

## **Cheratte-Visé: a Muslim village in Wallonia**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to describe the processes leading to social integration of a Turkish community at the beginning of the sixties who were resident in a mining region in Belgium. The stages through which this immigrant working population had to go through are described here: and how it managed, within a third of century, to become established in the district, to structure itself in associations, to be recognized by the local authority and the institutional fabric of the host country, and finally, to sit down at the same table with the local councillors.

**Keywords:** Cheratte, Visé, Wallonia, local integration, Muslim communities, social participation.

This article aims to describe the processes leading to social integration of a Turkish community at the beginning of the sixties who were resident in a mining region in Belgium. The stages through which this immigrant working population had to go through are described here: and how it managed, within a third of century, to become established in the district, to structure itself in associations, to be recognized by the local authority and the institutional fabric of the host country, and finally, to sit down at the same table with the local councillors. We are going to explain this to show how the population originating in Turkey and settled in Cheratte (commune of Visé, district of Liege) went through various phases of installation and integration: which were the factors which allowed these projections? What were the obstacles? How were they overcome? Which problems still persist? We explain in greater detail

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how a mosque was organized by the immigrants and how it claims to have become a partner in the launching of social actions and educational projects within a network of local actors, in the industrial suburbs of Wallonia (federal French-speaking part in the South Belgium).

This written account has been realised thanks to the work of many actors and observers, social workers, researchers, teaching staff, students, ordinary citizens, who worked or lived in Cheratte at the beginning of the Eighties. They have put down their initiatives in writing as well as those of other workers or have summarised their observations. Thus, this text represents, to a very great extent, the collecting, compilation, synthesis and linking up of reports, official reports of meetings, newspaper cuttings, statistical data, scientific accounts, articles relating to local history, notes and various brochures and folders. It was initiated by observers who had to be physically present in Cheratte and consequently they are the authors of a great number of these documents. Analytical work was then realised on the contents of these papers and further discussed by various witnesses in the locality and other researchers. The process made it possible to validate the summarised work and to enrich it. Some of these consultations were carried out in groups during thematic meetings that brought together political representatives, the inhabitants, persons in charge of the association and the social workers in the unit, as well as observers and students.

In the locality of Cheratte, which lies to the north of the Province of Liege, close to the Dutch border, the principal partner was the Association for Mutual Aid to the Turkish Families of Cheratte (AEFTC) which houses and manages the "Mimar Sinan" Mosque. The mosque has links with the Turkish diplomatic mission in Brussels. Since 1982 it has been the place of prayer for the majority of Turkish Muslims in the locality. The main part of its financing comes from the faithful who regularly proceed to elect the executive committee of association. AEFTC is currently represented in a local coordinated body, which is the Integrated Project for Cheratte (PIC), and negotiates the means for the launching of socio-cultural actions which it tries to develop so that they will be recognized by the local decision makers. In this locality, there are two other mosques and several other religious organizations that have been created by the immigrants.

The city of Visé is represented within the observation framework, by its Mayor, a deputy of the Reform Movement for the

French Community of Belgium and the Walloon Area. The Mayor is personally in charge of the files related to teaching issues (in particular religious) and the relations in the area of worship. The city has approximately 18 000 inhabitants including 10 % of Muslims of Turkish extraction. The population resulting from Muslim immigration is mainly settled in the southern peripheral area of the city since the middle of the Sixties, in an old coal mining site which is currently closed. Many problems of schooling, employment and integration are particularly preoccupying for the young people belonging to the Muslim community. The city of Visé and its Public Centre for Social Aid (CPAS) are members of the PIC which also brings together representatives of associations and socio-educational institutions of the entity.

The goal of this local, participative observation of long duration is therefore to identify and support the methods used for the recognition of a mosque association as a legitimate partner within the framework of coordination of socio-educational and cultural actions carried out by public and private institutions. This collaboration supposes the recognition, the financial support and the integration of the immigrant Turkish structure in its cultural and religious dimensions into the decision making networks for organization and concrete implementation of local socio-cultural actions. If there are many attempts to obtain such participation from the associations created by immigrants, it seems that this participative integration is not yet total or optimal from the point of view of the interested parties. One indeed observes many inequalities in fact, in the treatment of the associations created by the migrants both in the area where they live and elsewhere. Thus, churches legally receive financial assistance from the commune, but the three mosques in the locality have only very recently been given regular, specific aid which is equivalent to approximately one hundredth part of the endowment granted to the church. The Muslim faith is recognized by the Belgian Constitution as is the Catholic religion, but no satisfactory legal framework has yet been set up to guide the work of the local decision maker on the matter. There is also an element of suspicion which certain members suffer in immigrant associations and the mosques as compared to other actors in local life which marginalises them. The local action launched in Cheratte will have achieved its goals if, thanks to dialogue and cooperation, members of the public and local parastatal institutions, as well as the members of the local Muslim community develop the following:

- a greater comprehension of the respective positions, complementary roles and positive contributions of the local social institutions, on the one hand, and religious and cultural organizations created by the immigrants on the other;
- a higher level of mutual confidence which will allow them to overcome marked attitudes of "reservations", in particular with regard to the concrete organization of socio-cultural activities organised in Cheratte and in the negotiations which precede the distribution of financial means which are allotted to the parties concerned;
- a certain discipline to be observed in functioning (sectoral dialogues, negotiations, collaboration in the thematic sense, etc) which requires the co-operation and solidarity among the cultural and religious organizations set up by the immigrants and the public institutions as well as the private Belgian ones present in the area;
- a documented report highlighting this spirit of positive co-operation to be publicly disseminated for purposes of comparison with similar experiments. This document would include, in particular, details of the meetings, events and briefings with the population and written work of various types.

### **1. Arrival, installation and integration of the Turkish community in Cheratte/Visé**

The Belgo-Turkish agreements for the import of labour exist since 1962; the Turkish authorities officially agreed to send a quota of mine workers to Belgium. The organizational structures for this recruitment in Turkey began in 1963. This event was duly publicised in the country of origin and organized by the Belgian and Turkish authorities. However, the need for labour in the mines was so high that the Belgian State was willing to use unofficial practices of recruitment i.e. regularization of the residence status of clandestine immigrants if they had work contracts. It was also possible for the family in the country of origin to join the worker in Belgium after he had worked for one month in the mine; however, the miner was required to have adequate housing in order to be able to accommodate his family. In this context, the worker could request the coal mining company or an institution in charge of social housing to give him adequate family accommodation.

These first arrivals are revealing as they tell us what the real priorities were for the two contracting States and what they were willing to do for reasons of financial profit to the detriment of the wellbeing of workers and their families; thus, while it was said that the families were welcome, only the men, in other words, the mine workers were transported to the mine in vehicules. However, the workers did not intend to remain in Belgium, and imagined returning to their country after two or three years of work. It is undeniable that this absence of personal investment in a new life in Belgium retarded the integration of the Turkish families in Belgium by at least one generation. Indeed, the majority of the families remained in their country of origin; the children grew up there over a period of several years and at the earliest, when they were 6 years of age, one could say that they were really exposed to Belgian society. This second generation thus paid dearly for this lack of foresightedness and the means to help it to integrate.

Thus, the immigrant worker generally settled in a dwelling managed by the coal mining industry, which provided the workers with full board and lodging for which a certain amount of money was deducted from his pay; the miner was not obliged to follow this system – he was free to choose another possibility. However, lodgings were difficult to find, were more expensive, or unfit to live in. Various studies and surveys dating back to the period 1960-1970 point up to the difficulties that miners living alone experienced at many levels, in particular in terms of health. They often preferred to share a room than to take up more comfortable accommodation in order to save a maximum of their salary. That created a concentration of workers in bad quality accommodation. This initially allowed for the integration of the mining community via its many contacts, but later on, it slowed down, when it came to their adaptation to the wider Belgian community.

Training in language skills was also organized from the short-term point of view: for the employer it was a question of teaching the miner the rudiments necessary for the realization of the work that he was expected to accomplish and, for the employee, to meet the requirements of the employer and learn the language sufficiently to be able to do the “temporary” work during the short period of time that he would spend in Belgium. Obviously therefore, the first generation of immigrants speak very little French even after having lived for several decades in a French-speaking milieu. This is easy to understand if one takes into account the lack of willingness to teach this generation to read and write, the illiter-

acy of immigrant populations, the family regrouping, the fact that they lived in concentrated groups, etc. Another important point to bear in mind is that the majority of the Turkish immigrant workers had never gone down into a mine before they came to Belgium and many did not really have any industrial or urban experience in the matter.

