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„Building Bridges between a Universal Islam and a
Secular France:

Enacting a Space of Citizenship Using the Example of the Private Muslim
Bilingual School 'Eva de Vitray' in Mantes-la-Jolie, France“

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“[P]araphrasing the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, all humans are born with the potential to live thousands of different lives, yet we end up having lived only one. One of the central tasks of anthropology consists of giving accounts of some of the other lives we could have led.”

(Eriksen 2004: 11)

Before diving into the thesis, I want to emphasise how deeply grateful I am for the opportunity, the possibilities, the heartfelt welcome, the support, and the trust that was given to me by every involved person during this research project.

As anthropological research is about humans and their relations to one another and the phenomena that emerge from those, this research wouldn't have been possible without them. I send a deep thank you to every person at the school Eva de Vitray I encountered during my field research. Without you, this research would not have been possible.

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1. Introduction

“Outre la transmission des connaissances, la Nation fixe comme mission première à l'école de faire partager aux élèves les valeurs de la République. Le service public de l'éducation fait acquérir à tous les élèves le respect de l'égale dignité des êtres humains, de la liberté de conscience et de la laïcité.”¹ (Légifrance, 2019a).

In France, the school is officially responsible for forming French citizens. It is a key aspect of education in schools. But what exactly does this entail? The French government wrote a 1535-page legal document about the main tasks of the school, called “Code of education” (in French: “Code de l'éducation”). It states that the main mission of the school is to convey the values of the French Republic to the pupils. These values are: respect of the equal dignity of human beings and respect of freedom of conscience and laïcité.

If the last part sounds familiar, that's because it is. Most of us know it from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (United Nations, 1948). It is interesting to note that the French government chose to replace religion with laïcité. Laïcité is the term used in France for its particular secularism². It seems to be a small gesture but brings us to a widely discussed topic regarding laïcité and religion in France and how they relate to each other.

Because of France's history, there is a clear legal divide between the state and religion that makes itself felt in schools as well. Any religious activities or showing of religious affiliation are forbidden on public school premises (law of 15th March of 2004; Légifrance, 2004)³. Religion isn't taught in a class on its own in the public sector, but only through or in combination with other disciplines such as history or philosophy. The government argues that this ensures the liberty of conscience (Éduscol 1, 2021). Instead, there are also lessons called “teaching in ethics and civics” (in French: l'Enseignement Moral et Civique (EMC)). Since 2017/2018 every child also gets a booklet of citizenship during their obligatory school years

¹ Translation into English: “In addition to imparting knowledge, the nation sets as a primary mission for schools to convey the values of the Republic to pupils. The public education service shall ensure that all pupils learn to respect the equal dignity of human beings, freedom of conscience and laïcité.” (Légifrance, 2019a).

² In this thesis I will only use the French term laïcité or laïc. Secularism or secular would not encompass the contextual particularity of laïcité.

³ Original version: “Dans les écoles, les collèges et les lycées publics, le port de signes ou tenues par lesquels les élèves manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit.” (Légifrance, 2004).

(MENJS, 2020b). There is even a “day of laïcité at schools” every year on the 9th of decembre celebrating the laïc law of the 9th of decembre 1905 (MENJS, 2021).

Now, what caught my interest is how confessional schools in France deal with this issue. They have the duty to form citizens that are laïc and at the same time they transmit religious values, values that are considered to remain in the private sphere. How do they incorporate the religious factor in their main mission to form laïc French citizens? How do they combine those two elements, being religious and French, that are held so separate?

With these questions in mind, I looked for a private⁴ confessional school in France. I got the opportunity to do my field research in one of the first Muslim schools in Metropolitan France, the school “Eva de Vitray”. The school was founded in 2012 by local activists. It is located in the banlieues of Paris, in a town called Mantes-la-Jolie. The school itself is in the district of Val Fourré, a district known for its turbulent and dangerous history. A principal goal of the school is to participate in the formation of French citizens and in dissolving identity tensions. As stated on the landing page of the website: It is a non-profit project of common interest, a demonstration of an active exercise of citizenship (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). Back in 2016, I was told that the school wanted to sign the contract with the state, which meant it had to follow even more regulations to get financial support from the state - regulations defined by the state with regard to its notion of education (Interview Alouad Allouch 28.06.16: 23-27; Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 5). Therefore, it corresponded perfectly with my research interest as it made even more transparent what has to be considered in order to create a well-functioning base for a religious and laïc space. Since 2017, it is officially the first Muslim private school under contract with the state (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.).

Citizenship is often viewed as something that is nation-bound and -defined. Over the last decades, it has become more and more difficult to work with the concept of citizenship based on a historically constructed relation between nationality and citizenship. More and more sites and forms of citizenship have emerged and different communities (other than nations) are making claims (Caglar 2015: 637). Citizenship is now understood as something that is imagined and enacted in quotidian practices in specific contexts (Clarke et al. 2014: 36, 166).

⁴ The terms private and public school are not to be confused with the British understanding of public and private schools. In France, public schools are state schools. Private schools are fee-paying schools.

This is why the concept of space is so important as it already has a process-oriented, agency-based approach: “(...) contemporary ethnography of space and place is process-oriented; person, object and community-based; and allows for multiple forms of agency and political possibilities.” (Low 2017: 6).

Anthropological, qualitative research methods are therefore ideally suited to study citizenship as they can uncover processes and make it visible: Through participant observation I can observe daily practices and the enactment of citizenship. Through interviews I can filter how citizenship is imagined and link the local to a wider and global network of relations.

So, in my research, I analyse the space of citizenship using the example of the school “Eva de Vitray” and how the actors that are involved in the project access, enact, negotiate, create, and maintain it. Consequently, my main research question is: How does the first private Muslim primary school in Metropolitan France ensure its continuity as a space of citizenship?

To answer this question emphases are being made resulting in three sub-questions that are answered separately in the three main chapters of the thesis. The first question revolves around mapping the space: What role does the legal and socio-political context play for the process of enactment and the further existence of this school in France? Contextualization is necessary to get an idea of the space in which the research takes place. By doing so, we acknowledge that a place is always embedded in a particular set of relations, networks, and narratives. It is about opportunities that can emerge in this particular socio-political and legal setting. Intending to incorporate a scalar perspective, the chapter gives insight into the town where the school is located, Mantes-la-Jolie, the school itself, the national, and transnational scale. This concept of scales allows us to include the global and transnational aspect and reveal power dynamics and hierarchies (Caglar 2013: 26f.). The chapter “Mapping the Space” will concentrate on these aspects.

The second sub-question focuses on the why: Why create a space of citizenship? What is their vision behind opening a school? What are they aiming for? And what narratives surround the purpose of the space? And why are we talking of a space of citizenship in this case? Opening the school was not a coincidence or a quick decision that the founders made. The chapter “Purpose of the Space” gives insight into these questions. This part will strongly focus on data collected in interviews. Additionally, the chapter illuminates why citizenship is a key factor and

what kind of citizenship the founders want to promote. It delineates theories on citizenship and how the vision is embedded in this theoretical frame.

After mapping the space and elucidating its purpose, the third and last question is about the enactment of the space: In what way is what is being said and envisioned put into action? To what extent does the empirical evidence reflect the theory? The chapter revolves around the question how they accessed a space of action in order to bring this vision to life. So, what are the strategies, what are the possibilities that would allow actions to get closer to the vision? What allows them to access a space of action to realise their vision in the best way possible? In that sense, relations, networks, and resources are examined. This will illuminate the complexity and the intertwinedness of spaces and scales. Based on my fieldwork, interviews, field notes, and participant observation, the actual enactment of the space - outside and inside the school - will be demonstrated. It shows if the vision is being adopted and put to life and also what tools and methods are being used to create and maintain their space of action and citizenship.

Before jumping right in, the very first chapter will be about the research process. It sheds light on the research process and what it encompasses. It elaborates why I chose the research methods used in the field but also gives insight into the evaluation method and analysis of the data. The operationalization of the concepts is also addressed briefly. It examines how to make something as abstract as the concept of citizenship explorable. Finally, the last part of this chapter focuses on my ethical concerns and my position as an anthropologist.

2. Research Process

2.1. Access to the field

In the autumn of 2015, I got the opportunity to do Erasmus+ in Paris for a year. I benefited from this by conducting my field research there as well. Beforehand, I outlined my research proposal that had secularism in France as its main research objective. Having a particular history on the separation of religion and state, France has a very strong narrative when it comes to secularism or, as it is called in France, “laïcité”. Being French means to be laïc (EducationFrance, 2016). I wanted to take a closer look at that concept in a religious framing.

My supervisor at the university “EHESS” (“École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales”) gave me the contact of a Ph.D. student, Lola Petit, who was studying *laïcité* in private schools at the time. She and I met in a little French café. She listened to my research proposal and suggested that I contact Youssef Aallam from the private bilingual Muslim school “Eva de Vitray”. The school is situated in the banlieues of Paris. She explained to me that this was the first primary private Muslim school in Metropolitan France. She had already been there and had interviewed some founders of this school and her experience was very positive. The founders of the private Muslim school had given much thought to the identity issue of young Muslims in France in founding the school. This corresponded perfectly to my research interest.

Lola Petit is, anthropologically and methodologically speaking, my gatekeeper. She gave me personal access to the research field and, as the founders already knew her, this facilitated the communication and first interactions.

Aallam became my key person at the school. He was the first founder of the school I met. He arranged a lot of meetings with the other founders and teachers for me and was always a helping hand for everything I needed. He often facilitated my research and included me in different situations. More on his position and the role of the other founders is elaborated in the next main chapter “Mapping the Space”.

2.2. Research methods

Before going into the field, I premeditated what kind of methods would provide useful data for answering my research question. Even though it was clear from the beginning that *laïcité* was going to be the main point of focus, my research question has changed during my fieldwork. In the field, talking to the actors, reading more about the topic, I began to notice that some questions that I was asking, or hypotheses I brought into the field, weren’t accurate. Very early on, *laïcité* was clearly linked to citizenship as was their understanding of being able to practise their religion. So the theoretical framing of citizenship came to the fore. Understanding this concept as something fluid, dynamic, and contextual, the phrasing “space of citizenship” was brought to my attention by my supervisor Prof. Caglar. From secularism and Islam, the research now had shifted to citizenship and how the founders enabled their own understanding of it in their particular school.

The occurrence of these kinds of shifts in the research question is also alluded to in the Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology: “Fieldwork encompasses much more than the time you spend in the field. You must prepare by reading and talk, and by cultivating knowledge of your own ignorance and an attitude of intense and pure curiosity, rather like the feeling you have just before you utter a question to which you deeply want to know the answer. Then, in the field, you must be able to tap this sense and turn it upon anything you meet. (...) Whatever preparations you made, you will still have to make it up as you go along.” (Barnard & Spencer 2008: 231).

Consequently, my research methods stayed mainly the same, but changed in their content or focus and are what one may call typical empirical and qualitative methods for an anthropological study: participant observation, field notes, and interviews. I also attended many training sessions for the teachers, lessons (also the optional spiritual ones where the Qur’an and Islam were taught), formations, some events, and also school applications and interviews of parents for potential new pupils.

2.2.1. Participant observation and field notes

“Participant observation fieldwork is the foundation of cultural anthropology.” (Bernard 2006: 342). Participant observation means that the researcher observes the field, daily practices of the actors in the research field.

This method was especially relevant for getting an understanding of the space I was dabbling into. I acquired a feeling for the matter and also allowed me to map the space and to get a sense of the legal and socio-political framing. All my observations and informal discussions were put down in my field notes. They made it possible for me to grasp how the theory of the school is enacted and how much of what is said in the interviews is put into action. The school was built on a specific vision. Participant observation, the informal discussions and my observations allowed me to get insight into a space that isn’t necessarily communicated through a verbal exchange. This will become especially relevant in the chapters “Purpose of the Space” and “Enacting the Space”.

Early on, I was allowed and welcomed to participate in classes (especially those where laïcité or citizenship were addressed), to talk to and interview the founders and the teachers, and to get

a general impression of the teaching. I was also invited to their Friday training sessions for teachers that were held for teachers to discuss several topics that concerned different views and perceptions of the Qur'an and Islam. I additionally participated at the school closing ceremony in June and a few more personal settings like teachers' reunions.

I could also observe in classes how they spoke about religion and laïcité, how they reacted to comments and questions of the pupils. And as there are special classes on ethics and civic behaviour in France, it was very interesting to attend those as well - not only from a content-related but also an interactional point of view.

Next to being part of some lessons, I talked to the teachers and founders in the breaks and ate lunch with them. As a woman, I could talk to female teachers more freely. One of the first days in the school, for example, the female teachers met in a classroom and put down their headscarves. The majority of them wore one (Field notes 18.04.2016).

In total, I observed (all written down in my field notes):

- 6 ethics classes (in French: "Culture, civilisation et éthique") of the teacher Ahmed⁵ in the first grade of secondary school.
- 8 lessons of history-geography, Arabic, and ethics and civic instruction (in French: "l'Enseignement Moral et Civique" (EMC)) in different grades of primary school.
- 5 Spiritual Awakening classes⁶
- 10 training sessions for teachers concerning Islam with Ahmed
- 1 conference in the mosque on the topic of religion and science
- 1 interview session with potential new pupils and their parents
- 1 school performance for the end of the school year
- 1 demonstration in Mantes-la-Jolie where teachers and founders were present
- 1 formation on "Resilience - how to make it useful and practicable in an educational context?" (in French: "La résilience - comment la rendre utile et praticable dans un contexte pédagogique?")
- 1 workshop on "The teacher's well-being" (in French: "Le bien-être de l'enseignante")

⁵ Name was changed upon request.

⁶ These are optional lessons in which the Qu'ran and Islam is taught (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 130). It is important to the founders that they are not called religious classes but Spiritual Awakening lessons (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 41).

- 1 board meeting on the new school curricula
- 1 spontaneous session with the teachers with music and dancing

2.2.2. Qualitative interviews

Besides the participant observation, I conducted qualitative interviews. In my nearly five months' stay at the school, I conducted 29 interviews with the teachers and founders of the school. However, not every founder or teacher agreed to be interviewed. As Islam and laïcité are sensitive topics, suspicion and distrust about how I would use the information were sometimes noticeable. When asked why they didn't want to be interviewed, they often answered that they didn't feel that important to be interviewed. Some said it would make themselves too visible (Field notes 24.05.16).

The interviews were semi-structured. I always prepared an interview guide - starting with presenting myself and my research and then asking the interviewees to talk about themselves, what role they have in the school, what laïcité is for them, and so on.

I chose this kind of interview because I was able to compare the answers more easily as if I had chosen non-structured interviews. However, I didn't want to structure the interview too much, to allow more open answers. Consequently and intentionally, aspects of the research came up that I hadn't thought about. The actors became more visible. It allowed an emic perspective, a construction of the reality from the actor's point of view, and a subjective interpretation (Schlehe 2003: 73). The interviews were therefore adapted during the research. This is another advantage of this form of an interview as it allows flexibility. It is also a recommended form of an interview when it is not possible to interview the same person several times, which was the case in my study (Schlehe 2003: 78f.; Bernard 2006: 212).

Also, I differentiated between two aspects: one being the founders and the other being the teachers. The founders were the experts and the ones that framed the field. They could tell me about the history, the vision behind the school, their ideology. They were the main actors when it came to how they accessed, negotiated, and created the space of citizenship and the network that revolved around the school to make it happen.

The teachers, however, are the ones that are in contact with the pupil on a more daily basis. They are to a great extent responsible for making the vision of the founders a reality. I found

those two different levels and perspectives very interesting and important to elucidate. It showed me how much of the ideology and the vision behind the school was really transmitted and incorporated by the teachers on a theoretical level in the interviews, on an empirical level in my participant observations.

2.3. Operationalization of the concepts

Laïcité, citizenship, and space are concepts that are not easy to grasp as they are not visible in the classical sense. This chapter deals with this question and shows the operationalization of those theoretical notions in my specific fieldwork. In her book about methods and techniques of fieldwork (*“Methoden und Techniken der Feldforschung”* 2003) Beer mentions that i.e. “identity” and “ethnicity” are common concepts that are difficult to operationalize (Beer 2003: 18). So are “citizenship” and “space”. For the operationalization of the concepts, indicators are necessary. These indicators make the concepts accessible and relatable (Atteslander 2000: 50, cited in Halbmayer 2010).

I will focus on the theoretical concept of citizenship and not so much of “space” because “space” is a concept added to “citizenship” to underline that citizenship is dynamic, fluid, and imagined as Clarke et al. point out in their perspective on citizenship and in their anthropological approach to “citizenship”. They view citizenship as a concept that is literally “taking place” (Clarke et al. 2014: 131). By “taking place” they mean two things: First, citizenship is performed differently depending on the context. Second, the way how citizenship is taking place in a specific context also questions the way how citizenship is theorised in Europe. They open spaces and decentre conventional models of citizenship: “Rather, they open the spaces of possibility for thinking citizenship differently by decentring the established dominant modes of citizenship and modes of thinking about them.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 163).

Caglar emphasises this anthropological approach to citizenship. She states that anthropology has a “practice-based and processual understanding of citizenship”. There is a strong emphasis on “shifting meanings, everyday practices, and the varying and unpredictable sites of citizenship (...)” (Caglar 2015: 637). That makes ethnographic research so central for citizenship studies (Caglar 2015: 637).

The more context is given, the better to understand the space of citizenship that allows transformation and disruption. “In other words, citizenship *theories* should also be ‘contextualised’. They are produced in specific contexts, and aim at ‘crystallising’, however temporarily, specific configurations (...). Indeed, in the intense circulation and transformation of meanings around and about citizenship that seem to us best grasped if read as embedded in political projects, such theorisations might also require some ‘thick contextualisation’.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 36).

Therefore, citizenship is something that can and should be observed and researched in everyday practices and in specific sites. “In short, citizenship ‘takes place’ in sites, settings and locations: it is imagined, practised and enacted in quotidian practices, as well as spectacular mobilisations.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 166).

While Clarke et al. speak of contextualization, Comaroff & Comaroff use the term “processes”. For them the job of a social scientist “is to construe the processes by which realities are realised, objects objectified, classes of persons and things classified, and so forth. All of which returns us to the dialectics of deduction and induction - to the co-production of fact and sociological imagining - implicated in ‘doing ethnography.’” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2003: 159).

Anthropological, qualitative research methods are therefore ideally suited to study citizenship as they can uncover processes and make them visible: Through participant observation, I can observe daily practices and the enactment of citizenship. Through interviews, I can filter out how citizenship is imagined and link the local to a wider network of relations.

Following Clarke et al.’s arguments, it becomes more than that. It is about connections: “The re-imaginings and remakings of citizenship inscribe connections - between people, places and institutions - making new social and political landscapes and new ways of living in them.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 164). And it is about its fluid quality. Citizenship is reworked in daily practices and discourses (Caglar 2015: 640). Actors and their agency take centre stage. The assertion that citizenship is a dynamic, intersubjective and contentious process is both a rationale for, and an artefact of, an ethnographic approach that foregrounds the analyses of contemporary people as social agents.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 54).

This is why the concept of space is so important as it already has a process-oriented, agency-based approach: “(...) contemporary ethnography of space and place is process-oriented; person,

object and community-based; and allows for multiple forms of agency and political possibilities.” (Low 2017: 6).

2.4. Data evaluation method

To evaluate the interviews, I chose the qualitative content analysis of Mayring. In a nutshell, the content analysis analyses communication systematically, following specific rules. The method is theory-driven and its goal is to make aspects of communication traceable so that conclusions can be followed back and be verifiable and comprehensible (Mayring 2010: 13). It is also a good and often used method for analysing single case studies, which corresponds to my research (Mayring 2010: 23).

Mayring distinguishes between two central approaches when using the content analysis: the deductive (structured) category application and the inductive (summarising) category development (Mayring 2000: 3). He also emphasises the importance of contextualising the material: How did the material come about? Who attended the interview, meeting, etc.? What was the overall situation? Where does the analysed material come from? How was the data collected (recording, protocolling, observation, research diary, ...)? And how was it processed (influences in the transcription, ...)? (Flick 2017: 409).

My purpose is to step by step categorise the data based on my research question, to interpret the results and consequently answer the research question(s). The categories are evaluated and adjusted, if need be, during the analysis process. Consequently, the inductive content analysis is the appropriate method to apply to my material (Mayring 2010: 65ff.; Flick 2017: 409).

The following chart illustrates the steps of the inductive content analysis.

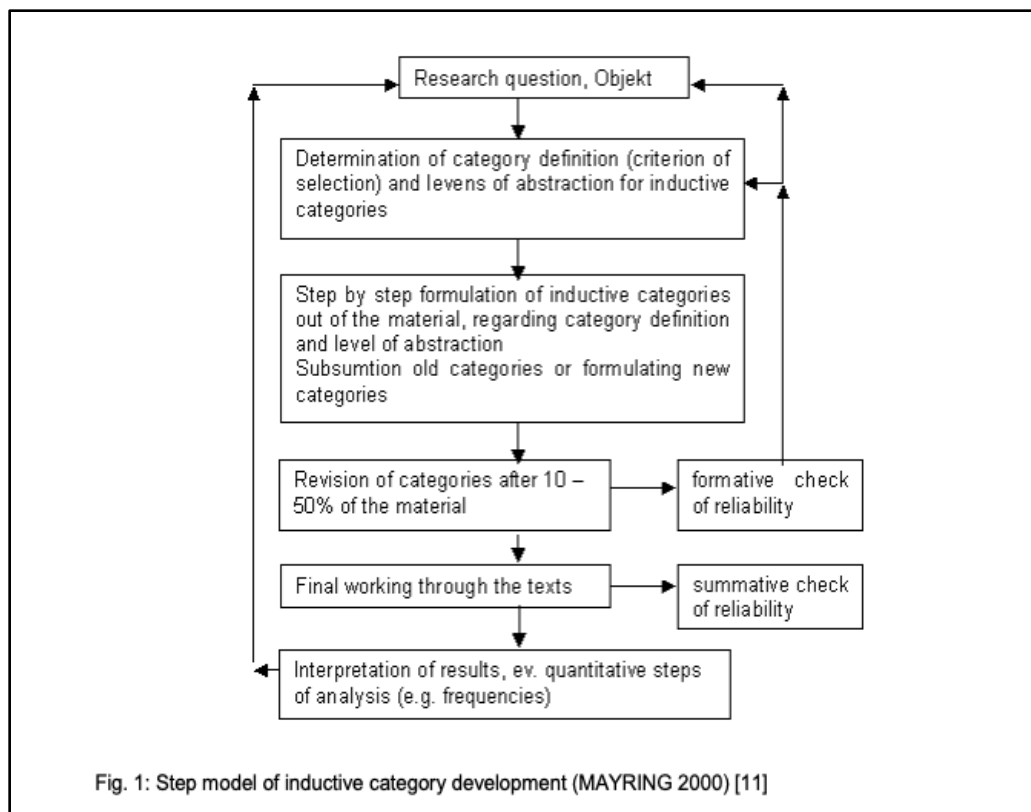


Figure 1: The steps of inductive content analysis (Mayring 2000, cited in Mayring 2000: 4)

2.5. Ethics and position within the research setting

Doing ethnographic research, talking, and writing to and about people entails considerable responsibility during and after fieldwork. As an anthropologist, I faced common challenges in my field research. My research question touches upon several topics that are delicate insofar as they are widely discussed, raise vast public attention, and are controversial. It is important how I position myself and how I go about information and data I hear, see, collect, analyse and bring into the world.

