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Guest workers and Islam in France

5.1. Introduction

When speaking of labour migrants in France the terms typically employed are “foreign workers” (*travailleurs étrangers*) or “immigrant workers” (*travailleurs immigrés*). Those terms however, do not take notice of the different regimes of incorporation of immigrant ethnic minorities and the different accommodation strategies for different categories of labour immigrants such as “colonial workers”, “seasonal workers” and “guest workers”. In chapter 1 I characterised a guest worker regime as a distinctive regime of incorporation of immigrant ethnic minorities. Historically it developed in Western Europe when companies and governments created special recruitment schemes to provide industries and agriculture with a foreign workforce. This kind of regime was first set up in interwar France to recruit European workers and provide for specific labour shortages. It was set up for a second time in the post World War II period.

In the interwar period the institutional arrangements to incorporate European guest workers existed in parallel with the arrangements developed for North-African colonial workers. That situation was reproduced in the period after World War II and continued to exist until the independence of Algeria in 1962.²⁰² Only from then onwards did Algerian workers come to be subject-positioned as guest workers and no longer as colonial workers. The historical development of these regimes of incorporation also created immense opportunities for the diffusion of representations, institutional arrangements and governing strategies from colonial to guest workers regimes. In the 1960s and 1970s the issue of Muslim religious needs and the creation of prayer spaces would present itself in France primarily within the specific institutional arrangements to accommodate North and West African migrant workers. The ways the French sought to develop public policy responses will be explored in this chapter.

5.2. Migrant workers in France and the emergence of a guest workers regime

Migrant labour had become a common phenomenon in 19th century France. Most migrant workers were either *frontaliers* – young men from Italy, Spain, Belgium and Germany, who crossed the borders to work temporarily in French industries, construction, mining or agriculture – or seasonal workers, usually peasants from poor regions in Europe or North Africa. A temporary stay in France allowed migrant workers to bring back much needed external resources to their families. In the late 19th and early 20th century an increasing number of migrant workers –especially those

202. I take 1962 as a limit because I will focus in particular on the accommodation of North African immigrants. In the case of the Comoro Islands, for example, colonial rule lasted until 1975.

from Italy, Belgium and Poland – began bringing their families to France. Employers usually welcomed family migration, fearing that single male foreign workers were prone to indiscipline, alcoholism and rapid turnover. Many of the Italian and Spanish workers settled permanently in France and formed families. They also became increasingly organised and unionised, and therefore had more opportunities to ask for higher wages and protest against bad working conditions. In the first decade of the 20th century confrontations with European foreign workers led French industries to also turn to the North African colonies to recruit workers (MacMaster 1997: 80).

Around World War I, French authorities became more actively involved in the recruitment of workers from the colonies and protectorates.²⁰³ Unregulated immigration continued in the 1920s. During the First World War the French had relied massively on colonial workers, but now they aimed at recruiting Europeans. The workers would be selected based on their professional skills and on their “ethnic orientation”, which would facilitate assimilation into French society. Georges Mauco, an important policy advisor, argued that the assimilation of Asians and Africans was impossible, and “physically and morally undesirable” (Mauco cited in Weil 2004: 38, my translation, M.M.). A more fully developed guest workers regime was set up between 1930 and 1939. It included the development of a recruitment program implemented jointly by the French government and private industry. It also entailed public policy measures such as the development of institutions to accommodate workers during their stay abroad (housing, medical care, nourishment) and the creation of opportunities for guest workers to maintain their culture. Guest workers regimes developed around the idea of differential exclusion, meaning that foreign workers would only be temporarily a part of society as economic subjects, but without being a part of society socially, culturally or politically.²⁰⁴

One institutional arrangement to house guest workers was the “workers village” and “garden cities”, which had been experimented with in France and in the colonies in the late 19th century. With regard to guest workers an additional advantage was that this type of isolated housing could help them maintain their linguistic, cultural, religious and social practices during their temporary stay in France. In the 1930s Polish workers and their families in the Pas-de-Calais region and in the north of France had been accommodated in company housing and villages, where they could benefit from their own schools and clubs and where spiritual care and religious ceremonies were provided by Polish Catholic priests (MacMaster 1997: 85). In the case of European workers, the French believed that a strong sense of collective ethnic identity and ethnic organisations was helpful in view of the future process of re-integration when workers returned to Poland, Spain, Yugoslavia or Italy (Ireland 1994).

