Mosques in Europe
Why a solution has become a problem

Editor Stefano Allievi
in collaboration with Ethnobarometer
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Preface

This book and the ‘Religion and Democracy in Europe’ initiative

The Network of European Foundations (NEF), based in Brussels, is an operational platform primarily committed to strengthening the potential for cooperation in the form of joint ventures between foundations at the European level. The NEF offers its members the opportunity to identify common goals and, as an open structure, to join forces with other foundations in Europe which may share similar concerns and objectives. It is also open to collaboration with the public and private sectors in developing its initiatives. Its areas of intervention to promote systemic social change include migration, European citizenship, support for the European integration process, youth empowerment and global European projects.

In January 2007 the NEF launched a special initiative on ‘Religion and Democracy in Europe’. This was conducted with the participation of Hywel Ceri Jones, NEF European policy adviser, and was based on a partnership between several foundations, including: Van Leer Group Foundation (chair); Arcadia Trust; Barrow-Cadbury Trust; Bernheim Foundation; Compagnia di San Paolo; Ford Foundation; Freudenberg Stiftung; King Baudouin Foundation; Riksbankens Jubileumsfond; Stefan Batory Foundation; and Volkswagen Stiftung.

The ‘Religion and Democracy in Europe’ initiative focused on the relation between religion and democracy in European societies, covering both religion and the public domain and religion and the state. The aim was to contribute to a better-informed debate on the topic through seminars and research on related issues.
The first year of activities, which included a roundtable with specialized journalists and a series of youth debates, culminated in the publication through Alliance Publishing Trust of a compendium in which all the material presented in an international symposium on 'Religion and Democracy in Contemporary Europe' held in Jerusalem was collected. This publication is available on NEF’s website at www.nef-europe.org.

The second phase of the ‘Religion and Democracy in Europe’ initiative (2008–9) aimed to develop a series of reports addressing specific aspects of the interaction both between the state and religion and between religion and society. The reports were supposed to be a mapping exercise of existing practices and different approaches to specific issues, set in the broader context of the religion and democracy debate. They intended to target practitioners, policy-makers and civil society actors.

Of one of these researches, on mosques in Europe, that I have directed, has been already published a synthesis (Stefano Allievi, Conflicts over Mosques in Europe. Policy issues and trends, 2009), together with the other research reports (Luce Pépin, Teaching about Religions in European School Systems, 2009; Dimitrina Petrova and Jarlath Clifford, Religion and Healthcare in the European Union, 2009; Beate Küpper and Andreas Zick, Religion and Prejudice in Europe: New Empirical Findings, 2010: all published by Alliance Publishing Trust, and available also at www.nef-europe.org).

Given the importance and the political and media attention given to this report – published right before the Swiss referendum on minarets – and given the interest and originality of the national reports produced for this research, together with NEF we have decided to update and publish them, adding new chapters on different other countries not included in the original research project.

For this book we have written a new introduction, discussed some more recent developments (from the Swiss referendum, November 2009, to the debate around the so called Ground Zero mosque, August 2010) and updated the statistics. Some elements of the previous synthesis are also resumed here. The comparative table, originally present also in the previous publication, contains more recent data, new items and a larger number of countries: it should therefore replace the previous one.

For more information, and an extensive bibliography, we ask the reader to refer to the original synthesis, of which we have republished here only the main suggestions.

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Acknowledgements

I wish first of all to thank the researchers who have worked on this project, which has required not only commitment and professionalism, but intense research time and rapidity of writing. All this would not have been possible if they were not among the best in their field in their respective countries. So heartfelt thanks to Azra Akšamija (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Maria Bombardieri (Italy), Felice Dassetto and Olivier Ralet (Belgium), Ernst Fürlinger (Austria), Göran Larsson (Sweden), Jordi Moreras (Spain) and Athena Skoulariki (Greece), who carried out the empirical research in their respective countries, and Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Jonathan Birt (Great Britain), Michael Kreutz and Aladdin Sarhan (Germany), Nico Landman (Netherlands), Stéphane Lathion (Switzerland), Omero Marongiu-Perria (France) and Davide Tacchini (United States), who have written the chapters on the situation in the countries indicated—and again Göran Larsson (for the Nordic and Baltic countries: Finland, Norway and Denmark; Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and Jordi Moreras (Portugal), for their further contributions.

But this book, as also the whole research project on the conflicts over mosques in Europe, would not even have seen the light without the institutions that have made it concretely possible. All my gratitude goes to the Network of European Foundations (NEF), which financed this ambitious project, and contributed in such an extraordinary way to the dissemination of its results, for the possibility it offered me to carry out this research in absolute freedom. The Freudenberg Stiftung, inside the NEF, took a special interest in the fate of the first phase of work of the European comparative research, and so I have a profound
debt of esteem with them too. Ethnobarometer is the organization that was the first to show me their enthusiasm for the project, and which proposed it to the sponsors who then took it under their wing; but they have also been a constant source of support during all the stages of work, from the planning to the final editing, passing through the relations with the authors of the various national contributions. For all the support given to me from the initial idea of the design of the research, I am extremely grateful.

As however institutions are made up essentially of persons, and it is to them that they owe their good functioning, I would like to refer to these persons, this time in reverse order. Alessandro Silj of Ethnobarometer, for his friendship, collaboration and the care he has put into this work, which has made him as enthusiastic about it as I myself have been. Christian Petri, of Freudenberg Stiftung, for his warm support and confidence in me right from the initial stages, when there were still delicate organizational problems to resolve. Rien van Gendt and Hywel Ceri Jones, who on behalf of the NEF directed the entire research programme with passion and competence, and promoted its results with conviction, and with intelligent lobbying at a European level, filling me with excitement for the first time in that crucial phase for every work of research when we really want to leave a mark on the reality that we have been called upon to investigate. And finally Cristina Pineda Polo, who from Brussels carried out a fundamental role of coordination, whose efficiency, scrupulous quality of work and personal likeableness were determinant in carrying on this work and making it a real pleasure. It is rare to find a team of such worth with whom to work: rigorous in the initial phase of giving the research a shape, pondered in their assessment of it, and determined in the final phases of publication, lobbying effectively for the common good. It is even more rare to discover that the professionalism and competence can go together with such human warmth, civil passion and personal kindness, producing an added value that I have rarely encountered. I fear that I will have more than one occasion to miss it.

So Alessandro, Christian, Rien, Hywel and Cristina, my most sincere thanks.

S.A.
The ever more statistically significant presence of Muslim communities in European countries should lead as an obvious consequence, similarly to what has been happening in other religious communities, to an ever more common presence of Islamic places of worship, following on historical and sociological trends and the founding juridical principles of European states, all inspired, when not for reasons of realpolitik, by the principle of religious freedom as a fundamental and inalienable right.

In reality, as we know from the newspapers every day, this is not so: Muslim prayer rooms are spreading rapidly, but conflicts over the building of mosques in Europe are multiplying in their turn, at both the local and national level. It is therefore necessary to take them on as a field of study and go into them in depth: without any ideological bias and avoiding the politically-correct, but also without underestimating their importance with misplaced good intentions.

**Mosques of Europe: why the conflict?**

Although forms of discrimination on the basis of religion are never completely absent—in particular, cases of discrimination towards certain minority religions or religious beliefs, some of which have even come before the European courts—in no country and in no other case has the opening of places of worship taken on such a high profile in the public imagination as the question of mosques and Islamic places of worship. With the passing of time, the issue of mosques has led to more and more frequent disputes, debates and conflict, even in countries
where such conflicts were previously unknown and mosques were already part of the landscape.

Confrontations over Islam have been frequent at various levels. Islam itself questioned, often through essentialist and simplistic interpretations and controversies regarding dogmatic aspects and customs. Some aspects of Islam are also being called into question because of the way they manifest themselves, particularly in Muslim countries: of these aspects, the most discussed are those related to the condition of women and gender equality, and to the relationship between religion and violence, fundamentalism and, more generally, politics. Finally, confrontation has led to questions and debate about the host societies themselves: on their degree of ‘openness’, on the possibilities of and limits to integration, on how best to achieve it (in essence, this is the debate on multiculturalism), and on the definition of any possible ‘tolerance thresholds’, at both an ethnic or religious level.

All this may happen without there necessarily being any debate or direct dialogue or confrontation with Muslims, or between society and the Muslims who live in it. Often these are debates within societies about Muslims and Islam.

The case of mosques is the most significant in this sense, even if it is not the only one, because it relates to a conflict that is not only debated within society, but is about society itself. This point seems particularly significant, in that it implies the perception of control over the territory and its symbolic imprinting. After all, control of and over the territory is not only a cultural and symbolic fact, it is also (and remains, in spite of everything) a very concrete and material sign of dominion and power.

These disputes are not limited to the establishment of places of worship, which we will discuss in the following pages; they also include the question of their visibility in European cities, which has an evident symbolic value. This issue encompasses related questions regarding the building and even the shape of minarets, the broadcasting of the adhan, the call to prayer, as well as the whole problem of Muslim cemeteries. An issue, this, in some ways even more surprising than that of mosques. First, because there is nothing more obvious and natural than that people, apart from living, should also die, and so need a place where to be buried. Secondly, because respect for and burial of the dead is an acquired fact not only of religions, but also of secular humana pietas, and it is disconcerting to see how many people, religious or not, are attempting to stop other people from burying and mourning their dead. And thirdly, because when immigrants decide to be buried in the countries where they have lived, rather than being sent to their countries of origin, which is a frequent and normal first phase of the migratory process, it is precisely because they consider it their country, and
therefore worthy of being their last and final dwelling-place: an evident sign of integration post-mortem, so to speak. But just because there are these conflicts, they tell us a great deal about the more general conflict that involves Islam in Europe, of which the mosques and minarets (but also the headscarf, the burqa, and everything that regards the female question in Islam) are the most visible and widespread sign.

These issues are important not only because they show how the presence of Islam in Europe is being debated and confronted; they are also crucial in understanding the broader issues of Europe as a whole: its problems, its values and its identity.

**Defining the mosque in Europe**

What is a mosque? Not necessarily a building with a minaret, dome and half moon. Not only because minarets are being called into question and here and there forbidden, as we shall see, but because the story of mosques in Europe begins with a prayer rug laid out at home, at work, sometimes on a street corner; it continues with a group of compatriots, colleagues or neighbours, coming together to pray at the home of one of them or at work, in a room usually used for other purposes put at their disposal by an association or possibly a parish; it continues with the first premises rented for the occasion (the back of a shop or a basement, and when the numbers grow, storerooms and disused industrial buildings or isolated farmhouses in the countryside); and it ends, or begins to come to an end, with purpose-built mosques, these having when possible all the characteristics of a traditional mosque, until we arrive at those modernist-looking mosques, which try to re-interpret the elements of traditional Islam by grafting them on to the canons of modern Western architecture.

I shall here use an extensive definition and a commonsense criterion: all places open to the faithful, in which Muslims gather together to pray on a regular basis, will be considered to be mosques. I am aware that this definition contains an inevitable margin of error, but at the same time it is more meaningful and more comprehensive of the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon under discussion. It appeals to the principal function – prayer – and its collective and public aspect.

Within the category of mosque, a number of differences are discernible. Employing a scale of decreasing importance, the first element is that of ‘Islamic centre’. By Islamic centre we mean a centre of significant size, which has, in addition to the function of prayer and worship, a number of social and cultural functions through various forms of gathering (a Koranic school, courses and
opportunities for adults, women and converts to meet; conferences and other educational and cultural activities),\(^1\) usually conducted in rooms separate from the prayer hall itself. Such a centre also carries out the activities of institutional and symbolic representation of Muslims. Islamic centres are a small but important part of what we call mosques. Only in major cities might there be more than one, and often there are none at all. Not infrequently they perform a centralizing function of representation at a provincial or regional level. Usually, they also organize special meetings, for example those relating to Islamic holidays.

One category that we often encounter, especially given its significance in relation to conflicts surrounding places of worship, is that of the ad hoc, or purpose-built, mosque, usually with visible signs of a dome and one or more minarets (the real masgids).\(^2\) These may overlap, and are often the same as Islamic centres, but there are cases of organized and structured Islamic centres that are not purpose-built mosques, as such centres are not infrequently located in converted buildings that do not have the visible form of a mosque and where signs of recognition and external visible clues to their existence are limited to a sign or a plaque.

A third category – numerically by far the most significant in all European countries—is the Islamic musalla, or prayer room. Musallas may be located in industrial buildings, warehouses, storerooms, former shops and apartments. In the literature these are variously called basement mosques, mosquées hangars, house mosques, hinterhofmoschee, backyard mosques, mescit, mescid, etc. They may only serve to host the activity of prayer, but more often than not other activities are also performed there (e.g. Koranic schools and other educational events). Within this category we also find ‘ethnic’ musallas, which are attended only by members of one ethnic group, usually on the grounds of language (non-Arabophone ethnic groups, for example). Special mention should be made of the prayer halls or Sufi zawiyas, i.e. those belonging to mystical brotherhoods; these sometimes have an ethno-linguistic specificity, but some, especially those attended also or mostly by converts, may have a strong inter-ethnic character. There are also prayer halls belonging to minority Muslim groups (Shiites, Ahmadiyya, etc.), when they have the resources to build their own structures. These three categories of prayer hall have the prerogative of being semi-closed: that is, in principle they are open to any Muslim, but in reality they are attended only by those belonging to that specific

\(^1\) In this sense they are also among the places where Islamic knowledge is produced, especially in what is still the most widespread and pervasive form of production and dissemination of knowledge, the oral form, through celebrations, rituals, meetings, sermons, personal care, teaching, counselling, etc.; on this, see Van Bruinessen, M and Allievi, S (2010), Producing Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe, London: Routledge.

\(^2\) It is not very useful, however, in Europe to apply the distinction between masgid and jami, or between a ‘weekday’ mosque and the traditional congregational mosque where the community meets on Friday. In fact, most mosques in Europe fulfil both functions.
group. This is particularly true of Sufi groups in which – albeit with significant exceptions, notably in the English-speaking world – there can be no external sign of recognition, and they have no desire to open themselves up to the ordinary Muslim in the area, who is simply looking for a place to pray, because the moments of the meeting may be different from the usual canonical ones, using particular liturgies and dhikr.

Some musallas are temporary for various reasons. This may be because they share the premises with other activities (which may occur, for instance, in universities, hospitals, centres for immigrants), so they serve as prayer halls only at certain times or in certain periods of the year. Such is the case with mosques that are situated in temporary gathering places (for instance, holiday destinations that attract Muslim workers only at certain times of the year, or rural mosques where seasonal workers are employed in agriculture). Many isolated rural mosques, which are often relatively unknown, are nevertheless stable, although lively only at certain times of the year.

While it is relatively easy to calculate the number of Islamic centres, purpose-built mosques and major prayer halls, the calculation of ‘hidden’ and temporary mosques is inevitably more complicated and often not very accurate. However, in this book, when we talk of mosques in general, the term is meant to include all types of mosques and prayer halls within a country.

Most mosques play complex and varied roles: religious, social, cultural, political and economic, for instance. Other activities of interest and gatherings often take place around a mosque: halal butchers, ethnic shops, phone centres, import-export activities, ethno-religious bookshops (Islamic, but also often places where one can find books, videos, CDs and DVDs of the main ethnic and linguistic community in the area). In neighbourhoods with a strong ethnic character or a strong immigrant presence, a mosque will take its place quite naturally in the area. Furthermore, at a local level, mosques are also community centres and act as an interface with various networks – ethnic, national (linked to the countries of origin) and transnational (religious and political).

Role and function of mosques

The presence of mosques in Europe is a recent phenomenon almost linked entirely to the presence of Muslim immigrant workers in Europe. The exceptions are Andalusia and Sicily, which in the distant past were under Muslim domination; the areas under Ottoman rule in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, from Bulgaria to Greece, part of which later came under the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Bosnia); a small Tatar presence in Finland, and a few other small groups. There are also a
few mosques from the more recent past, established for various reasons: commercial and mercantile interests (in ports, such as in the United Kingdom), for military reasons (e.g. the presence of Muslim units in the Prussian army), or due to the effects of colonization and decolonization (in France, UK and the Netherlands in particular). Nevertheless, the modern and contemporary history of mosques in Europe is linked to immigrant workers coming from Muslim countries.

The spread of mosques has usually taken the following (ideal) path. A prayer room opens in a given area, once a sufficient number of Muslims (often of a single ethno-national group) have settled in a certain place. These 'grass roots' mosques, being created from below and self-financed, call for a significant effort on the part of family heads (we are dealing here almost exclusively with men), for their own use and the need to transmit their cultural and religious experiences to the next generation.

Gradually, increasing concentrations of the Muslim population are reached; ethno-linguistic groups tend to differentiate their spaces of worship; political and religious differences too lead to the multiplication of prayer halls. Sometimes these are merely temporary or episodic, and are often precarious, albeit with a certain effervescence and vitality. They also suffer a high mortality rate due to a lack of resources and prospects and to bad planning (this may include promises of external funding which never arrives and is sometimes little more than wishful thinking).

At the same time, in capital cities in particular, large purpose-built Islamic centres are built, financed with external resources, often (especially in the capitals) with the support of the Muslim World League (Rabita al-alam al-islami) under Saudi control. The ambassadors of Islamic countries are usually represented on the boards of these mosques, but control is almost always in the hands of the financing body. Other institutional bodies intervene with funding for their respective national diasporas, such as the Turkish DITIB (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs), the embassies of Morocco, Iranian institutions promoting Shiite mosques, and so forth.

With regard to geographical location, with the partial exception of the large Islamic centres, mosques have mostly been located in the industrial suburbs, where it is easier to find buildings of sufficient size to adapt to their purposes at an affordable price, or in ethnic neighbourhoods, on the outskirts of big towns.

It is worth noting that in Europe there is a general trend towards a kind of Westernization of mosque functions, and even, one might say, in purely formal and institutional terms, of their 'Christianization'. On the one hand, they carry out functions that they would never perform in the countries of origin: celebration of
weddings and funerals, social activities based on language and ethnic groups, counselling on issues related to immigration. On the other, mostly as a result of pressure from the host society and an internal ‘evolutionary’ push, the mosque ends up being treated as a kind of church – the imam of common mosques considered a ‘priest’, the imam or emir of the main Islamic centres seen as a kind of ‘bishop’ and representative of all Muslims. Moreover, entry into the mechanism of religious welfare typical of various host countries, applied to pre-existing religious minorities, gives the staff of mosques and the mosques themselves roles and a stability that they did not have, often forcing the pace of institutionalization mechanisms that would occur more slowly if processes were left to their own internal dynamics. In this sense, the institutional advancement in some social aspects that are linked to mosques sometimes appears too rapid, as a result of exogenous factors driving the community, especially when compared with the institutional power and sometimes the financial capabilities of the Islamic communities involved.

With the passage of time and leadership, some mosques (relatively few until now) have come down from the Islam of the fathers to that of the sons, and have changed in terms of both their character and policies. More often, youth and transnational organizations have produced their own network of mosques. Above all, the strongest and most entrenched mosques have been able to expand gradually, moving to new premises and acquiring ground on which to build, being able to respond to an obvious growth in needs and numbers, changing from simple halls of prayer into community centres. In the meantime an important role has been played in ethnic neighbourhoods by what are called in French mosques de proximité: for ‘family’ use and a high level of social control operated by the neighbourhood, which represents a guarantee specifically for first-generation parents, while allowing more room for movement for the second generation, and, more generally, for categories such as the elderly, for whom the mosque becomes a place that is easy to reach for socializing, for children, who can reach it safely, and for women, for whom it becomes important as a mediator in relation to the host society, a place for counselling and discussion on life and opinions.

The same path is taken, at greater speed but at different times, in countries exposed to the new immigration phenomena. Typical in this respect are the countries in the Mediterranean area, which in the past were exporters of labour to Central and Northern Europe.

In countries where a recognized native ‘ethnic’ Islamic presence already exists (Greece, Finland, some countries of Eastern Europe), a new wave of Muslim immigrants have begun to make themselves felt. For the moment, they live in a state of mutual separation, with low levels of interaction and mixité, also because
they do not enjoy the same rights and recognition linked to places of worship that are enjoyed by historical minorities, who are already part of the institutional landscape of their respective countries.

**A European comparison: some figures in order to understand**

The following table presents figures for the number of mosques in the main European countries and in the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (million)</th>
<th>Immigrants (million)</th>
<th>Muslims (million)</th>
<th>% of Muslim population</th>
<th>Mosques Muslims x mosque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>3.2–3.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2,600 1269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2,100 1571</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1,500 1600</td>
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<tr>
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<td>60.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>764 1702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.8–1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>668 1347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>432 2315</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.2–0.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.04</td>
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<td>33 1212</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.4–0.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>&gt;50 8000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
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<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>&gt;200 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.19</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>115 1652</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>120 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>1,967 803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>16.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10,989 1528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>310.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>5–6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1,643 3348</td>
</tr>
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</table>

3 The figure refers to the population of ‘ethnic minority origin’, not immigrants, as these people are largely British citizens.

4 The variability is due to the fact that many mosques are not registered. Valid and complete statistical data is available for only about 255 mosques.

5 The foreign population is greatly underestimated, when compared to other countries (with the partial exception of France and the UK), as a consequence of the very simple naturalization policy which means that one can obtain Belgian citizenship after three years; that citizenship is automatic following marriage to a citizen; and that the son of a foreigner born in Belgium is automatically Belgian. If indirect indicators are used, today in Belgium more than one child in ten has a culturally Muslim name and in Brussels the percentage rises to a third.

6 Rather than immigrants, in the Bosnian case one should speak of ‘displaced persons’ of the various ethnic groups.
These figures give us first of all an overall and up-to-date picture of the Islamic presence in Europe. They are very reliable, because they are not based only on census figures or sojourn permits, but also on serious estimates by long-term observers of the phenomenon. They help to give us a reliable picture of the whole of Europe, whether a part of the EU or not.

To the total of Muslims in the countries examined in the table we have to add in fact Muslims present in the other European countries, both Western and Eastern: Albania 2,200,000, Kosovo 1,800,000, Bulgaria 1,000,000, Macedonia 630,000, Serbia 3–400,000, Cyprus 250,000, Czech Republic 200,000, Romania 70,000, Croatia 58,000, Ireland 32,000, Slovenia 31,000, Poland 30,000, Hungary 20,000, Slovakia 11,000, Estonia 10,000, Latvia 10,000, Luxembourg 8–10,000, Malta 5,000, Lithuania 4,500, for a total of 6,720,500 Muslims. If to these we add the 16,790,000 of our research we have a total of 23,510,500 Muslims who we could call Europeans. To these, to have a really complete picture, we should add the 76,000,000 of Turkey, a country that has applied to join the EU (or at least the over 6,000,000 of its European part) and the 20–25,000,000 of Russia.

If we attempt a first statistical approximation concerning the issue of mosques, as regards the countries that have been the subject of the research of this book, adding the total number of Muslims of the European countries analysed and that of the mosques, we obtain the following figures: around 16,790,000 Muslims for a total of almost 11,000 mosques (to be precise 10,989). These figures in themselves are not of secondary interest, but they become even more important if we compare them to the number of the potential faithful per mosque: 1,528.

If we even remove the Muslims and mosques of Bosnia and Thrace (not of all Greece: c. 120,000 and 300 mosques), in which Muslims constitute a historically stabilised and institutionalised presence and are not the result of immigration (which would also be true for the small Tatar minority in Finland and a few others), we obtain the figure of 15,170,000 Muslims and 8,822 prayer rooms, corresponding to one prayer room per 1,720 potential Muslims.

These figures are probably comparable to those of the places of worship of the major religions in many countries, both Christian and Muslim. As often happens, it is easier to have figures on minorities than on majorities. But, if only to give a point of comparison, a recent research promoted by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs of Morocco carried out a census of 19,205 mosques, for a population of 31,600,000 inhabitants, equal to one mosque every 1,645 inhabitants7. While, for a comparison of another kind, in Italy, for a population of 60,200,000 inhabitants, there are 25,682 parishes (one for every 2,344 inhabitants), even if the Catholic

places of worship, even just counting those attended regularly, are a higher number and difficult to calculate (many other places are indeed used as places of worship regularly, while not being parishes: non-parish churches, monasteries, hospital chapels, community centres for the elderly or for youth aggregations and associations, and lastly there exist also in this case temporary ‘prayer rooms’, for example in holiday resorts). As is obvious, these figures are in some way comparable with those of mosques in Europe, even though in this case, differently from what happens in the countries cited, we have calculated also less stable places of worship, and sometimes improvised and provisional (this is a criterion that would probably not be adopted if we were assessing a structured majority religion, in which case we would only count recognized and stable places of worship). The figure is however sufficient to makes us affirm that in principle and in general there is no problem of religious freedom and freedom of worship for Islam in Europe. So much so that in many European countries there is currently a phase of consolidation and stabilization (and even augmentation) as regards the number of mosques, and also of investment in their internal structures and enlargement of their spaces and functions.

By comparison, in the United States there are between 5 and 6 million Muslims, who are able to use around 1,643 mosques. Taking as a reference the higher figure for Muslims, which is also the most widespread, there is one mosque for every 3,652 Muslims (the variability is enormous, depending on the state, ranging from a single mosque in Alaska and in Hawaii, to 250 in California and 147 in the state of New York).

Furthermore we must bear in mind that so far we have spoken of Muslims, taking the number of Muslims present in each country, so to speak, wholesale. But actually we have to bear in mind that the figures for mosques (as also those for churches) should refer to Muslims who activate their religious references in some way (about one-third, according to a recent estimate8, but probably the number for practising Muslims is even less): in this case the number of Muslims per mosque is even significantly lower.

So far we have limited ourselves to averages. But a closer analysis of the situation in the various countries offers further significant material for analysis. First of all, if we can imagine that countries with older immigration are those with a higher number of mosques and so a smaller number of Muslims per mosque, this is not always true in all cases. It is not true for example for Holland, often described as a country invaded by mosques, which has an average that is higher than the European one (432 mosques per 1,000,000 Muslims, equivalent to 2,315 Muslims

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8 Dassetto, F, Ferrari, S and Maréchal, B (2007), Islam in the European Union: What’s at stake in the future?, Strasbourg: European Parliament. The same criterion should obviously be applied to mosques and muslims of Morocco, as well as to churches and catholics of Italy.
per mosque). It is not true for the hyper-civilized Sweden, which has absolutely the lowest number of mosques in percentage to the number of Muslims (8,000 Muslims per mosque, almost five times the European average) and a large number of conflicts on the issue. And it is not true for Switzerland, which has the second-worst European result (one mosque for every 4,000 Muslims). In part this is due to the prevalence of refugees from ex-Yugoslavia, which make up half of the Muslims in Switzerland, and to their lower religious activism, but in part it is due probably also to little aperture to the issue and so a low profile held by the Muslims in the country, seen recently also in the recent minaret referendum, even if this is not to be considered a logical and inevitable consequence of a tendency a long time in the making. Furthermore it is significant that also countries of the new immigration, such as Spain, and also Italy, despite a lively conflictuality on the issue, have a large number of mosques, almost as many as Portugal, which has a situation of absolute and peculiar lack of conflict, and some Nordic countries, excluding Sweden, as we have seen. The very high percentage of mosques in the population in Greece (the highest percentage figure in Europe, one mosque for every 625 Muslims) and in Bosnia (the second-highest figure) is due instead to their peculiar situation, which sees the presence in the whole of Bosnia and the Greek regions of Western Thrace of an indigenous Islamic population that we can consider to all effects autochthonous, and therefore strongly rooted and institutionalised, to such an extent as to make Islam the main religion of the respective areas.

The number of purpose-built mosques in respect to the analysis of the degree of acceptance of Islam and Muslims is important. These are not buildings originally destined for other uses and then adapted to their new use. Even if they do not always have a strong Islamic character (they are not built on the model of the mosques of their respective countries of origin, nor are they equipped with a dome or minaret or both), their number gives us important information. It is obviously not surprising that the countries that have the most, for the reasons mentioned before, are Bosnia (1,472 out of 1,867) and Greece (almost 300, and almost all in Thrace, out of almost 400); but there are however almost 200 in France, 100 in Holland, while we can estimate a figure in-between in Great Britain, almost

9 There were 1,703 before the war, of which nearly 1,200 were totally destroyed or damaged between 1992 and 1995; 376 were built from scratch in the following years. Today there are three Islamic centres, all funded by Saudi Arabia, while there were none before the war. This destruction, which also involved hundreds of churches, mostly Catholic, was defined by the Council of Europe as ‘a major cultural catastrophe’.

10 The various sources range from more than 100 to fewer than 200. This is due to the fact that French Islam has experienced a period of great effervescence in recent times, in terms of reorganization and visibility, and yet there is no research that measures it. What we present here is a first approximation of a field that is still only partly explored.
70 in Germany, and many also in Belgium. The countries which instead have the fewest are Denmark (1), Finland (2) and Norway (3), which are however among the countries in Europe with the fewest Muslims (fewer than 200,000). Italy has only 3 too, but has many more Muslims (1,300,000). To emphasize the Italian closure, it is significant that, with far fewer Muslims, Switzerland has 4, Austria 5, Portugal and Sweden 7, and Spain 14. By way of comparison, there are over one hundred in the United States, often with architecturally significant buildings.

One last important figure concerns mosques under construction. And here, to mark a significant trend, and perhaps a real inversion of the trend, also in respect to mainstream European public opinion, are the extremely clear figures from Germany, with its almost 200 projects¹¹, and France, with around 60. Holland and Greece have around 15, while there are 6 or 7 projects under discussion in Italy, in various stages of maturation, and the same in Sweden.

To conclude, we cannot say that there is a problem of non-guaranteed religious freedom for Muslims in Europe: the number of places of worship and halls of prayer indicates the opposite. But the increasing number of conflicts over mosques, the nature of which we will analyse in the following pages, attests that a problem exists. Also because it is not enough to simply state the hypothesis that there is a causal relationship with the number of conflicts surrounding mosques in Europe: that is, that there are more conflicts simply because there are more mosques. If this is certainly true, it is also true that the number of conflicts is not easily quantifiable, and the known ones give only a strongly under-estimated idea of the problem, because in most cases threats and intimidation are not even reported to the police. What we know is what comes to the attention of the media and enters the political debate. On the other hand, if the problem is not of a quantitative nature, there are certainly serious obstacles to accepting its qualitative nature. They are no less important for that; on the contrary, they are highly relevant and significant. Still, they must be placed within a proper quantitative dimension.

Symbolism and territory: mosques as a visible dimension

Mosques represent a way for Islam to leave the private sphere and to officially enter the public sphere, in which it becomes qualified as an interlocutor with society and institutions. Moreover, mosques and prayer halls all provide evidence of specific dynamics, linked to the dynamics of immigration, which have many facets. Mosques are often the only form of ‘ethnic’ association in a territory.

¹¹ The figure is particularly high compared to other countries as it includes projects on which work has not yet begun or which are still only at the planning stage.
Sometimes they show a higher level of religious practice in emigration contexts. They are a good barometer of the level of organization of the various ethnic and religious communities. They are also an element of growth – often set within conflictual dynamics – of the Islamic leadership, or sometimes a demonstration of its immaturity: clashes between competing leaders have often impeded and sometimes even prevented the establishment of mosques, notwithstanding the occasional goodwill shown by some municipalities. Sometimes the demand for a mosque ends up being only or primarily intended to lend visibility to those who promoted it. Finally, mosques are a factor that measures the ability of Muslims to grasp the opportunities presented by the new context, and to transform them and give them an Islamic slant.

It is interesting to note, from a European perspective, that even some non-Islamic local authorities are beginning to view the presence of mosques as a sign of cultural openness and ‘globalization’. It must be stressed, however, that the situation is different for small local neighbourhood mosques, those that in the French debate are called _mosquées de proximité_, and for large mosques, _mosquées cathédrales_, which play a symbolic, cultural and even diplomatic role, visited by important foreign guests, trade delegations, institutional representatives and ambassadors. They may actually offer an open and hospitable image of a city – a symbol of integration and openness of the local context to global horizons, including opportunities to promote cultural activities, exhibitions, debates, interfaith meetings and collective ceremonies. They can play a symbolic and ‘exemplary’ role: providing internal guidance within Muslim communities; hosting the signing of symbolic acts; accommodating meetings between representatives of various groups and associations; holding training courses for imams; and so forth. Mosques may also become the subject of architectural competitions, conferences, exhibitions and art events.

But most of all mosques – like any form of construction that is proposed in an area where previously it was not present – constitute a form of symbolic ownership of the land. At the same time, resistance to them becomes a very concrete and material sign of dominance and power over the territory. It is clear, therefore, that the conflict surrounding mosques is, above all, a genuine conflict of power. Several different variables come into play in this sphere: the actors deemed to be legitimate, their strength, the resistance of social actors already present (their ‘culture’, as it is often called), and their respective forms of legitimization and expression of their own beliefs.

A first observation is self-evident: not all buildings, even those that are new in form and function, produce the same kinds of conflict. Rarely does a public or commercial building produce such forms of protest. A new hospital,
bank, supermarket or multiplex cinema may be the subject of criticism, but this is rarely expressed in cultural terms. Assessments can be made regarding the appropriateness of its placement, compared to the interests that it may damage (e.g., a supermarket with reference to the small shops in the surrounding area); or its size and shape (a large building in the context of small-scale housing, a high-rise building in an area of low-rise development); or, again, its aesthetic qualities. But, although frequent, such conflicts rarely induce an identity reflex (and an ‘us/them’ dynamic) similar to those found with regard to mosques. This dynamic may manifest itself (for example, in a district of new residents in a town, or when people come from cities into rural areas), but only occasionally do such situations produce reflexes of collective identity. Mosques, instead, produce them very frequently, in mild or radical form, throughout almost all of Europe, at least at this moment in history. In contrast, churches of confessions other than the dominant one in a given country, or synagogues or temples of other religions, do not produce the same type of reaction and rejection (although it would be wrong to say that historically this has not happened in the past). In this sense the ‘mosque issue’ is real in Europe today.

It is interesting to note that conflicts concerning mosques involve people in the surrounding areas, either directly (public protests, demonstrations, collection of signatures, petitions, local committees) or indirectly (political groups and the media, acting or professing to be acting on behalf of local citizens), but not only. Many other actors are involved in these conflicts: the Islamic associations directly involved (and others, which can be in competition among themselves and in opposition to the project); the ethno-linguistic groups present; local, regional and national institutions; political parties, majority and opposition at the local level, but also locally not present (as is often the case of xenophobic movements and groups which mobilise for the occasion, with their respective interests in creating an opposition, or riding already existing discontent, or its containment and the resolution of the conflict); the various levels of justice that are often called to intervene in the decision process, both on the plane of respect for the urbanistic norms and of the protection of the rights of the actors involved; other religious groups, both the local majority group, and the other minorities, which intervene in various ways, and often with opposing positions on their inside, thus bearing witness to a division that is transversal to groups and communities; the local and national mass media; and again those who supply intellectual legitimation to one or the other position.12

12 For a description of these various actors, their positions and respective dynamics of interrelation, see the report of the main research: Stefano Allievi, Conflicts over Mosques in Europe. Policy issues and trends, 2009. Here I shall give a few short references.
Citizens’ reasons for protesting can normally be attributed to the following:

– ‘real’ or supposedly real reasons, such as: a fall in the value of property; fear of increased traffic; parking problems; loss of peace and quiet; fear of increased crime and greater numbers of unwelcome persons; fear of violence, incidents and Islamic fundamentalism; fear of invasion of public spaces (courtyards, pavements, parks, playgrounds) on Fridays and other Islamic holidays; other social priorities in the area;
– ‘cultural’ reasons: foreignness of Islam to ‘our’ culture; defence of women’s rights; reciprocity; ‘non-integrability’ and/or incompatibility of Islam with Western/European/Christian values.

While reasons of the first kind may be (but are often not) empirically based, and as such may be constructed discursively, those of the second kind serve only to justify a Kulturkampf whose objective is no longer the mosque as such – which becomes a symbol to be targeted – but Islam itself, as a different and foreign religion, ‘alien’ and incompatible with democracy, the West, Liberalism, Christianity or ‘our traditions’, according to the context.

Of course, the two sets of reasons often overlap and reinforce each other. It is therefore useful to keep the two sets conceptually separate, because one can give an empirical answer at a local level to the first set of issues, while the second set requires more time and goodwill to solve the profound problems of acceptance and reciprocal understanding – where these are truly at stake and where the groups actually seek to solve them (both conditions are not always met in practice).

Opposition to Islam has been growing stronger as a result of the traumatic events of recent years, including (among others): 9/11 and other dramatic internal events in various countries, such as the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London; the assassination of Theo van Gogh; the Danish cartoons affair; various turmoil related to the hijab, and not only in France; and debates on the issues of gender and paternal authoritarianism (forced marriages, sensational cases of honour killings, etc.). All this has certainly had an influence on the debate, but probably does not fully explain it. And it cannot be excluded a priori that opposition to Islam is also the result of a thoughtful evaluation of the effects of cohabitation – with Islam in general and mosques in particular – in various countries.

In the event of a conflict, it is very likely that opinions on practical reasons against a mosque intertwine with ‘non-local’ cultural motives focusing on Islam as such, especially when those ‘political entrepreneurs of Islamophobia’ get involved, and there is an increase in the role and influence of the media.
Some forms of conflict could actually be interpreted using the tools of ethology and sociobiology, rather than those of anthropology and sociology, still less those of urban planning. Examples include forms of imprinting on an area, such as the spreading of pig urine, or the placing of pigs' heads or spilling of blood, or certain politicians' parading about holding a pig on a lead in the area where a mosque is due to be built, or freeing a live piglet inside a mosque, or throwing pigs' offal inside a mosque, or anti-Islamic groups organized outside mosques ostentatiously devouring sausages and drinking wine (both foodstuffs that are forbidden by Islam), to offend and as a sign of open contempt. Cases of this kind have occurred widely, from Sweden to Italy, from France to the Czech Republic, and are in themselves a phenomenon that is worth mentioning because of the use of the primitive proprietary dynamics of privatization, passing through the logics of sacralization and desacralization of space. If we were discussing relations between animals, we would say it was simply an appropriation of space by means of unpleasant or aggressive signs and smells—claims of exclusivity to the territory and an assertion of aggressive competitiveness towards other possible contenders.

On the more general question of mosques, one should also note the spread of a vocabulary that refers to contamination, pollution and precautionary measures (used explicitly, with reference to mosques, by various anti-Islamic groups), as well as the return of the categories of purity and contagion in the cultural and political debate. Further reflection is needed here, recalling the historical precedents of the use of this kind of language and interpretation, and the risk that tragic ghosts of the past may re-appear.

**Battles over the minaret**

Most conflicts over mosques in Europe include, either primarily or marginally, the question of the minaret, its height, or its very existence. The minaret appears to have become a symbol *par excellence* of the conflict surrounding Islam, or rather of its visibility in the public space. The politics of identity, as manifested in connection with mosques, has ended up confining itself in a repertoire of forms, and paradoxically the minaret has ultimately become—both on the side of Muslims and that of society—‘a structural metonym of Muslim identity’; a situation that has become even clearer with the Swiss minarets (despite the fact that there are mosques in Muslim countries with no minaret and that this feature does not belong to the original history of Islam).

It is not inappropriate to recall here that the minaret, like skyscrapers and the Tower of Babel, is something that rises into the sky, a symbol of power, size
and strength. Even without making too much of its obviously phallic aspect—a symbol of domination, which is not alien to the ethological perspective that we have already introduced—historically towers have always been a sign of power and domination. This is why in the long history of medieval Italian municipalities, the victory of a family or a city over another resulted in the destruction of the towers of the defeated family or city; and that, more recently, during the war in the former Yugoslavia there was a race to destroy minarets and church towers, in order to establish dominance. The same degree of competition can still be seen in the present-day competition between large companies or between big cities, in particular the new economic and financial powerhouses, to build the highest skyscraper in the world as a visible symbol of power. It is a game of ‘political visibility’ which is being played, which explains why disputes over minarets can also be interpreted as conflicts of power: in which (among other things, and mainly unconsciously) Muslims attempt to introduce a symbol with high visibility and with an implicit ostentatious function, and why (mainly unconsciously) they are interpreted as such by the local population. Interpretation, indeed, plays a major role. For Muslims it is often more just a question of nostalgia, of doing things as they would ‘at home’, because, after all, ‘a mosque should look like a mosque’.

But for non-Muslim residents, it often becomes a matter of feeling like they have been invaded. This is why, architecturally speaking, the residents of all cities have tolerated without any reaction all sorts of foreign bodies which did not fit in with the surroundings (residential or administrative buildings, shopping malls or leisure facilities, convention centres or sports infrastructures, churches of the majority confession, even the temples of other religious minorities); but yet the minaret has, or is perceived as having, another meaning. This is so much so that, in many cases, the minaret has had to be reduced to a height below that of the local cathedral or the nearest church, and sometimes it has had to be eliminated altogether. And often – to demonstrate the fact that in reality the minaret has a nostalgic function rather than a fundamental identifying purpose or is a response to a real practical need – elimination takes place without any particular reaction from the Muslim community involved.

The case of the Swiss referendum against minarets was a sensational demonstration of how important the minaret issue had become, both in itself, and above all as to how much it teaches us about the problem of the more general relationship of European societies with Islam. And so, to go more deeply into the issue, perhaps it would be better to start from there: from what happened in this little country, with its long-standing and considerable immigration, and

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13 As a Muslim representative argued, cit. in Maussen, M (2009), Constructing Mosques: The governance of Islam in France and the Netherlands, Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.
adequate integration policies, but with a profound refusal—which had been however slowly but surely manifesting itself–of the visibilisation processes of Islam, which can also tell us something about more general European trends.

An observation point from which to understand the stakes involved: the Swiss paradox

Conflicts over the building of mosques and the visibility of prayer rooms in Europe have been a significant characteristic and a real fact in the debate over Islam during these years. The referendum against minarets was held in Switzerland on 29 November, 2009, passing with 57.5% of votes in favour of a ban, in as many as 22 of the 26 cantons.

The most sensational thing about the Swiss referendum however was not its result, but the fact that it was completely unexpected: that no one had realised what was happening, of what was coming in public opinion, and the effects it would have; that it took by surprise not only the political classes but also internal and external observers, from academics to journalists 14.

This issue is not however only an internal Swiss question, as most observers have preferred to imagine. It is in fact probable that in other areas of Europe, similar referendums would produce the same results, as we shall see below. The problem is that in terms of the constitution of many countries, Switzerland included, issues of this kind should never have even been put to the vote, because they are completely illegitimate. The problem in fact is that this referendum dealt a grave blow to the juridical foundations and to the base of civil and social cohabitation, as these have been progressively conceived and constructed in the West: where the basic principle of reference is purely and simply that rights are universal, therefore valid for all, and consequently majorities do not have the right to decide for the rights of minorities.

Having said this, the Swiss referendum made a significant and paradoxical element emerge on the cultural and social plane, which merits further reflection. Few people have noticed the fact, only apparently contradictory, that in three of the four cities where minarets, and their corresponding mosques, really exist, and have existed for a long time, and where the Islamic presence is greatest, the

14 One month before the referendum, the first poll commissioned by Swiss Radio gave a majority against the referendum to ban minarets of 53%, against 37% favourable to the ban, and 10% don’t-knows (in counter tendency the Canton Ticino, an Italian-language canton, already had 53% favourable to the ban, a sign of the influence of the Italian debate on the issue). Non-believers and persons with an income above 11,000 Swiss francs were the categories of those most against the referendum.
REAL PROBLEMS AND FALSE SOLUTIONS

The referendum was unsuccessful\(^\text{15}\): these are Zurich, where the minaret of the local Ahmadiyya mosque goes back to 1963; Geneva, 1978, where the authorities were in that period surprised that the minaret should be only 22 metres; Winterthur, 2005, in an Albanese Islamic centre; and Wangen bei Olten, north of Bern, where a little minaret of only 6 metres was inaugurated in 2009\(^\text{16}\). Meanwhile, the highest percentage of votes favourable to the referendum was obtained in internal Appenzell: 71%. This is by the way the same canton – in which the Muslim presence is insignificant if not non-existent – which, after three times rejecting the referendum to extend the vote to women (1973, 1982, 1990), was forced to concede it only through the direct intervention of the Federal Tribunal. A sign of mental closure in general, not only specifically. Translating into minimal terms and deliberately stating this double tendency in extreme terms, we can synthesize as follows: where there are no minarets, and possibly not even Muslims, fear forces people to banish the first and fear the others; where they exist and are even visible, there is much less fear. This does not mean obviously that the more you know Muslims the more you must like them, or at least not fear them; but it does mean that in these same places where there are natural dynamics of encounter and confrontation, long-term trends of integration are activated, as well as concrete intercultural policies, which have their effects. A fact that is a good indicator of the dynamics of the presence (which is less of a problem) and the processes of visibilization (which are the real problem) of Islam in the European public space.

The Confederation is still coming to terms with the results of the referendum. The analysis of the ‘official’ vote of Vox, published by the research institute Gfs and by Bern University in January \(^\text{17}\), gives more information, but nothing that was not already known: that those who have a level of schooling limited to the apprenticeship level supported the referendum with 76%, against 48% from those who had a secondary school educational level, and 34% those

\(^{15}\) The French-speaking cantons of Geneva, Vaud and Neuchâtel voted against the ban (with 59.7%, 53.1% and 50.9% respectively). Also the canton of Basel-Città, which has half a canton vote and is the largest Muslim community in Switzerland, rejected the ban with 51.6% votes. The turnout to the vote was 53.4%. The cities of Zurich, Geneva and Basel showed a slight prevalence of voters contrary to the ban. The same happened in Winterthur, which forms part of the Zurich canton. The Zurich canton, however, as a whole voted yes with 52%. Bern, Lausanne, Fribourg, Neuchâtel and others also voted against, but with very slight majorities.

\(^{16}\) It was precisely the request, at the same time, in 2006, to build minarets in as many towns belonging to German-speaking cantons (Wangen, the only one that went well, Langenthal and Wil) that triggered off the national debate over minarets which then led to the referendum. Wangen, not by chance a little village with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants and not an urban canton like the other three, was the only place with a mosque and minaret where the referendum passed, with 61% in favour. The case is curious also for other reasons: the local Nestlé firm produces food that is certified halal by the Paris mosque . . . (http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/27/world/europe/27swiss.html; accessed August 22, 2010).

with a university level. That the classic political cleavage between right wing and left had a fundamental influence, given that around 80% of electors of the left rejected the referendum, with almost as many electors of the right supporting it (figures most extreme on the extreme left, with 11% favourable, and on the extreme right, with 85%). That Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, supported the referendum with 60%, without distinction between levels of intensity of religious practice, while non-believers mostly rejected it (but this is more a cultural self-identification than a declaration of faith: many of the militants of the anti-Muslim groups define themselves today as Christian even without having any real religious practice). That on the whole, in the way people voted significant differences did not emerge according to sex or age, but that the women of the left (despite the fact that some analyses highlighted the alleged anti-Islamism of feminists, or even more that there was a strong instrumentalization of the feminist argument in an anti-Islamic key and so anti-minarets) voted in favour only by 16% (against the 21% of males), whereas it was to the right that they voted a majority in favour, with 87% of the votes as against 71% of the males. Among the reasons of the persons in favour the most common was given as the intention to give a symbolic blow against the expansion of Islam. Many also added that minarets had nothing to do with religious practice. About one person favourable out of six justified their decision as a reaction to the discrimination against Christian churches in Muslim countries. Significantly, reflecting a vote experienced more on the symbolic plane than on that of real problems, only 15% of those in favour gave a concrete criticism of Muslims resident in Switzerland as a reason for their decision. The most significant figures in this sense, only apparently paradoxical in the light of our analysis, are that even those who have an elevated level of tolerance supported the referendum with 49%, and lastly that 64% of all voters, favourable and contrary, was anyway completely or very convinced that the Swiss way of life and the principles of Islam are completely compatible. For the adversaries of the referendum, the restrictions on fundamental rights in freedom of religion and non-discrimination guaranteed by the Swiss Constitution were the main reasons that led to the contrary vote in the campaign.

The reaction to the vote inside Switzerland, especially among Muslims, was of course one of discouragement, but this was limited to demonstrations in the large towns, and the realisation that something had changed, and must be come to terms with; and obviously to lodging appeals to the European Court of Human Rights (which in mid-December had already received a dozen\(^\text{18}\)) for violation of the Convention on Human Rights (with reference especially to arti-

cles 9, 13 and 14), to which it will be interesting to see the reply. Even a leader of European prestige who was born in Switzerland and grew up intellectually in the shade of the minaret of the Geneva mosque as Tariq Ramadan, while judging the referendum ‘catastrophic’, limited himself to inviting the Muslims to more presence in society; while one part of non-Muslim Swiss society expressed itself in comments and in the square critically, but always calmly 19. International reactions, in the Islamic world—the counter-shocks that the government feared most, to such an extent that it immediately started bilateral and informational discussions with ambassadors—were weaker than might have been expected, apart from putting on a front of indignation: only Gheddafi called for the boycotting of the Confederation, but without success. European and non-Muslim reactions were more interesting: condemnation on the part of the Vatican, the invitation to abrogation on the part of the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council, weak words of dissociation on the part of various European politicians and much press, but also the interesting exception of the French President Sarkozy’s long and detailed stand—as against his own Foreign minister, Kouchner, who immediately took a critical position—in a public intervention in substantial agreement with the reasons for the Swiss decision 20. It is possible that more than a few Swiss electors, in the light of these reactions, came to a better realisation of the importance of the issues involved, and of the fact that they had made a mistake: and perhaps today, if they could vote again, they would vote differently. But many others will have seen the ‘exceptionalism’ of Switzerland confirmed, its specificity and irreducibility: even if Switzerland on this issue is anything but an isolated case.

Even more significant than the case of Switzerland, even if it has received less attention, is the case of Austria, the European country that was the first to recognise Islam, as long as a century ago, in 1912, after the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the Hapsburg Monarchy, in which Islam enjoyed a level of integration and institutionalisation widely superior to the European average, including the official recognition of the teaching of the Islamic religion in public schools, but which was also the first, a year before Switzerland, in 2008, to introduce specific laws that forbade minarets, in Carinthia and Vorarlberg, without

19 Symbolically original is the case of the entrepreneur who, in the little town of Bussigny, near Lausanne, built as a sign of protest a little minaret of wood and plastic of almost 7 metres on the roof of his shoe warehouse, lit up also at night and clearly visible also from the motorway that joins Lausanne to Geneva. The authorities, notwithstanding the lack of a permit, let it go. The mayor, giving an interpretation that involuntarily shows the bureaucratic contradiction of the initiative, said in an interview: ‘It doesn’t violate the law. It has nothing to do with Islam. A minaret needs a mosque. In this case, there isn’t one. There’s just a shoe warehouse.’ (http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB126264916012115609.html; accessed August 22, 2010).

even going through the unknown quantity of a referendum, which however in those regions – but not in the country as a whole – would have passed without any problems.

Switzerland and Austria are not however isolated cases. What would have happened in other European countries if they had found themselves faced with a similar situation? Many surveys, following on the Swiss referendum, have tried to simulate it: with significant results. Apparently few countries could sustain a referendum like the Swiss one. Against the minarets 78% of Czechs and 70% of Slovaks would vote against.\(^\text{21}\) According to a survey published by *Le Soir*, 59.3% of Belgians would be against.\(^\text{22}\) In Denmark, according to a Megafon opinion poll, 51% of the Danes would support a minaret ban, while only 34% would allow minarets\(^\text{23}\). Italians would be against minarets with 46%, especially the Right (60%; but the news is that the Left would vote against with 40%), the more elderly, and those with a low level of schooling\(^\text{24}\). According to the ISPO survey, 37% of citizens would be against, while 12% would not vote and only 5% are don’t-knows.\(^\text{25}\) Moderately in favour also are Britons and Americans: but in this case the percentages of votes expressed are quite low, and the weight of don’t knows still very high (respectively: 37% favourable to a ban, 25% contrary, 18% who wouldn’t vote, and 21% don’t-knows in Great Britain; 21% favourable, 19% contrary, 29% who wouldn’t vote, and 32% don’t-knows in USA\(^\text{26}\)). Many other countries declare instead that they would vote differently, rejecting the referendum, even though with extremely significant percentages in favour of a ban. But it must be remembered that one month before the referendum the Swiss also declared themselves as a majority against the ban. But we saw what happened in the secrecy of the polling booth . . . Having said that, let’s see the positions of the other countries. In France, according to a BVA opinion poll for Canal+, also published by *Le Monde*, 43% of the French would approve a ban\(^\text{27}\). The percentage would rise to 46% according to a


survey from the same days by Ifop published by *Le Figaro*[^28], according to which 41% would be opposed even to the building of mosques (and they were only 22% in 2001). Similar percentages can be seen in Norway, where according to an opinion poll[^29], 54% of Norwegians oppose a ban on minarets and 46% support it. The Germans are divided: according to a TNS-Infratest poll conducted for *Spiegel*, 44% of Germans support a ban, 45% oppose it (with opposite percentages in the East, more favourable to a ban – even though there are fewer Muslims and fewer mosques – than in the West): here again as elsewhere the same mechanism is repeated that we saw in operation in Switzerland (in Eastern Germany, 47% supported a ban, and 37% opposed it. In Western Germany, 47% opposed the ban and 43% supported it. 39% of men support the ban, compared with 48% of women. In any case 78% of Germans said they feared future conflicts with radical Islam, and only 18% said they didn’t). According to another survey conducted by Emnid for *Bild am Sonntag*, 48% of Germans oppose a ban on minarets, while 38% would ban them (here too we see confirmed the differences between East and West: 44% of East Germans support a minaret ban, compared to 37% who oppose it; in Western Germany, 51% oppose a ban, and 37% support it[^30]). The situation is complex in Holland: on one hand, according to a TNS-NIPO survey for *Editie NL*, 53% of the Dutch – thus, the majority – don’t want any more minarets. If there is a referendum, 67% say they plan to vote: but only 40% – thus, the minority – would effectively vote for a ban, 56% would vote against it. 46% of respondents see no problem with new minarets[^31]. In Finland, according to a poll conducted for the daily *Iltalehti*, 54% of Finns would allow minarets and just 31% would ban them[^32]. And also in Austria, notwithstanding the precedents in Carinthia and Vorarlberg, according to a Gallup poll, 60% of the population would be against a ban[^33]. The same is true in Sweden, almost half the population would be favourable to minarets, only 26% would be against, with about 30% don’t knows[^34]. Canada is also against a ban, with 27% favourable, 35% contrary, 16% who wouldn’t vote, and 22% don’t knows[^35].

How do we explain all this? It is above all a sign that the problem of the Islamic presence is real; that, also where there are no conflicts, and there is still a very advanced level of integration of Islam, also formal and institutional, problems can emerge, and emerge they do, as is happening a bit in the whole of Europe.

Perhaps one day in the future the minarets and mosques will become one of the points of attraction of a city, like other places of worship of other religions, also mentioned in the tourist guides and suggested as tourist landmarks. And they will certainly find more modern—even avant-garde—architectural forms, as has already been seen in various situations. We must however leave a naïf modernist, paternalist and illuminist perspective, according to which Muslims should build as most societies want, and convinced of their opinions as well, changing their own with a rapidity that is not in the logic of social processes: in reality, for a long time still, purpose-built mosques will go on looking as much as possible like their models in their countries of origin, or at least with traditional stylemes (and it is not necessarily a negative thing: after all why should a mosque look like a post office or a railway station?).

One effect of the Swiss referendum is anyhow that Muslims have also been forced into a re-thinking of the social and architectonic effects, in and on the public space, of their presence, and of the reactions that it induces: which has not been exactly a priority in previous years, and has led to a serious under-estimation of the processes under way and their significance, and which perhaps only today a part of the Islamic leadership in Europe is beginning to understand and accept as a problem. This also explains recent attempts to transform a perceived handicap into an element of aesthetic valorisation: like the launching in February 2010, through various organisations37, of a competition for the most attractive European minaret, the winner of which, the Madni Mosque in Bradford, which has as many as four minarets, was proclaimed winner with a ceremony in the European Parliament in April 201038. But also proposals that look also in the direction of certain popular Western desiderata: from the construction of the first eco-mosque, at a cost of 13 million pounds sterling, that will be erected in Cambridge, to the creation of a women-friendly directory on mosques, again launched in Great Britain. Attempts, certainly not amounting to much, certainly

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36 As to the reasons for these, see the interesting analysis of Roose, E. (2009) The architectural representation of Islam. Muslim-commissioned mosque design in the Netherlands, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/13771); by far the most detailed empirical research on the subject so far carried out in Europe. Read, on the same website, the 13 proposals, which do justice to much chatter as to ‘what mosques should be like’ in Europe.

37 COJEP International and EMISCO (European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion) with the support of Council of Europe, ISESCO and Organisation of Islamic Conference.

still élitist, which do not as yet really constitute a debate in the European Muslim world, but which show that there is an effort, and a concrete effort, to dialogue with a context in which, otherwise, there is the risk that there will always prevail—or at least remain exclusively visible—the dimension of conflict.

We cannot however leave the issue of the referendum on minarets without mentioning its intrinsic bureaucratic stupidity and the interpretative contradictions to which it lends itself, when we descend from the heavens of principles to the practical plane. In fact, let’s ask ourselves: and if Muslims asked a local authority to build a minaret in the exact shape of the nearest Church steeple, but smaller, so as to remove this argument as well? What other arguments could be used to oppose it? Or again: if it was decided to build it horizontally rather than vertically, next to the mosque or in the neighbouring field, or as a decorative element in the car park? Or paint it on the front of a building? An interesting example of contradiction has already been seen in the non-opposition in Switzerland to a minaret because it wasn’t one, because it did not belong to a mosque and was built as a provocation by a non-Muslim on his own roof (see note 19). Muslims in the Swiss Confederation have proposed however what is a genial architectural provocation: a request to build a minaret of ten centimetres on the roof of an Albanian prayer room at Frauenfeld. While at Langenthal—one of the places where the request for a mosque, going back to 2006, triggered off the process that led to the referendum (see note 16), Muslims have opposed the opposition to the minaret by calling it a ‘tower’, and underlining that ‘no legally clear and comprehensible definition of a minaret’ exists39, which is perfectly true.

Last of all, there is a more general contradiction in many discussions over mosques. Muslims have often been criticised or feared because their places of worship are often invisible, in some way (even if involuntarily) concealed, not easily accessible, closed. Gradually, as their search for a ‘visibilisation’ that is not only architectural has increased, and they have carried out projects that have brought their prayer rooms more and more into the light of day (as more perhaps could not be possible, given the interest around them . . .) this trend has been criticised. It is perhaps time for European countries to start thinking about how to get out of this impasse, following what guidelines, what (reasoned) criteria to apply to the issue.

The rejection of Islam and Islamophobia

The conflicts over mosques and minarets are obviously the result of the more general climate around Islam and attitudes towards Muslims in Europe: not only, but they are symptoms of extraordinary efficacy. They immediately reveal if we are in a situation of normality and so inside a relatively linear process of integration, or on the contrary if there are important signs at least of suspicion and distrust, if not of real Islamophobia.

The word has a recent and still contested history: even though already present in previous years, it first really became widespread with the report Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All, published by the Runnymede Trust in 1997. A first empirical survey came out in 2002 with the Summary Report on Islamophobia in the EU after September 11. A significant form of ‘officialization’ of the term appeared with the seminar organised at the United Nations on ‘Confronting Islamophobia: Education for Tolerance and Understanding’ in December, 2004, in which the then Secretary General Kofi Annan participated. Following this, other agencies joined, among them the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which set up an observatory on Islamophobia, and since 2008 has been producing monthly bulletins and an annual report on the subject. In these last years various sites have also dedicated themselves to it (among which www.islamophobia.org and www.islamophobia-watch.com), and practically all Islamic information sites, especially European and American, now have a section of documentation dedicated to Islamophobia.

Despite the essential officialization of the term, its use has stirred up much criticism, also in spheres that could certainly never have been suspected of anti-Islamism, even though it has now entered into the language and literature on the Islamic presence at an international level. Islamophobia indeed has a meaning that is not always etymologically correct: what it signals is not necessarily...
fear of Islam. It can be something else and even worse: hate that is unmotivated or motivated by other than fear, the expression (one of the many possible) of aggressive drives that do not have their origin in the object on which they work themselves out (so not fear of Islam). But it can also be a bland fear, a reasoned preoccupation which can be motivated rationally concerning the evolutions of society (of which the preoccupation over the building of mosques can be a legitimate part), which the word Islamophobia radicalizes and reduces to an extreme kind. This does not mean that Islamophobia does not exist – in this text we find many examples of it – but the term used intensively reduces all reactive phenomena to the same kind, as it is not able to grasp differences that are not subtle in order and grade, ending up sometimes by constructing the object of analysis instead of defining it correctly. It might be more correct to speak – and it is certainly not less worrying – of the growth of an anti-Muslim climate in Europe.

Having said this, if Islamophobia is the fever, the conflicts over mosques become an excellent thermometer to measure its level, to see how much the patient is suffering. And today in many countries, in various cities, in many different situations, what we are actually measuring is a level of fever sufficiently serious to create preoccupation\(^43\).

Now, the fever is never the illness, but a symptom of it, which leads us to inquire into its origins. The only note of optimism in it is that normally it is a transient phenomenon, which never lasts very long; even though we would not like to say that it has already reached its height today in Europe. Many signals, and among these the conflicts over mosques, tell us that this is not so. And the new fact, as we have seen, is that also in countries with a long experience of Islam and Muslims, in which it seemed that the situation was not problematic, the episodes of fever have been manifesting themselves with greater frequency and intensity.

Many reports today enumerate example upon example. The problem is that these long lists constitute only a sum, not yet an explanation.

The explanation can be seen at various levels of complexity. A first level is the simple application of mosques to the classic syndrome of ‘Nimby’ (not in my back yard), which we can summarise as a theoretical acceptance of the principle but not of the place. This level explains a part, but only one part, of the conflicts over mosques: and pertains more to the reasons declared than the real motivations. More complex, more subtle, more problematic to reflect over a more complex mechanism of ‘reactive identities’: identities that are created in reaction and in opposition to another identity – whether this other identity is real or, more often,

\(^{43}\) We have proposed an interpretation of the phenomenon in these terms at the Round Table on Islamophobia held during the Third Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, Rio de Janeiro, 27–29 May 2010.
only an imaginary, culturally constructed one (and where the principle, too—the very existence of a certain identity—is under discussion)\textsuperscript{44}.

Characteristic of such identities are, among others, the over-determination or over-semanticization of cultural elements. A prominent example in Europe today is those who are rediscovering their Christian roots, at a political, cultural, even intellectual level, much more than at the religious one, in opposition to the new arrival of Muslims. But another example, on the other hand, is among those Muslims that, in the West, are discovering or re-discovering (in reality re-inventing) their Islamic roots through forms of closure, self-ghettoization, etc. The mechanism is the same, and testifies to the fact that it is not attributable to one or the other group as a specific characteristic but it is characteristic of the times and the historical period that we are traversing.

Even the use of self-definitions, by both Muslims and non-Muslim Europeans, in terms of ‘community’ (an ideological rather than descriptive expression), which we find so often in debates on mosques—the neighbourhood or citizens’ community as opposed to the Islamic community—is part of this process.

Reactive identities produce conflicts, especially conflicts on and about symbols, and particularly religious symbols, because they are well placed to be exploited and used like a flag, around which consensus can be obtained.

Among those who use them with greater efficacy there are those that we could call ‘political entrepreneurs of Islamophobia’: a real International, well linked at the European level, who meet regularly, giving one another mutual support, and using the same slogans, against the same objectives. The political parties that take Islamophobia as the central part of their programme, and at the same time as an efficient method of gaining consensus, are in strong expansion in most European countries. And they systematically use the conflicts over mosques (opened by them, or on which they intervene even when they are not present locally) as a means of visibilisation, obtaining notable results on this plane in terms of success\textsuperscript{45}. The main problem of their activism in the conflicts—beyond the serious cultural fallout and that on civil cohabitation, to which sooner or later we will have to give a thought—is that they have an evident interest in stoking up the conflict, but none in finding a solution to it. Their political success proceeds and increases as long as the conflict remains open: the moment the

\textsuperscript{44} On the mechanism of the reactive identities, see Allievi, S (2005), ‘Conflicts, cultures and religions: Islam in Europe as a sign and symbol of change in European societies’, Yearbook of Sociology of Islam, 6: 18–27, and Allievi, S (2007), Le trappole dell’immaginario: islam e occidente, Udine: Forum.

\textsuperscript{45} More details on their action, together with an analysis of the role of media which actively support them, even non voluntarily, see the paragraphs on this issue in Conflict over Mosques in Europe, cit.
conflict is in some way resolved, and the tension and the attention disappear, the political entrepreneurs of Islamophobia lose their centrality, their visibility and their consensus. And it is for this reason that they are the worst enemies of any attempt to find a solution to the conflict: simply they have no interest in doing so. Which makes their role for the whole of society and not only for Muslims particularly problematic: because society, on the contrary, has no interest in protracting the conflicts, which are socially, culturally, politically and also economically, costly, and in the long run produce secondary effects that are strongly negative on the processes of integration and on the actors themselves involved in the conflict.

The role of political entrepreneurs of Islamophobia, just because we find ourselves in a situation of conflict, and the conflict leads to taking sides and the legitimation of whatever kind of one’s reasons (and certainly not to listening and seeking the reasons of the adversary), leads to a role in its turn conflictual on average, and to an intense activity of legitimation of the reasons of the conflict and of the systematic demonization of the adversary, which would merit a separate analysis. It leads among other things to the systematic introduction and the acceptance of forms of interference in the internal affairs of Muslim communities that would be judged unacceptable, in principle and practice, in the case of other subjects and other religious communities, with the request and not seldom the adoption for the Muslims of a surplus of regulations not responding to the principle of equality of rights and parity of treatment. These can be constituted in the negative (negation of a right, and typically those relative to the opening of a mosque), or in the positive (organs and specific regulations valid only for Muslims, and to permit the exercise of specific rights or safeguard them: think of the various issues open in the world of school, in the use of public swimming-pools, and others) which both constitute an evolution that is also juridical, and to which more attention should be paid. As regards mosques, this attitude manifests itself in the positive for example with the decision of some municipalities or states to finance their construction directly (where similar decisions are not taken in favour of other religious creeds); and, more frequently, in the negative, with various forms of impediment to the free exercise of the religion, or its specific regulation. In this regard it is important to cite both the forms of direct refusal, and the forms masked as late, partial or selective application of the laws. For example, the issue of building or utilization concessions is often refused to Muslims, but not to other subjects, in situations that are exactly comparable; and in the same way the closing down of mosques is often motivated by forms of

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46 See for many examples *Conflict over Mosques in Europe*, cit., and the national reports in this volume.
application of the norms (for example, safety standards or fire regulations) that are correct in themselves but applied blatantly selectively only to Muslims, or with modalities—for example interrupting the activity immediately, or not consenting to any form of conciliation—that do not apply for other subjects involved in similar problems.

Finally, this radical form of legitimation of the conflict leads to the use of a language with the adversary (and especially Muslims, wholesale so to speak: not some specific groups or certain individuals) of such roughness that we would refuse to accept it in the case of any other social group. We are not speaking of private speaking, but the language used on public occasions and in the public space. To understand the gravity of this it would be sufficient to substitute—in many articles in newspapers, in public speech by political figures, social actors, intellectuals, also in official documents and even sometimes in legal projects—the word ‘Muslim’ with the word ‘Jew’, and see if this language would be considered legitimate by the same actors that use it, and if the things said would be considered acceptable. Naturally this is true also for the positions of some Islamic groups in reference to the West, Christians, Jews, infidels, Israel, etc. But this kind of language is rarely expressed in the conflicts over mosques: it is rather present in other spheres, and mainly by other subjects. That is: it is certainly the patrimony of the mode of thinking of a part of Muslims; it is only rarely the patrimony of the Islamic leadership involved in the mosque projects. On the contrary: it is the patrimony of the mode of thinking of one part only of society; but it is frequently the patrimony of the mode of thinking of opponents of the mosque projects.

Obama’s challenge: A mosque on Ground Zero?

In the summer of 2010 a very symbolic polemic blew up, originating in the United States but spreading all over Europe, on the possibility of an Islamic centre being erected in Lower Manhattan, near to Ground Zero, to be precise two blocks from the site where Freedom Tower is being built, in substitution and in memory of the Twin Towers destroyed in the terrorist attack of 11 September, 2001. This polemic risks costing President Obama very dear, who for a much discussed and unpopular question of principle risks losing quite large quotas of consensus. It is worth going over it again, for the teaching we can glean from it in relation to the situation in Europe.

First the facts. A well-known imam and in the past normally called a ‘moderate’— who has collaborated both with the Bush administration, which entrusted him with numerous assignments of international representation, and
that of Obama – Feisal Abdul Rauf, who for thirty years has directed a mosque at Tribeca, twelve blocks from Ground Zero, together with the organization promoted by him and presided over by his wife, the American Society for Muslim Advancement, is planning, with an investment of 100 million dollars, an Islamic Community Centre of 13 storeys, called Cordoba House, which should contain a mosque and many other things (auditorium, theatre, fitness centre, swimming pool, basketball court, kindergarten, bookshop, restaurants) including a memorial to the victims of 11 September. The project enjoys the support of the Mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg – certainly also in consideration of the fact that in New York there live around 7–800,000 Muslims, equal to over one tenth of those in the whole of the United States – but also a vast and combative opposition: whose attitudes are often viscerally anti-Islamic, but in their more noble expression they agree with the fact that Ground Zero (which will remain for long, owing also to the tragic nature of the images as well as the symbols that were struck down, and the number of innocent victims, an indelible icon of Islamic terrorism, which continues to maintain all its tragic emotive charge) is hallowed ground, because of the blood shed and the martyrdom of almost three thousand people who lost their lives there. So it is unthinkable to allow freedom of worship there to people who belong to the same religion as the perpetrators of the massacre.

Some contradictory elements of the situation. There are already over one hundred mosques in New York, among them a modern Islamic Center (so we could quite reasonably sustain that one more does not change anything, or that there is no need for a new one). The planned mosque is not only a mosque, but a cultural and community centre. And it is not really on Ground Zero, which, from its address, Park 51, cannot even be seen. Muslims already pray on Ground Zero today, both in official commemorations and every day privately, like all those who in that open-air memorial that is Ground Zero mourn their dead (about 60 out of almost 3,000 were Muslims). If Ground Zero is hallowed ground, as it is right to think, nothing should be put anywhere within its boundaries that offends the sacredness of the place; while it is reasonable to think that in a city like New York, in the space of two blocks, we would find much more problematic things on the moral plane, and more offensive to the sacredness of the place, than a mosque (among others, a table-dance club). One place is as good as another, and so one would have thought that in respect to the families of the victims, it would have been better to look for a place that was a little further away; on the other hand it is not certain, seeing that the present site is not on Ground Zero, how far away it should have been for opponents to not consider it on Ground Zero: three blocks.
five, seven, the whole of Manhattan, the whole of New York? In the United States there is a thing that is called the First Amendment 48.

I do not intend to enter on the various reasons for and against the various parts involved, who are more divided internally than it might appear: the Liberals, the Jews, Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, are all divided, as are the Muslims of course, whether secularised or practising, through disinterest (or counterposed interests), for reasons of opportunity (let sleeping dogs lie . . .) or good taste (don't disturb the relatives of the victims, they have already suffered enough in the Muslims' hands). I would like to draw some considerations of principle from the whole matter, valid also for Europe. And this is why we must necessarily refer to President Obama's speech. A speech that there was no need for him to make (competence for the decision is all and only local, and anyway Mayor Bloomberg had already decided in favour), from which he knew that he could only lose (the foreseeable dissent and Republican exploitation, but also internal dissent or at least the embarrassed silence of many Democrats shows it) and certainly nothing to gain, especially in a moment in which his popularity is already so low (it was already known that according to a CNN opinion poll published the day before Obama's speech, only 29% of Americans were in favour of the mosque, 68% were against, of whom 82% Republicans and 52% Democrats 49).

It is also interesting to note the escalation of the figures of the opinion polls carried out only on the New York population, which is the one directly involved. A poll published on 1 July 50, and so carried out before the August polemics and Obama's speech, gave 52% contrary to the mosque, 31% in favour and 17% don't-knows. Significant figures, which we saw also in the case of Switzerland: the less contrary population (only 36% unfavourable and 46% favourable) was precisely that of the place directly involved, Manhattan. After two months of polemics, Obama's speech, and the harsh criticism that accompanied it, the percentages in New York, even if always lower than the national ones, showed instead that 63% of the New York voters surveyed opposed the project, with 27%

48 That says: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances”.

49 http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/08/11/overwhelming-majority-oppose-mosque-near-ground-zero/; accessed August 25, 2010. The poll was published on August 11, the day before Obama's discourse. A successive poll by Gallup has shown that 37% of Americans disapprove Obama's speech, and only 20% approve it (http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2010/08/18/2010-08-18_63_oppose_ground_zero_mosque_27_support_construction_according_to_new_siena_poll.html).

A sign that the mechanism of the intervention of the political entrepreneurs of Islamophobia, and the media attention that is a direct result, functions at least in the short term. To the extent that one fifth of Americans were made to believe that Obama is a Muslim...

Let’s return to Obama’s speech. On the occasion of the speech at the iftar dinner (the suspension of fasting during the month of Ramadan) offered by the President on 12 August, Obama said, among other things, the following things concerning the New York mosque: “Recently, attention has been focused on the construction of mosques in certain communities – particularly in New York. Now, we must all recognize and respect the sensitivities surrounding the development of lower Manhattan. The 9/11 attacks were a deeply traumatic event for our country. The pain and suffering experienced by those who lost loved ones is unimaginable. So I understand the emotions that this issue engenders. Ground Zero is, indeed, hallowed ground.

But let me be clear: as a citizen, and as President, I believe that Muslims have the same right to practise their religion as anyone else in this country. That includes the right to build a place of worship and a community centre on private property in lower Manhattan, in accordance with local laws and ordinances. This is America, and our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakeable. The principle that people of all faiths are welcome in this country, and will not be treated differently by their government, is essential to who we are. The writ of our Founders must endure.”

After this speech, critics attacked him, and the advice of friends to be silent multiplied. Obama went on to point out that the decision on the local plane is only, as is obvious, of the city of New York, and that his had been an evocation of principle, not direct support for that project. But this does not lessen the importance of his intervention. On the contrary, it is precisely the evocation of that principle that we need today: also in Europe.

First of all, because to say no to the construction of a place of worship goes against constitutional principles in Europe, and even more so in the USA, where...
freedom of religion is the original founding principle, being a country that was built above all around successive groups of the persecuted on religious grounds, such as were the Pilgrim Fathers. And because it is precisely constitutions that are the foundations of Western democracies: which do not only guarantee the freedom of one, but guarantee also the rights of all, and especially minorities, because this is the only bulwark against democracies destroying themselves.

Regarding this it is worth emphasizing one or two basic principles: because many, in the United States and even more in Europe, are trying to use a weapon against Muslims and mosques that is exquisitely democratic: the referendum. Now, there are two ways of thinking about democracy: one that emphasizes the role of the popular will (traditionally more left, but today more the right), the other that while recognizing the role of the popular will (as if it could be ignored) remembers that it has to express itself within limits and guarantees that are precise and insuperable.

Well, we must remember that the referendum is democratic precisely if and only if it is founded on, and does not place itself against, the democratic principles guaranteed by constitutions, and so it can express itself only within the limits established by them. Otherwise it becomes the most illiberal and anti-democratic weapon that exists. Not by chance in many countries there exists a control of constitutional legitimacy before considering if a referendum issue is admissible. And on the basis of those principles, referendums to ask citizens if they agree to the building of a mosque, as of any other place of worship or even of association, are unconstitutional: referendums can reflect a sentiment, but they cannot prevent the recognition of a fundamental right. In this sense the agitation of the political entrepreneurs of Islamophobia is purely instrumental; but, as we have seen in the case of the United States, this instrumentalization works. Not only to raise expectations that citizens have the right to decide on the fundamental rights of other citizens is not only false, but means instilling a very dangerous poison into society as a whole. Because if the foundations collapse, today it is Muslims, tomorrow it could be anyone else.

Democracy is a process by which principles are progressively constitutionalised, and transformed into institutions and guarantees. And institutions of guarantee serve precisely to emphasise the founding principles, and guarantee them for all, against the changing opinions of public opinion. It is not possible in democracies for the majority to decide on the rights of the minority, because it is precisely on the protection of these rights that democracies are founded. And this is the reason why Obama’s speech reminds us Europeans of something fundamental as well.
There is another issue, not of principle but of profound reasonableness, which must be remembered. To demonise an entire religious faith means to push it into a corner, force it into closing in on itself, producing paradoxically that resentment and even radicalization that we say we wish to avoid.

Finally, Obama’s speech and its unpopularity reminds us that there are moments and situations in which political élites must accept their responsibilities, even against the popular will or specific groups of the population. It has happened many times in history, and in certain ways it constitutes the ordinary activity of politics (just think of any taxation plan). But there are historical precedents that touch upon questions of principle that are particularly significant: think of the abolition of slavery, racial discrimination, or in Europe the death penalty. But also, to come back to our subject, the approval of laws that have progressively granted a series of rights to immigrant populations. Before these choices, in a democratic country, a political class worthy of the name has the moral duty to assume an educational role, formative, calling on values and principles, being a guide. Being content with the old principle ‘Je suis leur chef. Il faut que je les suive’, or worse, practising concrete policies that go against the fundamental principles in which political forces themselves should be reflected, becomes, in these cases, an abdication of one’s role and one’s responsibilities.

**Real problems and false solutions**

Minarets, mosques, but also veils and **burqas**, all begin to seem when we analyse them more in depth, false problems. The real problem, the problem that these sub-problems indicate, is greater than all this: it is the relationship of Europe with Islam, on one hand; and the relationship that the Muslims have with Europe and the West, on the other (that which they have, and that which we imagine they have).

Mosques and minarets end up by looking more like a discursive substitute: a transitional object, to say it in psychoanalytic terms. Mosques are the symptom: the illness is Islam, or rather the West’s imaginary of Islam: which, like the Islamic imaginary of the West, appears more and more conflictual. So we must concentrate on this.

To deal with this problem however we have to begin to create strategies that go in the right direction: which seems to be counter to the prevalent direction, at least as far as the public debate is concerned, that which creates the agenda on the subject.

We need first of all to call the conflict by its proper name, and deal with it as such. Painful concealments, politically-correct falsehoods, exploitative falsities
are no good. If we want to resolve the conflict we have to traverse it. And to traverse it we have to face it openly, making the reasons (even when unreasonable) of the sentiments and behaviours of significant parts of society emerge, the fears that move them, the drives that they contain.

So it is necessary to discard the idea of Islamic ‘exceptionalism’, the presumption that Muslims are always and anyway different, that they need unique and peculiar instruments. Perhaps it is true, as most people believe, but it is just as likely that it is not. It cannot be an initial assumption: it must be corroborated by the facts. And verification can only pass through a serious, honest and in-depth process of comparison, with the past (of Islam and Europe, and the relationships between the two) and above all with other religious creeds, with other minorities, with other ethnic and immigrant groups.

The European approach must be firmly anchored to the universalism that characterizes it: to the principle that the law is the same for all, that rights are personal and inviolable, that group responsibility does not exist, nor does that of the community, nor of religious creeds, that it is not possible to do away with the principle of the universality of the law, in any case, without jeopardizing a principle that is at the foundation of the idea itself of the West, the justification of its history, and its legitimate pride.

Reflection on these themes must leave the short term, the agitation of the present: a horizon that for those political forces that are interested in it hardly ever goes beyond the next elections. We have to put ourselves in the perspective of the middle and long term, shifting from elections to generations. Because the new generations (second and third, and tomorrow fourth) of Muslims are already in Europe, and are different from those that preceded them, from their immigrant fathers and mothers; but in the same way, and we think about this less, the new generations of Europeans that have to do with Islam are no longer people who have seen Muslims arrive from somewhere, but persons who have always been side by side with them from their birth. These generations have not yet any say in the debate on Islam: it is not they that determine the image. But they are already able to not recognise themselves in it. We also need to be able to assume a historical perspective in looking back at the past: without forgetting (and this is true mainly for Muslims) that societies change, evolve, but they also have a history, they take concrete form in institutions, in values, in lifestyles, in an imaginary of themselves and others, and we must respect the times of their change.

We need to abandon the logic of definitions of conflict in terms of mutual phobias (Islamophobia, Christianophobia, Judeophobia), which risks being a self-fulfilling prophecy, that leads towards a clash that is not at all inevitable.
Building and imaging society in terms of phobias is like wanting to reconstruct history by means of ‘black books’: (the black book of Communism, that of Christianity, Capitalism, Colonialism, Islam . . .), useful for ideological opposition and political struggle; useless and misleading for historical reconstruction; devastating for the process of social cohesion. If we don’t free ourselves of this logic we will never free ourselves of the conflict: nor will we even begin to face it really.

We need to concentrate on long-term trends to consolidate the terrain: constitutions, the system of jurisdictional safeguards, but also consolidated institutions like school have a stability and a strength greater than the changing trends of politics. If policies and politics change rapidly, institutions are a guarantee of coherence and duration, or at least slower and more mediated change than that which drives social and political forces. And despite everything, they are more solid than they seem. And they work in the direction of integration, universalisation, the extension of rights, and their consolidation, not in the direction of cultural opposition and social conflict. This process is also taking place on the religious plane. There are strong oppositions between religious communities (even though we have the sensation that those inside the various religions are even stronger, in respect to the way of approaching religious alterity and practising inter-religious relations). But there is also a common religious grammar that ends up by comprehending and recognizing the religious needs of others and their meaning: praying, also in the community, fasting, having clothing codes, an idea of modesty, sexual and gender roles of reference, the sense of pure and impure . . . In this there is the possibility of obtaining recognition and building alliances, and constructing relations of trust and confidence. But for this we need also to understand that the idea of reciprocity, often evoked off the point (as when a Moroccan immigrant who wants to set up a prayer room is crushed by the reply that in Saudi Arabia you could never build a Christian church, thus going against not only his rights but also European constitutions; or when we forget that the only juridical reciprocity possible and practicable is between states, not between religions), has instead a profound and socially significant meaning when it asks to mutually share the pain of an injustice, of a discrimination, of a religiously motivated act of violence, wherever it may take place, in Europe or in Muslim countries.

It is necessary to invest very much in religious, associative, cultural actors, on their formation, on their possibility of action and encounter, as they are fundamental nodes in the construction of real possibilities of cohabitation. Because the prevention of radicalism and even terrorism, as we are beginning to understand, also pass in large measure along these paths. Which are those of
normalisation, even banalisation, of ingress into the everyday\textsuperscript{54}. Because there is a long-term social logic that works in this direction: it passes through personal acquaintances (school friends and workmates, but also sport and entertainment) forms of mixité (friendships, couples and mixed families), neighbours, and progressively it normalises them – it makes them normal even before they become norm. Normalizing a little at a time what is in the last resort the real change, the real scenario within which everything we have analysed so far is contained: the progressive religious and cultural pluralisation of European societies. Also of those that were or considered themselves to be a homogeneous monoculture, and a religious monopoly. Because that is where the real change lies.

We spoke before of mosques and minarets as transitional objects, symbolic of a principal object, which is Islam. But this is only the first half of the argument, the most immediate. The second is that Islam is in its turn a transitional object: which represents and signifies the pluralisation of society, and in particular, religious pluralism. Islam has become the discursive substitute for important changes in society, which are tied generically to religious pluralism as such: in concrete terms they are called gender roles, clothing codes, family models, parent authority, ideas of modesty, purity, sacredness, as far as the relationship between religion and politics, religion and democracy, religion and state. Subjects which in secular and secularised societies it has become ever more difficult to discuss in also religious terms: and which cultural and religious pluralism are bringing into the limelight.

Islam – perhaps rightly or perhaps wrongly (other diversities are often much more ‘other’) – has thus become the most extreme example of alterity and the changes that alterity brings to our societies. Just that the problem is much more profound, and the change even more traumatic, and the issues to face even more decisive: because they do not involve only Islam and Muslims, but European societies themselves. However Islam, because of its symbolic overload and the problematic history that joins it to Europe, because of the striking and formidable aspect of some of its contemporary manifestations (among which obviously the emergence of transnational Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism), but also because of the significant statistical dimension of its presence, is inevitably at the centre of the political and social debate in Europe. And it will be here for a long time. Because with over 20 million faithful, Islam has become the second religion, or the first of the non-Christian minorities, in all European countries. So it will be impossible from now on to understand Europe without taking into consideration its Muslim component, but at the same time it will be impossible

\textsuperscript{54} As in the case – to make an example concerning means of communication that often go in the opposite direction – of the successful Canadian sitcom “Little mosque in the prairie”, currently running for its fourth year.
to understand Islam without taking into consideration its European and Western component. Islam has become a European fact and a European internal component. And Europe an internal fact of Islam. It is not something that is going to happen in the future. It has already happened. We have to begin to understand it, and understand the consequences.
Islam in countries of long-standing immigration
A problematic acceptance
General framework

Premises
In 1970, Belgium became a Federal state, since when it has experienced various reforms designed to increase the power of its federal authority. The Federal state exercises authority in the fields of Justice, Security, Defence, Foreign affairs, Finance, Social security and some aspects of Research. The other fields of competence (Education, Research, Social policy, Employment policy, Health and (Urban) Planning) belong to either the Regions or the Communes.

The organs that constitute the Federal state are:

– Three Regions, founded on a territorial basis (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels), which exercise powers in the areas of Economic policy and (Urban) Planning;
– Three language Communities (Flemish, French and German), which exercise authority in the fields of Education, Research, Health and Cultural policy.

And to make this already complex matrix more complex still, it should be noted that the Flemish have merged Region and Community into a single authority, the Vlaamse Raad, while the French-speaking community has two separate authorities: La Région Wallonne and the Communauté Française de Belgique (French Community of Belgium (sic! not French-speaking community)). But the Vlaamse Raad is not
competent in regional questions concerning Brussels, because Brussels is constitutted as the bilingual *Région de Bruxelles capitale*.

The remaining entities are the 10 Provinces (which exercise authority over Local administration, certain aspects of Health, Culture, Education, Co-ordination of the Fire Brigade and Civil Protection Services) and the Communes.

**Basic statistics**

**Total population**

On 1 January, 2008, the total population of Belgium was 10,666,866 (the source for this and the following tables is FPS Economy – Directorate General of Statistics and Economic Information, Demographics Service (*SPF Économie – Direction Générale Statistique et Information Économique, Service Démographie*), which used the National Register as its source.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territorial Region</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% by Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td>6,161,600</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>1,048,491</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallonie</td>
<td>3,456,775</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,666,866</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1** Population by region (1 January, 2008)

**Table 2** Estimated population by community (1 January, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% by community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flemish-speaking</td>
<td>Approximately 6,300,000</td>
<td>59.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-speaking</td>
<td>Approximately 4,300,000</td>
<td>40.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German-speaking</td>
<td>Approximately 71,500</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,666,866</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Immigrants
As they are calculated on the basis of legal nationality, the statistics under-estimate the scale of Belgium’s foreign population. Belgium does not carry out any ethnic census, and Belgian law also states that any child of foreign parents is automatically Belgian by birth. On the other hand, the Belgian law concerning naturalisations that was enacted in the 1990s has accelerated naturalisation procedures in such a way that it is now possible to acquire Belgian nationality after only three years’ residence in Belgium. To this must be added naturalisation by marriage: any foreign person who marries a Belgian national may automatically become Belgian. Moreover, Belgian law accepts double nationality, facilitating the acquisition of Belgian nationality by immigrants.

Taking these considerations into account, the following calculations of the percentage represented by the foreign population in Belgium, which is established largely on the basis of nationality, significantly underestimates the presence of immigrant populations, including the most recent arrivals.

Table 3  Total population and total foreign population in 2000–2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>10,239,085</td>
<td>897,110</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10,666,866</td>
<td>971,448</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels Region</td>
<td>959,318</td>
<td>273,613</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>1,048,491</td>
<td>295,043</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemish Region</td>
<td>5,940,251</td>
<td>293,650</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6,161,600</td>
<td>354,370</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallon Region</td>
<td>3,399,516</td>
<td>329,847</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>3,456,775</td>
<td>322,035</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can see the high percentage of foreign population in Brussels, of which almost two thirds is European, North Americans, Japanese, etc. This is to a large extent related to Brussels' status as a European capital.

Those refugees waiting to receive their papers and illegal immigrants must be added to the registered population.

The gender ratio among the foreign population is relatively balanced at 51% males, with a slightly higher male majority in Flanders and Wallonia.

The proportion of foreign residents per nationality (Table 4) reveals the diverse sources of immigration:

- Old migratory patterns (1945–1960) which continue to the present day: Italy, Spain, Greece
- Migration due to old colonial links: The Congo
- Migratory patterns that began in the 1960s: Morocco, Turkey
- New patterns: Poland, Serbia, Pakistan, Sub-Saharan Africa
- Migrations from neighbouring countries, partly for economic reasons: France, The Netherlands, Germany
- Migrations linked to international institutions: European countries, USA, Japan, etc.

Table 4  **Numbers of foreigners by principal nationality, by region**

(1 January, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Flemish Region</th>
<th>Brussels Region</th>
<th>Wallon Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>175,498</td>
<td>Morocco 26,456</td>
<td>Morocco 40,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>120,600</td>
<td>Italy 22,733</td>
<td>Italy 27,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>110,492</td>
<td>Turkey 18,922</td>
<td>Spain 19,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>80,602</td>
<td>France 18,022</td>
<td>Portugal 15,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>39,664</td>
<td>Great Britain 12,177</td>
<td>Turkey 10,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>37,007</td>
<td>Poland 6,690</td>
<td>Portugal 9,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>27,975</td>
<td>Poland 5,772</td>
<td>Great Britain 8,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>25,697</td>
<td>Serbia 4,225</td>
<td>Greece 8,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>18,026</td>
<td>USA 4,149</td>
<td>Congo 6,856</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 'Muslim' population

For the reasons set out above, estimates of the Muslim population using nationality as the only basis for calculations are largely inadequate. Another important element to underline is that, in speaking of the 'Muslim' population, we mean those populations directly or indirectly originating from Muslim societies. This does not mean that these people all practise their religion, as only 1% of these (estimated at about one third) identify themselves explicitly with Islam as their religion and thus practise their faith.

