Introduction

Looking for Islam in Paris, Finding a *Foyer*

I carried out my anthropological investigation among members of the Soninké[1] migrant community, from Kayes, Mali, living in a *foyer* (henceforth Foyer93) in Paris between June 2005 and September 2006, and then on several short fieldwork trips since then.[2] I chose the *foyers* as a vantage point of observation because they are a central issue for the French Republic historically, politically and socially. Any research on Muslim migrants in Paris will sooner or later lead to the *foyers*, where first-generation migrants live. Scattered around Paris and the Île-de-France region, the *foyers* exemplify the plight of Muslim migrants and with it, the tangible construction of vulnerability, exclusion and difference. France is the country that attracts the majority of the Francophone West African migration to Europe, both from rural areas and urban centres, and particularly from the Senegal River Valley, cutting across Senegal, Mauritania and Mali. It is estimated that '400,000 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa reside in France; between 1990 and 1999 the percentage of Malians has increased by 21.2%, and the Senegalese population by 28.3%' (Sargent et al. 2009: 6). Part of the influx has been due to the family reunification policy issued in 1975, after the restriction of labour migration. This led to 'a process of feminization of migration from West African countries and the appearance of second-generation West Africans born in France' (Trauner 2005:228). With the tightening of the family reunification rules through the Pasqua Law – named after

the minister who issued it in 1993 – and with a surplus of manpower in the economy, migration became less structural to the French economy, and circular migration increasingly difficult to carry out. The process made become those who once had the right to residence in France – either thanks to the principle of *jus soli* or because they had obtained legal status –undocumented people, *sans-papiers*. It appears in fact that between 1997 and 1998, 41 per cent of Malians and 29 per cent of Senegalese people applying for regularisation already had documents allowing them to reside in France (Lessault et al. 2009). Illegal migration might indeed be seen as a temporary status in the process of regularisation: this was the case for 31 per cent of the migrants who obtained legal status in the period 1999–2006. Overall, sub-Saharan migration only represents 12 per cent of inward migration to France, and the section of the male migrant population that my work addresses, amounts to about one hundred and fifty thousand men, spread across seven hundred *foyers*, of which 250 are situated in the Île-de-France region (op. cit.: 224).

The first *foyers* emerged as a consequence of the reconstruction of France, which was in need of a labour force in the aftermath of the Second World War. The first residents were Algerians. At the time, these buildings resembled military areas under the control of a guard who watched over them permanently. The *foyers* now have a completely different status: the migrants are residents with whom neither the mayor of Paris, the police or other social figures can interfere, unless criminal activities take place. Given the number of illegal migrants present at Foyer93, one wonders in fact how this can be. Because of the infamous uprisings of the 1970s, in which hundreds of Algerians were killed in a strike[3] (Fall 2005), and thanks to the ongoing work of social services and associations in the *foyers*, the latter have reached the status of *parc social*, or social housing, granting their residents the right to their privacy.[4] Nevertheless, the *foyers* are still no-go areas for ordinary French people. Those in Paris are particularly unsightly, because they are the oldest and have never been restored: many are falling apart and security and health are never guaranteed there. Open sewage, no anti-fire measures, no hygiene in the collective kitchens and other such issues make one wonder whether Islam is really the core problem. Clearly, the entanglement of political and economic interests with the social reality of how West African migrants live in France entails an (anthropological) understanding of the issues surrounding the phenomenon. French ideas of the individual, citizenship and secularism collide with the way that the Soninké migrants understand how to participate in society as Muslims in a meaningful way.

