize Islam as a social value in public discourse, and introduce it as an organic part of France, which is functioning like all other segments of the nation for the common good of the society. There is not a denial of laïcité, but inclusion of religion into it through commonalities rather than provocatively declared differences. Most leaders I spoke with told me that they choose to be visible not for the sake of declaring a religiously challenging physical visibility, but for building mutual trust and gaining respect by "culturalizing" religious principles under common values of charity and outreach, which are culturally acclaimed characteristics in France in particular and in most other countries.

My respondents told me that they perceive these values as part of a religious duty *and* a social obligation to the French nation, and that a French Muslim can achieve a sense of building his religion and nation simultaneously and be a valued member of his/her society while maintaining this perception. During our interviews, Amor told me many times that it is a communal responsibility to act on these principles, and to introduce Islam to non-Muslims as the religion of a great civilization through Islamic art and science, rather than orientalizing cultural symbols or religious clichés such as couscous or not eating pork. Amor advised a group of young men in the mosque, "Why Muslims don't eat pork has nothing to do with Islam. That's where

your job starts.” He then went on to explain that they could only properly present Islam in France by studying, finishing their academic education, and introducing Islam as an advanced culture to French society, because education is an essential part of Islam that is oftentimes neglected among Muslims.

Dr. Bachir: “Giving a good example”

Dr. Bachir believed in the necessity of being visible by illustrating the basic principles of Islam, which are usually celebrated and culturalized within the secular platform but are in fact essential to Islam. As Famille92 was celebrating their success after a public food drive event, Dr. Bachir made a speech to the association members in the mosque to compliment them for their efforts where he advised them to follow the good path of helping others:

With your presence in those grocery stores, you have served a very good purpose today by helping the poor in your neighborhood irrespective of their religious and cultural belonging. Generosity and donating are very important qualities of a human being, and a good Muslim. So, you should all follow the footsteps of the Prophet and his companions in these good qualities.

By using those social norms that are also valued in the French culture independent from any religion, Islam is integrated into the public shopping culture through the mosque space with visibly Muslim congregants. While interacting with the French customers, they did not mention any religious message, but focused on the shared values such as charity and feeding the needy.

Dr. Bachir promotes these values as the Islamic basis of long-term dialogue with other people:

Muslims need to learn the real Islam, which should organize their relations with non-Muslims. Unfortunately, Muslim populations in France are not good at maintaining good relations with their non-Muslim neighbors as fellow citizens.

When I asked him to define “real Islam,” he responded:

Real Islam is based on one’s relations with other people, colleagues, society, and the government. Protesting and saying “I am here” is not real Islam. They think they exist and become visible in the society through demonstration and

protest. A Muslim can be visible through his actions, and tolerance of counter-arguments. When someone criticizes the Prophet, let him do it. He never protested himself because it is useless, and it divides societies. You need to forgive them for their ignorance of Islam by making a good example. I gave a lecture at the Mosque de Clichy on anthropology after the jummah prayer last week. We don't have enough anthropologists. In the Quran, there are verses indicating the diversity of people, so we need anthropologists to better understand these verses and the value of living together in peace.

As reflected in his words, Dr. Bachir's vision of Islam in France is clearly different from that of Dounia, the traditional mosque leader, with respect to meeting in commonalities with tolerance rather than creating conflict by protesting assertively. The reason behind this difference in practicing Islam lies in the very definition of Islam for Dr. Bachir and Dounia. The two representative leader figures define Islam as keeping peaceful human relations through good behavior and respecting diversity, and observing Islamic doctrines irrespective of the context, respectively. Diversity is a major component of life in France, and Dr. Bachir challenges the strict political implications of *laïcité* as a system that favors secularism over religion and excludes religious and cultural particularities from public life: "Welcoming all citizens in France is not well developed. They usually view Islam through bad representations." He proposes a model that values diversity and includes religious practices that have a social aspect of bridging French values with a French model of multiculturalism. Diversity and room for differences are blended with respecting the law and the social life without highlighting their religious particularity in a contrasting manner, but instead through universally valued norms such as good behavior, tolerance, and respect to others. Diversity also helps Muslim youth re-explore their religion using authentic sources and putting them into perspective. Most young leaders are in search of their own model within a religious-oriented organizational body, where they would give young members the opportunity and space to research, interpret, make decisions, and act on

both religious and secular values using their personal autonomy. I will discuss further in relation to French republicanism in the next section.

The Meeting of Authority and Autonomy in a Republican Mosque

In the previous chapters, I have discussed civic republicanism in its relation to the attainment of common good as the major responsibility of all individual civilians. In line with this principle, the French state is the ultimate power over its citizens as a protector and a guarantor when it comes to the maintenance of the public well-being and political system, in contrast to individual rights to claim their differences. The common good basically entails the preservation of social norms, beliefs, and values as the glue that holds the society together (Durkheim 2013[1893]). However, these values cannot be neutral to all religious or cultural differences, because by its nature, each value is a product of a value or belief system. As discussed earlier, this is the major paradox of French republican secularism, which struggles to combine a liberal model valuing individual rights, choices, and differences with the civic republican model and its state-imposed dominant socio-political governance and particular value system.

As for the significance of this common good principle for a republican nation, some major French philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries highlighted a balance mechanism within the republican tradition. This mechanism rests on the interconnectedness between authority (discipline) and autonomy (self-mastery). In this equilibrium it is equally essential to follow the common good objective by accepting state authority and to act as a free individual without being pressured by an external force. Fernando (2014), in her latest work where she discusses the contradictory practices of the French republic, argues for the necessity of this interconnectedness both in theory and practice. Her standpoint is based on Rousseau and

Durkheim, who are both influential figures in shaping modern France. Rousseau's (1969[1762]) *savage man* has the potential to use his free will and yet is surrounded and guided by basic rules of human life, and he is in need of a social contract regulated and protected by the government as a separate but crucial institution from the sovereign person. Similarly, Durkheim (2010) holds that collective or common consciousness is vital in preserving the functioning of social institutions that are all necessary for the existence of the modern organic society. Durkheim adds to this argument:

Thus very far from there being the antagonism between the individual and society which is often claimed, moral individualism, the cult of the individual, is in fact the product of society itself. It is society that instituted it and made of man the god whose servant it is. (Durkheim 1974, 59)

By confirming that there is in fact no antagonism between the society and individual since they are interdependent, he takes the position of accepting public authority and autonomy (Cladis 1992, 115) within the commonality of a shared system (Morris 2006, 4).

Fernando (2014), by citing these two French philosophers, makes the argument that these positions reveal the true nature of French republicanism, and contemporary republicans defer to this interconnectedness through strict control systems and monitoring of citizens in order to craft them into a desired model of republican citizenship. This became more apparent after the killing of 11 people during an armed attack on the satirical weekly newspaper called *Charlie Hebdo*, known for its critical stance against all religions, including Islam, and caricature depictions of the Prophet. The attack was committed in January 2015 by two young brothers, who were French citizens born to Algerian immigrants. After the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, the state prepared to take extra measures to safeguard the century-old *laïcité*, especially among its young Muslim citizens.

One attempt to accomplish this was to reinforce the democratic republican values through control and surveillance in public schools: "President François Hollande said that in the future:

‘Each time that ... words are uttered that go against the fundamental values of the school and the Republic, action will be taken.’” (*The Independent*, 22 January 2015). French secularism is promoted and even imposed by state authorities through multiple methods, one of which is the Secularity Charter, which forbids racial or sexist behavior, and which will have to be signed by all children and their parents beginning in September 2015. Another state-imposed practice is the compulsory celebration of Secularity Day in schools each December 9th as the anniversary of the church and state law. Drawing our attention to control mechanisms in educational institutions, Fernando argues that contemporary republicans violate the essential pillars of republicanism when they rely on public institutions such as schools to impose on young Muslim girls a particular type of citizenship at the expense of stripping their emancipation” (Fernando 2014). In this particular example, the state functions as the sole authority, and the Muslim girls are expected to yield to state power and let it make a decision on their behalf. Thus, they are deprived of their individual agency.

In fact, Muslim girls negotiate their personal autonomy and religious authority by appropriating these two simultaneously, yet the French state refuses to acknowledge this by posing binaries of personal choice or religious obligation. When Muslim girls use the personal choice discourse, they are then disqualified from exercising their religious freedom because the French state asks them to prove that it is a religious obligation confirmed by religious authorities, and even when they do so, it is still not protected under law because for two main reasons: either because the headscarf is considered to impinge on the freedom of conscience of unveiled girls, and constitutes a violation of their religious liberty, or because it is understood as an imposition on women by religious leaders, fathers, and brothers negating personal freedom, and thus it is claimed to be an authoritative doctrine violating the secular liberal and republican norms. As a

matter of fact, it is almost impossible for Muslim girls to defend their act of wearing the headscarf as a legitimate practice within French secularism due to the French state's anxiety to suppress any attempts of deviation from the laic principles and republican values as understood by the French state. without any compromise, negotiation, or room for an alternative interpretation, or even a suggestion to apply its original principles based on a balance between authority and autonomy.

Fernando (2010), in her analysis of pious Muslim French women, suggests that they reconcile the dominant French secular oppositions between personal autonomy and religious authority. Most of the women she worked with were young Muslims, and through her research on the practice of veiling, her findings suggest that the veil can be both a personal preference as an identity marker, or a religious piety and submission to Islamic doctrines. Although I encountered a few who attributed their practice of wearing a headscarf solely as a form of identity protest, most of my informants declared the use of a headscarf as a personal journey of submission to religious obligations. In other words, their choice to wear the headscarf was based on their personal interpretation of what the religious authorities have to say rather than on blind obedience. The interplay of the two forces of individual freedom of choice and acceptance of religious authorities is vital in maintaining the integrity of a Muslim citizen. As Fernando suggests, they are in fact taking a Rousseouan and Durkheimian position by reconciling the autonomy and authority contrast of contemporary republicans. They also share a similar problematization of the private and public spheres in contemporary France in the sense that personal autonomy, which is ascribed to the public sphere, coexists with the religious doctrines that are considered to remain a private matter by secular law and public discourse in France.

Hence, Fernando concludes: “Muslim French are some of the only real republicans left in France” (2014, 180).

My analysis suggests that French Muslims not only use their personal autonomy and adhere to Islamic authorities at the same time, but, as discussed in the previous section, also appropriate French laïcité as a socio-political contract, which they claim as their system. They contextualize it to include Islam in the theoretical model and put it into practice in the mosque by educating congregants about the benefits of French secularism, and organizing events that present them as equally valuable members of the society. In other words, they appreciate both the French laïcité for its equal treatment of each citizen as well as religious doctrines such as the irrevocable pillars of Islam. That is to say, both Islamic texts or Muslim scholars/leaders and the French laïcité function as the authoritative powers that need to be reconciled and crafted with personal autonomy by young Muslims. When it comes to reading Islamic texts, these scholars and teachers always encouraged people to read from different sources and come up with their interpretations in their own context.

Dr. Bachir: “Do your own research!”

Dr. Bachir, during a casual conversation with the young members of Famille92, advised them to do their own research even on Islamic matters already “solved” by respected Muslim authorities. He told us that applying this real Islam in France required a contextual approach with a critical mindset towards religion. According to Dr. Bachir, each fatwa or Islamic teaching is given in its own context and we cannot take one aspect as a global reference. He gave us the example of the *European Committee for Fatwas*: Even though they take unique conditions into account while making binding decisions on a religious matter, one needs to be careful before taking up these decisions as the sole truth. Dr. Bachir respects the director of the Paris Mosque,

who he describes as having close ties with the French authorities, so their fatwas make sense in the French context. He concluded that despite all these authoritative institutions, Muslim individuals need to consult with other opinions from different reliable sources with competence in Islam since there is no ultimate religious leader in Islam like the pope in Catholic religion. The main point of this advice is that he places great responsibility on individuals for doing relevant research instead of jumping to ready-made conclusions from information derived from a single source. This way, they could break free from the unpractical cultural applications of religion such as gender segregation as discussed earlier.

Amor: “Discover Islam from authentic sources”

We were chatting in the mosque on a typical afternoon, and as we kept talking about the Arabic courses offered in the mosque, Amor got nervous and showed me a piece from a national French newspaper. It was a report made by a French journalist after a one-day visit to the mosque. The reporter had interviewed Amor and pointed out his remarks in the report. The report said that Amor, as a young mosque leader, appreciated the Arabic courses as they would help Muslim children read the Quran fluently. However, Amor told me that the reporter twisted his words because that was not what he meant or even what he said. When I asked him what he really meant, he said he perceived the Arabic language as both a religious and cultural tool, unlike the mosque administration policy of teaching it to young pupils only to read the Quran. Amor treats Arabic as both a private and public aspect in one's life. It serves more than the purpose of reading a religious text at home or in the mosque, but also to discover Islamic culture from authentic sources, engage in scholarly debates, analyze philosophical texts, and eventually rebuild a lost connection to a once great and global civilization. This could give Muslims freedom from resorting to an imam's speech and interpretation.