These figures show the strong 'Muslim' presence in Brussels. The percentages are higher among the younger population, as we estimate that 40% of the Muslim population is under the age of 20, as opposed to 23% of the average population. We can thus estimate that 7% of the total population aged under 20 is 'Muslim'. In Brussels 1 in 4 young people are 'Muslim'.

Table 5 Estimate of the ‘Muslim’ population in Belgium by Region

(my estimates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Total ‘Muslims’</th>
<th>% Total population</th>
<th>Principal origins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>400,000–450,000</td>
<td>3.5–4</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balkans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>160,000–190,000</td>
<td>14.5–16</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indian sub-continent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td>145,000–155,000</td>
<td>2.5–3</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indian sub-continent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallonie</td>
<td>95,000 – 105,000</td>
<td>2.5–3</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turkey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of Belgians who have converted to Islam is estimated at somewhere between 50 and 60,000. On average between 1,000 and 1,200 people request conversion every year. In 2007–2008 the number of requests halved.

In the absence of concrete statistics, a complementary indication of the Muslim population in Belgium can be found by calculating the number of births, basing calculations on the number of ‘Muslim’ first names (Table 6). Across the whole country, more than one child in 10 bears a ‘Muslim’ first name. In Brussels, a third of all new babies have ‘Muslim’ first names. There is a high proportion of these names in the Flemish region, in spite of the relatively weak percentage of individuals of ‘Muslim’ origin among the population.

Table 6 Estimates of percentages of ‘Muslim’ births calculated on the basis of first names (Author’s own calculations based on the list of first names published by the SPF Économie: Direction Générale Statistique et Information Économique, Service Démographie).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated % ‘Muslim’ babies / Total births (2007)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium, of which:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemish Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallonia Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels Region</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General information on legislation for religious faiths and Islam

Regulatory system for faiths in Belgium
The management of faiths is affected by the dissected nature of Belgium’s public bodies. In general, the State is described as having a ‘neutral attitude’ towards religion. In reality, this concept is imprecise, and used most often to mark the difference between Belgium and France, the latter defining itself as ‘secular’, basing itself on its law of separation between Church and State.

A more precise concept would be that of the ‘Transactional State’, the reason being that no social majority or movement has succeeded in imposing its viewpoint. Every Catholic and Atheistic/Agnostic movement (Liberal or Socialist in nature) has secured advantages (the financing of religious faiths or associations, financing of education, universities, hospitals, etc.). This transaction between the traditional two great social movements is governed pragmatically by the Belgian state, which acts above all in the role of mediator. The other faiths, Islam more recently, also benefit from the advantages of this arrangement. Given the existence of Atheism on one side and Buddhism on the other (which is not a religion), we increasingly refer to the State’s management of ‘convictions’.

As an extension of the above laws, other actions relating to ‘belief’ are taken into consideration (chaplaincies, cemetery lots).

Legislation concerning Islamic faiths
Islam was officially recognised in principle in 1974, on the basis of the law that recognised the ‘worldly dimension’ of faiths. That means financing religious (now convictional) buildings and religious (now convictional) servants. Since then, Orthodox and agnostic institutions and Buddhism have also been officially recognised.

On the basis of the ‘schools pact’ legislation, lessons on the Muslim religion were included in the official curriculum in 1978.

Since the Law of Recognition, the concrete application of Faith law has come up against the question of an authority to represent Belgian Muslims. This law in effect provides for a ‘faith leader’ who would act as spokesman for discussions with the State. At first, this figurehead was the Islamic Cultural Centre of Belgium (Centre Islamique et Culturel de Belgique), which had been created towards the end of the 1960s by the Muslim World League. This situation was contested by numerous Muslims, by some sections of popular opinion and by a section of the Belgian political class. After numerous glitches, at the end of the 1980s, following several consultations between the Belgian state (specifically, the Ministry of Justice, competent for faith issues) and various Muslim entities, a decision
was taken to elect a ‘representative’ authority. Several elections have since taken place, but each time the results have been contested, and on some occasions there were in fact instances of fraud. This authority is currently awaiting its future, having been provisionally recognised by the State up until the end of 2009.

In spite of this chaotic situation, some concrete actions are beginning to be implemented. In other words, there is no stable or convincing voice to represent Islam in Belgium, but the integration of Islam into the institutional processes is on the whole successfully taking place. We can enumerate the following concrete developments:

- The teaching of Islamic religion. Some 600 teachers instruct State pupils in religious education in Flemish and French speaking schools.
- Religious counsellors have been attached to hospitals and prisons.
- Muslim areas have been created in public cemeteries.
- Mosques have been recognised and receive public finance (see below).
- In the communes, dialogue is being pursued and built up between Muslim associations, mosques and local authorities.
- At the Université catholique de Louvain, a State-financed course in ‘Religious Science: Islam’ is being given by Muslim and non-Muslim teaching staff. This course entitles students to receive a formal university qualification, under legislation concerning life-long learning.

The federalisation of the State has diversified faith administration as set out in the table overleaf. This reflects Belgium’s institutional complexity: born out of pragmatism, it has resulted in the multiplication of institutions to ensure social calm (a strategy that has partially failed) in the face of the difficult, conflictive situation between Flemish and French-speaking Belgium. The advantage of this chaotic situation is that Islam-related initiatives have different institutional sources, and delays in one section can perhaps be compensated for by advances in other domains.
Table 7  
**Powers of the various public authorities with regards to the Islamic faith**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal state</th>
<th>Vlaamse-Raad</th>
<th>Wallonia Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall management with the representative authority</td>
<td>Recognition of local ‘Muslim Communities’</td>
<td>Recognition of local ‘Muslim Communities’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomination of religious counsellors for prisons</td>
<td>Recognition of Mosques and Imams (except Brussels)</td>
<td>Recognition of Mosques and Imams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of the status of religious ministers</td>
<td>Appointment of teachers of Islamic religion in Flanders and Flemish schools in Brussels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversight / Intervention regarding State security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General information concerning mosques**

**Evolution in the number of mosques and prayer rooms**

There are some 330 prayer rooms acting as mosques in Belgium. Only 5 buildings actually resemble mosques. Numerous planning permission applications are pending or in negotiation. These prayer rooms have been established inside houses, former cafés, cinemas, factories or office buildings. Their existence should not be seen as in any way clandestine, or in any kind of negative light: these prayer rooms are usually well furnished and well established. Moreover the majority of these establishments are legal entities, as they are constituted as Non-profit organisations (*Association sans But Lucratif – ASBL*) under Belgian Association Law. This law allows all groups of citizens (Belgian or foreign nationals) to form an association without any prior authorisation from the authorities. These associations are subject to certain formal requirements: they must hold an annual general meeting, nominate a governing body including a president and treasurer, have a registered office address, register their statutes and yearly accounts with the courts, by paying the fee for publishing their statutes. Since 2001, a new law has imposed stricter regulations, notably regarding the keeping and registering of accounts with the Chamber of Commerce (*Tribunal de Commerce*). It should be noted that non-profit organisations can be formed for groups exercising activities of any kind, from amateur theatre groups to hospitals to first-division football clubs, to mosques. Each of these organisations may turn over hugely differing amounts of money.
Table 8 Evolution in the number of mosques and prayer rooms
(author's own estimates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Brussels Region</th>
<th>Flemish Region</th>
<th>Wallonia Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 (mid)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note the steady increase in prayer rooms/mosques since the 1970s. We might hypothesise that a relative stabilisation is taking place, as we can observe that growth between the beginning of the 1990s and the middle of 2000 is notably due
to an increase in the number of Turkish mosques, of which there were few until 1990, given Turkish political control of religious issues. Another factor to consider is the growth, especially in Brussels, of Sub-Saharan African and Asian mosques, reflecting new migration from these countries.

It is important to observe how mosques remain strongly marked by their national/cultural/linguistic origins; and this despite the fact that today many Muslims in Belgium are third-generation immigrants. National affiliations persist. This phenomenon seems to be accentuated by trans-nationalism, as well as satellite- and Internet-enabled connections to their places of origin. Their countries of origin, notably Turkey, but also Morocco, contribute to reinforcing these national fragmentations. In this way, with the exception of the Belgian Islamic and Cultural Centre (Centre Islamique et Culturelle de Belgique), situated in the so-called Cinquantenaire Mosques, no ‘Belgian’ intercultural mosque has yet been founded.

**Attendance and religious orientation**

The 330 prayer rooms that fulfil the functions of a mosque are all well attended. Marginal or unattended establishments are few and far between. There are numerous reasons for the growth of mosque establishments. They all respond to the demands of first-generation males who are establishing themselves in Europe, in the current situation of global Islam. For them, the mosque is primarily a place of social refuge: a link, and a place of social solidarity. It is also a place with which they identify, as these centres also provide a source of identity and a confirmation of their own norms, affirming their paternal-patriarchal authority at the heart of the family. Prayer rooms/mosques are also a place for their children to become familiar with the Koran – the mosque is inseparable from Koranic teaching. So it is often the case that local, family or regional-network based initiatives lie behind the foundation of mosques or prayer rooms, although in European cities proximity to other neighbours is also a reason for such initiatives. Even though this demand cannot be dissociated from developments in contemporary Islam. Indeed it converges with them. Mosques are quickly attracted to or included in wider associational networks, relating to one or other of the Islamic schools (see table).

For these reasons, demand for prayer rooms has grown considerably since the 1980s. It is far from certain that the current trend will continue with the growing emergence of the second and third generations. The issue is currently open to debate: if on the one hand we can observe the growing influence of neo-Salafist schools, on the other we are also witnessing demands for a more spiritual Islam that is more focused on the religion’s meaning than on practices and norms.
Table 9 Estimate of the principal movements and schools represented within Belgian prayer rooms/mosques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of prayer rooms / mosques</th>
<th>Movements</th>
<th>Nationalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Above 20</strong></td>
<td>Dyanet</td>
<td>Turks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Milli Görüs</td>
<td>Turks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jama’ät at Tabligh</td>
<td>Moroccans, Pakistanis, Bangladesh and converts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Between 10 – 20</strong></td>
<td>Muslim Brotherhood</td>
<td>Arabs and converts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>neo-Salafist schools</td>
<td>Arabs and converts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naqshsebendi Fetullah Gülen</td>
<td>Turks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bouchicyya</td>
<td>Moroccans and converts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Under 10</strong></td>
<td>Allaouya</td>
<td>Moroccans and converts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suleymancilar</td>
<td>Turks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mourides</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Financing and status**

A significant number of prayer rooms are located in buildings that have been purchased by the association that manages the mosque. The acquisition of these buildings is financed thanks to donations from the faithful or from European Muslims or Muslim countries. Limited financing may also come from institutions such as the Muslim World League.

Public authority recognition of mosques began in 2007, meaning that a certain number of mosques and imams would be publicly financed. In the Wallonia Region in June 2007, 44 prayer rooms and mosques (17 Arabic, 26 Turkish) were recognised along with 50 imams: 37 mosques were officially granted 1 imam, 5 were granted 2, and 1 received 3. In Brussels in February 2008, 4 mosques were recognised of which 2 were Turkish, 1 was Arabic and 1 was from Bangladesh. In 2007 in Flanders, 7 mosques were recognised (17 mosques are still pending recognition).

It must be remembered that the recognition of mosques and imams is now a Regional power in Belgium. The Wallonia Region (with its Socialist majority) is ahead of other regions in recognising mosques. The decision to recognise 44 mosques was taken a few weeks before the Federal elections of June 2007, which allows us to suppose a certain electoral influence on the decision: in general Muslims now have the right to vote.

All Turkish mosques that received official recognition belonged to the Dyanet network (an official institution of the Turkish State) while mosques linked to movements such as *Milli Görüs* were not recognised.
It should be noted that in contradiction to the current movement towards a ‘Belgian’ Islam going beyond the confines of original ethnicity (this progress is confirmed by Muslims themselves) ‘national’ mosques continue to consolidate and reinforce their national/language identity.

Visibility and conflict
The creation of prayer rooms/mosques in existing buildings has not caused any major conflict. This may be due to various factors. In the vast majority of cases, these centres were installed in areas dominated by Muslim immigrant populations. In Belgium, these populations are largely found in urban zones (inner cities) that have either been evacuated by Belgians, or which are inhabited by Belgians with a poor capacity for making their voice heard (the elderly, impoverished, or relatively marginalised working-class populations). These prayer rooms occupy disused offices or buildings and so in some ways contribute to improving the condition of the area. Muslims are also usually a discreet presence, relatively careful to avoid (excessively) bothering their neighbours. There are no public calls to prayer. These take place inside the prayer room/mosque itself. And frequent dialogue between Muslims and commune authorities or various local associations has also helped to avoid exaggerating conflict around places of worship. The situation however changes when Muslims ask to make their presence more visible through the construction of more Islamic architecture or architectural elements.

Others

Education
Belgian law states that religious or ethics lessons (depending on parental choice) must be taught as part of the ‘official’ (i.e. State) curriculum in primary and secondary schools. Such lessons cover the following faiths: Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam. Agnostic ethics may also be taught. As of 2010, a course on Buddhism will also be offered. Around 600 Islamic religious teachers have been designated by the relevant authorities (Vlaamse Raad and La Communauté Française de la Belgique) after nominations from the religious authorities concerned.

There is only one recognised Muslim primary school. Opened in 2008 as a private school, it does not receive public funding.
Religious counsellors
The law includes the financing of religious counsellors for hospitals, prisons and the armed forces. 18 have currently been designated.

Cemeteries
Communes are responsible for managing secular cemeteries. They have the power to grant sections that are dedicated to specific purposes. Cemetery land has been set aside for Jewish use. Muslims have cemetery land in 14 communes: 2 in Brussels, 9 in Flanders and 3 in the Wallonia Region. Muslims still prefer to be repatriated at present; nevertheless there is a demand for Muslim cemetery areas in Belgium.

Case studies of three disputes generated by the establishment of mosques
The three cases analysed – in Wallonia, in Brussels, and in Flanders – are among the 7 or 8 cases currently (2009) being disputed in Belgium. Each sheds light on a different aspect of the social factors involved in the building of mosques.

Bastogne: a stand-off between identities

Town, history and population
The commune of Bastogne is in southern Belgium, in the Ardennes, and about twenty kilometres from the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. It started life as an ancient Celtic settlement before becoming Roman, a past of which few traces remain. It has been an administrative centre since the nineteenth century.

Bastogne has around 14,000 inhabitants in an area of 172 square kilometres of which 162 are used for livestock farming, agriculture and forestry. Bastogne also possesses two small but profitable industrial areas. Its proximity to Luxembourg means that the region’s residents can also commute to work in Luxembourg. The town came dramatically to fame at the end of the Second World War when German troops made their last attempt to break through Allied lines and reach the port of Antwerp, taking the American army by surprise. The result was the famous ‘Battle of the Ardennes,’ which was fought between December 1944 and January 1945. Held by the Americans, the small town of Bastogne was besieged and bombarded for several weeks. It was liberated by the 101st Airborne Division of the US army on January 15th.

This small town can be described according to its three-fold identity. The first is that of the Ardennes, anchored in a tradition which is still kept very much alive. This identity is based on the relationship with a rural and forest setting, with
nature and with local produce. It gives rise to the appreciation of a local character that is both strong and whole. The second identity is that of the Catholicism that is embedded in the relatively traditional landscape that marks the Ardennes region. Several religious orders have made their home in Bastogne. The Catholic identity is in decline in terms of practice and institutional affiliation, but remains an important point of reference. The Bastogne commune’s emblem is the Virgin Mary holding the Baby Jesus. A third identity was born from the wartime event that made Bastogne one of the key places of sacrifice by the American army and civilian casualties. Memory of this event is extremely visible in the town, and constantly being renewed. There are several monuments: a memorial erected in 1950 bearing the names of the American soldiers killed, the Bastogne historic centre, an old tank from the battle that is displayed prominently on the main square and has become practically the symbol of Bastogne, the Bois de la Paix (The Wood of Peace). These and countless publications, and box-office hit films, all keep the memory of this event alive. Numerous tourists from across the globe visit these sites, which are also a place of frequent pilgrimage for American visitors.

Politically speaking, Bastogne has experienced a division of power between the Christian party, or Humanist Democratic Centre (today known as the Centre Democratique Humaniste, CDH) and the Liberal party or Reformist Movement (today known as the Mouvement Reformateur, MR). A Socialist presence is to be noted alongside a weak Green party vote. In the commune elections of 2006, a Socialist-Liberal alliance (the Avenir list) evicted the majority CDH party from power. The CDH had a long tradition of holding power here and includes among its members political figures that have occupied positions on regional and federal government. The CDH is thus currently fighting to re-gain power at the next elections. This political rivalry is not without implications for the conflict that has arisen over the minaret that will be analysed in this report.

Since the 1970s, the commune has seen the arrival of Turkish and Moroccan populations, a community that is currently entering its third generation. This settlement has taken hold beyond the boundaries of the major mining and industrial areas. Workers are employed in local industry, notably stone masonry, construction and in public works. Even now, these are the most commonly held positions for these immigrants, alongside jobs in the commercial or services sector. These populations are generally in employment, as the Ardennes region is not experiencing the serious unemployment problems of Brussels or Wallonia, which is hitting young Turkish and Moroccan residents particularly hard.

Today, Bastogne’s Muslim population exceeds 500, of which around 250 are of Turkish origin. As elsewhere in Belgium, almost all of this population also holds Belgian nationality.
The town of Bastogne extends across a hilly area, around the road axes that cross the area along the trace of ancient Roman roads towards Luxembourg, Germany, Liege, Namur and Brussels. The fact that the town is also at the heart of a road network was a major factor in the German troops’ attempts to re-conquer the area.

There are few old buildings. Moreover, the Battle for Bastogne partly destroyed the town. But it retains a certain Ardennes character, with stone houses and shops selling local produce in addition to a certain village way of life. In the town’s immediate periphery, residential areas are being developed for suburban style housing.

The Muslim community
At the beginning of the 1980s a small group of immigrants created the first Turkish cultural association (Türk Kültür Dernegi), constituted as a non-profit organisation in accordance with Belgian law. Initially, the association rented premises for use as a mosque. In 2000, there was an opportunity to purchase an old semi-abandoned farm a few hundred metres below the main square in Bastogne. This farm is close to an area that used to be occupied by an old sawmill (a common activity in the area given the importance of forestry). This large piece of land was divided into lots and has given rise to a residential area. The farm is thus close to the town centre, and located in its residential spread. With a few exceptions, Muslims do not live here, as they mostly inhabit other areas, along other roads or in social housing. This situation, where a residential area lives alongside a ‘foreign’ place of worship both in terms of its culture and social milieu, is not irrelevant to the discussions that have taken place.

The association is affiliated to the mosque network of Turkey’s Directorate for Religious Affairs (Dyanet). It thus enjoys the services of a permanent imam, a Dyanet civil servant who lives on site and is generally in Bastogne on a three-year rotation. Generally, these imams do not speak French and are poorly integrated into the local context.

In 2006, with the help of a local architect, whose offices are located only a few hundred metres from the mosque, the association drew up plans to adapt the building’s exterior to make it look more like a mosque.

Plans to increase the mosque’s visibility and the dispute
First, here is an outline of the chronology of events:

2006 The architect makes initial informal contact with the planning department with a sketch of the transformation. The planning department questions the introduction of a minaret.
March 2007  Presentation of an initial plan for the reform work, including a 15.60-metre minaret on the left of the building. The commune’s planning department highlights the lack of procedure for processing this application: as this is to be a religious building, the building permit application must be presented directly to a higher authority, i.e. the Provincial Authority.

July 2007  The application is re-submitted, this time directly to the Provincial Authority. In accordance with the wishes of the mosque’s newly elected board of directors, the plans include a taller minaret, 18.74 metres tall. Planning permission is refused on the basis of a compulsory consultation with the Commune, in which they consider the minaret too tall.

2008  Beginning of the dispute. Initial opposition from local residents: a petition is circulated gathering 2,000 signatures, the commune authorities receive numerous e-mails protesting against the project, the regional and national press cover the story and protests are taken up by right-wing extremist groups from outside Belgium.

April 2008  A new application is submitted (plans having been modified in September), this time with a lower minaret (14 metres, exceeding the height of the main building by 4 metres) to be built between the two buildings. In the meantime, the mosque is officially recognised by a Wallonia Region decree as a mosque eligible for direct subsidy. This fact obliges the Province to recognise faith buildings and it approves the application.

May 2008  The commune appeals to the higher authority, the Wallonia Region, against the whole project, including the minaret.

2009  The Wallonia Region’s administrative commission, responsible for studying the application (comprising civil servants and architects) approves the whole project, minaret included. But the Minister responsible (who is a member of the CDH) supports the commune’s position and approves the application to reform the mosque building, but denies permission for the minaret.

The dispute that arose concerning the creation of this mosque came relatively unexpected. The Turkish Muslim community is small and generally speaking it had attracted little comment. It seemed to have quietly become part of this small provincial town. This apparently quiet situation allows us to assess the precise factors at stake in this attempt to enhance a mosque’s visibility in the public arena.
At the request of the association, the plans to adapt the farm included the creation of an Ottoman style minaret to the left of the building, which was then lowered and moved to between two buildings. The dispute focused on the minaret. Currently, the regional minister has approved construction of the mosque, but not of the minaret. This decision goes against the Region’s administrative commission, which supported the minaret. We cannot exclude the possibility that the Minister’s position is related to political pressures. The Turkish association is currently considering how to pursue the matter. Legally, there is nowhere to appeal, other than to the State Council, in case of procedural irregularity.

The minaret affair caused a great stir in the small town of Bastogne. It acted as an echo chamber for discussion and spreading rumours, and becoming increasingly dramatic, not without a certain degree of irrationality.

**Actors and mobilisation**

Let’s analyse in detail the positions of the actors involved. Bastogne’s Turkish community is, economically speaking, reasonably well integrated and its young people attend the commune’s primary and secondary schools. All its members use social security for their health and other needs. Moreover, the majority, from the second generation onwards, are Belgian citizens.

However, this economic and institutional integration conceals the social and cultural enclave formed by Bastogne’s Turkish population, which takes little part in local cultural, social and political life. It remains culturally dominated by its links with Turkey. Even second-generation citizens, especially the male population, seem to remain torn between a future in Belgium and their roots in Turkey. Access to Turkish satellite TV and the Internet accentuate this connection with a Turkish space. This phenomenon is not special to Bastogne but is a trend that extends across the majority of the Turkish population.

The mosque’s life is marked by its firm integration with the Dyanet Turkish institutions. These institutions remain exogenous to Belgian society and only serve to reinforce Turkish isolation. The Islam advocated is a strict expression of Turkish (national and of the State) and Muslim identity.

In this context, the mosque appears to be strongly affected by this double identity. The very project of the minaret, which conforms to the architectural style of minarets in Turkey, confirms this appurtenance. And the association’s board of directors seems at times to have turned the Ottoman-style minaret—cylindrical and pointed—into a question of symbolic importance. Their enthusiasm for the minaret led them to present a new application featuring a taller minaret, even after the previous application had been turned down.
The local residents behind the petition and the opposition movement all belong to the same family, which is well known in Bastogne. They own several houses in the street where the former farm, now mosque, is located. These houses were built on land belonging to the old sawmill, which their family owned. In some way, this land is seen as forming part of their ancestral domain.

While the first part of the street coming down from the town passes through modest workers' houses, after the mosque the area becomes more suburban, featuring detached houses surrounded by gardens. This street’s families feared that the mosque's construction would devalue their property as a result of increased traffic, public nuisance and probably also the negative image associated with mosques and Islamic symbols. Regarding the issue of public nuisance it should be noted that a large car park is situated 200 metres behind the street and is also used for visiting fairgrounds and circuses. The nuisance caused by these events is probably greater than that caused by the small mosque.

The families who initiated the mobilisation in this area and the town started a petition. The petition's text clearly differentiates between the mosque and the minaret and targets opposition at the minaret. It should also be noted that even when the building (which a member of the family had already tried to buy) was first purchased, there had been concern about the potential public nuisance.

The wording of the petition was as follows:

'We are open to the practice of every man's faith, no matter what faith that be and we see no inconvenience in the mosque's presence. Moreover, the mosque has been active for the past 7 years without having caused any problems in the neighbourhood. But we are strictly opposed to the construction of a minaret:

- A 15-metre tall minaret is in no way in keeping with the environment, aesthetics, architecture and town planning regulations, not only of this area, but also of the town and the commune.
- At a time when religious symbols are at the very least controversial, is it really opportune to mark out the building with a minaret?
- Is it going to result in the call to prayer 5 times a day by the muezzin? Today you’ll answer no, but in a few years' time?
- The minaret is not necessary for the practice of the Muslim religion'.

This conflict, which primarily affects about a hundred people, is in part a banal conflict of residents' interest concerning the use of space. But the petition received 2,000 signatures. This is probably partly due to this family's notoriety in the small town of Bastogne. But also due to other facts: the 'minaret' affair has mobilised symbols that go far beyond a local issue, and its being taken up by extremist groups and the echo in the press made it a hot topic. Finally, weak
relations between the Turkish community and the residents of Bastogne have also given rise to increased tension.

If the event has taken another turn, it is also because the reins have been seized by an ideological mobilisation led by movements with a certain degree of inter-connection.

One is the *Nation* movement close to J.P. Stirbois’ wing of the French National Front (*Front National*), created in 1999. This movement, which probably got to hear about the Bastogne conflict through the press, launched an appeal against the minaret, calling on its website for intervention from the Bastogne burgomaster. This appeal transformed the meaning of the Bastogne residents’ petition. The question of opposition to a minaret became an issue of the defence of freedom and identity against the attack of Islam. This movement also descended on Bastogne. The few militants present placed their flag on the tank commemorating the war in the main square along with a sign reading ‘Nuts to the Minaret’.

‘Belgium and Christianity’ (*Belgique et Chrétienté*) is another movement that intervened. Founded in 1989 it is presided over by the former spokesman of the Belgian Front National. This organisation is recognised as a European Parliament lobby group. The fight against the Islamification of Europe is also one of this minor movement’s big issues.

Other initiatives were taken up by a Wallon website: EUBOCO, the acronym for *Europa Bonum Commune*, which aims, among other things, to defend ‘Western Christian Culture’. The e-publication *Pilori*, which is hosted by an insurance advice company based in the south of France, also took up the issue.

The question is how did these movements or individuals get involved in the Bastogne debate. To date, the information compiled does not allow us to conclude that there is any connection between the minaret’s opponents and these movements. It is more likely that the information reached them indirectly, through the press. Alongside the 2,000 signatures, a significant number of e-mails have been addressed to the burgomaster.

**Political actors.** Besides a representative of the majority party who proclaimed their opposition to the minaret, political actors have generally reserved their positions on the issue. They were probably not against the project, but nor have they supported it. Faced with significant opposition from town residents as expressed in the petition’s signatures, they have done nothing other than follow town opinion.

The neutrality of their position is also a result of the competition between the Liberal and Socialist-Christian parties. These two parties compete to capture votes largely on the same grounds. No political group could or will be able to
alienate Bastogne's electorate. And the relatively low size of the Turkish population does not give them a significant electoral weight.

**The media.** The most popular regional publications are the daily newspapers *Vers l'Avenir* and *Rappel*. These two dailies followed the case and covered the opinions of all concerned, maintaining a very balanced position. This was also the case with the national dailies, *La Libre Belgique* and *Le Soir*, which addressed the issue in their regional pages.

**Absent actors.** It should be noted that no support movement was organised in favour of the Turkish project. When asked to take sides, the Catholic parish abstained. Secular Christians who often, in other contexts, mobilise themselves on these issues remained silent. This lack of support can be explained in several ways.

The first is the relative isolation of the Turkish community in Bastogne's civic life, in addition to their inability to generate a movement in their favour. Another reason is non-Muslims' relative ignorance about Islam, beyond summary images. A third, related reason may be linked to the fact that the core player behind the launch of the opposition movement is an important Bastogne Catholic family. You could say that in this small provincial town this was enough to ensure that residents did not become too involved in the issue.

*The stakes involved in the dispute: integration and relations*

Let's attempt, beyond the actors and movements, to identify a few of the socio-logical processes at work.

**UNMEDIATED IDENTITY**

Two identities found themselves facing each other in this dispute: Bastogne local and Muslim Turkish. These two identities are both strong and constructed in a self-referential manner. They were not and are not prone to establishing cultural bridges. This is the case to such an extent that no one in either group emerged as mediator. It is significant for example that in Christian circles, it is practically impossible to find anyone committed to Islamic-Christian dialogue and who might thus possess the philosophical tools to bring about mediation. The rare voices that tried to make themselves heard were isolated and have been fairly marginalized. The dispute around the mosque's construction thus occurred without third-party mediation between the Muslim initiative and neighbourhood residents, or more broadly, the residents of Bastogne. It is significant that only about ten people attended the information event held by Bastogne's Muslims to explain their project.
This lack of everyday and civic relations, this national religious identity which goes against the reasonably good level of economic integration, have certainly not helped to build positive relations at a time when, by making the mosque visible, the Turkish Muslims aimed to include this building in Bastogne’s public arena. This was a dispute where each of the parties either poorly understood or was ignorant of the arguments of the opposing party. The Muslim party’s arguments in defence of their project were weak, based on a reductive apologetic (for example, ‘We are monotheists’ or ‘I attended the Catholic high school’). Arguments from the non-Muslim population were also reductive: the fear of the call to prayer, the idea that the overall secularisation of society goes against religious symbols, the evocation of an Islamic extremism that would contradict remembrance of American heroism in the fight against dictatorship, a general fear of Islamic extremism that had no justification in the case of Bastogne’s Turkish community. This fear became polarised in the petition that was circulated calling for a ‘No to the Minaret’.

**POLITICAL BELIEFS**

As previously mentioned, Turkish Muslims are almost all Belgian citizens thanks to the extremely flexible law concerning naturalisation and the Muslim faith. More specifically, the Bastogne mosque had received recognition from the State. This formal situation gives Muslims the sensation, not only that they have certain rights, but also that they can describe themselves as citizens. Hence the important but inadequate nature of formal integration. It is not due to the fact that a mosque has been recognised or because people have obtained a country’s nationality that give a specific context, or these people automatic cultural and political integration. This dispute demonstrates the necessary nature of formal integration but also its insufficiency. The Turkish population’s lack of connection to social and political life, the lack of reciprocal awareness of cultural and symbolic experience has led to a degree of radicalisation.

**TOWN PLANNING AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS**

A third contrast concerns both ideas about town planning and religious beliefs. The Turkish Muslims are proud of their Turkish and Muslim identity. This identity is for them an obvious fact. Making it visible in Bastogne is also an obvious fact. As is the act of ‘visibilisation’ in accordance with their image of what comprises a mosque: that is, in accordance with the Turkish-Ottoman model. For them, agreeing to lower the minaret and agreeing to locate it between two buildings is already the maximum level of concession possible. But this aesthetic is unacceptable to Bastogne’s inhabitants. On the one hand, it constitutes a threat to their
urban identity, as it consists of something that clashes totally with their idea of a town. And on the other, this symbol, seen proudly and positively by the Muslim population, is seen negatively, or even as a threat by the residents who associate it with the vicissitudes of the Muslim world and the unease that this generates.

These two opposing ideas are relatively fixed. At the beginning of the dispute, neither of the two parties possessed the necessary tools to develop their ideas. But it is likely that of itself, the dispute will be a factor that brings about an evolution in and a deepening of thinking on both sides.

Brief conclusions
The dispute over the Bastogne minaret highlights a few issues:

- A relative cultural rigidity of the parties, shaken by their need to face up to cultural innovation.
- The weakness of social and formal relations between the two parties involved (immediate actors in the dispute and its wider context) and their relative ignorance of each other.
- The lack of mediators capable of building bridges that could allow the debate to progress.
- The amplification of the dispute thanks to the role of extremist movements, even where they are not directly linked to the situation on the ground, due to the Internet.

Given a lack of management, mediation and debate, this local dispute acquired a certain level of irrationality. Bastogne locals expressed largely unjustified fears. The Muslim population became fixated on their plans for a minaret in accordance with their cultural model, without accepting any concessions or negotiation.

Neder-over Heembeek: mediation at work and subtle strategy

The town
Neder-over Heembeek is an area (formerly a village) belonging to the City of Brussels, one of the 19 communes that comprise the Brussels agglomeration. Situated to the north of Brussels bordering Flanders, it lies beside the Royal Park of Laeken, close to the Brussels-Antwerp Canal. This area is also home to an important new military hospital. In this area of Neder-over Heembeek, the City of Brussels (through its Public Social Support Centre – Centre Public d’Aide Social) has built social housing complexes and plans to build more.

The quality of housing in Neder-over Heembeek is surprising. It is located over a hilly area, which is quite green, alongside the canal. Certain sections
possess a certain village charm. Other areas comprise large avenues with detached houses and gardens and occasionally small buildings and apartments. Lower down the canal are workshops and small office buildings. A tower, the remains of a medieval church, is surrounded by a public garden at the top of the hill. Neder-over-Heembeek is located away from the centre of the city and is poorly connected by public transport.

The major dispute around the Neder-over-Heembeek mosque straddled two political situations in the communes, relating to the city of Brussels. Before October 2006, the majority of communes were Liberal (MR: Mouvement Réformateur) and Green (Ecolo). After the commune elections of October 2006, a new majority came to power: Socialist (PS) and Christian Social (Centre Démocrate Humaniste, CDH, formerly the PSC or Parti social chrétien). The burgomaster is now the Socialist Freddy Thielemans.

Neder-over-Heembeek has a mostly Moroccan immigrant population. Part of this population lives in City of Brussels social housing and another section has settled in workers' housing.

*Muslim and historic populations*

The phases of Muslim settlement and dispute can be summarised as follows:

1983 Creation of the first Muslim association, the Muslim Community of Neder-over-Heembeek (*Communauté musulmane de Neder-over-Heembeek*). A small house is purchased and fitted out as a prayer room. Not all the necessary authorisations for using the space as a public place are obtained.

1988 Permission to use the space as a public space requested but denied given the unsafe nature of the building. Mobilisation of the Flemish nationalist extreme-right party, *Vlaams Belang* (VB), against the mosque. A commune school in the area starts a petition against the mosque. The reasons for this petition are not clear. The association sells the house, making a small profit on the original purchase price. Various contacts are made with the political authorities to express the need for a mosque in the area.

2001 December. Statutes registered with the authorities for constituting an ASBL (non-profit organisation), the Arrayane Islamic Cultural Centre (*Centre Culturel Islamique Arrayane*).

2002 Contact made with the Brussels burgomaster, the Liberal X. de Donnéa. He suggests that the association purchase some land in a no-build area, promising to change that zone's category. The association hires
an architect to draw up plans. During the commune elections, X de Donnéa is elected to the region and a new majority (Socialist – Christian Socialist) comes to power in the City of Brussels commune. The new majority does not accept the idea of changing the category of this land. Instead it proposes an area opposite the military hospital. The association has plans drawn up by an architect but to no avail. Tielemans, the Socialist burgomaster seems reticent. A printing press in the area, close to the canal, closes its doors and sells the building for over €500,000. The association acts as buyer and raises funds from mosques and traders to gather the necessary money. In 6 months, it raises €200,000, with the rest to follow.

2007 A petition is launched against the mosque, given fears of noise pollution and excessive traffic. The petition is started by neighbours of the building, and gathers 80 signatures. External actors set up a consultation process.

May 2007 The name, statutes and secretary of the association are changed: The Centre Culturel Islamique Arrayane becomes the shorter ASBL Centre Arrayane (Non-profit organisation Arrayane Centre.) The new statutes include a few women.

Early 2008 A consultation process is set up by the commune authorities after receiving a request for planning permission from the association to reform the building. Numerous Muslims attend this consultation.

January 2008 Inter-faith meeting.

It must be noted that the plans to refurbish the mosque include almost no exterior work, apart from a plaque bearing the mosque’s name. There are plans to raise part of the building to provide rooms for the women. But there is currently no design for a minaret, cupola or any other visible decoration. The association seems to have assumed that any additional ‘visibilisation’ would be inadmissible to local residents.

**Points of analysis**

The Muslim association had been trying to secure a space for several years. It developed a progressive strategy, securing the purchase of the first house, then after a period of waiting, the purchase of a second building. Moreover, it also gained experience in negotiating with public authorities and locals.
THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS
The responsibility and power to concretely support the implementation of places of worship by looking for a location, does not lie within the powers of Belgian communes. It is up to religious communities to find a way to purchase land or buildings.

The burgomaster de Donnéa’s promise to the Muslim community was illusory and may have been dictated by the forthcoming electoral deadline (as Muslims also vote). The fact that the Muslim community believed him and that they spent money on hiring an architect may be a result of their relative ignorance of the political scene. It is also possible that the Muslim organisation was implementing a strategy of respecting and following recommendations from the authorities, in order to create a situation where they were worthy of recognition.

The following political majority changed the promises made by the previous burgomaster, probably as much for ideological reasons as a result of noticeable opposition from neighbouring residents along the canal.

MOBILISATIONS AND MEDIATION
Mobilisation came above all from canal-side residents, i.e. a middle class residing in an under-valued section of the commune, in a low-lying area close to the canal that is dominated by offices and workshops. Their fear of a devaluation of their property was sufficient motive. Beyond close neighbours, a section of the hostility also came from a particular section of society, although other Catholics also intervened in the opposite direction.

It is important to highlight the double-mediation that was implemented in Neder-over Heembeek.

The residents’ petition, motivated by practical reasons, seemed to hide wider concerns linked to a fear of Islam that this mosque’s presence made more pressing. Faced with this issue, social workers in the area, along with active members of the Christian community who knew the Moroccan population, organised information meetings between Muslims and other local inhabitants.

The commune organised another meeting when the planning application was submitted. Numerous Muslims attended this meeting, which was skilfully presided by the council’s head of planning. It was a strategy conceived by the association to demonstrate their strength and determination. It could have turned into confrontation or increased fears of an ‘Islamic invasion.’ But the opposite result was achieved, allowing all parties to express themselves, so clarifying the matter. Beyond the mosque question, other issues emerged. The ‘Belgo-Belgians’ raised the issue of the insolence of some young Moroccans’ behaviour, who had even suggested at times that young ‘Belgo-Belgians’ should
‘lower their gaze’, as if they were in a conquered territory. Moroccans present recognised the unacceptable nature of this kind of behaviour but also emphasised that the presence of a local mosque, where respect for others is taught, would help reduce such bad behaviour. Moroccans also highlighted their integration in the area and their participation in local initiatives. They committed themselves to ensuring that the mosque would not generate parking problems, and reassured people that there would be no audible call to prayer.

More recently, in January 2009, the municipal councillor for faith issues organised an ‘inter-faith’ day in the area which was a great success. Even Christians, who at first were the most reticent about the mosque idea, were touched by the welcome they received from the mosque. This day reinforced relationships between neighbouring groups, friendship between believers of different faiths and different cultures of origin.

This favourable atmosphere was extended, for example in February 2009, when Catholic scouts organised an evening to finance a group trip to Meknes. The president of the mosque’s wife came to prepare the couscous and everything was extremely convivial. Relations between ‘Belgo-Belgians’, the majority of whom are Catholic, and Moroccan Muslims are the perfect picture of this evening: previous reticence about plans for the mosque from the deputy mayor’s council was overturned by the good neighbourly relations established between local residents of different faiths.

Good relations between neighbours seem to have been founded on frankness. As one of the social workers noted: ‘We aren’t playing hide-and-seek. When we have something to say, we say it, the clearer we are about our own opinions, the easier it is to discuss matters with others’.

**UNEXPECTED RISK**

The current positive solution may be fragile. A minor episode illustrates this fragility. The association’s current president is 68 years old, one of the first immigrants to the area who since the beginning has been an active member of the mosque committee. If his wisdom and good-will are considerable, his knowledge of the intellectual stakes linked to Islam is weak. He received several hundred brochures about Islam to be distributed, from the Islamic Cultural Centre of Belgium. This centre, which fulfils the functions of the Brussels Grand Mosque, is part of the Muslim World League. This brochure, which is Saudi in origin, is an apology for Islam, its superiority over Christianity and even cites anti-Christian verses of the Koran and incites Muslims to violence against Christians.

The mosque’s president was in all innocence on the point of distributing the leaflet to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. One of the local workers, who had
been involved in organising meetings, heard about it and convinced the president not to do so, explaining that this brochure would sour relations and trigger off an extremely negative reaction from the Christian population.

This episode demonstrates certain issues.

Firstly, that the truce, the establishment of good relations, the practical solution to problems linked to the establishment of mosques, is far from being a permanent fact. A kind of ‘care for and development of relations’ is fundamental. If chance hadn’t ensured that the distribution of this brochure was stopped, a step backwards would have been taken and it is highly likely that anti-Islamic extremism would have found a good nurturing ground for its propaganda.

Moreover, we can also see how the Muslim community is almost unprepared to assume its visibility in the public arena. Until now, its aim and vision have led it to demand a public presence. But its leaders have not always seen or understood the factors at stake, and the implications of this presence. They have failed to see the potential gap between strong inter-personal relations and inter-group relations and the relations between systems of thought. Before the contents of this brochure, people were happy to take part in parties, make couscous, etc. but a hiatus is inevitable. This case demonstrates well the limits of rushing into a certain vision of intercultural dialogue.

We can also see how local management initiatives are influenced by outside influences. The brochure in question is a translation of a pamphlet from Saudi Arabia, produced in a Wahabist philosophy that could interfere with recently constructed local dynamics if innocently distributed.

**Brief conclusions**

This case demonstrates the crucial role played by actors capable of mediation in this kind of dispute. It is important to have in-depth knowledge of each point of view to enable this to occur. It also demonstrates the mediating role that can be played by public authorities, who act as reassuring figures at the heart of a dispute where they have mastered the terms of debate.

**Borgerhout-Anvers: beauty and wisdom**

**Town, history and population**

Borgerhout is an area with a population of 40,000 in the heart of Antwerp, a city with over 470,000 inhabitants. This area begins just to the north of Antwerp Central station. It was formerly a separate commune, which was gradually absorbed into the city by walls and fortifications built to secure port defences that were constructed largely after Belgian independence. The nineteenth-century expansion of the City of Antwerp meant that Borgerhout was adjoined to the city.
Following commune reform in 1975, Borgerhout was incorporated into the city of Antwerp, although it retained its own administrative district. In the nineteenth century, especially after the First World War, numerous SMEs sprouted up in Borgerhout and a significant population of port workers settled in the area.

Antwerp is a great cosmopolitan town. The port of Antwerp (Europe’s second largest), numerous industrial activities, the significant development of design, a large university and numerous higher education colleges as well as important architectural and museum heritage make it a major economic and cultural metropolis. The diamond trade also makes Antwerp one of the largest commercial centres for diamonds in the world. The Jewish community (40,000) play an important role in this sector. The community includes Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and a very large community of Haredim Orthodox Jews. There are around thirty synagogues in Antwerp.

Politically speaking, Antwerp is one of the strongholds of the Flemish nationalist party ‘Flemish Interest’ (Vlaams Belang, VB). This party opposes immigration and Islam, French-speakers and any other contamination of the purity of the Flemish identity. This party’s success is not only due to specific electoral issues, but also to the fact that it feeds off the fertile grounds of Flemish identity, a common denominator for consensus among a significant majority of the population and political class. In the 2006 commune elections, this party secured 20 out of 55 seats on the commune council. The Socialist party obtained 22 seats, Christian socialists 6, Liberals 5 and Greens 2. The VB’s success has been solid over the past twenty years. A third of Antwerp’s population votes for this party. Its success has led other parties to form coalitions in order to secure a majority and exclude the VB from any access to power at a commune level.

Antwerp has a sizeable immigrant population, representing 15% of the total population and including hundreds of different nationalities. Since the 1960s, its proximity to the station has made the workers’ neighbourhood of Borgerhout home to a sizeable Moroccan community (Borgerhout has been nicknamed ‘Borgerokko’, a fusion of Borgerhout and Morocco). Later, Turkish, Pakistani and numerous other nationalities also settled here. Currently, Balkan, East-European, Central Asian, Chinese and Sub-Saharan Africans have all made it their home. Foreign residents exceed 50% of the total population.

Since the 1990s Borgerhout has experienced severe tension between its populations with instances of intolerance especially between young immigrants and long-term, often elderly, residents. The police often have to intervene for numerous reasons, to check IDs, for drugs, etc. This is not always carried out in accordance with acceptable professional standards, and it is not inconceivable
that some elements in the police force are influenced by VB ideas. In short, tension in Antwerp and in particular in Borgerhout was and is high.

This tension reached a peak after 2000. In November 2002, a young Moroccan Islamic religious teacher was killed by his neighbour, an elderly Belgian. It was probably not an explicitly racist crime, but a crime in the context of tension and the language of hate propagated by the VB. All opinion makers and the democratic political classes condemned the incident. But it also gave rise to spontaneous, violent reactions from young people, descended from the immigrant population. Surfing this wave of reaction, a young Lebanese political refugee, Abou Jahja, whose father was Shiite and mother Maronite and who was Belgian by marriage, created the 'Arab European League' movement. He organised defence patrols and monitors police work. He preached a heightened sense of Arab identity. To some extent he transferred the arguments of the Lebanese conflict to Belgium. He provoked significant political and media reactions. As with the VB, his logic of direct confrontation was not accepted in Belgian political culture, which preferred to act by negotiation in search of consensus. Moreover, the presence of a significant Jewish community gave rise to fears of the worst kind of losses of control.

Abou Jahja was even sentenced under a law that forbids the creation of private militias. The issue was highly sensitive, as this law was created against the pro-Nazi militias of the 1930s. In the 2004 legislative elections, Abou Jahja formed an alliance with the Marxist-Leninist party, the Labour Party of Belgium (Parti du Travail de Belgique), which ended up in failure. In December 2008, the Arab European League again aroused comment during protests against the Israeli war in Gaza. Acts of vandalism were perpetrated against one of Antwerp's synagogues.

*Muslim population and plans for the Noor ul Haram Mosque*

There is a considerable Muslim population in Antwerp. It is home to 36 mosques and numerous associations. There are 5 mosques in Borgerhout, 3 of which are Moroccan, 1 Turkish and 1 Pakistani. The latter is the subject of the dispute analysed here. These mosques are relatively concentrated geographically speaking, but are separated by national divisions. In this way, one street away from the Pakistani mosque, Noor ul Haram, is a Moroccan mosque and another street away is the Turkish mosque.

The Antwerp Islamic Association was created in 1983, thanks to the particular impetus of a Pakistani who arrived in Belgium in 1960 to study chemical engineering. Having settled in Belgium, he worked for a major chemical company in Antwerp. He still presides over the association. This academically trained
leader who was integrated into the life of Antwerp was not without importance in the development of this dispute. Around the time of its foundation, the association purchased an old house in Van Kerkhovenstraat to be converted into a mosque for the small Pakistani community and also to serve sailors who docked in the port. This street faced blocks of social housing. There was heavy traffic, numerous buses passing here. To a certain extent, the street acted as a transport route between two more enclosed sections of Borgerhout.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE DISPUTE**

In 2001, the house next to the mosque burnt down. The plan to purchase the burnt property and to build a new mosque following the demolition of the actual mosque was born. Initial plans were to build a new mosque, taking care to ensure that it was in keeping with the surrounding area. The project was given to an Antwerp architect who submitted a building application in 2002.

In 2002, the first stone was laid. At this point, the VB organised protests in opposition to the new building. VB threats had been received even before construction commenced; as a result, when the association launched the tender to find a contractor, only one candidate came forward. He asked to remain anonymous. Once work began, harassment followed. The container that served as a lean-to for the workers was tagged with the graffiti ‘Geen moskee hier!’ (No mosque here!) The VB organised a demonstration in Van Kerkhovenstraat on the subject: ‘Now “they” want to build a new mosque with two minarets!’ The VB also launched a petition – ‘We don’t want a mosque in Antwerpen-Noord!’ – against minarets, noise, music and parking problems that the mosque couldn’t fail to cause. The petition received 300 signatures from across Antwerp. An information meeting was organised for residents.

The *Vlaams Belang* also presented an appeal to the State Council, which sent a letter to the Antwerp Islamic Association requesting it to halt construction, in spite of the fact that it had been granted permission to build. The Association appealed to the Province, which authorised that work could recommence, on condition that some aspects such as access for the disabled and other minor details be changed. As a consequence, work was halted for one and a half years, as of 2003. This cost the Association a considerable amount of money, if only just to maintain the scaffolding, which was rented. The Antwerp architect agreed to continue working free of charge. In the new plan, the façade was given additional embellishment. Arabic calligraphy was to be included in the glazed tiles on the façade, work that was given to a Jewish artist and an Arab calligrapher.

In 2003 the VB also presented an appeal to the Province. The Antwerp Islamic Association was defended by a Turkish lawyer who worked *pro bono*. The
association had (and still has) very good relations with the city of Antwerp and its neighbourhood organisations. On 6 April, 2003, a demonstration was organised by the various Muslim communities and neighbourhood organisations in support of the mosque and against the VB. The demonstration went very peacefully, the Muslim population wishing to avoid anything that might be seen as provocation. In 2004, the State Council decided in favour of the Antwerp Islamic Association, and in 2005 work recommenced. But VB harassment continued and became more international. On 8 August, 2007, the VB organised a press conference on the issue ‘Geen megamoskee in Antwerpen-Noord – Stop islamerising van Antwerpen-Noord!’ (sic!), accusing the mosque of links with fundamentalists and of being financed by suspicious sources. On 22 December, 2007, the mosque opened its doors. It was to be officially inaugurated in the autumn of 2009, once work on the interior had been completed. Currently the house next door is on sale and the Association plans to purchase it to increase the capacity of the women’s area. On 15 November, 2008, the City of Antwerp’s Municipal Office for Social Affairs organised an ‘open-doors’ day and a ‘crossing cultural boundaries’ event in Van Kerhovenstraat, with messages such as: ‘Bezoek kerk en moskee, 2 werelden in 1 straat’ (Visit the church and the mosque, 2 worlds in 1 street’, or, ‘t Stad is van iedereen,’ (The City belongs to Everyone). A large neo-Gothic church stands just 500 metres from the mosque. The event was a great success, with around 300 people visiting the mosque. This helped change the image of Muslims by showing them as being able to dialogue with other religions.

Points of analysis
This dispute reveals several interesting aspects.

ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGY
The association’s architectural vision, as followed by the architect, consisted in the realisation of a strikingly beautiful mosque that was also in harmony with local architecture. The result is exceptional: the building is a genuine success and its integration with local architecture in comparison with that of the social housing blocks opposite is remarkable. The two small minarets that symbolically characterise the mosque do not clash. Moreover they reflect the two bell towers of the church located a few hundred metres away in the same street. This mosque could be described as an addition to Antwerp’s religious architectural heritage. The use of quality materials such as cast glass that was manufactured by a Dutch company, which encrusted a Koran verse in gold into the facade, gives the building a certain prestige. This has contributed to a renewed consideration
of mosque architecture, based not only on the importation of models from the other cultural areas of Islam.

The final cost of the mosque came to €700,000. According to the President of the association, the mosque was financed solely by donations from the faithful and Muslims from other mosques.

EXTERNAL AGGRESSION

The building project for the new mosque did not give rise to an opposition movement in the area. On the one hand, there was a strong Muslim presence in the community and on the other the mosque and the community had known its leaders for several years.

The Vlaams Belang provoked the dispute concerning the exterior and construction of the mosque.

The time was right. It was the day after the attack on the Twin Towers. The leaders were Pakistani. A rumour that dangerous Islamic radicals, close to the Taliban, had financed the mosque was swiftly constructed. The accusation of radicalism was completely unfounded with regard to this mosque. Moreover, the President was a member of the Muslims in Belgium Organisation and it is well known that members of this body have been submitted to screening by the Belgian State Security department. The aim was to induce fear among local residents and to increase tension, even at the cost of spreading false rumours. The press and this party’s website made and continue to make considerable fuss about accusations of radicalism.

This tension culminated in the organisation of a press conference and demonstration in front of the Noor ul-Haram by VB President Philip De Winter and leaders of the European extreme right in January 2008. Jörg Haider was present to represent ‘Steden tegen islamisatie’ (Cities Against Islamification). This event made the connection to the political extreme right, a feature of the campaign against the ‘visibilisation’ of Islam. It is significant that this VB action was not directed against the numerous Antwerp mosques, but against the first building to manifest itself symbolically in Antwerp’s public arena, while others merely fixed plaques to the wall with the name of the mosque or made the entrance look a little oriental.

THE ASSOCIATION’S STRATEGY

The Association’s strategy in the face of these vicissitudes was respect for legal process, silence, patience and explanation. Legal process in the sense that it diligently replied to all requests from public authorities for the improvements requested. It was certainly assisted in this respect by the architect, who was
particularly knowledgeable about the wheels of administration at several different levels. Silence in the sense that the Association never made any declarations or accusations against the VB. It placed itself above these accusations as it considered that it was better not to enter into polemics in the face of outright falsehood. This silent strategy bore fruit. In the end, the VB’s false accusations and the presence of the extreme right’s leaders gave the mosque considerable publicity as the victim of extremism. The notoriety gained ensured, among other things, that this minor mosque was recognised by the Flemish government. Its inauguration in autumn 2009 was to take place in the presence of the Flemish minister for Interior affairs who has the authority to recognise mosques.

Faced with problems, the Association’s strategy was one of patience and explanation. It did not rely on aggressive demands: it explained, it collaborated in meetings and dialogue initiatives, it knew how to wait until administrative issues were resolved, even where this cost money when construction was suspended.

AUTHORITIES
Antwerp’s commune authorities were confronted with the thorny issue of the VB’s presence and electoral success. In some ways, this case was a good opportunity for them as it allowed them on the one hand to condemn the VB’s falsehoods and on the other to base their arguments on Muslims, Antwerp citizens who were showing an attitude of openness. To a certain extent this was a case of model Muslim citizens who could prove the harmonious integration of Islam. They could also serve as models for other Muslim groups.

This probably explains the positive attitude and opportunity seized to organise joint visits to the two neighbouring places of worship. Since then the Noor groups, not only from an inter-religious perspective, but also owing to its architectural interest, regularly visit the mosque.

Brief conclusions
The case of the Noor Mosque allows us to highlight the following points:

– The central role of the mosque’s leadership both in elaborating an adequate project and in implementing a strategy for its establishment, not only within the Muslim community (where the Muslim leaders are very able) but also outside it.
– The role played by the project’s architectural quality and its integration with urban architecture.
– The European strategy of the extreme right on the subject of Islam.
– The role played by public authorities and their vision and management of future relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.
Conclusions

The cases studied have the advantage of being situated within their immediate sociological context. In terms of conflict dynamics we should rather speak of ‘episodes of dispute concerning adjustment’ rather than structural conflict situations. Each case (and this is also the situation in other cases in Belgium) concerns critical moments that tend, with varying degrees of success, towards a solution.

This allows us to gain a better understanding of the dynamics at work and the wider significance of these conflicts, and to see that it is important to analyse far more than simple questions of Islamophobia. They allow us to discern ongoing issues related to the definitive settlement of Islam in Europe. The openness of mosques, in particular those mosques that make Muslim symbols explicit within the city, introduce a new dimension in Islam’s insertion into Europe. More specifically we can highlight the following aspects:

a) Firstly we can observe how this public visualisation puts the social and cultural integration of Muslims in their social context to the test. Bastogne is exemplary of a weak connection: the Turkish Muslim population is poorly connected to its social context even though it is successfully integrated from an economic point of view. Its leaders are in a bad position to manage external relations, the architectural project is not culturally integrated into its urban setting. This is exactly the opposite of the Borgerhout case. Neder-over-Heembeek lies between the two, both from the architectural and social relations points of view.

We also saw how the acquisition of nationality is useful, as Muslims become voters and citizens who can use the rights of this status. But we have also seen that legal nationality is not enough to guarantee automatic integration in terms of social and cultural relations.

In some cases we can see how the desire for a mosque, motivated by religious enthusiasm, leads Muslims to achieve actions (such as the purchase of a building or creation of an architectural design) whose consequences are not always foreseen. The establishment of a mosque in a residential area is likely to cause a reaction, in the same way as the construction of a supermarket. Moreover, we can also see how Muslims do not always manage to assume responsibility for or to face the conflict that they have generated. In other words, the institutional progress of Islam, made possible by religious enthusiasm, is capable of, among other things, mobilising financial means, but seems at times to exceed the speed of the community’s integration into its context.

It should also be noted how, more often than not, it is first generation Muslim males who lead these projects. Young people, with some exceptions, do
not seem to invest much interest in these projects or these disputes. The question is thus to determine if the eagerness for mosques is not a phenomenon that lies partly in the past of the European Muslim community, even where Muslim entreaties make these their priority.

b) Beyond the reaction of local residents, we often see extremist groups intervening with the explicit aim of increasing tension. In some cases, as in Antwerp, these carry real political weight. In other cases, they are small groups whose substance lies above all in their websites or in carrying out a few demonstrations. In normal circumstances they do not explicitly reunite the masses to their cause and their actions. However they continue to mark the terms of the debate, to set the tone. The case of Antwerp, where there is considerable experience in this field, shows Muslims and public authorities adopting a strategy of not taking these positions into account.

It should be noted how web coverage leads to the amplification of the positions of these groups and gives them a social presence which they do not necessarily possess.

But over and beyond the action of these groups it is also clear that association of world dynamics with European realities weighs at least on first impressions of events: Islam up close is seen through the light of Islam elsewhere, that of the terrorist, the totalitarian. It is only through clarification that, in most occasions, this attitude can be overturned.

It is also clear that beyond political interest actions, there is a genuine questioning of identity and European identity taking place among local populations. This question is conservatively formed – *Europa nostra* – in terms that are often full of enmity towards Islam or anything that perturbs this sense of identity. Often these issues are under-estimated by the political class and by intellectuals. And yet the question of identity is at the heart of social life and the very construction of democracy.

c) For the overturning of prejudice to be possible, abstract information about Islam is useless. In the same way, it is not enough to simply inform Muslims about the reality of their context. Meeting points, forums for debate are indispensable, even if any other form of getting to know each other is also useful. Again this report underlines the limits of the inter-cultural process that relied solely on inter-communication. It is only through a debate that takes the time to deepen knowledge and arguments (not just slogans) that it is possible to evolve positions, notably when these positions are relatively fixed in the first place.

For this approach to be possible, mediation is essential. They need to be better profiled, but at least two characteristics are fundamental. First, the fact
that any mediator must have a thorough knowledge of views on the inside, the realities of the situation, in order to be able to understand the motives behind the arguments on both sides. This leads us to conclude that expert communicators are not sufficiently armed for this task. The second element is that these figures must have practical knowledge and from this the trust of all parties.

It follows that public policy in this area must act accordingly, although more often than not such tasks are seen as of marginal importance and often entrusted to inexperienced individuals.

d) We have seen how political leaders play a crucial role in these disputes. Such situations do not require leaders who make principled declarations either for or against one side or another, but leaders who prove that they are capable of making practical contributions to the controlling dispute. In short, leaders who can set the framework for a secure symbolic and practical environment for all parties concerned.

e) Earlier we underlined the major challenge represented by aesthetics. The establishment of mosques as visible realities within the European arena will depend on the capacity of constructors and architects to invent a Muslim religious architecture that is integrated into the European public space. And, depending on the means available, to create works which support the architectural heritage of European towns and cities.
3 Between religious freedom and social acceptance: the construction of mosques in re-unified Germany
Michael Kreutz and Aladdin Sarhan

General frame

Basic statistics
Germany is Europe’s biggest country in terms of population. It numbers around 82 million inhabitants and is thus almost twice as big as Spain. For a long time the majority of Germans refused to regard immigrants as such. Labour migrants were called Gastarbeiter (‘guest-workers’), and expected to leave the country after a certain period of time. In the course of time it could no longer be denied that only a tiny minority of immigrants were willing to return to their countries of origin. National awareness grew almost proportionally when more and more immigrants decided to settle in their new home country forever. Meanwhile the third generation of inhabitants with a migration background has changed the stratification of German society to its foundations.

Before the migration of the ‘guest-workers’ few Muslims had come to Germany, and then most of them as prisoners-of-war, some as guards and officers and many others after World War II as refugees from the Soviet Union. The Wilmersdorff Mosque, built in 1924, is the first manifestation of a Muslim institutional presence in Germany and a symbol of good diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire. When Western Germany after the war became the hotspot of the so-called ‘economic miracle’ (Wirtschaftswunder), immigrants had been arriving in large numbers since 1961. With the exception of some return migration in 1967, immigration came to a head in 1970 when about 550,000 contract workers entered Germany. Until 1973, the majority of the 1.5 million ‘guest-workers’ and their relatives were of Italian, Greek, Portuguese and Spanish extraction. The
programme came to an end in 1973 by which time an estimated number of 3.5 million immigrants had come to settle in Germany.

In the early 1970s, immigration to Germany changed when Turkish citizens became the largest group of immigrants. Since 1973, about one million Turkish labour migrants have come to Germany. Until then, labour immigrants numbered about 3.7 million. Family members formed about half of the immigrants coming to Germany between 1974 and the mid-1980s (Zimmermann 2007: 17, 19). The main countries of origin now are Turkey, Serbia and Yugoslavia, Italy, Portugal and Spain, Morocco and Tunisia. Muslims make up altogether about 3% of the entire German population. North-Rhine Westfalia, the biggest German state, is supposed to be home of one million Muslims.1 Recent estimates range from 3.2 to 3.4 million Muslims in Germany, as the authorities did not record denominations before 2003. The estimate is based on the ratio of denominations in the respective countries of origin, e.g. the share of immigrants from Lebanon is rendered in accordance with the ratio of denominations within Lebanese society. For political reasons, these data are not always reliable. Certain groups like Alevis and Ahmadis are often not considered Muslims at all (Guschas 2009).

Germany is a unique case as a huge number of representatives in Muslim organisations and pressure groups are converts. Official data does not exist; a survey conducted by the Zentralinstitut Islam-Archiv, which is funded by the Ministry of Domestic Affairs, has turned out to be rather questionable (Die Zeit, 19 April, 2007, no. 17). Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the Muslim share of the population is the fastest growing in Germany compared to other denominations. Inside it, citizens of Turkish extraction remain the largest group.

**General information on legislation**

According to the jurisdiction of the Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) the guarantee of freedom of belief, confession, and worship caters also for the freedom of religious association (Art. 4, Abs. 1, GG). The right to enjoy freedom of individual and collective worship is independent of being vested with legal capacity. The adjudication of a statutory body includes the possibility of public admission (Weber 2003: 87, 89), although to grant corporate rights it is not enough to maintain that Islam is a religion. The law requires the existence of a ‘religious community’ (Art. 137, Abs. 5 S. 2 WRV), which must constitute itself along the lines of a number of basic conditions. A ‘religious community’ is thus distinct from a mere ‘community of believers’ (ibid. 97–9). The German system of Private International Law seeks to apply the law of origin or of residence as the connecting factor in specific cases, which has become

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rather common. In the field of family law and the law of succession, legal norms in Germany are more likely to be applied on the basis of nationality than by residence, e.g. in cases of divorce (Rohe 2007: 115, 121–2).

Since the mid-1960s Muslims in Germany have begun to organise themselves in associations meant to maintain the culture and religion of the members' country of origin. So these associations have been considerably similar to the political currents in the original countries, mainly in Turkey. Besides the dominating Turkish Sunni organisations there are also independent organisations, like e.g. the Multinational Association for Education and Culture (MBK, Multinationaler Bildungs- und Kulturverein e.V.). The Alevi and the Ahmadiyya communities are also well organised. They share the experience of not being recognised by most Sunni Muslims and also of being exposed to repression or persecution in their countries of origin.

There are still controversies over the question whether the muezzin’s call to prayer is legally on a par with the ringing of church bells. A certificate approved and published by the Federal Designee of Foreigners (Bunderausländerbeauftragte) in 1997 and another certificate approved by the German Municipal and Communal Federation (Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund) both recommend the equal treatment of church bells and muezzin call and have come to the conclusion that the muezzin’s call is also part of the constitutional right of worship (Art. 4, GG). On the other hand, loudspeaker facilities will only be recognised by the government if they are indispensable to religious practices. One could argue that the constitutional law should protect the muezzin's call but not the use of loudspeakers. Nevertheless, while the non-amplified call is hardly audible, church bells are. From this perspective such a settlement does not really mean equal treatment as it was intended to be. Therefore some people argue that loudspeaker facilities are indispensable for muezzin calls if they are to fulfil their task properly.

The political situation
Both at the federal and local level, Germany expects Muslims to constitute representative bodies that can work as cooperation partners with the government. This creates the problem that an estimated number of no more than 20% of all German Muslims are organized in mosque communities while the remaining 80% are little more than a silent majority. The three biggest Muslim umbrella organizations – the Turkish DITIB with about 800 mosques and 700 imams, the VIKZ and Milli Görüş – cover only 15% of the German Muslim population and therefore cannot speak for the entire Muslim community.
So far it is just these umbrella organizations that have managed to become cooperation partners with the government at the national level. As a consequence, the federal administration founded in 2006 the so-called Muslim Coordination Council (KRM, Koordinierungsrat der Muslime), which is considered the central contact body for the government. Unfortunately, the Council has found only little acceptance as some of the organizations it embraces are under suspicion of being extremist or under foreign influence (DITIB).

This complex situation reveals a basic dilemma of German governmental policies towards Islam: while the government at both the federal and communal level wishes to have democratic and representative structures among the Muslim community as a prerequisite for cooperation, the Constitution prohibits such a demand from being directly addressed: there is the imperative of neutrality (Neutralitätsgebot). The government therefore lacks political scope in terms of Muslim self-organization and has no choice but to either accept or discard demands by the Council—until now mostly the latter.

The current situation reflects the fact that the majority of German Muslims are not willing to organize themselves into representative bodies, and the government is unable to compensate by enforcing organization. It is owing to these top-down policies that the resulting structures do not really represent the majority of German Muslims. The Islamologists Michael Kiefer and Jamal Malik point out that this is the exact opposite of what the government originally intended (Kiefer/Malik 2008: 100–1).

As for the mosques, so far no concept has been found for effectively preventing so-called ‘hate preachers’ (Hassprediger) from instigating worshippers. Therefore, politicians often regard the education of imams as a key concept in fighting Islamism. According to Kiefer and Malik this misses the real problem, insofar as it overestimates the role of imams, who do not usually serve pastoral functions (ibid. 102). This assumption is questionable, as our case study 2 shows.

Since the five-per-cent rule would render it impossible to gain mandates in parliament, Islamic political parties do not exist in Germany. Therefore, Muslim pressure groups concentrate on lobbying and creating study groups within existing parties. This might to some extent reduce problems specific to the Muslim community but major difficulties such as the issue of building mosques remain unsolved.

The official churches usually attempt to mediate in such conflicts. Many times they have called for tolerance and acceptance of compromises. This was the case of the Protestant Church in Hesse-Nassau when it bolstered mutual understanding ‘according to general local conditions and the particular religious traditions and convictions’. Nevertheless, on the Christian side unambiguous
positions do not exist and the different opinions reflect internal plurality in the Church. The churches advocate the integration of non-Muslim neighbours in the decision-making process of mosque building and muezzin calls so as to avoid conflicts, which are often stirred up when important decisions are made without consulting the neighbours directly affected. The congregations have then to tackle the task of intermediating and providing confidence.

General information on mosques

Number of mosques, Islamic centres, prayer rooms, cemeteries, and situations for calling the adhan

Currently, there are roughly 200 mosques in Germany under construction (Beinhauer-Köhler/Leggewie 2009: 117). The three biggest mosques in Germany are the Yavuz Sultan Selim Mosque in Mannheim-Jungbusch (Baden-Wurttemberg, built 1995) which is able to host up to 2,500 worshippers, the Şehitlik Mosque in Berlin-Neukölln (2004), built by Hilmi Senalp, with room for up to 1,500 people, and the Fatih Mosque (run by IGMG) in Bremen-Gröpelingen (1999) which accommodates up to 1,300 worshippers. The first two mosques in this list are run by the DITIB (cf. Beinhauer-Köhler/Leggewie 2009: 131).

The Ahmadiyya community, which suffers from constant pressure and enmity in their country of origin, Pakistan, aims at establishing 100 mosques of their own in Germany. This campaign started officially in 1989. The German news magazine Der Spiegel reported in October 2008 from unspecified sources that Muslims aimed to erect almost 200 mosques in this country (Der Spiegel, 6 Oct., 2008: 174).

At Oberstenfeld (8,000 inhabitants) in the county of Ludwigsburg (c. 40 kilometres north of Stuttgart) the DITIB plans to erect a classical grand mosque with a dome and minaret, planned by the DITIB. Although the town master plan does not allow the size of such a building there are indications that town council and administration are willing to issue a special approval. In Moers (near Dusseldorf) the Muslim community opened their new mosque, which is modelled on an extraordinary architectural plan, but only after a huge controversy took place. The opening ceremony was peaceful and rather cordial.

In 1987, the DITIB community in Ingolstadt (Bavaria) founded a cultural centre that at a later time was completed by a mosque. Founded in 2008, the

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4 http://www.alislam.org/gallery2/main.php?g2_itemId=21323&g2_imageViewsIndex=1
5 http://thomastartsch.org/page9.php
mosque has a capacity of 1,000 seats and has two minarets, each of them 27.5 metres high. Another mosque association with around 600 members exists in Nuremberg and was founded as early as 1976. The community mosque, the Eyüp Sultan Mosque, was erected in 1996.

**Mosques under construction**

Currently under construction are the much-disputed DITIB Cologne Central Mosque in Cologne-Ehrenfeld, and also one in Gelsenkirchen and in Essen (both NRW). In Munich-Sendlingen a planned mosque was halted when the board of trustees ran out of money. The mosque was supported by the Mayor of Munich, Christian UDE (Social-Democratic party) but lost its support from the DITIB. Some sources believe that the DITIB regarded the mosque project in Munich-Sendlingen as too open and liberal, as it was intended for holding prayers in German and to intensify the dialogue with the Christian churches. The German architect said he did not believe in a financial bottleneck. The first phase of the project was supposed to cost €500,000. The order for improvements was expected to be released in autumn 2009 (SZ, 3 December, 2008).

**Islamic cemeteries**

The oldest Muslim cemetery in Germany is the Turkish Cemetery of Berlin (Şehitlik), which dates back to 1863. In 1921 the area was extended by an additional 700 square metres and has now reached a size of 2,550 square metres. The last Ottoman ambassador Hafiz Sükrü Efendi was buried on this site. Currently, the vast majority of Muslim bodies are transferred to their countries of origin. There is some conflict with the German law, which requires bodies to be buried in coffins, which is why Muslim communities in Germany still do not obtain cemeteries under their own autonomous management.

**Cultural centres**

The King Fahd Academy is an Islamic school named after King Fahd ibn Abd al-Aziz to which a mosque is attached. It was opened in September 1995. In 2000, with Berlin becoming the German capital, the King Fahd Academy opened a branch in Berlin. According to the Saudi Embassy to Berlin, the school has 320 students. The school caused a scandal when in 2004 journalists discovered a massive presence of hate discourses within the academy's textbooks. From that

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7 [http://www.sehitlik-moschee.de/](http://www.sehitlik-moschee.de/)
8 [http://www.islamische-zeitung.de/?id=7242](http://www.islamische-zeitung.de/?id=7242)
time on, the German authorities have permitted classes only under restrictive conditions (FAZ, 24 June, 2004).

The Multi-Kultur-Haus (multi-culture house) in Neu-Ulm (Bavaria), another Islamic cultural centre, was closed in 2005 by the Minister for Domestic Affairs, Günther Beckstein, after it turned out to be a hotspot of Islamist extremism and hate discourses against Jews, the German democracy, and more generally against followers of other faiths. The name Multi-Kultur-Haus seemed to be a front since its initials M, K, and H in Arabic formed the logo of the association and read (from right to left) ‘Makkah’, i.e. Mecca, which gave the idea that the association might have an Islamic rather than multicultural agenda.10

The call to prayer: the adhan

Within the churches there is a contention about the muezzin’s call, which says, ‘God is most great – I bear witness that there is no God but God – I bear witness that Muhammad is God’s messenger – Come to prayer – Come to salvation – God is most great – There is no God but God’. For some Christians this remains a provocation since these utterances obviously deny the Holy Trinity of God and consequently a fundamental dogma of Christianity. Superintendent Guntau of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD – Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland) has admitted that the call for prayer might be understood as a call against Christianity, without forgetting to add that the Islamic call for prayer is nevertheless protected by the German constitution, since ‘freedom of worship also embraces the public advocacy for one’s own belief’.

Generally, it can be stated that Muslims are eager to achieve a socially acceptable solution to every problem. Nowadays this occurs more often than ten years ago, and this is true for the querelle about the prayer call as well. A realistic assessment of the situation may have led to the conclusion in many cases that a loudspeaker call to prayer does not make sense in a chiefly non-Muslim environment. Other than that, the muezzin’s call remains a hot issue, as can be shown in the case of the Duisburg Mosque in 1997/8 where it caused a massive controversy. The heated debate raised for the first time the question of to what extent church bells can be compared to Islamic calls to prayer.

In almost every single conflict concerning a mosque, minarets have become the bone of contention, although German authorities have never urged any mosque builder to refrain from building a minaret. Only a few building regulations have made it necessary to modify building plans. On the other hand, apart from some exceptions, the muezzin’s call has been prohibited. Muslim believers in general do not easily give up the muezzin’s call because of the very high

10 A picture of the logo can be found here: http://www.spiegel.de/img/0,1020,1159093,00.jpg
regard in which its symbolic value is regarded. Generally, the local authorities tend to give permission to erect a mosque more easily. There are alleged cases where the municipality has subsidized the construction of a mosque. In any case, the number of prayer rooms for Muslims is on the rise and also the number of purpose-built mosques has increased. Still, about 90% of all mosques are backyard facilities, many of them makeshift. Exact figures do not exist but there are estimates that in 2008 there existed in Germany at least 2,200 prayer rooms and 66 purpose-built mosques (partly under construction) (Leggewie et al. 2002: 50–2).

Historical background: establishment, conflicts, and social and political responses
Conflicts over the building of mosques are not a particularly recent phenomenon. As far back as 1997, the Mayor of Garmisch-Partenkirchen (in the very south of Germany) was receiving threats to his life after he spoke out in favour of mosques. In more recent times, some mosques have become the targets of attack and property has been wilfully damaged. And ever more often citizens’ campaigns have attacked the erection of mosques, as was the case with the planned construction of an Ahmadiyya mosque in Schlüchtern-Niederzell. However there are about 200 prayer rooms in Germany – a figure which is expected to double within the near future (Der Spiegel, 6 October, 2008: 176).

Building applications for mosques
According to a study conducted by the Herbert Quandt Foundation on conflicts over the erection of mosques, there are five ways of dealing with building applications:

Type 1: ‘The averted mosque’. Opponents of the mosque anticipate the planning and make it impossible to start building.

Type 2: ‘The desired mosque’. Decision-makers act in concert and attempt to create a public atmosphere favourable to the construction of the mosque.

Type 3: ‘The invisible mosque’. This kind of mosque is more tolerated than accepted. When a backyard mosque has obviously become too small for its users, people in the neighbourhood tolerate projects to extend and reconstruct the praying room. Finally, the authorities join this ‘standstill agreement’, too.11

11 Beinhauer-Köhler and Leggewie (2009: 134–5) mention a typical example in Rodstein where a mosque run by the DITIB and located near a Baha’i temple is not even mentioned in the DITIB’s own directories. Although in such a case worshipping is prohibited by the State, the local authorities tolerate religious activities.
**Type 4:** ‘The discursive mosque’. The mosque gets accepted by its surrounding area, after it has gone the long way through discussions and conflicts which turn out to be fruitful for both sides. In the end, neighbours and builders come together and agree to erect the mosque.

**Type 5:** ‘The trouble-free mosque’. This speaks for itself. Beinhauer-Köhler and Leggewie (2009: 130) name it ‘the supported mosque’.

One must add that indirectly the conflicts over the erection of a mosque often reflect social problems which might occur in the aftermath of its realization. Sometimes people fear loss in the value of real estate or considerable problems with parking space.

At present, 55 of the 66 purpose-built mosques in Germany belong to the Turkish-controlled DITIB. The age of backyard mosques on factory floors has come to an end. One third of the total number is located in North-Rhine Westfalia (NRW). But mosques do not only cause conflicts with their respective neighbourhoods. In many cases they constitute an occasion for citizens to come to grips for the first time in their lives actively with the religion of Islam. This for example happened in Duisburg-Marxloh (NRW) where Germany’s fourth largest mosque was erected in 2008 (Der Spiegel, 6 October, 2008: 174).

Conflicts over building mosques are fuelled when they turn out to be alleged hotspots of Islamic extremists. This was the case with the so-called ‘baggage bombers’ (Kofferbomber), two young radicalized Lebanese, who were possibly close to Hizb ut-tahrir circles and in June 2006 intended to blow up a train. Some of them were regular visitors to the Abu Bakr Mosque in Cologne-Zollstock.12 Although one should refrain from jumping to conclusions, correlations like this surely do not diminish sceptical attitudes toward mosques. In September 2008 the German Catholic bishops argued for the erection of mosques but condemned any possible ‘claim to power, rivalry, or aggressive conflict’.

According to a poll conducted by the Allensbach Institute in May 2006 an absolute majority of the German population, i.e. 56% of all respondents, voted for the prohibition of building mosques since ‘in some Islamic countries no churches are allowed to be erected’. It was against this background that Pro NRW tried to forbid the erection of mosques under the motto ‘No to huge mosques, minarets and muezzin calls!’ Demands for abolishing muezzin calls became more and more intense in the following campaigns against mosques (Häusler 2007: 8–10).

While critics and sceptics of Islamism usually draw a line between Islam and its politicized manifestations, there are chiefly three spokesmen of a more general resentment against Islam in Germany. One of them is the scholar Dr.

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Hans-Peter Raddatz who has earned a reputation in Middle Eastern studies and is now fighting for a "lex Islam" since he thinks Islam is not compatible with the German constitution. Nevertheless he advocates dialogue with the Muslim community. A second one is the investigative journalist Dr. Udo Ulfkotte, author of a great number of books dealing with Islam and extremism in Germany. Both are keen to defend an imagined Christian-Jewish West against a supposedly encroaching Islam, which intends to subvert Western democracies and to subdue non-Muslims to ‘dhimmitude’. Ulfkotte came to the public attention when he founded a party called Pax Europa which aimed at defending European culture which is characterized by its Christian and Jewish history. A third public figure is the Cologne-based author Ralph Giordano who constitutes a rather complex case insofar as he on the one hand admits that ‘not the mosque but Islam is the problem’, but on the other hand makes a difference between Islam and Muslims. As a Holocaust survivor who has learned discrimination and persecution the hard way he is free of racist undertones and thus a staunch defender of an open society that does not exclude Germany’s Muslim citizens. Nevertheless, as a fervent critic of not only Islamism but Islam in general he remains a rather controversial figure.

In June 2007, anti-mosque activists drafted the ‘Wertheim appeal’ (Wertheimer Appell) and called publicly for integrating the population living near planned mosques into the decision-making and to stop erecting a mosque when a majority of residents votes against it. Other than that, the appeal regards minarets as a symbol of political Islam and calls for forbidding them and by the same token the loudspeaker-facilitated adhan.

In an article in the Frankfurter Allgemeine (a Centrist-Conservative daily) Salomon Korn, vice-president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the country’s most important Jewish organisation, pointed out that in the long run, only change is sustainable within a culture. Germany’s traditional rural and urban architecture has in fact long since adopted oriental elements of style that had sunk into oblivion. By the same token, Korn reminded his readers that many synagogues built by the middle of the 19th century were geared to ‘neo-Islamic styles’ (Leipzig 1855, Berlin 1866, Nuremberg 1874, Kaiserslautern 1886, Pforzheim 1893) and no longer regarded as architectural symbols of an alien culture (FAZ, Oct. 27, No. 251: 8). Nevertheless, Korn’s article failed to pour oil on the troubled waters.

14 http://de.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php?wc_c=468&wc_id=1106
15 http://www.buergerbewegungen.de/wertheimer-appell.html
Historical background of mosques

‘When the Turks come, we must build mosques for them’, the Prussian king Frederick II (1740–1786) is alleged to have said (Abdullah 2002: 14). Consequently, a mosque was erected when Ottoman high-rank officers enlisted in the Prussian army at the beginning of the 18th century. The first mosques open to the public were established by the mid-1920s. In Germany as well as in other European countries, Islam became a political and social issue within a remarkably short time, merely sixty years.

Creative solutions were found for the first ‘guest workers’ of Muslim denominations to enable worship, e.g. rail cars for trackmen of the German Federal Rail (Deutsche Bundesbahn, today’s Deutsche Bahn) were transformed into rolling mosques, after the floors had been covered with carpets and the windows draped with curtains (Abdullah 2002: 69–70). In another case, a minaret was erected in an iron foundry made of an iron pipe with a winding staircase (Kraft 2002: 51). When Muslims began to settle permanently in Germany together with their families, mostly ordinary buildings without specific characteristics were rented for worship. These so-called ‘backyard mosques’ (Hinterhofmoscheen) remained almost entirely neglected by the German population. Kraft (2002) calls this kind of sacred space the ‘invisible mosque’.

But mosques have become, more and more, the visible and self-conscious symbols of the Islamic presence in a country with a Christian majority. This, according to Prof. Spuler-Stegemann, a Marburg-based specialist on Islam in Germany, is why they have been building ever bigger and taller minarets (Spuler-Stegemann 1998: 153–5). Apart from that, sacred Muslim architecture in the midst of a chiefly Christian country has yet to be defined. Most of the mosques in Germany gear their architecture and imagery to the traditional styles prevalent in Turkey or the Middle East. What this means in practical terms is a challenge by the Muslim communities, since oriental-style architecture is often regarded as alien and not fitting into the existing landscape (Kraft 2002: 200–2).

Nowadays the majority of mosques in Germany work under the tutelage of one of the Muslim associations in Germany and adhere mostly to either the DITIB, the IGMC or the VIKZ. Belonging to an umbrella organisation is usually determined by pragmatic reasons and does not necessarily indicate any political preference. Thus many associations put the emphasis on youth work

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16 The first ‘real’ mosque in Germany was the Wilmersdorfer Mosque (1924).
17 DITIB: Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V. (Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği).
18 IGMC: Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş e.V. (İslam Toplumu Milli Görüş).
19 Verband der islamischen Kulturzentren e.V. (İslam Kültür Merkezleri Birliği).
and other services. Controversies nowadays centre on a Muslim community that still does not exceed a tiny 3% of the entire German population.

The majority of Islamic associations are registered and funded by fees and donations. Some of them live off funding from abroad. Other than that, they often participate in economic activities. The greater Islamic associations especially compete in controlling segments of the Turkish-Muslim community, which ought to be as large as possible in order to emphasize their own importance as spokespersons for the Muslim community. The German government in general prefers dialogue with the DITIB, while the relationship with VIKZ and even more the IGMG remains ambivalent or even negative. Nevertheless, the inner structure of these organisations is not easy to analyse from outside (Spuler-Stegemann 1998: 68).

Case study 1: the DITIB Mosque, Cologne-Ehrenfeld

In Cologne-Ehrenfeld the projected erection of a representative mosque by the DITIB caused some trouble, which was fanned by a movement called Pro Köln (pro Cologne) and obtained widespread attention in the media. Pro Köln, usually apostrophized as 'populist', according to the official Verfassungsschutzbericht (Report on the Defence of the Constitution) is regarded as an 'extreme right-wing' (rechtsextrem) group. At a later time, another group called Pro NRW started a campaign in October 2007 against the alleged Islamisation of NRW. In doing so, they found themselves on the same page as the neo-Nazi party NPD (National-Democratic Party) which had organized a campaign against a representative mosque in Frankfurt-Hausen and called for 'stopping the Islamization of Germany' in October 2007 (Häusler 2007: 4, 7).

Both Pro Köln and Pro NRW proudly indicate on their websites that they are in contact with parties like Vlaams Belang in Belgium and the FPÖ in Austria, which also promote their own anti-Islam campaigns. Both movements emerged from the association Bürgerbewegung pro Köln e.V., founded in 1996. Leading members of this group were in contact with extreme nationalist organisations like the Deutsche Liga für Volk und Heimat (DLVH) and the Republikaner. Pro NRW was led at its foundation by a political activist who also used to work for the NPD and militant neo-Nazis (ibid.: 10–1, 14).

The majority of buildings in Cologne-Ehrenfeld is of four storeys, thus the buildings are about 20 metres high. The projected mosque in Cologne will have a dome of 34.5 metres and two minarets rising up to 55 metres in the sky. The size will be big enough to host a number of up to 2,000 worshippers, making it the largest mosque in Germany. It will be higher than the average building in
that area but not the biggest building in Ehrenfeld: the Telekom Building and the Herkules Tower are 102 metres tall, and the Colonius (telecommunications tower) 243 metres.

The draft resolution of the city council and the attached development scheme reveal higher buildings are more easily permitted near crossroads of external main and circular roads. This has already happened at many crossroads in Cologne. The ground on which the representative mosque is to be built is also located at a crossroads. The nearby church tower at Ehrenfeld is 60 metres tall and is thus taller than the minarets.

Cologne is home to about 120,000 Muslims, i.e. 12% of the entire population. At Ehrenfeld, the neighbourhood where the mosque was supposed to be built, the percentage amounts from 30 to 35%. Politically, the project was shored up by a majority of the city council. On 20 October, 2007, the local paper Express organized a question-time session for citizens to ask questions about the mosque planned in Cologne-Ehrenfeld while Cologne’s Mayor Fritz Schramma and the district Mayor of Ehrenfeld, Josef Wirges, were to give information. One of our informants who witnessed almost the entire event came to the conclusion that Cologne Ehrenfeld (...) seemed to be ‘a sort of Islamophobic diaspora’. The people, between 150 and 300, were obviously not interested in discussing a grand mosque to be erected in the midst of their neighbourhood. Only a few persons paid attention to what was happening on the tribune (Galla 2007b). This was corroborated by other sources, too (Beinhauer-Köhler/Leggewie 2009: 158).

This corresponds to the fact that, according to a poll conducted by the Express, around two thirds of Cologne’s inhabitants are for the mosque. The next day the media coverage drew a completely different picture: the Liberal-Conservative daily Die Welt wrote that opponents to the German mosque ‘were getting increasingly upset – and becoming ever more radical’.20 Germany’s number one tabloid Bild reported under the headline ‘Giant argument over a giant mosque’ that the atmosphere was ‘heated up’.21 Nothing could have been further from the truth.

In September 2008, the protest came to a head when Pro Köln initiated an ‘anti-Islamisation Congress’ in Cologne. Surprisingly, the organizers were not welcome: taxi drivers refused their services, hotel keepers refused accommodation, and the boat on which the ‘international press conference’ was intended to take place had to flee when protesters threw stones. The entire city of Cologne was crowded with protesters against a tiny number, an estimated fifty members

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20 http://www.welt.de/politik/article1283260/Die_beten_und_haben_ein_Messer_in_der_Hose.html
of Pro Köln, and the police seemed to have played a rather bleak role when they allegedly tolerated protesters, preventing citizens from getting into the city because of their alleged sympathy for Pro Köln.\textsuperscript{22}

The head of the municipal planning team, Andreas von Wolff, said in an interview with one of our informants that the authorities decided to start land-use planning just for the purpose of the municipal council getting permission to participate in the decision process and to make a public political debate possible. From the legal perspective this was an unnecessary step, for the planned mosque undoubtedly fitted into the existing building landscape. According to the law there was no reason why the DITIB should be urged to change their plan. DITIB was to be treated like any building project organizers. The current discussions were only of a political nature (Galla 2007a).

Originally, the DITIB had toyed with the idea of building an Ottoman-style mosque but was persuaded that a translation of the cultural language of the East into the symbolism of Western modernity would be an important gesture of integration. The preference for more Western-styled architecture was lastly the result of a compromise between the DITIB and its own religious community. The DITIB itself was willing to choose less traditional imagery but noticed that most of the community members were for the Ottoman models, which showed a clear preference and had to be taken into consideration (ibid.).

The rumour that the DITIB is going to receive money from the municipalities, the State or the Federal government is widespread in Cologne but is not true. Usually this myth has been taken to convince the DITIB that the erection of the mosque must be in accordance with the will of the inhabitants of Cologne. As a matter of fact, the DITIB funded both the construction and the maintenance of the mosque by themselves. The money is said to have come from the renting of a shopping arcade. Architectures say that lowering the minarets by 5 metres would spoil the overall appearance of the mosque. By renouncing a typically Ottoman-style mosque the DITIB has in the end met the basic expectations of the population.

The above-mentioned 5 metres are nothing but a side-show, says Stefanie Galla: ‘Actually, it is all about the question how much Ottoman imagery we have to bear and how much modernity the DITIB dares practice’. Although the DITIB is regarded by some experts in the field of Islam in Germany as counter to integration, there can be no doubt that this organization is far from being extremist. Not only does DITIB adhere to Germany’s constitutional law but it also offers courses for integration and caters for the needs of Muslim immigrants who are willing to find their place in society.

\textsuperscript{22} http://www.lizaswelt.net/2008/09/volksfrontspektakel-am-rhein.html
While other Islamic organizations running mosques are monitored by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (a domestic intelligence service) for suspected Islamist tendencies, the DITIB, affirms executive secretary Mehmet Yıldırım, has never had a fundamentalist or radical imam in their mosque. Press relations officer Mrs. Kiliç explains that such a thing would be impossible since all their imams are trained in cooperation with the Turkish Diyanet (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, or Diyanet, is the executive committee of religious affairs in Turkey). As a governmental body the Diyanet is the highest Islamic authority in Turkey, a country in which the constitution aims at controlling religious activities from the top down. Since Atatürk abolished the sharia in Turkey it is unlikely that the Diyanet will implement the Holy law of Islam in Europe by its backdoor. Other than that, in legal terms the DITIB is independent and able to opt out of the Diyanet at any time.

