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Constructing mosques : the governance of Islam in France and the Netherlands

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Summary in English

This thesis is about the governance of Islam and Muslim immigrant minorities in France and the Netherlands. Its focus is on public policy making processes with regard to the creation of mosques, with particular emphasis on developments in Marseilles and Rotterdam.

Most existing studies have analysed the forming of Islamic institutions in Western Europe as an aspect of a wider process of the formation of ethnic institutions since the early 1980s. This study, by contrast, looks at the ways French and Dutch societies and governments were involved in the governance of Islam since the mid 19th century until the early years of the 21st century. The study explores in what ways ideas and representations of mosques are dialectically related to distinctive governing strategies. Ideas and images inform public policies, but they also emanate from already existing policy paradigms and institutional repertoires. Of particular relevance are church-state regimes and different regimes of incorporation of ethnic immigrant minorities. I distinguish between three regimes of incorporation: a colonial regime, a guest workers regime and a citizenship regime. Public policy making with regard to mosque creation is thereby understood as a complex social and political process that unfolds over time, and in which institutional repertoires and policy discourses get produced, reproduced and contested.

In chapter 2, I introduce French and Dutch national regimes for the governance of religion. These regimes are an institutional legacy that has grown out of a history of relations between church and state. I more elaborately discuss the institutional framework for the financing of houses of worship.

In chapter 3 and 4, I discuss strategies of governance of Islam in the context of French and Dutch colonial rule. I specifically focus upon public policies with regard to the construction, maintenance and functioning of mosques in the colonies and Europe. At the colonial exhibitions in Europe, the French erected traditionally styled imitation mosques to demonstrate how the French respected Islamic culture in their overseas colonies. At the same time, Muslim workers and soldiers were performing their prayers in make-shift accommodations in cities such as Paris and Marseilles. The creation of a prestigious Muslim institute and a traditionally styled mosque in the centre of Paris in the 1920s served to show that France was a Great Muslim Power and that it honoured its Muslim soldiers who had died during the First World War. In Marseilles there were also plans to create a central mosque, in the interwar period and shortly after World War Two.

The Dutch sought to abstain from becoming involved directly in the regulation of "Islam as worship" in the East Indies. There was also a strategy of shielding and protecting indigenous cultures and adat communities from outside influences and reformist movements in Islam. The need to accommodate Muslim populations and Islamic practice did not present itself in the Netherlands in the colonial era. The fact that, paradoxically, the Dutch state became involved in the creation of mosques for post-colonial Muslim immigrants from the Moluccas was in large part due to the particular history of this group.

Chapter 5 and 6 deal with the accommodation of Muslim religious needs in the context of guest workers policies. In France, North and West African immigrant workers experienced their treatment as a continuation of a defunct colonial status. Compared to their European counterparts, Muslim guest workers were in a more disadvantaged position to perform their religious rituals and cultural practices. Prayer rooms in the foyers, in barracks camps and factories were

often experienced as safe havens in an otherwise inhospitable social and physical environment. I explain for what reasons policy efforts to improve the conditions for Islamic worship were developed in France in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In the Netherlands institutional arrangements for guest workers were developed in close relation with social work. There was hardly any diffussion of colonial repertoires into guest workers policies, in contrast to what happened in France. The religious needs of Muslim guest workers became an issue on the national policy agenda in the mid 1970s when the government decided in favour of a subsidy scheme for prayer houses. I discuss the shifts in perceptions of Islamic presence that occurred in Dutch cities in the closing years of guest workers policy.

In chapter 7 and 8 I more elaborately reconstruct state accommodation in the citizenship regime. A guiding idea for the French approach was the hope that an "Islam of France" could develop. Municipal governments believed that "Cathedral Mosques" could serve as symbols and institutional carriers of this type of Islam. In Marseilles, the building of a central mosque also seemed plausible in light of local traditions of inter-community relations. I analyze the impact of the Consultation on Islam in France and reconstruct in detail the discussions on the building of a grand Islamic Religious and Cultural Centre in Marseilles. A critical juncture occurred when the municipality of Marseilles took up a policy frame that had developed in other French cities, namely to focus on improving the housing conditions of "vicinity Islam".

In Rotterdam mosque creation entered the municipal policy agenda in the early 1980s and from then on moved with the tides of discussions on immigrant integration. Municipal policy makers eventually came to think that it would be possible to move progressively from better spatial accommodation of mosques to further social integration of Muslims. A special municipal policy on the housing of mosques helped to convert the process of the incorporation of mosques into an matter of sufficient parking space, preventing environmental nuisance and creating more understanding among the Dutch residents. In the second half of the 1990s the idea came up that newly built mosques could function as symbols of recognition and that this form of "multicultural architecture" should be endorsed. However, in the context of rising concerns about the "multicultural tragedy" alternative views on the symbolical meanings of newly built mosques entered the fray. Representatives of Liveable Rotterdam associated mosque architecture with the stagnation of integration of Muslims and the (perceived) growing prominence of Islam in the Netherlands. Eventually, however, proposals to forbid the building of large mosques in an "out of the ordinary style" were not converted into effective policy measures.

In the concluding chapter I compare the prevailing strategies of governance across time and also between the two countries. I argue that many taken-for-granted images of French and Dutch policies with regard to Islam are too much based on extrapolations from events and approaches that in actual fact were typical for particular periods. French and Dutch church-state regimes have shaped public policies of accommodation of Islam, but there is great diversity between the regimes of incorporation of ethnic immigrant minorities in that respect. In the colonial period the French drew upon Concordatarian and Gallican traditions to organise state control over Islam, and the ways these governing strategies were institutionalised created an important legacy for the governance of Islam in later periods. In comparison with France, Dutch colonial Islam policies were very little institutionalised. In addition, there were hardly any possibilities for colonial policies to diffuse into post-colonial policies of accommodation of Islam. Important shifts in public policies in both countries and cities illustrate in what ways institutional and legal frameworks can bend under the weight of diverging policy frames.