There is also a continuous reminder of the French premises that need to be respected and appropriated within the mosque. Leaders desire Muslim youth to be well-educated and respected citizens of France who follow the law and have a voice in all domains of society under the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity in their full meanings. Although in their lectures and events they always mention that these basic pillars of French republicanism are to be respected by all means, they invite the participants to reflect on these critically, and gain a personal understanding of what they really mean and how they are exercised in France. Then, they encourage the members of Famille92 to determine their individual position on these pillars within an Islamic framework. That is why Muslim girls are expected to complicate the public/private divide by appearing in public events with their hijabs on without violating the legal law. The idea is that using personal autonomy against all types of authorities is crucial, whether religious or non-religious. Young leaders are in fact trying to spread this attitude among Muslim youth using the mosque space in hopes that they will use the mosque as a republican site of responsible Muslim individuals working for their larger society with a free mind who act on Islamic principles in and outside the mosque.

Following this principle, the cultural center in Al-Hidaya Mosque functions almost as a youth organization where each member is expected to perform individual expressions, attend lectures, ask questions, make their own conclusions, and act on the commonly made decisions. Safia, the head of the community events program, encourages each member to take the initiative and actively participate in organizational activities, in hopes that this will help them acquire self-value (Kohn 1994, 282) and be beneficial to their communities as well as the society as a whole (Olson et al. 2004). By adding a public character to the mosque, Muslim youth are expected to move out of their comfort zone, gain awareness of their self-value as individuals, contribute to

their immediate communities and the larger society in compliance with the Islamic and republican values through hands-on experience, and eventually bring more diversity to French laïcité.

Most members are included in the decision-making process using their personal autonomy as an essential step in youth leadership (MacNeil 2006). Giving them voice for this is essential. They design the mosque space accordingly to reflect the individual value of each member. When Farouk organizes his monthly discussions, he refrains from talking too much and lets participants speak, ask questions, criticize, and analyze the subject matter, which is usually selected by the participants. The talks particularly target young people under 25 and are conducted in a gender-mixed environment, usually in a room within the mosque building. Participants are typically seated in a circle-shaped fashion, and the speaker is either sitting or standing within this circle in order to make it an interactive session, giving everyone an equal representation.

However, there is still the great power of the main leader of community events, Safia, who is a woman in her mid-thirties with a great enthusiasm for the development of leadership among Muslim youth. Power-sharing and minimum formal authority is fundamental in youth leadership (Heifetz 1994), yet there is clearly a perception of main leaders as a form of authority in mosque organizations. This may be because such youth initiatives are recent in mosques, and traditionally there is a hierarchical system within the religious communities. Too much enthusiasm for development of youth leadership sometimes causes power struggles among core leaders, which also contributes to the emergence of leaders claiming authority. However, these do not impede long-term achievements. Limited authority even facilitates the participation of

young people for now since the religious-oriented authority figures, using their traditionally renowned authority, contribute to building confidence among young members as future leaders.

The mosque youth leadership prioritizes individual effort above any top-down dogma. In the mosque, members are encouraged to use their own judgment, break free from any imposed cultural or religious dogma in the family or community, develop their understanding of matters, and act as future leaders. There is also a continuous reminder of the basic tenets of Islam and republican values. Whenever conditions to make a choice between Islamic and French values arise, leaders encourage their followers to not settle for what is being offered in their immediate surroundings, but to reach out to a variety of sources, do their own research, discover the true meanings behind concepts, and find a way to balance these two forces in harmony.

Within this approach, Muslim youth are expected to actively participate in society by contributing to achieving the common good and making their individual choices freely. Interestingly, sometimes this endeavor is taken to extreme levels, and even children as young as seven years old are included in community work, which receives criticism from peer leaders on the grounds that they are too young to make judgments and act as independent individuals. Despite the criticism, including children in organizational activities indicates the level of enthusiasm of the Muslim youth to develop autonomous individuals who respect their religious and national values.

Conclusion

Gole (2006) and Ramadan (2009) argue that French Muslims cannot be in conformity with the French norms by simply performing their religious identity and habits in public. In light of this argument, in this chapter I looked at how youth leadership in the mosque contributes to negotiating religious norms and the French secular rules of public space in the mosque, which

eventually turns into an alternative space that constitutes multiple components of life. I argue that the mosque space can open up possibilities of modifying French traditions within its long-lasting norms. Interestingly, this process of change is taking place in a predominantly religious site where the meaning and function of Islam are also transforming. Laïcité is also taught as a political and social system where Muslims could benefit by expressing their religious difference freely and enjoying the equal treatment promised by the law.

I argue that starting with a novel way of understanding Islam helps young Muslims make sense of religion using the mosque space, with a potential to build good relations with the rest of society, live as dignified citizens, and eventually introduce a diversity-based laic system to France through youth leadership within the mosque. In the next chapter, I will describe how young Muslims make sense of this process and apply it in their everyday lives in and outside of the mosque.

Chapter 6

An Ongoing Dynamism: The New Muslim Youth Culture

Introduction

When I first met and Aziza in the Al-Ihsan Mosque, both university students in their early twenties, they seemed excited upon hearing about my Turkish background. They started asking me questions and expressed their desire to visit Turkey soon. When I asked them what made them interested in Turkey, they responded giving me a number of reasons: First, it is a Muslim country with a secular regime, meaning a democracy that accommodates the needs of different groups. Second, it is a Muslim country by majority and therefore it is easy to practice Islam. Third, it has a rich history with an immense Islamic culture as a product of a great civilization. They explained the first two reasons by their commitment to live in a democratic country in which no ethnic, cultural, or religious group is prioritized over another, and their desire to live their religion freely without any institutional or social oppression. As Latifa put it:

It would be nice to hear *azan* from many mosques five times a day, but we cannot imagine ourselves living where our parents or grandparents came from. We like differences and learning from one another. Turkey would be a good place to live because of its Muslim heritage and the freedom to observe religious obligations.

The third reason was simply about their curiosity to learn more about the diverse Islamic cultures. Both girls traveled together to various countries with Islamic heritage to find out more about Muslim cultures. Their interest in Turkey was nurtured by the imagination of an ideal place in which there would be diversity, freedom, and democracy. This is part of the reason why they idealized Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism, as described by Latifa:

I like it here but sometimes I feel like I'd rather live in a more liberal country like England. New York is also a better place. It is multicultural and people are free to do whatever they want, and practice their religion freely. Here, French people are unwelcoming, they don't appreciate differences. There is an exclusionary diversity here.

Apparently, they needed more than hearing the azan from the mosque, and this was the first clue that they would gradually drift away from the mosque that was run by people with a mentality imported from their home countries. Along these lines, this chapter will analyze how young Muslims imagine, design, and use their own spaces, including the mosque, in ways that reflect their search for diversity in every aspect of life. In the previous two chapters, I have discussed the meaning and function of the mosque for Muslim leaders, and how different tendencies influence the way they imagine and organize the mosque space as it connects to their everyday lives. In this chapter, I will reveal those influences and the ways in which young Muslims negotiate multiple dynamics in their everyday lives inside and outside of the mosque differently. This chapter is intended to demonstrate what various groups of youth make of the complex interplay of religious identities and secular demands of the French society and institutions from a spatial standpoint. In the end, I show how young Muslims transform both the mosque and the French public space and suggest a multi-layered model that embraces various components of human life including religion, culture, education, employment, science, social responsibilities, communal relations, politics, and law.

In order to analyze these processes, I draw on cultural and youth literature across disciplines that deal with the experiences of Muslim youth in a secular setting. I particularly base my arguments on a new approach introduced by Stuart Hall that includes new minority groups and considers young people as agents of complex cultural innovations that are manifested by blending and appropriating multiple cultures (Hall 1997). This appropriation is also defined as new configurations of race, ethnicity, religion, and culture that recognize multicultural youth identities (Amit-Talai 1995). In the French context, it is considered difficult to express these identities. As discussed before, Tietze (2006) holds that young Muslims generally restrict direct

public expression of their religiosity to mosques. In fact, in the mosque, there is a growing tendency to express religious identities through a variety of models including educational, social, academic, and other publicly and politically recognized practices. In this chapter I seek to problematize these issues by asking the questions: Who are these young people? What makes them young? What do they do in and outside of the mosque? How do they imagine the mosque space? How do Muslim youth perform religiosity at the mosque and carry it into the public space? How does the mosque influence them differently in their everyday lives, and how do they redefine and change the mosque space? How do they deal with religion and *laïcité*, and contribute to the multicultural France?

Muslim as a Cultural Construct

Societies have long struggled with the human capacity to lead the good life with different approaches to the relationship between human nature and culture. Philosophers raised questions about these issues when people with different worldviews and social organizations came into contact. In other words, different theories that would respond to cultural diversity were established in order to explain the nature of the good life in distinct ways. Two major strands of thought dominated the political philosophy of human nature and culture (Parekh 2006a, 10). Monists believed in the one rational way of living the best life possible through the unchanging human nature that is capable of determining the ideal type of a life. They, however, did not value the power of culture in its capacity to affect social and political institutions. Nor did they take the plurality of values into consideration when reducing moral principles into a single overarching mentality. By doing so, monists ignored the role of culture, traditions, and the historical context (Walzer 1983) while seeking a common life that could apply to everyone in nature. This approach prevailed until the seventeenth century when cultural plurality and its importance in

human life were fore fronted by influential thinkers of the era who were the pioneers of recent multiculturalism.

Parekh (2006a) discusses these new approaches to diversity within the philosophies of Vico, Montesquieu, and Herder. He holds that, although they all break away from the long and powerful tradition of moral monism and lay the philosophical foundations of pluralism, they misunderstand culture in many respects. Despite their different approaches, they share common fallacies in their arguments about culture. First, they ignored its internal diversity and treated cultures as self-contained distinct entities. By essentializing culture in this way, they neglected the dynamic nature of culture and its ability to communicate across other customs and traditions. They also dissociated culture from the wider economic and political structure, so they undermined the agency of its members to shape and transform their culture. This radical culturalist view of human beings is far from being applicable to the current condition of people moving and communicating across states, societies, cultures, and ideologies at an unprecedented speed. Hence, several political scholars have developed theories of multiculturalism to accommodate different peoples and cultures.

Being a Muslim means different things in different contexts. Foucault maintains that even apparently identical concepts are subject to mean different things under different spatial and temporal conditions. He writes: “Recurrent distributions reveal several pasts, several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science, as its present undergoes change” (Foucault 1982[1969], 5). By the same token, Islam differs in what it means and entails for Muslim groups who diverge in time or space. As a matter of fact, religion is not the same as its followers (Singal 2014). Religion is interpreted and applied within a variety of references by distinct groups, and Islamic

culture is bound to transform continuously. All other determinants including economics, societal norms, and politics that exist within geographical locales and historical periods/moments result in particular cultural formations that evolve constantly. Within this framework, the Islamic culture that is transferred and transmitted from the home countries does not necessarily correspond to the needs of the young Muslims who come to the mosques regularly in search of religious guidance that would make sense in their everyday lives. Eventually, they modify this culture, and sometimes even resort to contradictory resolutions to navigate different cultural perceptions of Islam.

Understanding the changing dynamics of culture is essential in order to grasp this diversity in defining and applying Islam in a migrant population and its descendants. I draw my arguments from theories that treat culture as a mixed, changing, and dynamic category due to global flows (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996), hybridization (Çağlar 1997), and deterritorialization (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Unlike earlier interest in distinct groups, recent studies on transnationalism have been conducted in multi-ethnic sites in order to capture the dynamics of migrants' lives across national and local boundaries. This kind of an analysis is crucial especially for transnational and global communities as they nourish their knowledge and experience with multiple references simultaneously. This approach contributes to my understanding of how Muslim culture is perceived and lived in distinct ways by young Muslim congregants who have recently started to break away from essentialist treatments of religion practically and have ventured out to utilize a variety of reference points to claim their presence in France as active citizens (Ramadan 2005). Below are examples of breaking away from a cultural Islam and forming a more contextual and relevant interpretation.

Walid: Muslim Education in France

Walid, a 43-year-old Algerian educator, works with adolescents and youth from different backgrounds. He developed a critical vision of how Islam is applied in Muslim societies during 16 years spent in France studying and working in the field of education. He moved to France to receive his graduate degree in education from The Sorbonne, and stayed after finding a job. In the meantime, he worked in Al-Hidaya Mosque as an instructor teaching Arabic to children. His personal discovery of Islam, and the establishment of a multi-layered identity without losing integrity, were shaped by his academic training and professional experience with youth. He is now doing his master's degree on teaching methodologies for diverse learners. Over the course of his studies, he discovered the meaning of "cultural Islam" transmitted by his parents and resigned himself to the idea that he personally had to move beyond this religious mindset inflicted with cultural habits. It took him years to come to terms with conditions in France to take a position as an intellectual Muslim. Place-making was an essential strategy, but the mosque did not function as a site to fulfill his objectives. Hence, he came to realize that he had to start his own Islamic educational institution.

