

PORTUGAL

*Nina Clara Tiesler*¹

1 MUSLIM POPULATIONS

Portugal has a rather small Muslim population which has grown mostly since decolonisation in 1974. Estimates of the communities themselves and by researchers suggest around 46,000–48,000 people, mainly Sunni Muslims of South Asian origin from Mozambique and numerically stronger, Sunni Muslims from Guinea-Bissau, but also including about 8,000 Isma'ilis. Other Muslim groups from Pakistan (3,500)² and Bangladesh (4,000),³ have arrived more recently (noticeably since the early 1990s). Small numbers of Muslims originate from Morocco and Algeria (1,000–1,300), Senegal (1,000–1,500) and India (1,500). While small Muslim communities are established in the north (mainly in Porto and Coimbra), the south (in the Algarve) and on the island of Madeira, the overwhelmingly majority live in and around the capital city Lisbon, although the majority of Moroccan Muslims live in and around Porto and on the Algarve. In and around Lisbon, there is a certain (but not massive) geographical concentration in particular

¹ Nina Clara Tiesler is a senior researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon (Centre of Excellence) and coordinator of the Luso-Afro-Brazilian research network on Muslims in Lusophone Areas (MEL-net). She holds a PhD in Comparative Religion and has researched on Muslims in Europe since 1990. She is author of *Muslims in Europa: Religion und Identitätspolitik unter veränderten gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen* (Muslims in Europe: Religion and Identity Politics in New Societal Settings) (Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2006), and editor of "Islam in Portuguese-Speaking Areas", *Lusotopie*, vol. 14, no. 1 (special issue, 2007).

² This number is arrived at by cross-referencing of data from the Aliens and Borders Service (*Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras*, SEF) and estimates from within the community. Pakistanis use to live in the centre of and near Lisbon (Odivelas), as well as in Porto. No significant research has so far been carried out about/among this population.

³ This number is arrived at by cross-referencing data from the SEF (3,000 individuals), and data provided by the Consulate of Bangladesh in Lisbon (4,500). The number 4,000 corresponds with the estimates made by researchers with ethnographic field experience. Bangladeshis mostly live in the centre of Lisbon, but also in and around Porto. See Mapril, José, "'Bangla masjid': Islão e bengalidade entre bangladeshianos em Lisboa" (Bangla mosque: Islam and Bengali identity among Bangladeshis in Lisbon), *Análise Social*, vol. 39, no. 173 (Winter 2005), pp. 851–873.

neighbourhoods, such as in Laranjeiro and Odivelas (both having well-established representative mosques), Damaia and Sintra (Cacém).

'Official' figures provided by the Aliens and Borders Service (*Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras*, SEF) and the census⁴ do not reflect realities, being usually lower than the estimates of researchers and the communities themselves. For example, according to the 2001 census, Portugal's total population was 10,356,117, of whom 12,014 were declared to be Muslims.⁵ The reasons for these low numbers are, first, that religious affiliation is not an obligatory question in the census and, second, that Portuguese citizenship is quite widespread and so is an unsatisfactory starting point, so estimates based on nationality are unsatisfactory. In addition, in many cases the proportion of Muslims in the population of the country of origin cannot simply be transferred to the equivalent population in Portugal, especially not in the case of those from Mozambique or Guinea-Bissau.

2 ISLAM AND THE STATE

The Constitution, which recognises freedom of religion and conscience and prohibits all discrimination in this respect, provides for a system of equality and separation between the state and religious denominations, although the Roman Catholic Church traditionally enjoyed privileges not granted to other religious groups.⁶ A decisive change came with the Religious Freedom Act of 22 June 2001, with important improvements for religious minorities implemented from 2006. Before the implementation of the new law, the Islamic Community of Lisbon (*Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa*, CIL), smaller Islamic communities and other religious minorities, could only be officially recognised as "associations in private law".

With the change in the law in 2006, the CIL became a registered religious community, giving it a status substantially equal to that of the Catholic Church, including agreements with the state with regard to marriages (see below) and the optional benefit of the voluntary assignment by individual tax payers of 0.5% of income tax to their religious

⁴ National Institute of Statistics, <http://www.ine.pt>.

