

Receiving and institutionalising Islam at the municipal level: the case of the Turkish community of Schaerbeek

Ural Manço⁴⁴

Abstract

In the Brussels region, the case of Schaerbeek was particularly exemplary in this context between 1970 and 1994. Within the framework of the project "Faiths and Social cohesion" (2001-2004), this community was observed. We therefore propose a closer look at the relations between the Muslims and the Schaerbeek Municipality by focusing on the history of the Turkish community that is resident in this locality. The setting up and the progress of the Fatih mosque will be the objective here.

Keywords: Schaerbeek, Brussels, Belgium, Visibility of Islam, municipal level.

A faith which is not institutionalized as the law requires, will not be able to claim the same advantages as those religions which are recognized both at the national and local levels. Since Islam is not as yet completely regulated at the federal level in Belgium by an organization that is officially recognized and fully operational, a group of Muslims, even with a strong presence at the municipal level, will have difficulties to make itself heard by the communal authority. The legislation concerning the practice of religions and the freedom of worship could be re-interpreted by the municipal administration. Cases of abuse of power or arbitrary application of the legislation are far from being exceptional in the case of Muslims in Western Europe (Frégosi, 2001a, 14-16). Certain municipalities, which had a significant number of Muslims on their territory, did not hesitate to intervene in the organization of the Islamic religion, when they were not seeking to block its development, however legally justified this might have been. Many municipalities that were concerned by this particular problem managed and still

⁴⁴ Ural Manço is a lecturer at Sociological Studies Centre of Saint-Louis University in Brussels. Email: manco@fusl.ac.be.

manage the dossier on the Islamic religion, where the objective is clearly based on security matters.

In the Brussels region, the case of Schaerbeek⁴⁵ was particularly exemplary in this context between 1970 and 1994. Within the framework of the project “Faiths and Social cohesion” (2001-2004), this commune was observed. We therefore propose a closer look at the relations between the Muslims and the Schaerbeek Municipality by focusing on the history of the Turkish community that is resident in this locality. The setting up and the progress of the Fatih mosque⁴⁶ will be the objective here.

The analytical model developed by F. Frégosi (2001a, 23-24) used three interdependent criteria for this purpose:

(1) The way Islam and the Muslims are perceived by the communal authorities, i.e. the philosophy which is inherent in the methods of management of Islam at the local level, and the quality of the Muslim interlocutors chosen by the Municipality;

(2) The mode of action itself, i.e. the practical provisions implemented by the local authority with regard to how the Muslim presence must be treated and its needs as regards practice of the faith;

(3) The mode of inclusion of the Muslims, i.e. relational capacity and the behaviour exhibited by the local Muslim community.

The results of the analysis of the situation as revealed by each criterion would be presented successively: first, the administration of the mayor (burgomaster) Roger Nols and his collaborators, 1970 to 1994; then that of the current municipal authorities, which have declared themselves to be in total rupture with the previous period. The analytical process will not fail to reveal a certain number of “good practices” as regards relations between the municipalities

⁴⁵ By the size of its population (108 000 inhabitants in 2002), the commune of Schaerbeek is the second of the 19 municipalities in the Region of Brussels-Capital. Nearly 35 000 Muslims live in Schaerbeek (32% of the population). Half of them came originally from Morocco and 40% came from Turkey. Since the 70's the Muslims formed the majority of the foreign population in the commune. In 1975, nearly 29% of the Schaerbeek population was of foreign extraction (Bastienier, 1981, 107). Thirteen of the 79 mosques in the Brussels region are found here (8 of them are Moroccan, 3 are Turkish and 2 are Albanian).

⁴⁶ The mosque has been named after the sultan Mehmet II (1432-1481) known as the Conqueror (Fatih) after the taking of Constantinople in 1453.

and the groups of Muslims, in the fight against discrimination in the context of religious freedom.

1. Islam in Schaerbeek and the policy of the Municipality until 1994

The personality that undoubtedly marked the relations between the Muslims of Schaerbeek and the rest of the local society, was Roger Nols (1922-2004), elected for the first time to the post of communal councillor in 1957 on the ticket of the Liberal Party (right wing). In 1964, he became a member of the democratic Francophone Front (FDF), which was in favour of linguistic nationalism and defended the interests of the French-speaking inhabitants in Brussels in the face of rising Flemish nationalism (Dutch-speaking). His election to the post of mayor of Schaerbeek and his subsequent term of office dates back to 1 January 1970. He was re-elected four times to this post, which he occupied until 1989. He was also a member of the Belgian Parliament from 1971 to 1987. Schaerbeek, initially under the influence of Nols, from 1971 to 1989, and later, under the influence of his associates, from 1989 to 1994, stood out as being the most xenophobic and islamophobic of all the Belgian communes. It would not be an exaggeration to say that during these years, the Muslims in this locality lived through a situation of quasi-apartheid, often with the indifference of the government and the legal authorities. Mayor Nols gradually became the person who inflamed political life and public opinion of the inhabitants in Brussels. He is the person who introduced an islamophobic political current in Belgium, which was successful to a certain degree in the Eighties and Nineties (Rea, 1997, 56). The exaggerated ideas launched by Nols were of primary importance in the stigmatisation of the immigrant question through the media and the negative image that was given to Islam (Vandemeulebroucke, 1997, 211-212 and 218).

1.1. Perception of Muslims and Islam

At the beginning of his mandate, Nols wrote up xenophobic lead articles in the municipal monthly magazine, "Schaerbeek-Info", where since 1973, he had been incessantly clamouring for an immediate halt to immigration⁴⁷. His argument was based on a

⁴⁷ Nols' xenophobia seemed to go back much further: in an article signed in 1968 which appeared in a monthly publication known as the *Revue nouvelle*, he was worried about the "tidal wave" set off by the massive arrival of Moroccans and Turks (Bastenier, 1981, 104). He also published a

controversial concept, imported from American sociology, known as the “tolerance level” (Stroobants, 1984, 44-46), and on rhetoric which expressed the feeling of being invaded by the Muslim immigrants (Vandemeulebroucke, 1997, 208). In 1974, in another leading article, he clearly denounced the Muslims who came under his jurisdiction because of their particular type of clothing and their ritual slaughter of sheep, “which disturbed the neighbourhood” (Vandemeulebroucke, 1997, 206). The immigrant question was used by him as a springboard to gain votes. During these years he took advantage of a morose socio-economic climate and an international context where the rise of a political Islam in the Muslim world was becoming apparent, which did a great deal to feed incomprehension and fear in the Western world. In September 1979, he published an article in the magazine “Schaerbeek-Info” entitled a “Letter to the immigrants”, which was also translated into Arabic and Turkish:

“Countless letters (...) addressed to me by my Schaerbeekoï compatriots complain about a lack of integration on your part and they are asking for measures to be taken. The press, in addition, speaks about the participation of some of your children in delinquent acts by organized bands (...) to the point where our fellow-citizens do not feel safe any more. You have generated in our country a very careless attitude as regards the cleanliness of our streets. While they say they are neither racists nor xenophobes, our correspondents who are also taxpayers, do not quite understand why, in these times of economic crisis and unemployment, your presence is maintained in our midst.”