Here are some situations where I was confronted with my role as a researcher in the field.

Answering their questions that arose out of an understandable curiosity without influencing their answers when talking to me informally or during an interview was a recurring situation. If somebody knew, for example, of my critical stance regarding the notion of citizenship and how *laïcité* is defined, this person would most likely speak differently or not as freely to me about their notion of *laïcité* or being a citizen/citizenship.

Depending on the circumstances and the person the level of trust changed. How will I write about laïcité and the school? How will I use the data in the end? Is their career at stake? These are understandable questions that I answered to the best of my knowledge and ability. It was a constant balancing act between building a foundation of trust and not being too transparent to prevent attempts to meet expectations that would change the authenticity of their answers.

My age, my gender, my nationality, my view on religion, and many other factors played a major role in how I was perceived. Being a woman, I was able to be part of some discussions and gatherings that were only “meant for” women (Field notes 18.04.16). Once, I talked to a teacher and she came up to me and said that she had been wondering for quite some time, why it felt so easy for her to talk to me about sensitive issues. She attributed this to my not being French. She wasn’t proud to admit that she was well aware that it was excluding and discriminating (Interview Imène 13.05.16: 230). It shows how my nationality had a positive impact on her trust towards me. Additionally, my overall interest in and knowledge of Islam, the Qur’an, and the Arabic language was extremely well received.

I was also confronted with questions about Islam in Europe, the essence of democratic (European) values and the fear of it being threatened by Muslim values, integration, migrant workers after World War II, national education, French citizenship, the advantages or disadvantages of public and private schools, discrimination, religion, and secularism. Often, teachers or founders would ask about my opinion or position on these different topics. Those questions were very much discussed and reflected upon in the school “Eva de Vitray”.

Additionally, the focus of my research changed following my observations and fieldwork. This was made as transparent as possible. I started by researching laïcité and how the school enacted it and this issue gradually changed to become one of citizenship and what the founders thought the school needs to be visible and accepted as a Muslim school in France. Overall, most of the founders and teachers understood that this kind of development of the research question is a normal process of research (i.e. Field notes 28.06.16). Before submitting the thesis I also provided them with an update of the topic.

3. Mapping the Space

This chapter illuminates the legal and socio-political context of the research. Contextualization is necessary to get an idea of the space in which the research takes place. As Low argues: Humans create spaces that result in places (Massey 2005, Munn 1996, Pred 1984, Rockefeller 2009, cited in Low 2017: 8). By doing so, we acknowledge that a place is always embedded in a particular set of relations, networks, and narratives. Accordingly, a place is a specific articulation of relations in a particular moment in time (Massey 2001: 5). It is fluid and historically anchored (Low 2017: 4, 6).

The ethnography of space and place allows us “to address the complexity of contemporary social relations and cultural settings” (Low 2017: 2). Hence, it is important to look at how a place came to be and how it has been constructed (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 39). Mapping the space contributes to understanding the context in which the school of this research was created.

Massey defines space and place as constructed out of social relations and interrelations (Massey 2001: 2). Her definition of space is as follows: “‘Space’ is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global. What makes a particular view of these social relations specifically spatial is their simultaneity.” (Massey 2001: 265). Therefore, interactions of social relations, the interrelations between phenomena, politics, and the “cultural” differences within a locality are taken into account (Massey 2001: 265, 269). This not only means that space is constructed out of social relations but also that social relations are produced through the spatial organisation of society (Massey 2001: 3f.).

Intending to incorporate a scalar perspective, this chapter gives insight into the school itself, the town where the school is located, Mantes-la-Jolie, the national, and transnational scale. It is about opportunities that can emerge in this particular socio-political and legal setting. More precisely it revolves around the following question: What role does the legal and socio-political context play in the process of enactment and the further existence of this school in France?

3.1. School “Eva de Vitray”

The school “Eva de Vitray” is situated in the western suburbs of Paris (department of the Yvelines), in a city called Mantes-la-Jolie.

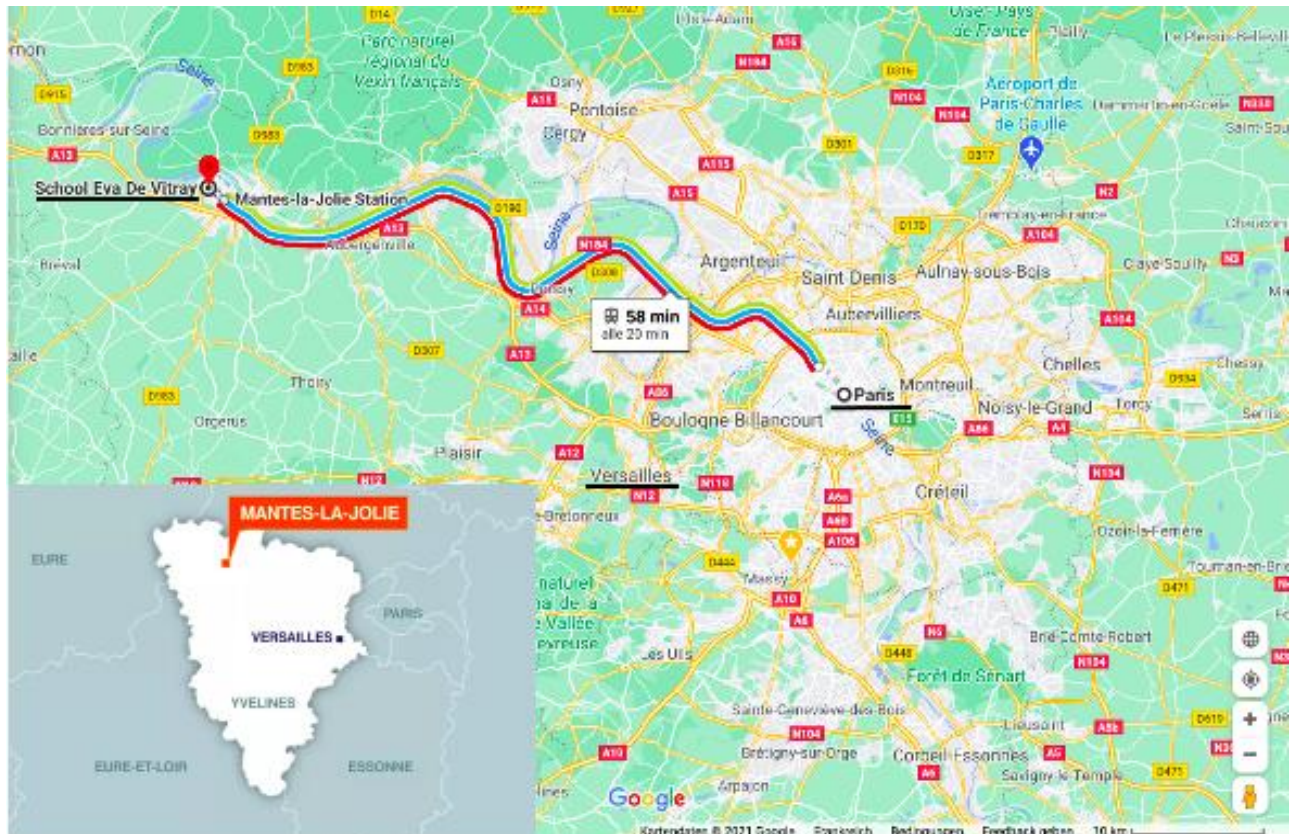


Figure 2: Route from Paris to the school “Eva de Vitray” in Mantes-la-Jolie (Google Maps 1, 2021) and a map of the department of the Yvelines (France 3 Paris & AFP, 2020)

On the 15th of February I met with Aallam for the first time. He was very welcoming and open to show me around the school and answer some questions (Field notes, 15.02.16).

The school consists of several buildings and a big courtyard for the children to play in during the school breaks. A French flag flutters at the main entrance of the school (which is nothing unusual in France as this has been a legal requirement since 2013 for public and private schools that are under contract with the state) (Légifrance, 2013). The sign above the door says “Eva de Vitray – école bilingue musulmane” (in English: “Eva de Vitray - bilingual Muslim school”) and shows an illustration of an open book.



Figure 3: Main entrance of the school “Eva de Vitray” (Loitsch, 02.07.16)

The founders are eight men that already knew each other beforehand and are associative actors of Mantes-la-Jolie (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.): Youssef Aallam, Hassan Aboulharjan, Alouad Allouch, A. Bamou⁷, Medhi Berka, Ali Elabdi, Abdelaziz El Jaouhari and Moussa Guerrouache (in alphabetical order).

Even though Abdelaziz El Jaouhari is not listed as a founder in the following picture, he was mentioned as a founder on several occasions in interviews or at events (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 161-180; Field notes, 19.03.16).



Figure 4: Painting from children in the office of the headmaster Aoulad Allouch thanking the founders of the school (Loitsch, 02.07.16)

⁷ The first name was not disclosed.

They grew up together in Mantes-la-Jolie, except for Alouad Allouch, who came to France much later (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 131). Most of their parents actually also knew each other, some of them were neighbours (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 133). Therefore, the founders are the second generation of immigrants from Morocco and one is from Algeria. Originally, some of the parents are even from the same Berber region. They were recruited in the post-colonial period in order to work in automobile industries in France (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 190, 233-225). As Aallam recalls, his father had even been tied to France before that. In need of soldiers, France recruited men in the old colonies. He became a skirmisher fighting under the French flag in the Second World War and also in the Indochina War (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 198-201). Therefore, the ties and the feeling of belonging to France run deep (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 207-209).

Bamou initiated the project in 2010 with five of them (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 259, 263; Interview Bamou 13.05.16). “Nous étions cinq au départ, donc là maintenant nous sommes huit. (...) Donc voilà, du coup on s’est retrouvé, on a beaucoup discuté pendant plus d’un an. On s’est vu trois heures à cinq heures par semaine pour discuter, voir quel est l’intérêt d’une école privée (...).”⁸ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 13). More founders means repartition of responsibilities (Bamou 13.05.16). They started talking about opening this school, which took them two years of preparation. The main question in those two years revolved around the place of a Muslim school in the French society. Additionally, they began working on a political, economic, etc. level. (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 74).

At the beginning, they started with the first grade and each year a new class was opened. It now covers the primary and secondary school classes with a total of 220 pupils (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). In 2016, they had 150 pupils and 34 staff (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 93, 94). As a private school they depend mainly on donations and school fees. Currently, they also have what they call “le cercle des amis de l’école Eva de Vitray”, a circle of friends that consists of people that are willing to invest in the school. The goal of the founders is to conclude a contract with the state so that some financial aid is secured.

The following illustration of the founders shows what role they play in the school and what professions and formations they have. If some information is not listed (i.e. role in school of

⁸ Translation into English: “There were five of us at the start, so now there are eight. (...) So that’s it, so we got together, we talked a lot for over a year. We met for three to five hours a week to discuss, to see what the interest of a private school is (...).” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 13).

Berka) it was not mentioned in the interviews or it didn't become apparent through my field research or observations.

AALLAM	ABOULHARJAN
• role in school: - overall responsibility of the educational area • profession: - instructor in public school "La Vaucouleurs" of adolescents with learning difficulties in Mantes-la-Jolie - civil servant - president of the association "IFDEV" (Institut de Formation et de Développement)	• role in school: - treasurer • profession: - entrepreneur in tourism
(Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 5, 9; Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 89; Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 135, 143; IFDEV, n.y.)	(Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 157-161)
ALOUAD ALLOUCH	BAMOU
• role in school & profession: - headmaster - responsible for the relations with pupils and parents - Arabic teacher - member of the educational area: coordination between Arabic lessons, Spiritual Awakening lessons and the general education; responsible for Arabic lessons - participated in construction of school - was in the educational area before Eva de Vitray for about 15 years	• role in school: - initiator • profession: - technical constructor, local regulation - artisan
(Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 145-147; Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 6-8)	(Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 149; Interview Bamou 13.05.16)

BERKA	ELABDI
● profession: - rector of the grand mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie - scientific formation in physics	● role in school: - laws - administration - politics ● profession: - deputy mayor for finances and the municipal council of Mantes-la-Jolie until 2017 - elected as urban community authority - entrepreneur, head of the store "Bureau Vallée" - formation in business

(Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 28-38)

(Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 60, 64, 69, 71, 79;
Interview Bamou 13.05.16; Abou, 2017)

EL JAOUHARI	GUERROUACHE
● role in school: - political area ● profession: - representative of the mosque of Mantes-la-ville - initiator and assistant secretary of CIMY (Council of the Muslim institutions of the Yvelines) - Initiator of CEIMY (Centre for Studies and Muslim Initiatives in the Yvelines) - representative of Muslims in the Yvelines - President of AMMS (Association of Muslims in Southern Mantes) - gives lectures at universities - media interviews and representation - IT formation	● role in school: - member of the educational area: ensures smooth operation of the daily teaching, choses the manuals, controls the notebooks, looks over the professional obligations of the teachers, helps with pedagogic methods - public relations ● profession: - headmaster of the public elementary school "Jean Jacques Rousseau" in Mantes-la-Jolie

(Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 161-180; Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 57-58; Field notes, 19.03.16; M.G., 2016; M.G. 2018; Gherdane, 2019; CEIMY, n.y.)

(Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 153-155; Interview Bamou 13.05.16; Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 11, 13, 18)

The graph shows the different areas in which the founders are active. As Aallam points out: “Ben, on a le responsable de la grande mosquée de Mantes-la-Jolie, on a un élu de la mairie, on a des enseignants, on a des chefs d’entreprises - en fait, des gens qui sont très respectés dans le quartier (...). Militants dans l’âme. Donc, qui ont fait beaucoup de choses pour la ville, pour certains.”⁹ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 13). Elabdi and El Jaouhari in particular are very committed politically. El Jaouhari also often appears on media platforms and is considered as the representative of Muslims of the Yvelines (which is relevant for the process of contracting with the state) (Interviews Aallam 01.07.16: 161; Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 57-62). Guerrouache who does public relations is however less visible for outsiders than Aallam (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 49). Aallam was definitely also the one who was most in contact with me and who took care of a lot of the communication between the founders and myself (i.e. how long I was going to stay, supporting me to get interviews and answering questions for others if needed).

The members of the educational area are a group of people that ensure the realisation of the national education curriculum and the teaching of the common core of competences, knowledge and culture. They also pay attention to a good balance between the teaching of Arabic language, Spiritual Awakening and general education (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 6, 58). All the founders work for the school unsalaried (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 62; Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 61).

Back to the school itself: Why the name “Eva de Vitray”? And what is bilingual and Muslim about the school? The bilingual aspect is easily answered as the school teaches Arabic and French. Arabic is not a usual language to be taught in French public schools and is not part of the curriculum of the French national education. That is definitely a particularity of the school.

As for the Muslim part, they consider themselves as one of the first confessional Muslim schools in France (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). The school offers “Spiritual Awakening” classes where religious matters are discussed. These classes are optional and are held in the morning before the other classes start. In public schools, there are no classes specifically held for religious content purposes. Religious matters are taught in other contexts as for example in the

⁹ Translation into English: “Well, we have the head of the big mosque in Mantes-la-Jolie, we have an elected official from the town hall, we have teachers, we have entrepreneurs - actually, people who are very respected in the neighbourhood (...). Militants at heart. So, who have done a lot for the city, for others.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 13).

class of history and geography (Eva de Vitray 2, n.y.; Éduscol 2, 2021). Their religious stance will be further discussed in the next chapter “Purpose of the Space”.

Choosing “Eva de Vitray” as the name of the school already shows a religious positioning. Born in 1909 in Paris Eva de Vitray-Méryrovitch was a French woman who converted to Islam when she was 50 years old. She was an expert on Islam, writer, thinker, translator and researcher (Eva de Vitray 3, n.y.). Aallam also mentioned in the interview that it was important for the founders that she was French and a woman. It symbolically represents the possibility of being Muslim and French (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 108). On the website of the school they dedicated a page to her and cite her view on Islam that the founders call an illuminated one:

“J’ai essayé de faire connaître ce que je crois être le vrai visage de l’islam. Les principes de l’islam font appel à l’amour, à la tendresse et à l’universalisme. Être musulman ou être musulmane, c’est s’en remettre dans la paix à un Absolu, tout en récusant l’indépendance de ce qui est relatif par rapport à cet Absolu.”¹⁰ (Pierre Assouline 1992, cited in Eva de Vitray 3, n.y.).

A principal goal of the school is to participate in the formation of French citizens and in dissolving identity tensions. As stated on the landing page of the website: It is a non-profit project of common interest, an illustration of an active exercise of citizenship (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). This is especially relevant in regards to this thesis as the founders themselves address the issue of citizenship.

3.2. Mantes-la-Jolie

Mantes-la-Jolie currently has about 44.000 inhabitants (INSEE 2022). It is divided into four districts: the city centre “Centre-Ville”, “Gassicourt”, “Val Fourré” and “Les Hautes-Garennes” (on the map below from right to left; “Les Hautes-Garennes” on the left in green, next to yellow “Val Fourré”) (EPAMSA n.y.: 6). The school is in the district of Val Fourré.

¹⁰ Translation into English: “I have tried to convey what I believe to be the true face of Islam. The principles of Islam call for love, tenderness and universalism. To be a Muslim man or woman is to rely in peace on an Absolute, while rejecting the independence of what is relative to that Absolute.” (Pierre Assouline 1992, cited in Eva de Vitray 3, n.y.).



Figure 5: Map of the districts of Mantes-la-Jolie (EPAMSA n.y.: 6) and a map of Mantes-la- Jolie (Google Maps 2, 2021)

It has existed since the Middle Ages and lies along the Seine river (SADY, n.y.). It was frequented by many royals as a holiday resort. This is also how Mantes-la-Jolie got its name. In the 16th century, King Henry IV of England wrote to his mistress, Duchess Gabrielle d'Estrées, a letter saying: “Je suis à Mantes, ma jolie...” (in English: “I am in Mantes, my love...”) and by doing so, determined the name of the city as it is known today (Hôtel de Ville 1b, n.y.).

3.2.1. Historical background

In the last century and decades, Mantes-la-Jolie has seen significant industrial development and economic growth (Hôtel de Ville 1b, n.y.). Youssef Aallam, a co-founder of the school, explained to me the particular history of Mantes-la-Jolie: After the Second World War, in the 1960s, foreign workforce was needed. Many workers came from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, much later also from other African countries. This is how the parents of the founders of the school came to Mantes-la-Jolie. They worked for example for the automobile industry “Renault” or “Talbot” (now known as “Peugeot”) (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 133, 137, 141). “Il y avait 10.000 salariés, 10.000 ouvriers. C’était énorme. Et donc, tout le Val Fourré s’est construit comme ça. Donc, on a eu besoin de cette main d’œuvre étrangère qu’on a

fait venir d'Afrique, souvent d'Afrique. Et ben, ce sont nos parents.”¹¹ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 137). Another co-founder, Moussa Guerrouache, added that people were recruited specifically to become workers in the automobile industries in Mureaux and Mantes-la-Jolie, which at the time was only a little town: “On a regroupé à Mantes-la-Jolie, au Val Fourré ou aux Mureaux, ben les personnes nécessitant de dortoir pour alimenter des Renault, Peugeot (sur Flins et sur Poissy (...)). On est allé chercher dans la ville même, dans les villages mêmes, des personnes (...). Donc, c’est un village Mantes-la-Jolie là. (...) Donc, il y a eu des recruteurs, hein. (...) Il y a eu des recruteurs, des Français qui sont venus dans les pays, dans les petits villages et qui ont pris ces personnes-là.”¹² (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 87).

Responding to the lack of housing in the 1950s and 1960s, the French government started the project “ZUP - Zone à urbaniser en priorité”¹³ (in English: “Priority Urban Development Zone”) and huge housing complexes were built. Val Fourré became the biggest ZUP in France with 8.230 new homes. However, in the 1980s profound changes occurred in the automobile industry causing 32.000 dismissals. The dense urbanisation combined with the economic crises and the rise of unemployment led to several social upheavals (Hôtel de Ville 1a, 2021; Hôtel de Ville 1b, n.y.; MTE, n.y.). The conflicts with the police and young inhabitants led to three deaths in 1991 (two young people of the city and a policeman) (Bernard, 1999).

Guerrouache came to talk about the conflicts saying that religion was and is often used as an apparent cause of tensions. In his view, however, the industries deliberately put antagonistic groups to work together in the belief that thus they would work more effectively. Additionally, the economic difficulties resulting from the dismissals created tensions (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 85, 87, 99).

¹¹ Translation into English: “They were 10.000 employees, 10.000 workers. It was huge. And so, the whole of Val Fourré was built like this. So, foreign workers were needed and they were brought [to France] from Africa, often from Africa. Well, those were our parents.”

¹² “In Mantes-la-Jolie, Val Fourré or Les Mureaux, all the people who needed a dormitory were grouped together to supply Renault, Peugeot (in Flins and Poissy (...)). They went looking for people in the town itself, in the villages themselves (...). So, Mantes-la-Jolie is a village at that point. (...) So there were recruiters, right. (...) There were recruiters, French people who came to the countries, to the small villages and recruited these people.” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 87).

¹³ ZUP is an abbreviation for “Zones à urbaniser en priorité” (in English: “Priority Urban Development Zone”). The idea of the project was based on the big housing shortage France was faced with in the 1950s and 1960s. The plan was to modernise and equip certain urban areas with big housing complexes. 197 ZUPs were created in the period from 1959 to 1969. As conflicts arose between inhabitants, this kind of urban planning was considered a failure and new strategies have been employed since (Commemorations Collection 2008, cited in Fourcaut, n.y.).



Figure 6: A before and after picture of Val Fourré in the 1960s (Brassens 2008: 56f.)



Figure 7: Val Fourré, © P.A. (Auffret, 2020)

Since the 1990s, the state has tried to improve the safety in Mantes-la-Jolie. Towers were destroyed, but also politicians invested in other projects that, among other things, encompassed reconstructions and the separation of public and private spaces (Hôtel de Ville 1a, 2021).¹⁴

Nonetheless, the city has been listed as a “ZSP - Zone de sécurité prioritaires” (in English: “Zone of Priority Safety Measures”) by the French government in 2012. The government wanted to tackle continuing insecurity and deep-rooted crime by establishing these zones: “La création des zones de sécurité prioritaires a pour objectif d'apporter des réponses durables et concrètes aux territoires souffrant d'une insécurité quotidienne et d'une délinquance enracinée

¹⁴ More on Val Fourré, its reputation and how it is perceived today can be watched in this short coverage: https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/francois-hollande/video-mantes-la-jolie-la-rehabilitation-du-quartier-du-val-fourre_817065.html

(...).¹⁵ (Préfet des Yvelines, 2013). Three so-called “waves” shall contribute to the stabilisation of those areas. Mantes-la-Jolie was listed in the first wave (Gouvernement, 2013).

Several projects are still ongoing. One of them is “OIN - Opération d’Intérêt National Seine-Aval” aiming to create an area of strategic development carried out by the public development management “EPAMSA”¹⁶ located in Mantes-la-Jolie (EPAMSA n.y.: 7; Yvelines - Le Département, 2013). In 2015, Val Fourré has also been labelled an Éco-Quartier¹⁷ (ecological district) by the former “Ministère du Logement, de l’Égalité des territoires et de la Ruralité” (in English: “Ministry of Housing, Territorial Equality and Rurality”) (Schwob, 2015).