⁵ Leitão, J., "The new Islamic presence in Portugal: Towards a progressive integration", in B.-P.R. Aluffi and G. Zincone (eds), *The Legal Treatment of Islamic Minorities in Europe* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), p. 180.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

community organisation, but no general public funding. Several inequities remain, as privileges depend on the number of adherents of religious groups and on the period of their establishment in the country, with a minimum of 30 years required (the CIL was founded 40 years ago). In practice, the CIL can benefit from tax advantages—for example, on buildings expenditure.

Whenever the main Islamic communities (Sunni and Isma'ili) celebrate an anniversary or special occasion, the Portuguese state often sends high-level representatives. The present and former presidents of the republic have all been made of Honorary Members of CIL, and the current CIL president has been one of the advisers to the president of the republic during his visits to India, Turkey and other countries. During the Dalai Lama's visit to Portugal in 2007, the CIL organised and hosted a huge interreligious meeting in the Central Mosque, with the Dalai Lama as guest of honour—an important event, taking into account that the Portuguese government had been facing the same problems as other governments regarding the impact of the visit on official relations with China.

3 MAIN MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS

The role of a small group of Muslims from Mozambique (a Portuguese colony until 1975), who were studying at the faculties of law, medicine and economics in the then metropolitan Portugal was decisive in laying the foundations of Muslim organisations. Most of these community founders, as well as other Sunni Muslims of South Asian origin, had already been Portuguese citizens under colonial rule and so did not regard themselves as 'immigrants'. Many African Muslims gather around their Sufi leaders, and Muslims from Bangladesh have founded a mosque (Mesquita Martim Moniz) closer to their work place. However, the vast majority of at least c. 30,000 Sunnis and their local communities are linked to and occasionally take part in the life of the central Islamic Community of Lisbon (*Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa*, CIL), founded in 1968, which acts as a formal and informal umbrella organisation for Sunni Muslims. The founding of an official umbrella organisation of/for Islamic communities in Portugal, starting with a first national congress, is planned for 2010.

The *Mesquita Central de Lisboa* (Rua da Mesquita in Bairro Azul [à Praça de Espanha], 1070-283 Lisboa, tel: (+351) 21 387 41 42/21 387 91 84; fax: (+351) 21 387 22 30, <http://www.comunidadeislamica.pt>)

has as its Imam Sheikh David Munir and is the home of the CIL. As well as housing a bookstore, social space and the CIL website administration, the 30-year-old Central Mosque in the heart of Lisbon is also used by the Women's Association, several groups of Guinean Muslims, and the Youth Association of the Islamic Community (*Comissão de Jovens da Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa*, CILJovem) which is organised and attended mainly by young people of South Asian origin, including some Isma'ilis.

The other main Muslim organisations are:

- *Comunidade Islâmica de Palmela* (Av. Vila Amélia, lote 171, 172, Cabanas, 2950-805 Palmela, tel: 21 211 05 30, fax: 21 211 05 39).
- *Centro Cultural Ismaili* (Rua Abranches Ferrao, 1600-001 Lisboa, tel: (+351) 217 229 000, fax: (+351) 217 229 045).
- *Comunidade Shi'ta de Portugal* (Ithna Ashari) (Avenida das Forças Armadas, 11 D, Almada; tel: (+351) 218106030).

4 MOSQUES AND PRAYER HOUSES

In 2002-3 the Islamic Community of Lisbon received a one-off grant to cover one third of the construction costs of the Central Mosque. The state's Commission for the Coordination of the Lisbon and South Targus Region (*Comissão de Coordenação da Região Lisboa e Sul de Tejo*, CCR) then provided further funding, bringing the state contribution to 40% of the total costs. Later, in 2004, the CIL received a small grant from the City Hall of Lisbon (*Câmara Municipal de Lisboa*) towards the daily costs of the Central Mosque. Various donors had funded the first phase of construction of the Central Mosque, which was concluded in 1985 (the year of its inauguration, see below, section 16), the City Hall had provided the land (as it also did later for the cemetery in Lumiar, see section 7), and various Islamic majority countries had given donation, as did the community members themselves.⁷

⁷ For details, N.C. Tiesler, N.C., "No bad news from the European margin: The new Islamic presence in Portugal", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2001), pp. 71-91 (79).

Besides the Central Mosque, there are two other large public mosques near Lisbon (in Odivelas and Laranjeiro) and another in Coimbra, and there are a total of 33 cultural centres and prayer halls across the country (close to Porto and mainly near Lisbon), and around 12 madrasas,⁸ as well as the Jamatkhana of the Shi'a Imami Isma'ili Muslim Community.

