

'Avicenne Hospital, Bobigny, France'

Hospital patient, around 70 years old

It reminds me of holidays back in the day!

Morocco, Maghreb countries, as we were lucky enough to go there. I think that it brings some joy to the patients as they go into the hospital; raises their spirits, I would say!

I think it is beautiful.

Passer-by of around 30 years old

- I really like the mosaics.

- So you like the mosaics? And what do you like about them; do they remind you of something?

- Yes, my holidays in Malaga. Yes, there were many such mosaics in Spain.

- Are you surprised to find them here?

- Yes, I really like that. It is something different.

- It surprises and delights you.

First hospital employee (around 60 years old)

Yes, it is fine, it is alright. But it is a pity about the entrance; it is rather run down.

What do I think about the hospital gateway? I do not like it at all because I think it should be restored, because it is really very old.

Second hospital employee (around 30 years old)

- First, do you work there?

- I think it is ugly and I work there.

Passer-by of around 30 years old

You can see it needs to be renovated, but it is beautiful.

I would be sad if it were knocked down tomorrow.

Emmanuel Blanchard, lecturer at the University of Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines and specialising in immigration history

I think that the Avicenne hospital's architecture, at any rate, the examples of Moorish Revival, particularly the gateway, is really striking for the people who come here.

Third hospital employee (around 30 years old)

- You come here every morning; you go through this gateway every day.

- I do.

- Have you ever looked at it?

- Well, when you come by tram... Yes, yes, the first time I found it rather beautiful, as well as the fact that it was a Franco-Muslim hospital. That has changed with the AP-HP (Public healthcare-Paris Hospitals), but I was struck by the hospital's architecture.

Then, I think the inside is a mix of styles. Slightly Moroccan in style...

Passer-by of around 14 years old

- I just like the blue, that motif.

- Does it remind you of anything or nothing at all?

- Not really... it is well put together, that's all.

Fourth hospital employee (around 30 years old)

My daily commute here takes an hour.

It is true that the main entrance is rather large, rather artistic, rather open and rather historical.

It reminds you of the Orient, of a culture. I think it also represents the 93rd, this department, rather well.

Third hospital employee (around 30 years old)

- This style of architecture is often seen around mosques, etc. It does not surprise me at all as there is a large Muslim population in Bobigny and in the suburbs.

- So, that does not surprise you?

- Not at all. In the end, it seems, well, that that part of the population has not been overlooked and for change to happen... and I really like that is part of the history of the town as well.

Newsreel, 1935 (Gaumont Archives)

The splendid Franco-Muslim hospital has been opened by the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Marcel Régnier. Si Kaddour Benghabrit and General Gouraud were among the dignitaries at the ceremony, which was followed by a visit to the hospital's different and fully staffed facilities – wash rooms, operating theatres, autoclaves, wards –, where the close cooperation between Metropolitan and Islamic France can be seen.

Observation by Juliette Hueber

Opened in 1935, the Franco-Muslim hospital was renamed the Avicenne hospital in 1978, but the original plaque remains and is confusing.

Second hospital employee (around 30 years old)

I think that what they wrote, the name, should have been changed afterwards, because it seems as if they are trying to give a message that, all in all, they want to include people who may have been excluded. I don't know....

It is a hospital, after all!

People come here for care, those who work here come to work, as in all other hospitals. So, why not? And as I do not feel involved, then it is even worse.

Could it inspire greater confidence among other people? I do not know.

Third hospital employee (around 30 years old)

I do not think that is at all excluding. Not at all.

And it is in fact a bit of history; that is part of the history of the building and it is even in Arabic.

Hospital patient, around 70 years old

- So, it was only for Muslims?

- Yes.

- Oh, okay.

Second hospital employee (around 30 years old)

Things should not always remain at the same juncture as at that time, because they have progressed, or at least I hope so.

Therefore, I believe, the name... it should just be the Avicenne hospital. That would be good enough! That's what I think.

Emmanuel Blanchard

Nowadays, the question is rather whether it is the vestiges of what would be a place of care and a place of separation, or whether it is merely the vestiges of a past that has sometimes tended to be blurred with the idea that Muslim immigration, the immigration from North Africa, would be a relatively recent phenomenon. Then, this gateway is there to remind us that it is a phenomenon that is secular today.

Algerians and Moroccans have been coming to seek work in France for over a century.

And what this architecture also reminds us is that those people arrived in a very specific context which was a colonial one.

Passer-by of around 14 years old

Yes, I had seen the Arabic writing, but then I did not know why it was 'Franco-Muslim' -
Perhaps, I am not sure, perhaps there was discrimination?

Emmanuel Blanchard

That hospital was also a place of segregation, as the idea was that Algerians would no longer be accepted in other hospitals once it had opened. The argument was that they would be better treated in this hospital, as there were people aware of their status - which was very complex from the legal perspective -, and who spoke their language because the Algerians very often did not speak French, but a dialect of Arabic or a Berber language.

When I look at this gateway, particularly in a photograph, the question I ask myself is what it could have represented to the Algerians, the Moroccans, who went through this gate.

What did they see as they went through this gate?

And that is a real challenge for the historian.

However, those Algerians also had spokespersons, particularly politicised spokespersons; the nationalists who belonged to the North African Star nationalist movement. *El Oumma*, the newspaper of the North-African Star, would claim it was all for show.

That architecture, to a certain extent, reflects that colonial approach to the populations. It is an architecture designed to please the colonials and not to take into account the expectations of the colonised.