This text and other statements that followed contributed to a first mediatization on Muslim immigration. Nols was defended by Antoinette Spaak, the president of the FDF party: “It is a question of alleviating the Belgian population. It is both a warning and proof that our elected officials do serious work” (the “Soir” newspaper dated 2. 10. 1979). However, the mayor left the FDF party to create his own communal political group: it was called “Nouvelles Orientations pour les Libertés Schaerbeekoïses” or, in translation, New Orientations for Freedom in Schaerbeek (NOLS). At the national level, Nols joined forces with the liberal reform Party (PRL, right wing) and, under this banner, he gained nearly 100 000 preference votes at the European elections in 1983 (he did not take

book: Nols R. (1987), “Belgium in danger. The truth about immigration, Brussels: Publishers: Ligne Claire.

office). This result can only testify to the sympathy which his speeches aroused in certain sections of the Belgian electorate. In 1986, the mayor took part in a televised broadcast organised by the French-speaking Belgian television (Striptease) to present his New Year's greetings. He was filmed in front of the building of the Schaerbeek commune, sitting on a camel and clothed in a Moroccan djellaba. He declared: "Everyone knows that Ecolo [the environmental party] would like to grant voting rights to the Muslims in Brussels. So, in a few years time, if this came to pass, this is how the mayor of Schaerbeek would come to present his New Year wishes to the population of Schaerbeek!"

Nols and his entourage perceived the Arab and Turkish populations as being potentially dangerous. Muslim culture and Islam seemed to them to be disturbing and incompatible with Western life and civilization (Rea, 2001, 62-63). Considered to be impossible to integrate and intolerant, the presence of the Muslims was comparable to a foreign occupation. The root cause of unemployment, urban neglect and juvenile delinquency was attributed to them. In the Eighties, an electoral poster showed a Hercules C-130 aircraft belonging to the Belgian army declaring that Nols would repatriate the immigrants to their native land. Another electoral poster (PRL, right wing) showed in 1991 a North African group of persons and the text proclaimed: "Nols: priority for security. Stop the invasion". The mayor and his close relations were of the opinion that the Muslims were seeking to impose their traditions, practices, customs and their values concerning birthrate, the status of women and the pre-dominance of religion in the public arena. Mosques were likely to attract "radical" militants. They perturb the neighbourhood (intimidation, noise, mobs, problem of carparks, and lack of cleanliness of the buildings that had been transformed into mosques). B. Guillaume (Reform Movement, right wing), one of Nols' former lieutenants, and deputy mayor of Schaerbeek, declared in a leaflet at the time of the local elections in 1988 (Rea, 1997, 62): "This is not racism, but the simple objective observation of a situation created by a sudden surge of persons from abroad who are impossible to integrate and who because of their culture and their religion in particular where the great majority seeks to impose its political and cultural values on all to the detriment of the traditional cultural values of its host country."

The refusal to consider Muslims differently, other than as foreigners on a temporary stay in the land without the least right to citizenship, put the municipal authorities in a comfortable position

and requests on religious matters or any other were quite simply ignored. The Municipality looked for “guardians” for its Muslim population. It made it a point of identifying the “good” docile Islam, the kind which is under the control of governments in the countries of origin. It is known that during the Eighties, the municipal authorities were in contact with the Moroccan and Turkish consulates.

1.2. Actions undertaken by the municipal powers

The “counter” affair was what propelled the turbulent mayor for the first time into the glare of the media headlines in 1975 (Lesthaeghe and Neels, 2000, 132). On the pretext that it was difficult to find communal employees who were bilinguals, speaking both French and Dutch, as the law required, and the small number of requests in Dutch that were made to his administration, Nols made arrangements at the commune for a separate counter for the Dutch-speaking population. Two other counters were set up by him to deal exclusively with foreigners. This administrative racial segregation, which was something new and anti-constitutional very quickly gave rise to protests. It was only in 1980, after a court judgement, that these counters that made a distinction on the basis of ethnic origin were done away with. But true to his method of going about the management of communal business by stigmatizing one part of the population, the mayor was preparing to make his anti-immigrant Muslim policy even more radical.

In September 1981, the commune illegally prohibited the registration of foreigners in the population records, which could block the family regrouping or the possibility of moving house. Other Brussels communes followed the example of Schaerbeek: the xenophobic populism which was directed at the Muslims was now being expressed with more legitimacy, since it was supported by local councillors of all the traditional political tendencies in the country. Complaints were lodged at the court in Brussels, but Schaerbeek and the other communes stubbornly refused to change their policy. The practice of forbidding the registration of newly incoming foreigners was finally legalized by the government in 1984 under pressure from the mayors in Brussels. The clause in the legislation that conferred the right on the mayors to refuse the registration of newly arrived foreigners in their Municipality was abolished in 1991. Far from preventing the creation of ethnically formed districts, it contributed, on the contrary, to the permanence of this phenomenon and the consequent stigmatization of the in-

habitants. For years, the Schaerbeek Municipality did not maintain the roads, the urban infrastructures and the communal services of the districts that were inhabited by Muslims. The elementary schools in the immigrant districts were under invested in financial and teaching terms. Between 1989 and 1994, the Municipality did not apply to the national and regional authorities which allocate funds to the local authorities to finance extra-curricular activities for those districts that are in the grips of socio-economic difficulties. Nols is the main culprit in the dualisation of Schaerbeek which is divided into the beautiful areas in one part of commune with an affluent Belgian population, and the other part which is called the “trash can area” of Schaerbeek, inhabited by a disadvantaged mainly Muslim population (Manço and Kanmaz, 2002, 82-85).

Municipal authorities prohibited the gathering of more than two people in the evening in order to “prevent the disturbance of the peace at night and juvenile delinquency”. The xenophobic acts of the police force in Schaerbeek during this period (harassment, provocations, strong-armed interventions, unfair treatment of tradesmen) against the Muslim immigrant population, who were perceived and “classified as being dangerous”, are regularly criticized (Bastenier, 1981, 125). The communal administrative services create problems of all kinds regularly and treat the requests coming from Muslim inhabitants in many different ways: slowness, loss of documents, intentional errors in the spelling of Muslim names, restrained access to administrative buildings.

At the beginning of the 80's, Schaerbeek stood out because of cases of abuse of power as regards freedom of worship. The instruments used to give life to this policy were the operating licence (for a building to be used as a place for worship) and the licence to build or renovate delivered by the communal authorities (Lesthaeghe and Neels, 2000, 133-134). The Municipality of Schaerbeek was among the first to use these means in order to block projects concerning the opening or restoration of mosques - the objective was to limit the visibility of Islam in public areas (Dassetto, 1990, 188-189). In the second half of the Eighties, a Moroccan mosque close to the Tabligh movement was prohibited from having any activity by the municipal authorities. In 1989, the local Turkish mosque involved in the Milli Görüs movement was taken to court by the commune because of illegal restoration work. If mosques were inaugurated in Schaerbeek under the Nols administration, they were discreet, without distinctive signs on the façade. Officially they were religious organizations which included an “inci-

dental” place of worship! They were established in dilapidated or unadapted buildings, whose administrative status was often unspecified, even illegal, in the eyes of the law.