During our interviews, he mentioned Muslim culture as a unique formation from an educational perspective. Having lived in France for over 16 years, he has come to appreciate many things in France, and has become fully aware of the evolution of Muslim culture. He, for example, is very critical of the pedagogical system of teaching religion in Al-Hidaya Mosque School, which he defines as an imported system from North African countries:

They follow an old-fashioned educational system. They insist on their methodology. Teachers come from different countries and they apply different methods in their classes. They learned Arabic in their countries, but the conditions here are very different. It is not the same to teach Arabic to non-Arabic speaking kids. It is the language-codes that make sense. We live in a different community, and those teachers cannot communicate with the kids properly unless they have these two things:

1. Pedagogy: transmitting the consciousness.
2. Culture: you need to know the culture in which you live.

I have realized that it is blocking education here. The methodology is archaic, punishment based, teacher oriented. We treat students like donkeys. We insult them, shout at them, and they don't like that. In France, education is student-oriented, and democracy-based. One has to know the context. The society is different here. It might be working in Muslim countries where there is dictatorship, no democracy, and no liberty. Here we have democracy, we vote and change things. Work, education, political systems, social structure are all integrated. They cannot be treated separately.

His solution to giving kids an effective Islamic education is based on the French pedagogical tools and values; not one is borrowed from Egypt or Algeria. He also disagrees on using Arabic as a primary component of teaching Islam in the mosque. He thinks Arabic is imposed on children as a necessary language for practicing religion without giving them any vision. In contrast, he wants to convince his kids rather than impose. He prefers to explain things and wait for their reaction before making a move to send them to the mosque or to learn Arabic. As a matter of fact, Walid favors French and English over Arabic as languages to master for personal and academic achievement. Religion is important, yet the primary goal should be to teach religion in French.

Education is embedded in a culture, and it takes various forms within particular cultural traditions. The cultures of Muslim populations and their educational methods have been undergoing significant changes in France, and Walid is just one example of its actors. Walid is taking a position benefiting from multiple reference points including Islam divorced from its cultural meanings, predominant value systems in France, global diversity, his Algerian roots, etc.

Aziza and Latifa: Being Muslim Girls in France

Aziza (22) and Latifa (23) are close friends from high school. They are both university students and also co-founders of a charity organization. They were attending Dounia's Islamic

education classes to learn more about religious duties and practices, because they both grew up in France in immigrant family circles. Since they were exposed to religion within the framework of their family traditions, their primary reason for attending these classes was to distinguish tradition from religion, which was also mentioned as a major motivation by their classmates that I interviewed. They were also coming to the mosque to make new friends and be engaged in a religious practice with their friends that they already knew from high school. After the class, they would usually hang out.

Aziza's family looked like a traditional Algerian family, and her grandmother did not even speak French. Her family came to France to work and make a new life. Their perception of Islam was clearly different from that of Aziza, and the reason why she came to the mosque is that she wanted to make sense of life from a religious perspective. Latifa oftentimes took her father as an exemplary figure in her life since he came to France to get his PhD in engineering, and his vision of Islam as one that promotes a scholarly approach to life affected her future aspirations to pursue higher education and fulfill her dreams of achieving success as a hijabi Muslim French woman. However, she felt she lacked sufficient knowledge of religious codes, which she expected to learn through mosque classes.

After hearing these aspirations, something unexpected happened during the end-of-the-year celebrations. Dounia instructed her students to prepare posters each depicting an image of a proper Muslim. Some drew images of a man doing his daily *salats*, showing every particular ritual movement, while some painted men and women standing happily with smiling faces all depicted in a big circle called *ummah* (collective Muslim community). Aziza and Latifa's poster was a depiction of two women, one wearing the hijab and a long dress, and the other without the hijab wearing jeans. The hijabi woman was endorsed, but the other dressed in a casual outfit was

crossed out and presented as inappropriate. This was a remarkable piece for me that clearly disproved the link both Latifa and Aziza were trying to make between their life and religion. Most of the time, Aziza wore jeans and she did not wear the hijab outside the mosque. She actually came coming to classes with a piece of cloth half covering her hair. I had seen other girls doing similarly contradictory things, such as wearing a jilbab in the mosque but hanging out with their friends with full make-up and hair done. However, Aziza's case was different because unlike most other girls, she never felt pressured or compelled to conform to what was expected of her by some mosque leaders and the community. She was the only woman in the class not wearing a full hijab. Latifa wore a headscarf herself, yet her vision of practicing Islam was not reduced to wearing a hijab; her focus was on getting her degree, and being an educated Muslim like her father. She also never thought of excluding non-hijabi girls in her life, which contradicted what the poster implicitly implied by crossing out the non-hijabi girl. In fact, they stopped coming to the mosque after year-long attendance in an Islamic education class taught by an Algerian instructor known for her full adherence to religious doctrines. They thought they had received the basics, and had to devote more time to their organization. Although they went to the mosque regularly to learn about religion, they did not take its teachings as a reference point in their lives. They both thought that rather than merely focusing on religious doctrines such as wearing the hijab, or on the strict rules of practicing religion, taking an active role in French society through community work was an essential form of exercising religion. In other words, reducing Islam to learning Quran, Arabic, or basic rules within the mosque did not cater to the needs and desires of the Muslim youth in France any longer. It is obvious that being a Muslim in Algeria is a different experience than being a Muslim in France, and both Aziza and Latifa knew

that these two experiences did not overlap in spite of forced attempts to reconcile them within the mosque.

Fatiha: “I distinguish between culture and religion”

Fatiha explicitly told me about her discomfort with conflating religion with culture. She had received an Algerian version of Islam from her mother, and made her own judgment by reproducing her religious views as she grew older. She is another example of a Muslim identity established within French culture. Being aware of the traditional aspect of Islam that she had borrowed from her mother as a small kid, Fatiha now distinguishes between culture and religion:

Earlier in my life, I lived on my culture, now I live on my religion. Sometimes these can be contradictory. My daughter feels that too. My parents gave me that culture. They did not know that in the culture there were some wrong practices and conceptions. For example, in marriage, the Algerian Muslim culture does not allow men and women to get to know each other before marriage. It is important that you marry someone from your country, but there is no such thing in our religion. In Islam, you can hang out, converse, spend time together, etc. If the parents have objections to that marriage, they have to give a good reason for their disapproval. Divorce is also not permitted in the Algerian culture, but it is an option in our religion. In that culture, a divorced woman is not supposed to marry after the divorce, and this is also a cultural misconception of the marriage institution. Personally, I distinguish between culture and religion.

She has sincere commitment to her religion as she understands and makes sense of it in France. Hence, she has different opinions on Islam from her mother, who did not really introduce her to Islam as relevant in France. However, unlike Aziza, she very much values the mosque in her life and sees it as a place to connect to the Muslim community and religion in the proper way.

Being a Muslim definitely entails different things for everyone. France, like overall Western Europe, is home to Muslim immigrants who are different in their demographic profile, origins, and backgrounds. The meanings attributed to Islam are not same for all Muslim immigrants or Muslims of immigrant descent, whether they were born in France or in an Islamic country. Age is not a determinant factor either. It is rather an outcome of each individual's

experience, family background, future aspirations, networks, and other determinants. This internal difference within Muslim populations is taken into account in the new diversity-based cultural approach (Parekh 2006a). Each country is implementing different policies, yet there is a growing tension between the state and dominant society, and the Muslim residents. There are multiple reasons for this dichotomy, but for the purposes of this study suffice it to say that Islam is becoming a counter identity marker to the allegedly Western identity in Europe and national identity in each particular country. If Islam has become a basis for a discourse of difference (Wieviorka 2002), then this discourse bears distinct cultural meanings for each immigrant community. In other words, its incorporation into diversity practices and its negotiation with other components of identities may differ for Muslims of different ethnic origins as well as for young Muslims. Clearly, Muslim youth are struggling to negotiate these in a way that makes sense to them and helps them connect to their environment in a meaningful and dignified way. In the following paragraphs, I will look at the ways in which young Muslims negotiate their religion, ethnic culture, and secular social values through a variety of diversity discourses in their everyday lives in and outside of the mosque. I will illustrate this complex process through the personal narratives of some major characters, but first will introduce some of the theoretical understandings of Muslim youth and everyday multiculturalism.

“Multicultural” Muslim Youth of the Mosque

Since the 1990s, a growing number of scholars have been studying the cultures of young people (Hoerder et.al. 2005, 20). These scholars have challenged the early anthropological conceptualization of adolescence as an incomplete liminal position, and presented an interpretation of youth as cultural actors (Bucholtz 2002). As discussed before, this new viewpoint considers young people as culturally competent, active, and innovative. Inclusion of

youth as agents with a growing capacity for social change in their environments is a common central theme in most of the recent work on youth (Bourdillon 2012, 8). The clash of the traditional ways and the changes of modernity depicted in previous ethnographies recur as a contemporary challenge of youth. However, the fluid identities that take up global cultural forms in local contexts are also recognized in the recent literature. These identities are described as visible and innovative actors in the public space (Weiss 2009). New young leaders educate the youth with this attitude. In other words, they are given an opportunity to take over the tasks and act as responsible individuals capable of bringing change.

Understanding the Muslim youth experience in French mosques necessitates a theoretical perspective that derives from the contemporary ethnographic research conducted within minority populations. Contemporary anthropologists have been conducting research to investigate the new cultural forms of youth that are performed in the public space as a response to these challenges. Recent studies by anthropologists and ethnographers (Hoerder 2005; Hromadzic 2015; Kaya 2000; Kucukcan 1998; Soysal 2001; Soysal 2004; Vertovec 1998; Yalcin-Heckmann 1998) illuminate how Muslim youth negotiate and resist dominant social discourses through everyday cultural practices. In these works, youth culture is recognized with its autonomy as a site where identities are constructed. Youth marginality and opportunities are portrayed as spaces where the young use culture as a means of constructing resistant and reactive identities. That is to say, youth are not depoliticized by the capitalist urgings of consumption, nor do they submit to the socio-economic hardships and racial/cultural ideologies. They rather posit a direct resistance to these challenges.

Soysal (2004) describes hip-hop, graffiti, and breakdance as the new performative genres of the “ghetto” youth. Promoted as a solution to violence by German state institutions, these

performances took new cultural forms, and the Turkish youth of Kreuzberg transformed them into a migration narrative that brought cultural diversity into the public space of the metropolis. By the same token, Kaya (2002) describes Turkish rappers as contemporary minstrels who contribute to German multiculturalism, and produce their own social, cultural, and political space by contesting its hegemonic nationalism through a negotiation of particularism and universalism. Kaya concludes that Turkish rappers in Germany blend authentic forms and themes into their local context, as well as global cultural styles and practices.

These approaches inform my project by offering an analysis of Muslim youth's capacity to produce alternative spaces where they (re)construct their ethnic and religious identities by connecting to wider cultures and adding cultural diversity into the public space, hence offering a social change. I also argue that French Muslim youth negotiate their religious belongings with their secular attachments in the unique space of the mosque, which they transform into an alternative, broadly conceived, multicultural space that is different from that of the conservative leaders and from the Anglo-Saxon model as this mosque space incorporates *laïcité* by slightly modifying its meaning. I suggest the mosque as a site where alternative ways of being religious and secular at the same time take place.

In relation to this argument, Killian (2003) deals with the responses to the veil by different groups of North African women in France. Her extensive research on how women of different educational backgrounds and age groups attribute different meanings to the veil illustrates generational differences between immigrant women. She concludes that younger women with better education are usually supportive of headscarves in schools on the grounds that the Western secular discourse promises equal treatment to different religious and ethnic groups. Their competence in the secular discourse allows them to make an argument within the

French cultural repertoire. They criticize laicism as held by many French people using the Western secular democracy (575). However, older women with less education do not use the French framework of reference in their discussions of the veil, whether they defend or dismiss it, for a variety of reasons. The author argues that younger women demand visibility in public through religious and cultural expression while older women tend to either blend into the mainstream society or remain in their private sphere with their headscarves on. Killian, however, suggests that new research be done to reflect the generational differences between the young native women and their immigrant mothers. My research takes the study a further step by including people sharing similar visions and by erasing the age component of the youth category.

Recent work on Muslim youth makes generation-based categorizations distinguishing people according to their age groups (Cesari 2002; Kepel 2012; Kepel 2014.) In these studies, youth are categorized as third and further generation Muslims, who are the descendants of the first immigrants unable to transmit their cultural and religious values to their children, causing a cultural gap, and children of second-generation parents who have taken up an individual perception of Islam. Young Muslims, different from these two, embrace local identifications over national in the political domain, build transnational ties, and carry strict religious observation. While these qualities are valid in some cases, I have observed a great diversity in terms of religious, political, or social identifications. This generational perspective also provides a distorted portrayal of Muslims. Therefore, I suggest a multi-dimensional understanding of young Muslims, which is more comprehensive than reducing youth to an age or generation category.

