

Le Corbusier, Orientalism, Colonialism

Author(s): Zeynep Çelik

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Zeynep Çelik

Le Corbusier, Orientalism, Colonialism

Zeynep Çelik is Associate Professor of Architecture at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. She is the author of *The Remaking of Istanbul* (University of Washington Press, 1986) and *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (University of California Press, 1992).

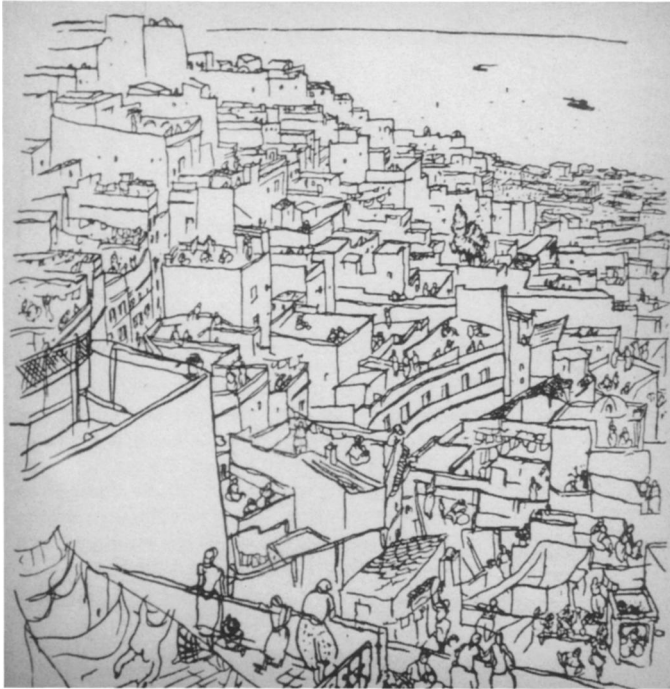
Le Corbusier's fascination with Islamic architecture and urbanism forms a continuing thread throughout his lengthy career. The first, powerful manifestation of this lifelong interest is recorded in his 1911 travel notes and sketches from the "Orient" — an ambiguous place, loosely alluding in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourse to the lands of Islam in the Middle East and North Africa, and in Corbu's case, solely to Istanbul and western Asia Minor.¹

The formative role of this *voyage d'Orient* for Le Corbusier is evident in his theoretical work and practice thereafter.² References to Islamic architecture and urban forms appear in his writings as early as 1915 and span his numerous publications, among them *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (1925), *La Ville radieuse* (1933), *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches* (1937), and *Le Modulor* (1949).³ A number of his early villas, such as the Villa Jeanneret-Perret (1912), Villa Favre-Jacot (1912), and Villa Schwob (1916), are inspired by the Ottoman houses in terms of their interior organization around a central hall, their simple spaces, massing, and blank street façades. The Mediterranean vernacular with an Islamic touch surfaces sporadically in his built work — for example, in the Weekend House (1935), the Roq and Rob project (1949), and the Maison Jaoul (1956) — recording its most memorable moment with the Notre Dame de Ronchamp (1950–55), inspired by the sculptural mass of the Sidi Ibrahim Mosque near El Ateuf in the Algerian countryside.

In one episode of Le Corbusier's career, however, Islam no longer only serves as a source of inspiration and reference, but

1. Le Corbusier, *Fathma*, 1939





2. Charles Brouty, sketch of the casbah, Algiers



3. Postcard view of Algiers and its terraces

becomes a living challenge: his projects for Algiers, developed between 1931 and 1942, attempt to establish an ambitious dialogue with Islamic culture, albeit within a confrontational colonial framework. The most lyrical of Le Corbusier's urban design schemes, these projects have been discussed at length by architectural historians of modernism. Yet, aside from brief references, their colonial context and ideological implications for French policies in Algeria have remained uninvestigated — a surprising oversight given their *raison d'être*: the decision to renovate the city in celebration of the centennial of French occupation and in preparation for its becoming the capital of French Africa.⁴ They have been explained as a parable of European modernism, as a poetic response to the machine age, to syndicalism, and so forth, and thus abstracted from the “political geography” of colonial Algeria.⁵ Neither have the Algiers projects been analyzed as part of Le Corbusier's infatuation with Islamic culture, on one side, shaped by the legacy of nineteenth-century French discourse on the “Orient,” and on another, informed by the Parisian avant-garde's preoccupation with the non-Western Other in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶ To fill this lacuna in the extensive literature on Le Corbusier, I will attempt to read the work of perhaps the most controversial figure of modernism from a shifted perspective informed by recent postcolonial discourse.

Not surprisingly, architecture and urban forms constituted the overriding theme in Le Corbusier's observations of other cultures. Nevertheless, they were accompanied by an inquiry into the social norms, in particular, religious and sexual ones — two of the three realms historian Norman Daniel defines as having characterized Islam for centuries in European discourse.⁷ It is my hope that an interconnected analysis of Le Corbusier's ideas on these issues will provide a comprehensive understanding of the architect's vision of Islam as the Other and reveal a new level of ideological complexity within the Algiers projects.

Le Corbusier undoubtedly first encountered the “Orient” through literature, travel accounts, and paintings. Certain popular authors, among them Théophile Gautier and Pierre Loti, appear time and again in his writings. Furthermore, the illustrations in travel books must have shaped Le Corbusier's expectations. His fascination with travel literature and its

4. Le Corbusier, sketch of Istanbul viewed from the sea



visual media is reflected in his own work, for example, by his use of Charles Brouty's drawings of the Algerian casbah in addition to postcards in *La Ville radiieuse*.⁸ As will be discussed later, the impact of the Orientalist school of painting becomes apparent in relation to Le Corbusier's studies of Eugène Delacroix's *Les Femmes d'Alger* in the 1930s, but it is manifested earlier in Istanbul in his speculations about Islamic women and the private life of the Muslim family.

In a rerun of innumerable travel accounts, Le Corbusier first viewed Istanbul from a boat in May 1911. "Thus we did approach by sea," he wrote, "like in old times, to watch all these things unfold."⁹ This was a strategy carefully planned by Corbu, in order to be welcomed by an image already formed in his mind by everything he had read. Nineteenth-century travel books on the Ottoman capital followed a set pattern, the opening pages describing the striking impressions of the city from the sea, divided into three settlements by water, with Istanbul on one side of the Golden Horn, Galata on the other, and Üsküdar yet farther away on the Asian banks of the Bosphorus; they talked at length about the harmony of colors, the skyline defined by domes and minarets, and the reflections of the built and natural forms on the water. To Le Corbusier, then, this was a familiar moment, much rehearsed in his imagination.¹⁰ He knew what he wanted to see:

I want Stamboul to sit upon her Golden Horn all white, as raw as chalk, and I want light to screech on the surfaces of domes which swell the heap of milky cubes, and minarets should thrust upward, and the sky must be blue. . . . Under the bright light, I want a city all white, but the green cypresses must be there to punctuate it. All the blue of the sea shall reflect the blue of the sky.¹¹

On that particular day, however, it rained, the sea turned gray, the Golden Horn looked muddy, mosques dirty, and houses flimsy. When he landed on the shore, Corbu was disappointed even further by the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the streets, "swarming with a crowd of Greeks, Germans, and French, all that suspect blend of the Levantine." Yet the burden of Orientalist tradition compelled him to partake in the collective passion expressed by other Europeans before him: "I had to work at it," he admitted, "and most of all I wanted to love this place."¹² As witnessed by his numerous sketches, Le Corbusier often relived the experience of viewing Istanbul from across the sea on the commuter ferries

that connected the shores of the city, thus finding something of the mental image he had constructed back in Europe. Indeed, Corbu surpassed the formulas of Orientalist descriptions by reading the urban form analytically: he studied the careful placement of monuments in respect to topography that resulted in "summits formed by really enormous mosques" as well as their relationship to each other in the calculated composition of the skyline.¹³

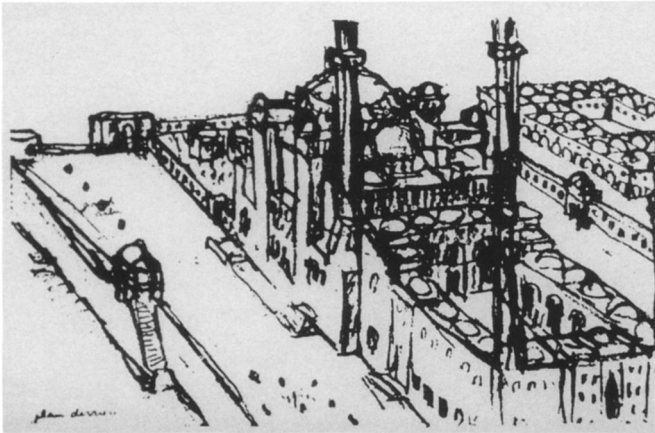
Like Istanbul, Algiers makes a powerful impression from the sea — one that has also been recorded unflinchingly in travel literature. Théophile Gautier described the approach:

A whitish blur, cut into a trapezium, and dotted with silver sparkles — each one of them a country house — began to be drawn against the dark hills: this is Algiers, Al-Djezair, as the Arabs call it. We approach; around the trapezium, two ochre-colored ravines define the lower edges of the slopes, and shimmer with such a lively light that they seem as though they are beds to two sun torrents: these are the trenches. The walls, strangely crenellated, ascend the height of the slope. . . . Two palm trees and four windmills stand out in contrast: the palm tree, symbol of the desert and the patriarchal life; the windmill, symbol of Europe and civilization.