Most importantly, the crime rate has declined. However, Mantes-la-Jolie still has a very high unemployment rate. The official unemployment figures in Mantes-la-Jolie of 2017 were published by the national institution of statistics (INSEE) in 2018: Only 68.3% were employed, 14.3% were officially unemployed and 31.7% were inactive¹⁸ (Insee, RP2008, RP2013 et RP2018, exploitations principales, géographie au 01/01/2021, cited in INSEE, 2022). To get a general idea of the proportions: In 2016, the total unemployment rate in France amounted to 10.1% (INSEE 2018: 13).

Mantes-la-Jolie, especially Val Fourré, still has to struggle with its poor reputation from that period of time (Field notes, 25.05.16). When I decided to visit the city days before my first official meeting with the founders at the school to get a first impression, my friends in Paris were surprised that I wanted to go alone. They considered it dangerous - especially for a woman (Field notes, 01.02.16).

¹⁵ Translation into English: “The creation of the zone of priority safety measures aims to bring concrete and sustainable answers to areas that suffer from continuing insecurity and deep-rooted crime.”

¹⁶ More on EPAMSA here: <https://www.epamsa.fr/>

¹⁷ More on the Écoquartier Val Fourré can be read here: <http://www.ecoquartiers.logement.gouv.fr/operation/1782/> and details concerning the label can be found here: https://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2019-08/dossier_presse_lancement_label_eq_2012.pdf.

¹⁸ Definition of inactive: <https://www.insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c2018>.
Definition of unemployed: <https://www.insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c1518>.

3.2.2. Local dynamics and global connections

In the 1980s, the parents of the founders also decided to build one of the biggest mosques in France “La Grande Mosquée de Mantes-la-Jolie” (in English: “The Grand Mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie”). Ali Berka, father of a co-founder of the school, Medhi Berka, who is also the representative of the mosque today, had founded the association “Union Islamique des Yvelines” (in English: “Islamic Union of the Yvelines”). Together, the parents initiated the construction of the mosque (Flory 2009: 191, cited in Hôtel de Ville 2, n.y.). Aallam recalls that it was the first mosque after the mosque of Paris: “Nos parents avec leurs moyens ont construit la première mosquée en dehors de la mosquée de Paris. La première grande mosquée, c’est la mosquée de Mantes-la-Jolie, au début des années 80. Et effectivement, ce sont nos parents qui l’ont construite.”¹⁹ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 138-141).



Figure 8: The Grand Mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie (Giroussens, 2020)

In order to better understand the different connections, a look further back into the past is necessary. As mentioned above, in the 1960s and 1970s accommodations were being built because of the increasing demand for housing. Immigrants were mostly coming from countries that practise Islamic traditions (North and West Africans and Turks) (Galembert 2005: 1145f.). Of course, one cannot deduce one's lived faith by its country of origin, however “(...) it can at

¹⁹ Translation into English: “Our parents with the means available to them built the first mosque outside of the mosque in Paris. The first big mosque is the mosque in Mantes-la-Jolie, in the beginning of the 1980s. And indeed, our parents built it.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 138-141).

least be stated that this national-origin breakdown does suggest the importance of the Islamic faith within the local context.” (Galembert 2005: 1146).

At the time, Islam was not yet such a heated political debate. Only at the beginning of the 1980s, with the social conflicts occurring in Val Fourré, Islam was portrayed as more and more problematic (Mouriaux and Wihtol de Wenden 1987, cited in Galembert 2005: 1147). During this period, the wish for a mosque arose. Public officials and Islamic partners played a major role in the realisation of this project (Galembert 2005: 1148):

“The speed with which the project was developed can undeniably be explained by the mutual momentum provided by two distinct rationales: that of the newly-elected Socialist mayor, Paul Picard, who, once the recognition has sunk in that the Islamic religion was bound to take root in France, lent his backing to the project and championed it amidst a social and political environment hostile to the growing focus placed on Islam; and that of A.B., a Moroccan skilled worker at the Renault plant who, after an unsuccessful attempt to create an Islamic cemetery, persisted in pushing the project to provide the Mantes area’s Muslim community with a mosque they could be proud of.” (Galembert 2005: 1148).

Mayor Paul Picard, an agnostic, believed that cultural differences should be respected (Galembert 2005: 1148ff.). And, even though the abbreviation A.B. is not explained in the article of Galembert, I am convinced that the person in question is Ali Berka, father of one of the founders of the school, now rector of the mosque: Medhi Berka. These are the reasons for my assumption: Ali Berka founded an association of Muslims called “Union Islamique des Yvelines” (in English: “Islamic Union of the Yvelines”) that initiated the construction of the grand mosque (Flory 2009: 191, cited in Hôtel de Ville 2, n.y.). Galembert also mentions this association that was set up in 1979 as a result of the interaction between the mayor and a group of Muslims that wanted to obtain a place of worship (Galembert 2005: 1150). Also, after Ali Berka’s death in 2017, the square in front of the mosque was named after him naming him as the founder and initiator of the mosque. The deputy mayor Michel Vialay (political party: LR) was at the inauguration stating: “Il était le chantre d’un islam apaisé.” And: “C’était aussi un homme juste, droit et solide.”²⁰ (Le Parisien, 2017). Consul General of Morocco in Pontoise,

²⁰ Translation into English: “He was a spokesman for a peaceful Islam.” And: “He was also a fair, honest and strong man.” (Le Parisien, 2017).

Zoubair Frej, and Consul General of Senegal in Paris, Amadou Diallo, were also present (N'diaye, 2017).



Figure 9: Inauguration of the square in front of the Grand Mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie in the name of Ali Berka: founder and initiator of the mosque. In the picture next to the plate is deputy mayor of Mantes-la-Jolie Michel Vialay, © LP/M.G (Le Parisien, 2017)

The association “Union Islamique des Yvelines” secured the funding of the mosque through the faithful and by generous Muslim donors. The mayor chose the place where to build it (Galembert 2005: 1150; Flory 2009: 191, cited in Hôtel de Ville 2, n.y.). There was some resistance against building the mosque, however the mayor referred to the law of 1905 that authorises building a place of worship and acquiring land (Galembert 2005: 1155). He even went further by shifting the issue from a religious domain to a political one by addressing the history and effect of immigration in the area. The mayoral team positioned itself as follows in its bulletin report: “‘The massive and unprepared arrival of millions of these workers, coupled with their poor integration into our society, creates an obvious over-dense concentration with ghettos sprouting in places like Mantes-la-Jolie...’.” (Galembert 2005: 1155). So, supporting the Muslim community in their wish for a place of worship is “‘the logical consequence of the programme of the new mayoral majority in favour of improving the living conditions of Val Fourré residents and intensifying the spirit [sic!] of tolerance and understanding among all communities within the city, while respecting the rights of each and every one’.” (Galembert

2005: 1155). Mantes-la-Jolie was in that sense the first city to recognise the practice of Islam in France: “Mantes-la-Jolie is France’s first city to officially recognise the practice of Islam by undertaking the construction of a mosque. This role of pioneering city as regards the political outreach to Islam gives Mantes a specific value in understanding the public sector’s handling of the presence of Islam in France.” (Galembert 2005: 1141).

The funding of the mosque is a completely different issue. A transnational dimension comes into play. Initially, funds from the Kuwaiti Embassy or from Libya or Saudi-Arabia were anticipated. Potential funders were highly interested in supporting the mosque in France: “This first Islamic mosque immersed in a French context would not take long to become heralded by Islamic powers at the international level, who were vying for the claim to Islamic leadership across the globe.” (Galembert 2005: 1151). Officially, Saudi-Arabia financed the mosque, even though Kuwait apparently also contributed. In total, foreign funding was estimated to be 6 million francs (former French currency, approximately 915.000 Euros in 2022) (Galembert 2005: 1151, 1156).

In February 1981, a ceremony was held by laying the first stone. 26 ambassadors, Si Hamza Boubakeur and local and national press were present (Galembert 2005: 1156). The mayor Paul Picard used the occasion to round off the mosque debate by saying that: “‘Mantes-la-Jolie be considered, now and in the future, both in France and elsewhere, the symbol of tolerance and peace and that this mosque sends a message of hope for times ahead’.” (Le Courrier de Mantes, 4 February 1981, cited in Galembert 2005: 1157). The mosque was quickly built in a time span of six months (Galembert 2005: 1156).

To make the Saudi-Arabian funder official, the son of Saudi King Fahd, Prince Abdelaziz ben Fahd ben Abdelaziz came to the mosque in 1997. At the ceremony, Ali Berka claimed that the aim of the ceremony was to make apparent who funded the mosque (Abdi, 1997). In the French Senate Information Report N° 757 on the organisation, place, financing of Islam in France and places of worship the Saudi Arabian ambassador in France, Khalid bin Mohammed Al Ankary, stated that Saudi Arabia funded eight mosques in France. The contributions for a project varied from €200.000 to €900.000. A total of €3.759.400 has been provided (an average of €750.000 per year). However, he added, Saudi Arabia only pays the salaries of 14 imams out of over 2,200 in France. The grand mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie is one of them (Féret et al. 2016: 59).

Here the list of mosques in France funded by Saudi Arabia, as deposited by the ambassador:

Nom	Adresse	Montant de l'aide (en euros)	Année
Mosquée Al Hidayah	25 rue de l'Abbé Lemire 92600 Asnières	201 612	2012
Grande mosquée de Strasbourg	6 rue Averroès 67000 Strasbourg	910 676	2011
Mosquée Othmane Ibn Affane	Rue Jean Honoré Fragonard 78200 Mantes-La-Jolie	191 274	2014
Grande mosquée de Cergy	26 avenue du Hazay 95800 Cergy	191 274	2014
Mosquée Okba Ibnou Nafaa	38 avenue de la République 92000 Nanterre	191 274	2014
Grande mosquée de Saint-Denis	125 rue Henri Barbusse 93200 Saint-Denis	800 000	2012
Grande mosquée de Mantes-La-Jolie	7 rue Denis Papin 78200 Mantes-La-Jolie	981 720	2010
Grande mosquée de Givors	51 rue Honoré Petetin 69700 Givors	291 600	2012

Figure 10: List of mosques in France funded by Saudi Arabia (Féret et al. 2016: 59)

Additionally, important Islamic universities have been created in Saudi Arabia in order to increase their religious influence (El Karoui 2016: 44). Graduates of the training in religious science are preaching in Europe - one country being France (Amghar 2012: 141).

Since 2001, the Muslim World League (a Saudi organization) is based in the mosque (Flory 2009: 191, cited in Hôtel de Ville 2, n.y.). As one of the founders is the representative of this mosque and most of the teachers of the Spiritual Awakening class of the school are from the mosque, I will delve a bit further into depths of the Muslim World League (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 509-512, 554; Interview Hayate 23.05.16: 32; Field notes 24.05.16). The founders never mentioned this fact or the League, so I can't say to what extent it influences the teaching in the school or in the mosque. However, as its seat in France is in this mosque, I would find it neglectful not to mention it in this thesis. Additionally, it again demonstrates how local phenomena don't end at the doorstep of an establishment, or the city border, but are connected transnationally.

The Muslim World League was created in 1962 in Mecca, Saudia-Arabia, in response to President Nasser, who was promoting a secular Arab world in Egypt (Amghar 2012: 127; Amghar 2007: 45f.). Disgraced by Nasser and his regime, Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhoods sought refuge in Saudi-Arabia and established the bureaucratic framework for

big Islamic institutions such as i.e. this Muslim World League (Kepel, op. cit., note [12], pp. 208-210, as cited in Amghar 2007: 45f.). “Today the League follows a policy of cooperation with Muslim communities throughout the world, especially in Europe. It finances projects to build mosques, it distributes Korans and leaflets and it organizes courses and Islamic conferences. By so doing it hopes to create a network of clients and allies that are not critical of Saudi Arabia.” (Amghar 2012: 138). It has offices in every European country (El Karoui 2016: 43). Also: “[I]t disseminates pan-Islamic ideology in the face of emerging Arab nationalist movements, and it seeks to secure Saudi Arabia’s dominion over Islam on a global scale. Structured over a number of departments, the Muslim World League organises the instruction of imams, provides study grants and fights Christianity.” (El Karoui 2016: 43). So, Amghar strongly suggests that the Muslim World League is an interface between Muslim communities and political institutions of European countries and a strong instrument to empower the Saudi Kingdom (Amghar 2012: 138, 140).

The League describes themselves as follows: “The Muslim World League is an international non-governmental Islamic organization based in the Holy City of Makkah. It aims to present the true Islam and its tolerant principles, provide humanitarian aid, extend bridges of dialogue and cooperation with all, engage in positive openness to all cultures and civilizations, follow the path of centrism and moderation to realize the message of Islam and ward off movements calling for extremism, violence and exclusion for a world full of peace, justice and coexistence.” (Muslim World League, 2010). The organisation is a member of the UNESCO, UNICEF, and Observer in consultative status with the ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) at the United Nations Organisation (Muslim World League, 2010).

The League is politically very active. One has to look at it very critically. As a Saudi organisation it is Salafi-oriented. “The League advocates a Salafism, which certainly looks like the plan advocated by the dogmatic theologians of Saudi Arabia, but distinguishes itself by its social and political dimension.” (Amghar 2012: 140). At the same time, on the political level it appears to be “neutral” and independent (Amghar 2012: 138f.).

“While trying to stem Islamist protest in Europe, the League maintains a loyalist and non-critical discourse toward Western regimes, all while remaining the vehicle of an orthodox and conservative Islam. Indeed, it intends to peacefully negotiate its entry onto the European religious stage. By using ‘neutral’ political operating modes, it appears as the expression of a political and social conservatism removed from the fascination of the

State and the politicization of Islam, but seeks to control all the dynamics of re-Islamization. (...) According to its officials, it intends to defend Islam as a legitimate identity in Europe, and so fight against the discrimination that Muslims can experience living in the Old Continent.” (Amghar 2012: 139).

3.3. National Framing

3.3.1. An overview of national education regulations

Researching on and in a private Muslim bilingual school in France, it became clear that the state regulations (legislative and regulative framework) have a big impact on its structure and organization. A lot is to consider when opening and maintaining a private Muslim school in the political setting of France.

For one, there are all the regulations that encompass the location and place of the school: is it according to standards, are there enough lavatories, can it be considered as a school, are the necessary actors like headmasters, teachers etc. present, and so on.

Another important part is also what is seen and defined as a private school by the state: what is a school for, what is its purpose, what are its main tasks, etc. Most of the answers of those questions above are written in the “Code de l’éducation”, which translates into the “Code of education”. This 1535-page document of the French government gives insight into the education system in France by defining all the legislative and regulatory parameters.

To get a general feeling and understanding of the educational system, here the main points or, as called in the Code of education, “general provisions” (in relevance to the contextualization of my topic) (Légifrance, 2019a):

1. Education is the first priority of the state. (This is actually the first sentence). This shall contribute to equal opportunities and fight social and territorial inequalities.
2. Inclusion into a school of every child - without any distinction.
3. The main mission of the school is to share the values of the French Republic to the pupils. These values are: respect of the equal dignity of human beings and respect of freedom of conscience and laïcité. The educational personnel implement those values.

4. The mastering of the French language must be guaranteed.

5. A general culture is to be acquired.

(Légifrance, 2019a)

Note that in the third point the usual phrasing in official documents, e.g. in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (United Nations, 1948), is formulated here as follows: “freedom of conscience and laïcité”. In that matter: When searching for the word “religion” no results came up in the “Code de l’éducation”. Laïcité, however, is mentioned several times and even has a small chapter dedicated to it. Religion is only discussed in the context of religious teaching (who can do it, in what way can a child be educated in a religious belief, etc.).

The ministry of national education also states that laïcité guarantees the freedom of conscience and protects the freedom of believing or not believing. Through laïcité the state stays neutral, the respect of every belief and equality of all citizens irrespective of their religion is given before the law. A charta of laïcité with 15 articles has been formulated²¹. It has to be hung up in schools visibly (Éduscol 1, 2021).

Next to the code of education there is also “le socle commun de connaissances, de compétences et de culture”. It ensures that every educational institution has a commun educational foundation. This document translates to “the common core of competences, knowledge and culture”. In other words, the government made sure that all schools, no matter if public or private, teach the same foundation of values to children aged six to 16 years old (Légifrance, 2016). It is divided into five domains, the third being the “formation of the person and the citizen”. The other domains are: 1) languages to think and communicate, 2) methods and tools for learning, 4) natural and technical systems and 5) representations of the world and the human activities (MENJS, 2020a; Légifrance, 2005).

The French government or more precisely the Ministry of National Education has therefore made the formation of citizenship a key aspect of education and responsibility of schools. On the site of the Ministry of National Education is also an illustration that explains the path of becoming a citizen from elementary school to the end of high school (MENJS, 2020b).

²¹ Link to the charta of laïcité:

https://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/09_Septembre/64/0/chartelaïcité_3_268640.pdf
07.04.2022)..

(accessed

In addition to these common cores, there are also lessons called “teaching in ethics and civics” (in French: l’Enseignement Moral et Civique (EMC)) in public and private schools (which are under contract with the state) and since 2017/2018 every child also gets a booklet of citizenship during its obligatory school years (MENJS, 2020b).

Additionally, as a historical and legal result of the clear separation of the state and religion, any religious activities or showing of religious affiliation are forbidden on public school premises (law of 15th March of 2004; Légifrance, 2004)²². Religion isn’t taught in a class on its own in the public sector, but only through or in combination with other disciplines such as e.g. history or philosophy. The government argues that this ensures the liberty of conscience. Pupils are protected from any form of pressure, from ideological influence and proselytism (Éduscol 1, 2021).

Therefore, if some parents consider it important that their child should get a more profound religious upbringing or knowledge at school or if they think the child should be able to live his/her religion visibly, they have to resort to private confessional schools.

3.3.2. Being a private confessional school in France

To get a general idea of the magnitude of the private teaching sector, here are a few statistics: 8.900 is the total number of private teaching institutions for first (primary school) and second education (middle and high school) welcoming 2.114.100 pupils by 2016. They encompass 16,4% of the schoolarised pupils (primary and secondary schools) in France (MEN-MESRI-DEPP 2017: 4ff.).

²² Original version: “Dans les écoles, les collèges et les lycées publics, le port de signes ou tenues par lesquels les élèves manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit.” (Légifrance, 2004).

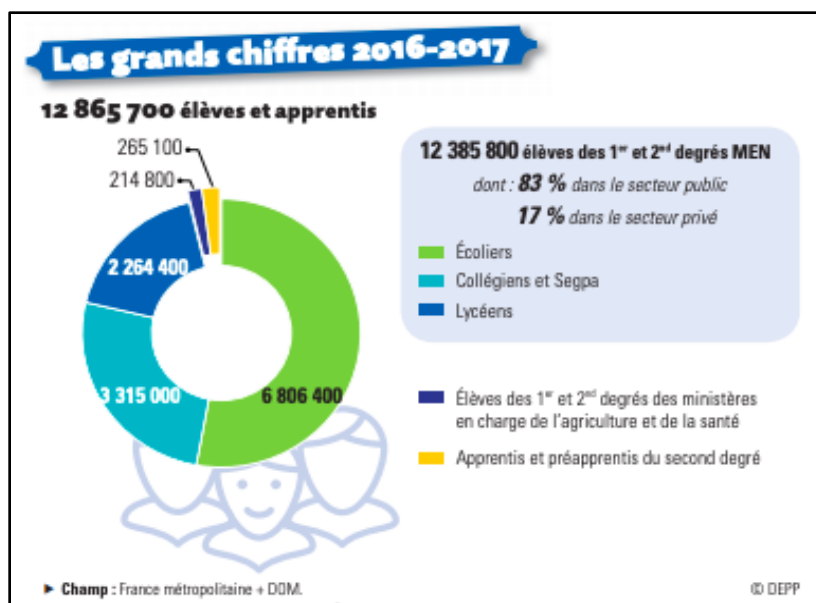


Figure 11: Graphic representation of pupils in public and private schools in Metropolitan France and its overseas dependencies 2016-2017, © DEPP (MEN-MENSRI-DEPP 2017: 4)

To open a school in France, a specific procedure must be followed.²³ These political stakeholders are important for the process of opening a school: the mayor, the state/public prosecutor, the prefect²⁴ and the chief education officer (Légifrance, 2019b; Service Public, 2020). If all the requirements are met, all the work of finding the personnel and location has been done and the political stakeholders have nothing to oppose to the opening, one question remains to be answered and that is: what relation does/do the founder/s want to have with the state? One can choose after five years of existence to initiate a contract (in French: “sous contrat”) with the state or not (in French “hors contrat”).

Being a private teaching institution with no contract with the state has some benefits. In its first five years every school is “independent”. That means it can choose its personnel, but also the

²³ He/She has to declare his/her intention to the mayor of the commune by detailing where he/she wants to establish the school and in what premises. The mayor, the state prosecutor and the prefect# can oppose the opening of the school for two reasons: 1) he/she judges it is against public morality and decency or 2) hygiene standards are not met (Légifrance, 2000a; MENJS, 2020c). If no objections are raised, the school can be opened after three months following the declaration (Légifrance, 2019b; Service Public, 2020). Furthermore, since 2018 the headmaster of a school has to be a French citizen, an EU citizen or from a country that is part of the European Economic Area (EAA) (Légifrance, 2018).

²⁴ The definition and function of the prefect/préfet is as follows: “A préfet represents the government and state authorities in a Département. He is supported by the police and has mayoral duties and is responsible for the decisions taken in the districts. Prefects were first introduced by Napoleon.” (Pons Dictionary, n.y.).

pupils according to their vision of the institution. There is total pedagogic liberty that includes the choice of methods, hours, of course pedagogy, and programs (Légifrance, 2019c).

The big disadvantage is that private institutions are not for free, as they don't get any financial support from the state. This is a challenge for parents but also for the founder/s who have to find a financial source to keep the school going. Consequently, 96.3% of the private schools are under contract with the state (MEN-MESRI-DEPP 2017: 4). These regulations of the relation between the private schools and the state goes back to the law of Debré (31 décembre 1959)²⁵. The founder(s) can choose between the contract of association and the simple contract. The simple contract is only possible for pre-schools or primary schools.²⁶ (MENJS, 2020c).

The contract of association brings additional regulations that have their pros and cons. First, the chief education officer has to decide if that specific school is even necessary in that geographic area. What does it bring to the area? What is its added value to the area?

Institutions under contract have to welcome every child regardless of their origin, belief or opinion. Furthermore, the program and the general rules have to be in accordance with those of the public school. The state, on its part, pays the teachers and chooses them. In addition, public authorities finance the schools like any other public school to ensure the functioning of the school. However, the state can also finance just one or a few classes and not all of them (MENJS, 2020c).

Concerning the confessional aspect: Every private school can choose, within the scope of its right to pedagogical freedom, to provide religious instruction. However, it comes with no surprise that because of the principle of laïcité every religious class has to be optional (Légifrance, 2000b). There is no specific law concerning confessional schools. Therefore, every confessional school is private, but not every private school is confessional. Nor can any contracted school admit pupils of only one denomination or select by denomination.