All imams who preach in DITIB mosques are subject to attachés who receive their instructions from the religious councils based in the consulates, says Mrs. Kiliç. Therefore, Turkey remains a reliable partner as opposed to certain Islamic organizations. One may argue that no one knows what Turkey will be in the future, whether it will adopt an Islamist line or continue to move towards the West but at present undoubtedly it is making an effort to foster integration: all imams coming from Turkey to Germany must have undergone at least 600 hours of German language instruction. According to Mrs. Kiliç this is taking place in cooperation with the German Goethe Institute (the main German cultural institution) and although all divine services are conducted in Turkish, a summary in German is presented at the end. The DITIB intends to extend this practice but does not know yet how to accomplish it. Possibly, and this is also a financial question, the complete sermon will be translated simultaneously or a written translation will be projected on a screen.

These ideas voiced by a DITIB spokeswoman beg further questions. A completely different stand is taken by the above-mentioned German intellectual Ralph Giordano, whose undelivered speech in Cologne on the occasion of the planned DITIB mosque was placed on the Internet. Under the title ‘Not the mosque – Islam is the problem!’ he writes: ‘Ahead of us lies the rubble of an immigration policy which refused to declare Germany an immigration country and to endow it with the respective laws and regulations. For decades there was nothing but helplessness, avoidance of conflict, and erroneous tolerance from the German side. (. . .) Integration has failed! And the “parallel societies” are the depressing result of this. (. . .) As little as the Muslim minority can be held

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under general suspicion, it cannot be handed out a carte blanche for benevolence. (...) The most uncomfortable, even most threatening question among all uncomfortable and threatening questions remains: Is Islam reformable, modernizable? (...) At the end of my address I can only appeal to the Mayor of Cologne and the supporting municipal councilmen to cancel the erection [of the mosque] in [Cologne-] Ehrenfeld. There are many stages between a backyard and a grand mosque without the deterrent effect which has been caused by the draft on the drawing board’.

Giordano argues that the DITIB purports to be loyal to the German federal constitution but is rather infiltrated by ‘radical nationalist organizations’ that aim at preserving the cultural identity of immigrants and their progeny instead of furthering their integration. This widespread suspicion uttered by Giordano was fuelled in October 2008 when the then Turkish Prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan came to Cologne and spoke to thousands of Turco-Germans and Turkish citizens on whom he called to not forget their roots.

Case study 2: the Khaled Mosque, Bochum-Wiemelhausen

The city of Bochum is located in the Ruhr area in the west of Germany. It is home to a great number of ‘guest-workers’, chiefly of Turkish extraction, now living there in the third generation. In 1964, a group of Muslim students decided to establish an Islamic association in the Querenburg neighbourhood where the university is also located. By 1983 a few guest-workers together with their families had joined the association which was soon to change its organizational structure profoundly and made it increasingly an association for the Muslim community of Bochum. After its first mosque, which was within the facilities of the Catholic Students’ Community (KSG), turned out to be too small, it moved to the facilities of the nearby Uni-Center, a shopping mall and housing district adjunct to the university. The mosque was then named the Khaled Ibn al-Walid Mosque. Since the year 2000 the association has changed its statute and aims at either erecting its own mosque or buying a building suitable for that purpose.

In 2004 the German police carried out a raid against the Mosque after receiving a tip-off that it was an alleged hotspot for Islamic militants. Ziad Jarrah, the pilot of one of the planes that crashed in rural Pennsylvania on 11 September, 2001, had regularly prayed at one of the mosques when he studied in Germany.24 Around 190 policemen were mobilized during the Friday prayer. In October 2008,
the Mosque—now named the Khaled Mosque—moved to another neighbourhood within the city of Bochum.

The mosque is organized as an Islamic cultural association with a prayer room. About 500 worshippers usually attend Friday prayers. During the five daily prayers the mosque generally hosts between thirty and fifty worshippers, in the course of Ramadan certainly more. There are twenty active members managing the mosque, which is supposed to be funded chiefly by membership fees and donations. The building does not contain elements of traditional Islamic architecture and thus constitutes a typical example of an ‘invisible mosque’.

Muhmmad Qadri, a 36-year old Egyptian citizen who studied German at Azhar University in Cairo before he became imam of the Khaled Mosque, told us in an interview conducted on 24 April, 2009, (the interview language was German) that the mosque covers many areas of the life of a Muslim in Bochum, i.e. first of all living within a community and collaboration with other community members to organize activities. The mosque is a place of weddings, funeral, festivals, birth and circumcision celebrations. Once a month a trip for families and young people is organized—with girls and boys separate.

Located in an area where a great number of guest-workers live and Turkish is widely spoken, these activities are meant to improve integration within the mosque community. Poor community members such as students or the unemployed receive support through donations and alms. Moreover, the mosque serves a pastoral function e.g. in case of marriage problems. This is in clear contradiction to Kiefer/Malik (2009) who assume that pastoral functions are unusual in imams (cf. p. 3).

An annual open day of the mosque, which addresses Muslims as well as non-Muslims, aims at integrating the mosque into its environment. Speeches on Islam are held and questions can be asked. The mosque also organizes cultural dialogues with other religions. There are dialogues with church representatives and also with members of the Jewish community. Afterwards there is a common meal. There is no ecumenical service but sometimes lectures on the respective religion. Additionally, a ‘neighbourhood day’ has the purpose of discussing and solving problems and conflicts with neighbours who are beyond religion. Sometimes but not often there are visits to another mosque to talk to the people there, depending on the time and the will of the imam. During Ramadan an exchange of imams usually takes place.

Mr. Qadri told us repeatedly that building mosques in Germany is prohibited. This is definitely not compliant with the facts and remains a rather enigmatic statement. In his own words, Mr. Qadri said, ‘You are not allowed to build a mosque in Germany. In Germany there are only two, in Heidelberg and Duisburg.'
Besides the two mosques there are no other mosques in Germany (sic!). You will not receive approval for the construction or the establishment of mosques. This is not feasible by Federal law. But there is no difficulty in establishing an Islamic association. It is allowed according to the law. The problem is building a mosque like a church, no Muslim is allowed to do that. Turkish people nevertheless do. But according to the law it is not allowed. The (Duisburg-)Marxloh Mosque is an exception'.

When we asked Mr. Qadri whether the environment was involved in the construction, he denied it, saying that ‘according to the law you are not allowed to do that’. Then he added: ‘Everyone does as he wishes. If you rent a house you can do what you want with it’. This is in clear contradiction to his own statement that German authorities do not allow the building of mosques. According to Mr. Qadri, during Tarawih prayer, when the mosque is crowded and generally in the last ten days of Ramadan, staying in the mosque to read the Koran during every Ramadan night and to pray is only possible with permission from the police.

The mosque is not nation-oriented, i.e. it embraces Muslims of different nationalities such as Egyptians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians and others. The mosque's management regards it as a major difficulty that the mosque hosts a range of nationalities, but also as an advantage, as this fosters not only cooperation and cultural exchange among Muslims themselves but helps to integrate them in society, since the only language which may serve as a lingua franca is German. Although in the case of the Khaled Mosque, things are more complicated. The first part of the khutba is in Arabic followed up by an addition in German. Being a mosque with mainly Arabic-speaking worshippers, the whole sermon does not need to be conducted in German because for the majority Arabic is already a lingua franca.

Nevertheless, differences between the ethnical appurtenance of members play an immense role in the community’s life. There is always some altercation along national nationalities. Mr. Qadri told us, ‘There are those who think very badly: the mosque is like my house and I have paid for it and founded the mosque and I have the right over the mosque, but you don’t, you just came to the mosque recently. I have paid a lot, you have paid little. That’s how silly people used to think. They do not understand that a mosque is a place for praying and a service room for Allah and not for people’.

As for the adhan, Mr. Qadri confirmed that owing to possible disturbance of others one is only allowed to call for prayer within the praying facilities, pointing out that the adhan generally makes no sense in Europe because everyone has

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25 A special prayer during Ramadan.
26 Friday prayer.
clocks and calendars and they will be punctual in coming to prayer. But often neighbours feel disturbed anyway because of the general situation in the area: some visitors to the mosque park their cars the wrong way and cause trouble and noise in front of the mosque. Also, there are people who oppose the mosque as such and do not want a mosque in their neighbourhood.

The Khaled Mosque in Bochum-Wiemelhausen.

**Conclusion**

In the 21st century, Germany and German society are still struggling to come to terms with the religion of Islam. Although a silent majority seems to be integrated into society and the general situation can be described as peaceful coexistence, major problems are still unsolved. Among native Germans mosques almost regularly arouse suspicion as they are regarded by a huge portion of the population as symbols of self-marginalization or even extremism—which time and again turn out to be justified. The Freimann Mosque founded in 1973 in the north of Munich turned out to be a foothold of radical Islam in the West and for decades a branch of the Muslim Brothers (Focus, 25 July, 2005).[^27]

Therefore, some level of suspicion is not expected to vanish, especially considering that more secular and integrated Muslims are under-represented by all those organizations that the government is forced to set up. As a consequence, Muslim representatives of doubtful attitudes in terms of liberal democracy have a stronger impact on the image of Islam than non-extremist Muslims have. On the Muslim side there is still a problem of how to educate imams and make sure that

hate speeches stay out of the mosques. Moreover, the mosque’s architectural styles oscillate between German mainstream and traditional Oriental elements which often make the mosque either invisible or a symbol of non-integration. A specific German problem is that the DITIB is an organization with strong ties to Ankara and therefore their imams are under the influence of Turkish politics.

But as Beinhauer-Köhler and Leggewie (2009: 200–1) point out, in a democracy, conflicts are not necessarily negative but constitute a process that might be helpful for Islam to find its way into society. And the past has shown that integrating the environment into the construction process can help the mosque to become more accepted. Therefore, the situation should not be painted as blacker than it is. The Turkish descent of the majority of Germany’s Muslims as well as the presence of the mosque’s imams also mean that Kemalist thinking is prevalent. This might explain why Germany was spared the Muslim turmoil that occurred in France in 2005.

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In a recent Dutch book on mosques two young Dutch architects of Turkish descent argue for a new kind of mosque. Mosques should not be symbols of a foreign culture, nor safe havens where an immigrant population can feel at home and where they can retreat from a society in which they do not feel welcome (Erkocu et al 2009, 8–12). They should not be regarded by the majority of the population as alien intrusions into Dutch society, intrusions of the East in the West, of a traditional culture in a modern world. Rather, the mosque should be a centre where people with different cultural backgrounds and even different religious affiliations meet. The mosque should serve the multicultural society by being an open space where a wide variety of social, cultural and religious activities take place for different groups of people. This requires buildings that are multifunctional, attractive, and accessible.

To create such a mosque, not only does the architectural design of mosques and their place in town planning need drastic revision, but also our thinking about religious and cultural identities must change. The ideal of these architects is a ‘pluri-cultural’ society, in which ethnic boundaries are no longer important.

The authors of this highly idealistic book are very aware that the picture they draw is their own vision for the future, rather than a reflection of the actual developments in the debate about Islam and mosques in the Netherlands. Their vision is critical of both the defensive attitudes of the first generation Muslims and their ‘nostalgia mosques’ (ibid, 11), and the Islamophobic trends in Dutch society. As such, their book can be read as an attempt to counterbalance the
dominant voices in the public debate on Islam, which in the Netherlands, as elsewhere in the West, has been shaped by the events of 9/11, and which has become uneasy about, and sometimes openly hostile to, the public visibility of Islam in the country.

The Muslim presence in the Netherlands

Statistical data
In 2008 the number of Muslims in the Netherlands was calculated at almost one million. This would bring the percentage of Muslims to 6%. As one’s religious affiliation is no longer registered by the authorities, this number must be deduced from birthplace and immigration statistics. The reliability of such deductions has become weaker and weaker as a growing number of Dutch Muslims have been born in the Netherlands, and whose parents also were born there. Moreover, the immigration statistics give no insight whatsoever into the number of those converted to Islam and those who have stopped seeing themselves as Muslims. Still, this calculation of almost one million Muslims in a total population of 16.5 million places the Netherlands among the European countries with the largest percentage of Muslims: 6%.

On 1 January, 2010, 3.12 million immigrants (first and second generation) were living in the Netherlands, i.e. 20.5% of the population (statline.cbs.nl). Of these, 1.5 million were from Western countries, and 1.85 million from non-Western countries (Turkey being considered non-Western). Immigrants from non-Western countries include a considerable population of Surinamese origin (342,000), a population which is very diverse religiously. From the Muslim world, the Turks (384,000) and Moroccans (349,000) are the largest ethnic communities. Their presence is the result of labour migration in the 1960s and 1970s, but today more than half the Dutch-Moroccan population, and almost half the Dutch-Turkish population, belong to the second generation, i.e. they were born in the Netherlands. Though in the early days of labour migration the Moroccan and Turkish presence was a male phenomenon, today’s figures show that the gender ratio has become balanced, as the percentage of women is about 47. Most of them today have a Dutch nationality but have not given up the nationality of their country of origin. Indeed for the Moroccans among them this would be impossible because Morocco does not denaturalize its citizens.

In the same period as the Turks and Moroccans, a third group of immigrants arrived in the Netherlands coming from the former Dutch colony of Suriname. Among them were Muslims of South and South-East Asian descent whose ancestors had left British India or the Dutch Indies in the late 19th and
early 20th century. The Surinamese-Dutch Muslims, whose number can be calculated between 40,000 and 50,000, formed separate networks of ethnic and religious communities, sometimes together with immigrants from Pakistan, India, and Indonesia. Other Muslims in the Netherlands are those coming from Iraq (52,000), Afghanistan (38,000), Iran (22,000), Somalia (27,000), and Egypt (16,000), and several other countries.

The largest concentration of immigrants from the Muslim world can be found in the big cities Amsterdam (13% of the total population) and Rotterdam (11%), followed by Utrecht and The Hague, where the Surinamese Muslim community is particularly strongly represented. However, as industrial areas all over the country attracted labour migrants in the 1960s and 1970s, communities of Dutch-Turks and Dutch-Moroccans sprang up in most provincial towns, as is reflected in the distribution of Turkish and Moroccan mosques (see below).

**Legal and political position of Islam**

The Netherlands has no system of concordats between the state and religious institutions, nor recognized religions. The Dutch constitution requires equal treatment of all citizens regardless of their religious beliefs. Based on this constitutional equality any state regulation for religious facilities, be it religious education in public schools, or the funding of private religious schools, or the ritual slaughter of animals, must be drafted in general terms and be applicable to all relevant groups. Separation of Church and State is an important feature of the dominant political discourse, but its exact meaning is far from being clear and open to negotiation. In reality, the relation between the State and religious communities is complex, as can be seen in the field of education. The majority of primary and secondary schools, and some universities, are run by private, mostly religious, organisations, but they are fully State-funded. For the training of religious ministers and priests several models are used, but for most churches the State pays the expenses without having any influence over the programme or the teaching staff.

A formal recognition of Islam is not needed for Muslims to organize themselves or to benefit on an equal basis from State regulations for private, religious institutions. This has become most visible in the emergence of State-funded Islamic primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Education is legally obliged to support these private schools if there is a sufficient number of children whose parents want to send them there. In 2009, there were 42 Islamic primary schools and two secondary schools in the Netherlands. Their religious identity is visible in daily prayer, weekly and annual religious ceremonies, and one or more religious lessons a week, but for the rest they have to meet national
standards set by the law and additional requirements of the Ministry of Education. These standards involve the curriculum, the language of instruction, the training of teaching staff, and financial accountability.

Even though the legal system gives Muslims opportunities that they do have not in most other European countries, especially in education, State support for the resulting infrastructure is under increasing political pressure. Explicit political support for Islamic schools has since the 1980s come from the Christian-Democrats and the advocates of Christian private education, and until recently also the more secular political forces tacitly agreed that one could not deny Muslims the privileges that Christians had had for decades. Today, however, the political discourse on Islam is much more critical, and this change in attitude is also visible in debates on Islamic schools. Both the quality and the management of the Islamic schools have in recent years been strongly criticized by the Ministry of Education, which seems no longer to be turning a blind eye to the shortcomings and organizational weaknesses of these newcomers on the educational market. This ministerial scrutiny is being followed intensely by the media and the political parties represented in Parliament. In fact, some Islamic schools have been closed for this reason.

It is an internationally well-known fact that anti-Islamic rhetoric has gained a prominent place in the Dutch political arena. The short film *Fitna*, produced by the Dutch MP Geert Wilders, and his proposals to prohibit the distribution of the Koran, had a global effect that resembled the Danish cartoon affair, so that this feature of contemporary Dutch politics hardly needs any introduction. In the 2010 election Wilders’ Freedom Party (FP) became the second party in the country and a major player in the political field. His success can partly be explained as a mobilization of anti-establishment sentiments in general, but also strongly suggests that Islamophobia has become a strong force in Dutch politics, which the other parties cannot ignore. As a result, any development involving Islam, be it a critical report on a local Islamic school, or the appointment of Tariq Ramadan as an integration advisor of the municipality of Rotterdam, or an anti-Western remark by an Islamic preacher, is likely to make headlines in national newspapers, to be debated in television talk shows, and ultimately to become the subject of a polarized debate in parliament. In this polarized political climate, one wonders how much room contemporary Dutch society can leave for the construction of mosques. For Wilders, the issue is clear: no new mosques will be built while he can prevent it.
Mosques and Islamic centres in the Netherlands. An overview

The exact number of mosques in the Netherlands is unknown, as any central administration of them is lacking. National Muslim federations, of course, have their address lists, but tend to include local mosque organisations that do not yet have their own place of worship and on Fridays go to the nearest town to pray. Many mosques, especially those run by Moroccans, do not belong to any of the national federations. Many municipalities also provide lists of 'mosques', but also these lists are far from complete and usually include any address of any organisation vaguely associated with Islam. (In fact, the municipality of The Hague provided me with a mosque list which included Hindu organisations. When asked about this, a civil servant explained to me that the word 'mosque' for them meant any religious institution of immigrants!). Also, there are some online databases of mosques (e.g. http://www.islaam.nu/moskee/), but the problem with them is that they use old lists from different sources, which for example results in the same mosque being mentioned several times with different addresses, including the address of a former location, or the home address of the secretary.

However, by combining and scrutinizing membership lists of national Muslim federations, data from local authorities, newspaper reports and my own observations, I have created a database of mosques and Muslim organisations, which is accurate enough to give a realistic overview. This database today includes 432 mosques, which are open for daily prayers and used for the Friday prayer. Although this list cannot be complete either, I believe it gives a more adequate figure than the 500 or 600 that are sometimes suggested in the press.

Of these 432, almost 100 are purpose-built, though most of them are modest in size. This number is likely to rise in the near future, as at least 15 other projects are under way. In addition to the 432 mosques, my database also includes 152 Muslim organisations which can be classified as 'mosque-organisations' because of their names, or basing myself other information, but which do not have a mosque. It is unknown how many of them make use of private homes or other facilities for religious meetings. Many of the mosques have developed into Islamic centres that have separate spaces for educational or social activities.

Mosques have the legal right to issue the call to prayer (adhan) through loudspeakers. This adhan has been given the same legal position as ringing church bells before and during religious ceremonies. This law stipulates that the municipality may formulate general rules about frequency, duration and sound pressure levels for public calls to religious services, but the municipality cannot prohibit them altogether. However, there are many cases in which mosque organisations refrain from using this legal right, sometimes as part of a negotiation process preceding building permits for the mosque.
In addition to mosques that are administered by Muslim organisations, there are places of worship (musallah or mescit) in a growing number of public buildings like hospitals and universities, sometimes as a part of a place of worship and meditation for different religions, sometimes separate. Thus, the academic hospitals of Utrecht and Nijmegen have musallahs for Muslim patients, like the hospitals in Den Bosch, Maastricht and Heerlen. These musallahs are not included in the number of 432 mentioned above.

**Mosques in the Netherlands: a history**

**Early examples: the Ahmadiyya Mosque, and the Moluccan veterans**
The first mosque in the Netherlands was built in 1955 in The Hague by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. Of the two branches of the Ahmadiyya that started their missionary work in Western countries in the early 20th century, the Lahore branch was the first to become active in the Netherlands. The activities of their missionaries between 1932 and 1939 did not, however, lead to the establishment of a mosque. The Qadian branch of the Ahmadiyya opened a mission in The Hague in 1947, distributed a magazine *Al-Islam*, started to translate the Koran into Dutch, and built the Mobarak Mosque, which for more than a decade was the most visible symbol of Islamic presence in the Netherlands. The mosque invited and welcomed many Dutch notables, including the Queen, all of whom were given a copy of a translation of the Koran. The mosque was also visited – before the 1972 Pakistani non-Muslim declaration concerning the Ahmadiyya – by the ambassadors of many Muslim countries.

The original design of the Mobarak Mosque was inspired by the Mubarak Mosque in Qadian, built by the founder of the movement Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, having a similar façade and minarets but lacking a dome (Roose 2009a). But the builders had to make concessions to the municipality which complained that ‘the design did not suit the surroundings and did not harmonize with the architecture in the vicinity’ (Roose 2009b, 39), and had to accept a less conspicuous design.

Today the Mobarak Mosque continues to be the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya (Qadiani branch) in the Netherlands, although many of their activities take place in a mansion in the woodland of the Veluwe district.

The Ahmadi missionaries were also present when the second Dutch mosque was opened in 1956 near the Frisian village of Balk. This second mosque had a very different background. It was a prayer room for Muslims from the Moluccas, a group of islands in Indonesia. The inhabitants of these islands, mostly Christians, had joined the Dutch colonial army and helped the Dutch to establish law and order, but also to combat the freedom fighters who strove for an
independent Indonesia after World War II. In the new Republic of Indonesia, the position of these 'black Dutchmen' became very difficult, especially after some of them declared themselves for South Moluccan independence. In 1951, the Dutch government decided to demobilize the soldiers of the Dutch colonial army and deport them—temporarily, they expected and hoped—to the Netherlands, where they were housed in camps in the Dutch countryside in strict isolation from Dutch society. After a decade, when their return to Indonesia had become less and less probable, this strict isolation could no longer be upheld, and the Moluccans gradually moved to provincial towns. The fate of the Moluccans, their frustration with the Dutch refusal to support them in their struggle for an independent State, and the violent actions of their second generation in the 1970s, is a story that falls outside the scope of this study. What is relevant here, though, is the fact that a minority of the Moluccans were not Christian but Muslim. Initially they were housed together with their Christian compatriots, but soon they were resettled in their own Camp Wyldemerk in Frysland, which included a mosque. When the Moluccan camps were abolished, the Muslims of Camp Wyldemerk moved to the small towns of Waalwijk and Ridderkerk, where they lived concentrated in a town quarter. In both towns they were allowed to use a house in that quarter as a place of worship. Finally, in 1984 and 1990 respectively, new mosques were built by the government for the Moluccans of Ridderkerk and Waalwijk. They are the only examples of new mosques fully paid for by the Dutch state, which had by the 1980s become reluctant to finance religious buildings. The colonial past had clearly created an exceptional situation, which required exceptional solutions.

The 1970s: prayer rooms for foreign workers
What was so exceptional in the 1980s was not so uncommon, however, in the previous decade. In 1963, when coalitions of Christian parties dominated Dutch politics, a law came into effect that allowed subsidies of up to 30 per cent for the construction costs of churches. The Church Building Law, which expired in 1975, was meant for areas where new cities were arising in recently reclaimed land, and where also the religious communities had to be built up from scratch. The Christian-Democrat government of that period felt that the financial burden for the established churches was too high, and that the authorities should help them. When the law was drafted, nobody was thinking about the labour migrants from Muslim countries that would be arriving in the 1960s. However, in the industrial town of Almelo, a local committee that tried to create a mosque for the Turks that had settled there was aware of the Church Building Law and was just in time to apply for a subsidy before the law expired. Together with other funding, including from industrial companies, this made possible the first purpose-built Turkish
mosque in the Netherlands, a tiny whitewashed square building with a round, sharp minaret.

In the meantime, mosque initiatives were being taken in about 30 Dutch cities in the early 1970s. Some of these mosque initiatives were started by pious labour immigrants from Turkey and Moroccan who opened their own houses, if they had one, for religious gatherings. With the communities they gathered around them they looked for money to rent larger accommodation, often supported by a local welfare worker (Landman 1992).

In 1976 these initiatives received a boost from a government subsidy, called the Global Regulation Subsidy for Places of Worship for Foreign Workers (GR), which was presented as an analogy to the Church Building Law, but turned out to be far less generous, as the average amount of money that the 31 mosques received from it was about one third of the average amount that 770 churches had received in the previous decade. Nevertheless, the GR was a significant contribution to the establishment of mosques, as it not only provided part of the money needed, but also stimulated Muslims to organize themselves in associations and foundations, and to seek support from municipalities and institutions of social work to overcome their initial difficulties that were caused by their limited knowledge of the Dutch language and regulations. As a result, the first mosques were established in about twenty towns, often in old school buildings, sometimes in former shops or small factories. The GR was followed by another temporary subsidy regulation that was even less generous, and in 1983 a total of 100 mosques had received a subsidy from them. Interestingly, the total amount of money involved (3 million Dutch florins, or about €1.4 million) was less than the costs of the two Moluccan mosques mentioned above. A proposal to continue the subsidies for mosques was not approved in Parliament in 1984, after the Christian-Democrat parties had lost their dominant position, and both the Social-Democrats and Liberals were no longer prepared to accept what they saw as violations of the separation between Church and State.

An important feature of the mosque initiatives that were stimulated by the GR was that they were meant for the local ‘foreign workers’ – in practice the Turks and Moroccans – to the exclusion of other (e.g. Surinamese) Muslims. The regulation did not recognize the ethnic and religious diversity within the target group. The money was made available to establish a mosque in towns with 1,000 Turkish and Moroccan inhabitants, although later on also towns with smaller Moroccan and Turkish populations could apply. The underlying assumptions that Turkish and Moroccan Muslims could be put together in one place of worship soon turned out to be a failure as the language barrier and cultural differences...
caused conflicts and a separation between the two groups. In several cases, the rival groups ended up using two different rooms in the same facility.

**The 1980s: federations in competition**

The 1980s witnessed a rapid increase in the number of mosques in the Netherlands, as rivalry broke out in the existing ones over the control of the mosques and the right to appoint the imam. After the separation of the Turkish and Moroccan mosque communities, further divisions surfaced that mirrored political tensions in the countries of origin.

Among the Turks, many of those involved in the early mosque initiatives belonged to the Süleymanı movement, a conservative Sufi group named after the Naqshbandi shaykh Süleyman Tunahan (1888–1959), who in Turkey were allowed to influence thousands of secondary school students, but were distrusted by the authorities as being anti-secular. After the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) decided in the late 1970s to send its imams to the Turks living in Europe, a controversy broke out between Süleymanıs and loyalists in many Dutch mosques, which forced the smaller group, mostly the Süleymanıs, to start an Islamic centre of their own. In addition, supporters of the Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan became ever more active, either in order to take control over local mosques or to break away from them. This happened especially after the 1980 military coup, when several leaders in Erbakan’s Milli Görüs movement fled to Europe. Soon further splits in Turkish Islam shaped the religious landscape of Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands, including a radical anti-democratic split-off from Milli Görüs, the Kaplancı, the ultra-nationalist Grey Wolves, and the Nurcu movement. As most of them tried to establish their own autonomous Islamic centres, including a mosque, the number of Turkish mosques increased dramatically in the 1980s, with most of them belonging to one of the rival federations on the national level. Cities with more than 1,000 Turkish inhabitants tended to have at least three Turkish mosques: a Diyanet one, a Milli Görüs one, and a Süleymanı one.

Diyanet became the strongest group and now controls more than 120 mosques, and in towns or town quarters with several Turkish mosques the Diyanet-controlled one is usually the largest. The Milli Görüs and Süleymanı movement control between 40 and 50 mosques each.

In Moroccan mosques similar conflicts occurred between those loyal to and those critical of the regime in the country of origin, and in some cases a group of dissidents broke away after a conflict with an excessively loyalist mosque board, but this did not lead to strong rival federations but rather to a number of independent local mosques, which tried to avoid the influence of the Moroccan embassy, sometimes by underlining the ethnic diversity of their visitors. Some
of these mosques later became associated with international organisations or movements like the *Jama'at al-tabligh* and the Salafi movement.

Next to the Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, the Suriname Muslims were also very active in creating Islamic centres, even though they did not benefit from the government subsidies discussed above. Often they cooperated with Muslims from Pakistan who belonged to the same religious movement, most prominently the *Barelwi* movement, rooted in popular Sufism, and characterized by the devotion for the prophet Muhammad and the high esteem they have for deceased saints and their living descendants. Controlling about 25 mosques, they constitute the fifth mosque network in the Netherlands, after three larger Turkish federations and one Moroccan. The Lahore branch of the *Ahmadiyya* is also active among the Surinamese Muslims; they have established six Islamic centres.

Most of the Muslim immigrants from other countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia came in after the Turks, Moroccans, and Surinamese had already constructed their mosques and religious centres. These newcomers tended to join the Friday prayers there, especially the Moroccan ones where Friday sermons were in Arabic, a language that was at least more familiar to them than Turkish, even if they could not always understand it. As a result, the Moroccan mosques, and to some extent the Suriname ones, have become more multi-ethnic than in the early 1980s, while the Turkish mosques have often kept their exclusively Turkish character.

**The 1990s: consolidation**

In the 1980s the number of mosques in the Netherlands tripled from almost 100 to 300. As this multiplication resulted mostly from internal strife and splits, many of the new initiatives were taken by small groups with very modest financial means, which accepted the cheapest accommodation available, which was often in very poor condition and did not meet the minimal safety standards set by the local authorities. In the big cities Amsterdam and Rotterdam the municipalities designed policies to encourage mosque organisations to reduce the risks of calamities, for example by creating fire escape routes or moving to a more suitable location. Elsewhere, similar measures were sometimes taken on a more *ad hoc* basis. Part of the Rotterdam policy was to encourage the construction of a large central mosque to replace several existing small ones.

Though small places of worship continued to be established in the 1990s in smaller towns that did not yet have a mosque, or in the larger towns by groups that broke away from an existing mosque community, the rapid rise in numbers was over. Also the fierce competition between rival Muslim federations lost its
momentum, as they recognized their mutual control over local mosque communities. Both locally and nationally the larger networks of Muslim organisations consolidated their position, and in some fields started to cooperate. Much of the effort to consolidate went into the acquisition of better accommodation or the construction of new mosques. In 1990 there were only ten purpose-built mosques in the Netherlands. By the end of the decade there were more than 40, and several others were under construction.

The most active and successful Muslim organisation in the field of mosque construction in the Netherlands was the ISN, or Islamic Foundation Netherlands, whose Turkish name *Hollanda Diyanet Vakfi* makes clear that it belongs to the Diyanet network. Starting with some small mosque projects in Terborg, Druten and Apeldoorn, they soon embarked upon larger projects like the Mevlana Mosque in Rotterdam and the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Zaandam, which is the largest mosque in the Netherlands. The number of purpose-built mosques of the Diyanet network has risen to 33. Most of them are clearly recognizable as Turkish mosques by their minarets with a round shaft and a balcony, and their dome. The larger ones have become a conspicuous part of the skyline in Dutch cities. Their names also clearly suggest a Turkish-Islamic identity, as they usually refer to the monumental Ottoman mosques in Turkey: Sultan Ahmet, Mevlana, Yeni Cami, Yesil Cami, Süleymaniye, Selimiye, and so on.

With 22 purpose-built mosques, the Moroccan Muslims have not lagged far behind. An early example was the Al Fourkaan Mosque in Eindhoven, which opened its doors in 1990 after a construction and preparation process of two years. This mosque was commissioned by Moroccans who advocated a puritan version of Islam, and were associated with the Saudi-based charity *Al-Ouakf al-Islami*. The commissioner deliberately chose to avoid style characteristics that were considered typically Moroccan, like a square-planned minaret. Instead, design elements were taken from Turkey and Iran (Roose 2009b, 151–160). In most other new Moroccan mosques in the Netherlands, however, the square minaret and the hipped roof makes them recognizable as Moroccan.

The Surinamese Muslims of the Barelwi movement are also active builders, led by the World Islamic Mission (WIM) of the Pakistani shaykh Ahmad Noorani (d. 2003, after which his son took his place). As early as 1985 they opened the Taibah Mosque in Amsterdam, which in recent years has been replaced by a larger one. The WIM also built mosques in five other cities, including The Hague and Utrecht.

The second Turkish-Muslim federation, the SICN or Islamic Cultural Foundation in the Netherlands, more commonly referred to as the Süleymanci movement, also made much effort to improve the buildings they used as Islamic
centres, and have started the construction of some new ones, but they have opted for a more cautious approach. None of their centres have minarets or domes. They have no design that makes them recognizable as mosque. They could be office blocks or schools, and only a name-tag will reveal to the observer the identity of the organisation located there.

*Milli Görüş* did not build new mosques in the Netherlands. The one effort to do so, which has become a highly controversial and much debated one, has failed to materialize, and it is uncertain when, if ever, the Wester Mosque in Amsterdam will be built. Elsewhere, the larger *Milli Görüş* associations invested in the acquisition of vast multi-storey buildings to accommodate both a prayer-hall and social, cultural, and economic activities.

The construction of new mosques often met with opposition from the inhabitants of the quarter where the mosque was planned (see below), and in some cases the project had to be moved to another location. But more often than not the objections only led to some minor adaptations in the project, after which the building permits were granted.

**After 9/11: mosque organisations under scrutiny**

The consolidation of the position of mosques in the 1990s was a relatively silent process. With a few exceptions, conflicts over mosques only reached local newspapers. More in general, the development of Muslim institutions did not receive much attention in the public debate. On the national level, there was an integration policy in place that focused on language acquisition, housing, and the labour market, and in which cultural diversity was accepted without much discussion. There were some isolated voices that warned against the rise of an Islamic culture that was argued to be at odds with Dutch culture, like the voice of the Liberal politician Frits Bolkestein in a lecture in 1991, and the publicist Pim Fortuyn in his booklet ‘Against the Islamisation of our culture’, but these voices were marginalized by the dominant forces in the public debate.

Even before 9/11 this multicultural climate in the Netherlands had begun to shift, though it seems obvious that the attacks in New York and Washington influenced the Dutch debates on Islam as they did elsewhere. In the Dutch intellectual elite, a fundamental debate on the drawbacks of multiculturalism was launched after the publication of an essay called ‘The Multicultural Drama’ by Paul Scheffer. The more populist critic of Islam, Pim Fortuyn, went into politics in 2001 and won a landslide victory in local elections in Rotterdam in March 2002 with rhetoric that was both anti-establishment and anti-Islamic. He might have won the national elections in 2002 if he had not been murdered by a radical environmentalist. After these events, the issues of integration, multiculturalism, and, increasingly, the
place of Islam in Dutch society, has become highly politicized, and become the focus of a continuous and polarized public debate. The film Submission, about the oppression of women in Islam, the murder of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Dutch-Moroccan youth, and the anti-Koran film Fitna by the Dutch MP Geert Wilders are sufficiently known as illustrations of this polarization.

In this changed climate, the scrutiny of mosque organizations and their preachers has become a top priority of security services, media, and politicians of both the right-wing populists and the mainstream parties which for electoral reasons cannot afford to appear 'soft' on Islamic radicalism. Regular reports of the AIVD (General Information and Security Service) have focused on a very limited number of Islamic centres in four Dutch cities, which have been labelled as advocates of 'radical dawa' (AIVD 2007). All of them are primarily frequented by Moroccans, though some of their preachers are Syrian, or Egyptian, or Somali. Media coverage of Islam in the Netherlands also tends to put these centres and their imams in the spotlight, while for example the Turkish mosques are virtually invisible to the media.

Although this negative public attention clearly affects the lives of Muslims in the Netherlands, it is less clear how the process of mosque construction is affected by it. Wilders' populist Freedom Party shouted 'no more new mosques', but this obvious violation of religious freedom can easily be unmasked as empty rhetoric, and a more important question to ask is, whether governing parties in a more indirect way are also trying to prevent the building of mosques – not by unconstitutional discriminatory measures but by bureaucratic obstruction. In some of the cases to be discussed below (Rotterdam), this seems to be the case, but in other cities (Utrecht) large, centrally located, and representative mosques are being planned with a surprising lack of political opposition. There are no serious indications that the ongoing process of mosque construction in the Netherlands is coming to a halt.

Mosque conflict in a provincial town: Driebergen

In 2005, two modest mosques at a stone’s throw from each other were opened in Driebergen, a provincial town of just 18,200 inhabitants, located in the woodlands 15 kilometres east of Utrecht. The opening festivities concluded a conflict that had lasted more than twenty years. The alley where the mosques now stand, called Akkerweg (or Field Lane) is on the outskirts of the town and forms the border between a residential area and a stretch of wooded land followed by meadows. On this stretch of land an abandoned school was located, which in 1983 was given to the local Turkish and Moroccan community to use as a prayer
hall and a meeting place. Some of the neighbours protested against this use of the school, claiming that the municipality had promised to remove it. According to the municipality the intention had always been to replace the old building with a new one, to be used for social activities (Landman and Wessels 2005). The protests died out and for twelve years the school was used as a mosque and community centre by both the Moroccan Migrants’ Association and the Turkish Solidarity Association.

As the building was in poor condition, it had to be demolished for safety reasons in 1995 and the two associations were given other temporary accommodation. However, when they had to leave this alternative location the following year, they asked permission from the municipality to return to the Akkerweg, where two prefab units could be placed to be used by them while looking for a more permanent solution to their accommodation problem. On 3 May, 1996, the municipality informed the neighbourhood that they intended to give their permission, and that they would start a procedure to change the zoning plan in which the neighbours would have the opportunity to raise objections. Whether or not such a change was really necessary is questionable, because the destination of the area was formulated in rather general terms: ‘rural area, destined for the maintenance and recovery of the rural, natural or cultural-historic values and for social-cultural and educative purposes’. Nevertheless, the municipality felt that the construction of mosques was not included in the purposes of the zoning plan. Therefore, exemption from the existing zoning plan had to be given for the short term, and a change of the zoning plan had to be prepared for the long term. Both the exemption and the permanent change of the plan gave opponents opportunities to object (Wessels 2003, 33).

What followed was a long and complicated juridical struggle between the municipality and a Committee of Interested Parties at the Akkerweg, which gained the support of 280 inhabitants of the neighbourhood and its wider environment. The Committee argued that the prefab units were ugly and unsuitable for the green area, an argument that was supported by a provincial council that advised the municipalities about the aesthetic aspects of building projects. When the municipality decided in July 1996 to ignore this advice and grant the building permit and exemption from the zoning plan, the Committee focused on juridical technicalities. Their main point became that exemptions from the town zoning plan needed to be temporary and limited to five years, whereas there was no guarantee whatsoever that the units were temporary. On 21 July 21, 1999, the district court accepted the Committee’s arguments and nullified the municipality’s building permit and exemption from the zoning plan. The municipality appealed against this court decision and in the meantime negotiated with the
Moroccan and Turkish associations about selling the plot to them and preparing the construction of two new mosques (Wessels 2003, 34). On 5 October, 2000, the appeal court supported the district court and again nullified the exemption given by the municipality. Rather than following this court order, the municipality decided in 2001 to give a new five-year exemption for the prefab units, after moving them to another part of the plot, and claiming that this second exemption pertained to a new situation. After this very controversial decision, the Committee of Interested Parties was more frustrated than ever about the municipality’s strategies and more prepared to fight against the construction of the mosque, but by then the juridical technicality they had been able to use was not valid any longer. In 2001 there were more elaborate plans for the construction of new mosques, and the change to the zoning plan, so that the temporary character of the prefab unit now could be substantiated in court.

Though their struggle over the temporary units had been lost, their struggle over the new mosques, which started after the first drafts were presented in 1999, continued. The Committee again argued that constructing mosques on the plot would dramatically change the green and quiet character of the area. They claimed that it would contribute to urbanisation, a claim that seems a bit far-fetched if one considers that fact that it had been the location of a school. In addition they argued that the value of their houses would drop and demanded to be compensated. Finally they took the opportunity to comment on the actual designs of the two mosques. In this struggle, they booked at least some successes, as both the Turkish and the Moroccan associations were prepared to make concessions in order to appease the neighbourhood.

The two mosque projects were developed separately and both had to follow the bureaucratic procedures individually, although the two procedures influenced each other. After all, the two mosques were planned on the same plot and met with the same group of opponents. Thus, the approval by the municipality’s aesthetic committee of the Moroccan Nasr Mosque being constructed with two storeys led their Turkish brothers, who had initially opted for only one floor, to change their plans and also to prepare a two-storey mosque.

The Moroccan Nasr Mosque that was finally approved was smaller than in the first drafts. The first designs of the Moroccan architect El-Harouï had a minaret, a cellar underneath the building, an entrance with a porch, a shop, and a mortuary with facilities to clean the bodies of the deceased according to Islamic custom. All these elements were removed from the design during negotiations with the municipality in 2000 and 2001 in an effort to reduce the size of the complex and to make it agree with its surroundings. The removal of the minaret was a concession that the Moroccan association made to the opponents upon a request by
the municipality. In the final design of the Nasr Mosque, which was built in 2004 and 2005, it is made of bricks and built on a square plot of 18 by 18 metres, divided in a front part of 6.8 metres in height, and a larger rear part of 8 metres in height above which a rectangular dome of 3 metres rises above the rest of the building. The front part contains on the ground floor storerooms, toilets, washing rooms for men and on the second floor the women’s prayer room. The stairs are also in this front part of the mosque. The rear part contains lesson rooms on the first floor and the men’s prayer room at the second floor (Wessels 2003, 52).

The Turkish Haci Bayram Mosque is also on a plot of 18 by 18 metres, which is slightly less than the 20 by 20 metres that the designers had in mind in 1999. However, the Turkish association had originally planned a single-floor mosque, but in 2000 followed the Moroccan example and the advice of the municipality’s Committee for Aesthetic Appearance to draft two floors. As a result, the total surface increased considerably and the designers could now fit in more multifunctional rooms for social activities than initially designed. These rooms could be located on the ground floor, as could a kitchen, toilets, and a reception hall. However, a minaret was removed from the design in an early stage of the design process as the Turks expected too much opposition from the neighbourhood committee, and later also the plan for a shop in the building was dropped.

Not only were the size and shape of the two Driebergen mosques the subject of lengthy negotiations and protests, also the exact location on the plot was debated. Opponents objected to the mosques being built at the centre of the plot, with a parking place behind them, arguing that a parking place behind the buildings could easily become a place for people to ‘hang around’ and be a nuisance. This objection was met by placing the mosques at the rear part of the plot, as far as possible from the street, with parking places for both cars and bicycles in front.

The Committee of Interested Parties at the Akkerweg is one of the most longstanding and active local opposition groups against mosque construction in the Netherlands. Though their critics have suggested Islamophobic or racist motives, this suggestion cannot be substantiated by either oral or written statements on their part.¹ Their spokesperson, Mrs. Geerts, has declared that it was not prayer rooms she was opposed to, but social centres in which many activities would take place and attract many visitors. That would destroy the quiet character of the street (Wessels 2003, 70). This attitude may explain their opposition against specific elements in the design of the mosque, like the inclusion of multifunctional rooms for social activities. Their opposition to the minarets, however, does suggest that the symbolic presence of Islam had some role in their fierce

¹ Herman Beck comes to similar conclusions in his discussion of a mosque controversy in the Dutch town of Tilburg. (Beck 1999)
juridical fight against the Driebergen mosques. But they played it according to the legal rules, and the target of their activities was the municipality rather than the mosque committees themselves.

Faced with this opposition, both mosque committees went to quite some length to accommodate what they saw as reasonable claims by the neighbourhood. They also showed themselves prepared to sign a management agreement drawn up to reduce any nuisance to the neighbours. However they refused the idea that their mosque was to be a prayer hall only, without the possibility of functioning as a community centre.

Within the municipality of Driebergen, local civil servants had tried to mediate between the two parties and suggested measures to reduce any nuisance. But once the decision about the location of the mosques was made, the municipality consistently supported the mosque projects, in one case even using dubious means to buy time: the above-mentioned replacement of the temporary prefab units.

An interesting feature of the mosque controversy in Driebergen is its reception in the national debate, or rather the absence of such a reception. The conflict had a local character, and the various court decisions, the construction process, and the opening of the mosques were mentioned briefly in the national media, if they reported it at all. This lack of attention can be explained partly by pointing out that Driebergen is a modest provincial town whose local events tend not to interest the general public very much. But the fact that the conflict reached its height well before the much more polarized debates on Islam in the post 9/11 period is relevant here. Today, a similar conflict is much more likely to become a political conflict on the national level.

Essalam Mosque or Maktoum Islamic Centre? A mosque controversy in Rotterdam

In 2006 the builders of the Essalam Mosque placed two 50-metre high minarets on the south bank of the Maas River in Rotterdam, thereby giving the skyline of the city a new appearance. There was not much reason for a celebration, though, as the project had become the subject of several conflicts: between the commissioner and the municipality over building permits, between the board and part of the Moroccan community over management and power, and between the commissioners and the constructors over money. Unlike the Driebergen controversy, the one in Rotterdam took place in the spotlight of the national media, and became a target of Islamophobic MPs in the Dutch national parliament.
the meantime, construction works were stopped and resumed again, deadlines for its delivery have passed, but by early 2010 the mosque was still not finished.

The political decision-making about the Essalam Mosque is discussed in the Ph.D. thesis by Marcel Maussen (2009), while another Ph.D. study, by Eric Roose (2009b), elaborates on the design and the decision-making process behind it. Together, the relevant chapters in these two studies give a detailed picture of the complex interaction between the many parties involved in this mosque project.

Although the controversies over the Essalam Mosque are relatively recent and should be understood against the background of the post 9/11 Islam debate, the project itself goes back to before that date, and the major political decisions concerning it are part of a broader municipal policy developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Rotterdam is one of the cities with the largest Muslim populations in the Netherlands, the uncontrolled proliferation of makeshift prayer rooms in the 1980s could be felt stronger here than elsewhere. As early as 1981, a policy document of the municipality’s Migrant office noted the existence of 13 mosques which did not have the required official permission and did not meet fire safety standards. (Landman 1992, 291). In order to solve the more serious problems, some prayer rooms had to be replaced and in other cases repairs were made. But in a policy document, drafted in 1990 and accepted in 1992, the municipality spoke of structural problems surrounding mosques, because not only safety requirements were not met and permission was lacking, but also because of the lack of alternative locations. Existing mosques had become obstacles to wider urban development plans. Moreover, they were increasingly being targeted by anti-foreigner rioters (Landman 1992, 292, and Maussen 2009, 203). Therefore, Rotterdam accepted a ‘mosque policy’ which aimed at creating a limited number of large mosques, which were to replace several smaller ones in the city districts and to be located not in residential areas but rather on larger thoroughfares. Because of opposition by the mosque organisations, united in the Platform of Islamic Organisations in Rijnmond (SPIOR), who argued that mosques should be located in the middle of residential quarters to serve their communities (Sunier 1996, 149), the municipality had to make some concessions, but in the following years attempts were made to let small mosque organisations with similar ethnic backgrounds and religious denominations cooperate in their efforts to find new accommodation.

In the planning of these new mosques the Town Planning and Housing Department was given an important role, a decision that made mosque construction a practical problem and a task for technocrats. As Maussen states, ‘Urban planners would take the lead in the entire planning process’. They made
inventories of existing accommodation problems. When there were plans for a new house of worship they would conduct a ‘location study’ and determine the ‘supply area’. The relatively technical urban planning vocabulary and the embedding of mosque building in regular urban planning practices helped to normalise what was usually seen as a sensitive and socially explosive issue (Maussen 2009, 204). As a part of these new policies, which were supported by the main political parties in the municipal council, the Turkish Kocatepe Mosque in the southern part of the city was relocated to a large school complex of 6,500 square metres in the centre of the Afrikaanderwijk near the Feyenoord football stadium. Although there were attempts, by both non-Muslim residents of the quarter and some of the second generation Turkish Muslims, to give the Kocatepe complex an open, multicultural identity, eventually the mosque became mainly a centre for the Turkish-Muslim community in South-Rotterdam.2

On the north side of the Maas river, the municipal mosque policy helped to establish several mosques, the largest one being the Mevlana Mosque, which was opened in 2001 by the city’s mayor, Ivo Opstelten. Its photograph proudly covered a guidebook of the district’s municipality, together with a picture of the other local pride, the harbour. Another indication of the official acceptance of this mosque was the fact that the square in which the mosque is located was renamed Mevlana Square. This acceptance was not free from political controversy, as the ruling Labour Party presented the mosque as a symbol of the multicultural character of the district, whereas the local party, Leefbaar Rotterdam, had criticized it for being too large.

Similar controversies arose around the Essalam Mosque, which can be seen as a Moroccan equivalent of the Turkish Mevlana Mosque project. The Essalam project was developed according to the Rotterdam mosque policy of reducing the number of small makeshift mosques by creating some larger ones. Two Moroccan mosque associations, the Essalam and the al-Mohcenin, in 1994 applied for better and larger accommodation for their mosque, both of which were in South Rotterdam. Following these applications, the municipality’s urban planners suggested that a new, large, representative mosque for the Moroccan community would fit perfectly into a zoning plan for an area on the south bank of the Maas called the ‘Kop van Zuid’, in which innovative architectural projects, and a park, were being developed. A group of residents in a neighbouring apartment protested but the municipality decided to go ahead with the plan (Roose 2009b, 171). The Essalam association now launched a campaign to acquire the necessary funding and soon found the Dubai-based Al Maktoum Foundation prepared to sponsor all the estimated costs, about 3 million guilders (1.5 million US

2 See for a detailed study of these debates: Buijs 1998.
dollars). A political debate followed over one of the conditions that the Maktoum Foundation stipulated for its sponsorship. They demanded the right to purchase the land on which the mosque was to be built. This was against standard municipal policies, which gave municipal land in lease only. However, the Alderman for Urban Renewal, Herman Meijer of the Green Party, suggested a solution to this problem. The land could be sold to the Maktoum Foundation, but at the same time the municipality would purchase the land on which the old Essalam Mosque was standing. As the plot for the new mosque was much larger than the old one, Maussen (2009, 222) criticized the term ‘land-swap’ that the Municipality had used for the deal as being euphemistic, but the Alderman managed to get a majority for it in the municipal council, in which only two parties, the City Party and the Socialist Party, voted against the proposal. The larger political parties in the city, the Social Democrats and the Green Party, welcomed the project as a positive contribution to the diversity of the metropolis Rotterdam.

This positive attitude continued to dominate public discussion in the months following 9/11, when the first designs of the mosque became available. As Maussen shows, both in municipal gatherings and during information evenings for the neighbourhood, attention to the architectural form of the mosque was very limited (with the City District Mayor exclaiming: it looks like the Taj Mahal!) and the discussion was directed towards the practical and technical problems to be solved. The political climate was such that opponents of the mosque also phrased their objections in these technical terms, focusing on parking regulation and assigned dog-walking spaces, etc, and refraining from voicing any objection to the mosque as a symbol of Islam, or of a new immigrant group, or a foreign intrusion, because they were well aware that this would lead to an accusation of racism (Maussen 2009, 227).

The above-mentioned shift in the multiculturalist political discourse, which took place after 9/11, was felt early in Rotterdam, because this was the city where Pim Fortuyn rose to prominence by winning local elections in March 2002. His local party, Leefbaar Rotterdam (Liveable Rotterdam), had attacked the Social-Democrat political establishment for being too soft on criminality and too indulgent towards immigrant communities. In contrast with the old multiculturalist policies Leefbaar Rotterdam tried to introduce a more ‘assimilationist’ approach to the ethnic diversity in the city. As they had gained only 16 of the 45 seats in the Council, they could not, however, impose their will, but had to form a coalition with the Christian Democrat Party and the Liberal Party.

The new approach was immediately felt in the preparations of the Essalam Mosque. Under the old administration the various bureaucratic procedures for the zoning plan and building permits had almost been finalized, and
the new Alderman responsible for urban planning, Marco Pastors of Leefbaar Rotterdam, could not stop the municipal council giving its permission to the zoning plan which included the Essalam Mosque. However, in August 2002, he began to approach the Essalam association and the sponsor of the project, the Al-Maktoum Foundation, in an attempt to drastically alter the design of the mosque into something that he thought to be more ‘Dutch’ and less ‘Arabic’. Also, he criticized the 50-metre tall minarets and the dome and wanted the mosque to be less conspicuous (Roose 2009b, 185). At the same time, Pastors launched a media campaign in which he introduced a new, hostile discourse on larger mosque projects. He claimed that the Turkish Mevlana Mosque would not have been built if he had been in power earlier, and the Moroccan Essalam Mosque was a ‘megalomaniac sugar cake’ and an ‘Ali Baba’s castle’ (Maussen 2009, 231); it was too traditional and intimidating (Roose 2009b, 185). In the new discourse, not just the size of the building became a target of criticism, but also its design, and the fact that a Dubai Foundation, from now on often referred to as ‘oil sheikh’, was sponsoring it. Soon the claim was made that the mosque design was simply a copy of a mosque in Dubai.

As Roose’s detailed study shows, the reality was far more complex. The final design of the Essalam Mosque was the outcome of negotiations between, among others, Ahmed Ajdid, the Moroccan commissioner and project manager of the Foundation Essalam Mosque, Mirza Al-Sayegh of the Al-Maktoum Foundation, and the Dutch architect Wilfried van Winden. The Dubai representative and the Moroccan commissioner gave the architect photographs of and Internet references to mosques in Medina, Casablanca, Lahore, and to the Jumayra Mosque in Dubai as sources of inspiration. Ajdid explicitly wanted to combine architectural elements from different parts of the Muslim world rather than following typical Moroccan styles. According to Roose, the early designs of the architect were mainly inspired by the Jumayra in Dubai and some Moorish style-elements, but many changes demanded by the Moroccan commissioner were meant to make the Essalam look more like the Prophet’s Mosque in present-day Medina, built by the Saudis to replace the older Mamluk Mosque there (Roose 2009b, 171–185).

Alderman Pastors’ assumption that the Essalam Mosque was the product of an oil sheikh transplanting a Dubai mosque design on to Dutch soil was incorrect. He was right in observing that ‘Dutchness’ was not something the commissioners had in mind, but they did not want the mosque to look Moroccan either. Pastors’ attempts to pressure Essalam into drastically changing the design of the mosque met with a refusal of the Foundation, whose representatives argued that the painstaking process of designing had simply reached its final stage and
that Pastors’ proposals would mean starting all over again. The Alderman then threatened that the deal over the purchase of the land would be cancelled but when the Foundation told him they would sue him if he tried, he gave in and ultimately signed the contract. The foundation stone was laid on 21 October, 2003, in the presence of both the Alderman and Mayor Van Opstelten, but the attitude of both officials was critical and contrasted sharply with the opening of the Mevlana Mosque two years earlier (Maussen, 2009, 230).

In the following years, while the construction of the mosque was in progress, Alderman Marco Pastors’ increasingly critical utterances concerning Islam became unacceptable in the eyes of his Christian Democrat coalition partners, who forced him to resign in 2005. In the 2006 local election Leefbaar Rotterdam was reduced to 14 seats, and sent to the opposition benches, although with 30% of the vote they continued to be a force to be reckoned with in the politics of Rotterdam.

Opposition to the Essalam Mosque had already been taken to the national level in October 2003, when three MPs asked the Dutch government to forbid the sponsorship of the Essalam Mosque by the Al-Maktoum Foundation. The three MPs – Eurlings from the Christian Democrat Party, Wilders, who at that time was still a member of the Liberal Party, and Eerdmans from the Pim Fortuyn List – attempted to associate the Al-Maktoum Foundation with terrorist activities. The government responded that indications of a terrorist link were insufficient to justify the harsh measures proposed by the MPs (Tweede Kamer, 2003–2004, Aanhangsel van de Handelingen, 678). Since then, criticism of the sponsor of the Essalam Mosque has been a recurrent theme in the Dutch Islam debate, and not only has Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party put it on the agenda, but the Social-Democrats have also expressed their concern about the influence of ‘oil money’ on the future course of the Essalam Mosque.

While Wilders’ attacks are a part of his virulent anti-Islamic rhetoric and reflect a post 9/11 discourse that portrays mosque construction as a security issue, the Social-Democratic criticism of the Essalam project has another background and resonates with unrest within the local Moroccan community that surfaced in October 2005. A committee of mostly elder Moroccan residents of South Rotterdam was angry about the influence of the Maktoum family, and their protests led a local newspaper to conclude that the oil sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid al-Maktoum, Finance Minister of the United Arab Emirates, had ‘bought influence’ in the mosque, whose board was now dominated by representatives of the Maktoum Foundation. Moreover, their financial policies were not transparent, and there were rumours of Moroccan members of the board filling their own pockets with Foundation money. The opponents were also angry with the
Maktoum Foundation website speaking about the ‘Al-Maktoum Islamic Centre Rotterdam’, instead of the Essalam Mosque (AD/Rotterdams Dagblad, 24 October, 2005). The unrest led to a temporary halt in construction activities. In early 2006 the building again came to a standstill because of problems with the work permits of the construction workers, mainly Turks from Germany who were hired by the German contractor König (Trouw, November 4, 2006), and the following years the contractor several times stopped building activities as he claimed that the Maktoum Foundation had not fulfilled its financial obligations (Zuiderwijk 2009). As the date of delivery was postponed again and again, unrest among the visitors of the Essalam Mosque grew. In December 2006 an Essalam Mosque Association was created that claimed to have the support of 95% of the visitors in their opposition against the Dubai-controlled board (AD/Rotterdams Dagblad, 16 December, 2006). In response to their criticism, the Moroccan vice-president of the Essalam Mosque Foundation Boutaher argued that there were just a few troublemakers who wanted to control the mosque themselves (AD/Rotterdams Dagblad, 9 October, 2007). Internal strife escalated to a point that the police had to separate fighting groups, and in July 2008 five of the opponents were denied access to the (old) Essalam Mosque by a court order (AD/Algemeen Dagblad, 26 June, 2008). In the meantime, relations between the Maktoum Foundation and the Rotterdam Municipality were also less than friendly, these parties not being able to reach an agreement about some final details of the ‘land-swap’, more specifically about fixing a date on which the old Essalam would have to be cleared.

In early 2010 the mosque was not yet finished and there were reports that the several sub-contractors had stopped work as the Maktoum Foundation refused to pay them. Though members of the board of Essalam Mosque Foundation have claimed that the trouble will be over in the few months that are needed for the final touches in the construction, the optimism that characterized this mosque project in 2001 has disappeared. It is unclear what exactly is behind the refusal by the Dubai sponsor to pay his contractor on time, and whether or not this refusal is a first step in abandoning the project altogether. Are the delays a response to the changed attitude of the Dutch local and national politicians, who are hesitant about continuing? Is it a reaction to the rebellious local Moroccans? Obviously more research is needed to answer these questions. What is clear, though, is that the financial dependence of the Essalam Mosque project upon just one foreign sponsor has turned out to be a major weakness.
Recognizing the symbolism

In an article on mosques I wrote in 2005, I argued that mosque construction in the Netherlands so far had stayed by and large outside party politics, but that the transformations in political culture introduced by the populism of Pim Fortuyn were likely to change this situation (Landman and Wessels, 2005). A comparison between the Driebergen Mosque controversy and the one in Rotterdam makes clear that this change did take place. Before 9/11, in Rotterdam as in Driebergen, objections to mosque projects existed, but were voiced in the form of concerns over practical issues, and if there were xenophobic, or racist, or anti-Islamic motives involved, the expression of such motives was carefully avoided by opponents, and their presence was indignantly denied, because they were simply socially unacceptable.

The major change in the post 9/11 era seems to be that mosque construction has become part of an intense, polarized, ideological debate over Dutch identity, and the place of Islam in Dutch society. Controversies about mosques can no longer be managed in isolation, detached from wider social conflicts. Controversies about mosque construction in the Netherlands have become intimately connected with the issue of freedom of speech, and the question of where and when the use of this freedom turns into incitement to hatred.

In a way, this change is not just visible in the sometimes cynical rhetoric of the former Rotterdam Alderman Pastors, for whom the construction of mosques represents everything he seems to dislike about Islam, in particular its resilience to assimilation in modern Dutch culture. The young Turkish architects with whom I started this article also turn the mosque into a symbol, into something much more than just a place to pray. For them, the mosque may contribute to social harmony and integration, but all too often it becomes the ramparts to protect alienated minorities from their environment. Both the contemporary opponents of new mosques and the advocates of new designs recognize the symbolic value of mosques. They symbolize the presence of Islam, and Muslim communities as a distinct part of society. Efforts to minimize their size and visibility in the public space go hand in hand with efforts to assimilate the community associated with them, whereas the acceptance of large, centrally located mosques is a form of public recognition of Islam. Not only does the size and location of the mosque have a symbolic value, but also its design. The question whether a mosque design must be considered modern or traditional, European or foreign, progressive or conservative, open or closed, is hotly debated. Roose’s recent studies have made clear that this debate is often ill-informed about the true reasons behind the commissioners’ and designers’ choices, and that the labels put forward to characterize design elements are very subjective and sometimes opportunistic.
Ill-informed as they may be, the politicians who today discuss mosque construction in terms that are relevant to the integration debates recognize the symbolic value of mosques, and rightly so. The attempts of an earlier generation of policy makers to divert attention from this symbolic value by focusing on parking regulations were a technocratic solution that failed to address the tensions in multicultural Dutch society.

References


General Frame

Basic statistics
The resident population of the UK was 60,975,000 in mid-2007 (www.statistics.gov.uk, accessed 22/4/09).

Approximately 7.9 per cent of the UK population is of ethnic minority origin (2001 Census). Within this figure, about half are Asians of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other Asian origin. A quarter of minority ethnic people described themselves as Black (either as Black Caribbean, Black African or Other Black). Fifteen per cent of the minority ethnic population described their ethnic group as ‘mixed’. About a third of this group is from White and Black Caribbean backgrounds. Since 2001, there has also been a rapid expansion in the number of immigrants from Eastern Europe (mainly Poland) who have registered to work in the UK (Kerbaj 2009).

The Muslim population of the UK was measured for the first time in the 2001 Census, resulting in a figure of 1.54 million in England and Wales, and 40,000 in Scotland. However, more recent figures from the Labour Force Survey (Office of National Statistics) estimate a figure of 2.4 million Muslims. This rapid increase may be attributed to recent immigration, the growing birth rate, some conversion to Islam, and an increased willingness to self-identify as ‘Muslim’ on account of the ‘war on terror’.

Muslims now constitute approximately 4 per cent of the UK population. Compared to the rest of the population, British Muslims are distinctive in terms of age distribution. Approximately 13 per cent of the Muslim population is under
the age of four years, and 50 per cent are under the age of 25 years. Three-quarters of Britain's Muslim population is of an Asian ethnic background, particularly Pakistani (43 per cent), Bangladeshi (17 per cent) and Indian (nine per cent). A further six per cent are of Black African origin (especially Somali, Nigerian, and other North and West African countries). Data from the 2001 Census indicated that men slightly outnumber women by a ratio of 52 per cent to 48 per cent, but among younger Muslims, there is a more equal proportion of male and female. Approximately half of the Muslims in Britain were born in the UK, but regardless of their birthplace, the vast majority of British Muslims hold UK citizenship.

The 2001 Census provided one of the first opportunities to estimate the approximate number of converts to Islam in Britain which was estimated at 14,200 in 2001, of which about 61 per cent were white and 31 per cent were of Black Afro-Caribbean origin (Birt 2003). Assuming that converts still constitute approximately 0.9 per cent of the Muslim population, as they did in 2001, there are now likely to be approximately 20,000–21,000 converts in Britain.

General information on legislation
The UK comprises four different nations: England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, which together comprise the United Kingdom. The arrangements for religion in each of these countries are different. England has an ‘Established’ Church of England (Anglican), and the monarch is the Head of the Church of England. There is thus a direct link between church and state in England. The Church of Scotland, known as ‘The Kirk’ is recognised in law as the national church in Scotland though it is not an established church and is independent of state control in spiritual matters. The British Monarch is an ordinary member of the Church of Scotland and is represented at the General Assembly by the Lord High Commissioner. The Church in Wales (Anglican) is a collection of six dioceses, headed by the Archbishop of Wales. The Church was disestablished in 1920, and is thus independent of the Welsh Assembly Government. The Anglican Church of Ireland is an independent province of the Anglican Communion and has a presence in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1871. The largest Protestant denominations are the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Church of Ireland, and the Methodist Church.

The growing religious diversity of the UK, combined with the increased political agency of Muslims and members of other faith traditions, has resulted in various forms of legal accommodation. At present, English law ‘has not granted Islam or any organisation associated with it any special protection . . .[but] has on occasion made for Islam, as well as other faiths, specific provision to take
account of certain obligatory practices' (Khaliq 2002). Legal provision for religious minorities has often been a reflection of more general policies relating to ethnic and racial minorities, and these have reflected the particular priorities and approaches of the government in power.

Practical consequences of legal accommodation include modification of the law to take account of particular religious practices, or exemption (on religious grounds) from certain policies. Examples include: the Slaughterhouse Act 1974 (now ‘The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995’) which outlines the legal basis for the (halal) slaughter of animals; new tax and banking regulations in the UK, to enable the development of shari‘ah-compliant financial products; or, the December 2003 ‘Employment Equality (Religion or Belief)’ regulations which make it unlawful to discriminate against workers on the grounds of religion or belief. Other areas of law that have seen British Muslims negotiating their rights have been in relation to family law (Bano 2007; Warraich and Balchin 2006), applications for state-funding of Muslim schools (Fetzer and Soper 2004; Meer 2007; Tinker 2006), and permission to establish new mosques.

Mosques are subject to several key pieces of legislation: the Places of Worship Registration Act 1855, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and the Charities Act 1993. Muslims who wish to establish a mosque must normally apply for planning permission from local authorities, which can accept, reject or propose amendments to the application. Although there is no legal requirement to register the premises under the ‘Places of Worship Registration Act 1855’ there are advantages in doing so, most notably in terms of exemption from local chargeable rates and taxes, and exemption from separate or additional registration under the Charities Act. As of December 2001, 635 buildings were certified for Muslim worship in England and Wales under the 1855 Act, though at the time there will have been other additional mosques only registered under the Charities Act 1993.

Over the last two decades, there has been growing political recognition of British Muslims. Particular Government departments now actively consult and engage with a range of independent ‘representative’ umbrella Muslim organisations, such as the Muslim Council of Britain (Pedziwiatr 2007), the British Muslim Forum, the Quilliam Foundation, and the Sufi Muslim Council. The extent to which these various bodies are ‘representative’ of British Muslims is highly contested and often controversial (McLoughlin 2005b).

The political situation
At the time of writing, the UK is currently governed by the Labour Party, under the leadership of Gordon Brown. Some aspects of policy and governance are
determined at local level, whilst others are determined from central government based in Westminster in London.

In recent years, Muslims have become increasingly represented in local and national politics. There are currently four Muslim members of parliament in the House of Commons and nine Muslims in the House of Lords. The growing involvement of Muslims in national and local politics provides a mechanism for lobbying, as well as an opportunity to contest the influence of political parties that actively campaign against British Muslims using distinctive anti-Muslim propaganda (see the example of the ‘British National Party’ below). There are currently no distinctively Islamic political parties engaged in mainstream national politics.

General information on mosques

Number of mosques, Islamic centres, prayer rooms, cemeteries, and the situation for calling adhan

British Muslims have devoted more energy and resources to the creation of mosques than perhaps any other institution, but establishing the precise number of mosques in Britain is complex (Gilliat-Ray 2010). This is because not all premises are registered as places of worship with local authorities, and much depends upon the criteria used to define a mosque. There are today approximately 850–1,500 mosques in Britain, varying in size, architecture, function, and history. The producers of the ‘Model Mosque’ competition run by the UK-based ‘Islam Channel’ in 2008 estimated 1,500 mosques in the UK, whereas another ‘inside’ source, the Muslim Directory UK 08/09 lists 849 mosques. McLoughlin notes the existence of approximately 1,000, including unregistered premises (McLoughlin 2005a). Perhaps the most recent comprehensive quantitative study of mosques in Britain has been undertaken by the UK Charity Commission (Coleman 2009). This study worked with initial information for 1,102 British Muslim mosques and Islamic centres, but ultimately reduced the sample size to 716, resulting in the probable omission from the survey of many unregistered and less formally established Islamic centres in Britain. This survey provides valuable basic data on 255 British mosques, in terms of their size and structure, their activities, and their funding and governance.

It is difficult to assess how many of Britain’s mosques are purpose-built (i.e. an entirely new building, perhaps with typical Islamic architecture, such as a dome and minaret). The best general estimate can be derived from looking at the number of purpose-built mosques relative to the total number of mosques in particular cities. From the table below, we can estimate that in towns and cities
with sizeable Muslim populations, purpose-built mosques are likely to constitute between 9 and 20 per cent of all mosques.¹

Table 1 Purpose-built mosques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Muslims in 2001</th>
<th>Total mosques</th>
<th>Purpose-built</th>
<th>Percentage purpose-built</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>140,033</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradford</td>
<td>75,188</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>11,261</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leicester</td>
<td>30,885</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>125,219</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Today, the institutionalisation of Islam through formally established mosques is evident across the entire UK, in small towns and big cities, in the workplace, but also in other public settings such as universities and prisons. At least three major London prisons have a mosque: HMP Pentonville, Feltham YOI, and HMP Wandsworth. There was a mosque at the Millennium Dome in Greenwich, the first to be sited in a public leisure attraction (Gailani 2000; Gilliat-Ray 2005a; Gilliat-Ray 2005b). Subsequently, this has been followed by a sound-proofed prayer room at Ewood Park football stadium for supporters of Blackburn Rovers. A number of other football clubs have followed this example. Prayer rooms set aside for predominantly Muslim use are now becoming commonplace in many ‘non-places’ (Auge 1995) such as airports, shopping centres, and motorway service stations (such as at the M6’s Hilton Park Services). But as mosques have become more numerous and often more visible in the urban landscape, they have become correspondingly more vulnerable to vandalism and attack, particularly in the wake of international affairs (Werbner 2002). Recent additions to the premises of some mosques have been security fences and CCTV surveillance cameras.

Just as mosques and Islamic centres are clear and identifiable markers of the Muslim presence in Britain, Muslim cemeteries and burial grounds are equally significant sites for establishing and affirming an Islamic presence. Provision for cemeteries is largely determined by local authorities, under the terms of the Local Government Act 1972. During the nineteenth century, Muslims who died in Britain were usually buried in non-consecrated ground, or ground allocated to Nonconformist traditions (Ansari 2007). Over the last century, it has become commonplace for Muslims to be buried in separate sections at public

¹ We are grateful to Chris Hewer, Dilwar Hussain, Atif Imtiaz, and Fiaz Ahmed for figures regarding mosque construction in Birmingham, Leicester, Bradford, and Manchester, respectively.
cemeteries, and most large towns and cities now have a distinctive 'Muslim' section. Associated with this, many local authorities have in place arrangements to facilitate 'same day' burials at weekends and on public holidays, in keeping with Islamic tradition.

There are now a number of famous historical Muslim burial sites in the UK, such as Brookwood cemetery near Woking in Surrey, which contains the graves of well-known figures in the history of Islam in Britain, such as Syed Ameer Ali (1846–1928), Abdullah Quilliam (1856–1932), and Lord Headley (1855–1935). Over time, distinctive sections of this burial ground have become associated with Muslims from different 'schools of thought'. One of the first private cemeteries for the sole use of British Muslims was established in 2002; the 'Gardens of Peace' near London claims to be the largest Muslim burial ground in Europe (www.gardens-of-peace.org.uk, accessed 25/4/09), containing space for 10,000 graves.

When applying to local authorities for the establishment of a mosque, some Muslim organizations have sought permission for the public calling of the adhan, especially where a newly built mosque has included a minaret within its design. Planning permission has rarely been granted for the public calling of the adhan. However, certain local authorities have made concessions to allow the call to be made for the midday or late afternoon prayers, usually when mosques are sited in areas with a high local Muslim population, and on the condition that the volume remains within certain limits.

**Historical background: establishment, conflicts, and social and political responses**

Mosques in Britain reflect the character, history, and evolution of British Muslim communities. Early British mosques, particularly those established in the nineteenth century, were established by Muslim traders (often associated with the shipping industry), so-called ‘Orientalist’ scholars, and by Islamic scholars and missionaries. However, the most significant period for the establishment of mosques in Britain occurred from the 1950s onwards. The various stages of mosque construction since then reflect the growth, evolution, fortunes, and aspirations of Muslims in Britain, and in particular a shift within the migrants’ self-perception, from being sojourners to settlers.

**HOUSE-MOSQUES**

The first mosques to be established in the 1950s and 1960s were nearly always 'house-mosques'. These were domestic residences that were internally modified to accommodate religious gatherings. Internal walls would be removed to make sufficient room for congregational prayers. Given the size of the Muslim
community in Britain at this time, such makeshift premises often accommodated Muslims from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Stephen Barton (1986) recalls the establishment of the first mosque in Bradford in 1960 in a terraced house on Howard Street. It was used by both Pakistanis and Bengalis, and by the two major Sunni Hanafi schools of the Indian Sub-Continent, the Deobandis and the Barelwis, but, by 1969, a separate Bengali mosque had been established. This was also a ‘house mosque’, located within a predominately Bengali area of settlement, on Cornwall Road. This example of early mosque construction in Bradford illustrates well the natural point of fission that usually leads to the creation of new mosques. Premises have either become too small or, as is more often the case, worshippers begin to exert their own distinctive ethnic and linguistic identity, or theological preferences. This process is often contentious, as particular factions break away to establish a new congregation which conforms to their particular interpretation of Islamic practice. ‘House-mosques’ remain the prototypical mosque in Britain today, though they have sometimes undergone considerable evolution, mainly in their status from temporary, make-shift and unregistered with local authorities, to permanent and formally registered. This is particularly true where neighbouring properties have been acquired to accommodate growing numbers of worshippers. Sometimes, the original residential property (or properties) has been demolished, to make way for a new, larger, purpose-built mosque on the same site.

The proximity of these facilities to residential communities reflects the importance of having a facility for worship that is within easy walking distance of home. Children can walk from their home or school to the nearby maktab or madrasah safely without having to cross busy roads; Muslim elders with restricted mobility find the mosque a convenient place where to gather, not only for daily prayers, but also for social support. For some South Asian Muslim elders in northern British towns and cities, the mosque has replaced the textile mill as the centre of activity (Kalra 2000: 148), and so mosques also reflect the changing socio-economic conditions of British Muslims. Some mosques have also become important resources for women, accommodating a crèche, counselling and advisory service, library, or study circle. However, the physical expansion and evolution of ‘house-mosques’ into larger, more active community centres, particularly where this has involved the incorporation of traditional external mosque design, has often been subject to restrictive planning laws and contested understandings about what counts as ‘authentic’ local architecture.
‘CONVERTED’ MOSQUES

As Muslim communities have grown in size and wealth, some congregations have deliberately acquired much larger premises for their worship and social functions, these often being former churches, synagogues, cinemas, factories, or warehouses. The number of redundant churches and chapels coming on to the property market in the 1970s and 1980s, reflecting the changing fortunes of some Christian churches in Britain, meant that some former Christian places of worship were converted into mosques. Furthermore, in relation to factories and other premises on ‘brown field’ sites, the ‘rehabilitation of redundant buildings was often an important means of tackling the functional and physical obsolescence of the industrial built heritage, imbuing these buildings with new cultural and functional meaning’ (Nasser 2006: 380).

With relatively little structural alteration, these buildings could be converted and re-imagined as mosques, often with associated social facilities, such as wedding halls and kitchens. In order to achieve this, various decorative devices have been employed to strip away the former ‘identity’ to create a new, distinctive visual appearance, perhaps using Arabic lettering, a star and crescent motif, green paintwork, or decorative arches. The style of lettering, or the language used to translate Arabic terms often convey particular messages about the distinctive ethnic or religious identity of the community. When mosques are converted in this way, especially from former chapels or churches, ‘the presence of the Other’ (Nasser 2006: 384) is made manifest, but so too is the dynamic nature of culture and the scope for ‘architectural hybridity’ (Nasser 2006: 386). As ongoing cultural productions, buildings do not have a consistent or timeless identity, but are marked by contestation, manipulation, and new appropriations and definitions shaped by history and power.

PURPOSE-BUILT MOSQUES

Over time, many architecturally-impressive purpose-built mosques have been constructed, and the three different types of mosques, ‘house’, ‘converted’, and ‘purpose-built’ now co-exist simultaneously in the religious landscape. As Muslim communities from different schools of thought and different ethnic groups have become more established, sometimes ‘the building of highly elaborate mosques represents an intense (and expensive) form of status competition between Muslim groups and personalities’ (McLoughlin 2005a: 1053). Both in relation to other Muslims, and to wider society in particular, ‘architecture can embody the interactions between individuals and groups in a given society, particularly when these interactions occur under sustained relations of power and resistance’ (Gale 2004: 28). Although there is no functional necessity for either a
dome or minaret, some Muslim communities have insisted upon their construction because they recognise that ‘the dome in the British context is perceived by non-Muslims as the form by which Islam is recognizable’ (Nasser 2005: 74). Thus, the inclusion of a dome and/or a minaret, is symbolically and politically important as a means to signal and legitimise the community’s presence, as well as linking Muslims to ‘an imagined tradition’ (ibid.) of their own.

Many of Britain’s purpose-built mosques, particularly those in major British cities, are often called ‘central’ mosques. The distinction between a local mosque and a ‘central’ mosque is similar in some respects to the distinction between, for example, a local ‘parish’ church and a cathedral. A number of major British cities, such as Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, and Manchester have a ‘central’ mosque. They often act as a focal point for Islamic activities, for example hosting major conferences, providing legal services such as a sharī’ah council or offering facilities for funerals. Werbner (2002: 29) notes the ‘symbolic primacy’ of Manchester Central Mosque relative to other mosques in the city, and, on account of this, the scenes of contestation that have often surrounded it.

Because purpose-built ‘central’ mosques have this ‘symbolic primacy’ (ibid.), they have often also taken on a strategic role at the interface between the Muslim community and wider society. On account of their distinctive architecture and staffing, they have often played an important educational role for non-Muslims, for example, as part of religious education classes, or the training of public sector professionals. ‘Central’ mosques are often uniquely able to host such parties of visitors, and provide for many non-Muslims their only experience of, and exposure to, the British Muslim community.2 Similarly, when Muslim or non-Muslim dignitaries visit the Muslim community in a particular town or city, the ‘central’ mosque makes an ideal ‘stage’ for the performance of mutual recognition and affirmation. Local authorities can promote such buildings as examples of effective multiculturalism and integration of religious buildings into urban cityscapes.

The development of mosques has altered the social, religious, political, and physical landscape of many British towns and cities, and this has often been accompanied by some degree of controversy. The establishment of a mosque, whether this involves a new building or a transformation of meanings attached to an old building, frequently marks a change in territorial control and, as a result,

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2 Some mosques take part in an annual ‘open day’ organised during Islam Awareness Week, but visits to mosques can be organised at other times too. For guidance on protocols, see for example, Religions in the UK: A multi-faith directory (University of Derby/Inter Faith Network for the UK). Resources for RE teachers are also useful, such as (http://www.learninglive.co.uk/teachers/re/places_of_worship/islam/index.asp, accessed 03/01/09).
the symbolic and political dynamics of a community or locality are altered. This is especially evident and perhaps also for the ‘indigenous’ community somewhat poignant when, for example, a disused chapel or synagogue is converted into a mosque. Such a transformation is an indicator of new local identities and politics. It marks the start of a new phase of history. Regardless of architecture, a mosque is a ‘very concrete and material sign of domination and power’ (Allievi 2003: 344), the more so when it is purpose-built. The bricks and mortar make a ‘visual claim on public space’ (Eade 1996: 223), and where mosques are permitted to broadcast the call to prayer, often only for the midday and afternoon prayer, this makes for a further ‘acoustic’ claim on the non-material spaces of a locality.

The objections and contested local debates that take place around the construction of mosques usually centre on either historical or aesthetic considerations, such as architectural heritage and urban conservation, or on more mundane or practical matters such as parking facilities and traffic congestion in the surrounding streets. These are legitimate concerns, but behind the overt objections to the new, visible and audible presence of Muslims, there are often deeper and often unconscious assumptions about local history, and the perceived ‘symbolic appropriation of territory’ (Allievi 2003: 344). This can result in ‘hegemonic representations of what does, and does not, constitute “Britishness”’ (McLoughlin 1998: 214), and highly selective understandings about those who ‘belong’, and those who do not. Case-studies of mosque controversies are effective for unmasking some of these deeper issues, even if we would not want to suggest that they are necessarily typical of planning applications for mosques. We offer two recent case studies of applications to build purpose-built mosques that did become highly controversial: the so-called ‘Mega’ Mosque of the Tablighi Jama’at in Newham, East London, and the Regent Road Mosque in Stoke-on-Trent in the West Midlands.

Case study 1: Abbey Mills (‘Mega’) Mosque, Newham, East London

Since 2005, the Abbey Mills Mosque controversy in Newham, East London, has had local, metropolitan and international dimensions, and it is only possible to discuss its broad outlines here. The four main factors that have led to it becoming an international story were: (i) the involvement of an international Islamic movement of faith renewal, the Tablighi Jama’at, (ii) the great size of the development and the site’s proximity to the landmark 2012 Olympic village, (iii) the linkage of the movement with terrorism and cultural separatism in a multicultural setting,
and (iv) the inability of the _Tablighi Jama'at_ to respond effectively to hostile media coverage and campaigning.

The _Tablighi Jama'at_, an international lay movement of faith renewal, was established in British India in 1920s as an offshoot of a reformist educational movement of religious scholars, the Deobandis. Through the use of preaching tours, the movement expanded rapidly throughout the Sub-Continent before spreading globally after the Second World War. In Britain, the movement had a major impact in fostering the core institutions of Islamization in nascent Muslim communities – the mosque, the _madrasah_ and the seminary – in alliance with the Deobandi scholarly movement. Its leadership in Britain was dominated by Gujaratis, although it has developed a wider cross-ethnic appeal. Its stance has been anti-political and it has concentrated on the expansion of its programme of faith renewal, but has been traditionally averse to publicity of any kind. The global movement’s international centre for Europe and the Americas was set up in Dewsbury in West Yorkshire in the early 1980s. (For more background see Lewis 1994, Masud 2000, Sikand 2002). For many years, the movement’s centre (markaz) in the South-East had been an overcrowded former synagogue in Christian Street, Tower Hamlets in East London, and, in 1996, it was decided to move to larger premises by purchasing eighteen acres of industrial wasteland in Newham for £1.6 million on the contaminated site of a former sulphuric acid plant (New York Times, 04/11/07). Temporary accommodation onsite was used to hold the weekly gatherings of the _Tablighi Jama'at_’s South-East chapter, although this _ad hoc_ use of the site later came in for criticism: planning application had expired in 2001 without being renewed and, given the contamination of the site, its ongoing use had not been assessed for its suitability (which the council ordered the Jama’at to have assessed).

With London’s successful bid for the 2012 Olympics confirmed in July 2005, the movement subsequently announced its ambitious plans for the mosque. It would be the largest religious building in Europe (holding between 40,000–70,000 people according to various reports), with a futuristic and eco-friendly design by the architects Mangera Yvars, including a library, school, garden and accommodation for visitors, and ‘designed to become the “Muslim quarter” for the Games, acting as a hub for Islamic competitors and spectators’ (Sunday Times, 27/11/05). However, in the face of a hostile campaign and negative press coverage, the _Tablighi Jama'at_ decided in the first quarter of 2007 to scale down the project considerably and to hire public relations specialists. With the aid of a Muslim property developer, Sohail Sarbuland, new architects Allies and Morrison and some professional property consultants were brought in, as well as a public relations agency, Indigo Public Affairs, to handle the press. The new capacity was
now to be reduced to 12,000 and an Indigo spokesman, Nick Kilby, indicated that ‘the Olympics are not the deadline’ (*New York Times*, 04/11/07). In March 2008, a campaign was launched to build more local understanding and support for the project (*Reuters*, 06/03/09). However, as yet, no submission to obtain formal planning permission has been given to the local council at the time of writing (April 2009), and so the local council and the Mayor of London’s office have declined to make any comment on the status of the mosque at this stage.

Abandoned plan of the Abbey Mills Mosque in Newham, East London (2005), by the architects Mangera and Yvars, adopting ‘the language of nomadic structures or tented cities’ and designed as a prototype for the use of sustainable energy sources.

Two consistent cases have been made against the proposed mosque by its opponents. The first is that *Tablighi Jama’at* is ‘separatist’ in the language of the Newham councillor Alan Craig, the mosque’s most notable critic: ‘[This mosque is] something we don’t want down in East London where people of different religions get on well’ (*Park and Pray*, Building.co.uk, Issue 13, 04/04/08). This charge of separatism is made in a local context of ‘super-diversity’: the 2001 Census showed that Newham has an ethnic majority population, with a third of the population being white. Christianity predominates and Muslims make up 24.3% of the London borough. In the early stages of its campaign, the *Jama’at* did not see the importance of reaching out directly to build local consensus about how much the project would be geared towards serving the whole community, relying instead on the stated outward-facing and multi-functional nature of the project to carry public opinion without providing further reassurance. But later on this rationale of multicultural and inclusive service was expressed clearly, as Faisal Iqbal, a mosque spokesperson put it, ‘we want to show that this new mosque can be just as much a part of the community as a football ground’ (*Battle for Britain’s largest mosque*, 2008).
A local Muslim group, Sunni Friends of Newham, who collected 2,500 signatures, also argued that a mosque project of this size should be non-sectarian and not tied to one movement. However, an online petition on the Prime Minister’s website in the summer of 2007, which gained more than 255,000 signatures and was allegedly proposed by a British National Party supporter, took a more rejectionist line:

_We the Christian population of this great country England would like the proposed plan to build a Mega Mosque in East London scrapped. This will only cause terrible violence and suffering and more money should go to the NHS_ (BBC News, 17/07/07).

In this petitioner’s notice it is the prospect of such a huge mosque that seems to threaten Englishness and Christianity directly, and that, were it to be approved, there is a tacit threat of violence and discord; the suggestion of any public funding was quickly dismissed by the government, the Mayor’s office and the mosque’s trustees.

The second criticism was the linking of Tablighi Jama’at with al-Qaeda-style terrorism. Some reports after 9/11 indicated that Western intelligence services saw the movement as linked with terrorism, and it was associated with the airliner bomb plotters of August 2006 and the 7/7 bombers who had prayed at Tablighi mosques as a non-violent, but intolerant, gateway organisation for global jihadists (Sunday Times, 27/11/05; Times, 17/08/06; Observer, 24/09/06; Spectator, 03/01/07). The movement was defended as a peaceful faith movement by the Muslim press (Muslim News, 30/03/07) and Faisal Iqbal, a spokesperson for the mosque, put the counter-argument for the Jama’at as a force for deradicalization that was actively co-operating with the police:

_We are moving people away from extremist views. We work with Special Branch and the Metropolitan Police. If we were preaching something extremist, they’d be all over us._ (‘Park and Pray’, Building.co.uk, Issue 13, 04/04/08)

However, it is largely the case that the movement was very slow to respond to the hostile press coverage, and, in the words of their former architect, Ali Mangera, they were ‘frightened off by the opposition’ to the larger project of 70,000 and ‘should have responded to the criticism . . . instead of remaining silent for three years’ (Evening Standard, 30/04/07). It seems plausible, although further research would be needed to confirm it, that their change of plan was forced on the Jama’at, and that their response was to scale down the project and seek the protection of a professional PR agency; a spokesperson frankly described the former plans as ‘naive’ (Newham Recorder, 25/04/07). Yet they retained the confidence (i) to carry on with what was still a very large project and (ii) to refuse offers of help from
other Muslim organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain, or to turn up to a local debate hosted by the Muslim community on the mosque and, to this extent, it seems that the Jama'at was prepared to take on the consequences of a higher public profile on its own, which a marked change from its earlier and historical aversion to publicity of any sort. The argument over the ‘Mega’ Mosque provides an interesting test case on the limits of multicultural tolerance in a post-9/11 environment.

Case study 2: Regent Road Mosque, Stoke-on-Trent

The British National Party, established in 1980, is a fringe far-right political party, whose main policies are to end and then reverse immigration, repeal anti-discrimination laws and to take Britain out of the European Union. Since the election of its second chairman, Nick Griffin, in 1999, it has increasingly adopted a focus on attacking Islam, which has brought it its greatest success so far – from its first local councillor in 1993 to 56 altogether in 2008. In Stoke-on-Trent, a declining industrial city in the West Midlands with a population of 240,000, the BNP’s strategy was to attack the main centre-left Labour Party’s record on economic issues concerning the working classes, along with attacking the asylum seekers like the Czech Roma (Times Education Supplement, 04/06/04) and the local, mainly Pakistani, Muslim community, comprising 3.2% of the local population (2001 Census). The BNP has made steady electoral progress in Stoke-on-Trent. Two local councillors were elected in 2003 and 2004 and then rising over successive local elections to nine by May 2008. This success contributed to the collapse of the Labour Party vote after sixty years of political dominance: from holding all sixty seats in 2000 in Stoke, Labour held only fifteen seats in 2008 (with twelve coming from the four wards where ethnic minorities are more predominant). Employment in the main pottery industry has fallen to a tenth of its size thirty years earlier, employing only 6,000, and trade unionism and familial allegiance to Labour has fallen with it (Guardian, G2, 28/05/08).

In August 2005, the BNP began a campaign to oppose the building of a £1.5 million, purpose-built ‘central’ mosque and community centre in Regent Road, in the Hanley area of Stoke-on-Trent, for which planning permission had been sought in October 2000 and granted in January 2001. The land, vacant since 1992 (which the council had failed to sell on two occasions), was offered to the Muslim community for a nominal rent of £1; the BNP claimed, on the other hand, that the council was giving away valuable land worth hundreds of thousands of pounds (Independent, 22/05/06). Some 20,000 leaflets were distributed in the area claiming that the mosque would be an ‘eyesore’, with prayers being heard
throughout the city; the leaflets featured a silhouetted mosque next to terraced housing and said, ‘Is this what you want for Stoke?’ (Guardian, 22/04/06). Another successful leaflet said,

‘Hanley 70 years ago,’ it reads above a montage of photos of the church tower, pottery kilns and smiling housewives. ‘Is this what you want for our city centre?’ it says below, next to silhouettes of mosques and a picture of three women in niqab, one of whom is raising two fingers to the camera. (Guardian, G2, 28/05/08)

The mosque’s director, Rana Tufail, defended the project by saying that it would be ‘a credit to the city in terms of its use and architectural stature’, that it would be entirely funded from community donations, and that all application procedures had been properly adhered to (Sentinel, 17/05/05).