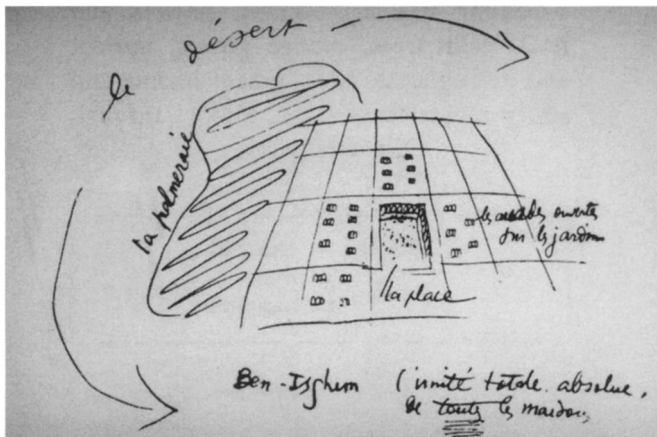
Algiers is built as an amphitheater on a steep slope, such that its houses seem to have their feet on the heads of others. Nothing is stranger for the French eye than this superposition of terraces in the color of chalk. . . . When the distance gets smaller, we perceive amidst the general glare the minaret of a mosque, the dome of a sufi convent, the mass of a great edifice, the Kasbah.¹⁴

Le Corbusier's drawings and descriptions of Algiers similarly move from distant views to inner city (echoing again the travel literature). The architect's main focus, however, was to show how his project would complement and enhance the beauty of Algiers, whose "real face" would be a *front de mer* in his proposals as throughout the city's history.¹⁵ His essay *Poésie sur Alger* thus begins with an argument about incorporating poetry into urbanism, but follows immediately with a description of the city from the sea:

We are in Africa. This sun, this space created by azure and water, this foliage have formed the set for the actions of Salambo, Scipion and Annibal, together with those of Kheir-ed-dinn the Barbaresque. The sea, the chain of the Atlas Mountains, the slopes of Kabyle unfold their blue displays. The earth is red. The vegetation consists of palm trees, eucalyptus trees, gum trees, cork oaks, olive trees and



5. Le Corbusier, sketch of Suleymaniye, Istanbul



6. Le Corbusier, sketch of Ben-Isghem

fig trees; the perfumes, jasmine and mimosa. From the first plan to the confines of the horizons, the symphony is imminent. . . . Building their Casbah, the Turks [*sic*] have created a masterpiece of architecture and urbanism.¹⁶

Elsewhere, Le Corbusier described the casbah as having *made* the site: “The casbah of Algiers . . . has given the name Algiers-the-White to this glittering apparition that welcomes at dawn the boats arriving to the port. Inscribed in the site, it is irrefutable. It is in consonance with nature.”¹⁷

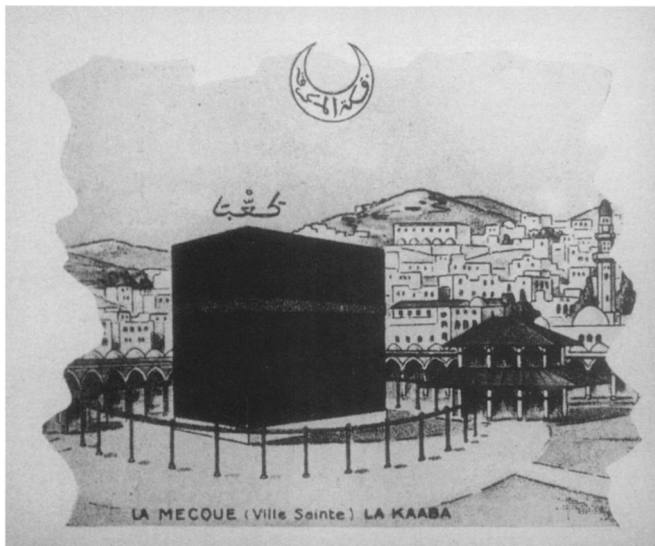
The aesthetic appeal in the image of these two cities, created by the powerful dialogue between geography and architectural form, turned them into unique poems. In Istanbul the poetry resided in the “unforgettable spectacle” of the urban form, with the light coming from behind and giving the city a monolithic appearance.¹⁸ In Algiers the quality of light reflecting on the buildings and the landscape gave the city its poetry, and complementing the geography, the vegetation, and the perfume of the air, created a “symphony.”¹⁹

Even in the early stages of his career, for Le Corbusier good urbanism meant formal unity. In Istanbul this unity was achieved by the modular design system that, following an “elementary geometry,” underlay the composition of the great mosque complexes; cubic masses covered by domes acted as modules, being “centered, measured, and proportioned in relation to the sanctuary they belong to.”²⁰ The integrity of the urban form depended, therefore, on the cubic elements, making Istanbul a masterpiece of urbanism, because, Le Corbusier stated, “great architecture is cubic.”²¹

Two decades later, Le Corbusier observed a similar unity in Algeria, again based on a module, the square-shaped cell. He commented on the cellular organization of Ben-Isghem, a town in Mزاب, “What an order, what a decision, what a sensible tool to the service of mankind.” And he provided an architectural formula for happiness:²²

the key = the cell
= men
= happiness

Displaying the historic fascination of Europe with Islam, Le Corbusier attempted to explain architectural and urban forms in terms of religious beliefs. Unversed in Muslim philosophy, he recycled the cliché that the Muslim religion

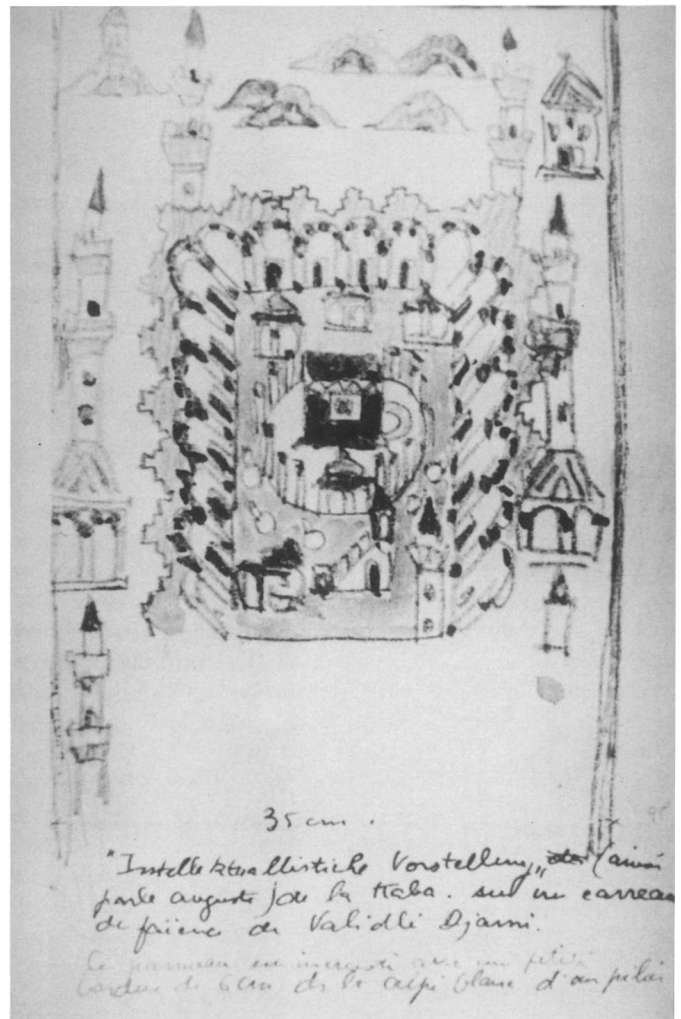


7. Postcard of the Kaaba

held an answer to all sociocultural questions and in one short sentence argued that the unity of concept was due to the unity of religion. He considered this a most reasonable explanation because “Asia [was] forever religious” — an ahistorical if widespread reading that fixed the entire continent in some ambiguous place in the past. Then, repeating another cliché, he suggested that the module was derived from the nomadic tent and “religion elevate[d] it to the infinite.”²³

Le Corbusier’s sole insightful observation on the relationship between Muslim religion and built form might be found in his global diagram for the world of Islam, that is, in his discussion of the unity of religion as expressed in the physical and symbolic “pull” of Mecca: “the orientation of the axis of every mosque on Moslem soil toward the black stone of Kaaba is an awe-inspiring symbol of the unity of faith.”²⁴ The *mihrab* of every mosque was indeed “a door to the Kaaba.”²⁵ Undoubtedly, Le Corbusier’s obsession with the Kaaba also derived from its simple, cubic form, which he illustrated in *La Ville radieuse* with a postcard, but which he had studied earlier while sketching a tile in the Valide Mosque in Istanbul.