From the Eighties onwards, the Schaerbeek administration adopted a rule for its schools where the wearing of any head covering was prohibited as a sign of religious or philosophical affiliation. It is possible to consider Mayor Nols as the person who initiated the ban on the wearing of the head scarf. Another mayor in the Brussels region, Mr. C.Piqué (Socialist Party) in the commune of Saint-Gilles, introduced another measure, emulated by Schaerbeek, which were the courses on the Islamic religion, which though imposed by law, were not organized between 1986 and 1991 (Vandemeulebroucke, 1997, 211). This ban was lifted only when a group of Muslim parents went to court in 1989. Though there are many policies of this type, the policies put in place in Schaerbeek are discriminating towards Muslims. They generally are in line with rejection and strong mistrust towards the Muslim immigrants (Bastenier, 1981, 120-122), and could even be a way of harassment to try and push this population to return to its origins. Sometimes, these policies are introduced according to an electoral programme or are a reaction to events related to national happenings, or to what has taken place in the Muslim world (Frégosi, 2001a, 21-22), or even connected to obscure facts. (Dassetto, 1990, 189-190).

However, these are not the only kind of relations that exist between the communal authorities and the Muslims. At the end of the Eighties, Nols did not hesitate to inaugurate, in the presence of Moroccan diplomats, a prayer room installed inside the “House for Moroccan Youth” (Association of independent Youth), closely connected to the government in Rabat. During the same period, a group of Albanian Muslims did not just receive from Nols an operating licence for a new mosque, but a letter signed by the mayor himself requesting departments concerned not to block the activities of the place of worship (Mosque for the Albanian Muslims). According to the Imam, this act of favoritism came about in exchange for a promise to vote for the mayor’s list (the Albanian population, the oldest of the Muslim communities in Belgium, is mainly naturalized).

1.3. Mode of integration of Muslims in local life and the beginnings of the Fatih mosque

Between the beginning of the Sixties and that of the following decade, the first Turkish immigrants settled in Schaerbeek and

Saint-Josse, the neighbouring Municipality. Some had initially settled in another Belgian region (in Ghent, in Hainaut or in Limbourg) and had worked there as miners or labourers in the textile industry. In Brussels, they also were unqualified workers employed in particular in the construction industry, public works, the cleaning of offices or railway equipment. Schaerbeek, located in the north of Brussels, allows for rapid access to the industrial area of Vilvoorde, which is a few kilometres to the north of the Capital. One of the characteristics of the Turks of Schaerbeek is that they come mainly from the villages that lie side by side in their country of origin: the sub-region of Emirdag in the province of Afyon (south-west of Ankara):

“They first arrived here in the Sixties, but it was between 1970 and 1974 that the most important immigration took place because of the limitations imposed on poppy cultivation, which was, together with cattle breeding our traditional trade [restrictions imposed by the Turkish government under pressure from the United States]. Then we benefitted from the request made by the Belgians, who recruited people in Ankara. At the beginning the Belgians treated us well. They needed us. We wanted to save some money and return home. The savings were used to bring our families to live with us and then we remained... To want to return, was to lie to oneself. The only ones who returned were those who were dead in their coffins! In Brussels, we settled in areas near the North Station which was our arrival point. This district was appropriate for us because housing was abundant there and the rents were cheap. The houses were abandoned and in bad condition, but we must acknowledge the fact that our own houses in the village were not better. We gradually did work on them so that they were fit to accommodate the family. Then, it was understood that it was to better become owners, and then we started to buy up the houses that we occupied. In each street there was at least one older Turkish immigrant who could inform us about important things. There was always somebody who could advise us on the question of administrative papers, work or even help us to translate documents. We, the people of Emirdag, are very attached to each other. We always act as a group. There was no question of going it alone. This is why, even today, we live close by to the others. In a street you have a majority of people who come from a certain village; in the next street, there are people from another village, etc We did not return, but gradually we rebuilt Emirdag in Schaerbeek! Did we need a grocery store? A bakery? A hairdresser? A dressmaker? ... At the beginning, the mosque was something we needed for moral comfort. We felt the need more to say our prayers here than we did when we were in our own country. Abroad, you know nothing. You fear you might be on the wrong path and that you may come to grief. The

first times when we prayed in houses, in carparks and in the park [the Josaphat Park in Schaerbeek] it was prayers we said on feast days when time permitted it. Then, thanks to God, we had this mosque. With time everything fell into place. Each time a politician or somebody famous in Turkey goes through Brussels, he also visits the Turkish district. (...) Today, we are rich compared to what we would have been in Turkey. But we lost many things here. There is no longer the honesty and sincerity that we had in the village Young people do not respect old men any more, and parents do not recognize their young people any more. While we seek to earn our living, our children remained without supervision. They adopted the bad manners from here. How can you educate them in the morality and the faith of our tradition? Fathers found themselves in court, before the judge [due to ill-treatment] because they tried to put their children on the right path. We are regarded as second class citizens, but it is still better than in Turkey! Over there, one is considered even less than one is here. As soon as it is known that you are emigrants, they try to swindle you." (An old person we met in the Fatih mosque in 2001).

The question of the practice of Islamic worship had worried the Municipality even before Mayor R. Nols took office, given that in 1964 it had proposed the ownership of a house to be converted into a mosque for the token sum of one Belgian franc. The proposal was addressed to the Albanian community who were not very numerous, who had come to Belgium throughout the Fifties because they were fleeing the communist regime in Tirana, and they were concentrated in Schaerbeek. Moreover, the Schaerbeek administration accepted the erection of the statue of Skanderbeg (1403-1468) who was an Albanian national hero, in the municipal park. The house to be handed over, which can be regarded as the first mosque in Belgium, was to be acquired by the religious dignitary of the Albanian community, Ibrahim Hoxha, who could also speak Turkish. The following year, in order to respond to the demands that came about because of the growth of the Muslim population, four Turkish emigrants originating from Emirdag and one from Istanbul joined hands with Ibrahim Hoxha and bought an old movie theatre, situated in the vicinity of the first house-mosque, which became the white Mosque (Ak camii). The ownership of the building was in the hands of Ibrahim Hoxha, but since 1975, the activities of the mosque were organized according to the Belgian law, in the form of a non-profit association (law of 1921). It was the first mosque which requested this status in Belgium. Today, all mosque associations in Belgium, which are founded with the objective of managing places of worship, have this status. This legal status is granted by the Ministry for the Interior and is an automatic admin-

istrative procedure (Dassetto, 1990, 188). It guarantees to the members of association a democratic operation and the security of a management that is inspected on an annual basis. It is also a guarantee of continuity, since an association can acquire real estate.

Between 1965 and 1980, this mosque, one of rare ones at that time in the region of Brussels, attracted a community that was 90 % Turkish, under the supervision of an Albanian Imam; an unusual situation for the Anatolian immigrants. In the Seventies, Ibrahim Hoxha refused to bequeath the ownership of the property of the white mosque to the association and sought financing from the Saudi Embassy. The faithful of Turkish origin suspected him of being sympathetic towards wahhabism and rejected the idea of Saudian subsidies. It was also during this period that a minority of Turks started to become members of various Islamic political movements, which were developing in Turkey⁴⁸. These movements questioned the legitimacy of the State to organize the practice of worship and in particular to intervene in Islamic dogma in with a view to transform Turkish Islam into a nationalist religion disconnected from the rest of the Muslim world. These internal divisions within the Turkish population were also probably due to regional solidarity: the majority of the immigrants in Schaerbeek who owed allegiance to the Turkish authorities originated from Emirdag. On the other hand, the majority of the members of the minority protest group hailed from other regions in Turkey.