The insularity of the Turks was in parallel with the lack of interest on the part of the native population as far as they were concerned: very few sources reported their arrival and their subsequent settling in Belgium. One of the rare references made to this event, for example, can be found in "Les rendez-vous de l'histoire" a review of the local history of Visé, on the people of Turkish and Maghrebian origin which is an account that mentions the Polish and Italian festivals and the processions organized by the catholic church and goes on to explain that: "as for the Muslims, our neighbours in the city, that is another mentality, another culture". In the same way, when one notes the names of the elected officials at the time of the trade-union elections in Cheratte since 1963, one finds Italian sounding names, but there are no names of Maghrebian or Turkish origin, and this remained so until the closing of the coal mines in 1977: logically, therefore, from the start, the integration of the persons who came in last was more difficult to achieve than it would have been with the first waves of immigrants.

The end of the Sixties stands out in the whole of industrial Europe because of an economic situation in which petrol consumption exceeded that of coal. The agreements of the ECSC envisaged the reduction of this commodity at the end of the 50's and, in the long term, the phasing out of coal production. Consequently, since 1968, various coal mines in the region of Liège were already closing down. A period of reorganization just before closure of the mine had also started for Cheratte. One can imagine the feelings of many Turkish and Moroccan families who had arrived just a few years before to work in these mines. The closing of their source of livelihood would leave them stranded in a foreign country where they had been invited to settle with their families on a long term basis... However the year of the closing of the Cheratte coal mines also corresponded to the administrative merger of the communes; the entity of Cheratte, hitherto autonomous, was now part of the city of Visé. Within this rather rural and commercial geographical unit that could not really be called industrial, Cheratte seemed to be the most marginal locality judging by its inhabitants, who were mainly of foreign origin. Communication between the various

parts of the extended municipality proved to be difficult; services and administration were now set up in the centre of Visé, leaving the inhabitants of Cheratte with the feeling that they had been abandoned.

The political community in Visé knew little at the time about the popular realities in the entity of Cheratte. But the political leaders were forced to take note of the situation during the first months following the merger of the communes. Indeed, in spite of the closure of the coal mining industry, many workers continued to live in Cheratte. However, in these circumstances, the former industrial land gave way very quickly to waste land. The neighbouring trades closed down too, the surroundings became dilapidated, and the city of the miners now became public property and its inhabitants had neither the means nor the motivation to maintain it. The Belgian State, ex-cavasser of labour abroad for the benefit of the mining industry, gave very little support to the efforts being made by the local, community made even weaker because of its heterogeneity, caught up in a period of total economic recession. Many miners were given early retirement or were declared unfit to work; others took advantage of their unemployment benefit payments. If many of them found intermittent employment in the building and construction sectors, the ratio of men who were in work was low, and they were heads of immigrant families with very little education so this was another source of problems at the beginning of the Eighties. Observations carried out at the end of this decade and in the following decade, in the schools in Cheratte, showed that two thirds of the children of Turkish extraction had a father who was out of work.

The story of the arrival of the first foreigners from abroad who came to work in the mines in Cheratte is typical of the way in which most of the industrialised States assumed responsibility for immigrant workers. At the beginning of the process, “ghettos” began to spring up; the men coming from abroad lived together in lodgings far away from the Belgian families. Later on, the majority of the miners’ families of foreign nationality lived together in the same street. Thereafter, at the end of the Sixties, the immigrant population had become very numerous and spread outwards to the city where the miners lived. However, this area is geographically isolated from the rest of Cheratte: it is hemmed in by highways, a railway, a wet dock and a low wall which closes in the main entry point. This type of land planning and insularity can partially be explained by the fact that the mining company of le

Hasard was a long time owner of the city as it used to house its employees there, close to their place of work. The coal industry thus modified not only the physical landscape but also the human landscape in certain localities, and it organized, in collaboration with the Belgian State, the arrival and the settling in of workers coming from abroad, who were necessary for the economic development of the country. Moreover, since this property was privately owned, only the regular mine workers could live there: by isolating them from the rest of the population, according to the logic of "stock" management, the coal industry also favoured a particular mode of integration for immigrant populations.

Forty years after their arrival and subsequent settling in Belgium, these men and women are still in the area which they thought they would leave three or four years after their arrival. They are still there within a few feet of the mine where they used to work. It will be noted that, in the case of the Turks in Belgium, the factors that contributed to the maintenance of the families in an immigration situation are multiple:

- The family regrouping that encouraged the long term installation of the Turkish workers was rapidly carried out in 1964-1965 for many families and peaked during 1970. However, housing conditions, employment for women, education of children, the right to the freedom of worship, food customs and habits, burial rites, etc were not given much thought and the constant demographic growth of the immigrant community made it so that it had to be satisfied with the space that was allotted to it. The schooling of the children in Belgium generated a host of problems disenfranchizing the parents and loading the children who had been educated with unexpected responsibilities, like having to assist their parents in different, complex situations, for example administrative or medical.

- This vacuum created by the Belgian State which had not anticipated certain situations is thus one of the reasons for which the Turkish community resorted to self-organization to meet its needs for education and security. Thus, the immigrant families had to invest in and generate individual and collective initiatives, such as associative and religious structures, for example, to secure their long term installation in Belgium. The concentration of the Turkish community in a restricted territory also makes it possible for the immigrants to weigh the choices offered by the local authorities and the social services; isn't this demographic concentration and

the subsequent structuring of this community a demonstration of their desire for integration? For example, after the communal elections in 2000, a first elected official of Turkish extraction took office as a councillor in the commune while another was appointed to advise on questions relating to social assistance in the Public Centre for Social Aid in Visé. Others work on the Committee for tenants in social housing and participate in the management of public affairs through various bodies...

- If the absence of open confrontation with Belgian cultural realities incites the immigrant families to maintain an organization on a daily basis that could be termed "Turkish", it is often so because the minimal conditions that are necessary to maintain this type of lifestyle are unavailable. Then, the immigrant families are inclined to reproduce these conditions: creation of trade, colonization of waste grounds in order to improvise a family kitchen garden there, a poultry yard, etc maintenance of the matrimonial rites, organization of a local social structure, maintaining former food habits, reorganization of family networks, the protective ton-tines,... are "edifices" which make it possible to exist culturally when in exile.

- This "village" aspect of social life in Cheratte was a positive factor which also helped the Turkish community in their long-term settlement here. Obviously, all persons of Turkish origin did not participate in the collective initiative that was launched in the area, neither did the native population but they undoubtedly benefited from this closeness that is the hallmark of small entities, to the point where they felt motivated to participate partially in the local social and political life.

- It should be remembered that in many cases immigration is an irreversible process: in the sense that the place that has been vacated in the country of origin is, in general, quickly filled by non-migrants, thus ruling out any possibility of returning. There is a kind of equilibrium that settles between the families who have migrated to Europe and their near and dear ones who have remained behind – this equilibrium is made up of relations based on solidarity, loyalty and allegiance etc...each person is called upon to maintain his particular place in these relations at a distance of 4,000 kilometres. The advantages linked to the country of origin, in this case, the Republic of Turkey which is a candidate for membership to the European Union and one of its important economic partners is an element worthy of consideration....The EU has every

interest in maintaining an important Turkish colony in Europe, one which is very integrated, prosperous, numerous and politically influential, able therefore to defend Turkish arguments and to develop initiatives that would benefit the country of origin, the “fatherland”.

- Seen from the host country’s point of view, that is Belgium, the question of the return of the immigrants would appear to be a senseless policy for political and moral reasons (at the outset, immigrant families were invited to stay permanently in Belgium) as well as economic and demographic considerations. If one examines the age pyramid of the Belgian population, especially of West European descent, one can perceive the absolute necessity of maintaining immigrant populations in this country at all costs, and even, in the future, authorising fresh immigration. However, certain questions such as economic integration and socio-cultural recognition still are open ended to this day with regard to the populations whose forefathers were immigrants. In fact, the case of young people born in Europe of immigrant parents, a group that is commonly known as “second generation” immigrants should be put into a separate context because these persons often have Belgian nationality (or even hold the nationality of the country of origin) have no experience of exile. The notion of “the country of origin” is different for them when compared to the connotation it has for their parents. For young Europeans of Turkish origin, Turkey is (only) “their parents’ country of origin”.