Another 5,000 leaflets were distributed in North Staffordshire by the BNP in March 2006 depicting the Prophet Muhammad and some radical Muslim marchers protesting the Danish Cartoons Affair (BBC News, Staffordshire, 02/04/06), in the run-up to the 2006 local elections. The BNP offered £100,000 to purchase the mosque land and build affordable housing on the site (BBC News, Staffordshire, 25/07/06), however the land was not up for sale. A report into the scheme concluded that the application was in order and it was approved fully in September 2006 (Sentinel, 03/01/09), delayed by over 12 months because of the BNP’s protests. Building work began on the site in January 2008 with completion scheduled for August 2009 (Sentinel, 03/01/09).

There was also local opposition to the amplification of the call to prayer (adhan) from the mosque, linking it to the Islamization of the city and the rise of terrorism (The Sentinel, 05/07/08; 28/07/09). In preparation for the June 2009 election of the council leader, the BNP candidate, Alby Walker, pledged to scrap the agreement with the mosque for a community centre on the mosque site (Sentinel, 01/01/09) if he was successfully elected, while the mosque spokesman defended its value as a ‘multicultural centre’ (Sentinel/01/01/09; 01/03/09). A letter to the local newspaper rejected that claim saying, ‘in my opinion, it’s a monstrosity. To say it is for all the community is a nonsense…. I would go the ends of the earth to stop it.’ (Sentinel, 09/01/09)

The BNP’s campaign has not succeeded to date in halting the approval process for the mosque or the community centre between 2005–2009, and throughout the Muslim community had the support of the Labour group as well as the other main parties, an increasing number of independent councillors, and the churches. Nonetheless the fear the building of the mosque raised about Islamization of the city centre, seen as a threat to Britishness, alongside other anxieties relating to high unemployment, education and housing regeneration
policies, led to significant BNP representation at council level and a near displacement of the formerly hegemonic Labour Party.

**Conclusion**

Both the two case studies point towards the power of the purpose-built mosque, with its dome, minaret and arabesques, as an Islamic symbol. For Muslim communities or movements, building one is a powerful statement of commitment, of marking the land as sacred. Yet as these studies indicate, in times of controversy, that commitment is potentially seen as an alien cultural invasion, of an overturning of social solidarity (represented either by the *modus vivendi* of ‘super-diversity’ or by the hallowed and pure English space) and of home which becomes unfamiliar and foreign. Steeples are replaced by minarets, housewives by veiled Muslim women, and Olympic prowess by religious puritanism. It is not just the mosque, dome and minaret as symbols *per se* that arouses such hostility but they are also felt to wrongfully occupy a space of high prestige (the Olympic village, the town centre) or are simply too large, too overpowering, as was the case with the ‘Mega’ Mosque. Whatever the legal framework and mundane procedure that in many instances has led to the banalization of mosque building, these exemplary cases of controversy indicate that the much more subtle matter of legitimacy and acceptance, that lie beyond policy and law, is still undecided and up for grabs, and is bound up with the challenge that the symbol of the mosque really represents, which is the full acceptance of those who pray in the mosque, who have demonstrably sought to establish their most central religious institution as a commitment to Britain as a home.

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Mosques in France: vectors of normalization of Islam on a local scale
Omero Marongiu-Perria

Thanks to its migratory history and its colonial past, France is distinguished from other Western European countries by its special relation with Islam and Muslims. France is the European country that has developed the idea of secularism furthest, with total separation between the State and religious institutions. At the same time France has accommodated on its soil the first Jewish, Buddhist and Muslim communities, a large proportion of the total population. Muslims, mainly North African descendants, were the last to arrive en masse. They were gradually equipped with infrastructures pertaining to their faiths and beliefs, giving them a stronger visibility. This visibility raised several issues that have not been resolved to date. In this article, we will attempt to present these issues and draw up a general picture of the current situation of mosques in France.

Population, migrations and Muslims in France

As of 1 January, 2009, France counts a little more than 65 million inhabitants, with 62 million of them living in Metropolitan France. France and Ireland have the highest fertility rate in Europe, with its 2.14 children per woman, and a positive migratory balance. The country as a whole has kept a constant population growth. France has a long tradition of welcoming immigrants, and counts approximately 5.7% alien residents, 10% of whom are naturalized immigrants or descendants of immigrants. If one goes back to the generation of grandparents, more than

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1 The figures presented come from statistical studies carried out by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies.
20% of the French population have immigration lineage. Approximately half the immigrants in France are from North Africa (Maghreb) and 12% from Asia and Turkey. The immigrants are mainly located in the mining sites and industrial zones of France. Paris and its suburbs absorb more than 40% of immigrants, followed by the Southern and Eastern regions with approximately 10% of total immigrants. Regions like Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Aquitaine are facing declines in the amount of immigrants, whose numbers have dropped below the national average.

**Difficulty related to counting the Muslims of France**

An estimation of the Muslim population in France is very complex due to the fact that it is forbidden to carry out a census on the basis of religious belief. Figures generally provided by researchers and institutes are vague, going from 2.5 million to 6 million individuals. In 1989, Bruno Etienne spoke of the difficulty of producing quantitative data that reflected the real state of the Muslim population. However, researchers have come up with a method that helps gather data from different sources which is closer to reality. They start by recording all the statistical data of naturalized French born in a Muslim country and resident aliens from a Muslim country. The assumption is that Muslims present in France are mainly from immigrant families, and that approximately 8 children out of 10 continue to claim that they belong to Islam. For the time being, the methods of calculation of Alain Boyer, also used by the French High Council for Integration, remains the most relevant, because it takes into account the statistical data related to immigration from so-called Muslim countries, French Muslims from Algeria and an estimate of converts to Islam. The 1999 census provides us with the following data: Muslims of Maghreb origin: 2,900,000, including 1,550,000 of Algerian origin, 1,000,000 of Moroccan origin and 350,000 of Tunisian origin. Arabs from the Middle East: 100,000. Turks: 315,000. Sub-Saharan Africans: 250,000. Converts: 40,000. Requesting asylum and illegal aliens: 350,000. Asian: 100,000. Others: 100,000. From a total amount of 4,155,000 ‘sociological’ Muslims in the early 2000s, a little more than 3 million declared themselves as such. Beyond the inaccuracies relating to this number, Alain Boyer’s figures confirm quite clearly that the majority profile of the Muslims has a direct link to colonial and/or migratory history, while other European countries, such as Germany or Great Britain, have welcomed immigrants mainly from Turkish and Indo-Pakistani communities. Thus, successive censuses have revealed an evolution in France towards a foreign population.

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2 Bruno Etienne, France and Islam, Hatchet, 1989. Considerations on the production of the figures are found in the Introduction, p 45 to 53, and chapters III and IV.


made up of a majority of Maghrebians, with since the 1960s a number from Algeria equalling that from Portugal. Concurrently to this majority profile, one can count a certain number of converts, with a broad estimate going from 30,000 to 100,000 of people, based on the records of large mosques and Muslim federations, and data provided by the Bureau of Worship of the Ministry of the Interior. Converts could be classified in three major categories: converts to spiritual search such as Sufism, converts through marriage, or converts through social proximity in the suburbs.\(^5\)

**A very specific legislation on religions**

Approximately 51%\(^6\) of French people declare that they are Catholic but only 7% of them practise their religion on a regular basis. On the contrary, 40% of the population consider themselves atheist.

From the official standpoint, non-profit organizations are governed by the Law of 1 July 1901 (*le loi du premier Juillet 1901*). On the other hand, religious organizations and associations are governed by the ‘loi du 9 Décembre 1905’, also known as the Law of Separation of the State and the Church. One of the aims of this law was to make compromises that allowed believers to have public activities and services related to their faith (at the time it mostly targeted Catholics). This law relating to worship in France was created from the principle of absolute neutrality of the State with regard to worship. However, two points should be mentioned here. First, places of worship, mainly churches built before 1905, were under the responsibility of the government as regarded maintenance and management, and granted free use to believers; an agreement that went back to a specific chapter in French history. Secondly, the 1905 law did not intend to standardize modes of worship over the whole of French territory (thus the concordat is still in force in Alsace and the Moselle). Moreover, the intervention of the religious authorities in the public field was recognized, in a more or less official way, through the National Committee of Ethics, the High Council for Integration, the Episcopal adviser at the disposal of Members of Parliament, and the religious authorities entrusted with certain mediatory missions, as was seen in the case of the conflict in New Caledonia. Islam was also managed by the 1905 law, but it is important to note that during the colonial era the law of separation of State and Church was not applied in the departments of French Algeria. Article 12 of the law stipulates for example that ‘buildings [ . . . ] are used for the public exercise of


worship [. . .](cathedrals, churches, vaults, synagogues, archbishops’ palaces, bishoprics, presbyteries, seminars), without mentioning buildings for Muslim worship. For its part, article 43 mentioned that public administration rules would determine the conditions under which the law (the 1905 law) was to be applied in Algeria and the colonies. The colonialist lobby of Algeria was to play an active role in holding back the application of the law in non-metropolitan French.

**The political situation in France and the vision of Islam**

By its Constitution of 4 October, 1958, France is defined as a secular, democratic and social Republic. The current President, Nicolas Sarkozy, was elected at the last Presidential elections that took place in May 2007. He belongs to the political family of UMP (Union for Popular Movement), the main Republican Party, in power since the elections of 1995. When Nicolas Sarkozy was Minister of the Interior he played a major role in the emergence of the French Council of the Muslim cult, created in 2003 into a system of representativeness of Muslim places of worship. Generally, the far-right parties developed an anti-Muslim discourse in the media and public arena in the early 80s, a period during which the first questions related to the practice of Islam were starting to raise questions and fears in the French political community. The two principal figures are Jean-Marie le Pen, President of the National Front, and Bruno Maigret, President of the National Republican Movement. However, the existence of Islamophobic discourses within left-wing parties as well as right-wing encouraged researchers in social sciences to develop the concept of Islamophobia⁷ to qualify this sentiment of rejection with respect to the expression of Muslim identity in the French public space. On their side, the French Muslims had not organized themselves as a political body. The only existing party with any Muslim connotation was the Party of the Muslims of France (PMF), with at its head Mohamed Ennacer Latrèche. Established in Strasbourg in 1997, it failed to gain any credibility within the Muslim community owing to its radical position, but also through the absence of Muslim unity around any religious factors that might act as a catalyst for a dynamics of political action.

**The mosque, major anchoring point for Islamic visibility**

The mosque is the principal place of celebration of the Muslim religion. But it also plays a very important role for community sociability. France counts a large numbers of mosques, in constant expansion since the 1970s, thanks to the will

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of the Muslims but also thanks to the support of the Catholic Church and, to a
certain extent, the French public authorities. More recently, a representative body
for the Muslim religion has emerged, but is still struggling to find a unified Islamic
voice in France.

A very particular genesis of the mosques in France

It was around the year 1926 that the first great building project for a place of wor‑
ship dedicated to the Muslims, decided since 1849 by France within the framework
of its colonial policy, saw the light. The Paris Mosque and its Islamic Institute
were created, under the control of the ‘Society of the habous and Holy places of
Islam’, founded in Algiers in 1917, because the secular government could not offi‑
cially direct a religious establishment. That would not prevent the Company of the
habous from being transformed into a legal association, by a 1901 law, and benefit
from a State grant and the Paris town hall. At that time, the Paris mosque repre‑
sented a few thousand Muslims present primarily in the Paris region. The his‑
tory of the Paris mosque has been marked by repeated ups and downs that have
put it alternately under the authority of the French and Algerian Governments.
Needed as the instrument of the legitimacy and representativeness of Muslims,
the mosque was subjected to many controversies in the two states and would
never succeed in fulfilling its initial role. Not having established close contacts
with successive waves of migrants, the mosque would never be recognized by the
mass of Muslims as the federative authority of their aspirations. Its construction
illustrated, right from the start, the distance that was going to separate institu‑
tional Islam from the Islam of the suburbs, which would later become the Islam
of the districts. At the present time, the Muslim Institute of the Paris Mosque
maintains very close links with the Algerian Ministry of Religious Affairs, which
provides it with imams in charge of the religious and official affairs of the mosque
and reports directly to the Ministry, which has the responsibility of covering the
major part of its budget, as well as the salary of those presiding over worship.

During the 1970s, some 600 places of worship were created, thanks to the
economic opportunities that the Muslims were offered. In spite of the legislation
in force at the time concerning the right of association, and the rather conflicting
relations maintained with the Paris Mosque, the provision of buildings or rooms
to celebrate religious office there was to be facilitated at the same time by initia‑
tives on the part of the Catholic world and the ‘goodwill’ of the public authori‑
ties. Part of the problem, initially, was to be solved by the provision of buildings
belonging to the Church. At the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, and
through the good offices of the Pastoral of Migrants, the Episcopate launched
a policy of rapprochement with Muslims, by lending, renting or selling them
places of worship. However, with the beginning of the year 1980, the Episcopate changed course and showed itself to be more prudent in granting concessions to followers of the religion of Muhammad. The reason put forward at the time was in order not to place themselves in an awkward position with a militant base, certain elements of which did not see the retrocession of buildings marked with a Catholic imprint with favour. International upheavals related to the seizure of power in Iran by Khomeini, and the recrudescence of acts of terrorism in the Middle East, were no strangers here. But already since the middle of the 1970s the State, as well as various local institutions, had become the privileged interlocutors of the Muslims.

The first claims of a religious nature received positive feedback from the public authorities, which, during the 1970s, took several measures to grant places of prayer to the Muslims. Adopted in the general indifference of the political parties, these measures stated clearly that Islam did not represent at the time a major stake in the political plan. For the representatives of the State, the positive response to the religious claims represented to some extent the price to be paid to stabilize the situation on the social and economic plane. The first significant step was taken at the conclusion of the ‘rent strike’ of the Maghrebian tenants of the Sonacotra foyers in 1975, during which the latter laid their first claims in religious matters, demanding the opening of prayer rooms in the foyers. At the time, the State sought to clear up the situation of immigrants and in 1975 named Paul Dijoud as Secretary of State for immigrant workers. This remodelling was carried out in order to take into account the particular needs of Muslims, in particular following the circular of 29 December, 1976 ‘relating to the cultural activities of the immigrants’. It was requested by the Prefects (local government authority) to install places of worship as well as means of cultural education in favour of immigrants, and in connection with their country of origin. For the government the political price of Islam seemed unimportant at the time, but the economic costs were already being felt by the Federation of Employers (CNPF). The government of the time suggested to the CNPF to allow Muslim holidays to become official holidays, like Christmas holidays, and to facilitate the practice of Ramadan fasting.

The second point of anchorage of places of prayer was their establishment in factories. In October 1976, the majority of the Muslim workers of Renault Billancourt signed a petition for a prayer room. The head of the company gave a favourable answer, seeing this as a way of compensating the distress of the immigrants through spirituality. For the executives, it was also a way of containing the heat of these employees, through the control of the imams, who were indirectly in charge of them. At the same time, the CGT (one of the major unions)
nominated itself as the spokesperson for Islamic claims in the factory, in order to get the support of this mass of workers and to obtain leadership over the other company unions.$^8$

The third point of the installation of mosques in the districts of the great urban areas was to address the question of ‘how to transmit what we are to our children’.$^9$ So the opening of prayer rooms and the creation of Islamic associations represented a way of taking over the process of sedentarisation through the children. In this period it is important to note the presence on French soil of Muslim intellectuals, and the proselyting action of some preachers among immigrant workers. But the majority of the actions during the whole of the 1970s were the fruit of the migrants themselves, and showed the provisional character of the Muslim presence in France. One could interpret this attitude as a sign of their integration in general within France, whose political and legal framework they accepted.

For Gilles Kepel, this period of extension of the Muslim associative park sees the emergence of new leaders. It is the time of the arrival en masse of students, coming from the Middle East or Maghreb countries, many among them taking at the same time an active share in the organization of courses of religion and Arab language in the places of worship, as also in the structural organization of the mosques. These students and these cadres, of whom a large part had already been members of, or in contact with, Islamic movements in Arab countries, were to become leaders in the claims relating to the recognition of worship, and the application of legal dispositions to facilitate respect for Muslim obligations of worship.

From national to local, various configurations

Three great Muslim federations claimed to have control or exert influence over the majority of existing associations. No research has made it possible so far to measure the trustworthiness of the data spread by the Paris Mosque, the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF) and the National Federation of Muslims of France (FNMF). However, we can estimate according to the national or ideological affiliation of Islamic associations that these three structures exerted their influence on approximately half of the 2,100 listed places of prayer. The principal Islamic structures identified at the national level geared their actions continually to one of the Islamic movements in Muslim countries or under the authority of a foreign government. Despite their divisions and competition for the

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$^9$ Ibid., p 160.
status of being the main Muslim representatives with the public authorities, this Federation represented an important interlocutor for the State.

Besides, the Government was pushing for the equipping of Muslim associations with a representative body, following the example of the other religious bodies in France. From the beginning of 1980 to the installation of the French Council of Muslim Religion (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman) in 2003 however, the government wavered for so long in getting directly involved, as if to create the suspicion that it wished to impose a representative structure ‘from the top’, and an attitude of withdrawal tarnishing the credibility of the Muslim attempts. Last in date of the multiple attempts at organizing Islamic worship in France, the election of the CFCM seems to have retained the support of the majority of associations and the Muslim federation. The CFCM was the result of several abortive attempts, from the Council of Reflection on Islam in France (CORIF), initiated by the minister Pierre Joxe in 1989, until the various attempts on the part of the State or by the very antagonistic Muslim federations. It was following all these attempts that in 1999 the Istichâra (Consultation) of Jean-Pierre Chevènement was formed, and resulted in the election of the CFCM in 2003. The current composition of CFCM reflects the subtle alchemy of the State aiming at finding a balance between the various national and ideological sensibilities of Islam in France. Members were elected and co-opted at the same time at all levels of the CFCM. Qualified persons were added to these, representing the cultural dimension of Islam and compensating for the lack of male-female parity within it.

As for the executive office, it resulted from a preliminary negotiation for fair distribution of posts among the Muslim main confederations. The CRCM were elected following the same model, with however much less space allowed for co-opted people. They were organized in associations according to the law of 1901, and were composed of a general assembly, an administration council, an executive office and various commissions supposed to work on the principal projects and programmes related to the practice of the Muslim religion in different areas. If the central organ of the CFCM followed the political decisions of the State, and the strategic moves of the great Muslim federations of the Hexagon, the Regional Councils of Muslim Religion could be considered, for their part, as reflecting the concrete situation of the places of worship at the local level.

**Focus on the French Muslim religious landscape of today**

There are currently more than 2,000 Muslim places of worship on French territory, according to the data of the Ministry of the Interior and the directories of
the principal French community sites. These places are located in the principal French urban areas and follow the history of the establishment of immigrations coming from Muslim countries, with a clearly visible ethnic and national division. For example, it is common to see in the old coalfields and industrial areas of the North, East and South-East of France that Moroccans, Algerians or Turks dominate places of worship. In the same way, these past years have seen what we can describe as ‘the passing of Islam from the cellars to the Islam of the disused factories’, with a multiplication of projects for the construction of large mosques in industrial wastelands. There is still a clear lack of analysis in France regarding the characteristics of Muslim places of worship. At the present time, there exists one exhaustive regional diagnosis of Muslim places of worship and analysis of the needs of Islamic worship. That however has not prevented researchers from working out typologies of these places of worship. Ahmed Boubekeur and Herve Paris have constructed one of them on a primarily geographical criterion, according to site:

- in the peripheral districts of the great urban centres; they note a multiplicity of places of worship of small size, established in multiple sub-districts;
- in the popular areas of the medium-sized towns, the Muslims privilege a place of worship of intermediate size, quite well-equipped;
- in districts with HLM of intermediate size isolated in the outplaced suburbs, generally, one can find a single place of worship, in most cases small;
- in the old districts in town: one or more mosques of intermediate size close to each other, well equipped;
- in the medium-sized towns of the suburbs: a single mosque, of average or large size, well equipped.


This diagnosis was carried out over the period 2000–2001 by the Regional Resource Center on Interculturality and the fight against discriminations in the North-Not-of-Hampton. Regional diagnosis of Muslim places of worship. 110 places of worship were charted and analysed. It will be remembered that Le Monde, in its edition of 24 May, 2000, published a chart of the 1,536 Muslim places of worship listed by the Ministry of the Interior to date.

Bernard Godard and Sylvie Taussig propose a typology in three categories: large mosques or cathedral mosques and 'wasteland' mosques, house mosques, and small places of worship and precarious places. If today it is almost impossible to count the number of places of worship in each category precisely, the diagnosis of places of worship in the North of France since the beginning of the 2000s clearly confirms the evolution of local projects, from simple places of worship to larger, cultural centres. The Bureau of Worship of the Ministry for the Interior counted thus, to the end of 2008, several dozen projects and each one of them evaluated at several million euros each. The local Muslim communities thus share with other religious communities the same idea of polyvalence of places of worship, which are not solely intended for the celebration of prayer, but also for the control of training activities of religion and culture, as well as community regrouping at various times of life and at the time of great annual feasts. Also, if in the year 2000 there existed hardly ten large mosques erected specifically for the practice of worship, today there are several hundred projects for the construction, relocalization or rehabilitation of mosques, which are very rapidly transforming the landscape of Muslim worship. However one may wonder about the extent of the projects of large mosques developed over these past years. The arguments stated by the developers of Muslim projects systematically consist of affirming that there is a lack of space for the practice of worship. As mosques are considered at the same time places of prayer and places of communal cultural regrouping, Muslims consider it necessary to build or rehabilitate buildings of larger size. If we take into account the sociological data indicating the advanced secularization of the religious behaviour of Muslims and the cyclic character of the community practices of worship, in particular according to the great feasts of the year, we can note that the managers of the Muslim association over-estimated both their capacities of self-financing and the surface necessary to carry on their religious and cultural projects. In the absence of sufficient funds to get started, the mosque projects were thus being spread out over a long period of time, generally approximately ten years, which is considerable.

Recurring difficulties for the financing of mosques

That brings us to the question of the financing of mosques, which rests above all on the receiving of funds coming from the gifts of the faithful. Indeed, there exist today very few mosque building projects supported by funds from financial or commercial activities managed by Muslim foundations or companies related to religious works, like those existing in Muslim countries. Some economic activities

15 Cf. ‘Le financement des mosquées en France . . .’, op. cit.
are beginning to be developed in certain great places of worship in order to take charge of the expensive maintenance costs. In the geographical plan, we can count four great funding sources of Muslim places of worship. The first, counting for the large majority, comes from private gifts from believers. The second comes from donations given in other mosques of the urban area or region. This is a kind of relation of present and counter-present, where the persons in charge of the mosque accommodate their co-religionists by allowing them to come to collect gifts, knowing that they themselves will ask their guests to reciprocate in the near future. The third source of funding is national, even European; we can note in this case a regular back and forth of the mosque’s project managers travelling between France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. In this kind of journey it is enough for the same persons in charge to cross enough important distance on several occasions to collect a few thousand euros. The fourth source of funding, with a non-European dimension, must for its part be correctly circumscribed. The expression ‘financing coming from the Gulf’, largely used by the media, refers to donors, in general emirs from these countries, or foreign investors who have made their fortunes in the Gulf. These donors collect during the year, but more particularly during the month of Ramadan, bearers of Muslim projects from the whole world, so also from Europe. These are sometimes provided with recommendations, called *tazkiyah*, on the part of great Muslim federations, in order to reinforce the credibility of their projects.

Finally, the only gifts coming from the States are those obtained by the Great mosque of Lyon, built with a ‘personal’ financing of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. Putting aside precise cases of this type, the only structure having the capacity to inject large amounts of money into targeted projects is the World Islamic League, a private Saudi institution which maintains close links with the Saudi government. This has an office in France and has financed large-scale projects like the mosque at Mantes-La-Jolie. Its investment is very important as, after having validated a project, it deals with not only construction but also all the maintenance costs. The only explicitly formulated condition is the inscription in the statute of the association that in the event of dissolution or of discontinuance of business the inheritance will be bequeathed to the World Islamic League. Apart from the financing channels, there does not exist any occult network for the benefit of mosques, except to consider that Muslims have a propensity for ‘miserabilism’ and not using received funds or systematically diverting them. On the other hand, the media continue to largely feed the legend of the supposed
financing capacities of the mosques, which continues to reduce the comprehension of the reality of Islam to a local scale.\textsuperscript{16}

**Islam is normalized by the visibility of worship**

The mosque thus represents the principal element of visibility pertaining to Islamic worship. The problems involved in the refusal to build places of worship on the part of municipalities, if they persist until today, are however much fewer than in the 1980s and 1990s, the sign of a rather more benevolent view of the State and public opinion on the expression of Muslim worship. At the same time, the Muslims of France have made the choice of discretion, not only in the sober architecture of the very great majority of the mosques, as in the public absence of the call to prayer. At bottom the \textit{adh\=an} is subject to the same restrictions as the ringing of church bells, controlled by article 27 of the Law of 9 December, 1905, relating to the separation of Church and State, which severely specifies: ‘The ringing of bells will be regulated by local by-laws and, in the event of dissent between the Mayor and the President or Director of the association of worship, by order of the Prefect’. On their side, Muslims have made a choice of not claiming anything that could raise controversies against them.

Muslims however have increased their claims to the possibility of having Muslim burials in cemeteries. On this subject, it should be mentioned that denominational cemeteries have not existed in France since the Law of 14 November, 1881. The only exception is the cemetery of Bobigny, inaugurated in 1937, in which all the tombs face towards Mecca, and where there is no common grave. However, the massive arrival in the metropolis of repatriated Muslim French settlers from Algeria will encourage the public authorities to a certain pragmatism. Without calling into question the non-denominational character of the cemeteries, the Ministerial circular of 28 November, 1975, granted ‘the possibility for mayors to authorize Muslim cemeteries in their town in order to make it possible for French Muslims to have their own squares’. Later circulars would confirm this possibility for town councillors, with certain restrictions such as for example the obligation to bury the deceased in a coffin and not directly in the ground, conditions that are observed by Muslims.

\textsuperscript{16} Observe the covers of the large national magazines with recurrent stories devoted to the ‘secret fundings’ of Islam in France.
The reality of mosques in France through two cases studies

The elements presented previously indicate that in France, the town councilor represents the keystone of the relations between the public authorities and Muslims. It is indeed on this level that one finds the most important points of tension between Muslim communities and representatives of the communities, and where we can analyse precisely the strategies of the various actors. It is thus certainly by starting from the local scale that the questions related with the practice and the visibility of Islam will find their best answers. As mentioned in the title above, this will be illustrated through two case studies concerning re-localization projects of a mosque in the town of Roubaix, a municipality in the north with a significant Muslim presence and the town of Bobigny, located in the Paris suburb. The first case could be seen as an ideal sociological type, and we have been able as researchers to draw up an analysis of the different types of transaction between religious communities and the local government.

A. Construction of a new mosque in the town of Roubaix

The site of the study

Second agglomeration of the urban community of Lille, with nearly 100,000 inhabitants, Roubaix for a long time represented one of the most flourishing examples of the French textile industry. Certain researchers estimate that the original population where Islam was a majority religion was practically 40% of the town population, which is a considerable proportion. The statistical data on the geographical distribution of populations indicate that out of the 13 districts that account for the town, some have a strong community concentration. In Roubaix, the ingredients of the configuration of Islam in France are perfectly visible, in particular through a weak and cyclical rate of frequentation of places of worship, an ethno-national distribution of places of worship, a hiatus between the old and new generations.

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17 The practical case presented in this part comes from a European action research entitled Cults and social cohesion. Construction of social participation in religious difference: local Muslim communities in Europe, supported by the European commission, within the framework of the European Programme of Fight against Discrimination and for fundamental social rights and civil society (Article 13 of the Treaty of the Union) of one/two years’ duration (09/2002–08/2004). Coordination was ensured for it by the Research institute, Formation and Action on Migrations (IRFAM), based in Liège, in Belgium, under the direction of Altay Manço and Spyros Amoranitis. The aim of the research consisted in studying the way in which local governments manage religious diversity, and in particular the Muslim presence and its mosques. Cf Omero Marongiu-Perria, ‘From the cellar to the landscape park . . . Stakes around the relocalization of a mosque in Roubaix’, in Recognition of Islam in the communes of Europe, under the direction of Altay Manço and Spyros Amoranitis, in Harmattan, April 2005.

18 This second case has been extracted from a field study conducted for the Town of Bobigny during the year 2007. The study helped the team produce a final report called ‘Expertise du projet de centre culturel et cultuel musulman de Bobigny’.
in their relationship with Islam, very peripheral phenomena of radicalism, places of worship generally managed by rather old migrants. The Muslim population of the city is characterized by its heterogeneity. Coming mainly from the Maghreb, the Muslim immigrants can be divided into two principal groups, those coming from Algeria – with a strong proportion of repatriates (harkis) – and those coming from Morocco and, in a much smaller proportion, from Turkey, Tunisia and Black Africa. This situation has a whole series of intra-community divisions, Algerians above all, but also between Algerians and Moroccans, in particular for the management of places of worship, where the Algerian element is dominant. The Turkish population goes to the mosque managed by the Islamic religious organization of the Turks in the North of France. It is thus difficult to talk about the existence of a local ‘Muslim community’ strictly speaking. One could say, in extreme cases, that the concept of oummah, or ‘community’, plays a strongly symbolic role, but is lacking in any kind of concrete structure both at the local and national level.

The construction project for a new mosque

The city counts eight Muslim places of worship, of which six have an official existence for the local public authorities, the other two being more like backrooms rearranged for the older persons in the neighbourhood. One of these places of worship is managed by the Afro-Islamic Association, or 2AI, and is in a bicycle garage located in a low-rent public sector house (HLM) in the Epeule district. The Muslims have been requesting a new place of worship since the end of the year 1970. The directing body of the Association reflects the composition of the Muslim population of the district, mainly Moroccan. In 1999, the Association asked for the town hall to facilitate the acquisition of a new place of worship that would meet the current demands of the community. This point was put to the town council of 21 December, 2000, but the project gave rise to a battle of words at the political level, with an action launched by the extreme right wing during the election campaign, where with the local commercial union they protested against the choice of the site earmarked at the beginning for the relocation of this place of worship. The dossier moved along, until the end of the year 2002, in four stages. The town hall first of all chose to acquire, after a municipal debate on the subject, an old service station measuring 400 square metres, situated at the head of the main street in the district, and then to sign a long lease with the 2AI association. However, the street was also Commercial Street, which was registered in the programme that was part of the revitalization of the district. The traders drew up a petition against the installation of a place of worship, officially pointing out the inconsistency of the new use of the service station at the head of
Commercial Street. In order to protect the different sensibilities at play here, the town hall then chose another place located in the wasteland of an old factory site in the neighbourhood. The Association appreciated the place because it bordered the inhabited area, and was very close to the new landscape park that the town hall intended to create by extending an existing park. The site was so old that the building was destined for demolition. The third stage was to open a series of consultations, under the authority of the district mayor, between the inhabitants’ association of the district, the architectural department of the Town Hall, and the Association. This was the period of time that followed the events of 11 September, 2001. The fourth stage was the time to make a political decision. After having initiated a series of consultations with the members of all religious denominations present in the city, concerned about the inherent needs for the practice of their faith, the mayor wanted to set up a ‘framework discussion’19, specifying the commitments of the city, in respect of the provisions of the Law on Separation dating back to 1905, for each place of worship requiring, if necessary, an intervention of public bodies. The decision to grant a plot of land on long lease to the Association within the future landscape park in the Epeule district was ratified.

A rather long political decision-making process
The decision to grant a plot of land on long lease to the 2AI Association was thus ratified by this debate, during a town council meeting held on 19 December, 2002. It was then a question of proceeding to completely demolish the industrial wasteland, in order to hand over a plot of land to the Association. A second round of debate was voted on during the meeting of the town council on 16 October, 2003 – almost a year after the vote during the initial deliberation. The rather long intervals between the political decision-making and its effective implementation were considered too spaced out by certain members of the Association, who, not seeing the start of any clearing work on the industrial wasteland since the time the framework discussions had taken place, began to doubt the good intentions of the municipality. The president of the Association came up against the insistence of certain faithful who were strongly in favour of buying a house or a shop in order to install the new place of worship there. But the fact of the visibility that the new mosque would have within the future landscape park over-rode the eagerness of these faithful. In parallel, questions about the long lease seemed to have found unanimous favour with the leaders of the Association. There

19 The ‘framework debate’ established the general orientation of the town hall as regards direct or indirect actions for the religion. Later on, each place of worship had to be discussed in specific terms in order to establish the exact nature and cost of the commitment. This debate, which was prepared in consultation with the elected members of the opposition parties in the municipality, was welcomed by all the political groups excepting the Far-right party.
might be contradictions, according to them, with the statutes of the mosque, which, according to Islam, would be regarded as a *waqf* or property bequeathed to perpetuity, without the possibility of retrocession. Following the framework discussions, the municipality had fixed three conditions for the leaders of the Association: to comply with the provisions of the law of 1905, in order to guarantee free access to all the faithful; to guarantee the transparency of the financing, and to avoid finances coming from countries with a ‘negative’ reputation; and to see that the new association would be representative of all Muslims in the district, and not only those coming from Morocco.

On its side, the Association entrusted an architect to develop the plan for a large mosque within the future landscape park. At the same time, the municipality decided to entrust the follow-up of the mosque project to the Directorate-General of the ‘Ville Renouvelée’, which supervised all rehabilitation projects in the town districts. The involvement of each partner led to the organization of a meeting at the Town Hall on 20 May, 2003, during which several decisions were taken:

– The municipality reiterated its formal commitment to grant a place to the new mosque inside the future landscape park; and at the same time, reiterated the stipulations relating to the surface area, namely 600 square metres for a neighbourhood mosque, with possible small differences that might be made according to the project to be presented.

– The nature of the project, drawn up on land that fell in the public domain, would mean a stricter control of the architectural project by the State, but the granting of the building permit would be quicker as long as requirements were adhered to; a schedule complete with the dates of future meetings was to be worked out for the handing-over of the complete file describing the project for the future mosque, with the architectural scale model.

– The Association’s architect would be in direct contact with the Town Hall planning department to facilitate and exchange information.

To overcome these concerns, a decision was taken to circulate the maximum of information and to maintain contact with all the people involved in the project. The municipality had made a firm contract, which was drawn up in explicit terms, but the questions posed by the elected district official on the appropriateness of the cultural component of the project raised fears once again concerning the possible postponement of the file. In fact, the 2AI association had made it known that it intended to continue with the teaching of Arab-Muslim culture in an adjacent area not connected with religious matters. This modified the architectural
plan, which presented a frame where the spaces devoted to worship and cultural activities were quite distinct. Apparently, the municipal majority seemed largely favourable to the updated project, which was in excess of the initial surface area by 200 square metres, but new reactions were on their way and would be made known at the end of the town council debates in December 2002.

*A negotiating time that was prolonged*

These debates are significant of a ‘negotiating time’ that was prolonged during all the period of 2003–2004. The stakes, as well for the municipality as for the Muslim association, were to have a set of conditions accepted considered to be fundamental for the result of the project. A few key moments were to mark out the second half-year of the year 2003. Following the development of the file presenting the complete project, a meeting was planned for 8 July, 2003, at the request of the mayor of the district, where were to be present, besides the persons in charge of the association 2AI and the architect of the project, the director of the renewed city and members of the town planning cabinet of the town hall. The aim was to assess the content of the project on the basis of a written report produced by the association. The meeting proceeded well at the date envisaged, but in the absence of the district mayor and the person in charge of the renewed city, this last having been excused beforehand. This absence threw the associative partners in disarray. On his side, the elected district official estimated that this meeting had not been taken with his initiative and that was waiting for written confirmation on the part of association.

The first consequence of this was to carry forward the discussion to the architectural project and the creation of a sense of discomfort among the persons in charge of the Muslim association. They were informed besides that the district mayor had set a veto on going beyond the initial surface of 600 square metres, and that he wanted to remove all the cultural part of the project, which, according to him, would clash with the initial qualification of a mosque. With their re-entry in September, the municipal council voted two decisions: that of 16 October, 2003, granted a subsidy for the repair of the Protestant church of Roubaix, and a long-lease plot of ground for the Buddhist association of the city rather than for the 2AI. This decision stipulated the need to create a new Muslim worship association by re-grouping the populations and the Muslim sensibilities of the district. The mayor here winked in the direction of the repatriated settlers from Algeria who, having sought a place of worship in the district for several years, felt wounded by the fact that a dominantly ‘Moroccan’ association should carry the project of the future mosque. So the text, on the basis of the 600 square metres granted at the start, left a margin of interpretation for a possible going beyond
this surface according to the arguments that the promoters of the project would present. But the interpretation of the formulation was the object of a difference between the mayor and the Muslim association. The decision of 18 December, 2003, lay down the methods of acquisition of the wasteland, communal property, but subject to carrying out a study of the grounds and to the absence of pollution.

A rise in tension and reorientation of the project

At the beginning of January 2004, more than six months after their last meeting and the vote taken during the two deliberations, the persons in charge of the 2AI association and the district mayor met again to discuss the basis of the architectural project. Having observed that no effective action had taken place on the site of the industrial wasteland, the vice-president of the Muslim association addressed a letter to the Mayor of Roubaix, on 10 December, 2003, to question him on the progress of the dossier. The Mayor rapidly responded and proposed a meeting for the end of January 2004, in order to adhere more precisely to the dates fixed for demolition and the consequent availability of the wasteland. Meanwhile, the same elected official invited the technician of the town planning cabinet and the operations manager of the Renewed City project for a technical discussion on January 6, during which recent progress would be discussed with regard to the estimated dates for clearing the waste land and the question of compliance of the association with the provisions of the law of 1905. During this meeting, just as at the meeting with the persons in charge of the 2AI, on 24 January, the district mayor was intransigent with respect to the surface area initially agreed upon, and questioned the relevance of the cultural part of the project. According to him, it would be more than what the Muslim community of the district required. The association office members did not wait to address a letter to the city mayor on the matter to resolve the disagreement they had with the district mayor. How can we interpret this hesitation on the part of the district mayor? Apart from the question of principle, this attitude was exacerbated by the convergence of several factors, making him reluctant to hurt the various sensibilities in the district. First of all, during the last quarter of the year 2003, the district mayor had been the subject of several attacks from political and association leaders blaming him for his political work and his moral uprightness as a person. For the first time since the beginning of his mandate, he had been obliged to publish a response to these attacks in the press. Then, during the month of December, the district committee had announced, in its small newspaper, that the inhabitants were impatient to see their ‘Muslim Arts Centre’ built. The district mayor was immediately challenged on the question of the Muslim arts centre, and certain persons in charge of associations and policies thought that they had detected in this wording a potential
or real competition with the *Arts Centre of the Arab World*, a secular association present in the district which did not have any link with the question of worship.

A third attack was made directly on the entire municipal team. Relayed by the press, it came from the National Front, which distributed in several districts of the town leaflets bearing the message: ‘Must our taxes be used to finance a mosque and a Buddhist temple in Roubaix?’

The Front National threatened to tackle the deliberation relating to the long lease in the prefecture and the administrative court. In response to this, the vice-president of the 2AI wrote a letter that was published on 29 October, 2003, in a newspaper. In the meantime the National Front called on the Prefect, on 24 October, 2003 to overrule the municipal deliberation. Faced by the refusal of the Prefect, the Front National then attacked the administrative court on 1 March, 2004, on the basis of the same argument. In response to the two notes successively deposited by the National Front, the municipality answered with two replying notes explaining the overall evolution of the legal processes in this project. The administrative court in its final decision took the side of the National Front because the municipality approach could be interpreted as an indirect support for worship. As a result this could be contrary to the Law of Separation. In the meantime the wasteland had been cleaned up and the lots for the future Mosque were ready.

The elected officials of the city tried to create an environment for objective debate with the Muslims. They assessed the need of the Muslim Association and looked over the effectiveness of the architectural design of the project. By then the Association had already chosen a new option for acquiring a different building in a nearby area. The city hall officially acknowledged the refusal of the Muslim association to abandon the initial project. The Mosque would be inaugurated a year later in the same industrial building after being remodelled several times.

**A project with multi-faceted repercussions**

The key words *uncertainty* and *repercussions* were adapted for the evaluation of this project for the new mosque. *Uncertainty* related to the political will, but also to the project presented by the Muslim association. On the one hand, municipal consent came with several conditions, opening up the possibility of divergent interpretations on the part of the members of the municipal team and the promoters of the future mosque. Viewed from another angle, the members of the Muslim association followed each decision-making phase with a certain degree of scepticism, the administrative delays appearing to them to be very long and the coherence of the political action quite unfathomable. Also relations between the
various participants changed with the events that occurred in local political life, some details of which have been mentioned. The combination of these various factors made the progress of the negotiations very complex. Each new repercussion could cause strained relations between one or several actors and this could result in the project being delayed yet again. In this context we could describe the simple case of the de-pollution survey discussed during the deliberations in December 2003, which aroused a whole series of suspicions on the state of the industrial waste land and the company dealing in energy matters that were set up on this plot of waste land. The residents had recently circulated a petition asking to know the exact state of the soil, and the extremist party in the city could see the possibility of putting an end to the mosque project through seeing the plot classified as being unsuitable for construction because of its supposed polluted state.

It is also appropriate to place this mosque project in a more global context. Based on our observation, there are several challenges associated with local life, among which there are specifically two that render the analysis more complex. First, at the start of the project, the importance of the park and its surroundings was underestimated. The existing park was closed, and opened only to accommodate sports events. Apart from these sports events, the park was almost inaccessible to the inhabitants of the district, who felt hurt about this, in particular during the summer season. At the beginning, the district committee managed to open the park, but the town hall took over the management of opening hours. The result for the inhabitants was that it was practically impossible to walk in the park in good weather. The district committee wanted to manage the park again, and the mosque project once again raised the question of having an open park and not a closed one in the district. There was indeed another informal place of worship in the district, attended by whole families of Algerian repatriates. After having been informed of the project concerning the new mosque, perceived as having a dominant Moroccan component, they contacted the municipality in order to be directly associated with this project. The decisions in December put forward the idea of constituting a 'representative' association for the Muslims in the district. But the question was, who could legitimately address the Muslims? The persons in charge of the 2AI responded to the municipal injunction by insisting on their French identity, thus making the repatriate argument devoid of all legitimacy.

This multiplicity of factors gave rise to questions concerning the uncovering of possible religious discrimination. From this point of view, it was not easy to isolate the elements that were specific to this relocation project to find a place for Muslim worship nor to explain this to those who participated in the negotiations. Very often the simple fact of using in-depth analysis to understand one
local situation makes it possible to see other angles, certain standpoints or decisions taken by the political and institutional actors which might have been based on discrimination. Moreover, it sometimes takes a long while to understand the role of the various actors and the coherence of interactions between the various protagonists engaged in the project, which is also another dimension of mature interpretation.

B. The Bobigny field study case
Bobigny is a town of 46,000 inhabitants and the chief town of the department (also known as Local governing body) of Seine-Saint-Denis. The inhabitants of Bobigny are from different cultural backgrounds with a population of several thousand Muslims. Muslims regularly visit the 5 major mosques of the city situated in house cellars or foyers; these five mosques can accommodate up to 1,000 Muslims. The project of building a new mosque was launched in 1997 by the Bobigny Muslim Cultural Association (Association Culturelle Musulmane de Bobigny (ACMB)). In 2002, the Muslims of Bobigny decided to create an association under the Law of 1905 (purely related to religious practice), with the name Muslim Association of Bobigny (Association des Musulmans de Bobigny (AMB)). This newly created association took over the management of the project that consisted of creating the new mosque in connection with the ACMB, which handled the cultural affairs of the project, such as language and civilization courses. The town council was in favour of the project and decided through the municipal deliberation of 25 September, 2003, to support it by providing the Muslim Association of Bobigny with 2,280 square metres of land in support of the construction of the mosque and cultural centre. Beside the support of the municipality, the project was still on hold due to the local political situation, the evolution of the AMB and its capability of carrying out the project.

The political will is not always sufficient
The late M. Birsinger, former mayor who passed away in 2006, wanted to embed the mosque and the cultural centre project in the urban planning related to the renovation of the city by offering Muslims land in the city next to the departmental archive of Seine Saint-Denis. This political will to provide the Muslim population of Bobigny with such an important piece of land would be subjected to two major incidents: the first concerning the architectural dimensions, and the problem of the mosque being on six floors; the second the difficulties created by the urban planning technicians, who planned the failure of the project by making it very
complicated for the Muslims to handle all the norms and regulations (for example, they imposed on the Muslim association to dig an underground car park of the same depth as the one at the departmental archive, which indirectly obliged them to have deeper foundations, something that was not planned in the initial AMB budget).

The political will shown at the beginning created considerable confusion between the two parties. From the town’s standpoint the contribution to the project was to offer a piece of land under a long-lease agreement. The overall budget for the project was approximately €5 million; so, from the Muslims’ perspective, the understanding was that the local authorities, namely the city hall, the local governing body, the regional governing body – would participate financially in the construction of the building by financing up to €3 million to cover the budget of the cultural centre, and one million to cover the budget of the centre of worship. This was an important budget, and the Muslim association failed to build an understandable budget that would separate the different elements composing it, for example, the operational costs of the centre did not appear in the budget. To this, one needed to add the administrative length in handling this kind of complicated matters, for example, processing the papers related to the land probing, validation of the architecture by the town safety commission, all of these complications that would create among the Muslims, as in the case of Roubaix, the idea that there was no political will to see this project implemented.

The incapacity of the AMB to implement its project

The actual state of the mosque and cultural centre of Bobigny suffered from several weaknesses. It was first of all a project that was not completely finalized, in which the aims and operations of the building did not appear clearly. It was the absence of a clear proposal with all the specifications in good shape, and the absence of financial planning and budgeting by taking into account salaries, and direct and indirect costs. Furthermore, the project was managed by a not clearly identified group of individuals who failed to create a clear legal relationship between the two associations AMB and ACMB. Because of all this, major obstacles would intensify progressively and reach a peak during the year 2007 mainly in the interpretation of the commitment of the politicians. From the politicians’ standpoint, support was given through the long-lease agreement, whereby the land was leased at the symbolic price of €1, after which anything related to making the land viable and operational depended on the Muslims with their own budget. According to the AMB the commitment of the town should have a financial component directly connected to the building of the cultural centre and the mosque; in addition to the town’s financial support, the AMB leaders were expecting the
financial support of the local governing body, and the regional governing body. The project was halted for several months essentially for financial causes as the Muslims did not have enough money to finance the preparation of the land.

A politicized relationship
This case relating to the town of Bobigny significantly illustrates the game played most of the time by the different stakeholders in mosque construction projects. In these situations we can observe how all the different parties engage in a strange game of negotiations. Politicians and Muslims were now in the logic of mutual political support. The Muslims had been cornered in this dead end by over-estimating their electoral weight in the town, by conditioning town financial support by the fact that they could mobilize the community at the level where this mobilization could influence the politicians. On the other the politicians did not take the necessary time in the beginning to clarify their position, the meaning of their support for the project, its limitations, their responsibilities, what to really expect from the town in the way of commitment, etc. This lack of clarification created confusion in the beginning among the Muslims. During the municipal election of 2007, many Muslims in the mosque project were engaged in the opposing party, with the hope that they could directly influence the development of the project. This would not have any real incidence on the position of the town as far as the financing part of the project was concerned. As of today, the project is still on hold due to a lack of funding and cash available for the Muslim community.

Which lessons to draw from this kind of situation
Before detailing the elements that are highlighted in the cases presented, it is advisable to state that the discrimination that Muslim communities at the local level can be victims of can be prevented only if concrete work is achieved on two levels. The first level concerns the precise knowledge of the parameters of the action entrusted to local communities and the requirements in matters pertaining to worship. Many municipalities think that they are not covered by the legal framework of the Law on Separation, and that they could, in fact, benefit from the real possibilities that should be taken into account. The second level relates to work on mentalities, both with regard to the authorities, who sometimes have a pejorative image of the Muslims because the latter have difficulties in formulating their requests in understandable language, and the Muslims themselves, who sometimes tend to pose as victims whereas their project is quite simply incomplete, and this works against them.
Analyses of the conditions under which projects should be completed

The optimum conditions for good results in projects as presented by Muslim associations must include at least four parameters:

1. A peaceful local situation, favourable to consultation. That means for town councillors not to seek to manipulate a community project in any way, nor to have it checked by someone close to them. The municipality of Roubaix in this context managed the situation very well, as we have already seen, by distributing clear information to all the municipal partners, even those of the opposition, and by having a vote on the framework debate referring to all faiths concerned, by any public action. This was not the case in Bobigny, where the municipality had to handle public speeches afterwards (mainly negative, as far as to slander the mayor) by the Muslim Association regarding the project.

2. Political good will supported by openness with regard to the provisions contained in the law of 1905 on the Separation of the Church and State. On this subject, we can note the low level of knowledge of the majority of the Muslim associative participants and many municipally elected officials. We are here in a real system of representation where everyone has his own idea of the concepts involved, which is very important: the public and private domains, secularity, prohibition of granting subsidies to religious entities. Many elected officials still think that a faith can be practised only by an association that is in compliance with the provisions of the Law on Separation, and conversely, many Muslims are persuaded that being a member of a religious association according to the law of 1905 means being subject to police control and stricter financial inspections.

3. A coherent project, presented by a Muslim association, which was given credibility through work done through public relations. When they approach the local authorities, their interlocutors do not always easily understand Muslims, and two principal reasons are responsible for this confusion:

   – The use of terms that create confusion. For example some Muslim leaders used terms such as mosque or Islam to define or talk about all the activities that were to take place in the building. There was no clear distinction between what was a worship-related act, humanitarian work, social work, etc. whereas from the local authorities' point of view, the same terms might lead to areas that did not qualify for any public support;
Gaps in the definition of the project related to technical and urban planning. Certain projects presented by Muslim associations contained failures on the level of environment and safety, respect for land occupation, architecture, etc. Sometimes the municipality made it more difficult for Muslims to obtain the necessary permits if there was no explanation.

4 ‘Non-specific’ treatment of the Islam question, by considering the requests formulated by Muslims on the same basis as any other request received from any other association on the question of religion. The Muslims feel slighted, and rightly so, when a local councillor tells them that their request is not admissible whereas, at the same time, he is favourable towards requests asking him to intervene in religious matters that are not in his area of competence. On the other hand, these same Muslims make the mistake of making certain demands with regard to buildings owned by the local community. Explanations are still necessary in many cases to avoid injustices on both sides.

It is not always possible to combine all these factors. The work of mediation and technical support will help to achieve progress in dealing with the establishment of places of worship. It can help to raise basic questions, which are very often overlooked by the persons in charge of these places of worship, as also town halls, which do not always give the required attention to these matters. For example, how can a mosque, or a Muslim arts centre, constitute a qualifying element in a district? Indeed, the creation of a place of worship is not an end in itself. Regarded as the equipment of general interest within the meaning of French legislation on town planning, the place of worship, for Muslims, can be likened to a true arts centre as, apart from the usual prayers that are recited, it offers several types of cultural activities, from conferences that are open to the general public, to topics of interest to society, courses on the Arabic language and Arab-Muslim culture, while at the same time being involved in the organization of religious feasts or other festive activities. This aspect constitutes one of the factors of suspicion against the mosques, which are generally perceived, wrongly, as being a kind of hiding-place open to all kinds of wrongdoings.

Locating the actors of change

In this ‘play with several partners and several dimensions’, we can locate ‘actors of change’, i.e. the key people who have a direct influence on the evolution and especially the result of the project. A summary typology of the spheres of activities reveals several profiles of actors:
– the political actors, who are the decision makers;
– the administrative actors, generally agents of the administrations concerned with the project. They deal with the technical shutter and expert testimony;
– the economic actors, who can weigh on the choices of the policies;
– Muslim associative actors;
– non-Muslim associative actors.

In this range of actors, two categories are of particular interest to us: the 'qualified actors' and the 'legitimate actors'. By qualified actor, we mean any person having a specific skill allowing him to express a relevant opinion at certain key moments in the negotiation or to make a decision directly influencing the project. By legitimate actor, we mean any person who, because of the position he occupies in one of the areas quoted above, is recognized by the other partners in the project as being entitled to deliver an opinion or to make a decision. If we apply this to the case of Roubaix, we can quote at least four of them:

– with regards to the policy, the legitimacy of the district mayor was challenged several times on the pretext that he was only an elected official of the district and that only the mayor of the town was entitled to take important decisions;
– regarding the agents who played a technical role and had the required expertise, in 2003 the town of Roubaix appointed a project manager to investigated the legitimacy of the different decisions relative to this project. His work helped to accelerate all the processes in place, thus the release of the necessary documents and finally the building of the mosque. Meanwhile, this project manager played a critical role in the creation of a new association that would manage the future mosque. In reality, the Law of Separation forbids politicians to interfere in worship-related activities. The question becomes: ‘Why do politicians choose to validate the decision of one expert instead of another one?’

Within the 2AI, it will also be noted that the vice-president was at the heart of all the initiatives taken at the level of the town hall and the municipal services. He was the person responsible for arranging almost all the work meetings. He was also an actor who was very involved in local community life. He was thus considered by the municipality as the most credible interlocutor on this project, second only to the president. That was the cause of great tension between the two men, the second accusing the first of wanting to replace him;
in more general terms, within the Muslim population of the district, the action of the repatriates, on the pretext that access to the new place of worship might perhaps be denied to them, impelled certain municipal actors to have recourse to 'ethnic' logic, whereas the town hall was simply dealing with a religious organization, knowing full well that any public building used for worship in France, managed by an association in compliance with the law of 1905, is in fact open to all the public belonging to the faith concerned. The question of knowing who is entitled to give the right interpretation of a fact or a legal act still remains, and what is the definition of an association that represents diversity as stipulated in the deliberation.

This general table would however be incomplete if we omitted to mention certain much more positive aspects of collaboration between qualified and legitimate persons. One can quote, for example, the collaboration between the architect of the association, the town planning services of the municipality and the architect for France. This latter gave a favourable opinion, together with some observations on the architectural project for the new mosque, on the basis of the preliminary document provided by the architect and discussed with the town-planning cabinet.

Towards a positive development of the local reality of mosques in France

The lessons drawn from the different cases presented here could be applied to most of the situations of conflict observed on French territory. Regardless of the issues at stake, from the political standpoint, as well as from the National Federation of Muslims, our way of reading local Islam should take into account the belief aspect, meaning the mosque as well as the ethnicity of the local Muslims. It is very clear that in the management of the existing mosque and the project related to the building of the future mosque, general negotiation in the medium term should take into account the subtleties associated with the attitude of local politicians as well as local Muslim leaders. In the present configuration, the gaze of society toward the Islamic faith and the mosques could be facilitated if deeper work were done at three levels: information, mentorship and training of the population by the Muslims themselves, or an expert on the subject with some level of credibility. Can the Muslims present a clear and understandable discourse about the practice of Islam to non-Muslims? The future will tell, but the current outlook as regards the various mosque projects for the last three years has seemed to be
positive. However we could see that the case of the town of Roubaix is far from being an isolated case: unfortunately, in many towns, Muslims after designing a large-scale project end up buying an old building then remodelling it as much as they can; in most cases, the remodelling does not respect in part the required safety regulations for public buildings. In return, this attitude ends up creating mistrust of the Muslims leaders’ credibility in the eyes of the local authorities. As a final result we might see resistance regarding the standardization of Islam in France.

Bibliography

Over the past few years, the French bibliography on Islam has increased considerably. However, specialized books are not as many as we would like to see. We present here the major books published in recent years in connection with the subject of this article.

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Duthu, F Le maire et la mosquée. Islam et laïcité en Ile de France, L’Harmattan, 2009
Godard, B Taussig, S, Les musulmans en France : courants, institutions, communautés, Hachette, 2009
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Ternisien, X La France des mosquées, Albin Michel, 2002
Revue Maghreb-Machrek, Islam de France, La Documentation Française, 2005
Revue Confluences Méditerranée, Musulmans de France, L’Harmattan, 2006
Revue La Médina, La mosquée dans la cité, La Médina, 2001
Hafiz, C.E Devers, G Le Droit et l’islam en France, Dalloz, 2005

Critical essays

Abu Sahlieh, SAmih al Deeb, Les musulmans en occident, entre droits et devoirs, L’harmattan, 2002
Fourest, C Venner, F Tirs croisés. La laïcité à l’épreuve des intégrismes juif, chrétien et musulman, Calmann Lévy, 2003
Fourest, C La tentation obscurantiste, Grasset, 2005
Websites

There exist multitudes of websites on Islam, communitarians for the major part. Specialized sites are not that many as well as the site of Muslims Federations. For the past few years we can observe the emergence of websites presenting projects, local Mosque and regional activities. We have numbered 1 of them during the time of this article. Bellow we present majors Islamic site in France regularly visited by Muslims and non-Muslims.

General academic sites
www.religion.info
www.droitdesreligions.net

Community information sites
www.oumma.com
www.saphirnews.com

Muslim annuaries
http://mosquee.free.fr
www.lislamdefrance.fr
www.annuaire-musulman.com
http://annuaire.islam.free.fr
www.oummati.fr

Community sites of Federations and Grand mosques
www.portail-religion.com
www.uoif-online.com
www.mosquee-de-paris.org
www.mosquee-lyon.org

Sites of Regional Councils of Muslim Worship
www.crcm-ra.org Rhône Alpes
www.crcm-paysdeloire.info
www.crcmnpdc.fr

Anti-Muslim sites
http://mosquee.blogspot.com site antimusliman
www.islamisation.fr
Old immigrants, new problems
The cases of Austria and Switzerland
7 The politics of non-recognition: mosque construction in Austria
Ernst Fürlinger

Introduction

The official recognition of Islam by the State goes back to the last years of the Habsburg monarchy (1912). Compared with the legal situation of the Muslim communities in other states of the European Union, Islam in Austria is legally in a better position and enjoys the same rights as the Christian churches. Muslims and politicians in Austria never tire of underlining these positive legal conditions. A consensual climate of recognition between the State and the Muslim community is expressed by symbolic acts such as the invitation of representatives of the Muslim community to a post-Ramadan reception by the Federal President Heinz Fischer, who began this initiative at the start of his presidency in 2004, or the invitation to the Iftar-dinner by the Federal Chancellor, the Mayor of Vienna and the President of Parliament.¹

At the same time, there is a gap between the fundamental legal recognition of the Islamic religion by the State and the social, economic, and political integration and participation of migrants with Muslim backgrounds in general (Mourão, Permoser and Rosenberger 2008). The legal parity of Muslims is more striking given their unequal treatment in practice. At the local level, they are confronted on a daily basis with the politics and practice of non-recognition, above all when it concerns questions of the visibility of Islam in the public domain. So, for example, although Austria has liberal legal regulations concerning the Muslim

¹ That is, the invitation to the Iftar-dinner by the former President of the Austrian Parliament, Prof. Andreas Khol (ÖVP), in the years 2005 and 2006. Source: Prof. Khol, e-mail communication, 29 January, 2009.
headscarf (Gresch, Hadj-Abdou, Rosenberger and Sauer 2008), there are at the same time many cases of discrimination against Muslim girls and women with headscarves, especially in the labour market. Another example is the restriction and refusal of basic rights in the case of the construction, extension and maintenance of prayer rooms or mosques. This is especially true in the federal states of Carinthia and Vorarlberg, where in spring 2008 the State governments passed amendments of the building law with the openly expressed intention of prohibiting the construction of mosques with minarets. When Swiss voters decided in November 2009 to include a ban on minarets in the Swiss constitution, a Muslim intellectual stated that Austria was almost two years ahead with such a ban on visible mosques in two federal states (Hafez 2009) – although it is not part of the constitution, and ‘mosque’ and ‘minaret’ are never explicitly mentioned in the corresponding legal passages.

As in other European countries, ‘Islam’ is in the midst of public debates over European identity, the role of religion in modern European democracy, and religious symbols within the public space. The narrative of the radical right parties dominates the public perception and discourse: the Islamic headscarf and the minaret are seen as a symbolic threat to Austrian society, to national identity – be it from the Christian, feminist, leftist, conservative, secularist or radical-right points of view. In the case of Austria, the people who are socially constructed and racialised as the Muslim ‘other’ are mainly workers with Turkish backgrounds. The former ‘guest-workers’ from Turkey and their families are seen as ‘a problem’, as ‘unwilling to adjust’, who ‘exploit the Austrian welfare system’ and are the main target of campaigns of the radical-right populist parties.

There is a specific factor in Austria which is crucial for relations especially with the Turkish Muslims: the Ottoman Siege of Vienna in 1683, which is more than just a date in Austrian history; it is rather a central national myth. During the last 300 years, ‘1683’ has been exploited by different political streams and parties for different purposes. The collective memory of the Turks as the ‘arch-enemy’ has been again and again re-affirmed, be it earlier by the rituals of the Catholic church at the centenary of the Relief of Vienna, in school books and history lessons, memorials in the whole country and, finally, by political discourses (Rauscher 2010; Vocelka 1983). Another factor that is relevant in Austria is the activities of a strong radical-right party, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the small BZÖ, which split from the FPÖ. Both make extensive

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2 See ZARA (Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit, Vienna): *Racism Reports*, in English (www.zara.or.at). Most of the Muslim girls and women concerned abstain from filing a suit on the basis of the ‘Federal Law Regarding Equal Treatment’ (BGBl. Nr. 98/2008) and refrain from informing the Ombudsman for Equal Treatment, because of the fear they would never obtain employment if they fought the case (personal communication with teachers in a Islamic School in Vienna, January 2009).
use of the issue of ‘Islam’ and of anti-Muslim resentment in their political strategies and campaigns (Hadj-Abdou and Rosenberger 2010; Geden 2006), but other parties are also trying to exploit this issue (Hafez 2010).

General background

Population
The total population of Austria is 8,355,260 (1 January, 2009). The number of foreign citizens is 870,704, which is 9.59% of the population (2001: 8.9%). Most of them (339,134 persons) live in Vienna (4.97%), followed by Upper Austria (110,279) and Lower Austria (106,620). Most persons with non-Austrian citizenship come from other states of the European Union (760,019). 134,865 persons are citizens of Serbia and Montenegro (in Vienna: 73,628), 110,678 from Turkey. 41,130 persons with Turkish citizenship live in Vienna, 15,634 in Lower Austria, 14,140 in Vorarlberg, 13,871 in Upper Austria, and 11,998 in Tyrol.

Official data regarding religious confession exist only for 2001. According to the National Census 2001, the Muslim population in Austria was 338,988 (4.2% of the total population). In 1991, 158,776 Muslims lived in Austria (2.0%), in 1981 only 76,939 (1.0%).


In 2001, 123,028 Muslims in Austria were Turkish citizens (36.2%), 96,052 were Austrian citizens (28.3%), 64,628 Bosnian citizens (19.0%), 21,594 Serbian citizens (6.3%), 10,969 Macedonian citizens (3.2%), 3,774 Iranian citizens (1.1%), 3,541 Egyptian citizens (1.0%), 1,065 Tunisian citizens (0.3%) and 1,027 Croatian citizens (0.3%).

Most Muslims live in Vienna (121,149; 35.7% of the Muslim population), followed by Upper Austria (55,581; 16.3%), Lower Austria (48,730; 14.3%), and Vorarlberg (29,334; 8.6%). Carinthia has – after Burgenland – the second smallest Muslim population in Austria (10,940 Muslims; 3.2%).

Legislation
Legislation on religions follows a model of coordination and cooperation between Church and State, with the State providing a legal framework for the

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4 There is uncertainty regarding this number, because it is not known how many Alevis declared themselves to be Muslims. Other religious communities: Roman-Catholic 5,915,421 (73.6%); Protestant 376,150 (4.7%), Orthodox 179,472 (2.2%), without religious affiliation 963,263 (11.9%). Source: Statistik Austria, National Census 2001.
integration and participation of religious communities in the public sphere (Kalb, Potz and Schinkele 2003). Religious communities have the legal status of public corporations. One example of this cooperation between Church and State is the participation of recognized churches and religious societies—including the ‘Islamic Religious Community in Austria’—in the ‘Österreich-Konvent’ (Austria Convention, June 2003–January 2005), a conference on the reform of the constitution established by the government. Islam had obtained the status of a legally recognized religion already in 1912 under the Islam Act (Potz 1993; Bair 2002), after the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Habsburg Monarchy in 1908. Basically, the Act granted the right to practise the Islamic faith in public, to administrate internal religious affairs autonomously and to establish religious, educational and social institutions, foundations and funds. The Federal Ministry of Education and Arts approved the constitution of the ‘Islamic Religious Community in Austria’ in 1979, and since then it has functioned as the official representative body of the Austrian Muslims. One central activity of the Community is the organisation of Islamic religious education in public schools, which started in 1982 and is funded by the state.

**Political situation**

For more than twenty years, Austrian policy has been shaped by the rise of the FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria), founded in 1956 and succeeding the Verband der Unabhängigen, the lobby of former National Socialists and expellees (1949–55). At first, almost the entire leadership of the party consisted of former members of the NSDAP. The party ‘is perceived as the continuity of National Socialism’ (Pelinka 2002, 3). Under the leadership of Jörg Haider from 1986 to 2000, it became the strongest far-right populist party in Europe and was able to form part of the governing coalition. The use of the topics of immigration and asylum by the FPÖ, and the nationalist, racist rhetoric against ‘foreigners’ played a crucial role in this.5 The radically xenophobic campaign of the FPÖ for the parliamentary elections in October 1999 used the slogan ‘Stop der Überfremdung’ (Stop alienation) and exploited anti-Muslim sentiments. In this election, the FPÖ became the second largest party (26.9%) after the SPÖ (33.1%) and according to votes ahead of the ÖVP (26.9%). Since then ‘Islam’ has played a crucial role in the policy, strategy and discourse of the FPÖ. A recent example is the use of the topic ‘mosques and minarets’ in the FPÖ election campaign in Vienna in 2009 and 2010 (election to the Vienna City and District Council, 10 October 2010)—in spite of the fact that there is no concrete project for a mosque with minarets in Vienna at present.

In February 2000, the ÖVP formed a coalition with the FPÖ. This resulted in a boycott of the Austrian government by the governments of the EU-14. In April 2005, the FPÖ split when Haider, together with other members of the FPÖ, founded a new party, the Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ), which continued the coalition with the ÖVP until 2007. Since then one can observe a competition between the two far-right parties in the field of anti-Muslim agitation, and especially on the minaret issue. This is particularly obvious in Carinthia and Vorarlberg (see case study Bludenz). Another example is the xenophobic campaign of the two parties for the communal election in Graz (Styria) in January 2008. The FPÖ used among others the slogan ‘Unser Gebot heißt Moscheeverbot’ (Our demand is a ban on mosques) on posters, while the BZÖ used the slogan ‘Moscheenbau macht keinen Spaß’ (The construction of mosques is no joke). The openly hostile attitude against Islam reached its climax with an attack by the front-runner for the FPÖ in Graz, Susanne Winter, in a public meeting of the FPÖ (13 January, 2008), which was unanimously condemned by the Federal President, the Prime Minister and leading representatives of the churches.

In the parliamentary election of September 2008, the two parties FPÖ (17.5%) and BZÖ (10.7%) together were able almost to double their votes and reach the second-strongest position, after the SPÖ (29.2%). Since December 2008, Austria has again been governed by a grand coalition between the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP).

Islamic cemeteries
Already at the end of the 19th century there were tombs of Muslim soldiers in the Central Cemetery in Vienna (opened in 1874), but they do not exist any longer. Since 1930, Muslim tombs have existed at the Central Cemetery, at present more than 1,400, in separate groups. There are other Islamic sections at cemeteries in different cities, for example at the cemetery of Linz/St. Martin (Upper Austria),

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6 See the results of the monitoring of the election campaign by the Human Rights Advisory Board of the City of Graz (www.wahlkampfbarometer-graz.at).

7 Winter declared in her speech: ‘In the last years a real Muslim immigration tsunami has inundated Graz. Everywhere mosques are being erected against the will of the people. We, dear friends, as the FPÖ, are the only ones throughout Austria who want to stop this increasing Islamization. And I hold that Islam should be thrown back from where it came, that is to say beyond the Mediterranean Sea (applause). But personally I wonder: Is everything which is today called a religion actually a religion? Let us look at the prophet Mohammed: He has to be rather characterized as a commander. 66 wars, 27 of them led by himself. He wrote the Koran during epileptic seizures. And something which especially makes me bristle as a woman, and which I always highlight and say: As a fifty year old he married a six-year old, a six-year old girl. In today’s system, this Mohammed is a child abuser (applause).’ (Source of the German text: ORF ‘Report’, 16 January, 2008). On 22 January, 2009, the Graz Criminal Court convicted Winter – an MP since October, 2008 – of baiting (Criminal Code, article 283) and vilification and mockery of religious doctrines (article 188).

in St. Pölten (Lower Austria), Innsbruck (Tyrol) and in Graz (Styria). The Islamic section of the cemetery in Linz was defiled for the third time in September 2008;9 in Graz, 45 Islamic tombs were devastated in February 2008.10

After 20 years of negotiations with the city, Austria’s first Islamic cemetery was inaugurated in Vienna on 3 October, 2008.11 The Islamic cemetery Vorarlberg in Altach was applied for in 2003;12 the start of construction work for the cemetery (688 tombs) is planned for autumn 2010.

Mosques in Austria

Historical aspects
During the time of the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman Embassy in Vienna employed an imam and kept a prayer room. Before the First World War, a prayer room existed for the Muslims of the Bosnian Infantry Regiment No. 1 in the Alser-casern in Vienna (9th District) and afterwards in the Archduke Albrechts-casern (2nd District), where the regiment was transferred in 1911. The army mosque has been led by an imam since 1891. In 1916, an initiative was started to construct a representative mosque in Vienna, with the city of Vienna providing an estate for the construction. Because of the end of the empire this intention was not realized (Balic 1995).

In the 1960s, the ‘Muslim Social Service’ (MSS), an association founded in 1962 by Bosnian intellectuals, together with other Muslim organizations, tried to organize the construction of a mosque for 500 to 1,000 persons in Vienna. In 1965, the Egyptian government was ready to support the project, but the plan was stopped by the war with Israel.13 In 1968 the MSS set up a small prayer room in a basement in the 3rd District of Vienna (Löwengasse) – one of the first in the


10 Graz: Grabschändung verunsichert Muslime’: Die Presse, 6 February 2008. (http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/oesterreich/360961/index.do). At the same time the head of the Egyptian Muslim community in Graz, Soleiman Ali, received a threatening letter (‘Your mosque will burn’ etc.) which used a Nazi symbol (Website ORF Styria, 6 February 2008, http://steiermark.orf.at/stories/254722).

11 Islamischer Friedhof Wien, Großmarkstr. 2a, 1230 Wien-Liesing. The private cemetery is administered by the Islamic Religious Community in Vienna and has space for 4000 dead. During the construction, the cemetery building was subjected to an arson attack on 9 April, 2006, and ‘This will be blown up’ was greased on a wall. In November 2006, the wall of the cemetery was painted with 53 large black crosses. The first funeral there took place on 27 March, 2009.

12 Attila Dincer, Speaker of the Association for the Vorarlberg Islamic Cemetery (founded in winter 2007), phone interview, 14 April 2009.

13 In 1964 the Egyptian Foreign Minister Fazwi discussed the project with the Austrian Chancellor Kreisky. Cf. Die Presse 11/12 June 1966.
Second Republic. In 1981, 7 prayer rooms are reported to have existed in Austria, among them a small prayer room in the Afro-Asian Institute in Vienna (Balic 1981). Fourteen years later, the number of small prayer rooms in Vienna had grown to 55, and today there are approximately 72 active prayer rooms in the city.

**General overview**

In Austria at present (June 2010) there are two mosques built as mosques with minarets: in Vienna (Vienna Islamic Centre, 1979, one minaret) and Bad Vöslau, near Vienna (2009, two minarets). Additionally, there are three buildings with prayer rooms where short minarets have been added: Innsbruck, Saalfelden and Telfs.

On its website, the ‘Islamic Religious Community in Austria’ (IGGÖ) presents a different picture: four mosques (Vienna, Telfs, Saalfelden, Bad Vöslau) and 200 prayer rooms (*mescid*). But the exact number of prayer rooms is not known and is estimated to be much higher. The major Muslim organizations run most of the prayer rooms, though there are also a number of independent centres.

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14 Turkish-Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Cooperation (ATIB): 59 associations; Islamic Federation: 45; Austrian-Turkish Federation: 30; Union of Islamic Cultural Centres in Austria: 20; Umbrella organization of Bosnian-Islamic Associations: 22; Union of Albanian Muslims in Austria: 12; Islamic Association Ahul-Bayt (union of Shiite associations): 7. Source: websites of the organizations.
The majority of these spaces are not visible from the outside – many of them are located in courtyards, basements, former flats, stores, factory halls and depots. In recent years, a number of Muslim cultural-religious centres with prayer rooms have been established, for example by the Avusturya Türk İslam Birliği (Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Cooperation in Austria, ATIB) in Bregenz, in Vorarlberg (2000), Schwaz, Tyrol (2003), Lustenau, Vorarlberg (2005), Hall, Tyrol (2006), Vienna, 10th District (2007), Landeck, Tyrol (2009), Vienna, 21st District (2010) and by the Islamic Federation in Linz, Upper Austria (2007) – all of them without a minaret.

Mosques built as mosques with minarets
After many attempts to establish a mosque in Austria, on 20 November, 1979, a representative mosque, the Vienna Islamic Centre, with one minaret, was built. Located on the periphery of Vienna, it was initiated by the Embassies of eight Islamic countries. Today the mosque is administrated by the Embassies of Islamic states in Vienna; the chairman of the board is the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia. Since 1979, there has been a call for Friday prayer outside over the loudspeaker.

The first mosque built as a mosque with minarets by Austrian Muslims (mainly with a Turkish background) is the new mosque at Bad Vöslau (Lower Austria), near Vienna. It was erected by the local branch of the ATIB, the strongest Muslim organisation in Austria, affiliated with the Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Turkish Republic (Diyanet). After protests and a mediation process in which its visibility was negotiated, the mosque was inaugurated on October 24, 2009 (see case study Bad Vöslau).

Buildings with a prayer room and minaret
There exist three buildings with a prayer room and a short minaret in Saalfelden, Innsbruck and Telfs.

Innsbruck (Tyrol). The Integrationshaus (House for Integration), located on the periphery of Innsbruck and owned by Caritas, the welfare organization of the Catholic Church, was established in 1998. Initially it hosted, among other groups, the Bosnian-Muslim community in a small prayer room. After the request of the community to build a minaret, the Bishop of the Innsbruck Diocese agreed to the construction. A group of young people of Austrian and Bosnian origin constructed a small minaret (5 metres high) behind the building in October 2001. From the minaret there is also a call for Friday prayer via loudspeaker.

Saalfelden (Salzburg). The local branch of the ATIB established a mosque with a minaret in a former storage depot, which was rebuilt between 2001
and 2005. The prayer hall is 75 square metres, and its dome, which is not visible from outside, has a height of 2 metres. The minaret is 9 metres high, with a diameter of 1.60 metres. The building is situated on the periphery of the city in a mainly industrial area. There was no political opposition to the construction. Since there were no conflicts and no media reports, the first minaret in the Federal state of Salzburg remained widely unknown, even to the ‘Islamic Religious Community in Austria’. The national paper Die Presse first gave news of the minaret in Saalfelden in December 2009.

**Telfs (Tyrol).** In 2005, the local branch of the ATIB applied for the construction of a minaret next to the existing Eyüp Sultan Mosque. The plan led to numerous protests in the Tyrol, especially by representatives of the FPÖ. Several neighbours of the mosque started a petition against the construction of a minaret in 2005, which was signed by 2,400 people. The Mayor, Stephan Opperer (ÖVP), authorized the building in November 2005. He received anonymous threats, while the Federal President, Heinz Fischer praised him for his brave position. The Telfs ATIB ended the dispute with the neighbours by agreeing (in November 2005) to erect a shorter minaret: 15 metres rather than 20 metres. The minaret was built in 2006. A contract with the municipality declared that no muezzin and no call for prayer were allowed. There were Muslim voices raised which viewed the minaret in Telfs as a negative architectural example: better no minaret than such an ugly,
Conflicts over mosque constructions
Recent years have seen several conflicts over existing and new Muslim prayer rooms; in some cases the prayer room could not be built. Here are some examples: the cases of Traun, Spittal and Vienna, which were reported and discussed on a national level.

Traun (Upper Austria). In 1998, the local association of the Islamic Federation (Milli Görüş) in Traun rented a kiosk in the very centre of town and adapted it for use as a prayer room. The Little Al-Akṣa Mosque (Mescid Aksa Camii) for 90 persons was built in May 1998. The Traun FPÖ, which formed a coalition with the SPÖ in the city government, campaigned against the mosque and called on the authorities to use building regulations to end these ‘threatening conditions’. Adaptation was carried out without a building permit (Wieshaider 2001). The Mayor, Dr. Peter Schlögl (SPÖ), forbade continuation of the building work. In November 1998 he ordered the demolition of the mosque by 9 July, 2000, on the grounds of fire protection and security protection laws. In June 2000 and March 2001, the Muslim association organised demonstrations against this in the form of public Friday prayers. On the scheduled date of the demolition, 14 March, 2001, about 100 Muslims occupied the mosque and temporarily halted demolition. On March 28 the mosque was demolished under police protection. Today the Islamic Federation uses a small building on the periphery of Traun, near the railway station.
The other Mosque association in Traun, the ‘Union of Islamic Cultural Centres’ (Traun UIKZ) uses a larger building (the Mevlana Mosque) with a prayer room for about 100 people, and a small prayer house for women. The space is overcrowded, since there is no other mosque in the region. For years, the community has been in search of a new site. For example, in 2007, the Traun UIKZ wanted to buy a plot and build a new centre; the city council voted unanimously against the project. In spring 2010, there was a new attempt to build a centre in an industrial zone on the periphery of Traun, with no direct neighbours. That again failed.

**Freistadt (Upper Austria).** Since 1991 a prayer house of the ‘Islamic Youth Organisation of Freistadt’ (IJOF), which belongs to the Islamic Federation, has existed in Freistadt, initially a small space (about 40 square metres), since 1993 a larger place (about 100 square metres) in the centre of the city. A member of the Muslim community in Freistadt bought an old house in the city centre (Schmiedgasse) with the intention of providing the IJOF with a new prayer house. In August 2004, the IJOF submitted the first layouts for the new centre at the location, comprising a prayer room for 200 men, a prayer room for women, a room for the younger members, and a canteen. There was no plan for a minaret or dome. The neighbours set about collecting signatures against the project. The fear of noise and parking and depreciation of their property and house values mingled with the fear of ‘fundamentalist groups’. To smooth out tensions, the Mayor, Josef Mühlbacher (ÖVP), organized a public discussion of the project on 4 May, 2005. The city was for the solution of offering an alternate plot for the prayer house. The conflict was revived by members of the ÖVP and FPÖ. As a result, the Muslim community capitulated and sold the house. In 2006 the Islamic Youth Organisation bought a new house and shifted its centre there, all done very discreetly to avoid any further agitation. The new prayer house provides space for about 120 persons.

**Reutte (Tyrol).** In 2000, the Turkish-Islamic Cultural and Religious Association bought a former car dealership. For several years the association fought a running battle with the neighbours and the municipality about the change of designation. In November 2005, building permission was granted, and the community immediately started with the reconstruction of the building. The centre (829 square metres) contained a prayer room, an office, seminar and youth rooms, a shop and two flats. There was no minaret: the chairman, Ahmed Tiytili, stated that the association wanted to avoid any kind of provocation, but would consider the construction of a minaret if there were other minarets in Tyrol and it became normal in the future.15

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15 *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 17 November 2005, p. 14. In Reutte, 11.8% of the population are Muslims, 8.6% are Turkish citizens (National census 2001).
Vienna. In the spring of 2007, the Vienna-Brigittenau ATIB (Dammstrasse 37, 20th district) submitted building plans for the extension of its centre-cum-prayer room, which had been used by the ATIB since 1997. The four additional floors were to be used for flats, offices, a shop and a kindergarten; the plans show a normal apartment building. A neighbourhood group concerned with the problems of traffic and noise developed slowly into a citizens’ campaign (Kübel, Pfeffer and Stöbich 2008), born in July 2007 under the name ‘Moschee ade’ (Mosque adieu), now advocating the relocation of the centre and against an ‘Islamicization of Austria’. It ultimately collected 4,000 signatures against the project. The initiative was supported by the FPÖ, which financed the website. The campaign, as well as the FPÖ and the district ÖVP, called for a demonstration on 13 September, 2007, the beginning of Ramadan, which started in front of the ATIB centre. 700 persons protested under the banner ‘No mosque in Brigittenau!’, including the chairman of the FPÖ, H.C. Strache, the chairman of the district ÖVP, Wolfgang Aigner, as well as several dozen neo-Nazis, members of the AFP (‘Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Politik’) and the NVP (‘National Volkspartei’) who shouted ‘Here marches the National Resistance’. At the end of the march, in front of the district directorate, a model of a mosque was presented, and the crowd shouted ‘Burn it!’. The demonstration stirred up a fervid political debate, which reached as far as the Vienna city council. The city and the district government launched a series of projects: a mediated public discussion in November 2007 and consequently three working groups on the themes traffic, noise, and the public presentation of the plans in January and February 2008. The ATIB initiated a weekly open house and a new website providing information about the building project. On 12 March, 2008, the Commission for Construction Projects of the 20th district approved the extension, based on extensive concessions by the ATIB, especially different arrangements for noise control.

Again on 14 May, 2009, the citizens’ ‘Moschee Ade’ campaign, together with the FPÖ, organised a demonstration against the supposed Turkish ‘mosque’, now in the centre of Vienna, where 700 people participated. The demonstration started in front the Federal Chancellery and ended at the back of the town hall, with a speech by the leader of the FPÖ, Heinz-Christian Strache. During the speech, against the ‘Islamisation of Austria’, he used coded language: for a short moment, he held up a large golden cross—in my opinion imitating the posture of the sculpture of Father Marco d’Aviano in front of the Franciscan Church at the New Market in Vienna, erected during Austro-fascism, in 1935, as a symbol of the resistance of the city of Vienna and the ‘Christian West’ against the Turks in 1683.

Spittal a.d. Drau (Carinthia). In 2006, the Türkisch-Österreichischer Islamischer Kulturverein (Turkish-Austrian Islamic Cultural Association), the local
branch of the ATIB, bought a small, one-and-a-half-floor agricultural building. Earlier the association had used the garage of a tyre dealer in Spittal. The Muslim group applied for a minor remodelling of the interior of the house to create a small prayer room, an office and a flat for the imam, which received preliminary approval from the Mayor of Spittal, Gerhard Köfer (SPÖ), on 10 April, 2007. A few (four to five) neighbours started a petition against the prayer house. A member of the city council, Willi Koch (ÖVP), was against the prayer house and supported the neighbours on the grounds that it would not fit in the old city zone and that there would not be enough parking. On the initiative of Koch, the city council rejected the application, voting unanimously in June 2007 against the redesignation of the building. The Islamic association appealed against this decision to the State government. Meanwhile, the case became part of the election campaign of the BZÖ: at the national convention of the BZÖ (Graz, 24 June, 2007) – the start of its election campaign – the governor of Carinthia, Jörg Haider, talked for the first time about an instrument against ‘the influence of foreign cultures in the form of buildings of other religions’:

‘Building regulations will be tightened in such a way that certain things which infringe upon our building culture will not happen, and a minaret does not belong here.’

On 26 August, 2007, the chairman of the BZÖ in Carinthia, Stefan Petzner, claimed in a press release, ‘Muslims want to make a mosque out of an existing building in the middle of Spittal an der Drau’. In a press conference the following day, Haider demanded a ban on the building of mosques with domes and minarets, which would be ‘visible symbols of power’ in Christian Europe. The establishment of prayer rooms should be granted. He also mentioned the case of Spittal: here there would be a danger that the house would be gradually transformed into a mosque. Haider announced the change of building regulations, of the laws regarding the appearance of places (‘Ortsbildpflegesetz’) and the laws regarding communal planning (‘Gemeindeplanungsgesetz’) in Carinthia. On the same day, the chairman of the FPÖ, H.C. Strache, reacted by demanding a ban on the building of minarets and the obligation to use German in services and sermons: both should be included in the Federal constitution, as the FPÖ had already demanded in a motion for a resolution of the Austrian parliament on 6 June, 2007. On 14 September, 2007, the Mayor of Spittal an der Drau met the imam of the Bosnian community in Spittal, Hasudin Atanovic, and the media reported a

17 Kleine Zeitung, 27 August, 2007. Haider underlined these points: ‘according to the present regulations, in case of approval there would be the possibility to build a mosque in Spittal’ (Die Presse, 4 September 2007).
joint declaration. On 25 September, 2007, the municipal council of Spittal unanimously resolved this declaration (‘the Spittal declaration’). It called on Muslims, ‘to give an unambiguous signal of the revocation of every form of violence, aggression and intolerance, and to declare a clear commitment to the way of life practised in Austria. This means also the abandonment of constructional signs like mosques in the form of domes and minarets’.

In autumn 2007, the State government of Carinthia (Department 7 Economic and Building Law) responded to the appeal of the Muslim Association in Spittal and overruled the official notification of the city council. Accordingly, in its session of 22 January, 2008, the city council overruled the preliminary decision of the mayor and thus opened the way for new construction proceedings. At the end of February 2009, approval was granted for the remodelling of the house by the building authority in Spittal, under certain conditions regarding opening hours (doors and windows were to be closed at 10 p.m.) and a limitation on the number of visitors. On 12 February, 2008, the State government of Carinthia passed a proposal for an amendment of the buildings laws: any building ‘which because of its extraordinary architecture or size (height) essentially differs from the local building tradition’ requires the approval of a ‘special commission for the maintenance of community appearances’ (Ortsbildpflege-Sonderkommission), established by the State government. The annotations to the legislation explicitly mention mosques as an example for the appointment of the commission. On 18 December, 2008, the law was passed by the parliament of Carinthia.

Mauthausen-Albern (Upper Austria). The Mauthausen ATIB used a small building in the centre of Mauthausen (Promenade 4 und 6). It planned to establish a new centre (encompassing 1,000 square metres) with a prayer hall, rooms for youth programmes and sports, and a shop, and applied for the redesignation of premises in Mauthausen-Albern. A citizen’s initiative was formed and collected 2,000 signatures against the project. On 31 January, 2008 the construction committee of the municipal council unanimously rejected the application of the ATIB, based on concerns regarding integration and land use regulations. The Mayor of Mauthausen, Thomas Punkenhofer (SPÖ) assured the Muslim Association of his readiness to support a smaller project. At the moment (May 2010) there has been no new application for a building.

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18 ‘We will not allow ourselves to be misused by radical groups from both sides. We do not need minarets or a referendum’. (‘Schulterschluss gegen Minaret-Polarisierung’: Kleine Zeitung, 18 September, 2007). Esad Memic (Villach, Carinthia), member of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria, reports that Atanovic met the Mayor but did not know that journalists were present, that he did not sign any declaration and that he was not authorised to make agreements (telephone interview, 2 February, 2009).

19 Spittaler Erklärung’: Stadtjournal (October 2007) p. 17.
Mauthausen was the location of the main concentration camp in Austria and was established by the SS in August 1938. It has been a national memorial since 1949. On the night from 11 to 12 February, 2009 persons unknown smeared the outer wall of the memorial with the slogan ‘Was unseren Vätern der Jud, ist für uns die Moslembrut, seid auf der Hut! 3. Weltkrieg – 8. Kreuzzug’, (‘What the Jew was for our fathers, the Muslim brood is for us! Beware! 3rd World War, 8th Crusade’) written in 70 centimetre high red letters. Again, in the night from 4 to 5 March, 2010, the slogan ‘Türk’ und Jud’, giftig’s Blut’ (‘Turk and Jew, poisonous blood’) was smeared on the outer wall, almost at the same place and in a similar form, by unknown persons.

In Hörbranz (Vorarlberg), the local ATIB association had to leave its old centre with the prayer room and to establish a new centre. In 2007 it chose a plot (about 960 square metres) for the new centre. According to Mayor Karl Hehle (ÖVP), the plot is in an area zoned for enterprises; therefore he would be against the building. In November 2007, he requested that the State government (Department for Land-use Planning) audit the possibility of establishing the ATIB centre on this site. The Department confirmed that with the present zoning it would not be possible. In February 2008, the chairman of the BZÖ Vorarlberg raised the alarm: there were plans for the construction of a mosque in Hörbranz—which was disclaimed by the mayor and the regional coordinator of the Vorarlberg ATIB, Mustafa Pacali. On 23 June, 2008, the ATIB officially applied for the re-zoning of the plot. The FPÖ Hörbranz announced it would file a motion against the project. On 3 September, 2008, the commission for land-use planning in Hörbranz recommended rejecting the re-zoning of the plot. During the meeting of the municipal council of 10 September, 2008, the mayor explained that the area should be used for enterprises: ‘The construction of a mosque is a highly sensitive topic. It is up to the government of Vorarlberg to find a central location. The rural structures of the Hörbranz municipality at the periphery are not suitable for a place of worship with supra-regional functions’.\(^{20}\) In the vote, the majority (22 to 4) rejected the re-zoning request.

Current mosque projects
Currently, a few newly constructed mosques are being planned or have been planned.

Nenzing (Vorarlberg). In 2011, because of the construction of a street, the Nenzing ATIB has to leave its old prayer room, which has been used by the 120 members since 1983. In June 2007, the mayor, Florian Kasseroler (FPÖ), informed

the municipal council that the Association had started talks with the mayor about a new location. The ATIB signed a contract with the communal authority stating that they would not erect a mosque with minaret and dome. The municipal council agreed to sell a plot (1,500 square metres) to ATIB, but only on condition that it was clear from the application for construction that the Association fulfilled the contract regarding the shape of the building. It was planned that the building should contain a prayer hall for 200 people, a tea-room, rooms for the young, and an apartment for the imam. In spring 2009, one of the neighbours of the planned mosque started the initiative ‘Pro Wiesengrund’ against the construction of the mosque, which collected 200 signatures, which were handed over to the mayor. One of the rumours which were spread was that the Muslims were going to use the place to slaughter animals according to Islamic ritual. Because of the resistance against the project and for financial reasons, the Nenzing ATIB gave up the project of a new building. In December 2009, the Association informed the mayor that it was going to buy a former factory hall which would be adapted as a mosque centre. The size of the area is 893 square metres, the size of the plot 1,712 square metres.