A lot of the private schools are confessional. Most of them are Catholic, some Jewish and a rising number is Muslim (Zwilling, 2016). It is not easy to find reliable statistics on how many

²⁵ Law of Michel Debré: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000693420> (accessed 07.06.2021). Since 2018 a new additional law has been passed concerning the relation between the state and private educational institutions, namely the “law Gatel”: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000036798673/> (accessed 07.05.21) (MENJS, 2020c).

²⁶ For more details on the two different kinds of contract, see: <https://www.education.gouv.fr/les-etablissements-d-enseignement-scolaire-prives-2942> (accessed 05.05.21).

confessional schools exist. The Ministry of National Education usually provides statistics and data on educational institutions²⁷. According to their data on the distribution of pupils in different private institutions without a contract there are 15.8% of pupils in Catholic schools, 8.8% in Muslim schools, 5.1% in Jewish schools, 3.2% in Protestant schools (Billon 2018: 10). However, this only concerns schools that are not under contract with the state and most private schools usually have such a contract. Even though there are some organisations that collect data, none of them are officially commissioned by the state and therefore not a reliable source.

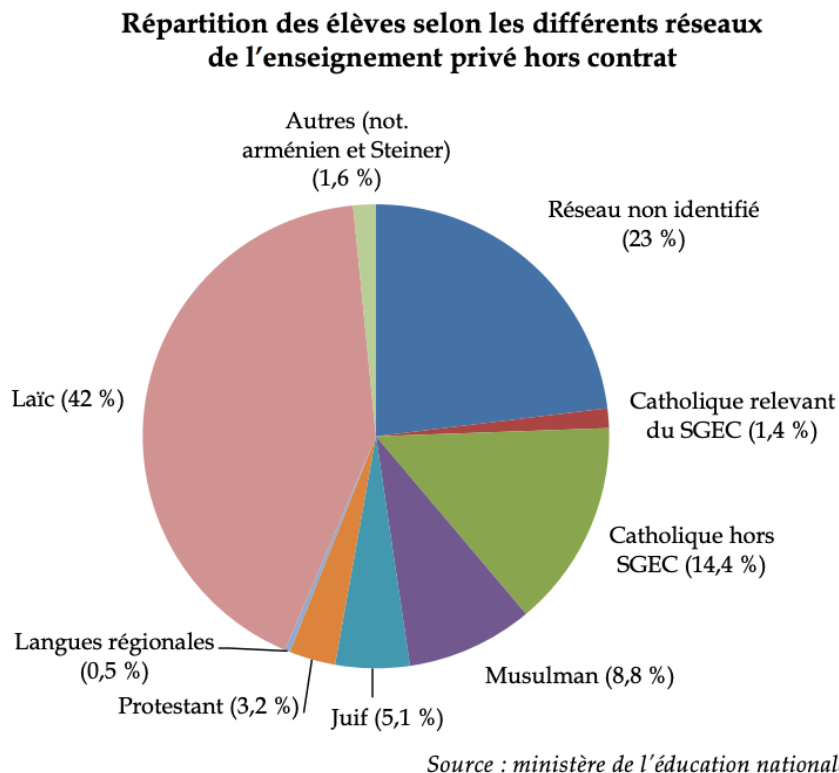


Figure 12: Distribution of pupils in private schools that are not under contract with the state (Ministry of national education, cited in Billon 18:10)

Since 2017, “Eva de Vitray” is under contract with the state (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). From the beginning of the idea of opening a school, the founders made sure to consider the criteria necessary to be approved for the contract.

²⁷ More on the statistics here:
<https://www.education.gouv.fr/reperes-et-references-statistiques-309129> (accessed 11.05.21).

3.4. Role of the legal and socio-political context

What did the mapping of the space illuminate concerning the role of the legal and socio-political context for the enactment and further existence of the school? This chapter illustrates that context plays a major role in understanding how the school came into existence and what has to be considered when opening a private confessional school. Because of the history of the founders and their parents, the history of Mantes-la-Jolie, it is no surprise that the school is where it is now.

When I asked Aallam why they chose Mantes-la-Jolie and especially Val Fourré as the place for the school his answer could not have been more fitting. He starts by explaining that they are children of Mantes-la-Jolie: “Pourquoi Mantes-la-Jolie? Pour plusieurs raisons. La première c’est parce qu’on est des enfants de Mantes-la-Jolie. Bon, on est plus des enfants mais on est de Mantes-la-Jolie. On a grandi ici.”²⁸ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 129). And then he goes on to talk about the particular history of the city and how his parents moved here. How Mantes-la-Jolie is the first ZUP (Zones à urbaniser en priorité) in France, even Europe. He talks about the dismissals and the dark period in the 90s, about how their parents built the mosque together and knew each other. And even though each of the founders went their own path, they found each other again in 2010 to start this project “Eva de Vitray” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 129-143). He adds that it is no coincidence that the school is in Mantes-la-Jolie: “Je pense qu’aujourd’hui cette école elle est pas là par hasard. Quand tu vois le parcours de chacun, chacun a un parcours différent (...). Mantes-la-Jolie c’est très, très particulier, d’un point de vue historique, d’un point de vue de l’importance de la communauté française d’origine maghrébine, l’ouverture des mosquées. Et donc, il y a tous pleins de conditions qui ont permis à une école comme Eva de Vitray d’ouvrir.”²⁹ (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 285, 289). Guerrouache goes on to say that Eva de Vitray reflects their soul in Mantes: “L’expression d’Eva de Vitray c’est un peu le modèle de ce que peut être notre âme à Mantes.” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 129).

²⁸ Translation into English: "Why Mantes-la-Jolie? For several reasons. The first is because we are children of Mantes-la-Jolie. Well, we're not children anymore but we're from Mantes-la-Jolie. We grew up here." (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 129).

²⁹ Translation into English: "I think that today this school is not here by coincidence. When you see the background of each one of us, we all have a different background (...). Mantes-la-Jolie is very, very special, from a historical point of view, from the point of view of the importance of the French community of Maghreb origin, the opening of mosques. And so, there are all sorts of conditions that have allowed a school like Eva de Vitray to open." (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 285, 289).

The contextualization also explains why citizenship plays a major role in the educational realm of France. A school is responsible for the formation of French citizens. This means adhering to certain values as the well-known Republican ones, liberty, equality, and fraternity, but also *laïcité*. Gupta and Ferguson also discuss the nation-states' role in coining the term citizenship in an educational setting and point out how the conventional understanding of citizenship is state-centric: "Here the exemplary image is of the conventional world map of nation-states, through which schoolchildren are taught such deceptively simple-sounding beliefs as that France is where the French live, America where the Americans live, and so on." (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 40).

Caglar points out how in literature on migration the nation-state is often equated with culture and society (Caglar 2013: 31). "This assumed isomorphism of space, place, and culture results in some significant problems." (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 34). The state seems to have this incredible legitimised power to determine one's right and also one's rightful place of belonging. Legal notions of being a citizen are very much framed in a setting of inclusion and exclusion. A person that is not legally a citizen is excluded from many aspects in comparison to a person that is formally seen as a citizen. And even if the person is a citizen but doesn't act or look like one, mechanisms of social exclusion can occur. "In asserting the need to disentangle citizenship from the state, we do not mean that the state is irrelevant to citizenship, but rather that people's visions of citizenship produce different views of the state as well." (Clarke et al. 2014: 97).

This shows that citizenship, in the sense of belonging, is also socially constructed and is not ahistorical (Clarke et al. 2014: 66). "While there is no doubt that 'The Law' has a particular discursive quality (...), it is also never above or beyond social and political contestation (Clarke 2013, cited in Clarke et al. 2014: 66). Consequently, conclusions made on a national scale (or indeed at any other level) are not universally applicable (Massey 2001: 128). "Both the ethnological and the national naturalisms present associations of people and place as solid, commonsensical, and agreed on, when they are in fact contested, uncertain, and in flux." (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 40). National naturalism misses to take into account cultural differences that go beyond the national scale within a locality (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 34ff.).

So, as with the concept of space, the notion of citizenship got entangled with national naturalism. However, it becomes apparent that the links between citizenship and state are by far more complex, more fluid, more subject to changes, and much more multi-layered. There are indeed historical and geographical variations (Neveu et al. 2011: 949). Following this line

of argumentation, there is more than one citizenship and not only the one that is defined by the state-individual relation (Caglar 2015: 637).

The local and the particular matter. It is the place where citizenship is claimed, enacted and produced. “Anthropology has been more careful than most other disciplines about the ways in which contexts matter - the locations and localisations of citizenship produce connected but distinct enactments of citizenship. So, *where* citizenship is imagined and practised is significant for *how* it is imagined and practised.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 163). Following Massey’s line of argumentation when it comes to space, Eva de Vitray is a particular articulation of relations and interrelations in a particular moment in time (Massey 2001: 5).

Additionally, Mantes-la-Jolie historically shows how people actively became part of the process of inclusion, be it through building a mosque, creating an organisation, making claims or opening a school. Even more so, scholars stress the importance of margins for the inclusion of those who are excluded: “Scholars argue that citizenship is defined at its margins because the inclusion of the excluded leads to a rearrangement of the existing structures and to a disruption of the taken-for-granted assumptions upon which the hegemonic understanding of citizenship at that place is based.” (Caglar 2015: 639). Understanding that citizenship is claimed by individuals and through social relations brings sites, spaces and practices to the fore - referred to as the margins (Caglar 2015: 639).

The particular contexts and projects become the driving force of how citizenship is defined and reinterpreted. The school “Eva de Vitray” is a manifestation of such a force. The founders themselves address their participation in citizenship and in dissolving identity tensions. Defining and practising their idea of citizenship becomes an important factor in the continued existence of the school.

Margins are therefore sites and spaces of transformation, disruption and negotiation. They play a significant role in the processes of citizenship-claims and legitimacy (Clarke et al. 2014: 49). As Das and Poole state: “[Das and Poole] see margins as constructed and produced through the work of regimes of power that organise the relations between people, places and practices. Margins, as a result, provide a distinctive standpoint from which to look into the workings of politics and power, as well as being the site of everyday practices of livelihood making, survival strategies and forms of refusal, recalcitrance and resistance to the normalising effects of power.”

(Das and Poole 2004, cited in Clarke et al. 2014: 51). Therefore, looking at margins is also analysing a space of power dynamics and relations.

Hence, the context in which the school was created is relevant and crucial to understand certain dynamics and phenomena. Furthermore, this case study acknowledges the importance of applying the concepts of scales to analyse local dynamics in regards to global connections. This concept allows to include the global and transnational aspect and reveal power dynamics and hierarchies (Caglar 2013: 26f.). Transnational ties are given i.e. by their migratory history and the religious and global connections through the mosque to Saudi-Arabia and the Muslim World League.

The next chapter focuses on the purpose of the school meaning how the founders found their space of action within the space of citizenship. As Neveu et al. put it: “We aim here at analysing an often under-estimated field within citizenship studies: how do locally produced conceptions of what citizenship means interact with legal conceptions and definitions? We think it is important to both compare and connect different levels and types of citizenship production: vernacular and legal, localised and state based, while recognising that each is neither singular nor discreet [sic!]; they always engage, interact and contest.” (Neveu et al. 2011: 947).

4. Purpose of the Space

This chapter revolves around the question of why even open a school and create a space of citizenship? Opening the school was not a coincidence or a quick decision that the founders made. They shared a vision. This chapter provides insight into this vision, on why they decided that a school was the best way to realise it. While describing the mission of the school, their vision often becomes evident. Therefore, this part of the chapter will strongly focus on data collected in interviews. Furthermore, narratives will be discussed that contributed to the idea of opening this school. These are narratives that were brought up in interviews during my research and are relevant for understanding and contextualising their vision. This chapter also illuminates why citizenship is a key factor and what kind of citizenship the founders want to promote. It gives insight into theories on citizenship and how the vision is embedded in this theoretical framework.

4.1. Vision

The founders see themselves as activists and active actors in the society (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 13; Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 67): “C’est vrai en fait, le socle commun de ce groupe, c’est le militantisme, l’associatif; c’est être au service de l’autre (...), être acteur dans la société.”³⁰ (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 67). From their perspective, they bundle their energy to be active in the educational realm by opening this school. Thereby, they contribute to society. Education is what is needed nowadays and for them it is important not to neglect it anymore.

The school has a deeper humanistic goal that is linked to the question of why we as humans are on earth in the first place and what our purpose is (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 140-150). Alouad Allouch, headmaster of the school, explains it as follows: “On est pas des robots. On est des êtres humains et quand on parle d’un être humain il y a l’esprit, il y a le corps. Il y a de tout! Il faut travailler tout ça. Donc, je pense que par l’éducation on peut prendre l’être humain dans sa globalité, mais si on néglige l’éducation ben je pense qu’on va marcher sur un seul pied.”³¹ (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 142). Doing a humanistic deed is important and plays a big part in their vision.

For Alouad Allouch, pupils are at the centre of attention when it comes to educational decisions. Interaction with them takes place on a horizontal and not on a vertical level and the adults are at the service of the pupils (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 22). He adds that it is important to see a person in their three dimensions: emotional, cognitive and physical (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 10, 70). He continues to explain that spirituality also supports the blossoming and development of the human being. This is not included in the national educational programme and is therefore an additional aspect that the school provides for its pupils (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 10).

Adding spirituality to their vision determined that the school was going to be private as in France every confessional school is automatically private. Being a private school wasn’t in the

³⁰ Translation into English: “It’s true, in fact, the common base of this group is militancy, community work; it’s being at the service of others, being an actor in society.” (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 67).

³¹ Translation into English: “We are not robots. We are human beings and when we talk about a human being there is the mind, there is the body. There is everything! You have to work on all that. So, I think that through education we can take the human being in its entirety, but if we neglect education, well, I think we’ll be walking on a single foot.” (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 142).

interest of everyone involved in the process of founding the school. Of the eight founders five to six rejected the idea of a private school (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 75). Some of them are defenders of the public schools. Aallam and Guerrouache for example are staunch advocates of the public school system (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 58; Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 6). As a civil servant, Aallam defends public schools because they give every child a chance. It wasn't easy for his colleagues at work to accept that he was a co-founder of a private school, a Muslim private school at that (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 9, 13). Guerrouache, on the other hand, was even opposed to private schools, one of the reasons being that they are not accessible to everyone (fees). He is a person of the public system and headmaster of a public school. However, he says that the private school, as they (the founders) understand it, participates fully in public education (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 57).

Another aspect that spoke against a private school was the fear of being too closed off. They don't want to create a community environment - actually quite the opposite. They want to create an environment close to the children's culture, religion, values and also close to the society they live in (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 74). The interactions with "others" are needed to form citizens without identity issues. "Parce que le meilleur [!] de former des citoyens, c'est d'aller vers les autres et puis justement de s'éloigner de ces crispations identitaires."³² (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 109).

In accordance with those interviews, the educational project is described on their website as follows:

"L'humanisme spirituel est au cœur des principes fondateurs de la pensée musulmane. La motivation essentielle de l'équipe fondatrice de l'école Eva de Vitray est de promouvoir ce principe dans le champ de l'enseignement, participant ainsi à l'enrichissement du paysage éducatif français.

Loin de nous inscrire dans une posture de repli ou d'opposition, nous souhaitons apporter notre contribution à toute la communauté nationale.

L'enfant, en tant que porteur du souffle divin, est un être dans toute sa plénitude. A ce titre, il doit être aimé, respecté, valorisé et, toujours, au cœur de l'attention des adultes. Ces derniers ont pour mission principale de préserver son innéité, sa prime nature, tout

³² Translation into English: "Because the best way to train citizens is to reach out to others and to move away from these identity-based tensions." (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 109).

en lui transmettant les savoirs en mesure de garantir la préservation de sa liberté pour assumer pleinement sa responsabilité future de citoyen.”³³

(Eva de Vitray 4, n.y.).

Therefore, for the founders, this school is an alternative and doesn't stand in opposition to public schools. It is very similar to a public school but additionally offers the confessional and bilingual aspect (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 13). More than that, it adds additional value to the already existing public education system (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 8).

The bilingual aspect is the teaching of the Arabic language. It is taught weekly for 4.5 hours and corresponds to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Eva de Vitray 5, n.y.; Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 49).

The confessional aspect, which is foremost present in the optional Spiritual Awakening classes, aims to contribute to the development of the spirituality of the pupils and is about embodying an ethical stance and to enable learning by example and through experimentation by exploring their environment (Eva de Vitray 2, n.y.). It is important to the founders that the lessons in which Islam is taught are not called religious class but Spiritual Awakening lessons (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 41).

In the Spiritual Awakening classes pupils learn about the life of the prophet, the relation between the three monotheist religions and historical events and ancient texts (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 41, 44). They are taught the universal values of Islam. These values are humanistic values and can be found in Judaism and Christianity and consist of: respect (also towards the environment), solidarity, openness to others and to the world and being a citizen (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 18). In secondary school, it is more of a philosophical and ethical education to encourage questioning their knowledge. The older the pupils get, the more this questioning is deepened (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 44).

³³ Translation into English: “Spiritual humanism is at the heart of the founding principles of Muslim thought. The essential motivation of the founding team of the school “Eva de Vitray” is to promote this principle in the field of education, thus participating in the enrichment of the French educational landscape. Far from adopting a posture of withdrawal or opposition, we wish to make our contribution to the entire national community. The child, as the bearer of the divine breath, is a being in all its fullness. As such, they must be loved, respected, valued and always be at the heart of the attention of adults. Their main task is to preserve their innate, primal nature, while at the same time passing on the knowledge that will guarantee the preservation of their freedom to fully assume their future responsibility as citizens.” (Eva de Vitray, 2022d).

Defining values of Islam as universal and humanistic values is something the founders all agree on. Coining them universal inevitably makes them compatible with French society: “Pour nous, les valeurs de l’Islam, en réalité, ce sont des valeurs universelles. Ce sont des valeurs qu’on retrouve dans toutes les religions, mais pas seulement. Je veux dire, même chez un athée (...). C’est des valeurs humanistes. Je pense que c’est des valeurs qu’on peut retrouver chez chacun et forcément donc complètement compatibles avec la société.”³⁴ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 87). In their understanding, values concerning citizenship are spiritual values as well. Liberty, equality, fraternity, and even laïcité are humanistic values. For Aallam, “99.999%” of the world population share those spiritual values that are universal and humanistic, and are also shared by all religions (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 136-138). Bamou even calls Islam a philosophy of life and says that it has never been a religion (Interview Bamou 13.05.16). Therefore, in their view, the school has a very laïc positioning (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 9).

One thing they agree on is that the school serves as a bridge. Bamou, the initiator of this school, talks about two worlds that “Eva de Vitray” wants to reconcile: school life and life at home. The parents of the founders lived a narrative of immigrants and were oriented towards Morocco. Even today there is this belief that Islam is not compatible with democracy. This school can contribute to building a bridge between those two worlds (Interview Bamou 13.05.16). Aallam wouldn’t go so far as to say that it is a religious matter. For him it is more a cultural aspect. However, he agrees that there is a gap between the education at home and the public education. This doesn’t mean though that the values at home aren’t compatible with those of French society (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 37). Aallam argues that the school as a bridge serves to dissolve fears towards one another, demonstrating that a Muslim school is compatible with French society (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 8; Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 15). “(...) [U]n des objectifs de cette école c’est aussi de dire: ‘Ben une école musulmane a toute sa place dans la société française.’”³⁵ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 119). Ideally, it shows that a Muslim school has its place in French society, but also in this particular district of Val Fourré. Val Fourré is very modest. So, it is also a bridge between Val Fourré and the city centre of

³⁴ Translation into English: “For us, the values of Islam are actually universal values. They are values that can be found in all religions, but not only. I mean, even in an atheist (...). They are humanist values. I think they are values that can be found in everyone and are therefore completely compatible with society.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 87).

³⁵ Translation into English: [O]ne of the objectives of this school is also to say: ‘Well, a Muslim school has its place in French society.’” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 119).

Mantes-la-Jolie (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 119, 143). Yvelines is their focus in order to organise themselves concerning the school (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 181).

This school also follows the programme and curriculum of the national education system. As a private school that was not under contract with the state at the time, they aren't actually obliged to do so - except for the part concerning "le socle commun de connaissances, de compétences et de culture" (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 64). As it is stated on the website of the school: The idea is to have a school that is following the programme of the national education and adds a specific character inspired by the humanistic, spiritual, Abrahamic traditions which is manifested in the optional Spiritual Awakening classes in the morning (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.).

The website reflects what Aallam told me in the interview: By following the curriculum and adding their take on Islam, they want to build a bridge between seemingly incompatible values or worlds between Muslims and French society. The goal is to participate in the formation of French citizens and to dissolve tensions concerning the identity of French Muslims: "Il s'agit de créer un groupe scolaire assurant un cursus complet et cohérent, participant ainsi à la formation de citoyens français, aux antipodes des crispations identitaires."³⁶ (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). Aallam emphasises that it is about reconciling differences, not creating them through this school. Consequently, the school enhances the integration of children in France and illustrates the active practice of citizenship (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 106f.): "Ce projet d'intérêt général est une illustration de l'exercice agissant de la citoyenneté."³⁷ (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.).

Creating those bridges goes hand in hand with aiming at the contract with the state. This is more for political reasons and contributes to driving things forward concerning Muslim schools in France and how public services deal with them. Since the beginning (2012), they had in mind to reach a contract. In their opinion this shouldn't be such a problem as they follow the curriculum of the French national education and the whole school functions like a regular school, if you leave aside the confessional aspect (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 152). Additionally, the school has to be open to everyone regardless of race, religion, etc. and the

³⁶ Translation into English: "The aim is to create a school group that provides a complete and coherent curriculum, thus participating in the formation of French citizens, in not creating identity-based tensions." (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.).

³⁷ Translation into English: "This project of general interest is an illustration of the active practice of citizenship." (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.).

pupils need to have the necessary competences at the end of their schooling (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 47). At the time, their goal was to enrol for the contract in September 2016, so that the contract would be effective in September 2017 (Interview Alouad Allouch 28.06.16: 24). In 2017, they became the first Muslim primary school in the history of France to be awarded a contract (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). It is even the first Muslim school in the departement of the Yvelines to get the contract of association (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 37; Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 50).

Another factor that is relevant to the further existence of the school and the realisation of their vision is the one concerning the admission of the children and the recruitment of the teachers. The competencies that teachers need are humanism and professionalism (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16:124). Additionally, the school supports the teachers in preparing for their exams to become private teachers. Ideally, after the exams the teachers stay at the school (Interview Aallam 23.03.16: 61).

The admission process for the children is focused on the parents. As an open school they welcome everybody, however the parents need to adhere to the educational project. If the parents can't support the school and its vision, the child isn't admitted to the school. This includes agreeing to mixed classes and swim classes for example (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 118). The hope is that parents come to the school for its quality and not for the religious aspect (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 136, 142).

When asked if the school is a political project the founders say that this isn't the case. Of course, a school has a political impact whether you want it or not. However, more than anything, they want to prove that this Muslim school has its place in French society and that they are no contradiction whatsoever. "On porte un message, un message de citoyenneté. (...) Pour nous c'est très important de pouvoir dire que, (...), un musulman c'est avant tout un citoyen."³⁸ (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 8). In their words, it is an educational project inspired by spiritual humanism (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 10). They are transparent about the project, sincere about everything they do and non-strategic. It is a noble project (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 67, 81). It is about contributing to society (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 58).