The choice of Foyer93 as my fieldwork site is not casual: this *foyer* is one of those that are known as *foyers-taudis*, or slums. These were part of the post-war housing project aimed at transforming ex-factories into large dormitories for the migrant labour force. At the time, these were seen as temporary. Like Foyer93, other *foyers-taudis* are also organised ethnically. They reopen, or rather perpetuate, the debate about the integration of new citizens of migrant descent in France and the cultural adjustments necessary to make this happen. The Soninkés in Paris are now into their third generation, and yet migration from Kayes continues through trajectories similar to those described twenty years ago by anthropologists, with the *foyers*, where people cram together with their few belongings in small rooms, still at the centre of the process. These *foyers* have survived without much having been done to improve them. The physical space that the residents inhabit determines inextricably their subjectivity: the rooms do not allow anyone the peace of mind to sleep at night, let alone any privacy. The common areas, such as the canteen and the cafeteria, provide the residents with a space in which to relax, yet other boundaries intervene to make even those areas disciplined: caste divisions, age groups and seniority in migration create and recreate space and priorities continuously. The well-being of the residents resonates with and is strictly linked to the materiality of Foyer93. The ageing of the residents, along with that of the building, demonstrates the trap into which they have fallen: their expected temporary stay in France has become a life-long stay; their illegal status has in some cases never been cleared; they have lived in France as invisible people, while being absent from their homeland. They are neither here nor there, neither citizens nor migrants. As defined by Sayad (1998), the latter are people whose mobility is constitutive of their condition. Foyer93 defies this understanding as much as it tempts one into functionalist ideas of a pathological body politic, which nonetheless ignore 'questions of social change, oppression and unequal power' (Littlewood 1991: 697).

Notwithstanding the small number of people living there in comparison to the wider migrant population, the *foyers* are the gateway to future housing and work for the migrants (Timera 1996), especially when they are illegal. In this way, the *foyers* are representative of these migrants' strategies for settling in the big city, since they have hosted, and still host, different ethnic groups from the Sahel. They are organised by village of origin – thus resulting in ethnic patterns, in Paris as much as in other towns of France, such as Marseille and Lyon. France is now the second destination of the overall West African migration trends after the USA, while Southern European countries such as Spain, Italy and Por-

tugal have emerged first as alternative destinations and in recent years as transition countries (Wihtol de Wenden 2016; Mohammedi 2014; Belguidoum et al. 2015; Saraiva 2008). Nonetheless, African migration towards OECD countries is lower than to the Global South[5], in line with the current international trend determined by South–South migrations[6]. So, what is really at stake when European countries vow to 'tackle migration'?

The stink, dirt, insecurity and noise of Foyer93 tell us upon entering what the residents face daily: exclusion, abandonment, danger and fear. Foyer93, like other *foyers-taudis,* will undergo relocation projects in the near future. The residents are not granted any assurances and are likely to face repatriation. Therefore, what are their expectations? What does their life experience at Foyer93 tell us about migrants' well-being and integration in France?

Anthropology of the *Foyers*

Anthropology in France, not unlike in other countries, has from its inception been concerned with the study of either rural and internal or far-distant communities (Bazin et al. 2006). Thus, it has addressed the exotic, the alien and the external, lacking an understanding of the country's internal diversity, which has instead been pushed to the margins. Migration Studies started out by using a structural approach (Noiriel 1988), while more recently social scientists have turned to the migrant communities in France in relation to their involvement in development projects in Africa (Quiminal 2002; Grillo and Bruno 2004). Interestingly, medical-anthropological studies focusing on the health-seeking behaviour of migrants have provided an understanding of the problems they suffer and their social dimensions, but they have also provided a critique of the way that French transcultural psychiatry and French society have engaged with migration. Devereux (1978, 1980) and Nathan (1986) led the way in this regard, filling the gap between psychiatry and medical anthropology (see Chapter 7).

The *foyers*, where people sojourn at times for twenty years or even a lifetime, have been construed as gateways, transit zones or temporary solutions before more permanent accommodation can be achieved, while in reality, they are suspended between the unsatisfactory present and the projection towards better adjustments: new residency permits, a place for a bed, more room in the wardrobe. A sense of blockage seizes those who enter these places, notwithstanding the frenetic activity generally going on at Foyer93. The detachment of the *foyers* from the rest

of Paris and even from their own neighbourhoods stigmatises further the people who live there. The *foyers* are as socially invisible as their residents are silent, undergoing the same denial as a part of the French colonial history to which they are a testimony. Meanwhile, the *foyers* have seen the coming and going of different people, and the passing of time has marked these buildings with deterioration.