**Linz (Upper Austria).** In 2006, several Muslim organizations in Upper Austria formed a coalition, under the name *Al Andalus*, to establish a central mosque in Linz-Kleinmünchen. The pool included the ‘Islamic Religious Community’ in Upper Austria as well as Turkish, Albanian and Bosnian associations. The building plans envisioned the expanse of the whole centre to be 2,000 square metres, including a prayer hall for 500 persons (300 square metres), a hall for events, a library, shop and offices, but no minaret. Members of the pool thought that a minaret would create too much agitation. The project was supported by the city government, and the Federal state government granted permission for the re-zoning of the area for a mosque in November 2007. The construction plan would be officially filed as soon as the funding was guaranteed. For this purpose, a representative of *Al Andalus* visited various Muslim countries, and Arabic papers reported the project.

There were political protests against the project by the FPÖ and by the citizens’ ‘Keine Moschee’ (No Mosque) campaign together with the extreme right NVP (National People’s Party). On New Year’s Eve, 2007, heads of pigs were erected on three poles on the construction area. Photographs of the action were
presented on the websites of the NVP and of ‘Keine Moschee’.\(^2\) As Al Andalus did not press charges against the offenders, there was no investigation by the police.

**Leoben-Donawitz (Styria).** A Muslim community (‘Verein Frieden und Barmherzigkeit’) which used a small prayer room, bought a 1,000 square-metre plot in October 2009 and was going to apply for the construction of a new 170 square-metre mosque. Rumours spread in the city that a mosque with minarets was going to be built. On 17 March, 2010, the regional daily Kleine Zeitung reported the project for the first time, underlining that no minaret was planned. In the context of the communal elections at 21 March, 2010, an independent list (Bürgerliste Walter Reiter, a former member of SPÖ) was founded, and started a campaign against the project and collected signatures. With the help of this issue, the newly-founded party was able to win three seats on the city council. On 12 April, the Donawitz SPÖ, which is the ruling party in Leoben, together with the Muslim association, organised a question-and-answer session which was dominated by xenophobic statements and anti-Muslim hostility by some of the participants. At the meeting, the association presented the first outlines of the building. It is to look like an apartment building without any outer signs of a mosque.

**Graz (Styria).** Graz, the capital of Styria in the South of Austria, is the first ‘Human Rights City’ in Europe and member of the ‘European Coalition of Cities against Racism’. In 2005, the city established an ‘Interreligious Advisory Board’ (Interreligiöser Beirat). There had been discussions about a mosque construction in Graz since the 1990s. In 1998, representatives of the Muslim communities met the former mayor, Alfred Stingl (SPÖ), and the city councillor for culture, Helmut Strobl (ÖVP), who had initiated the rebuilding of the synagogue in Graz (destroyed in 1938), and asked for the support of the project. The first Conference of European Imams (June 2003) in Graz, the European Capital of Culture in 2003, reflected the development of an Islam in the European context. The final declaration recommended the establishment of an Islamic Centre in Graz and called on the Federal state, the country and city government to support the project. The Conference urged the Muslim communities to work together and to aim for a common mosque for all Muslims in Graz, independently of the diverse national and ethnic groups. An advisory board was established. It was planned to organise an international architecture competition if the project was successful. But it was difficult to find a building plot, and the funding of the

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\(^2\) The photos of the action were still presented in January 2009 at the website of NVP (www.nvp.at/schweine_moschee/schweine_moschee), of the initiative ‘Keine Moschee’ and of the website ‘Altermedia’, 31 December, 2007 (http://at.altermedia.info/allgemeines/schweinisches-neujahrsgrusse_193.html#more-193). At present (16 March, 2009) the links are deleted and redirected to the NVP website. The NVP was acknowledged as a legal party in November 2008. One photo of the action is used for the article: Stefan Apfl, ‘Das Minarett im Dorf’: Falter (Vienna) No. 4 (2008) 10–12.
construction remained an open problem. It was also planned to adopt a specific legal arrangement. The Islamic Community would erect the building, but the City would remain the owner of the plot, so as to be able to control what happened in the mosque and to insist on certain conditions: sermons in German with translation, access of the security agencies at any time. The Catholic Bishop of Styria, Egon Kapellari, was against the mosque: ‘As long as Christians have to hide in almost all Islamic countries, Muslims in countries like ours should forgo dominant urban mosques’. After a conflict between the Muslim associations there was no more progress on the project. Meanwhile, two of the Muslim associations started their own individual construction projects: the ‘Union of Islamic Cultural Centres’ (UIKZ) and the Community of Bosnian Muslims.

During the meeting of the city council on 22 April, 2010, the mayor presented the UIKZ project, a four-storey apartment building, apparently without any outer signs of a mosque (Lazarettgasse 26, Graz-Gries). Construction was to start in autumn 2010. This presentation was a response to the ‘urgent queries’ of the FPÖ and the BZÖ in the same meeting of the city council. The FPÖ Graz demanded a political inquiry for the discussion of the mosque construction projects with the city council and representatives of the Islamic community. The Graz BZÖ demanded from the city government ‘a draft for a ban on buildings which because of their extraordinary architecture or size differ essentially from local building traditions’, in this way quoting the amendment of the building law of the state government in Carinthia. Both queries were rejected by a majority in the city council. At the same time, the Mayor Siegfried Nagl assured the public, ‘Nobody in Graz needs to be scared, in Graz there will be no mosque in the typical sense, no minarets will rise on the Graz skyline’ (Website Graz ÖVP). The Bosnian Muslims were planning a mosque with minaret project which was to be built in the Herrgottwiesgasse 155–157, in the south of Graz. Since two strong associations were planning their own mosque, it was now unlikely that a central mosque would ever be built in Graz.

Case studies

The new ATIB mosque in Bad Vöslau (Lower Austria)

Bad Vöslau is a small city in the south of Vienna, since 1904 a health resort with mineral springs. According to the national census, in 2001 the city had a population of 10,998,877, 8 per cent of whom were Muslim. Vöslau was famous

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22 Source: Phone interview with Mr. Helmut Strobl, member of the Advisory Board of the Islamic Religious Community in Styria and Carinthia, 7 May, 2010.

for its large worsted factory ('Vöslauer Kammgarnfabrik'). Founded in 1833, it employed up to 3,900 people in Vöslau, until it was closed down in 1977. In the 1960s, the factory had to look for workers from abroad. In 1962 a few people arrived in Bad Vöslau from Turkey; a second, larger migration occurred in 1965. In 1983, the Turkish-Muslim community established the first prayer room in Bad Vöslau. After a split in 1985, today there are two Turkish Muslim communities in the city: the 'Islamic Cultural and Social Association' belonging to the ‘Islamic Federation’ (Milli Görüş), and the ATIB. The Vöslau ATIB has 150 members. Earlier, it used a small centre with a prayer room that was too small, in bad shape and without heating. It was located in the so-called ‘Turkish quarter’, called 'Little Istanbul' by the people in Bad Vöslau, in the neighbourhood of the former factory on the periphery of Bad Vöslau. In spring 2006, the ATIB headquarters of Vienna bought the plot next to the old ATIB centre, and in July 2006 an application to build a new mosque was filed with the city. The mayor, DI Christoph Prinz, representing ‘Liste Flammer’, a citizens’ party founded in Bad Vöslau in 1985, informed the city council in August and September 2006 of the building project. Avoiding the term ‘mosque’, the city called it a ‘Turkish cultural centre’, and the persons in charge of the ATIB also used this terminology.

An intense communal and political debate flared up when the local newspaper Badener Rundschau anonymously received the plans for the construction and published them on 3 November, 2006. The plans, designed by an architect with a Turkish background in Vienna, showed a mosque with two minarets (15 metres high), a dome (12.5 metres high) and several small cupolas.

Architects’ drawings of the proposed Bad Vöslau mosque
The mosque comprised a prayer hall for 130 persons (250 square metres), a teahouse, a restaurant, an office and two classrooms. Thirty years after the construction of the Islamic Centre in Vienna (1979), it was the second mosque with minarets that was to be built as a mosque in Austria. The city obtained expertise from the state government; it concluded that the building fitted in with the surrounding environment. In an interview, the mayor confirmed that if the ATIB insisted on realizing this plan, it could not be stopped either by the city or the federal state government, since the plot for the mosque was located in the core zone of the building land of the city where religious buildings could be erected without limitation on the height of towers.

In several meetings between the mayor and the mosque association, the mayor achieved the first compromises regarding the height of the building, the creation of a car park at the plot and ‘the clarification that the planned towers must not be used for loudspeakers, call for prayer, and so on’. Gradually protest against the construction took shape. In November, 2006, the mayor’s advisor in the field of city marketing (‘city coach’) criticised the mosque as an ‘unrepresentative symbol in the area’; the city marketing and tourist advertisement would be highly disturbed by it: ‘A mosque does not fit in a health resort’. As a consequence, the advisor was fired by Mayor Prinz.

In December, the FPÖ of Lower Austria started to intervene. On 10 December, 2006, the MP Barbara Rosenkranz, head of the FPÖ in Lower Austria, together with other members of the FPÖ, distributed flyers against the mosque in the city centre in Bad Vöslau. In an open letter Rosenkranz defended the action: the size of the mosque would not correspond to the size of the Muslim community in Bad Vöslau. The ‘magnificent building’ would threaten the image of the health resort Bad Vöslau. She interpreted the fight against the mosque as resistance against the menace of a dominating Islam in Europe.

An intellectual element also played a crucial role in the discussion. In an interview in the local paper, Dr. Otmar Rychlik, an art historian in Bad Vöslau and former lecturer at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, assailed the architecture of the mosque: the motif of the planned dome went back to the Byzantine church Hagia Sophia, which had been seized by Islam, ‘therefore the dome refers to the bloody victory of Islam over Christianity in the Orient’. The minarets represented ‘signs of victory’. There was the risk that the religious centre would become ‘a centre of political Islam’. In a FPÖ press conference on 19 January, 2007, in Bad Vöslau, the FPÖ representatives approvingly referred to Rychlik’s

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24 Report of Mayor Christoph Prinz at the meeting of the City council, 13 December, 2006. In the discussion of the report Dr. Sommer (FPÖ) stated that ‘the Islamic Cultural Centre is in fact a mosque’.

'excellent report' and demanded that the governor of Lower Austria change the building law in such a way that domes and minarets were no longer possible.

Some citizens of Bad Vöslau founded the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäische Kultur (Working Group for European Culture, AEK) and sent the city a petition ‘Cultural centre without minarets’, which was signed by about 300 persons by the end of January 2008, and in February by 1,470 persons. A member of an evangelical fundamentalist group, Ichthys Community, of Wiener Neustadt, which viewed Islam as a satanic religion, founded the group. Members of Ichthys supported the petition by collecting signatures. This background of the initiative was never discussed in public. Before the start of the petition, its initiator met the mayor, and the text of the petition was softened. The initiator of the AEK cooperated with the Christliche Mitte (Christian Centre, CM). In the local press it was ignored that the CM, founded in 1988, was a Christian-fundamentalist political party in Germany, which represented extreme-right positions, in particular a radical form of Islamophobia. The AEK was supported by members of the local FPÖ, among them the head of the local party. The local FPÖ decided to carry out this support covertly because it expected more signatures for the petition against the mosque in this way. But the initiative against the mosque was also supported by members of the Wiener Akademikerbund which was part of the Österreichischer Akademikerbund (Austrian Union of Graduates) belonging to the conservative party (ÖVP). The Wiener Akademikerbund ran a working group ‘The Danger of Islam’, which was again a meeting-point of some of the members of the AEK in Bad Vöslau.

On 22 January, 2007, a Kunstgruppe Vöslauer Widerstand gegen Moscheezunami (Artistic Group for Vöslauer Resistance against the Mosque Tsunami) organised bulk mailing against the construction project.

The city closed down the guest book on its website because of a flood of extremist statements by opponents of the mosque; in its place it opened an online discussion forum. According to the mayor, it was supposed to function as a kind of valve to release pressure. At the same time, there were persons and groups in Bad Vöslau who supported the Muslim project in public. The founding of the women’s campaign ‘Vielfalt statt Einfalt’ (Plurality instead of Oafishness) by Vera Tiefengraber was important, in March 2007, which brought together women of different ethnic and religious backgrounds living in Bad Vöslau.

26 The practice of Islam is characterized by CM as devil worship; the chairperson of the party, Adelgunde Mertensacker, characterises Muhammad as the ‘possessed prophet of Satan’ (M A Mertensacker, 1996, Der Prophet Allahs, Lippstadt, 102): mosques are seen as the ‘bases of the Islamic conquest’ (A Mertensacker, 2001, Moscheen in Deutschland. Stützpunkte islamischer Eroberung, Lippstadt).
Under pressure, the mayor initiated on 23 January, 2007, a meeting between members of the city council and representatives of the Vöslau ATIB. At this meeting, the two sides agreed to mediation – an initiative of the mayor’s, which would be paid for by the city. The mayor engaged a mediator, and the mediation started on 29 January. It included representatives of all political parties in the council, also the FPÖ, and five representatives of the Bad Vöslau ATIB as well as two advisors. In this situation, the board of the ATIB asked second-generation members, who had more outside contacts and spoke better German, to represent the association in the mediation group. From the beginning, the aim of the negotiations was clear. In an interview after the first meeting, the mayor stated: ‘I cannot confirm the rumours that the minarets have already “fallen”, but it is clear that the talks are running in this direction’. For this purpose, the mediation continued for six months until June, in the beginning with one session every week, later approximately every two weeks, sometimes five to six hours per session. Topics were mistrust regarding the size of the building in relation to the size of the Muslim community, the influence of fundamentalist financiers, the dominance of foreign religions and cultures, the fear that a ‘Turkish ghetto’ would be strengthened by the mosque – but foremost the appearance of the building with its cupolas and minarets. Variants of the building were created and discussed during this time. An ATIB member of the mediation commented on the talks: ‘everything was about the appearance of the building – nobody was interested in what type of Islam we represented; nobody discussed the use of the rooms, for example, for the education of young people. There were only negotiations about centimetres, that the building should not look Turkish, that there should not be Oriental bulges, that it should look like a hall in a health resort’. It was clear that the constitutional right to religious freedom in Austria implied that the Muslims in Bad Vöslau could build their mosque as they liked, since the building laws allowed such a religious building at this location. But the position of the majority of the ATIB was: ‘We live in Vöslau, we do not want to fight – we have to find a point in the centre’. This point was a new architectural plan, which was presented on 22 June, 2007, at the end of negotiations. The two minarets were now 13.5 metres high, the material was glass, and the minarets were placed in the inner court of the building and on the ground. They are not visible from outside. The dome was also hidden by a wall. There is no call to prayer via loudspeakers outside the building. The prayer hall is 220 square metres and located in the rearmost part of the building.

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28 Elisabeth Schirk (SPO), member of the city council, quoted in *BR*, 12 July 2007, p. 20.
29 Interview with a member of the mediation group, Bad Vöslau, March 2009.
30 Interview with the chairman of the ATIB, Aydin Akyüz, 26 March, 2009.
The function, the appearance and the height of the building were fixed in a contract between the city and the Vöslau ATIB. The contract also stipulated that there be no call to prayer or its transmission from inside, and that three persons nominated by the city council had the right to participate in the elections of the board of the ATIB.31 A working group for the social integration of the different ethnic and cultural groups in Bad Vöslau was established.

The mayor described the new architecture in this way: ‘a Turkish cultural centre will be constructed which does not look like a mosque, but rather like a musical pavilion’.32 In fact, this result of the mediation met exactly the terms of the AEK petition: there should be a prayer room, but not a clearly visible mosque. The compromise was presented as a ‘model for Austria’ and as a success, especially by the mayor and by some of the Muslim members in the mediation group. Many members of the Vöslau ATIB were unsatisfied with the glass minarets, however. ‘The city was against concrete columns, against everything which is usual in the oriental construction style’.33 Now some members intended to erect the symbol of the half-moon at the top of the glass minarets, in spite of the contract between ATIB and the city: ‘If the minarets are already short and hidden, at least there should be the half-moon’. Some members of the community thought that the donations for the project would be much higher if the original classical architecture were retained.

In spite of the concessions of the building owners, the two FPÖ members in the mediation left the group shortly before the last session (18 June, 2007) and the signing of the result of the mediation. Their position was that the new version was not ‘a compromise, but a victory of the ATIB over the will of the native population’; the mayor, accused of being ‘an active fighter for Islam and mosque’34, was called upon to resign. On 25 June, 2007, the FPÖ organised a demonstration against the building of the mosque in the city centre in Bad Vöslau, under the slogan ‘SOS Abendland’ (SOS Occident), with H.C. Strache as the main speaker. 250 people participated, mainly the FPÖ following in the region; several groups protested against the ‘agitation’. A public discussion of the new plans followed on 2 July.

In September 2007, for the first time, the governor of Lower Austria, Erwin Pröll (ÖVP), commented on the matter. In the ORF broadcast Report, he argued against the building of mosques with minarets: ‘Minarets are something

31 Report of the mayor on the result of the mediation, meeting of the City council, 28 June, 2007.
33 Interview with the chairman, Aydin Akyüz, 26 March, 2009.
dissimilar (Artfremdes), and in the long run something dissimilar does no good for the culture'.

On 27 September, 2007, MP Barbara Rosenkranz (FPÖ) broached the issue of the building of the mosque in Bad Vöslau during the 31st session of the Austrian Parliament. She criticized governor Pröll: on the one hand he denoted minarets as ‘dissimilar’, on the other hand the external assessment of the Federal state government gave its approval for the building of the mosque in Bad Vöslau.

With this remark she initiated a lengthy discussion of mosque building in the plenary of the Parliament. In this context the BZÖ proposed a motion for a parliamentary resolution intending a change of the construction law at the national level, which would explicitly prohibit mosque and minaret construction.

In March 2008, work on the construction of the mosque started. It was inaugurated on 24 October, 2009, in the presence, among others, of the President of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria, Anas Schakfeh, and the Grand-Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mustafa Ceric.

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35 Quoted in Profil Online, 15 September, 2007. The President of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (IGGiÖ), Prof. Anas Schakfeh, disapproved of the statement of Pröll: ‘It does not correspond with the principle of secularisation’ (News, 17 September 2007.) The adjective ‘artfremd’ was part of the vocabulary of the National Socialists: the term denotes something which is in contradiction to the nature of one’s own race (Duden, 10th ed. 1929, 11th ed. 1934, 12th ed. 1941). In National Socialism ‘artfremd’ is used for a foreign race which is, according to the Nazis, physically and psychically incompatible with one’s own race. For them, the embodiment of ‘Artfremdheit’ were the Jews, which are called ‘Artfremde’. See C Schmitz-Berning (1998), 67–69.

36 31st session of the National Assembly, 27 September, 2007, stenographic protocol.
In the local election (March 2010), the ruling party, ‘Liste Flammer’, lost more than 10% of votes and four seats in the city government. The winner was the list ‘FPÖ and Independents’, which achieved second place with 12.7% of the votes and jumped from one to five seats in the city government. Among the Independents were the initiator and a further member of the AEK—the spearhead of the protest against the new mosque.

The Mosque of the Bludenz ATIB (Vorarlberg)\(^{37}\)
Bludenz is a small city in Vorarlberg, founded in 1265 AD. According to the national census, in 2001 13,862 people lived in Bludenz, 2,348 of them foreign citizens (16.9%), 1,360 (9.9%) Muslims. A Turkish-Muslim group was established in 1987 and joined the ATIB-Union in 1990 when the latter was founded. Since 2000, the Bludenz ATIB had used a two-storey building, called Sultanahmet Camii Mosque Bludenz, in the neighbourhood of the railway station, between a petrol pump and the train lines. It was one of the 13 centres of the ATIB in Vorarlberg. The prayer room had space for about 100 persons, but was too small. In September 2006, the association initiated talks with the Mayor of Bludenz, Josef Katzenmayer (ÖVP) on the construction of a new mosque with a minaret in a parking lot bought by the ATIB and next to the existing centre. It would be the first mosque with a minaret in Vorarlberg.

In the night between 1 and 2 January, 2008, unknown persons committed arson in the Turkish consulate general in Bregenz, the capital of Vorarlberg. When the ORF Vorarlberg reported on the assault, it also mentioned the plans for a new mosque in Bludenz. Mixed with the news of the crime, the project became public. Immediately, Dieter Egger, chairman of the FPÖ Vorarlberg and member of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition government at the time, stated in a press release that it was imperative to use all legal avenues to prevent minarets becoming ‘symbols of religious power’.\(^{38}\) From this moment, the FPÖ in Vorarlberg dominated the anti-minaret campaign and the competition with the BZÖ regarding the political exploitation of the issue. In the middle of January, the FPÖ filed a motion, ‘No minarets in Vorarlberg’ in the State parliament. Referring to the plans for Bludenz, it called on the government to change the building law and the land use regulations

\(^{37}\) For interviews, discussions, information and material I would like to thank Volkan Deve (ATIB Bludenz), DI Thorsten Diekmann (head of city planning, Bludenz), Attila Dincer (speaker, ‘Turkish Platform’, Vorarlberg), Dr. Eva Grabherr (director, ‘okay.zusammen leben’ – Project office for Migration and Integration, Dornbirn), Josef Katzenmayer (Mayor of Bludenz), Hayrettin Kösem (Chairman, Bludenz ATIB), DSA Oliver Mössinger (Department for Youth and Integration, town of Bludenz), Mustafa Pacali (former coordinator, Vorarlberg ATIB), Bekir Saf (delegate of the chairman, Bludenz ATIB). I am especially grateful for permission by Dr. Grabherr to use the press archive of the institute.

\(^{38}\) Vorarlberg ORF.at, 2 January, 2008.
in such a way as to prevent ‘the construction of minarets in Vorarlberg’. In a press conference on 15 January, 2008, the governor of Vorarlberg Herbert Sausgruber (ÖVP) stated that a general ban was not possible because of the Federal Constitution, but the government would consider stricter regulations in the land-planning use law. According to him, this would force a dialogue with the municipal authorities regarding the creation and location of Islamic prayer rooms. The forcing of a discussion on minarets by a political ticket of migrants would lead to polarization and not to integration.

At the same time, the Mayor of Bludenz Josef Katzenmayer (ÖVP) affirmed that he was in principle open to the construction of a minaret. He noted the fact that the Muslims in Austria had had the freedom to practise their religion for 100 years. In the following weeks, the mayor received a flood of very emotional letters and e-mails from around the country, mainly from opponents of building the mosque. Other politicians, of the SPÖ and Green Party in Bludenz, reacted positively to the plans to construct a mosque with a minaret. Peter Haas, the Dean of the Church of the Holy Cross, which was in the neighbourhood of the ATIB and had sometimes hosted the Muslim community in the parish hall, stated: ‘if Islam has been acknowledged by the State since 1912, then the construction of mosques cannot be refused’. A regional paper published the first layout for the new mosque in Bludenz, created by the architect H. Akkaya-Kürtür (Stuttgart, Germany): it showed a five-storey building with a hall, two prayer rooms for men and women, two apartments, a café, and an unmanned minaret (20 metres). There have been talks between the Bludenz ATIB and the city about the location, parking and other questions, but to date (August 2010) no official building plans have been filed with the city.

On 18 January, 2008, the Vorarlberg BZÖ launched a campaign for a change of the building law on the model of Carinthia, in which the construction of minarets as ‘symbols of fundamentalist Muslims’ would be prevented. At the press conference the director of the BZÖ stated that the Islamic community, consisting mainly of migrants, would try to impose its culture on the native population (‘Urbevölkerung’) of Vorarlberg.

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39 Discussed in the State parliament on 15 January, officially passed as a ‘Selbständiger Antrag’ (Beilage 6/2008) of five FPÖ members of the State parliament on 21 January, 2008.

40 The background was the announcement by a group of Austrian citizens around Adnan Dincer (NBZ chairman), of their intention to establish a new political ticket which would run for the Federal state election in 2009. Dincer is of the opinion that minarets are not necessary for the practice of Islam. The question of the construction of minarets would not be a question of the new political ticket (NBZ, press release, 12 March, 2008). Report on the press conference of governor Sausgruber: Vorarlberg ORF.at, 15 January, 2008.


42 Interview, 4 March 2009.
On 24 January, in a broadcast, Governor Sausgruber confirmed the intention to change the land use regulations, so that cooperation between building owners and the municipal authorities was necessary. The amendment would allow the power of veto by the state government of a decision at the municipal level. The construction times, and design of, a new mosque would in the end have to be accepted by the majority of the population. Sausgruber ignored the fact that, in the case of Bludenz, the Muslim community had approached the mayor and discussed the project with the city even before the official application. For the FPÖ, this amendment planned by the ÖVP was not enough – the government should set boundaries to 'Islamicization', otherwise the FPÖ would initiate a referendum in Vorarlberg.\(^43\)

On 1 February, a working group consisting of representatives of the city, integration experts, the ATIB and the 'Turkish platform' in Vorarlberg discussed the mosque project – a meeting called for by Mayor Katzenmayer in autumn, when he was informed by the Muslims in Bludenz of the plans. It decided to establish a commission for the legal and technical questions regarding the construction of the mosque and to arrange an excursion to two mosques in Penzberg and Miesbach (Germany). The ATIB agreed to supply the public with further information about the project.

On 25 February – two weeks after a similar decision in Carinthia – the Governor of Vorarlberg presented the proposal for the amendments of the building law and land use regulations. It stated that municipal authorities could decide that in residential areas, the construction of buildings that are visited by many people – like mosques, cinemas, discotheques – is only allowed by special permission. In projects which involve the protection of the image of a place and landscape in a special way, the state government can decree that the municipal authority is obliged to obtain expert advice from the state government. The governor called these measures ‘a clear signal for slowing the minaret plans’.\(^44\) The amendment of the building law (LGBl 2008/34) and of the land use regulation (LGBl 2008/35) was enacted by the state parliament (ÖVP 21 seats, FPÖ 5 seats) on 9 April, 2008, over the objections of the SPÖ and the Green Party. In its ‘Human Rights Report 2008’, published on 25 February, 2009, the US Department of State mentioned the amendments to the zoning laws in Carinthia and Vorarlberg.

In a press release (18 March, 2008), the Roman-Catholic Bishop of the diocese of Feldkirch, Elmar Fischer, intervened in the debate. He conceded that Austrian religious law allowed the construction of mosques:

\(^44\) Vorarlberg Online, 25 February, 2008.
Yet it is a requirement of human respect, that an ethnic group which is new practice a degree of integration in a country which for the native population signals recognition and cooperation. . . . Mosques with minarets would be a provocation and a blatant endangerment of the social peace, and they do not correspond to the mindset of the predominant part of the population in Vorarlberg.45

In this way, the Bishop of Vorarlberg openly dissented from the position of the head of the Austrian Bishops’ Conference, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn. Two days before in a talk with journalists on Austrian television, the Cardinal had been asked if Muslims should be allowed to build mosques. He underlined the right of Muslims to build mosques with minarets within the frame of the existing building law: ‘In Vienna we have a mosque with a minaret. Where is the problem? I don’t see it’. Here he saw himself ‘completely grounded in the Austrian constitution’.46 The FPÖ and BZÖ welcomed the statement of Bishop Fischer and criticized the Cardinal. Disagreement with the Cardinal was also expressed by the Bishop of the diocese of St. Pölten (Lower Austria), Klaus Küng: in an interview he stated that in many Islamic countries it is not allowed to build Christian churches, ‘And here I ask myself if Muslims in this country should not voluntarily abstain from building mosques, as long as this situation continues’.47 The same position was taken by the Bishop of the diocese of Graz-Seckau, Egon Kapellari. A split within the Bishop’s conference on this question became visible. On 5 April, 2008, in an open letter, eleven prominent personalities of the Catholic Church – among them theologians of the Universities in Vienna and Innsbruck – criticized the statements of Bishop Elmar Fischer and reminded him of the official doctrine of the Catholic Church regarding the attitude towards Muslims. It was not the Muslims in Austria who would endanger the social peace, ‘but rather those political groups in Europe which agitate against Islam and fuel an existing fear and hostility against Islam to exploit it systematically for their political purposes’.48

In a poll in Vorarlberg, 65% of respondents stated that they were principally against the construction of minarets, 5% were for the construction, 24% were for minarets at places where they did not disturb (at the periphery).49

At the end of April, the Vorarlberg FPÖ announced an ‘anti-minaret initiative’ in all towns and larger municipalities in order to implement the new

45 Bischof Elmar Fischer: Stellungnahme „Streitfrage Moschee”, 18 March, 2008..
49 Meinungsforschungsinstitut Edwin Berndt, Göfis (Vorarlberg). Report: VN, 21 April, 2008, A5. In towns, 59% are against minarets, 8% for minarets, 27% for it outside of the centre of the city; in small municipalities (less than 3,000 people) 70% are against minarets, 2% are for, 24% for it if they don’t disturb.
amendment: the FPÖ would initiate the enactment of a regulation that buildings which are visited by many people (‘publikumsintensive Veranstaltungsstätten’) need a special zoning designation from the municipal authorities.

In the middle of August 2008, a young member of the Bludenz ATIB, Volkan Deve, announced that the ATIB planned now to apply for a smaller building—a three-storey annexe to the existing centre, for two prayer rooms and rooms for the young members, without a minaret. This would allow sufficient parking at the plot. It would be planned by architects from Vorarlberg.50 The new plans were discussed in the building commission of the city. Immediately the chairman of the Vorarlberg FPÖ claimed that this decision was due to the success of the ‘campaign against minarets’ of his party51 and started a campaign with advertisements, mainly in local papers: ‘the persons in charge had to yield to pressure and have abstained from building a minaret in Bludenz’.52 Afterwards the entire debate died down.

In an interview in March 2009, the persons in charge of the Bludenz ATIB unanimously declared that they wanted to build the annexe with a minaret, ‘if it is possible’.53 In a conversation, a member of the board of the Bludenz ATIB stated: ‘we want to have a building with a minaret, we will try. The mayor is in favour of it—but what can he do if the population is against it?’54 In the interview, Volkan Deve explained the report that the Muslim community would abstain from a minaret as a ‘misinterpretation’ of his statement. It seems that there are different opinions between the members of the first and the second generation in the community regarding the function and appearance of the new mosque.

In the case of Bludenz, it is clear that the mosque construction project and the necessary intensive contacts with the city government has stimulated very positive inner developments: the women of the mosque association have obtained a new, better room; there are more young, German-speaking people on the executive board of the mosque, and the youth association of the mosque became members of the city ‘Youth Council’ in May 2010.55 And the case of Bludenz demonstrates that a clear stance of the city government on the basis of fundamental rights for all does not harm electoral success. In March 2010, with

53 Interview with Hayrettin Kösem (chairman Bludenz ATIB), Volkan Deve (represents the 30 young members of ATIB in the town’s building commission), Bludenz, 4 March, 2009.
54 Conversation with Bekir Saf, delegate of the chairman, Bludenz ATIB, 4 March, 2009.
55 Telephone interview: Oliver Mössinger, town of Bludenz, Department for integration, 6 August, 2010.
57.2% of the votes, Mayor Katzenmayer was able to hold his absolute majority in the city parliament.

Conclusions

Exactly 30 years separate the opening of the first representative mosque in Austria, the Islamic Centre in Vienna (1979), and the opening of the mosque in Bad Vöslau (2009). The circumstances surrounding the two projects show how, in the last 30 years, the relationship between the West and the Islamic World, as well as the general attitude of Western European societies toward Islam, have changed. While the mosque in Vienna was seen in 1979 as a symbol of the sophistication and cosmopolitan nature of the city and was dedicated with the participation of the highest representatives of the State and of the Catholic church, the building of the Vöslau mosque became a flashpoint of community conflict and a major local problem the solution to which was found by disguising the building’s function as much as possible.

The developments surrounding the recent mosque construction projects show a marked tendency: the building of private religious buildings by Muslim organisations is no longer handled by the usual community construction authorities; rather, on account of its political volatility, it has become a priority issue of local governments. This can mean, as in the case of Leoben, that the local government organises information sessions for the public in order to bring various groups to the table for discussion, to counteract the politicization of the theme and to prevent the escalation of anti-Muslim sentiments. It can mean, as in the case of Bludenz, that the city sets up its own commission, with the participation of integration experts, in order to accompany and support the mosque building project technically. It can also mean, as in the case of Bad Vöslau, that the local government becomes actively involved in the mosque building project, intervening to force significant modifications in the architectural profile of the building and even to have a say in the inner workings of the mosque association.

Decisive for these examples of cooperation between the city and Muslim organizations is the degree to which the principles of religious freedom and the ideological neutrality of the secular state are respected. In many cases these principles are not followed, when political pressure is applied in order to achieve agreements and contracts by which the Muslim organizations consent to erect buildings that are not outwardly recognizable as mosques; to move out of central locations into the periphery of cities; and to forgo calls to prayer. In this way the practising of the Islamic faith is forced into the private sphere. In fact, in the case of Muslims an exception is created concerning the freedom to practise
religion and the autonomy of religious organizations. The freedom of religion also includes the right to manifest belief outwardly. The public and the politicians appear to have become accustomed to seeing no problem with curtailing and eroding the freedom of religion, in regard to Muslim associations. To deny basic rights is exculpated with a kind of ‘state of emergency’ and the general perception of Islam as a threat (Scheepers, Gijsberts and Coenders 2002).

The problem is not, however, only to be found in Austrian politics. The facts surrounding Islamic construction projects are complex and ambivalent: in the case of Vöslau, the Muslim association wanted to erect a mosque which had no architectural connection with the Austrian context, rather it represented a statement of Turkish national and religious identity politics, a building in sharp dissociation from secular Austrian society. In the case of the ATIB, a foreign state was directly involved in the construction and control of mosques in Austria. The city government intervened heavily in order to prevent the planned construction – but the political intrusion was concerned primarily with the (in)visibility of the mosque and not with the development of a structure that would represent an innovative, contemporary and European sacred space for Muslims. One important topic would have been the inclusion of women in the prayer hall. But neither side broached the subject of how a gender-equal path could be negotiated. Both sides missed the opportunity to inform the public adequately from the start of the project – a lack of transparency that fuelled suspicions and fears among the citizens.

The conscious partisan calculus of political parties in connection with ‘Islam’ is obvious. Behind it, there are also hidden mechanisms of power, whereby the ‘other’, the ‘stranger’ is subordinated, not only culturally, religiously, politically and economically, but also spatially – whether it concerns access to publicly supported living space and access to certain neighbourhoods, or whether it concerns Muslim buildings or public calls to prayer. In dealings with building projects of the Muslim minority, a mindset appears that fights against societal change as the result of immigration and which defends the existing social hierarchy between ‘natives’ and ‘new arrivals’. In any case, the result of this attitude is a paradoxical situation: Muslims are beginning to emerge from decades of invisibility in ‘backyard’ mosques – but the new buildings are not recognizable as Muslim cultural buildings. This is either a result of direct intervention by politicians or a result of ‘anticipatory obedience’ and accommodation on the part of Muslim project initiators, who want to avoid conflict.

The form of the modern liberal democracy and of the constitutional state guarantee freedom of religion as a universal human right. In Austria, the Basic State Law (Staatsgrundgesetz 1867) and the St. Germain Treaty (Staatsvertrag
von St. Germain 1919) contain the basis for the constitutional guarantees of the freedom of religion. It is also anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 18) and protected by the European Human Rights Convention (article 9) and the UN International Convenant on Civil and Political Rights (article 18). The normative basic principles and the legal status concerning the practice of religion for Muslims are clear. But their consistent implementation is lacking.

Individual communities and regional governments in fact do not treat mosque and minaret building projects on the basis of the principles of modern human rights to religious freedom, but rather on the basis of the tolerance principle. Religious tolerance enforced by the authorities is, however, something different from religious freedom (Bielefeldt 2008; Heimbach-Steins 2008). Examining the pre-modern policies of Josephine tolerance makes the distinction clear. The Edict of Tolerance, which Emperor Joseph the 2nd decreed on 13 October, 1781, strengthened the privileged position of the Catholic Church, which alone possessed the right to practise religion in public. For Christian non-Catholics – the Protestants of Lutheran and Calvinist denominations, as well as the Orthodox Greeks – a limited form of religious freedom was permitted, namely the permission to practise religion privately. The difference between the public and private practice of religion affected above all the visibility of the various religious buildings. The emperor decreed in the Edict, that the ‘places of worship for the non-Catholic Christians . . . may not have noises, bells, towers or public entrances on to the streets, as a church would have’. They were permitted to hold services of worship inside buildings, as well as public funerals. In 1782, several discriminatory provisions against the Jewish faith were also abolished by the Tolerance Edict.

The appearance of the Protestant ‘tolerance churches’ during the Habsburg monarchy of the 19th century served as an expression of the subordinate position of Protestantism, which, as a false religion, was merely tolerated, and in its practice was limited and controlled by the state. ‘Tolerance mosques’, which are being built today in Austria, Islamic centres, which are being pushed to the peripheries of towns, and the building projects of Muslims, which have been hindered systematically for years, manifest both physically and spatially that Islam in Austria, 100 years after the ‘Islam Law’, is not being treated as a religion with equal rights.

Bibliography


The impact of the minaret vote in Switzerland
Stéphane Lathion

Muslims in Switzerland were not really a European issue until 29 November, 2009. While there is no colonial history, there used to be annual summer immigration of rich traditional Arab families spending their money around Lake Geneva, people with high socio-economic standing and a multicultural and multilingual tradition – nothing that was really religiously problematic. But, since 2003 and the cantonal referendum on public-legal recognition of non-Christian religious communities in the canton of Zurich the situation has changed. That debate was reduced to an Islamic issue on the emerging danger of reducing tax support to Koranic schools. The 2004 referendum on easier naturalization of 2nd and 3rd generation migrants in Switzerland became a debate on Islam and Muslims. The opposition pointed out the danger that – should the ballot be won – by 2040 Swiss Muslims would have increased in number by 70%.1 The Islamization of this debate contributed decisively to the rejection of the initiative. So the current situation is clearly different and the ‘minaret vote’ may turn out to be a turning point in history. As a result, this paper discusses two issues linked to the Muslim presence in Switzerland. The first and most obvious is the minaret vote of November 2009, and the second, close to the mosque issue, is the more complex question of imams working in Switzerland.

Historical keys to understand the Muslim reality in Switzerland

Prior to 1960, the presence of Muslims within the Swiss population was rare, and was estimated at some 16,300 in the 1970s. However, this changed owing to three waves of immigration: the first of economic migration, the second family-based, and the third political. The first wave, in the late 1960s, was mainly economic and was largely composed of men coming to work in Switzerland with no particular intention of staying permanently in the country. These immigrants were mostly from Turkey, former Yugoslavia, and Albania. The second wave came in the late 1970s after Switzerland modified its legislation concerning foreigners to allow family regrouping. The effects of this decision were immediate. From this point onwards, Islam was no longer only an ephemeral, male, social factor in Switzerland but became a permanent reality with the arrival of families. The last wave was a political one, composed of foreigners seeking asylum from oppressive dictatorships, civil war, famines, and a variety of other circumstances. More accurately, this was not so much a wave as an ongoing movement since it started in the 1960s (mainly from the Middle East) and continues today with the exodus of people from the Middle East, former Yugoslavia, North Africa, and other African countries. Today, as elsewhere in Europe, governments have to deal with this ongoing migration process but also with the more complicated new reality of Muslim citizens in European countries who were born or have grown up in Europe. It is no longer possible to talk about a host society as these people were born in Switzerland. They are at home in Switzerland, and in Europe. This new reality must be acknowledged and the consequences faced by both groups.

The total Swiss population, according to the 2000 census, numbered 7,288,010. For the first time a question relating to religious belief was included in the census, and it was found that 310,807 of the total Swiss population were Muslims, meaning Muslims represent 4.3% of the total population in Switzerland, while Muslims of Swiss nationality made up only 0.6% of the total population of Switzerland. In contrast to the number indicated in the last census, some estimates put the number of Muslims today as being much closer to 400,000.²

The majority of Muslims in Switzerland (58%) are from former Yugoslavia, followed by Turks (21%), Swiss (11%), North Africans (4%), Sub-Saharan Africans (4%), and Middle Eastern immigrants (2%). For more details, see www.gris.info. Muslim communities in Switzerland are 75% Sunni, 7% Shi‘a, 10%-15% Turkish Alevi, and a few members of various Sufi orders. The fact that statistics reveal the presence of 169,726 Muslim men compared to 141,081 Muslim women

demonstrates that the Muslim presence has evolved and is no longer due to labour migration alone. Automatic Swiss nationality is by descent and not by birth on Swiss territory. In general, even if born in Switzerland, foreigners must have lived a total of twelve years in Switzerland before they may apply for Swiss nationality. In 2004 a federal referendum made access to Swiss citizenship for the descendants of immigrants easier. It is a young community with about half under the age of 25. The large majority live in the urban cantons of Geneva, Basel, Bern, Zürich, St Gallen, and the urban centres in the canton of the Vaud.

Main Muslim organizations

At present, there are over 80 Muslim associations in Switzerland but this figure is constantly changing. It should be noted that most of the established Muslim associations have substructures for their youth, and women are also often organized within the framework of the main association. However, the range of activities varies, with some focusing on religious activities while others are much more culturally orientated. Muslim associations are generally locally organized, but they are also starting to create representative bodies in the cantons. The associations in most cantons are gathering themselves into federations (for example, the Union of Muslim Associations of the canton of Fribourg), which gives them more weight in discussing important issues (e.g. cemeteries, swimming pools, construction of mosques). At the national level, there are three main bodies: Musulmans et Musulmanes de Suisse (MMS) www.islam.ch, La Ligue des Musulmans de Suisse (LMS) www.rabita.ch, and the Fédération des Organisations Islamiques de Suisse (FOIS, c/o Dr. F. Afshar, Kappelenring 44c, 3032 Hinterkappelen), but there is no official representation as in France. The Ligue and the MMS were both founded in 1994 with the aim of helping Swiss Muslims find ways of integrating and participating in Swiss society constructively. So far their wish to develop some form of Swiss federation of Muslim organizations has not met with success. However, united bodies have been emerging in most cantons since 2002. For example, the Union des organisations musulmanes de Genève (UOMG) in Geneva, Union vaudoise des associations musulmanes (UVAM) in the Vaud, Union des associations musulmanes de Fribourg (UAMF) in Fribourg, Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen in Zürich (VIOZ) in Zürich, and lastly, the Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen in Luzern (VIOL) in Lucern.

Islam and the state

Switzerland is a secular state, but the Swiss state recognizes both Catholicism and Protestantism as official religions, and relations with religious communities are based on the fundamental rights to freedom of religion and philosophy and to equality before the law (Swiss Constitution). However, since Switzerland is a federation of small states known as cantons, all matters of religion fall under the competence of the cantons, within the limits of federal (constitutional) law. That means that a canton is permitted to support a recognized religion. In fact, only two cantons have clearly separated the state from religion and these are Geneva and Neuchâtel.4

Muslims in Switzerland must abide by all Swiss laws and regulations. In general, no Swiss laws exist that directly interfere with any Islamic obligation. For example, no Swiss laws forbid Muslims to exercise their religious beliefs or practices, such as the ‘five pillars’. The issue of official recognition of non-Christian religions is being continuously debated and was the subject of a referendum in the canton of Zürich in 2003. Furthermore, during 2007–2008 all the main political parties developed a strategic paper on the place of Islam in Switzerland.

The situation in Switzerland with regard to cemeteries for Muslims varies. As a federation of states, Switzerland has left this issue to the competence of the cantons. The cantons usually allow the individual communes to find the solution that best suits their population. A number of Muslim cemeteries have been established in recent years. The oldest was started in Petit-Saconnex in Geneva in 1978, followed by Basel and Bern (2000), Lugano (2002), and Zurich, after some years of debate to find a consensual solution (2004). Requests for Muslim sections to be allocated in existing cemeteries or for a Muslim cemetery to be established in Neuchâtel and Fribourg have been made recently and received a positive response.

With regard to funeral rites, Muslim organizations usually provide personnel to prepare the body for the funeral. Where no local regulations exist regarding details of funeral rites, parishes usually try to do their best to find a solution that is acceptable to the family.

The question of setting aside designated areas for Muslim burials in cemeteries is an interesting one because it has emerged fairly regularly in the cantons for some years now. Nevertheless, more than 90% of Muslim families decide to repatriate their relative’s body to their country of origin. Up until the present, the strategy of dialogue and search for a consensus has borne fruit even in the most

secular cantons of Geneva and Neuchâtel, where arrangements have been made with their Muslim communities to settle the question of burial. So, this question could be solved before being considered a problem and be an example of pragmatic and reasonable accommodation.

The minaret campaign: how to avoid a useful debate?

The major public debate of 2009 was about the referendum held on 29 November, in which Swiss voters were asked to decide whether or not they wanted to ban the construction of minarets. Having collected the required 100,000 signatures, the organizers handed over the proposal to the federal authorities to test its validity. Following an intense debate, the government took the risk and approved the constitutionality of the campaign.

The result of the vote was that 57% were against the building of new minarets, which came as a surprise to all and spilled over into the international arena. By way of explanation, some analysts pointed to the political élites and the media being out of touch with the general population. Others pointed to the Libyan crisis, and yet others recalled a certain degree of Swiss xenophobia that has a tendency to surface from time to time. It is most likely that a combination of these factors came into play. The refusal of the élites to recognize the fears of people regarding an Islam that is generally not well known and is felt to be threatening, the suggestion that people were stupid and Islamophobic to hold such views, can only have reinforced the opposition.

The right-wing conservative political party saw the minaret as a symbol of Islam conquering Switzerland and Europe. The main goal of the campaign was to send a strong signal to Muslims, viewed as being too visible within civil society: not everything is permitted, and their main priority should be to integrate. Nevertheless, freedom of religion was still guaranteed by the Federal Constitution, as was the right to build mosques, but the minaret, which could be taken for an offensive and ‘threatening’ religious symbol, was forbidden.

Before examining the multiple reasons for the vote and its consequences, it would be useful to consider several points affecting the Swiss mosque/prayer hall situation.

There are more than 100 mosques and/or prayer halls registered in Switzerland, although statistics in this field are unreliable. Of these, only four have the distinctive features of Islamic architecture, including a minaret, while the rest are mainly prayer halls without any outward indication of their Islamic activity. They are located in industrial areas; a few have facilities such as a library
and/or cafeteria but these are almost invisible from the outside and have never been a source of major problems.

The first one was built in Zurich (Ahmadiyya) in 1963 with a minaret of 18 metres, then, in 1978, the King of Saudi Arabia financed an important project in Geneva with a 22-metre high minaret. At that time, the local authorities even asked why the minaret was so small! The two mosques are located in residential neighbourhoods a few kilometres from the city centre and are well integrated into the urban landscape. In May 2005, a third minaret was built on the roof of the Albanian Islamic Center in Winterthur while in 2006 three projects were registered in the German part of Switzerland: in Wangen bei Olten (BE), Langenthal (BE) and Wil (SG), which triggered a national debate.

The typical Swiss democratic process (Right of Initiative) was set in motion and in less than 15 months almost 115,000 signatures had been gathered (July 2008). Then the government decided to organize a federal vote whose result is now known: a modification of the Swiss Constitution banning the building of new minarets in Switzerland.

The approach chosen was clearly provocative and debatable since there are only four minarets in Switzerland, and given that, in spite of the marked growth
of the Muslim population, there has not been a similar increase in requests for permission to build mosques with minarets. For example, there has not been a single request for a minaret in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. The whole matter was much more a debate about the Muslim presence itself than about minarets. The debate was very emotional; firstly owing to widespread ignorance about Islam among the population as well as politicians, secondly due to an international climate that, as in the rest of Europe, rejects a reasoned and considered approach to Muslim themes. What had happened in certain Muslim countries and even certain European cities was confused with the calm reality lived by Muslims in Switzerland so that it could be said that a dangerous invasion that was threatening Swiss society and values needed to be stopped. Campaigning was emotional and it’s not enough to tell someone that being Islamophobic was stupid to make them stop being that.

Seven reasons in all explaining the Swiss vote against the building of new minarets can be identified:\(^5\)

1. An ideological milieu hostile to Islam that is networked today through the Internet using arguments that are circulated beyond frontiers. For example, the *Mouvement suisse contre l’islamisation* (MOSCI).
2. People worry about immigration. In fact, Switzerland is a country where emigration has historically been strong and which has never been perceived as a country of immigration. Furthermore, an omnipresent xenophobia has been developing in Swiss politics since the 1970s. And like everywhere else in Europe, the rapid growth of a foreign population practising a religion with which Western Europe’s relations have often been marked by conflict has inevitably resulted in a reaction to it.
3. Some Muslims defend secularization to the detriment of the external signs of religion. For example, a large number of Alevis voted for the initiative because in their eyes while there is no real problem with Islam in Switzerland, one developing needs to be avoided.
4. The reciprocity argument has also played a not insignificant role: when one visits their home, one has to adapt . . .; or when we can build churches in their countries, then . . .
5. The unfavourable violent images from the Muslim world seen in news footage especially since 11 September followed by the Madrid and London bombings.
6. The Ghaddafi affair. Since the arrest of one of the Libyan leader’s sons in Geneva, relations between the two countries have deteriorated and

made some Swiss perceive that they might be humiliated by a Muslim country, which is something they do not want to happen.

Lastly, there are people who quite simply view Islam as a foreign presence in Switzerland, whose visibility is resented as an act of aggression, as these people perceive this presence to be permanent. Quite simply, Islam has no place in an ideal Swiss landscape unless it remains discreet.

There is no simple or straightforward explanation, but in a debate that has remained very emotional, the question now is: What does the acceptance of this initiative mean in practical terms? There are four permanent minarets in Switzerland and they are not going to be destroyed. On the other hand, the new article in the Constitution has banned the construction of new minarets but the creation of mosques and places of prayer for Muslims is still possible, as is the practice of Islamic worship. Unfortunately, the necessary debate on the Muslim situation and future in Switzerland has been avoided. Neither politicians, the media, nor leaders of Muslim associations have been able to escape from the emotional tensions. But, in any case, this crucial issue will have to be answered, and the sooner the better.

The other point in the coming months is whether or not the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg will judge whether or not the vote discriminates against anyone, and so possibly require Switzerland to reverse its decision in order to conform to international treaties.

What has happened within the Muslim communities since the vote of 29 November, 2009?

To understand the current situation, an important fact preceding 29 November needs to be considered. The presence of Muslims in the media was 99% Arabic. Since more than 90% of Muslims in Switzerland are from Turkey and the Balkans, the problem is easy to see. There is a huge gap between the Muslims talking in the media and the silent majority of Muslims who do not feel that they are represented by these spokespeople. Furthermore, year after year people are becoming tired of hearing the same politically correct discourse that seems to have no connections with Muslim concerns and the questions non-Muslims ask. Too often they talk about religion from too much of an Arabic perspective and do not discuss concrete social issues enough. This leads to the impression that they are detached from the grass roots.
Something else observed during recent years has been the appearance of a secular pole within Muslim communities: ‘Forum pour un Islam progressiste’ in Zurich and ‘Musulmans pour la laïcité’ in Geneva. Not very successful or representative but very important for the silent majority that can now express itself easily: ‘I don’t feel represented by the traditionalists but neither do I feel represented by the progressives, so I must express myself once and for all!’.

At the beginning of the campaign, a lot of doubt and hesitation could be seen in Muslims because most of them did not feel very involved in the subject: ‘Muslim representatives have called for dialogue and respect. Due to this self-restraint, they did not actively campaign against the initiative’ (Des musulmans sortent discrètement du bois, Valérie de Graffenried, Le Temps, 6 November, 2009). But, at the same time, they were conscious they had to do something but they did not know what. A very uncomfortable position.

The debate over the provocative UDC posters is instructive in more ways than one. First, it shows the malaise in the political class, which was lulled away from getting involved in the subject because during the first two weeks of the campaign it focused on whether or not it was necessary to ban these posters, on the form rather than the substance. For some, freedom of expression has limits and must not allow everything, the incriminating posters must be banned because they incite to hatred and encourage the association of Muslims with terrorists.

Others, particularly the authorities in Geneva, think the publicity of a ban would reinforce the position of those responsible and they would be able to endorse their role of victims. The fact that the UDC’s position and contradictions can be analysed from the poster can be added to this argument: it is not the minaret that poses problems, it is Islam (the visibility of Islam) represented by the fully-veiled woman, an element that is further emphasized by the style and colours (a full black veil as if it were in black capital letters like a STOP road sign).

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6 The Swiss People’s Party (SVP) also known as the Democratic Union of the Centre (UDC).
On the other hand, the debate over the provocative UDC posters and the media packaging of it led to the emergence of new spokespeople from Muslim communities in Switzerland, resulting in a much more varied picture of Islam than had previously been seen. This is the most positive point of the anti-minaret initiative. This resulted in a wider spectrum of views of Islam and Islamic practices present in Switzerland emerging, both socially and in the media. Since then, many newspapers have tried to hand the microphone to these new ‘Muslims’. So the question is: will they continue their public involvement after the shock result or will they be too disappointed to continue? The answer will provide a key element for preparing for the future.

The gap between state expectations and Muslim preoccupations

The minaret crisis has highlighted a reciprocal lack of knowledge and ignorance, and how different the expectations are of the State and the preoccupations of Muslim communities in Switzerland. For example, the question of representation is essential and justifiable in the eyes of the political authorities. The State might prefer it if all the various opinions from the concrete questions affecting a wider Muslim public were represented rather than only the most religiously active. Obviously, it is a great deal easier to have a definite representative with whom to discuss problems. However, this does not work in Islam in the same way as it does with the Catholic clergy, Protestant pastors, or Jewish rabbis: there is no recognized authority or single representative likely to bring together all the Islamic groups.

The various Islamic communities in this representational framework are working hard to become local umbrella organizations. This is the start of an intra-Muslim community process that is important in order to define a positive dynamic for the years to come.

By insisting on questions of representation, the State risks encouraging the communitarianism that it also fears and condemns. Many Muslims do not like to define themselves (even less to be defined) by religious references only. They are not only Muslims.

There are initiatives on both sides that attempt to improve understanding of the other side and overcome ever-present fears. This arises out of Muslim diversity, which has been seen in the media a little more often than before, and at meetings organized by the cantons on specifically Islamic themes: education, citizenship. Since March 2010, the appearance of very small Salafist groups that profit from the climate of tension in order to establish themselves on the
public scene in Switzerland should also be noted. Using provocative actions, discourses and clothes (prayer in the public space, apology of shari’a and women wearing the *niqab*) they wish to affirm a strict and traditional version of their faith and practice. That trend will confirm fears within the non-Muslim population and could complicate the intra-community dialogue.

**What room is there for religion in the public domain?**

Far from being limited to the particular question of the minaret, the debate largely concentrated on Islam in general and the minaret in particular has been transformed into a marker of Islamization in Switzerland. However, one of the main issues of our times has been avoided, that is, what place is a secularized society ready to give to religious expression?

This questioning of the place of religion in the public domain goes far beyond Islam. It is not only that this debate should have been reduced to the expression of various Muslim demands (the headscarf in France, mosques in Germany, training of imams in Switzerland, forced marriage almost everywhere) but also that a secularized democracy dares to confront this new issue. Furthermore, there will always be individuals in both camps who will endeavour to complicate truly responsible debate: on the one hand there are Islamophobes for whom all bearded men and veiled women are potential terrorists, and on the other, there are some Muslim leaders who take pleasure in arguing victimization in order to reinforce a community response that legitimizes their local power and influence. However, it must not be forgotten that the majority of Muslims in Switzerland do not go to mosques and do not belong to any Muslim organization.

It is this silent majority that must make itself heard in order to confirm that the integration of the first generations is very much a thing of the past and that the situation now favours living together in diversity and with respect for the legal framework in force. The Jesuit theologian Jean-Bernard Livio confirmed this assessment from a Christian point of view when he stated (*Le Temps*, Friday, 9 December, 2009): ‘It is for them (the silent majority) to insist on the fact that several problematic regulations are not to be found in the Koran: stoning, which is a monstrosity, has no foundation. As Christians we are destabilized by Islam because it questions Christianity, whose numbers are greater. Very often we conceal that part of our heritage that is a spiritual tradition and the source of our civil values: tolerance, respect for others, and equality are evangelical values (which had to be re-conquered by the powers proclaiming Christianity during the 18th century)’.
Similarly, the authorities must make the effort to listen to all these different voices, which are always expressed from deep within the heart of Muslim communities in Switzerland, the voices of Turks, Bosnians, Kosovars, progressive and lay Muslims, no longer content with the habitual Arabophile leaders in the media and politically-correct debates which do not represent the reality of the large majority of Muslims in Switzerland.

From the Muslim point of view, and as certain self-proclaimed leaders repeat ad nauseam, the ideal vision is of a united community. It concerns giving a sense of responsibility to citizens of the Muslim faith so that some of them can venture to explain what they are, and move away from the position of victims and start playing an active role.

It would also be advisable for all the actors to think of not placing Islam where it is not, because far from being an obstacle, religion can become a very effective tool in resolving intercultural conflicts in which only customs, male chauvinism, and culture are involved.

The only possible positive outcome of the vote would be for the various actors to adopt a responsible attitude and engage in a genuine debate over the underlying problems. Otherwise the likely outcome is growing security fears, prohibition of the burqa (even though it is not really worn in Switzerland), ever stricter controls against forced marriages and hijabs at school, and an exaggerated climate of suspicion and mutual ignorance which risks endangering social stability and public order.

Key issue: the urgent need for imams to know their context

On 7 May, 2003, an imam from Macedonia was denied a work permit to work as an imam in the Catholic canton of Wallis. This was largely due to the fact that he had studied in Medina (Saudi Arabia) and the cantonal authorities considered him to be a potential threat to religious harmony. As a result, imam training became a political issue and a study group was set up which was to report its findings in May 2009. The report, ‘Training courses for Imams and Islamic Teachers’, confirms that the Muslim majority expects training courses for teachers based on the German model (educational studies, Arabic, Islam). The situation in the French part is quite different and seems more oriented towards the historical and ecumenical approach proposed by an NGO called ENBIRO (http://www.enbiro.ch/default_b.html), which discusses the two models for training Muslim religious teachers. One is to establish an academic unit in a university. The other is an intermediate solution that provides continuing adult education to supplement the theological training that working imams already have, and also to make this
training available to leaders in Muslim associations in a way which might assist foreign imams.

A training course for Muslim association leaders was proposed in Fribourg in 2009 but for various reasons it has been impossible to hold it. Firstly, because of the lack of interest from the Muslim association leaders, and secondly the lack of support from the University also explains the difficulty found in convincing candidates. Finally, perhaps the programme was too ambitious in trying to attract two different audiences: Muslim association leaders together with non-Muslim professionals working with Muslim populations.

Why throughout Europe is it considered important to offer some civic skills to imams and Muslim association leaders? This can be illustrated for both communities through two situations involving two religious leaders working in Switzerland. Firstly, M. Hani Ramadan, chairman of the Geneva Islamic Center, who during a Muslim rally in front of the UNO building in Geneva a few years ago took the microphone and made a speech about the Muslim situation all over the world. He used the term *jihad* to explain his position. People who know the multiple meanings of this term do not think this is anything really unusual or even something that should be criticized, but M. Ramadan knew very well that most of the audience would only understand the classic violent meaning of *jihad*. The fact that the speaker was admittedly only speaking of the major *jihad*, the spiritual effort every Muslim should make to become a better person, a better Muslim, does not change anything. Worse still, whatever result those words had on the audience, he could always claim that he was only talking of major *jihad* and was not advocating violence.

This kind of verbal argument is problematic in Europe. Courses in civic responsibility, communication, and warnings as to the emphasis placed on words, oblige religious and association leaders to openly accept their ideas and arguments and assume the consequences.

Another more recent example from the summer of 2009 was made public when the anti-minaret initiative was in full swing. It concerns an investigation into an officiating imam in Fribourg who was accused of inciting to violence during a sermon. In a sermon given in Arabic to a hundred or so faithful, the religious dignitary had called on God to ‘punish the enemies of Islam and support the warring brothers in Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine’. Here again there is more than an invitation to violence and an interpretation that conceals something more serious, the lack of knowledge and ability to understand the context in which they work as religious leaders.

In fact, the impression received is that these intentions are more the fruit of religious rhetoric than can be found in other religions. ‘Pray for your persecuted
Christian brothers... There is something understandable in the discourse on solidarity with the faithful of a similar faith. However, the initial part of this debatable sentence shows a dangerous line of argument and the interpretations that the listeners could give to this tirade: ‘... punish the enemies of Islam...’ Who is considered to be the enemy of Islam? The King of Saudi Arabia, the apostate, the atheist, the non-Muslim, the non-practising...: the looseness of the term leaves all types of answer open. Furthermore, for a negligible part of Muslims in Switzerland there is, with that kind of rhetoric, a legitimate gap between us and them (since they are our enemies). Once again, this type of argument is no longer tolerable and must be condemned both by Muslims, who are shocked by these intentions, and non-Muslims for whom living respectfully together cannot become a reality if there are such insinuations.

However, be careful not to miss the target by denouncing a radicalism that is not that, directly, but target the much more serious dangers it expresses.

Conclusion: mosques, minarets, Muslims and European citizenship

The Swiss vote against the construction of minarets and the various procedural blocks in all countries of the European Union on authorizing the construction of mosques confirm two constants in the Muslim presence in Europe that need to be addressed.

Firstly, as has occurred with other migrant populations in the past, the settlement of Muslims is real, inevitable, and is increasingly visible. This religious visibility in the public domain is certainly what disturbs some citizens in a secularized society. The headscarf, full or otherwise, faith burials in cemeteries, halal food in public administrations, and appropriate places of worship, arouse recurring tensions. Fears that have been the subject of permanent manipulation since political parties have brandished the spectre of an Islamic invasion of Europe, which is, for example, the case with the European populist parties (the right-wing ‘Gather for EU-Wide Minaret Ban’), and religious leaders who take pleasure in the pose of being victims of this and advocate a community response only so that they can protect the belief in rejection by society at large.

Secondly, there are problems connected with managing the visibility of religion in the public domain. As stated above, the question goes beyond Islam and reflects the question of what place religion has in the public domain in Europe today, what limitations should be placed on expressing this faith, and the legitimate criteria for justifying these limitations. A responsible and objective attitude from the authorities is fundamental for this to be handled well. It must be allowed
in the Swiss context because the model of integration in which differences are respected has meant first and second generation Muslims have found their place in society and feel at ease. However, it is dangerous to deny, and worse still to scorn, the fears expressed by a section of the population, because to say to a fearful person, ‘You are stupid to be afraid!’ does not remove the feeling of fear. An effort must be made to understand this fear and to deconstruct it in order to compensate for the lack of knowledge and the simplifications coming from the not very assuring international news from the Muslim world. In addition, since 11 September, 2001, and Madrid in 2004, and London in 2005 the news has only exploited reasonable arguments on an abstract subject, that is Islam, and has done considerable damage to concrete individuals, the Muslims, who are also men, women, fathers of families, heads of organizations, journalists, basketball players, politicians; people who are believers every day, and with whom we have more problems than with non-Muslims.

The crucial issue for the Swiss and for the other European countries in the coming years will be to fulfil the expectations of the Mahmouds, Saffiyyas, Erkans, and Aminas, who are Swiss, feel Swiss, but who with their patronymics, their faces, and their colour do not appear to be very Swiss. It is no longer a question of them integrating, they already are. It is essential for the framework in which all the actors live together to be rethought. Without preferential treatment, but without discrimination either, otherwise the number of different identities will double and the means to a positive coexistence will become restricted by running into extremists on all sides. Trust and vigilance could be more effective than suspicion and rejection.

An approach in which the ‘mosque’ and the ‘town hall’ work together obliges all of the actors to get involved and above all admit that today men and women of the Muslim faith in Europe have as much need of their Islamic ‘universe’ as they do of the secularized context of their lives, and that it is their individual responsibility to determine the correct dosage that balances their identity. It is time for these two spheres (civil and religious) to be perceived as opportunities for identity rather than as implacable enemies. This occurs through the reappropriation of a personal relationship with God rather than an idealization of traditional idyllic models disconnected from reality, sandwiched between two universes that individuals create, making them potential schizophrenics rather than responsible citizens. The challenge is considerable and desired by numerous

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7 An intention confirmed by the 2005 study led by GRIS that has since been regularly republished, ‘Vie musulmane en Suisse, profils identitaires, demandes et perceptions des musulmans de Suisse’ Federal Commission for Foreigners, CFE, 2005.

Muslims throughout Europe. Furthermore, it is necessary to help non-Muslims to understand better and allow them to fight their fears of a threatening Islam. This shared responsibility is a crucial issue for the future of a multicultural multi-faithed Europe.

**Bibliography**


The return of Islam
Southern Europe and the Balkans
Introduction

The Islamic presence in Spain has grown rapidly in the last decade, reaching the position of other European countries with a long tradition of Muslim communities on their territories. But there is one factor that characterizes the Spanish case as opposed to the rest of Europe: the Al-Andalus legacy. And the memory of the splendour of the culture and civilization of Al-Andalus acts, in a way, both as a burden and interference on the present. There is no connection between the past (although it is officially claimed as part of the Spanish identity) and the present of the new Muslim immigration. The new Islamic presence is taking on the image of a historical cultural otherness: the contemporary Muslim presence in Spain as the result of waves of migration that started in the 1970s, but Spain has also had its own Muslim populations, in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, since at least the fifteenth century. Today, Islam is one of the major religious minorities in Spanish society, although the majority of the Muslims are of foreign origin.

The presence of Islam raises substantive challenges to the model of relations between State and religious denominations. The Spanish state is defined by a principle of non-confessionalism (aconfesionalidad), which guarantees religious freedom and establishes cooperative relations with representatives of religious denominations. There is no state religion, but the Catholic Church enjoys some privileges not available to other faiths (especially in financial contribution by the State). This framework of religious freedom was developed legally in 1980. The government of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero is preparing a reform of this law of religious freedom, which will reflect a new context of increasing pluralism.
This reform will seek to introduce a 'positive' concept of 'laicity' (laicidad positiva), which has raised serious criticism from the Catholic Church. Indeed, in recent years Zapatero’s government has been heavily criticised by the Catholic Church on issues like gay marriage, abortion, or the presence of religious symbols in the public space.

With regard to Islam, the Spanish government continues to promote cultural activities in these communities through the annual grants programme of the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence (Fundación Pluralismo y Convivencia, www.pluralismoyconvivencia.es), which in 2008 amounted to €701,285, representing 40% of the total awarded to minority religious communities. In July 2009, the Catalan Autonomous Government (Generalitat of Catalonia) passed a law on places of worship, with which it wishes to regulate the opening of places of worship, and to prevent conflicts that have led in recent years to the establishment of Boards of Islamic Prayer in Catalonia. The law provides that municipalities must make reservations of public land for religious facilities, according to their possibilities.

In the past decade, there have been intensive discussions over the visibility of Islamic religious practices and symbols in Spanish society. These debates are generating a change in perception in relation to this presence. Conflicts over mosques are arising at the intersection between this change in perceptions and the institutional development of Islam in Spain, between perceptions and structures. Their analysis shows the interaction that occurs between these two levels.

Reactive sociabilities of the ‘nimby’ kind, referring to what David Harvey called ‘militant particularism’ (Harvey, 2007: 206), are part of the revival of the principle of ‘locality’ (Bobbio, 2003: 196). These conflicts have been presented as the expression of a redefinition of appurtenance with respect to a particular social territory. Neighbourhood reactions can be understood as a mechanism to assert their own membership through the use of classic arguments involving the exclusion of those who are considered outside the social context.

After a descriptive introduction to this presence, we discuss four specific cases (Premià de Mar, Mataró, Lleida and Seville, the first three in Catalonia, and the last in Andalusia) that show the structure of these conflicts. We conclude by suggesting that the resolution of these cases takes on a provisional basis, showing the difficulties that the integration of the Muslim presence in Spanish society still has.
The contemporary Muslim presence in Spain is the result of waves of migration that began in the 1970s (with the exception of the North African cities of Ceuta and Melilla). The 1978 Spanish Constitution establishes that ‘no one can be forced to declare his or her ideology, religion, or beliefs’ (Art. 16.2). This prevents the production of any official census according to religious affiliation. For this reason, all that can be done is to attempt to develop a series of estimates of the Muslim population, estimates that may at times be biased and may not have an objective basis. Four profiles succinctly synthesize this presence: people with Muslim roots (including residents of Muslim origin in Ceuta and Melilla, around 70,000 and 80,000), nationalized Muslims (between 1960 and 2006, 80,235 people of Muslim origin – especially Moroccans, but also Arabs from the Middle East and Pakistanis – acquired Spanish nationality²), and new Muslims (Spaniards who have chosen the Muslim faith. The size of this last group is always difficult to establish, although the last report of the Observatorio Andalusí-UCIDE (2008) affirms that there are 33,750 Muslim converts in Spain, a figure probably overestimated³), and foreign residents (including both people who are just passing through Spain, such as businessmen and students, and, above all, immigrant workers, mainly Maghrebian, African and Pakistani workers who, according to data from 2008, represent some 860,755 people, the majority natives of Morocco (it is necessary to add a certain percentage (8–10%) to this figure to account for the people whose legal situation is irregular). The resulting figure is between 800,000 and 1,000,000 Muslims (representing 2.2% of the Spanish population).⁴

The Spanish regions that contain the greatest number of Muslims are Catalonia, Madrid, Andalusia and Valencia.

The path to the institutionalisation of Islam in Spain began with the Cooperation Agreement, signed in 1992⁵ between the Spanish state and the Islamic Commission of Spain, which established the framework for the recognition of Islam as a religion rooted in Spanish society. Its approval meant that Spain

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¹ On the contemporary Muslim presence in Spain, see Moreras, 2009.
² Foreigners obtain Spanish nationality after living ten years in Spain, and those born in Spanish territory may apply after the first year. In recent years there have been cases of denial of access to citizenship due to the maintenance of Islamic religious practices. The claims raised in the Supreme Court have been reviewed favourably according to the principle of religious freedom.
³ Muslim converts are an active minority within Islam in Spain, in areas such as community representation, publishing and promotion of cultural activities. Their doctrinal spectrum is very different from the Sufi communities, progressive Islam, or doctrinal literalism.
⁴ 1,145,424 Muslims in Spain according to an estimate of the Observatorio Andalusí-UCIDE.
⁵ The Spanish state has also signed an agreement with Jews and Protestants, confirming the religious plurality of Spanish society.
was endowed with a framework for the recognition of Islam that was the most advanced in the European Union. However, eighteen years later, many aspects of this agreement, which have yet to be developed, still impede the development and organization of Islam in Spain. 6

The Islamic Commission of Spain was created in 1992, with the de facto union of the two major Muslim federations, the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI) and the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (UCIDE). Both federations are very heterogeneous, both in their national origins and doctrinal guidance. In January 2009, there were 633 Islamic religious institutions registered with the Ministry of Justice: 443 belonged to UCIDE, 64 to FEERI, and 126 were not federated.

In the absence of development of the 1992 Cooperation Agreement, and the lack of any operational capacity of the Islamic Commission of Spain, various Islamic organisations have called for the modification of the representation model of Islam in Spain. In the last months of 2010, the Spanish government intends to begin a process of electing Muslim representatives at the regional level, which then must choose the commission that is to lead a renewed Islamic Commission of Spain. This proposal has sparked off an intense debate within Muslim communities, generating new organizational initiatives and new strategies for cooperation between associations.

Changing perceptions

Spanish society appears to be having trouble coming to terms with the cultural contributions of certain groups, particularly Muslims. This perception of ‘otherness’, which is a combination of the accumulation of old stereotypes and the introduction of new images and demands, interferes with carrying out a debate on the Muslim presence in Spain and the place it is to occupy in Spanish society. One crucial factor that makes the full recognition of Islam difficult may be the insistence of many citizens on seeing the Muslim presence in Spain as a result of certain migratory cycles rather than as the result of a process by which a religious minority has been created. Islam is still seen as an import, an alien reality, in clear

6 There are four reasons for the non-implementation of this agreement: 1) internal disputes between the two Islamic federations (FEERI and UCIDE), which have limited the role of the Islamic Commission of Spain as a representative body; 2) the development of a centralised organisational model (the Islamic Commission) disregarding communal geographical distribution; 3) the lack of political will among the political authorities to promote the development of this agreement, due to distrust of the demands of Muslim communities; 4) the lack of interest expressed by Muslim communities because of their ignorance of the contents of the agreement. Representatives of the two federations have been unable to mobilise these communities in order to bring about the implementation of some aspects of the agreement, such as religious education and Muslim burials.
contradiction to the understanding of Islam as a permanent presence, which was one of the motivating factors for adopting the Cooperation Agreement.

There is a feeling that in Spain in relations of proximity between Muslims and non-Muslims mutual mistrust has become the currency. Both groups end up expressing their intimate fears, so that communication is interrupted and encounters are avoided. After the recent impact of the 11 March 2004 terrorist attacks, the old stereotypes were replaced by a feeling of widespread and unpredictable threat that was, however, implicitly related to concrete facts and a concrete presence. Terrorism, which has continued to be one of the main worries of Spaniards, thanks also to the Basque political conflict, has, since the 11 March events, reached higher indexes than ever before.

The Observatorio Andalusi has reported and condemned the increasing Islamophobia of Spanish society.7 According to this report, during the year 2008 various controversies included a clearly xenophobic discourse in relation to Muslims. New conflicts have arisen against the background of the opening of mosques. Some statements by politicians in relation to certain Islamic practices, such as the wearing of the hijab, have contributed further to reveal a latent bias against the Muslim presence. Police actions against suspected Islamist activists have further contributed to a widespread perception of mistrust and threat in relation to the presence of Muslims in Spain. According to a survey of 2,000 Muslims, prepared by the Ministry of the Interior in December 2008, 31% of respondents claimed that the Islamic religion is rejected in Spain.

Some mosques, many prayer halls

The 2008 report of the Observatorio Andalusi estimates that in Spain there are some 598 Muslim places of worship, fourteen of which major Muslim centres. Updating those that are located in Catalonia, the sum amounts to 668. There is no official record of the number of Islamic places, which further contributes to their social invisibility. The spatial integration of Islam in Spanish society manifests a strong contrast between the great Islamic cultural centres, along with their architectural forms clearly identifiable, with their minarets, and prayer rooms in garages that are opened on the initiative of small immigrant communities, without any symbols that might identify them as a religious centre in the public space. The paradox is that while these notorious centres are part of the urban landscape of cities where they are located, it is the prayer-rooms that despite their invisibility receive social opposition to their location.

The following table summarizes some statistics of the Islamic presence in Spain.

### Table 1 The Muslim population in Spain (communities, mosques and conflicts)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Muslim population</th>
<th>Registered Islamic communities</th>
<th>Mosques</th>
<th>Prayer rooms / oratories</th>
<th>Mosque conflicts (1990–2008)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catalonia</td>
<td>279,037</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>196,689</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andalusia</td>
<td>184,430</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valencia</td>
<td>130,471</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murcia</td>
<td>63,040</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canary Islands</td>
<td>54,636</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melilla</td>
<td>34,397</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castilla-La Mancha</td>
<td>32,960</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aragon</td>
<td>30,982</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceuta</td>
<td>30,537</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balearic Islands</td>
<td>25,859</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castilla and León</td>
<td>17,366</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basque Country</td>
<td>16,608</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremadura</td>
<td>15,536</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navarra</td>
<td>10,884</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Rioja</td>
<td>10,373</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galicia</td>
<td>6,709</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asturias</td>
<td>2,731</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantabria</td>
<td>2,179</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,145,424</strong></td>
<td><strong>633</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>668</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** For Muslim populations, Observatorio Andalusi (2008); for Registered Islamic communities, see the Ministry of Justice’s Registry of Religious Entities (http://dgraj.mju.es/EntidadesReligiosas/Index.htm. Dated on January 1, 2009); for mosques and prayer rooms, see Observatorio Andalusi (2008), except for Catalonia (Moreras, in press); and for mosque conflicts, see Astor (2008), except for Catalonia (Moreras, in press).

The analysis of conflicts over the mosques in Spain should be made through the two ways in which these religious centres have been created: the first, induced and operated from the outside, through the intervention of Muslim countries to finance the construction of these centres, and second, through a process of self-organization of religion by Muslim communities of immigrant origin. These two ways cannot be presented as disconnected, but as incorporating different logics and interests. When in the early 1980s, the Saudi Prince Salman Ben
Abdulaziz Al Saud promoted the building of the mosque of Marbella (Malaga), as the first mosque opened in Spain in modern times, 8 he was probably not thinking so much of meeting the needs of worship of Muslims in Spain, as the needs of his own entourage that accompanied him during his summer break in the lands of the former Al-Andalus. Located in the exclusive neighbourhood of Las Lomas de Marbella, its minaret of 25 metres and its capacity for holding 400 people do not disturb residents.

Between the 1980s and early 1990s four new Islamic centres were opened in Spain and sponsored by several Muslim countries. In 1983 the Abu Bakr Mosque was built in the Estrecho neighbourhood of Madrid. It is the home of the UCIDE. It takes up a total of 3,500 square metres, distributed over four floors, and has a minaret. It was financed with the contributions of various Arab countries. The opening generated little interest in the Madrid press, which considered it a centre for the Muslim-Arab diplomatic corps stationed in the Spanish capital.

The Spanish press were more attentive to the opening in September 1992 (five months after the approval of the Cooperation Agreement with the Islamic Commission) of the Omar ibn al-Jattab Mosque, or Islamic Cultural Centre of Madrid (popularly known as the M-30 Mosque, after the road that circles Madrid). The 16,000 square metre area on which the mosque is built was given by the Madrid city council, and King Fahd Ben Abdulaziz Al Saud undertook its financing. The prayer hall of this mosque occupies 550 square metres and holds 700 men and 130 women. Until the inauguration in 1997 of the mosque in Rome, the mosque in Madrid was the largest in Europe.

Outside Madrid other centres were opened at this time: in June of 1992, the Islamic Cultural Centre of Valencia was inaugurated, financed with Kuwaiti capital and under the authority of the Organisation of Arab Cities. In 1994, Fuengirola Mosque, headquarters of the Suhail Islamic Community, was opened, financed by Saudi Arabia and linked to the Muslim World League.

During the rest of the 1990s no Islamic centres were opened. However small prayer houses proliferated throughout Spain, which are indicative of the first settlement of Muslim communities of immigrant origin on Spanish territory. In the early years of 2000 two new Islamic centres were launched in Andalusia. First, in July 2001, the Azzagra Cultural Association built a mosque and the Centre of Andalusian Studies in La Puebla de Don Fadrique (Granada). Located on a farm of 120 acres, this centre has the financial support of Shaykh Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasim, Emir of Sharjah. Secondly, and after two decades of

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8 During the Protectorate of Northern Morocco (1912–1956), the Spanish colonial administration built mosques, prayer halls, and other Islamic religious buildings. The two main mosques of Ceuta and Melilla, the Sidi M’barik Mosque and the mosque in Garcia Cabrelles street, respectively, are good examples of this.
polemics concerning its placement in the Albaicin neighbourhood, in July 2003, the Great Mosque of Granada was officially inaugurated. Various Islamic countries (Libya, Morocco, the Arab Emirates, Malaysia) contributed financially to its construction. The centre is managed by members of the Murabitun movement. Finally, the last major Islamic centre, which occupies over 4,000 square metres, was opened in Malaga in August 2007. Its construction has cost about €22 million, provided by Saudi Arabia. Foundation Suhail owns this new mosque with a capacity for over 1,000 worshippers, and with a nursery, auditorium, rooms for men and women, and a translation service.

The coexistence of big centres and small prayer rooms shows that, first, the large Islamic centres are playing an increasingly important role in the institutionalization of Islam, especially at a regional level, both in its doctrinal influence on the Muslim community, and for the official recognition they receive from political powers. Secondly, this complicity between the promoters of these centres and the political class, which even leads them to grant public land for construction, does not have any precedent with regard to the situations in which there are the small prayer rooms. They are unable to accommodate the increase in the religious needs of their communities because of the small size of their premises, their precariousness and their increasing social visibility that generates adverse social reactions. The dilemma that is generated between monumental spaces and proximity spaces provides the margins of the debate over the place of the Muslim community (and not only their spaces of worship) in Spanish society.

This chapter will examine four examples that represent the materialization of this debate through the policy options given to resolve social conflicts generated by the opening of a Muslim mosque in Spain.

The contexts of social conflict

Table 1 shows that there were a total of 60 conflicts over the opening of mosques in Spain between 1990 and 2008. We understand that these conflicts are the active expression of the rejection of a social actor in the presence of these places of worship in a specific territorial context. An expression that, by definition, becomes a public and visible dimension, which can overcome the immediate local area where it occurs, thanks to its dissemination by the media.

The accounts of these conflicts, based on the use of press releases,\(^9\) raise two methodological problems: first, in that it assumes that there is no evidence of conflict if it is not treated by the press, and second, that this information is not able to cover the stages before the appearance of the news, and which usually

correspond to the expression of a more pronounced rejection (demonstrations, use of violence, etc.). Such information must be combined with other empirical material drawn from the field of observation.  

The case of Catalonia (where the cases of Premià de Mar, Mataró and Lleida are located) shows how the succession of conflicts between 1990 and 2008 had a clear influence on the opening of the new Muslim places of worship. We can see in the progression that began in the early 90s how it had altered from 2002 to the accumulation of the reactions against these mosques (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Evolution of mosques in Catalonia, and conflicts related to their opening (1974–2008)

From this point, the rate of progression of new mosques decreased, and was again similar to what occurred before 1995. The accumulation of conflicts during the 2002–2004 period led many municipalities to freeze permission to open new mosques, and many communities had to postpone their projects of opening or relocating their former schools, since the municipalities argued that there was no adequate legal framework for granting such permits, and recommended that Muslim communities wait until the Catalan parliament drafted a specific law on

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10 This is the methodology used in developing the cases of Premià de Mar, Mataró and Lleida, and is the basis of our work (Moreras, in press). Regarding the case of Seville, we have combined the news with annotations of the fieldwork carried out by the anthropologist Sol Tarrés, whose comments on the case I appreciate.
this matter. Nonetheless, the Muslim communities continued to express their desire to open new places of worship, and in 2008 there was a spate of conflicts caused by the opposite responses of the neighbourhoods.

From an analysis of these conflicts, and on the basis of the arguments presented by the different actors involved in them, we follow the proposals of Joseph S. Gusfield (1981: 5–6), who thinks that public issues are those that ‘become matters of conflict or controversy in the arenas of public action’. They generate, on the one hand, ‘various modes of conceptualizing them as problems, so too their public character is open to various means of conceiving their resolution’; and also raise the question of the responsibility of ‘different institutions and different personnel who are charged with obligations and opportunities to attack the problem’.

From the political point of view, addressing these conflicts is based on a logic of management of religious pluralism, and the adequacy of outdated legal frameworks and enunciation of a set of political practices hitherto non-existent. The ambiguity that is incorporated in this principle of management (Moreras, 2006) becomes even more evident in the cases discussed below, when these conflicts are defined as the resolution of ‘problems of living together’ resulting from immigration, or proposes measures to ‘redefine’ these neighbourhood conflicts.

We will also analyse the role played by prominent actors, such as those responsible for the Muslim community, the leaders of neighbourhood complaints, civil society and the media. We propose an analysis of a network of actors, who generate a series of fields (political, community, neighbourhood, social and media) and establish what Alberto Melucci (1989) terms as a ‘network of shared meaning’. Each field develops its own dynamics, which define the relations that bind the actors who are part of it. There are a number of actors that could be called principals, which are clearly identifiable, and they take a defined role in each context. But it is also possible to find other actors, placed locally or at a more peripheral level, who play an important role, although much less apparent than that of the main actors. Within the political sphere, the importance of secondary stakeholders in the decisions taken by the major political actors shows the complex relationships that develop the exercise of politics at the local level. The sum of all interactions between these areas and the development of the relevant actors is, in the words of Edgar Morin, a kind of ‘political ecology’ (cited by A. Boubeker, 2006: 12).

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11 The Catalan Parliament approved the first law in Spain that established the conditions for opening a religious centre. The law was approved on 15 July, 2009, for the administrative regulation of places of worship of religious minorities (not referred to the Catholic Church), and the disposal of public land for the construction of religious buildings.
Premià de Mar: the mosque that was not built

Premià de Mar has been considered the first major conflict over the creation of a mosque in Catalonia. It had an impact on immigration policy in Catalonia, and a much more widespread impact across the whole of Spain. It is remembered because it marked the start of a succession of local conflicts in Catalonia between 2002 and 2004. Located 20 km from Barcelona, Premià de Mar is a small coastal town that has 27,545 inhabitants (2008), and is just over 1.9 square kilometres, one of the cities that has the highest population density in Spain. The first immigrants from Morocco and Gambia arrived here in the early 80s, working first in agriculture and then in industry and services.

Premià de Mar has had a mosque since 1987, which opened the Islamic Association At-Tauba, the joint initiative of Morocco and Gambia. The oratory was a small room, which eventually became insufficient to accommodate the whole of the Muslim population of the city. The problems that this caused among local residents led to various allegations against the Muslim community. Given the impossibility of extending their local power, the community sought an alternative site, and in 1997 bought a plot of undeveloped land in the same neighbourhood where the earlier prayer room was located. Following the purchase of this land, the Muslim community asked the municipality for permission to organize activities, which was granted. In November 2001, the neighbours demanded that the municipality comply with the court ruling that obliged the prayer room to close down, and started to collect signatures against it. Before the arrival of the month of Ramadan, and to prevent the Muslim community from being left without a place to pray, the council gave them the use of the premises of the old Voramar school over the next three months, a period which was extended until April 2002. At the same time, the neighbours living near the site acquired by the At-Tauba began to pressure the City Council to withdraw permission for the construction of the mosque, collecting signatures throughout the town. What was originally a conflict between the neighbours of a block of flats became a conflict in the whole neighbourhood and was subsequently extended to the whole of Premià de Mar.

Given this pressure, the Socialist mayor of Premià de Mar, Maria Jesus Fanego, began talks with representatives of the Muslim community to get them to move the construction of the mosque from that site to another location in another district of the city. This further contributed to the conflict, because the neighbours in that neighbourhood were opposed in the same way as the previous ones. Negotiations between the municipality and the Muslim community broke down, and as a result they had to leave the Voramar school temporarily. As a form of pressure, the community representatives decided to return to their site in the village and pray outdoors. In response, the level of protest grew in the
neighbourhood, as the neighbours tried to prevent the Muslims from praying. The first spontaneous protests started near the site, with graffiti and banners on the balconies (see picture 1). The council faced a dual controversy: with regard to the Muslims, the mayor understood that their refusal to accept moving was not conducive to resolving the conflict, and the decision to pray in their property without a licence for activity led to an administrative complaint on the part of the municipality itself. As for the neighbours, the mayor said that many residents were unaware that the legal system allowed a religious building to be built in that place.

In April 2002 the Premià Civil Council for Coexistence was created which drew up a manifesto in support of the Muslim community and criticised the ambiguous position taken by the council. This Civil council organised a demonstration which involved members of Iniciativa per Catalunya-El Verds (a Leftist party, part of the coalition government of Premià de Mar), which generated an intense internal debate about conflict management on the part of the municipality. A few weeks later, in May, a demonstration was held against the mosque attended by about 1,500 people. The leader of the xenophobic party Plataforma por Cataluña, Josep Anglada, took part in the demonstration. In the presence of the extreme Right, the rest of the Catalan political parties started to take up positions in their relation to the mosque conflict. The Opposition criticized the Catalan Government for not having a specific immigration policy to address these conflicts. Finally, the Generalitat decided to offer their support to the municipality as a way of finding a reasonable solution to the conflict. It also sought the intercession of the Islamic and Cultural Council of Catalonia to facilitate agreement with the Muslim
Various mediations restored negotiations with the Muslim representatives. The months of May and June 2002 were key to resolving this conflict. The City Council proposed to the Muslim community that they stop the planned construction of the mosque in exchange for the extended use of the old Voramar school. The Muslim representatives made the draft of the new mosque, designed by a Catalan public firm, a building of 227 square metres. The council acknowledged that the Muslims had every right to build this centre, but believed that it would prolong the conflict with their neighbours. Finally, in late June the parties reached an agreement that they would transfer the use of this place by the Muslim community to the municipality (to be used as an auxiliary space for the adjacent school), in exchange for fifteen years of use of the Voramar school by the Muslim community. The agreement was signed in September 2002, in the presence of representatives of the Catalan Government and the Islamic and Cultural Council of Catalonia.

Eight years after the conflict, most of the actors involved have ceased to occupy a prominent role in the public sphere. The Socialist mayor lost the municipal elections held in 2003 and she left political life, as did the principal councillor who was at the forefront of these negotiations. In an interview with him, he stated that ‘the conflict had political consequences for all, but much more obviously for those who were at the head of the council’ (interview July 23, 2008). Representatives of the Muslim community were also replaced by those members who led the opposition to his leadership, believing that the solution of the conflict had prevented the community from having a place of worship of their own property. The leaders of the protest tried to capitalize politically, and formed a political platform that was presented in the municipal elections. They obtained a councillor in the 2003 elections, but this platform disappeared a few years later. Perhaps the player who gained more from this whole conflict was the extreme Right-wing leader Josep Anglada, with his Plataforma por Cataluña, based on a xenophobic and anti-immigration position. After this, this party was present in various Catalan municipalities, achieving significant electoral results.

Today, the council of Premià de Mar has no position on the future of the mosque. Soon half the period of exchange of land with the Muslim community will be over, and the council does not seem quite ready to begin preparing for the final resolution of this case.