Another possibility for the European immigrant workers was to settle in France and gradually assimilate into French society. Immigrants who would choose this option would primarily have to rely on their own social networks. In Marseilles many of the Italian and Corsican immigrants who decided to stay found lodging in the poorer and more run-down areas of the city, such as the *Le Panier* (The Basket) a neighbourhood of small curving streets on the hill across from the Vieux Port. Those who had settled would help newly arriving migrants to find a job and a place to live and this kind of assistance was usually provided by the use of family and kinship relations. In this way the social structure of villages in Italy or Corsica was being reproduced

203. See chapter 3.

204. See Cross 1983; Attard-Maraninchi and Temime 1990.

in Marseilles. The ethnic community infrastructure was further developed around the many Catholic village parishes that existed in Marseilles. In the 1920s Corsican and Armenian migrants established several ethnic organisations around local parishes – the so-called “Church Bell associations” (*associations de clocher*), kinds of social clubs. The crucial role of religious institutions in the life of ethnic immigrant communities in the early decades of the 20th century resembled that of the Jewish immigrants in the city who had built a central synagogue in the centre of Marseilles between 1862 and 1863. A narrative on immigration was woven into the “imagined past” of Marseilles, according to which migrants had managed to overcome their hardship and difficulties by setting up their own associations and religious institutions and by building a central church. A confirmation of that pattern was the building of an Apostolic church by the Armenian Christian community on the Avenue du Prado between 1928 and 1933. The image of self-supporting ethnic communities and a flourishing religious life also served as a counterweight to the challenge of the dominant view of Marseilles as merely a city of immigrants, villains and networks of patronage.²⁰⁵

It is important to recall how different the situation was with the colonial immigrant workers who lived in France and in Marseilles in the same period. The North African workers were not particularly welcome and other migrant workers saw them as competitors, but also as strike breakers.²⁰⁶ North Africans were also perceived as more culturally different because of their skin colour but also because of their Muslim religion. French colonial officials and military officers in North Africa repeatedly warned their colleagues in France to keep a close eye on the workers because there was a great risk of intemperance when they “escaped from the Muslim environment”.²⁰⁷ Even when similar types of institutions existed to accommodate colonial and European workers they often functioned in radically different ways. The temporary barracks camps catered to all kind of refugees and labour migrants, but in the case of the Algerians these institutions were administered by an organisation that had been especially created in 1924 to provide assistance to the Algerian population and subject them to disciplinary controls (the *Service de Surveillance, Protection, et Assistance des Indigènes Nord-Africains*) (SAINA). Another major difference concerned the control of migration to and from France. The regulation of immigration of colonial workers from Algeria to France was increasingly strict and was carried out by specialised institutions such as the *Service de l’Organisation des Travailleurs Coloniaux* (SOTC) and the SAINA. Institutional arrangements for surveillance, control and assistance of North African immigrants were further developed in the 1930s (Le Pautremat 2003: 302ff.; Rosenberg 2006). Another difference was that European immigrants could eventually decide to settle and be absorbed into French society, whereas the North African workers were

205. In the 1930s French journalistic, literary or cinema-graphic discourse –mostly produced in Paris- portrayed Marseilles as an obscure and corrupt city inhabited by immigrants, Italian criminals, revolutionaries, and sailors. Illustrative was the movie “Justin de Marseilles” of 1934 in which the criminals were Italians and the murderer was an African (Attard-Maraninchi and Temine 1990: 84). In 1939 Marseilles was placed under tutelage of the national government (Jankowski 1989).

206. This occasionally led to brawls between Italians and Algerians in Marseilles in the first years of the 20th century (Lopez and Temine 1990: 154-155).

207. The resident general in Tunis, Gabriel Alapetite, for example recommended in 1915 that French employers strictly survey North African workers because of the risk of “intemperance” when they “escaped from the influence of the Muslim environment” (cited in Le Pautremat 2003: 283).

kept segregated from mainstream French society. French authorities were particularly apprehensive of the idea of French women marrying Muslim men (Le Pautremat 2003: 287). French authorities preferred Kabyle seasonal workers to rotate between Algeria and France, thinking this would enable them to remain firmly rooted in Kabyle culture and therefore to more easily re-adapt upon the return to Algeria. Finally, the Algerian migrants also lacked the social, legal and political power to organise and protest against their treatment, and to create institutions or organisations and community infrastructures of their own. North Africans remained a separate category, of mostly single men whose lot was largely in the hands of French authorities.

5.2.1. The post-World War II period

France once more developed institutional arrangements for the recruitment and incorporation of guest workers between the 1950s and 1973. A directive (*ordonnance*) of November 2 1945 established a legal framework for immigration and the regulation of foreigners in France which would continue to function until 1975.²⁰⁸ A new National Immigration Office (*Office national d'immigration*) (ONI) was created that obtained the monopoly of recruiting foreign workers and their families, and of receiving them in France. The post-war Monnet Plan for economic recovery issued in 1947 had proposed a future recruitment of no less than 200,000 Algerians (MacMaster 1997: 185). However, the new government preferred to stimulate the immigration of *European* families, notably from Poland and Italy (Weil 2004: 82ff.). Whereas French authorities had been relatively successful in creating housing and facilities for guest workers before the war, they did not immediately undertake the infrastructural adjustments that were needed to cope with the rapid increase of immigrant workers in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Because of the lack of adequate housing, many newcomers ended up living in shantytowns (*bidonvilles*) and in concentrated areas with dense immigrant populations. In Marseilles, for example, a hostel for migrant workers was established in 1953. But because the construction of public housing could not keep up with the speed with which newcomers arrived, many migrant families eventually found accommodation in shantytowns, which would continue to exist until the 1970s.²⁰⁹ This largely uncontrolled process of settling immigrants led to a concentration of ethnic groups that in turn developed a strong sense of collective identity. The government was supportive of attempts of guest workers to retain their cultural identity and in the 1950 it set up Spanish Houses (*Casas de España*) in major French centres of Spanish settlement (Ireland 1994: 39ff.).