Le Corbusier’s sporadic notes on Islam, otherwise, cannot be considered as products of deep thinking and analytical observation, but they reveal the young architect’s claim to a disposition of superiority toward other cultures. His choice of words in these brief statements tells more perhaps than their subject. He thus referred in Istanbul to the Muslims’ “poignant mysticism before Allah,” their “loud laments . . . in the ritual rhythms of worship,” “their supplication to the Unknown, the mournful credo of their beautiful prayers,” and “the swooning of their souls and those undulating recitals of



8. Le Corbusier, sketch of a tile in the Valide Mosque, Istanbul

all the *muezzins* on their minarets when they chant and call the devoted to prayer.”²⁶ His reference to a performance of whirling dervishes — a ritual transformed dramatically in the nineteenth century for touristic consumption and one often drawn and painted by European artists — evokes scenes that extend the imagination: “We have attended a fiery religious service by whirling Dervishes, of which I will say nothing just now because otherwise I would never finish.”²⁷

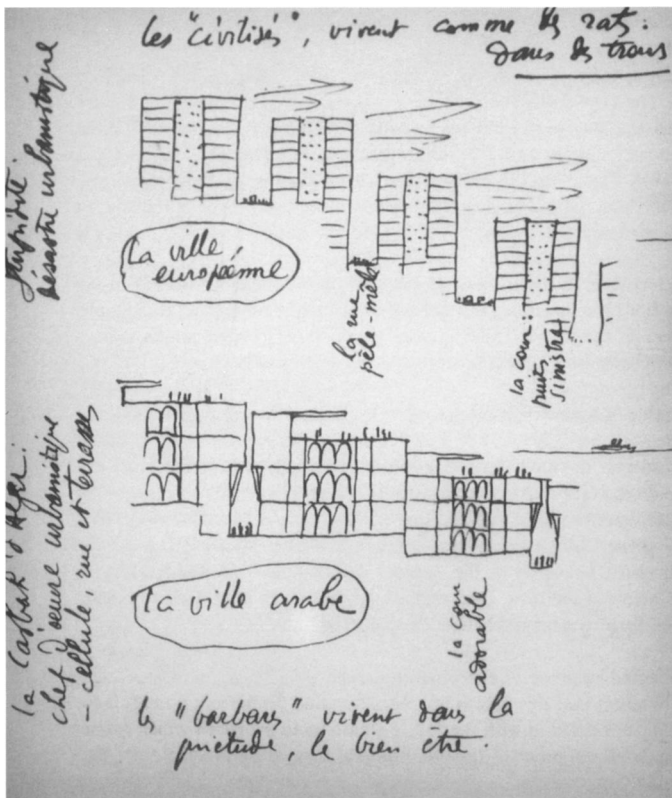
Compared to his curiosity in all aspects of life in the Ottoman capital, Le Corbusier maintained a marked distance from the local culture in Algiers. In part stemming from his mission to redesign the city, his analytical observations were keyed to vernacular urban and architectural forms. He did not, as in Istanbul, indulge in speculations about society or religion, neither did he record eyewitness accounts of religious rituals, although a populist version of Orientalist vocabulary surfaced every now and then in his writings.²⁸ Le Corbusier’s references to the religious monuments (the “high” art) of Algiers were brief and within the context of his own proposals. For example, he envisioned clearing the area around the two mosques on the Place du Gouvernement and returning them to their original condition, sitting on a rock base. The Marine quarter would harbor “indigenous institutions” in a “vast ensemble of new [and] grand Muslim architecture, as monumental as it would be picturesque.”²⁹

This detachment from monumental architecture in Algiers was connected to current debates among the Parisian intelligentsia, especially around the dialogue between ethnography and surrealism in the 1920s. Questioning “reality” and searching for alternatives to local (European) customs and truths, surrealist ethnographers had turned to the non-Western, abandoning, in the process, the distinction between “high” and “low” culture.³⁰ Influential and rigorous, the debate generated a new emphasis on ethnography, as witnessed by the extensive literature from the 1920s and 1930s. Not surprisingly, the majority of the fieldwork was carried out in the colonies, among them Algeria.³¹ Indigenous house forms and settlement patterns constituted major topics of interest to ethnographers; their publications were richly illustrated with examples from vernacular architecture, analyzed in terms of daily life and rituals. Although Le Corbusier had always displayed a critical sensitivity to vernacular forms and

fabrics, his deliberate determination in Algeria to turn away from monumental architecture altogether should be understood in reference to this discourse.

In Istanbul Le Corbusier’s eye and pen had wandered from the monuments to the side streets defined by blank garden walls, to the *konaks*, large mansions that he considered architectural masterpieces, to the simple houses. He rediscovered the solitude of the residential streets of Istanbul in Algeria, where, again, the houses — although much different in their architectural character — were divorced from the street. “The [Algerian] street is an anonymous corridor,” he declared; life and poetry flourished inside the house.³² The narrow streets of the casbah, effectively sheltered from the sun by the projections of the buildings that lined them, were only public passages and places to shop. Yet a “miracle” occurred when the door of an Arab house opened onto a lovely courtyard, one or two stories high, surrounded by sculpted arches. Here silence reigned. “The street [was] abolished.”³³ By ignoring the street, that “violent passage,” the Arab house afforded a life in coolness (*fraîcheur*) and tranquility. Furthermore, Arabs had “conquered the view of the sea for every house” by means of roof terraces that “created a roof over the city.” The casbah thus became an “immense stairway, a tribune invaded at night by millions of adorers of nature.” Comparing the Arab city to the European, the “adorable courtyard” of the Arab house to the “sinister courtyard” of the European apartment buildings, the protected passageways to the “jumbled streets,” Le Corbusier concluded that “the ‘civilized’ live like rats in holes,” whereas “the ‘barbarians’ live in solitude, in well-being.” Juxtaposing his own proposal for the *à redents* housing in Algiers with the patterns offered by the casbah, he summarized the lessons he had learned: “terraces, suspended gardens, grand bays open to a landscape of dreams conquered by height.”³⁴

Westernizing transformations in Istanbul’s architecture and urban forms, a process that had begun in the mid-nineteenth century, created mixed reactions in the young Le Corbusier.³⁵ The hybrid and modern look of Pera, a former Genoese settlement to the north of the Golden Horn, inhabited mostly by Europeans and non-Muslim Ottoman minorities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, intrigued him as “a compressed city with the allure of New York” whose buildings “thrust upward like dominoes, . . . nothing

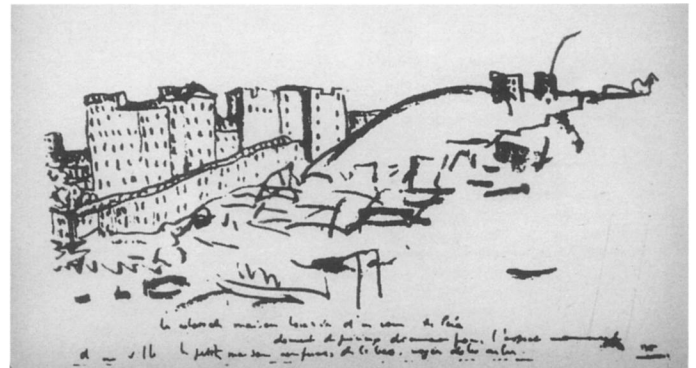


9. Le Corbusier, sketch comparing the European city with the Arab city

soften[ing] the severity of [their] height." Pera was "beautiful and imposing."³⁶ Other Europeans had, of course, lamented the Westernized appearance of Galata as not fitting into an Oriental imagery. Gautier, for example, had noted these apartment buildings as negative developments:

Some ugly houses, of six and seven stories, line the road on one side, and rejoice a superb view, of which they are quite unworthy. It is true that these houses pass for the best in Constantinople and that Pera is proud of them — judging them (rightly) as fit to figure honorably at Marseilles or Barcelona, or even Paris; for they are, in fact, of an ugliness the most civilized and modern.³⁷

Elsewhere, Le Corbusier echoed those Europeans who deplored the destruction of the old city by modernization and



10. Le Corbusier, sketch of Pera

Westernization. "The catastrophe that will inevitably ruin Istanbul [is] the advent of modern times," he wrote. "Stamboul will die. The reason is that she is always burning and being rebuilt," he continued, diagnosing correctly a main factor behind the fast pace of Istanbul's transformation. He attributed the poor quality of the new architecture in the neighborhoods cleared by fires to the inability of European companies (especially the German ones) commissioned to do the work.³⁸ Another loss was the "majestic coat of white-wash" in mosque interiors to the "ignominy of repugnant and revolting painted ornamentation" — the signature of the Young Turks, according to Le Corbusier.³⁹ While the connection between political reform agendas and painted decoration is far-fetched, Corbu's critique was broader; he aimed at the turn-of-the-century Ottoman adoption of European fashions that, in order to replace the purity (the modernity) of local historical forms, disguised these truly "modern" forms behind masks of decoration. In 1925, back in Paris, Le Corbusier condemned the modernization programs of the new Turkish republic that had succeeded the Ottoman Empire by referring again to whitewash: "And already today we have Ankara, and the monument to Mustapha-Kemal! Events move fast. The die is cast: one more centuries-old civilization goes to ruin. No more whitewash in Turkey for a long time to come!"⁴⁰

Le Corbusier expressed similar sentiments about the destruction of Algiers, for which he blamed the French interventions. "The last fifty years of European colonization," he argued

in 1942, “abolished without any regrets the natural richness and petrified the new city into a desert with its crowded houses leaning onto noisy streets.”⁴¹ Like the cities of Europe and America, Algiers had sickened, for it had been torn of its poetry by the engineers.⁴² Nonetheless, Le Corbusier respected the original achievements of the French colonial oeuvre and credited the first six decades of French rule with good urbanism. He had already clarified his standpoint in *La Ville radieuse*, where, including a plan that indicated the first interventions (the Place d’Armes and the main east-west artery), he expressed his admiration of the early colonial urbanism: “The military rulers of the conquest knew how to make beautiful city plans. They knew how to urbanize.”⁴³ While Le Corbusier’s scheme to obtain the commission by associating the current administration with the glorified conquerors is quite transparent in this statement made on the centennial of the occupation, his repetition of the same theme in various contexts reflects his firm support of French colonial policies. Celebrating the *mission civilisatrice* in Morocco, he praised the instruction, loyalty, and justice brought by the French, as well as the network of roads and the cities they had built — all “signs of civilization.” These achievements, he argued, had created an atmosphere of admiration, enthusiasm, and respect among the Arabs:

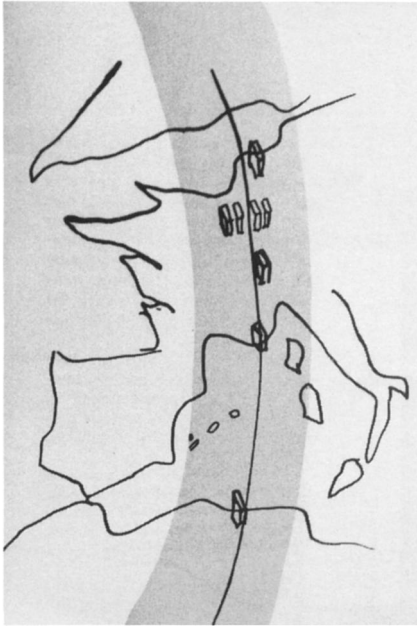
The Arab discovered his educator, his instructor. He did not bat an eyelid of doubt. With two hands outstretched, leaving all his hopeless deceit behind, he loved, admired, understood the new times and respected France with all his conviction. Architecture and urbanism can be the great educator.⁴⁴

In accordance with the colonial mission, Le Corbusier’s Algiers — the “French capital of Africa,” the “head of French Africa,” and the “phoenix of France . . . reborn out of the ashes of the mother country” — would reinforce French rule not only in Algeria, but throughout the entire continent.⁴⁵ The architect expressed this view passionately in his writings, but also in several drawings where an axis originating in the north continues into Africa, connecting France, from Le Havre via Paris to Marseilles and across the Mediterranean, to Algiers and to Gao. Sketches of skyscrapers indicate the cities along the axis, proposing the unification of greater France through the new architecture and urbanism. The notion of a geographical axis between France and Algiers was not unprecedented in colonial discourse; for example, Cotereau, a

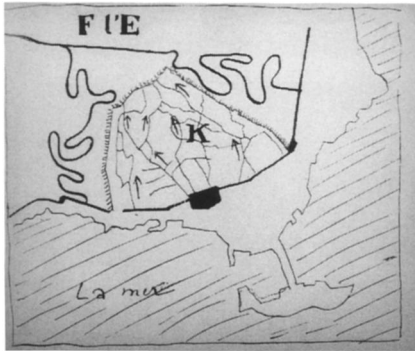
prominent engineer working for the city of Algiers, argued in 1933 that the city must be renovated by means of a “sane architecture, following Aryan traditions,” because of “its position on the axis of France.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, Le Corbusier’s sketches depict the idea of *la grande France*, which stemmed from an “imperial” French doctrine and a colonial consciousness developed in 1930, and which culminated in the Colonial Exposition of 1931.⁴⁷ As Paul Reynaud, Minister of Colonies, expressed at the time, “the essential aim of the Exposition is to give the French people consciousness of their Empire. . . . Everyone among us must feel he is a citizen of the greatest France [*la plus grande France*] that expands to five parts of the world.”⁴⁸

Given Le Corbusier’s loyalty to the idea of *la grande France* and to French rule in Algeria, it makes sense to analyze his projects within the framework of colonial planning traditions in the earlier part of the century. In the history of French colonial urbanism, the name of Hubert Lyautey, governor-general of Morocco from 1912 to 1925, stands out. Under the rule of Marshal Lyautey and the supervision of the architect Henri Prost, France had undertaken extensive experiments in urban planning that expanded Rabat, Fez, and Casablanca according to a well-developed social strategy. Certain ideas and passions connected Lyautey and Prost to Le Corbusier. Like Corbu, Prost had visited Istanbul as a young man while studying at the academy in Rome, which he had convinced to finance a study of Hagia Sophia — not as a monument in isolation, but in its urban context. The historical and cultural richness of the Ottoman capital as well as its formal structure had indeed appealed to Prost and underlined his proposal for a restitution project for the neighborhood around Hagia Sophia.⁴⁹

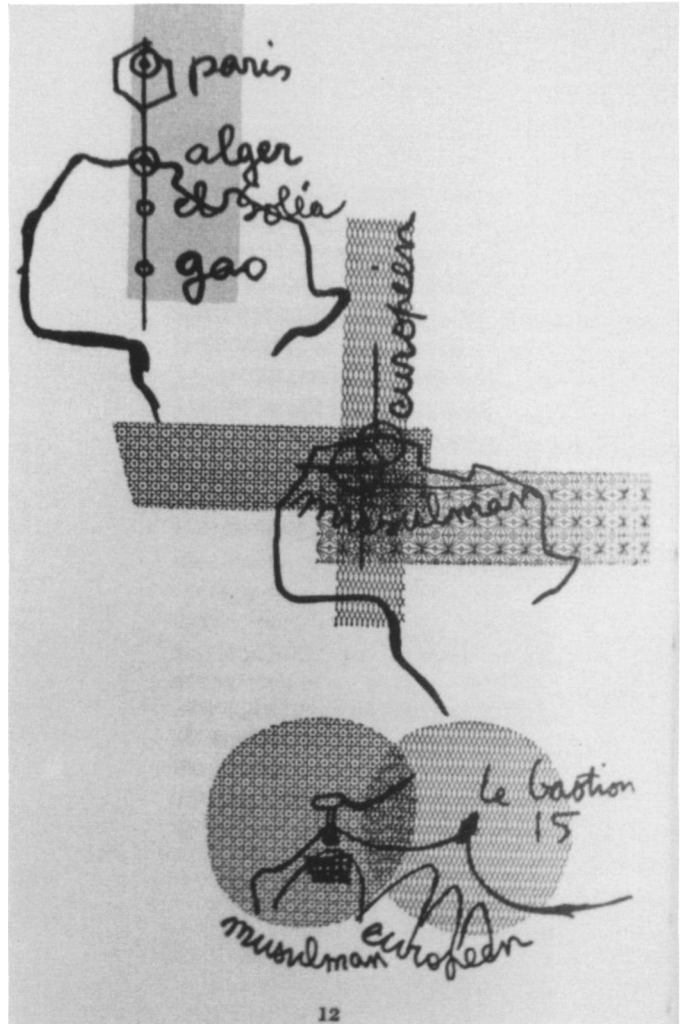
Lyautey and Le Corbusier shared an admiration for the vernacular architecture of the Islamic Mediterranean, which reflected on their implementations and proposals in the historic fabrics of the Arab cities they were involved in, as well as on their preference for modernist aesthetics. Lyautey confirmed the latter point clearly: “Islam gave me,” he declared in 1931, “a taste for great white walls and I could almost claim to be one of the forerunners of Le Corbusier.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, Lyautey and Le Corbusier both believed in the central role urbanism played in changing people’s lives. Lyautey’s urbanism aimed to accommodate his new colonial



12, 13. Le Corbusier, diagrammatic maps showing geographical axis between France and Algiers



11. Le Corbusier, plan showing the first colonial interventions in Algiers



order, based on diversity, where people of different social and cultural circumstances would coexist. His widely quoted statement “A construction site is worth a battalion” meant that city planning would replace the older colonial policies based on military force.⁵¹ The strong social engineering agenda in Le Corbusier’s urbanism, especially in reference to the new man of the machine age, is well known. Yet his understanding of diversity, which also seems to imply regionalism and enables us to understand the Algiers projects better, has remained more obscure. On the title page of *La Ville radieuse*, Le Corbusier defined urban plans as “the rational and poetic monuments set up in the midst of contingencies”: “places, peoples, cultures, topographies, climates . . . only to be judged as they relate to the entity — ‘man.’” The specificity of some of these contingencies in Algiers — the place, the topography, the climate — surfaces in the unprecedented lyricism of Le Corbusier’s Algiers projects. The other contingencies — different peoples and cultures — help to explain the parallels between Le Corbusier’s and Lyautey’s urbanism in the colonies.

The two principles that Lyautey had outlined for Prost at the outset of the latter’s arrival in Morocco in 1913 were, according to legend, to preserve the medinas in respect to the local culture and aesthetics and to build new, modern cities for the European populations.⁵² Both of these principles underlie the structure of Le Corbusier’s plans for Algiers, leading to the separation of the French from the indigenous people, a phenomenon Janet Abu-Lughod has labeled “urban apartheid” in reference to Moroccan cities.⁵³

For Lyautey, the preservation of the Arab town held several meanings, some emotional, some practical. Above all, he savored the aesthetic qualities of the Arab town, its “charm and poetry,” which he attributed to the sophistication of the culture.⁵⁴ To understand the *difference* between this culture and the European one was essential to building a colonial policy that would endure:

The secret . . . is the extended hand, and not the condescending hand, but the loyal handshake between man and man — in order to understand each other. . . . This [Arab] race is not inferior, it is different. Let us learn how to understand their difference just like they will understand them from their own side.⁵⁵

This major difference between the two cultures required the separation of the indigenous from the European populations in the city:

Large cities, boulevards, tall façades for stores and homes, installation of water and electricity are necessary, [all of] which upset the indigenous city completely, making the customary way of life impossible. You know how jealous the Muslim is of the integrity of his private life; you are familiar with the narrow streets, the façades without opening behind which hides the whole of life, the terraces upon which the life of the family spreads out and which must therefore remain sheltered from indiscreet looks.⁵⁶

Consequently, Lyautey made the conservation of the Moroccan medinas one of his priorities in urban planning. He announced proudly, “Yes, in Morocco, and it is to our honor, we conserve. I would go a step further, we rescue. We wish to conserve in Morocco Beauty — and it is not a negligible thing.”⁵⁷ Behind these compassionate words, nevertheless, lay an economic goal: the medinas were essential for the development of tourism, especially for the romantic travelers and artists who would be eternally thankful to Lyautey.⁵⁸

The International Congress on Urbanism in the Colonies, held during the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris, recorded the powerful influence of Lyautey’s ideas and practice on the new rules of planning in the French colonies. Among the goals of the congress, as listed by Prost, were “tourism and conservation of old cities” and “protection of landscapes and historic monuments”; the “wish list” of the participants included a respect for the beliefs, habits, and traditions of various races and the creation of separate settlements.⁵⁹ By then, the implementation of such principles had already expanded to other colonial cities. In Algiers, for example, the casbah was placed under a special regime destined to conserve its picturesque character to promote tourism.⁶⁰