12 The Islamic and Cultural Council of Catalonia signed a collaboration agreement with the Catalan government in 2002, thereby becoming the official representative of Islam in Catalonia. This Council was established in 2000 and was formed mainly of Moroccan imams ideologically aligned with the Moroccan government.
Mataró: two mosques, one policy

Mataró is an industrial town (119,780 inhabitants in 2008), located just 10 km from Premià, and is the administrative capital of the coastal region of Maresme. Mataró was one of the first towns to receive African and North African immigrants. It was there that the first immigrant workers came to work in intensive agriculture in the region. In the early 80s, entities associated with Christian parishes proposed the first social and care initiatives for the immigrants. In 2008, the Moroccan community amounted to 7,140. In Mataró there were three Muslim places of worship: the first, the Younes Mosque, was created in 1984 on the initiative of Gambian and Senegalese migrants. The second, the Annour Mosque, was founded by Moroccans in 1992 and is linked to the tabligh pietist movement. The last oratory is the Muslim Cultural Association Al-Ouahda, and was opened in 1994. While the former is located in the town centre, other centres are located in the neighbourhoods of Rocafonda and Cerdanyola, respectively.

The social context of these neighbourhoods needs to be described. They are populated by former immigrants from other regions of Spain who came to the town in the 60s and 70s. Cerdanyola and Rocafonda are two of the districts that boosted the population and territorial growth of Mataró. Today, this population has aged more than average in the town since the children of those immigrants have chosen to go and live in other neighbourhoods in the newly-formed town. These neighbourhoods of old Spanish emigrants now receive the majority of the new immigration from Morocco, Gambia and other countries of Latin America and Eastern Europe. The coexistence of various immigrant memories and identities assumes particular significance in the development of the conflicts that we wish to analyse.

The growth of the immigrant presence has encouraged the development of a policy of local integration. Mataró was among the first municipalities in Catalonia to have a plan to promote coexistence between residents and newcomers. The existence of this framework allowed the municipality – always under a Socialist mandate – to guide their solutions to immigration policy.

In March 2001, representatives of the Annour Mosque of Rocafonda informed the municipality of this project to build a mosque in Mataró, and requested its collaboration in finding a suitable place. The local press reported on the project, indicating some possible sites for the future mosque. Immediately came the reaction of the association of residents of Havana, which borders the Rocafonda, who formed a committee that began collecting signatures against the possible location of the mosque in the neighbourhood. The neighbours

13 The absence of a similar framework in the case of Premià de Mar was indicated as one of the factors that had hindered the resolution of this conflict.
argued that their reasons were related to the alleged devaluation of home prices in that area, increased crime and the existence of other social priorities.

The strategy developed by the municipality was to provide information about their intentions (such as, for example, a willingness to grant ground, but not to finance its construction), while identifying interlocutors among the opponents to this project and establishing a series of meetings. In reply, in May 2001 the opponents delivered to the municipality 7,079 signatures, collected in a month and a half, against the construction of the mosque in Rocafonda. Given the scale that this controversy had taken, the council opted to develop another double strategy: first, to gain the support of other parties represented in the council, and also to activate the City Council for Coexistence, which was the organ of development of immigrant policy.

What the municipal did not expect was that the same controversy would be reproduced in the district of Cerdanyola, following the rumour that the neighbourhood would be the place where an alternative place would be sought by the Al-Ouahda Muslim Cultural Association. Again, after barely a month, 3,000 new signatures were collected against this project, and the neighbours put banners out on their balconies. The representatives of Al-Ouahda found large premises of 650 square metres in front of their old prayer-room, and although they had agreed with the municipality not to use the premises until they had a municipal permit, the fact is that the advent of Ramadan in November 2001 forced the community to have to use this space.

This generated fresh complaints from their neighbours, which helped to accelerate the alternative proposal from the municipality, which involved the location of both mosques in industrial areas adjacent to the districts of Rocafonda and Cerdanyola. This was the first time in Catalonia that a municipality had dared to consider the option of locating these religious places outside the urban frame. The symbolic component of this process generated numerous opinions against this ‘peripherisation’, questioning the ethics of this decision.

According to the council’s proposal, they rented two industrial buildings for both communities to have a decent place of worship, far from the controversy raised by their presence in both neighbourhoods. The agreement to assign these spaces incorporated the commitment of both communities to participate actively in efforts to promote coexistence in Mataró and in the development of cultural activities in these premises. These premises, of approximately 500 square metres were enabled by members of the community to the conditions of a mosque, with spaces reserved for women with separate access. The signing of agreements took place in June 2002 with the Al-Ouahda Association and a month later with the Annour Mosque.
Today the size and location of the two mosques facilitate the exercise of collective prayer of the Muslim communities in Rocafonda Cerdanyola. The spacious facilities, however, do not prevent them from being small during major religious celebrations. The model applied to two distinct communities, despite being criticized, is now viewed with care, serving as inspiration for the resolution of other cases. Perhaps what distinguishes these other cases that have opted to relocate the mosque in Catalonia on the urban periphery (Reus, Santa Coloma de Gramenet) is that in the case of Mataró, the council followed a number of compromises that would ensure continuity in working with these entities. What was positive here was that they capable of thinking the day after the resolution of the conflict, demonstrating the need for a new kind of relations with religious communities through their places of worship.

Los Bermejales (Sevilla): the last big mosque in Andalusia?

Seville is the administrative capital of Andalusia (699,759 inhabitants in 2008), but unlike other cities in Andalusia (Marbella, Fuengirola, Malaga or Granada) does not have a large Islamic centre. At present there are six small oratories in the city. One of them, located in Plaza Ponce de Leon, is managed by the Islamic Community in Spain Morabitun Guidance, which led the project of the Great Mosque of Granada. The members of this community, mostly Muslim converts, are the promoters of a project to build a large Islamic centre in the neighbourhood of Bermejales. In July 2004, the city of Seville made public its intention to transfer a plot of 6,000 square metres in the south of this neighborhood. Slowly, through its advocates, the details of this project became known. The building would have a basement and two floors, each of about 2,000 square metres, a prayer room with room to hold 700 people, a library and halls. Undoubtedly, the most characteristic element of the project would be the construction of a minaret of 30 metres, guided by the shape of the Giralda tower (which is the minaret of the former mosque-cathedral of Seville today). This is one of the first types of symbolic elements that were incorporated in this project, which would generate an even more intense social debate. In the review of the project by the council (April 2006), the minaret was reduced to half its height, without the promoters making any objection.

The first estimate by the promoters of this centre was that the building work would start in February 2006. To this end, the Islamic community made the payment of €31,524 and it would have to pay royalties to the city council in respect to the transfer of the land for 75 years.
The first reaction against this project came from the Residents' Association Bermejales 2000. In the summer of 2005 they lodged a complaint against the rightness of the agreement between the municipality and the Islamic community. This association held the view that the district needed additional facilities and services, and that the mosque would become ‘a focus of insecurity’. The Association collected over 3,000 signatures against the construction of this centre, and conducted a series of weekly demonstrations to increase the echo from their protest 14.

On April 9, 2006, the judge who had admitted the claim of the Association ordering the suspension of building work on mosque in Bermejales until a final decision of the court. From this moment a long administrative process was to continue in which the promoters of the mosque tried to avoid the halting of this building. The general Master plan, which was approved in early February of 2007, recognized the feasibility of constructing a religious place where it had been scheduled. Despite this, the debate over the mosque began to be politicized: the Conservative opposition called for the Socialist mayor to revoke the transfer of land for the mosque, the local leader of the Andalusian Party asserted that ‘the mosque was financed by Al–Qaeda’, while the Izquierda Unida (Left–wing) leader accused them of racism and xenophobia (20 Minutos, 18–5–2007).

On the eve of municipal elections in May 2007, the Socialist mayor confirmed his decision, if re-elected for a third consecutive time, not to build the mosque in Bermejales. Yet he did not rule out the possibility of a new, smaller sized one, but elsewhere in the city. This change in focus by the municipality was supported by the Bermejales 2000 Association and the political opposition, but harshly criticized by the Muslim community which understood that the council had resigned to the ‘blackmail of a few’ (Diario de Sevilla, 14–6–2007). However, nine months after the elections (which again were won by the Socialist mayor), justice was obtained by the Islamic Community in Spain against the complaint lodged by the Bermejales 2000 Association, giving them a right to build their mosque in the Bermejales district.

The municipality in opposition to its government partner (Izquierda Unida), sought for new alternative sites where to place the mosque outside the neighbourhood of Bermejales. After considering three possible sites, the council decided to make the proposal to locate the mosque in La Cartuja, which after the Universal Expo of 1992 had become an industrial and business district. The Business Confederation of Seville expressed their opposition to this option, which they considered inappropriate. The Mayor, Alfredo Sánchez Monteseirín, 14 The members of this association made active use of the Internet to publicize their opposition to the mosque. They participated actively in public forums in Seville, and created a website (www.mezquitanogracias.com) through which they reported on their activities.
replied flatly: ‘the mosque will be located in the Cartuja, and no more talk!’ (*Diario de Sevilla*, 8-4-2008).

In October 2008, there was a new turn in the controversy, which definitely seems to be of an administrative and political kind: the High Court of Justice of Andalusia, receiving the appeal by the *Bermejales 2000* Association against the decision of the administrative court in December 2007, agreed with the neighbours that a religious facility could not be built on the plot. The problem that arose now was that the alternative site proposed by the municipality, at La Cartuja, had the same legal problem as above. The final episode of this whole process is that the council made its resignation public by placing the Seville Mosque on a municipal plot (*Diario de Sevilla*, 20-10-2008). After five years, the proposed creation of a large Islamic centre in Seville seems to have been watered down.

**Lleida: displacement to the periphery**

Lleida is one of the four provincial capitals of Catalonia (131,731 inhabitants in 2008), undoubtedly the most agricultural of them all. This has encouraged immigration, especially from Africa (data from the municipal census of 2008 recorded 3,828 Moroccans and 784 Senegalese). Lleida has two prayer rooms: the oldest, the Omar Mosque, was opened in 1990 on the initiative of the Senegalese *Tijani*. It is a small and discreet chapel located in front of the City Hall. The other centre is the *Ibn Hazm* Mosque, located in the Northern neighbourhood, which was opened in 1996. Moroccans and their promoters are aligned under *Salafi* doctrinal guidance.

The community of the *Ibn Hazm* Mosque was installed in an old factory on North Street in May 2001 without permission for activities from the municipality of Lleida (picture 2). The place, which was some 400 square metres and attracted a large number of Muslims, did not go unnoticed by neighbours who complained to the council that the centre was illegal. In December 2001 the council closed the oratory, calling for the Islamic community to meet the legal requirements for the opening of the mosque. After carrying out the necessary development works, the mosque received permission to open, causing the first reaction from neighbours with the collection of 500 signatures against them in February 2002. Progressively, the controversy between the council and neighbours grew. They claimed that the Muslim community were continuing to carry out work on the mosque without municipal authorization.

Throughout the year 2002 there were complaints from the residents’ association in the neighbourhood, where the controversy surrounding the mosque was incorporated into the political debate. The Nationalist opposition to the
Socialist mayor required compliance with current regulations by those responsible for the mosque, but the mayor replied that it had all the necessary permission. The neighbours continued to express their disapproval by putting up banners, and threatening to organise various demonstrations, but their threats were never carried out. A manifesto signed by the residents’ association explained that their ‘opposition to the mosque was not racist but legalistic’ (Segre, 12-9-2002).

The new composition of the local government that emerged after the municipal elections of 2003 (alliance of Socialists and Left nationalists) meant the opening of a new phase in the controversy. The Nationalist councillor dealing with this controversy suggesting a range of interventions from an inter-faith perspective, suggesting the possibility that the Muslim community might share space in a future inter-faith centre. Those responsible rejected the proposal out of hand and in June 2004 the council proposed to transfer the mosque to another location. During the year the municipality studied this proposal, looking for different alternative locations. This would lead to a conflict within the government team, as the Socialist mayor wanted to opt for locating the mosque in an industrial estate, while the Nationalist group saw an urban area as being more appropriate.

As we have seen in the case of Premià, the alternatives suggested by the council to relocate the mosque were met with reactions from the neighbours of those areas. Finally, in November 2005, the council proposed two alternative locations to the Muslim community. But on December 21, as a result of an operation against Islamist terrorism, three Moroccans were arrested in Lleida accused of belonging of a jihadist political group. Political opponents and neighbours used the case to insist on the closure of the mosque. This further underlined the controversy, and the council had trouble finding an alternative site for the
mosque. The neighbours continued to report on the status of the mosque, and the concentration of new shops opened by members of the Muslim community. During 2006 and part of 2007, the council carried out an urban reform in the neighbourhood, as a way of improving mobility of vehicles and people in order to meet the demands of residents and merchants. The final re-location of the mosque was incorporated as a final step of the reform.

But this could not be done until after the municipal elections of 2007, when the Socialist party won an absolute majority. The new government teamed up to finalize a definitive proposal to locate the site of a mosque in the industrial area of Pardinyes, located relatively close to the area where the Ibn Hazm Mosque now stands, and with good communications (picture 3). The Muslim community finally agreed to the council’s proposal. For the second time in Catalonia, after Premià de Mar, it was proposed to build a new mosque. The architectural design by a Catalan team of architects suggested the creation of a building of 800 square metres, with two floors and a minaret.

Following the signing of the agreement, two new obstacles were raised against the implementation of the project: the complaint of the Businessmen’s association about this area, who believed that the location of this religious space was not appropriate. The council quickly rejected this. Again, the fact that the Muslim community did not have sufficient capital to take the cost of building this centre upon itself. ‘This lack of funds in the community leaves us in an awkward position before the neighbours and their political opposition,’ they confessed (interview, September 20, 2008). The Muslim community suggested the possibility of using prefabricated modules to lower the cost of the project, which were not covered
under the agreement signed by both parties, which spoke explicitly of construction. The latest news we have on this, provided by the councillor for Urban planning Lleida on March 27, 2009, is that the council intends to approve this change in the text of the agreement in order to speed up the building of the mosque.

**Conclusion: Taking the provisional as paradigm**

In some phases of the conflicts listed above, the media reproduced the architectural projects that were designed to build the mosques. The following pictures show the external shape of the future mosques of Premià and Lleida (pictures 4 and 5). These exercises in virtual recreation acquire a special meaning, as we know that there is no purpose-built mosque in Catalonia.

![Picture 4: Architectural project for the Premià de Mar mosque (2002) (Avui, 3-6-2002)](image)
To imagine the size and appearance of what should be the first Islamic centre built in Catalonia in modern times has in itself a strong symbolic meaning. However, the fact is that many Spanish cities are not yet at this stage of discussion of the aesthetic-symbolic impact on the public space of these different buildings, but still at a stage prior to this, at the recognition of the right of Muslims to have their collective spaces with decent conditions. The debate in Spain has not reached an architectural dimension, and still remains in the social and community dimension of the impact of collective religiosity, which takes place in discrete and invisible spaces.

It is significant to note that many of the conflicts discussed here are derived from the will of the Muslim groups to improve the conditions of this collective religious practice, relocating their mosques to more appropriate areas, leaving these small oratories more visible in the presence of these Muslim communities in the urban space. The changes in location and capacity of these new alternative spaces are interpreted by the residents of these neighbourhoods as indicative of a willingness to imprint their presence more strongly.

In the scenario that emerged after these conflicts, it is possible to establish some findings:
a. The success of the contentious actions of neighbourhood actors
We must recognize that their contentious actions have succeeded on more than one occasion in correcting the starting points of political actors and making them respond to the demand made by the Muslim collective to open a place of worship. Pressure actions have prevented the opening of these premises, or have forced their relocation to another area. Other protests are reproduced in those neighbourhoods that are suggested as alternative places for these mosques. The protest is usually spread around the territory, leading the authorities to consider choosing the location of these places of worship in peripheral areas. The spatial and symbolic relocation of Muslim mosques as a result of these resolutions might have an obvious effect on the future commitment of this collective to participate in a collective social life. The neighbours may feel stronger, because they are aware that their contentious actions can impact on the will of a minority group to build their religious facilities, but can also change the decisions of the political actors.

b. The management of religious pluralism, a sensitive issue on the political agenda
The political actors are aware of the sensitivity of local integration of religious pluralism in Spain. Faced with this complexity (as elsewhere), political experience recommends prudence in decisions, before embarking on major ideological statements. Doubts, uncertainties and changes in the decisions taken during these processes show the difficulties local authorities have in tackling this new social reality. Moreover, there is a shortage of good practices to guide policy decisions. This indicates the need to reflect on the points of departure and instruments (regulatory, advisory, budget) to speak of this reality.

c. Overcoming the traditional neighbourhood movement
The old associative structures in these neighbourhoods are being doubly challenged by these controversies, with their representativeness and their way of promoting social mobilization. From the perspective of political actors, these conflicts question the leadership accumulated over the years by these neighbourhood associations. An important part of these controversies have been promoted and organized spontaneously (an expression of reactive sociability) outside these associations. Is this a test of the transformative nature of the new immigrant presence in the structures of social participation in these neighbourhoods?
d. The polarization of citizenship
These conflicts have not only led to a polarization between neighbours and Muslims but also between groups of neighbours who were positioned differently as regards the controversy. In contrast to reactions against the presence of these mosques, other voices were mobilized but in the opposite direction. At certain times, their arguments confronted one another in situations that generated significant social tension. These controversies have generated a profound debate, which outperforms other arguments of social differentiation (such as political ideologies). The resulting polarization has altered the daily life of a neighbourhood or a municipality.

e. Distrust and frustration among Muslim communities
The hesitations of local government politicians faced by the reactions of citizens against the opening of a mosque have been causing some feelings of distrust and frustration among Muslims. They are aware of receiving a negative message, which is not being refuted or given a firm answer by the political authorities. That they are implicitly asking that their places of worship remain discreet and invisible in the public space is a very clear message concerning the contrary reactions aroused by their presence. It is still early to assess the impact of these controversies within these collectives, but they have probably opened up two roads: first, to persuade non-Muslim people of the social and communitarian function of these mosques (this is not an easy task, because the promoters of these centres must reorient the functions of a social institution which was designed only to act in a communitarian sense); and secondly, to begin a process of withdrawal of the community, isolated from the social context where they are located, finding the resources necessary for their own survival, and leaving aside all possibilities of social participation.

In the cases analysed, one of the points of interest is to show the relationships established between the various actors involved in these conflicts, and the real difficulties in understanding each other. Each actor sets out his views using his own arguments regarding their scope. It is not so much the use of concepts, but the meanings and uses of them. For example, the term ‘recognition’ used by Muslim actors or by neighbourhood actors may be substantially different according to the requirements that are supposed to achieve such recognition.

A structural analysis of these conflicts should enable us to understand their complex and extensive dimension in time. The different phases that are happening as a result of interaction between actors allow a temporal continuity that, in principle, is long, and does not always meet the timing parameters
defined by the political arena. The cases of Premià and Mataró show how, after ‘conflict resolution’, new phases of institutional relations with the representatives of these communities will open, which are assumed in one case but not in another. In Seville and in Lleida, temporality seems to be defined by indecision policy alternatives in addressing the siting of these religious places.

Similarly, the study of the grammars of protest show profound arguments that seem to emerge through the mechanisms of expression and contentious repertoires. Spectacularity, continuity, symbolism and intensity are all prerequisites for this contentious action, which seeks to achieve its aims. A weak argument is often concealed behind a large banner. Also, making visible protests is almost as important as developing the arguments that motivate them. But all these elements have no importance, if it is not known that such actions are likely to revise a policy decision (see the case of Premià de Mar or Seville).

The (re)solutions obtained in the different cases are the result of the constraints of the context where they were made and the circumstances that occur therein, which led political and social actors to adopt them. From the assessment made by these actors, it is possible to develop a simple typology of ‘closed cases’, ‘semi-closed cases’ and ‘cases still pending’. We speak of ‘closed cases’ when the decision that was taken will be revised with difficulty. The consolidation of this first decision, although considered as provisional, will not be amended in the future because other situations are generated. The temporary becomes permanent. This might be the case of the two Muslim communities in Mataró. In contrast, semi-closed cases are those where the decision is still pending, dependent on other factors and conditions, suggesting the need to find a new alternative for the location of these religious centres. We might say that there are cases that are ‘false closures’, such as Premià de Mar. The third type of pending case could be applied to Seville and Lleida, with their legal disputes still to be resolved.

Thinking about these and other cases throughout Spain, it could be argued that the sense of provisional acts is a paradigm of (re)solutions that have been made. Interim solutions have been reached, they are not qualified for all stakeholders as satisfactory, but have become sufficient for the overcoming of two needs: to respond to the demands of collective Muslim worship, and get out of the conflict that this demand has provoked. Political actors tend to justify these (re)solutions as the only possible ways of getting out of a conflict, showing the weakness of their mechanisms of social regulation. But keep in mind that behind these conflicts is a desire to manage religious pluralism at the local level. We must be aware that this regulation cannot always avoid controversy, and should bear in mind the implementation of mechanisms for conflict resolution.
In short, these conflicts have a clear meaning with regard to the inclusion of Islam as a religion and Muslims as a minority in the public space of Spanish society. An inclusion that suggests a growing social visibility simultaneously increases with the discretion of the social initiatives taken by these communities. The formulation and selection of modes of being present in this society is part of the way undertaken by these groups for the next decades.

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Portugal: an exception that proves the rule?
Jordi Moreras

Introduction

In the absence of conflicts over the opening of mosques Portugal is a special case compared to other EU countries. However, perhaps the analysis of this single case will serve to better understand the causes of this kind of conflict in general. The case of Portugal is especially significant when we contrast the relationship between the visibility of the Muslim presence and the emergence of these social reactions.

The Muslim presence in Portugal is one of the most discreet in Europe.¹ It is estimated that around 38,000–40,000 Muslims live in this country, mostly Sunnis (of whom around 10,000 are Isma'ilis) of Southeast Asian origin, coming from Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. More recently, in the late 90s, Moroccans and Bengalis began to settle in Portugal. This Muslim population is mainly located in the capital, Lisbon, and its environs, as well as in major cities in the north (Porto and Coimbra), the south (Algarve) and Madeira (Funchal). In none of these cases can we speak of the existence of ‘Muslim neighbourhoods’. Overall, the Muslim community represents 0.3% of the total Portuguese population.²

There are 7 mosques in Portugal: Lisbon (the central mosque of Lisbon, the Benformoso Mosque), Odivelas (Aicha Siddika Mosque), Sacavem (Hajrak Hamza Mosque), Laranjeiro (Laranjeiro Mosque), Barreiro (Barreiro

¹ For a detailed description of the current Muslim presence in Portugal, see Tiesler (2009).
² In the 2001 census, a total of 12,014 people declared themselves to be Muslims. This declaration is voluntary, hence the difference from the total estimates of this population mentioned above.
Mosque) and Coimbra (Coimbra mosque). There are also thirty throughout the Portuguese territory.\(^3\) This small number of sites of worship means that this presence is barely visible in the public space of the main Portuguese towns and cities.

Since 2005 there has been an area reserved for Muslims in the cemetery of Lumiar, near Lisbon. It buries the dead of the Muslim community (whether Sunni or Shiite) in Portugal. It is significant to see the preference by the most established Muslims to be buried on Portuguese soil, in the belief that this is their society, as opposed to more recent immigrant groups (Moroccans and Bengalis) who still choose to repatriate the body to the country of origin.

Further evidence of this presence is an emerging halal trade (six halal butchers’ shops in Lisbon, three in Odivelas and one in Laranjeiro, besides nine halal restaurants spread throughout Portugal),\(^4\) as well as two private Islamic schools: the Islamic School or Colégio Islâmico of Palmela (which combines classes of the official Portuguese curriculum, from elementary to secondary levels, with Islamic religious teachings. This school is officially recognized by the educational authorities and the Islamic Centre of South of the Tagus river at Laranjeiro, a small but dynamic Koranic school.

**Legal and institutional recognition**

The Portuguese Constitution recognises the freedom of religion and conscience, and provides for a system of equality and separation between the State and religious denominations. The new Religious Freedom Act was signed on 22 June, 2001, and most of its improvements for religious minorities were implemented in 2006.

Islam is recognised in Portugal in the same way as other faiths, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism or Judaism. In Portugal, there is no ‘official interlocutor’ of the Islamic Community, but the Islamic Community of Lisbon (Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa, CIL, founded in 1968) is the main representative, since it coordinates at a national level the representation and activities of several mosques and places of worship.\(^5\) The CIL headquarters are located in the Central Lisbon Mosque (Mesquita Central de Lisboa), inaugurated in 1985. The CIL acts as an umbrella mainly for Sunni Muslims, and receives implicit institutional support from the Portuguese state.

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\(^3\) More practical information on these mosques and oratories is to be found in http://islamnet.blogs.sapo.pt/145876.html.

\(^4\) Ritual slaughter according to Islamic rules has been permitted since 1975.

\(^5\) For a detailed history of the CIL, see Vakil (2004).
There has always been a positive relationship between the authorities and the CIL, which has been, for many years now, the venue *par excellence* for public ceremonies attended by important political figures. These events usually occur from an ecumenical standpoint and as a clear intent on the part of the State and the Portuguese Islamic Community to reinforce the role and visibility of Islam. Just after 11 September, 2001, there were public appearances of high-level figures of the State and the main Islamic community leaders, who also participated in common prayer sessions with a diversity of religious participants (Jews, various Christian denominations, Hindu and Buddhist leaders). On the other hand, Muslim representatives are part of the Religious Liberty Commission (*Comissão da Liberdade Religiosa*). This commission, whose president today is the former President Mário Soares, is independent of Parliament and the Government and functions as an advisory body regulating all matters relating to the application of the Religious Liberty Law.

In 2006, the CIL became a registered religious community, and obtained legal status comparable in some aspects to the Catholic Church.

**Gharb al-Andalus: a similar historical legacy, but a very different present**

Portugal shares the same historical legacy with Spain, that of Al-Andalus and the Reconquista, but the present-day consequences in the two countries are very different. The Arab cultural inheritance of the historical Islamic presence in Portugal is evident in the architecture and language, for example. But unlike Spain, the official claim to this legacy has not occurred until recently. During the Salazar dictatorship (1930–1974) the ideological link between ‘Portugueseness’ and Catholicism was strengthened, and ‘found both expression and support in a narrative of national history as ‘reconquista’ in which the formation of the nation is reduced to an epic history of territorial conquest as Christianization. The making of Portugal, in other words, is literally the erasure of Islam; in such a narrative, by definition, there was no place for Muslims in national history’ (Vakil, 2003a: 10).

The new political and cultural spirit that came with the April 1974 Revolution did not override this reading of the historical past, despite the impact it had had in shaping the Portuguese national identity. It is in itself significant that there is an absence of any academic tradition of Islamic studies, considering that the attention of the Salazar regime had focused on the historiography of the period when

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6 As Tiesler says, ‘while Spanish tourist agencies nowadays increasingly promote tours in “Al-Andalus”, and invite tourists to “Discover Islamic Spain”, the (Southern) Portuguese postcards which show “typical Portuguese chimneys” overlook the fact that these minaret-like chimneys are typical features of Islamic architecture’ (Tiesler, 2001: 205).
Portuguese colonial expansion began in the fifteenth century (Von Kemnitz, 1987; Cardeira da Silva, 2005).

Unlike the previous regime, Portuguese democracy ‘takes its story in full’, as stated in 1997 by the then President Jorge Sampaio, and in the corresponding ‘new and proud consciousness’ of its Arab-Islamic heritage, finds a confirmation of its ‘democratic and pluralist credentials’ (quoted by Vakil, op. cit, p. 11). But as if it were a pendulum, the efforts of the new historiography to rebuild that legacy, sometimes end up by erecting an idealized construction of this presence, as indicated again by Vakil (2003b). In this sense, the similarities with the Spanish case are obvious, given the tendency of a part of Spanish historiography to idealize the spirit of religious tolerance in Toledo (Fanjul, 2004).

The transplantation of the minority experience

The current Islamic presence in Portugal is a direct result of the process of decolonization of the African territories which lasted until the mid 70s. Of the former colonies, the natives of Mozambique are the largest group, and it is dominated by Muslims of Indian descent who had been well established as traders. They came to the metropolis in response to the process of Africanization started after decolonization, and later as a result of the armed conflict caused by the civil war. The second Muslim community comes from Guinea Bissau, and shows a remarkable percentage of students, who have greater employability on the Portuguese labour market than other groups originating in the former colonies. We are talking, then, of two groups that use their professional and educational capabilities to improve their insertion into Portuguese society. Their proficiency in the Portuguese language is a direct path to obtaining their residence permits, and to smooth the path of their social integration. These groups had previously experienced a minority condition, expressed in the territory of the former colony. In the case of Muslims of Indian origin coming from Mozambique, their professional profile is connected to trade and the financial world, and they are on a course that can be described as exceptional in its rapidity, in relation to the classic patterns of integration of other migrant groups. Even as part of a minority, their access to Portuguese society makes them a business and intellectual élite. Nina Clara Tiesler referred to this as the ‘migration intelligence’ of the Muslim community in Portugal (Tiesler, 2005: 833).

This is the élite which is taking part in the whole process of the institutionnalisation of Islam in Portugal. The main names in this community (Vali Suleyman Mamede, Abdool Karim Vakil, both presidents of the CIL) correspond to the profile of an élite with close ties with important sectors of Portuguese society.
Moreover, the approximately 10,000 Isma’ilis of Indian origin (mainly from the Gujarat region) who reside in Portugal, are interconnected with the various networks of followers of the Aga Khan. This highly structured organization, and its transnational contacts, make this specific community of the Shia Imami Nizari another example of the experience of living in a double minority sense.

As a result of this community profile, an estimated 50 to 70% of the Muslims in Portugal are Portuguese citizens, especially those that came with the first wave of immigration, and their children.

How to explain the absence of conflict?

During the inauguration of the mosque in Odivelas in 1983, some youth violently demonstrated their intolerance against Islam. The Muslim representatives invited them to come into the mosque for an educational discussion and that solved the incident. This is the only documented incident to date of public opposition to the opening of a mosque in Portugal. How can we explain this situation?

Tiesler (2001) was the first to question the absence in Portugal of those patterns of conflict that often occur in other European countries: ‘in viewing the phenomenon of Islam in present-day Portugal, the interest of what we see lies in what we do not see: no demonstrations against the opening of mosques; no controversial issues in parliament, in local administration or in the media; no “headscarf affair”; no debates on official recognition or standards of secularism; and no academic discourse on “anti-Muslimness”, “Islamophobia” or the role of Islam in processes of social marginalization of ethnic minorities. One must ask why this is so’ (Tiesler, 2001: 190). She understands that this may be only a matter arising from discreet demographic profile of the Muslim population, and considers that probably the key to this can be found in the combination of socio-historical development of Portuguese society and the specific conditions of the real Muslim presence itself.

Tiesler understands that behind this apparent absence of conflict lies the test of unconscious public marginalisation of the Muslim presence in Portugal. This hypothesis is based on three factors: the first has to do with one of the consequences of Muslim immigration, that profile to which we referred earlier. Their professional qualifications, language proficiency and their place in Portuguese society has rapidly encouraged the development of a Muslim middle class. Thus, Portuguese public opinion has not been questioned about an alleged lack of social integration for this group to contribute to developing a potentially conflicting perception of it. Contacts between members of this group and the
Portuguese political, economic and cultural élite have considerably limited the development of these perceptions based on their social vulnerability.

The second element, also discussed above, is the result of the post-colonial dimension of this presence, knowledge of the language, educational bodies, administrative or legal Portuguese of this group, which have greatly facilitated their social integration and their access to citizenship.

The third has to do with the forms and mechanisms that these groups have used to convey a positive image of Islam in Portuguese society. They have participated in various initiatives in the media (highlighted in religious-themed programmes such as Caminhos and Fé dos Homens on Portuguese public television), and links of institutional relations, which are held by institutions and representatives of the group, especially the CIL.

The combination of these elements has made the Muslim presence a reality that is not being publicly questioned by Portuguese society, in combination with a presence that so far has remained discreet, and this explains the absence of conflict at least in its public dimension.  

What future prospects?

However, it is well known that social perceptions are changing, generating new patterns of response in any particular society to the Muslim presence. Both Tiesler and other researchers are beginning to feel the need to observe the transformations of this presence in detail, and its possible effect on changing perceptions. In contrast to the first generations of Muslims in Portugal, recent migrations, not from former colonized territories, but from Morocco, Bangladesh and other countries of origin, are incorporating new dimensions. To begin with, these waves of migration came previously from other countries, Spain and Saudi Arabia respectively, with other migratory experiences. As Tiesler says, they are ‘migrants in transit’. Undoubtedly, the social accommodation of these groups is much more complicated, partly in the transnational dimension which defines this migration structurally, but also by virtue of occupying an unskilled place in the labour market, which puts them far ahead of the middle class of the first generation of Portuguese Muslim.

Another issue highlighted by researchers who wish to explain the change in social perceptions of Islam and Muslims is the development of second generation identity. The children of migrants of Indian or African origin who came

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7 In any case, we set aside disputes arising within a Muslim community that is becoming more heterogeneous.

8 On this new presence, see the works of Gomes Faria (2007) and Mapril (2005, 2007, 2009).
from former colonial rule inherited the status of citizenship through their parents. But the development of their identity as Portuguese Muslims themselves is established in relation to their society. These new generations have made new demands and new projects, which differ substantially from those of their parents, who were conditioned by having to maintain a minority position again as they had already experienced during colonization. The younger generation definitely opens the post-colonial period, to increase the feasibility of thinking of Portuguese society as a diverse and multicultural reality.

The third element called in to play a leading role in the transformation of these perceptions are those visions of Islam and Muslims that have been imported into Portuguese society as a result of discussions generated on a planetary level concerning Islamic terrorism after September 11. As in Spain, these visions have been introduced into Portugal without the existence of any evidence that could help to identify them empirically. The problem is that the global change in these perceptions is influencing public opinion in countries that hitherto had not made hardly any question of their local Muslim presence. An example could be the case of the Tabligh movement in Portugal, which according to Vakil is the most dynamic Islamic force among Portuguese Muslims (Vakil, 2004: 308). As is known, this movement is profoundly traditionalistic, and favours distance in Muslims from their social context. However, the missionary activity is carried out in a discreet manner inside these communities. After September 11, the mobility of tablighi preachers and missionaries has begun to generate suspicion in Europe and in Portugal.

The combination of these elements does not necessarily have to come from the initiation of an anti-Muslim sentiment in contemporary Portugal, although emerging evidence of Islamophobia should be analysed carefully. This is probably thought because of the controversial words of Cardinal José Policarpo on 15 January, 2009, recommending that Portuguese women (Catholic, of course) do not marry Muslims. The words of the Cardinal are probably best understood within the logic of that conviction, still rooted in the national consciousness of Portugal thanks to the influence of the Salazar dictatorship, according to which the Portuguese are by definition Catholic. In contrast, the words spoken in 1995 by the former President of the Republic, Mário Soares, to mark the tenth anniversary of the construction of the Central Mosque of Lisbon, called for the creation of ‘a common house’ and ‘the construction of a country again’, which has a longer echo.

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9 This is an excerpt from his remarks: ‘The advice that I give to young Portuguese girls is to be careful with relationships, think twice about marrying Muslims. [...] I know that if a young European of Christian background marries a Muslim, as soon as they go to his country, they’ll be subject to the regime of Muslim women. Just imagine it!’
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Why Italian mosques are inflaming the social and political debate
Maria Bombardieri

1. Muslim immigrants in Italy

In the second half of the 1970s Italy underwent its first major influx of Muslim immigrants. These migrants, made up of young and educated individuals from urban settings, had fled territories with few opportunities for steady employment. They brought with them a firm sense of their Islamic faith with which they make their presence felt, visibly organizing themselves already within the 1980s and the 1990s. The years following this period saw fresh waves of Islamic migration, with an increasingly illegal presence in the country, cases which were eventually addressed by two decrees. The more recent fluxes constitute the masses present within the mosques, while those of the earlier migration have developed leadership roles within their communities.

According to the ISTAT figures (processed by Caritas-Migrantes in the XIX Immigration Report 2009)¹ the country’s resident population in 2008 was 60,045,068 of which 3,891,295 were foreigners with residence permit, representing 6.5% of the population. 62.1% of them live in the north, 25.1% in central Italy and 12.8% in the south and on the islands. Among these foreigners the number of Muslim immigrants is 1,292,000². Almost 60% of them are from Africa. The countries of origin most represented are: Albania (441,396), Morocco (403,592), Tunisia

¹ CARITAS MIGRANTES (2009), Immigrazione. Dossier statistico. XIX rapporto, Roma, Idos
² The Muslim immigrants reside predominantly in Northern Italy: in Lombardy foreigners number 904,816, most of whom come from Morocco, then Albania, Egypt and Senegal. In the Veneto region foreigners number 454,453 of which 136,591 Muslims: 40% of them are Maghrebians, followed by Balkans and Asians. In the Emilia-Romagna region there are 421,482 foreigners: 15% are from Morocco, 13.1% from Albania and 5.6% from Tunisia. In Central Italy we find a strong foreign presence as well: 450,151 foreigners live in Lazio alone, 17.5% are Muslims.
(100,112), Egypt (74,599), Senegal (67,510), Bangladesh (65,529) and Pakistan (55,371). Muslim immigrants in Italy represent 33.2% of the immigrant population, slightly higher than the Orthodox population (28.4%) who are the most numerous Christian group, followed by Catholics (19%) and Protestants (3.1%).

At present it is impossible to ignore the presence of foreigners in Italy, particularly the presence of Muslim immigrants. The number of second-generation immigrants is also increasing, those either born in Italy or who arrived during infancy. They are often polyglot, recalling the colours and flavours of their (or their parents’) countries of origin, though many of them feel Italian at heart and in values. Nevertheless they lack recognition as citizens, in spite of having lived in Italy for several years. These form an organized generation, taking part in the country’s public life through associations, publication of journals and online news.

1.1. The converts: a visible presence
When considering the Muslim community one cannot ignore the phenomenon of Muslim converts. This phenomenon was first studied in Italy by the sociologist Stefano Allievi. Prior to the year 2000, researchers estimated the number of conversions to be 10,000. However the number today is significantly greater. Precise data on the subject is unfortunately unavailable, due to the lack of a national registry (even within a major organizations such as the UCOII). Converts perform management roles in their centres and are amongst the main promoters of Islamic publishing. An important factor to consider is the presence of young Italian converts, particularly present in well-organized visible Islamic establishments, where they deal with the transmission of information through websites. An increase in the number of marriages between Muslims and Christians has been registered as well.

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3 FRISINA, A (2007), Giovani Musulmani d’Italia, Roma: Carocci
4 ABDEL QADER, S (2008), Porto il velo, adoro i Queen. Nuove italiane crescono, Milano: Sonzogno Editore
5 www.giovanimusulmani.it and www.secondegenerazioni.it
6 Over the past couple of years the Vila Non-Profit monthly magazine has given a group of young Muslims the opportunity to write about their lifestyles and perspective of the world
7 CHAOUKI, K (2005), Salaam, Italia!, Reggio Emilia: Aliberti Editore. Chaouki is the director of the website www.minareti.it
9 www.islam-online.it is the website managed by Hamza Roberto Piccardo of UCOII and editor of the publishing house Al-Hikma; ‘Il Puro Islam’ is by Ammar De Martino magazine of Shiite Islam, ‘Il messaggio dell’Islam’ by Abdurrahman Rosario Pasquini.
10 www.islamicita.it is the website managed by the youth of COREIS ITALIANA, an Islamic community made up primarily of Italian citizen converts.
11 GHIRINGHELLI, B, NEGRI, A T (2008), I matrimoni cristiano-islamici in Italia: gli interrogativi, il diritto, la pastorale, Bologna: EDB
1.2 Islamic affairs with respect to Italian politics and laws

In 1929 Italy signed a pact with the Catholic Church called *I Patti Lateranensi*. Though it guaranteed the secularism of the State, it also established the teaching of religion in state schools. These conditions are cited in Article 7 of the Constitution. It wasn’t until the 1980s however that new proposals were formulated with respect to other Christian creeds, such as the Jewish community.\(^{12}\)

There are two articles in the Italian Constitution that guarantee the freedom to profess one’s creed (nos. 8 and 19). They express the State’s duty to preserve individual religious freedom in the context of a pluralistic society. According to this constitutional framework, the State has the duty to remove any possible impediments that could limit ‘the freedom and equality of citizens’ (Article 3, para. 2, Constitution), to allocate additional resources and to provide special interventions in local governments ‘in order to favour the effective exercise of individual rights’ (Article 119, para. 5, Constitution).

1.2.1 Steps taken towards an agreement with the state

The path towards formulating an accord between the Italian Republic and Islam began in the 1990s, when three key associations\(^{13}\) consecutively proposed a dialogue: the Italian Muslim Association (*Associazione Musulmani Italiani*, AMI), the Union of Italian Muslim Communities and Organizations (*Unione delle Comunità e delle Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia*, UCOII), and the Italian Islamic Religious Community (*Comunità Religiosa Islamica*, COREIS). None of these organisations ever reached their goal or achieved legal status.\(^{14}\) Today the only legal entity officially recognized by the State is the Islamic Cultural Centre in Italy, which manages the Great Mosque in Rome. Nevertheless, with a committee composed solely of ambassadors from Arab and Muslim countries outside the Italian territory, the Centre has remained incapable of advancing proposals of agreement with the State, even if, together with other Muslim representatives, it is part of

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\(^{12}\) In 1984 with the *Tavola Valdese*, in 1986 with the Assemblies of God in Italy, in 1988 with the Italian Union of Seventh Day Adventist Churches and next year with the Union of the Italian Jewish Communities. Not until the mid-nineties do we see the conclusion of the accord with the Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy (UCEBI) and with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Italy (CELI). Agreements signed, but not ratified, during the third millennium (2007) concern the Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Buddhist Italian Union. The accord grants them many important rights, like the possibility of acquiring an 8% revenue statement as in the case of the Catholic Church and to get public funds to maintain and build places of worship.


\(^{14}\) Only the Italian COREIS received positive feedback from local and national institutions in 2000, but not also legal status. Abd al-Sabur Turrini, general secretary, believes that this is owing to a political issues.
the Italian Council for Islam (Consiglio Italiano per l’Islam)\textsuperscript{15}. The following year, on 15 June, 2007, the Charter of Values, Citizenship and Integration\textsuperscript{16} was published by means of a decree (no. 137); the decree asserts that ‘values and principles are valid for everyone who wants to reside permanently in Italy, no matter what cultural, ethnic or religious community they are part of’.

Before the end of Prime Minister Romano Prodi’s government a plan was under way to form an Italian Islamic Federation. These plans led to a Declaration of Intents signed by representatives of key Islamic organizations.\textsuperscript{17} However the project ran around with the subsequent administration of Silvio Berlusconi, a Centre-right coalition made up of the following political parties: Popolo della Libertà, Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord (Northern League). The latter has been involved in racist and Islamophobic campaigns. In fact, Umberto Bossi’s party has taken the front line for years in impeding the creation of mosques. For example in September 2008 two Members of Parliament, Gibelli and Cota, proposed a moratorium against the building of mosques.\textsuperscript{18} However in 2010 the Home Office Minister Roberto Maroni has formed a new consultative body on Islam: the ‘Committee of Italian Islam’. Christian academics and journalists, and so-called ‘moderate’ Muslim leaders joined the committee.\textsuperscript{19} Besides Minister Maroni supported the first national course of training for religious guides and exponents of Italian Muslim communities. The course, whose title is ‘New religious presences in Italy. An integration process’, was promoted by the International Forum for Democracy and Religion (FIDR) which involves 5 Italian universities.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{15} The official organization promoted by the Italian Home Affairs Minister Giuseppe Pisanu in 2005 and supported by his successor Giuliano Amato in 2006

\textsuperscript{16} The Charter was realized on the basis of a Home Office requirement by a group of scientists appointed on 13 October, 2006, coordinated by Carlo Cardia and constituted by Roberta Aluffi Beck Peccoz, Khaled Fouad Allam, Adnane Mokrani, and Francesco Zannini. It was signed by many local and national Islamic associations, and also by UCOII (the organization which includes almost half of the places of worship in the country). To read the text of the Charter, see http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/servizi/legislazione/cittadinanza/09998_2007_06_15_decreto_carta_valori.html while for a summary of the final relation on the charter given by the scientific committee http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/15/0678_DICHIARAZIONE_DI_INTENTI.pdf

\textsuperscript{17} http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/15/0679_DICHIARAZIONE_DI_INTENTI.pdf

\textsuperscript{18} http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2008/agosto/22/Moschee_legge_muro_della_Lega_co_9_08082211080822111.shtml; For a careful consideration of the bill (n.1246 of 4 June, 2008) read the speech by Silvio Ferrari published on http://www.islamicita.it/FILES%20STAMPA/gi%20edifici%202012‑01‑09.html

\textsuperscript{19} http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala_stampa/notizie/religioni/0776_2010_02_11_Islam

\textsuperscript{20} www.fidr.it; http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala_stampa/notizie/religioni/0773_2010_05_31_Varese.html
2. Islamic places of worship

2.1 Islamic organizations and visibility

The first form of Islamic organization in Italy was initiated in the 1970s with the Muslim Students Union in Italy (Unione degli Studenti Musulmani in Italia, USMI). It was an organization created by predominantly Middle-Eastern Muslim students studying at Perugia University for Foreigners. The USMI became the flagship of the many Islamic centres in Italy, which soon followed in Milan, Padua, Trento, Trieste, Ancona, Perugia, Genoa, and Naples. The original founders of the USMI are still acting as chairpersons in Islamic centres in some of these cities. The USMI, with the support of the first Italian converts, in 1990 created another organization, the UCOII, ‘Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations in Italy’ (UCOII). Today the UCOII represents an important component part of Islamic organization and visibility. According to official data, many prayer rooms are linked to the UCOII. El Zir Izzedine, president of the UCOII, reports that about 134 Islamic centres have joined the organization.

The al-Rahman Mosque of Segrate is part of the association, for example, built in 1988 with a capacity for 150 people, in addition to a dome and a ten-metre high minaret. It is administered by the Islamic Centre of Milan and Lombardy, directed by Abu Shwaima, one of the most important exponents of the USMI. The al-Rahman Mosque is one of the three Italian purpose-built mosques, with a dome and minaret.

The other two mosques are the Great Mosque of Rome and the one in Catania. The Great Mosque of Rome was built on a terrain of 30,000 square metres given by the municipality. It received the silent approval of the Vatican and was financed by Arabic countries. Under Saudi influence, it was inaugurated in 1995 and is still coordinated by the Islamic Cultural Centre in Italy (the only Islamic organization with a legal status as recognized ‘Ente morale’, or ‘moral organization’) whose president is Abdellah Redouane.

In the late 1990s the Islamic Cultural Centre in Italy formed a league among its 35 Islamic centres through the Muslim League in Italy with the aim of representing those Muslims who were not represented by the UCOII. Their first attempt to create this league failed in early 2000.

A second attempt has been made by the Islamic Cultural Centre in Italy in recent years. As the ex-ambassador Mario Scialoja pointed out, the effort has given life for the formation of a league of mosques connected to the Grand

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22 The Muslim League in Italy is an association in which a former ambassador of Italy at the United Nations converted to Islam, Mario Scialoja, has a leading role.
Mosque of Rome, which are simultaneously autonomous with respect to their management. Scialoja went on, ‘It is not a monolithic organisation, but an entity whose purpose is to maintain and favour the exchange of information throughout the nation’. Currently it has declared to involve 55–60 centres, among them the Zayd ibn Thabit Association in Naples and several Moroccan centres. It is however quite difficult to substantiate these numbers.

The third mosque is located in Catania and was promoted by Michele Papa, a non-Muslim lawyer. It was designed by an Egyptian architect and financed by Libya. It is the oldest of the three mosques (inaugurated in 1980), though it is now closed, or rather, ‘privatized’.

Among the most important Islamic organizations is the Italian Islamic Religious Community (COREIS), directed by Shaykh Abd al-Wahid Felice Pallavicini. It is a community composed only of Italian citizens, most of them converts to Islam, following the opinion of the Gnostic-Esoteric French thinker René Guénon. It is an independent part of the Ṣaḥīḥa Al-Ṣāḥibīyya in Europe. The community possesses two private mosques, one in Milan and the other in Sanremo.

For the past couple of years the Union of Italian Muslims (UMI) of Abdel Aziz Khounati has gained a certain prominence with regards to organization and visibility of Islam. Its headquarters is located in Turin, at the Mosque of Peace. Its president has affirmed that the Union is made up of about 50 Islamic centres, one-fifth of which are located in the provinces. The UMI was founded in 2007, after Khounati left the UCOII. The lack of turnover in the Islamic leadership was one of the causes of the split, as well as the strong sense of belonging within the Moroccan community. Moreover, although Khounati has defined the association as ‘religious and non-political’, he says that he does not want to bring foreign politics into Italy. In 2007 the UMI organized a training course for imāms with the contribution of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Morocco. The course was open to everybody and numerous international speakers intervened, among them Abd al-Wahid Pallavicini.

2.2 Mosques in Italy
As we have seen there are only three mosques for the approximately 1,300,000 Muslims in Italy. The other spaces in use are sheds, garages, basements, apartments, warehouses and gyms. What we define as mosques are the three recognized masjid, though muṣālla (prayer room) is the best word to describe those other spaces mentioned above where, besides the practice of the ṣalāt, believers also

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23 In a book by Yahya Pallavicini (the group’s vice president), the Coreis community accounts for 5,000 members. Anyway it is quite difficult to substantiate this number. PALLAVICINI H. Y. S. Y. (2007), Dentro la moschea, Milano, BUR, pag. 26.
hold meetings, cultural events, Koran and Arabic courses for children. Though when referring to an Islamic centre, we mean a visible structure present for some time that promotes a variety of cultural activities. An Islamic centre has specific rooms for the salât and other rooms for the various activities available also to outsiders, ranging from conferences to Arabic courses for non-Muslims to inter-religious dialogue and school visits. There may also be a room reserved as a bookstore, where books and audio and visual materials can be bought in Arabic.

Each region has Islamic centres of this type, and almost every province has some point of reference of this nature. Some of these centres aim at being the cardinal point for their region, like the Segrate Centre or the one in Trento or in Turin. In the case of the Islamic centre of Naples, the aim is to become the point of reference for the entire South of Italy. Where the Muslim community is not so numerous and organized there may be one prayer room available, used only on Friday for the Yawm al-jum’a, that is, ‘the day of the assembly’.

In recent years there have been many requests to change the location of the prayer rooms, which have not been met with many positive responses. These responses have been made by the Regional Administrative Court (TAR), often accompanied by the closure of the prayer rooms. The instances have found lively debate in the public and political spheres. The desire of Muslims to make their presence more visible in their territories, besides responding to an evident need for worship, indicates a clear willingness and an understanding of living in Italy and opening themselves to Italian society, to interact with the local institutions and the Church. However, there is a sense of apprehension in Italy with regard to the mosques.

2.3 Mapping out the mosques
The first and only study conducted throughout the entire country was conducted by Stefano Allievi and Felice Dassetto in the early 1990s, by literally travelling throughout Italy and mapping out almost one hundred places of worship. In 2001 the then Minister Franco Frattini announced the presence of 351 meeting places and associations during a discussion of the control over intelligence services in Parliament. Five years later an official report counted 628 associations and

25 Quoted in NESE, M ‘Fini e l’Islam: prediche in Italiano’ in Il Corriere della Sera 19 gennaio 2009, (a), pag. 8.; DUSI, E ‘Regolarizzate le nostre moschee così l’islam vi farà meno paura’ in La Repubblica 6 gennaio 2007, (a), pag. 10
places of worship.\textsuperscript{26} The latest report issued by the intelligence services (SISDE, Information and Security Democratic Services), cited by newspapers and dating back to spring 2007, identifies the following: 735 prayer rooms and associations, mostly present in Lombardy (110), Veneto (104), and Emilia Romagna (94), among which only 157 were controlled by the intelligence services.\textsuperscript{27}

According to our own recent research carried out between October 2008 and July 2009, Islamic places of worship in Italy number approximately 764.\textsuperscript{28} This figure includes not only Islamic organizations but places where the Islamic community gathers for the \textit{şalāt} on Friday. The following table illustrates how more than half of the places of worship are located in the north, where the majority of Muslim immigrants live.

### Regional mosques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valle d’Aosta</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piemonte</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lombardia</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veneto</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trentino Alto Adige</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friuli Venezia Giulia</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liguria</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia Romagna</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toscana</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marche</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umbria</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>764</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the 764 places of worship identified in this analysis we have also included the Shiite places of worship, the private rooms of \textit{ṭarīqa} Sufi (about twenty) and the ethnic \textit{muṣālla}.\textsuperscript{29} The data for the most part comprises public \textit{muṣālla}, open to and frequented by Muslims of every nationality, including Italian converts.

\textsuperscript{26} The figure included more than 258 ‘mosques’ allocated in the following way: Sicily 38, Lombardy 31, Veneto 23, Calabria 22, Emilia Romagna 22, Lazio 20, Tuscany 18, Campania 14, Piedmont 13, Marche 13, Apulia 11, Umbria 7, Sardinia 6, Liguria 6, Abruzzo 4, Basilicata 3, Trentino Alto Adige 2, Friuli Venezia Giulia 2, Molise 1, Valle d’Aosta 1.

\textsuperscript{27} POLCHI, V ‘Moschee d’Italia, la mappa del rischio’ in La Repubblica 9 marzo, 2008, (a), pag. 20.

\textsuperscript{28} The national research has been conducted through interviews (more than two hundred) of the representatives of the most important Islamic centres of every region, and the directors of immigrant desks managed by diocesan CARITAS organizations, municipalities and trade unions, to city councilmen and members of political parties, and the directors of inter-religious dialogue in Catholic churches, policemen, cultural mediators and journalists. Additionally several mosques throughout the different regions were visited.

\textsuperscript{29} There are mostly Senegalese, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi \textit{muṣālla}.
2.3.1 Zâwiya Sufi
Among the 764 locations there are also about twenty private locations belonging to a tariqa Sufi: the Naqshbandiya, the Shâdhiliyya, the Chistiyya, the Burhaniyya, the Tijâniyya, the Khalwatiyya and the Ahmadiyya, each of which expresses itself in different groups present in the zâwiya (private prayer rooms) located in many Italian regions. The members of each tariqa can vary from about one hundred to only about ten, and many of the members are Italian converts. Amongst the sufi orders the popular Senegalese tariqa of the Mourids, organized in dahira, should also be counted (see below). Unlike other visible organizations, the tariqa represents a silent and almost invisible presence. The sufi order of the Jerrahi Halveti30 is one of those groups that demonstrate a greater visibility and notoriety in their activism in the cultural and religious fields. They refer to the Khalwatiyya, directed by the shaykh Gabriel Mandel Khan (died in July 2010) with their headquarters at the tekkê in Milan, in the same city as tariqa Ahmadiyya Idrîsiyya Shâdhiliyya of Abd al-Wahid Pallavicini, shaykh of the previously mentioned Italian COREIS31.

2.3.2 Ethnic mušâlla
Almost in every region there is a dahira of Senegalese Mourids32, connected by a solidarity network33 going beyond regional lines, as is the case between Lombardy and Veneto. The relation with the country of origin is also important, in fact a marabou joins them for the festivities. We also find them in the mosques attended by Maghreb members, though they tend to gravitate towards their own ethnic groups. Also present in Italy is a group called the Layannes, primarily from Cape Verde and Senegal. Another nationality tending to stay amongst its own is the Pakistani population. There are relations between Pakistani association in Lombardy and Emilia Romagna34, some linked to Jama ‘a al-Islam.

In the Triveneto area, Asian immigrants have increased by 90% over the last three years. There is a numerous Bengali community in Marghera, for example, whose mušâlla is attended by members of the Magrebian community. In Lombardy, Emilia Romagna and Marche there are many people from Albania and Macedonia, though more secularized. Other ethnic groups, active in the

30 www.suﬁjerrahi.it
31 We recall the presence of Yahya Pallavicini at the first international Catholic-Muslim forum, which had as its theme ‘The Love of God, the Love of Neighbour’. The forum was requested by the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and by the Muslim delegation of 138 signers of the open letter entitled ‘A Common Word’. www.acommonword.com
33 Several groups are organized in the Coordinamento delle Associazioni Senegalesi in Italia (CASI).
34 We refer to the Pakistani mušâlla in Desio, Brescia, Carpi, and in Rimini.
religious as well as in the political field, are the Turkish (Süleymanç, Milli Görüs, Fetullah Gulen). It is also worth mentioning the Jama'a at-Tabligh, of Indian origin, whose members are more closed than other groups and found throughout the Italian peninsula. There is also the Al-'Adl wa al-Ihsân organisation of Moroccans, a political-religious movement illegal in Morocco.

2.3.3 Shiite musâlla
The Sunni presence predominates in Italy, though the Shiites are also present, practising the duodecimal Shia, organized in associations throughout the nation. There is also the Ishmaelite community represented by the Ishmaelite Italian Community located in Rome. The duodecimal community is also present in Milan with its own meeting house composed only of Iranians. The hall was donated by the Iranian Consulate and is attended by about forty people on Thursday evenings, with tripled participation during festivities or the commemoration of the Ashura. During this celebration an hojjatullah makes a visit from Iran. In Lombardy and Emilia Romagna we find the presence of the Imâmiyah Association, made up of mostly Pakistanis. In the Como area there are a number of Shiite Lebanese Muslims, many with Italian citizenship, though lacking well-organized structures. In the centre of Italy the Islamic association Imâm Mahdi has maintained a presence since 2004. It is important on a national level and made up of Shiite Muslims of different nationalities, active in disseminating the teaching of the Jafarite school with translations, publications and through some public events. Finally in the South, in Naples, we find the Islamic association Ahl al-Bayt, which mainly involves Italian converts to Shiite Islam.

2.4 Mosques potentially under construction
Throughout the country we find visible signs from the Islamic community of their desire to build a real Mosque or to restructure other locations with characteristics typical of Islamic architecture (dome, minaret . . .), but only in a few cases have we seen any results.

In Turin, the Mosque of Peace directed by Abdel Aziz Khounati has become too small for its community of about one hundred worshippers. With the help of the municipality however, Khounati has found a building that could become a place of worship after suitable modification. The municipality gave its approval considering the seriousness of the request and managed the matter in an intelligent way. Adopting the Social Promotion (APS) form the association can use a location not used as a place of worship. Therefore the new centre will

35 Italians, Iranians, Lebanese, Iraqis, Pakistani and Afghans.
36 We refer to clause no. 4 of Article 32 of Law no. 383 del 2000.
be named Centro Socio-Culturale La Palma Onlus, which will include a mosque of 1,000 square metres, a conference room, a public library, a computer room and an office to help immigrants. The mosque will be financed with over €2 million by Morocco. The news of the construction and its financing has caused great enthusiasm among the Moroccan community in Turin. Opposition to the plan has also been expressed by the MP Souad Sbai (PdL, of the right-wing coalition) of Moroccan origin.

Membership of the Islamic Cultural Institute of Viale Jenner in Milan, directed by Abdel Hamid Shaari, has increased to 4,000 over the last ten years. At times, worshippers holding their mats and carpets block the pavements for pedestrians. To remedy this situation Minister Maroni has ordered the şalât on Friday to be taken in another place, the Palasharp (a sports stadium). In any case, the Islamic community is still waiting for its request for a larger place of worship to be reconsidered by the Municipality. Muslims trust the EXPO in 2012 will give the opportunity for them to have a mosque. The diocese has always supported the right of Muslims to have a dignified place of worship, thus exposing itself to the criticism of the Northern League party.

Another case of the building of a new mosque in the same city is that of the Italian COREIS. This project was approved in 2006, proposing the re-qualification of existing spaces. The Al-Wahid Mosque will have an octagonal base with columns and a dome. The surface area has to be of 200 square metres. The project also includes the restructuring of a three-storey building furnished as a guest house and some offices. There will also be a mausoleum with a quadrilateral base and a dome to contain the future construction of Shaykh Abd al-Wahid Pallavicini.

For the past three years the Islamic House of Culture (Casa della Cultura Islamica), another Muslim association based in Milan, has organized thousands of faithful to pray on Friday in rented gyms. Plans have been proposed to build a mosque with a multi-purpose centre. In order to reach this goal, the group have purchased space for €1,400,000 in via Padova in Milan. The space includes a 1,000 square metre shed and another 2,400 square metres available for future buildings.

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37 A group of ‘moderate’ Muslims of Turin, supported by MP Souad Sbai, sent a letter to the police in which they denounced the presence of fundamentalist imams in the 9 mosques of the city, including the one managed by Khounati. In the letter they warned about appeals made by the imams in favour of jihad against the West and Christians, and collections to benefit Hamas. **NUMA, M ‘Appelli alla giihad e insulti. A Torino seminano odio’ in La Stampa, 22 aprile, 2009, pag. 54; PAUTASSO, L ‘È guerra nell’Islam torinese sui soldi per la nuova moschea’ in Il Riformista 25 aprile 2009, (a), pag. 8; FASANO, G ‘Gli islamici con la Lega: non aprite quella moschea’ in il Corriere della Sera, 24 aprile 2009, (a), pag. 21. These polemics must be seen as an internal positioning of different Moroccan groups.**

38 **CREMONESI, M ‘Islam, Lega contro Tettamanzi: “E’ l’ultimo cattocomunista”’ in il Corriere della Sera, 7 dicembre 2008, (a), pag. 18; SENESI, A ‘Bene Tettamanzi, serve più integrazione. Ma a Milano ci sono già cinque luoghi di culto’ in il Corriere della Sera, 7 dicembre 2008, (a), pag. 6.**
Different projects have been submitted to the municipality, but they have all been rejected for urban reasons or because of their inadequate environmental impact. According to internal sources however, the real reason is the connection of the Islamic centre to *Waqf al-Islam* and linked to the UCOII.

This has led to tensions among the leading members of the Islamic House of Culture. We find another example in Lodi, where from 2000 (with a Centre-left local government) to 2004 negotiations and municipal resolutions were held over the construction of a mosque and a cultural centre in a 2,000 square-metre space.\(^{39}\) Then, in 2005 the Islamic community representative decided not to continue the project owing to the lack of support from the Mayor (still Centre-left) during the election campaign. On the other hand a proposal was made in Brescia to renovate a farm building located between two highways. The mosque plan included certain characteristics of Islamic architecture within the structure. However the Northern League’s opposition to the plan blocked the project. The topic will be treated at length below.\(^{40}\)

Finally we recall that in Lombardy in 2006 an anti-mosque organization called *Frantese Cristiano Combattente* (Combatant Christian Front) was in operation, led by Maurizio Peruzzi with his accomplice Roberto Sandalo, a former Prima Linea terrorist. They admitted to have made at least ten criminal attempts in the region, including attempts against the Segrate Mosque in via Quaranta, the COREIS Mosque in via Meda, the main office of the Islamic Relief Association and the former cultural centre *Fondaco dei Mori*.

In Ravenna the Islamic Centre for Culture and Study of Romagna has bought an area of about 3,800 square metres (with 1,500 square metres of building space) in the suburbs of the city. The project includes the construction of a mosque with a dome and minaret, a school, a meeting hall, a cafeteria, a library, space for community activities and a spacious park. The land was bought with money from the community.

In Bologna the situation is still at a standstill. The building of a mosque in a 19,000 square metre area (2,800 square metres of building space) was forthcoming, despite the opposition of the MP of the North League party Calderoli who promoted a ‘Pig Day’ demonstration, in spite of ecclesiastic reserves. The process was impeded in the spring of 2008 because of disagreements between Mayor Cofferati of the Centre-left party and the Islamic centre of Bologna over

\(^{39}\) It was with the case of Lodi Mosque, one year before 9/11, that the anti-Muslim campaign of the North League started.

the legal title to be assumed. The idea was to ensure transparency of funds and to stop the affiliation with the UCOII.41

The Islamic community in Modena has been planning the building of a mosque for the past four years. Just recently the municipality allocated a location in the suburbs of 30,000 square metres to include a prayer hall, a conference room, a library and an area for the Mezza Luna Blu volunteer association. The project does not include either a minaret or the dome and it will be partially financed by worshippers, who have already collected €130,000.

A year ago in Liguria, the Genoa Islamic community came to an agreement with the Centre-left municipality to build a mosque for 1,000 worshippers in the east suburban area.42 The project also includes a library and a public garden, with the hope for a minaret and a dome. The agreement also relied on the independence of the Islamic community of Genoa from the UCOII.

In Trento we find the Islamic centre of the Islamic Community of Trentino and Alto Adige managed by Aboulkheir Breigheche since 1990. The community recently bought a 500 square-metre warehouse in Gardolo where it will eventually move. Once they had obtained municipal approval building renovation work began, until it ran into the legal opposition of the owner of the adjacent hotel. The complaint was that the mosque could impede access to the hotel on Fridays. Moreover, the muşâlla of Trento has been subject to vandalism and xenophobic actions (damage to the windows, blasphemous writings and swastikas on the walls).

The Islamic centre in Padua raised €1 million to restructure a farm into a mosque, in via Longhin.43 The Rahma Association that was supposed to have managed the mosque failed to sign the agreement with the municipality for the concession of the farm building owing to internal disagreements and financial problems. On the other hand the association has recently bought a storage facility just outside Padua in Ponte di Brenta. We also note that in Villorba (in the province of Treviso) the Islamic community has purchased a new storage facility for €350,000 to be turned into a mosque.

Action is underway in southern Italy at the Zayd ibn Thabit association in Naples. Last year Massimo Cozzolino confirmed that a 1,000 square metre space had been allocated and was being restructured. The space was to be granted on lease for 25 years, about €3,000 per month. It seemed that the municipality

41 The UCOII not joining the Federation of Italian Islam prompted Minister Amato to interrupt negotiations for the building of the mosque. http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/15/0679_DICHIARAZIONE_DI_INTENTI.pdf; GULOTTA, C ‘Bologna, stop alla nuova moschea’, su La Repubblica, 29 aprile, 2008, pag. 20
42 www.youtube.com/watch?v=duBCdc4OMRg
43 ‘Firmato il preliminare: spesa di €460.000’ in Il Mattino di Padova, 18 maggio, 2009, pag.15; ALLIEVI, S ‘Moschea e referendum’ in Il Mattino di Padova, 23 maggio, 2009, pag.1
may give its approval after the Technical Office has evaluated the project proposed by the architects. This project included a mosque and an Islamic centre for educational and cultural initiatives. At the end of last July, there was an unexpected turn: the space allocated was occupied by the Association of Mothers Against Drugs.

To summarize, the social conflicts between members of society and the Islamic community are typically provoked by political parties, the media and lay organizations against the mosques and Islam in general, taking place primarily in northern Italy. In central Italy there have been sporadic cases of protests against the opening of Islamic places of worship. In the north we find a greater presence of *muşâlla* and of Muslim immigrants searching for employment. Moreover the immigrant presence in the north is rather consolidated, stable and not as fluid as it is in the south. For many immigrants, the south represents a necessary step in order to reach the north and the rest of Europe, where there are more employment opportunities. Muslim immigrants are more numerous in the south during the summer as a result of seasonal labour. Indeed one can observe the formation of temporary places of worship during these periods, especially on holiday resorts.

### 2.6 Islamic cemeteries

In almost every region we find the presence of Islamic cemeteries. These cemeteries are limited spaces found inside pre-existing cemeteries that are not entirely independent, occasionally with an embalmment room. The Islamic ritual requires that the body be buried directly in the earth with the face towards Mecca, the direction in which the entire cemetery should face. Clearly it is forbidden to bury a body without a coffin for health reasons, a provision that the Islamic community respects and approves. The body should also not be exhumed according to the Islamic creed, though exhumation is prescribed by Italian law after 20 years.

In Italy the question of building mosques and cemeteries has created social uneasiness owing to the feeling of territory possession. The symbolic value of a territory ‘threatened’ by the visible presence of foreign elements.

Let us consider the case of Arezzo Cemetery. In 2007 the municipality deliberated over the allocation of two Islamic areas, provoking opposition by the Centre-right coalition. Through the manipulation of information, it succeeded in spreading panic through the public. In fact, *Forza Italia*, the Centre-right majority party, considered the proposal unacceptable because it created specific areas that could lead ‘to the marginalization of the dead as well as that of the living, of family members, and of mourners who dealt not only with the pain of their loss, but with social marginalization’. It also affirmed that ‘changing the orientation

44 www.arezzoweb.it
of cemeteries could be seen as a privilege for immigrants’. As a result the public collected 3,000 signatures against the cemetery. A solution was found a year later with the allocation of seven burial areas in seven towns in the province of Arezzo.

3. The mosque issue: analysis of 4 conflictual cases

In analysing the mosque question in Italy, we will refer to four significant cases in the northern and central Italian cities of Colle Val d’Elsa, Genoa, Brescia and Padua. We have chosen these cases because of the interesting socio-political debates they aroused, and the disputes internal to the Islamic communities. As we will see, in these cases the municipal authorities decided in favour of mosques and identified the places where to build them. These municipalities are all under the leadership of Centre-left parties. Thus we will see in the next cases the same Institutions allocating the spaces where the mosques are presently to be built.

The one exception among these cases is that of Brescia. The present Centre-right municipal administration is against the construction of the two mosques currently underway. The decision was taken by the previous administration, while the present one is taking measures to block them. The case of Colle Val d’Elsa is important not only because it represents one of the major cases of conflict, but because there also was an agreement between the municipality and the Islamic centre for the management of the mosque. On the other hand the case of Genoa is moving towards a resolution thanks to the willingness of the Islamic community to act independently of the UCOII. Finally there is the controversial case of Padua. At the moment of signing an agreement with the municipality there was a division within the Islamic community over finances, thus bringing public negotiations to a halt.

3.1 Colle Val d’Elsa

The Islamic community of Colle Val d’Elsa is made up of about a thousand people out of a population of about 20,000 inhabitants. The town has had its own Islamic centre since 1993.

The first signs of the construction of a new centre for the Islamic community were to be found in the local electoral programme proposed by Mayor Marco Spinelli (Centre-left coalition) in 1999. The Islamic community requested part of the Abbadia area to build a new Islamic centre at its own expense. The municipal administration was in favour of the initiative, seen as ‘an opportunity for the cultural enrichment and social growth of the entire area of Colle Val d’Elsa’. The political and public debate started. Part of society supported the
request of construction and the Centre-right called for a referendum in order to test public opinion.

In 2003 the city council granted 46 the use a 3,200 square metre space in the San Lazzaro public park (locality of Abbadia) to the Islamic community for a period of 99 years. Besides the municipality proposed a policy of integration and of mutual understanding amongst the parties involved, highlighting the Islamic community’s needs to reach an agreement with the city council in order to exercise control over the Islamic centre.

In the following months the signature of the Agreement Protocol Draft 47 between the municipal authority and the Imâm Feras Jebareen 48 confirming the public character of the allocated areas (art.2) for an annual rent of €11,000. A key element of the agreement was the constitution of a joint scientific guarantee committee, assigning to eight members the task to plan the centre’s activities program together with the association’s executive organ. The assignments indicated the use of the Italian language, except for ritual and worship activities (art.8).

For the first time in Italy an agreement 49 was reached between a local Islamic community and its municipal authority. During the presentation of the agreement the civic list ‘Insieme per Colle’ gave the mayor a document with the signatures of 4,000 local citizens against the Islamic centre in the San Lazzaro Park. The writer Oriana Fallaci also strongly attacked the municipal administration and its integration plans for the Islamic community.50

From August 2005 to March 2009 the Abbadia Committee ‘Giù le mani dal Parco!’ together with the civic list presented some more referendum queries against the construction of the centre in the park. But the queries were judged inadmissible by the Guarantor Committee.51 The Islamic centre’s project included the construction of a prayer hall with a 6 metre dome and a 8.30 metre minaret, a library open to all citizens and a multi-purpose room in an area of 570 square metres, in addition to improvement of the state of the park. Building work began on the mosque in 2006, thanks to a large donation of €300,000 by the

46 Atto n. 111/2003
48 An Arab-Israeli doctor, also supported by Magdi Cristiano Allam until he realized that Jebareen and his Islamic centre took part in the UCOII organization not considered moderate by the journalist. ALLAM, M (2006), Io amo l’Italia, ma gli italiani la amano? Milano: Mondadori, pp. 184–189.
50 http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2006/05_Maggio/30/fallaci.shtml
51 ‘The Colle Val d’Elsa mosque, the sentence of the State Council and the legitimate position of the municipality’ in www.valdelsa.net/det-cy30-it-EUR-27056-.htm
Monte dei Paschi di Siena Foundation. The opening of the building site was followed by acts of intimidation such as cutting off a pig’s head, Northern League committee meetings, protests led by the MEP Mario Borghezio with the slogan: ‘Tuscany is Christian, never Muslim!’

Instead the local Church gave a favourable response to the construction of the mosque, together with the Hebraic community, the Mormons, the Waldenses and the Soka Gakkai Institute.

In the summer of 2007 the building site was at a standstill, owing to a sudden lack of funds for the foundations. Besides a year after Imâm Feras Jabareen definitely left Italy and El Zir Izzedine substituted him as interlocutor with public institutions. The UCOII aegis on the mosque has caused considerable perplexity in some Islamic organizations and in the right wing parties. In other cases we find strong political dissent towards UCOII Islamic centres. Centres that have been well-organized with a visible presence in the territory for many years. The roots of this opposition can be seen on one hand in power struggles over desired visibility involving other national organizations who enjoy a favourable relationship with the State in representing Italian Islam, assisted by distortions in the

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52 The former mayor of Colle Val d’Elsa Spinelli was a member of the general deputation of the foundation (the organ that decides who can receive donations), while the present mayor Brogioni now serves in the deputation. ALLAM, M ‘Primo Referendum in Italia contro una moschea’ in http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2006/03_Marzo/05/moschea.shtml
53 BOLOGNI, M ‘Insulto al cantiere della moschea’ in La Repubblica, 13 December, 2006, pag. 5.
56 http://www.comune.colle-di-val-d-elsa.si.it/download/comunicati/08/jabaren280708.pdf
57 BOCCOLINI H. ‘Colle val d’Elsa, il problema non sono le moschee ma gli imâm’ in www.loccidentale.it/trackback/15765
58 For instance, MP Souad Sbai of Moroccan origin is a MP of Popolo delle Libertà, active in defending the rights of woman immigrants and strongly critical of the UCOII, mosques and Imams in general. BOCCOLINI H. ‘L’UCOII trova i soldi per finanziare la moschea della discordia’ in www.loccidentale.it/trackback/54014; Also Andrea Ronchi has expressed reserves about UCOII; he stated: ‘We say no to the construction of the Colle Val d’Elsa mosque and to all the mosques connected to UCOII, a dangerous organization because is close to the Muslim Brothers’. In www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcNUlIPXo. On the role of the Muslim Brothers in Italian Muslim organisations, see ALLIEVI, S, MARECHAL, B (2010), I Fratelli Musulmani in Europa. L’influenza e il peso di una minoranza attiva, in CAMPANINI, M, MEZRAN, K, I Fratelli Musulmani nel mondo contemporaneo, Torino: UTET, p.231–236.
mass media. On the other hand one must take into consideration the UCOII’s explicit political position in favour of Palestine.\textsuperscript{60}

We conclude the case of Colle Val d’Elsa by remembering that the construction is now underway and the community hopes to open the mosque for next Ramadan.

### 3.2 Genoa

The Islamic community in Genoa has been present since the 1970s. Today it is made up of 9,000 Muslims, of whom 2,000 are under-age. They have four prayer halls in the city: three in the city centre and one in Pra (Genoa-Voltri) represented by Salah Husein, president of the Islamic centre of Genoa and Liguria, associated with the Muslim Community in Liguria\textsuperscript{61} (CO.MU.L). The Islamic community bought a building in the year 2000 for €300,000 previously owned by Officine Meccaniche Passalacqua in via Coronata (in the Cornigliano area, close to the city centre). A building request was made to the Centre-left municipality which gave its approval in 2005 without intervening in the urban plan since it was already a service area.

Approval for the construction of the mosque increased the reaction to the Centre-right parties, particularly on the part of the Northern League with demonstrations against the plan and a call for a referendum. This opposition led the CO.MU.L to present a letter to the President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. It stated ‘We wish to live in absolute peace and become integrated in Italy, which does not mean that we are not people, hiding underground and suffering insults and humiliations’.

Underlying these words is one of the main themes related to the building of the mosques – that of visibility. From a situation of marginality the Islamic community attempts to establish relations with political and religious institutions, asking to be recognized as an active presence in society. The reaction, unfortunately, is one of closure, with strong opposition particularly from the Centre-right political parties.

Chief Rabbi Giuseppe Momigliano and Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone have highlighted the need to grant religious freedom, the latter hoping in the meantime for reciprocity towards Christian minorities in Muslim countries. During this time the Church wanted to create a multi-functional space for youth and families in west Genoa. For that reason it asked Mayor Pericu for the Muslim space in via

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\textsuperscript{60} In the summer of 2006 UCOII published advertisements in the national newspapers condemning Israeli military actions in Palestine and Lebanon, comparing them to the Nazi massacres. This strong political position in favour of the Palestinian cause triggered the mistrust of the Italian institutions.

\textsuperscript{61} The Ligurian Muslim Community established in 1999 has 12 Islamic centres today.
Coronata, offering in exchange a field in the suburbs. Unfortunately the field was not available for construction because of technical and urban problems.

Then in 2007, Mayor Marta Vincenzi of the Democratic Party (Centre-left) succeeded Mayor Pericu, a position she holds to this day. After disputes over the finances and the membership of the Islamic community to the UCOII, Mayor Vincenzi signed an agreement with Salah Husein in July 2008 to build the mosque in the Lagaccio area (suburbs of east Genoa) which is easily accessible by train from Genoa. With this agreement the city’s Islamic community became independent of the UCOII. According to Mayor Vincenzi the mosque’s autonomy represents a definitive element in solving the mosque question.62

The Northern League party quickly made its move against the mosque project.63 It stated that opposition to the mosque was for religious reasons, as Islam is a threat to Christian and Western values, insisting that Muslims are a threat to the security of the Genoese and to their traditions.64 The party’s statements have a clearly political aim, exploiting both Christian and Italian cultural values. They are concerned neither with religious freedom nor its public profession, yet they call for reciprocal visibility for Christians in Muslim countries. The mosque is an edifice that marks and controls an area. Besides the Muslim community COREIS has reserves not about the construction of the mosque but about the leaders of the Genoa Islamic centre connected with the UCOII, so it suggests the formation of an external committee able to discern politics from religion.65 Anyway Mayor Vincenzi will give Muslims the Lagaccio area with a certificate of occupancy for up to 60 years with the payment of a rent. Husein confirms that the Islamic community will take complete responsibility for the building costs, which will be covered by the sale of the factory on via Coronata and possibly by foreign funds.

Architect Claudio Timossi, who was commissioned with the Cornigliano project, has redesigned a new project with a 500 square metre men’s prayer hall and a women’s hall of 300 square metres. The plan also includes a multi-functional room, a library, a museum and a public garden outside. A minaret has also been planned but its dimensions have not been defined yet. The hope is that the plan will be complete in the following years.

63 http://genova.repubblica.it/dettaglio/Borghetto-Il-giuramento-della-Commenda-Soltanto-noi-a-difendere-la-Cristianita/1499966
64 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IlyLrcqT8&feature=channel_page
65 VALLI, W ‘Ebrei e Islam insieme al Tempio, nel segno della pace’ in La Repubblica, 28 gennaio, 2009, (a), pag. 2.
We conclude the Genoa case with a declaration of Husein’s: ‘Our mosque will never be a source of decadence anywhere in Genoa: it would be a place of intercultural debate, a place of welcome and, last but not least, a tourist attraction for the city. […] For years we have accepted the community's requests to reach an agreement: now it is time for us to start building our mosque, which will also be yours, as a testimony of richness of ideas, feelings, and culture’.66

3.3 Brescia
In Brescia two mosques67 have already been built, one belongs to the Islamic Community Association of Brescia and its Province, mostly made up of Maghrebians, Middle-Easterners and Senegalese. The other is promoted by the Islamic Association Muhammadiah, which is solely made up of Pakistanis.68 We will consider only the first case because of its representation of the policy of visibility, becoming the favourite interlocutor of institutions and citizens, disclosing information about itself to the media and making every mosque initiative public.

The Islamic Community Association of Brescia and its Province was formed at the end of the 1980s by a group of USMI students and is at present located in a rundown farm building in need of renovation, adjacent to the highway. This solution was found thanks to the previous Mayor Paolo Corsini (Centre-left). The project was financed privately without any public funds but through collections from national mosques and possible funds from a foreign bank.

After starting renovation work the community moved to via Corsica in 2005 and brought its imam over from Yemen. That same year some problems with the municipality arose because the 1,500 square metre area had to be expropriated in order to enlarge the highway. About 1,000 square meters were available behind the Islamic centre, a green area owned by the Province which could become a parking area after modifications on the Regional Regulatory Plan69. The centre’s final project included a multi-functional centre, a PC lab, rooms for the youth and meeting rooms opened even to non-Muslims, in order to favour inter-religious and intercultural dialogue. Besides the prayer hall there will be a minaret. There

66 www.islam-liguria.org
67 ALBERTI, M (2009), Per una politica della visibilità. Il caso delle moschee di Brescia, Tesi di Laurea, Università Ca’ Foscari di Venezia.
68 It was born in 1994 with the separation of Pakistani immigrants from the Islamic Community Association of Brescia and its Province. In 1998 they bought a prayer hall and in 2002 a Pakistani imam arrived. The community grew so in 2004 they bought a building (790 square metres in a 1,243 square metre area) in via Volta to renovate and transform into a mosque, with a 10-metre minaret. The mosque is almost invisible because it is surrounded by homes and the ring road. The Muhammadiah Association, opposite the Islamic Community Association of Brescia and its Province, aims to become a point of reference exclusively for the Pakistani community, and is not interested in becoming visible and having a social role in the Brescia community.
69 PRG was modified in October 2006.
are some reservations however over the proposal of a dome and palm trees from the Middle East.\textsuperscript{70} The Building Committee had refused the mosque project twice as a result of its exotic elements; only in February 2008 did it agree with the project of the Islamic association without granting it permission to build. In favour of the mosque were the Centre-left coalition and the Church, underlining the contribution that thousands of Muslim immigrants give to the development of the city.

There was no delay in the negative response of the Centre-right parties, with the Northern League party collecting signatures for a referendum. It was able to advance its position against the building of mosques by equating mosques with terrorism and thus associating the presence of Muslims with security issues.\textsuperscript{71} The other centre-right parties insisted on the dangerous link between Islamic communities and the UCOII.\textsuperscript{72}

During his election campaign Paroli, the current mayor, promised to oppose the enlargement of the area for the Islamic centre. Thus, when he was elected he changed the town plan modifying the provision for the enlargement of service structures\textsuperscript{73}. This action, followed by strict controls by firemen, the ASL and the municipality underlines his determination against the visibility of the mosque, a visibility necessarily involving a political role in the mosque’s management leadership, within the immigrant community and within an urban context enlarging into the province.

We conclude the Brescia case by referring to the approach adopted by the Islamic community in response to the opposition of Centre-right parties. The Association has always been in favour of dialogue, refusing to make any negative statements and accepting the plans for re-designing the minaret. Issam Mujahed, a member of the mosque, invited the institutions not to isolate mosques from society, since it could lead to the spread of fundamentalism. He also said that it was important to avoid speaking negatively about Muslims and not to make generalisations about mosques, because this prevents the integration of the Islamic community and its positive role in Italian society.

**3.4 Padua**

In Padua there are about 4,000 Muslims, mostly from Maghreb. The first organized Islamic community dates back to 1986: it was originally located in the city

\textsuperscript{70} The new town master plan (25th May 2005) establishes that the external aspect of buildings has to conform with the town’s architecture and with the colours of the other buildings.
\textsuperscript{71} Bresciaoggi, 5th February 2006.
\textsuperscript{72} Bresciaoggi, 20th February 2008.
\textsuperscript{73} The variation he said: ‘from now the projects will be approved by the assembly, subject to an evaluation of the effective need for parking’. As the parking place is the key element in the question, the Islamic community risks losing its work so far.
centre then moved to Ponteigodarzere, a suburban area. Today the centre is part of the UCOII. Another case that we will consider is the Rahma Association, an Islamic community present in via Anelli. In 2006, following riots between Nigerians and Maghrebians of the area, the prayer room was damaged and was closed the following year after the entire building was cleared out by the police. The present location was found by the municipality, it is an ex-supermarket in the same street. The 500 square metres allocated to the mosque with a certificate of occupancy was given by the ITD society of Castelfranco through the mediation of the municipality for a monthly rent of €300,00. It was supposed to be a temporary solution, though the concession of the location has been met with numerous delays, and is now scheduled for September 2010.

In 2007 Mayor Zanonato proposed the availability of a farm building to the Rahma Association. The building was the property of the municipality and located in via Longhin in the city’s industrial area, near the Rom camp and the incinerator plant. The proposal involved a building with 1,200 square metres of available space (in need of renovation), surrounded by an area of 3,970 square metres which could be built upon. The final project conceived by the architect Ivan Petrus Iobstraibizer includes prayer halls, a room for the imâm, offices, and rooms for Arabic and Koran classes for children.

Just as in previous cases the Northern League opposed the building of the mosque and mobilized its members in opposition to it. In November 2007 some members of the party took a pig over the area allocated for the mosque with the intention of making the area impure. This act was condemned by the Centre-left coalition, the Church, many associations as well as most citizens.

In February 2008, the building was allocated to the Rahma Association for a minimum of 30 years, via a municipal resolution with the possibility of renewing the contract and with the payment of a forfeitable sum. Opposing that decision were the Centre-right coalition, the Città Antenore association and the Neighbourhood Committee, which promoted a referendum against the mosque, gathering 5,868 signatures in three months. Once again the Northern League showed opposition to the concession of a public property, though their

34 N. 2008/0083 12 February 2008
75 A cultural association politically closest to the Centre-right.
74 In this survey the question is ambiguous: ‘Are you for the mosque in via Longhin in an area and building owned by the municipality as indicated by the community decision no.2008/0083 of 12/02/2008?’ It is ambiguous because it superimposes a request for expressing an opinion about the mosque (even if the right to profess one’s creed is established by the Italian Constitution) to the use of public property; this is confusing for public opinion.
77 The Regional Administrative Tribunal of Veneto turned down the appeal of 16 January, 2009.
real motivation was the simple nature of the Islamic place of worship. Instead the Jewish community and the Diocese of Padua expressed their approval of the mosque.78

Anyway the municipality signed an agreement with the association, as in the cases of Genoa and Colle Val d’Elsa, underlining the principles of the Charter of Values and asking for transparency in the activities and funds, and finally the use of Italian for the khutba.

The past several months have been characterized by public debate about the municipality’s decision with pressure from the Centre-right coalition on the municipal decision, affecting the internal politics within the Centre-left coalition of Mayor Zanonato. Thus the municipality modified the resolution on 12 February, proposing that the farm building be conceded to the association rather than granting a limited certificate of occupancy. According to a survey performed by the SWG Institute for the Foundation New Society of Padua in June 2008, the number of Paduan residents in favour of the mosque had increased, matching the 38% of residents against it, while the remaining 24% remained neutral. Three reasons were given by those opposed to the mosque: opposition to the creation of places of worship for Muslims, concern over the use of municipal funding, and fear for a potential rise in criminality in the area. Finally only 8% were in favour of using public finances to build the mosque, while 78% were against it.79

The new resolution80 which was passed in July 2008 called for an annual rent of €21,850, in spite of an unforeseen event: a fire devastated the roof of the farm, thus raising the restructuring costs to be paid by the Islamic community by €1 million. The substantial rise in costs caused tension within the Islamic community and its management. Some thought it was absurd to spend so much money on a damaged building that they would never own, while others believed it was an occasion to give the Islamic community visibility and recognition of their rights as Italian citizens. An agreement was never reached on the farm building, forcing the community to find a less expensive place. Then in 2009 the community purchased a recently renovated warehouse in Ponte di Brenta81 for €460,000. According to the architect Iobstraibizer, the new building is a 500 square-metre ex-auto shop. The new project, in contrast to the via Longhin project, includes only one prayer hall for men and one for women. Neither a minaret nor a dome has been called for. The community hopes that they will start works in the near future.

78 ZATTI, G ‘I luoghi della fede” in www.diweb.it
79 ‘La nuova moschea: si e no sono a quota 38% ma i favorevoli aumentano’ in Il Mattino di Padova, 15 giugno, 2008, p. 16.
81 A city near Padua.
They will be self-financed, so a checking account has also been opened to collect funds from everyone, including the other citizens.

In conclusion, the resolution of this case invites us to consider an opportunity that was missed in Padua in the realization of a highly symbolic and ambitious project that would have favoured integration and mutual respect. The political opposition of the right coalition prevailed with its expression of cultural and religious closure. Thus the municipality let the Islamic community solve its own problems and find a new private location.

Conclusion

In the four cases considered, we have reported the key elements in the public and social negotiations regarding ‘the mosque question’. The issue involves factors that both regulate and condition relations between Islamic communities and the municipalities where they wish to erect their edifices. The decision of the municipalities to formulate an agreement protocol with the Islamic associations desiring to erect mosques guarantees specific guidelines over the activities performed in the Islamic centres as well as control over the funding used by the community to build the mosque. The protocol also sanctions the use of the Italian language within the Islamic centre for matters regarding official business. Agreements such as these have been made in the cases of Colle Val d’Elsa, Genoa and Padua, where the municipal administrations sought to concede a public space, real estate or an area to be built upon, either by certificate of occupancy or within a location owned by the Islamic community.

Another factor influencing the mosque question is its affiliation with national associations. For example, the relationship between the centres in Colle Val d’Elsa, Genoa and Brescia and the UCOII have given rise to controversies, due to the negative public image that the UCOII has been given through intense media campaigns. This has been owing at some level to the public statements made by the association’s ex-president Dachan in favour of the Palestinian cause. Another contributing factor has been the association’s relationship with the Muslim Brothers. The UCOII have in this way become synonymous with radical Islam, as distinguished from moderate Italian Islam, compatible with the precepts of the Italian constitution. Just consider the Genoa case, where one of the clauses within the text of the agreement protocol requires absolute disassociation from the UCOII, under penalty of nullifying all negotiations for the construction of the mosque. For instance the Islamic centre carrying out the

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82 A useful contribution to this reflection is the documentary ‘Fuori dal ghetto. Storia controversa della moschea di Padova’ created by Chiara Dall’Osto and Filippo Dal Lago from the University of Padua.
negotiations with the municipality in 2007 refused to disassociate itself from the UCOII, resulting in a failed agreement with the municipality. Aside from the public contract negotiations, some communities have opted for the private sector, only to be blocked by municipal administrations (even under Centre-left leadership). In these cases the municipalities have refused the concession of title changes for the localities, which are necessary in order to gain official recognition as a place of worship. Indeed, negotiations with Centre-left administrations have not always been successful. Whereas the Bologna and Lodi cases are examples of the past, Padua is a present-day case. Would any association have paid a million euros for a dilapidated property usable for only 10 or 20 years? The municipal administration allowed itself to be manipulated in this instance by pressure over the upcoming elections coming from heavy opposition from the Northern League. The opposition called for the modification of the resolution, conceding the warehouse on via Longhin through a certificate of occupancy, as in the cases of Colle Val d’Elsa and Genoa.