In a postcolonial fashion, I carried out fieldwork in one of these *foyers* because the anthropologist there acts as a broker, allowing life stories and people to speak for themselves (if this can ever be achieved) to the wider public. Certainly, I had to be legitimised by my respondents to do so; they accepted me and my work under the impulse of their increasing awareness of the misrepresentation and prejudice that the wider public held towards the Muslim community and migrants by and large. Despite my own reservations about their possible response to me carrying out fieldwork in the *foyer* and the general lack of mobilisation within Foyer93, the residents needed to be heard and to talk. This, which is also a finding of medical associations working in the *foyers*, reveals the residents' psychological need to be listened to beyond the group spectacle, which depicts them as a community of people always clustered together. Their 'African-style' community life is nothing more than the lack of privacy induced by the overcrowding of the *foyers*, and is thus a sign of their marginalisation. The residents complain and are very vociferous about this. What are the channels that they use to express themselves in a situation already curtailed by illegality, isolation and poverty? What are the margins of marginality? Is Islam indeed the fundamental issue among the residents of Foyer93, as the political discourse would imply?

The features of present-day migration have changed greatly in recent years. As Wihtol de Wenden (2001) has argued, there are almost as many forms of migration as there are migrants themselves. Any migratory project is unique in itself; strategies overlap at moments in time, without being final, univocal choices. The old 'migratory couples', as Wihtol de Wenden defined them, that is, the movement from the ex-colonies to the ex-colonial powers, for instance between France and West Africa or the United Kingdom and the countries of the Commonwealth, are no longer the main points of either arrival or departure. It appears that the poorest countries in Africa are turning towards nearer countries on the same continent; that sending Mediterranean countries, such as Spain and Italy, have turned into receiving countries; and that the 'pull' factors of migration have taken precedence over the 'push' factors (ibid.), meaning that the attractiveness of the richest countries has become a reason in itself to emigrate, without necessarily being linked

to the poverty of one's home country. The typologies of migration may also fall within different categories, ranging from spatial (national and transnational, diasporic) to social and cultural ones, such as gender, age, social status and so on – not to mention readings of the phenomenon in economic, political or demographic terms.

Mobility is no longer limited in time as it was in the past (e.g. seasonal migration in Africa or temporary labour work in the factories of Europe). The 1974 border restrictions in France made people believe that migration would gradually stop, or that only elite migrants would be able to migrate easily. Nonetheless, migration has remained constant. In addition, the image of the migrant is not entirely that of the rural migrant, coming from the village without schooling. Indeed, illegal migrants are also middle-class people who have come to Europe in the hope of advancing their careers. However, while this is the general trend in Europe, my fieldwork data in the *foyer* revealed quite widespread illiteracy and traditional ways of life, especially considering that the majority of my respondents are from the rural region of Kayes, Mali. What is profiled is a new form of conflict (Agier 2011), which sees free circulation and the possibility of finding a new place in the world hindered. The myth of transnational movement enabled by globalisation can only but deceive those who decide to take the plunge, who find themselves stopped by the ever-increasing legal restrictions for non-Schengen countries. Migrants and asylum seekers alike are rejected at the borders, placed in immigration detention centres (Könönen 2021) or ending up in the *foyers*. Are these migrants the real face of globalisation?

As the landscape of migration maps onto marginalisation, poor housing and instability, the *foyers de travailleurs migrants* (housing for migrant workers) resonate with the idea of circulation as being dysfunctional in itself, rather than with quaint forms of living that are seemingly frozen in time. West African migrants bring back the notion of cosmopolitanism through non-elite strategies of survival in the face of insecurity (Kothari 2008), which create temporal niches within the wider global phenomenon of migration. However, free circulation is granted to goods, not to people. This being the case, the capitalist ideal has fully established itself, and with it, its inevitable alienation. People are goods; as such, they are sellable, usable and susceptible to being returned to the sender. Foyer93 stores its residents, like a warehouse stores its merchandise, stacking them in room-dormitories, assigning them both a location and an expiry date: the residents are expected to leave Foyer93 in time, moving on to either private accommodation or back to their homelands.

