Chapter 11
Portuguese colonialism and the Islamic community of Lisbon

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11.1 The Portuguese governance of Islam: Historical background

This chapter deals with a story of power relations between the Portuguese colonial government and the Muslim community that began to settle in Lisbon during the 1960s and attempted to assert itself, both in cultural and political terms. It documents the struggle for social visibility that is involved in the interaction between dominant and subaltern groups. But above all, it offers an example of the kind of governance the Portuguese authorities were forcing upon Muslim communities during colonial rule, more specifically during the ten years of war (1964-1974) that was waged against the nationalist movements in the colonies of Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique.

I will focus on the role of Suleiman Valy Mamede and the association he led, the Islamic Community of Lisbon (ICL), which was set up in the Portuguese capital in 1968. Although the number of Muslims in Lisbon was rather small by that time, Valy Mamede thought he could claim a special rank for himself and his association considering the millions of ‘Islamised’ people who lived in Guinea and Mozambique, then thought to be integral parts of Portugal. In that demographic and political scenery, he cherished the dream of becoming the spokesman of the ‘Portuguese’ Islamic populations, federating them under the ICL, but this project was doomed to failure. It clashed with the colonial authority’s attempts, particularly in Mozambique, to gain the support of the local Muslim leadership against the anti-colonial guerrillas. This gave rise to a tug of war: on the one hand, Valy Mamede and his followers sought to promote their place within the colonial order, forcing the Portuguese administration to fulfil a commitment, until then just rhetoric, to a multiracial society; on the other, the colonial government discouraged such attempts that could easily get out of control. In spite of his closeness to some influential circles of Salazar’s dictatorship and even the Catholic Church, Valy Mamede ended up being seen by the authorities as a nuisance, someone who could disrupt a delicate balance because he did not fit into the Portuguese strategy. He was so mistrusted that the intelligence services and the political police put him under surveillance until the end of the dictatorship.²
To get the overall picture of this particular story, one has to take into account the position Portugal occupied in the hierarchy of the world system. According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, this country was for many centuries the core of a colonial empire and on the periphery of Europe, performing the systemic function of intermediary between the core and peripheral regions. This gave it the double character of a simultaneously colonial and colonised country (Santos 1990: 107; 1994: 58-59, 130-132; 2002: 42-45). Portugal has been defined by a contradiction between consumption patterns characteristic of core countries and a production model specialised in segments not highly valued on international markets. Portuguese identity images could only suffer from this duality, which led to the coexistence of social representations typical of core societies with others typical of peripheral ones, in configurations that were often paradoxical (Santos 1994: 60).

Until the end of the nineteenth century, without financial, organisational or human resources to run the extensive territorial possessions in Africa, unable to institute a real colonial state and forced to hire local populations to perform many of the administrative tasks, Portuguese colonialism had been basically self-delusional (Santos 2002: 58-59). It could strive with all its might to join the restricted club of European imperial powers, but it had neither the means nor the causal dynamics to fulfil that pretension. Such a precarious position remained after World War II, despite the fact that the Portuguese state had managed to gather some fund reserves, thus becoming more resourceful in its sway over the African colonies. Already in 1959, a memorandum from the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs foresaw the collapse of Portuguese possessions.

By the end of the decade the Portuguese will probably have been forced to realise that they have neither the political nor the economic resources to maintain indefinitely singlehanded control of their African provinces.  

Although Portuguese colonialist practices did indeed show the external signs of colonial domination, at the same time they concealed the fact that Portugal, as a colonial power, was merely a mediator of Western core countries' interests in Africa. When those interests began to shift to a neocolonialist strategy in the 1960s and 1970s, Portuguese pretences lost all foreign support, particularly from the United States (Antunes 1991; Rodrigues 2008). That Salazar's policy stuck to the colonies against the whole world only reveals the importance colonialism had for the national self-image of an authoritarian political elite.

The governance of Islam in the Portuguese context reflected the predicaments of its semi-peripheral condition. Engaged in a power com-
petition, the Portuguese authorities and ideologues recognised the strength of Islamic influence and the prospect of its superiority, which threatened to overturn the Catholic (Portuguese) ascendency over the African populations — an ascendency that, due to a lack of means, was always more rhetorical than effective. In other colonial contexts, namely in French possessions in sub-Saharan Africa, Muslims were also perceived as threatening and untrustworthy, and the authorities kept a close watch on their religious leadership (Harrison 1988: 42; Triaud 2006: 271). But my working hypothesis is that the discomfort that the Portuguese authority felt in relation to Muslims, especially those of Asian origin, was structurally linked to the semi-peripheral condition of Portugal and the frailties it implied.

One can detect a distinctive pattern in the relations of Portuguese colonialism with Islam and the Muslim populations. Starting in the 1940s and even earlier (Enes 1946: 212-215) and continuing until the first half of the colonial war period (1961-1965), Muslims were conceived as menacing and unmanageable (Bastos 2008). A whole array of ideologues, military, political policemen and colonial anthropologists described how Muslims were keen on overtaking Portuguese power according to the layout of pan-Islamism (Rodrigues 1948; Dias 1956; Franklin 1956). On the contrary, the ‘animist’ populations of Guinea and Mozambique were considered to be potential allies of the colonial authority. Unlike Islam, impervious to Portuguese ‘Western’ values, African ‘native’ religions were not taken seriously and ‘animists’ were thought to be pliable to Catholic preaching and Portuguese propaganda.

Nonetheless, the end of the 1960s witnessed a dramatic shift in this view due to the knowledge that had been acquired in the meantime. Now the ‘experts’, particularly those who worked in the intelligence services, saw the local Muslim leaders as preferential allies of colonisers. The assumption was that those leaders had become gradually aware of what they would lose in future independent African nations ruled by ‘atheist’ Marxist regimes. The ‘animists’, on the other hand, were known to have been recruited by the nationalist movements and served as their main supporters, thus becoming lost to the Portuguese cause (Cruz 1968; Vieira 1971).

Of course, the old mistrust towards the Muslims did not completely vanish in this new paradigm. Stubborn stereotypes and identity depictions kept on conditioning the political choices. In fact, ‘ambivalence’ is the key word to explain most of the policies that the Portuguese administration applied to the Muslim communities in the African colonies. Nevertheless, until 1974, those policies shared a wish to build bridges with Islam so that Muslims could be co-opted into the Portuguese war effort.

In order to focus on the role played by Valy Mamede and his ICL, the preceding background information must be kept in mind.
11.2 Twisted relations: The governance of Islam and the Islamic Community of Lisbon

In 1968, under the leadership of Valy Mamede, a small group of 25 Sunni Muslims founded the Islamic Community of Lisbon (ICL). Behind them was a story of migration, as their ancestors had moved from the region of Gujarat in India to Mozambique towards the end of the nineteenth century. Later, some of them came to Lisbon to pursue their high school or university studies and their businesses – namely Valy Mamede, who arrived in 1953 when he was only sixteen years old (Ferreira 1989: 191; Alves 1995). They were, so to say, pioneering a wave of Muslim migration towards Portugal, which only attained its full expression after the collapse of the dictatorship.

With the creation of the ICL, their purpose was apparently close to the one that inspired the birth of several Muslim associations in Mozambique, many of them controlled by people of Indian origin. They wanted to promote and diffuse the Islamic culture in an environment dominated by Christianity, committing themselves to the ecumenical dialogue between religions so dear to the Vatican in that period. They also put pressure on the authorities so that the Muslims who lived in Lisbon or visited the city could perform their religious duties in proper conditions. In Valy Mamede’s view, this required no less than the building of a mosque.

These were the official objectives of the ICL as stated in its statutes. Nonetheless, the historical record – some public speeches that Valy Mamede gave, declarations made in articles published in the bulletin of the association, as well as the information gathered by national intelligence and the political police – give us every reason to suspect that he aspired to a much higher role for himself and the organisation he was leading.

The founder of the ICL and its first president was a complex character. The fact that he worked as a low-level civil servant in the Ministry of the Overseas did not prevent him from mingling with people who were well positioned in the hierarchies of the regime and the Catholic Church. Apparently supportive of the Portuguese dictatorship, his self-affirmation was enmeshed with the assertion of an ‘Islamic Community’, less real than imaginary. Valy Mamede played on two different – and not necessarily compatible – chessboards: on the one hand, loyalty towards the Salazarist regime and its colonial strategy; on the other, the promotion of Islam in order to raise it to the same level as the Catholic religion. The latter called for greater visibility to be given to Muslims in the context of a transcontinental system perceived as an ‘empire’. Valy Mamede was going to find out that such an aspiration would force him to go beyond the acceptable limits defined by the political regime.

The trajectory of Valy Mamede and the group he represented must be understood in the context of the legally framed colonial hierarchy between
‘indigene’ and ‘civilised’ or ‘assimilated’. He belonged to the last category, one that was expected to enjoy all the rights of the dominant white population; this explains most of his strategy to find a proper place for Muslims who were considered to be socially and politically integrated. In fact, he was attempting to take advantage of a new rhetoric in the ideological legitimisation of Portuguese colonialism. He took this ideology at its face value, or at least pretended to do so, and confronted it with its consequences. By doing so, he was performing the ‘logical’ role of the ‘assimilated’, demanding the fulfilment of an ‘assimilationism’ that the colonial system proclaimed in theory without any real intention to carry it out in practice (Macagno 2006: 57). If, according to that ideology, there were no coloniser and colonised, and if everybody were just plain Portuguese, then Muslims should be given the rights already enjoyed by Catholics.

[...]. It is necessary to dignify Portuguese Islam, in order to prove that the Muslim Community is not a cultural or ethnic minority, but an ensemble of Portuguese who follow the Islamic religion on a par with the rest of their fellow countrymen. (Mamede 1967: 67)

In this statement, Valy Mamede placed the idea of ‘ethnicity’ in opposition to that of ‘citizenship’. The first was an idea that placed Muslims in an inferior position, close to a marginal and minority status. On the contrary, the notion of being a citizen fuelled feelings of pride, suggesting that Muslims were equal to any other ‘Portuguese’. Valy Mamede was negotiating the place of Muslims within the symbolic hierarchies of Salazar’s regime. If Portugal were supposed to spread from Minho, its northern boundary, to the overseas territories – as the official rhetoric put it – then it would be necessary to recognise the parity between Islam and the Catholic religion in such a huge territory.

Islam and Catholicism undeniably are the two great religions that occupy places of prominence in the Portuguese territory. (Mamede 1971: 5)

And yet, no matter how much Valy Mamede tried to integrate his vision into the colonial frame, his fate was to clash with the unwillingness of the Portuguese authorities. To illustrate this, I will consider three strategies, all taken from the period that goes from 1968 until the beginning of the 1970s.

**i) First strategy: The claim for political representation**

On 24 August 1965, the chiefs of the Muslim Religious Brotherhoods, a network close to Valy Mamede, presented a proposal to the authorities, suggesting that a permanent representative of Islam take a seat in the
Chamber of Corporations, a branch of the institutional system in Salazar’s dictatorship. They were requesting recognition of a right that had already been granted to the Catholic religion (Mamede 1970b; Cahen 2000: 577), and thus hinting at the parallel positions of Islam and Catholicism in the Portuguese empire. Later, and according to Valy Mamede:

[...] The Muslims of Inhambane, in July 1969, also expressed their burning desire to see included, for the first time, the name of an Islamite among the seven representatives of the province in the list of candidates to the National Assembly’ (Mamede 1970b: 9).

Muslims were thus striving to become visible in the political arena by reinforcing the links between the Portuguese regime and a supposed ‘Islamic Community’. I use the word ‘supposed’ because, as we will see, that ‘community’ in its ‘overseas’ dimension was defined by deep tensions, contradictions and identity cleavages that split it into heterogeneous groups.

On 23 September 1969, Valy Mamede sent a letter to the president of the Provincial Commission of the União Nacional in Mozambique,⁵ which expressed the requests for visibility within the structure of the Portuguese state. But, above all, it conveyed all the disappointment for not seeing such wishes satisfied. It is worthwhile to quote extensively from Valy Mamede’s text.

I learned through the press of the composition of the list of candidates representative of Mozambique to seats in the National Assembly, a list sponsored by the União Nacional, in which I believe this patriotic organisation has once more forgotten the great Islamic mass of Mozambique.

Your Excellency has simply ignored the wish, expressed by the Muslims of Inhambane who were undoubtedly supported by the great majority of the Islamites of that province, to have for the first time a qualified Muslim on the list of the União Nacional [...].

I am sure that Your Excellency is aware that, without a single shred of exaggeration, one-fourth of the total population of Mozambique is Islamic, and that the União Nacional has presented a list that regrettably did not recognise these Muslims who, as is common knowledge, refuse to capitulate in face of the enemy’s greed and on all fronts where the fight is imposed upon us.⁶

The fact that the rhetoric used by Valy Mamede did not in any way resort to humbleness or self-humiliation is telling. To the contrary, he assumed a tone of accusation, while at the same time restating his alignment with the regime’s perspective on the colonial war, and perhaps taking from
such ‘loyalty’ an argument to justify his claims (Vakil 2004b: 299). This letter could also be read as a strategic trade in a power relation: the loyalty of Muslims to colonial policies would be granted in exchange for the promotion of their identity.

Valy Mamede forced the Portuguese authorities to face the consequences of their own discourse, namely quoting from an official communique of the União Nacional in which this organisation committed itself to ‘unite all citizens who wish to contribute to the achievement and defence of the constitutional principles, without distinction of political affiliation or religious faith, for the benefit of the supreme interests of the Portuguese Nation’. What Mamede was doing was, in fact, to play off the contradictions implicit in the regime’s propaganda.

If the União Nacional truly wishes, in the future, to fulfil the noble purposes that its mentors prescribed, and in order to be representative, it cannot in any way ignore the Islamic element as it has done until now in spite of the wish, clearly stated by the Muslims to this organisation, to take an active role in national life [...].

And Mamede repeated a claim he had already expressed in previous articles and public speeches, this time moving from the parity of religions to the parity of citizenship: ‘Muslims are not a cultural or ethnic minority, but Portuguese citizens with equal rights and duties as the rest of their fellow countrymen.’

In an allegedly multiethnic society, Islam was returning with a vengeance. A new generation of leaders was born within a religion whose expansion the colonial authority had been unable to check; they had personal projects and were ready to claim their place in accordance with the role they knew Islam would obtain when projected onto the symbolic geography of the ‘empire’. But the Portuguese authorities resisted these demands. Several factors explained such an attitude: first of all, the intricate problem of how to face the liberation movements in the colonies, something that required the religious ethnosc to be framed; on the other hand, the phantasmatic reading that conservative Catholicism, the ideological core of the dictatorship, did of Islam and its relationship with a mythified West. All these factors converged against Valy Mamede and his followers, condemning their attempts to give Muslims a renewed visibility in the political sphere of Portuguese society.

ii) Second strategy: Building a mosque in Lisbon
Mamede and the ICL conceived another device to symbolically assert the Muslim presence: the building of a mosque in the capital of the empire. This idea had given a sort of banner to the association since its inception and apparently was not opposed by the authorities. As the most prominent
newspapers announced in 1969, the mayor of Lisbon was ready to offer a plot of ground in one of the hills of Lisbon for that purpose and some Catholic bishops were willing to participate in a public subscription that had been opened the year before to collect the necessary funds. The bulletin of the ICL justified the need for such a building in the following terms:

The absence of a mosque in the capital of a country traditionally composed of people of different faiths is a serious problem not only for Muslims living in Lisbon, but also for the Portuguese and foreign Muslims that constantly visit us.

In all European capitals there are mosques, and we believe that Lisbon cannot avoid it, taking into account, on the one hand, the Ecumenical movement launched by the much-missed Pope John XXIII, and, on the other, the traditional religious coexistence that we have in the country.

This excerpt conveys a significant comparison between Lisbon and other ‘more advanced’ European capitals, which hints at the still ‘non-European’ character of a city that propaganda depicted as the centre of an empire. In order to become ‘truly European’, Lisbon should have a mosque. The improvement of Muslim identity in the Portuguese capital would in turn improve the position of the city in the imagined hierarchy of European capitals. One wonders how this message could have possibly been palatable for the Portuguese regime.

Quite significant was the location that Valy Mamede idealised for Lisbon’s mosque, a place that was loaded with identity fantasies.

The ideal would be to locate it in the area of Restelo or Belém, for historical reasons, because the current existence of Islam in Portugal is due to the discoveries that restored the contact between the Christian West and the Islamic East. In fact, both Restelo and Belém are closely linked to the discoveries’ undertaking. But, of course, if that site is not available, any other one will be good for us.

Besides the obvious attempt to exploit the propaganda mythology of discoveries that Salazarism instilled in the representations of national identity, Valy Mamede wanted to insert Islam at its very symbolic centre. Therefore, a privileged space for Muslims such as the mosque of Lisbon could be part and parcel of that centrality. The simple existence of such a building stood immediately at the heart of a politics of identity assertiveness. Far from being an uncontroversial issue, the idea of installing a massive mosque in Lisbon forced the Portuguese authorities to face ‘otherness’ and deal with it. And that probably explains why Muslims in Portugal had to wait for the post-colonial age to finally see the construction
of their mosque in Lisbon, despite the apparent support the project was receiving.

iii) Third strategy: Becoming a centre for ‘Portuguese’ Islam

The building of a mosque in Lisbon, or the claim for renewed visibility in the public sphere, amounted to acquiring a central position in Portuguese society. And that wish was perhaps the most disturbing for the authorities.

To properly understand the strong opposition to Valy Mamede’s ideas, one must link it to the strategy regarding the Islamic populations of Guinea and Mozambique. As I mentioned before, by the end of the 1960s, the official policies towards these communities had undergone a profound change. There were now some key figures in the army and the intelligence services who thought that the Islamic leadership could be seduced into becoming allied with Portuguese interests in the colonies. Fernando Amaro Monteiro stood at the helm of the movement. Born in Angola in 1935, Monteiro was a scholar who worked as an assistant and consultant at the Services of Centralisation and Coordination of Information in Mozambique from 1965 to 1973. He is a crucial figure who has not yet been the object of detailed study. As a liberal monarchist, Monteiro was an opponent of Salazar and was subjected to constant surveillance by the political police, but he still believed that a new and more democratic Portugal should preserve its colonial possessions. This conviction led him to work intensively in the Mozambican intelligence services, which hired him in spite of his heterodox political views. Being one of the most learned Islamologists in Portugal, Monteiro was at the core of all the attempts made to approach the Muslim leaders, using the techniques of ‘psychological warfare’ to align them with the ‘Portuguese cause’ in the struggle against the Frelimo, the Mozambican Liberation Front. It is impossible here to analyse in detail the ‘psychological action’ that he reserved for Mozambican Muslims, a plan in four stages: 1) ‘detection’, a phase for the collection of data on the cultural context and structures of the Islamic leadership in Mozambique; 2) ‘attraction’, the seduction of Muslims through public acts of recognition by the colonial power; 3) ‘commitment’, persuading the Muslim dignitaries to identify themselves with the Portuguese administration; 4) ‘mobilisation’ (accionamento), involving the Muslim populations and their religious leaders in the ‘anti-subversive’ war against the liberation movements (Monteiro 1989b: 84-89).

Monteiro’s plan was not exactly a Portuguese invention. Before and during World War I, in their sub-Saharan colonies, the French administration had already lured Muslim dignitaries into a patronage system of collaborationism and dependency (Harrison 1988: 34, 38-40, 107; Robinson & Triaud 1997). As in the French case, the Portuguese design was immersed in the ambivalences and contradictions typical of the
politicisation of Islam. On the one hand, the Islamic religion was expected to work as a dam against the 'communist threat' in Africa. On the other, the authorities were deeply afraid of the 'hegemonic' drive they ascribed to Islam, suspecting that any space given to it would be used to feed 'Arab imperialism'.

All this explains why Monteiro, as well as the colonial governors he managed to influence, developed an ambivalent relationship with Valy Mamede. For them, he could be either useful or damaging to Portuguese intents, depending on how fully he would be able to make his goals real. They believed it necessary to bring him under control lest he disrupt the new colonial policy concerning Islamic communities. As we will see, all this required limiting the scope of Valy Mamede's influence, which meant narrowing down the spatial range of his activities.

In fact, Mr. Valy Mamede is just the President of the Islamic Community of Lisbon and it is up to him, I think, to exclusively relate to what the organisation is concerned with.

Everything else will be, as far as he is concerned – at least in respect to Mozambique – an intrusion in the internal affairs of the Province, unless the statutes of the Community of Lisbon grant it powers to spread its action to the entire Portuguese territory. If this were indeed the case, let me express that I consider this fact as dangerous and harmful to the policy that, at least in Mozambique, is being developed with the purpose of controlling and mobilising the Islamic masses.10

The authorities suspected that Valy Mamede's project, aimed at granting visibility to Islam in the public space, was in fact attempting to duplicate the centralist model by means of which Portugal intended to subordinate the colonies. He was being accused of wishing to unify all 'Portuguese' Islamic communities, centralising them in Lisbon so that Muslims from the colonies would become diluted and his could be invested as their highest leader.

The clash between Valy Mamede's centralising drive and Monteiro's programme reached its peak after the visit the former made to Mozambique in May 1970. The trip had been in preparation since February 1969, when Valy Mamede asked permission from the Overseas Minister to travel to Mozambique with all the facilities required in order to pay a visit to the most important districts in the local geography of Islam. The overall purpose he transmitted to the ministry was to collect data that would allow him to publish a book on Muslim Religious Brotherhoods.11 The first reply from the Portuguese authorities to this request was negative, and we have all reason to suspect the influence of Monteiro behind that decision. On 4 March 1969, Monteiro wrote a classified report12 whose title contained a whole indictment against Valy Mamede's presumed
agenda: ‘Hegemony of the Islamic Community of Lisbon over the remaining Mohammedan communities in the Portuguese territory’. Monteiro’s assessment of the course of action taken by the leader of the ICL revealed a strong apprehension regarding his plans. The starting point for this report exemplified the kind of governance that Muslims were being subjected to. The knowledge that Valy Mamede’s organisation had just appointed three delegates to Mozambique led Monteiro and the director of SCCIM to unleash a network of control. Local governors, intelligence services and the political police were mobilised to find data on the three individuals. All this resulted in a final reasoning that Monteiro highlighted in his report.

By appointing delegates to Mozambique, the procedures of the Islamic Community of Lisbon seem determined solely by its president, Suleiman Valy Mamede.

The aim this individual pursues is, after all, implicit in his own work ‘Mohammed and Islam’, in which the author explains the need for the heads of Muslim states and representatives of the Islamic communities in non-Mohammedan countries to meet in periodical conferences.

This comment made its way to higher authorities. On 13 March 1969, Baltazar Rebello de Sousa, then Governor General of Mozambique, sent a letter to the Overseas Minister in which he made it clear that he disapproved of Valy Mamede’s visit to the colony, partially grounding his position on the arguments Monteiro had used in his report. The crucial premise to a recommendation against that visit was that it might clash with the new tactics of attraction/cooptation of the ‘Islamic masses’ (Vakil 2004b: 299-300). In other words, the perception existed of a power game being played between the association that Valy Mamede headed in Lisbon and the administrative structures of the Portuguese state. And that game seemed focused on the influence over the abovementioned ‘Islamic masses’.

Despite these negative judgments, Valy Mamede did eventually travel to Mozambique, in May 1970. In the archives I consulted, I was not able to track any indication of backstage influences being summoned to give him the necessary permission. One thing is certain: he no longer declared the study of Muslim Brotherhoods as his motive for that trip. Instead, his stated goal was now to deliver a number of lectures and, above all, to receive donations for the construction of a mosque in Lisbon. If we are to believe the book that Valy Mamede himself wrote and published that year after his visit to Mozambique, the tour was a complete success (1970b). When we look at the pictures printed in the book, we are immediately struck by the amount of official coverage that his visit received, despite the previous
objections that the central powers had raised. He went to Nampula, Monapo and Quelimane, among other places, and was always met by local dignitaries – mayors, chiefs of police, deputies, political personalities and so forth. Everything seemed prepared to stage the *ideal visibility* for a well-integrated Muslim. There was a two-way profitable trade going on here: Valy Mamede exploited the support of the authorities to project his own image and the image of the religious community he was supposed to represent; and, at the same time, the colonial powers exploited his presence as living proof of the intercultural harmony only achievable under Portuguese rule.

And yet, that book glossed over the nasty tensions and open conflicts that his visit roused among some local Muslim communities, especially in the north and particularly during his stay on the island of Mozambique. There, he clashed with local Islamic dignitaries, causing such an uproar that the political police reserved a whole file to deal with the issue and Monteiro felt he should personally visit the area, after Valy Mamede’s return to Lisbon, in order to collect testimonies from the leaders of Muslim Brotherhoods and the local Mohammedan Association. These tensions emerged mostly from the fact that some Mozambican Muslims resisted what they considered to be a centralising drive in Valy Mamede’s intentions. Local leaders, as well as the Portuguese administration – albeit for very different reasons – could not accept the concentration of powers in the ICL and its projection as the epicentre of the ‘Portuguese’ Muslim world, something that Valy Mamede apparently aspired to. Some Mozambican Islamic dignitaries actually resorted to complaining about his behaviour before the colonial authorities with the purpose of asserting their autonomy in relation to him and his ICL.

These conflicts partly coalesced around the issue of a Portuguese or Mozambican location for the central mosque that Valy Mamede wanted to build. On 14 May 1970, a document from the political police disclosed all the discomfort felt by part of the Mozambican Muslim communities even before his arrival.

As soon as the news [of Valy Mamede’s visit] spread, members of several Islamic communities of Lourenço Marques [currently Maputo] have made various comments, of which the following are the most conspicuous:

[...] They agree even less with the construction of a mosque in Lisbon, because in the metropolis the number of believers who would attend the five daily prayers and the call is not sufficient. To this one must add the fact that the Chasita Sect, to which the Metropolis’s Islamised belong, demands the presence of a minimum of 40 attendants to Friday prayers, and that is a number much larger than the whole number of Islamised living there [...].
They think that the intention of Dr. Suleiman to create a centre representing all the communities on the Island of Mozambique is a mistake, since the largest worthy and thinking masses are settled in Lourenço Marques, which is the best place for an Islamic centre [...] .

The so-called ‘Muslim community’ was divided into different conflicting communities. Tensions erupted from rivalries to attain the greatest prestige: in what symbolic centre should one build the mosque – Lisbon or the ‘province’ of Mozambique? Where was the centre of local Islamic communities: the Island of Mozambique or Lourenço Marques? The passage of Valy Mamede through Mozambique had the effect of turning tensions among Muslims into an open conflict.

Therefore, in an atmosphere charged with imagined menaces of pan-Islamic domination, identity competition evolved around the symbolic locus of power, that is, the very idea of a centre from which power should irradiate. Valy Mamede’s aspiration to occupy such a place, even with the supervision of Portuguese authorities, seems to have crossed his mind if we are to believe what he wrote in a letter sent on 3 July 1970 to Silva Cunha, the Overseas Minister.

[...] I underline the need for creating ever closer links between the Islamic Community of Lisbon and those in the Portuguese Territory (with the purpose of forming a Federation of Communities whose headquarters must be Lisbon), with the indirect support of the Overseas Ministry. I want to stress that, in this field and if it is helped and understood in its aims, the Islamic Community of Lisbon may play a great role in national life, especially in the Provinces of Mozambique and Guinea, and always for the good of the Nation.

These propositions confirmed the worst apprehensions of the authorities regarding Valy Mamede’s organisation. The governance of Islam they were planning would not tolerate any Muslim centres that could dispute the control of local communities by local Portuguese authorities – closely articulated with the core sites of power in Lisbon. Thus, in the abovementioned report, Monteiro stated the need for limiting the scale on which the ICL could deploy its activities.

It seems to me fruitful and necessary that Mr. Suleiman Valy Mamede should be warned by the authorities (and that the statutes to the Islamic Community of Lisbon should be confined in the following sense) that his activities as president of that organisation are to be limited only to Lisbon; for, in fact, the Community is called [...] ‘Islamic of Lisbon’.
This advice would dictate the line of behaviour that the Portuguese authorities would take in relation to Valy Mamede. As early as 11 July, a political police report echoed Monteiro’s strategy.

It is thought that the coming of this visitor [Valy Mamede] had the purpose of congregating all Muslims around an ISLAMITE ASSOCIATION for the entire Portuguese territory.

The best policy seems to be to counteract such unification, because of the danger that Islamism may present if one day it becomes a homogenous whole. While divided, its power is diminished.

Such a comment is revealing of a strategy based on the motto ‘divide and rule’ that the colonial dictatorship applied to Islam. At the same time, it reflects all the anxieties caused by the bogeyman of a transnational Islamic union. What is remarkable in these observations written by a political police agent is that they expressly dealt with Muslims – that is, with an abstract and fantasised Islam. The Portuguese authorities were not merely trying to hinder any possible connection between Islam and the Frelimo. Although that aim loomed high on the horizon of Portuguese rulers, they were not simply waging a policy to fight ‘subversion’ in a colonialist-Salazarist sense. Above all, they sought to circumvent an ‘excessive’ visibility of Islam, lest it emerge as a ‘spiritual force’ to reckon with. They did not want it to become a ‘homogenous whole’, a ‘single structure, homogenous, subjected to a single leader’. In their mind, Muslims could be invested with the power that only ‘homogeneity’ could give, one of a threatening phallic wholeness. To avoid this, a necessary castration was in order. It would disendow the enemy of his potency: ‘While divided, its power is diminished’.

Within the colonial frame, a ‘Portuguese Islam’ was not to be found inside the Portuguese metropolis but abroad, in the overseas possessions of Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. Nevertheless, to promote such a controlled, supervised version of Islam, Valy Mamede was definitely not the man. First of all, he did not have connections to the local Muslim communities of Guinea and Mozambique that were strong enough to give him ascendancy over them. Therefore, his activities in Mozambique could not be taken as leverage for Portuguese power. On the contrary, they were seen as a liability. That, of course, did not prevent him from trying to gain some influence in northern Mozambique, namely by appointing representatives of the ICL who were a source of unease both to the colonial authorities and the Mozambican Muslims.

It is rather significant to find out that the abovementioned issue of an Islamic centre was raised in the Portuguese colonial frame with quite the same terms that were used by French authorities in West Africa. Since both read African Islamic identities through the lenses of a so-called Islam
noir, both the French and the Portuguese tried to shield a more ‘pliable’ ‘black Islam’ from foreign and potentially anti-colonial influences coming from East Africa, India, South Africa and the Arab world (Harrison 1988: 124-125; Bonate 2007: 196-197). As Bonate put it, in the Portuguese case this meant to create ‘a centralised and state-sponsored Islamic organisation, a local centre of religious authority, independent and autonomous of the centres of Islam abroad’. This aim was supposed to be partly accomplished through a device tailored by Monteiro to give Portuguese authorities an alternative to the centralist project of Valy Mamede and his Islamic Community of Lisbon. This device was nothing but the ijma, a designation later replaced by the Concelho de Notaveis (‘council of notables’), an Islamic organ to be created in Mozambique, composed of some 21 to 23 well-known figures chosen among the local Muslim hierarchy. Supposedly confined to religious affairs, ‘endowed with infallibility to express the will of the community (umma) in matters of faith’, the ijma would be, however, destined to play a much more secular role, for, according to Monteiro, the candidates to its membership were those ‘who really mobilised the million of Muslims living in Mozambique’. But, beyond its particular potential for co-opting Muslims in the war against the liberation movement, the ijma should also be aimed against Valy Mamede’s pretensions, ‘to whom this organ is not convenient, because it would collide with his project of “a Federation of Communities whose headquarters must be Lisbon” [...] with him as its obviously most prominent exponent’. As a rival centre, despite its strictly local sphere of action, the ijma was thus conceived to undermine all attempts at unification of the Islamic communities that took Lisbon as a global ‘Portuguese’ centre.

11.3 Post-colonial epilogue

This imagination of the centre, immersed as it was in an identity competition, suffered an unexpected dislocation when the revolution of 25 April 1974 broke out, forcing Valy Mamede and the ICL to radically reformulate their self-image. Now they had to act in a context that reflected the reconfiguration of what used to be conceived as ‘Portuguese territory’. Overnight, Valy Mamede changed his views. He suddenly seemed quite aware that any project of federating Islam in Portuguese-speaking countries was completely out of the question. In those euphoric days, he quickly emerged as a voice favouring the independence of the former colonies, namely Mozambique, with a rhetoric that was on the extreme opposite of what he had stood for in the last years before the revolution.

I am, naturally, and in accordance to the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, in favour of the full emancipation of all peoples,
because this inalienable right cannot be exclusive to Europeans, or those from other continents, who fought some years ago for their complete liberation. It is necessary for an independent Mozambique to finally arise, and that the interests of all Mozambicans, whether Black, Asian, European or Mestizo, and followers of all faiths, are respected, for only this way will we have a truly independent Mozambique, in which its children will never feel alien.27

The change of tone could not be more complete. Overlooking his own ambiguous relationship with the colonialist dictatorship, Valy Mamede radicalised the indictments against the former Portuguese regime, relating it to the conflict between Zionism and the Arab world. Suddenly, the whole geopolitical map went through a dramatic displacement. There no longer was an empire in which ‘Portuguese’ Muslims had to assert their presence among hostile Christians. Or, in other words, there no longer was a trans-European territory to give ‘metropolitan’ Muslims a numerical dimension that would put them on a par with Catholic people, within the logic of identity competition. The new reality required new geopolitical alignments. From now on, Muslims living in Portugal – who were not necessarily Portuguese – would claim an identity affinity with Arabs, namely in the struggle against Israel. This would also allow for a definition of the post-colonial attitude of the ICL in relation both to a ‘fascist’ and a ‘democratic’ Portugal. Note in the following excerpt how quickly Valy Mamede adopted the new rhetoric of the April revolution.

Portugal, during the fascist regime, was undeniably the spiritual ally of Zionism, even though paradoxically it had not recognised the State of Israel.

The fascist regime served imperialism through Zionism, not only by the media, which in unison repeated the lessons they received, but also by yielding national sovereignty [...].

On the other hand, Arab countries were considered tenacious enemies of the Portuguese government, as they openly supported the liberation struggle of the Portuguese colonies and welcomed nationalist movements in their countries [...].

To Afro-Arab solidarity, the Portuguese fascist rulers answered with Luso-Zionist solidarity. (Mamede 1975: 6-7)

After the ‘normalisation’ of democracy in Portugal, the ICL retained a critical mood that, in terms of identity and symbolic boundaries, viewed Portugal as an opponent of the Arab world. Reflecting the opinions of that association’s leaders, an article in the newspaper Expresso reported the following:
The initiatives Portugal took to approach the Arab world have been fuelled by obsessive concerns in getting immediate economic gains, almost entirely neglecting cultural factors and the understanding of the specificity of the Muslim civilisation, something to which Muslims are particularly sensitive. Portugal suddenly burst onto the scene with an excessive greed for petrodollars, without offering any compensation; furthermore, it pretended to serve as a ‘bridge’ between Europe and the Arab world, and as a purveyor of technology and personnel, which, according to people close to the Islamic Community of Lisbon, revealed a weak knowledge of what, in this area, is currently happening in Arab countries [...].

Under this accusing stance, Muslims living in Portugal were, in fact, negotiating their insertion in a post-colonial environment – resorting to arguments completely opposed to those they used in order to negotiate their place within the old regime. Now they needed new forms of empowerment that could dispense with an overseas population definitively lost to Portugal. Such a renewed strategy of identity assertiveness had two sides: a national (Portuguese) and a transnational one. The former involved, among other things, securing a presence in party politics – that is, taking an active role in the political system, something not too far from what Valy Mamede had tried to achieve for his community before the 1974 revolution. This explains why he became a member of the Social-Democratic Party, using it as a bridge to connect Portugal to some Arab countries and to compensate for a lack of diplomatic relations. He considered all other parties to be either marginal in relation to the Muslim issue or clearly aligned to Israel’s cause, an accusation he particularly addressed to the Socialist Party of Mário Soares. The second side of Valy Mamede’s strategy reinforced a sense of belonging that merged the Muslims settled in Portugal with a much larger community – not exactly the umma, but the already mentioned ‘Arab world’. This last orientation was conspicuous in the financial support he was able to get from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Libya in order to finally fulfil one of his most cherished dreams: the construction of a central mosque in Lisbon. When he died, an obituary published in a Portuguese newspaper called him ‘Mr. Mosque’ (Alves 1995) – such was the identification between him and that project.

The construction of a Muslim temple in a country ambivalently ‘reconciled’ with its peripheral position in Europe happened in an atmosphere completely alien to any debates on Islamic centres. In fact, post-colonial Islam in Portugal has become decentered, since Muslims are no longer perceived as overseas Portuguese but simply as citizens with a different religion. The reinvention of the ICL (Vakil 2004b: 301) represents, therefore, not only a break with colonialism, but also a downsizing of
identity ambitions. It had begun as an unviable centre for all the Muslim communities settled in the ‘Portuguese space’ and later turned into a host for immigrants who profess the Islamic religion. In this trajectory, it sums up the way Muslims have been dealt with in recent Portuguese history.

Notes

1 I would like to thank Veit Bader, Annelies Moors and Marcel Maussen for their comments and suggestions that helped me improve this chapter. Liazzat J. K. Bonate also made pertinent remarks that forced me to brush up on some of the historical details of my argument. A very special word of thanks is due to Fernando Amaro Monteiro, who kindly agreed to read this chapter and give all his insightful comments on it, being someone who played a major role in the story that I have tried to unravel.

2 The political police kept two files, one on Valy Mamede (ANTT/PIDE-DGS, SC, Proc. 13.890-SC/CI(2), NT-7700, with 38 sheets) and the other on the ICL (ANTT/PIDE-DGS, SC, Proc. CI(2) 10666, NT-7601, with 55 sheets). There are, however, many other documents spread throughout the files of the Mozambique’s Services for Centralisation and Coordination of Information (SCCIM). In an interview, Valy Mamede said that when was trying to establish the ICL he was summoned no less than nineteen times to the political police and eighteen to the civil government of Lisbon (Ferreira 1989: 19R). See also Mamede (1975: 6) and ‘Construção da mesquita de Lisboa poderá estimular aproximação entre Portugal e o mundo árabe’ in Expresso 3 February 1979: 1.

3 The National Archives, CAB 129/28.

4 ANTT/AOS/CO/UL-37, 1.

5 União Nacional (National Unity) was the name of the single legal political party under Salazar’s regime.


8 A statement given for the newspaper article ‘Construção de uma mesquita em Lisboa’, República 7 July 1969: 13. Restelo and Belém are areas in Lisbon, close to the Tagus River, that formed natural harbours from which the Portuguese caravels sailed to their voyages of exploration in the fifteenth century.


10 Information No. 19/70, in ANTT/SCCIM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheets 16-23. Amaro Monteiro wrote this particular report.

11 For this information, see the letter sent from the Overseas Ministry to the Governor General of Mozambique on 26 February 1969 (ANTT/SCCIM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheet 62).

12 Information No. 7/969 (ANTT/SCCIM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheet 55).

13 This had been reported in local newspaper Diário de Moçambique (22 February
1969), a clip of which was kept by the SCCIM and annexed to the report that Monteiro wrote (SCCIM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheet 57). The same news could be found in O Islão: Órgão da Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa (bulletin of the ICL) February 1969, No. 3: 23.


15 The emphasis is in the original text. In Valy Mameda’s bibliography, I could not find a book entitled Maomé e o Islão (‘Mohammed and Islam’). I did find a work with a slightly different title, Maomé e o Islamismo (‘Mohammed and Islamism’), the contents of which do not, however, mention the position referred to by Monteiro.

16 ANTT/SCCIM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheets 58-60.

17 See Information No. 19/70 of the SCCIM, in ANTT/SCCIM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheets 16-23.


19 PIDE/Delegation of Mozambique, P.º 58/SR-1, Information (classified) No. 928/70/DI/2/SC, in Proc. 13.890-SC/CI(2), NT-7700, sheets 28-29. As for the number of Muslims living in Lisbon, the Islamic Community of Lisbon had no more than 25 to 30 members in 1968, the year of its foundation. One of its founding fathers, Abdool Karim Vakil, later recognised how for the occasion of religious festivities they had to seek other Muslims in order to be able to perform the prayers together (Ferreira 1989: 191). The Portuguese authorities were aware of this situation, as we can see from Monteiro’s words in a report sent on 31 July 1970: ‘... it does not seem that his [Valy Mamede’s] community in Lisbon is able to assemble, on Fridays [the holy day of Islam], the number of believers necessary for the celebration of Khotba [public prayer]’ (Information No. 19/70, in ANTT/SCCIM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheets 16-23).

20 ANTT/SCCIM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheets 4-6 and 26-28.

21 After being summoned to the Overseas Ministry, Valy Mamede was received on 10 August by Ribeiro da Cunha from the political affairs section of that ministry. The two had a "long conversation" in which Valy Mamede was forced to accept the narrowing of those activities developed by the ICL. It was agreed that these should not include any actions among the Muslim communities settled in the colonies, namely those who lived in Mozambique (see the secret communication from the Cabinet of Political Affairs of the Overseas Ministry to the Governor General of Mozambique, No. 4162/F-5-15-30, in SCCIM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheet 9). This meeting, however, did not stop the interference of Valy Mamede’s organisation upon the Islamic communities in the colonies. From other documents in the political police’s file No. 13.890-SC/CI(2), it is easy to conclude that a year after Valy Mamede’s visit to Mozambique conflicts still existed between some Mozambican Muslim leaders and delegates from the Islamic Community of Lisbon.

23 These words can be found in another report from the political police (Order No. 1406/70/Dl/SC, in ANTT/PIDE-DGS, SC, Proc. 13.890-SC/CI(2), NT-7700, sheet 16).

24 See, in particular, Order 3683/72/Dl/2/SC on 21 October 1972 from the political police’s branch in Mozambique concerning the activities of Carlos Aires Pereira, appointed by the ICL, whose authoritarian demeanour in respect to local Muslim dignitaries seemed to replicate the behaviour that Valy Mamede himself had assumed in his visit to the same regions of Mozambique. Both pretended to act on behalf of the Portuguese authorities. ANTT/PIDE-DGS, SC, Proc. 13.890-SC/CI(2), sheets 7-9.

25 In the Islamic tradition, *ijma* is not exactly a specific organ. It means the ‘consensus’, one of the sources of the sharia. In order to represent the whole umma, that consensus must be unanimous, and this can be achieved through the consensus attained by Muslim notables with recognised authority in matters of faith (Monteiro 1972: 18).

26 Information No. 19/70, in ANTT/SCCM/H/9/2, No. 420, sheets 16-23. The following quotation in the chapter is taken from the same document.

27 Interview given to newspaper Notícias de Lourenço Marques (24 May 1974) in No. 12, tomo II. O Islão: 21.


29 Expresso 3 February 1979: 5.

30 Or, as his rivals within the ICL would say, one of his worst obsessions. In 1985, conflicts appeared within the association, when a number of members challenged the leadership of Valy Mamede. Musa Omar, a physician who disputed the presidency of the ICL, said ‘the mosque is not as essential’ as Mamede thought it to be because ‘anyone can pray in their home’ (Cabral 1985: 6) – an argument that brought back the kind of criticism Valy Mamede had already faced before the revolution of 1974. The conflict around the election of the direction of the ICL was fought along the lines of division between the Arab countries, with Mamede’s upholders accusing the members of the opposing list of being loyal to Libya. This conflict was so nasty that it led some countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, to suspend their financial support towards construction of the mosque. As late as 1989, it was still incomplete (Ferreira 1989: 207).

31 In 1997, the ICL was estimated to include some 20,000 Muslims, most of them (14,000 to 15,000) coming from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Mozambique. The rest came from Guinea-Bissau (some 5,000) and the Maghreb (some 1,000) (Bastos & Bastos 1999: 116). According to the ICL, there are now approximately 40,000 Muslims living in Portugal (see http://www.comunidadeislamica.pt/02b3.php?nivel_1=2&nivel_2=22&nivel_3=223).

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