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Migrant Muslims: Moroccans in Utrecht by Sjef Theunis

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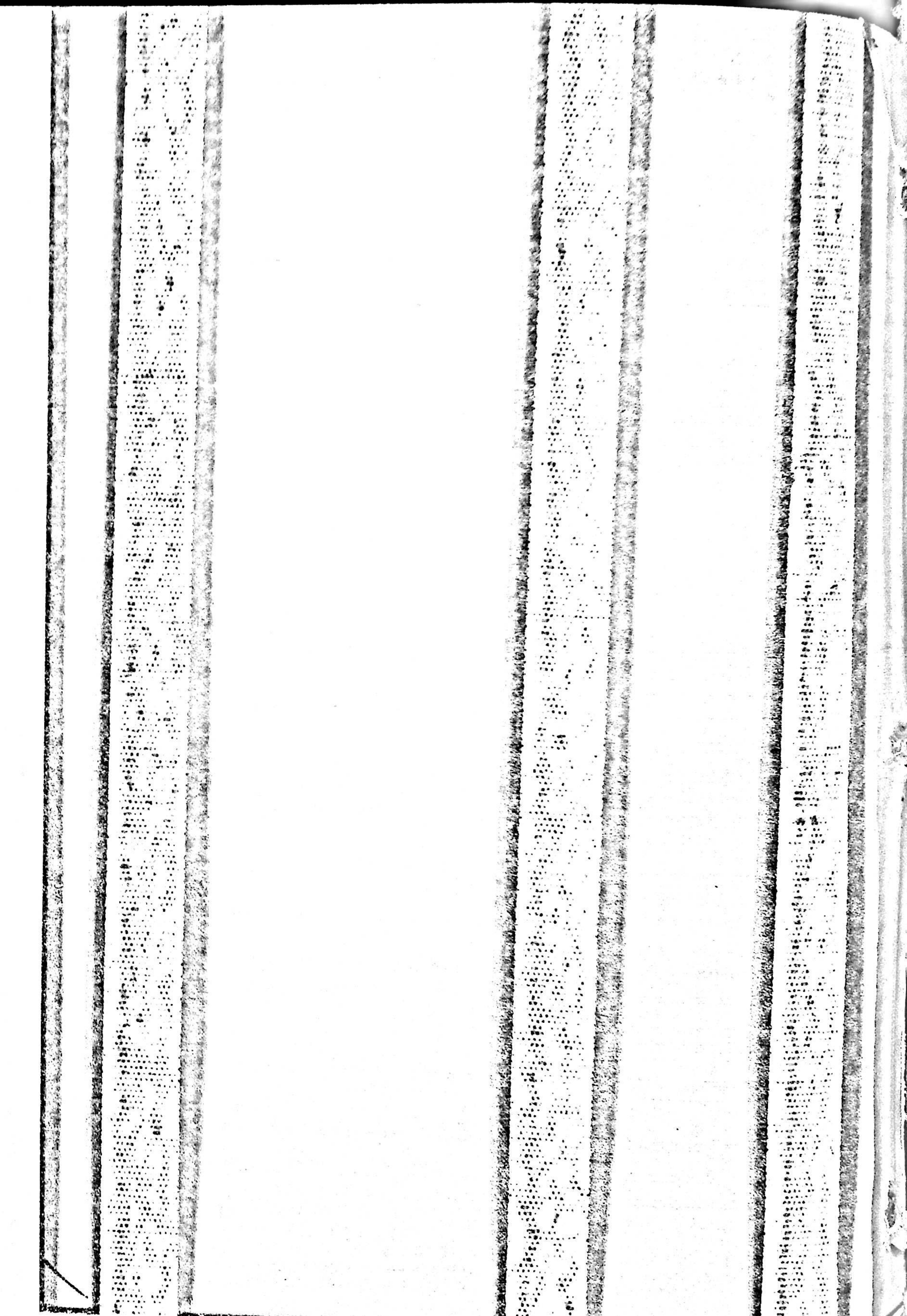
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INTRODUCTION

In the Netherlands, Islam has now become the second most important religion. This is a consequence of the extensive migration of Mediterranean and Surinam Muslims to the Netherlands, and has contributed another religious element into a land traditionally split along religious lines. This immigration, largely from the Mediterranean in the sixties, and from Surinam (a former Dutch colony in South America) in the seventies now appears as if it is to consolidate itself in the 1980's. In spite of the numbers involved, the presence of so many Muslims in the Netherlands, whose history has always been dominated by religious factors and factions, went for a long time unnoticed. Even now, the average practising Christian Dutchman is hardly aware that only a few streets away there now reside representatives of an important world religion. Life for Muslims, living as a minority amongst the Christian and non-practising Christian majority of the autochthonous Dutch population is not without frustrations. Misunderstanding, non-recognition, proselytisation, rejection - all these form a pattern of conscious or unconscious discrimination to be found in many forms in the Netherlands.

How does a Muslim work and live in the Dutch diaspora? This article is based on my own researches among Moroccan workers - male and female - in the town of Utrecht. It is a town which for a sociologist is fairly representative of Dutch society. It is also representative (coincidentally?) of Mediterranean immigrants in the Netherlands. I worked for many years in this town in the centre of the Netherlands and lived under the same roof with many members of so-called ethnic minorities. I was particularly interested in groups of Moroccan Muslims and got to know their language and customs, and no less their problems. Their experience as Muslims in the diaspora, formed the subject of my study *Migrant workers in the Netherlands: a non-participating population*.

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I THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The subject of this research is the Muslim labourer and his religious world. The question which is to be answered in this research is: do the Muslim workers in the Netherlands experience their religion as a projection of a dependence-relationship both in respect of the elite in Morocco, and towards the non-Muslim majority of the Dutch population ?

The method employed by this research is the phenomenological approach, which gives inarticulate, non-participating Muslims workers the chance to speak. This is done by means of interviews with the researcher, who has built up a relationship of trust with the Muslims he interviews. In the interviews, light is thrown on sensitive areas in the lives of those Muslim workers who form part of a Muslim "diaspora". The interviews have first been recorded verbatim and later had their contents analysed. In this piece of research, eleven interviews are handled in this way: eight are with typical members of the Muslim community in the Dutch town of Utrecht, and three with formal leaders of the same local community.

An interview is the best way of making perceptible the things which preoccupy a Muslim labourer, because it does most justice to the tone of such a conversation. Disadvantages of interviews are: situational factors (time and place), differing degrees of confidential relationships (functional or emotional), and the absence of non-verbal details. All these things can influence the tenor of the conversation.

Before introducing these eleven interviews, it is necessary to attempt to set this piece of research in perspective alongside similar and earlier published findings regarding Muslims in western Europe. As far as may be known, findings concerning related research have already been published in western Europe. But not one gives the Muslim worker in the diaspora the opportunity to talk about the role of the Islam in his life in such an informal way. Existing research regards religion as one small aspect in the life of the Muslim labourer, or does not succeed by means of its chosen method in letting the Muslim express what he "thinks and feels in his heart of hearts".

From the eleven interviews, set down verbatim, I have tried to discover what the role of Islam is for the person being interviewed, what function the mosque has for him, and what the relationship is between Muslim and Christian. In so far as it is important for my enquiry, I also refer to the social, economic and political context. My aim in this is to make a start on "an outline of the sociography of Islam in the Netherlands".

II A SUMMARY OF EIGHT INTERVIEWS WITH MUSLIMS

Taib

Taib is an example of an educated Muslim with only a small degree of commitment to his religion. He denies being a Muslim emphatically, when reminded of the fact that he never reads the Qur'an together with others, and thinks back to the years of his youth with a certain nostalgia. He is not the type of orthodox

Muslim who takes it for granted that his wife will also be a Muslim. As a well-educated Moroccan, he commands a fairly wide range of facts, including a grasp of facts pertaining to Islam, which are central to his culture. He has learnt how to use the Qur'an in order to trace back or prove certain facts about religion. From the defensive posture in which he is placed in conversations with Christians he mentions the dogmas and gives a traditional defence. Moreover, the Qur'an gives Taib essential information, for example about religious feasts.

Taib remains a Moroccan, and in spite of his more liberal notions and different life-style, he shows solidarity towards the *umma*. He argues in favour of building a mosque in Utrecht, not because he himself has need of one, but because his fellow Moroccans do. He defends observing Ramadan on social grounds, even though he hardly fasts at all himself in this period. He considers himself one of the younger generation, who have had a good education, and are "modern": they no longer keep the *salat*, do not go to the mosque any more, even in Morocco, and have left off numerous other observances. However, Taib's conception of God is still composed of traditional elements. He knows that God must be so: it is not whether he experiences him which is open to question. Either way, he is not a mystic immersed in his religion, but a man who uses his knowledge of religion skilfully, and in general horizontally, i.e. to regulate social relations rationally.

Taib balances between two cultures. His ambivalence sets him on the one hand within the West European matrix, but on the other hand he is still indisputably in possession of his own cultural background. Taib wants to send his children to a non-denominational school. He approves of western freedoms, and in his own country feels himself in a backwater. He feels less at home, experiences the extended family as a restraint on his freedom and is happiest when his two-month vacation in the village of his birth is ended.

However, in the Netherlands he makes a point of the fact that he intends to give his children Moroccan names. The wife follows her husband, and the children are in the first place the "property" of their father. He has brought many elements of the Mediterranean extended family system into his Dutch way of life, e.g. the circumcision of children, the Moroccan names, paternal authority and the submission of the wife.

When Taib wants to stress the distance between himself and the Dutch way of life, he falls back on elements in the Moroccan culture. He is constantly evaluating his own culture in terms of western categories, frequently to its disadvantage. Never does he identify with Christianity, always and on many levels with Islam, even though he remains reserved and critical towards it, giving an impression of being "above" and aloof from it.

Allal

Allal is an educated Moroccan, who, thanks to his education, in travels, and his sojourn in the West, has risen above the feelings of shame (social control) and the anxieties of his fellow Moroccans. In Dutch family life, he approves the abolition of tabus and the freedom, which there is, for example between parents and children. They are free to talk about everything:

"The young Dutch child speaks openly to his mother and father and shares in their home. His father and mother explain things to him clearly, without problems arising from sexual guilt or shame. Such

a child lives freely and develops an open mind towards many things. That is a big difference with Morocco."

Allal is a man proud to have his feet on the ground, a man who "knows" life. Religion is not relevant this side of the grave. Reality means "not being contained within the framework of the traditional Muslim community".

Study, contacts with priests in Spain and above all his leaving Morocco have given him a contempt of the traditional way of life in which he was brought up. He is so estranged from his own country, that he has no plans ever to return for more than a visit. Religion is in his view outdated. In the Netherlands he has made acquaintance with various Christian institutes and institutions. He married in church, has attended midnight mass at Christmas, and is acquainted with discussions in traditional (Catholic) families such as that of his in-laws.

The pastor, who visits him at home, he mistrusts. The pastor "only comes for the annual subscription of 80 guilders (approximately \$15)"! Moreover, he tries to get Allal into church via clever subterfuge - Allal is invited to come and see the handsome church interior. He related this meeting to me with obvious animosity. This reaction is typical of him: he is tolerant towards religious practices, as long as these demand nothing of him.

The devotions of the faithful in Morocco, the Muslim minority in Utrecht, and the beliefs of Dutch people are no more to him than a distant mirage.

Farid

Farid is a young traditional Muslim who does not acknowledge the controversy "science - belief" or "Qur'an - modern science". Religion for Farid is in line with science. The Qur'an for example prescribes circumcision. This rule is completely in keeping with scientific findings for the *t'ahara* is important for hygiene and sexual intercourse. This practice is also to be found in "modern countries" like Israel and Japan. In other words: science confirms what the Qur'an has to say.

If it be the will of God, then humanity may make discoveries: the Qur'an does not oppose industrialisation: "If there is something to be discovered you can discover it".

His standpoint sounds definite:

"The Qur'an is not against industrialisation, not against the twentieth-century as such".

Unfortunately, his views are not shared by many young Moroccans because they regard industrialisation as their own discovery. A "civilisation" has grown up - free from religious norms, which are relegated to the inner imagination - in which God is far away from man.

"Civilisation" has become antipathetic to God. And that is valid to Farid's way of mind - not only for Muslims, but also for Christians, with whom he feels himself closely related by means of a common belief in God. For only the older generation in the West is interested in God. Farid is a Muslim who clings to tradition tenaciously with the feeling that the fight is lost anyway". In an-

other hundred years, religion will have disappeared", so Farid says. Religion in general, and Islam in particular, appear to Farid to be on the defensive. Instead of inspiring people and uniting a minority, the days of religion are numbered. Such a fatality is part of a longing for Morocco, where life was somehow better, and a nostalgia for the "olden days", the time prior to industrialization.

Mohammed

Mohammed is 41 years old. He is an imam, and uses this name emphatically.

Every weekend Mohammed opens his door to fellow Muslims, but especially during Ramadan. Sometimes it happens that almost sixty people spend the night at his home. The Moroccans who he takes in have a fairly transitory character. They come from all parts of Morocco, from Fez, Tetouan, Marrakesh etc. "We are all Moroccans" he answered to my prompting that there might be many differences.

During Ramadan, Mohammed sleeps little, because he spends the night reading the Qur'an and praying over and again. Mohammed observes daily the prayers encompassed in the *salat*. He mostly recites these alone, but in the weekends often does this with others. Mohammed recognises that his office of Imam here in the Netherlands has a different character to that in Morocco. In Morocco, all the mosques have imams paid for by the government. However, for him, this function is his "hobby".

Mohammed knows large parts of the Qur'an by heart. He recites them often. Still more often, he recites from the Hadith. Mohammed never eats pork nor drinks alcohol. Mohammed is of the opinion that there are no great differences to be found between Islamic practices in the Netherlands and in Morocco.

Mohammed says that he has no contact with either Christians or Jews. True enough, he talks to Catholics and Protestants often. But never about things to do with religion. In fact, they never ask such things.

His own knowledge of Christendom is fairly non-existent. In fact, he doesn't even have the faintest idea what the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant is. If you press him on the matter, he might say hesitantly: "I think that there is some kind of argument between the two, but I am not sure. I think it has something to do with their books - the book of Joan, or the book of Jesus, or the book of Moses or such like ... But our book is one".

That last remark again indicates the kind of cultural isolation in which Mohammed finds himself as a man of religion, as an honest and devout Muslim, he knows nothing of the majority with whom he lives cheek by jowl.

Hasan

Hasan, the son of Mohammed, still knows the essentials of religion which he formerly learnt at school. The basic values of Islam had been explained to him three times per week. He had had to do both written and oral exams. The most important were in history (*ta'rikh*) and religious values (*din*).

He knows some of the *suras* in the Qur'an, is aware that there are 114, and knows the origin of the word Qur'an. But this knowledge is vague in spite of the fact that he has read parts of the Qur'an.

It is as if he is still in the lesson when he answers questions such as : "Did Allah reveal the Qur'an directly ?"

His feeling of participating in the "Belief of his fathers" does indeed stem from his father for whom he has great respect. In answer to the question of why he calls himself Muslim, he says unhesitatingly: "Because my parents are also Muslim".

Hasan is satisfied with the religion of his fathers. Proudly he tells how this is the first year that he has to fast. It is difficult to gauge from his own testimony whether his participation in religion - beyond his attachment to his father - really affects him deeply. What might happen should his father disappear from the scene ?

The biggest difference between Morocco and the Netherlands lies for Hasan in how the *salat* is kept. In Morocco, people have time for prayer, but not here in the Netherlands. In fact, Hasan is not sure whether all Moroccans keep the *salat*.

Hasan does not smoke or drink and never eats pork. Before performing the *salat*, he washes. One must take care to remain "t'ahara". After the toilet one is obliged to wash.

Regarding circumcision, a rather shy Hasan finds it difficult to put his ideas into words. Its religious significance however escapes him. Nonetheless, he considers circumcision important and his own children - whatever his wife might think of it - will later be circumcised

Hasan also has respect for the great and rich people who have made a pilgrimage to Mecca. His own father may not be rich, but has undertaken the hajj.

The Moroccan culture is the framework of reference for Hasan. His wife and children will have to be Muslim. Belief in Allah, respect for the holy books and observance of the law dominate his world. Dutch culture has made no impact on him: he knows little of Dutch history, hardly anything about the different manifestations of Christianity, and has no intensive contacts with Dutch people, however young they may be. His age and his protected home environment, with its strict social controls are probably the reason for him not yet having come into real conflict with what for him is a foreign culture. He counts himself as Muslim without a moment's hesitation because:

1. His parents are Muslim
2. He "says the words": the *shahāda*.

Ali

For Ali, Allah is above all else, the inaccessible, exalted and far-off aspect of God. His existence is beyond doubt. He does not speak about Allah with unbelievers, unless they want to become Muslims. A serious Muslim like Ali also knows his Qur'an. He can recite many fragments by heart. It is not to be denied that Ali has something of a proselytising manner about him. He talks to me enthusiastically about this religion.

The feeling of being in contact with his creator is great - as we have just seen. His devotion shows traces of maraboutism. Ali considers himself one of the Nasiris, an important family within Morocco, with many branches, commanding great respect. This family

traces itself back to distant forefathers of noble blood. One of the forefathers lies buried in the Sahara (Temqrurt). Ali himself (who comes from the north-west) has not yet made the long journey to the tomb of his forefathers. His father has.

The traditional way in which Ali experiences his belief is, for instance, reflected in his vision of the King. One of his most treasured principles runs as follows: "Talking about politics in Morocco is talk about the King". The King in Morocco is everything, he rules in the name of Allah, he is his Caliph. The kingship is hereditary. Ali sets this in contrast to the queen in Holland, who is completely without power.

Ali reads the Qur'an, thinks seriously about what he reads, and does what Allah wants of him. He prefers to recite the Qur'an in the company of others. In Morocco this often happens, and people may recite the Qur'an all night long.

Ali engages in prayer - the *salat* - five times a day. The three most important religious ceremonies are for Ali the ceremony of sacrifice, the ceremony of fasting and the birthday of the Prophet. Ali observes the fasts scrupulously. He still hopes to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Ali is an orthodox Muslim for whom Islam is an absolute framework of reference. West European civilisation is far removed from him. Living in the Netherlands he speaks no Dutch. He does, however, feel the contempt which Dutch people have for him where he works. Ali falls back upon his own culture completely. He observes rigidly all the laws even on "infidel ground". For all the world is Allah's.

Abdel

Abdel is a Moroccan worker and has the lowest level of development of all the persons looked at in this study. He is illiterate, has spent seven years in Holland and speaks not one word of Dutch. He knows nothing about the Netherlands. He knows nothing about its religion, and has in all his seven years never seen the inside of a church. Amongst his compatriots, too, he participates hardly at all in their culture either in Nador or in Utrecht. A mosque would be wasted on Abdel, even though he is of the opinion that one should be built. He would not be able to make use of a mosque because he does not understand everything that happens there. How the ceremonies are performed is too difficult for him. At times it makes him bitter.

Abdel experiences his belief in terms of the observance of the laws. He lacks direct access to the Qur'an. Everything he can remember about it comes from his early youth when he attended a Qur'an School. His approach to Islam is legalistic: the judgement of Allah is central: good-evil, reward-punishment, paradise-hell. I came to know Abdel as a somewhat legalistically inclined Muslim, whose whole religious life was centred on observing the laws. We also find that same attitude in his observance of the rules of what is clean and unclean, Ramadan, the *salat* and other religious feasts.

Mina

Mina has very little knowledge of even elementary religious beliefs. What she knows, she has learnt from the religious practices of her childhood home in Oudja, and from her very religious husband.

She cannot read the Qur'an. Nor does she know the Suras. All she knows is the most important of the stylised prayers. She has no contact with the hajj so that further development of her religious knowledge is impossible. She does not seem, however, to feel her incomplete knowledge of religious matters as a loss. With childlike unconcern she lives from one day to the next, with the feast-days as climaxes.

From conversations with Mina and impressions gained elsewhere, there are indications that the few Moroccan women - their numbers are growing - live in great isolation. When their participation in social life in Morocco is already minimal, it is obvious that they will find hardly any point of contact in our society. In Morocco their most important - practically their only - role is within the extended family. Family life in the diaspora is found to a very meagre extent, because here the nuclear family is thrown back on its own resources, a small unit freed from ties with the wider family and neighbours. Traditional usages and beliefs (as expressed in numerous observances) then often offer the only means of security in a strange land. Further research into the position of women is necessary.

III THREE CONVERSATIONS WITH FORMAL MUSLIM LEADERS IN UTRECHT

The three Muslims are the schoolteacher Ishak, Ibrahim, who studied at technical school, and Samir, a man with some years of primary schooling. All three have been chosen by their fellow Moroccans in Utrecht to represent them in the migrants' council (Moroccans in Utrecht are not allowed any other organisation of their own except football clubs). This council contains members from other mediterranean nationalities and advises, at request but also unrequested, the municipal council of Utrecht concerning all matters with which migrants were confronted. The municipality is free to accept or disregard this advice.

These three formal leaders are undoubtedly Muslims. That evidences itself in their religious observances, and in regular conversations about their religion, which they have both with fellow Muslims and also with Christians.

One concrete problem for the Muslims in Utrecht - not only for the Moroccans - was that there was no mosque. They were only able to celebrate on religious occasions in hired schoolrooms, at the house of the Hajji Mohammed, mentioned earlier, or in tiny attics at their lodgings. All these facilities were unsuitable. The attempts of a working party to buy or build something failed. There was no money, the working party had failed to secure enough support amongst Moroccans and there was no imam who could function as a central figure to direct the project.