- Finally, the question of the social action that is included in the Belgo-Turkish labour transfer agreements, that was intended to help to integrate Turkish workers should be highlighted here. First, it is a question of commitment on the part of social workers who were supposed to help in the professional and social adaptation of the Turkish miners. Their mission was to smooth out adaptation difficulties and to ensure that this Turkish labour force was included in the social context especially as regards linguistic interpretation. However, this mission was given to these social workers essentially by the employers and they were therefore responsible to them and their demands, on a priority basis. Later on, in Cheratte, in the eighties, a series of social initiatives were launched in the context of children’s education for those who were immigrants. Turkish families were thus able to benefit from literacy courses, help with homework, sports clubs, and folklore dance groups as well as women’s activities. All this work that was done for and by

the Turkish community has no doubt contributed to strengthen the institutions in Cheratte and the immigrants themselves.

## **2. Description of the cultural and religious situation in Cheratte/Visé**

Any immigrant population searches for points of reference from the past in order to construct the stages of their insertion in foreign surroundings which are, from then onwards, imposed on them. In the case of the Turkish Cheratte population, this process has been complicated by their being excluded from the job market, due to the closure of the work for which the immigrant workers, accompanied by their families, had been imported in large numbers. When, overwhelmed by a social disqualification, they raise the question of the heritage to bequeath to their children; they turn towards collective educational behaviour in order to collectivize the risks of assimilation and the cultural extinction of their children in exile. The first institutions that they set up were thus mosques that were familiar to them, in order to meet the cultural needs and a need for gathering together and social control, as well as to meet their desire for cultural expression. The poorly educated immigrant population was helped in this process by the diplomatic structure in the homeland, which was anxious to maintain strong economic and cultural ties with its expatriates.

In fact, in Cheratte and in the homeland, the true “social glue”, the religious rites and associated customs govern the year, set the social relations and give meaning to the acts. In fact, religion plays a prescriptive role in various areas of life, such as the rules of purity, behaviour, diet, etc. For the believer, it is also important from a socio-cultural point of view, insofar as it constitutes one of the major distinctive markers of the community. In short, religion plays a structural role: it provides an infrastructure where the most diverse social interactions can be interpreted. Without being the only social organiser, religion, together with the patriotic values that are equally cherished by Turkish immigrants, have the advantage of responding to the feeling of guilt that dogs the immigrant, the guilt of having abandoned his homeland and his people, a guilt that makes him feel that it is his duty to remember the important values of his native society, even decades after emigrating. Paradoxically, the same national and religious values paraded by the young second generation immigrants – who have never lived in the homeland of their parents – at specific moments and charged

with emotions, such as during the religious holidays, also become a driving force behind their insertion efforts in the host country, even if they evolve in a different way than in the homeland.

Therefore, from the first month of their presence in Belgium, the immigrant Turkish population desire to practise the Muslim religion led to a need for prayer areas to be set up in the collieries boarding houses. They were generally improvised and not very suitable. In Cheratte, a room was reserved for prayers in the bachelor accommodation. The lack of planning and the spontaneous respect of the customs and everyday habits of the workers called to help the mining industry were noted. It was not until a Fédéchar circular was sent to the colliery director that a place to pray would be made available for the Muslims, that pork would be banned, that Turkish baths would be provided, together with a source of water for the ablutions. However, these favours were accompanied by certain restrictions in order to guarantee the productivity of the worker. Therefore, for example, the Federation contacted the Turkish Embassy in Brussels in order to obtain religious dispensation for the mine workers with respect to the ritual fasting during the month of Ramadan.

This situation forty years ago has surprising similarities with that of today where premises are always needed to meet the demands linked to the practising of the Muslim religion and the response was rather improvised, when they did not decide to imply ignore them. And yet, the freedom to worship, included in the Belgium Constitution, and the Islamic religion has been officially recognised by the Belgian State since 1974. Islam is now the country's second religion in terms of number of worshippers. The same type of improvisations would be seen regarding the funerals of the miners that died while at work. These conditions were the reason for a strike by the indignant Turkish workers, who were demanding that their compatriots who died in the mine be repatriated. Other claims, such as the right to celebrate religious festivities, for example, were also supported to a greater and lesser extent depending on the towns<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> The importance of these religious and cultural claims should not be underestimated with respect to the other political claims made, in particular, by the trade unions, such as, for example, the access to the political rights for the immigrants. Respecting the community rights is as important as respecting the individual social and political rights, without their positive impact on the integration process of the foreign populations with

Since the 70s, the Cheratte Turks have had a mosque and it is, together with the cafés that are more recent, a place to meet and talk for the men of the Turkish community. The men are in charge of, according to the traditional distribution of social functions, the “public sphere”. The women develop among themselves a parallel social network in private and, it is true, on community premises. When they arrived in this town, the Turkish workers set up a de facto association (1966). These first moves towards structuring the Cheratte Turkish community meant that certain difficulties inherent to being far away from their homeland could be offset, such as financing the return of some miners to their country, as they were unsuitable for mine work. Another of the objectives was to fund the repatriation of the bodies of the Turks who died in Belgium. The heads of families still pay their contributions in order to ensure that the bodies are buried according to the Muslim religion and a collection is made to help the families in mourning – but the risks are currently mutualized on the bases of larger communities, covering several federations of Turkish associations in Europe.

An initial attempt to set up the Turkish cultural association occurred in 1975. The structure of the association had its own leadership. This included a seven-member board (Mosque Committee), made up of a chairman, a deputy chairman, a treasurer, a deputy treasurer, a secretary, a deputy secretary and a spokesman. There were also three substitute members who also controlled expenditure. The board was elected for two years and the ten candidates who obtained the most votes during the general assembly held the aforementioned posts. Only the members could stand as candidates and vote: these were Turkish men, heads of the household, living in Cheratte or nearby. At the start of the 80s, the association would become a non-profit association (ASBL) which gave it an official legal status in the eyes of Belgian Law. It would be called the Mutual Aid Association for Families and the Turkish Community (Association d’Entraide des Familles et de la Communauté turque), commonly known as the “Cheratte Turkish Cultural Asso-

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their specific religious and cultural characteristics. Currently, if the attribution of political rights to Non-EU immigrants comes with a series of limitation, it is planned for the forthcoming coming local elections, certain cultural claims are also on the political agenda and are the subject of federal and local adjustments and subsequent negotiations. However, during recent years, these requests have taken on another level of importance as they are being made by naturalised Muslims or even converts, in other words Belgian citizens.

ciation". In 1982, as the first site in the housing development had become too confined, the association moved to a house located in Rue de Visé, and the building was mainly financed by contributions from the faithful and outside help.

This building houses the cultural centre on the ground floor and a prayer area on the first floor. It is the "Mimar Sinan" mosque and is named after a famous Ottoman architect. The mosque is supported by contributions from the members and also by donations collected on certain occasions in other Belgian mosques and elsewhere, in the same way as the association can come to the help of other ones. This solidarity is partly explained by the relative financial self-sufficiency of the Turkish associations in Europe. More recently, the Turkish community has built an extension to its building, which is used as a multipurpose meeting room. The association was provided with administrative help by the Turkish embassy to help with tasks such as the foundation or purchasing property. This is normal practice in the case of all the immigrant mosques or associations in Europe that have agreed to join a confederation close to the Ankara government. In Belgium, this is the Turkish religious Foundation located in Brussels. It is in charge of coordinating the mosques, the arrival and funding of the imams in Belgium, the mutual insurance company in charge of repatriating the dead, the pilgrimage to Mecca, etc., which are the main reasons that drove a number of immigrants to come together around a collective life.

The creation of the "Mimar Sinan" mosque in the heart of an associative structure meets the pressing need for the Sunni Muslims who have to pray together. It should be noted that in the Liege province, there are thirty or so mosques, most of which are in confined premises that have not been adapted. On religious holidays, for example, some of them are not large enough to hold all the worshippers. The Muslims are then forced to meet in sports halls. Theoretically, the recognition of the Muslim religion means that it could be funded by the State following the example of other recognised religions and in line with the secular philosophy. Even if this funding has so far only been rather limited, Islam is taught in the schools. However, the Imam, the religious leader, is still not paid by the Belgian state (December 2004). There is an agreement that allows the Turkish Republic to send religious leaders to officiate in

the mosques located in Europe and serving the Turkish immigrant population, as in Cheratte<sup>60</sup>.

The Mosque plays a fundamental role<sup>61</sup>. It is the place to meet and pray. The Muslim men have to go there at midday on Friday. The women only go there on religious holidays and during Ramadan. A room is reserved for them. The prayer is lead by the Imam, but, previously, with the help of a loud speaker, he calls the Muslims to prayer. His call rings out three times a day in the Cheratte workers' residential development – in reality, the rule is five calls for the five daily prayers, but the early morning and night calls are left out as the result of an agreement with the neighbours and in order to respect the peace and quiet of the local residents. A decibel level that should not be surpassed has also been set.