I argue that being young suggests having an open-minded approach to events and concepts, without perceiving them based on long-lasting pre-established norms and value

systems. This kind of an approach requires a culturally and socially manufactured vision of life. In other words, both the personal and social experiences of a person may shape his/her viewpoint on any matter relevant to his/her life. For most French Muslims, this is how they process Islam and secularism in their environment. There is, however, a historical aspect to this process that needs to be traced back to colonial times, because colonial history is also a part of the context that determines the ways in which Muslim youth understand and live Islam in secular France. The majority of the first arrival Muslims from North Africa were Algerians who experienced colonialism; some of them even took part in the fight for independence. Children and young Algerians have long been neglected in the Algerian Revolution literature, although they formed the majority of the population during the conflict (Weideman 2011). In contemporary works of the Revolution, young people were given credit for their share in the struggle for independence (Fanon 1967[1965]), and they were even cherished as actors bringing change to Algeria by fighting assertively for their independence, as opposed to their fathers who were hesitant to take sides due to their fear of French forces. Independence at the expense of sacrificing civilians was the ultimate goal of FLN¹⁷ members. Their nationalistic agenda was to be achieved over other considerations such as protecting Muslim Algerians. Most of the guerilla fighters were left wing revolutionary Algerians against strict Islam, and that assertive and non-conservative spirit has lasted over the decades long after the end of the bloody war. Some of these adhered to strict Islam later on due to political instability and poor socio-economic conditions, but the secular middle class, the FLN, and the veterans of the Independence War did not let the country become an Islamist state under the influence of the Salafist regime (Boubekeur 2008). Interestingly, this

¹⁷ FLN is an acronym for the *Front de Libération Nationale*, or National Liberation Front, which is a social political party in Algeria. It functioned as the principle political actor of the nationalist movement during the Algerian War of Independence, at the end of which Algeria gained its independence from France in 1962.

assertive and liberal Islam attitude is evident in the young Muslims of contemporary France. Mr. Achebouche, who was a strong defender of independence in Algeria, maintains this attitude by working to secure Muslim presence in France and find common ground. Younger ones, who only heard about the war from their parents, are also acting in the same manner although they never experienced the liberation struggles. However, their predecessors have passed on their courage and liberal views to their children, and today's Muslims have built their agendas on this heritage. This way, they have appropriated Islamic practices, and have taken over and given different meanings to religious spaces.

French Muslim youth of today have embraced Islam as a cultural marker, and they have adopted an individualized form of Islam as opposed to the collective aspirations of the older generation (Mayer 2009). However, a personalized relation to faith does not mean that it is necessarily a privatized one, for it is displayed in communal and public domains (Gole 2006, 41). Fernando (2010) explores this intersection of the private and public nature of religion through an analysis of the use of the headscarf by French Muslim young women, who state that it is both an obligation and a personal choice, thus both a private and a communal matter. She maintains that they navigate religious doctrines from a personal point of view. They do not submit to them as a top-down order imposed by their parents or husbands. Nor do they wear the headscarf as a sheer religious obligation dictated by the Islamic commentators.

In light of this research, in my project I argue that French Muslim youth reconcile individual and communal aspects of religion, and position their religious identities within a laic setting in the mosque by debunking the generational differences between native Muslims and their immigrant parents, and they do this through unique cultural practices. In the following narratives, I explore different religious expressions of young immigrant and non-immigrant

Muslims. Although most of them have been seeking new ways to establish meaningful and practical connections with their society and religion, sometimes the dominant discourses within the mosque disturb this process. For example, in Al-Ihsan Mosque, where immigrant Muslim youth are given roles by the “older” leaders who lead the mosque, most of the young women told me how they considered the mosque as a refuge from discrimination and an excessive secularism. Even those with intrinsic motivation to reconcile Islam with laïcité may be influenced by the traditionalist discourses that aim to import the Islamic doctrines of a Muslim society to a non-Muslim society, without considering the possible opportunities and challenges that French society poses because of its strict separation between the wider French society and the mosque.

Fatiha’s dilemmas

Fatiha (47) may not be considered young from an age perspective, but she surely is based on her complex identity nourished both by an Islam combined with Algerian culture, and by French values. Fatiha is a loyal congregant of the mosque seeking several things at once. She is a French Muslim born to Algerian parents who had immigrated to France as a very young aged-couple. She grew up in a bidonville (shanty town) of Nanterre in *maisons en bois* (wooden houses) “like the Romans do now,” in her words. She criticized the French politics of housing while recounting her family past. Her attitude towards the French understanding of Islam is overtly critical. She also mentioned her problematic years while a high school student due to her teachers’ negative attitudes and discouraging manners, which ultimately affected her academic success negatively in school. Another important factor that bothered Fatiha was media, which she viewed as a mechanism working against Islam by systematically depicting false images of Muslims in France and worldwide. Nevertheless, hers was not a blind criticism; she rather tried to build a better future for herself and her daughter by acting wisely instead of playing the victim.

She was being constructive by offering suggestions to overcome difficulties and preferred to take a positive approach, which might be an outcome of her desire to construct a better future for herself, her family, and all other French Muslims in France. Her stories about her parents, describing their inability to change things for the better, reflect her desire to reinstate the active mood of the revolutionaries just before her parents immigrated. To reiterate, she wanted to act rather than play the victim. Even within her criticism of discrimination she faced in school, she also attributed her incompetence in French to her parents' speaking Arabic at home all of the time, and her not reading books as another reason for her failure in school. In other words, she holds her family and herself equally responsible for her failure in continuing her education. Her criticism of the French media coverage of Muslims was also oriented toward extracting positive outcomes from their poor and inaccurate depictions by arguing that these actually trigger curiosity and interest in Islam.

Throughout these experiences, Fatiha developed her own interpretation on religion:

Religion is in my heart. I do not wear a headscarf but a hat¹⁸ that covers my hair. I do not want to face discrimination. Also, I do not need to show my religion to others in the form of a headscarf. In Algeria, that would be the same. It is my integrity. I would not wear the headscarf in Algeria and the hat in France. Sometimes I have debates with my mom. She wants me to get dressed like the women in Algeria. But, this is my choice. You have to be brave and it depends on how brave you are to decide on how to dress.

Fatiha had conflicting opinions about the hijab and why she chose to wear the beret instead of traditional forms of veil. While trying to avoid negative attitudes from the public, she also assimilated the individual aspect of being religious, which is the commonsense view held by of the French public, as well as the political discourse on keeping religion a private affair within the context of French secularism (Bowen 2007). This contradiction might be a product of being a

¹⁸ This refers to a beret that some Muslim women prefer to wear as a form of hijab instead of a headscarf in France.

Muslim woman born to Algerian parents who suffered from poverty and isolation due to cultural and language barriers, and having experienced discrimination in her life as well as witnessing it in the media. In this respect, her parents' submissive attitude towards living as immigrants might also have put her in a predicament that clashes with having adopted the French mindset growing up in France. Her gender also added to this contradiction, as veiled Muslim women are more visible and subject to negative reactions within the mainstream society. Most of the time it is harder for women to negotiate the teachings of the mosque in their everyday lives due to the visibility of wearing a hijab and the social, professional, and educational limits it sets in France. Salma, who wore a full-covering jilbab in the mosque, preferred to be dressed in jeans with full make-up and hair done at university. The physical difference was so remarkable that I could not even recognize her when we met at the university where she studied economics. When I asked her the reason why she dressed so differently in and outside of the mosque, she responded that she felt comfortable with a higher sense of belonging this way in each place. She added that it was also a matter of practicality. This implies she considered the mosque more of a religious site, as suggested by her Islamic studies instructor.

Having suffered from cultural burdens, Fatiha's hopes to live her life as she desired vanished as soon as she married her husband who, just like her, was a French-born Muslim of Algerian descent. Her husband did not want her to work and she had to deal with the kids all day on her own. That caused Fatiha to turn inwards and eventually feel disconnected from society, until she got a divorce and started running her family business:

My husband's salary was enough for us and he did not want me to work so I did not work. But, I had hard times at home with my kids. I could not adjust to my new status as a wife and a mother easily, so I had part time jobs to keep myself busy outside of home. The jobs that I found were far away and not convenient so I had to quit. Then, I had my second child. My kids grew up. We are now running

our family business. We serve halal food. It was a good experience. I felt being of use to society. Then, a few years ago I got a back injury and had to stop working.

It was at that time she decided to attend the mosque. All her life, Fatiha sought happiness by sticking to her principles despite constant setbacks. She valued working, against her husband's restrictions, practicing her religion in a way she felt comfortable with without the burdens of cultural baggage from her parents, and establishing dialogue with the larger society in a constructive fashion. Along the way, the mosque played a major role in her life in achieving these goals and maintaining a positive approach to life despite the recurring difficulties since childhood. Her positive attitude mainly derived from her regular attendance at the mosque, where she found communal support, religious education, and friendships. She refreshed her hopes to live happily with integrity. As she was trying to make sense of the intersection of culture and religion and take a position as a French Muslim, she felt the need to understand what Islam really is. One of the reasons why she came to the mosque was to learn more about her religion. The mosque is a place where she expects people to clarify the difference between tradition and religion, and to learn more about Islam properly. In other words, the mosque is to be a place to reinforce the true face of Islam with its universal values such as respect for women, human rights, and the significance of education, which are all commonly respected principles in French culture. Her discovery of Islam took place in France largely through the mosque:

I come to the mosque to learn my religion. It has been three years since I started coming to the mosque regularly. My parents did not give me a proper religious education, and I did not learn how to speak Arabic, my language, properly, because they did not receive a school education. I had to come here to learn Arabic. They teach it with a new method for French speakers with emphasis on pronunciation. I also take Islamic education classes. I come to Friday prayers when possible. I come to the mosque whenever I feel depressed because I feel better here. We all have concerns, worries, and issues in life. We need to be patient and not accentuate those issues. We should see the good sides and move on. The people here give me strength to face the challenges of life. My mom raised me as a reserved person, so I did not have good

communication even with my kids. Now, the dialogue opened up. It is the mosque and my religion that helped me through my issues and enabled me to be more open to dialogue and enjoy life. We have a very supporting and understanding imam and educators here.

Her past experiences, personal traumas, and problematic family relations caused her to establish a strong affiliation with the mosque, which filled a gap in her life. The mosque plays a vital role for French Muslims as well as herself, so Fatiha attributed some qualities to this place. She placed responsibility on the mosque to bypass negative views on Muslims by fulfilling multiple functions within the Muslim community. She imagines the mosque as a place to educate Muslims on Islam and to bring them into the French public sphere through proper education and enhancing dialogue with the rest of the society. Along the way to overcoming personal and social challenges through including Islam in her life in a meaningful way, the mosque has been influential in her daily decisions. The leaders, her classmates, and the discourses based on religious norms were all determinants in how she organized her life.

However, the mosque leaders from Algeria taught her more about the religious doctrines directly imported from the homeland, and her strong attachment has led to a reconstruction of the mosque space that is primarily based on imaginary ideals overshadowing facts. Her personal ties with the mosque combined with this ideal image let her accept it as it is, at the risk of not being overtly critical of its shortcomings or changing it to be more appealing to her and other Muslims' lives. The only criticism she suggested was that a more systematic approach by both the administration and its congregants is needed to make the mosque a well-established organization. She had high expectations from its leaders and volunteers to make it into a legitimate organization within the French public sphere. However, her past traumas and search for a haven to find peace and company prevented her from developing a critical approach. When Dounia's

group had to cancel their trip to the UK due to religious reasons, she did not seem to be very upset:

I know that Dounia suggested that we travel with our husbands or brothers, and it is unfortunate that I am divorced and do not have a son. Besides, I want to visit my daughter who lives in the UK now, and I was planning on going on a short trip to visit her. Well, in fact, I do not feel comfortable traveling alone anyway. So, it does not pose a big trouble for me. Also, we can organize other trips within Paris since acting together is the essential thing for us.

Fatiha's decision to revisit her travel plans after receiving her religious instructor Dounia's fatwa-like statements about women traveling long-distance, was based on her past life and social networking. These experiences shaped her relationships with the mosque and its leaders. Indeed, after several weeks the group organized another trip to see the Hajj exhibition in Institut du Monde Arab. Most of the students attended this time because it was a women's group taking a trip within Paris, so they would not need a responsible man to accompany them.

Although Fatiha, at first, mentioned her discontent about the pedagogical methods applied in the mosque, she then changed her discourse and praised the mosque through its imam:

I talk to other parents about the mosque and they are critical of some teachers' behaviors to their kids. But they should also take into account that their kids may be difficult or misbehaving. They should also come up with results, suggestions, and solutions instead of complaining. It is true that there are some problems with some educators, but we have a great imam here and he has great communication with the kids.