³⁸ Translation into English: "We carry a message, a message of citizenship. (...) For us it is very important to be able to say that, (...), a Muslim is above all a citizen." (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 8).

Furthermore, they want to show that it works and that this kind of school can set an example for other schools in France (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 119). “Eva de Vitray” sets this example and is an exception in comparison to other schools - historically, but also as regards the persons that support the school (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 44). Ideally, they hope that the spirit of their school will spread: “On veut vraiment ouvrir l’école parce que pour nous il est important que l’état d’esprit de l’école se diffuse.”³⁹ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 17).

In summary, their vision consists of:

- fostering the three dimensions of the human being: emotional, cognitive, physical.
 - And additionally: spiritual, by offering Spiritual Awakening and ethics classes.
- creating a school which resembles a public school as much as possible: open to everyone, national education programme, not closed off, respecting quality standards.
- contributing to society and enriching the public educational landscape. The school is not in opposition to the public, but it is an alternative.
- pupils learning to question their upbringing and religion.
- pupils learning universal values of Islam, which are humanistic and universal.
- building bridges: illustrating that a person can be Muslim and French and that Islamic values are compatible with the Republican values.
- participating in the formation of French citizens.
- dissolving identity tensions.
- going under contract with the state and being the first primary Muslim school to do so.
- accompanying teachers in their formation.
- selecting parents that support their educational project of the school.
- being open and transparent.
- setting an example for other schools.
- spreading the unique spirit of the school.

If and how this vision came to life will be illuminated in the chapter “Enactment of the Space”. Now follow the narratives that surround this vision and ideas of the founders.

³⁹ Translation into English: “We really want to open up the school because for us it is important that the school spirit spreads.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 17).

4.2. Narratives

A narrative that supports and surrounds a lot the vision created by the founders is that being Muslim and French isn't compatible. Islam just doesn't go with France. It has often been regarded as a threat. On the one hand, to the West, by jeopardising the secular, democratic and liberal values of the nation states; on the other hand, because of the rise of "militant Islam" and "religious extremism" (Mozumder 2011: 2). "Even when there is no direct violence, Islam appears as the bearer of a frightening tradition that calls instantly for the joining together of politics and religion. It threatens thereby to undermine the very foundation of modern values that are said to be exemplified in Europe and North America." (Asad 1997: 183f.). Values that are associated with the secular state are feared to be compromised by the Islamic religion. There is a "fear of the collapse of 'national cohesion'" embodied by the Muslim population in the member states of the European Union (Amiriaux 2013: 794). "This politicized Muslim identity poses a manifest difficulty for the elemental principles of liberal democracy, which projects public spheres constituted by harmonious political discourses and free of private identities." (Soysal 1997: 515).

These discourses around Islam being a threat, not being compatible with European secular values and thereby weakening the social cohesion deserve our attention because the imagined European state and self-perception and what it implies is integral to what and who is considered a citizen or not. Consequently, it is related to the possibilities of participation and recognition (Amiriaux 2016: 44). "The discourse on the integration of Muslim minorities in secular Western contexts has to be linked with the constellation of elements feeding the general perception that certain groups of citizens or citizens-to-be are not equipped with the right cultural competencies and can therefore not perform their roles properly (...)." (Amiriaux 2013: 804). This leads to segregation, as being secular is a narrative used by the state to form unity. If you are religious, this entails that you are not part of that unity (Amiriaux 2016: 39, 44). "In France, religious identity is a reality from which secular, enlightened modern liberal citizens mostly prefer to keep their distance." (At Home in Europe 2011, Parvez 2011, cited in Amiriaux 2016: 40).

Guerrouache also mentions the distrust towards Muslims in an interview saying: "(...) [O]n est dans un climat, je parle pas d'Islamophobie, je parle vraiment de méfiance, c'est un mot léger,

de confusion entre ce que peut être un terroriste, ce que peut être un musulman.”⁴⁰ (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 48). And the young people of Mantes are also starting to believe that Islam and France aren’t compatible, Bamou adds (Interview Bamou 13.05.16). This leads to not feeling part of society, to not finding one’s place in society: “Tu te sens pas à ta place en France, mais tu l’es pas plus sur le Maroc ou en Algérie ou au Sénégal. Trouver sa place, c’est difficile.”⁴¹ (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 83).

For a long time the ideal citizen was bourgeois, male and Christian (Isin 2010: 146). “Thus, to a certain extent, contemporary developments in Islam in Europe can be viewed from within the wider lens of the struggle between the secular and the religious.” (Fokas 2007: 9). Religion, secularism or *laïcité* are closely related to national history. “The new structure of secular power replaced the religious community with a political community, excluded religion from public political life, and gave rise to a still-present anti-religious and anti-clerical discourse which renders *laïcité* a ‘particular’ experience.” (Kastoryano 2004: 1243). Public schools in France have been *laïc* since 1882 and *laïcité* in schools has been a fundamental principle since (law Ferry, 1882 and Goblet, 1886). The law separating the French Republic and the Churches was passed in December 1905. It symbolises the basis of *laïcité*. 1946 *laïcité* was added to the first article of the French Constitution (EducationFrance, 2016). Since then, it has been modified and reinterpreted several times.

In the interviews, the founders talk about *laïcité* then and now and that there are two different versions (Interview Allam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 9; Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 19f.). One is the law of *laïcité* of 1905 which provides protection for both religions and *laïc* space. All religions can coexist. It is about respecting religions and the Republic as well (Interview Allam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 51; Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 91f.; Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 27). The other is hard *laïcité* (“*laïcité dure*”). It has existed for a few years now and is about rejecting religions (Interview Allam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 51, 54). Especially since 1989 the question of *laïcité* came up again in the context of the rising visibility of Islam in France (headscarf affair 1989). Debates on the visibility of Islam and the challenge of *laïcité* arose (Schenker 2008: 177). Kastoryano even claims that since then *laïcité* has been the “official religion” of France

⁴⁰ Translation into English: “[W]e’re in a climate, I’m not talking of Islamophobia, I’m really talking about mistrust, it’s a soft word, of confusion between what can be a terrorist, what can be a Muslim.” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 48).

⁴¹ Translation into English: “You don’t feel like you belong in France, but you don’t belong in Morocco or Algeria or Senegal either. Finding your place is difficult.” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 83).

(Kastoryano 2004: 1239). “Today, Islam is at the core of the redefinition of laïcité and serves as its mirror.” (Kastoryano 2004: 1239). Guerrouache supports this theory: “(...) [M]ais on sait très bien qu’on parle pas de la laïcité. On parle des musulmans. C’est clair.”⁴² (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 110).

The media isn’t helping either, says Aallam. They would take anything to talk about Muslims (Interview Aallam - Part 2 15.02.16: 161). Islam isn’t portrayed objectively and not the best things are being featured. There is a strong emphasis on extremists (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 19). Especially since 9/11, Islam has been in the focus of attention (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 40). Additionally, in 2015, the attacks on Charlie Hebdo and at Bataclans occurred in Paris (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 110ff.). The founders decided to turn down any requests from the media. This may seem suspicious, but they are claiming to be transparent and direct with the education authority (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 156ff.).

Guerrouache and Aallam, however, also agree that something needs to be changed or adapted for the Muslim minority in France (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 110). Aallam points out that it is not easy to organize Islam in France. France as a laïc country can’t get involved in religious matters and at the same time wants to organise a religion that claims to have a direct and two-way relationship with God (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 159). In addition, Islam isn’t structured in the way Catholicism or Judaism are. There is for example no clergy (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 157).

This is also noticeable when it comes to Muslim schools in France. Aallam observes that more and more Muslim schools are being opened in France. As a laïc country France can’t really get involved much, however, sometimes it is necessary (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 161). Also, creating a Muslim school generates fears, as it is fraught with assumptions and prejudices (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 17-19). He also argues that not opening Muslim schools would be fatal as well. There are just not enough of them - especially in comparison to Catholic and Jewish schools. It would help to bring non-schooled children into the educational system. Some parents for example refuse the public school system because of religious convictions (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 39). “Le danger c’est de ne pas permettre l’ouverture et

⁴² Translation into English: “(...) [B]ut we know very well that we are not talking about laïcité. We are talking about Muslims. That is clear.” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 110).

puis d'avoir des enfants qui sont scolarisés à domicile ou scolarisés dans des écoles illégales ou en tout cas pas officielles.”⁴³ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 37).

Therefore, the founders advocate more the laïcité of 1905. As mentioned above, they refer to Islam as a religion with universal values. This is common ground of the monotheist religions, which speaks for opening Muslim schools as much as Catholic ones (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 136). There are other private schools of confessions other than Islam. Why shouldn't there be Muslim ones? If France is laïc, then it shouldn't be a problem, says Bamou (Interview Bamou 13.05.16).

Even though there is a need for Muslim schools, it doesn't mean that they should become a trend. “Moi, je vais te parler en toute franchise. Les écoles musulmanes c'est pas une mode. Ça doit pas être une mode.”⁴⁴ (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 167). The goal should be to form citizens and not to create more tensions (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 151).

In the founders' view: if laïcité is understood as something in which religions coexist, the school Eva de Vitray absolutely has its place in France (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 27). The incompatibility feared does not exist: “Parce que pour nous on était convaincu qu'une école avait toute sa place dans (...) l'espace français. Qu'une école musulmane n'est pas incompatible, que l'islam en fait n'est pas incompatible avec la France. Et ben je crois que l'école Eva de Vitray est un bel exemple.”⁴⁵ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 15). Eva de Vitray shifts the lines of what is considered private and public school, and of what it means to be French and Muslim. There is no incompatibility (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 46-51).

Laïcité in that sense is a certain neutrality that allows one to be religious, but in a position as a teacher where children are not influenced: “Pour moi, la laïcité c'est une certaine forme de neutralité. Ça veut dire, rien n'empêche un enseignant d'être musulman, d'être pratiquant, d'être ce que tu veux, d'être juif. Ce que tu veux. Mais il a un rôle par rapport aux enfants et en aucun cas, ces croyances religieuses ou politiques ne doivent influencer l'élève. Parce qu'un

⁴³ Translation into English: “The danger is not to allow an opening and then to have children who are home schooled or schooled in illegal or at any rate not official schools.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 37).

⁴⁴ Translation into English: “I'm going to be honest with you. Muslim schools are not a trend. It must not be a trend.” (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 167).

⁴⁵ Translation into English: “Because for us, we were convinced that a school had its place in (...) the French space. That a Muslim school is not incompatible, that Islam is in fact not incompatible with France. And I think that the school Eva de Vitray is a great example.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 15).

professeur pour ces élèves c'est quand même une référence.”⁴⁶ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 135). In that sense, Eva de Vitra is laïc (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 9).

Consequently, female teachers are wearing headscarves or other religious clothing. The school gives them this option and thus the opportunity to practise their profession as teachers. In a public school, the teachers wouldn't be allowed to teach in those religious clothes. For Guerrouache and Aallam too much thought is given to the whole headscarf debate. Appearances don't say anything about a person's spirituality or suitability as a teacher (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 134; Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 149). Amiraux adds by citing Korteweg and Leckly (2013): “The prohibition on wearing certain religious signs or garments, presented as regulating the behavior of Muslim individuals to protect national mores, illustrates the asymmetrical power certain public social narratives have over others (Korteweg, 2013). The secular narrative of Muslim veils in France allows the state to ideologically reconstitute the nation as a society that is secular and united (Leckley, 2013).” (Korteweg 2013 and Leckly 2013, cited in Amiraux 2016: 44). So, this debate on religious clothes is more about narratives that create power over others.

An additional narrative revolving around the relation to public and private schools and the state is the funding by the state. Although it is not that visible, private and public schools are in opposition to each other. When it comes to financial support, the state finances 80% of public schools and 20% of private ones that are under contract (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 8). This 80/20 rule is not official or prescribed by law. Usually, most of the private schools are Catholic and financed by the state. There are also some Jewish schools and other private schools that are not confessional that are supported by the state. However, as Aallam states, there are no primary Muslim schools under contract in Metropolitan France, but only some secondary schools (around four or five). (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 4).

Those 20% of the cake have to be shared among all private schools. The slice of the pie chart doesn't get bigger or smaller according to the number of private schools opening. This is where it gets problematic. “À un moment, il va falloir faire des choix ou faire un gâteau plus grand.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Translation into English: “For me, laïcité is a certain form of neutrality. It means, nothing prevents a teacher from being Muslim, from being religious, from being what you want, from being Jewish. Whatever you want. But he has a role in regard to the children and in no case these religious or political beliefs should influence the pupil. Because a teacher for these pupils is still a reference.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 135).

⁴⁷ Translation into English: “At some point, you will have to make choices or make a bigger cake.” (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 80).

(Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 80). This also means that competing claims are inherent to this space, which in turn impacts relations. “The impact of competing claims to space and place and the ensuing territorial and cultural conflicts are transforming social relations among ethnic and religious groups, social classes, regions, states, and neighborhoods.” (Low 2017: 1).

Hence, as the founders want the school to be under contract with the state, work on the political level becomes necessary (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 15). From the beginning, they had been working towards the contract and made sure to fulfil the requirements. As there were no primary Muslim schools under contract in France in 2016, this was also a new area for the public services. In the view of Guerrouache, by wanting to conclude a contract, they were and still are also building bridges on the political level: “Le contrat et on le sait très bien, c’est un choix politique. C’est pas un choix réglementaire. C’est parce qu’il n’y a pas d’école élémentaire en France sous contrat, donc c’est aussi une nouvelle chose à créer. Nous, on a créé des ponts (...). On sait que, eux aussi, ils ne savent pas. Il y a une vraie ignorance des services publics, des services de l’État sur les écoles primaires, écoles musulmanes en tout cas. On voit qu’on construit quelque chose. Et si on passe sous contrat, des choses devront s’adapter. Parce qu’il y a trois collèges sous contrat, mais le fonctionnement du collège et de l’élémentaire n’est pas le même.”⁴⁸ (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 152).

In 2016, the school was already acknowledged by the state, registered and in the process of signing the contract (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 26). The aim was to apply for the contract at the end of September 2016 in order to be under contract by the school start of 2017 (Interview Alouad Allouch 28.06.16: 23-27). They would be the first, Aallam states: “En tout cas, (...), si on a le contrat on sera la première école de l’histoire de France à l’avoir. Donc, c’est pas rien.”⁴⁹ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 37). Being under contract not only brings the status of being the first in France, the financial aid that comes with it pays the salary of (most of) the teachers. However, from then on, the state will recruit the teachers (Interview Aallam 15.02.16

⁴⁸ Translation into English: “The contract is a political choice, as we all know. It’s not a regulatory choice. It’s because there are no elementary schools in France under contract, so it’s also a new thing to create. We have built bridges (...). We know that they don’t know either. There is a real ignorance of the public services, of the state services on primary schools, Muslim schools at least. We see that we are building something. And if we sign the contract, things will have to be adapted. Because there are three secondary schools under contract, but the functioning of the secondary and elementary schools is not the same.” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 152).

⁴⁹ Translation into English: “In any case, (...), if we get the contract we will be the first school in the history of France to have it. So, it’s not nothing.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 37).

- Part 2: 5). Eventually, the first class of elementary schools was contracted in the autumn of 2017 (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.; Guémart, 2017).

The founders are prepared for the inspections and feel more than ready. The secondary school nearby (in Trappes) sought a contract and had about ten inspectors staying at the school for several days. Inspectors look at the pedagogical aspect as well as the financing of the school, the structure, the compliance with national laws and the quality of teaching (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 27). In the end, the prefect approves the contract (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 82). When asked about more details about the contract or if I could see one, Aallam unfortunately couldn't give me any further information (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 123).

To sum up, several narratives become apparent in the interviews with the founders. One that particularly stands out is the belief that being Muslim and French isn't compatible. The religious values differ too much from the Republican ones. This leads to a segregation of who can be a citizen and consequently creates different forms of participation and recognition.

Very closely linked to this narrative is also the history of *laïcité*. There are two versions: one dates back to 1905, the other is newer. The founders lean more towards the law of *laïcité* of 1905, as for them it is more about the respect of other religions in accordance with the *laïc* space. The newer version, in their view, is more about the rejection of religions, and has especially recently targeted Islam, creating even more of a gap between "French" and "Muslim" values. This creates an issue of belonging for young people (i.e. for those living in Mantes). The narratives of the media aren't helping either, as they portray Muslims as extremists.

Linked to the different kinds of private schools is the narrative revolving around the financial support of the state. As funds are limited, private schools have to share the budget that is available. That leads to competition and the raising of claims. In addition, there is an unofficial opposition between public and private schools.

Another important aspect is that a structure for an Islam in France is lacking. Catholicism and Judaism are better organised and this is noticeable. The government is only at the beginning of signing contracts with Muslim schools, for example. It is however important to open more Muslim schools as the demand is there and this would also contribute to integrating more children into the educational system. Furthermore, other confessional schools exist as well and it only seems logical and fair to open more Muslim schools. However, it shouldn't become a

trend and the school should be secular by not trying to influence children in their beliefs and by conveying the Republican values in order to form good French citizens.

4.3. Forming Citizens

As mentioned before, the founders feel that they are contributing to forming French citizens. In their perception, they do so by building a bridge between seemingly incompatible worlds: being Muslim and being French. Islam is defined as a life philosophy that consists of universal humanistic values that in no way contradict French national values (liberty, equality, fraternity, *laïcité*). In their view, they support the integration and inclusion of children through their education project: “Parce que bien éduqué, forcément pour nous c’est une conviction, ça veut dire, avoir des bons citoyens de demain.”⁵⁰ (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 45).

In the past decades, it has become more and more difficult to work with the concept of citizenship based on a historically constructed relation between nationality and citizenship. More and more sites and forms of citizenship have emerged and different communities (other than nations) are making claims (Caglar 2015: 637). “Consequently, the taken-for-granted connections between rights and states, the static nature of rights, seen as if they were possessions, as well as the universalizing conceptions of citizenship came under scrutiny. Rather than a static view of citizenship, which is inscribed into formal laws, a processual understanding of citizenship with an emphasis on its ‘unfinished’ nature came to the fore.” (Balibar 2003, cited in Caglar 2015: 637).

In short, the conventional ‘vertical’ conception of citizenship between the state and the individual has shifted to a horizontal one that focuses on the relations between citizens (Clarke et al. 2014: 25). This also leaves us with the interesting and relevant question: “If states are no longer what they were, how do the emerging forms of power and authority create new forms and conditions of, or possibilities for, citizenship?” (Clarke et al. 2014: 70).

Before going into the different forms of citizenship, it is still important to mention that focusing on horizontal citizenship doesn’t mean that the state doesn’t play an essential role when it comes to linking people to places. “Such analyses of nationalism leave no doubt that states play a

⁵⁰ Translation into English: “Because for us, clearly being well-educated is a conviction, it means having good citizens for tomorrow.” (Interview Alouad 23.03.16: 45).

crucial role in the popular politics of place making and in the creation of naturalized links between places and peoples.” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 41). Citizenship is just more when disentangled from nation-states, bringing forth new discussions.

Consequently, notions about membership are being revised: “Decentring citizenship(s) thus requires not only to disentangle it from state(s) or the nation-state, but also to discuss its membership dimensions: membership of the legally defined ‘community of citizens’, membership of a ‘political community’, the intermingling or memberships through which one might imagine oneself as a citizen, and how these diverse belongings are hierarchised, contested and enacted.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 59f.).

The school Eva de Vitray is an interesting case as it acknowledges the power of the state and at the same time seeks to expand its definition of being a citizen. The founders take aspects of the state’s definition of citizenship and add some of their values in order to create a space of belonging that goes beyond the walls of the school. “Et effectivement nous ici (...) les valeurs, tout ce qui est citoyenneté, on incite. Et en même temps, on met en parallèle avec des valeurs spirituelles (...).”⁵¹ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 91). The aim is to dissolve segregations between citizens. “Pour nous c’est important d’inscrire les enfants en France.”⁵² (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 107). So it could well be said that the founders of the school are shifting to and creating a horizontal citizenship by claiming their right to be Muslim and French at the same time.

There are several forms of citizenship. However, scholars mainly distinguish between cultural and social citizenships (Caglar 2015: 637ff.). The term “cultural citizenship” has been coined by Renato Rosaldo (1994)⁵³. Aihwa Ong developed it further and uses it “to refer to the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a nation’s population and territory. Cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made

⁵¹ Translation into English: “And indeed here we (...) the values, everything that is citizenship, we encourage. And at the same time, we put in comparison with spiritual values (...).” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 91).

⁵² Translation into English: “For us it is important to inscribe the children into France.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 107).

⁵³ His definition is as follows: “Cultural citizenship refers to the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense. It claims that, in a democracy, social justice calls for equity among all citizens, even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation potentially could be used to make certain people less equal or inferior to others. The emotion of belonging means full membership in a group and the ability to influence one’s destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions.” (Rosaldo 1994: 402).

within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society.” (Ong 1996: 738, cited in Clarke et al. 2014: 46).

While cultural citizenship is still focusing on the vertical relation between citizens and the state, social citizenship, on the other hand, concentrates on social relationships (Caglar 2015: 639). It wants to grasp how persons claim rights through practices. “In order to address these practices and claims that facilitate the daily participation in the social life of a locality and generate claims and assertions of belonging that are not confined to the politics of difference and the cosmology of identity politics, scholars have begun to speak of social citizenship.” (Caglar 2015: 638).

In that sense, citizenship is a powerful tool for empowerment and claim-making. What makes this approach also very interesting, is that the process of claiming rights isn’t necessarily done by a legal citizen (by the state’s definition), but can be done by a substantive citizen: “[T]he difference between legal citizenship and substantive citizenship is important, the latter referring to practices of claims making to belong to a state, as well as collective organizing ‘to protect themselves against discrimination, gain rights, or make contributions to the development of that state and the life of the people within it’.” (Glick Schiller & Fouron 2001: 25, cited in Reed-Danahay & Brettell 2008: 11f.).

One form of citizenship that is very significant as well is transnational citizenship. In global times, relations that go beyond national borders are common. Homeland ties are kept and fostered. And becoming a citizen in a host country influences the homeland. Even more so, the legal status of citizenship isn’t proof of belonging. It doesn’t have exclusive status (see Caglar 2015: 639f.). “The re-imaginings and remakings of citizenship inscribe connections - between people, places and institutions - making new social and political landscapes and new ways of living in them.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 164). Hence, persons not only imagine themselves as citizens, but also re-imagines citizenship and create new forms of it (Clarke et al. 2014: 166). Furthermore, it is impossible to understand citizenship at present time and the transformations it has undergone without taking into account human rights that are globally framed (Soysal 2012: 16). It is an additional source to draw upon in order to obtain power and legitimacy (Clarke et al. 2014: 67).

Citizenship connects, enables not only socially and culturally, but also politically. In the (claim-)making of citizenship new projects come into being (Neveu et al. 2011: 946). “Citizenship thus functions as a connecting knot - a point of mobilisation - for a number of individuals and groups,

who identify themselves as citizens when they act; name themselves citizens when claiming citizenship; or aspire for citizenship to be enlarged, widened or transformed, so as to include other issues, other identifications, other aspirations.” (see also Isin 2002, 2008, cited in Neveu et al. 2011: 952).