The three formal leaders attribute three functions to a mosque: it is a place of worship where the *salat* takes place, and ceremonies can be observed.

It is a social centre, where contacts between Muslims can be made,

e.g. with Muslims from Surinam (a former Dutch colony in South America); an emancipating institution, which is seen as a symbol of recognition.

The lack of an imam as leader could not be filled by the Hajji Mohammed because he is not a Sunnite Muslim, unlike 90% of his co-religionaries, and because he lacks a strong personality. The local Dutch council of churches set itself to obtain a mosque but held its discussions almost entirely within its own Christian circles. Ultimately this achieved nothing for the Muslims and evoked their distrust.

The three formal leaders are opposed on social and political grounds to the foundation for migrant workers, which was set up (by the Dutch government) to help migrant workers with their problems. The foundation is entirely dependant on its government subsidy. "The foundation does nothing for us. That's why the migrants' council is so good," they all three say. All three of them also experience discrimination. Moroccans in particular are "looked down on" by Dutch people. The three take a cautious but firm political line, in spite of it being rumoured that agents of the King Hasan regime in Morocco are operating in Utrecht. The three have, so they say, noticed nothing of such agents.

IV ISLAM IN THE NETHERLANDS

Although Muslims had lived in great numbers in western Europe in the sixties, they were hardly noticed by their Christian neighbours. How they conducted themselves and what they felt has passed largely unrecorded by western scholars. But the situation was changed, the pre-history of Islam in western-Europe is past, the Muslims are looking for their own structures. As well as mosques and imams, Muslim butchers, Qur'an schools, officially approved ritual slaughtering places, and Muslim organisations have become part of the western scene.

The Muslims in the Netherlands have been grouped in one section together with France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland. The headquarters of this section is in Brussels.

In practice, however, the Muslim in the Netherlands notices little of this international structure. It is a fact that Muslims now form the third largest religious group in the Netherlands, outstripped only by Roman Catholics and Protestant. If all Christians are counted together, the Muslims form the second largest group.

To an acute observer, there are mosques to be seen in diverse towns, some indeed complete with minaret. Many such mosques have imams and invite great faqihs or imams, often clad in jellabas, turbans or fezes, from Turkey or Morocco for the great religious occasions.

Suddenly in a busy shopping street in Amsterdam on Friday afternoons you see a group of Moroccans in their jellabas busily talking going somewhere or perhaps coming back. Especially on Islamic feast days there is activity of some significance. Often the celebration of such feast days is moved to Sunday because on Sundays the Muslim workers are, according to western custom, off work. On a quiet Sunday then, they all go out, while the rest of the town is still asleep. Especially at the start and finish of Ramadan, the Muslims gather together in their rented halls, or sometimes in their own

prayer-centres. Many Dutch workers are surprised to see their Muslim fellow workers fasting till sunset.

Apart from the annual feasts, which are generally well kept, more and more Dutch people notice that Muslims have their own shops (grocers and butchers) which sell special foods. As well as a number of Muslim butchers, where flowing Arabic writing somehow keeps the Dutchman at bay, there is the market. In all the larger industrial towns, the market is a meeting place (second only to the mosque - if there is a mosque) for North African and Turkish workers. Moreover, the Dutchman - or his wife - finds exotic products there, such as olives and mint-tea, to an increasing extent. Bales of material and second-hand clothing are eagerly bought by women in pantalon and knotted headscarf, or pass into the caloused hands of Mediterranean workmen. After the shifts have ended they enjoy spending their time at the market, and in some places foreign workers form more than half of the shoppers because "money stretches further in the market".

Sometimes, the Muslim workers stroll into a "cafe" for a cup of coffee or mint-tea before going back to their cheap lodgings with their purchases for the week. Dutch people seldom frequent such cafes. They speak Turkish or Moroccan and everyone knows everyone else.

Back again at the lodgings, or on endlessly long Sundays the *Gastarbeider* opens his prayer-book, the Qur'an. Often there is someone who reads out loud, for not everyone has mastered the art of reading. Being able to read or write is not important for the *salat*, which some Dutch landladies see being performed regularly in a room in their house specially rented for that purpose. The room has only to be clean. If there is no room, then a prayer-mat will do instead.

Some Dutch people have felt the impact of Muslim workers to a much greater extent, because amongst their family or friends they have witnessed a "mixed" marriage. There are often many problems inherent in such a match, which the couple only realise after the wedding has been concluded in the presence of the civil authorities in the Netherlands, and once more for good measure in Morocco, Tunisia or Turkey. Other Dutch people in their turn experience the decease of a Muslim workmate. They see the panic amongst Muslims because there is no Muslim burial ground and the remains of their former companion have to be transported by 'plane to wherever home is. They want to be buried by kith and kin in the land of Islam.

Less dramatic are the many confrontations between Muslim parents and Dutch teachers. Sometimes Dutch parents may also be involved. Two cultures meet when the children are brought or left at the school gate. Sometime Dutch parents give the others the opportunity to get to know them at closer quarters. Some classes are fifty per cent Muslim, and Dutch children come home with their stories - sometimes bringing their strange playmates with them.

In a number of places, Dutch and Muslim workers meet each other in small groups for language lessons or at information evenings. They may meet one another in church discussion groups, or at mass demonstrations. Muslims are not to be forgotten in the social structure of the Netherlands. You meet them everywhere in ordinary settings at unexpected moments.