After the war, the government had wanted to put a curb on immigration from North Africa. However, the opportunities to effectively stop this immigration had been reduced, notably

208. The *ordonnance* of 1945 also facilitated the regulation and surveillance of migrant workers in France on the basis of their legal status, by linking the *carte d'identité*, the *titre de séjour* and the *titre de travail*. From now on migrants in France needed a resident permit (*titre de séjour*) which was delivered by the Ministry of Interior, and a working permit (*titre de travail*) which was delivered by the Ministry of Labour. A *dossier de séjour* was made for every migrant and the main criterion for deciding on the legal status of migrants, on the renewal of their working and residence permits and the possibility to obtain French nationality, became the duration of stay (*durée de séjour*) in France (Spire 2005: 30).

209. See in particular Sayad et al. 1991: 134-137; and Temime and Deguigné 2001.

because the constitution of the newly founded Fourth Republic had introduced the “citizenship of the French Union” (*citoyenneté de l’Union française*). Since 1947 the native Algerians or Muslim French (*Français musulmans*)²¹⁰ had, at least formally, the same citizenship status as French citizens (Spire 2005: 199). Growing numbers of migrants from Algeria arrived who were unskilled and illiterate peasants who had no previous experience of life and work in France. Officials feared that there was a risk of Algerians in France becoming uprooted and losing their cultural, social and moral sense of orientation. Official studies on the situation of Algerian immigrants in France suggested that the best way to prevent Algerian workers from becoming uprooted was by preserving the traditional “tribal” structures during their stay abroad.²¹¹ Support for Islamic institutions was advocated as a way of enabling Algerians to maintain their culture (MacMaster 1997: 188). New organisations and institutions were introduced to exercise special control on Algerian immigrants in France. In 1945 the special North African brigades of the *Préfecture de Police* had been dismantled, but in practice the officers who spoke Berber and Arab and who were seen as experts in “native management” (*encadrement*) continued to be charged with the surveillance of Algerians (Spire 2005: 195ff.).

In 1956 the free circulation of Algerians to and from France was ended because of the Algerian War.²¹² The development of uncontrolled enclaves of Algerian workers in shantytowns was seen as threatening. In the context of the war, French authorities wanted to be able to control the Algerian population in order to prevent the squatter camps becoming bastions of the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale*) (FLN). Algerians in France were accommodated in camps and *foyers*, where social assistance was once again combined with strict policing and surveillance (Spire 2005: 200ff.). In this context, a semi-public property management organisation was set up in 1956. It was responsible for worker housing and was created to finance, build and equip *foyers* (hostels or homes) for Algerian migrant workers. It was called *Société nationale de construction de logements pour les travailleurs algériens* (SONACOTRAL). The company initially only served to manage housing of Algerians and only after 1962 other foreign workers could also be housed in its hostels and its name changed to SONACOTRA.²¹³

When the Evian Accords were signed between representatives of the French Republic and the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic in March 1962 there were about 350,000

210. Please note that the term *Français musulmans* here refers to native Algerians, and not to the so-called *Français musulmans rapatriés* or the *harkis*.

211. Several studies were commissioned on Algerian immigrants in France between 1945 and 1955, including J.J. Rager *Les Musulmans Algériens en France et dans les Pays Islamiques* (1950) and *L’Émigration en France des Musulmans d’Algérie* (1956); and R. Montagne *L’émigration nord-africaine en France : son caractère familial et villageois* (1953). See MacMaster 1997: 184ff.

212. In 1958 Maurice Papon became *préfet de police* in Paris. This former colonial administrator, who under the Vichy regime had been responsible for the deportation of French Jews, was to oversee the establishment of the administrative institutions that were to survey and police Algerians in France, and that eventually became responsible for the increasingly violent repression of Algerian nationalists. Maurice Papon also ordered the violent repression by the Paris police of a peaceful demonstration of Algerians in Paris on October 17 1961. The French police murdered about 200 Algerian civilians that day, many of whom were dumped in the Seine (MacMaster 1997: 199ff.). See also “17 octobre 1961: les enjeux cachés d’une manifestation” in *Le Monde* October 28 2004.

213. See Ginésy-Galano 1984; Grillo 1985; Kepel 1991: 126ff.; and Silverstein 2004: 92ff.

Algerians living in France (MacMaster 1997: 203; Shepard 2006).²¹⁴ The independence of Algeria coincided with the beginning of a period of expansion of the French economy and soon labour shortages began to re-emerge. French authorities again were reluctant to see Algerian migrant workers meet the labour demand and tried to “repatriate” Algerian workers who were suspected of nationalist sympathies. Whereas the French government tried to stem immigration from Algeria, labour immigration from Portugal was encouraged. In 1963 labour recruitment agreements were also signed with Tunisia and Morocco and in 1965 with Yugoslavia and Turkey (Weil 2004: 89-90). But immigration from Algeria would rebound in the 1960s.²¹⁵ The new Algerian government soon realised that it depended on France for economic and technical assistance, as well as on the revenues that Algerian emigrant workers in France could send back to their families (MacMaster 1997: 202). The French government established and maintained diplomatic ties with its former North African colony and French industries began to recruit Algerian workers anew.