Decentring and disentangling citizenship from the state makes way for the “contextual, processual, practice-based, and contested character of citizenship.” (Caglar 2015: 637). In the anthropological approach citizenship is reworked in daily practices and discourses, and is therefore always in the making. Relationships between persons become relevant and also the meanings attributed to them (Caglar 2015: 640). Anthropologically speaking, citizenship is therefore a grassroots and political process. Attention is given to communities and how claims are made, what they are based on, how memberships and the sense of belonging are established. This not only focuses on the horizontal quality of citizenship, but also gives people agency (Caglar 2015: 640). It depicts a realistic view of citizenship as it is lived (Nuijten 2013: 11, cited in Caglar 2015: 640).

An obvious form of claim to social citizenship in accordance with this thesis is religion or spirituality. “Although human rights regimes provide an important basis for social citizenship claims, some others make such claims of social inclusion, participation, and sociability in the name of religion. Religious claims and networks can foster social citizenship.” (Caglar 2015: 639). As will be shown further on in this thesis, religion is used in order to create a feeling of belonging. It is an important marker of identity (Kastoryano & Schader 2014: 254). The particular contexts and projects become the driving force of how citizenship is defined and reinterpreted. This again emphasises that conceptions of citizenships are not universal (Clarke et al. 2014: 16).

Citizenship can therefore be put to work and used by different agents and also projects (Clarke et al. 2014: 14f.). And there are a lot of imaginaries “called upon, contested and elaborated when different agents use references to ‘citizenship’ to make sense of their membership or ground their claims.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 59). Citizenship in its variety can be about hegemony and dominance, empowerment and discipline, oppression and liberty - horizontally or/and vertically (Clarke et al. 2014: 176f.).

These conceptions of citizenship are often embedded in political projects. “The notion of ‘political projects’ is here used to designate the beliefs, aspirations, interests, conceptions of the

world and representations about what life in society should be, that guide the political action of different subjects.” (Alvarez et al. 1998 & Dagnino 2006, cited in Neveu et al. 2011: 952). Political projects are a way to make one’s voice heard, to redefine citizenship, to mobilise (Clarke et al. 2014: 23). A person has agency regardless of being a citizen or not. “This is particularly relevant when one thinks about emerging projects of citizenship in which subjectivities play a crucial connective role. Such shared desires, needs and aspirations are one basis for the articulation of mutual recognition, solidarities and action.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 23). Speaking of political projects addresses the diversity of agents and thereby makes the conception of citizenship flexible (Coll 2010, cited in Neveu 2011 et al.: 952). Even though they are based on already existing cultural settings they are reframed into new configurations (Clarke et al. 2014: 27). “Political projects are, then, always complex combinations rather than ‘pure’ articulations of singular positions or ideologies.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 34).

4.4. Why create this space of citizenship?

Creating a space of citizenship wasn’t an intentional goal of the founders. In their view, they want to contribute to society by offering a place where identity-based tensions can be dissolved or deconstructed. Their personal history and experience of being Muslim and French is a relevant aspect. Based on different narratives and their belief that contributing is important they created a vision together that led to opening a Muslim primary school.

The “Why now?”-question is always an important one in the time-space study (Caglar 2013: 31). It is about opportunities in this particular socio-political setting in Mantes-la-Jolie. Space empowers them, but also limits them. Their space of citizenship is enabling a place of belonging in France and provides a space of claim-making in the current time and space.

Their vision has become much more now: they have become new narratives such as Eva de Vitray is a role model, identity-based tensions are being dissolved, bridges to the state and to the society are being built, children get schooling within the national education system; Islam is a life philosophy, etc. These are some of the narratives I have heard on numerous occasions that affect or/and create an alternative to other (more common) narratives.

When tackling the issue of the incompatibility or compatibility of Islam and France, of course the topic of citizenship comes up. With the objective of integrating young Muslim children into

the French society the prevailing idea of what a typical member of the French state should look like is being revised. The founders fully support the well-known French values of liberty, equality, and *laïcité* (when it is the one of 1905). They add a supplementary value of spirituality.

In order to initiate and maintain a project like *Eva de Vitray* the founders must be aware of their agency. They must have the belief that they can actively participate in changing or illuminating aspects of citizenship. Agency or, more precisely, the awareness of one's agency, is one of the first steps of decentring citizenship from the state. The founders allow themselves to also have a say in who is a member of the state and who should belong. Therefore, Soysal very well has a point with her concept of social project: "Thus, while expanding the boundaries and forms of participation in society, this project at the same time charges the individual as the main force for social cohesion and solidarity." (Soysal 2012: 2f.). The founders themselves never used the term social or political project. However, Aallam acknowledged that as soon as someone is active in society it is a political act: "Mais, comme pour moi, à partir du moment où on agit, on est militant. On est actif dans la société. Forcément c'est un acte politique. (...) [A]lors je pense pas qu'on puisse être apolitique."⁵⁴ (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 22). They generally talked of *Eva de Vitray* as an educational project.

Still firmly acknowledging the vertical dimension of citizenship, the founders bring in a horizontal one. I wouldn't go so far as to claim that there is a shift towards horizontal citizenship, but there is certainly a focus on the relations between citizens that would speak for horizontal citizenship. So, they are making their claims through social citizenship, however, by being well aware of cultural citizenship and working with it. I could observe what Ong described as cultural citizenship: "a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society." (Ong 1996: 738, cited in Clarke et al. 2014: 46). However, it doesn't grasp how persons claim rights through practices within social relationships, which is a practice of social citizenship according to Caglar (Caglar 2015: 639f.).

Last but not least: transnational citizenship. It plays an important role as the founders not only have a migrant background, but by adding spirituality and religion to their values of a French Muslim school and with two founders being representatives of mosques nearby they have ties going beyond national boundaries and are embedded in a religious community. Kastoryano

⁵⁴ Translation into English: "But, as for me, from the moment we act, we are activists. We are active in society. Therefore, it's a political act. (...) [S]o I don't think you can be apolitical." (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 22).

even finds secularisation to be important in the organisation of religious communities: “(...) [R]eligious communities have always been stimulated by secularization to organize themselves in pressure groups and take action in the domain of international relations.” (Kastoryano 2014: 250). The following chapter elucidates those networks and also resources the founders are a part of and how the space is enacted.

5. Enacting the Space

After mapping the space and elucidating its purpose, this chapter focuses on the enactment of the space. In what way is what is being said and envisioned put into action? How much does the empiric reflect the theory? “Examining how citizenship ‘takes place’ both enlarges the study of citizenship, and identifies citizenship as a critical dimension in the politics of scale and space. Citizenship projects are connective: linking people, places and power in distinctive - and very different - ways.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 132).

The chapter revolves around the question how they accessed a space of action in order to bring this vision to life. So, what are the strategies, what are the possibilities that would allow actions to come closer to the vision? What gives them access to a space of action and also how do they enact the space to realise their vision in the best way possible?

In that sense, the first part will concentrate on the relations, networks and resources that are available and used in the space. This will illuminate the complexity and the interconnectedness of spaces and scales. The second and third parts are about the actual enactment of the space - outside and inside the school. Based on my fieldwork, interviews, field notes and observations these chapters show if the vision is being adopted and brought to life and also what tools and methods are being used in order to create and maintain their space of action and citizenship.

5.1. Networks and Resources

In anthropology we have “to pay particular attention to the way spaces and places are made, imagined, contested, and enforced.” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 47). The ethnography of space and place allows us “to address the complexity of contemporary social relations and cultural settings” (Low 2017: 2). A particular place and project, like the first Muslim primary school of

France, is the product of relations, interactions on and between those different scales. The subjects involved such as the founders or politicians of the project have agency and therefore are “scale makers” (Caglar 2013: 36). What kind of relations do the founders have and enact in order to realise their vision? What resources are at their disposal? To answer those questions it is necessary to look at social relations which directly relate to power relations (see Massey 2001: 4). All those steps, interactions, decisions, thoughts happen in a space and constitute the space. Questions about who has the power to shape or create the place and enter the space become relevant (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 40).

During the fieldwork, analysing the data and doing research, the relations on different scales became very apparent, regionally, nationally and transnationally. Of course, these scales are not clearly separated, but are intertwined. They are relational and consequently build and make each other. The school couldn’t work without these networks that go beyond national boundaries.

The founders knew from the beginning that political and economic work would be necessary in order to open a private Muslim bilingual school in a sustainable manner. “Donc, entre le moment où on a commencé nos réunions et le moment où on a ouvert l’école, il y a eu deux ans. Donc, pendant ces deux années on a discuté, on a échangé, on a commencé à préparer le travail au niveau politique, économique etc. Parce qu’il a fallu effectivement aller vers les gens, leurs dire: ‘On ouvre une école, voilà. Derrière cette école il y a ces personnes-là. Le but c’est pas de créer un milieu communautaire. Bien au contraire. Bien au contraire. On est loin des crispations identitaires. On veut permettre à des enfants de pouvoir être dans un milieu très proche de leur culture, de leurs valeurs, de leur religion, tout en étant aussi très proche de leur société.’ Donc voilà.”⁵⁵ (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 74).

Of course, it helped that the founders are known in the community. Institutions, the town hall, the national education system, the state know their positions, their various activities and consequently the school “Eva de Vitray” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 51; Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 133). To recapitulate, these are the founders: Youssef Aallam, Hassan

⁵⁵ Translation into English: “So, between the time we started our meetings and the time we opened the school, there were two years. So, during these two years, we discussed, we exchanged, we started to prepare the work on the political, economic and other levels. Because we had to go to the people and tell them: “We’re opening a school. Behind this school there are these people. The aim is not to create a community setting. Quite the contrary. Quite the contrary. We are far from identity-based tensions. We want to allow children to be in an environment very close to their culture, their values, their religion, while also being very close to their society. So here we are.” (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 74).

Aboulharjan, Alouad Allouch, A. Bamou, Medhi Berka, Ali Elabdi, Abdelaziz El Jaouhari and Moussa Guerrouache (in alphabetical order). I will now go into greater detail about the different networks that the founders are part of to show how involved they are on different levels. These were told to me in interviews and others are the result of research.

- Aallam (teacher in other schools), Alouad Allouch (headmaster) and Guerrouache (headmaster of the public elementary school Jean Jacques Rousseau) are heavily involved in the day-to-day business of the school and are members of the school's educational team.
- Aboulharjan is an entrepreneur in the tourism sector and is the school's treasurer.
- Bamou is the initiator of the project and launched the idea of opening a school.
- Elabdi was deputy mayor for finances and municipal councillor of Mantes-la-Jolie until 2017 and thus politically very involved. He is also an entrepreneur of a store called "Bureau Valet".
- El Jaouhari is also politically active and very present in the media. Furthermore, he is the president of the mosque in Southern Mantes and is associated with or the initiator of various organisations:
 - AMMS (Association des Musulmans de Mantes Sud; Association of Muslims in Southern Mantes). He is the president of AMMS (M.G., 2016).
 - CIMY (Conseil des institutions musulmanes; Council of Muslim institutions). He was the initiator and general secretary. Since 2018, he has been assistant secretary (due to internal disputes). CIMY is an institution for dialogue between Muslims and the State (M.G., 2018; Gherdane, 2019).
 - CEIMY (Centre d'études et d'initiatives musulmanes des Yvelines; Centre for Studies and Muslim Initiatives in the Yvelines): a monitoring centre for the presence of local Muslims initiated by him (CEIMY, n.y.; Gherdane, 2019).
- Berka is rector as well, but of the Grand Mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie.

As can be noted, they are very active in the Muslim community in Mantes-la-Jolie and the surroundings. As Aallam put it: "Alors nous, on essaye de s'organiser au niveau des Yvelines. On a créé des institutions, des institutions musulmanes des Yvelines. [...] Deux des fondateurs font partie de l'initiative. Donc, ils travaillent à Versailles avec la préfecture, le département, etc. Et donc, ils se réunissent régulièrement avec le préfet pour, ben, quand il y a des difficultés à porter une réponse, et puis aussi quand tu es avancé sur des questions très terre à terre. [...]"

Donc, là dans les Yvelines ça avance bien. Mais ça reste les Yvelines. Ça reste les Yvelines, mais c'est difficile.”⁵⁶ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 181f.).

Looking at the list of organisations the founders are associated with, one can see El Jaouhari is very active in the political organisation of Muslims in the Yvelines. In this context, I want to refer to a “Le Monde” newspaper article from 2018 in which El Jaouhari speaks out against religious extremism and in favour of the need to integrate Islam into French laïc society. In his words, the lack of organisation offers Salafism the opportunity to profit from local activism (El Jaouhari, 2018). Unfortunately, I didn't get the opportunity to speak with him in an interview. We only met once at the school on the “Open Day” (Field notes 19.03.16).

Aallam also mentioned in an interview that, as far as the school is concerned, they do not attach themselves to any political movement, neither left nor right. They work with all political parties: “Par contre ce qui est sûr, c'est qu'on n'est rattaché à aucun mouvement politique. Voilà. Ni de gauche, ni de droite. On travaille avec tous les politiques. On est obligé de travailler avec les politiques, puisqu'il faut des autorisations, parce qu'il faut une reconnaissance, parce qu'il faut des locaux, [...]. Donc forcément, on est amené à travailler avec des élus. [...] Mais quelque soit leur appartenances politiques. [...] Par exemple, l'école ne sert pas à un nom politique en particulier. Par exemple, aucun homme politique de la région ne peut venir dire: ‘Ben, l'école Eva de Vitray c'est moi.’ Ou: ‘L'école Eva de Vitray, le groupe scolaire, me soutient.’ On est pas là dedans.”⁵⁷ (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 18).

Also when asked if they are a member of the FNEM (“Fédération Nationale de l'Enseignement privé Musulman”, in English: National Federation of Private Muslim education”), the first representative organisation of private Muslim education in France, Aallam said they preferred to stay independent - even after being approached by them several times. “On a fait le choix de

⁵⁶ Translation into English: “So, we try to organise ourselves at the level of the Yvelines. We have created institutions, Muslim institutions in the Yvelines. [...] Two of the founders are part of the initiative. So they work in Versailles with the prefecture, the département, etc. So, they meet regularly with the prefect for, well, when there are difficulties in coming up with a response, and also when it's advanced on very down-to-earth issues. [...] So, in the Yvelines, things are progressing well. But it's still only the Yvelines. It's still the Yvelines, but it's difficult.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 181f.).

⁵⁷ Translation into English: “But what is certain is that we are not attached to any political movement. No, neither from the left nor the right. We work with all politicians. We have to work with politicians, because we need authorisation, because we need recognition, because we need facilities [...]. So, of course, we have to work with elected officials. [...] But regardless of their political affiliation. [...] For example, the school does not belong to a particular political party. For example, no politician in the region can come and say: ‘Well, the Eva de Vitray school is mine’ or: ‘The Eva de Vitray school, the school board, supports me’. We're not interested in that.” (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 18).

pas en faire partie. [...] [P]arce qu'on a été approché effectivement. On a été approché plusieurs fois. Mais voilà, nous on a toujours été indépendants. On a un projet qui est très particulier. On a un positionnement qui est très particulier. Et adhérer à une fédération c'est adhérer forcément à ces valeurs. Et (..) je pense vraiment qu'on a un positionnement très particulier. On aurait du mal à faire partie d'une fédération. Alors effectivement, pour négocier des contrats, le rectorat ne parle pas avec des écoles, n'échange pas avec des écoles, mais plutôt avec des fédérations. Pour l'instant, c'est la seule fédération qui existe. [...] Mais en même temps, voilà. Nous, on a préféré rester indépendants."⁵⁸ (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 184, 186).

As for the connection to the Muslim World League, no further information is currently available. In the interview, Aallam clearly states that they are not connected to any political movement. They stay neutral and work with all parties (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 18). The founders were very transparent about their connection to the mosque, however, they never addressed the League at any occasion. This is definitely an interesting investigation and research to pursue in the future.

Of course, the school has to be able to support itself financially. As long as it is a private school that isn't recognised by the state, the state isn't allowed to financially support the school. This is only possible as soon as they conclude a contract with the state (which happened in 2017 for some classes) (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 176). Until then, they rely on donors and on the school fees that only cover the cost partially (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 10). In an interview, I was told a bit more about donors that are part of the "Cercle des amis de l'école Eva de Vitray" (in English: Circle of friends of the school Eva de Vitray): "Et donc, on a ce qu'on appelle le cercle des Amis de l'école Eva de Vitray. Ben, ce sont des amis, des chefs d'entreprises, des ingénieurs, des personnes qui financièrement ont des entreprises et ont des salaires qui viennent contribuer. Quand on a besoin d'eux on les appelle, on leur dit: 'Voilà, on a récupéré cet immeuble, on va le refaire entièrement. On a besoin de €50.000, €60.000.' Donc ils posent l'argent. Alors ils le posent en sachant qu'ils y gagnent aussi puisque c'est déduit de leurs impôts. Puisque on a créé une structure qui permet aux donateurs de déduire de leurs

⁵⁸ Translation into English: "We made the choice not to be part of it. [...] [B]ecause we were actually approached by them. We were approached several times. But we have always been independent. We have a very particular project. We have a very unique positioning. And to join a federation is necessarily to adhere to their values. And (...) I really think that we have a very particular positioning. It would be difficult to be part of a federation. So indeed, to negotiate contracts, the rectorate doesn't talk with schools, doesn't exchange with schools, but rather with federations. For the moment, it's the only federation that exists. [...] But at the same time, that's the way it is. We preferred to keep our independence." (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 184, 186).

impôts.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 123).⁵⁹ During my fieldwork, the founders organised an event for the circle. After getting the headmaster’s confirmation that I was allowed to attend, this decision was revoked with the explanation that it was too delicate (Field notes 19.04.16, 11.05.16). When asked about it again in an interview afterwards, I was asked to stop the recording (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 78-84). I never got any additional information about who is in the circle or how often they are meeting.

Another way to ensure the continuity of the school was to structure the school itself in associations. When they opened the school, they started several associations - including one that runs the school. One is responsible for the wages, another for legal matters. This way they ensure that the school stays more or less independent. So that if there should be a problem one day the school can still continue to operate. “Donc, on a une association qui gère le collège, une association qui gère l’école, une association qui gère le personnel d’entretien. C’est important de bien distinguer pour pas qu’il y a un jour un souci.”⁶⁰ (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 95). Additionally, they have endowment funds. This is like a foundation. It manages the premises. In 2016, the founders became the proud owners of the premises, which also made them more independent of any political changes (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 103). “C’est aussi important d’être complètement libre par rapport aux (...) politiques, par rapport aux locaux, de ne pas dépendre. Demain la mairie change de couleur peut-être qu’on peut nous dire: ‘Ben, on arrête la location.’ (...)”⁶¹ (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 103).

So, the networks and resources reach from political to social ones and from local to global. They are known in the Muslim community and also represent them in different settings (mosque, organisations, committee of the Versailles Academy). Consequently, they have a lot of supporters. The next chapters will discuss the enactment of the vision outside and inside the

⁵⁹ Translation into English: “And so we have what we call the circle of friends of the school Eva de Vitray. Well, these are friends, entrepreneurs, engineers, people who financially have enterprises and have salaries, who come to contribute. When we need them, we call them up and say: ‘Well, we’ve acquired this building and we’re going to redo it entirely. We need €50.000, €60.000. So, they put the money in for us. So, they put it in, knowing that they also gain from it because it’s deducted from their taxes. As we have created a structure that allows donors to deduct it from their taxes.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 123).

⁶⁰ Translation into English: “So, we have an association that manages the secondary school, an association that manages the school, an association that manages the maintenance staff. It’s important to make a distinction so that one day there won’t be a problem.” (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 95).

⁶¹ Translation into English: “It’s also important to be completely free in relation to (...) politics, in relation to the premises, not to be dependent. Tomorrow the town council may change its colour and say: ‘Well, we’re not renting anymore. (...)’” (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 103).

school. It will be illustrated how the space is enacted, what remains a theory or is really transmitted and lived and how the networks are being put to use.

5.2. Enactment outside of school

Having insight into the networks and resources of the founders, this chapter illustrates situations and scenarios in which those are being enacted in order to ensure the continuity of the school and to advertise and express their view of being Muslim in France. These include different groups, e.g. politicians, parents, the media, the mosque.

The political work of the founders is remarkable in regard to the high standing the school enjoys on a political and regional level. In the two years of preparation before opening the school, they made sure to work on and with the political level as well. Today, they are reaping the benefits. Some influential politicians have already visited the school and supported it, one of them being the prefect. He is the highest representative of the state in the département. According to Aallam, the prefect claimed that he was against Muslim schools being contracted, with the exception of Eva de Vitray (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 15, 21, 23). Another person who came to visit the school was the President of the Senate, Mr. Larcher (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 135). In general, the school inspections were short, adds a teacher (Interview Sinan 27.05.16: 222).

The Mantes city hall has provided support from the beginning. Pierre Bédier, President of the Provincial Council of the Yvelines and former Mayor of Mantes-la-Jolie, already knew the school and the people behind it and was a supporter from the start. He facilitated the meeting with the prefect for instance, who came to the school. (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 25; Annuaire Mairie, 2021; Hôtel du Département, 2015). “Il y a une vraie collaboration avec M. Bédier.”⁶² (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 25).

The founders have also worked with elected officials in the area and open-minded mosques. In a way, “they are a kind of intellectual, mature elite activists” (“une sorte d’élite intellectuelle militante”) (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 298) creating a project in an area where conditions coincide to ensure its success (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 298). Especially El Jaouhari has

⁶² Translation into English: “There is a true collaboration with Mr. Bédier.” (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 25).

contacted a lot of politicians in the area. He is responsible for the political work when it comes to the school. He analysed in advance what could cause issues. “[...] Il a une analyse politique très très fine. Et il est - comment dire? - il est très pointu. Très pointu. Il a fait un super boulot notamment par rapport à l'école. Il a déchiffré tout ce qui pouvait poser problème au niveau politique. C'est lui qui s'est chargé de toute cette partie-là. Il a rencontré tous les politiques du coin. Tous les responsables, quelque soit leur positionnement pour préparer l'arrivée de l'école. Et du coup l'école est arrivée ici sans aucun problème.”⁶³ (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 180).

El Jaouhari is also regarded as the representative of Muslims in the Yvelines (see p. 21 for the organisations he is involved in). For now, there are no official Muslim representatives on the committees of the Versailles Academy. The Versailles Academy decides on the opening of schools and also on whether they can enter a contract with the state (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 30-58). That is why El Jaouhari was present at the committee in order to represent the founders of the school. The exact procedure when it comes to Muslim private schools is not clear, not even at the board of education (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 62).

The mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie is also a supporter of the project (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 25): Not only is Berka a co-founder of the school and the representative of the Grand Mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie, but, as mentioned, some teachers of the Spiritual Awakening class come from the mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie. They also talk a lot about the school at the mosque and donations are collected (Interview Assalma 28.06.16: 11). The mosque has a kind of partnership with the school. It ensures that the school is known and supported. However, as a teacher points out, the school does not have to give anything in return (Interview Laurence 27.06.16: 143-147).