On entering the mosque, there is the community room where the men can meet, chat, read outside the prayer times, have a cup of tea, watch a video or use the computer. The association, includ-

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<sup>60</sup> The imam is in charge of calling the faithful to prayer, to lead the prayers, to preach, to teach the readings of the Koran and to coordinate the burial rituals. He lives in an apartment adjoining the mosque.

<sup>61</sup> There are two other mosque-associations in Cheratte. In particular, a place of prayer used by the North African population. The Cheratte Moroccan community has recently got together to build a new mosque in this neighbourhood. The plans were approved by the Town Planning Department at the start of 2004 and the work has started. The "Aya Sofya" mosque, Sainte-Sophie, is situated in Cheratte and only welcomes Turkish families. It is a place of worship that belongs to a different federation to that of the "Mimar Sinan" mosque. This federation, "Milli Görüş" (Confessional Vision), is close to an important Turkish traditionalist religious movement. Between a quarter and a third of the local Turkish population attend this second Turkish mosque in Cheratte, which is also located on the main way through the village. Even though some families may go from one to the other of the mosques, there seem to be little visible collaboration between these two structures, even if the leaders of the two mosques invite each other to the services. The "Aya Sofya" also offer cultural activities to its faithful, such as initiatives aimed at groups of women and young girls, support sessions, etc. This is also a tea room in the compound of this association and occupies commercial premises on the ground floor. This meeting place also allows the mosque to earn income that held to pay for the upkeep of the building. The Visé local authorities has been working with the "Mimar Sinan" mosque for a long time, in the same way that it symbolically supports the Moroccan mosque in Cheratte. However, the formal relations between the local authorities and the "Aya Sofya" mosque are very recent and can only be traced back to the Spring of 2004.

ing the mosque, is, in principle, a place that is open to everyone whether or not they are Muslims, men or women. Managed by the committee of Muslims, it also has other roles: it deals with problems relating to migration (procedures with embassies and consults, the Belgian authorities, etc.). It also acts as the "tenants association" for the Turkish inhabitants in the housing development. Beyond its religious role, the Mosque committee therefore becomes a *de facto* spokesperson for the Cheratte Turkish community, as well as being a place that organises cultural and sports activities for young people.

As can be seen, the mosque-association concept is not comparable to the "pure" religious places which may exist in the homeland. In fact, apart from the religious aspect, the association performs very important socio-cultural functions for the immigrant community. For all these reasons, proximity and confusion are clear among the mosque committee and the other structures that act as a "cultural centre". This collusion first of all exists in the head of the creators of these structures, in other words the immigrants themselves, as they only identify one type of educational and community needs and only one type of possible community responses, where the religious element is predominant. The confusion is maintained in the way that the community refers to this place as the "*camii*", which means "Mosque". In short, the sign on the building only refers to it being the "Mimar Sinan" mosque. This confusion is also to be found among the local resident representative committees and the heads of the autochthonous associations or institutions. It curbs their desire to cooperate with the cultural dimension of this association as it too close to the religious role. Therefore, the organisation of a French course for adults in the Turkish community premises was, for example, deemed to be inappropriate as these premises were not considered to be sufficiently neutral.

When it first began operating, the mosque-association committee was, in fact, co-opted by the members. They were mainly men in their fifties, pious and whose "wisdom" and "attachment" to the religion and the community were well known. It would be clearer later that this choice modelled on the "committees of the wise men" in the Anatolian villages was not the best formula to ensure the role of the community spokesperson in a context that needs the person to know French and Belgian law. As a general rule, these "wise men" are respected in the housing development, but their relative inefficiency was recognised and the "second generation

young people” put it down to their age, their lack of knowledge of the language and the rules of the host country, as well as the fact that their volunteer status did not motivate them to act and to take initiatives. Finally, these people, who had taken early retirement from the mine, spent a large part of their time in Turkey. This meant that they were often absent when the community needed them. Many Cheratte Turks criticised their committee during the 80s and 90s of sitting on the money from the contributions instead of dealing with the urgent matters. The “young” community put that down to the “anxiety about death” of the older people. In fact, if one of them died, there needed to be sufficient money in the mosque’s coffers to repatriate the body to the country. This led to disagreements about paying the member fees. However, a certain social pressure meant that the money was paid: thus, the list of the people who had not paid their annual fee used to be posted in the mosque. According to a local study of 20 households conducted in 1989, sixty per cent of the adult Cheratte Turks strongly approved of the Muslim associations in their towns. Yet 40% of the adults only considered, in 1989, that it had a symbolic role, and that it was not really very effective.

Driven by this assessment, a group of “young people” (around thirty), and not belonging to the group of primo-migrants, sought, from 1989, to replace the “committee of the elders” in managing the associative life in Cheratte. But this proved to be difficult: the feelings of the elders had not to be hurt. In fact, the desired evolution has already been underway for several years. The “reformers” proposed changes in the makeup of the committee and in its policy of action. They wanted to have somewhere to have a “social association” where indoor games can be played (table football, billiards, ping-pong). They also wanted to build meeting rooms in the mosque’s garden and make the “young branch” of the committee (for adolescents and young adults) independent. In short, the “youths” saw the association and the mosque as “a cultural activities and meeting centre”. But some of the “elders” were against the mosque becoming a “café”. The young members also proposed that the power of representation and the financial power of the association be used to solve the problems regarding accommodation, facilities in the district (effective negotiations with the region) and schooling (fighting against school failures, not obtaining the primary school certificate, perfecting the information given to the parents, education in Turkish and the religious education of the children, developing French courses for adults, ...). In short, a

team of the young managers won the trust of three-quarters of the members of the association during the elections and were thus able to take over the mosque-association committee from 1990 onwards. It was an innovation insofar that, for the first time in the history of this structure, a French-speaking person was chosen to be spokesperson (6/10), who had studied in Belgium. Even though they had lost their factual power, the Cheratte elders continued to have a symbolic power (the deputy chairman continued to be an elder). Moreover, are not the “youths” the children of the “elders”? The aim was to innovate in the sense of a better service to integrate the population while ensuring that the internal cohesion of the community was preserved. The mosque-association committee, in which new blood was again injected during the 2004 internal election, continues to want to honour the elderly as the pioneers of immigration by means of organising events that stress their experience.

Certain effects of this team change were quickly seen. Since 1991, Turkish parent committees were set up in the Cheratte primary school and the parents become involved in the education of their children: funds were raised to buy new books in Turkish and religious books. A new imam increased the number of pupils in the Koran reading courses. But, the parents were also represented on numerous occasions, at the Cheratte local school, at the homework support group and at the adventure playground. With respect to the activities organised within those structures, this involvement of the community would experience highs and lows, but it would always remain even if the specific initiatives, such as the parents committee, would finally disappear. A “Turkish Cultural Club” (bringing together a dozen young people under 30 years old) was set up. This “Club” was allocated some premises by the Visé Local Authorities where a series of changes were made by the young people themselves. A coffee shop (tea, coffee), games, a video and a small library were set up. These young people spent a year trying to find the ways to organise a French course in their club without success. Many adolescents spent time at the club. Several cleaning operations of the areas around the Darse were organised by this club. Several years later, the premises would become a community centre organising youth activities under the aegis of the Social Aid Public Centre.

A transaction process with the local authorities was then put in motion. The demands related to safety on the public highway (speed bumps, protection against the railway and the branch of the

Meuse), the environment (felling trees, noise barriers along the motorway,) and the leisure infrastructure (a football pitch for the young people and a children's playground in the centre of the housing development). Initially by mail and informal meetings, the negotiations continued with the help of a legal adviser who the Committee organised before there was a school boycott in September 1990. Asserting their desire to be recognised, this conflict coincided with a games unit being installed in the district. Different work, depending on different departments, such as the speed bumps, the noise barriers and the felling of trees, etc., were also carried out from 1991 onwards. These various events mark the start of a collaboration process between the local authorities and an organisation set up by the immigrants. From 1991, the "Mimar Sinan"/Turkish cultural association would thus be invited as a member of an educational and social actions local partnership. Besides, various members of this association would develop specific partnerships with local political parties. The "Islamic-Christian Friendship" Association would also emerge with the help of the Turkish mosques that bring together the residents of the Basse-Meuse region in debates about beliefs and philosophies<sup>62</sup>.