It is in this context that a certain number of requests were registered with the Turkish consulate for the government in Ankara to contribute to the organization of Islamic worship. The first Counsellor for Religious Affairs came from Turkey and took up his post at the Embassy in Brussels in the middle of the Seventies. The mission of these religious civil servants, who tried to take up the spiritual life of the immigrants and the organization of worship, was to keep the Turkish immigrants away from "Arab" Islam, and at the same time to "keep the flame of nationalism burning brightly" for the Turks. The competition that was started by the Islamic movements with regard to the official Islam encouraged the Turkish authorities to spring into action. The Consulate spread the idea within the community of a collective departure from Ibrahim Hoxha's mosque to then create the first exclusively Turkish mosque in Brussels. The consular authorities insisted on having the

⁴⁸ On the subject of politico-religious currents, especially the Milli Görüş movement, within the Turkish immigration in Europe: Manço, 1997.

title deeds of the future mosque. In exchange, they said that a religious civil servant (an Imam) from the Turkish State would be sent to officiate on religious questions.

The dispute between the majority of the Turkish community and their Albanian Imam ended in 1980 when the Turks rented one part of a church in Schaerbeek, which was an unoccupied building near a catholic secondary school. The mosque association which was at the origin of the current Fatih mosque set up because of this separation from Ibrahim Hoxha. The installation of a mosque in a rented building is in some way considered to be precarious and unworthy of a place of worship. The objective was to settle in a place that was bought, and where the property would be, as it was understood, bequeathed to the representative of the official Islam in Belgium, which was "La Direction des Affaires Religieuses" or the Management of the religious Affairs of the Turkish government. The community found a house on the Chaussée de Haecht, in the middle of the Turkish district, which seemed appropriate for conversion into a place of worship. Ten men, all of them heads of families pooled the money to buy it in 1982: this is how the Fatih mosque was born.

On this occasion a new quarrel broke out. A minority group of the Turkish population broke away from the rest on the pretext that it wanted to further organize its own teaching classes on Islamic catechism ("courses on the Koran") for children in a house called "medrese" (medersa) located some streets away. The minority group, which defended the colours of the political islamopopulist movement called Milli Görüş, could no longer tolerate the dominance of the Turkish government in the organization of worship. The members of this movement thus created their own association in 1983 and, after a short stay in another place, they chose to set up their association on the Chaussée de Haecht, the principal artery of the Turkish district. The Belgian branch of the Milli Görüş movement (which is currently called the Islamic Federation of Belgium/Belçika İslam Federasyonu) has its headquarters in an old commercial building which lies within fifty metres of the Fatih mosque.

The Fatih mosque will no longer suffer any more important scissions. The Association includes practically no members other than those who originated from the villages of Emirdag; the mosque building belongs to the official religious organization; the latter provides for the appointment and remuneration of an Imam.

The administrative expenditures and renovation costs of the building are financed by the contributions of the members. It is in theory possible for them to launch any socio-cultural activity which could help community life and integration in the civil society of the host country. However, nothing of the kind was done until the end of the Nineties. It goes without saying that the nature of the communal powers hardly encourages any initiative of this nature. However, two other problems have hindered the evolution of the association of the Fatih mosque: Turkish nationalism which is apparent in many members of the association, and historical quarrels that arise among the villages of origin. The members of association position themselves (still) according to their village of origin. Sometimes these villages are caught up in enmities that date back to hundreds of years in time (an old vendetta, an old theft of cattle or pastures that were unlawfully occupied) or some sterile clash ("parochialism") which goes far back in time. The general assemblies of the association are held still in the spirit of "village against village". These old memories block mentalities and set attitudes in stone. One member of the community stated that since 1982, the presidents, vice-presidents and treasurers of the association have never been elected for their competences or the projects which they propose, but because they come from a certain village... Under these circumstances, the appointment of young Muslims educated in Belgium to the post of head of the association, who are ideologically not too attached to their village of origin which would make them capable of entertaining less superficial relationships with the communal authorities, was probably prevented or delayed.

In the whole of the Muslim population in Schaerbeek, the first generation immigrants seem, as far as the majority goes, to be resigned to the hostility of the municipal authorities. Some seek to prove their docility in order to gain the confidence of the communal authorities, as in the case of the Moroccan Friendship Circle and the Albanian Mosque referred to earlier on. Others, in particular the Turks, approve the ideology and the policy of Mayor Nols, as can be read in an article which appeared in the daily newspaper "Le Soir" of October 2, 1979. Since they do not think that they are living "on their land", the first generation Muslims in Schaerbeek adopt a low profile. In spite of many internal conflicts, the religious life of the community proceeds discretely with respect to outside. The Muslims lack the means to mobilize Belgian public opinion in their favour. They have a limited linguistic capacity in French and are unaware of Belgian sociopolitical realities, as well

as their rights. In the face of rising islamophobia, it is better to be invisible and ask for nothing. Except for an active catholic minority of philanthropists or leftist militants, few Belgians are interested in the fate of the Muslims in Schaerbeek. An anti-racist associative network started in Schaerbeek thanks to the actions of this milieu during the second half of the Eighties which sought to alleviate the discriminative effects of municipal policy in schools and the socio-cultural sphere. Before the development of these associations, groups of Muslims, including the one that founded the Fatih mosque, organized social activities, such as help with school homework and French courses for adults. Volunteers who help in this sphere are neighbours or retired Belgian teachers. These activities are somewhat in the nature of a smoke screen which is used to hide the true social objective of association from the communal authorities: which is the practice of religion. Indeed, in order to avoid having to ask the municipal authorities for an operating licence, the mosques of Schaerbeek were made to pass off as cultural organizations.

2. Muslim Citizenship: municipal policy since 1994

Mayor Nols resigned in 1989 due to health reasons, but his majority following and their philosophy continue to reign supreme. Having become a simple communal councillor, Nols continued to exert his influence within the municipality. In 1993 for example, he arranged for the appointment of a police officer, J. Demol, known for his hard methods, to be the chief of the police force of Schaerbeek. This person had to resign in 1998, when his past as an extreme right activist came to light (Jacobs, 2000, 297-298). However, since the communal elections of October 1994, the communal majority has changed. The Municipality is governed by a mixed coalition of parties. With the departure of Nols, the Schaerbeek political chess-board exploded in a multitude of unstable formations. Contrary to what is noted in the majority of the municipalities in Brussels, there is no dominant party any more. An important challenge for the major political parties in the Brussels region (the Reform Movement – right wing, formed by the federation of the FDF and the PRL, the socialist Party and the Green Party) is to conquer the electorate in Schaerbeek. Because of its dilapidated districts, its over stretched finances and a high rate of unemployment, and as the second most important Municipality in the Brussels region considering the number of inhabitants, it has very high economic

potential in terms of employment, public works and real estate speculation, which is why it is so important for the regional political community⁴⁹. In addition to this, further to the successive reforms that were introduced throughout the 90's, the Belgian naturalisation rules have become one of most liberal in the world. The number of Schaerbeek foreign nationals who have acquired Belgian citizenship has grown quickly. Under these conditions, all the votes count and mentalities become easier to change. At the time of the elections on October 8, 2000, a coalition similar to the one formed in 1994 was once again in place (liberal reform party, Socialists and the Greens) under the direction of a young economist, Bernard Clerfayt (Reform Movement, right wing). Today, a certain number of Nols' former buddies are still active in policy making in Schaerbeek, but they rub shoulders with the eleven Muslims who are elected officials to the Commune administration (out of 47 seats), which includes seven of Moroccan origin and three of Turkish origin. Three of these elected officials were appointed as the mayor's deputies.