As soon as the children start secondary school they also have ethics classes (name of the class: “Culture, civilisation et éthique”) (Field notes 27.06.16). The teacher, who wants to stay anonymous and will be referred to as Ahmed, was also a speaker at a conference in the mosque during my stay there. Ahmed also teaches as a sociologist. The topic of the conference was “La religion de la science” (in English: “The Religion of Sciences”) and revolved around the idea that (re)searching scientifically is like searching for God. The following questions were at the

⁶³ Translation into English: “[...] He has a very, very fine political analysis. And he is - how can I put it? - he is very sharp. Very sharp. He has done a great job, particularly in the case of the school. He deciphered everything that could be a problem at the political level. He was in charge of that entire aspect. He met all the politicians in the area. He met with all the local politicians, whatever their political position, to prepare for the arrival of the school. And so the school was able to settle here without any problem.” (Interview Aallam 01.07.16: 180).

centre of the discussion: How can we reconcile the sacred writings of religion with scientific knowledge about the origin of the world? Does scientific progress threaten religion? Should science have limits? What is the difference between religious and scientific beliefs? (Field notes 08.04.16). Ahmed has a scientific and well-read approach to Islam. He not only teaches children at school about his views, but also has regular training sessions with the other teachers where Islam and the Qur'an are questioned and analysed through his lense. More about these sessions will be elaborated in the next chapter ("Enactment inside the school").

Another example of the involvement of the mosque and its positioning outside the school was the tragic event of a policeman and his partner who were killed by a young man in their house in the nearby town of Magnanville on the 13th of June 2016. It was classified as an Islamist terrorist attack (Le Parisien & V.W., 2020). The mosques in the area jointly called for a march against barbarism in remembrance of the killed policeman and his partner. 4.000 Muslims walked peacefully in solidarity on the 19th of June, according to the French press "Le Monde" (the police reported 2500 persons). The march started at the grand mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie and ended at the police station of Mantes-la-Jolie. Co-founder of the school and rector of the Grand Mosque, Medhi Berka, is cited in the news article. He is very active and has attended commemorative events since the terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan (Aubenas, 2016). At the walk, I also saw Elabdi, Alouad Allouch, Aallam, El Jaouhari and some teachers and pupils from the school (Field notes 19.06.16; France Bleu Paris, 2016). El Jaouhari was especially represented in the media as he is the president of the Mosque of Mantes-Sud (France 3 Paris Ile-de-France & AFP, 2020; Arrêt sur Images, 2016).

In the picture below you can see El Abdi, who was deputy mayor at the time (wearing a sash in the colours of the French flag, more or less on the right). The banner reads: "Collectif des Mosquées du Mantois. Mobilisons-nous contre la barbarie!"⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Translation into English: "Collective of Mosques of Mantois. Let's mobilise against barbarism!"



Figure 13: “Members of the Muslim community march in Mantes-la-Jolie on June 19, 2016, in memory of the police officer and his partner stabbed to death on June 13 by an ISIS extremist”, © Eliot Blondet, © AFP (RT, 2016)



Figure 14: Flowers in remembrance of the killed policeman and his partner at the police station (Loitsch, 19.06.2016)

A few weeks later, Aallam and I sat down for an interview and discussed this march and his take on it. He came to talk about the media and the media’s portrayal of the walk and the Muslim community. He pointed out the schizophrenic situation: If Muslims don’t come together when such a tragic event occurs, it is reprimanded - and if they do, it is not received too well, either, as it is considered to be too community-based (Interview Aallam 01.07.16 : 115).

In general, the founders’ opinion of the media is very critical. The image of Islam in the media is not objective enough and not the best things are being shown, so Aallam. There is a focus on

extremism (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 19). Or: “Les médias vont prendre n’importe qui pour parler au nom des musulmans.”⁶⁵ (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 161). Before, they were more tolerant towards the media (Interview Bamou 13.05.16). Now, they are very discreet, says Guerrouache. On refuse (...) toutes les interviews.” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 156). Declining the requests is a choice, he adds. However, they are transparent with the prefecture and the school board (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 164). Aallam reaffirms this statement by pointing out that if they open the doors to the media, they would justify their appearance in front of the school: “Si on ouvre la porte on justifie leur arrivée devant la porte.”⁶⁶ (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 9). This communication battle is scary (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 153).

Actually, during my fieldwork, it happened once that I came to the school and journalists equipped with cameras were standing in front of the gate. The headmaster clearly rejected their request if they could come in. This was on the 13th of June 2016. Looking for a reason why they might be here, the suggestion was made that it must have to do with the terrorist attack on the Bataclan that had occurred exactly 6 months before, on the 13th of November 2015. Apparently, the day before some journalists had also been standing in front of the school (Field notes 13.05.16). Just two days before, he had told me how annoyed he was by the media, even when they wanted to portray a good example. What do you need a good example for, he asked rhetorically (Field notes 11.05.16).

Eva de Vitray, however, seems to be a good example for other people who want to open a school. In an interview, I asked them if they give advice to other potential founders of Muslim schools and in fact, they receive people who want to start a project (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 77). As Aallam points out: As one of the first Muslim schools they are sought after by everyone. A lot of Muslim schools are opening and a lot of them come to visit Eva de Vitray to ask about funding, administration and educational organisation (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 149). They would ask them questions like “What is your educational project?” or “Why do you want to open a school?” It is important to the founders that the schools they are giving advice to offer added value to the educational area. Just responding to a big demand isn’t enough of a reason

⁶⁵ Translation into English: “The media will take anyone to speak on behalf of Muslims.” (Aallam Interview 15.02.16 - Part 2: 161).

⁶⁶ Translation into English: “If you open the door, it justifies their appearance at the door.” (Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 9).

for them to actually open a school. In Aallam's words: "On est très dur. On leur montre tout de suite les difficultés."⁶⁷ (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 77). Education shouldn't foster a closed environment. It is important that the school forms pupils who will feel comfortable in French society: „Si votre école n'apporte rien au champ éducatif français, c'est pas la peine de l'ouvrir. Si c'est pour garder des enfants dans un endroit clos, qu'on vient même avec des bonnes conditions, qu'on vient même avec des super enseignants, qu'on vient même avec une structure extraordinaire - si on les garde pendant dix ans et qu'on les enferme, ben on en fait des schizophrènes. Quand ils vont se retrouver dans la société, quand ils auront fini leurs études (...) quel sera le résultat? Ils seront peut-être performants scolairement mais est ce qu'ils seront à l'aise dans la société dans laquelle ils vivent? Et à partir du moment où on commence à interdire des contenus pédagogiques, qu'on commence à que être entre soi, je pense que c'est le début de la fin."⁶⁸ (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 77). So, they do assist other schools in opening Muslim schools but are very critical. They still think, though, that opening Muslim schools is important. However, the goal of the school shouldn't be to create schizophrenia, but citizens (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 151).

Another occasion, where the school gets to present itself is the "Open Day" for parents who are interested in bringing their children to Eva de Vitray. Pretty early on in my field research, I had the opportunity to attend one of them. Alouad Allouch, Aallam, Guerrouache, Berka, El Jaouhari and El Abdi were present. The afternoon was organised in two tours with two different groups of parents. Approximately 30 people were in each group. Children were attending as well. The teachers and classrooms were presented. They explained how the school is structured and that it follows the national curriculum. Mainly Aallam was talking at the first tour. During the tour Guerrouache came up to me and explained that a lot of friends were there. For him, this school is mainly a private one, not a Muslim one. The second tour was primarily guided by El Abdi. Berka talked to me a lot on this tour. He emphasized how exceptional and not representative this school was compared to other Muslim schools. As for the parents, they asked

⁶⁷ Translation into English: "We are very hard. We show them the difficulties from the start." (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 77).

⁶⁸ Translation into English: "If your school doesn't contribute anything to the French educational field, it's not worth opening it. If it's to keep children in a closed space, even if you provide good conditions, even if you provide great teachers, even if you provide an extraordinary structure - if you hold them for ten years and lock them up, well, you turn them into schizophrenics. When they find themselves in society, when they finish their studies (...) what will be the result? They may perform well academically, but will they be at ease in the society in which they live? And from the moment we start banning educational content, from the moment we start to be only among ourselves, I think that this is the beginning of the end." (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 77).

questions about the timetable, the number of children in a class, details on classes as Arabic and how Muslim ethics are incorporated into the school (Field notes 19.03.2016).

The work with parents came up several times during my stay at the school and in interviews. The headmaster mentions the education of families. It is not only about working with young people but also with the parents. Eva de Vitray offers meetings, conferences and awareness raising sessions (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 146). Alouad Allouch also speaks of how the school changes strict parents. The effect of Eva de Vitray is visible (Interview Alouad Allouch 28.06.16: 32). Aida, a teacher, emphasises the work that has to be done with the parents concerning their identity and cultural differences (Interview Aida 11.05.16: 39-43). Actually, the school chooses its pupils by selecting the parents. The parents have to support the educational project (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 118). When the school started out, a lot of parents came for the Muslim aspect (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 136). To give an example: The first conversations with the parents would sometimes be about them not wanting their daughters to touch other people's hand as this is considered "harām" ("forbidden") (Interview Aida 11.05.16: 98). Boys and girls swimming together was also sometimes an issue (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 37).

However, this is less and less the case. The focus is now more on the school being a private one as it has the reputation to offer a higher educational quality (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 136). Additionally, the founders have added more criteria for admission (Interview Aida 11.05.16: 98). Parents have to agree with what they do and with their vision (Interview Alouad 23.03.16: 37). This is also the observation I made when present at the interviews between the founders and the parents who applied for their children. The founders would look at the interaction between the parents and the child(ren), at who would speak more and really ask fundamental questions about their educational project. As soon as the parents were too rigid in their religious beliefs or not in agreement with the vision of the founders, they decided not to take the child (Field notes 08.04.16). Aallam says that it was a process, but now the parents have the same positioning. The school has no difficulty finding new pupils - quite the contrary. For every vacant place there are about seven to ten requests (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 118).

What can be observed is that whether with the work with politicians, parents, in relation to the mosque, at conferences, manifestations or open days the founders advertise and express their view on being a Muslim in France in a very consistent and coherent way.

5.3. Enactment inside the school

Getting the chance to participate and being present in the day-to-day business of the school, I had the opportunity to see how the vision of the founders is shared, transmitted to and enacted by the teachers at the school. Subsequently, I was able to observe how the space of citizenship was enacted as well.

In chapter “Vision” I already summarised the main points of the vision from the founders’ perspective. This will be the basis for assessing the extent to which the teachers’ actions and teaching correspond with the vision of the founders. Accordingly, during my interviews with the teachers, I would ask them why the school “Eva de Vitray” was needed, and how they perceived religion and *laïcité* in school.

A lot of teachers mentioned the work that has to be done in society in order to reconcile the Muslim community and French society. They referred to the existing “schizophrenia” and the resulting identity issue:

One teacher hopes that Eva de Vitray guides the Muslim community in a good direction (Interview Laurence 17.06.16: 9). The school works on Islam from the inside. It shows a different world, a world as it could be. A broadening of their belief and their vision of society are necessary in order to live together⁶⁹ (Interview Laurence 27.06.16: 133-134). She adds it is about the renewal and the alliance between citizens of the Muslim community and France. Both citizenship and religion are important and need to be reconciled (Interview Laurence 17.06.16: 32-36).

By referring to “working on Islam from the inside”, she also refers to the aspect of teaching pupils to reflect their upbringing and religion. The school also works with the parents in order to convey that both being French and Muslim is possible. Eva de Vitray acts like a link between the Muslim community and the public authorities (Interview Laurence 17.06.16: 41). The teacher’s job is to get the children to open up. It is about working on and shaking up the Muslim community from the inside (Interview Laurence 17.06.16: 58).

Even the word “schizophrène” was used to describe some Muslims in the context of their identity in France - as did Aallam in an interview (Interview Laurence 17.06.16: 36; see

⁶⁹ Translation into English: “The moment you see a different world, it changes you. To be able to live with others, they have to broaden their beliefs, so that they can broaden their vision of society. It is to work on Islam from the inside.” (Interview Laurence 27.06.16: 133-134).

Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 77). Several teachers spoke about being religious in France. There is work to do when it comes to French identity (Interview Aida 11.05.16: 43). The children were born in France and at the same time they are not part of this country. That is frustrating for them (Interview Kamissa 01.07.16: 74). That is why Eva de Vitray is a beautiful project, said another teacher. It is important to build a Republican identity that can integrate both the French and the religious (Interview Siham 20.06.16: 21). Both aspects, citizenship and religion, make a person. In this school, there is a good balance between the two (Interview Laurence 17.06.16: 35; Interview Siham 30.06.16: 29). It is important that future generations feel French regardless of their religion: “Donc, en tant que français, pratique la religion que tu veux, mais agit en tant que français. Moi, je trouve que ça c’est nécessaire pour les générations à venir. De se sentir français. Avant tout.”⁷⁰ (Interview Imène 13.05.16: 179).

A teacher claimed that what this school does is eventually a work of integration, which of course brings its challenges (Interview Aida 11.05.16: 92). “Intégrer c’est donner aux enfants la possibilité de regarder les choses dans la complexité et après développer un esprit critique pour dire: ça je l’accepte, ça je l’accepte pas.”⁷¹ (Interview Aida 11.05.16: 95). The biggest issue today is the fear of differences. Therefore, the goal of the school is to bring them closer to the differences (Interview Kamissa 01.07.16: 50-51). It is an open-minded school and they are transparent (Interview Kamissa 01.07.16: 28, 35).

Other teachers very plainly answered the question of why the school is important by addressing that it meets the demands of Muslims. Why shouldn’t there also be Muslim confessional schools? This school meets this demand (Interview Imène 20.05.16: 4; Interview Sana 07.04.16: 212; Interview Siham 30.06.16: 27).

The (only) male teacher at the school also pointed out that the founders are picky not only in choosing the parents, but also when it comes to choosing the teachers. They want them to share the vision and philosophy of the school (Interview Sinan 27.05.16: 130). This includes respecting the national curriculum (Interview Laurence 17.06.16: 34; Interview Siham 30.06.16: 30). The founders believe in what they do, agrees another teacher (Interview Emna

⁷⁰ Translation into English: “So, as a French person, practise the religion you want, but act as a French person. I think this is necessary for future generations. To feel French. Above all.” (Interview Imène 13.05.16: 179).

⁷¹ Translation into English: “To integrate is to give children the possibility to examine things in their complexity and then to develop a critical mind in order to say: this I accept, that I don't accept.” (Interview Aida 11.05.16: 95).

23.05.16: 76). New teachers are accompanied by the educational team of the school. During the first classes, Aallam and/or the headmaster come by and every trimester Guerrouache checks the pupils' notebooks and talks with the teachers (Interview Halida 01.07.16: 228-229, 234-238).

He also boils the role of Eva de Vitray down to two essential tasks: instruction and education. Instruction is the theoretical one. Education is about Republican values, i.e. respect (Interview Sinan 27.05.16: 153-155). "On est une école privée musulmane, mais on est avant tout une école française. Et c'est vrai que c'est un projet rare." (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 285). One teacher even said that it is a school like any other, as the main objective is to learn what you would also learn in any public school (Interview Halida 01.07.16: 155). The only difference: more headscarves and the Arabic language (Interview Assalma 28.06.16: 27). French education is the most important task (Interview Imène 13.05.16: 152).

When talking about religion and France, the topic of *laïcité* came up. A question I asked was whether they would consider Eva de Vitray to be a *laïc* school. This also started conversations on *laïcité* in general and what it means.

A teacher states that theoretically, the concept of *laïcité* is nice, however it doesn't reflect reality. *Laïcité* is misunderstood, vague and automatically linked to Islam (Interview Laurence 17.06.16: 45; Interview Siham 30.06.16: 35; Interview Kamissa 01.07.16: 59). It is a new and political problem (Interview Assalma 28.06.16: 43). The ideal seems to be an atheist (Interview Halida 01.07.16: 273-275). It is a paradox: On the one hand, there is the liberty to practise one's religion. On the other hand, one can't exercise a public function by showing one's religion. This consequently leads to a double life (Interview Halida 01.07.16: 277). Some teachers wanted to work in a public school, which isn't possible with the headscarf. Or they already worked at a public school and then decided they wanted to wear the headscarf, so they had to change to a confessional private school (Interview Halida 01.07.16: 145; Interview Sana 07.04.16: 91).

If a concept of *laïcité* is applied at the school, it is the one from 1905 that allows the liberty of religion and is open to everybody (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 607; Interview Imène 13.05.16: 217). Often the children don't perceive *laïcité* as something positive. However, the school tries to show the positive aspect of it. It is the respect for religions (Interview Sana 07.04.16: 75-76).

With regard to *laïcité* and Islam, there were many similarities with what the founders communicated. The vision of the founders of an Islam that is humanistic and open-minded is

consistent with the interpretation of Islam by many teachers (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 287; Interview Emna 23.05.16: 60): The religious aspect of the school is more understood as a spiritual one (Interview Laurence 27.06.16: 85; Interview Emna 23.05.16: 62). Religion at school manifests itself through Spiritual Awakening classes, but also through small things like religious celebrations or allowing pupils to practise their religion (Interview Imène 20.05.16: 10). Also the values are lived and conveyed to the children: respect, solidarity, fraternity, helping each other, equality (Interview Siham 30.06.16: 31-32; Interview Kamissa 01.07.16: 45). The pedagogic team is on the same page with regard to the teaching vision as well: imparting knowledge, developing critical thinking skills in pupils and not imposing a way of life on pupils (Interview Sana 07.04.16: 204-206).

However, no religious matters are taught in general education and teaching (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 379). That wouldn't be professional (Interview Emna 24.05.16: 28). Religious questions raised by the pupils are only discussed in the Spiritual Awakening classes. If the questions come up in other classes, pupils are told to ask them during the Spiritual Awakening classes (Interview Laurence 17.06.16: 52; Interview Laurence 27.06.16: 91-92; Interview Sinan 27.05.16: 165).

Which brings us to the Spiritual Awakening classes. Spiritual Awakening classes take place every morning (except Wednesdays) for 25 minutes and are optional; any pupil can attend, if they want to (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 130; Field notes 11.05.16, 27.06.16). At the school they instil these universal values of Islam into the children (Interview Alouad Allouch 23.03.16: 18).

In total, there are five teachers (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 501). Each teacher of Spiritual Awakening classes teaches independently and they don't exchange the details of their lessons with each other (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 527; Field notes 13.05.16). Three of them also work as Arabic teachers at the school, two are external teachers from the mosque (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 509-512, 554). However, nearly every one of them has worked at the mosque at some point (Interview Hayate 23.05.16: 32; Field notes 24.05.16).

I attended the Spiritual Awakening classes and also interviewed the teachers. From my observation and the interviews, I was able to gather the following information about the content of the lessons: Hayate teaches the recitation and the memorisation of the suras (Interview Hayate 23.05.16: 12; Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 533). Imène does chants, pronunciation and

also the meaning behind the written words (Field notes 24.05.16 & 27.05.16). Mme. Berka teaches the values and behaviour in different settings (Field notes 03.06.16). She is the mother of the co-founder and representative of the Grand Mosque in Mantes-la-Jolie, Medhi Berka (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 555). She is also a representative of the Grand Mosque and is part of the management (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 563). Samira teaches religious songs at the school and *tajwid* (the correct pronunciation of the Qur'an) at the mosque (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 541, 561). Fatima teaches *tajwid*. She doesn't explain the meaning behind the written words, but focuses on the pronunciation (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 342, 539). However, *tajwid* for her also means how to behave and to think. *Tajwid* means to be and study better. The Qur'an is more than just a book, it is about changing from the inside (Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 350, 354-357).

In secondary school, the pupils have no Spiritual Awakening class, but instead they have "Culture, civilisation et éthique" once a week for 1.5 hours with Ahmed (Field notes 27.06.16). He has three main teaching goals: 1) ethics (civic and moral), which is similar to philosophy, 2) inspiring progressivism and 3) re-modernising religious reasoning (Field notes 16.03.16). Topics addressed in his classes during my visit were: Darkness and light; the mentioning of brain and heart in the Qur'an; Noah in Torah, Bible and Qur'an; historical science: what is truth?; meat consumption; the issue with beliefs and not God; Ramadan (Field notes 16.03.16, 23.03.16, 24.03.16, 27.03.16, 03.06.16).

By using classics and traditions he wants to make them progress and open their minds. He claims that he doesn't teach religion. He strongly emphasises the concept of rationality as he believes in a real pure rationality that is absolutely universal (Field notes 16.03.16; Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 190). He doesn't believe in God, however thinks that there is something more (Field notes 23.03.16). "Je suis dans la tradition des illuminés de Bavière."⁷² (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 141). He also identifies with Durkheimian and Marxian analyses as well as Foucault's theories on religious construction (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 173).

In his opinion, Eva de Vitray is a solution to public schools in terms of laïcité. Public schools don't help emancipate children on religious matters. This requires a logic of reason and realistic thinking and not faith (Field notes 16.03.16). Religions in general don't exist, only individuals who create their existence (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 81). He states that Islamic education is

⁷² Translation into English: "I follow the tradition of the Bavarian illuminati." (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 141).

in crisis (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 18): “[S]tructurellement les modes de penser et des modes de transmission de l’islam ne correspondent plus à la réalité temporelle.”⁷³ (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 39). His theories are based on Durkheim, among others, who sees religion as a social stabiliser (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 39). How Islam is taught today doesn’t serve this purpose anymore as it isn’t adapted to the present. Hence, it can’t serve as a stabilising factor (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 48). Consequently, in creating an identity, young Muslims in France resort to a religion that isn’t in accordance with contemporary times and think they have to practise a pure Islam (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 55). He is aware that he is challenging the children and the parents. He causes belief systems to waver, and doubts and insecurities can arise (Field notes 23.03.16). It is important to leave the comfort zone and to question common conceptions (Field notes 16.03.16). One founder thinks that Ahmed’s work helps to remove inhibitions about being Muslim in France and helps to reconcile French and Muslim values (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 74).

Ahmed not only teaches the pupils, but also holds training sessions for teachers every Friday. Usually about seven teachers would attend those sessions. In the nine sessions I attended, the content varied a lot, but always revolved around the Qur’an and its interpretation or the practice of Islam.

Content of Friday training sessions for teachers	
Prayers are not obligatory. Importance of depersonalising God. Women are never impure (in reference to their period). Religion is a social construction, Durkheim. Peace is the root of Islam. Everybody can be a Muslim. The Qur’an is a guide for human behaviour.	Polygamy. Orphans are the most vulnerable in society. Fasting. Relation between humans and technology. Drugs, Alcohol, Homosexuality, Women and Men. Dreams and quantum physics The Prophet and structure of a Sura.
(Field notes 18.03.16, 24.03.16, 08.04.16, 15.04.16, 13.05.16, 20.5.16, 27.05.16, 10.06.16, 17.06.16).	

⁷³ Translation into English: “[S]tructurally the ways of thinking and the ways Islam is taught no longer correspond to modern times.” (Interview Ahmed 18.05.16: 18, 39).

The setting of the sessions was very amicable and often discussions would arise. Most of the time the teachers were very interested and also agreed with Ahmed. However, once in a while teachers would also argue against him (Field notes 18.03.16 & 08.04.16; Interview Fatima 01.07.16: 589).