5.3. Native management (*encadrement*) and the reproduction of colonial institutional arrangements: the foyers

For generations Africans had been immigrant workers in France, but in the 1960s and 1970s they arrived no longer as “colonial subjects” but as guest workers.²¹⁶ However, for North African and West African immigrants the guest workers regime was by and large a *continuation* of the institutional arrangements that had existed during the colonial period. One of the key factors thereby was that, despite the fact that Algeria became independent, labour migration from Algeria to France continued. Therefore there was no pause that (counterfactually) might have led to a more profound change of perceptions and institutional arrangements for the accommodation of Algerians in France. But there were also specific mechanisms of cultural and institutional diffusion that were directly related to the ways French authorities sought to accommodate North African immigration after 1962, and which explain the continuation of colonial arrangements. In the first place, there was the continued importance of anti-Algerian racism, which was fuelled by the massive return of *pièdes noirs* to France. In the second place, many institutions to accommodate North African workers were already in place and continued to function as they had in the past. The foundational ideas, values and routines that these institutions embodied were thereby being reproduced. This was the case of institutions such as the hostels, immigration services and the police. In the third place, the handling of immigration and the accommodation of North African immigrants in France since the 1960s was in a significant part carried out by people who had been formerly employed in the administration and services of colonial rule. One occupation for which these veterans were seen as extremely good candidates was to become directors of hostels for immigrant workers, because

214. In the early 1960s nearly all of the remaining one million European settlers left Algeria for France. About 80,000 Algerians who had worked in the French colonial administration or who had fought in the French army (the *harkis*) also came to France, escaping persecution in the newly created Algerian state. The Evian Accords made it possible for Algerians to demand French citizenship until 1967. See chapter 3.

215. For an overview see Stora 1992; and MacMaster 1997.

216. For an overview see in particular Noiriel 1988; and Hargreaves 1995.

they were used to having foreigners under their command (Ginésy-Galano 1984: 128). In fact, the foyers functioned as one of the crucial mechanisms of diffusion of institutional repertoires acting as a bridge between colonial and guest workers regimes of incorporation in France. This would have important consequences for North African immigrants.

In the 1960s the number of foyers had grown rapidly and by 1975 there were 403 *foyers-hôtels* in France, which were housing more than 100,000 migrant workers. People who lived in a hostel were called “residents” (*résidents*) and not “tenants” (*locataires*). The residents usually had a small room for themselves and they could use a number of common spaces such as kitchens, dining rooms and sanitary facilities. They were subjected to a strict discipline, which was based on an internal regulation (*règlement intérieur*). These regulations stipulated, for instance, that the residents had to pass a medical exam every six months, they could not receive female visitors, they were not allowed to hold political meetings or distribute pamphlets, and the director of the hostel was entitled to enter the rooms at any moment (Ginésy-Galano 1984: 114ff.). In 1975, 144 out of 151 hostel directors working for the SONACOTRA were army veterans, and 141 of them had worked in North Africa.

Another continuity in the ways North Africans were being accommodated in France in the post-colonial period was the supportive attitude of French authorities and employers towards the maintenance of cultural identity.²¹⁷ There was however, a major difference. In the colonial period the French officials in Algeria, the *colons* and self-styled experts on “indigenous culture” had been among those who proclaimed to one and all that colonial workers should be enabled to maintain their identity and culture while in France. In the post-colonial situation, a new advocate of such a policy approach had been found in the form of the governments of the newly founded postcolonial states. Countries such as Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria needed the economic revenues migrant workers in Western Europe could provide. They encouraged their compatriots in France to retain their cultural identity and nationality, also fearing that Western Europe might become home to all kinds of political and religious oppositional movements that were being repressed by the authoritarian regimes at home. In 1962 the Algerian government established the Fraternal Association of Algerians in Europe (*Amicale des Algériens en Europe*) (AAE). The *Amicales* explicitly “stroved to nurture national identity and to prevent the assimilation and acculturation of Algerians into French society” (Ireland 1994: 38). That strategy meanwhile did not conflict with the idea of French authorities who also thought it would be best for guest workers not to assimilate into French society.

It was in this particular political and institutional context that the issue of Muslim religious needs presented itself anew in France. For some of the North and West African guest workers religion and religious practice became a source of hope, consolation and serenity during a stay in France that was characterised by hard work in poor conditions, poverty, solitude and discrimination. Prayer rooms represented specific meanings for migrant workers and in the hostels they often became key sites for migrant workers to appropriate a demarcated cultural and religious sphere. Prayer rooms became “alternate social totalities and subjectivities on the embers of built and dilapidated urban forms” (Silverstein 2004: 78). Based on interviews with residents of foyers in Marseilles conducted in 1985 French researchers concluded: “The territory of the ‘mosque’ is perceived, in principle, as a base that belongs to all Muslims, and as such,