Like Lyautey’s Moroccan medinas, Le Corbusier’s Algerian casbah was “beautiful,” “charming,” and “adorable” and it “never, no, never must be destroyed.”⁶¹ Its historic significance as the “place of European and Muslim life during centuries of picturesque struggles” was held to be of great interest for the entire world.⁶² Therefore, its historical and aesthetic values, the vestiges of Arab urbanism and architecture, should be protected to enhance the “gigantic” touristic potential of Algiers for western and central Europe.⁶³ The

problem of the casbah was, however, an admittedly difficult one. This was mainly due to overpopulation caused by the influx of peasants escaping the miserable conditions in the countryside; the casbah sheltered four to six times more residents than it could contain, sometimes twenty persons in a single room, according to Le Corbusier's figures.⁶⁴ If Algiers was to become the capital of French Africa, the misery of its Muslim population had to be addressed, the casbah "purified" and reorganized, its population reduced.⁶⁵

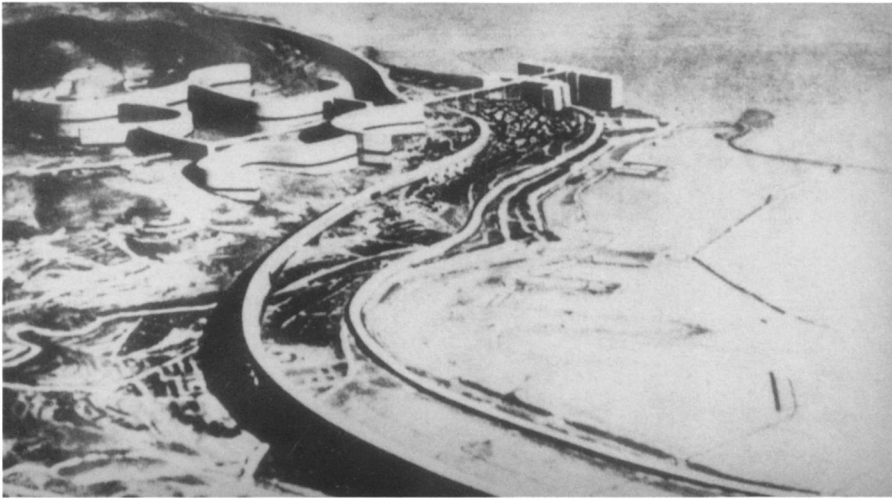
Le Corbusier thus proposed to preserve the upper casbah in its integrity, while restricting the densities and intervening in the patterns of use, following the planning decisions made before him.⁶⁶ A number of buildings were to continue to function as residences, but others were to be converted into centers of arts and crafts in order to initiate an indigenous "renaissance." Indeed, an impressive number of new schools and workshops were established by the colonial authorities in the 1920s and 1930s to develop local crafts — embroidery, leatherwork, metalwork, copperwork, woodwork, carpentry, pottery, masonry, and decorative arts — with the goal of increasing their commercial value.⁶⁷ The lower casbah, on the other hand, would be expurgated of its slums; only the mansions would be preserved, converted into specialized museums for the indigenous arts. Parks and gardens would replace the areas cleared from the slums, but the existing street network would be maintained to link the high casbah to the Marine quarter and to the harbor.⁶⁸ Following the Moroccan precedent, the Muslim residents of Algiers would be strictly separated from the Europeans.

The policy of establishing separate cities was carried through to such an extent that written into the wish list of the participants in the 1931 urbanism congress was the creation of a "green belt," sometimes referred to as *cordon sanitaire* (a term that recalls the practice of evacuating Europeans from epidemic-ridden towns in the Algerian countryside and enforcing quarantine on local people).⁶⁹ Le Corbusier reinterpreted the idea of the green belt while wholeheartedly acknowledging its necessity. In his Obus plan of 1932, for example, a giant linear structure that connects the hillside residences for Europeans to the *cité d'affaires* in the Marine quarter forms a bridge over the casbah, transforming the sanitary green belt into an air band and reversing the

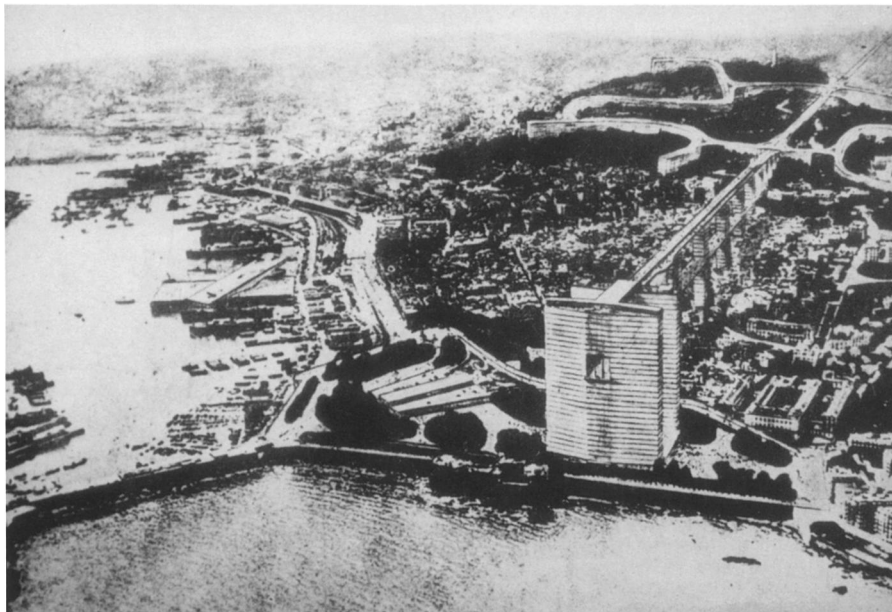
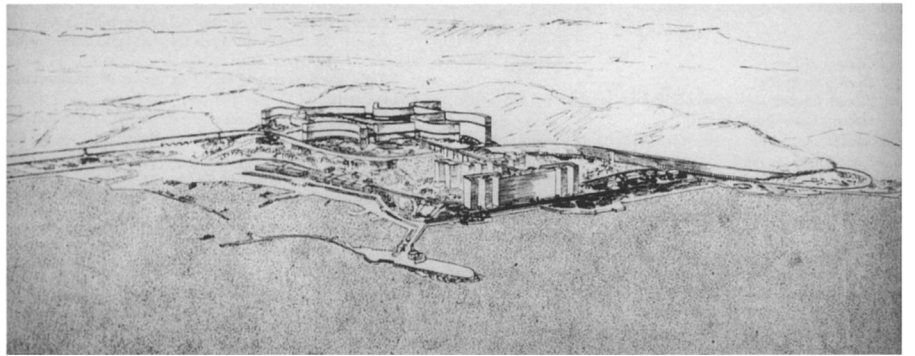
horizontality of the former into a vertical element. Repeating the concept in his later plans, Corbu himself emphasized the essential separation of the two settlements: "This artery will be separated entirely from the indigenous town, by means of a level difference."⁷⁰

Le Corbusier's dramatic segregation of the casbah has been commonly interpreted by architectural historians as a symbolic gesture. Tafuri sees in Corbu's treatment of the casbah a "timeless model . . . the metaphor of an ancient time," which is "foreign to time, foreign to the modern, indifferent to its destinies."⁷¹ These words from one of the most perceptive historians of our day belong, paradoxically, to the Orientalist tradition that attributes timelessness and a prehistorical existence to the Islamic city, denying it change and process and accentuating the difference between the dynamism of the European modern and the stasis of the ancient Muslim. No doubt, Le Corbusier's new Algiers would have stood in sharp contrast to the Muslim town, but his reading of the casbah was far more complex than Tafuri suggests. Emphasizing its cosmopolitan nature and its fascinating process of change, Le Corbusier praised the casbah for its houses that recorded the "progress of styles, of periods, of history."⁷² Nevertheless, the implications of the project carry the colonial premises much farther than does Lyautey's work: Le Corbusier's plan establishes constant visual supervision over the local population and clearly marks the hierarchical social order onto the urban image, with the dominating above and the dominated below.⁷³

The colonial planners envisioned the green belts as places where "contact and collaboration" between races would not be prohibited: they were the potential sites for interaction.⁷⁴ Le Corbusier assigned this function to the starting point of his air belt, the Marine quarter, between the casbah and the streets of Bab Azoun and its eastern extension, Bab el Oued. Cleared and rebuilt with large *à redents* blocks over parks and gardens, harboring the "business center" and "civic center," the quarter would provide the link between the European and the Arab cities. Certain Arab institutions, such as offices, shops, and meeting halls, would also be placed here.⁷⁵ The location was most convenient for overlapping functions, because of its proximity to the port, its centrality in terms of future growth, and its significance as a historical axis for