Because of this compliance with the dominant discourse within the mosque, Fatiha has developed a more religious approach to the mosque space over the course of her attempts to preserve her personal bond with religion and the secular society by conforming to the Islamic principles. Hence, the monolithic religious aspect of the mosque even affects her public life, including travel and her friend circle. As a matter of fact, Fatiha found herself more within the limits of her local neighborhood, and oftentimes socializing with women from the mosque within

the limits of Islamic practices. This poses a remarkable difference from her previous life, when she used to run a store and interact with diverse people from different backgrounds. Despite all these changes in her attitude and practices, she continued telling me stories about how women have been treated so differently than men and have been repressed in the Algerian culture, and she expressed her desire to challenge this attitude by learning the true Islam in the mosque.

Fatiha is preoccupied with trying to be a part of the mosque community, and creating this space based on her imagination. In contrast, her 20-year-old daughter, who never really encountered such traumas, does not have this attachment to the mosque as she appreciates a more private connection to religion. Therefore, she developed a more blend-in attitude toward French/European culture by going to England as an au pair to improve her English and secure a job as a flight attendant. She is more interested in making global connections and discovering the world, rather than forming local bonds to make sense of her life. In this respect, despite Fatiha's troubles in imagining the mosque as a space to address her daily life, she is actively engaged in this process as opposed to her young daughter. Interestingly enough, secular norms may be negotiated with religious values more vividly by physically old women than younger ones. Such women told me that they appreciated living in France, where they discovered Islam within the French secularism. Some of these women had lived in Islamic countries, and they made comparisons about living as a Muslim in an Islamic country where they simply followed religious doctrines without engaging in social life as active Muslims on the one hand, and in France where they developed a sense of respect and awareness of other beliefs and cultures as well as their own faith on the other. They expressed their desire to take an active role in gaining a public character for Islam in a secular country where they belong. In this sense, the mosque does not represent a space of private affairs, but connects them to the larger society by informing them

on how to act in various fields with concrete consequences in real life. The idea is to challenge the calamities of life by discussing, acting, and getting out of the mosque, even in surprising ways by leaving the commonly accepted Muslim image, as in the case of Samira.

Samira: “I like surprising them”

I first met Samira in Dounia’s Islamic education class. She caught my attention with her challenging views and questions that caused long discussions in the classroom. She is a 61-year-old Muslim woman born to Algerian parents in Algeria. She was nine years old when her family immigrated to France in 1962 after the War of Independence. Her father was a member of the FLN working for the independence of Algeria in France. After the War, he was not allowed to go back to Algeria, so the rest of her family moved to France to reunite with her father. Unlike Latifa and Fatiha, Samira had first-hand experience of the traumas of war, which was followed by prejudiced treatment she received during her school years in France. Since then, she has been fighting against this systematic discrimination with perseverance and by collective action:

I came to France at the age of nine. It was the year 1962. I still remember the traumas of war. I was put in a class with minors because I didn’t speak French. The professor said the elder were mean, and bad. I said no! I am not! I am a good kid! Then I promised myself that I would prove this wrong. I have been working to challenge this system ever since. Because, we have a history of struggling to live with dignity in this country. The colonial mindset still persists even today even at the symbolic level. Muslims need to learn about this history, and its relationship to issues of citizenship. This way, they will to gain consciousness to fight for their citizenship rights, to gain consciousness to take a position, and to use their tools and the law to their ends.

Then, she showed me her *carte vital* (health insurance card) where the numbers 99 were marked. Each *département* (territorial division) in France is given a numerical code. Until the declaration of independence, Algeria was composed of three French divisions and people born in Algeria had a departmental code of 99. Hence, the number has symbolic significance that Samira is still considered a colonial subject by the French social system. Then, Samira started explaining to me

the history of colonization and its effects on current debates on citizenship. She argued that anti-Arab sentiments are replaced with anti-Islam attitudes. In other words, Islamophobia is the major challenge that French Muslims are facing in contemporary France. Despite this tension, instead of taking a side with radical Islamists to fight against anti-Muslim attitudes, she has embraced an approach in favor of an inclusive and progressive Islam. She said the way to their independence came with determination, decisive moves, and a future-oriented firm stance. In this respect, the legacy of French colonialism is the driving force behind Samira's ambition to take action as a French Muslim. Her religious views have been shaped by this experience as a child, and she is calling for a collective action with other Muslims that should be "context-based, intellectually driven, and strategically planned," in her own words. She thought everyone had a certain responsibility to collectively work on elevating Muslim's social, educational and career statuses in France.

Samira does not like to shy away from revealing her religious identity or expressing her personal views on any matter. She declared her position in an assertive manner:

When I tell the French people I work with that I am a Muslim, they get surprised. I like surprising them and shattering their expectations. My facial features do not give away my Algerian background. When they learn that I am a French Muslim of Algerian descent, they get shocked as if we were not capable of working in these fields and achieving such results.

This surprise strategy is commonly applied, especially among Muslim women minorities in Western countries with secular regimes. I have been told similar stories by different Muslim women in Europe, the US, and Canada. A young Canadian woman of Palestinian origins working in the field of media told me about her experience at the airport. Although she considers herself as a non-practicing Muslim, she is very critical of the prejudice against Muslims in Western countries. She gave me several examples from her everyday life, one of which was at an

airport in Canada where she was “randomly” selected for screening by the security officers. She purposefully refused to go through the x-ray machine and agreed to be examined thoroughly, only to give the woman officer a hard time. While the officer was examining her by touching different parts of her body, she made strange sounds as if she was being tickled or having fun, which made the officer feel awkward. She said this kind of a reaction, to be enjoying the moment of being examined, reversed the situation in the sense that while it was intended that she feel nervous during the process of being selected and examined as a non-White Muslim woman, instead the officer felt uncomfortable. She concluded that this way of surprising people is a good strategy for her to preserve her integrity and not feel upset in unpleasant situations, and it is also a helpful way to bring change in power dynamics within society even at a minimum level. For Samira, both this self-declaration and acting on it could start in the mosques, where there is solidarity among Muslims undergoing similar problems in France. It is a place to surprise French people with prejudice or with Islamophobic views against Muslims by using multiple diversity discourses and thus designing the mosque space for everyday use. In the following paragraphs, I will analyze this aspect of using the mosque space on a daily basis, and extending it to the outer society through practices of diversity.

In order to grasp this everyday aspect of Muslim youth experience, I base my analyses on the theories of everyday multiculturalism. Everyday multiculturalism illustrates the ways in which citizens, minorities, and state authorities interact with each other and communicate across ethnicities, cultures, and religions (Watson 2000; Wise and Velayutham 2009). Watson’s ethnographic research in two London markets exhibits this complexity by examining the antagonistic relationship between the residents and the new migrants at Queen’s Crescent market on the one hand, and the productive communication between natives and non-Anglo populations

at Ridley Road market on the other. He illuminates the complexity of multicultural encounters across difference and intercultural exchange through everyday routines of Anglo and non-Anglo communities that are shopping, bargaining, and selling in London bazaars. This aspect of multiculturalism is central to my project, as the growing interfaith dialogue between mosques and churches are more of a cultural project rather than a religious one (Akgonul 2005). It also helps us understand how the Muslim culture in France is being transformed by benefiting from other cultures.

My research builds on these anthropological debates on multicultural interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim groups as well as between networks of coreligionists. These everyday dialogues should be studied in order to capture the multiculturalist politics of place-making among French Muslims because it is through these everyday politics that they seek belonging to and recognition from the state and society. The Muslim experience in France cannot be understood through a simplistic scenario of Islam and Republic as incompatible institutions, but only by the everyday practices of Muslims who are citizens of France (Bayart 2010).

El-Aswad (2010) concludes in his narrative study on Arab Americans, that they negotiate their heritage and the American values of freedom and diversity. He argues that it is not a matter of a split personality but rather a dual consciousness bridging multiple spaces through everyday practices. Muslims of immigrant origin are in constant transformation as they reconfigure their positioning and identities as France's different kind of citizens. They articulate their histories, national ties, religious orientations, and French norms and culture in unique ways within the space of the mosque as an ideological site beyond its physicality. In this sense, claiming religious/cultural rights translates into everyday practices of life through multicultural friendships, negotiation of sameness and difference in the everyday life, incorporating Muslim

practices into French ways of living, etc. This project may contribute to the understanding of diversity forms practiced by different groups of Muslims beyond the scope of rights-based claims toward diversity-based strategies, which entail claims for “recognition without marginalization, acceptance and integration without ‘normalizing’ distortion” (Pakulski 1997, 80). Matters of cultural recognition, inter-cultural relationships, and emphasis on unity within diversity are crucial for French Muslims, like for all minorities.

I build on these anthropological debates on everyday diversity, and investigate how the mosque is fashioned into an everyday multicultural and public site of encounter for both Muslims and non-Muslims through its “secularization,” how these seemingly distinct culture groups communicate, and how their value systems are negotiated through dual processes of convergence and differentiation inside French society, which is perceived as excessively secular. Mosque congregants, especially the younger ones, appropriate *laïcité* by attributing it new meanings as they incorporate a religious component to the secularization of the mosque. In this respect, the multiculturalism that is employed by Muslim youth of the mosque is not simply about communication and interacting with other cultures to obtain their rights, but maybe even more importantly, it entails bringing change into the mainstream society in its perception of French Muslims in particular and Muslims in general.

In this respect, Muslim youth are starting to attribute new meanings to the Western originated concept of secularism, as discussed earlier, and they also suggest an internalized multiculturalism that recognizes and provides a real-life experience to all religious difference including Muslims. In this sense, this approach suggests a diversity model beyond respect and tolerance. It is intended to make all minority differences an integral part of a society, both through inner transformation within the Muslim community, and external change within wider

society. Most French Muslims have friends from a variety of backgrounds, and interact with them on a daily basis. Although the mosque-church interfaith project is running efficiently between administrative people, it does not really include congregants due to a lack of interest, especially from the Muslims. Interestingly, they are already in constant dialogue with not only Christians but also with other faith or non-faith groups on a daily basis. Amor invited a group of young people from the Coexister organization, which is a non-profit working toward getting diverse youth groups together for a social project. His objective was to do this in the mosque in order to connect these groups for a meaningful purpose. Samira follows a similar strategy by interacting with non-Muslims to learn from each other in real-life situations, and to extend this sense of diversity to all aspects of life.

Samira: Benefiting from cultural exchanges

Samira appreciates the value of the mosque especially for Muslims living as a minority population in non-Muslim countries. Amid the social and economic difficulties posed against Muslims in France, they go to the mosque to seek support and solidarity, not just to pray. Communitarianism emerged to effectively protect the community against French racism and hostility toward pre-colonial subjects. There is no institutional communitarianism as described by some politicians and the media (Deltombe 2005). Samira is a supporter of communitarianism as a practical tool to serve communities rather than a systematic disintegration. Along these lines, she argues that if they followed the right policies that would be beneficial to their congregants, mosques could even contribute to making Muslim communities self-sufficient without resorting to state resources. By doing so, mosques have the potential to debunk the idea that Muslims are the biggest economic burden to the social system due to their demands for housing, retirement, health benefits, etc., without really being an asset to society in any way. As an outcome of her

perception of the mosque as an organization with social functions to benefit both Muslims and non-Muslims, Samira proposed a project to the mosque administration, and because they intended to keep it as a religious site for Muslims, she was rejected. Interestingly, her project is inspired from other religious groups, and in this sense it has a multicultural aspect:

Catholics and the Jews are well organized. They have their own nursery homes, and they are good examples of solidarity. They are open, welcoming, kind to others and sincere. Why can't we like them? I think the priority should be given to the needs of the community. We do not have *maisons de retraite* (retirement homes), health support centers for psychological problems of Muslims, etc. In the past the old went back to their countries after retiring, but we will stay here. So, we need to be future-oriented.

Samira is open to engaging with other religious groups not only for the purposes of finding common grounds in theological approaches, but also in order to exchange ideas and come up with a youth culture that benefits from a variety of cultural approaches to treating daily matters, such as how to take care of the elderly. In doing so, she is teaching the youth to gain a wider perspective on issues that might even go beyond their immediate interests like looking after their parents in the future.

Another critical function of the mosque is educating its young congregants by valuing their existence without erasing their differences, and even promoting these differences as cultural values to the wider society. In Samira's view, both the Muslim and non-Muslim public also benefit from the mosques through its educational approach. Muslim school kids are usually treated with prejudice and assumed to be bad students. They are even considered to have insufficient knowledge of the French language. In fact, how the teacher views the student directly affects his/her teaching method, and equally the performance of the student. The mosque instructors, however, treat the kids with respect and trust despite their lack of pedagogical competence. They emphasize their Muslim background as something to be proud of. This,

Samira thinks, makes a big difference. Kids, when they graduate from school, are more likely to be active and confident members of society if treated with respect versus the passive or revengeful figures that could result and potentially pose a threat to society if treated with humiliation and disrespect. Hence, it is a win-win situation both for Muslims and non-Muslims.

For Muslims, the mosque is a place to learn about their religion and make sense of their difference within French society. In this sense, the mosque plays an important role within the Muslim population, as competent leaders educate them about the basics of religion. Samira is trying to fill this gap by attending Dounia's classes. She needs more knowledge on Islamic codes to make a synthesis with her prior knowledge, which is mainly based on Sufi teachings. As much as the mosque space is needed as an environment where both religious and non-religious matters are handled from an assertive point of view to normalize the Islamic presence in a dignified fashion, it is required to undergo a transformation to fulfill its role properly for French Muslims.