2.1. Perception of Muslims and Islam

From 1994 onwards, and this was even more clearly defined after 2000, the new majority managed to overcome the annoyance and irritation related to the presence and the visibility of Islam and the Muslims in the commune. The calming down of the situation supposes that it could be due to a political legitimisation of the cultural and religious differences (Frégosi, 2001b, 94). Islam is from now on, an ordinary everyday reality which is rooted in the existence of the commune. The willingness to locally institutionalize the Muslim presence as demanded by a State of law and democracy requires equal treatment to be meted out to all the actors. The Municipality no longer tries to seek out a "good" flexible Islam. Officially, there are no appointed interlocutors anymore. The Municipality deals with all those who request something. The Muslims are looked upon as citizens just like the others.

⁴⁹ Nols is once again elected municipal councillor on the PRL ticket (right wing), but he refused to take his place beside the first elected members of foreign origin and he resigned. Despite a debt of 20 million euros, the Brussels press referred to a Schaerbeek Eldora do when describing the largest land reserve of the region (up to 94 hectares) – the railway station for training and sorting – which lies side by side with the territory belonging to the Municipality: *The Vif/l'Express* dated 25.10.2002 and the *Vlan* dated 7.4.2004.

This new attitude on the part of the Municipality came about through a dramatic event. On May 7, 2002, an 82 year old fanatic, known for his racist ideas and his sympathy towards the extreme right party, broke into his Moroccan neighbours' home. He killed the father and the mother. On the following day, the commune called a crisis meeting in a Moroccan mosque in the district in order to clear up the misunderstandings (the witnesses on the scene of the crime accused the local police force of passiveness) and to limit the risks of a riot breaking out (there were incidents that occurred on May 8 and 9). At the time of the funeral ceremony of the victims on May 10, the politicians from Schaerbeek and many representatives of the regional and federal governments were present, as were many persons who were well known in the sphere of Belgian socio-policy. Before the Islamic religious rites took place, the Mayor, Mr. B. Clerfayt addressed the 6 000 Schaerbeek inhabitants present: "Our walls exude hate (...) I know that you hope that the situation will return to a state of calm and serenity which is necessary at a time like this. All citizens are equal. They have the same rights, the same duties. We must guarantee the same privileges to all and accord the same attention to all." Since December 2002, a dialogue has started at the initiative of the authorities in Schaerbeek between the bereaved family, the inhabitants of the district and the regional authorities in Brussels in order to transform the building where the crime took place into a space for meditation and exchange among the different cultures.

2.2. Mode of action of the municipal powers

Many things have changed in Schaerbeek since the second half of the Nineties. It is impossible to give a full account here of the policies that have been introduced in the following areas: urban, social, school and cultural led by the communal powers in favour of the inhabitants in the underprivileged districts (and therefore for Muslims) and to encourage harmonious co-habitation among all sections of the population. Only certain facts related to mosque associations and the practice of the religion are indicated. Since 1995, the local sections of various political parties as well as the majority and the opposition, started to organize meetings with the Muslims in certain mosques in Schaerbeek. At the time of each election campaign (municipal, regional or legislative), their representatives (sometimes high ranking officials) no longer hesitate to visit the Turkish and Moroccan mosques. During one of these visits to the Fatih mosque, the faithful raised the question of the lack of an Islamic cemetery in the area and the difficulties that the Mus-

lms experienced because of this. From 1996 and on a continuing basis, the commune began the preparation of a project for a Muslim burial ground in the Schaerbeek cemetery not without however, meeting with resistance from the former close relations of ex-mayor Nols. However, the project grew in dimensions in 2000, because under the influence of the Schaerbeek administration six other Brussels communes joined in the project. The project came to fruition in 2002 with the inauguration of the first multifaith cemetery in the Brussels region. In October 1996, during the official launching ceremony of the project, the municipal college solemnly declared: "We wish to offer all religions a burial place worthy of the name. This is a gesture which we have made with regard to the Muslim community. It is a sign which shows our desire to facilitate as far as we possibly can, their integration in our commune. These people were born here, have grown up here, live here and will die here. And they will be buried here."

Since the end of the 1990's, at the time of each festival of the sacrifice (aïd Al-adhâ), the municipal authorities arrange for the necessary to be done where the professional butchers are at work, with bin liners and bags for waste and containers to deposit the sheep carcasses. Between 1997 and 2000, the mayor's deputies for town planning services and the future mayor, Mr. B. Clerfayt, started a systematic operation for regularization of the administrative status of the 13 mosques in Schaerbeek. The administration also benefits from the informal but effective mediation on the part of an Islamic teacher of religion of Turkish origin, Halis Kökten. There is now no distinction made as all the mosques are contacted when necessary, certain are visited (Mr. Clerfayt visited a mosque for the first time in 1999). It is an official recognition at the local level coupled with a learning process, since the administration and the mediator explain the urban procedures to the mosque associations. Following this regularization procedure, seven mosques in Schaerbeek, among them, the Fatih mosque, obtained a renovation permit. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the mayor's deputy in charge of the religious issues, Mr. E. Noël, officially took the initiative to organize meetings in the context of interreligious dialogues among the local representatives of the three monotheist religions. Some of these meetings are held in the Moroccan and Turkish mosques⁵⁰. In December 2002, E. Noël participated in the celebration of the festival which ends the

⁵⁰ Right until March 2003, these meetings were a regular feature.

Ramadan fast which was held in a Moroccan mosque (Kobaa) in Schaerbeek. This event was broadcast live by a local Moroccan radio station.

2.3. Mode of integration of Muslims in local life and the Fatih mosque during the new period

The reasons for the change in mentalities and communal policies are not specific to Schaerbeek alone, but for the most islamophobic Municipality that existed in the recent past, these changes are more noteworthy. According to the data available on the municipal administration from 1991 to 2001, nearly 20,200 Schaerbeek residents acquired Belgian nationality. The great majority of them are Muslims. Today, all the democratic parties have Muslim candidates on their lists when there are communal, regional or legislative elections, and this includes right wing parties which had Nols and his close associates on their lists. According to our calculations on the results of the communal elections on October 8, 2000, in Schaerbeek there were 35 Muslim candidates and 235 non Muslim candidates on the lists of the democratic parties. The Muslim candidates (eleven of whom were elected) received on an average 360 preference votes, against an average of 297 preference votes for the non Muslim candidates, some of whom are very well known stars in the local and even national political sphere.... This comparison, which has not escaped the attention of the strategists in the different parties, shows that the Muslim electorate is particularly active and that it is necessary from now on to take it into account.