However, these developments, which have a strong influence on both the professionalization or the systematisation of the associative life of the immigrants and their gradual integration in the environment where they have settled, have not been easy for the young volunteer leaders of the association to bring about, as they often are organising the initiatives on top of their work and family life. These difficulties are also clear in the case of Cheratte, as nearly the whole team of the leaders of the association is changed

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<sup>62</sup> It can also be seen that the members of the mosque-association have always been very active in various federations that bring together the Turkish popular initiatives in Belgium. Several leaders of this structure have played leading roles in the Turkish Association Federations, since the start of the 90s. According to the heads of the Cheratte Turkish associations, they are involved in larger federation in order to develop an inter-knowledge between Turks from different entities; implement cultural activities in several entities (computer courses, art activities...); develop partnerships with the local authorities of the entities in question; organise the solidarity between the members, put forward proposals regarding the needs of the young people (orientating them towards higher studies and help them to find a job, etc.); organise solidarity with the homeland or other companies, reinforce the philosophical or religious meetings.

every two years, as most of the elders are exhausted by the initiatives taken. Besides, the collaboration between the Turkish association and the Visé authorities is not obvious. It is difficult for the public service personnel to envisage a spontaneous and smooth collaboration with the changing members of specific communities that are moreover also religious groups. The funding of the activities directly organised by the Turkish groups is in fact totally relative compared to the support generated by the very initiatives of the local district and of its authorities. Furthermore, the Turkish volunteer leaders do not have either the professional culture, or the training or the availability of salaried agents. The emergence of multi-cultural associations, bringing together people of every origin, is therefore an alternative that nevertheless does not meet all the sensibilities existing in the territory. Another study carried out without the Cheratte Turkish associations investigated the possibility of setting up a new "intercultural" association that would be totally independent of the mosque and the organisation of the religion. Even if it set up by the Turkish population, it will be open to the entire town's residents and the aim will be to break the suspicion generated by the confusion between the management of the religious and cultural aspects.

The analysis allowed the communication and management difficulties linked to religion in general to be highlighted. That is why it was decided in 2004 to set up an "inter-religion and inter-philosophical platform". On the one hand, the goal is to gather the opinions, the good will and the comments of the professionals involved regarding the ties between religions, spiritualities and insertion of the young people: *What can the churches, mosques and associations, together with religious and moral teachers, contribute to the dissemination of social values and standards among young people? On the other hand, it also involves assessing why these association and religious entities are or are not working with the public institutions in charge of the education and activities for young people? How to make the partnership between the churches, mosques and other associations, on the one hand, and the professional services to welcome, educate and insert the services, on the other hand, more positive and above all more efficient? What are the problems that arise at this level?* Of course, there was also the question of the relations between these various philosophical and religious structures themselves, together with the coordination between the various secular moral and religious teachers. A desire to produce an orchestration module for the moral and religious teachers as a way of fighting against xenophobia emerged from this movement. In particular, the families and their associations

will be more involved in the initiatives of the schools. It will also involve closing the gap between the world of training and of insertion, reserved for professionals, and the world of religions and convictions, reserved for families, to show that they all share a certain number of common values with which a social cohesion can be built. Eventually, this collective orchestration commission may become, if that is what the participants want, a committee to reflect and comment on the faiths and the philosophies inside religion. Religion, in general, and Islam, in particular, will therefore be able, through this intermediary structure, to better plan their relations with the public services and institutions.

### **3. Socio-political interactions between immigrant populations and local institutions**

*How to work for the social integration of an immigrant community such as the Cheratte Muslim and Turkish community without thinking about the setting up of a democratic management of differences? Forgetting this political dimension is to ignore that the host society-immigrants, autochthonous-immigrants, immigrants-homeland relations and the relations between these relations are power relations in the intercultural conflicts with an uncertain outcome. In other words, can the “integration of the other” be achieved with him or, worse, despite him? These are the major methodological, political and ethical problems that arise from the interactions between the Visé political and socio-educational agents and the immigrant community in Cheratte. These interactions take place at different levels:*

- First, in the field and during the practical socio-pedagogical activities. The community is then involved according to various modalities in function of the institutional schemes, characteristics of the social workers, the proposed activities and the specific audience affected.

- Then, interactions are observed at the level of the coordination between institutions and associations in the field.

- Finally, a third level is that of the political decision. It can currently be seen that people from the Muslim and Turkish immigrant minority are beginning to get involved.

During their interactions, the religious or associative institutions of the Turkish community are presented to the authorities of the host society with a desire to participate and be recognised. It

will also be noted that if each sees the intercultural contact also through their indirect or direct personal experience, more or less in line with the fabric of their life in all its interactions mentioned regarding the groups of individuals. The importance of the inter-individual dimension must not be undervalued, above all in entities such as Visé where “*where everyone knows each other*”... In a similar context, if the local political leaders, the heads of the local governments and institutions decide to sound out the point of view or cooperate with the immigrant populations – a democratic attitude which has not always been current in the history of immigration in the Belgian regions -, two major governance choices are possible in view of the variety of interactions listed:

- either, the autochthonous institutions ignore the spontaneous structuring of the immigrant group and decide to cooperate with the “representatives” of their choice which, in their eyes, appear “more positive”. The risk is then to loose contact with the base of the immigrant population and to marginalise these individuals selected within the foreign origin community

- or, the autochthonous institutions decide to cooperate with this (these) spontaneous structuring(s) that have the advantage of being “representative”, at least provisionally and in certain areas. The danger is then to set in motion an official recognition process of certain organisations which, in the last analysis, can have an exclusive community role, preventing the minority or marginal members from expressing themselves within the immigrant group.

In the absence of an ideal solution, it is one or another of the two alternatives that were found in Cheratte due to of a large number of factors and in various proportions.

One of the origins of the intercommunity exchanges and the social coordination involving the Cheratte Turkish population can be traced back to the opening, in 1983, of the new Cheratte middle school and its multi-purpose sports hall. The construction of this infrastructure is without doubt a pivotal date in the relations with the Turkish community, as the ties but also the frictions were felt around and from the building. The new public school was threatened on several occasions by the Turkish population: there was first a flow of a group of 50 Turkish pupils towards the local Catholic school in 1986 which, contrary to the legislation at the time, organised Islamic religion courses. Specific mention should be made of the boycott of the local school in 1990. The new school building and other older premises in Cheratte were continually the

target of vandals and thefts. From the media impact in the press, these extreme situations perfectly show the lack of communication and understanding between the population and the services (lack of mediation, triangulation and information), with the (immigrant) population often preferring direct contact with its mayor (in fact, 40% of the visitors of the mayor's social department are Turks). But this is not taken into account in many of the cases (use of the private land, building a bridge over the railway, etc.). He is required to act as arbitrator with respect to the some contradictory expectations of the various residents groups. In certain types of cases, the population has also rarely felt as if it has obtained satisfaction, even if, from their point of view, the local council and its various partners are working harder on integrating the population with Turkish roots: help with the duties, district coordination, literacy and French classes, etc.

A better example of long-term social coordination developed at Cheratte, the *Cheratte/Visé Coordination Committee (CCCV)* is a place for discussion where contacts can be made between the various partners committed to the social action and to meet the demands of the population. It involves coordinating the social-education services offered to the population in order to develop an intercultural dynamics that encourages the integration of the immigrant families. The experience thus accumulated in Cheratte is supposed to affect the whole of the region. It also involves coordinating the search for new means for common initiatives. The CCCV was also one of the first entities to witness the official participation of representatives of the Turkish community and later the participation of other associations of residents from different roots<sup>63</sup>. The goal of

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<sup>63</sup> This committee was set up in 1989, under the aegis of the International Health and Guidance Association. It was initially made up by professional field agents: Vottem Family Education and Training Centre, Visé Mental Health Department, Visé Life Framework, Social Services and Training Regional Centre (Echevinats), Visé Social Welfare Public Centre, branch of the National Childhood Office at Cheratte, Visé Royal Branch, General Pedagogy Department of the University of Liege, together with coordinators and teachers from Cheratte. A representative of the Cheratte Turkish community then joined this assembly, at the request of the local authorities, as well as sporadically, various local departments and institutions, such as the Police. The actions coordinated by the CCCV at the start of the 90s were focused on literacy (French courses for adults), homework classes (after school help with primary and secondary schooling), nursery schools, holiday and leisure camps, etc. The thoughts of this committee were sent to the field by two consultations with the people involved, on the one

this permanent committee is to ensure the cooperation between the partners, but also to manage the conflicts during the crisis situations. The themes tackled during the dozen or so years that it has been operating are mainly linked to the integration of the Cheratte Turkish population. The participation, since 1991, of the representatives of the Turkish community on this committee, whose roles are to question the decision makers and to inform that about the realities and expectations of the immigrants and their groupings, was one of the first displays of the political desire to recognise and support an association set up by the Turkish residents. A community development dynamics can then be initiated, even it is dependent on the participation of the representatives of the Turkish communities that change every two years. Furthermore, it is not easy to ensure that women or second-generation immigrations are included in these changes.