Statistics reinforce this impression. There are Muslims in Europe: in the Netherlands they have come to stay.

Numbers

Different sources furnish different answers. The Islamic Foundation estimates their numbers at 200,500 in a total Dutch population of 13,440,000 in Khurshid Ahmed's Publication "Muslims in Europe" (Leicester, 1976). Unpublished documents of the conference "Muslims in Europe", held in Vienna from 19-21 November 1977 offer a lower estimate 150-200,000.

Professor J.D.J. Waardenburg, an expert on Islam, has made calculations based on figures published by the Dutch Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Work. His total figure is 102,000, made up of 2,600 Muslims from Surinam, 5,500 illegal (hence unregistered) workers, 30,000 Moroccans and Tunisians, 50,000 Turks and 6,4000 Indonesians.

The latest estimate of the number of Muslims in the Netherlands dates from about mid-1980. Since 1975 the migration of Turks and Moroccans has been swelled most especially by workers having their wives and children join them. The number of Turks rose between 1/1/1979 and 1/1/1980 from 106,600 to 122,000; the number of Moroccans in the same year from 64,000 to 73,000. Approximately 50% of all Mediterranean migrants were Turkish or Moroccan in 1973. In 1979 that had grown to almost 70%, in 1980 to 78%. If this trend continues then the proportion of Muslims (Turks and Moroccans) among Mediterranean migrants will rise to 84-90%. The statistical projection is:

1/1/1980	Turks	min.	217,000
		max.	234,000
	Moroccans	min.	173,000
		max.	183,000

This spectacular increase in the coming years owes its origin most of all to an increase in the numbers being born in the Netherlands. This will also affect the numbers of school children and school-leavers looking for work. The numbers of pensioners - from amongst the first generation - will also increase strongly after 1990, unless the majority choose to draw their pension in the lands of their birth.

Divisions amongst the Muslims in the Netherlands are great. There are a small numbers of Shi'ites, a great number of Sunnites (amongst whom a small number of North African Malikites and Turkish Hanafites) and a smaller group of Shafi'ites. National divisions in particular are reflected in the diaspora in the groups formed among Muslims. Add to that dispersion over the whole country, and one would be correct in speaking of a "diaspora within the diaspora".

The mosque

As mentioned earlier, Muslims experience the greatest difficulty in obtaining a mosque nearby where they live. In many Dutch towns there are initiatives such as the working party in Utrecht. Often they call themselves "The Islamic Centre". In a number of places, old houses, factory canteens, schools, local halls and even disused churches have been utilised as makeshift mosques. There are, however, still only a few real mosques: there is one in the Hague, in use since the 'fifties, and belonging to the Ahmadiyya movement. It is little used by Muslim workers, more by diplomats and intellectuals. There is another in Almelo, this time the result of pressure from below by Muslim workers. Elsewhere in the Netherlands, places

of prayer are rented for the more important religious occasions, or there are "prayer-rooms" in private lodgings, or the Muslim worker visits an Imam in his own home, as we saw at Mohammed's in Utrecht.

In 1976 the government published a report with directions for financing places of prayer for Muslims. In so doing it recognised the necessity of such facilities for Muslims. Subsidies have been available since then for municipalities which have at least 1,500 Muslims. The Muslims have to be capable of financing such projects themselves in the long run.

The possibility of financial help has also stimulated Muslims into organising themselves around a local initiative. All organisations are automatically entitled to an initial subsidy to help them off the ground. In Utrecht, as evidenced by the socio-political platform, which the migrants' council formed, it has been clear that interest in "matters of religion" has been great, both amongst Turkish and Moroccan representatives. Central was the demand for a good mosque or place of prayer. In 1978, after six years, this demand was in part met.

The Imam

Finding an imam for the numerous prayer rooms is not easy for the Muslims of the diaspora. There are not many amongst the migrants. Hence they must be brought over from Morocco or other Muslim countries for this special purpose. They are not subsidised; the faithful themselves must provide for their upkeep. This is in keeping with Dutch policy of leaving churches to pay for their own clergymen, but not in accordance with Muslim practice of having the state pay the imams. State and church are strictly separate in Holland. If there are enough faithful Moroccans in any one area, the Moroccan government may appoint and pay for an imam to come and teach for a period.

It is noteworthy that the emphasis in choosing these imams who come from Morocco falls on their learning, in contrast to imams appointed by the groups themselves, who are chosen on the basis of how well they lead the faithful in prayer.

This may remind us of the long and complex discussion amongst Muslims, regarding the recruitment of imams. The imam must satisfy a number of physical, moral and intellectual demands. The imam should not be short of money but may not seek his fortune. "Un geste gracieux, une parole respectueuse", is the order of the day. The conduct of the imam must be in accordance with the laws. His way of life and all his actions have an eschatological significance.

As regards the means of testing his theological background prior to appointing him, there are all manner of means known to Islam. In any case, his most important task is to convey without perversion knowledge of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. Innovation is seen as the greatest evil.

His knowledge must be thorough, his teachings orthodox, and his moral qualities indisputable. Difference of opinion regarding the appointment of imams - apart from their political viewpoints - did not reveal themselves in my conversations with Muslims. This may be due to the diaspora situation of Muslims with a low level of education, who do not have much choice of candidates.

The significance of the role of the imam however should not be exaggerated. His activities are not really comparable with those

of a western "pastor" in the Catholic church, who is not only responsible for teaching his flock, preaching and the liturgy, but fulfills a social role amongst his congregation (helping individuals or groups). This is less so in the case of the imam. He is for the Muslims of the diaspora much more the man whom they ought to have so that the Muslim community can function in the fullest sense.