Mentalities are therefore evolving in parallel with the more positive approach implemented by the municipal majority on the question of the Muslim presence. Feeling that the new municipal authorities were more open to their requests, seven of the thirteen mosques in Schaerbeek have, since 1997, applied for renovation permits. However, the Fatih mosque⁵¹ is the first to act, since its

⁵¹ The number of members of the Fatih Mosque association varied greatly during its history (between 200 and 500). It is possible to note a dwindling in numbers because according to the present President of the association, the number of subscribing members had gone down to 200 persons. A reduction in the numbers attending Islamic catechism classes and the lack of interest on the part of the parents for this particular course was also pointed out by the mosque official. A member is usually the father who represents all the family, which in theory means that the community is made up of 1 500 to 2 500 individuals (out of about 14 000 inhabitants of Turkish origin in Schaerbeek in 2002). The monthly subscription is 10

first contacts with the Municipality date back to 1995. The house on the Chaussée de Haecht where the Fatih mosque was initially set up has only a narrow and dark space. The building itself is in a bad condition. The place gives the impression that this tenancy is provisional, in line with the image of the particularly old Muslims who frequent the place. Contrary to what is obvious now, these first generation immigrants have not grown accustomed to the idea that they are now forever resident in Belgium. Thus no attempt is made to change the layout of the premises, even if it is only to repaint the frontage, which has not been done from 1982 till 1995, a period of 13 years!

In 1994, the management of the association of mosque changed. This date coincides with the advent of the new municipal majority. The new president, Osman Duran, is a worker in the building trade who has taken early retirement. He views his new responsibilities from this angle, in terms of renovation and space utilisation. He contacted the new communal management to ask for a building or an adequate plot of land for the construction of a new mosque. In spite of the rapid refusal of the commune, the president understands that a new period is opening up:

“The refusal to give us land or a building did not discourage me, since my real project was to work over our current mosque. The “old curtains” were beginning to tear since 1994. One can talk about experience, acquired through the years, which has matured us all. The Belgians saw that they were going to have to live with us. And we looked deeper into the question of our integration and our bonds with this country. We finally learned how to accept ourselves. During the time of Nols’ term of office, certain Turks were not even allowed at the communal offices! Then, the number of naturalized persons started to increase. The Belgians of Turkish origin who started out in politics are of great help to us. Now, it

euros. Apart from the ordinary collection every Friday, an exception collection can be organised to cope with unexpected expenditure. The monthly operational budget for the Fatih mosque was around 2 800 euros in 2004. The association which manages the Fatih mosque is directed by a Board of 11 members (this includes the President), elected every two years. The number of faithful who regularly frequent the mosque is much greater than the subscribing members. The mosque can hold up to 1 000 male members of the congregation. This number is constant during feast day prayers (aïd al-adhâ and aïd as-saghir). Then it becomes the biggest Islamic prayer community in Belgium. The Fatih mosque is the biggest in Brussels. Its geographical situation is central with regard to both the Turkish neighbourhood and the Brussels region as a whole.

*is sometimes necessary to wait, but we always obtain the desired appointment. Our presence from now on is regarded as legitimate*⁵². ”

In 1995, O. Duran managed to collect the sum necessary to buy the house neighbouring the mosque and succeeded in obtaining a building permit from the commune – his plan was to link the two buildings and to install the central heating unit there. This allowed for the enlargement of the place of worship, and together with a hall which would make it possible for the community to take tea there and for the association to increase its financial income in this way.

“The Municipality was unaware of the lack of place and finances which was a source of suffering for us. Until the present time we have not received any financial assistance from a Belgian authority. After the first purchase, we were able to buy two other houses (out of the three that we coveted) in the street perpendicular to the Chaussée de Haecht. Thus we obtained the final square area that we currently own – it is “L” shaped, because of the way the four buildings were joined together with their gardens. We could finally develop the grand project with interior decoration thanks to material and the earthenware imported from Turkey. (...) After my first failure in 1995 [refusal of the request to grant us a building or a plot of land], I think I have implemented a three step strategy in our relationship with the Municipality. Initially, it was a request for renovation [enlarging and central heating], following the purchase of the adjacent houses; then, in the second stage, in 1997 we applied for the permit to construct a cupola and a minaret, as in the case of the permit for interior decoration. It took me six months before I obtained an appointment with the deputy mayor for town planning [the current mayor is B. Clerfayt]. The 1997 project obviously had more visibility from the outside than the 1995 one. Perhaps that bothered the administration more. I was told that it would be impossible to build a minaret in the heart of Brussels! At this stage, the intervention of the professor of religion H. Kökten as a mediator had the desired effect. It is true that the teacher speaks French and I can’t really. Administrative documents were missing in our file and I was unaware that we needed them. The communal civil servants never took the trouble to explain all this to me. The Councillor for Religious Affairs at the Turkish Consulate helps us, but obviously it is not sufficient with regard to the administrative and technical aspects of the dossier. I also think that the communal elections were approaching and that the chances of Mr. Clerfayt to become mayor were increasing. The mediation and the elections were perhaps the two reasons for which the dossier was finally sanctioned. We however were not entitled to the cu-

⁵² Interview with Osman Duran in the Fatih mosque in February 2003.

pola. We had to be satisfied with only one minaret 12 metres in height and not 18 metres as initially envisaged and we were forbidden to hold prayers there on the public highway. The administrative status of the minaret is in fact similar to that of an advertising signboard. It was to be built in a light metal structure. The permit for the minaret must be renewed after inspection every nine years. The renovation, interior decoration and the minaret cost nearly 62 000 euros. Half of this sum was financed from the reserves of the mosque and the other half was obtained through the gifts given by the Muslims of the district, and we must not forget the voluntary work done by many of the faithful. Lastly, the third stage of my strategy will be the purchase of a plot of land out of the greater Brussels area, possibly along a highway, where we can build a really large mosque there, for 4 to 5 000 faithful designed in the Ottoman architectural style with cupolas and minarets, which must serve the entire Brussels region. My objective is the appreciation of the Muslim presence by the Belgian population; this is why it is possible to consider an "intercultural" Belgo-Turkish architectural style. This mosque would also have an arts centre, a park and a carpark. This final project can be carried out only over a period of several years. At the moment we are on the look out for an adequate plot of land. We will contact the authorities only after acquisition. From now on, we must negotiate with the Municipality about the means of improving the religious services which we render to our community. For example, we should be able to say the funeral prayer service at the Fatih mosque before the burial of the deceased in the multiconfessionnal cemetery in Schaerbeek or before repatriation to Turkey. We are also taking part in the official project to beautify and redevelop the Chaussée de Haecht, since we applied for and obtained the permit for the future widening of the pavement in front of the Fatih mosque in order to embellish the front façade."