5 CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

There is a recognised, private secondary Islamic school in Palmela (near Lisbon). It has around 150 pupils, nearly 10% of whom are non-Muslims. Apart from any input by their parents, most young Muslims receive their Islamic education in one of the madrasas and/or by private tutors who visit them at home. The Law of Religious Freedom allows Islamic instruction in public schools, provided there are at least ten pupils whose parents request it. In practice, there are currently no public schools in Portugal with enough Muslim pupils of more or less the same age to take this option. Parents do not complain about the lack of provision, as their children receive instruction in the madrasas.

6 HIGHER AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

The Religious Freedom Act (no. 16/2001) governs the role of the imam in detail, equating imams with Roman Catholic priests in terms of legal status, and providing for the possibility of setting up specific training institutions.⁹ As a higher institution for the training of imams has not yet been founded, imam training is partly provided at the Islamic school in Palmela, where 10–15 women have been educated as *alimas*. Some imams have received their education abroad (mostly in the UK, but also in Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia).

⁸ Madrasa in the Portuguese context does not refer to a physical place, such as a school building or class room, but rather to religious instruction classes held in the main mosques and prayer halls.

⁹ Leitão, "New Islamic presence", p. 300.

7 BURIAL AND CEMETERIES

There is no exclusively Islamic cemetery in Portugal, but several municipal cemeteries, reserve areas for Muslims and their communities (Odivelas, Feijó). Such an area has also existed formally since 2005 (and informally since 1998) in the cemetery at Lumiar (a district of Lisbon). It was donated by the Municipality of Lisbon and is available to Muslims from all over Portugal and more than 500 gravestones bear Muslim names. It has become the most important cemetery for both Sunnis and Shi'a, including Isma'ili and Ithna-Ashari families, who all call it 'our cemetery'. Because these facilities exist and also probably because most Muslims in Portugal are either Portuguese citizens or are in other ways deeply attached to the country, it is very rare for families to send the body of a deceased relative to be buried abroad.¹⁰

8 'CHAPLAINCY' IN STATE INSTITUTIONS

The Religious Freedom Act (no. 16/2001) grants members of the Islamic and other communities the right to practise their religion in special situations (such as during military service, or when in hospitals or in prison). No imams work exclusively or regularly in such institutions due to the lack of demand. If the need arises in hospitals, the Commission of Social Affairs (*Comissão de Assuntos Sociais*) of the CIL provides special care and support for the individuals and their families, including the visits of an imam. With regard to prisons, imams made informal visits until an official protocol was registered in the *Diário de República* I/185 (23.09. 2009), and only came into effect on 13 November 2009.

9 RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

The state does not officially recognise Islamic festivals or holidays, but permits absence from work and school for the main festivals on request. On these occasions, the CIL distributes information to the public, the Ministry of Justice, schools and employers and provides

¹⁰ This does not apply to Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and sometimes Guinea Bissau.

the relevant forms for applying to the authorities for time off. Workers and employees are expected to be flexible and make up for the time lost. Students may take examinations on alternative dates.

10 HALAL FOOD

According to a CIL spokesman, ritual slaughter according to Islamic tradition has been permitted since 1975, although most ritual slaughter for Muslims was performed by the Rabbi of the Lisbon Synagogue until the first halal butcher's shops were established in 1982. Today there are at least six halal butcher's shops in Lisbon (three in Odivelas, one in Martim Moniz Square in the city centre, one in Laranjeiro, and another downtown in Alvalade, which is owned by a non-Muslim), and one in Porto. Halal chicken is available in the major shopping centres and supermarket chains (Continente and Jumbo). At least twelve halal restaurants exist in the main cities, nine of them in Lisbon.

11 DRESS CODES

The use of the headscarf or other distinctive clothing at school and workplaces has not caused any conflict or controversies. Islamic dress is rarely worn by women in public places.