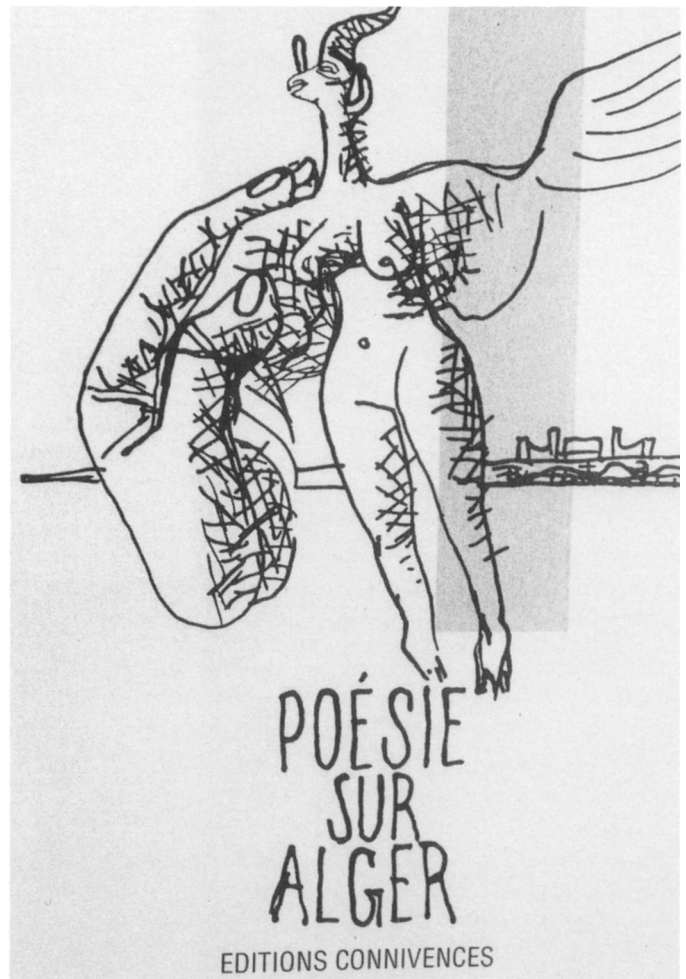
14-16. Le Corbusier, three views of the Obus plans



Arabs.⁷⁶ At the time of Le Corbusier's involvement in Algiers, this crowded quarter, occupied by residents of diverse nationalities, was the most problematic area for the city administration due to a lack of "material and moral hygiene."⁷⁷ Provisions had already been made for its "destruction and complete reconstruction."⁷⁸ Le Corbusier's cleansing would be urban and social, at once providing for controlled activities for Arabs and racial contact in an ordered environment.

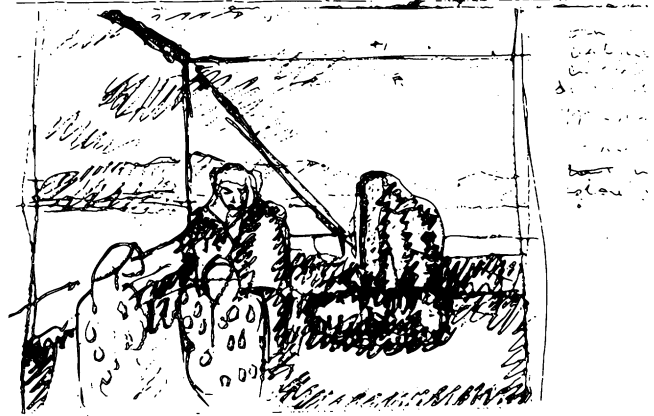
Le Corbusier's projects would thus endow the colonial administration in Algiers with a new apparatus for enhancing its political power by means of an urban order that facilitated supervision. In addition, a militaristic signal lies in the curving forms of the building complexes, emphasized by the architect himself in calling the plan "Obus" in reference to the trajectory of an exploding shell. This is not a simple, light-hearted metaphor and should not be dissociated from its political context, from the violent confrontations between the French army and the local resistance forces during the one hundred years of occupation. Curiously enough, the curvilinear forms of Le Corbusier's project relate to another major aspect of French colonialism in Algeria: its obsession with Algerian women. Under colonial rule, the European fascination with Muslim women had led to controversial policies, among them penetrating the privacy of Muslim family life by "liberating" the women. Women were, for example, strongly encouraged (and at times forced) to discard their veils — perhaps the most loaded symbol of Islam. The rationale was that if women were conquered, the core structure of this unyielding society would be destroyed, leading to its total surrender.⁷⁹

Le Corbusier himself provoked the association between his projects and Algerian women by describing at length his enchantment with the women of the casbah and by likening the city of Algiers to a female body: "Algiers drops out of sight," he noted, viewing the city from a boat leaving for France in 1934, "like a magnificent body, supple-hipped and full-breasted. . . . A body which could be revealed in all its magnificence, through the judicious influence of form and the bold use of mathematics to harmonize natural topography and human geometry."⁸⁰ The cover sketch for *Poésie sur Alger* depicts a unicorn-headed (?), winged female body — supple-hipped and full-breasted — (the city/poem?) caressed gently



17. Le Corbusier, sketch for the cover of *Poésie sur Alger*

18. Le Corbusier, sketch of Turkish women, Istanbul



by a hand (the architect's hand?) against the skyline of new Algiers. This type of analogy, which claims mastery over the feminized body of the colonized territory (in this case, claiming that its beauty can be reincarnated through the architect's intervention), is not unprecedented in the French discourse on Algeria. One author, writing at the turn of the century, called Algeria "a wise and dangerous mistress," but one who "exudes a climate of caresses and torpor," suggesting that control over her mind and body was essential.⁸¹ Although the feminization of the "Orient" is a common theme in European descriptions and representations of Islam, the blatant use of the word *maîtresse* is specific to the colonies.

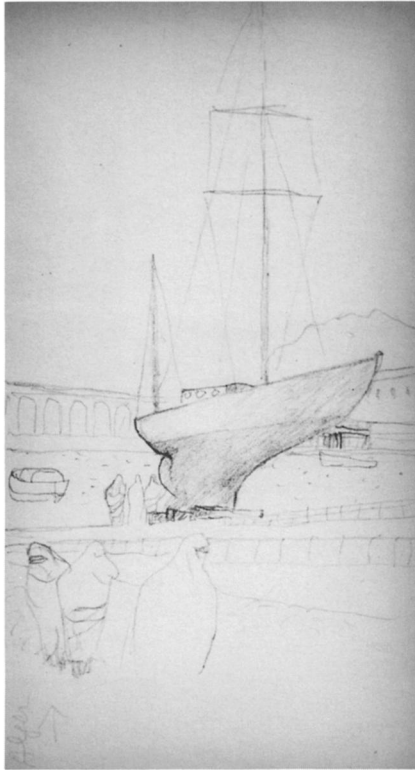
Le Corbusier was immersed in the discourse that attributed a lascivious sexuality to Islamic culture. This was one of the attractions that had drawn him to Istanbul in his youth. Re-enacting the scenes he had read of in books and had seen in paintings and repeating another favorite association between prison and palace, he fantasized about the life in the seraglio, which would be filled with "divine, thrilling odalisques . . . [wearing] around their naked ankles and arms . . . solid gold rings . . . like serpents. Loaded with gold and their nails painted in vermilion, they suffocated from waiting so long in their magnificent cages."⁸² The houses on the quiet streets of Istanbul were "perhaps . . . prisons of odalisques," evoking in young Corbu feelings of "a lightly painful, melancholic, beneficent poem."⁸³

The women of Istanbul, inaccessible to Le Corbusier, intrigued his sense of mystery further with their veils. He could barely make out their eyes through the pieces of cloth that enhanced their beauty: "innocent eyes of gazelles," he exclaimed, "delicious." He was more ambivalent about the long robes. At times he described the women in chadors as "impressive bats, with the folds of their capes framing their heads and then fading away from their hips," reminiscent of "those fiends at the towers of Notre Dame"; at others, as "hidden

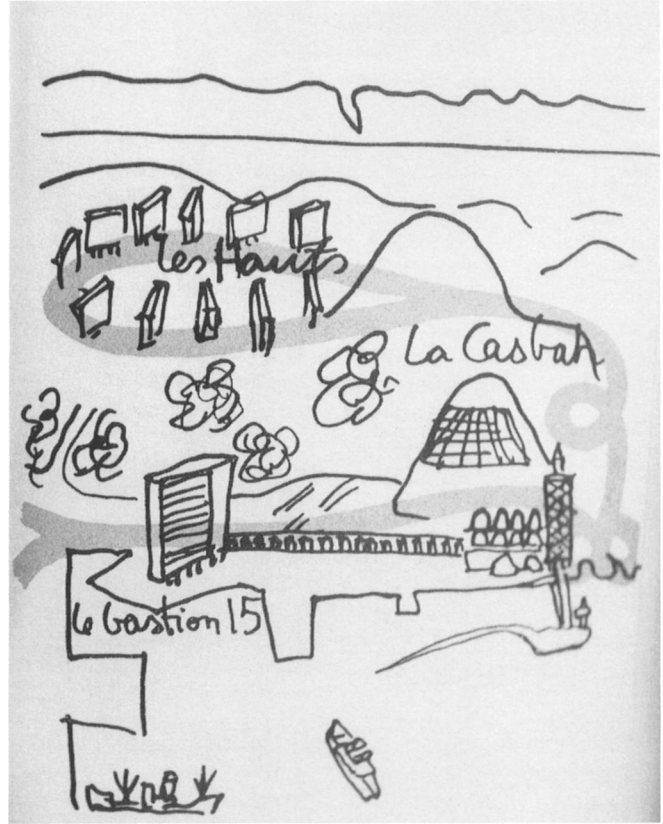
treasures in burgundy, ebony silk . . . just as exquisite as Persian cats," "charming in their mysterious black veils, their disquieting anonymity of identical silks, their hidden treasures all alike."⁸⁴

The Muslim women of Algiers rekindled Corbu's memories of his youth, with all the associations. He now used the veil as a shorthand to denote the local culture. He included veiled women in his sketches to highlight the poetry and the duality of the city. But more, he also consistently represented the casbah as a veil in his diagrams, thus visually feminizing the colonized Muslim society. He was, of course, neither the first nor the last to do so; in 1933 Lucienne Favre, a French woman writer, had, for example, described the casbah as "the vamp of North Africa," bearing a "capricious feminine charm" and a great "sex appeal."⁸⁵

Le Corbusier's experience with the women of the casbah contrasted with the impenetrable distance he had encountered in Istanbul. Now as an older and more self-confident man, and one bearing the psychology of being French in a colony, he visited the brothels, sketched women in the nude, and claimed to have discovered here "the nobility of the nude thanks to the plastic structure of certain females of the casbah under the intense but nuanced light of Algiers."⁸⁶ Jean de Maisonseul, who later became the curator of the Museum of Modern Art in Algiers and who had accompanied Le Corbusier on his sight-seeing trips, witnessed to his astonishment the architect's purchase of popular postcards, "horrible . . . in raw colors, pinks and greens, representing *indigènes nues* in an oriental decor."⁸⁷ Such postcards, depicting women in the public realm, in prison settings that were homes, involved in "typical" rituals and poses — all loaded with sexual innuendos — have been studied by postcolonial critic Malek Alloula as expressions of the Frenchman's fantasies about the Algerian woman.⁸⁸ In light of the previous discussion, Le Corbusier's appropriation of these public images



19. Le Corbusier, sketch of the waterfront, Algiers



20. Le Corbusier, sketch of the casbah, Algiers



21, 22. Le Corbusier, sketches of Algerian women



bears some connection to his private life; nevertheless, he also relied on them for models, in addition to his own in situ sketches, in several paintings. One such painting from 1939, *Fathma*, displays two dominant themes of colonial representations of women in popular and “high” art. Here, Fathma, the generic Algerian woman, sits on a roof terrace among a clutter of objects with an Islamic allure, revealing her double image: the veiled (the hidden, the mysterious) and the nude (the prostitute, the conquered).