Hence, diasporic trends have become transnational and return migration less viable because of tighter European legislation towards non-EU

citizens, while international networks have strengthened. Migrants can in fact only return to their countries when their legal status is cleared, such that many prefer to remain in the liminal space of illegality rather than risking being refused entry upon their return to France (personal communication). Therefore, they maintain links with their homeland through religious centres, migrants' associations and by phone. The current economic recession and pandemic-induced isolation worldwide can only have reinforced this trend. All the while, the hypothesis according to which religion would disappear or be privatised (Habermas 1991) as a result of modernisation and secularisation processes has not proved to be tenable. AfterHefner (1998: 87), we know that the vibrant resurgence of religious movements in the West during the Enlightenment was supported by a 'newly urbanized working and middle-class', and per Gellner (1992), that nationhood corresponded in Muslim countries to a return to Islam through the purification of religion. In France, from the foundation of the Republic, the secular and religious domains were to remain separate, and religion was to pertain to the private realm of human agency, which no survey could ever breach. Paradoxically, this has not generated more respect for the other's faith, but rather more suspicion, prejudice and confusion, and has led to religion receiving greater visibility in the public domain.

France and Islam: A Contested Relationship

As much as the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York indelibly marked our memories, so has the 13 November 2015 explosion at the Bataclan music venue in Paris, with the power of a disruptive violence that has reawakened[7] a counter-logic of resentment and closure towards Muslim communities in the West. Public discourse worldwide has made national security its prime political objective and transformed Muslim communities into potential suspects. The long-standing relationship between France and Islam, which goes back to colonial times, is caught in a stalemate in which diffidence and fear have increased on both sides. Anthropological work among Muslim communities in France has changed drastically, with African respondents less and less willing to cooperate with anthropologists. African Studies have declined in favour of wider perspectives turned towards Cultural Studies, Religious and Globalisation Studies, while the discourse about migration has gradually moved from an economic approach to one of national security regarding Islam. Recently, the Brexit campaign and Donald Trump's presidential campaigns respectively have tapped into a blunt sense of generalised in-

stability, for which Muslim migrants are blamed, in order to divide the electorate and successfully defeat leftist or inclusive views of society. Thus, migration from the ex-colonies is no longer, or not simply, a matter of cultural difference, expressed harmoniously or through clashes according to Huntington's analysis (1996), but one which emphasises Islam in particular as the Pandora's box of our time. While internationally, Islam is associated with extremism and terrorism, in France it is drawn into an oppositional debate in which Muslims, as bearers of religious sectarianism and *communautarisme*, community drift, would infringe upon the Republican value of *laïcité,* secularism. Islam appears to be the central issue, since it is by drawing on it that Muslims claim their identity in the diaspora and French republicanism articulates its discourse in order to integrate or eschew the influx of Muslim migrants onto French soil (Mayanthi 2014). Migration, Islam and identity were the buzzwords during the time of the riots in the French banlieues[8] (October–November 2005), when angry French youths expressed their rage at the exclusionary French policies that targeted, in their view, people of migrant descent. Islam in France is the prism through which integration, ethnicity and religion take form, albeit in disguise. In fact, assimilation, community and *communautarisme* are used as substitutes for these concepts, or rather as the French versions of them. In turn, the community members of my study, through a discourse connecting the *sans-papiers* (undocumented migrants) to the *tirailleurs* (Senegalese and Malian veterans), uphold/exhibit a postcolonial legacy based on traditional ideas of 'trans-generational mutual obligations' (Mann 2003: 377).

The moment of social crisis during which my fieldwork took place – although potentially a threat to my entire work – also presented an ideal perspective that enabled me to observe the conflict in action, the positions emerge and the debate develop. The 2005 uprisings in the suburbs of France and the Île-de-France region violently brought the migrant community, both old and new, back into the spotlight, and in unmitigatedly negative terms. Suburban Paris was equated with disaffected people, generally migrants or French people of migrant descent, and with Muslims. Islam became a synonym for Salafism, used to indicate radical Islam that was attempting to reform Islam first and then the West by referring to literal understandings of the Qur'an and by enforcing strict forms of behaviour and dressing. However, the discontent was not voiced in the jargon of Islam, nor did Muslim leaders – Algerian qadis or West African marabouts – take the forefront. The crisis did not have the characteristics of a movement, but featured only groups of disenfranchised youths, who vandalised cars and verbally assaulted transport

workers for symbolising the system that denied them any kind of social 'mobility'. Their violence originated elsewhere.