The problem of “the integration” is thus implicit in nearly all the Committee debates, as the global and positive goal of all the coordinated efforts. This matter is particularly dealt with by means of the concerns raised by certain participants. Thus, the leaders stress the “impervious” nature of the miners’ housing development at Cheratte, where the majority of the residents are from the Turkish community. At various moments of Cheratte’s history, tension has therefore arisen between certain elements of the Turkish community and the Belgian administrative, education or political representatives. These frictions reveal the reciprocal expectations and concerns of each of them. They illustrate the need for the intercultural and inter-religious aspects to be linked to politics in the general sense of the term. The end of the 90s would thus be the scenario of a series of changes in the configuration of the local partnership under the effect of various institutional factors. In 1998, the Visé partners began a methodological support experiment under the supervision of the IRFAM which included the partnership during four years. This would be the start of the “*Cheratte Integrated Project*” (*PIC*), whose goal would be to develop new strategies to encourage intercultural and inter-institutional communication. The idea would also be for the local population to be more and better involved in the projects affecting them. In fact, the limits of collaboration with one single immigrant association would be noted. Moreover, the difficulties of a partnership le-

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hand, by activities in the different homework schools and, on the other hand, by offering professional and social insertion/French classes.

tween the volunteers from a residents association and the social action professionals would be assessed. In fact, objections were identified between the institutions and the immigrant groupings according to the *secularism/religious inclination* axis, but also according to the *cultural universality/ethnic uniqueness* axis. Other tensions were also mentioned by the players both between certain associations and certain public services, and between various public services themselves:

- No organisation alone can tackle a social integration goal. It is essential to design a coherent and collective project capable of bringing together all the public and private good will.

- The population that is Belgian born and bred is concerned about this project. We have to make sure that they are not excluded. The population that was not born in Belgium is also concerned about the project. However, we have to make sure that they are not stigmatised.

- Beyond their specific characteristics, the immigrant populations experience the same frailties as other populations, even if this group often lives them more intensely. However, if their specific characteristics are not taken into account, the feeling of frustration may generate violence among these populations. The policy therefore needs to intervene in order to satisfy their need for recognition.

One of the recent situations that have thus arose from the tension between the Turkish population and local institutions regards the naming of a road in Cheratte after *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*, the founder of the Turkish Republic. The Cheratte Turkish population saw this gesture, a first in Europe, as a recognition and honour. However, at the request of the non-Turkish residents, the local authorities were tempted to rename the road, which led to a state of tension among of the Turkish community. The solution found was to name the main square of the housing development as "Place Atatürk" and to change the road back to its original name. However, the granting (a ceremony had been organised for the naming ceremony with the presence of Turkish officials), followed by the withdrawal or the transformation of this act of recognition upset the local Turkish population: nobody could understand the attitude of the local authorities and people began to think that any past agreement could be questioned at any moment. Furthermore, the important figure of Atatürk, the secular leader, generally worshipped in Turkey nearly 70 years after his death, is being ques-

tioned. In fact, a minority of Turkish public opinion, in particular in the migratory context, is increasingly developing a critical reading of the Kemalist political heritage where it is believed that he imposed secularism in an authoritarian way on a population that was largely and deeply Muslim. The place of a Kemalist symbol in the heart of a district inhabited by people of Turkish origin and Muslims is in itself a fact that is worth debating. We would be wrong to think that everybody of Turkish origin approved of this. Some people were therefore against the reminder of the authoritarian secularism of the Turkish Republic in the place where they were living as immigrants. Other still regret this naming as they fear that the stigmatisation that they suffer in Belgian society as immigrants is accentuated: *"I already have a Turkish name and my address will be Avenue Atatürk! Who will employ me?"*

It should be noted that this type of symbolic initiative is of great importance in the eyes of the local populations. It comes within marking territory and the desire for cultural promotion. It is also not astonishing that similar attempts lead to rejection by part of certain residents who are not part of the communities so honoured. The point of view of the Visé mayor, one of the driving forces behind the naming of the road, is totally different: he wishes to promote each immigrant community with a road name honouring the important figures representing each homeland. In the case of Atatürk, he willingly accepted the proposal coming from several people from the Turkish cultural association. According to the mayor, the modern and secular figure of Kemal Atatürk was also a reason to highlight the "western" dimension of the Turkish identity. Starting from the good will on either side, the symbolic gesture is complicated and needed to be rethought. This tension would have been able to be avoided by better information from the residents before the decision was taken. A consultation of the people could have been carried out either by their associations or by the local authorities. A good occasion to discuss secularism and the place of religious beliefs in society, as well as the socio-cultural identity of the immigrant populations was therefore missed.

This *"Religions and Social Cohesion"* project (2001-2004) represented a new period of cooperation between local communities and the municipal authorities. The observations and field work carried out has thus highlighted a certain number of specific problems experienced by Cheratte Muslim community:

- At an *individual* level, the grievances could be seen of certain members of the Cheratte Muslim Turkish community, who had experienced rejection and scorn from the representatives of the public institutions. For example, there were comments about the number of children in a family asking for council housing or discourteous remarks about the habit of intra-family marriages that can currently be found in the Turkish communities. Some comments also revealed that the Belgian socio-educational agents sometimes have inappropriate expectations with respect to the immigrant families and children that never occur with respect to Belgian families who do not have to “*prove their degree of integration*”... Humiliations have also been experienced with, for example, the proceedings brought by a woman against the town that forbid her, despite a permissive administrative regulation, to wear a headscarf in the photo on her identity card.

- At a *philosophical* level, it can be seen that in Belgium, the struggle by the public institutions to be secularised is still very important on the one hand for certain political groups and on the other hand, for the social agents (teachers, educators, social workers) put in place by the public authorities. One of the values of this struggle is to tolerate the religious and spirituality at an individual level by insisting on the private nature of the commitment of each person. Religion that is too visible or too practiced is devalued.

- At an institutional level, a reaction of mistrust and suspicion could also be seen with respect to the religious representatives in general. When it comes down to Islam, this feeling has obviously been strongly rekindled and for numerous reasons, which include the current world context and the impact of the media that result in a frequent association between Islam and terrorism.

- At the *religious* level, even though positive negotiations have allowed certain problems to be resolved, such as the call to prayer or the picking up of the carcasses during the Sheep Festivity, target discriminations have been identified. This situation is part of a more global context where the recognition of Islam is not entirely regulated at a national level.

Part of the difficulties listed can be traced back to the perceptions that the various political and socio-education agents have of the immigrant Muslim spokespersons in Cheratte. This mental perception is in line with the general perception of Islam in the world. We can be influenced by our media environment and our imagination. The religious, linguistic and ethnic mono-culturality

followed by the Turkish community as a whole stands in the way in this case of the secular mono-culturality sought by most of the political and social action agents in the host country. This is the most important aggravating factor in the production of ghosts that is detrimental to the mutual integration of the autochthonous and immigrant groups. Numerous socio-educational actions are imagined with ingenuity and generosity by numerous agents both at Visé-Cheratte and elsewhere in the country. Yet a true meeting has only rarely taken place between the expectations of the institutions organising these actions and the immigrant communities designed as target. A whole community is rarely targeted and the devised actions are mainly limited and by sectors. They target certain audiences deemed to be interesting for the integration and the evolution of the immigrant communities (women, young people, ...) by avoiding others considered to a problem (adult men, representatives of the self-organisation of the immigrant communities). Possible failures then reinforce the frustrations and stereotypes on either side, by contributing to a deadlock situation occurring. Therefore, despite an impressive quantity of good will put in during decades, the actions in Cheratte have not succeeded to produce a feeling of satisfaction and effectiveness shared by all.

