



From sending to host societies: how Portugal integrates its minorities - the situation of Muslim immigrants

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Abstract: The debate about how to best integrate its growing ethnic minorities, with origin in different parts of the world, is not new in Europe. This debate is closely linked to the rise of extreme-right and populist movements with a declared anti-immigration agenda seen across the continent during the 1990s. Nowadays, approximately 60% of the EU population believes that there are too many immigrants in their countries. This is valid also for Portugal, although until recently it had been a country of emigration. For many decades thousands of people left Portugal for the USA, Canada, Brazil and other developed European countries. Following significant transformations since the mid-1980s, Portugal became a host society for people arriving from a variety of places and with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Considering the lack of a common European immigrant integration model and the fact that the existent national models seem to be in crisis, this paper will discuss the strategy of Portugal towards the integration of its immigrants, with a special focus on its growing and heterogenic Muslim minority. In Portugal the Muslim community has its main origin in the decolonization process, but nowadays it is becoming increasingly plural in terms of nationalities, cultures and ethnic diversity. We will analyze the origin, structure and context of arrival of these immigrants. We will also discuss the attitude of the Portuguese society towards immigrants and the Muslim community, keeping in mind the weight of History and the Islamic roots of the country. Modern Muslim presence in this Iberian country is a recent phenomenon, and it is becoming increasingly visible due to various dynamics. At the same time, immigration and the increasing national, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity within Portugal contributes to the redefinition of national identity.

The reversal of migratory flows in Portugal

It is possible to analyze the evolution of the Portuguese society in terms of migratory movements and its transformation into a receiver of immigrants. This change - from country of emigration to country of immigration - is one of the most important signs of the changes occurred within the country.

Portugal has had contact with other peoples and cultures at least since the 16th century, as a result of the Discoveries. During that period millions of Portuguese people left their territory towards other parts of the world, with the aim of *civilizing* other peoples and territories. Their presence was cemented in several parts of the world and many communities were formed in different countries.¹

Traditionally Portugal has been a country of emigration. The hard living conditions in the country during the 19th and 20th centuries provoked an exodus of people to other parts of the world. Despite the departure of some Portuguese people for North America and Africa during the 19th century, the main destination for Portuguese emigration was Brazil, at least until 1960.² Between the two World Wars, the flow of emigration decreased, but after 1950 it tended to grow at a constant pace. However, after the 1960s the main destination of emigration flows varied. The problematic political and economic situation of Portugal, the colonial war and the need for workers in several European countries opened the doors of Europe to Portuguese emigration.³ From then on, some European countries became the main choice for Portuguese emigrants. In 1962, France already was the main destination for Portuguese emigrants. However, the economic crises of 1972/74 that affected Europe and the Revolution of 1974 in Portugal lead to a strong decline in flows from Portugal.

During the 1980s, emigration continued to be significant, even though it is difficult to assess it due to Portugal's accession to the European Community and illegal departures. Flows were directed mainly to Europe, but also to the USA and Canada. Departures for these two countries accounted for 24.9% of total departures.

During the last decade of the 20th century, people continued to leave to France, Switzerland, Germany and other European destinations, such as Spain and the United Kingdom, which until then were not among the emigrants' preferences.

¹ Mário F. Lages [et al.], *Os Imigrantes e a População Portuguesa: Imagens Recíprocas*, Lisbon, Observatório da Imigração 21, Alto-Comissariado para a Imigração e Minorias Étnicas, October 2006, p. 57.

² *Id.*, p. 58.

³ *Ibid.*

Departures to North America decreased considerably, and therefore the European character of Portuguese emigration has been confirmed.

Between 1985 and 1990 around 33,000 people left Portugal each year.⁴ During this migratory period, the growing importance of temporary emigration was particularly significant. While until that time most people leaving Portugal mainly consisted of unskilled workers or people without formal education, over the past few years the trend is for students and people holding university degrees to look for conditions to develop their activities in other countries. These days, common belief is that around four millions of Portuguese emigrants live around the world.

Nevertheless and to a certain extent, Portugal lost its character as an emigration country. This is related to the massive arrival of people from different places. Many of these individuals saw their experience in Portugal as just a step within their migratory project. They came to Portugal either because it was the nearest country (for people from Africa or South America) or because it was easier to obtain legal status there. Their intention was to leave afterwards to other European countries, where they would find better living conditions. However, some of them remained in Portugal. This happened for professional reasons, for family reason or simply because it was impossible to move to another country.⁵

On another note, many of the people who arrived to Portugal already had previous experiences in an European country or in an African country, in the case of immigrants arriving from that continent. Portugal had to learn how to deal with this new aspect of its society.