Dialogue or rejection

In theological circles a publication in 1973 led to a rejection of a possible dialogue between the Christian churches, and the rapidly growing Muslim community in the Netherlands. D.J. Kohlbrugge and the Utrecht ecclesiastic J. van der Werf published a book *The authentic Joseph* which gave rise to vigorous polemics.

Drawing on the twelfth Sura (Yusuf) from the Qur'an they sketch a comparison with Genesis 37-50, the biblical story of Joseph (=Yusuf). They call the Qur'an "confused" in this instance, and go on to attempt to prove that these chapters in the Bible are concerned with a picture of the messianic prince and the function of Israel as chosen people in the salvation of the world. In the customary explanation given by the Qur'an, there is "no divine history, and true salvation can hence be found only in the paradise of Allah's forgiveness at the end of days". In the Sura under discussion, Allah's role as universal ruler is central, according to Kohlbrugge and van der Werf. But Allah is in all the Suras nameless and abstract. "Mohammed is the prophet of the nameless God, who had no knowledge of names, nor of their situation in place or time. Natural history is doomed to end in megalomania, chaos and destruction. The individual can only find his place in the service of Allah by seeking to save himself, developing his own potential, struggling to justify himself in the eyes of others, so that he can convince himself of his own self-righteousness. But a human being is not created merely as an individual. By loosing him from all bonds, Islam shows itself to be destructive. The atomised human being interpolates on the whole world his atomised nature, seeing a reflection of his own existence".

Both authors see the Bible and the Qur'an as completely antithetical. Dialogue with Muslims must in their eyes be drastically restricted to the mission, in other words, proselytising. Helping Muslims in the realisation of a mosque is then for Christians such as these unthinkable.

Criticism of this approach to the Qur'an from Muslims and Muslim workers is not without grounds. In the magazine for missionary studies *World and mission*, D.C. Mulder has delivered the sharpest, hardest-hitting and most profound attack. He shows that nowhere in the Qur'an is Allah seen as nameless: "To Allah are attributed the most beautiful of names. Call him by his name, and let him hide his face, who will not do so".

As far as the arguments of Kohlbrugge and van der Werf are concerned, namely that Islam only accepts a "natural history, one in which Allah's divine intervention is completely absent, there are three points to be made:

1. The Qur'an has a clear viewpoint on the creation of Adam, and the covenant between Allah and Adam: "Islam points to an unbroken relationship between God and humanity as manifest in history".

2. Throughout the life of Mohammed, Allah intervenes at all kinds of moments. "Many things have been revealed to us by means of concrete events, and later Muslim scholars of exegesis have had to take careful account of those things which have been revealed to us on earth".

3. Muslim dating begins with the year in which Mohammed entered Medina. Medina became the first model state in which the Muslim community subjected itself to "the laws of Allah".

In the discussion, as it is conducted by Kohlbrugge and van der Werf, what we miss is Muslims themselves in the flesh. The people who have borne witness to Islam are real. In the book *The authentic Joseph* there is not one flesh and blood Muslim to be found. There are no people such as we find in our interviews. The Islamic ceremonies, the *umma* (the Islamic community), Ramadan, the *sakat*, the religious and moral laws, all these very real aspects of Islam are missing.

If one wants to come to general conclusions about the religion of Islam which is a living, breathing force in the world of today, then it is not enough to study just one sura.

The polemical approach of our two authors is influenced by their fear of an invasion of huge numbers of Muslim workers. Had they met these Muslims and come to know them then they would have seen that the conditions for a true dialogue were absent. These Muslims have a marginal position in Dutch society, and only a meagre knowledge of their own Islamic tradition in consequence of their diaspora situation. Instead of attacking them, it would have been fairer to have given them a chance to defend themselves.

Less well grounded theologically, but most probably wider read is a very recent work under the evocative title *The threat from Islam* by I.A. Kole. In an attempt "to make the problems of the migrant workers and their religion rather more accessible" the author characterises Mohammed as a false prophet. He quote Luther who said: "God is grace, Allah is revenge and wrath". The Turkish Christians, for some thousands of whom the Netherlands provides a refuge, are, just like the American hostages in Teheran, victims of the jihad, the holy war of an aggressive Islam. Dialogue is understood by the writer to mean preaching the Gospel. There is no two-way discussion.

Partly in reaction to the programme of dialogue of the World Council of Churches, the opponents of such a dialogue have set up a "Foundation for evangelical work amongst Muslims in the Netherlands". In the eyes of such people, too, dialogue is taken to mean proselytising. Objection has been made to the work of such a foundation even by missionaries, who point out that the Muslims in the Netherlands have come here partly at our request in order to support our affluent society, and partly forced to by the poverty in their homelands. To make them the object of evangelisation here is in their view making misuse of the situation. Other missionaries take a different view and write that it "is not mere chance that these 200,000 reside amongst us. God has brought them here along the ways of dire need. it is not making misuse of the situation to proclaim the joyous message of the evangelists".