217. See Freeman 1979: 168ff.

it is a symbolic place of safety” (Diop and Michalak 1996: 82). French authorities provided the Muslim residents with some money to celebrate the Islamic new year and the al-Kabir (Diop and Michalak 1996: 81). However, until the mid 1970s there was no detailed policy response or clear idea about ways to accommodate for Muslim religious needs. It was mainly a matter of immigrants themselves creating minimum facilities, sometimes with some help from foyer directors, French caretakers, churches, the *Amicales* or administrators.²¹⁸

5.4. Public policies and final efforts to encourage return

Following the oil crises of 1973 and 1974 the French economy entered a period of recession. The social climate for foreign workers had deteriorated. Public opinion was increasingly hostile to immigrants. In Marseilles the xenophobic *Comité de défense des Marseillais* was created in 1973, a local initiative that was supported by the Front National, which had been founded a year earlier.²¹⁹ In the autumn of 1973, 11 North Africans were assassinated in the Marseilles region. The Algerian government unilaterally decided to stop emigration to France in September of that year, arguing that because of the racist attacks Algerians were no longer safe in France. The French government ended the immigration of foreign workers in 1974. Since then French policy measures in the domain of immigration developed around the idea of controlling new immigration, stimulating the return of the migrant workers and eventually planning ways of integrating those migrants that would stay in France. The government refused to prolong residence permits, developed plans for a forced return of migrant workers and tried to conclude repatriation agreements with the governments of countries of origin.

In 1976 the Under-Secretary of State for Migrant Workers, Paul Dijoud, came up with the idea that the individual migrant should have the opportunity to “choose his destiny” (*choisir son destin*). He thought that “for those who prefer to let their stay in France be temporary” it was in the best interest of the French government to “facilitate the maintenance of religious traditions, cultural ties, or the expression in the mother tongue” (in Weil 2004: 127, my translation, M.M.). Special language and culture classes for the children of migrants (*Enseignement de langues et cultures d’origine*) (ELCO) had been made available in public schools since 1973, and they could prepare the children for a return to the home countries.²²⁰ These policy measures that served to help immigrants maintain their cultural identity in view of a return were combined with other measures that were meant to obstruct their further integration in French society. Facilities that could help migrant workers to participate in French society, such as alphabetisation

218. See De Galember 1993 on the role of the churches in providing prayer spaces and help to Muslims in France and Germany.

219. The extreme right had a large electoral basis in the Bouches-du-Rhône and in Marseilles, partly because of the presence of a large community of army veterans and *pieds noirs*, who “returned from Algeria conditioned by brutal actions against the civilian population, by the coarse barrack-room ‘humour’ and racism of the platoon and by the values and practices of colonial society” (MacMaster 1997: 212).

220. On the importance of language education see Grillo 1985: 188ff. See also Favell 1998: 57; and Kepel 1991: 139ff.

courses and French classes, were abolished. In 1977, under the new Under-Secretary of State on Migrant Workers, Lionel Stoléru, the Social Action Funds available for migrant workers (*Fonds d'action sociale pour les travailleurs migrants*, FAS) were radically reduced (Weil 2004: 148). The measures taken to provide for immigrants social and cultural needs were thus increasingly focussed on facilitating return. Moreover, the simultaneous downscaling of the funds that were available to support and help immigrant workers in France showed that the French government had set out to dismantle the guest workers regime.

5.5. Muslim religious needs and policy responses in the late 1970s

Migrant workers in France in the 1970s not only continued to work in harsh conditions for low wages, but they were now also increasingly confronted with hostility, violence and discrimination. The military discipline that was maintained in the foyers and the fact that directors often discriminated against the North African residents was an important factor leading to the protests of foyer-residents that swept through France between the mid-1970s and early 1980s. In 1975, a nation-wide protest movement developed when tenants refused to pay the rent, and demanded the improvement of their housing, the right to receive visitors and the lowering of the rent (Ginésy-Galano 1984: 188ff.). Another central demand of the residents was to have facilities for Islamic practice, such as prayer rooms and ritually prepared food (Kepel 1991: 132ff.). The protest movements in the hostels were followed in 1982 by protests by North African migrant workers in French industries. Strikes were held in the automobile industry of Renault and Citroën. The strikers eventually succeeded in getting their employers to comply with their demands for prayer rooms, ritually prepared food and special breaks to allow them to accomplish the daily prayers (Kepel 1991: 145-159). The religious needs and concerns that arose in the context of economic institutions – factories and industries – could be dealt with by private employers. In order to find recognition for their religious needs and concerns the Muslim workers who lived in hostels, however, had to address their demands primarily to the public officials who were in control of their accommodations, i.e. the administrators of the foyers. The administrators of the foyers came to think that the possibility of having adequate prayer rooms would be perceived as a significant symbolical gesture by the Muslim residents. It would therefore help to keep social peace at relatively low costs (Kepel 1991: 126). Between 1976 and 1986 80% of all foyers in France were equipped with prayer rooms. This operation was subsidized by the public-private property management organisations that were responsible for workers housing.