Another painting by Le Corbusier, *Femmes d’Alger*, is the product of a similar process.⁸⁹ The story of *Femmes d’Alger*, which took its final form in 1938, has been told before, although little has been made of its colonialist implications. It is thus worthwhile to note again the close relationship of this work to the architect’s Algiers projects and the appropriation of the Muslim woman as a metaphor. With *Femmes d’Alger*, Le Corbusier returns to the centennial celebrations of the French occupation one more time: he refers directly to Delacroix’s *Femmes d’Alger* of 1833, a painting that had come to be regarded as a symbol of the conquest of Algeria.

I have tried to show here that Le Corbusier’s Algiers projects were expressions of the French “colonial consensus,” which developed from the common French experience based on a shared perception of France’s role in contemporary history, and which protected the French “economic, moral, and strategic” interests in Algeria.⁹⁰ As such, they must be situated in a broad time frame. They do not belong solely to the 1930s and to modernism’s response to colonialism; they also “speak” the idiom of other periods — nineteenth-century Orientalism as well as the colonial discourse of the first decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, these projects epitomize a culmination of the long history of French interventions “to represent, to inhabit, and to possess” a territory.⁹¹ Had Le Corbusier’s scheme been realized, it would have marked an appropriation of Algiers such as no colonial planner had elsewhere ever achieved. The comprehensive scale of the proposal and its aggressive seizure of the city’s geography from the coastline to the mountains would have transformed the urban image radically — the now miniaturized casbah a symbol of the controlled existence of the colonized people and their “different” culture, a constant reminder of the power of colonialism.

Notes

I am grateful to the director and the staff of Fondation Le Corbusier for their assistance and to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a travel grant to Paris. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Fine Arts Department, Harvard University (March 1989), Society of Architectural Historians Annual Meeting in Montreal (April 1989), and the School of Architecture, Cornell University (April 1990). I would like to thank Howard Burns, Oleg Grabar, Michael Hays, Alicia Kennedy, Neil Levine, Mary McLeod, Gülrü Necipoğlu-Kafadar, and Perry Winston for their comments and suggestions at various stages. The idea for the topic originated during a conversation with the late Spiro Kostof. I remember him with deep gratitude and affection.

1. See Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, trans. Ivan Žaknić with Nicole Pertuiset (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987). For an annotated edition in Italian, see Giuliano Gresleri, *Le Corbusier: Viaggio in Oriente* (Venice: Marsilio; Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, 1984). The original notebooks have been printed in facsimile as *Le Voyage d’Orient* (Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, 1988).

2. For a discussion of the impact of the Turkish house on Le Corbusier’s work, see Pierre Pinon, “La Maison turque,” in *Le Corbusier: Le Passé à réaction poétique*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Hôtel de Sully, 1988), 165–73.

3. In his notes from 1915 for a book on city building, Le Corbusier cited the urban form of Istanbul to explain his concept of “unity.” See *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks*, vol. 1, 1914–1948 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1981), 6–7.

4. William Curtis, for example, mentions the “blatant colonialism” of the project, but does not articulate it. See William Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), 209. Mary McLeod provides a background to the “assimilation” debate without situating Le Corbusier’s projects within the context of colonial urbanism. See Mary McLeod, “Le Corbusier and Algiers,” *Oppositions* 16–17 (1980): 55–85. It is particularly striking that neo-Marxist historian Manfredo Tafuri does not once refer to colonialism in his analysis of the projects, which he calls “still unsurpassed from the point of view of both ideology and form.” See Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 125–36.

5. I owe this interpretation to Said’s critique of Albert Camus’s critics. See Edward Said, “Narrative, Geography, and Interpretation,” *New Left Review* 180 (1990): 88.

6. Giuliano Gresleri and Sibel Bozdoğan have written about Le Corbusier’s dialogue with the East. Gresleri focuses on the impact of Corbu’s journey on his professional growth. See Giuliano Gresleri, “Home-Ties — Adrift Abroad: The Oriental Journey of CH. Jeanneret,” *Daidalos* 15 (March 1986): 102–11, and idem, “Les Leçons du voyage d’Orient,” in *Le Corbusier et la Méditerranée* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, Musée de Marseille, 1987), 37–49. Bozdoğan studies Corbu’s sketches against the background of Orientalism: abstracting Le Corbusier from his cultural inheritance, she frees him from the legacy of Orientalism. See Sibel Bozdoğan, “Journey to the East,” *Journal of Architectural Education*

- 41, no. 4 (1988): 38–45. Her position has been challenged by Richard Ingersoll, *Journal of Architectural Education* 42, no. 4 (1989): 61.
7. Daniel's third realm is power. See Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe, and Empire* (Edinburgh, 1966), xvi.
8. Charles Brouty illustrated many popular books on Algeria, among them Lucienne Favre's *Tout l'inconnu de la casbah d'Alger* (Algiers, 1933). According to a letter from Jean de Maisonneul to Samir Rafem [sic], dated 5 January 1968, Brouty, a "very well-known" figure in the casbah, took Le Corbusier around the quarter (Algiers Files, Le Corbusier Archives, Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, hereafter FLC).
9. Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 88.
10. Le Corbusier wrote in a letter to Karl Osthaus on 28 July 1911, "J'avais tant rêvé de Constantinople" (quoted in *Le Corbusier: Le Passé à réaction poétique*, 162).
11. Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 85.
12. *Ibid.*, 88.
13. *Ibid.*, 90.
14. Théophile Gautier, *Voyage pittoresque en Algérie*, ed. Madeleine Cottin (1845; reprint, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1973), 179–80.
15. Le Corbusier, letter to the Governor of Algeria, 16 May 1942, FLC.
16. Le Corbusier, *Poésie sur Alger* (1950; facsimile reprint, Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, 1989), 16.
17. Le Corbusier, "Le Folklore est l'expression fleurie des traditions," *Voici la France de ce mois* 16 (June 1941): 31.
18. Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 149.
19. Le Corbusier, *Poésie sur Alger*, 16.
20. Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 103.
21. *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks* 1:6. In 1915, to illustrate the concept of unity in city form, Le Corbusier mentioned one other city, Isfahan. His other references were to buildings — to the interior of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, to other Gothic cathedrals and to the Egyptian temples (the latter two unspecified), to the exterior of the Greek temples, and to the mosque complexes.
22. Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse* (Paris: Vincent, Fréal, 1933; English trans., New York: Grossman Publishers and Faber & Faber, 1967), 230.
23. *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks* 1:6–7. The association of Islamic monuments with nomadic tents has been made before. Consider, for example, Viollet-le-Duc's argument that for Arabs "monuments were nothing but tents." See Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, preface to Jules Bourgoïn, *Les Arts arabes* (Paris, 1873).
24. Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 104.
25. *Ibid.*, 100.
26. *Ibid.*, 95.
27. *Ibid.*, 143.
28. For example, he referred to the builders of the casbah as "terrible warriors," who, paradoxically, enjoyed a joie de vivre and knew how to relax. See Le Corbusier, "Le Folklore est l'expression fleurie des traditions," 32.
29. Le Corbusier, "Proposition d'un Plan Directeur d'Alger et de sa région pour aider aux travaux de la Commission du Plan de la Région d'Alger et comme suite à la séance du 16 Juillet 1941," FLC. The two mosques that Le Corbusier proposed to return to their original setting are the eleventh-century El-Kebir and the seventeenth-century El-Djedid. It is noteworthy that Le Corbusier did not even mention them by name; nor was he intrigued by their architecture.
30. For a discussion of ethnographic surrealism, see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 117–51.
31. The Mission Dakar-Djibouti, which took place between 1931 and 1933, was the first large-scale expedition. For the link between ethnography and colonialism, see Michel Leiris's important article "L'Ethnographie devant le colonialisme," *Les Temps modernes* 6, no. 58 (August 1950): 357–74. Among ethnographic studies of Algeria, see M. Goichon, *La Vie féminine du Mزاب: Étude de sociologie musulmane* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste, Paul Gauthier, 1927); Mathea Gaudry, *La Femme chaouia de l'Aurès* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste, Paul Gauthier, 1928); and the work of Thérèse Rivière in Fanny Colonna, *Aurès/Algérie, 1935–36: Photographies de Thérèse Rivière* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1987). A small group of French women ethnographers focused their studies on Algerian women.
32. Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse*, 230.
33. Le Corbusier, "Le Folklore est l'expression fleurie des traditions," 31.
34. Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse*, 230, 233 (Le Corbusier's emphasis).
35. On nineteenth-century transformations in Istanbul, see Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986).
36. Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 90.
37. Théophile Gautier, *Constantinople* (New York, 1873), 87.
38. Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 167.
39. *Ibid.*, 100–103.
40. Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, trans. James I. Dunnett (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 190.
41. Le Corbusier, *Poésie sur Alger*, 17.
42. *Ibid.*, 11–13.
43. Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse*, 233.
44. Le Corbusier, *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches* (Paris: Éditions Plon, 1937), 46–47.
45. Le Corbusier, *Poésie sur Alger*, 38, 44.
46. Cotereau quoted in J. J. Deluz, *L'Urbanisme et l'architecture d'Alger* (Algiers: Office des Publications Universitaires, 1988), 12.
47. Raoul Girardet, *L'Idée coloniale en France* (Paris: Pluriel, 1972), 176–99.
48. Quoted in *ibid.*, 185. There was, nevertheless, a vocal opposition to these policies by the French Communist Party and a group of Parisian intellectuals. Surrealist artists, writers, and poets — among them André Breton, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, and Yves Tanguy — named the concept of *la grande France* "intolerable" and, condemning the standpoint of the socialist party in its acceptance of colonialism, explained their version of the real goals of the exposition in May 1931 as "nothing other than to give the citizens of the metropole the consciousness of proprietors, which they will