The Islamic religion teacher, Halis Kökten⁵³, who proposed his services as a mediator, gives the following personal account concerning the initiation of the relations with the mosques and the Municipality:

"I was just starting out in communal politics. As a very new member of B. Clerfayt's political party, in August 1997 I contacted the municipal authorities of Schaerbeek at the request of the Milli Görüs community, which was taken to court in 1989 by the old municipal administration. It

⁵³ Mr. Kökten lives in the neighbouring commune of St. Josse. He is a member of the same political party as the mayor of Schaerbeek, Mr. B. Clerfayt (Reform Movement) and during the 2000 communal elections; he was elected councillor in his commune. Interview realised in December 2002.

wanted henceforth to comply with the rules in force, but the new dossier sent in several months before did not seem to progress. I met the civil servant responsible for town planning at the communal offices. To my great astonishment, I realized that the files containing the application for a renewal permit made by the two Turkish mosques situated on the Chaussée de Haecht (the Milli Görüs mosque and the Fatih mosque) had got mixed up through carelessness! The civil servant was unaware of the existence of the two Turkish mosques situated at a distance of just a few metres from each other. We spent some time to put the two dossiers in order. Faithful to my commitment, I initially dealt with the file on the Milli Görüs mosque. It was regarded as an "islamist" mosque not controlled by the Turkish government. The fact that this file was passed before all the others astonished many people. However the problem was by no means political. The administration only seeks to serve all the members of its population, but the rules must be respected. All the files that were sent in by the various mosques in Schaerbeek were incomplete because one or another document was missing. Then, linguistic difficulties and the annoyances and irritations dating back to the time when Nols was in power complicated the channels of communication.... As far as documents go, the association which manages the mosque must be legally established and have the status of a non-profit association and this information must be published in the Belgian Monitor [Official Journal]. For the permits concerning matters dealing with renovation and installation of equipment, a plan signed by an architect is indispensable. This plan must be inspected by the firemen for safety requirements. Moreover, a project which includes external transformations cannot contravene the urban regulations in force. It is also necessary to have a thorough check of the neighbourhood area and this must be done within 15 days. Finally, the work must be carried out by recognized companies and not by amateurs. Documents must attest to the fact that all these requirements have been adhered to. It is rare that a mosque file is complete. They are often haphazardly put together. It is always necessary to chase documents and shake up the administrators of associations so that they get on with the work. It is true that no mosque receives public financing of any kind which is the case for all religions that are recognized and are aided in this way to provide for the operational needs of their places of worship. In addition, the municipal authorities have their own calendar of activities. And all the applications that are received take time to process. The other problem, apart from the administrative questions, is the ignorance of the communal authorities about Islam as a religion and a culture. It is understandable. One should not suspect any automatic rejection of requests in these cases. Certain blockages or malfunctioning is due to lack of comprehension or a misunderstanding, and personally I am of the opinion that they are primarily caused by the recurrent incapacity on the part of the Muslims to

present their faith and their cultural practices in terms that would be understood by the Westerners”.

According to H. Kökten, the restructuring project outlined by the president of the Fatih mosque did not, at the outset, make reference to the construction of a minaret⁵⁴:

“The origin of the project concerning the embellishment of the frontage by a minaret is more to do with description. The Imam of the White Mosque, the Albanian Ibrahim Hoxha, had placed a plywood board measuring two metres in height which represented a minaret. The old Turks who see this refer to the ancient quarrel with the Albanian imam and demand that the president of the Fatih mosque do likewise for a minaret to be put in place. President O. Duran discussed this with a Belgian friend, a draftsman. The friend is delighted by the idea and immediately suggests that a real minare⁵⁵t measuring eighteen metres in height be built on the frontage with its base constructed on the pavement. The idea appeals to all concerned. Although this is not a religious obligation, because even in Muslim countries there are mosques without minarets, it is however an architectural detail and an identity feature which is very symbolic, which unabashedly points to a permanent presence which is blending into the native landscape in the public area. The height of the minaret however is exaggerated and the documents that were attached did not include any expertise on the resistance of material to the wind force. The height of the minaret was the real reason for the blocking of this file before I stepped in at the request of president Duran. Finally, to prove its goodwill, the commune resolved the problem. Technical specifications that apply to luminous commercial signboards were used to build the minaret in compliance with these standards. This is how the only popular mosque in Brussels with a minaret became a living reality. As regards the call to pray announced from the top of this minaret, I formally advised the persons in charge of the mosque not to ask the question. One should not unnecessarily provoke negative reactions. Later on, it will be always possible to ask for permission on an exceptional basis to be able to do this for feast days or at the beginning of the month of Ramadan.”

The Fatih mosque that was renovated and decorated with its minaret and earthenware imported from Turkey was inaugurated during a special ceremony that took place at the beginning of the month of Ramadan on, November 16, 2001. The communal authorities and the Turkish consular dignitaries were present at the

⁵⁴ On the subject of the minaret read *Le Soir* dated 3.7.2001 and 3.11.2001.

⁵⁵ The term “minaret” comes from the Arabic “al-manâr” meaning guiding post or lighthouse.

time of the event, which was highlighted by the Belgian media. The president of the association of the Fatih mosque was interviewed on television: he invited the public to come and visit the building⁵⁶. According to Mr. Duran the Fatih mosque had become “presentable” and was now recognised as a place where interesting meetings are held. One of the multifaith meetings organized by the Municipality in the aftermath of September 11 was held there. Since spring 2002, the mosque organized several open days for the Brussels public. School visits are arranged and Islamic worship is explained to the pupils by French-speaking persons in charge of the mosque. During the month of Ramadan in November 2002, two evenings of breaking the fast were organized there in the presence of political leaders and Muslim and non-Muslims associations. Belgian neighbours⁵⁷ and catholic and orthodox priests from Schaerbeek started to come to the mosque to have tea there.

3. Conclusion: “good practices” which are the basis of integration

The sudden appearance of a new faith in the public area that belongs to a municipality can certainly create disturbances. The municipal authorities who are caught unawares and are ignorant of the realities of this population and its religious rites, can be tempted, in the interests of security, to resort to a populist or xenophobic type of management, as was the case for Islam and the Muslims in Schaerbeek over a long period of time (1970-1994). The way in which Islam was dealt with by the Schaerbeek Municipality can also be largely explained by the personal convictions or the personality of the mayor himself (Frégosi, 2001b, 114). The formation of the Muslim communities must thus also be perceived through the vision of the world that was exclusive to mayor Nols.

⁵⁶ O. Duran condemned the 11 September attacks during this interview. The president confided in us saying that for months he feared an anti-Islamist attack since his mosque has been thrown into the glare of publicity because of its inauguration. For several months, those persons who were carrying a briefcase or a bag were denied access to the mosque for security reasons.

⁵⁷ Mr. Duran specified that after the inauguration and the subsequent publicity that the mosque received, a Belgian neighbour remarked: “before, the building was dark. We did not really know what was going on there. I never wanted to go into it. Since it has been renovated, your mosque is much more attractive and the cafeteria is more welcoming”.

His actions could have prejudiced the integration of the Muslims into the local population. However, the relational model, marked by mistrust and hostility towards Muslims, which prevailed until the first half of the Nineties, was finally replaced by another one. The new relational model is characterized by the effective recognition of the freedom of worship for Muslims and for the valorization of their identity. According to the new municipal rhetoric, citizenship for Muslims is being discussed as well as the desire to pull Islam out of institutional underdevelopment. The attacks of September 11, 2001 and the international conflicts which have arisen since have not blocked this process of “local citizenship” for Muslims. Even if the willingness on the part of the communal authorities could be tinted with more prosaic objectives of an electoral nature, the requests for social and religious recognition coming from the Muslim population are gradually being taken into account.