Other types of prayer houses, by contrast, were illustrative of changes in the nature of the presence of Muslim populations in France. Much as in other West European countries groups of Muslims had at their own initiative managed to create prayer houses here and there, in disused warehouses, derelict factories, chapels or parish facilities.²²¹ One of the first Islamic houses of prayer in Marseilles was established in 1953 in a small house in the neighbourhood of *l'Estaque*

221. Sometimes the churches would help to finance or find spaces. Between 1962 and 1995 the Catholic Church helped to create 20 mosques (De Galembert 1993).

in the north of the city. The total number of Islamic prayer spaces in France increased from about 100 in 1970 to about 274 in 1980.²²² Many of these included prayer spaces created in the so-called *Cités HLM* or complexes of Low-Cost Social Housing (*Habitations à Loyer Modéré*, HLM). They foreshadowed that immigrants were settling permanently in France, despite the fact that at the moment of their creation most Muslim immigrants continued to believe their stay in France was temporary.

Many French cities experienced tremendous urban growth since the 1960s as new urban zones were being developed.²²³ For migrant families in a precarious position the relocation to a public housing complex signified an improvement, even if they would end up living in the less desirable units. The combination of continued immigration and the rapid development of huge public housing projects would have a tremendous effects upon the social and physical structure of French cities. Patterns of social and physical segregation of immigrants in France were re-produced and created a burdensome legacy for later generations.²²⁴ In the *cités-HLM* migrant families had access to community centres, libraries, and leisure and sports activities. Confronted with the demands of Muslim residents for a prayer space, the boards of the *cités* often made a two person apartment or a garage available. These spaces were then renovated by the residents, who would often find some material and financial support from French organisations (Kepel 1991: 168-175). Many of Islamic houses of worship that were created in France in the 1970s were these kind of small and “invisible” places that were entirely absorbed in public housing complexes that functioned like self-contained systems. They were almost exclusively used by Muslim men who performed their prayers with one of their fellows acting as a “working-class imam” (*imam ouvrier*). Thus, in the 1970s the typical pattern of Islamic prayer spaces in French cities would consist of prayer rooms in foyers and *cités-HLM* and some storefront mosques in existing premises. In Marseilles most of the 30 prayer spaces created between 1950 and 1985 were located in the foyers, the *cités-HLM* or in abandoned premises converted for the new function. Speaking of the significance of these spaces of worship in this period and why they were on the whole experienced as adequate the president of one of the larger mosques in Marseilles tried to describe the state of mind of Muslim immigrants: “At the time...to be able to allow the Muslim culture to endure... and their Muslim faith... they wanted to maintain that value, because they are temporary... preserve in order to return there”.²²⁵

222. For these numbers see Frégosi et al. 2006: 44 and Kepel 1991: 229.

223. The new complexes included high tower apartment buildings, public service facilities, recreational facilities, and commercial centers. The housing projects were targeted to host a socially-diversified population, including French residents seeking more spacious and modern apartments and foreign workers who had settled in France for many years, such as Polish, Italian and Portuguese communities (De Galembert 2005: 1144-1145). By the end of the 1960s in several French cities there were signs of North and West African immigrants settling in the subsidised housing complexes.

224. In Marseilles, for example, the population grew between 1954 and 1975 from 650,000 to 914,000, mainly as a result of immigration. The modernist housing projects destroyed the village-like character of Marseilles that had been so crucial to its social structure at the beginning of the century. Migrant families would gradually find their way to the low cost *cités-HLM*. In 1975 35,000 Algerians, 2682 Moroccans and 6273 Tunisians lived in Marseilles (Sayad et al. 1991: 121).

225. [“à l’époque...pour pouvoir perdurer leur culture musulmane...et leur foi musulmane...ils voulaient maintenir cette valeur, parce qu’ils sont provisoires...conserver pour ensuite se retrouver là bas”]. Interview with Mohand Alili, March 22 2002.

In 1976 a report was published with the results of a study on the situation of Islamic prayer houses in 65 *départements* in France.²²⁶ In the same year, the draft policy on a new immigration policy that was mentioned above, spoke of the risk of North African immigrants in France becoming “uprooted”.²²⁷ This was said to result from social and cultural isolation. Many immigrants were living in cities while they originally had come from rural areas and they were also cut off from the spiritual ties that in “Islamic countries play an essential role in the collective and individual equilibrium”. Seen in this light: “Religious practice and being able to have access to a place of worship would help the Magrhebis to recreate in France one of the important moments of their daily life” (cited in Kepel 1991: 141, my translation, M.M.). The earlier mentioned Under-Secretary of State, Dijoud, planned to provide for the religious needs of Muslims by creating a Muslim television broadcast on Sunday mornings, creating possibilities for Muslim spiritual care in hospitals and prisons, encouraging municipalities to create Muslim cemeteries and encouraging company directors to facilitate respect for Muslim religious rules with respect to dietary requirements and prayer. In 1976 he sent out a directive which laid down a program in favour of cultural action for the immigrant population. This program included among its headings “Support for the establishment of houses of worship” (*Aide à l’implantation des lieux de culte*). In the neighbourhoods where many Muslims lived places of worship were to be put at the disposal of the believers because “traditionally, for the Muslims, the cultural life cannot be separated from the religious duties” (cited in Kepel 1991: 143, my translation, M.M.).