need in order to hear without flinching the echo of distant gunfire.” See “Ne visitez pas l’Exposition Coloniale,” in *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives, 1922–1939*, vol. 1 (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1980), 194–95. In response to the exposition, the surrealist artists organized an anticolonial exposition. See the forthcoming book by Herman Lebovics, *True France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), chap. 2.

49. While in Istanbul, Le Corbusier, too, had carefully studied Hagia Sophia. Yet he did not share Prost’s enthusiasm for the Byzantine history of the city, which he considered “imperially corrupt” and which he believed “could not be brought to life” because “its spirit [had] departed from the very few stones that remain[ed]” (Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 89). Henri Prost returned to Istanbul in 1934, when the Turkish government commissioned him with the master plan for the city. He worked there from 1937 to 1951 and his plan was largely implemented. On Prost, see *L’Oeuvre d’Henri Prost: Architecte et urbaniste* (Paris: Académie d’architecture, 1960), and Jean Royer, “Henri Prost: L’Urbanisation,” *Urbanisme* 88 (1965): 3–31. During approximately the same years, from 1939 to 1949, Le Corbusier was involved on and off in a rocky process of developing a master plan for the city of Izmir, which he completed in 1949, but which remained unimplemented. Originally, in 1928, Prost had designed a plan for Izmir, but Corbu was able to persuade the authorities to substitute Prost’s plan with his own. See the correspondence between Le Corbusier and the French Ambassador to Ankara, 14 February 1939, 23 February 1939, 9 March 1939, and 30 January 1940, FLC. By this time,

Le Corbusier was a strong critic of Prost’s urbanism. Previously, he had fluctuated in his evaluation of Prost’s work. As seen in his statement, quoted above, from *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches*, he praised Prost (if indirectly) on the success of colonial urbanism in Morocco; however, in 1931, during his visit to Fez, he noted that “Prost’s city planning is nothing but confusion” (“Sketchbook: Espagne// Route 31b/B7,” in *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks* 1:440).

50. Quoted in Jean-Claude Vigato, “The Architecture of the Colonial Exhibitions in France,” *Daidalos* 15 (March 1986): 28–29.

51. On Lyautey in Morocco, see Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 277–319; Janet Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 131–73; and Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Urban Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 85–160.

52. Rabinow, *French Modern*, 288.

53. See Abu-Lughod, *Rabat*.

54. Quoted in *ibid.*, 141.

55. Quoted in Daniel, *Islam, Europe, and Empire*, 489.

56. Quoted in Abu-Lughod, *Rabat*, 143.

57. *Ibid.*, 142.

58. Henri Prost, “Le Développement de l’urbanisme dans le protectorat du Maroc, de 1914 à 1923,” in Jean Royer, ed., *L’Urbanisme aux colonies et dans les pays tropicaux*, vol. 1 (La Charité-sur-Loire: Delayance, 1932), 60, 68.

59. Henri Prost, “Rapport général,” in *ibid.*, 21–22.

60. M. Pasquier-Bronde, “Alger,” in *ibid.*, 39, and Charles Montaland, “L’Urbanisme en Algérie,” in *ibid.*, 51–52.

61. Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse*, 229.

62. Le Corbusier, letter to the Prefect of Algiers, 18 May 1942, FLC.

63. Le Corbusier, Questionnaire C, 1931–35, FLC; *idem*, note for M. Sabatier, 6 May 1941, FLC; and *idem*, *La Ville radieuse*, 244.

64. Le Corbusier, “Le Folklore est l’expression fleurie des traditions,” 30.

65. Le Corbusier, note for M. Sabatier, and *idem*, “Proposition d’un Plan Directeur.”

66. The conservation of the upper casbah and the transformation of the lower casbah into a “museum quarter” were matters decided by then. See René Lespès, “Les Villes,” in *Les Arts et la technique moderne en Algérie 1937* (Algiers, 1937), 25–26.

67. See Montaland, “L’Urbanisme en Algérie,” 51, and *Pour le paysan et l’artisan indigènes* (Algiers: Gouvernement Général de l’Algérie, Direction Général des Affaires Indigènes et des Territoires du Sud, Service de l’Économie Sociale Indigène, 1939), 140–41. To hasten the pace and increase production and to provide more “precision” to the work, these schools and workshops promoted the use of modern machinery.

68. Le Corbusier, “Proposition d’un Plan Directeur.”

69. Prost, “Rapport général,” 22. Also see Abu-Lughod, *Rabat*, 145.

70. Le Corbusier, “Proposition d’un Plan Directeur.”

71. Manfredo Tafuri, “‘Machine et mémoire’: The City in the Work

of Le Corbusier,” trans. Stephen Sartarelli, in *The Le Corbusier Archive*, ed. H. Allen Brooks, 32 vols. (New York: Garland, 1982–84), 10:xxxviii–xxxix.

72. Le Corbusier, “Le Folklore est l’expression fleurie des traditions,” 32.

73. In the light of this discussion, I must refer once again to Tafuri’s analysis that sees in Le Corbusier’s megastructures into which residents could insert their choice of buildings “the greatest liberty” allowed to the public (Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 131). While this observation is valid as far as the European public in Algiers is concerned, it is disturbing that Tafuri dismisses the city’s Muslim population as a nonentity.

74. Prost, “Rapport général,” 22.

75. Le Corbusier, “Note financière annexe au Projet C de l’urbanisation du Quartier de la Marine à Alger,” 1934, FLC.

76. Le Corbusier, Questionnaire B, 1931–35, FLC.

77. Joseph Sintès, “Le Quartier de la Marine et la Casbah,” *Les Travaux nord-africains*, 31 December 1932.

78. Lespès, “Les Villes,” 10–11.

79. One of the most memorable, if sentimental, essays on the topic was written by Frantz Fanon, who traced the origins of this policy to the early 1930s. See Frantz Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 35–67 (first published in 1959 as *L’An cinq de la révolution algérienne*).

80. Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse*, 260.

81. J. Lorrain, *Heures d’Afrique* (1899), quoted in Yvonne Knibiehler and Régine Goutalier, *La*

- Femme au temps des colonies* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1985), 40.
82. Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 83.
83. *Ibid.*, 94.
84. *Ibid.*, 125, 128–30.
85. Favre, *Tout l'inconnu de la casbah d'Alger*, 10 ("sex appeal" is English in the original).
86. Quoted in Samir Rafi, "Le Corbusier et 'Les Femmes d'Alger,'" *Revue d'histoire et de civilisation du Maghreb* (January 1968): 52. Prostitution was rampant in the casbah, a phenomenon attributed to French encouragement. See David Gordon, *Women of Algeria: An Essay on Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 42. According to Favre, in the early 1930s there were five to six hundred "girls . . . permanently active" in the casbah, especially in the lower casbah (Favre, *Tout l'inconnu de la casbah d'Alger*, 103). The presence of the brothels was so overwhelming that, not to be confused with them, many families residing in the quarter posted signs declaring "honest home" [*maison honnête*]; others dressed their daughters *à la française* so that they would not be bothered on the streets of the casbah. See Sintès, "Le Quartier de la Marine et la Casbah."
87. De Maisonseul, letter to Rafem, 5 January 1968. This document was first discussed by Rafi himself in "Le Corbusier et 'Les Femmes d'Alger,'" 51–52, and then by Stanislaus von Moos, "Le Corbusier as Painter," trans. Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith, *Oppositions* 19–20 (Winter–Spring 1980): 89–91. The postcard collection is at the Fondation Le Corbusier.
88. See Malek Aloulla, *The Colonial. Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
89. Von Moos, "Le Corbusier as Painter," 92–93.
90. Tony Smith develops the notion of "colonial consensus" in *The French Stake in Algeria, 1945–1962* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 28–29.
91. I have borrowed these terms from Said's analysis of the appropriation of the geography of Algeria in Albert Camus's fiction. See Said, "Narrative, Geography, and Interpretation," 88–90.

Figure Credits

1. *Le Corbusier peintre*, exhibition catalogue (Basel: Galerie Beyeler, 1971).
- 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14–16. Le Corbusier, *La Ville radiieuse* (Paris: Vincent, Fréal, 1933).
- 4, 5, 8, 10, 18. Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, trans. Ivan Žaknić with Nicole Pertuiset (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987).
- 12, 13, 17, 20. Le Corbusier, *Poésie sur Alger* (1950; facsimile reprint, Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, 1989).
19. *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks*, vol. 1, 1914–1948 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1981).
- 21, 22. Fondation Le Corbusier.