In general, until recently there were very few immigrants in Portugal. Similarly to other Southern European countries, this is a recent phenomenon in Portuguese history. During the Dictatorship period, there was a small flow of people arriving from the former African colonies. In 1970 immigrants accounted for 0.3% of the country's population.

From 1974 to approximately 1979 this number grew exponentially. After the colonies' independence, a large number of people started to arrive to Lisbon. They comprised Portuguese returning to their country and Africans from the newly independent countries, who were running from civil war and hoping to find better living conditions in now free Portugal. Most of them never returned to their countries of origin.

During the 1980s the growing number of immigrants and the diversification of their origins were clear. Portugal joined the European Community in 1986 and

⁴ *Id.*, p. 59.

⁵ Until some time ago the Southern countries of Europe were seen as transitory to immigrants. However, this situation changed and countries like Portugal, Spain and Italy are already considered as main destination countries to many immigrants.

one of the consequences was the internationalization of the Portuguese economy. Many people from Asia – mainly Chinese – and South America – particularly Brazilians – arrived to Portugal.⁶

In 1991, Portugal signed the Shengen Treaty,⁷ thus increasing the trend of national diversification of immigrants. Foreign population living in Portugal grew very rapidly, particularly due to legalization campaigns carried out by the government in 1992 and 1996. People living illegally in Portugal, and even in a few other European countries, took the opportunity to obtain legal status. Nonetheless, in 2000 foreigners in Portugal accounted for only 2% of the total population, mainly from Portuguese-speaking African countries and Brazil. Illegal immigration in Portugal also shows a growing trend since 1996, but it is impossible to know its actual dimension.

Thus, immigration became a structural phenomenon in Portuguese demography only after the early 1990s. Until 2000 most movements were linked to the Portuguese colonial past and to its historical, cultural and economic links. Subsequently, flows changed, with the arrival of citizens from countries without privileged links to Portugal: Ukraine, Russia and Romania. In 2001 an exceptional legalization campaign took place, which contributed to the arrival of more immigrants from these Eastern European countries.

In 2003 a campaign was especially intended for Brazilians living illegally in Portugal, and one year later the possibility of legalization was extended in order to include workers with other nationalities. Therefore, the significant rise in the Brazilian and Eastern European communities in Portugal benefited from exceptional regimes enforced from 2000 onwards.⁸

Regardless of the group involved, migratory movements to Portugal are mainly motivated by economic and professional reasons. However, the family reunification process and the greater ease in obtaining legal documents in order to work have also contributed to the influx of immigrants to Portugal.

Nowadays, there are three major communities of immigrants in Portugal: Brazilians, Eastern Europeans (particularly from Ukraine) and Africans, namely from Portuguese-speaking countries. They are mainly concentrated on the coast, and

⁶ *Id.*, p. 63.

⁷⁷ The Schengen Agreement was signed on 14 June 1985, by Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. They agreed that they would gradually remove controls at their common borders and introduce freedom of movement for all nationals of the signatory Member States, other Member States or third countries. The Schengen Convention supplements the Agreement and lays down the arrangements and safeguards for implementing freedom of movement. It was signed by the same five Member States on 19 June 1990 but did not enter into force until 1995. The Schengen agreements have been extended over time to all 15 old Member States: Italy signed them in 1990, Spain and Portugal in 1991, Greece in 1992, Austria in 1995 and Finland, Sweden and Denmark (under a special arrangement) in 1996. Source: European Union (http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/schengen_agreement_en.htm).

⁸ Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (Aliens and Borders Service), *Relatório de Actividades 2006*, Lisbon, Departamento de Planeamento e Formação, 2006, p. 19.

particularly in Lisbon, Setúbal, Porto and Faro. Nevertheless, the trend is for immigrants to move across the territory depending on job offers. Men account for 55% of immigrant flows, although in the past few years this trend has been eased by family reunification.⁹

It should be noted that when Portugal started to receive a significant influx of immigrants it was not yet prepared for that new reality at institutional and social level (mentality, job offers, etc.). In less than thirty years, Portugal was transformed from a cultural, religious and ethnically homogeneous country into a plural society. The cultural and ethnic diversification within its main cities created the need to adapt its legislation, policies and institutions to this new reality. There was some real effort in order to adapt society and institutions, and in the early 2000s the situation had already changed somewhat. The perception of a debilitating demographic situation in Portugal and the need for these human groups – mainly consisting of working-age men and women – for its economic development, for the sustainability of the social security system and the enrichment of the country's cultural life was important to change policies and mentalities.