Illustrative of the position of many Dutch Christians is the stream of letters which the preacher Mr J. Slomp received after a T.V. broadcast by the Protestant Broadcasting Organisation (NCRV) in

which he argued that the church should manifest its solidarity with Muslim workers. As well as the Dutch Reformed Church, Catholics are also interested in the situation. Within the "Cura Migratorum" (the agency responsible for helping Catholic migrants), a steering-committee was set up in 1976 which aimed at conveying information to Dutch people about the cultural-religious values at the heart of Islam, by means of its magazine *Understanding (Begrip)*. The Reformed Church (not to be confused with the Dutch Reformed Church previously mentioned) has its own separate workgroup, the Workgroup for foreign labourers within a broader context of Christian Protestant social work. This same church set up in 1974 "A contact committee for Muslims and Christians in the Netherlands" which involves itself in issues such as providing mosques or places of prayer, furnishing Muslim burial grounds and working for better chances of education for Muslim children.

Another initiative to come to a dialogue arose in 1973. At that time, a section was set up of the Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe. Under chairmanship of the above mentioned Dr D.D. Mulder, prominent and learned members of these denominations meet together in order to build up a dialogue by means of conferences or invitations to one another's religious observances. Finally, one last publication may not be forgotten: H. Mintjes, *Social Justice in Islam* published by the Dutch Reformed Church.

The author asks himself if Islam, just as other religions, stands in the way of emancipation or offers inspiration to those who seek (social) justice. Both tendencies are present in Islam, he believes. According to Mintjes Islam is in full motion, and certain currents clearly have sympathy with the socially weak. Some of the imams who work in the Netherlands share this sympathy; others, most in fact, do not. They restrict themselves to the traditional forms of worship.

Trade-unions, pressure groups and political parties

Moroccan workers in the Netherlands are poorly organised. At national level there is the Committee of Moroccan workers in the Netherlands set up in 1975 (KMAN) and only open to Moroccans, although it has a separate Dutch supporting group. As far as the KMAN is concerned, Islam is in the first place an instrument in the hands of the (repressive and anti-democratic) regime of King Hasan II. In the eyes of the KMAN, Islam indoctrinates by means of the imams who are protected by the consulates. In the mosques, prayers are said for the health and protection of the king. The Hasan regime misuses Islam to oppress the emigrants in the view of the KMAN.

In Rotterdam, the Moroccan Workers Committee (MAK) is active. This committee, too, rejects the traditional prayers for King Hasan II. Those in power misuse religion to "keep the people quiet", is the standpoint of the MAK.

Dutch pressure groups have until now underestimated the influential role played by Islam and the imams. They place more emphasis on arousing political consciousness and language lessons. If it is clear that a place of prayer is presided over by an imam who maintains close contacts with the Amicales, then pressure and workgroups together with the KMAN and MAK campaign against him.

What is this *Fédération des amicales des marocains aux Pays-Bas* which has drawn so much opposition the last few years? This

organisation was set up in the Netherlands in 1975 in the form of a national federation modelled on a similar French organisation, and enjoys the support of the Moroccan government and its diplomatic staff.

By means of a Moroccan radio programme put out by the Dutch National Broadcasting Association (NOS), the Federation was able to spread government sponsored news. The Federation also received support from social workers, certainly when they used arguments in favour of more being done in the interests of Moroccan workers. It has only been a few years since such social workers were instructed by their organisations to pursue another policy, and restrict their contacts with the Amicales and not to regard them as representatives of the Moroccan community.

The Amicales are particularly active in religious matters. In such matters, in fact, they have a monopoly because left wing groups of Moroccans and Dutch people do not actively interest themselves in the role of Islam in the daily life of the Muslim worker. It has not been difficult then for individual Amicales to play a leading role within groups working for a mosque. The Amicales have also been able to help in the appointment of imams thanks to their excellent relations with their embassy, the consulate and the Ministry for Religious Affairs in Rabat. Hence, in most of the groups formed around the mosques and places of prayer, the organisations and the imams have very close ties with the Federation. The Amicales also offer their "services" in instructing Moroccan children in Arabic, religion and history. In order to get children to go to these lessons, the Amicales are not above putting pressure on their parents. Moroccan butchers also appear to be an important centre for the Amicales' propaganda. The Amicales enthusiastically support all initiatives towards obtaining such things as abattoirs for ritual slaughter and for Islamic burial grounds; they demand a leading role in such movements, and try in this way to win the support of the Moroccans in the Netherlands, as well as in Belgium, France and West Germany.

The Dutch government has taken no steps so far to prosecute such groups in spite of many requests from Moroccans, Dutch activists and MP's to do so.

Recommendations to the churches

Islam is important for the Muslims in western Europe in that it helps them to retain their own identity and makes the links with their homeland tangible. It is however misunderstood by the dominant majority in the Netherlands.

Islam is used by the ruling elite in the homeland to dominate and control expatriates.

Many Muslims are sensitive to criticism, both oral and written at the hands of the Christian majority.

For these four reasons the churches can exercise a moderating influence in favour of the Muslim minority, which lacks the right to speak for itself in western Europe.

What concrete recommendations can we make to the churches in the Netherlands on the basis of research into the way in which Muslim workers in the diaspora experience their Islamic norms and values ? Here are at least five:

- the foundation of a study centre on Christian-Muslim relations.
- better dissemination of information among the Christian communities,
- the foundation of interreligious councils as in Britain,
- advisory plans for the financing of mosques, imams and Islamic education,
- the designing of common prayer services for special occasions, e.g. mixed marriages.

CONCLUSION

Rising racial tension, second generation social problems, national economic depression and growing antagonism towards the Arabs (due to the Middle East conflict, the oil embargo, and the rise to power of Khomeini) are not encouraging signs. Against this background there is still much work to be done by the Dutch churches, because the Muslim-Christian dialogue is starting to bear fruit and take root outside the small group of people who are most actively concerned. What the future holds, however, will be revealed in the coming years.