Being an assertive Muslim does not necessarily lead to a dogmatic pursuit of religious codes. This is the kind of approach Samira is actively working to take out of the mosque, while bringing in a more practical and interactive attitude by making it appealing to French Muslims. The reason why Samira comes to the mosque on a regular basis is not to build a personal attachment or make friends to fill a social gap in her life. She is rather interested in transforming the mosque into a site that provides solutions to immediate and long-term needs of the Muslim population, and a place of dignified recognition. Samira is challenging the traditional perceptions of Islam, and teaching it within unfitting methods.

As Samira continued to come to the mosque, she began to become disillusioned by the imposition of the strict rules. Strong emphasis on teaching the practical aspect of religion without paying attention to the meanings behind each code was the major concentration in the Al-Ihsan

Mosque. This did not really overlap with her own understanding of religion, which primarily operates on a spiritual level, and eventually has practical consequences:

The real *jihad* is on the heart and the thought aspect, which are both not visible to others. Some people make a big fuss on eating halal food, etiquette, and they don't wake up for the *fajr* prayer (morning prayer), which is seen only by God. All the time we are stuck with asking why do I not drink alcohol? Why do I pray five times? We need to stop asking "why," and start asking "how"? How can I purify my heart, make a better person for the society? We seek to be better people.

As we she went on to explain to me more about her perception of religion in relation to her daily life, a young girl in her jilbab approached us to ask a question about the Islamic courses offered in the mosque. After a brief conversation about those courses, the young girl left, and Samira said: "We are in a movie theater. They don't get the faith aspect of belief. They are stuck in the rigid rules of religion, which are basically the show part of it."

Samira celebrates cultural exchanges, and wants Muslim youth to go beyond the purely religious doctrines. One can be a Muslim, but at the same time entertain the cultures of the society in which s/he lives. Paris is a multicultural city, meaning that it provides its inhabitants with a wide array of cultural performances, and the mosque is a part of this diversity. In this respect, it should reflect this diversity both by encouraging its congregants to reach out for these opportunities and by offering its space to some of them:

Dounia suggested creating an association culturelle (cultural association) within the mosque but I don't think she knows what it would entail. It requires an open approach. How can they organize cultural trips when they say it is against Islamic law for women to travel without a mahram? When I propose to watch a film, then will they accept to see it if it is not about Muslims? Or will they agree to visit museums and see naked sculpture in Louvre? Cultural is not necessarily Muslim. We are in France. They are after getting money from the mayor and organize trips to Institut du Monde Arabe to see the Maccah exposition, to rent a bus, etc. But you need a larger perspective. I suggested a box of ideas for women to come up with projects and then we can identify problems and necessities, have discussions, and eventually we can release a journal or an article on each subject.

Samira, like Aziza, Latifa, Walid, and Fatiha, makes a distinction between religion and culture. For her, Islam can be blended with cultures of non-Muslim societies, and attune to secular matters such as looking after old parents, which is primarily a worldly concern that needs a practical solution. For such solutions or Western cultures to be engaged in everyday Muslim lives does not necessarily clash with religious obligations or duties but instead makes Islam more relevant to their daily lives. Samira not only imagines the mosque as a space that reflects this mindset, but also takes the initiative for a change.

Some young Muslims are not so dedicated to claiming the mosque as their space from those who have been managing it for decades now because they cannot relate to it in their everyday lives, and they are not patient enough to change the mosque in the long run. So they either go to other centers where they fulfill their interests or start their own projects in their own organizations. In the Al-Hidaya Mosque, young mosque leaders have taken action as discussed before, and the youth that work with them apply the discourses of diversity in their everyday lives by taking active participation in social life through interaction with non-Muslims to elevate the quality of Muslim presence in France. It is harder to achieve this in Al-Ihsan Mosque since there is no organized youth leadership there except of individual efforts by young leaders such as Amor. In this case, Muslim youth, and especially Muslim women, who do not have a woman leader working with Amor to integrate them into youth initiatives, are oftentimes reluctant to attend these events. In the absence of a woman leader who meets their expectations or leads them to act on a more progressive attitude toward engaging Islam into their lives, they leave the mosque and follow their own path.

Latifa: "I want to fulfill my dreams"

Currently, Latifa is not committed to partaking actively in the mosque community. Her attendance was very limited, and she eventually stopped coming like her friend, Aziza. The reason why she stopped attending the mosque was that she could not relate to its activities and thus could not include it either as a religious or a public space in her life. She therefore chose to make her own space and engage in another that are both interconnected and relate to her personal life with her friends, school, and elsewhere. These two spaces are their association, and her father's Islamic institution.

Latifa's mother grew up in France, and her father immigrated from Morocco to receive a university education. Latifa's father continued his education and got a PhD in economics. He chose to stay in France due to the difficult political climate in Morocco and his desire to contribute to the Muslim communities in France. He had difficulties in getting a job as a foreigner from Morocco, despite his strong educational credentials. For the past several years, he has been working as a director of an Islamic university-level academic institution recognized by the French state. The academic focus of the institution is to educate people in Islamic law, intellectual system, Arabic, Quran, and other related fields from a universal perspective free from any cultural influence of Muslim countries. As a law student, Latifa took her father as a role model in her life. His rigorous determination to bring change for the Muslims in France has given her courage for the future. She is working there as a volunteer in her free time outside her school work. She describes her work there as valuable to the Muslim community. Religious education stripped of its cultural baggage is the primary responsibility for all Muslim individuals. She feels accomplished while volunteering after school hours and on weekends. She inherited her desire to educate other Muslims and be an active member of the society as an intellectual citizen from her father, who treated her with respect, and they built mutual trust over the years:

I want to be independent and fulfill my dreams. I am a Muslim woman with a hijab, and my dad was a Muslim from North Africa. I am now facing some issues because of my Muslim identity, and my dad went through similar difficulties and he achieved, so I will succeed too. He supports me even more than my mother who grew up here. He trusts me.

This trust and support led her to identify with her father, and develop a constructive vision to work actively for her community. However, she also wished to initiate her own non-profit organization to be able to connect and contribute to the wider society through non-religious activities. As we were sitting on the terrace of the mosque after Dounia's class, Aziza, Latifa, and a few other girls told me about their project, which was in its initial stage at the time. They told me about an imam preaching at a nearby mosque, and how his teachings, which criticized Muslim youth for being inactive, affected them and made them consider initiating their own organization. This imam encouraged them to take action as responsible Muslims. The teachings of this imam, as well as her father's personal achievements, encouraged Latifa to start their association, called "Association Blooming."

Throughout the year, it became very active with its charity-oriented events. The charity work that she started with Aziza enables them to build local and transnational ties through which they can co-organize donation events and educational training. They do not necessarily do this from a non-religious point of view though. They engage in social work by integrating their religion into these activities, especially in a spiritual sense rather than in strict practicality. This is how they would be "Muslims in everyday life rather than Muslims on Fridays." Being a Muslim is more than practicing Islam on holy days and in certain places, but living up to its principles, which determine relationships with the outer world. On the Facebook page of their organization, they describe their mission as a humanitarian one targeting the wider society, and introduce themselves as a Muslim group:

Many actions are put in place, such as donating food and clothing in collaboration with a sports tournament organization in a charitable or cultural dimension. These events are also held around refreshments and meals to better know and get together and with the help of Allah extend our actions into various geographical scales. Of course everyone can be involved as this organization is open to anyone who wishes to make a contribution to the needy and to engage with us in reaching out to a wider public.

The cultural aspect of their events is not geared toward promoting a Muslim culture but rather enhancing dialogue with different cultural groups. They make partnerships with non-Muslim organizations to be able to reach out to larger populations in other countries by joining their forces for a common cause. Even in joint events with other Muslims, they use the opportunity of working together as a way of to get to know each other and learn from each other by sharing stories and ideas.

I was once invited to a food drive event that they co-organized with another non-profit group. The members were all young men, and Latifa's group were all young women, some of which were wearing the hijab. I was not sure how the communication would continue after they finished talking about the logistics and future plans. Would they go to their separate corners and minimize interaction after talking about essential matters, as dictated by most of the mosque instructors? They did not. They sat in a circle and started talking about casual things by asking random questions. Then, they started discussing Islam-related issues such as the position of women in Islam, gender relations from an Islamic perspective, and the ideal Muslim family. They exchanged ideas, and it looked like some of them held more traditional views, such as seeing women as primarily responsible for housework in the household, while others thought these things should be based on the context, and that women need to be self-sufficient in the contemporary world, especially in France where women are treated in an inferior manner to men contrary to the equality discourse.

By working in a gender-mixed space, Latifa enjoys benefiting from exchanges of ideas, which helps her truly connect with her Muslim male peers in daily life, learn about their ways of thinking, and eventually experience Muslim diversity amongst young Muslims in a fruitful fashion. Connecting Muslims working with similar long-term agendas is beneficial in establishing collective stand and finding a path to make France their home, without worrying about being excluded and discriminated against in the future. Latifa is aware of the problems they need to fix within their own communities, and she identifies these difficulties in three main categories:

1. There are those who do not understand the French law, the necessity of abiding by the law, the significance of academic education, and modern science. For example, they come to classes late, and they think they have to be accepted to class although according to the French educational law, you are not allowed to attend the class if you are late for a class. They just won't follow the rules. They also don't look back to the earlier Islamic culture when science and rational thinking were at the peak level. They don't read about the earlier Islamic civilization when it was powerful and advanced. They fall into the meaningless debates and false interpretations of the current movements.
2. They are not into politics. However, without engaging in politics we can't change anything in this country. We need more associations. Those who are in politics are not interested in the problems of the Muslim community. They are sold out. The lack of political interest has to do with the family background. For example my dad was always into politics, so I gained a political awareness within my family. It also has to do with the education. The more educated you are the more interested you are in politics. It also has to do with your economic status. The wealthier you are, the better education you get, and the better educated you are, the more interested you become in politics.
3. There are also those with identity issues. They only look to their ethnic and Muslim identities, but although they were born here, they reject their French identity. Let alone not embracing the French principles of democracy, and laïcité (in principle) they distance themselves from this country, and their non-Muslim fellow citizens. They live as if they were in a Muslim country. They need to come to terms with the life here, and engage in the social life.

Latifa shares the same vision as Amor, the young Algerian mosque leader who is trying to change the mosque into a multidimensional space. They respect the French law, and appreciate the value given to scientific education and following the rules in their country. They both link

these to ancient Islamic civilization, and aspire to bring back that tradition of advancement within the Islamic principles by taking up some of the cultural elements of France. Unlike Amor, Latifa does not insist on pursuing this agenda through the mosque but chooses to make her own space following the footsteps of her father, and taking it a step further by engaging in social and cultural life beyond a religious scale. Her understanding of organizing entails an independent initiative through which she can act to make a change in society without the limits that a religious institution such as a mosque could pose.

In this process, she incorporates her religious identity into other segments of life. Human rights, democracy, and French national identity are all embraced within her understanding of Islam. However, she is critical of discrimination and prejudice within French politics and society, and this is the main reason why she is engaged in organizational work. She shares with the other co-founders of her association the objective to change the ideal of a French nation as a monolithic entity into a diverse unity that operates on the principles of *laïcité*, through which the state guarantees exercise of religion by keeping the same distance from all religious thoughts and groups. This is where they feel connected to non-Muslim groups sharing this ideal.

According to this understanding, making France into home for plural societies can only be accomplished through fulfilling the ideal to exchange ideas and learn from one another on an equal platform. Latifa acts on these principles by joining forces with other religious or non-religious groups to help the needy in their local community and in distant communities. Their association provides youth with a space where no group has privilege over another through open dialogue.

Their understanding of a diverse space involves their neighborhood, which is very multicultural as discussed before. What is more, this multicultural banlieue is home to a youth

population suffering from poverty, unemployment, and isolation from the mainstream society. For Latifa and her friends, Argenteuil is their neighborhood, and their attachment to this physical, social, and cultural space is complemented by their enthusiasm to organize within their neighborhood. They choose to work with organizations in Argenteuil to meet the needs of the communities in their immediate surrounding since, Muslim or non-Muslim, every association understands the hardships of living in Argenteuil including poverty, poor educational and job opportunities, isolation, etc. In addition to this, they also reach out to needy people in non-European countries, and collaborate with other national organizations to facilitate this process. This is an outcome of their enthusiasm to exceed their physical limits, and extend their social and cultural agendas to a greater diversity. Their commitment to their association proves their belonging to their own space, and the variety of connections regardless of religious ties makes the secular/public vs. religious/private dichotomies irrelevant in youth lives.