In order to block proposals for the erection of mosques, the Centre-right opposition exploits bureaucratic and urban planning measures. The Northern League on the other hand exploits sentiments associated with Christian and Italian cultural values, thereby masking their xenophobia and Islamophobia. Its ‘No to the Mosque’ campaign is a ‘no’ to Islam and Muslims. Its constant recourse to referendums makes inappropriate use of what is designed to be a consultative instrument, using it instead to impose upon certain inalienable rights of individuals’ religious freedom and public expression. We have witnessed the rise of lay associations where the erection of Islamic places of worship was intended to take place. This opposition is at times born out of logistical issues; in other cases however the opposition is associated with the proximity of an Islamic space to a residential area. Suspicion breeds fear, a tactic exploited by the Northern League and fed by prejudice and by propaganda that equates Muslims to a threat to public safety. As a result, wherever an Islamic community decides to erect a mosque they meet with resistance from parts of the residential community.

Finally we would like to reflect upon the areas allocated for the future mosques in the four cases analysed. It is readily obvious that these four locations are all in suburban areas, in areas where one finds a sizeable foreign presence. They are at times poor areas or areas whose urban planning is in need of redesigning, new infrastructures and improved public services, as in the case of Lagaccio in Genoa or that of via Longhin in Padua. Some locations are chosen by the municipal administrations on the premise of avoiding a clash caused between the mosque’s strong visible presence and the general population. Furthermore, as in the case of the Brescia mosque, logistical reasons often
lead to the positioning of a mosque in an uncontented area, where movement on Fridays will not be impeded, favoured by the proximity of highways. If on the one hand the distance from urban centres inevitably favours low rent costs and adapts the place of worship to the community to which it is destined, on the other the location itself becomes prey to its transformation into a ghetto. The formation of ghettos in such areas is rather common as new immigrants often inhabit areas providing them with a reference point, bridging together their native land with the new European society. The challenge for municipal administrations is therefore to favour integration in the public and social spheres by means of protocol agreements, avoiding the creation of isolated Islamic groups. If the big mosque brings doubts as to its effective role in integrating a community, its presence can be the first step towards a visible and authentic acknowledgement of an ever-increasing human presence in Italian cities.

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Introduction

Unlike in the case of most European countries, Islam is not new in Greece. Mosques have been built in South eastern Europe for many centuries. From the late 14th century to the early 20th century various parts of present-day Greek territory belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the oldest mosque in the Balkans is the Mosque of Sultan Beyazit, the first in Didymoteicho (Western Thrace), built between 1389 and 1402.

Many of the Ottoman mosques and the other Muslim monuments, especially in southern Greece, were destroyed during the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s and the wars and conflicts that followed. In a period of nationalist uprising and successive wars against the Ottoman and later the Turkish army, the newly independent nation showed little respect for the monuments of a faith identified with the enemy.

A number of Ottoman mosques survived, nevertheless, which are nowadays protected as monuments. Many Ottoman mosques and other religious buildings survived also in the provinces which were integrated in the Greek State in the first half of the 20th century (Macedonia, Thrace, Crete and the islands of the Dodecanese), when a law for the protection of religious buildings of all faiths was already in force.

Although for many decades the mosques have been more or less abandoned, most of them have been properly restored only during the last twenty years. Several are being used as museums or hosting cultural activities. The recent illustrated book on the Ottoman architecture in Greece published by the
Ministry of Culture,\textsuperscript{1} as well as the one on the preservation and restoration of Ottoman monuments of Greece,\textsuperscript{2} prove that a less ethnocentric view of the cultural heritage has been developed in the last decades.

However, the Muslim faith in Greece is not only linked to the past. Despite the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in the 1920s, minorities were allowed to remain in both countries. In Greek Western Thrace there lives a Muslim minority of approximately 110,000–120,000, recognized officially according to the terms of the Lausanne Treaty signed in 1923.\textsuperscript{3} The special provisions for the protection of Muslim religious practice, for minority education and the other minority rights, are implemented in the departments of Xanthi, Rodopi and Evros.

Outside the region of Western Thrace these provisions do not apply. On the islands of Rhodes and Kos, where a small Muslim population has resided since the Ottoman period, two mosques are also functioning. These islands were integrated in the Greek territory not before 1947, so they were not included in the Lausanne Treaty.

According to the Greek Constitution, the Greek Orthodox Church is the ‘dominant religion’. Nonetheless, article 13 of the Constitution declares religious freedom and permits the worship of every ‘known’ religious faith ‘under the protection of the laws’. Indeed, several religious communities existed traditionally in Greece, among them Catholic, Armenian and others including Christians, Jews and Muslims. However, there were complaints about administrative and legal discriminatory practices against non-Orthodox confessional groups.

Another source of protest has been that until 2006, the local Bishop of the Orthodox Church had to give his authorisation for the establishment of all places of worship, including those of other confessions. This provision was subsequently abolished by a new law, according to which permission was given by the Minister of Education and Confessions.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1} Brouskari, E (ed.) (2008), Η οθωμανική αρχιτεκτονική στην Ελλάδα [Ottoman Architecture in Greece], Διεύθυνση Βυζαντινών και Μεταβυζαντινών Αρχαιοτήτων Υπουργείου Πολιτισμού, Athens.
\textsuperscript{2} Stefanidou, A (ed.) (2009), Η συντήρηση και η αποκατάσταση των Οθωμανικών μνημείων στην Ελλάδα [The Preservation and Restoration of the Ottoman monuments in Greece], AIMOS – EMMABP, University Studio Press, Thessaloniki. Includes articles on the restoration of 14 mosques, two minarets, a turbe, an minaret, 8 hamams, a bezesten and a clock tower.
\textsuperscript{3} Regarding the Greek citizens of Muslim confession, no official number exists, since there is no question about religion affiliation in the population census. A small number of the minority population, around 15,000, have migrated to Athens since the 1980s. On the Muslim minority in Greece, see J. Dalègre (1997), La Thrace grecque. Populations et territoire, Paris, L’Harmattan; K. Tsitselikis (2004), ‘Muslims in Greece’, Islam and the European Union, R. Poz & W. Wieshaider (eds), Peeters, Leuven–Paris–Dudley MA, pp. 79–107.
\textsuperscript{4} On the relation between the State and the Orthodox Church in recent years, see E. Fokas (2008), A new role for the Church? Reassessing the place of religion in the Greek public sphere, GreeSE Paper no 17, Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe.
Despite the fact that the Greek state, with its presence of a minority Muslim population, has had a long experience in dealing with Islamic religious institutions, it has proved to be totally unprepared to provide equal religious rights to the new Muslim populations of immigrants. The reason lies in the strong essentialist view of Greece as a coherent Christian Orthodox nation, where the presence of Islam is perceived as a threatening alterity, a familiar yet rival cultural marker, potentially destabilising.

Before focusing on the new Islam though, we will have to take into account the case of the minority Islam in the north-east of the country.

The mosques in Western Thrace

In Western Thrace, the religious affairs of the minority are strictly regulated by the Lausanne Treaty. Several issues have given rise to tensions between the minority activists and the State. However we will only discuss the ones related to religious practices here. 5

There are actually 300 mosques and mescits in the three departments of Xanthi, Rodopi and Evros, recognised as wakf, that is, the property of the Muslim communities. Around 270 imams serve in the region. The spiritual leader of each department’s community is the mufti; there are therefore 3 muftis: one in the city of Xanthi (dep. of Xanthi), one in Komotini (dep. of Rodopi) and one in Didymoteicho (dep. of Evros).

According to the Lausanne provisions, Islamic family law (sharia) is still implemented in Thrace. Therefore, the muftis, on top of their religious duties, are also responsible for the implementation of Islamic law. Since they perform juridical acts, the Greek state insists on appointing them, as with all judges. The minority leaders, on the other hand, claim that the muftis should be elected. This has turned out to be a serious cause of tension, since the minority activists refuse...

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to recognise the officially appointed muftis in Komotini and Xanthi, and elect others, who are not recognised by the State.\(^6\)

The specialist on human rights law Yannis Ktistakis is proposing to abolish Islamic law as the best solution, which in any case is in contradiction with both Greek legislation and European law, especially as regards women’s rights, and then let the minority elect their spiritual leaders if they wish.\(^7\) The muftis and the majority of the minority élite however have rejected the abolition of the *sharia*, while the Greek state is reluctant to contest any provision of the Lausanne Treaty whatsoever.

According to all observers and our informers, there is no other serious problem concerning the religious affairs of the minority. The (official) Mufti of Komotini confirmed to us that the communities had never encountered any problem in their religious practices and that there had never been any reactions or conflicts with the Christian population on issues of religion, prayers or celebrations.\(^8\) Yet some acts of vandalism occurred during 2009, namely an arson attack on the mosque of the village Toxotes.

The town of Komotini has 18 mosques, and there are another 150 mosques or *mescits* in the villages.\(^9\) During the last 15 years, more than 10 new mosques have been built with the State’s authorisation. The Yeni Cami, which despite its name is the most central and oldest mosque of Komotini, has been restored by a Turkish architect. The Mufti hopes that the minority will continue to enjoy religious freedom and that Islamic family law remains in force.

On the contrary, the Mufti declared that he is very concerned about the question of the mosque in Athens. He insisted that this is a serious problem for Muslims in Greece. People are obliged to come to Komotini or Xanthi for weddings and funerals. ‘What if they can’t afford it’ he objects. The problem concerns the members of the minority who have migrated to Athens, as well as foreigners. ‘Athens is the only capital in Europe left without a mosque,’ the Mufti observes.

A minor issue for the minority, according to the Mufti, was a problem that occurred a few years ago with the minarets of some villages, which were built higher than the regulations prescribed. In 2007, members of the Kimmeria

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\(^7\) Y. Ktistakis (2006), *Ιερός νόμος του Ισλάμ και μουσουλμάνοι έλληνες πολίτες μεταξύ κοινωνισμού και φιλελευθερισμού* [The Holy Law of Islam and Greek Muslim citizens between Communitarianism and Liberalism], Athens: Sakkoulas.

\(^8\) The Mufti of Komotini, M. Cemali Meço, personal interview, 13 March, 2009.

\(^9\) See the official site of the Muftia: http://www.muftikomotini.com/index.php?m=gal&c=9
community, including the imam of the mosque, were condemned by the court for violation of the regulations concerning the construction of minarets. In July 2008 in two other villages, Venna and Kallyntirio, the administration did not give authorisation for minarets. When the minority deputy Ahmet Hadjiosman asked for the reason, the Minister of National Education and Confessions, Evripidis Stylianidis, explained that according to the regulations the maximum limit for the minaret was 7.5 metres high, although as he admitted this regulation had fallen into disuse for many years. In fact the minister of the Conservative party had decided to put an end to the tolerant practices of the previous Socialist government, provoking the reactions of the minority. Some months later the minister decided informally to suspend the implementation of the regulation.

Sami Karabuyukoglu, a well-known minority journalist working for the Komotini public radio, explained that minarets were traditionally low in the villages. Under martial law in the early 1970s, the authorities allowed the minarets to be built higher. Later the administration was never very strict, especially with those who had connections with the government deputies.10

All our informers attributed the problem with the minarets to the symbolic contest between Islam and Christianity in the region.11 Stamatis Sakellion, also a journalist, says it is a lousy political game of antagonism between ‘the churches and the mosques, Christians and Muslims, the majority and the minority, Greece and Turkey’.12

Although after 1990 there was a significant change in the State’s policy with full respect for the minority and human rights in Thrace, the distrust between the two communities is still perceptible. As my informers remarked, there are many people in the region whose political influence depends on this antagonism and who have no interest in letting it die out.

The debate over the construction of a mosque in Athens

During the last 20 years, along with the new minority policy in Thrace, the Greek state has had to face another challenge: the flow of important immigrant

12 Stamatis Sakellion, personal interview, 13 March, 2009.
populations from the former Communist countries, especially Albania, and the Middle East. Among them, there are some 250,000 people of the Muslim religion.13

Yet while in the minority regions the local Muslim population attends religious services in 300 mosques and mescits, the Greek state has not responded yet to the request of the Muslim communities to build a mosque in the capital, Athens. Consequently, as we will see later, Muslims pray in storehouses and apartments turned into prayer rooms. Muslims living in Athens and in the rest of Greece have to travel to Western Thrace for religious ceremonies, especially for officially-recognised religious weddings or funerals. The distance and the cost are a heavy burden for most families.

The question of the construction of a mosque in Athens dates from the early 1970s. It was in 1971, under martial law, when the Arab countries raised the issue. The proposal of the Ministry of Education then was to restore and use the 15th-century Ottoman Fetiye Mosque of Plaka, but the Ministry of Culture objected that the mosque was inside the archaeological site of the Roman Forum and that the whole area under the Acropolis had to be protected as a monument.14

In 1976 the ambassadors of the Arab countries made a demand to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In November 1980 the Muslim deputy Z. Celal put the question to the government. The response of the Undersecretary of State on Foreign Affairs was that the foundation of a mosque is a private matter of citizens, and that the state should only give its authorisation when asked. Nevertheless, he said that the government would take the initiative to build a Muslim place of worship and that the governments of the Arab countries would offer the building plot.

Indeed, in 1983 the Greek state offered a plot of land in Marousi on which to build the mosque. However, the location was rejected later and the State proposed the location of Alimos, but the mayor and residents reacted. In 1992 the issue was discussed again, but this time there were reactions from deputies of the opposition and the plan was abandoned once more.15

13 Greece has a population of 11,215,000 (2008). In 2006, 695,979 immigrants had a permit of residence or work, while according to official data, the estimated number of illegal immigrants were approximately 200,000 (IMEPO Research). The estimated number of Muslim immigrants in Greece varies from 200,000 to approximately 300,000. These rough figures comprise immigrants and refugees, from the Balkans (Albanians and Roma), the Middle East (Turks, Kurds, Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Iraq), Africa (Egyptians, Libyans, Sudanese) and Asia (Afghans, Pakistani, Bengali). The key point of uncertainty has to do with the fact that calculations are based on the number of people originating from Muslim countries or regions, and do not refer to the people that are actually practising Islam. Albanians of Muslim descent, for example, are on the majority atheists or not interested in religious practice. The same applies to a part of the Palestinian, Turkish and Kurdish political refugees who have embraced a Marxist ideology. It is not useful therefore to give any statistics based on the country of origin.

14 Eleftherotypia, 18 September, 2003.

15 Eleftherotypia, 18 September, 2003; To Vima, 02 April 2006.
The question re-emerged in the early 2000s, as the need for a mosque during the Olympic Games of 2004 had become urgent. In February 2000, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist government (PASOK), George Papandreou, met the Ambassadors of Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority and assured them that only some technical details remained to be solved before the beginning of the construction of a mosque and a Cultural Centre. A special law (2833) was voted on 30 June, 2000, by which the State offered 33,490 square metres in Paiania, a suburb near the airport of Athens, but owing to local reactions, construction was delayed.

The issue was raised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, yet it concerned also the Ministry of National Education and Confessions, as well as the City of Athens. Still, the Greek Orthodox Church (from now on referred to as ‘the Church’) was one of the most influential actors. Because of its status as the ‘dominant religion’, according to the Greek Constitution, the Church claimed the right to supervise all confessional issues. The fact that the late Archbishop of Athens Christodoulou was a very dynamic personality, with strong ethnocentric ideas about the role of the Church in defending the Greek national identity, made his opinion on the issue of the mosque even more crucial.

In February 2002 the Church of Greece finally ‘consented’ to the construction of a mosque in Athens, after a discussion between the Archbishop of Athens and the Ambassador for Libya. The representatives of the Church expressed their objections to the creation of a Centre of Islamic Culture, both for religious and security reasons.

A year later though, in September 2003, the Church also objected to the decision of the State to build the mosque in Paiania. This specific area had been chosen by the Arab ambassadors in the 1970s. Although there was some criticism concerning the fact that Paiania is too far from the centre where most Muslim immigrants live and that there were hardly any Muslims living there, the main argument was that a mosque should not be the first image foreign visitors would have of Greece. According to the representatives of the Church, the locality chosen for the mosque ‘should not offend the religious sentiment of Orthodox Greeks’ and should not be built in a district where ‘foreigners arriving in Greece would think it was a Muslim country’.  

These issues of a symbolic nature found an important echo in the media. The residents of Paiania also reacted to the idea and planted a big white cross on a hill near the highway. The objections of the Archbishop were removed only when the government promised that a big and ‘magnificent’ church would be built.

16 Kathimerini, 3 September, 2003.
in the airport area. In his letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Christodoulos asked for a church in order to ‘put the Greek Orthodox mark of our homeland on this crucial place of people’s crossing’. The predominance of Orthodoxy and its association with the nation should be acknowledged and visible.

Meanwhile, on 5 September, 2003, the Prime minister of Turkey Tayip Erdogan in a meeting with the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul), had also asked for a Mosque in Athens and suggested the use of an old Ottoman mosque in Monastiraki (in the heart of the ancient city, below the Acropolis). The fact that the question of the mosque was associated with Turkish politics aroused the distrust of the Greek public and provoked negative reactions in the media. The mosque risked being seen as a ‘concession’ to the Turks, and not as a right of the Muslim inhabitants of Athens. As the Archbishop had explained to the Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe in June 2002, ‘in the mind of the Greeks everything Islamic equals Turkish’.

The Greek state had always held discussions for the mosque with the Arab countries in order to avoid any Turkish intervention. The plan was that the charity foundation of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia would fund the construction of the mosque and the Islamic Cultural Centre. In the Administration Board would participate six Greeks (from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Education and Culture, and from the Legal Council of the State) and six Arabs; the president would be an Arab.

Concerns were expressed in the media about the potential Islamic threat, and especially about the Saudi Arabian Wahabist influence. The former minister and well-known liberal politician Andreas Andrianopoulos was one of the most active opponents of a Centre of ‘Islamofascist Wahabist propaganda’ as he wrote. The focal point of the controversy was the Cultural Centre more than the mosque itself. The Archbishop of Athens declared that the Church was not opposed to the construction of a mosque, ‘since the right of religious freedom is protected by the Constitution’, but was against the foundation of a Centre of Islamic Culture. He also revealed that the ambassador of Libya had told him that all they were asking for was a mosque, the Centre was a desire of Saudi Arabia which was funding the construction.

There were also objections from a different point of view, regarding the responsibility of the State to guarantee equal rights for all its citizens in a pluralist

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18 Kathimerini, 26 October, 2003.
20 Kathimerini, 26 October, 2003.
society: ‘The mosque is an obligation of the Greek state. Greece has to construct it,’ stated a columnist in *Eleftherotypia*. 23

Father G. Metallinos, a highly-respected professor of Theology at the University of Athens, wrote an article arguing that a mosque should be built only on a basis of reciprocity, that is, only if the Muslim states agree to open churches in their capitals, otherwise Greek Orthodox culture would be endangered. The article was reflecting prejudice against Turkey, where, according to the writer, Muslim religion only serves as a political tool, as well as against the West and against multiculturalism, an idea associated with *New Order*. 24

Many members of the clergy shared his views: ‘Why should we be more sensitive in regard to the needs of foreigners and not to those of the Greeks?’, asked the Bishop of Kaisariani. 25 For the Mayor of Paiania, the risk was that the construction of the mosque might encourage the formation of ‘a minority’ in Paiania. In principle, the right of the Muslims to practise their religion was not denied, but multiple objections were presented against the concretisation of the government’s plan. As the Bishop of Mesogaia explained, ‘The mosque has to be constructed, but with respect to the national idiosyncrasy, to the environment and to our historic and cultural tradition’. 26

Still, many articles in the press supported the building of the mosque, arguing for respect of the rights of thousands of Muslim immigrants and criticising the xenophobic and nationalist positions of the clergy and a number of politicians. ‘The question is what kind of society do we want?’ wrote a columnist, ‘A society which fears the stranger or a tolerant one? Do we want Athens to be a metropolis of the Mediterranean, a bridge between East and West, or do we want Athens to be the only capital in Europe without a mosque? […] There is no threat from a person who prays, but from the person who experiences his prayer as a humiliation. In a garage or a storehouse’. 27

After the elections of February 2004, the new government of the Conservative party (*Nea Dimokratia*) declared that the law for the mosque had to be implemented. Since building work had not started, a provisional mosque was set up at the Olympic village during the August 2004 Games.

Every time the issue was publicly discussed there were the same reactions of the clergy. The Bishop of Salonica (Thessaloniki), Anthimos, well-known for his ultra-nationalist views, qualified the Islamic Centre ‘a clear suicide’, saying

25 Ibid.
26 *Kathimerini*, 16 April, 2006.
it would function as a ‘centre of propaganda’\textsuperscript{28}. He also said that Paiania was not a proper solution and proposed instead the area of north-eastern Athens (an area far from the centre, rather under-developed, where many immigrants live).

Two years later the problem remained unsolved. The State was searching for a different location for the mosque. The Church replied repeatedly that neither the residents of Paiania wanted the mosque, nor the Muslims, who found that Paiania was too far away.\textsuperscript{29} Yet this argument seemed to be an excuse, since no one from the Muslim communities had ever been asked to give an opinion. Another problem was that there was a conflict of interest between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Arabic Emirates as to who would preside the Administration Board.

It soon became clear that the government had abandoned the idea of Paiania and the plan to create an Islamic Cultural Centre. In March 2006 the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dora Bakoyanni, said that the issue was being re-examined. She proposed the use of a 17th century Ottoman mosque in Monastiraki, used currently as a museum, but the idea was rejected by the Archbishop because it was considered too small; it was at the centre of the city ‘below the Acropolis’ and close to the Orthodox Cathedral church of Athens. In the media reactions were noisy against the idea of a mosque placed at ‘the heart of the ancient city, the cradle of democracy’, the symbolic centre of Greek civilisation. According to others, the concentration of Muslims in the historical and most visited point of Athens would change radically its character.\textsuperscript{30} Ultimately, the Church proposed the construction of the mosque in Elaionas, a district on the periphery, where there was available space.

The fact that the prime minister of Turkey had asked two days earlier for a mosque in Athens as a counter-concession for the re-opening of the Orthodox Theological School of Chalki in Istanbul had once again associated the question of the mosque with Greek-Turkish antagonism. Accused of obeying orders from the United States after her visit to Washington, Dora Bakoyanni faced reactions, including from her own party.

The Under-Secretary of State in National Education and Confessions, G. Kalos, was opposed to the use of the mosque of Monastiraki; he assured however that ‘the will of the government is to create a mosque, without provoking religious conflicts and fanaticisms’.\textsuperscript{31} According to a report the representatives of the Muslim communities reacted positively, saying that even if the mosque in

\textsuperscript{28} Eleftherotypia, 2 August, 2004.
\textsuperscript{29} Eleftherotypia, 2 Mars, 2006.
\textsuperscript{30} Eleftherotypia, 3 April 2006.
\textsuperscript{31} Kathimerini, 2 April, 2006.
Monastiraki was small, it would be good as a first step. The Imam of the oldest informal mosque in Goudi, Mounir Abdel Rasul, wrote an article asking for respect of the Muslims' right to have a decent place of worship.

In April 2006 the Muslim Union of Greece sent the Ministry of National Education and Confessions a petition with 10,000 signatures demanding a mosque and calling for dialogue. The MUG proposed that the mosque should be controlled exclusively by the Greek authorities. A month later a delegation of the MUG was received by the Secretary of the Ministry and had the opportunity to present their demands.

In July 2006, the government announced its decision to build the mosque in the Votanikos area, with funds from the Greek state. The site chosen was the old naval base of Elaionas. The budget was estimated at €15 million. Indeed, a special law was voted in October 2006. Since then, however, no progress has been made. The excuse this time is the cost, because the Navy is asking between €30 and 60 million for the concession of the base.

In 2009, the Special Secretary for Intercultural Education of the Ministry of National Education and Confessions, Stefanos Vlastos, reassured us that the Ministry respects the rights of all confessional communities and the need for Muslims to pray in dignity. He thought that Elaionas was a good choice, it is easily reached by public transport and the district is to be developed. Still, the issue is not simple, he said, because there is a lot to do and five ministries were co-responsible. 'The economic crisis is not helping either,' he admitted, 'We have to give a clear answer though. It is not our aim to eternize the problem'.

In April 2006 Dora Bakoyanni had declared that she had the political will to solve the problem. Three years later, while she was still on duty, the construction of the mosque was once more suspended.

The eventual creation of a Muslim cemetery in Athens was not progressing either. In 2006 the Church as a sign of its good will decided to offer land for the creation of a Muslim cemetery in Schisto. The Keratsini community claimed the land as its own property, but the Church won the case in the courts. After three years of delays due to disagreements between the city administration and the Ministries, the State informed the Church that the locality was not suitable. That was also the answer of the Under-Secretary of State on Internal

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32 To Vima, 2 April, 2006.
33 Eleftherotypia, 4 April, 2006.
36 Kathimerini, 16 April, 2006.
Affairs to the parliamentary question asked by the deputy of the Left (SYRIZA), Periklis Korovesis.37

‘The Muslims of Greece have a feeling of rejection since they don’t have the right to pray, to marry or to get buried in dignity,’ attests Naim El Gadour, the president of the Muslim Union of Greece.38 His letters to the Ministries obtained no response. If a satisfying solution was not found by the end of 2009, he said he was thinking of taking the case to the European Court of Human Rights.

The severe financial crisis in Greece has marked the end of any discussion. Nevertheless, it was clear that the issue was not of primary importance for the authorities. Konstantinos Tsitselikis notes that ‘the religious freedom of foreign Muslims in Greece encounters problems on the fields that positive measures are needed to be taken by the Greek state’. 39 The fact that, until recently, immigrants had not had the right of vote seriously reduced the possibility they had of being heard by the authorities. For successive governments, the construction of a mosque could be postponed without any political cost. To use the words of Shadi Ayoubi, a Lebanese living in Greece since the early 1990s, working as a journalist, ‘those who have the will don’t have the power, and those who have the power don’t have the will’.40

The new law (March 2010) which accords citizenship to permanent residents and to the second generation, and gives legal immigrants the right to participate in local elections, may offer the possibility, at least to a part of them, to put pressure on political parties for their demands.

Informal ‘mosques’ in Athens

Given the absence of a place of worship, in Athens as in other Greek towns, immigrant Muslim communities have created several informal ‘mosques’ to practise their faith. We use quotation marks because these places of worship are simple apartments, basements, or storehouses, which lack all the architectural characteristics of a mosque, especially the minaret used for the ezan (the muezzin’s call for prayer). Instead of referring to a ‘mosque’, it would be more appropriate in this case to use the term mescit.

The initiative belongs usually to nationally distinct Muslim communities, who get funding from governments or other institutions of their country of origin,
and/or international Muslim organisations. However, the immigrants themselves contribute in many cases to the regular expenses (rent, electricity, etc.). The imams are immigrants themselves and none of them had served as imams in their country of origin. Most of them are volunteers, but there are some who earn a modest salary, when external funding is available. The same sites are often also used as schools (part-time or full-time) for the children and some have licences as cultural associations.

The first informal ‘mosque’ was opened in Goudi in the early 1980s. Since the massive immigration flows of the 1990s, their numbers have grown steadily. A recent survey established a detailed inventory of 26 mescits in the centre of Athens. However, around 60 mescits exist in the wider area of the capital, according to our informers. Only three of them are based in private buildings, also functioning as cultural centres (the Greek-Arabic Cultural and Educational Centre in Moschato, the Al Salam in Neos Kosmos and that of the Libyan Arab School in Psychico). The Centre of Moschato was founded in 2007 with private funds (offered by a Saudi-Arabian businessman) in a building of 1,800 square metres; the initiative belonged to the head of the Muslim Union of Greece, Naim El Gadour: ‘I have been 36 years in Greece, I have Greek citizenship, I pay taxes and I believe I have the right to pray in a decent place without being persecuted by anyone and without having to hide in basements with no daylight,’ he says. The Bengali ‘Al Jabbar’ community has also bought a building in the centre of Athens for the same purpose, raising money from the immigrants themselves.

Taking into account language and cultural criteria, a distinction can be made between the Arab-Muslim communities, the Pakistani and the Bengali. Albanians, by far the largest immigrant population in Greece, have not founded any mosque to this day. In any case, in spite of the community who runs the mescit, most people choose the one closest to where they live; as a consequence, the public is an ethnically mixed one. There are also Shiite Muslim communities, and notably the ones from Pakistan, which celebrate the day of the Ashura outside their ‘mosque’ every year, in the Pireus, attracting large media attention. For the annual celebrations, since there is no central mosque, Muslims throng in stadiums. Last year’s Eid-al-Adha was celebrated in the Cycling Court of the Athens Olympic Stadium.


42 Ethnos online, 26 April, 2009.

Mescits are used almost exclusively for Friday prayer. A number of people, 150–200, gather in each of them. Immigrant workers complain that few Greek employers will allow them to leave work in order to attend prayer. It seems also that Greeks often criticize Muslims for being ‘too religious’. Yet there are no reactions from neighbours or other citizens against the informal ‘mosques’ and the people who gather there for religious purposes. Despite the negative stereotypes related to Muslim customs in public discourse, there are rarely any incidents concerning Islamic practice. As the sociologist Evangelia Dourida points out, ‘Muslim immigrants face discrimination for being immigrants, not for being Muslims’.45

The authorities practically tolerate the existence of these informal ‘mosques’, even if they don’t have licences and don’t fulfil the safety requirements. The use of these sites may be dangerous though, in case of a fire or earthquake, since there are no security exits. In February 2009, after a report by the residents of the building, a fine of €87,000 was imposed on the Greek owner of a storehouse in Nea Ionia for illegally changing its use into a mescit.

The President of the Pakistani Community, Dzavit Aslam, protested: ‘They want to stop the function of the mosque. Greece, which is supposed to be a country with democratic values, won’t let us practise our religious rights freely. Where are we supposed to go to pray? ‘If they make us an official mosque we won’t bother anyone,’ says Arsent Cezar, who used to pray in Nea Ionia, ‘Most of us have lived many years in Greece, we have families here. We don’t want to create problems, we just claim our right to freedom of religion’.47

The Muslim communities in Athens ask for the construction of a central mosque and for a Muslim cemetery. Regarding the mosque, it is clear that this would not totally replace the existing places of worship in the different neighbourhoods of the city. A central official mosque though is seen rather as a symbol of respect for Muslim religion, a sign that the State recognises the rights of religious minorities, and a step towards integration of the Muslim population in Greece.

The police are in favour of the creation of ‘an official place of worship, organised and concrete,’ since it would this way cut out ‘illegal activities with a non-religious purpose’.48 The Security services are also interested in supervising the activities of Muslims, especially regarding Islamism and potential terrorist networks. No serious threat has been recorded to this day. Nevertheless, there

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44 KSMP (2007).
45 Evangelia Dourida, personal interview, 23 March, 2009.
46 Greek Insight, 4 February, 2009.
47 Ethnos online, 26 April, 2009.
48 Eleftherotypia, 2 April, 2006.
have been cases of police controls during prayers; witnesses attest that police officers were rude, didn't take off their shoes and took those who dared to protest to the police station for identification.\footnote{Antoniou (2007), \textit{op. cit.; Ethnos online}, 14 October, 2007.}

Ahmet Moavia, the co-ordinator of the Immigrants’ Forum, argues that most Muslim immigrants fear the authorities, because they feel their status is insecure, and so they don’t claim their rights. Another factor, says Moavia, may be that they come from countries with authoritarian regimes, so they don’t realise that in Greece they could mobilize freely and put pressure on the government. Moavia assumes that, while for the Forum it is difficult to communicate with the immigrants and to convince them to participate in demonstrations or other social actions, hundreds of people gather every week at prayer and communicate with each other. The Imam can instruct them, they discuss and find solutions to their problems. ‘These are communities in the literary sense of the word,’ he says.\footnote{Ahmet Moavia, personal interview, 21 March, 2009.}

It is important to note that it is a Research centre dependent on the Church of Greece, the Centre for Assistance for Repatriates and Immigrants (KSPM), which in 2007 conducted the only systematic survey on the subject of Muslim immigrants in Athens. The research, on the occasion of the \textit{European Year of Equal Opportunities for All}, was funded by the European Commission and the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection. The researches conducted fieldwork and interviews with Muslim immigrants and created an inventory of the ‘mosques’ in Athens.\footnote{See above footnote 40 and the website: http://www.kspm.gr/} They also organised a conference and three meetings between imams and members of the Christian clergy, as well as citizens of selected parishes of Athens (Patissia, Kalithea, and Akadimia Platonos), the purpose being to encourage dialogue and understanding between the two confessional groups and to eliminate negative stereotypes against Muslims. The discussions were very successful, although there were moments of tension.\footnote{E. Dourida, personal interview, 23 March, 2009.} The President of the Socialist party (PASOK), George Papandreou, and the President of the Institute for Immigration Policy, Alexandros Zavos, attended the third meeting. In the context of the project, five programmes were broadcast by the Church radio station on the subject of Islam, Muslim immigration, religious differences and ways of co-existence. In this case, there were many reactions from the public, among which several negative ones, qualifying the motives of the organisers as ‘anti-national’. Once more, the negative attitude towards Muslims seems to reflect the dominant perceptions of national ideology, and especially the idea of national homogeneity, rather than religious prejudice \textit{per se}.\footnote{E. Dourida, personal interview, 23 March, 2009.}
Culminating anger or prospects of integration?

On May 2009, an unfortunate incident brought to the surface the hidden social tension in Greece surrounding Muslim immigrants and Islamic culture. During an ordinary police control, a policeman ripped some pages from a Koran found in a Pakistani immigrant’s possession. The following days, thousands of Muslim immigrants held angry demonstrations in the streets of Athens, some of them ending up in riots with the police. Most of the demonstrations were supported by Greek leftist groups and the clashes with the police were strongly reminiscent of the ones of the Greek youth on December 2008. Muslim immigrants were demanding respect for their faith, but their means of protesting indicated that they were adapting to Greek political culture.

At the same time, less politicized Muslim immigrants were supporting the President of the Muslim Union of Greece, who was considering taking legal measures against the policeman. On this occasion, the demand for the construction of a mosque in Athens was reiterated. The media insisted on the incident and the protests for many days, but in spite of the mainstream arguments in favour of tolerance and respect for all religious groups, the debate was heated up by the racist and xenophobic rhetoric of the nationalist extreme-right party LAOS. The numbers of Muslims in Greece was exaggerated out of all proportion and a wave of Islamophobia seemed to wash over public discourse. The fact is that after 2004, immigrants in Greece have come mainly from Muslim countries and their living conditions in the centre of Athens have worsened, but there is a growing tendency to associate anti-immigration, racist and Islamophobic stereotypes more and more.

As tension culminated, on the night following the demonstration of 23 May, 2009, the underground clandestine ‘mosque’ of Agios Panteleimonas was set on fire. Five Muslim immigrants were injured. The arson attack was condemned by all political parties, who were starting to worry about a possible outbreak of violence. In this context, the immigration theme became predominant in the European elections of June 2009, and the populist party LAOS increased its votes.

Since then however, there has been no significant change in any aspect of the issue, while the crisis of the Greek economy has suspended all discussions of public funding of the Athens mosque, at least for the time being. The only hope is that the law passed in 2010 by the newly elected Socialist government on citizenship and the participation of immigrants in local elections will eventually enhance their influence in the public sphere.

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13 Contested identities: identity politics and contemporary mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Azra Aksamija

1. General information about Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH)

1.1 Geography
- Area: 51,129 square km
- Major cities (est. pop.): Sarajevo (capital) (387,876); Banja Luka (220,407); Mostar (208,904); Tuzla (118,500); Bihać (49,544).

1.2 People
- Population (est.): 3.8 million (July 2004) / Population growth rate: 0.45% (2004)
- Nationalities: Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian.
- Ethnic groups: Bosniak 48.3%, Serbian 34.0%, Croatian 15.4%, others 2.3%.
- Religions: Islam (40% = c.1.5 million); Serb Orthodox Christian (31% = c.1.18 million); Roman Catholic (15% = c.570.000); Protestant (4% = c.152.000); others (10%).


All data dealing with population are subject to considerable error because of the dislocations caused by military action and ethnic cleansing. The most recent census was conducted in 1991.


Another source lists the following ratio of ethnic groups according to CIA sources from 2000: 48% Bosnians, 37.1% Serbs, 14.3% Croats, and 0.6% other.

http://www.bosna-hercegovina.info/stanovnistvo.htm
1.3 Legislation on religion

Freedom of religion and the relationship between the State and religious communities is regulated by the State Constitution and the Law on Religious Freedom. The issue of religious freedom, however, was severely contested during and after the war of 1992–95. Depending on the regional demographic and political situation, restrictions on religious freedom, discrimination of ethno-religious minority groups, and even violence against worshippers and houses of worship were evident in some regions with ethnically homogenous population. These problems led the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees to issue instructions for the implementation of the Law on Religious Freedom on 16 October, 2006, but the problems with religious intolerance are still unresolved.5

The legal and spiritual representative institution for all Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ICBH). The hierarchical structure of the ICBH currently consists of: *jammats* (religious communities counting at least 100 households), *majilises* (usually a group of not less than 7 *jamaats* per municipality or town), *muftiluks* (mufti district, there are 8 in Bosnia, 1 in Slovenia, 1 in Croatia, and 1 in Sandžak), the *Riyasat* (or *Rijaset*, main executive body of the ICBH), the *Raisu‑l‑Ulama* (directs the *Riyasat*, Grand Mufti or supreme authority in the ICBH, with the current *Raisu‑l‑Ulama* Dr. Mustafa Cerić), the Council of the ICBH and the Constitutional Court.

1.4 Political situation

- Type of Government: Parliamentary democracy.

The country is divided into two political entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (subdivided into 10 cantons) and Republika Srpska. Following the

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3 Source: UN Statistics, Social Indicators; Year: 2007
Source: UN Statistics, Social Indicators; Year: 2007


unresolved status of the area around the city of Brčko at the time of the Dayton peace accord, in 1999 the Arbitration Tribunal issued its Final Award, establishing the Brčko district a special self-governing demilitarized zone under the exclusive sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While every ethnic community in BH has its dominant political party, the issue of determining what parties are ‘national’ is highly controversial. It is also important to note that an ideology or political programme equivalent to some Western European political party might have a different meaning in BH. No party can be understood as ‘Islamic’ exclusively, but several political parties can be said to represent Muslim, Bosnian and/or patriotic interests, such as the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Patriotic Party-Sefer Halilović, the Democratic People’s Community, and the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Due to the nature of the recent war, in which religion was instrumentalized to foster ethnic animosities, and given the tense political situation at present, the main political entrepreneurs of Islamophobia are to be found among the Serbian and Croatian nationalist parties (i.e. the Serb Radical Party, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, Croatian Democratic Union of BiH, and so on). Pro-communist political parties (i.e. the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina) are among the main criticizers of the ICBH and the new mosques. While it is difficult to determine the number and identity of the opponents to the new mosques, it is notable that the construction of new mosques is a highly politicized topic, which is fostered and carried out in the mass media, predominantly in newspapers such as Dani, Start, Nezavisne Novine and Slobodna Bosna. In this context, some of these media promote the agenda of the various political parties they are linked to, occasionally organizing aggressive campaigns against the government, individual politicians, and various mosque projects.

2. General information about mosques in BH

2.1 Mosque statistics and estimates
The exact number of mosques and their devastations in BH is still unknown. The following chart was provided by the Center for Islamic Architecture at the Riyasat, Sarajevo, with records from autumn 2008. Masjid is defined as a prayer space without a minaret, which may be purpose-built or temporary space. All mosques listed are purpose-built as mosques. The majority but not all of mosques and masjids in BH are recorded at the Center for Islamic Architecture. The accounts of devastation also vary in the reports by the various experts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Mosques</th>
<th>Masjids</th>
<th>Mosques + Masjids</th>
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<td>A. Existed before 1992</td>
<td>1,370</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>1,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Destroyed between 1945–1992</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Totally destroyed during the war of 1992–95</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(42.63%)</td>
<td>(33.33%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Damaged during the war of 1992–95</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30.92%)</td>
<td>(23.42%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Remained undamaged during the war of 1992–95</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(27–08%)</td>
<td>(43–24%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Built anew after 1995</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.a. from these, building anew in process</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Rebuilt after 1995</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.a. from these, rebuilding in process</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(69.64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Renovated after 1995</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.a. from these, renovation in process</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Not yet rebuilt or renovated</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number (A–C–D+F+G+H)</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,472</strong></td>
<td><strong>395</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,867</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to this chart, c. 72% of mosques and c. 56% of masjids in BH were totally destroyed or were severely damaged during the 1992–95 war. The process of rebuilding and renovation after the war has progressed well with c. 70% destroyed/damaged mosques and masjids renovated and rebuilt.

**Some additional numbers**

- Before the 1992–95 war there were no Islamic centres in BH, and today there are three. All three were funded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- During the 1992–95 war, Islamic commentaries were attacked as a part of the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of territories. In many instances, gravestones were destroyed and removed in order to remove traces that Muslims had lived in the region.
- The *adhan* is generally permitted, there are no special regulations on its loudness. In some neighbourhoods, the *adhan* is called from the minaret balcony by the imam; however, most commonly loudspeakers attached to minarets are used. Depending on the demographics and political situation of a region, objections to the volume of the *adhan* are occasionally expressed by neighbours.
2.2 Historical background on mosques

*Mosque architecture in Bosnia-Herzegovina between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries*

The Islamization of the predominantly Christian Southern Slavs began in the fifteenth century with the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. During Ottoman imperial rule between 1463 and 1878, Islam played an important role in the region as a new common ideology that served to unify various social classes under the single political and cultural umbrella of the Empire, in which Bosnia-Herzegovina functioned as an autonomous administrative unit. The majority of mosques in the region were erected between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Architectural historians group them into three major categories of design: 1. Domed mosques with stone minarets, 2. Mosques with a hip-roof and stone minaret, and 3. Mosques with a hip-roof and wooden minaret. The first category includes major congregational mosques consisting of a single-dome structure with a stone minaret, built in cities with the support of local wealthy benefactors. The largest and most famous example is the Gazi-Husrevbeg Mosque in Sarajevo (1531), designed by Esir Ali, one of the main Ottoman court architects. While the domed mosques tie into the religious architecture at the centre of the Ottoman Empire, the second and third categories encompass the majority of neighbourhood mosques built according to regionally characteristic building traditions. These are inexpensive smaller structures with wooden hip-roofs (or stone roofs in Herzegovina), and small wooden or stone minarets built primarily in rural areas by local communities.

The political and economical decline of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had an effect on building activities in Bosnia Herzegovina, with a notable decrease in the number of new mosques, and the few exceptions typical of the Ottoman-Baroque style, such as the Husejnija Mosque at Gradačac (1826) and the Azizija Mosque at Brezovo Polje (1862) (Jahić, 2006, p.126).

Following the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, Bosnia-Herzegovina was annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878, but kept its status as an autonomous province until 1918. The Austro-Hungarian colonial project in Bosnia-Herzegovina brought about an increase in regional building activities of primarily urban public infrastructure. The realm of religious architecture also witnessed notable changes: while numerous churches and cathedrals were built (predominantly in the neo-Gothic style that was foreign to the indigenous building culture), the number of mosques was significantly smaller. Notwithstanding possibly unrecorded projects built by local communities, several projects built by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, such as the Behrambeg Mosque at Tuzla
(1888) or the Mahala Mosque at Hrasnica (1895), advertised their patron with the neo-Moorish style, which represented a break with Ottoman building traditions (Jahići, 2006, p.126).

In the period between the two World Wars, Bosnia-Herzegovina was part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, in which Bosnian Muslims did not possess a national status, but were regarded as either Muslim Serbs or Muslim Croats. This constitutive lack of national acknowledgement continued in the decades of the post-WWII era, when the Communist regime of Yugoslavia recognized the Bosnian Muslims only as Serb, Croat, or Yugoslav nationals. Within this political and economic context, the building of mosques was prohibited. During the Yugoslav period, the region was guided by the secularist principles of the Communist regime, while religion was regarded as backward. Although Communist, Yugoslavia was not part of the Eastern Bloc, but rather one of the founding member-countries of the Non-Aligned Movement formed in 1956. As such, it existed in a European void during the Cold War, supported as such by both sides.

In 1968, the Bosnian Muslims were finally recognized nationally with a decision by the Bosnian Central Committee, despite the fact that a religion-based definition of a nation ostensibly contradicted the secular principles of the Communist regime. Mosque architecture in subsequent decades reflects this political shift in a new stylistic language. Two significant projects from the 1980s point to a twofold proliferation of mosque designs: one oriented towards Ottoman building traditions, as exemplified by the Islamic Centre of Zagreb (1987), and the other towards Western European architectural trends, as rendered through the famous Šerefhudin White Mosque at Visoko (1980), which received the Aga Khan Award for architecture in 1983 (Jahići, 2006, p. 145–147).

The political trend toward the decentralization of Yugoslavia from the 1960s to the 1980s was strengthened through the decline of the Yugoslav ‘self-management’ economic system, the accumulation of national debt, and Tito’s death in 1980. The subsequent economical crisis and the loss of a unifying iconic leader paved the way for power struggles between nationalist groups. The rise of resentful nationalism, which instrumentalized religion for its own ends, finally culminated in a brutal conflict between the former republics of Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

Development of the Bosnian nation in the post-Socialist period
With the end of the Socialist era, the collapse of Yugoslavia affected Bosnia-Herzegovina in March 1992, when the war began on the heels of the international recognition of the country’s sovereignty. The conflict was fought out
between the predominantly ethnically (and religiously) defined parties: Serbs (Orthodox Christians), Croats (Catholics), and Bosnians (Muslims), with diametrically opposing outlooks on the country’s future: separatists and nationalists against pluralist and multiethnic visions of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Amid the fluctuating goals and alliances, the concrete territorial lines of demarcation that emerged were created by population displacement and so-called ‘ethnic cleansing’ carried out by the predominantly Serbian and Croatian nationalist extremists. It involved eviction and mass murder of civilians—identified as enemies because of their ethnicity and religion—as well as the destruction of all traces of their cultures and histories (Riedlmayer, 2002b, p.99).

This process of territorial and cultural ‘decontamination’, which proceeded unhindered in the presence of international peace-keeping forces for over three and a half years, resulted in the demolition of over seventy per cent of the significant cultural monuments and institutions, including over one thousand mosques and hundreds of churches (predominantly Catholic, with a smaller number of Orthodox ones). The large numbers point to the fact that places of worship were especially targeted, a form of cultural warfare that was pursued on all sides, to a greater or lesser degree.

NATO intervention in the late summer of 1995 against the Serb military forces made the Bosnian war an international conflict. Refugee displacement, ethnic cleansing, concentration camps, mass rape, and other human rights violations that Bosnian Muslims among others suffered finally came to an end with the signing of the controversial Dayton Peace Agreement in mid-December, 1995.7

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6 While all ethnicities suffered destruction or damage of their cultural heritage, the quantity of destroyed mosques far outweighs the number of destroyed churches. In reviewing the indictments of Karadžić and Mladić, the Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) stated that: ‘Throughout the territory of Bosnian and Herzegovina under their control, Bosnian Serb forces . . . destroyed, quasi-systematically, the Muslim and Catholic cultural heritage, in particular, sacred sites. According to estimates provided at the hearing by an expert witness, Dr. Kaiser, a total of 1,123 mosques, 504 Catholic churches and five synagogues were destroyed or damaged, for the most part, in the absence of military activity or after the cessation thereof . . . . Aside from churches and mosques, other religious and cultural symbols like cemeteries and monasteries were targets of the attacks’ (Karadžić and Mladić, Review of Indictment Pursuant to Rule 61 of the Rules of Procedure and Evidence, 11 July 1996, para. 15) See: ICJ Judgment of 26 February, 2007, Destruction of Historical, Religious and Cultural Property. pp. 121–124, para. 336. <http://www.icj-cij.org/cijwww/cdocket/cbhy/cbhyjudgments/cbhy_cjudgment_20070226/cbhy_judgment.pdf> accessed on 10 September 2007.

7 Given the fact that many deaths occurred without being recorded, and that the process of recording was chaotic and uncontrolled during the war, it is very difficult to provide the exact number of victims. According to the research conducted by demographic experts from the International Criminal Tribunal, ‘the number of war-related deaths in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be estimated as 102,622 individuals, of which 47,360 (46%) are military victims and about 55,261 (54%) are civilian war-related deaths’. See: Ewa Tabeau and Jakub Bijak, ‘War-related Deaths in the 1992–1995 Armed Conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Critique of Previous Estimates and Recent Results’, European Journal of Population (2005) 21: 207, 210.
The compromise made for peace included further division of the country into two ethnically-homogenized entities: the Serb Republic and the Bosnian-Croat Federation. Yet, although the end of fighting was eagerly awaited, peace was, in fact, not achieved, for the set of limitations the Dayton Peace Agreement imposed ironically caused what the Slovenian social theorist Rastko Močnik recognized as the ‘societal militarization’ of the Balkans (Močnik 2002, p. 82). That is to say, if an open accumulation of weapons was now banned, the fight was bound to go underground and be perpetuated as a militarized contest between different forms of ethnic nationalisms, which was to a significant extent aggravated through religious architecture.

To conclude, the region’s mosque architecture built or rebuilt over the course of the past two decades has been shaped by four factors: 1. a shift from socialism to multi-party democracy; 2. the devastating impact of the 1992–95 war on the country’s social and physical strata; 3. the political provisions established through the Dayton Peace Agreement, and; 4. increasing foreign influence in the cultural, political and economic spheres. In the following section, I will investigate the continuous impact of these forces on the religious architecture of the region in order to see how the mosque itself has become the place where their effects were played out and reproduced.

3. Case studies of mosque conflicts in BH

The three case studies of mosque conflicts in BH described below were chosen owing to the prominence of the public controversy around their recent (re)construction. Each case study is also representative of a different scale – local, regional, and global – of the ongoing mosque conflicts in BH.

3.1 The Truhan Emin-Beg Mosque in Ustikolina

*It is not strange that this mosque has been destroyed several times and that we have managed to rebuild it each time. Here are our roots, which make us what we are! . . . I would like to congratulate you who came to water these roots, from which our homeland, our faith, our honor, and our pride grow! (Bajramović, 2007, p.8, translation mine)*

These were the words of greeting of Raisu-l-Ulama Dr. Mustafa ef. Cerić, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina, directed to several thousands of people who gathered in the Bosnian township of Ustikolina on 7 July, 2007, to celebrate the opening of the newly rebuilt Truhan Emin-beg Mosque. What the Grand Mufti symbolically referred to as ‘roots’ were the foundation stones of the 15th-century mosque built at the time when Islam began to take root in the Balkans. This
mosque is said to be the oldest in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its foundation is
ascribed to the Ottoman military leader Truhan Emin-beg. Because it was an
important cultural and historical monument, under State protection, the mosque
was among the first targets of the Serbian military during the 1992–95 war, whose
attack it did not survive. The ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Ustikolina faded beside a new
conflict over the mosque’s inadequate renovation; the new minaret that was built
now reaches almost twice as high as the destroyed monument it replaced. This
sixty-metre high tower proudly holds the title of the highest minaret in Bosnia
and Herzegovina. The process by which the minaret gained its monumental size
soon became part of a wider politicized debate centred on two issues: the first
regarding the illegal construction of contentious religious and national symbols
that have been appearing on hilltops and other prominent public spaces all over
the country. The second regards the inadequate post-war reconstruction of pro-
tected national monuments. The diverging views on how these two issues are
applicable to the Turhan Emin-beg mosque have contributed to the minaret’s
survival and its unresolved destiny so far.

Oral tradition has it that the Truhan Emin-beg Mosque is the oldest mosque in
 Bosnia, yet no historical records sufficiently support this widely-accepted belief.
Only a few scholarly attempts have been made so far to determine the mosque’s
origins and uncover further details about its founder (Zarzycki, 1891; Zuhrić,
1930–31; Mujezinović & Dimitrijević, 1954); while the mosque’s initial construction
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date (1446 or 1448 or other?) has so far remained a moot point, it is widely accepted that the mosque at Ustikolina is the oldest mosque in BH.

The mosque has been destroyed and rebuilt several times throughout history. In 1941, the Turhan Emin-beg Mosque was set alight by Bosnian and Montenegrin Četniks (Muftić, 1997, p. 175). In this outburst of nationalist extremism, all of the mosque’s wooden structure was destroyed, including the roof and the portico. The minaret and the walls survived a repeated Četnik attack in 1942, but the minaret’s balcony was badly damaged (Mujezinović & Dimitrijević, 1954, p. 143). Reconstruction of the mosque after the second world war had to await professional action by the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments and Natural Rarities of Sarajevo (IPCMNR); but at this point the mosque was already recognized as an important cultural and historical monument. Conservation work on the mosque proceeded in 1953/54, parallel to which two additional buildings for communal functions were erected in close proximity. Mujezinović’s plans and drawings from the 1950s show the ancient mosque as a square-based chiselled stone structure covered with a pyramidal roof. Attached to the mosque was a slender stone minaret with a muqarnas decoration on the balcony (Mujezinović & Dimitrijević, 1954, p. 143). The reconstructed Turhan Emin-beg Mosque was proclaimed a protected national monument (Muftić, 1997, p. 175, 176).

Ironically, this protected status did not help prevent the mosque’s devastation in yet another Četnik raid in April 1992, when the mosque, together with of its accompanying buildings, was looted, set on fire, and then blown up and completely destroyed in June of the same year. The minaret was blown up and completely destroyed. Many local inhabitants were killed, and those who survived were brutally expelled (Muftić, 1997, p. 176).

What remained standing in Ustikolina after the war were the ruins of some 500 devastated houses, along with the rubble and wall fragments of the mosque. Safet Jahić, a member of the IC Ustikolina Executive Committee, who used to be a temporary imam in Ustikolina immediately after the war, reported to have found 9 tank shells among the ruins of the mosque. According to Jahić, no Muslims were in town at the time when the mosque was blown up.8

Reconstruction work started, without any official building permit, some time between 1998–2002. Suvad Bašić, president of the Mosque Building Committee in Ustikolina, explained that the returning inhabitants of Ustikolina waited several years for the authorities to initiate or finance rebuilding of the mosque. During this period the local school served as a temporary prayer space. After six years of waiting for the authorities to start proper reconstruction, but

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8 Safet Jahić, Interview by Azra Akšamija on 9 April, 2009.
to no avail, as Bašić explained, the *jamaat* decided to start the rebuilding of the mosque independently (Borović, 2004, pp. 25–26).

This account has not gone unchallenged, however. Prof. Muhamed Hamidović, former Director of the Institute for Protection of Monuments (IPM), the very institution the *jamaat* had been waiting for, reported that the Institute had already developed a project and a fundraising programme for a supervised reconstruction before the community started rebuilding the mosque. In preparation for reconstruction, original stones had already been selected, numbered, and arranged on site. Yet, when the initial funds were received, the *jamaat* ignored the IPCMNR’s project and went on to build the imam’s house first. Thus prayers continued to be held in temporary spaces. After that, discussions were held about the reconstruction project.

Safet Jahić confirmed that the IPCMNR initiated proper reconstruction, but he explained that this type of reconstruction would have been too expensive for the local community. Given the large costs and the lack of support of the authorities, the community decided to start rebuilding on their own. Some donations were collected from various regional companies, but the rebuilding was mainly self-financed by the community (Anon. 2005, January 8, p. 7).

While the mosque was being rebuilt in the same location, but with some changes, the previous 37 metre-high minaret went through a much more remarkable transformation. Pre-fabricated concrete elements, as well as other technological inventions, were used in building it, giving it a new height of 60 metres. This new, slender white-washed tower with three balconies and a shiny copper roof soon became known as the tallest minaret in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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9 Muhamed Hamidović, Interview by Azra Akšamija on 8 April, 2009.
10 Muhamed Hamidović, Interview by Azra Akšamija on 8 April, 2009.
11 Safet Jahić, Interview by Azra Akšamija on 9 April, 2009.
12 It is also often cited as the tallest minaret of Europe, but this is not quite true, given that a higher minaret exists in Edirne – namely, the 67 metre-high minaret of the Ottoman 15th century Üç Serefeli (‘Three Balcony’) Mosque. The use of three balconies in Ustikolina is a novelty in Bosnian mosque architecture. It is a specific Ottoman feature of this masterpiece built under Sultan Murat II between 1438 and 1447 (notably, it is almost the same period as the construction date of the Turhan Emin-beg Mosque). The first Ottoman mosque with multiple balconies placed on a single minaret, the Üç Serefeli Mosque has four minarets, the tallest of them standing in the southern corner reaching 67 metres. If not for the height, it is easily recognizable because of its red and white zig-zag patterned decoration in stone.
Safet Jahić explained that this height was reached quite by accident, as people were initially very generous in promising donations, which were calculated per metre of the minaret’s height. Nevertheless, the more likely reason for its monumental design is symbolic: for many, the idea of rebuilding a mosque was closely linked to the idea of revitalizing the community after the war and signalling the return of refugees from exile. Given the violence and loss that the inhabitants of Ustikolina had suffered during the war, the visible protrusion of the minaret from the landscape around the river Drina represented a means for the community to reassert new material evidence for their return to the region. The Turhan Emin-beg Mosque also functioned as a visual marker of Islamic presence and identity in a complex frontier zone—the minaret thereby marking Bosnian territory at the border of the Bosnian Podrinje Canton, a peninsula of the Bosnian-Croat Federation, which is almost entirely surrounded by the Serb Republic.

Regardless of the different motivations for the new minaret’s monumental size, the sensitive historical and political circumstances within which the minaret was rebuilt contributed to a heated public controversy about its future. To begin with, the case of the Turhan Emin-beg mosque ties into a larger nationwide ethnic conflict carried out through post-war religious architecture. Since the end of the 1992–95 war, the process of rebuilding the ruins and building new religious monuments has been characterized by competing for visibility and an overt signalling of territorial dominance. The silhouette of the old city of Mostar, for example, witnessed an explicit signalization of Croatian ethnic supremacy.

\[13\] At that time, one metre of the minaret cost €500 (today it costs €1,000).
in the shape of a gigantic church tower attached to the late nineteenth-century Franciscan monastery. The monastery was heavily damaged during the war. Its subsequent rebuilding became an opportunity to enlarge the church tower to more than twice its original height. To underscore Croatian territorial dominance beyond the city’s periphery, a colossal cross lit up at night has been erected on a hilltop overlooking the city. For analogous reasons, 15 crosses have been illegally erected in the fortress at the Old Town of Stolac, a monument-protected zone of a formerly Muslim dominated town, in which numerous monuments from the Ottoman period were destroyed.

The historical and political context of the interventions on monuments at Stolac and Ustikolina are very different in legal terms, however, both instances representing a form of devastation of the cultural heritage in the eyes of the BH Commission for the Preservation of National Monuments. For this reason, the legal response of the Commission has been to list both the Old town of Stolac and the Turhan Emin-beg Mosque as sites on the ‘Priority List of Endangered Monuments’ and to include the cloister of the Franciscan monastery, the only surviving part of the religious complex from the nineteenth century, in the ‘Provisional List of National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina’.

Subsequently, in June 2004, the Federal Ministry for Regional and Environmental Planning filed a lawsuit, after which the Federal Inspector for Building issued a decree to pull down several illegally built structures, including both the minaret at Ustikolina and the crosses at Stolac. As regards the Turhan Emin-beg mosque itself, the plan was to reinitiate a supervised reconstruction of the entire monument into its pre-war appearance. As Ramiz Mehmedić, the Federal Minister for Regional and Environmental Planning at the time emphasized, the minaret needed to be changed back to its ‘authentic’ appearance. According to Mehmedić, the Ministry was ready to provide the funds (approx. €25,000) necessary for the disassembly of the new minaret, and for the reconstruction of the original old one. The reconstruction works could start as soon as the inhabitants of Ustikolina agreed to these terms (Borović, 2004, p. 27).

This plan, however, was never executed owing to profound objections by the members of Ustikolina’s jamaat, as well as the wider Islamic community in BH and abroad: the intended pulling down of the minaret was perceived as a political provocation (Anonymous 2005, January 14, p. 25; Borović, 2004, p. 27). What members of the Ustikolina jamaat found to be particularly outrageous was that the Ministry’s decision, in their understanding, equated the Ustikolina minaret with the crosses at Stolac as products of a nationalistic contest. The principal imam

of Ustikolina at the time, Begzudin ef. Jusić, argued that the mosque had been erected on a *waqf* estate and in the very place in which it had stood for over five centuries (Anonymous 2005, January 12). Ef. Jusić also felt that any comparison of the Turhan Emin-beg mosque ‘[...] with some other buildings in the Federation BiH, which were built more or less yesterday, and as an offspring of genocide and ethnic cleansing, is an additional humiliation and insult for all Muslims in the Podrinje region’ (Anon. 2005, January 14, p. 25, translation mine).

However, the Federal Minister Ramiz Mehmedić had already publicly expressed his counter-argument to this equation. In an interview for *Ljiljan* in 2004, Mehmedić criticized the political instrumentalization of the Ustikolina minaret, which has led to a polarization of the *jamaat* and public into those arguing for its ‘authentic’ reconstruction and those favouring its current appearance. For Mehmedić, there should be no dilemma on this issue. People in Ustikolina, as Mehmedić argued, must be aware that what the mosque’s destroyers wanted to annihilate was its very authenticity. Considered in legislative terms, however, the problem of Stolac and Ustikolina were the same for Mehmedić, since both structures were illegally erected in monument-protected settings. Still, he continued, the Ministry could not and did not put the Ustikolina mosque on the same level as the crosses of Stolac, for ‘the mosque is one of the most important cultural monuments in BH’ (Borović, 2004, p. 27).

The notion of State-protected status remains questionable in Ustikolina, given that this status helped to prevent neither the mosque’s devastation during the war, nor the post-war misuse and reuse of its ‘protected’ remains. Reportedly, some of the remaining stones of the ruin of the mosque had been used by individual *jamat* members as building material for houses and gardens.15 More recently, another violation of the monument’s status had had no consequences when the French SFOR used the mosque’s remaining rubble for the construction of a local road and a bridge.16 In this context, Prof. Muhamed Hamidović criticized both the mosque’s inadequate reconstruction and the recent reuse of the remaining rubble, which had already been carefully classified and prepared for proper reconstruction, as the triumph of pragmatism. Hamidović contended that the appropriate reconstruction of the cultural heritage was very important, for it could signal a very strong message against the attempts of the ‘ethnic cleansers’ to recreate BH history.17 Unfortunately, this message was transformed into a message of defiance and territorial struggle in Ustikolina.

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15 Safet Jahić, Interview by Azra Akšamija on 9 April, 2009.
17 Muhamed Hamidović, Interview by Azra Akšamija on 8 April, 2009.
An additional quarrel broke out when the newspapers announced 19 January, 2005, as the date for demolishing the minaret. The date coincided with the Day of Arafat, which is one of the concluding events of the Hajj, and therefore symbolically important to Muslims. Imam Jusić felt that the very choice of the minaret demolition date, one day before the Eid-al-Adha, was ‘a serious and rude provocation targeted against Muslims’ (Anonymous, 2005, January 8, p. 7, translation mine). When the red-letter day finally arrived, several hundred people from Ustikolina and surroundings, including even some local Serbs, gathered around the mosque. Many of them were ready to physically defend the minaret, if necessary. However, no demolition took place that day and the minaret has so far remained untouched.

While the entire minaret conflict has been extensively covered in the media, a comprehensive examination of the mosque’s history, its repeated demolition, and the motivations for its controversial renovation, have been mainly left out of reports. The initial devastators of the Turhan Emin-beg mosque have still not been found since 1992, and are now only rarely mentioned as part of the ambiguous notion of ‘devastation though war actions’. Notwithstanding the fact that the adequacy of reconstruction of a national monument represents an important problem that needs to be resolved, a more sensitive critique might have contributed to avoiding the effect of ‘equalizing guilt’ – an effect produced in propagandistic reports, in which people who were once victims of ‘ethnic cleansing’ are set on an equal footing with their persecutors, nationalist extremists. The emphasis of the media on the emotional side of the conflict not only fostered the jamaat’s resistance to cooperation with the authorities, but also contributed to a deepening of the split between Muslims with different approaches to a recovery of their history.

Meanwhile, the conflict has not been entirely resolved, but the jamaat has agreed to compromise with the Federal Ministry, in the case that the Ministry can provide approx. €1.25 million (= 2.5 million KM) required to rebuild the mosque and its minaret, as well as provide for a temporary prayer space for the jamaat during the reconstruction works (Borović, 2004, p. 27). It remains to be seen whether the ‘Phoenix of Ustikolina’ will experience any further resurrections in the future.

18 Begzudin ef. Jusić stated for Oslobodenje: ‘This move is a serious and rude provocation targeted against Muslims, especially because of its planned date and the forthcoming Eid-al-Adha. . . . This is when the Hajj pilgrims go to Mount Arafat and pray to Allah (p.b.u.h.), and others fast on this day, for it is a day before the sacrifice and the Eid-al-Adha. This is why we could not but understand this news as an attack on Muslims’ (Anon. 2005, January 8, p. 7, translation mine).

3.2 The Ciglane Mosque in Sarajevo

The laying of foundations for the new mosque on Merhemić Square within Sarajevo’s former elite housing quarter of Ciglane in the spring 2008 was a dream come true for Fuad Vučijak, one of the initiators of the building of the mosque (Preporod, 2009, April 25). Vučijak is also one of the founding members of the Ciglane jamaat, which has prayed in several temporary prayer spaces ever since its formation in 1994 (Preporod, 2008, April 25). In need of a permanent place of worship, the jamaat started the legal procedures for the construction of a small modern-looking mosque after the war—and found that this mosque became one of the most publicly criticized contemporary religious buildings in the country. Activated by harsh media criticism that followed the announcement of its construction, over six hundred people signed a petition against it. While the number and identity of these petition signers is controversial, it is notable that the conflict around this mosque was highly politicized and carried out in the mass media, predominantly in newspapers such as DANI and Oslobodjenje. In numerous reports, the Ciglane Mosque was criticized as a sign of the intensification of Islam in post-war BH and an example of an ethno-national demarcation of territories.

The Ciglane Mosque in Sarajevo with the Ciglane settlement in the background

The Ciglane settlement, which currently counts some 1,350 apartments and 5,000 inhabitants, used to be one of the most prestigious housing districts in the city (Preporod, 2008, April 25). The Ciglane settlement never had any religious building, because it was built during the 1980s to house the Yugoslav regime’s (predominantly secular) élites. When the town’s demographics changed during the 1992–95 war, the new inhabitants of Ciglane called for a mosque. The planning of the Ciglane Mosque started in 1994, during the siege of Sarajevo. Following a
war-time change of the town’s master plan, a public architectural competition was called for contributions for a new public programme for Merhemić Square. The winning project included various kinds of programmes for a surface of 7,000 square metres, taking in almost the entire square; the plan included a mosque, several other religious and commercial buildings, and an underground parking lot.

From the time of its foundation, the *jamaat* had used a small temporary prayer space provided by the company *Jugodrvo*. The opening of a LORA supermarket in this location incited the *jamaat* to find a new prayer space, which is still in use. After praying in a temporary prayer space for over a decade, as Sead Šehbajraktarović, President of the Jamaat Committee, explains, the *jamaat* initiated legal procedures for the construction of the mosque (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 28).

Subsequently, the Medžlis of the Islamic Community (MIC) Sarajevo, the legal representative of the *jamaat*, applied for an alteration of the master plan, asking for a smaller mosque covering c. 1,000 square metres. Approved changes of the master plan of 2006 were followed by a decision in 2007 of the municipal council *Centar* to grant the MIC Sarajevo building permission for the mosque (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 27–28).

The mosque that is currently being built is not the design project that won the architectural competition in the 1990s, but a new mosque that was commissioned from different architects: Aida Dajdžić, an architect who built several modern-style mosques throughout the country, in collaboration with the architect Namik Muftić, who designed the Ciglane settlement forty years ago (Preporod, 2008, April 25).

The unusual design aimed at an architectural integration of the mosque into its modern environment (Preporod, 2008, April 25). The prayer space was contained in a cylindrical single-storey building covered with a round roof and shading elements in the form of concentric circles. The minaret was with a square base, 15 metres high and entirely illuminated (Preporod 2008, April 25). For the architects, this small and innovative design was meant to beautify this part of the city, and also contrast with most other contemporary mosques, which Dajdžić criticised as pretentious (Huremović, 2008, p.14).

Some Muslims, such as Esad Karahmet, Secretary of the Sarajevo MIC, finds the mosque’s modern design well suited for Ciglane (Huremović, 2008, p.14). Others criticize its cylindrical shape as lacking reference to local religious architecture. The main point of assessment, however, is less architectural. Soon after the construction of the mosque became public, numerous newspapers reports, such as in *DANI* and *Oslobodenje*, started bringing up various arguments against the mosque. At first, the mosque’s designated location was criticized
for taking up the only remaining free space in the area, and so the construction of the mosque was criticized as replacing children's playgrounds with religious spaces (Selimbegović, 2008, p.3). Along these lines, some argued that they were not objecting to the construction of the mosque itself, but that they were against the increasing disappearance of free public spaces in the city (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 26). While the city of Sarajevo really does lack free and green spaces, this type of criticism is inadequate in the case of Ciglane mosque, given its current location. Merhemić Square is today predominantly used as a parking lot, which is continuously overcrowded with cars. As such, the square cannot be used for any type of youth or children activities. It should also be noted that there is a very large park with a children’s playground located directly across the street from Merhemić Square.

Merhemić Square in Sarajevo with the Ciglane settlement in the background

The park across the street from Merhemić Square
The location debate was followed by a controversy about the need for a new mosque at Ciglane anyway. First, the number of potential mosque users from the immediate neighbourhood was put in question. Secondly, some attempts were made to cast doubt on the appropriateness of the mosque’s location, as well as the religious devotion of its potential worshippers. For this, journalists of DANI and Oslobodjenje often deployed provocative words in their articles, such as, for example, the subtitle ‘A little beer, a little Friday Prayer’ (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 26). The implication of such a title is that the mosque’s location is inappropriate because the site is already packed with bars and betting ships, in which alcohol is consumed on a daily basis (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 26). Thirdly, some have argued that no new mosque is needed at Ciglane at all, since many mosques already exist in the neighbouring settlements (i.e. the Ali-pašina Mosque, and the mosques at Jezero and Koševsko Brdo) (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 26). This criticism was meant to address other jamaats in Sarajevo aspiring to build mosques in their immediate surroundings (Selimbegović, 2008, p.3).

Sead Šehbajraktarević countered these objections suggesting that the Ciglane jamaat counts some 300–400 regular worshippers in need of a permanent prayer space. The number of worshippers doubled for the Friday Prayer and during Eid and Ramadan, and the current prayer space at Ciglane neither represented an adequate prayer space, nor could it accommodate the community’s needs (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 28). Kemal Zukić, former Director of the Centre for Islamic Architecture at the Riyasat in Sarajevo, added that the need for a mosque in Ciglane must be considered in relation to the great influx of Muslim population to Sarajevo during the war. Similarly, Said Jamaković, Director of the Cantonal Planning Institute at the time, asserted that the numbers for a new mosque need to be considered in relation to the fact that many Muslims who settled in Sarajevo had been expelled from other rural parts of the country during the war, particularly from eastern Bosnia where the process of return was very problematic.20 The need for new mosques, as Zukić and Jamaković contended, was thus prompted by the recent dramatic shift in the city’s demographic landscape.21 This new need was also evident from a study that the Centre for Islamic Architecture had conducted after the war, as Zukić added, in which the number and the spread of mosques in Sarajevo was determined in relation to the number of inhabitants, Muslims, and children in need of religious education in different parts of the city (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 28).

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21 Kemal Zukić, interview by Azra Akšamija, 4 April, 2009.
Still, some citizens of Sarajevo argue that no new mosques were needed in Sarajevo any longer, since the city already had 96 active mosques, and that the money should be rather spent for other purposes or in building factories (Selimbegović, 2008, p.3). Zukić found such assessments absurd, since mosque donations were purpose bound and could only be spent on mosques. Zukić also countered that Sarajevo before the 1990s had had 86 mosques, nearly all of which were located in the Old town (except two). Over the course of the past century almost no new mosques had been built, whereas 27 mosques were destroyed through anti-religious politics in the Kingdom SHS, NDH, and the Yugoslav periods. Thus, the newer settlements in the city did not have any mosques at all, as he argued (Bećirbašić, 2008, p.28). Since mosques still served just as regular places of worship, and not only markers of territory, Zukić stressed, there was a very real need for new houses of worship, particularly in places where their construction had not been possible in previous regimes. This was particularly true in the parts of the city built under the Socialists, which had no religious buildings at all. This was why a dozen new mosques were built in these areas after 1995. However, as Zukić argued, new mosques were built only in places designated in the city’s master plan, and only where they were really needed (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 28).

The total number of 99 mosques provided the inspiration for another confrontational article title in the same magazine, ‘99 Mosques for Multi-Ethnic Sarajevo’, in which the journalist Belma Bećirbašić claimed that the Ciglane Mosque represented just another instance of ethno-national inscription of territory by architectural means (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 28). Other reports similarly criticized that the need for the Ciglane Mosque was not so much about religion, but about politics, and that the Ciglane Mosque could be understood as a sign of Sarajevo becoming a mono-ethnic (Muslim) town (Selimbegović, 2008, p.3).

While criticizing the Mosque, journalists often bring up other examples of religious monuments for comparison, controversial buildings generally perceived as markers of individual ethno-religious supremacies in other parts of the country. The first is the well known case of the illegally erected Orthodox church in the garden of Fata Orlović, an old Muslim widow, who was expelled from her village of Konjević Polje, East Bosnia, in 1992. Fata Orlović’s legal and political struggle to reclaim her property – which became part of the Serb Republic after the war and was claimed as such for longevity with the erection of the church – made this case a synonym for the post-war ethnic struggle over identity and territory. The second example is the mosque erected along the M-17 road at Bradina.

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22 According to Zukić, it is the private donors, and not the Islamic Community of BH, who determine the application of their pious contributions. (Kemal Zukić, interview by Azra Akšamija, 4 April, 2009).

23 Ibid.
near Konjic in 1995, which stood partly on the private property of Bogdan Kureš, a Serb killed during the war. Aiming to signal that a mosque or a minaret should not be understood as an expression of defiance, the Riyasat ordered their removal, which was completed in 2008. The third often cited example in this context is the enormous church tower of the Franciscan monastery in Mostar (see Ustikolina section), which was enlarged during its post-war reconstruction and still dominates the skyline of the town.

The problematic comparison of these three illegally constructed religious buildings with the Ciglane mosque led to further complaints and questions about the mosque’s legal status (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 28). The complaining culminated in June 2008, when a petition against the mosque was signed by 648 immediate neighbours of the mosque at Ciglane, as well as other inhabitants of Sarajevo. The petition signers urged for an immediate halt to construction works on the mosque, which had already been started at this point. The petition and its accompanying letter were sent to all federal and cantonal governmental institutions, NGOs, the Riyasat, as well as to various international organizations. The issue raised here was that changes to the town’s master plan during the war were not legitimate. The letter also noted that a public hearing about this mosque had never been conducted. Thus, the signers of the petition considered the complete building procedure illegal and asked for a new mosque location to be found that would better suit the needs of citizens (B.B., 2008, p.8).

Alma Sadović, Director of the Planning Department of the Municipality Centre in Sarajevo (PDMC), explained that the building of the Ciglane Mosque had proceeded in accordance with all legal conditions and that raising the issue of the public hearing was now beside the point, since the legal procedures for the mosque’s construction had been concluded (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 28). However, the ambiguous circumstances of the changing of the master plan during the war had led some to argue that the mosque had been forced upon the city by the war-time authorities. Ahmed Burić in his article for Oslobodenje, for example, portrays the Ciglane mosque as taking part in Sarajevo's 'problematic urbanistic and demographic destiny' that Burić characterized as the 'continuous fight between things the town needs and things that are forced upon it' (Burić, 2008, p.7). Vildana Selimbegović in DANI asserted that by erecting a mosque such as at Ciglane, among others, the post-war government in Sarajevo was terrorizing the city’s non-Muslim population, which was not allowed to criticize the construction of new mosques in places where they had never existed before (Selimbegović, 2008, p.3). The criticism implied in DANI and Oslobodenje was that the opinions of those citizens who were against the mosque was not heard by the authorities,
and that the government did not care about the opinion of other ethnic groups including agnostic and atheist Bosnians (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 28).

Ahmed Burić in his article for Oslobodenje made an even harsher criticism by stating:

‘What is really alarming is neither Islam, nor the terrifying Arab metallic-sounding adhan, which can be heard from such new-fashioned buildings. What is really alarming is that, despite the elected government in municipalities, cantons and state, an informal group of people exists, which, if it does not include the authorities for this, is above the government and agencies, which give permits for this. Assembled from the remaining circle around Alija Izetbegović, this group of people have the power to do anything, which it proved this week’ (Burić, 2008, p.7, translation mine).

While some neighbours shared Burić’s concern for the loudness of the adhan, complaining that they had never been asked whether they would object to hearing the adhan five times a day (Bećirbašić, 2008, p. 26), others went so far as to imply that the Ciglane mosque was a sign of the ‘jihadization of Sarajevo’ (Šehić, 2008, p.55).

Many members of the ICBH were outraged by the rhetoric deployed in such articles, which they found propagandistic and/or Islamophobic. Abdulgafar ef. Velić, imam of the Istiklal mosque in Sarajevo, who was the imam at Ciglane for the longest period of time, criticized such newspaper reports as an ‘aggressive’ and ‘shameful media campaign’ that had been organized not by the majority of the mosque’s neighbours, but by a small group of people. According to ef. Velić, the propagandistic motivation of this media campaign was aimed at disguising the fact that the entire Ciglane settlement had been erected on a waqf property that had been endowed by hadži Mujaga Merhemić and taken away from the ICBH in the previous Yugoslav regime.24 Ironically, as ef. Velić criticized, the main problem being discussed was not that dozens of bars were built on the stolen waqf property, but that a small mosque was being built there. Ef. Velić also added that many of these newspaper reports presented untruthful or distorted arguments. For example, he asserted that it was not true that so many neighbours objected to the adhan. During Velić’s mandate as an imam at Ciglane, there had been only one objection to the loudness of the noon adhan, after which the volume had been lowered (Beganović, 2008). What was notable too in Burić’s article was the taking things out of context and reassembling them selectively to criticize

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24 The taking over of waqf estates and finances was a common practice in Yugoslavia, through which Islamic Community was financially and politically weakened and controlled. Within the city development plans of the 1980s, the waqf estate endowed by hadži Mujaga Merhemić, after whom Merhemić Square at Ciglane was named, was taken over by the city for the purpose of housing developments.
the legacy of Alija Izetbegović, BH’s first president, whose name had become misused for contemporary political conflicts, even though he had had nothing to do with this mosque.

Kemal Zukić from the Centre for Islamic Architecture at the Riyasat, who had been an active supporter of the Ciglane Mosque, was also enraged by the propagandistic media reports. For Zukić, the entire conflict was produced by an ‘anti-mosque lobby’, which, as he said, occasionally organized similar media campaigns and petitions against the construction of new mosques, as had been the case with the Grbavica I and Grbavica II Mosques. While certain political parties manipulated people with the media they controlled, the biggest problem within the Ciglane Mosque conflict, in Zukić’s analysis, was that not a single politically independent media in the country existed, which could provide an objective report.

There was no doubt, Zukić continued, that the conflict over the Ciglane Mosque was political and that such aggressive reports represented an instrument of an organized political campaign directed against ‘pro-Bosnian’ or ‘pro-Muslim’ political parties (i.e. SDA and Stranka za BiH) and the Islamic community of BiH. Possible partakers of this anti-mosque lobby, as Zukić contemplated, were political parties such as SNSD (Milorad Dodik) and SDP (Zlatko Lagumdžija), which might benefit from attacking the SDA and Stranka za BiH for their presumable support for new mosques. While SDA and Stranka za BiH were neither promoting nor supporting construction of mosques – since each new construction must be exclusively initiated by the individual jamaat – these parties were now gaining extra votes. So it might have been possible that another type of political arrangement existed between all these parties, but all of this is just suspicion. In sum, as Zukić contemplated, the effect of this anti-Ciglane Mosque media campaign was to break up the Bosnian population into religious and secularist groups.

In the meantime, the shell of the Ciglane Mosque was almost completed, but the construction work was languishing owing to the lack of funds (Huremović, 2008, January 31, p.14 and Huremović, 2008, June 1, p.13). It remained to be seen whether new types of conflict would emerge with the continuation of work on the construction of the mosque. So far, the Ciglane Mosque conflict had evolved around secular versus religious visions of BH identity, as well as pro/counter Muslim propaganda of Serbian and Croatian nationalists. What became increasingly evident after the mosque's construction was disclosed in the newspapers was the instrumental role of the mass media in the continuation of the Bosnian ethnic conflict a decade after the war was over.

3.3 The King Fahd mosque and the Cultural Centre in Sarajevo
The King Fahd mosque is the largest mosque in the Balkans. Opening together with the Cultural Centre ‘King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud’ in 2000, this stylistically hybrid marble-clad mosque, crowned with an Ottoman dome and two 49-metre high minarets monumentally signalled the presence of a pan-Islamic vision in Bosnia.
Built to promote the intercultural exchange between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the mosque complex offers a wide range of socially beneficent services that are open to all citizens of BH. Over the course of the past decade, however, the King Fahd mosque has become a symbol for various conflicts evolving around ideological influences from Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Islamic world on local Bosnian Islamic religious life. Opponents of the mosque and controversial phenomena they associate with it include 1. local Bosnian Muslims, who practise Islam according to the Hanafi madhhab and are disturbed by the proselytizing activities of the so-called 'vehabije' (Wahabis); 2. local Muslim intellectuals, who have criticized the Riyasat and the Islamic community for not maintaining the integrity of local Islamic tradition; 3. secular and/or agnostic inhabitants of BH of all ethnic groups, which feel threatened by any form of intensification of religious life in the country; and finally, 4. Serbian and Croatian nationalists, for whom the conservative Muslims offer an easy target to criticize Bosnian Muslims in general.

The highly politicized controversy over the mosque, especially in regard to the appearance of Wahabism associated with it, is being fueled with numerous propagandistic reports, whose accusations are often lacking in any evidence. With the exception of a few recent studies that have tackled the appearance and the effects of Wahabism in the Balkans, no research has been done so far that would specifically relate the King Fahd mosque to this issue. This study will therefore only briefly outline the contexts in which the King Fahd mosque in
Sarajevo has been used to critique the presence of Wahabism in the contemporary BH media.27

Located in Sarajevo’s modern neighbourhood Alipašino Polje, the King Fahd Mosque and the Cultural Center sit amid high-rise housing structures built in the 1980s. Occupying a surface of 8,187 square metres, the mosque can accommodate some 3,000 worshippers. An additional 1,000 worshippers can pray in the 869 square metre courtyard, if needed on special occasions. Adjacent to the mosque is the Cultural Center King Fahd—a cultural and educational institution founded upon the initiative of His Excellency Selman Ibn Abdul-Aziz, emir of the province of Riyadh and president of the Supreme Committee for the Collection of Donations for the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The initiative for the foundation of the centre, as explained in the centre’s informational pamphlet, ‘came as a response to the pressing need for assistance to the Bosnian people through the preservation of their identity and through culture and education, and through the establishment of a cultural link between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Bosnia and Herzegovina’. Emir Selman personally laid the foundation stone for the centre on 2 May, 1997, during the Saudi government’s first official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The centre was officially opened on 15 October, 2000.

According to the King Fahd Cultural Center’s homepage, the main mission of this institution is the promotion of cultural, scientific, and educational exchange between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Equipped

27 All the information taken from the mass media, however, needs to be taken with a pinch of salt, as I had no means to verify their validity.
with modern educational facilities, the Centre offers services such as courses in Arabic and English language and information technology, seminars in management and science, summer schools, religious education, lectures, book promotions, exhibitions, sport competitions, and *iftars* (meals) during Ramadan. These services are free of charge and open to all citizens of BH, regardless of gender, national, political, and/or religious affiliation.

Classrooms and facilities of the King Fahd Islamic Center in Sarajevo

The King Fahd Mosque and the Cultural Center jointly form an Islamic Center, and this type of programmatic building-complex represents a novelty in BH post-socialist religious architecture. While in the pre-1990s in BH no Islamic centres existed, after the war three such centres were built, all funded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Next to the King Fahd Islamic Center in Sarajevo, the two other examples are similarly equipped with modern facilities offering analogous cultural and educative program: the Mosque and Cultural Center ‘Princess
El-Jawhara bint Ibrahim Elbrahim’ at Bugojno (opened in 2001) and the Saudi Arabian Cultural Center in Mostar. Since the end of the 1990s war Saudi Arabia has also built several other monumental mosques throughout the country, such as the ‘Prince Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz al Saud’ Mosque at Tuzla (opened in 2000), presently the second largest mosque in the country, after the King Fahd Mosque. The architectural models of these buildings are exhibited in the lobby gallery of the King Fahd Cultural Center in Sarajevo.

Exhibitions of architectural models of mosques in the lobby of the King Fahd Islamic Center

Designed to promote a pan-Islamic visions of their patrons, the Saudi-donated Islamic centres and mosques in BH render a pastiche of various architectural styles with reference to different periods and building traditions of Islamic history. Common architectural features include the use of expensive building materials, deployment of double minarets, and the monumentality of the buildings. Dominating over the local context, this type of monumental architecture has provoked harsh criticism from the Bosnian public. Many have condemned the appearance of the King Fahd mosque as architecturally inappropriate for its urban setting, describing it as an ‘alien space-ship’ that has landed at Alipašino Polje—meaning that this mosque lacks any cultural and architectural relation to its surrounding. Indeed, the mosque's luxurious marble-shining façade provides a striking contrast to the neighbouring socialist housing blocks, which were severely damaged during the war and have been deteriorating ever since. The
same type of criticism also regards the equally monumental Church of St. Luke the Evangelist (Crkva Sv. Luke Evangelište), which is currently being built in the same neighbourhood, possibly in response to the monumentality of the King Fahd mosque. Disaffection with this extravagant-looking church, built as the first Catholic house of worship in Sarajevo since 1936, culminated in the night of 24–25 March, 2009, when the unfinished building was stoned by unknown attackers.28

At this point, it is important to note that Saudi Arabian donations to Bosnia and Herzegovina have not been limited to monumental buildings with a religious content. At the very start of the 1992–95 war, the government of Saudi Arabia launched a large-scale humanitarian programme providing war-time relief for Bosnians. This humanitarian aid funded clinics, schools, restoration of water supplies, mosques and houses, care of orphans, etc. In May 1992, the Supreme Committee for the Collection of Donations for the Muslims of Bosnia (VSK) headed by Prince Salman was established in Saudi Arabia to channel private donations from the Kingdom. Humanitarian aid to the value of c. $450 million was locally channelled through fourteen offices that were established in different cities throughout BH.29 Records of this humanitarian aid are exhibited in the gallery of the King Fahd Cultural Center in the form of numerous framed documents of acknowledgment and letters of thanksgiving written by the individual Bosnian jamaats, whose mosque reconstructions were also supported by funds from the VSK.

These funds for the restoration and rebuilding of destroyed mosques were locally channelled through the Center of Islamic Architecture, an institution formed in 1995 upon the initiative of Reisul-Ulema Dr. Mustafe Cerić, which was until recently headed by the architect Kemal Zukić. Individual jamaats in process of rebuilding their mosques could apply for partial or full financial support for their mosque’s construction and furnishing, as well as seeking architectural and structural advice. Mosques rebuilt and reconstructed with Saudi donations are not only recognizable as such from the inscription plaques honouring the donors that are mounted on the entrances of mosques, but also inside. In the meantime, the VSK has been closed, with an explanation that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not in further need of such humanitarian aid and projects. All VSK-funded mosques have been endowed to the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ICBH),

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28 Retrieved February 14, 2009, from Katolička Tiskovna Agencija http://www.ktabkbih.net/info.asp?id=19807
29 Humanitarian activities continued long after the end of the war, as stated in King Fahd’s official homepage. Saudi Arabia provided approximately $450 million in aid. King Fahd himself gave more than $100 million. Retrieved February 14, 2009, from http://www.kingfahdbinabdulaziz.com/main/i401.htm
whereas the Cultural Centers in Sarajevo and Mostar have remained under the supervision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Nezim Halilović Muderis, hatib of the King Fahd Mosque, and Director at the Waqf Direction in Sarajevo, explains that the architecture and programme of the King Fahd mosque is not related to any planned influence of Saudi Arabia on BH, but that it is based on contemporary needs. In addition, no architectural guidelines were imposed on the architect by the patron. The architect of the King Fahd Mosque is Ahmed Kapidžić, a Bosnian and a member of the Sarajevo Association of Architects (ASAS). The architect’s reinterpretation of, or departure from the Ottoman style was his own interpretation of the commissioned Islamic Center.30

In architectural terms, the King Fahd Mosque might have provided a model for the development of novel features in Bosnian post-war vernacular mosque architecture. For example, a new phenomenon in the architecture of new and rebuilt mosques is the increasing appearance of the double minarets with which the vernacular mosques in villages are competing in monumentality with Saudi mosques in larger towns (as well as with each other). Another novel architectural development in Bosnian mosque architecture is more clearly articulated gender separation. In the King Fahd Mosque, gender segregation is not only architecturally arranged with separate prayer spaces (men on the ground floor, women in the gallery), but is also highlighted with appropriate prohibition signs and inscriptions posted on the door of each space. While gender segregation has always been an integral part of Bosnian vernacular mosque architecture, what has changed now since the pre-war period, is that in many newly built or rebuilt mosques gender separation takes place in a more organized and emphasized way, for example through separate entrances for men and women or following inscriptions similar to those in the King Fahd Mosque.