The uprisings flagged the discontent of the French working class, many of whom are indeed Muslim and of migrant descent, and who were symbolically aligned with the new migrants, also supposedly Muslims. Thus, a reconsideration of the role of Islam in France was inevitable, going beyond the security issues that the crisis had highlighted. At the same time, positive action was implemented in the suburbs to help the youths from disadvantaged boroughs find jobs in Paris, where they were notoriously turned down. The face of France and the identity of its citizens had to be reconsidered at a national level. The *foyers*, such as Foyer93, which could have become hotbeds of resistance and contestation, remained silent and quiescent. No mention of them was made in the national press, while they continue to exist in their state of segregation. Nonetheless, discussions did take place among the residents, reflecting their anxieties and hopes about their future, since the migrant community in France is defined primarily as Muslim, thus contradicting the notion that secularism regards people as equal individuals, shorn of ethnic, gender and religious connotations.

Islam is now the second religion of France, after Catholicism and above Judaism and Buddhism, with about five and a half million Muslims living in the country.[9] Since the period of its colonies in Africa (West Africa, Algeria and the Moroccan protectorate), France has been confronted with Islam. With the formation of French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française), comprising what are now the states of Senegal and Mali, France aimed at dealing peacefully with the local Muslim realities in order to obtain the people's support and cooperation. Coppolani and Depont (1897) initiated anthropological studies on what they defined as *Black* Islam, central to the understanding and control of the Muslim countries. Coppolani, posted in Algeria, worked for the colonial administration with 'a very strong military orientation' (Robinson 2000b: 32). His writings were the main reference for the understanding of Islam in Africa until postcolonial studies attacked them for being imprecise and ethnocentric.

The search for the 'other' in anthropology has reached a point of exhaustion due to the homogenising phenomenon of globalisation, which has rendered the world uniform in 'aspirations and mode of thought' (Littlewood 2003: 256). The 'other' can no longer be found in the idealised romantic image of distant tribes whose practices are unknown and alien to ours, if not in meaning and intentions. Nonetheless, the Muslim 'phenomenon' appears to have taken on those characteristics, so as to become something totally non-Western, anti-progressive and

radically different. The challenge that lies ahead concerns how French universalism will be able to fine-tune itself in order to accommodate the varieties of communities and the plethora of Islamic tendencies in and of France. In this book I will show, by analysing the Sufi Mouride community of the Île-de-France region, how the country is headed towards a successful acknowledgement of its Muslim citizens and their expressions of faith.

Outline of the Book

This book is an anthropological contribution to the field of migration studies in that it builds on issues of well-being and community-making among sub-Saharan minority groups in France. It takes its cue from the social life and health-seeking behaviour of the *foyer* residents, to whom my interest was drawn to analyse issues of integration as part of the French national controversy on migration and Islam. The Mouride[10] brotherhood, founded in Senegal by Cheick Amadou Bamba M'Backé (1855–1927), serves to broaden the view of Islam in Paris as one of its many faces, and to show how Muslim allegiances are changing in relation to the homeland. Debates surrounding migration are often equated with Islam and seem to have veered towards the Muslims' home countries, their own development and their peace-making, while France attempts to reaffirm its presence on the international scene by promoting the value of *francophonie*, conceived of as a cultural world, sharing a common heritage, with French as a common language. This is all the more salient with regard to Africa, as the Francophone world lies now, more than ever, on the circulation of both its values and interlocutors in and from Francophone Africa, an economically, demographically and culturally growing area. Sub-Saharan migrations are in fact characterised by the geopolitical dimension of *francophonie*, as partially are those from the Maghreb as well, where French is generally the second national language after Arabic.