Because Under-Secretary of State Dijoud disappeared from the scene for political reasons, even before the text explaining the New Immigration Policy was published in 1977, the implementation of these ideas was gravely compromised. The idea of developing a nation wide effort to help create prayer houses as part of a “*promotion culturelle*” was not really executed. It is important to reiterate, however, that French public authorities and semi-public institutions such as the directors of the SONACOTRA and the cités-HLM, did think they should be of help in creating the necessary facilities to enable the immigrant workers to maintain their cultural and religious practices. Local housing authorities and municipalities would on an incidental basis make funds or facilities available, such as the municipality of Mantes-la-Jolie that provided the Muslim community a tent to hold holiday services (De Galembert 2005: 1146). These forms of support were not primarily seen in terms of public authorities financing religion or of public officials responding to Muslim claims for recognition. They were motivated both by the idea that helping immigrants to retain their religion and culture might facilitate their return to the countries of origin, and by the idea that helping Muslims to create and equip elementary religious spaces was not fundamentally different from helping to provide for other socio-cultural needs.²²⁸

226. The report distinguished between mosques (31 of which 22 at the planning stage), masjids (52 of which 10 at the planning stage), socio-cultural centres (4 of which 1 at the planning stage) and 5 prayer spaces at the planning stage without further precision (Frégosi et al. 2006: 44, footnote 51).

227. This text had been written by Paul Dijoud, but it was only published in 1977 when he had already been replaced by Lionel Stoléru. The latter would in part implement the policy proposals, but he also opted for a tougher policy aimed at stemming immigration (Kepel 1991: 141).

228. A series of failed measures would lead French officials and politicians to acknowledge that a massive return of the guest workers was unlikely to occur. These included the failed ban on family migration (because of a ruling of the Council of State in 1976), the plans for premium on return (rejected in 1977), and the failure to conclude an agreement with the Algerian government on a massive repatriation scheme involving some 500,000 immigrant workers in 1978 (Weil 2004: 159).

5.6. Escaping from *encadrement*: Islam and the formation of ethnic communities

In the course of the 1970s the increased importance of family-based immigration had begun to affect social, cultural and religious needs of immigrants. Muslim parents also wanted to be able to transmit religious values and knowledge to their children in the perspective of a more long-term stay. Houses of prayer began to cater to other activities, such as religious instructions and language classes, and they played a role in expediting the formation of communities. The informal associations that administered houses of worship became more established and began to function as ethnic organisations.²²⁹ Some associations could now assume the ownership of houses of worship, sometimes with financial funds from OPEC countries (Kepele 1991).

However, it was not only the Muslim immigrants who began to see their presence in France in a new light. This also happened among native French populations and public authorities. French public opinion was on the whole anxious about the settlement of immigrants in France and in particular they were concerned about the possibilities of North and Black African immigrants to “adapt to French life” (cf. Freeman 1979: 269ff.). Xenophobia and the existence of extreme right organisations were not new, but what was new was that Islam became more of an issue in xenophobic rhetoric. The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 led, much as in the rest of Europe, to an increased public concern about the activities of Muslim fundamentalists.

In Marseilles a larger mosque had been established in 1977 in a former post office, located between the Rue Bon Pasteur and the Rue Camille Pelatan near the *Porte d’Aix* in the centre of the city. In the 1980s it would colloquially become known as the Grand Mosque of Marseilles. The Algerian owners of the mosque, who ran a restaurant located next to it in Rue Bon Pasteur, approached a municipal official, Pierre Rastoin, in the beginning of 1980s to discuss plans to enlarge the mosque. The house of worship was too small to cater to the numerous worshippers during Friday prayer and at that occasion many worshippers were forced to pray in the street. The façade of the building was still that of the original 18th century post office, but the members of the Mosque Committee had asked a local architect to make sketches for a new façade which would give the mosque a more “Islamic appearance”.²³⁰

The chairman of the Mosque Committee, Hadj Alili, explained his ideas about the renovation of the mosque in an interview, which was conducted some years later by a French researcher:

[Marseilles] wants to be the revolving door, the window, the Gateway to the Orient ... I don’t know how, with what, if it is not with the elements that it holds in its hands. Even today there is a South Mediterranean colloquium which brings together all the countries of the Maghreb. Ambassadors and officials meet at the Chamber of Commerce, and I know that the majority of them are Muslims. And God knows that, at the present day, one cannot

229. In 1981 the 1901 Law on Civil Associations was modified creating possibilities for non-nationals to set up civil associations.