This, however, does not mean that they are being insensitive to their religious belonging. During the Charlie Hebdo protests, when protestors were all declaring their sympathy for the non-Muslim casualties who drew the caricatures of the Prophet by identifying themselves with the magazine as a way of showing their support for freedom of expression, Latifa posted on Facebook a reactive narrative: “Je suis Latifa.” This was even against most other “liberal” Muslims siding with the defenders of the magazine. Latifa expressed her hatred of any terrorist action in the name of Islam, but she also did not shy away from stating that certain limits should be set to prevent any insult or aggressive discourse that would cause resentment among Muslims or any other religious groups. When I asked Amor, the mosque leader, about his views on the Muslim response to the killings, he mentioned that letting people do what they wished to do would be a more appropriate approach, and added that the best response would be through

writing about their religion, or even showing their true value with professional, scientific, and artistic achievements rather than clashing physically or verbally. Obviously, Latifa and her friends preserved their sensitivity. These two different approaches by two young Muslims illustrate that the mosque, which is thought to be a space of conservative people, can even be used to promote diversity by eliminating the emotional reactions to anti-Muslim actions. Young Muslims who choose to function outside of the mosque because they do not find the diversity they seek are forming their own leadership, and it might be similar and different in certain ways from the mosque youth leadership.

Conclusion

There has always been a struggle to gain public recognition as fully-fledged French citizens while retaining religious and cultural particularities and thus to bring diversity into French society. This struggle is recently on the rise, and is certainly not an easy path to tread. In this chapter, I have presented the dynamic character of the young Muslims through various cultural elements in different contexts. I have argued that this complex dynamism contributes to pluralist France. I analyzed this complexity through the use of essential spaces, mainly by three young Muslim figures with attachments to the mosque on different levels. Young, in this context is more than an age category in its social and cultural description.

Narratives of these three figures suggest that one's relationship with the mosque both influences and is influenced by one's relationship to Islam, Muslim leaders, and the secular society. As a common driving force, the young spirit of their predecessors from the colonial times has been influential in their motivation to change the mosque space. Based on these determinants, they each make sense of the mosque space in their own way. Fatiha is oscillating between her own interpretation of Islam and the secular society, and the traditional mosque

discourse. Despite her respect for the mosque leaders, she somehow still insists on her needs and vision. Samira, however, is an active participant of the mosque in offering a diversity oriented laic system, because she is aware of the significance of the mosque for many Muslim youth, and prefers to transform the mosque into a site where they feel at home and connected to French society simultaneously. Latifa though, prefers to create her own space. Those who abandon the mosque are disappointed by the strict culture-based religious character of the mosque, and they choose to disassociate their activities from this traditional and religious entity.

Unlike the older groups, who come to the mosque with heavy cultural baggage, the youth establish their own culture through either reimagining or redesigning the mosque space, or even creating their own spaces. This culture is not imported from the homeland, but is future-oriented, a future that is destined to be constructed in their home, France. Muslim youth, by benefiting from various cultures within the framework of Islam, create a Muslim youth culture that is religious, secular, and French all at once.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

As I was interviewing the girls from Dounia's class in the terrace outside the classrooms, they all expressed their appreciation for the things they learned in the mosque. They expressed their contentment with the existence of the mosque as a physical body that represents Islam within French society. As they talked further, it became obvious that they were looking for more than what was offered in the mosque. Their life outside of the mosque did not necessarily fully comply with its teachings, and yet the mosque was a place to meet, study Islam, and interact with other Muslims. Despite some discontentment with certain teachings, practices, and the design within the mosque, it was still a source of inspiration and aspiration for the future. Aziza and Jennifer, a 21-year-old convert, told me about their NGO project, and the driving force behind this initiative: "We listened to Abu Omer, a young imam who regularly gives conferences in a mosque nearby. He speaks very good French, and he is the one who converted me. We listened to his lecture once where he said 'we, young Muslims, are inactive.' His speech really affected us." An imam's speech in the mosque made them question their roles in society, and filled them with hope for the future.

It is not only imams or religious instructors that put meaning into their lives. The mosque is a chock-full of people: instructors, imams, congregants, and non-Muslims. A young girl, who recently moved to Argenteuil, said she first came to the mosque to make friends and get to know the community. Similar things were said to me during interviews with the girls in the Famille92 organization. They all expressed their desire to build friendships and social networks. Amor is also very determined to include non-Muslims in the mosque activities. In this respect, the mosque is becoming a unique multicultural site that is extending from being a faith-based center

to a multi-faith and non-faith site that brings people together from different backgrounds through a new form of secularism and Islam relationship. In this respect, it is slowly transforming into a microcosm of a diverse society.

This informs the understanding of Islam and what it entails. It is being stripped of cultural traditions, and a social relevance is being inserted into religion. Along these lines, the mosque space is being transformed on a physical, cultural, and social level as new philosophies and activities are introduced. However, this is being achieved within the boundaries of the French laïc tradition, and by simultaneously transforming it. In other words, the mosque people respect laïcité by taking initiative as a community outside the state dominion, yet claiming it as a guarantor for the continuation of their activities, which do not violate the limits set onto them such as not interfering in state affairs or imposing their values on the rest of society. They, however, question the strict public/private dichotomy by bridging religion and secularism. According to this equilibrium, these are not mutually exclusive concepts leading to contrasting practices. On the contrary, they are both integral parts of the individual and social life feeding one another.

This research suggests that this kind of an approach is manifested by young Muslims, who I define as people with a free mindset that is not restricted by the cultural interpretations of Islam or social norms, regardless of their age groups. Most studies on youth in the migration literature indicate that young people are those who belong to the third or fourth generation. My findings suggest that youth culture is not necessarily bound to an age category, but is a product of a particular stance in life. In other words, in this study it rather is an attitude toward religion, culture, and secularism than a belonging to a certain age cohort or generation.

In the next few paragraphs, I sum up the findings in this dissertation that are briefly outlined above.

Making of a Religious Space

Within the global world, where physical and non-physical flows take place at a high speed (Appadurai 1996), spatial identifications and claims remain crucial particularly for diasporic populations (Metcalf 1996) and other minority groups. People living at the margins often need a representational body through which they can take on new meanings and express themselves through multiple attachments that are broader than their ethnic belonging (Soysal 2000). Minority experience reveals that when conventional ways of identifications are missing in everyday practices, people use space to construct and enact “new” identities (Hall 1994): “As immigrants are negotiating their belonging, they engage in creating places” (Ehrkamp 2005, 349). Living as a minority away from “home” also requires additional efforts to build attachments and create new forms of representation. It is of utmost importance that minority groups construct their places to assemble, feel comfortable, and act on their values. In this dissertation, I argued for the indispensable role of a primarily religious space in the lives of French Muslims, and how it has been transformed into a larger entity by the youth. Regardless of the socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, or gender background, and the age group one belongs to, a place with its physicality is an essential component of his/her life. This particular place is then turned into a space, which has a larger dimension in terms of providing a setting to network, to develop a sense of belonging, as well as ideas, discourses, and agendas, and to eventually act on these formations.

When Muslims immigrated to France, their ethno-religious identities formed the most prominent reference of belonging that would help them survive through the socio-economic

hardships of their migration experience (Laurence and Vaisse 2006). Construction of mosques proliferated in the 1980s, after the law that would enable Muslims to create the same social organizations as other religious groups passed. Then, after 9/11, mosque construction multiplied rapidly as a reaction to the Islamophobia that has been growing both amongst the larger society and worldwide since then. This research demonstrated the continuing significance of this process, and more importantly it presented an ongoing act of negotiating Islam with secularism within the context of French *laïcité*.

As much as places are important for minorities, they are not stable and fixed. On the contrary, what makes a particular concrete place into a complex and conceptual space is the people using it actively in various ways for a particular cause. In this respect, I focused on the link between people's daily struggles and places they go to regularly. These struggles may be temporary and practical or immanent and philosophical. In both cases, they go through these troubles using spaces that they feel attached to.

Mosques and affiliated Islamic centers are essential in this process for most of the minority Muslims in the West. They are even more important for Muslim groups in Europe, and especially in France, due to the clash of secularism and Islam in the political discourse as well as in social life. Another factor that makes mosques crucial places of identification is the socio-economic background of their families, most of whom are low-income immigrants with strong or moderate religious belongings. Whether transmitted this belonging by their families or not, curious and open-minded Muslims, which I call young in spirit, have continued to hold on to these attachments as a means of handling their financial, social, cultural, educational, or work problems, which are usually systematic rather than instant issues. Most of these problems derive from the imbalance between the level of acceptance of "non-White" Frenchmen/immigrants by

the state or the willingness to make them an integral part of French society, and the level of conformity to the secular and “French” demands of politicians as well as the mainstream society. France, as an example of a strict nation-state wishing to homogenize its citizens by detaching them from their differences, is not considered a welcoming country to diverse populations by most of the minority populations, including the Muslim communities. Ever since the extremist attacks in Europe followed by 9/11 in the US, this intolerance has been directed at Muslims, and most European Muslims have resorted to religion as a means of resistance and assertion. In this respect, the hardships of Muslims briefly described above have resulted from the clash between the secular demands of French politics and society, and the religious interests of Muslim groups and individuals. Therefore, how they use the mosque space bears significance in understanding the ways in which Muslims process this clash, and act on their desire to come up with a solution while maintaining their religious commitment as well as their attachment to French society.

Islam and Secularism Inside the Everyday Mosque

In this research, there are two models that I suggest based on my fieldwork. The first is the integration of secularism into Islam within the context of contemporary France, and the second is the incorporation of Islam into French *laïcité*. For these two models, I draw on the recent theories of multiculturalism that take the cultures of populations of immigrant origin into account (Stevenson 2003). Earlier studies of anthropology reflected the Western social commonsense of the universal liberalism by attributing “cultures” to non-Western societies while acknowledging a Euro-centric approach to treating European cultures as the culture-free norm (van Meijl 2008, 165), while in fact, they are also products of a particular mindset, which does not necessarily have a universal validity. Along these lines, I argued that a multiculturalism that excludes religion or Islam violates the Muslim populations’ right to live as non-exceptional

citizens and members of a given society. Therefore, we need a religiously sensitive form of secularism (Parekh 2006a, 370) to address the concerns and interests of Muslim individuals and groups. To complement this theory, I proposed a larger model, which also necessitates a secular friendly religiosity that would apply to Muslims in the West.

I started with the latter model, which rests on the engagement of secularism into Islam with a particular emphasis on the French *laïcité*. This model precedes the religion-sensitive secularism model because a comprehensive change in a society with long-lasting traditions of a particular kind of secularism requires an initial reevaluation and readjustment of the minority populations built on a context-based positioning, leaving behind the cultural baggage of the home countries. In fact, secularism is more of a social concept with practical consequences on a daily basis than a political project. For example, there is no Islamic way of constructing a highway or paying the bills, which are both secular projects and practices that are meant to organize our shared lives in this world. In this respect, these make up the everyday routines and systems that facilitate people's lives, and are independent of one's personal preferences in life (Calhoun et al. 2011, 10). According to this understanding, there is no point in valuing a religion or a belief system over another. Likewise, secularism is not to be understood as a religion-excluding practice since it could be thought of as an overarching principle that has room for religions and non-religious faith systems. Based on this understanding of secularism, I suggest that young Muslims use the mosque space in order to highlight this perception, and make their religion relevant to real life, such as by promoting academic education, getting jobs, and partaking in communal and social activities. Aziza explained her communication with men within this framework: "It is value plus religion that we care about. We hang out with guys, and we know that it is haram, but we are like sisters and brothers. We adapt Islam to our lives." They

do so in order to strengthen their ties to their society, which is a two-way process. They hope to develop a stronger sense of belonging, and to be accepted as an integral part of the society. It is clear in Aziza's statement that her value system is shaped by Islam, French culture, and her own perception of these two basic dynamics, implying that identity is a two-way street: one's own perceptions and the society's perception of this person (Hall 1996b).

This brings us to the second model proposed in this project, which is a religion-friendly secularism. As discussed above, secularism does not necessarily remove religion from the big picture. For example, an Anglo-Saxon secularism is mainly based on Christianity (Fernando 2014), and engages its norms and values into the state system and public life. However, although Christian and even Jewish values are prioritized over Islamic ones, the French model is more about valuing the top-down worldly mechanism over any religious or cultural principles, which has a long history in the desire to rule out the Catholic influence from the state. Once the state obtained the ultimate power, it exercised it over society through the idea of protecting individuals from any religious or cultural influence, so that they could live their lives free from any sort of pressure that would come from these powers. However, this idea of "liberating" individuals plays out as an enforced mechanism where there is strict definitions of and boundaries between private and public spaces. Furthermore, by doing this, the state also violates its distancing position to all religious and non-faith groups, and its role as a guarantor of individuals to practice their religion, which includes participating in a community. Lastly, the republican state contradicts its republican values of balancing individual autonomy and institutional authority as two major forces in organizing one's life. French Muslims are obviously engaged in a search to make sense of French *laïcité* by proposing different meanings and applications such as emphasizing the state's role as a guarantor, and using the mosque as an

integrated part of French society both through commonalities and differences. Hence, to be a Muslim citizen does not contradict but can even complement Frenchness in a laic country.