In Chapter 1, I examine the historical backdrop to current migration issues in reference to the integration of the 'second generation' (people born to migrant parents). This sociological category was first used with reference to the Algerians and the problem that their children posed as new Muslims citizens of France. This was in the years following the 1974 law, which closed the doors to migration and family reunions and was the first example of what is now the European utopia of zero migration, implemented by the Schengen treaty. I provide an overview of France's relationship with its colonies in order to understand the way in

which it grappled with Islam and the Muslims there, before this became a domestic French issue. The Soninkés are an old migratory group to France (they are now into their third generation) that has nevertheless remained in the shadows. In Chapter 2, I show how I resolved to work at Foyer93. In Chapter 3, I introduce the *foyer*-space as it was originally conceived and as it presents itself now, in order to ground and give context to the residents' narratives and everyday lives, which I shared, with the caveats and limitations of carrying out fieldwork as a woman among uniquely single male migrants. The constraints of the *foyer* create a hybrid tradition, combining village roles with necessity and improvisation. The old residents and their migratory practices, now gradually being abandoned, testify to the role they played in shaping current migration. The analysis of Foyer93 continues in Chapter 4, where I assess the Soninkés' practice of Islam, which is composite and plural. Next to the clerical figure of the leader of prayer, the imam, stand the spiritual leader or marabout and the iron-makers, who both perform divination and have a relationship with the jinns, the spirits. Both claim to practise in the cadre of Islam, either because they have a relationship with Muslim spirits or because they employ ritual formulas drawn from the Qur'an (or both). While within the Mouride community (the object of Chapter 5 and 6) a strong Sufi theodicy assigns everyone their role (spiritual and mundane), the same cannot be said for the Soninké community at Foyer93. The Mouride order has a long history dating back to the foundation of the *tariqa* (الطريقة), or Sufi order – which continues and thrives in the diaspora too. The Mouride community has been able to settle in France and to be an important feature of the consolidating *French* Islam, quite in resonance with the French goal of bringing Islam into the folds of the Republic. In Chapter 7, the French understanding and provision of health is outlined and countered by a case study of ritual healing. Finally, I draw my conclusions on the status quo of both French minority groups and Islam in France, together with their achievements and setbacks.

Notes

1. This ethnic group lives in the regions between Senegal and Mali along the Senegal River Valley, and is a subdominant group (demographically and linguistically) in both states: the Wolof ethnic group is dominant in Senegal, while the Bambara are dominant in Mali. The Soninké are part of the wider Mande family group, comprising the Bambara and the Mandinka.
2. A *foyer* refers to housing exclusively for single male migrants.

3. The Beurs movement of the 1970s involved the uprising of the Parisian ban-
   lieues through the organised action of French youths of Algerian origin, claiming
   civil rights and political recognition. It also involved a great number of Algerian
   migrants living in SONACOTRA *foyers*. The movement is tragically remembered
   for the fierce oppression of the protesters at the hands of the French gendarmes.
4. The *foyers* benefit from the L633-1 Article of Construction and Housing (2000
   Law), according to which they are private domiciles, whose internal organisa-
   tion cannot be subjected to restrictions 'other than those fixed by the law'. Thus,
   the residents enjoy considerable freedom at (and control over) the *foyers.*
5. Sub-Saharan migration to OECD countries, estimated to 3.4 million migrants
   (with only 300 thousand in France), is inferior to the overall stock that reached
   7.2 million Africans in 2000, https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/Beauchemin.pdf.
6. South-South migrations are equivalent to 36% of the total stock of migrants,
   amounting to 90.2 million, https://www.oecd.org/dev/migration-development/
   south-south-migration.htm
7. The Al-Qaida Islamic terrorist network attacked in the United States first (11
   September 2001) and Europe later, with sequels in Madrid (11 March 2004)
   and London (7 July 2005). ISIS has since claimed victims in Berlin (19 De-
   cember 2016), London (several attacks in 2017) and throughout France (since
   2014), with the last episode on 24 May 2019 in Lyon that has been treated as a
   case of terrorism.
8. The banlieue, which literally means *lieu bannis*, or 'banned place', is first of
   all a peripheral territory, where different socio-economic realities coexist. The
   banlieues have a wider meaning than 'outskirts of a town' or 'suburbs'. They
   comprise the departments surrounding the capital city of a region and include
   smaller communes. Nonetheless, I will use the words 'suburb' and 'banlieue' as
   synonyms.
9. See https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/472017/population-religion-france/ (ac-
   cessed 28 Mars 2022).
10. *Mouridullah* (مريد الله) refers to the Sufi faithful, following the path to God.