This picture is complicated by the presence of a multitude of integration agents in the Belgian institutional scene. The structure and institutions are sometimes in competition with each other for the survival of the actions that they have initiated. In Belgium, this competitive situation is accentuated by the presence of public and catholic private networks (schools, activities, social services, etc.). The effects of this competition are harmful to the target audiences. It contributes to a weakening of means and information by reinforcing the ghost of the "threatening other". The situation is aggravated in situations where there is a growing shortage of public resources for social action. The analysis of these observations has allowed different factors to be released, which can be used to positively transform the situation and therefore define the action goals:

- With respect to the factors linked to the functioning of *the Belgian institutions*, it should be noted from the outset that the Federal State has not been capable of regulating the full integration of Islam, even though this religion has been officially recognised after 1974. This situation generates and legitimises the discriminations at other levels, mainly within the local authorities. At a local level, specifically, the cooptation processes results in a democratic perception in the strategic decision bodies, such as the coordination

committees, for example, not being respected. Furthermore, most of the French-speaking Belgian public institutions are characterised by a militant secular identity. They are instrumentalised by local political forces which have vote-catching relationships with the members of the immigrant community. If the local authorities can be considered as being close to the citizens, the other powers, such as the French Community, the Walloon Region and, a fortiori, the Federal State, are seen as being very distant. Therefore, this leads to problems of understanding, representation and applications for the neophytes of the Belgian institutional system who are, in general, the immigrant communities, without being the only possible victims of this obstacle. Furthermore, the application procedures to obtain the subsidies are complicated and need writing skills that are generally not held by people from foreign roots.

- The factors linked to the *running of the local Muslim religious institutions* are also numerous. The weakness of the visible and formal partnerships between the three mosques can be noted. Furthermore, due to the lack of notably linguistic skills and due to the lack of social insertion, but also due to the lack of resources, time and quite simply motivation, the Muslim community leaders do not develop the communication and partnership with the important institutions of their environment, such as the schools, social services, intercultural associations, etc. They seem to stay in the background and only wish to give priority to the marginal networks or networks of the people of the same origin.

- The *representatives of the host society* are also sceptical with respect to possible partnerships with immigrant associations. The analyses highlight the fears and the mistrust regarding religions, in general, and Islam, in particular. They are always largely seen to be under-informed about the realities of Islam (Belgian) and the anti-discriminatory laws and directives, the legislation regarding the freedom to worship, the personal experiences of the discriminations suffered, the needs and demands of the various communities, the useful role of religion in the psychological integration of immigrants and second-generation immigrants. It is true that this information has to first of all be produced so that they can use it. Furthermore, the skills of certain social contributors seem to be relatively limited in terms of mediation, conflict management, needs analysis in a diversity perspective (gender, age, religion, ...), setting up exchange speaking/listening places and structures that bring together the various points of view, coherence between the political discourse, budgetary decisions and social actions, integra-

tion policies of the diversity in the public institutions (school, health, social services, leisure, ...).

- With respect to the factors linked to the *representatives of the Cheratte Muslim Turkish community*, in the training and perpetuation of the discriminations, the mistrust and fear that these persons feels about the host country institutions will be able to be seen on a social-emotional level. These feelings push them towards a type of isolation or lack of social participation. The representatives of the community, moreover, have little knowledge about law and regulations, as well the administrative procedures of the Belgian institutions. They have a difficult relationship with the administrative writing and language. In short, they are proof of a weak capacity to manage the diverse aspects inside their own community (women, young people, competition between families), to find good solutions, to prepare, implement projects, to organise themselves, to deal with external and internal conflicts, distinguish between what comes from the collection action and what is from the more private or family domain, to communicate a positive image of themselves, of their group, of their community, their religion, their history, their values and their culture.

As part of the “Faiths and Social Cohesion” project, the action on which the greatest time and energy has been spent is undoubtedly the memory work. This investment is linked to a hypothesis according to which, the transmission of the history and knowledge helps to change the life skills. In fact, the transmission of this memory to the key players of the local authorities may allow them to draw up a balance sheet, to appreciate the presence, the contributions and the difficulties of the immigrant communities. On the other hand, a memory work allows these groups to appropriate and understand the past and also to legitimise the Muslim presence in Europe in their eyes. This awareness contains a real possibility of internal mobilisation. Thus, the youngest elements of the immigrant community, for example, which were particularly approached during the meetings to validate and disseminate the results, develop a new awareness of the efforts of their elders to adapt to Belgium. This action is part of the desire of the leaders of the local associations to see the young people become more aware of the history of their community and to recognise/respect the efforts of their elders. The whole community thus develops a better understanding of the wealth and difficulties of the collaboration with the Belgian private and public structures. At the very least, a debate has been started on the legitimacy and difficulties of an

association with religious roots, run by an immigrant community, at a time that coincides with the anniversary of the fortieth anniversary of the presence of the Turkish workers in Belgium.

The support role pursued by the administrative and political leaders is a second aspect of the “Faiths and Social Cohesion project”. However, without an explicit approach to training and working on their attitudes, it is difficult to change the people, even if the usefulness of this support might have been highlighted by an inverse effect: when the IRFAM agents were no longer on the PIC project management committee, a phenomena of space could be seen which is expressed by a substantial reduction of the budget directly or indirectly granted to the mosque-association. Ongoing support therefore seems to be necessary in the current context to ensure that there is no decrease in relation to the gains. It can be acknowledged that the support in question does not necessarily come from isolated and external agents. The intervention process of this project has therefore envisaged establishing new local spokespersons and launching new alliances in order to further anchor the community associations in the management of the state. Thus, the support of the representatives of the Muslim community leads to sometimes quick and sometimes extremely slow reactions, provoking contradictory feelings among the spokespersons. However, among the results obtained, the following can be identified: improving the image of the mosque (opening the doors and shutters which seems to have been positively noted by certain people in the district); improving the management of the association (separating the religious and cultural aspects of the associations), rejuvenating the leaders, etc.

Another of the solutions envisaged by the IRFAM team to allow sustained support by the agents in the anti-discriminatory surveillance would likewise be to set up an advisory, observation and action entity, whose embryo could be the working committee on philosophical and religious teaching that is already organised by the Visé teachers. Eventually, by opening up to other agents of the local authorities, this working committee may be transformed into an arbitration commission, a sort of anti-discrimination watchdog that could be consulted and which would meet regularly. But even there, a pilot project only can give an impetus: the outcome of the initiative is up to the local agents, to those who wish to bear the problems and to the balance relationships that they are able to forge.

In this new dynamics, another strategy would still be to bank on the elected Turkish, or more widely the Muslim, representatives who are part of the privileged contacts of the approach. At various levels, there are already several of them and with the forthcoming local elections (2006), they will only increase in number according to the demographic importance of the Belgian population of foreign origin. The effectiveness of their action will depend on their ability to grant the demands of the other members of their religion in line with their elected roles. Their capacity to bring together various Muslim populations, or better, the connections that they will be in a position to create between the demands for cultural recognition, on the one hand, and the socio-professional insertion demands from various groups excluded from the job market, on the other hand, will certainly contribute to defining their importance in politics. Even more so, the listening to and defence of the minorities is not only a democratic issue, but also a simple political issue for a large number of Belgian politicians with respect to an electorate that barely changes. The emergence in this fixed arena of a new contingent of around 10% of "new Belgian" voters is good reasons to whet the appetites.

In fact, the support of the social agents, such as educators, social workers and teachers, provides very variable results according to the people. These agents are also seeking a valorisation and the opportunity of better recognition of their action in the eyes of the target audiences. Above all, it involves calming the fears and costs of certain players and to provide them with the keys to "win-win" solutions. If it is possible to progressively work on the knowledge and on some opening attitudes, it however seems to be difficult with only a support strategy of setting up professional skills. These observations underline the need to use flexible, informal and discrete support strategies, based on individual contacts, in favour of the minority group, all the more so when the development is at a local level where it seems that the judicialization and the media coverage have counterproductive effects.

#### **4. Summary and analysis of the observations**

The town of Visé, its public social welfare centre and the region's notable forces of socio-cultural action are linked since 1984 as part of an evolving and active partnership aimed at constructing social cohesion. This coordinated social-educational work has first of all affected school help and literacy in order to lead to an activi-

ties policy for young people (youth groups and houses, sports activities) and including the development of extracurricular actions (trips, inter-cultural exhibitions, adventure playground, etc.). The current goal of the Cheratte/Visé partners is to consolidate and develop all their actions and, in particular, the social participation and activities work for different audiences. It should be noted that, in this set of interactions, the introduction of the Muslim difference in the day-to-day life of the town is one of the important areas of “*friction*” between the original or second-generation immigrants and the administrative or political leaders, together with the non-Muslim local residents.