This dynamism between Islam and secularism makes the mosque a multicultural site of everyday life. A wide array of activities that take place not only contribute to the fulfillment of the mosque's role as a religious site, but they also engage religion into this material life by applying its principles to human life in multiple aspects. In this respect, the mosque has begun to be a multicultural site thanks to its young participants' efforts to bring Islam and secularism together in a unique way through the use of this "religious" space in different ways. This cultural diversity not only serves to generate a fruitful dialogue between cultures as scholars of multiculturalism declare (Taylor 1992), but it also helps Muslim youth study and evaluate religious teachings in a way that addresses their needs and goals to have a promising future in France. Because of this relevancy to instant conditions, the mosque becomes an everyday space that connects the transcendental matters to the physical world. In this respect, this space takes the "private" out of its cluster and incorporates it into French public life, offering room for differences.

The mosque as an Alternative Public Space

Gilroy theorizes the cultural politics of diaspora through the spatialization of Black consciousness while he traces the politics of Black identity in the late twentieth century cosmopolitanism (Gilroy 1991). He links the diasporic identity with a communal space that is simultaneously inside and outside the West (Keith and Pile 1993, 18). The Black resistance has the power to conflate the seemingly incompatible cultures and politics through the creation of subversive new public spaces. This approach enabled me to discover the importance of place-making in politics of identity when two cultures that are deemed irreconcilable come together in

a particular setting. In this respect, I explored the French Muslim politics of simultaneously belonging to a Muslim and a secular society as a spatial experience by creating new public spaces: mosques.

This study has illustrated the mosque turning from a strictly religious place particularly reserved for prayer times, into a real place with an architecture, real life activities, human interactions, and an exchange of ideas. The abstract nature of the mosque originates both from the religious leaders' desire to be invisible and the state agenda to make mosques an exceptional state institution by reducing their roles to fulfilling religious obligations that comply with secular French policies. This is a paradox in itself because of the state's promised position to stay out of religious affairs, and its attempt to homogenize Muslims under a limited Islam by creating an abstract space, which "can be achieved and maintained through state-sponsored process of fragmentation and marginalization that elides difference and thus attempts to prevent conflict" (McCann 1999, 171). Organization of mosques by the state to homogenize and integrate Islam into the French public sphere marginalizes differences in an attempt to push them into the "private" spaces of identity, in order to prevent conflicts that could pose challenges to the secular public order. The statist French nationalist ideologies that require absolute separation of church and state (Laegaard 2008, 161) have reformulated this policy by institutionalizing Islam, and thus created abstract spaces populated by abstract people who do not have actual representations in the lived space, which, by contrast, is based on the perceptions of people that are negotiating with the dominant conception of space as defined by Lefebvre (1991).

In this research, the intersection of these abstract and concrete spaces illuminated the ways in which French Muslims connect their religious privacy to the secular public through the multicultural mosque space, which takes a visible public position by re-introducing asymmetry,

plurality, and heterogeneity. The state project to turn citizens into a part of a monolithic structure composed of identical and symmetrical elements is challenged using a public discourse that is nourished by a variety of references. Using the mosque as a reference point, Muslims move out of their designated areas into the seeable public sphere. I interpret this visibility as an assertive challenge to the dictated public space through its reformulation by including religious difference. In both mosques that are the focus of this study, French Muslims create their concrete spaces (Geulen 2006) in which religious and non-religious activities co-exist in various degrees. Through these activities, Muslims both challenge and appropriate the public sphere as organized and imagined by the French government. For example, by welcoming non-Muslims into the mosque and its activities, and even by engaging the mosque in public organizations, Muslims are in fact turning the mosque into a site where the laic premises of approaching everyone equally are exercised, and this gives room for a practically and mentally diverse society. In this respect, they both defy the state discourse of keeping the mosque a private site of religious affairs, and reinsert the democratic principles within a laic structure that is distorted by the state and the commonsense perceptions, which exclude different voices.

Although France is a diverse nation, and Paris in particular is one of the major diverse cities in the world, people are not necessarily receptive to religious, cultural, and ethnic differences, contrary to the findings of some scholars suggesting that there is less hostility and xenophobia in big cities, where there is more interaction between different groups, than in small towns (Seth and Digiusto 2014). My observations and even personal experience suggest that this may not be true in all cases. In Paris, obviously, it is not only Muslims that are suffering from xenophobia but other different groups are also excluded on a daily basis. This fact indicates that the official and public discourse still resist diversity, so Muslims are in the process of forming

their alternative spaces where they introduce, live, and promote diversity. In this sense, the transforming mosque can be an alternative space to Paris, where people can bond through their differences. Along these lines, this research bridges the political discourses and everyday lives in the mosque as a multicultural public space where different forms of identifications are formed in relation to national attachments, religious orientations, the French public, and state politics.

France is a plural country, and mosques are home to emerging and transforming Muslim identities who strive to form a distinct multiculturalism of their own in this plural society, which I call the new Muslim culture.

The New Muslim Culture of Youth

Youth studies suggest that young people use different means to rebel, resist, and form their own culture; some scholars call this third space (Bhaba 1990), and some others call these youth contemporary minstrels (Kaya 2002) based on their capacity to come up with a challenging culture to official or mainstream perceptions. As is common in most of these studies, these are young aged groups of immigrant origins, they are referred to as second or third generation youth. In this study, I treated youth as a social and cultural phenomenon regardless of physical ages. I argued that being young is a matter of perceptions and the capacity to be receptive, flexible, and adaptive. In other words, age alone may not determine one's being young.

Within this framework, generational categorizations are also problematic mainly because they are based on the place of birth and the country where one was raised. Ideally, first generation immigrants would be those who came to a foreign country at a later age, and second, third, and later generations would be those who were born and raised in the country of residence. In this formula, there is a correlation between age and generation, and also between the number of days spent in the country of residence and generation. In this respect, generation groups are

ambiguous as they would not necessarily indicate a particular age group in real life, as in the case of some of my informants who would categorically be considered as first generation because they were born and raised in their home countries, such as Dr. Bachir, who in fact acts with a fresh mind free from long lasting traditional applications of religion. Samira, on the other hand, would be considered as second generation as she was raised in France. This, however, is exceptional in this categorization because second generation Muslims of immigrant origin are in their thirties today whereas Samira is in her early sixties. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to call her second generation because of her physical age. In this respect, my approach to Muslim youth in this study was based on their capacity and willingness to use the mosque space as a means of negotiating Islam with secularism in a way meaningful for them.

This approach frees Islam from its tradition-based understanding, which rests on coupling religion with traditional practices, and puts it in a larger framework within the context of a particular society. Although it may seem like an instrumental approach at first glance, this requires a deeper attitude since it would be extremely difficult for someone to live by continuously changing his/her position in order to fit in a given situation. As Parekh (2006a) suggests, diversity has the advantage of providing people with an opportunity to self-evaluate and explore their own lives in every aspect. In this respect, French Muslims go through a culture change by making their religion more relevant in their everyday lives. By the same token, Islam also benefits from this transformation because it reaches more Muslims in an applicable way with a possibility to improve its distorted image in the eyes of French society and the wider public worldwide. This is achieved through a new design of Muslim culture.

Most studies cited in this dissertation examine cultures exercised by youth, and call it youth culture. This research showed that the culture introduced by Muslim youth is already

starting a new Muslim culture, calling for everyone to think “young”. In this respect, it is open to everyone without inherent limitations such as physical age or years spent in residence. This research demonstrates that this new culture has the potential to influence all French Muslims, European Muslims at large, the non-Muslim French populations, and even state policies in the long run. In this respect, Muslim youth using the mosque space is a means of initiating a new Muslim culture with a distinct approach to diversity. In this dissertation, I examined this process through a close analysis of two major Parisian mosques and suggest that youth involvement has a great impact on the process of making the mosque space a part of French public life. I argue that this process in the French context has the potential to change the Muslim and French cultures simultaneously, but further research is needed to evaluate the outcomes of this potentiality in the future, especially in the context of current backlash against Muslims and their places of worship¹⁹.

¹⁹ During the completion of this dissertation, French Muslims have just started to face excessively negative reactions from the society and the state. There have been countless attacks on Muslims all across France, and a number of mosques have been closed for their alleged connections with the radical and violent groups abroad.

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University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Research Specializations

Sociocultural Anthropology, migration, Muslims in France/Western Europe, racial/ethnic/religious identities, multiculturalism, youth cultures, and space/place theories.

Languages

Turkish, English, French, German (Intermediate), Spanish (Beginner)

Education

- 2015 PhD in Anthropology Syracuse University, Maxwell School, Department of Anthropology
- 2013 MA in Anthropology, Syracuse University, Maxwell School, Department of Anthropology
- 2013 Certificate of Advanced Study in Civil Society Organizations, Syracuse University
- 2006 MA in English Literature, Doğuş University, Institute of Social Sciences
- 2001 Certificate of Foreign Trade Specialist, The Istanbul Chamber of Commerce
- 2000 BA in English Literature, Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters.

Academic Experience

- 2015-Present Lecturer in Turkish, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Linguistics Department
- 2014-2015 Visiting Lecturer in Turkish, Columbia University, Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies: Modern Turkish for beginner, intermediate and advanced level learners.
- 2013-2014 Turkish Language Instructor, Etude Plus, Argenteuil, France
Turkish for beginner and advanced level learners.
- 2013-2014 English Language Instructor, SOS Soutien Scolaire, France
- 2011-2012 Turkish Language Instructor, Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School

Modern Turkish for beginner level learners.

- 2009-2012 Teaching Assistant for Peoples and Cultures of the World ANT 121, Syracuse University, Department of Anthropology
- 2007-2008 Turkish language instructor as a Fulbright FLTA (Foreign Language Teaching Assistant) for Turkish TRK 201 and TRK 202, Syracuse University, Middle Eastern Studies: Modern Turkish for intermediate level learners at Syracuse (classroom setting) and Cornell (via videoconferencing).
- 2006-2009 English Language Instructor, Istanbul Commerce University
- 2005-2006 English Teacher: Children group, Maltepe University, Continuing Education Center
- 2003-2006 English Language Instructor, Maltepe University

Fieldwork and Research Experience

- 2013-2014 Dissertation research on French mosques in the Paris area.
- Winter 2013 Volunteered in “Youth leadership development project”, Hopeprint, Syracuse.
- Summer 2011 Volunteered in social aid projects, Valdocco France
- Spring 2011 Worked as a volunteer researcher in the “Improving outreach and coalition-building with churches” project, Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse (ACTS)

Publications and Presentations

“Alternative spaces of Muslim youth: experimenting laïcité within the multicultural French Mosque” at the *Unsettling Colonial Modernity: Islamicate Contexts in Focus* conference, to be held at the University of Alberta (Edmonton, Canada), on Friday April 24 and Saturday April 25, 2015.

“Passage to European Integration: The Role of the Immigrant Muslim Youth in the EU’s Youth Policies” at the 2009 AAA Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, PA

“Unison Despite Differences: Transnational Attachments of Turkish Muslim Organizations in the Urban Space of Europe” at the 2008 ISA Annual Convention in San Francisco, CA, USA.

“Identity Crises in Two Novels from the Opposing Sides of Europe: A Comparative Reading of Henry James’s *The Ambassadors* and Halide Edib Adıvar’s *The Clown and His Daughter*” in *International Journal of the Humanities*, 3(11), 2006: 129-140.

“From colonization to mediation: the shifting discourse of Turkish filmmakers in Europe” at the 2005 Middle East & Central Asia Politics, Economics and Society Conference, University of Utah, USA, September 8-10. 2005

“Identity Crisis in Two Modern Novels” at the Third International Conference on New Directions in Humanities, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, August 2-5. 2005

“Turkish migrants in Germany: Is it a matter of losing or gaining?” Poster session at the Fourth Biennial Conference on Intercultural Research, Kent State University, OH, USA, May 4-7. 2005

Grants and Fellowships

- 2013 Claudia De Lys Graduate Scholar in Cultural Anthropology
- 2013 Maxwell School Dean’s Fellowship
- 2012 Maxwell School Dean’s Summer Research Award
- 2012 Center for European Studies Graduate Summer Research Grant (The Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs)
- 2011 Maxwell School Roscoe-Martin Fund for Research
- 2011 Maxwell School Dean’s Summer Research Award
- 2010 Maxwell School Roscoe-Martin Fund for Research
- 2010 Maxwell School Dean’s Summer Research Award
- 2010 Goekjian Summer Research Grant 2010 (The Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs)
- 2009 Maxwell School Summer Fellowship
- 2008 Travel Grant Award for the ISA Annual Convention in San Francisco, CA. (International Studies Association and Syracuse University)
- 2007 Fulbright FLTA (Foreign Language Teaching Assistant)
- 2001 Çamlıca Rotaract Club, Traveling grant for the European Convention in Antalya

Memberships in Professional Societies

- American Anthropological Association
- European Writing Centers Association
- American Association of Teachers of Turkic Languages List