230. The post office had been built in the 18th century and its façade was classified as a monument. This was also important for the reaction of the municipality to the plans of the mosque association to renovate the exterior of the building (Mazzella 1996).

show them a single place (...) which is worthy of the city, [a city] that wants to be the opening, the revolving door of the Mediterranean...²³¹

The first time possibilities of symbolically marking the presence of Islam in Marseilles were being discussed in the post-colonial period the building of a mosque was immediately linked to the familiar tropes of the colonial period. Marseilles was close to North Africa, it was a Mediterranean city and it should be able to offer Muslim visitors an appropriate place to worship. However, in Marseilles of the 1980s the creation of a more prominent mosque had different significances as well. According the municipal official it was unwise to create a stir by allowing for a larger mosque in the city centre, because of the rise of the Front National and in the context of international terrorism aimed at French policy in the Middle East (Rastoin 1985: 69).²³² When the Mayor of Marseilles, Gaston Defferre, was informed of the idea of making the mosque in Rue Pasteur more prominent and visible, he reportedly said to the chairman of the Mosque Committee: “Make a place... but don’t make it there... it is the entrance of the high way... I don’t want the tourists who come to Marseilles to see the Arabs leaving the mosque”.²³³

5.7. Conclusion

Temporary foreign workers in France were mostly housed in impermanent and separate accommodations, allowing them to remain at a distance from mainstream French society, socially, physically and culturally. They were encouraged to maintain their own social, cultural, linguistic and religious practices to facilitate their reintegration in the society of origin on the day of return. A guest workers regime was developed in France when the colonial empire still existed. This allowed colonial representations and regulatory practices to feed into newly emerging arrangements for labour migrants. It also institutionalised a differentiated and unequal treatment of European and colonial workers. Just like the Europeans, colonial workers were segregated from mainstream French society and they were also encouraged to maintain their culture in view of their re-insertion into the “colonial order”. However, they were not allowed to bring their families and to settle in France. French authorities did not like seeing French women marry Muslim men. For the Algerian colonial workers special foyers were built where they were subject to strict discipline and surveillance, the latter becoming more intense during the Algerian

231. [“Elle [Marseille] se veut la plaque tournante, la fenêtre, la Porte de l’Orient, je ne sais pas comment, avec quoi, si ce n’est pas avec des éléments qu’elle a en main. D’ailleurs pas plus tard qu’aujourd’hui y a un colloque sud-méditerranéen qui rassemble tous les pays du Maghreb au niveau des ambassadeurs et des personnalités qui se réunissent à la chambre de commerce, et que je sache la majorité sont musulmans et Dieu sait, qu’aujourd’hui, on ne peut leur montrer un lieu qui nous dit de la ville, voyez, je ne parle pas des autres, mais digne de la ville qui se veut être l’ouverture, la plaque tournante de la Méditerranée”] (cited in Mazzella 1996: 141).

232. In 1983 Lebanese terrorists exploded a bomb in the St. Charles railway station in Marseilles.

233. According to Mohand Alili, the son of Hadj, the Mayor at the time, Gaston Defferre, had said: [“Faites un lieu... mais ne le fait pas là bas... c’est l’entrée de l’autoroute... je ne veux pas que les touristes venant à Marseille voient les Arabes sortir de la mosquée”]. Interview with Mohand Alili March 22 2002.

war. Since the 1960s North African workers no longer came from the French colonies or protectorates but as citizens of North African states. Nevertheless they, and especially Algerians, experienced their treatment as a continuation of a defunct colonial status. The vast majority of foyer directors were army veterans who had worked in North Africa and who were seen as experts in “native management”.

Muslims were in a more disadvantaged position to perform religious practices and duties or to maintain cultural practices, compared to the Polish, Italian and Portuguese workers. Residents created prayer rooms in the foyers and in barracks camps and factories at their own initiative and these spaces were often experienced as safe havens in an otherwise inhospitable social and physical environment. Between the 1950s and the early 1970s there existed no coordinated public policy with regard to the religious needs of Muslim guest workers. Rather paradoxically, however, the French guest workers regime did produce more elaborate public policy responses to provide for the religious needs of Muslim guest workers when the French government was doing its utmost to encourage a large scale return of migrant workers to their countries of origin. One explanation for the timing of these policy response was that it was a reaction to social protests of immigrants who had managed to bring the issue to the attention of their employers, the boards of the foyer owning companies and French authorities. Following a movement of strikes of the residents the SONACOTRA company and other property management organisations responsible for worker housing set out to equip nearly all foyers in France with prayer rooms between 1976 and 1985. A second explanation can be found when one takes into consideration the motivations underlying this support. In the first place, French authorities and officials (foyer directors, boards of cités-HLM, social service organisations) framed their support for the religious needs of immigrants in a manner not fundamentally different from other forms of social and cultural support for a poor and powerless population. It was therefore not primarily seen as a way of “subsidizing religion”. Second, there was a (brief) period in which progressive ideas about the “*promotion culturelle*” of immigrant workers was seen as a contribution to their human flourishing. Third, the willingness of French authorities to contribute to creating possibilities for immigrants to retain their culture and religion was an attempt to help sustain the possibility of a successful return of immigrants and their families to the country of origin. Ironically public funds and policy efforts that were dedicated to the creation of Islamic prayer rooms were motivated by ideas associated with a guest workers regime, but were only being advocated and (in part) implemented when the institutional arrangements of that regime were being dismantled. By the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s the number of small places of worship that were created in discarded factories, former chapels and in the basements of the cités-HLM had grown considerably. Most of these religious spaces remained “invisible” and were part of largely self-contained urban forms where immigrant communities were concentrated, such as the *cités*. When Muslims wanted to create more permanent, larger or more prominent prayer houses they would often be confronted with lack of interest or outright hostility.