These days, immigrants account for 9% of the labor force and for 4.5% of the national population.¹⁰ Naturally, these figures do not include illegal immigrants. Therefore, it is fair to say that immigrants contribute significantly to Portugal's economic development.

Taking into account that as yet no common policy exists at EU level aimed at dealing with immigration¹¹ or integration of the migratory flows, the current national immigration policy is organized around four pivotal guidelines: the control of migratory flows, the promotion of legal immigration, the fight against illegal entries in the country, and the integration of immigrants.¹² Therefore, the Portuguese model of integration consists of a structure that aims at co-ordinating the different aspects of immigration and integration.

In 1996 the government created the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities. This institution was then defined as "an interdepartmental structure for government consultation and support in matters of immigration and

⁹ *Id.*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, *Plan for Immigration Integration*, Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 63-A/2007 of May 3, p. 5.

¹¹ The future common European Union immigration policy was one of the themes under discussion during the High Level Conference on Legal Immigration that took place in Lisbon, between 13 and 14 of September 2007. This meeting was considered an important step for the formulation of a policy to deal with immigration at EU level. Similarly, issues such as the problems of legal immigration, the control of immigration flows, the integration of immigrants and the contribution of migrations to development were under discussion. This conference was also under severe criticism because it highlighted the intention of EU countries to promote the entry of highly skilled workers, who are seen as more helpful in economic terms. According to some people this can be considered a kind of "condescending racism" as it denies the entry to other less skilled people. Moreover, the brain drain from African societies will have a negative impact and bring about considerable damages to African continent.

¹² Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (Aliens and Borders Service), p. 4.

ethnic minorities".¹³ Its mission included the promotion of integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities into the Portuguese society; the co-operation with immigrants' associations and social institutions in the definition of policies aiming at promoting social integration and fighting social and economic exclusion; the supervision of the application of legal provisions seeking to prevent and forbid discriminatory and racist actions based on race, color, nationality and ethnic background; the promotion of knowledge and acceptance of the Portuguese language, legislation and cultural and moral values by immigrants as preconditions to a full integration into society, but always respecting its cultural and social identity; the improvement of living conditions of immigrants; the promotion of equal opportunities for all citizens allowed to stay in Portugal.

Last May, in the framework of a reform of the Administration and public services, the High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue was created, i.e. an institute that will replace the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities.¹⁴ This new institution results from the fusion of several organizations: the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities, the Mission for Religious Dialogue, the structure of *Programa Escolhas* (Choices Program) and Secretariado Entreculturas (Intercultural Secretariat). This new structure centralizes in one single public institute the responsibilities and attributions of several bodies. The goal is to reduce bureaucracy and to more efficiently promote intercultural and religious dialogue.

Both institutions have played a very important role in helping immigrant communities integrate in a new environment and in bringing the State and Portuguese authorities closer to immigrants. Their creation clearly showed that authorities were aware of the transformations that society was going through and that the new social reality in Portugal demanded new measures by the State. This new situation brought upon the State the responsibility of both integrating these citizens, with particular emphasis on the reinforcement of social cohesion, and improving integration and cultural diversity.¹⁵

Despite the positive progress of integration policies for immigrants in recent years, until recently Portugal had not enforced an overall and integrated plan to systematize the aims and commitments of the State regarding the welcome and integration of immigrants. Therefore, last May a commitment was reached establishing the State as the main ally for immigrant integration. The *Plan for Immigration Integration* is the outcome of the collective work of all Ministries with the contribution of civil society organizations. It resulted in a document that mirrors

¹³ Decree-Law No 251/2002.

¹⁴ Decree-Law No 167/2007.

¹⁵ Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, *Plan for Immigration Integration*, p. 5.

the sensitivities of Portuguese society. This plan aims at launching new initiatives, ensuring the consolidation of those already in place, and simplifying and reducing bureaucracy entailed by various procedures. Immigrants are encouraged to participate and take joint responsibility in conceiving, developing and assessing immigration policies. Immigrant associations are clearly named as a primary expression of immigrant participation.

The implementation of 122 measures will cover several areas: the welcoming of immigrants; work, employment and professional training; education; housing; health; social security; culture and language; justice; media; information society; sport; family reunification; fight against racism and discrimination; religious freedom; relations with countries of origin; access to citizenship and political rights; gender equality; and human trafficking. These measures have two explicit goals: the creation of conditions for the full integration of immigrants and the promotion of a positive view of immigration.

One other recent initiative clearly pointing to a *new* Portuguese society is the creation of ten cable TV channels especially for immigrant communities in Portugal. These channels are broadcasted in Russian, Ukrainian, Chinese and other languages.

With regard to the integration and acceptance of refugees, in 2006 Portugal accepted 17 refugees after a request from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Twelve of them were in Morocco and the remaining five were rescued by a Spanish boat near Malta.

As for asylum seekers, the 129 requests made last year to Portuguese authorities came mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel, Russian Federation, Angola, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. Only 30 of them obtained the statute of refugee.¹⁶ Nowadays, there are about 200 refugees in Portugal.

Attitudes towards immigrants

When asked about the main factors of integration, immigrants usually answer that having a job is the most important condition for being accepted in the Portuguese society. Secondly, they mention the presence of their family near them and the ability to speak the language of the country and to understand its culture.¹⁷

The personal or familiar experience of emigration could play a significant role in outlining people's visions of immigration. Such an experience could encourage a

¹⁶ Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (Aliens and Borders Service), p. 45.

¹⁷ Lages, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

more open attitude towards Otherness and to the emerging reality. Indeed, among Portuguese there is the general feeling that immigration contributes in a positive way to society. People are able to recognize its economic and cultural value, recognizing that Portuguese cultural life is enriched by the presence of other people and that immigrants are economically important as they perform the tasks that no one else is interested in.¹⁸

According to a 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey released last October 4, people around the world expressed concern about the level of immigration to their country.¹⁹ Moreover, people in 44 of the 47 countries surveyed agreed with tighter restrictions and control of entries of people into their country.

In contrast to the migratory historical experience, available data show that 53% of people support a decrease of immigration to Portugal.²⁰ This means that not only they do not accept the arrival of more immigrants but also they sustain that some of the existing immigrants should leave the country. Immigrants coming from Africa (the first group to arrive and settle in Portugal) face the greatest opposition, followed by the remaining immigrants with economic motivations.²¹ Perhaps because they are able to understand the inherent obstacles in the process of adaptation to a new reality, former emigrants show a more open-minded position towards immigration than the remaining society.

In general, explicit racist acts are not so common, as they are a social censured behavior. However, racism does exist in certain social segments, usually in a 'disguised' or paternalistic form. According to a recent study, approximately one quarter of the Portuguese population express racism in their attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes.

This is even more marked when we look at the perception of cultural difference, especially concerning African and Eastern Europe immigrants.²² The perception of cultural difference regarding other human groups is also an expression of prejudice, but it is not exposed to the same social condemnation. The Other/foreigner is seen as different, but this difference is related, to a greater extent, to cultural aspects and less with skin color. Thus, the intolerant person gives a correct image of himself/herself, but at the same time he/she points out the differences and sometimes even emphasizes them.

¹⁸ Lages, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹⁹ The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *World Publics Welcome Global Trade – But not Immigration*, Washington, October 4, 2007, p. 25.

²⁰ Lages, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-211.

²¹ According to some news, the number of immigrants living in Portugal has decreased in 2006. The departure of some immigrants seems to have been caused by the economic crisis that affected Portugal during the past few years and the lack of jobs. The most affected group was Eastern Europeans, particularly those from Ukraine. Ricardo Dias Felner "Número de imigrantes em Portugal atinge nível mais baixo dos últimos cinco anos", August 13 2007 issue of *Público* (<http://ultimahora.publico.clix.pt/noticia.aspx?id=1302070>).

²² Lages, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

If it is true that most Portuguese say they accept immigrants – which is predictable –, one third refuse closer links to them.²³ Prejudices against African immigrants are the highest, followed by Eastern European. This is valid both for racist attitudes and for the perception of cultural difference.²⁴

On another note, among immigrants there is also the feeling that the most discriminated group comprises African immigrants, while Brazilians are well accepted.²⁵

This kind of attitude towards African immigrants clashes with five centuries of history and culture. The historical, cultural and linguistic links with several African countries, as well as the long presence of African people among us, are not enough to prevent Portuguese from harboring prejudice against them. Many Portuguese, in particular the older generations, are still influenced by ideas formulated when Portugal was a colonizer country, and so they continue to see African people as inferior and Portugal as a country of white people. Portuguese people like to see themselves as non-racist and good hosts, but evidence and our daily experience show a very different reality.

Immigrant populations can suffer from professional, social, economic, institutional and ideological exclusion. It is the authorities' responsibility to pay attention to this reality in constant mutation, by implementing measures to prevent potential unstable social situations. Immigrants that declared having suffered discrimination refer situations related to access to work. Some of them also declared to have been discriminated when trying to find housing or when trying to open a bank account.²⁶

Although Portuguese understand the obstacles that immigrants have to deal with and are sympathetic with their situation, they simultaneously show intolerant positions. Similarly to the rest of Europe,²⁷ less educated people in Portugal, with lower incomes and living in rural areas, are the most vigorously opposed to the arrival of more immigrants.²⁸

²³ Lages, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-267.

²⁴ *Id.*, p. 277.

²⁵ *Id.*, p. 309.

²⁶ Maria José Carrilho, Maria Cidália Mesquita Figueiredo, "Measures for Ethnic Discrimination in Portugal: an explanatory analyse", *Revista de Estudos Demográficos*, Instituto Nacional de Estatística, No 41, 2007, pp. 53-71.

²⁷ European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, *Majorities' Attitudes towards Minorities: Key Findings from the Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey*, March 2005 (http://fra.europa.eu/fra/index.php?fuseaction=content.dsp_cat_content&catid=3fb38ad3e22bb&contentid=42369ad95426f)

²⁸ Lages, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

Muslim communities in Portugal

After examining the policies undertaken by Portugal in the field of immigration and integration, it is important to assess the influence of those policies on Muslims and to understand the status of Muslims in Portugal.

The increasing visibility of Muslim communities in the main cities of Europe is the result not only of their demographic expansion, but also of their growing social and cultural affirmation. The formulation of social, educational and urban policies by the government and local authorities must take into account these minority groups, in such a way that their integration is ensured and that their rights are respected.

Portugal's links to the Muslim world are ancient. The eight centuries of Islamic presence in the Iberian Peninsula – from the 8th to the 15th century – left a rich cultural legacy in both Portugal and Spain. The Al-Andalus period was decisive for the formation of the Portuguese identity and also very important to the cultural and scientific evolution of Europe. The current Muslim presence in Portugal has no social or ethnic link with this historic presence.

As Islam is undergoing a transformation process from an immigrants' religion into a religion that by full right is part of the European reality,²⁹ a recent phenomenon in Portugal is the growing interest in issues related to Islam. This interest has increased attention towards the Portuguese Muslim community. Largely ignored during decades, Muslims living in Portugal are now the object of interest of the society, media and academic world.

In the first decades of the 20th century there were Muslims in some of the Portuguese former colonies, namely in Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and East Timor. The situation was sometimes tense as Muslims were from time to time considered a threat to the national unity. At that time Portugal was a deeply Catholic, closed and conservative country.

Nowadays, the Muslim community in Portugal is small compared to other European countries and has a recent origin. Although it is not possible to know the exact number of Muslims in Portugal – it is not mandatory to declare one's religion affiliation –, several sources suggest a number between 35 and 40 thousand people. These figures account for around 0.4% of total population. However, when I recently spoke to a Muslim convert, I was told that according to her own research and conclusions (based on statistics from the National Statistics Institute and her contacts with other Muslims) the Muslim population might already account for 1% of total population.³⁰ Naturally, it is not possible to confirm these figures.

²⁹ Dasseto, Felice [et al.], *Islam in the European Union: What's at Stake in the Future?*, Brussels, European Parliament, 2007, p. IV.

³⁰ Personal interview with Mrs. Nidia Hanifa Ponte, Oporto, July 17 2007.

Nevertheless, Muslims represent the largest religious minority in the country. Approximately 70% of Muslims living in Portugal are Portuguese citizens.

The contemporary Muslim presence in Portugal is essentially a post-colonial phenomenon and a consequence of immigration. Before 1974, there was only a small community of twenty or thirty people, who arrived from Mozambique and were from Indian origin. They belonged to a cultured middle class and they came to Portugal in order to proceed with their studies at the university. On the one hand, this group faced some obstacles due to the fact that they were very few, but on the other hand, they had not to deal with difficulties at a cultural and language level because they were arriving from a Portuguese-speaking country and they were familiar with Portuguese culture. For this reason, they did not feel any of the tensions or constraints that many times affected other European Muslim minorities. They played a very important role in making contacts and developing the bureaucratic processes that would lead to the establishment and institutionalization of the Muslim community in Portugal. They were the founders of the Muslim Community of Lisbon, an institution that plays a central role in the management of relations between the Muslims and the broader society and political power.

After the Revolution of 1974 and during the decolonization process, thousands of people arrived to Portugal from former colonies. Among them there were many Muslims, who escaped unnoticed among around 500,000 people. They settled down mainly in Lisbon and in its surroundings and mainly came from Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. Also in this case, their familiarity with Portuguese culture and language made their arrival and integration into the Portuguese society much easier.

Comparing the two groups and in general, the integration of Mozambicans was favored by several conditions. People from Mozambique had both Portuguese and Mozambican nationality and therefore did not have to cope with the difficult task of waiting for Portuguese nationality. Another reason for the good integration of this group of people was their professional background. They were mainly educated people, working in the services sector or as traders. When they arrived to Portugal many of them were very successful in re-establishing themselves in the same professions. Even if the majority were Sunnis, there was a considerable proportion of Isma'īlīs (a Shia branch) among them.

Guineans arrived some time later. Some of them were students and some were former members of the Portuguese army. This last group came to Portugal hoping to claim their right to the pensions that were due to them. Some of them

had to face some obstacles in order to obtain Portuguese nationality.³¹ Guineans had different ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the composition of the population of their country of origin. During the 1980s and 1990s the flow of Muslim immigrants from Guinea continued to grow. These more recent waves are economically and socially different from the previous one. They consist mainly of young men, looking for a job in the lowest sectors of economy, such as the construction.

On the whole, the first waves of Muslim immigrants that arrived to Portugal were successfully integrated into society, even if no public policies were put into practice to ease their adaptation. Today some are physicians, managers of important companies, economists, traders, and even politicians.

After joining the European Community and the Schengen Treaty, Portugal raised some interest among a new group of individuals coming mainly from Arab countries and the Indian subcontinent. Among the Arabs, the main group arrived from Morocco, followed by Tunisians and Algerians. From the Indian subcontinent, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis comprised the main group. And then the smaller group that came from Sub-Saharan Africa consisted mainly of people from Senegal.

By that time, Portuguese government carried out a legalization campaign and it became easier to apply and obtain a visa in Portugal. Consequently, many individuals from Muslim countries who were in an illegal situation in other European countries came to Portugal in order to get documents and a legal status in European soil.

Moreover, the proximity with North Africa redirected many migratory flows to Portugal. Although many of these people would settle in Portugal, many of these individuals only stayed in Portugal for one or two years and subsequently left to other European countries in order to find better salaries.³² In this sense, Portugal works as a "door to Europe".

These last groups to arrive to Portugal have to cope with greater obstacles to their social and professional integration and even in obtaining a legal status, because they do not speak the language and do not have any kind of ties with the host country. Some of them live in economic poverty (especially those coming from sub-Saharan African countries). They work mainly as traders, street sellers and in the construction. These migratory flows consist generally of young men, who many times live in groups and share a rented house in order to save as much money as possible. The aim of the majority is to bring their families to Portugal, which in some of the cases is already taking place.

³¹ Personal interview with Mr. Abdul Rehman, President of the Muslim Community of Oporto, Oporto, September 29 2007.

³² *Ibid.*

The arrival of these new human groups is creating the current diversification in terms of nationality, ethnicity, socioeconomic conditions and culture in the Islamic presence in Portugal. This is reflected in the variety of religious practices within the community and in the emergence of new mosques and prayer rooms all over the country. Although previously Muslims were mainly concentrated in Lisbon and its outskirts, in the past 15 years the Muslim population has spread across the country to look for jobs (as it happened with the other immigrant groups).

An interesting feature of the Muslim community in Portugal is the high number of Ismailīs, around seven or eight thousand members. They arrived in Portugal also in 1974 and their social and professional integration was very successful. They are also the most prosperous among the Portuguese Muslims. They have strong relations with other Ismailīs communities around the world, especially with the British and Canadian ones. For instance, the three most important Ismailīs centers are located in London, Vancouver and Lisbon.

There are some differences between the Muslim community in Portugal and Muslim communities in other European countries. Often Muslim communities in some countries are composed of people coming, if not from the same country, at least from the same region where the majority of population is Muslim. This is evident in Germany in terms of the Turkish population or in France regarding the North African population. This never happened in the Portuguese case. When people from Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau came to Portugal, they already had experienced a minority status in their countries of origin.

The perception of the current diversity among the Muslim population demands a new discursive approach to this minority. Instead of just one Muslim community, we should refer to Muslim communities in Portugal. Islam is the common link between several national communities in the country. Everything else is different: from their language and culture to their rituals and food. The existence of several associations – each nationality has its own organization of this kind – proves it. At the same time, these associations reveal a growing Muslim civil engagement.

Social networks work as important mechanisms for the process of integration of immigrants. They provide information and resources to help newcomers in their adaptation to the new country, to help them defend their rights and in the clarification of their duties. It is common for new immigrants to address the existing Muslim institutions in order to get support to find a house, work and to organize their daily life in the host society. Some of these associations also work as a powerful socialization network, as they arrange for Portuguese lessons and they organize cultural and entertaining events for its members.

In a few other European countries, there was a trend for informal ghettos to form around local mosques and community centers. Imams imported from Pakistan or North Africa knew little of local conditions and in many cases did not even speak the languages of their European hosts. Things were not exactly processed that way in Portugal. During the first wave of immigration from the former colonies, it was common for some nationalities to gather around the same neighborhood, but the religious factor did not seem to have played a significant role in this process. This concentration was common to people from Cape Verde, Guinea, Angola and Mozambique, no matter what religion they belonged to. It is true that in Lisbon some areas are crowded with shops belonging to Muslims, e.g. in a quarter called Martim Moniz. But again, these shops and the people who live there are mainly from Bangladesh, so national identity seems to work as the main cause for this concentration. After the establishment of a certain number of families or individuals from the same origin in a given area it is common for them to open a mosque or prayer room close to their work place or house. This occurs because it is difficult for them to cross an entire city to go the main mosque of that city. As for Islamic religious leaders in Portugal, they mainly come from within the existing communities and they are fully integrated into the country's values and culture.

Since their arrival, these communities have been identified firstly with reference to its national and ethnic features, and finally by their religious affiliation. Even today, the national identity seems to prevail in the definition of the individual in the public space. However, the notion of *Muslim* is gaining importance, in part due to the fact of greater awareness of individuals' religious identity.

The great majority of Muslims perform their religious duties, even the younger generations. They go to the Mosque at least on Fridays and they fulfill all religious observances of Ramadan. The rate of non-practicing 'sociological Muslims' in Portugal might be lower than in other European countries. One of the reasons that can explain this is the fact that communities are small and so there is a greater interaction between its members.³³

In a country with 85% of Catholics, Muslims felt often neglected by the authorities. The lack of support from the State and local authorities was felt in several occasions.³⁴ Despite all the efforts made by the government, some public entities are said not to be prepared to deal with immigrant problems, as they are not able to give answers or help.³⁵ However, things seem to be advancing with the

³³ Personal interview with Mrs. Abdul Rehman.

³⁴ One of those occasions was when the Muslim community of Oporto asked the city's mayor for a site to build a new Mosque, which was to be financed by Saudi Arabia. The continuous hesitation and postponement of authorities in conceding the site rendered that project impossible.

³⁵ Personal interview with Mrs. Nidia Hanifa Ponte.

new Commission for Religious Freedom and with the Law of Religious Freedom³⁶ approved in 2001, and more recently with the Plan for Immigration Integration.

The Commission for Religious Freedom is an independent institution for the government and parliament consultation. The new Plan for Immigration Integration also includes some policy measures concerning religious freedom.

Usually Muslims tend to consider Portugal a welcoming country, saying they can freely practice their religion. Despite some cases of negative remarks that some had to hear when walking in the streets – the majority of times related to Muslim garments -, no cases of vandalism, violence or discrimination against Muslims were reported. Mosques and community centers are well integrated into their areas and Muslims are said to have good relations with neighbors. In contrast to many European countries, in Portugal there were no problems regarding the construction of new Mosques or opening of prayer rooms and religious symbols were never under discussion. Also, Muslims are not affected by major social problems that frequently affect other minorities in the country.

As for social attitudes towards Muslims it is interesting to notice the discrepancies of discourses between Muslim families and Portuguese who converted to Islam.³⁷ The latter group is more critical towards Portuguese society, declaring that it is complicated to be a Muslim in Portugal. Converted people feel more comfortable in highlighting negative aspects of society, given that they are not immigrants and therefore are not limited by the likely restrictions of that condition.

In sum, Muslim minority in Portugal consists of multiple national, ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities. Its main feature is its growth in terms of population and new nationalities and cultures. The first wave of immigration developed remarkable integration processes. The most recent wave coming from Muslim countries arrived to Portugal as part of a continuous influx of immigrants and for economic reasons. They have to cope with more difficulties in their integration; they do not speak the language and are not familiar with the culture of the country. In addition, they have to compete in the labor market with other group of immigrants, such as the Brazilians and the Eastern Europeans, who are well regarded by Portuguese society. However, it is important to notice that this does not happen due to *muslimness*, as Muslim communities are much esteemed at

³⁶ This law answered some of the claims from religious minorities in the country. It changes the situation concerning religious weddings, which are now valid before the law, assistance to ill people in hospitals and religious education in schools.

³⁷ There are very few converts in Portugal. However, after the events of September 11 the rate of conversion increased. Some members of the Muslim community explain this with the fact that, until that tragic day, many people did not know anything about Islam, which they considered to be a Middle Eastern religion. After that date they realized that there were Muslims also in Portugal and tried to learn more about a religion that was completely strange to them. The leaders of Muslim communities in Portugal were invited to conferences, seminars, meeting in universities to talk about Islam and their community. Some people felt attracted by the doctrine ("without inconsistencies" as one converted girl told me) and religious principles and so they decided to convert to Islam.

national level. When existent, prejudices are more often related to the national origins of the individual – the majority is from African and North African countries – than to the fact that he or she is a Muslim. A person from Morocco will always be seen as a Moroccan first and only afterwards as a Muslim.

Although Muslims have become more visible in the past few years, their contribution as an integral part of the economic and cultural fabric of society is still largely ignored.

Conclusion

In the phenomenon of immigration, the movement of individuals or groups is a process of dialogue and confrontation.³⁸ These days, the discussion about immigration is often linked to two other topics: security and culture. More than ever before in Europe, migrations are viewed as a security issue, when they probably should be seen as a labor and human rights subject. Moreover, as the recent Pew Global Attitudes Survey showed, opinions about immigration are closely linked to perceptions of threats to a country's culture.³⁹ People who favor stricter immigration controls are more likely to believe their way of life needs to be protected against foreign influence. The discussion regarding western values in Europe is essentially a defensive device to stop these perceivable threats and to advance the project of a "fortress Europe". In this sense, Muslim inhabitants are viewed through the lens of security questions and cultural threats more often than other communities.

Integration can be seen as a process resulting from a continuous adjustment between the different populations in the same territory and the policies adopted by State institutions. It is also the outcome of an often conflicting dialogue between dominant groups, public actors, local and national authorities.

Portugal has experienced the transition of being an emigrant country to country of immigration in the 1990s, and is the last of the Western European countries where this transition took place. For this reason, Portugal could benefit from other countries' experiences, adopting the best practices and learning with the mistakes of other countries' strategies. When considering the model of welcoming and integration of immigrants in Portugal, the country is confessedly committed to

³⁸ Donald Cuccioletta, "Multiculturalism or Transculturalism: Towards a Cosmopolitan Citizenship", *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 12, 2001/2002, p. 3.

³⁹ The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *World Publics Welcome Global Trade – But not Immigration*, p. 27.

an intercultural model, which is deduced from multicultural policies.⁴⁰ However, those policies have changed and improved. This model consists of interactive and relational dynamics, proposing the welcoming of the 'Other' and the transformation of both the host society and the arriving community or individual into a new entity. The cultural miscegenation helps to create a new identity.

It is important for immigrants to feel that they belong to the host country, but simultaneously that their original culture is respected. Immigrants are free to keep their national and cultural features, but at the same time it is important that they start identifying themselves with the new country. This is likely to happen through the strengthening of their presence in the society. Each person comprises multiple identities, linking him/her to his/her own cultural heritage, but also to the culture of the host country, neighborhood, school and street.

Immigrants have rights, but also duties. A critical aspect for the expressions of their rights is the political participation in the host country, as this will increase their sense of belonging and of sharing responsibility for the management of public policies. However, the new Plan for Immigration Integration fails to improve the political rights of immigrants. It will be interesting to see in a year from now, how this Plan is being implemented and what the results are.

Nothing in the Portuguese experience corroborates the theory that proposes the distinction between immigrants that can be easily integrated and those that due to their different cultural and ethnic background are not likely to be integrated into the European society. According to this thesis, Brazilians would develop better mechanisms of integration, while for instance, Muslims immigrants (the majority from African origin) – due to their religious and ethnic background – would be those with more problems in accepting the values and culture of the dominant society. If indeed it is true that Brazilians are not likely to face great difficulty in their integration process, it is also true that Muslims living in Portugal, regardless of their national origin, are well integrated into the society. This is especially remarkable as Portugal continues to be a very Catholic country (even if less than half of Catholics go to church on Sundays!). Also, the religious factor was never a reason for discrimination acts in Portugal.

Portuguese society and identity is the product of different peoples and cultures, namely Muslims and Jews. And all of a sudden, it has become a plural society, consisting of different ethnic, national, cultural and religious communities. This new reality demands a continuous effort from the part of political power and social actors. In this context, the Portuguese identity is going through a redefinition

⁴⁰ Rui Marques, "Diversidade e Identidade Nacional na União Europeia: Desafios multiculturais", conferência *Diversidade e Identidade Nacional na União Europeia: desafios multiculturais*, Lisbon, Portuguese Institute of International Relations, March 22–23.

process, with the creation of a new identity, which is simultaneously a challenge and an opportunity. This identity should comprise all citizens and be open to include the 'Other'.

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