The practices that we observed have contributed to a wider mutual comprehension and a qualitative co-habitation in the locality. In conclusion, we could summarise them in the following way:

- listen to the Muslims. The municipalities should seek to mobilize and include as far as possible the various categories of inhabitants, including the Muslims so that they participate in all projects of collective living. The mosques or various associations that are representative of the local Muslim population should be explicitly invited to join in the different aspects of communal life (district councils, urban projects, assistance to the most deprived members of the population, local festivals and activities, etc). It is highly desirable that the communal authorities visit the mosques in a spirit of co-operation to encourage harmonious relations. It is particularly recommended that the authorities visit the mosques during Muslim religious festivals. The municipalities could verify the administrative status of the mosques without causing friction, and, if necessary, launch the necessary procedures to regularize them. It is necessary to precisely explain municipal powers as regards worship, to the Muslim persons in charge. Regular contacts between the municipality and the mosques offer a serious guarantee for the integration of Muslims in local life. They could also be a means of preventing the emergence of radical groups or ideas within this population. The recruitment of Muslim workers to fill posts that are vacant within the municipality can contribute to a policy of openness.

INSTITUTIONALISING ISLAM AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

- To invite people to train as mediators. The weakness in the relationship of the Muslims with the rest of society and the scarcity of competent interlocutors is something we have noted for a long time (Dassetto, 1990, 206-207). It is therefore necessary to promote and encourage mediators be they Muslims or not, who will gain the confidence of the various local groups. These mediators should be able to play a dual teaching role: (1) to explain what Islam is about and the needs of Muslims to the municipalities; (2) to explain the regulations and procedures in force, as well as the challenges at communal level facing the Muslims. The following actions must be taken care of by these intermediaries: popularization of the legislation as regards freedom of worship and conscience (including its implications at the municipal level) with regard to the communal officials in charge, the associative Muslims, and any other organization in charge of promoting intercultural relations, social and human rights, and fighting against racism. The appearance of Muslim politicians (of both sexes) is also desirable: present in the local political life and anchored in the Muslim community, they are potentially good mediators. They legitimise participative citizenship in the eyes of the Muslims and the Muslim presence is consequently legitimised in the eyes of the natives. Another factor which encourages the taking into account of Muslims at the local level is the appointment of new directors as heads of mosque associations. The new leaders of mosque associations who have the nationality of the country of residence and who speak the language of the country of origin are preferable. Compared to their predecessors, they are generally better trained and more conscious of socio-political realities in European countries and in their locality. The dialogue between local authorities and the Muslim community is vital for such leaders to be engaged in, so that they are legitimately accepted within their community (Yalçın-Heckmann, 1997, 95 and 101; Frégosi, 2001b, 127 and 129).

- To invest in communal life. If it wishes to succeed in its attempts to gain recognition, the local Muslim community should structure itself so as to transcend national, ethnic or doctrinal memberships. Ideally, it should be able to speak with one voice. The Muslim community must follow up on the work of its representatives through democratic and disciplined methods (of its administrators of mosque associations), whose responsibilities must be clearly spelled out and recognized by all. The community and the persons in charge must take care to respect the laws and regulations within the framework of a transparent management system

set up within their association. The Imams must try to bring people together, because it helps to develop a sense of active citizenship and responsibility for the Muslims, as well remaining open to the fellow-citizens who are non-Muslims thus respecting the values of the country of residence. The development of the Muslim community and the development of its Islamic spirituality closely depend on the intellectual quality of the interaction. The Muslim persons in charge (preferably a common delegation representing the various mosques and/or Muslim communities that are ethnically different and are present on the municipal territory) could take the initiative to contact or invite the communal authorities in order to explain little known facts about Islam, to create durable bonds and to expose their own problems and put in their requests. This invitation should be sustained by patience and respect for the authorities: diplomatically, at the beginning of the relationship, the ignorance of the political and administrative personnel communal about Islam should be tolerated in order to understand the reasons for its possible maladroitness. It is up to the Muslims and to them alone to explain their faith and clarify their values and requirements in cultural and religious matters. The Muslims must resort to professional staff in order to obtain information, prepare negotiations with the authorities and conclude their projects: lawyers (freedom of worship and communal responsibilities on the matter, litigations); architects (construction or renovation of places of worship); veterinary surgeons (ritual slaughter); intercultural and anti-racist associations (methods of negotiation, lobbying, Community development); journalists (to present itself to the public). The Muslims should develop strategies in their relationships with the authorities: (1) to support and accelerate the process of naturalization and active citizenship; (2) to establish alliances between Muslims and non Muslims; (3) to develop integrated and hierarchical projects (in the long run, in the short term); (4) to propose several alternative solutions to avoid the dead ends; (5) to ask for more than they require so as to guarantee the satisfaction of a reasonable number of claims; (6) to develop and explain architectural projects, as well as cultural activities and those pertaining to worship in the Muslim community, which are concrete contributions to the social and cultural life in the commune and to local and urban embellishment; (7) to take part regularly in the sociocultural and festive activities organized by the commune.

References

- Bastienier A. (1981), « Quand Bruxelles découvre ses immigrés », *Actes du colloque « Le présent et l'avenir de l'immigration à Bruxelles » (28-29 mars 1981)*, Brussels: Commission française de la culture de l'Agglomération de Bruxelles, 103-127.
- Dassetto F. (1990), « Visibilisation de l'islam dans l'espace public », Bastienier A. & Dassetto F. (eds), *Immigrations et nouveaux pluralismes. Une confrontation de sociétés*, Brussels: De Boeck Université, 179-208.
- Frégosi F. (2001a), « Les régulations locales du pluralisme religieux : éléments de problématique », Frégosi F. & Willaime J.-P. (eds), *Le religieux dans la commune. Les régulations locales du pluralisme religieux en France*, Genève: Labor & Fides, 11-26.
- Frégosi F. (2001b), « 'Droit de cité' de l'islam et politiques municipales : analyse comparée entre Strasbourg et Mulhouse », Frégosi F. & Willaime J.-P. (eds), *Le religieux dans la commune. Les régulations locales du pluralisme religieux en France*, Genève: Labor & Fides, 92-137.
- Lesthaeghe R. & Neels K. (2000), « Islamic Communities in Belgium. Religious Orientations and Secularization », Lesthaeghe R. (ed.) *Communities and Generations : Turkish and Moroccan populations in Belgium*, Brussels: NIDI CBGS Publications, 36, 129-163.
- Manço U. (1997), « Des organisations sociopolitiques comme solidarités islamiques dans l'immigration turque en Europe », *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam*, 4, 97-133.
- Manço U. & Kanmaz M. (2002), « De la pathologie au traitement. La gestion municipale de l'islam et des musulmans de Belgique », *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, 33, 57-88.
- Rea A. (1997), « Mouvements sociaux, partis et intégration », Coenen M.-T. & Lewin R. (eds), *La Belgique et ses immigrés. Les politiques manquées*, Brussels: De Boeck Université, 56-71.
- Rea A. (2001), « Délinquance et immigration : usage politique d'une association symbolique », Brion F. & al. (coord.), *Mon délit ? Mon origine. Criminalité et criminalisation de l'immigration*, Brussels: De Boeck, 59-76.
- Stroobants M. (1984), « Actualité du biologisme dans l'interprétation des faits sociaux. La notion de 'seuil de tolérance' », *Critique régionale*, 10-11, 22-69.
- Vandemeulebroecke M. (1997), « Sous le regard des médias », Coenen M.-T. & Lewin R. (eds), *La Belgique et ses immigrés. Les politiques manquées*, Brussels: De Boeck-Université, 205-220.
- Yalçın-Heckmann L. (1997), « The Perils of Ethnic Associational Life in Europe : Turkish Migrants in Germany and in France », Modood T. & Werbner P. (eds), *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe*, Londres-New York: Zed Books, 95-110.