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Abstract

### **An Islamic City in Europe? Parisian Urbanism Redefined**

How can one define an “Islamic city?” Can such a definition even exist? The construct of the Islamic city seems to work best for cities where the majority of its inhabitants are Muslim and the ruling state is Muslim-directed. Islamic cities are defined geographically as Middle Eastern and Arab. However, Muslims live within the borders of many cities and states (sometimes as a minority and sometimes not) that are beyond the traditional Middle East. Furthermore, there is no one homogeneous form of Islam, just as there is no single Christianity or Judaism. When a community (that shares identity) is in a minority, often, a shared identifying “mark” (color, religion, country of origin) becomes a symbol of identity. Religion becomes synonymous with ethnicity and vice versa.

The city of Paris represents itself as being part of a republican state. Its very definition is challenged and strained as difference emerges. As the government works to negate public markers of difference such as headscarves and mosques, the question arises – who has a right to the city? And how does this city function? Identities are clearly altered, based upon the urban experience of Paris. In recent history, the suburbs of Paris (*banlieues*) have once again, become sites of violence and contention. These violent flare-ups speak to greater tensions between assimilation and secularism (*laïcité*) in French governmental mandates. While it is easy to assume urban anonymity, difference is inevitably encountered as well. Using newspaper reports from the past decade, as well as through reference to the extensive literature on Parisian urbanism, this paper will interrogate its recent history and explore its re-definition as a European/Islamic city.