Another formation that took place during my field research was a seminar that was also held by Ahmed and Aallam on the question of: How and why are we working? In this seminar Aida explained a lot about childhood traumatism and resilience (Field notes 18.04.16). She is a member of the support team and also teaches art at the school (Interview Aida 11.05.16: 9). They addressed the responsibility of the teacher and the parents to always maintain an attitude of continuous learning. They talked about how a religion isn't an education and that it is the school's responsibility to anticipate uncertainties and to be aware of Islamophobia. The best way to achieve this is knowledge (Field notes 18.04.16).

It is noticeable that the founders chose the teachers according to their vision. The trainings ensure that questions around Islam and the Qur'an are addressed among the teachers. Ahmed is the central person when it comes to formulating the details of what Islam is. As a person who doesn't believe in God, it is an interesting choice. However, the focus seems to be on knowledge and questioning one's belief in order to open the mind and make Islam suitable for modern France again. By doing so, they believe to be contributing to building a bridge between Muslim and French values.

5.4. How is the space enacted?

"How is the space enacted?" is the question of this last main chapter that demonstrates how actors have agency, manage urban restructuring, go beyond national scale and accumulate capital. The enactment of a space also entails the question of how the space has been accessed in order to make actions possible that focus on identity, and, more specifically, on the identity of Muslims in France. A space where those seemingly non-compatible identities can coexist and even merge, and which forms and educates French citizens that practise an Islam that isn't in opposition to French values.

How a space is enacted is an important process to observe. It reveals connections and interactions and strategies that make it understandable and traceable how the space came to be

and also how it can continue to persist. Therefore, the first part of the chapter shows the different networks and resources the founders of the school that help to access, enact and maintain the space. These networks made apparent how the school Eva de Vitray came to be and what made it possible in that time and context. Without these networks and resources the school wouldn't work. "For if one begins with the premise that spaces have *always* been hierarchically interconnected, instead of naturally disconnected, then cultural and social change becomes not a matter of cultural contact and articulation but one of rethinking difference *through* connection." (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 35; emphasis in original).

This chapter shows how political participation takes place and creates new spaces of action and negotiation. "Political participation and collective action never take place in a vacuum but in a structured political and social space that renders some actions possible or even likely and leaves little room for others." (Kastoryano & Schader 2014: 252): The support of Mayor Bédier that facilitated the visit of the prefect at the school or in general. The school's general prominence. The fact that El Jaouhari is part of the committee of the Versailles Academy because there is no existing official Muslim representation in France.

It is noticeable that the founders chose the teachers according to their vision. The trainings ensure that questions about Islam and the Qur'an are addressed among the teachers. Ahmed, an atheist, is the main person when it comes to formulating the details of what Islam is. As mentioned above, they are working the Islam from inside. Moore also emphasises the meaning of classrooms as a space of negotiation: "From the perspective of manifest and latent content and meaning, classrooms - like cinemas or sitting-rooms - are viewed not just as places of ideological and cultural reproduction and coercion, but also as forums, in which actors with divergent interests, histories, interests and perceptions actively negotiate new meanings and new futures." (Moore 1999: 148f.).

One can quickly observe that the connections are on different scales: political, religious, communal - local, regional, national, transnational. This corresponds to how Massey defines the spatial: "'The spacial' then (...) can be seen as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales, from the global reach of finance and telecommunications, through the geography of the tentacles of national political power, to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace. It is a way of thinking in terms of the ever-shifting geometry of social/power relations, and it forces into view the real multiplicities of space-time." (Massey 2001: 4).

The transnationality of the resources and networks is not to be underestimated. Besides the obvious migratory history, one can see the similarities between the Islam that the Muslim World League wants to carry into the world and the Islam that the founders and Ahmed talk about: “It [The Muslim World League] aims to present the true Islam and its tolerant principles, provide humanitarian aid, extend bridges of dialogue and cooperation with all, engage in positive openness to all cultures and civilizations, follow the path of centrism and moderation to realize the message of Islam and ward off movements calling for extremism, violence and exclusion for a world full of peace, justice and coexistence.” (Muslim World League, 2010). “True Islam”, “tolerant principles”, “humanitarian aid”, “bridges of dialogue and cooperation”, “openness to cultures and civilizations”, “path of centrism and moderation”, “ward off movements calling for extremism, violence and exclusion” and “world full of peace, justice and coexistence”: These are all values that are coherent with what the founders told me in interviews or what I was able to observe in my research.

Even if this apparent transnational connection weren’t present, the founders call for an Islam that has universal values. By doing so, they themselves go beyond national scales. They bring forward an Islam that unites across borders and transcends differences. At the same time they seek recognition of their identity as Muslims in France on a national scale. This can be seen at the European level as well: “Nationalities, ethnicities, and religions intermingle and build a unifying discourse on the experience of “being Muslim in Europe,” promoting a European Islam that seeks to homogenize national differences.” (Kastoryano & Schader 2014: 250). So, the transnational scale mobilises resources based on religion that are used by the founders to make their claims. This is not uncommon. As Kastoryano states: “In short, Islam in Europe is seeking a unity in its diversity through a transnational solidarity based on religion. Yet, as with social and cultural networks, the strategy aims at the recognition of identities that are primarily national and ethnic.” (Kastoryano 2004: 1252).

Using religion as a means of solidarity and identity understandably has the effect of challenging secularism in Europe. In turn, secularisation stimulates religious communities to take action: “Moreover, religious communities have always been stimulated by secularization to organize themselves in pressure groups and take action in the domain of international relations.” (Kastoryano & Schader 2014: 250).

What this kind of claim-making shows us is that social changes (integrating Islam into French identity) are not nationally bounded and shape themselves independently and that new forms

of community and solidarity emerge to connect claims of different individuals and organisations (Soysal 1997: 511). “Through their collective associational and relational activities (formal or informal) in the public sphere, individual citizens mobilize and advance claims. In that sense, a shared public space, within which social actors interact and mobilize, is essential for the exercise of citizenship.” (Soysal 1997: 510).

The school Eva de Vitray is a place-making of a space of citizenship where the claims of the founders, their vision, are enacted. Through the school and resulting actions people are mobilised and participate in building a bridge between a universal Islam and laïc France by activating and enacting different networks and resources. Mobilisation through organisations and personal, communal, political and religious ties on different scales are resources for political empowerment (Kastoryano & Schader 2014: 248). They are creating a community that exercises a certain kind of citizenship, proving that citizenship is indeed reinvented daily.

A lot of researchers studying social movements point out that a combination of 3 factors is needed: 1) context for political opportunities, 2) mobilising structures / organisational resources and 3) framing processes / discursive resources (Koopmans & Statham 1999: 203, cited in Kastoryano & Schader 2014: 252). The school “Eva de Vitray” fulfils all of them.

6. Conclusion

So, how does the first private Muslim primary school in Metropolitan France ensure its continuity as a space of citizenship? As announced in the introduction, to answer the main question focal points were set resulting in three sub-questions. These are answered separately in the three main chapters of the thesis: “Mapping the Space”, which focuses on the legal and socio-political context of the school, “Purpose of the Space”, which investigates the purpose and reasons for the school, and “Enactment of the Space”, which demonstrates how the enactment of the space of citizenship takes place.

Before I get to these chapters, the chapter “Research Process” depicts how the access to the field came about, what research methods were used, how concepts such as citizenship can be operationalised, what data analysis was used, and finally the last part of this chapter focuses on research ethics and my positioning of the field. By illustrating that citizenship can be observed in everyday practices, anthropological, qualitative research methods such as semi-structured

interviews and participant observation are ideally suited to study citizenship. The ethnography of space and place allows us “to address the complexity of contemporary social relations and cultural settings” (Low 2017: 2). It uncovers processes and makes them visible. Over a period of five months, I was able to gather following data: Nearly 30 interviews were conducted, numerous informal discussions were held, several relevant classes were attended, training sessions, formations and workshops for the teachers were visited. Participant observation was additionally possible at parents’ interviews by the founders of the school, at the annual school performance and at a demonstration in the city where teachers and founders were present.

The chapter “Mapping the Space” contributes to understanding the context in which the school “Eva de Vitray” was created and focuses on the emergence of the school in this particular context of Mantes-la-Jolie. It addresses the question of where this space of citizenship is enacted in order to understand how it has been enacted. “So, *where* citizenship is imagined and practised is significant for *how* it is imagined and practised.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 163). By doing so, we acknowledge that a place is always embedded in a particular set of relations, networks, and narratives in a particular moment in time (Massey 2001: 5). Hence, it is important to look at how a place came to be and how it has been constructed (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 39).

In a nutshell, the bilingual (Arabic and French) Muslim school “Eva de Vitray” is located in the Val Fourré district of Mantes-la-Jolie, a banlieue of Paris in the department of the Yvelines. The bilingual aspect is easily answered, as the school teaches Arabic and French. As for the Muslim part, they consider themselves one of the first confessional Muslim schools in France (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). The school offers optional “Spiritual Awakening” classes in the morning where religious matters are discussed (Eva de Vitray 2, n.y.). Being a confessional school, it is automatically a private school in France as no religious matter is allowed to be taught in public schools (Légifrance, 2020b; Éduscol 1, 2021). Since 2017, the school Eva de Vitray has been under contract with the state, meaning that it gets financial support (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). Additionally, they rely on other support such as the “Cercle des Amis de l’école Eva de Vitray” (in English: “Circle of friends of the school ‘Eva de Vitray’”), school fees and other donations (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 123; Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 10).

Val Fourré has a turbulent history and still has to struggle with its poor reputation (Field notes, 25.05.16). After World War II, many workers were recruited to work mainly for the automobile industry in Mantes-la-Jolie. That is how most of the parents of the founders of the school got to know each other. The parents founded the association “Union Islamique des Yvelines” (in

English: “Islamic Union of the Yvelines”) and also the Grand Mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie (Flory 2009: 191, cited in Hôtel de Ville 2, n.y.). This mosque is the first big mosque after the one in Paris and was financially supported by Saudi Arabia (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 138-141). The parents of the founders of the school “Eva de Vitray” set the first steps towards the integration of the Islamic religion in France, as Mantes-la-Jolie was the first city to recognise the practice of Islam in France (Galembert 2005: 1141). Additionally, the Muslim World League has had its seat there since 2001. So, these are all networks and resources that are directly connected to the founders.

This becomes evident when looking at the eight founders of the school, who describe themselves as associative actors of Mantes-la-Jolie (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). An illustration summarises their individual roles in the school and their other professions and formations (see p. 20f.). They are well-known in the community and are politically very involved. To name but a few: one of the founders of Eva de Vitray is the representative of the Grand Mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie, another is involved in several Muslim organisations in the Yvelines and yet another was elected deputy mayor for finances and municipal councillor of Mantes-la-Jolie until 2017 (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 1: 13). Institutions, the town hall, the ministry know their positions, their various activities and consequently the school “Eva de Vitray” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 51; Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 133). Together, they opened the school in 2012.

The founders themselves address their participation in citizenship and in dissolving identity tensions. As stated on the landing page of the website: It is a non-profit project of common interest, an illustration of an active exercise of citizenship (Eva de Vitray 1, n.y.). Thus, defining and practising their idea of citizenship becomes an important factor in the maintenance and continuity of the school. The local and the particular matter as they are the place where citizenship is claimed, enacted and produced in this specific time and space: “The local is always specifically located, both in time and space, and grasping the diversity of sites where citizenship is enacted and contested requires us to register both the diversity of institutional arrangements of scales and spaces (and the meanings they are endowed with) in relation to citizenship processes, and how alternative conceptions and practices can be developed by agents.” (Clarke et al. 2014: 153).

This conception of citizenship entails a disentanglement of the notion that citizenship is state-bound, thus defying national naturalism. It becomes apparent that the links between citizenship

and state are more complex, fluid, changeable, and multidimensional. Following this line of arguing, there is more than one citizenship and not only the one that is defined by the state-individual relation (Caglar 2015: 637). Understanding that citizenship is claimed by individuals and through social relations brings to the fore sites, spaces and practices referred to as the margins (Caglar 2015: 639). Margins are sites and spaces of transformation, disruption and negotiation. They play a significant role in the processes of citizenship-claims and legitimacy (Clarke et al. 2014: 49). Therefore, looking at margins is also analysing a space of power dynamics and relations. This shows that citizenship in the sense of belonging is also socially constructed and is not ahistorical (Clarke et al. 2014: 66).

Furthermore, this case study acknowledges the importance of applying the concepts of scales to analyse local dynamics with regard to global connection. This concept allows to include the global and transnational aspect and reveal power dynamics and hierarchies (Caglar 2013: 26f.). The transnational connections are especially apparent in the migratory history and in relation to the mosque, which is linked to Saudi Arabia and to a global Muslim community.

The chapter “Purpose of the Space” explores the vision and the narratives revolving around the space. They provide insight into the question of why a space of citizenship should be created in the first place. Narratives include the school “Eva de Vitray” being a role model, identity-based tensions being dissolved, bridges to the state and to the society being built, children being provided with schooling in the national education system, Islam being a life philosophy and consisting of universal values, etc. The vision is to dissolve identity tensions and to create a bridge between being French and Muslim.

When addressing the in-/compatibility of Islam and France, the issue of citizenship of course comes up. With the objective of integrating young Muslim children into French society, the prevailing idea of what a typical member of the French state ought to be like is being revised. The founders are fully supportive of the well-known French values of liberty, equality, and laïcité (if it is the one of 1905). They are adding an additional value: spirituality.

The school Eva de Vitray is an interesting case as it acknowledges the power of the state while seeking recognition of its particular conception of citizenship and being a citizen. The founders’ aim is to dissolve segregation between citizens and to integrate the children into society (Interview Aallam 15.02.16 - Part 2: 107). So, it could well be said that the founders of the school aspire to and create a horizontal citizenship by claiming their right to be Muslim and

French, while at the same time identifying with and drawing from the vertical citizenship that is defined by the state. It uses the vocabulary of the state by invoking the Republican values, and stipulates Islam to consist of values that go with those that already exist. Consequently, in their view, Eva de Vitray as a Muslim private school isn't incompatible with France (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 46-51). Eva de Vitray can even be seen as *laïc*: If *laïcité* is understood as something in which religions coexist, the school Eva de Vitray absolutely has its place in France (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 27). Kastoryano even finds secularisation to be important in the organisation of religious communities: “(...) [R]eligious communities have always been stimulated by secularization to organize themselves in pressure groups and take action in the domain of international relations.” (Kastoryano 2014: 250).

After getting insight into the context of the school Eva de Vitray and the reasons why the founders created this space, the chapter on the enactment of the space follows. It is about strategies, actions, relations, networks and resources which are enacted (outside and inside the school) in order to maintain the space of citizenship they have created. It illuminates the complexity and the intertwinedness of spaces and scales and shows how the founders are scale-makers as they actively use their agency.

In order to initiate and maintain a project like Eva de Vitray the founders must be aware of their agency. They believe they can actively participate in changing or illuminating aspects of citizenship. Agency or more precisely, the awareness of one's agency, is, in my opinion, one of the first steps towards de-centring citizenship from the state. The founders allow themselves to also have a say in who is a member of the state and who should belong. Therefore, Soysal very well has a point with her concept of social project: “Thus, while expanding the boundaries and forms of participation in society, this project at the same time charges the individual as the main force for social cohesion and solidarity.” (Soysal 2012: 2f.).

The founders knew from the beginning that political and economic work would be necessary in order to open a private Muslim bilingual school on a permanent basis. They are well-known in the community. Institutions, the town hall, the national education system, the state know their positions, their various activities and consequently the school “Eva de Vitray” (Interview Guerrouache 18.05.16: 51; Interview Aallam 14.11.16: 133). They never used the term social or political project. They generally talked of Eva de Vitray as an educational project. Nor did they in any way want to create a community. Quite the contrary. In an interview Aallam states: ‘On ouvre une école, voilà. Derrière cette école il y a ces personnes-là. Le but c'est pas de créer

un milieu communautaire. Bien au contraire. Bien au contraire. On est loin des crispations identitaires. On veut permettre à des enfants de pouvoir être dans un milieu très proche de leur culture, de leurs valeurs, de leur religion, tout en étant aussi très proche de leur société.’ Donc voilà.”⁷⁴ (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 74).

This is an interesting and important aspect to analyse. The founders don’t want to create a community or to be portrayed as a political, strategic project, however, they also want to bring forth a citizenship that dissolves identity tensions of children in French society. This research shows that they are creating a space of citizenship and have a clear vision of what it should look like. They are using Islam and its universal values as a common ground and are teaching i.e. parents, teachers, the existing Muslim community in the Yvelines and state officials the reasons why this is necessary. So, how different is the creation of a space of citizenship from creating a community?

What this kind of claim-making shows us is that social changes (integrating Islam into French identity) are not nationally bounded, but interact on multiple scales from local to global. Through this space new forms of solidarity emerge, connecting claims of different individuals and organisations (Soysal 1997: 511). The school Eva de Vitray is a place-making of a space of citizenship where the claims of the founders, their vision, are enacted. Through the school and resulting actions people are mobilised and participate in building a bridge between a universal Islam and laïc France. The mobilisation through organisations and personal, communal, political and religious ties on different scales are resources for political empowerment (Kastoryano & Schader 2014: 248). Together, they exercise a certain kind of citizenship that is particular to this space and time.

The maintenance of the space is ensured through different strategies: Teachers and parents are chosen because of their vision. They give advice to other Muslim private schools that are opening up, thus ensuring to set a standard for Muslim schools in France. They are active in the Muslim community of the Yvelines itself. So they have a wide range of networks that support

⁷⁴ Translation into English: “So, between the time we started our meetings and the time we opened the school, there were two years. So, during these two years, we discussed, we exchanged, we started to prepare the work on the political, economic and other levels. Because we had to go to the people and tell them: “We’re opening a school. Behind this school there are these people. The aim is not to create a community setting. Quite the contrary. Quite the contrary. We are far from identity-based tensions. We want to allow children to be in an environment very close to their culture, their values, their religion, while also being very close to their society. So here we are.” (Interview Aallam 24.05.16: 74).

them. They have very good political connections. They hold conferences, meetings, training sessions, etc. to make clear what kind of space of citizenship they are enacting.

Finally, a lot of researchers studying social movements point out that a combination of three factors is needed: 1) context for political opportunities, 2) mobilising structures / organisational resources and 3) framing processes / discursive resources (Koopmans & Statham 1999: 203, cited in Kastoryano & Schader 2014: 252). In the case of Eva de Vitray, all of these conditions are fulfilled.

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Appendix I

Abstract

In France, the main mission of the school is to create French citizens and to convey the values of the French Republic to the pupils. These values are: respect for the equal dignity of human beings and respect for freedom of conscience and laïcité. Laïcité is the term used in France for its particular secularism. Because of France's history, there is a clear legal separation of state and religion that makes itself felt in schools as well. Any religious activities or showing of religious affiliation are forbidden on public school premises.

Now, what is particularly interesting is how confessional schools in France deal with this issue. So, in this thesis, the space of citizenship is analysed, using the example of the Muslim private school "Eva de Vitray" in the banlieues of Paris, France. Since 2017, it is officially the first Muslim private school in Metropolitan France under contract with the state. Consequently, the main research question is: How does the first private Muslim primary school in Metropolitan France ensure its continuity as a space of citizenship?

To answer the main question, focal points were set resulting in three sub-questions. These are answered separately in the three main chapters of the thesis: "Mapping the Space", which focuses on the legal and socio-political context of the school, "Purpose of the Space", which investigates the purpose and reasons for the school, and "Enactment of the Space", which demonstrates how the enactment of the space of citizenship takes place. It shows how the actors that are involved in the project access, negotiate, and create this space.

The maintenance of the space is ensured through different strategies: Teachers and parents are chosen because of their vision. The founders of the school give advice to other Muslim private schools that are opening up, thus ensuring to set a standard for Muslim schools in France. They are active in the Muslim community of the Yvelines itself. So they have a wide range of networks that support them. They have very good political connections. They hold conferences, meetings, training sessions, etc. It shows the strategies, actions, relations, networks and resources which are enacted on different scales (local to global) in order to maintain the space of citizenship they have created. It illuminates the complexity and the intertwinedness of spaces and scales and shows how the founders are scale-makers as they actively use their agency.

Keywords: space of citizenship, spatial scales, integration, religion, education, France.

Zusammenfassung

In Frankreich besteht die Hauptaufgabe der Schule darin, französische Staatsbürger:innen zu formen und den Schüler:innen die Werte der französischen Republik zu vermitteln. Diese Werte sind: die Achtung der gleichen Würde der Menschen und die Achtung der Glaubensfreiheit und der Laïcité. Der Begriff "Laïcité" bezeichnet den besonderen Säkularismus in Frankreich. Aufgrund der Geschichte Frankreichs gibt es eine klare Trennung zwischen Staat und Religion, die sich auch in den Schulen bemerkbar macht. Jegliche religiösen Aktivitäten oder das Zeigen der Religionszugehörigkeit sind auf dem Gelände öffentlicher Schulen verboten.

Besonders interessant ist die Frage, wie konfessionelle Schulen mit diesem Thema umgehen. In dieser Arbeit wird daher der Raum der Staatsbürgerschaft am Beispiel der muslimischen Privatschule "Eva de Vitray" in den Banlieues von Paris analysiert. Seit 2017 ist sie offiziell die erste muslimische Privatschule im metropolitanen Frankreich, die einen Vertrag mit dem Staat abgeschlossen hat. Die Hauptforschungsfrage lautet daher: Wie sichert die erste muslimische Privat-Grundschule im metropolitanen Frankreich ihre Kontinuität als Raum der Staatsbürgerschaft?

Zur Beantwortung der Hauptfrage wurden drei Unterfragen formuliert. Diese werden in den drei Hauptkapiteln der Arbeit beantwortet: "Mapping the Space" befasst sich mit dem rechtlichen und soziopolitischen Kontext der Schule, "Purpose of the Space" untersucht den Auftrag und die Gründe der Schule und "Enactment of the Space" zeigt auf, wie die Umsetzung des Raums der Staatsbürgerschaft erfolgt. Es wird gezeigt, wie die am Projekt beteiligten Akteur:innen auf diesen Raum zugreifen, ihn verhandeln und gestalten.

Die Kontinuität des Raums wird durch verschiedene Strategien sichergestellt: Die Lehrkräfte und Eltern werden aufgrund ihrer Visionen ausgewählt; die Gründer der Schule beraten andere muslimische Privatschulen, die gerade eröffnet werden, und sorgen so dafür, dass sie einen Standard für muslimische Schulen in Frankreich schaffen; sie sind in der muslimischen Gemeinde von Yvelines aktiv. Sie haben also ein breites Spektrum an Netzwerken, das sie unterstützt. Sie haben sehr gute politische Verbindungen. Sie veranstalten Konferenzen, Treffen, Schulungen, usw. Die Masterarbeit zeigt diese Strategien, Tätigkeiten, Beziehungen, Netzwerke und Ressourcen auf, die auf verschiedenen Ebenen (lokal bis global) eingesetzt werden, um den von ihnen geschaffenen Raum der Staatsbürgerschaft zu erhalten. Sie

beleuchtet die Komplexität und die Verflechtung von Räumen und Ebenen und zeigt, wie die Gründer durch den aktiven Einsatz ihres Handelns die Ebenen mitgestalten.

Schlagwörter: Raum der Staatsbürgerschaft, räumliche Ebenen, Integration, Religion, Bildung, Frankreich.