The most controversial phenomena of new Islamic practices in BH, however, are not necessarily directly linked to or do not occur in the King Fahd mosque, but are related to ideological and financial influences mainly from Saudi Arabia, but also other Islamic countries in post-war BH. The most controversial phenomenon associated with the involvement of Saudi Arabia and its humanitarian aid for Bosnia (and also to the arrival of foreign Muslim combatants, who settled in Bosnia after fighting in defence of Bosnian Muslims during the 1992–95 war) is the presence of Salafism, Wahabism, and other conservative interpretations of Islam, which have been taking visible root in BH since the 1990s war. In numerous reports dealing with these issues, a photograph of the King Fahd Mosque is often used as an illustration and a symbol of Wahabism in BH, regardless of whether

or not the article’s content actually problemizes this issue in the context of the King Fahd Mosque. In this regard, the King Fahd Mosque has often been negatively portrayed in the BH media as the ‘centre of Wahabism’, or as the place to ‘gather’ or ‘recruit’ radical Islamists (Fazlić & Buljubašić & Maglajlija, 2006, p.26). The term ‘vehabija’ (Wahabi) is thereby derogatively used to denote bearded men, accompanied by fully veiled women, who see themselves as the ‘rightly guided’ followers of the Koran and the guidelines of the Prophet Muhammad. Many Wahabis come to pray in the King Fahd Mosque; some of them also selling various religious equipment, books and media in front of the mosque entrance.

The number of such expatriate and domestic proselytizing communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the extent of their ideological influence in BH is unknown, but they have become increasingly visible. Some critics have linked the increasing number of veiled women in BH’s public space with the Saudi promotion of different types of gender relationships that there used to be in Bosnia before the war. While in pre-war Sarajevo veiled women generally represented a rare appearance, their number increased dramatically after the war. This phenomenon, however, is not necessarily related to influences from abroad exclusively, but also to the country’s more recent war-contested religious history as well as the overall phenomenon of increased religious prominence in post-communist societies. What could be related to the ideological influences
of Saudi Arabia, however, is the appearance of new forms of total veiling, such as the *niqab*, sometimes involving the full concealment of the eyes and hands. Such veiling practices are completely new to BH. ³¹

New phenomena in Bosnian Islamic life have become visible not only in dress code, but also in a number of recent incidents in mosques. It is evident from numerous media reports that the imposition of the conservative interpretation of Islam and pan-Islamic identity over the Sunni Hanafi tradition of Bosnian Muslims is very controversial and that it faces significant resistance among the local population, including Muslims. For example, over the course of the past decade there have been several fights that took place between traditional Bosnian Muslims and ‘Wahabis’ in various mosques, caused by a discrepancy in religious practice, for example, over the position of the legs during prayer. Reported conflicts and fights in mosques seem to have been provoked by ‘Wahabi’ attempts to ‘correct’ the Bosnian way of praying. Some village communities also feel that ‘Wahabis’ are taking over their mosques, by praying there, reading, and giving lectures, or sometimes even staying in there overnight.

Nezim Halilović Muderis, *hatib* of the King Fahd Mosque, and Director of the *Waqf* Direction in Sarajevo, has energetically disapproved the assumptions that King Fahd Mosque is a ‘Wahabi mosque’ and that conflicts with Wahabis take place there. According to Halilović, prayer in the King Fahd Mosque proceeds according to Sunni Hanafi tradition, and that the mosque is open for prayer to anyone who respects this tradition. ³² Halilović’s emphasis as an imam in this mosque is on the unity of Muslims, which means that all Muslims have the right to perform the prayer ritual according to their belief or interpretation. ³³ Halilović argues that the King Fahd Mosque has been labelled a ‘Wahabi mosque’ in the propagandistic media. Instead of focusing on spreading further misinformation about the mosque, which only contributes to deepening prejudices against Muslims, as Halilović contends, the social services that this mosque and its *jamaat* provide should also be mentioned in the media. For example, Halilović reports that members of the King Fahd Mosque *jamaat* have been taking part in numerous humanitarian activities in East Bosnia, where they are helping local populations in clearing the ruins and rebuilding. The mosque has recently organized a campaign to help the sick and socially deprived. Socially beneficial actions such as blood donations that take place every Friday in the King Fahd Mosque have

³¹ Rumours were spread that Muslim women were paid to veil in the first decade following the war, and many accepted this owing to financial needs. These accusations, however, remain questionable, since no specific evidence is available.
³² Interview with Nezim Halilović by Azra Akšamija on 8 April, 2009.
³³ Ibid.
served as a role model for other *jamaats*, who have now started similar actions in other regions.  

An additional issue is that the ICBH is internally divided in regard to the presence of such parallel and proselytizing Islamic groups in BH. In response to harsh media criticism of the ICBH in the Bosnian media, for not taking an action against the development of Wahabism and other conservative interpretations of Islam in BH, Reisu-l-ulema, Dr. Mustafa ef. Cerić, has continuously held the position that the focus of the media on this topic is an exaggerated and politicized witch-hunt, which is distracting attention from the recent genocide of Muslims and, as he argues, only contributing to spreading Islamophobia in BH. In an interview for *Dnevni Avaz* in 2006, ef. Cerić stressed that the ICBH will not be trapped into such political provocations, which are aimed at internally dividing Muslims (Lučkin, S. & Orahovac, 2006, p. 4; MINA, 2006, p. 4). He also noted that certain individuals do indeed have no respect for local Islamic customs and traditions of tolerance and that the ICBH will take the necessary action to protect and preserve the integrity of local Islamic tradition (Lučkin, S. & Orahovac, 2006, p. 4).

In an interview for *Oslobodenje*, the Mufti of Sarajevo, Husein ef. Smajić, explained that such Wahabi and pro-Wahabi organizations have indeed taken root in BH, registering themselves as civil and/or humanitarian organizations during the war, but they have nothing to do with the ICBH; they exist and act outside the official system of the ICBH (Hodžić, 2007, February 24, p. 5). These humanitarian organizations have been funding their own *jamaats* parallel to the ICBH, thus undermining the latter’s authority as the sole legal representative organization of Muslims in BH. Ef. Smajić also explains that the ICBH cannot do much legally to control the actions and development of these parallel Islamic communities and organizations, since many of them are officially registered. However, a new law that was issued in 2006 now makes the existence of two organizations or communities with the same prefixed word impossible. When this law was issued, the ICBH filed a legal request for the renaming of all other organizations with the ‘Islamic’ prefix. In addition, the ICBH has formed a commission to investigate further details about the existence of such parallel Islamic communities. So far, the commission has collected information about five such groups. Their exact number is indefinite, and it is also unknown whether they are Wahabis or not, but this is how they are identified by the ICBH. Ef. Smajić assumes that they are not numerous, but they travel to different cities to attract new followers in mosques, and they are very visible and cause problems (Hodžić, 2007, February 24, p. 5).
That such actions were not effective or sufficiently applied is evident from increasing internal criticism within the ICBH, expressed by various Muslim intellectuals in the past decade. A major controversy was caused by an essay entitled ‘Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Wahabis. They are Coming to Take Our Children’, by Prof. Dr. Rešid Hafizović, which was published in Oslobođenje (Hafizović, 2006). The controversy that followed Hafizović’s essay and Riyasat’s explicit distancing himself from Hafizović in reaction to his essay (Huremović, 2006, p.9), led to another wave of reports centred on various questions, such as on academic freedom in BH, actions and non-actions of the Reisu-l-ulema, internal power relationships within the ICBH, etc.

What is evident from these and other reports published over the course of the past two years is that the entire controversy over ideological influences of Saudi Arabia and other Islamic and non-Islamic countries is highly political and is still taking place. While these debates have divided the ICBH internally, the entire conflict has provided new arguments for the Serbian and Croatian nationalists, as well as for secular Bosnians to criticize the ICBH. Regardless of its actual role in this conflict, the King Fahd mosque epitomizes the present negotiation of competing nationalist and religious ideologies in the space of religious architecture.

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35 Among them are, for example, several renowned professors from the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Sarajevo, such as Prof. Dr. Enes Karić, Prof. Dr. Rešid Hafizović, and Mag. Đzevad Hodžić, as well as Mustafa Sušić, lecturer at the Gazi-Husrev-beg’s Madrasa in Sarajevo.

36 In this essay, Prof. Hafizović expressed his deep concern about the spread of Wahabism in BH, describing it as a dangerous virus, which was attacking the very substance of the BH Muslims, and their religious and administrative authorities (Hafizović, 2006). The Rijaset of the ICBH immediately reacted to this essay, and distanced itself explicitly from Hafizović’s critique, which it felt to be inadequate (Huremović, 2006, p.9). What the Rijaset found particularly problematic was Hafizović’s evaluation and general judgements on the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which Rijaset felt to be inappropriate, especially in consideration of all the humanitarian aid that the Kingdom had provided for BH.
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Interviews

Prof. Muhamed Hamidović, former Director of the Institute for Protection of Monuments (IPM).

Safet Jahić, a member of the IC Ustikolina Executive Committee, temporary imam in Ustikolina after the war.

Said Jamaković, architect and former Director of the Cantonal Planning Institute at the time.

Kemal Zukić, architect and former Director of the Center for Islamic Architecture at the Riyasat Sarajevo.
The other periphery
The situation in
Northern Europe
From aesthetic conflicts to anti-mosque demonstrations: the institutionalisation of Islam and Muslims in Sweden

Göran Larsson

It was the Ahmadiyya community that set up the first purpose-built mosque in Sweden in 1975, in Gothenburg, the country’s second city. At the time of its inauguration in 1976, the mosque had only received one type of complaint. The pink stones used for the building did not match the nearby houses, which were mainly built in grey building materials. Since then it is evident that the climate of discussion has changed. Owing to both internal changes, such as growing immigration and a heated debated about multiculturalism, integration and Swedish identity, and external developments, especially the rise of so-called international terrorism carried out in the name of Islam, the building of mosques has become a controversial topic generating debates, conflicts and even open violence and threats.

My aim is on the one hand to present the reader with the background to the history of Islam and Muslims in Sweden, and on the other to review the discussions that have followed the setting up of both basement mosques and purpose-built mosques in Sweden. Subsequent sections will also give an overview of the existing mosques in Sweden, followed by a more in-depth study of local developments in Gothenburg. Besides the history of the Ahmadiyya mosque, Gothenburg also has approximately fifteen to twenty basement mosques, and the city will soon have its second purpose-built mosque. Even though it will be shown that the setting up of mosques is generally associated with conflicts and tensions, I will also provide an example that demonstrates that we need to redefine our understanding and definition of mosques. Unlike the building of purpose-built mosques, the sports hall used by the Chalmers Islamic Association for the Friday prayers is an example of a ‘modern’ mosque that has caused few, if
any, conflicts and debates. I suggest that this is a positive example, illustrating that it is possible to provide public spaces for Muslims who wish to practise their religion. The sources that I have used for the chapter are newspaper articles and other media reports, interviews with Muslim leaders, and experiences collected during fieldwork with and among the Muslim communities in Sweden.

Although my focus is on Gothenburg and specific local trajectories, I will also present data regarding conflicts that have followed the building of mosques in other parts of Sweden. Special attention will be given to the general anti-Muslim rhetoric that is normally linked to the construction of mosques. The opposition is currently concentrated on Gothenburg and the plans to build a second mosque in the city. Besides its descriptive aspect, the chapter seeks to answer two questions. What is the main content of anti-mosque criticism, and why is the building of mosques such a controversial topic?

Two different stories

In this chapter, I will argue that the debate, criticism or support for the building of mosques in Sweden can be analysed and related to two different and contradictory views of the history of Sweden. On the one hand, it is possible to see the establishment of mosques as a natural development in the religious history of the country. From the eighteenth century until today, Sweden has become more and more open to non-Lutheran congregations (especially Catholics, but also Free churches) and non-Christian dominations (Jews, Sikhs, Buddhist, Hindus and of course Muslims). By accepting this development – a path that Sweden had already taken in the eighteenth century when Jews were accepted and under certain conditions allowed to practise their religion – the building of a mosque is a natural outcome and result of legal changes and of the growing Muslim population in Sweden. From this point of view, the demand for purpose-built mosques mirrors the composition of the population and the religious map of Sweden. In line with political developments (freedom of religions, equal rights, multiculturalism, anti-discrimination laws) and the ethnic and religious composition of the Swedish population, the building of mosques is a right. Like all other citizens, Muslims should also benefit from and have equal rights to practise their religion in Sweden.

On the other hand, a broad coalition of critics is trying hard to portray the building of mosques as something unnatural or unfamiliar to Sweden and so-called Swedish culture. By accepting the erection of mosques, in this view, Sweden and Swedish values are running a severe risk of becoming contaminated and polluted by non-Swedish cultures. Those who argue along these lines
seem to view Sweden as a fixed and static entity that should be protected from non-Swedish influences. In recent decades, it has become evident that Islam and Muslims are often being targeted as the main threat and as public enemy number one. Within this heterogeneous camp, we find individuals and groups embracing Samuel Huntington’s theories (i.e. the clash of civilizations), populist politicians, right-wing parties, conservative church leaders and neo-Nazis. Although of mixed backgrounds, they are united in their convictions and their strong criticism of multicultural society, and of Islam and Muslims in particular.

Islam and Muslims in Sweden

Archaeological finds, rune stones, diplomatic contracts and business transactions demonstrate the fact that the Nordic region and the Swedish state have had contact with the Muslim world from the epoch of the Vikings throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern era. Nonetheless the Muslim presence in the country is mainly associated with the labour migration that began after the Second World War and at the end of the 1960s. As in other countries in Europe, industry in Sweden depended on a growing workforce, and after the war it became essential to invite guest workers from both neighbouring Nordic countries (especially Finland) and the Mediterranean. Even though more research needs to be carried out, it is clear that those individuals who arrived in Sweden during the 1960s were mainly single men who wanted to earn money quickly and then return to their home countries. If they were religious, their religious observance was restricted to the private sphere. Although Tatar Muslims who arrived in Sweden after the Second World War had set up the first Islamic congregation in Stockholm in 1949, there were hardly any mosques or Islamic institutions to help immigrants of Muslim cultural background to uphold their religion.

Owing to political and economic changes—especially after the oil crisis in the first half of the 1970s—Sweden’s immigration laws were amended. Workforce migration was stopped, but from now on it became possible for workers to invite their families and relatives to Sweden. In Swedish migration history, this period, of family unification, is often viewed as a second phase in modern migration. With the arrival of older relatives, women and children, it became important to set up Islamic institutions, found cemeteries and start mosques, i.e. to establish a set of bodies to assist in the upbringing of Muslims and the transmission of values and norms to following generations.

The third phase of modern migration is mainly associated with the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers. Since the 1970s, an important number of individuals of Muslim cultural background have arrived to Sweden from countries
and regions such as parts of Africa (especially from the Horn of Africa), Iran and Iraq (especially during and after the war between the two countries), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lebanon, Afghanistan and most lately from post-Saddam Iraq. Compared to those who arrived during phases one and two (i.e. as guest workers or family migrants), many individuals who arrived as asylum-seekers or refugees came traumatised by war and suffering from post-traumatic stress.

Like most countries in Europe, the law in Sweden prohibits the state from recording a person’s religious affiliation. In the last census to include information about religious affiliation, in 1930, a mere fifteen individuals registered themselves as Muslims. Since then, the number of Muslims has grown rapidly over time. According to the latest calculations, the figure is estimated to be around 350,000 or 400,000, though this calculation suffers from methodological problems and uncertainties about how to define a Muslim. Without going into any detailed discussion of particular estimates and their methodological problems, the figures refer to individuals from a Muslim cultural background that can be considered more or less religious. Nonetheless it is clear that, like most other Muslims in the West, the Muslims of Sweden are generally portrayed as religious in both the public discourse and the media. The fact that a large number of migrants and their children (those who have been born and raised in Sweden) are as secularised as the average Swede is generally forgotten or neglected by both academics and journalists. The bias towards portraying Muslims as religious is problematic and contributes to an unbalanced presentation of a large and heterogeneous population: in fact, the Muslim community is Sweden is characterised by diversity and complexity. Besides ethnic and language differences, it contains within it a rich variety of political and religious tendencies, different educational backgrounds and economic and social backgrounds.

Since 1951 and the law of religious freedom, it has become possible for non-Lutheran and non-Christian communities to set up religious bodies and organizations, as well as to embrace a non-religious or atheistic lifestyle. As noted in the previous section, there was no pressing need for Muslims to start organizations or build mosques prior to the 1970s. In the first half of the 1970s, the first Muslim umbrella organizations were set up in Sweden, and in 2010 the Swedish state recognised six Muslim organizations (see table 1 below) through the Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund (Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities, henceforth SST). The organizations that are entitled to grants are presented in the table opposite.
Table 1 Recognized Muslim organizations in Sweden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of organization</th>
<th>Year of inauguration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Union of Islamic Congregations in Sweden (Förenade Islamiska Församlingar i Sverige, or FIFS: Kapellgränd 10, SE-116 25 Stockholm, Sweden, homepage: <a href="http://www.fifs.se/">http://www.fifs.se/</a>)</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Swedish Muslim Union (Sveriges Muslimska Förbund, SMF: Kapellgränd 10, SE-116 25 Stockholm, Sweden)</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Union of Islamic Cultural Centres (Islamiska Kulturcenterunionen, IKUS: Bergsbovägen 15, SE-191 35 Sollentuna, Sweden)</td>
<td>Beginning of the 1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Islamic Assemblies (Svenska Islamiska Församlingar, SIF: Moränvägen 13, SE-136 51 Haningen, Sweden)</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Shi’a Communities in Sweden (Islamisk Shiasamfund , ISS: Box 690, SE-175 27 Järfälla, Sweden, homepage: <a href="http://www.shiasamfund.se/sida1.html">http://www.shiasamfund.se/sida1.html</a>)</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bosniak Islamic Congregation (Bosniakiska Islamiska Samfundet, BIS: Barnarpsgatan 39 G, 553 33 Jönköping, Sweden, homepage: <a href="http://www.izb.se/">http://www.izb.se/</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SST (http://www.sst.a.se/)

As shown in Table 1, Muslims are recognised and are entitled to receive grants from the Swedish state, but they have to live up to the norms and values of Swedish society. Support through SST is divided into three different categories. They are:

- An organisational grant enabling the parishes to hold religious services, offer pastoral care and provide education.
- A working grant to support specific areas that the state wishes to subsidize, e.g. the Hospital Church, and theological training at certain seminars.
- Project grants, which are aimed to stimulate new forms of activity and cooperation.

However, it is not possible for Muslims to abide by specific Islamic laws if the practices or interpretations of the sharia contradict the law of Sweden. Consequently, there are no exceptions from the legal system. Nonetheless it is clear that the law of freedom of religion of 1951 gives Muslims an opportunity to practise their religion. There are, however, some conflicts with regard to specific dress codes (for example, the use of the niqab in schools), and the halal methods of slaughter prescribed and followed by the majority of Muslims are not accepted in Sweden. All animals should be pre-stunned before they are slaughtered, a method not
approved by all Jews or by Muslims. This is an example of how the legal system circumvents the law of freedom of religion according to both Jews and Muslims. As a result, Swedish law in its definition of religion does not cover what kind of food you may eat, how you slaughter animals and what kind of dress you wear.

Like most European states, the Swedish government has become more aware of the Muslim community and its special needs. A number of reports and enquiries commissioned by the state and NGOs have demonstrated that people with a non-Swedish ethnic background are more likely to suffer from various forms of deprivation (economic, social, organic, ethical, psychological). Some experts (for example, Masoud Kamali) have argued that Swedish society suffers from structural discrimination and have called for special stakes targeting the areas and groups that are more likely to be disadvantaged. As I shall try to demonstrate in the last section of this chapter, other groups and political parties (for example, The Swedish Democratic Party or Sverigedemokraterna, henceforth SD, but also local parties in the south of Sweden, for example Skånepartiet) argue that the problems are to be found on the immigrant side. For example, according to the programme of Skånepartiet, although the party does not take a stance on religious issue, Islam is presented as a divergent religion not complying with Swedish norms and values. In April 2010 the party displayed a poster in Rosengård, Malmö, that depicted a naked prophet Muhammad holding hands with his nine-year old naked wife. The poster was reported to the police, but the party leader, Carl P. Herslow, defended the image by saying that it was a defence of freedom of speech and that 'Islam is a very dangerous and psycho-social contagious illness'. According to both SD and Skånepartiet, Muslims and immigrants do not suffer from any discrimination or xenophobia, but are themselves unwilling to assimilate to the Swedish system. If they do not want to adapt to Swedish society, they should be kicked out of the country. For those who embrace this world view, Muslims should not be allowed to practise their religion, since as a religion and culture Islam contradicts the Swedish way of life.

To facilitate and help the Muslim community integrate, the Swedish state has commissioned an enquiry investigating whether it was possible to educate or train imams in Sweden. Even though the enquiry found no support for supporting an education or training of imams in Sweden, this initiative illustrates how the Swedish government is concerned about the condition of the Muslim community. According to the report published by the Ministry of Education (SOU 2009:52, Staten och imamerna: Religion, integration, autonomi) either the state or Muslim leaders (in this case represented by the imams) called for a religious training programme. What the imams and the government are looking for is educational programmes that can improve and help religious leaders facilitate the
integration of the people of a Muslim cultural background into Swedish society. A positive interpretation is that the discussion of the education of imams is an attempt to argue that Muslims should be given an equal opportunity to train their imams and be part of the Swedish society (i.e. they are entitled to freedom of religion, education and participation on equal terms). A more negative interpretation is that the Swedish state is trying to control the imams and discipline them by educating them to become decent citizens. Even though some imams have expressed this fear, it seems that the climate in Sweden differs from that in other European countries. As compared to the rest of Europe, the proposal to start an enquiry into the training of imams was initiated by members of the Muslim community themselves, i.e. it was not a top-down initiative taken by the state in order to control or discipline them. At the time of writing, however, it is too early to say what the outcome will be and also impossible to say whether Muslims will accept the proposals put forward by the enquiry.

The Swedish legal system has also been changed and amended to make it easier for people not born in Sweden to become citizens and to play a part in society. For example, after five years of residence in the country, the individual is given the opportunity to apply for citizenship, and since 1976 one has the right to vote and stand in local elections if one has lived in the country for three years. Since 2000 it has been possible to hold dual citizenship, and it is likely that most individuals who have a Muslim cultural background are full citizens of Sweden, though there are no empirical findings to support this conclusion. Basically it is the mother’s citizenship that decides that of the child, though if the father holds Swedish citizenship, it is also possible for the child to apply for Swedish citizenship, even though the mother is not Swedish.

**Mosques in Sweden: a brief overview**

Since the Ahmadiyya community set up the first purpose-built mosque in Gothenburg in the mid-1970s, six more purpose-built mosques have been constructed in Sweden (see Table 2 overleaf), located in Malmö, Uppsala, Stockholm and Trollhättan. Four of these are Sunni Muslim (one in Malmö, one in Uppsala and two in Stockholm), one is Shia Muslim (Trollhättan) and one is Ahmadiyya (Gothenburg). Besides these mosques, local congregations have bought and converted old churches into mosques in Gävle and Västerås.
Table 2 Purpose-built mosques in Sweden (city, year of inauguration, religious outlook and incidents related to mosque as reported by the media).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City, address</th>
<th>Year of inauguration</th>
<th>Religious outlook</th>
<th>Incidents related to the mosque as reported by the media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uppsala mosque, Sportfältsvägen 1, Box 1642, SE-751 46 Uppsala</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm mosque, Kapellgränd 10, SE 116 25 Stockholm</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Received bomb threats after 9/11, 2001.**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm, Fitja mosque</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Sunni (Diyanet)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tegelbruksvägen 10, SE-14553 Norsborg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trollhättan mosque, Lextorspsvägen 976, SE-461 65 Trollhättan</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Shia</td>
<td>Destroyed by arson on August 14th, 1993 (rebuilt and enlarged after the fire).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Converted Churches **

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City, address</th>
<th>Year of inauguration</th>
<th>Religious outlook</th>
<th>Incidents related to the mosque as reported by the media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gävle mosque, Södra Rådmansgatan 25, SE-802 51 Gävle</td>
<td>Rebuilt</td>
<td>Methodist Church in 2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Västerås mosque, Jakobsgatan 93, SE-724 64 Västerås</td>
<td>Rebuilt</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


** Forsström 2001.

Besides the mosques included in the table above, the great majority of Muslims perform their religious rituals and religious life in so-called basement mosques. The number of mosques located in basements, flats or industrial buildings is unclear, and the estimates from Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö are uncertain. According to calculations made by journalists and researchers from Gothenburg and Lund University, the number of mosques is estimated at
around 20 in Stockholm, 15–20 in Gothenburg and 10–15 in Malmö. Because the religious landscape is changing fast, mosques frequently close and re-open, so the figures above are only tentative.

As reported in academic studies, NGO reports and Swedish national radio, however, it is clear that several mosques (both purpose-built mosques and so-called basement mosques) have suffered from Islamophobia, vandalism and threats. According to a survey conducted by Swedish national radio (Sveriges Radio, SR) in 2005, 41 Muslim congregations reported that they had received threats and 33 had confirmed that they had suffered from attacks (attempted arson and vandalism). The survey was conducted among 100 Muslim congregations serving approximately 80,000 Muslims. Still it is clear that most incidents are not reported to the police and there is a gap between official and unofficial data for Islamophobic incidents. It is therefore likely that the figures presented by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) are on the low side. In 2008, 90 incidents (45 per cent of 600 reported anti-religious hate crimes, i.e. anti-Semitic, Islamophobic or anti-religious in general) were included in the category of Islamophobic crimes.

Besides the Islamophobic crimes recorded by BRÅ, it is also reported in the media that mosques and prayer halls have been targeted. While most attacks are limited to vandalism and graffiti, the two purpose-built mosques in Malmö and Trollhättan have both been damaged by fire. The whole mosque in Trollhättan went up in flames on the night between 14 and 15 August, 1993. This attack was, however, not only focused on Islam and Muslims, since an Oriental church was also attacked, but in the latter case the assault failed. Hence, it seems as if the violence against the Shia community was part of a larger campaign against immigrants. According to Karlsson and Svanberg, it is possible to link this incident to the current political climate. At the time, New Democracy (Ny Demokrati), a populist party with a strong anti-immigration rhetoric, had risen in popularity, and several of its spokespersons had attacked both immigration and Islam.

In April 2003, the Islamic school and the administrative building attached to the mosque of the Islamic Centre in Malmö were also destroyed. Two years later (September 2005) the mosque was damaged again when a Molotov cocktail was thrown into the prayer hall. In August 2008 a mosque was set on fire in the small town of Strömsund, Jämtland. This incident was reported as a hate crime, and a 19-year old man was arrested for arson. According to media coverage, Strömsund had received a large number of refugees from Uzbekistan and Chechnia, and it is likely that the attack against the mosque was just the tip of
an iceberg, since the police had earlier reported conflicts, tensions and racist crimes in the small town.

During my years of fieldwork, local leaders have often told me that they and their mosques and prayer halls have received threats and that their buildings have been sprayed by anti-Muslim graffiti, ketchup and even pig's blood. For example, in Malmö somebody smashed the windows of the mosque of the Islamic Centre and let a pig into the prayer hall. The entrance to the mosque complex in Malmö has also been desecrated with pig heads. At the time of writing, there is no documentation and we do not know how common threats, vandalism and open attacks are, but it is likely that most mosques refrain from reporting these incidents. It is, however, clear that attempts to damage or destroy mosques may be motivated by either Islamophobia or xenophobia, and it is often difficult to make a sharp distinction between them.

Three mosques in Gothenburg

As mentioned in the introduction to this text, the Ahmadiyya community in Gothenburg set up the first purpose-built mosque in Sweden. Construction started in 1975, and the building was inaugurated in 1976. In 2001 the original mosque was demolished and replaced by a larger and more functional building. Although this was the first mosque to be built in Sweden, it has received few complaints from the surrounding community or its immediate neighbours. The Ahmadiyya community is very active and open to the surrounding society. To the disappointment of the Sunni and Shia communities of Gothenburg, who do not recognise this group as ‘true’ Muslims, the mosque receives a larger number of visitors (especially from schools and other community groups). Consequently, this building is often perceived as the mosque. Local politicians, academics and other celebrities of the city are generally invited to attend the yearly meeting (*Jalsa Salana*) organized by the Ahmadis, and there is a functioning dialogue between the community and the city administration.

However, the Ahmadiyya mosque is far from being the only building that serves as a mosque in Gothenburg. According to calculations made by the University of Gothenburg and the city authorities, there are around fifteen to twenty basements and industrial sites used for religious practices in the city. This is a very provisional figure, and it is obvious that the religious landscape is under constant and rapid change. Locations used as mosques are often closed or relocated to serve the diverse Muslim community of Gothenburg.

Today, however, one of the most interesting mosques in the city is operated by the *Chalmers islamiska förening* (The Islamic Association of Chalmers,
henceforth CIF). This body was set up in 1998 in order to help students of a Muslim cultural background remain and uphold their religious practices at the university. Chalmers, which is one of the most prestigious technical universities in Sweden, accepts an extensive number of guest students from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, who are studying in order to obtain their BA or MA degrees. Besides being an esteemed university, it is also free for foreign students to come to Sweden to study, and there are no tuition fees at the university.

The fact that the university maintains an Islamic student body is positive, but it is not the main reason for students to come to Chalmers for their studies. The main function of the CIF is that it provides a location that can be used for Friday prayers (salat al‑juma). After some initial problems, the student organization managed to arrange with the board of the university to use the sports hall located on campus for their prayers. This is an example of how a public space – in this case a sports hall – can be used and reshaped as a space for religious sermons and prayers. Consequently, when the Muslims are gathering outside the hall and preparing for prayers (for example, by performing the wudu ritual), the non‑Muslims are finishing their activities and returning the equipment to its proper place in the room. As they leave the hall and the Muslims enter, the room is transformed into a mosque with the help of rugs that are unfolded to mark out the qibla and the walls of the mosque. This is a creative and illustrative example of what Barbara Daly Metcalf has called the making of Muslim space in the West.

During my visits to Chalmers, on a normal Friday approximately 150 praying Muslims gather together, making the mosque a natural meeting place for the Muslims. The congregation is diverse, but the great majority are students with a Pakistani or Bangladeshi background. The imam, i.e. the person who leads the prayer, uses an ordinary chair instead of a minbar, and there are no Islamic symbols (minarets, calligraphy, a mihrab or other Islamic artefacts) indicating that this is an Islamic space. The imam is generally a student at the university, and it is common for him to be a member of the board of the CIF. Because of the language diversity, the qutba is held in Arabic and English. During my visits to the mosque, the imam focused on how to remain Muslim in a non‑Muslim environment. To be a practising Muslim at Chalmers is difficult, and the university offers many tempting activities (such as drinking alcohol and dating the opposite sex) that Muslims should avoid according to Islam. When the Salat al‑Juma is over, the Muslims pick up the carpets and prayer rugs, and the room is again converted back into a non‑Muslim space (i.e. a regular sports hall). As the Muslims leave, the sports hall is filled with non‑Muslim students dressed in shorts and sneakers who are eager to return to their sports activities. Even though this is an unorthodox Muslim space, the members of the CIF whom I have had the opportunity to
meet during field studies in Ramadan 2008 seem to have few if any problems with the fact that ‘mosque’ is normally used as a sports hall. From this point of view, the mosque at Chalmers is an example of a modern mosque that can be used for many different purposes.

The debate over Islam in the public space in Sweden, which has been thoroughly documented and analysed by Pia Karlsson and Ingvar Svanberg, has recently focused on plans to create a new purpose-built mosque in Gothenburg. This project was started in the mid-1980s, but the road to obtain a permit to build a mosque has been long. The Swedish Muslim Foundation (Sveriges muslimska stifelse, henceforth SMS), which is responsible for the planning and operationalization of the construction, received a building permit in 1996. However, due to internal conflicts and splits, the Muslims of Gothenburg have had great difficulties in allocating the necessary funding to build the mosque. Because of the rise in international terrorism in the name of Islam, it has become also very difficult to receive economic support from the Muslim world. Like most countries in the West, the setting up of purpose-built mosque usually requires external funding. Since 11 September, 2001 and the terror attacks on New York and Washington, it has become even more difficult to transfer and receive money that is linked to Islamic or Muslim affairs, but in 2004 the SMS still managed to receive money for the building of a mosque in Gothenburg from the state of Saudi Arabia. However, in order to transfer the money, the Saudi Arabian state demanded that some Swedish government body (or something equivalent) formally agreed to the transfer of the money to the Muslim foundation in Gothenburg. This demand was difficult for the board of the SMS to solve, but after initial failures – for example, they contacted the former Social Democratic Prime Minister Göran Persson (in office between 1996 to 2006), but without success – the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland agreed on 24 April, 2007, to write the necessary letter explaining that they agreed to the SMS receiving the money.

Building was started in April 2010, and the mosque was located at Myntgatan on Hisingen just below Ramberget. The cost of the building – which was to be covered by the Saudi Arabian subvention – was estimated at US$ 8.6 million, and the mosque was designed by the Swedish architect Björn Sahlqvist. Initially the support from Saudi Arabia caused little debate, but over time it has become clear that this specific mosque has attracted a lot of negative attention, as I will describe in more detail in the subsequent sections.
Contested space

Already in 1995, Pia Karlsson and Ingvar Svanberg had demonstrated and documented that most mosque projects in Sweden have stimulated public opposition, strong reactions, Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism and in some extreme cases, violence. Although it is possible to find antagonists in all political, ideological and religious camps, some common traits can be identified in the debate.

The opposition can roughly be divided into two different categories. In the first we find those who attempt to make ‘objective complaints’ (i.e. that the building of a mosque will cause traffic chaos, make house prices slump, and so on). Those who hold to this mode of criticism argue that they are not against Muslims or Islam, per se, but simply that they do not want to have mosques or Muslims close to their own homes. The objectivity of such arguments is questionable, and it is clear that those who pursue them come close to the rhetoric used by populist parties and racists. If we leave out the explanation as to why people embrace this attitude, it is clear that Islam and Muslims are seen as something dangerous and foreign that will have a negative effect on local society.

The second category of argument – which I call ‘Islam and Muslims as the negative Other’ – is linked with individuals and groups who claim more openly that Islam and Muslims are un-Swedish and foreign and that they threaten core Swedish values. Multiculturalism and Islam are both seen as something dangerous that should be prohibited or even extinguished. Immigrants should not be given similar rights to ‘Swedes’, and they should be made to abandon their cultures and religions, or else be kicked out of the country or converted to Christianity. It is also common to refer to so-called historical fact when opposing the building of mosques (see table 3 overleaf). As compared to the first category, this kind of opposition is more openly and bluntly Islamophobic. Within this camp we find populist politicians, religious people of different denominations, and individuals who regret more generally the fact that Sweden has become a multi-religious and multicultural society over the years.

The categories that I have used as rough typologies to differentiate between different kinds of negative opinion against the building of mosques can be illustrated by a number of quotations collected and translated by Pia Karlsson.
**Table 3** Opposition against mosques in Sweden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of complaints</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>The context of the letter written in opposition to a mosque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Islam and Muslims as the negative Other”</td>
<td>“We who are born here and have lived here all our lives do want unconditionally to try and preserve what is genuine and original about our Söder. This is our home district that we love and want to protect.”</td>
<td>Letter written by prospective neighbour to the planned mosque at Södermalm (Söder, Stockholm). This mosque was opened in 2000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Objective complaints”</td>
<td>“Muslims from all over Stockholm and its surroundings will gather here to celebrate their feasts, and we are going to be overwhelmed by cars.”</td>
<td>Letter written by prospective neighbour to the planned mosque at Södermalm (Söder, Stockholm). This mosque was opened in 2000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Objective complaints”</td>
<td>“The Fittja creek is an oasis, with its water and green open spaces with all different kinds of seabirds where boats and different leisure-time activities prosper and where neighbours are able to relax. [. . .] The general public feel they have been pushed aside, and we in the boat club fear for our future existence.”</td>
<td>This quotation is taken from a letter connected to the plans to build a mosque in Fittja, a suburb south of Stockholm. This mosque was opened in 2007.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Objective complaints”</td>
<td>“The site is located just opposite a primary school. We all know that some buildings are easier targets for terrorist attacks than other. [. . .] There is a great risk of children being hurt in possible future bomb attacks against the mosque.”</td>
<td>Letter written against plans to build a mosque in Jordbro, Stockholm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Islam and Muslims as the negative Other”</td>
<td>“[The site chosen for a mosque in central Stockholm] has a history, which goes back to the 12th century. Torkel Knutsson was beheaded one day in February 1306 at the place of execution, which then existed here.”</td>
<td>Letter written by a local politician in Stockholm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Islam and Muslims as the negative Other”</td>
<td>“These people, who live entirely from us and do not want to work, but most of the time are on the sick list—turn them out of Sweden. They are nothing but a burden to us.”</td>
<td>Letter written in opposition to the plans to build a mosque in Gothenburg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Islam and Muslims as the negative Other”</td>
<td>“The Koran is dangerous because it encourages acts of violence.”</td>
<td>Letter written in opposition to the plans to build a mosque in Gothenburg.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These quotations illustrate clearly that it is very difficult to uphold the proposed typology, and the oppositional and critical remarks are generally easy to place in both categories.

Anti-Muslim attitudes, the Internet and a new mosque

Prior to the expanding use of the Internet, most anti-Muslim critics used flyers, stickers and posters to give voice to their anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim opinions, but today it is evident that most critics use the Internet. According to the NGO Expo, which among many things covers and reports on racism, neo-Nazism and fascist organisations in Sweden, there are 45 homepages or blogs that present Islam according to a stereotypical model that portrays all Muslims as anti-Western or that wishes to limit or exclude Muslims from all civic rights in Swedish society. The number of homepages, blogs and forums has risen sharply during the last two years, according to Expo, and anti-Muslim criticism can now be found in a number of different contexts. Besides those criticisms that come from populist parties (for example, SD, Nationaldemokraterna or Skånepartiet) or neo-Nazi organizations, the Internet has made it much easier for individuals to give voice to their personal beliefs and values. The anonymity of the Internet has also contributed to the emergence of a harsh and hostile climate of discussion, and there are few if any obstacles to publishing anti-Muslim, racist or xenophobic opinions on the Net. For example, 22 of the 45 sites that Expo linked to anti-Muslim attitudes were hosted and run by anonymous individuals. It is also easier to create networks, forums and discussion lists that can unite individuals and organizations that have one or two common issues that they want to discuss or criticise. Two examples are FOMI and WikiIslam, which collect together a large number of different sites that are more or less united in their criticisms of Islam and Muslims. The lists of links often include individuals and organizations with little else in common than their belief that Muslims can be seen as a homogeneous group and that Islam threatens freedom of expression, democracy and Swedish culture in general.

One of the latest contributions to the opposition against the building of mosques in Sweden is found on the Internet. Via the homepage Ramberget.com – which is registered by the local SD politician Mikael Jansson – it is possible to read and complain about the plans to build a mosque on Hisingen in Gothenburg. Through this homepage it is also possible to download and buy posters and stickers containing the slogan ‘No to a mosque at Ramberget’. This site is specifically focused on presenting Islam and Muslims as something foreign and dangerous to Swedish culture. In one of the articles (‘Hisingen, our island’) posted on the homepage it is stated that:
The spread of Islam is nothing but a threat to our way of thinking and our way of being. The worst thing is that politicians on the right and the left in Gothenburg are inviting the conquerors. The multi-billion sponsoring of the mosque by Saudi Arabia is nothing but cultural imperialism.

The perception that the building of a mosque on Hisingen will change Gothenburg’s skyline and cultural identity is nothing new. Already in 1995 Pia Karlsson and Ingvar Svanberg had documented several local groups (including populist politicians, private individuals and some local priests from the Church of Sweden) using local history to oppose the plans to set up a mosque. It was often argued that since Ramberget had been used as a so-called ättestupa, i.e. a high hill or a mountain that people who had become unable to care for themselves were pushed down and killed in Old Norse society, it was not appropriate to build a mosque below Ramberget. Although the historicity of this claim is debated, it is still used as an argument against building a mosque on Hisingen. It is clear that the opposition is working hard to present a mosque as something foreign, unnatural and as not fitting in with Swedish culture.

Opposition to the mosque increased in autumn 2008 when somebody placed pig's heads and parts of slaughtered pigs on the building site of the mosque. The police have not been able to link any offender to the crime, and it is unclear whether the violation should be seen as an expression of juvenile delinquency or as an Islamophobic crime. For the SMS, the desecration is clearly an expression of the growing anti-Muslim rhetoric associated with the building of the mosque and the support it has received from Saudi Arabia. It is, however, also important to stress that a number of local groups and individuals have expressed support for the building of a new mosque in Gothenburg. The group, called ‘Happy mosque neighbours’, has, for example, registered on the Internet community Facebook, and after the building site had been desecrated, one group set up a sign to demonstrate their support for the efforts being made by the SMS to build a mosque there. The local Church of Sweden has also been active in supporting the project, and the church of Brämaregården has, for example, put on a photographic exhibition showing basement mosques on Hisingen. It is also clear that the local bishop of the Church of Sweden (and especially the former bishop, Lars Ekerdahl) and the diocese in Gothenburg has shown a growing interest in religious dialogue and in its relationship with the Muslim community in the city.

A couple of days before the building of the mosque was started – the groundbreaking ceremony was held on Thursday, 15 April, 2010 – a group called Preserve the Keillers’ park (Bevara Keillers park) organised a demonstration against the building of the mosque. A group of 150 anti-mosque demonstrators protested on Sunday, 11 April and the police had to use both pepper spray and batons to
hinder the demonstrators from clashing with approximately 400 supporters that had gathered to hinder the anti-mosque demonstrations who were showing their support for the building of a mosque in Gothenburg. The anti-mosque group have primarily used the internet to urge citizens to protest against the mosque and to criticising the building company (AF Bygg Göteborg) who are responsible for the construction of the mosque. According to the information posted on the above-named webpage, the surrounding area is a so-called Swedish area and the park (the Keillers park) will lose its charm if a mosque is built in connection with the park and house prices will go down in the neighbourhood. Even though the demonstration was aggressive and the police had to use violence to keep anti-mosque and pro-mosque demonstrators apart, the ceremony that was held in connection with the groundbreaking ceremony was peaceful and representatives from the political parties and the local religious communities gave speeches to show their support and care for the local Muslim community.

Conclusions

The debate that followed the granting of permission to construct a second purpose-built mosque in Gothenburg can easily be related to the two different stories of Sweden that I discussed in the introduction. According to the opposition (especially the homepage Ramberget.com and http://www.keillerspark.se/), it is evident that building a mosque is perceived as a threat to Swedish culture. Islam is viewed as something un-Swedish, and Muslims should not be permitted
in Sweden. To build a mosque on Hisingen would corrupt the city of Gothenburg, and the Muslims should not be given the right to do so. Even though Swedish law grants freedom of religion, Muslims should not be allowed to practise their religion freely. If they do not accept assimilation, they should be kicked out of the country; in order to fit into Swedish society, they should be made to abandon their religion. According to those who embrace this worldview, Sweden and Swedish culture is a fixed entity that must be protected against all foreign influences that threaten its purity and honour.

But the discussion over building a second mosque in Gothenburg also shows that the other camp, i.e. those who believe that Muslims should have equal rights to build mosques and perform their religion, have a different view of Swedish history and of the composition of Swedish culture. Sweden has never been a fixed entity, and the understanding of Swedishness and Swedish culture is flexible and has evolved over time. The composition of the country and the debate over Swedish identity is closely related to the composition of the population, and the laws of Sweden should mirror this development. If Jews were given freedom in the eighteenth century and Christian Free Churches were allowed to break free from the Church of Sweden, why should not Muslims, Sikhs and followers of other non-Christian belief systems benefit from equal opportunities? Consequently, when a Muslim group is granted permission to build a mosque, there is no legal way of obstructing the process. Accordingly, the building of temples, synagogues and mosques is nothing but a continuation of the building of Free Churches, a legal development reflecting the increasing migration into Sweden from non-European regions dominated by other religions than Christianity.

References
Mosques as part of history, or something new?
The institutionalisation of Islam and Muslims in the Nordic and Baltic countries
Göran Larsson

This brief chapter will provide an overview of the institutionalisation of Islam and the building of mosques in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Like the other chapters in this volume, my focus is on conflicts and the building of mosques. The chapter covers the current situation in Norway, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; Sweden is excluded from the present chapter since I have dealt with this country in another part of this volume. My focus is not on the history of Islam and Muslims in the Nordic and Baltic countries, though the presentation will provide the reader with some basic information about the current situation in each country.¹

Background

It is no exaggeration to say that most Westerners associate the arrival of Islam and Muslims in Europe with the workforce migration that began in the late 1960s, and the migration cycles that followed from the 1970s onwards. This perception is partly correct, but it is also a selective and restricted understanding, which leaves out important details. Besides the well-known historical roots of Islam and Muslim cultures in the eastern and western parts of the Mediterranean region – i.e. on the Iberian Peninsula, in the Balkans and contemporary Turkey – Muslims

¹ The author would like to thank Tuomas Martikainen, Lene Kühle, Egdunas Racius and Christine M. Jacobsen, who have provided me with important information about the situations in their respective countries. A more detailed outline of the history of Islam and Muslims in northern Europe can be found in Larsson, G. (ed., 2009), Islam in the Nordic and Baltic Countries, London and New York, Routledge.
have had a visible impact on large parts of central Europe. Various Turkish and Tatar groups also made up important ethnic components of the Russian Empire and its neighbouring territories. Muslims originating from these parts of Europe are generally left out in introductions and encyclopaedia articles on the history of Islam and Muslims in the West.²

This lacuna can partly be explained by the generally weak interest that Arabists and Islamologists have demonstrated in the history of Islam in Eastern and Central Europe. If the study of Muslims in the West has suffered from the old preferential treatment for studying the Orient and the ‘real’ history of Islam, the Eastern parts of Europe have generally been left untouched. The founding fathers of Islam Wissenschaft and Oriental languages have generally focused on the study of manuscripts (the Koran, the hadith and the life of the Prophet Muhammad) and Muslim leaders and theologians of importance in the development of Islamic theology or Muslim empires. Consequently, the study of how ‘ordinary’ Muslims understand, interpret or practise Islam in local milieus has generally been neglected or downplayed.³

Secondly, the impact of Communism and the rise of the Soviet Union from the October Revolution of 1917 up till the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 have had a negative effect on the study of religions and minorities. Religion was downplayed in the name of secularism, and the State prosecuted most expressions of religion and religiosity. Religious institutions were closed, and belief systems were ‘only’ presented as cultural or ethnic markers. Yet although the religious were harassed and religious institutions were closed down, the religious history of Eastern Europe managed to survive under the rule of the Soviet Union. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rapid dismantling of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, churches, synagogues and mosques have been reopened, and interest in new religious movements and in Evangelical and Pentecostal forms of Christianity is thriving.⁴

Thirdly, besides local oppression under the Soviet Union, the bipolar world order and the Cold War had a negative impact on the study of religions in

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² A more thorough discussion about this problem is found in G. Larsson and E. Račius (2010) ‘A different approach to the history of Islam and Muslims in Europe: a North-Eastern angle, or the need to reconsider the research field’, Journal of Religion in Europe, No. 3.


Eastern Europe. Consequently, few Western scholars paid attention to Muslim minorities in the former countries of the Soviet Union. Religion was generally not a prioritized or important subject in the study of Russia and the Soviet Union. However, since 1989 and the rise of international terrorism, religion has become a hot topic in both academia and the public sphere, and its importance as an explanatory factor has increased. Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that the Baltic countries are still waiting to be researched by scholars who are interested in the history of Islam and Muslims, and more generally in the study of migration and minorities in Europe.

The Baltic states

Unlike most parts of Europe, Muslims had already arrived on the Baltic rim in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as soldiers and traders. From this time on, Tatars constituted an important part of the Russian and Polish-Lithuanian army and they were given specific privileges and rights to practise their religion. They were also allowed to build mosques and establish burial grounds for Muslims. Still, it is clear that Muslims are in a minority position in the three Baltic States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated number of Muslims</th>
<th>Total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Larsson 2009, p. 3.

Irrespective of its small numbers, the early presence of Tatar and Muslim minority communities on the Baltic rim demonstrates that Islam and Muslims are part and parcel of the history of Europe. Consequently it is incorrect to argue that Islam is a new religion in Europe, and it is therefore important to include the Baltic States in the study of Islam and Muslims in the West.

For example, with its three wooden mosques dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Lithuania has some of the oldest Islamic sites in Europe. Since the Soviet authorities demolished the central mosque in Vilnius in the 1960s, the land being appropriated by the State, currently there is no purpose-built mosque in Vilnius. The construction and planning of a new

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5 For a more detailed outline of the history of Islam and Muslims in the Baltic States, see Larsson 2009.
mosque has been delayed because of disagreements regarding its location. Representatives of the Muslim community argue that the site suggested by the State is too far from the city centre, but there have also been problems regarding how to fund the building. According to Egunas Racius of Vilnius University, Lithuania, there are no anti-mosque reports recorded in the country. The last example of conflict over a mosque dates back to the seventeenth century, when the Trakai Mosque was burned down by a mob. To the best of my knowledge, there are no estimates of how many basements, flats or houses are currently being used as Muslim prayer halls or mosques in Lithuania.

Currently there are no purpose-built mosques in either Estonia or Latvia. The Latvian Islamic Community has bought an apartment block in Riga at 104, Brivibas Street, to use as a mosque and prayer room. There are plans to build a mosque in Riga, but they have not yet materialised, and according to the Latvian Islamic Community there is no need for a larger mosque in the city at the moment.

The main mosque in Tallinn, Estonia, is located in a rented apartment that has been converted into a prayer hall, but there are also other places in the suburbs of Tallinn that are used for Friday prayers. All discussions and plans to build a mosque in Tallinn have been met with harsh criticism. For example, in an online opinion poll conducted by the Estonian daily Postimees in September 2008, almost 76 percent of 2,900 respondents were against the plans to build a mosque. The Radical party, the Estonian Christian Democrats, have also capitalized on the debate and voiced their own negative opinions against mosques, Islam, Muslims and immigrants.

Besides the old Tatar mosques in Lithuania, modern and purpose-built mosques are absent from the Baltic States. There is, however, no strong demand for larger mosques, and it seems that the Islamic communities of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are not currently calling for more or better mosques. The current Muslim populations in these countries seem to be content with the existing apartments, flats and houses that they use for their prayers and meetings.

The Nordic countries

From a comparative perspective the history of the Nordic countries is interrelated, the inhabitants of the region sharing similar histories, and holding similar political world-views and equivalent norms and values. Still, it is important not
to exaggerate the homogeneity between these countries, and important differences are observable in the historical and contemporary records. In particular here, despite similar values and world-views, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark have developed different and sometimes contrasting policies towards migrants and the so-called multicultural society. Before I provide a short history of Muslim migration to the Nordic countries, it is beneficial to have some basic statistics on each country. As for the rest of Europe, all estimates of the number of Muslims are associated with methodological problems.

Table 2 Number of Muslims in Nordic countries per country and by percentage of population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated number of Muslims</th>
<th>Total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>190,000</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>350,000–400,000</td>
<td>3.8–4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Larsson 2009, p. 3

From a Nordic point of view, the history of Finland is more closely related to the Russian Empire, the Baltic region and Sweden than to Denmark and Norway. Consequently the arrival of Muslim immigrants in Finland differs from that in the other Nordic countries. While people of Muslim cultural backgrounds entered Denmark and Norway as workforce migrants from the late 1960s and early 1970s or as asylum-seekers or refugee migrants, Muslim Tatars had already arrived to Finland during the period when the country was part of the Russian Empire (1809–1917). With the arrival in Finland of Russian immigrants who belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church, the Tatars were permitted to practise Islam, establish burial grounds and build mosques, and in 1919 (renewed in 1999), freedom of religion was guaranteed in the Finnish constitution. Most Tatars, especially from the district of Kazan, in Central Russia, came to Finland between 1910 and 1920, their immigration more or less ceasing after the 1930s.\(^9\) Owing to economic and political developments, Finland soon developed into a country of net emigration, and large numbers of people left the country after the Second World War to seek opportunities in other countries. Approximately half a million Finns emigrated to Sweden for work during this period. Hence, it was only with the second cycle of immigration, which started in the early 1980s, that people from Russia and the Baltic countries, as well as from Africa and the Middle East, started to arrive in

Finland in larger numbers. Between 1990 and 2000 the foreign population grew from 21,000 to 88,000, and today the immigrant population constitutes about two percent of the total population.\(^\text{10}\) As for Sweden, Denmark and Norway the situation was very different: migrants from regions dominated by Islam and Muslim cultures had already arrived in the 1970s, followed by an increase in the institutionalisation of Islam in the 1980s.

There are no comparative studies on mosques in the Nordic countries, and it is difficult to determine the number of mosques. While so-called purpose-built mosques are easier to count, it is more difficult to estimate the number of basements, flats and houses that are used as prayer rooms and mosques.

The Tatar community in Finland was organised in the first half of the 20th century, and today (2009) it runs five mosques and has one congregation in Helsinki and another in Tampere. The first non-Tatar mosque community was founded in 1986, and today there are between thirty and forty functioning mosques in Finland, but no purpose-built mosque (besides the Tatar mosques in Helsinki and Järvenpää).\(^\text{11}\) Plans to build a mosque in Turku at the end of the 1990s attracted public criticism, and some people worried that the site chosen for the building was inappropriate and that it would cause parking problems. It was also argued that the mosque did not fit into the local environment. Even though opposition to the building of a mosque resembles debate in other European countries, Tuomas Martikainen concludes that the reactions are just ‘a little above the average if one compares it with other public discussions’.\(^\text{12}\) However, in a radio programme on Meriradio (17 March 1998), where people could call up the studio, several callers made a connection between Islam, terrorism and the oppression of women. Many callers were also upset by the fact that the Lutheran Church of Finland had remained silent on this topic.\(^\text{13}\) Tuomas Martikainen comes to the following conclusion:

‘In general, I can state that the mosque project [i.e. the project in Turku] has received fairly wide publicity. This is not uncommon in Turku, as all big projects are discussed publicly and there are strong emotions connected to them. So the discussion in itself is just the way things happen, but the arguments and their bases are interesting. There seems to be an Islamophobic undercurrent among many people, where Islam as a religion or a way of life represents a threat towards the Finnish lifestyle. Stereotyped views of Islam come out in every discussion. Islam is seen as unequal, and the use of different


\(^{13}\) Martikainen 2000, p. 340.
clothes and a veil are a symbol of that. The discussion stops with these arguments. There is no interest in getting to their roots. Islam represents something other, something strange. The arguments are essentially the same as in similar cases around Europe.\textsuperscript{14}

The public debate over mosques in Sweden, Denmark and Norway follows and repeats more or less the same arguments that Martikainen found in Finland.

The growth of mosque congregations in Denmark has been studied by Lena Kühle in her book on mosques in Denmark. According to her estimates, the number of basement and purpose-built mosques in the country is close to 115 (for the year 2006), most of them being located in Copenhagen, Aarhus or Odense.\textsuperscript{15} The first purpose-built mosque in Denmark was set up by the Ahmadiyya community in 1966–1967. According to the great majority of Sunni and Shia Muslims, however, the Nusrat Djahan Mosque is not accepted as a ‘proper’ mosque.\textsuperscript{16} In order to gather support and collect money for the building of a proper Sunni mosque in Aarhus, a Sunni Muslim organization has started a homepage.\textsuperscript{17} This plan has been met with fear, resistance and strong opposition, especially on the Internet. On the homepage/discussion list ‘Aarhus against the mosque’, a forum that attracts conservatives, leftists, Social democrats and other autonomous groups, the plans to build a mosque are seen as a threat to local Danish culture. These voices want to preserve and work for an ‘Aarhus without minarets, which builds on Danish culture, Danish values and the respect for women’.\textsuperscript{18}

Besides the discussions in Aarhus, there are plans to build a grand mosque in Copenhagen that can serve 3,000 people, and an Islamic centre and mosque in Helsingør. Local politicians have criticised the project in Helsingør and argue that the building of a mosque will cause disturbance and severe problems for the non-Muslim population.\textsuperscript{19} Even though the public debate over Islam has been very harsh – especially since the publication of the Muhammad cartoons by Jyllands-Posten in September 2005 – the conflict seems to have opened

\textsuperscript{14} Martikainen 2000, p. 340.
\textsuperscript{15} Kühle, L. (2006), Moskeer i Danmark: islam og muslimske bedesteder, Højbjerg, Forlaget Univers.
\textsuperscript{16} According to the great majority of Sunni and Shia Muslims, the Ahmadiyya community is heretic because its followers have different opinions about prophethood in Islam and the crucifixion of Jesus. On the theological differences between Sunni/Shia Muslims and the followers of the Ahmadiyya movement (i.e. the Qadianis), see, for example, Larsson, G. (2009), Ahmadiyya, in Klauck, H.-J. et al. (eds.), The Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception, Berlin and New York, Walter de Gruyter, Vol. 1.
\textsuperscript{18} http://www.aarhus-mod-moskeen.dk/index.asp?id=317
up the debate about future mosques in Denmark. Resembling the Finnish case, many people in Denmark seem to fear that mosques may be used as recruitment centres for extremists and Muslims who support violence. This anxiety has also been nourished by the fact that the Danish police have arrested young Muslims who have been linked to, for example, the Taiba Mosque in Copenhagen and the radical Muslim organization *Hizb ut-Tahrir*; those detained were suspected of planning terror attacks.

According to Christine Jacobsen’s and Oddbjørn Leirvik’s estimates there are approximately forty basements, flats or houses being used as mosques or prayer rooms in Oslo, the capital of Norway. The three purpose-built mosques that existed in Norway in 2009 belonged to Norwegian-Pakistani organizations and were all located in Oslo. Local Muslim communities in cities such as Stavanger, Kristiansand and Drammen have prayer rooms and mosques that are located in flats and basements. In 2006, the total number of registered Muslim congregations was 120. I have no information about plans to build new mosques in Norway, and there is no information about conflicts that can be linked to mosques specifically. There has been a debate about whether the World Islamic Mission Mosque in Oslo should be allowed to give the call to prayer (i.e. the *adhan*), but this question has been resolved and the mosque is now allowed to make one call to prayer every week (i.e. for the *salaat al-juma*) if it does not break health regulations concerning urban noise (60 decibels).

**Conclusions**

From the existing literature on Islam and Muslims in the Nordic and Baltic countries, it is not possible to identify any specific ‘mosque conflicts’ that are different

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20 On the public discussion about Islam in Denmark, see, for example, Schmidt, G. (2007), *Muslim i Danmark – muslim i verden: en analyse af muslimske ungdomsføreninger og muslimsk identitet i årene op til Muhammad-krisen*, Uppsala, Swedish Science Press.


from the general pattern in Europe. There are no legal obstacles for Muslims in building mosques in the Nordic or Baltic countries, but Muslim communities generally suffer from internal conflicts and shortages of funding. Still it is clear that most plans to build mosques generate protests that can be linked to concerned local neighbours, populist parties with anti-Muslim opinions, conservative Christian groups that fear Islam, and neo-Nazis who view all immigrants as something threatening and dangerous to the social order. Similar protests are, of course, also found in the Baltic States, but the old Tatar wooden mosques in Finland and Lithuania are part and parcel of the history of the region, and it seems that it is demands to build new mosques that create problems. Otherwise it is clear that most mosques and Islamic organizations have been established on the basis of ethnic belonging, language and cultural backgrounds, nationality and religious profile. Like other European countries, the purpose-built mosques in the Nordic countries and Baltic States are more likely to encompass Muslims of more diverse backgrounds than the basement mosques, which tend to attract specific ethnic or linguistic groups.

A useful comparison
Europe vs. USA
Islam, mosques and Islamic centres in the United States of America
Davide Tacchini

(. . .) Islam has always been a part of America’s story. The first nation to recognize my country was Morocco. In signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, our second President John Adams wrote:

‘The United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquillity of Muslims’.

And since our founding, American Muslims have enriched the United States, they have fought in our wars, served in government, stood for civil rights, started businesses, taught at our universities, excelled in our sports arenas, won Nobel prizes, built our tallest building, and lit the Olympic torch. And when the first Muslim-American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Koran that one of our Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson, kept in his personal library.

(. . .) Much has been made of the fact that an African-American with the name Barack Hussein Obama could be elected President. But my personal story is not so unique. The dream of opportunity for all people has not come true for everyone in America, but its promise exists for all who come to our shores – that includes nearly seven million American Muslims in our country today who enjoy incomes and education that are higher than average.

Moreover, freedom in America is indivisible from the freedom to practice one’s religion. That is why there is a mosque in every state of our union, and over 1,200 mosques within our borders. That is why the US government has gone to court to protect the right of women and girls to wear the ḥijāb, and to punish those who would deny it.

So let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America.

(Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, Cairo, Egypt, 4 June, 2009).
The United States of America, a nation made up of immigrants

Population 306,700,027 (18 June, 2009, 4.40 p.m. CET) ¹

Foreign-born population and foreign-born as percentage in the total US population, 1850 to 2007

The term ‘foreign-born’ refers to people residing in the United States who were not US citizens at birth. The foreign-born population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, certain legal non-immigrants (e.g. persons on student or work visas), those admitted under refugee or asylum status, and persons illegally residing in the United States.

According to the US Census Bureau’s 2006 American Community Survey, there were 37,547,789 foreign-born in the United States, which represents 12.5% of the total US population. Mexican immigrants accounted for 30.7% of all foreign-born residing in the United States in 2006, by far the largest immigrant group in the Union. Among the remaining countries of origin, the Philippines accounted for 4.4% of all foreign-born, followed by China (excluding Taiwan) and India with 4.1% and 4.0% respectively.

¹ http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html
These four countries, together with Vietnam (3.0%), El Salvador (2.8%), Korea (2.7%), Cuba (2.5%), Canada (2.3%), and the United Kingdom (1.8%), made up 58.4% of all foreign-born residing in the United States in 2006.²

1. Muslims in the USA

Even though President Obama clearly spoke in terms of numbers (both of Muslims and mosques), since the US Census is prohibited from asking about religious affiliation, these are still hotly-debated issues with political overtones. There are currently several studies claiming between 1.5 and 6.0 million Muslims in the United States. To make up for this lack of solid numbers, different researchers have used different methodologies. A 2001 study entitled The Mosque in America: A National Portrait³, reported 6 million Muslims in the United States. According to Tom W. Smith of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago those numbers were inflated and in fact, Muslims in the country were 1.9 million. A significant amount of literature is available on this subject but, of course, not all the data are accurate or updated. Internet resources must be taken into account to approach a research in this field. And the Pluralism Project at Harvard University provides a wealth of updated information.

1.1 Estimates

It is actually difficult to have precise data on the Muslim presence in North America, especially in the USA. As we mentioned above, the U.S. Census is prohibited from asking about religious affiliation.⁴ It has traced people’s ethnic ancestry, though, and this may help to construct an idea of the total number of Muslims. The political implications of these issues, especially in the post 9/11


⁴ To give an idea of the complexity of the situation: if one assumes that the proportion of Muslim high school students represents their weight in the general population, then by 2000, Muslims numbered 2.8 million of America’s 281 million people. The College Board data, however, may represent an underestimation because more than 17% of the students did not indicate any religious preference. The sensitivity of the question may have led many minority students, Muslims included, not to disclose their faith. The College Board has, by the way, maintained data on the ethnic and religious profile of students.
world, still play a prominent role. Studies and researches can vary significantly in their results.

Another factor that may help to decide how many Muslims actually live in the USA is ... the government of Canada! It does track its population by religious affiliation, and the 1991 census counted 253,000 Muslims, reflecting an increase of 263% in just one decade. If this pattern of growth remained constant throughout the 1990s, Muslims could have reached more than 665,000 by 2002.

Furthermore, we should consider that the number of immigrants increased rapidly after 1965, when the Congress abandoned racial and national origin restrictions in immigration laws. The Immigration and Naturalization Service shows that from 1966 to 1980 emigration from Muslim world regions jumped to 865,472. From 1966 to 1980, the average of yearly arrivals increased to 57,698 and in the following ten years it rose again to 99,700, peaking at 131,586 in the past seven years.

Since the early 19th century, the natural growth rate of the American Muslim population has been much higher than that of the rest of the nation. On the basis of the College Board data, one can assume that Muslims from major American population groups represent roughly 18% of the total Muslim population. Their number, then, could be somewhere from 460,000 to 790,000, which raises the minimum Muslim total to a range of 2,560,000 to 4,390,000 or an average of 3.5 million, representing less than 2% of the United States population. 6

This wide range of different estimates is analysed by Tom W. Smith of the American Jewish Committee in his Estimating the Muslim Population in the United States. This study, that should be considered a counterpart to some ‘Muslim’ surveys, is interesting especially for its analysis of different researches.

1.1.1 The Latest Media Estimates
Since the 11 September terrorist attacks, the media has used estimates of the Muslim population in the United States of 5–8 million, with an average of 6.7 million or 2.4% of the total population. 7

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1.1.2 Range of Recent Estimates

Over the years 1996–2001 estimates of the Muslim representation in the total population have ranged between 3 and 9 million. Looking at 20 specific estimates, they spread out as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of estimates</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 4 million</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–4.9 million</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–5.9 million</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–6.9 million</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 million +</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average of estimates</td>
<td>5.65 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, at the end of this overview of a multitude of methodologies, researches, results, political convictions and ideologies, we can affirm that statistics may vary from 4,200,000 (Encyclopedia Britannica Online estimate for 2000), to 5,500,000 (2000 World Almanac estimate, based on 1999 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches), to 4,132,000 (2000 Britannica Book of the Year estimate for 2000 – this includes 1,650,000 Black Muslims) to 2,800,000 (2003 World Almanac) and 5–6 million (2004 World Almanac). In the view of the above, although most of these surveys were conducted in the aftermath of 9/11 or at the end of the 20th century and we do not have reliable post-2005 updated researches, we can consider an estimate of 5–6 million as the most acceptable.

The American Muslim community is deeply diverse. Nu’man’s 1992 work\(^8\) put African-Americans at 42%, South Asians at 24.4%, Africans at 6.2%, Iranians at 3.6% of the total Muslim population. Another survey, conducted by Ba-Yunus and Siddiqui in 1999\(^9\) shows that Americans are around 30%, Arabs at 33% and South Asians at 29%. Shi’a, Ismailis, Ahmadis and Druzes are also present in small groups all over the country. Even the three largest groups of American Muslims are very different from one another, all these communities having been shaped historically by race and/or class struggles.

Chronologically the first Muslims who arrived in the USA were African slaves and, although at least 10% of these slaves were Muslims\(^10\), there is no evidence that any family of slaves that had survived slavery had kept its Muslim faith. In the early 20th century, some African Americans developed their own


vision of Islam. In those years the *Nation of Islam* and other movements were born.\(^{11}\) African-American Islam remained deeply connected to the economic and social history of the Black. Therefore it is part of the development of so-called *Black Nationalism*: the search for roots and alternatives to White Christian America. Islam is seen as a defence against racism, as a new and separate collective identity in the USA. Furthermore, in this analysis we must take into account that prisons and departments of corrections have been a major recruiting ground for Islam.

The first Muslim immigrants who retained their religion in America were from Lebanon, and arrived in the late 19th century. Mainly uneducated single men, they settled in major urban areas such as Detroit, Chicago, New York City and Boston. As still happens in some European countries, probably they saw themselves at first as temporary immigrants.\(^{12}\) With some discrepancies according to different periods, we can say that between 1875 and 1938 Arab immigrants did what their compatriots would be doing in Europe several decades later. Young single men paved the way for their families (family reunions and the arrival of more relatives) and for the whole new Arab population of the United States. The *National Origin Quota Act* of 1924 and the *Immigration and Naturalization Act* of 1965 affected the flux of these immigrants heavily.

Interesting and scholarly works on local Muslim neighbourhoods and particular situations are available, too.\(^{13}\) Lebanese and Iraqi Shi’a, minorities in their homelands, are majorities in Dearborn. Immigrants from British India, mostly Punjabi peasants, arrived in the US in early 1900, and their immigration was halted by federal legislation during and after WWI. In 1946 the *Luce-Celler Act* was to extend citizenship to Indians through naturalization. Relatively homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic class, in 1990, Indians had the highest average family income, *pro capita* income and educational degrees among foreign-born groups.


2. Mosques, Islamic centres and Muslim places of worship in the USA

In statistics on mosques, masjids and other Muslim places of worship, we can find a wide variety of results.

A directory of religious centres (mosques, Islamic schools, but also associations and organizations) is available online at http://pluralism.org/directory/results.php?sort=state%2Ccity%2Ctitle&tradition=Islam and shows 1,655 results. Let us take a look at the situation state by state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>No. of mosques</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>One mosque or Islamic centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4,661,900</td>
<td>194,245.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
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<td>686,293.00</td>
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<td>Arizona</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6,500,180</td>
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<td>California</td>
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<td>Connecticut</td>
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<td>Delaware</td>
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<td>D. of Columbia</td>
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<td>Florida</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
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<td>9,685,744</td>
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<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,288,198</td>
<td>1,288,198.00</td>
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<td>Idaho</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,523,816</td>
<td>217,688.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
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<td>12,901,563</td>
<td>140,234.38</td>
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<td>Indiana</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6,376,792</td>
<td>303,656.76</td>
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<td>Iowa</td>
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<td>3,002,555</td>
<td>176,620.88</td>
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<td>Kansas</td>
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<td>Kentucky</td>
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<td>4,269,245</td>
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<td>Louisiana</td>
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<td>4,410,796</td>
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<td>Maine</td>
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<td>438,818.66</td>
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<td>Michigan</td>
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<td>Minnesota</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
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<td>Nevada</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,600,167</td>
<td>520,033.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,315,809</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8,682,661</td>
<td>100,961.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### MOSQUES IN EUROPE: WHY A SOLUTION HAS BECOME A PROBLEM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>No. of mosques</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>One mosque or Islamic centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,984,356</td>
<td>283,479.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>19,490,297</td>
<td>132,587.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9,222,414</td>
<td>236,472.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>641,481</td>
<td>320,740.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>11,485,910</td>
<td>201,507.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3,642,361</td>
<td>202,353.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
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<td>3,790,060</td>
<td>291,543.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>12,448,279</td>
<td>254,046.51</td>
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<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,050,788</td>
<td>131,348.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4,479,800</td>
<td>159,992.85</td>
</tr>
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<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>804,194</td>
<td>201,048.50</td>
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<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6,214,886</td>
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<td>Texas</td>
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<td>255,816.68</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,643</strong></td>
<td><strong>304,059,724</strong></td>
<td><strong>185,063.74</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This result may seem to show a discrepancy with the one of the 2000 National Portrait, but here we are considering every Muslim association present in the country. So not only mosques, but also Islamic schools, associations, organizations, information and cultural centers.*

More than the astonishing number of mosques concentrated in areas such as Chicago, Detroit or New York City, what seems to be more interesting to us are two other factors. The first is that in every single state there is at least one mosque, Islamic centre, Muslim place of worship\(^{14}\), or even a Muslim information centre (as in Hawaii). The second is the overall number of mosques in the country compared to the number of Muslims. Even considering the highest estimate of Muslim population (6 million), there is one Islamic entity or institution every 3,651 Muslims (the number drops to 1,625 according to the *National Portrait*, which registers 1,209 actual mosques, see below).\(^{15}\) Some Catholic parishes in Italy or Spain serve more people. Compared to the topic of personal religious affiliation, that of mosques and places of worship seems to be easier to deal with. Politics

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\(^{14}\) Smaller mosques or informal and unofficial *masjids* are very difficult to locate for any survey, so we can expect these numbers to be smaller than the real ones.

\(^{15}\) The precious database of the *Pluralism Project* at Harvard University provides the 'profile' of 124 Muslim centers across the country.
and ideology play their role though, and both data and methodology may vary significantly.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{2.1. The National Portrait}\textsuperscript{17}

Geographically and in time, the \textit{National Portrait} is the largest, most comprehensive survey of mosques ever to be conducted in the United States. It is part of a larger study of American congregations, named \textit{Faith Communities Today}, which was coordinated by Carl Dudley and David Roozen of Hartford Seminary’s \textit{Hartford Institute for Religious Research} in Hartford, Connecticut. Telephone interviews of a mosque representative (usually an imam, board member or president) consisted of over 160 questions on five basic areas of religious life: identity and worship, history, location and building, programmes, leadership and organizational dynamics, and participants.

The mosque is defined as an ‘organization that holds Jum’ा prayers and other Islamic activities’. Of the 1,209 mosques counted, 631 were randomly sampled for the survey. Interviews were successfully conducted with representatives from 416 of the 631 mosques. Only 2\% were founded prior to 1950 (the oldest dates back to 1925), and 13\% earlier than 1970, 30\% were established in the 1990s and 32\% in the 1980s. A good 69\% of 10-year-or-older mosques have moved at least once since their foundation, and 75\% are located in metropolitan areas. African American mosques are more concentrated in the cities, while others, such as Arab and South Asian, are more evenly distributed. 55\% of mosques are owned by the community (as far as their purchase is concerned, it might be interesting to study how the issue of \textit{Riba} is perceived by the different groups), but only 26\% of them are purpose-built. 15\% are rented and 4\% are provided by institutions such as universities and private firms. Most mosques are ethnically diverse, attended by South Asians, African Americans and Arabs together. Especially on Fridays, in the larger mosques, more than one Jum’ा (and \textit{Khuṭba}) is performed, so different groups may attend at different times. Only 7\% are attended by only one ethnic group.

\textsuperscript{16} See http://www.riseofislam.com/islam_in_america_03.html for a typical militant Muslim ‘research’.

\textsuperscript{17} See footnote 3. Despite its being organized in partnership with Muslim institutions and organizations, such as the \textit{Council on American-Islamic Relations} (CAIR), the \textit{Islamic Society of North America} (ISNA), the Ministry of Imam W. Deen Mohammed and the \textit{Islamic Circle of North America}, the research committee (Ihsan Bagby - Shaw University-, Lawrence Mamiya - Vassar College- and Mohamed Nimer - Director of Research, CAIR-) developed the research design, the questionnaire and guaranteed scholarly rigour. Dr. Bagby oversaw the collection of data. The \textit{Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate} (CARA) at Georgetown University did the data entry, and Paul Perl and Bryan Froehle of CARA provided the data analysis and a preliminary report of the findings (Bagby, Ihsan – Perl Paul M. – Froehle, Bryan T., \textit{The Mosque in America: A National Portrait}, p. 1).
These last data may be misleading. In fact, later in the survey, we will realize that 24% of the places of worship are attended by 90% by one ethnic group. Most of the times the dominant ethnicity is not surprisingly the African-American one.

In some particular large Muslim contexts, such as Chicago, where two thirds of the city’s mosques are Indian or Indo-Pakistani, socio-economic status is more important than ethnicity in exploring the location of residences and religious establishments\textsuperscript{18}. In the years 2002–2007 many Indian Muslim medical doctors bought a new house in a better neighbourhood, and new mosques have been built recently in areas where Lebanese or Palestinian businessmen had been living for decades.

Of the estimated 6 million Muslims living in the United States, more than 2 million are associated with the activity of a mosque. On average, there are over 1,625 Muslims\textsuperscript{19} associated in some way with the religious life of each of the 1,209 mosques located in 2000\textsuperscript{20}. Half of mosques have 500 or more Muslims associated with them. The average attendance at Friday prayer is 292 persons, median attendance is 135. The number of participants increased at more than 75% of mosques between 1994 and 2000, and it has kept on increasing even more strongly in the following years. Suburban mosques have experienced the greatest increases. It is therefore interesting to observe how 40% of mosque-goers travel more than 15 minutes to reach their mosque.\textsuperscript{21}

The comparison between the data of 2000 with that of the other, more limited survey conducted in 1994 shows that the percentage of smaller mosques remained the same but the number of larger mosques increased.

Over 90% of mosques have had at least one convert to Islam during the past 12 months, and on average nearly 30% of mosque participants are converts. On average every mosque has 16 conversions per year.

Other interesting data, which would need to be updated, are those according to which most mosque representatives report that their mosque ‘is spiritually alive and vital’ (79%) and their members ‘are excited about the future’ (80%). The survey was conducted before 9/11 and it would be very interesting to ask the same questions now.

Only about 15% of mosques are located in states of the mountain or western regions. The remaining mosques are spread relatively evenly among the east, the south, and the Midwest.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} See footnote 10.
\textsuperscript{21} Isaksen Leonard, Karen, Muslims in the Unites States, State of Research, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{22} See picture above.
97% of mosques use English as their main language, or one of the main languages, for the message of the *Jum'a Khutba*. The few mosques that do not use English most frequently use Arabic or Urdu. As far as leadership is concerned, 81% of the mosques have an imam; frequently (in about 50% of cases) he is the leader and spokesperson of the community, too. Both first-generation immigrants and second-generation citizens are involved in leadership. This trend is still developing, with more young, highly-educated American Muslims working as chaplains in universities, prisons, hospitals, and as mosque leaders.\(^{23}\)

Turning to gender issues, in 2000, 78% of people attending Friday prayers were men, 15% were women. In more than 60% of the mosques women pray behind a curtain or in a different room. With more and more purpose-built mosques, a dedicated space for women is provided, usually with a separate entrance. 69% of the mosques with a governing body allow women to serve on the board, but in 2000 women were actually serving on the board of only 72% of the mosques that permitted it. Different sources indicate different data, patterns and attitudes towards women's participation in mosques. Some practices, especially in immigrant and African-American environments, are cultural rather than religious.\(^{24}\) The issue of women's participation is still hotly debated within Muslim communities themselves, both because of the actual differences among different traditions and cultures and because of the high impact that this issue has on public opinion.

Once more intra-Muslim debates in the West are heavily affected by non-Muslim perception\(^{25}\). Although it is generally held that women may not be imams, several women are currently working as chaplains in prisons, hospitals and campuses all over the country. The associate director of the Islamic Chaplaincy Program at Hartford Seminary, in Hartford, Connecticut, the only accredited program of its kind in the US, is Mrs. Mu'mina Kowalski, and Canadian-born Dr. Ingrid Mattson served as president of the ISNA, Islamic Society of North America, until last September. Despite the discrepancies, debates, misperceptions, misunderstandings and political issues that come up frequently, Muslim women's participation in the public space in the US is not as difficult and controversial as in other Western – mainly European – countries.

\(^{23}\) See www.hartsem.edu. Hartford Seminary still offers the only accredited Islamic Chaplaincy program in the country.


\(^{25}\) On the issue of perception and the importance of the point of view of the opponent, see the works of Tāriq Ramdān, 'Abdullāh Abū Ṭáhir, Nāṣr Abū Zayd, Muḥammad Ābid al-Jābrī, Burḥan Ghalioun, Muḥammad Arkoun, Wā'il Fāruq and others.
3. The new frontier of Muslim architecture: mosques in metropolitan areas in the West

The urban mosque is undoubtedly one of the most prominent visual expressions of global Muslim religious identity in Europe and the USA. Furthermore, since metropolitan Islam in the West shows a sort of transnational identity, the mosque itself frequently represents a reflection of a displaced diaspora community. A range of cultural nuances, traditional styles, modern schemes or even hybrid features are involved in the planning and building of a contemporary urban mosque in a so-called non-Muslim country. According to an article published in an exhibit catalogue put together by Public Affairs Germany at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin and the U.S. Consulates in Frankfurt and Düsseldorf (accompanied by Dr. Omar Khalidi’s photo exhibit Mosques in America) there are over 2,000 mosques in the United States, mostly housed in buildings originally built for other purposes.

American mosques built in the last few decades, a period in which Islam has begun to feel at home in America, however, are almost universally architect-designed. Of nearly 1,000 mosques and Islamic centres surveyed in the mid-1990s, fewer than 100 had originally been built to be mosques and, of those, the older ones were not designed by architects. Many of these simple buildings were meant to be used as cultural or community centres, with such facilities as classrooms, a library, a conference centre, a bookshop, a kitchen and a social hall, residential apartments, and in some cases even a funeral home. They had a room for prayer, but they also served as clubs, with a hall for weddings and parties and a basement for bingo games.

Islam’s first mosque, built in Madina in 622, was a simple rectangular structure constructed of palm logs and adobe bricks. The United States’ first purpose-built mosque, completed in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1934, was a simple rectangular building of white clapboard on a cinder-block foundation, with a dome over the front door.

Mosques in the US began in houses and storefronts, and when they began to be built, their adherents initially wanted them to blend into the landscape. By the end of the 20th century, however, Muslims wanted their mosques

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28 See footnote 15.
to be statements of Islamic identity: for example through architecturally striking minarets and domes.30

The mosque is perceived by Muslims in the United States both as a private and a public place. It may be mainly private in the view of some African-Americans, for instance, who look at their domestic space as a place to enhance spirituality with other Muslims (and consider the outside as a world of intolerance and racism). The place of worship is, in these views, a physical representation of the concept of self-seclusion and a defence against the corruption of the external world. This feeling is common to many Muslims in the West.

After 9/11, non-Muslims are increasingly being invited into Muslim spaces in America. This helps 'non-believers' to know first-hand from the inside this otherwise often misrepresented tradition, and should help Muslims themselves against self-seclusion. This new trend, which was stimulated by 9/11 and the other tragic events in its aftermath, has given life to a need for consideration on the Muslim side, and a need for knowledge among non-Muslim citizens. A renewed atmosphere has affected the style and inspiration of new mosques, through which Muslims are becoming creative and enjoying controversy and debate.31

In the 21st century we may single out three main approaches to the building of a new Muslim place of worship and Islamic centre:

1 There are mosques that embody a traditional design transplanted entirely from one or more Islamic lands. Examples are the Islamic Cultural Center in Washington, D.C. (built in 1957)32, the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo, Ohio (1983), and the Islamic Center of West Virginia in South Charleston (1989). This seems to be a fairly practical approach to a more complex situation. In these cases architects appear also to have disregarded the flexible spirit of Islam (this approach has been used by Muslims and non-Muslims alike), but we should

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30 Isaksen Leonard, Karen, *Muslims in the Unites States, State of Research*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2003, p. 73. This book, which is a mainly bibliographical work, provides an immense wealth of information and has been very precious in our research.


32 Architecturally it is still one of the most significant buildings that Muslims have built in the United States (it is listed, and thus protected, as a historical American building). It was designed by Mario Rossi, an Italian architect practising in Cairo. It took its inspiration from the Mamluk architecture of the capital city of Egypt, together with Ottoman Turkish and Andalusian decorative motifs. The interior furnishings are also a multi-ethnic mix: the wall tiles were donated by Turkey, the chandeliers are from Egypt and the rugs were presented by the Shah of Iran. See: Abdul Rauf, Muhammad, *Al-Markaz al-Islāmihi-Washington* (The Islamic Center in Washington), Washington, DC, Colortone Press, 1978. The Albanian Islamic Center in Harper Woods, Michigan is another example of transplanted Islamic architecture. Although all Muslims are welcome there, its façade proclaims the identity of its original founders, the Albanian Muslim immigrants of Michigan.
understand that in this context, such buildings aim to bring back the past, the familiar.

2 Other mosques represent a reinterpretation of tradition, sometimes combined with elements of American architecture. Examples are the Islamic Cultural Center in New York City (built in 1991) and the Dar al-Islam in Abiquiu, New Mexico (founded in 1981).

These projects represent efforts to find an image that would please both Muslims and the larger, surrounding society. During the design stage of the project, the ICC board appointed two advisory committees, one composed of ‘prominent members’ of the Muslim community in New York, the other of architects, mostly non-Muslims. The debate between the two centred on the image of the mosque. The architects (some practitioners, some scholars) wanted a ‘mosque that belongs to the 21st century’. The Muslims wanted the designers to reproduce the style of a traditional mosque with literal versions of historic motifs. After a long and thoughtful debate the two committees agreed on a ‘modernist’ building and because of the mosque’s location in one of the world’s financial and cultural capitals, the architects conceived it as providing a ‘welcoming image, which includes rather than excludes the public’. Since its completion in 1991, the mosque has become a landmark in the area.

3 The third and more recent trend is characterized by designs that are entirely innovative, like those of the Islamic Society of North America’s headquarters in Plainfield, Indiana, built in 1979, the Islamic Center of Albuquerque, New Mexico, established in 1981, the Islamic Centers of Edmond, Oklahoma and Evansville, Indiana (both founded in 1992). These mosques were the first to inaugurate a new approach towards Muslim architecture in the United States, where a building should be expressive and understandable by all. It should employ a form of language that invokes in immigrant Muslims a sense of belonging to their present and hoping in their future. To indigenous Muslims it should represent a link with Muslims from other parts of the world and should underscore the universality and unity of Islam. To the new Muslim this architecture should invoke confidence in their new belief. For non-Muslims it should take the form of clearly identifiable buildings that are inviting and open, or at least not secretive, closed, or forbidding.

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33 It is interesting to know that David Rockefeller donated a large sum to finance the minaret of this mosque. See Khalidi, Omar, Designed Mosques in the United States and Canada, p. 28.
34 Ibid, p. 29.
With new purpose-built mosques, Islam wants to proclaim itself, Muslims want everybody to know that they are there, active in the society in which they live. The last two kinds of buildings we have analysed, in fact, show a sort of new style which symbolizes the struggle to marry tradition with modernity and to set down roots in the West.

This kind of statement (these mosques are actual *statements of identity* in themselves) may be dared only by second- and third-generation Muslims, who are confident enough to build stone and glass symbols of Islam’s growing strength in places like Europe or the USA. Sometimes these themes are used as tools for political purposes (the so-called ‘politics of fear’), but, once again, we can learn from history, and in this case it is the history of Islam we should keep an eye on.

This process of step-by-step affirmation of Islamic identity in non-Muslim lands had been passed through by early Muslims before they realized they were outside the Arabian peninsula, and countless other times in the history of Islam. Let us think of minarets, for instance, which are still a hot topic, both in Europe and the USA. They were not born with Islam—the first mosques did not have a minaret. We can find the earliest minarets in Bosra, Syria (about one hundred miles south of Damascus), between 665 and 705 AD. Omayyads were the first caliphs to build one, and it is not difficult to guess why. A minaret (as well as, we can say, any purpose-built mosque in Europe or the USA nowadays) is a clear, high, visible statement of the presence of Islam. You need confidence to stand up and openly declare your presence in the public space. This confidence could have been reached only after the Omayyads had created a solid political structure. Furthermore, the so-called Omayyad civilization must be considered the result of the meeting between Muslim conquerors coming from the Arabian peninsula and the Syriac world. We must not forget that the towers of Syriac churches in Damascus were used, from the 4th century AD, both as places of worship for the monks and as towers for the call to prayer. Step by step they had become visible signs of the presence of Christianity. Also in Europe, from the 12th century on, in every town, village or neighbourhood, churches started being built with the specific purpose of affirming in the heart of Europe the victory of Christianity.

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36 The heavy, complex and extremely topical issue of the relationship between Islam and modernity is not directly part of this research and there are plenty of recent resources on it. See Fārūq, Wā’līl, *Kayfa yumrūs al-muslimūna al-ḥadātha wa yarfdūnāhā fī nafs al-waqīf* (How Muslims practise modernity and refuse it at the same time), part of the lecture given at the international conference ‘Western Islam, New Muslims and the Challenge of Modernity’, held in Piacenza, Italy, on 21 April, 2007. Proceedings still in press.

37 See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDjmXSEurL0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDjmXSEurL0) and following, about American Neo-Con movement, radical Islam and international terrorism.

As for mosque there are two Arabic words (masjid and jāmi’, ‘place to prostrate oneself before God’ and ‘place to gather’, respectively); for minaret we can find ma’dhana and manāra. Ma’dhana means the place from which to perform the adhan, the call to prayer, and manāra was a sort of lighthouse.

In the USA, but also in Europe, we can see aluminium minarets, walls with vast windows and openings in the façade, the interior of prayer rooms visible from the outside, and so on. These are invitations to prayer for Muslims, but also invitations to get acquainted with non-Muslim fellow citizens. Despite its being outside the USA, and therefore not directly part of this research, the example of a mosque in Penzberg, Germany, is in this sense extremely significant. It actually symbolizes a situation that is shared by most Muslims in the West and especially by those who live in metropolitan areas in the USA. Its minaret is a calligraphic representation of the words of the adhan, punched out of steel plates:

'It does not call to prayer five times a day, but twenty-four hours a day, without disturbing the (non-Muslim) neighbours'.

This is undoubtedly a major switch from traditional approaches to mosque building.

Unsurprisingly immigrant Muslim communities are pushing for the biggest changes, and the Western mosque is fast becoming the site of contestation between the kind of Muslims who espouse the traditional mosque and those who want to win proportionate space for women, for example. All this is giving life to a new trend in Muslim architecture. It may look like something revolutionary, but it is nothing but a physical representation of the change (should we call it reform?) that is taking place in Islam after it is becoming a Western religion. Islam is facing challenges, difficulties and problems never experienced before, and mosques are definitely part of the game.

Mosques, through history, have been shaped by the land in which they were built. We cannot hide the human side when approaching these topics. Religious architecture, as well as any other issue which involves personal feelings, does not belong to a sacred text only. It is also the result of a historical and social process (text and context). Therefore, if in some European countries we are still debating if building mosques and minarets should be allowed or not (Italy, Switzerland), in the USA the strongest challenges are different. The contribution of Muslims to the various social strata of American life, their efforts not to
be considered as something alien or foreign any longer, but as an endogenous factor, are issues which every one of us (Muslim and non-Muslim) is called to work on.

So that Islam may actually become an active part of America.

**Acknowledgements**

My warmest thanks to Professor Stefano Allievi for inviting me to take part in this fascinating project, to Professor Paolo Branca of the Catholic University of Milan for his dedication, help and support, and to Professor Diego Zancani, Praefectus of Balliol College, University of Oxford.

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Jane Idleman Smith (Harvard University) and Professor Scott Thumma of the HIRR at Hartford Seminary for their invaluable bibliographical information and for sending me drafts of unpublished works.

Special thanks must also go to my Ph.D. and international students at Hartford Seminary, in particular to Nick Mumejian, B. Minlib Dallh, Paola Ghisoni and Radko Popov for their constant support and for agreeing to read early drafts.

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A typical mosque in a residential neighborhood in Chicago, IL, still being built in 2008. This Muslim institute includes a primary and a secondary school and an Islamic Cultural Center.

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