A progressive and negotiated project, the intervention model developed in Cheratte has been “pragmatically” constructed, based on the local facts and the professional practices, with each of the partners in question, even if the often alarming influence of international current affairs has not been non-existent. Such research-action methodology imposes a necessarily “inter-cultural” point of views, which involves articulating professional cultures from the different specialists present (teachers, activities monitors, nurses, social workers, elected representatives), or to play – sometimes in a crisis situation – the mediators between the services and their audience, fundamentally the Muslims from an immigrant background.

The successive Cheratte and Visé activities do not bring together people on the sole basis of their hierarchical status, as is the case with respect to bureaucratic cooperation. The presence of “interface-people” close to the real living conditions of the population in question sometimes allows information and means of action direct to the heart of the community. It is also essential to consider the degree of autonomy and expression that such representative committees guarantee to the families and to the collective in the management of their existence. The question of the democratic rights of the people and communities therefore is raised together with the pressing need of a direct consultation of these people as part of the representatives committees that surround their lives.

In 1997, the IRFAM played the role of coordinator-facilitator within this local representative committee. Budgets coming from the regional authorities were then freed for integration actions. The IRFAM played an arbitration role by allowing the representatives of immigrant community to become part of the decision taking body and also to finance the activities that they deemed to be im-

portant (French course in the premises located in Cheratte, a five-a-side football club, folk dance group, etc.). The fundamental issue could be made out regarding *the legitimacy of certain players to supervise young people from the point of view of integrating immigrants or global social cohesion*. The nature of the models and values to be transmitted, the capitalisation of the social action from a public or private institution are questions that are important in the eyes of the Visé-Cheratte partners.

One of the recurrent methodological difficulties in social work is being able to realistically assess the effects of long-term actions. The assessment work that does not take into account the evolution in time of the target communities as a result of the actions implemented often have limited or biased visions of the psychosociology of these groups, visions affecting the feelings of failure. The monochromatic reading of the situations linked to the insertion and integration of the immigrant populations focuses on the admissions of failures of the so-called integration policies. The absence of an assessment policy thus highlights the ghost of the Other: to extend the analysis to the intimate view of the immigrant groups would result in notably different results showing how, in his way, the immigrant benefits from the social action undertaken and in turn constructs his own "integration" on the basis of his own intentions. Is not one of the largest indicators of this "integration" seeing how the transplanted population takes its new space? The setting up by the immigrant community of a social structure, meeting places such as businesses and mosques and the access to ownership are tangible signs of this appropriation. The occupancy of the space can also be seen from the setting: a sound setting, first of all, for that Muslim community who are called to prayer several times a day, but also a visual setting, an appropriation written on the walls, on the road signs translated into Turkish... The identification of the territory is notably the work of the youngest members of the community as can be seen from the graffiti on the walls of the garages: "*Cheratte boys*". Appreciating the way in which an immigrant population invests in its new territory and allow investments to be made by new realities with which it is crammed is undeniably an indicator of greater psychological integration and, consequently, one of the important places in the construction of the social cohesion between different populations, beyond their cultural diversities.

Thus, a numerous immigrant population who is developing the project to remain as a community may take unexpected ways of

integration and appropriation of its new cultural and socio-geographic space. It is impertinent to expect them to necessarily take the exact insertion routes as those that the previous immigrant populations did, in the same way that it would be an illusion to believe that it will be assimilated in exactly the way as the autochthonous population would wish, even more so as the socio-economic theatre of this integration changes from period to period and provides a backdrop that is sometimes favourable and sometimes produces exclusions. This doubly inappropriate expectation is the source of frustration among certain of the people from Cheratte and Visé, Belgians “born and bred” or children of European immigrants, social contributors, decision-takers or just local citizens. As proof of the gap between the socio-cultural paths of the Polish, Italian or Greek immigrants, for example, on the one hand, and the Turkish immigrants, on the other hand, it is normally to hear some of them complain that *“The Turks do not want to integrate”*.

Is then not necessary to question the concept of integration that they develop? It is in fact difficult for the social players to understand and/or accept as legitimate the needs for intimacy and homogeneity of the immigrant group without their feeling excluded. *“Being among your own, in family...”* is however an expectation in every group and precisely contributes to constructing the identity of this group. The fear of the homogeneity of the “Other” group often has the equal of the ignored homogeneity of the group itself. Furthermore, the compensation process or the identifying balance is only rarely understood by the players in contact with immigration. The identifying compensation allows the individual a differentiated management of his identity fragments or his multiple belongings. Everything happens as if what is externally identified as an “identifying withdrawal” in such a subject cleared (or made negotiable) that can be felt as a voluntary cultural assimilation in such another area: *“Yes, I am religious and that is why I am open to people from anywhere... I do not know how to hop, I have to find myself again and at the same time go towards the others...”*.

The divisions and sometimes the dissensions within the immigrant groups, for example, the various ways of experiencing Islam (the Islam of the Turks and the Islam of the Moroccans, the Islam of the “Mimar Sinan” mosque, the Islam of the “Aya Sofya” mosque, the Islam of men, the Islam of women, etc) are not always understood and offend, in some cases, the outside observers: *“Why do we have three mosques in a such a small town like Visé?”*. However,

it should be noted that the perceptible homogeneity in certain immigrant groups authorises in a way the interiorised heterogeneity of each of the members of these groups, at the price of an apparent identity ambiguity. That is still a new source of possible lack of understanding between the immigrants and certain social players. In short, the valorisation of the difference of the other and his sincere welcome seem to be one of the first conditions for integration. It should be remembered that the cultural minorities from working class immigration expect such an important recognition that legitimises their final settlement in the host country. It so happens that the cultural immigrant groups, in particular the religious associations, try to present their culture, faith and religion to the other inhabitants and invite them to share their festivities, meals and communions. This impetus, which is sometimes badly understood, can lead to rejection reactions such as considering the reading the Koran at the opening of a meeting to be a fundamentalist act or being upset by the use of the native language as well as French, etc. The diversity of the other certainly meets another reception than: *"We are in Belgium!"*

Connective and thematic spaces need to be designed that will allow the populations to "rub" together and to support and appreciate each other. Another important act of recognition that has so far barely been used to Cheratte will undoubtedly be the opening of a Muslim cemetery in cooperation with all the members of the population in order to allow families that have clearly lived the majority of their lives in Belgium to bury their dead there with dignity. However, in fact, can the immigrant possibly fully identify with a land if he does not have the possibility of being buried there? In turn, the foreign population and, in particular, the associations or the mosques have to continue to work towards being more open to young people and women, as well as all the population and institutions of the town, in the framework of collective and various activities. In certain cases, these initiatives could show everyone the usefulness of religious morality or, at the very least, of a community link (*religare*) compared to current social goals such as guaranteeing the safety and serenity of everyone, ensuring that the elderly have their place in society, offering young people positive behaviour models and values, showing solidarity with the poor and with the less development parts of the world, etc.

However, religion is undoubtedly not an easy way to make contact in a secular world, in particular when it involves Islam. Therefore, the spontaneously constructed alliances between believ-

ers of different religions in Cheratte-Visé offer a series of interesting regular activities, but do not rally a central part of the population. With respect to the strategy of the Turkish cultural federation to form an association with other Turkish structures, it no longer is serving the goal of social cohesion within the town, even if these internal collaborations in the Turkish community allow local associations to reassert themselves. Paradoxically, the setting up of unions between Turkish immigrant associations is mainly aimed at developing the more effective collaborations in the long terms with local authorities of the entities in question. However, the more competent the leaders of the Turkish associations show themselves to be in their work to mobilise the community, the more they upset the Belgian counterparts as they are strengthening the homogeneity of the Turkish community. In this process, the social players feel unrecognised in their professional work to open up the situation and intercultural project. On the other hand, the heads of the working class immigrant associations lack the institutional and linguistic tools to enter into a relationship on the same footing with the Belgian social structures, such as administrations, foundations. They are therefore often inadequate for this type of interactions. *The nodal problem that is now raised then shows the lack of a suitable communication channel that could reassure each of the parties present and allow the vicious circle: the consolidation during the period of the project for a local mediation and community intervention structures – Actions en Milieu Ouvert « Reliance » - with notably the presence of young professional staff from various cultures is therefore one of the lasting outcomes of the “Faiths and Social Cohesion” local action.*

*For further information see Ch. Parthoens & A. Manço (2005), De Zola à Atatürk : un «village musulman» en Wallonie. Cheratte-Visé, Paris : L'Harmattan, coll. « Compétences interculturelles ».*