12 PUBLICATION AND MEDIA

Like other religious groups, Muslims take part in two television programmes on the public channel RTP2, in which the presentation time is divided according to the numerical strength of the communities. This means that, in practice, the time is mostly taken up by the Roman Catholic Church, followed by Protestant and Pentecostal churches. A programme on the public radio station (Antena 1), which follows the same pattern, started on 1 November 2009. The CIL runs a website (<http://www.comunidadeislamica.pt>) and some younger community members have set up a chatroom (<http://www.aliasoft.com/forumislam>), which also accepts questions to be answered by the imams. This chatroom is also used by Muslims from other Portuguese-speaking countries (mainly Brazil, but also Mozambique) as well as by Portuguese Muslims living abroad.

There is currently only one printed periodical, *Al-Furqan*, which is also available online (<http://www.alfurqan.pt>). It has a long tradition, is a private initiative and is not related to CIL. The CIL publishes newsletters and occasional pamphlets.

13 FAMILY LAW

Since 2006, religious communities that are registered have the right to perform religious marriages, which will be accepted by civil law if the appropriate documents are submitted. According to a CIL spokesman, the organisation is currently making the necessary legal preparations for this process, while the Jewish and Evangelical communities have already solemnised a few such marriages in 2008.

14 INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

Portuguese Muslims look back on a long tradition of interreligious relations, the latter having already been informally established between leading figures of various different religious minorities under Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique. The closest ‘cooperation’ partner during the early years in Portugal was the Jewish community (see section 10). This relationship was maintained during the negotiations regarding legislation on religious freedom which took place in the early 1990s and gained official standing in 2007 with the founding of the Abrahamic Forum (*Forum Abraâmico de Portugal*), which includes Muslim, Jewish and Catholic representatives. It is linked to the Three Faiths Forum (<http://www.threefaithsforum.org.uk>) and connected with groups worldwide. The Abrahamic Forum organises cultural events (including lectures and debates) and assistance to needy people of any religion or none. Such assistance is mainly organised through a task force made up of young people from the three religions working with a selected Portuguese NGO.

In 2008, the CIL joined the Municipal Board for Interculturality and Citizenship (*Conselho Municipal para Interculturalidade e Cidadania*), which includes 37 religious groups and immigrant associations and is hosted at the City Hall of Lisbon.

CIL is also involved in the International Movement of Charter for Compassion (<http://charterforcompassion.org/>). Again, it was CIL, together with the Abrahamic Forum, which took the initiative and

provided the space where 150 people met on Sunday, 15 November 2009, for a 'Day of Compassion' to reflect upon concepts of compassion (and follow up action), with speakers from 17 different religious and non-religious groups.

15 PUBLIC OPINION AND DEBATE

The historically recent 'new' Muslim presence (in distinction to the historical presence on the Iberian Peninsular before the fifteenth century) did not attract much attention before 9/11, which gave rise to curiosity and questions about Islam and Muslims. The rhetoric of the 'war on terror' is dealt with by Portuguese Muslims and their spokesmen in their normal, patient and calm way. Researchers and Muslims know about harassment, but public Islam in Portugal always stresses that Muslims in Portugal do not suffer discrimination and are well integrated citizens and members of society.

The media mainly cover special occasions (anniversaries and famous visitors to the communities) and festivals (first and foremost being the beginning and end of Ramadan), or mention the Portuguese Muslim community when reporting on Muslims in other European countries or at the international level.

The most recent of the rather rare occasions when the Portuguese Islamic community has become part of a polemical public debate occurred in January 2010. In a TV talk show aired nationally on 13 January, the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, José Policarpo, had addressed Portuguese women and girls, advising them that "they would put themselves in a whole lot of trouble if they married a Muslim man". There were international echoes, when *USA Today*, the *International Herald Tribune* and the *Daily Mail* (London), among others, reported this. The leading Portuguese newspapers responded critically and invited Muslim responses (both representative and others), which were not polemical or aggressive, and found much support in online readers' comments. In fact, the online version of the main article, published by the important daily *O Público* (14 January 2010), which quotes Policarpo at length, had only 3,123 readers and 645 overwhelmingly critical readers comments, while the follow up interview with the President of CIL, Abdool Magid Vakil (*O Público* 14 January 2010), had 10,993 readers and 542 comments.

16 MAJOR CULTURAL EVENTS

The Day of Compassion (see section 14) on March 15 was the major cultural event in 2009. Preparations are taking place for the celebration in March 2010 of the 25th anniversary of the Central Mosque, the first mosque to be built in Portugal since the fifteenth century, when Muslims and Jews were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula.