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Muslims (Un)like the Others – the Ismaili in Portugal

Summary

This essay focusses on a specific Muslim community, that of Ismaili in Portugal, a minority of the (shi'i) minority in the global context of Muslim presence in Portugal in which Sunni constitute a majority. In parallel it shows the evolution of the Ismaili communities worldwide, highlighting the transformation of the traditional networking model into its present institutional form, culminating with a new kind of governance instituted by the actual Imam, Aga Khan IV, Shah Karim al-Husaini, described as an “authority without territory” concerning the situation of the Ismaili communities worldwide without a state. Further it analyses the process that enabled this community in Portugal to rise to prominence, as a result of changes that had occurred within the Ismaili communities worldwide, gaining particular visibility as a voice of “modern Islam”, becoming an outstanding partner of the Portuguese institutions and finally of the Portuguese state.

Keywords: Portugal, Islam, the Ismaili, Aga Khans, Ismaili governance model

Introductory remarks

Portugal, like many other European countries, has experienced a significant change in its population's composition due to the process of decolonization. As a result, after 1974¹ the new demographic structure revealed alterations in terms of ethnicity, religion and culture.

¹ The Carnations Revolution of April 25th 1974 originated profound transformations in all the sectors, starting with the change of the political regime, followed by negotiations that lead to the independence of the former Portuguese colonies.

The so called “new Muslim presence” as compared to the former historical presence of Muslims in Portugal (from the 8th to the 16th century²) was perhaps the most striking phenomenon. The Muslims coming from Portuguese overseas territories were mainly people of African descent from Guinea-Bissau and people of Indian origin settled in Mozambique. They were mainly of Sunni orientation, though small numbers of Shi’i were also present. The majority was entitled to Portuguese citizenship by law and the regularization of this situation after arrival in Portugal helped smooth the process of integration.

Portuguese public opinion has increasingly become aware of the presence of Muslims and the global reaction has been generally speaking positive³. Over the years this perception has become more accurate, singling out a minority of the (shi’i) minority that has gained particular visibility as a voice of “modern Islam”, becoming an outstanding partner of the Portuguese institutions and finally of the Portuguese state. This role has been played by the Ismaili⁴ in Portugal.

Sources

The present essay dealing with the Ismaili in Portugal and its evolution focusses on the chronology from after 1974 up to the present day, although references will also be made regarding the preceding period so that a global picture may be fully understood.

In contrast with the rich literature concerning the Ismaili in the British Empire the literature on this community in the Portuguese context is small. Despite this, these are well researched scholarly publications that have provided an essential contribution to the subject, shedding light on the Ismaili in the Portuguese colonial context and the transition after 1974. They stem from long term research projects carried out under the scientific supervision of Nicole Khouri (*L’Université Paris I – IMAF – l’Institut des Mondes Africains*) and Joana Pereira Leite [*Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão (ISEG), da Universidade Técnica de Lisboa (CeSA – Centro de Estudos sobre Africa, Ásia e América Latina)*, Lisbon]. They are:

Khouri, Nicole et Pereira Leite, Joana (ed.), *Indiens de cinq colonisations de l’Afrique Orientale: mobilités et identités en diaspora de 1870 à nos jours, Lusotopie XV (2)*, Brill, Leiden 2008.

² The political Islamic domination ended in mid-13th century but a part of Muslim population remained until 1521 when the new Code, the *Ordenações Manuelinas*, forbade the presence of Jews and Muslims in the Portuguese territory under death penalty and seizure of property.

³ In this respect the news conveyed by the Portuguese press offer an interesting example of how this presence was viewed. See: E.-M. von Kemnitz, *Les Ismailis dans la presse portugaise, 1975–2010*, in: Nicole Khouri, et Joana Pereira Leite (ed.), *Khodjas Ismaili. Du Mozambique colonial à la globalization*, L’Harmattan, Paris 2014.

⁴ We retain the form “Ismaili” for both noun and adjective as worded in official documents of the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate.

Pereira Leite, Joana and Khouri, Nicole (ed.), *Os Ismailis de Moçambique. Vida Económica no Tempo Colonial* [*The Ismaili in Mozambique. Economic life in the Colonial Period*], Edições Colibri, Lisboa 2012.

Khouri, Nicole et Pereira Leite, Joana (ed.), *Khodjas Ismaili. Du Mozambique colonial à la globalization*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2014.

We shall add also a publication by a Portuguese Ismaili that explores the oral history transmitted from generation to generation and a rich private photographic archive:

Merali, Aziz, *Ismailis in Moçambique. Memórias do Sul* [*The Ismaili in Mozambique. Memories from the South*, Author's edition. Lisbon 2015.

Naturally, more general studies like Farhad Daftary's, *The Ismaili: their History and Doctrines* (1990); *A Modern History of the Ismaili* (2011), also Farhad Daftary and Zulfikar Hijri (2008), *The Ismailis: An Illustrated History* (2008) were useful in framing the general context. We shall mention also Daryoush Mohammad Poor, *Authority without Territory: The Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili Imamate* (2014).

Information disseminated by the organs of the Ismaili Community was naturally taken into consideration.

The global context has been complemented by news released by the Portuguese press, considered as a secondary source. In recent years the press has given more detailed information focusing on cooperation between the Ismaili Community and Portuguese institutions and between the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate and the Portuguese State. A weekly, the *Expresso*, and two dailies: the *Diário de Notícias* and the *Público* have supplied most of the information although occasionally some other newspapers were also used.

A new configuration of the Ismaili

The contemporary history of the Ismaili, having remote roots in the *nizariyya*⁵, starts with Aga Khan I whose turbulent fate relocated the traditional base of this community from Persia to India.

The honorific title Aga Khan was granted to Hasan Ali Shah (1804–1881), governor of the Kirman province and recognized by his followers as 46th Imam of the Nizari Ismaili Muslims, by Fath Ali Shah of Persia in 1817. In 1841 Aga Khan I was forced to leave Persia, seeking refuge first in Afghanistan (1841) and later in India (1847)⁶ where he settled. In India he relayed on the Khodja community, members of a mainly trading caste converted to Islam between 14th and 15th centuries. The Khodja community acknowledged Aga Khan as their spiritual leader but not all were eager to accept imposed

⁵ F. Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History of the Ismaili*, I.B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London 2011, pp. 3–6.

⁶ M. Boivin, *Les Khojas et la Construction de la Communauté Ismaélienne dans la Période Contemporaine. Invention de la Tradition et Communauté Imaginée*, in: Nicole Khouri, et Joana Pereira Leite (ed.), *Khodjas Ismaili*, pp. 318 and 320.

taxation. After a long court case of the dissenters, the judgement of the Bombay High Court (1866) legally established the status of Khodjas as a community referred to as *Shia Imami Ismailis*⁷ and of Hasan Ali Shah as the supreme spiritual head of the community. This implied the control of the communal property and the payment of the *dasond* (religious due) as exclusive prerogative of the Imam, the principal base of the wealth of the Aga Khans. The title Aga Khan became hereditary and was recognized by the British.

The Bombay High Court's verdict constituted a turning point, changing the status of the Ismaili from a hitherto dissimulated group observing varying degrees of *taqiyya* into a legally recognized one and whose Imam was legally acknowledged as their supreme spiritual and temporal leader, imbued with *'isma* or infallibility. The acknowledgment of the *living Imam* as the central figure of the Community constituted a break with the *nizari ismaili* teachings according to which the visible face of the concealed Imam would be a *da'i /pir* (religious propagandist / Sufi master)⁸. Aga Khan I laid the foundations of religious identity of his followers setting up a communal organization and personally nominating his representatives.

This new situation of the *Shia Imami Ismailis* created distance in relation to the traditional Arab, Persian and Turkish cultural background, shifting it into an Indian cultural framework. It offered simultaneously new professional opportunities for its members due to its geographic and political context, benefitting from the dynamics of the British Empire. It also brought a new challenge to the head of the community, that of how to manage all the Ismaili communities scattered in the Indian subcontinent, Syria, Lebanon, Persia and Central Asia.

The traditional networking that proved successful in the past was now applied to new realities. It gave rise to a more centralized control and hierarchization of the leadership. Already in 1905 Sultan Muhammed Shah, Aga Khan III (1885–1957) issued a set of guidelines and rulings that may be viewed as a proto-constitution⁹.

In the aftermath of the World War I, the Aga Khan III ordered his followers to publicly assume their muslimness and recite the *shahada*. The Constitution was elaborated finally in 1925.

In the 1930's the Aga Khan sought to create an Ismaili state in Indian territory but the British rejected these proposals¹⁰. Due to growing tensions between Hindu and Muslims in the British Raj, Sultan Muhammed Shah decided to settle in Switzerland.

Far away from his disciples in India and Africa, the relevance of the *jamat khana* as the congregational space has grown exponentially as a strategic space where religious and

⁷ The hitherto used varied denominations like "Khojas", "Khoja Mahommedans" or "Khoja Ismailis" were to be substituted by the official term of "Shia Imami Ismailis". See: F. Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History*, p. 135.

⁸ A. Sidarus, *Les Khojas dans la Communauté Ismaili Aga Khani*, in: Nicole Khouri, et Joana Pereira Leite (ed.), *Khodjas Ismaili*, p. 402.

⁹ *The Rule Book of the Khoja Shia Imami Ismaili Council*. It was printed in Gujarati language in Zanzibar. Cf.: F. Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History*, p. 146.

¹⁰ L. Gandelot, *Paroles de l'Imam et Jeux de Pouvoirs, Madagascar 1930–1975*, in: Nicole Khouri, et Joana Pereira Leite (ed.), *Khodjas Ismaili*, p. 388.

communitarian issues were dealt with in a homogenized way in all places where the Ismaili dwelled. The centralized governance was exercised through Provincial Councils. In 1916 the Aga Khan Supreme Council for Southern and Portuguese East Africa, comprising the territories of the Island of Mozambique and of Alagoa Bay (Lourenço Marques, today's Maputo), was established.

Aga Khan III, engaged in international political affairs, was elected President of the League of Nations in 1937. At the conference at Evian, in 1952, he had the whole of his *firman(s)* published concerning the wellbeing of his community in economic and social terms¹¹.

New relevant developments took place during the imamate of the Aga Khan IV, Shah Karim al-Husaini. These were initiated in 1957, as a response to the challenges of the post-colonial order, globalized economy and differentiated diaspora of the Ismaili. In fact they constitute the continuation of the network of educational, health-care and financial bodies set in motion before but in the new international context they were transformed into its present institutional form.

The first step was the creation of the Aga Khan Foundation (1967) and of the Aga Khan Development Network¹². *The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims* was issued in 1986 (amended in 1998) binding for all the Ismaili all over the world¹³ and in its wake new institutions aiming at the modernization and levelling of all the communities were set up: the Institute of Ismaili Studies (1977, London), the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (1988, Geneva), Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (2002), the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance (2002), the Aga Khan Agency FOCUS (2004, Humanitarian Aid, Lisbon) to mention just a few.

This deep and complex process of reshaping the institution of authority and the office of the Imamate under Aga Khan IV, is characterized as a “transmutation or an epistemological shift” producing a new kind of governance described as an “authority without territory”¹⁴ related to the situation of the Ismaili communities worldwide without a state.

¹¹ *The Constitution, Rules and Regulations of His Highness Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Councils of Africa*, published in English. Cf.: F. Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History*, p. 146.

¹² The Aga Khan Foundation is largely an implementing organization rather than a grant-making foundation, focusing on rural development, health, education, civil society and the environment. Its activities are intended to improve the quality of life of the beneficiary communities by assisting in struggle against hunger, disease, illiteracy, ignorance and social exclusion. On the Aga Khan Development Network consult: M. Ruthven, *The Aga Khan Development Network and Institutions*, in: F. Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History*, pp. 189–220; Daryoush Mohammad Poor, *Authority without Territory: The Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili Imamate*, Palgrave Macmillan New York 2014, pp. 163–203 and for an updated overview: http://www.akdn.org/sites/akdn/files/media/publications/2014_07_-_akf_-_overview_-_brief_-_high_res.pdf consulted May 3rd 2016.

¹³ F. Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History*, p. 11.

¹⁴ D.M. Poor, op. cit., p. 27.

From Mozambique to continental Portugal

The first groups of Ismaili arrived in Mozambique, at the time an integral part of the Portuguese colonial Empire, in the late 19th century. This migration made part of a larger scale of earlier immigration to East Africa and South Africa within the framework of the trade connections between India and the Eastern coast of Africa. Therefore from the Portuguese point of view these newcomers were initially considered a part of the Indian immigration¹⁵. The Ismaili immigration intensified from 1910–1920 and again in the 1940's, encouraged by the Aga Khan.

Some Ismailis settled on the island of Mozambique, others in towns like Lourenço Marques (today' Maputo), Nampula, Inhambane and Beira, whilst others lived in the interior of the country. Albeit not engaged in trade at the onset, the conditions existing in the Mozambican colonial society made them embrace this activity, in certain cases combined with services or even agricultural exploitation. A network of brokers *cantinas* (in the countryside) and *lojas* (in urban areas) was established and run by family agglomerates, contributing largely to improve their living conditions¹⁶.

Much later than the Sunni, the Ismaili established their own organization – *A Comunidade Ismailia Maometana*, with statutes approved in 1951¹⁷.

This Mozambican period up to 1970's coincided with numerous transformations having as their principal objective the modernization of the Community under the auspices of Sultan Muhammad Shah and from 1957 onwards, under the current Aga Khan IV, Karim al-Husaini.

Much attention was paid to education. Schooling became obligatory for boys and girls alike¹⁸. The Ismaili should learn local languages and English¹⁹ and should dress in European manner²⁰. In 1930 the Aga Khan Boy Scouts were established, and after an interval their activities were resumed in 1970. There was also a group of Girl Guides²¹.

The economic boom that followed World War II created new opportunities to expand commerce and several Ismaili families made their fortune.

General trends however in the African political situation were showing signs of unrest in the wake of national independencies. The Portuguese Empire could not remain

¹⁵ J. Pereira Leite, *Indo-Britanniques et Indo-Portugais: présence marchande au Sud de Mozambique au moment des l'implantation du système colonial de la fin du 19^{ème} siècle jusqu'aux années 30*, "Outre-Mers" 2001, pp. 24 and 31–32.

¹⁶ N. Khouri and J. Pereira Leite, *Khodjas Ismaili*, pp. 29–31, 79–87.

¹⁷ E.M. von Kemnitz, *Muslims as seen by the Portuguese Press 1974–1999: Changes in the Perception of Islam*, in: W.A.R. Shahid and P.S. van Koningsveld, (eds.), *Religious Freedom and the Neutrality of State: the Position of Islam in the European Union*, Leuven, Peeters, Leuven 2002, p. 8.

¹⁸ About the concern of Aga Khan III in regard to education of his followers see: F. Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History*, pp. 168–182.

¹⁹ English became the language of all official documents issued by the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate, translated into local languages.

²⁰ N. Khouri and J. Pereira Leite, *Khodjas Ismaili*, p. 85.

²¹ A. Merali, *Ismailis in Moçambique. Memórias do Sul*, Edição do Autor Lisboa 2015, pp. 114–115.

immune to these changes and in 1961 war broke out in Angola and then in Guinea and Mozambique threatening the stability and a long preserved *status quo*.

Upon his accession to the imamate the Aga Khan IV was very much aware of these processes and in one interview (1975) he declared: *When my grandfather died, Ismailis were occupied mainly with commerce. I considered this situation dangerous. A community whose material existence depends on a single activity is subject to political pressures. ... I suddenly had two goals: the first, education, had to be immediate and substantial to allow these families of tradesmen to regain a professional mobility which would correspond to their physical displacement in case of a crisis. It was essential, if these folk had to emigrate, that they found doors open to them. A huge effort on the education scheme was made in Africa and Asia between 1957 and 1970*²².

In the late 60's a series of upheavals in Uganda led to expulsion of non-indigenous populations, including a large number of Ismaili. Fearing a similar fate for his followers in Mozambique, Aga Khan issued a *firman* ordering the Ismaili to forget Africa and leave in December 1972. The departure should take place gradually in two years²³.

In Portugal

The Ismaili first arrived in Portugal in the mid-1960's. Most of them came initially as students from Mozambique and other Portuguese territories²⁴.

In the framework of an organized departure, the Ismaili reached Portugal in several phases between December 1972 and December 1976. The peak occurred after the independence of Mozambique in June 1975. Their estimated number accounts for about 3.000 comprising about 600 families²⁵. Most of the Ismaili from Mozambique settled in Portugal, smaller numbers migrated further to the United Kingdom and Canada.

The Ismaili's case differs substantially from the departure of other groups from the Portuguese overseas territories that took place in most cases *ad hoc*. Not all Ismaili acknowledge the organized nature of their community's departure. This is attested in interviews conducted 30 years after these events with community members, where raising the topic still generates awkward attitudes²⁶.

²² *The Nano Wisdoms Archive of Imam Speeches, Interviews and Writings* <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1732/> consulted May 10th 2016. This is an authorized and a unique website dedicated solely to the Ismaili Imam's speeches, interviews and writings.

²³ A. Melo, *A diápora ismaelita – preparação e "partida", vivências da migração dos anos 70*, in: N. Khouri et J. Pereira Leite (ed.), *Indiens de cinq colonisations de l'Afrique Orientale: mobilités et identités en diaspora de 1870 à nos jours, Lusotopie XV* (2), Brill, Leiden 2008, pp. 97 and following.

²⁴ *The Ismaili Centre* (1996), not paginated volume.

²⁵ The numbers vary between 3.000 and 5.000. Cf.: N. Khouri and J. Pereira Leite, *Khodjas Ismaili*, pp. 182–184. In global terms the Ismaili constitute about 12 to 15 million people scattered in 25 countries.

²⁶ A recurrent answer transmitted in the interviews: N. Khouri and J. Pereira Leite, *Khodjas Ismaili*, see in particular the chapter 5 – "Le départ des Ismailis du Mozambique" – that draws on different approaches to the subject amongst the Portuguese Ismaili, specially: pp. 183–204 and 218–221; whereas Merali, op. cit., p. 330

New developments

In 1983 a new phase started, that of institutionalization with the establishment of a branch of the Aga Khan Foundation in Lisbon²⁷. This coincided with the 25th anniversary of accession to the imamate by the Aga Khan IV and conveyed a clear mark of globalization of the Community.

The first signs of this transformation may be traced to an advertisement placed in the *Expresso* weekly seeking Portuguese collaborators for the Foundation²⁸. In 1986 a plot of land was acquired for the construction of the Ismaili Centre in Lisbon in order to encompass the headquarters of the Aga Khan Foundation in Lisbon, the Community Centre including the Educational Board (*Itreb*), a library and the Scout group (n° 36) exclusively composed of the Ismaili, and the *jamat khana*. It was the second Ismaili Centre in Europe, after the one in London, inaugurated 1985.



Fig. 1. Ismaili Centre, Lisbon – general view²⁹

– mentions “a calm departure of the Ismaili from Mozambique 1974–1976 in search of peace and better living conditions”.

²⁷ In 1996 the Foundation received the statutes approved in Portugal and as the *Fundação Aga Khan* is actually the fourth largest foundation operating in Portugal. In the framework of the Protocol of Cooperation with the Portuguese Government signed in 2005 it is working on research and innovative direct intervention in the areas of early childhood education, social exclusion and urban poverty.

²⁸ E.M. von Kemnitz, *Les Ismailis dans la presse*, p. 255.

²⁹ <http://wherearchitectureisfun.tumblr.com/post/125537222667/islamic-center-in-lisbon-aga-khan-foundation-by>.



Fig. 2. Ismaili Centre, Lisbon – *char bagh*, interior gardens of Persian inspiration³⁰

The competition was won by a duo of architects, Raj Rewal (India) and Frederico Valsassina (Portugal). Their project, an outstanding example of contemporary Islamic architecture was conceived and constructed. The building and its gardens mirror the identity of dual heritage of the Portuguese Ismaili, on one hand that of their Indian legacy and on the other hand that of Al-Andalus. The interior decoration pays homage to the Portuguese tile tradition and includes works by Portuguese contemporary artists³¹.



Fig. 3. Ismaili Centre, Lisbon – *Jamat Khana*³²

³⁰ <http://wherearchitectureisfun.tumblr.com/post/125537222667/islamic-center-in-lisbon-aga-khan-foundation-by>.

³¹ A complete set of plans and illustrations was presented in a special edition: *The Ismaili Centre* (1996).

³² <https://ismailimail.wordpress.com/2015/08/02/ismaili-centre-in-lisbon-portugal/>

The ceremony of laying the foundation stone took place on December 18th 1996 in the presence of the Aga Khan IV and of the President of the Portuguese Republic, Mr. Jorge Sampaio. Two years later, on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of the Aga Khan III that the Ismaili celebrate annually, a solemn inauguration of the Ismaili Centre was staged on July 11th 1998 again in the presence of the Aga Khan IV and the President of Portugal and numerous guests from Portugal and abroad.

The Ismaili Centre gave a new visibility of the Ismaili Community in Portugal that by that time had already gained a positive appreciation in Portugal, being perceived as an important player in the Portuguese economy³³. Simultaneously the Ismaili are seen as “well integrated” and “successful in business”, a community with a high level of education and are therefore seen as different from other groups of Muslims³⁴. The Ismaili today are no longer merely perceived as just a community, but are closely associated with the Aga Khan Development Network.

The tragic events of September 11th 2001 shattered the public opinion and the way Islam and Muslims had until then been perceived, generating growing misconceptions or *clash of ignorancies* as put by Farhad Daftary³⁵. In this globally hostile environment, the ideals of interfaith and inter-civilizational dialogue, of justice and peaceful coexistence pursued since long time by the Aga Khan IV have gained new relevance.

A further step in cooperation was attained following signing of the *Protocol of Cooperation between the Portuguese Republic and Shia Imami Ismaili Imamat*³⁶ in December 19th 2005³⁷. The agreement upholds the promotion of quality of life and the preservation of human dignity, while promoting economic and social development, interfaith dialogue, and the peaceful resolution of conflict as ways of achieving justice and peace.

The Protocol set up a series of projects aiming at the improvement of quality of life of poor and vulnerable populations in Portugal and in Portuguese speaking countries in Africa, engaging the signatories in pursuing the goal of creating favourable conditions for sustainable development in the economic, social and cultural fields through joint partnerships underpinned by the principle of ethics. In fact it is the first agreement of this kind ever signed between the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate and a western government. On this occasion another project aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue was envisaged³⁸.

Aga Khan IV returned to Portugal in 2006 for a short visit in Évora³⁹ and in July 2008 in the framework of Golden Jubilee celebrations when he joined his community in

³³ *Negóciós. Os Cifrões da Índia* [“Affairs. Millions from India”], “Expresso”, January 30th, 1993.

³⁴ The title of the article is suggestive: *Aga Khan: a outra face do Islão* [“Aga Khan: another visage of Islam”], “Expresso”, March 5th, 1993.

³⁵ F. Daftary, *The Ismaili, Introduction*; idem, *As Lendas dos Assassinos. Mitos sobre os Ismailis*, Fenda Edições, Lisboa 2005; E.-M. von Kemnitz, *Les Ismailis dans la presse*, p. 261.

³⁶ When quoting the designation of the agreements we retain the Arabic form “Imamat” as worded there.

³⁷ E.-M. von Kemnitz, *Les Ismailis dans la presse*, p. 255.

³⁸ “Público”, December 19th 2005.

³⁹ Aga Khan IV participated in an international conference on “Cosmopolitan society, security and Human Rights in peaceful and plural world” and was granted a *Honoris causa* doctor’s degree in acknowledgment of his

Lisbon⁴⁰. These visits, instituted already by his predecessor, have had an enduring impact consolidating the relationship between the Imam and his followers. During this visit Aga Khan met with Portuguese political personalities, being received by the President of the Portuguese Republic, by the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Justice. Aga Khan declared that “the aim of this visit is to create an ambiance of entente and of inter-faith dialogue, of peace and justice and of shared values at national and international level”⁴¹.

This intention materialized next year with the signature of the *International Protocol between the Portuguese Republic and the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate* on May 5th 2009⁴². This agreement enables the Ismaili Community in Portugal to benefit from the legislation applicable to other non-Catholic religious communities in Portugal⁴³.

A meeting with the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, Monseigneur José Policarpo took place in which projects in favour of marginalised urban groups were defined and will be carried out with the participation of the Aga Khan Foundation and the *Misericórdia* (Portuguese ecclesiastical institution – Holy House of Mercy)⁴⁴. Therefore in the Portuguese public opinion the Ismaili are viewed as an important partner of social projects.

During this visit the Aga Khan was also received at the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon where he delivered a lecture on “Science for the 21st Century” in which he encouraged the Portuguese to exercise their “global influence in the world to the developing countries, using the best that you have and you know”, having in mind Portugal’s historical presence in Africa and Brazil.

In the wake of the Protocol, a Representation of the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate enjoying a diplomatic statute was opened in Lisbon⁴⁵. It is the first of the kind in Europe, preceded only by the one established in Canada (2008), a country with which the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate entertains very close relations due to a large Ismaili community dwelling there and the many important projects currently implemented there⁴⁶.

“ethical dimension and sense of fraternal universalism” as well as for his engagement in “social pluralism and peaceful coexistence”, *Diário de Notícias*, February 12th 2006.

⁴⁰ “Diário de Notícias”, July 4th 2008; “Diário de Notícias”, July 10th 2008.

⁴¹ “Diário de Notícias”, May 8th 2008.

⁴² *Líder espiritual ismaelita Aga Khan de visita a Portugal para comemorar 50 anos da subida ao trono* [“Visit of the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismaili in Portugal to commemorate the 50th anniversary of accession to the throne (imamate)”], “Diário de Notícias”, May 5th 2009; *Público*, May 5th 2009; “Expresso”, May 5th 2009

⁴³ Granted by the Decree n° 16 of June 22nd 2001. The enlargement of the privileges given to the Ismaili contradicts the parity of rights of the aforementioned law. Cf.: E.-M. von Kemnitz, *Les Ismailis dans la presse*, p. 257.

⁴⁴ *Cardeal-Patriarca defende o diálogo com a Comunidade Ismaili* [“Cardinal Patriarch favours the dialogue with the Ismaili”], Agência Ecclesia [*Portuguese News Agency of the Portuguese Catholic Church Ecclesia*], May 2009.

⁴⁵ In the journalistic jargon it was worded *Aga Khan opens Embassy in Lisbon*, *Diário de Notícias*, September 24th 2009.

⁴⁶ They are the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development in Ontario, the Institute for the Study of Pluralism in Ottawa and the Islamic Art Museum at Toronto, inaugurated in 2014.

The International Protocol between the Portuguese Republic and the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate was ratified by the Portuguese Parliament in July 2010⁴⁷. In practice it meant the recognition of the juridical statute of the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate already materialized in the opening of its Representation in the previous year.

Turning the page: a historical agreement

On 3 June 2015, the Portuguese Republic and Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate entered into an agreement⁴⁸ establishing *the global Seat of the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate in Lisbon*. It was approved by the Parliament and ratified by the President of the Portuguese Republic, coming into effect in November 2015. In consequence the official residence of the Imam will be moved to Portugal too.

Building on a long relationship and a series of earlier agreements dating back to the first Protocol of Cooperation signed in 2005, the agreement upholds the common goals and provides a basis for an intensified cooperation with Portugal. Further it provides a framework to facilitate the work of the Imamate globally by establishing the privileges, immunities and facilities extended by the Portuguese Republic to the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate, the Imam, as well to its Seat and assets⁴⁹.

Greeted by the Portuguese press as a *historical agreement*⁵⁰ this document marks an evolution of an already existing pattern of cyclical displacement of the seat of the imamate conditioned by trends of globalization of the Ismaili diaspora. The first seat was established in Bombay (1866) sealed by the verdict of the Bombay High Court. During the imamate of the Aga Khan III it was shifted to Nairobi at the turn of 19th to 20th century and in the first half of the 20th century further to Switzerland. With the actual Aga Khan IV it was transferred to Aiglement (France) and now to Lisbon (2015).

How should we view the choice of Lisbon as the global seat of the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate? The agreement offers important fiscal advantages to the Imam and the Ismaili institutions like the Aga Khan Development Network and the *Fundação Aga Khan*. It is true that the conditions of “courtesy” fiscal status, usually reserved for heads of state, offered in France by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008⁵¹ could not be maintained under the Socialist government of François Hollande. At the same time it is tempting to

⁴⁷ *Reconhecimento da personalidade jurídica ao Imamate Ismaili* [“Acknowledgement of the juridical statute of the Ismaili Imamate”], “Diário de Notícias”, July 18th 2010.

⁴⁸ The PDF version of the June 3, 2015 Agreement is in the public domain, and may be viewed by clicking on English text of the Agreement, PDF File: <http://ismaili.net/heritage/files/protocol-aga-khan-seat-imamat-portugal.pdf>.

⁴⁹ *Estado dá superbenefícios fiscais a príncipe Aga Khan* [“The state grants special fiscal conditions to prince Aga Khan”], “Negócios”, January 14th 2016.

⁵⁰ *Aga Khan admite investir em Portugal nos próximos cinco anos* [“Aga Khan admits investing in Portugal in the ensuing five years”] by Nuno Ribeiro, *Público*, June 2nd 2015. The article refers to the engagement of supporting scientific and economic cooperation which projects should be defined briefly; *Ismailitas. A elite muçulmana da diplomacia e dos negócios* [“The Ismaili. Muslim elites in diplomacy and affairs”], “Público”, April 10th 2016.

⁵¹ Boivin, op. cit., p. 333; “Libération”, February 3rd 2013.

consider other factors of geo-strategic nature that might have influenced the decision, such as the position of Portugal as a traditional mediator in Africa due to its historical and current links, constituting an advantage for the Aga Khan Development Network projects centred on Africa. Let us recall the words of the Aga Khan during the inauguration of the Ismaili Centre in Lisbon in 1998: "...Portugal has an extraordinary history and the country understands pluralism and that is relevant in any society..."⁵².

In fact from 1993 onwards the Ismaili go regularly to Africa to promote business opportunities, not only to East Africa, including Mozambique, but also to new destinations like Angola⁵³.

At a recent summit held in Egypt the Aga Khan gave a speech *Africa 2016: Business for Africa, Egypt and the World*⁵⁴ stressing the role and responsibility of the civil society for promoting a sustainable development, stressing that *Cooperating across traditional lines of division does not mean erasing our proud, independent identities. But it does mean finding additional, enriching identities as members of larger communities, and ultimately as people who share a common humanity. It means committing ourselves to an Ethic of Pluralism.*

It seems that Africa appears again as an opportunity for investment, business and other initiatives subscribed by the Aga Khan Development Network.

On May 12th 2016 the Aga Khan paid his first visit to Portugal after the signature of the Agreement⁵⁵. Nazim Ahmad, the hitherto Representative of the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate in Lisbon, was appointed Head of the Department of Portugal and other Lusophone Countries.

On that occasion an additional Agreement of Cooperation between the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education of the Portuguese Republic and the Ismaili Imamate was signed, establishing a joint initiative aimed at fostering academic, scientific and technological cooperation with countries and regions in development and having in mind the forthcoming establishment in Lisbon of the International Centre for Advanced Training of Researchers from Portuguese speaking Countries. The agreement emphasises research in the areas of poverty alleviation, food security and biodiversity, early childhood development, sustainable energy systems and urban development, resettlement of migrants, civil society and pluralism.

It also was announced that the mansion of Henrique de Mendonça will house the Seat of the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate, once its restoration is complete⁵⁶.

⁵² <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/>.

⁵³ A. Rocha, *Crescimento Económico e Desenvolvimento em Angola: Uma Análise para o período 1997–2010*, in: Nuno Vidal and Justino Pinto de Andrade (eds.), *Economia Política e Desenvolvimento em Angola*, MEDIA XXI, 2011, pp. 115 and following.

⁵⁴ Held on February 21st 2016. <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10948/>.

⁵⁵ <https://www.theismaili.org/news-events/mawlana-hazar-imam-portugal-first-official-visit-after-establishment-seat-imamat> consulted May 21st 2016.

⁵⁶ *Uma casa portuguesa, com certeza* ["A Portuguese house, surely"], "Visão", May 19th 2016. The title echoes the text of a popular *fado* song.

What answers to identity issues?

Presenting the Ismaili in Portugal, a brief reflection on identity appears necessary. Identity questions permeate the debate on diasporas and migration in the globalized context and an attempt to address these questions naturally tackles another problem, that of modernity and how it is envisaged and interpreted. How do the Ismaili define and construct their identity?

Let us quote a passage from the discourse of Aga Khan IV, Imam of the Shi'a Nizari Ismaili on the occasion of the Foundation Ceremony at the Aga Khan Academy at Dhaka / Bangladesh on May 20th 2008: *In the process of nurturing a healthy sense of identity, we must resist the temptation to normalise any particular culture, to demonise "the other", and to turn healthy diversity into dangerous discord*⁵⁷.

These words pronounced by the *Imam-e zaman* (Imam of the time), must be understood as a guide line of conduct for the Ismaili Community worldwide and in fact they are in tune with educational policies pursued by the Aga Khan Foundation through the network of Educational Boards (*Itrib*) since long time ago aiming at a homogeneization of ideas and values amongst the Ismaili scattered all over the world.

Another concern of the present Imam is the need for a "*cosmopolitan ethics*" as a sound basis of peaceful coexistence for all people living within the same society, a concept contrary to the ethics of solely one faith. The Ismaili Imamate by highlighting this position seeks to defy the common clichés about Islam and Muslims produced mostly by Western media⁵⁸.

In Portugal, the Ismaili declare that they are Portuguese citizens and Ismaili, summed up in statements like: "Our religion is different, in all other aspects we are Portuguese just like you"⁵⁹ or "I'm Ismaili but this circumstance does not prevent me from being a genuine Portuguese"⁶⁰.

These answers should be read however in the light of the guidance of the present Imam, stressing the duty of Ismaili as "loyal citizens" of every country where they live following the principle of two major commitments, one of spiritual allegiance (*bay'a*) to their Imam and other that of loyalty to a country which ensures their security and welfare⁶¹.

⁵⁷ Aryn B. Sajoo, *Modernity: The Ethics of Identity* in: F. Daftary, Aryn B. Sajoo and Shainool Jiwa (eds.), *The Shi'i World. Pathways in Tradition and Modernity*, I.B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London 2015, p. 349; <http://www.akdn.org/Content/661/Foundation-Stone-Laying-Ceremony-of-the-Aga-Khan-Academy-Dhaka> consulted May 18th 2015.

⁵⁸ D.M. Poor, op. cit., p. 157.

⁵⁹ Susana Trovão, Ana Costa and Filomena Batoréu, *Voix et processus de l'individualisation chez les jeunes Ismailis de Lisbonne*, in: N. Khouri et J. Pereira Leite, *Khodjas Ismaili*, p. 228.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁶¹ D.M. Poor, op. cit., p. 170. This advice was also inculcated by the Aga Khan III to his followers earlier insisting on the duty of gratitude towards the country of their residence understood as a guarantee of their safety. See: Susana Trovão et al., op. cit., p. 269.

It may be also pertinent to ask how Muslim are the Shia Imami Ismaili? The core belief encapsulated in the figure of a *living imam* contradicts the Nizari Ismaili teachings that recognize a lineage of seven imams, followed by a hidden imam and constitutes an innovation as is the case of this specific persuasion. Let us resort to a fragment of an interview in which the Aga Khan IV himself defines his role as the head of his community: *The Imam must direct Ismailis on the practice of their religion and constantly interpret the Qur'an for them according to our theology. On the spiritual plane, the Imam's authority is absolute. Ismailis believe therefore that what the Imam says is the only true interpretation possible. This is fundamental to our religion...*⁶²

The Ismaili refer frequently to their community as a *community of interpretation* that may be interpreted as a community open to evolution according to the interpretation given by the *imam-e zaman*.

From the 1970's onwards, with the rise of fundamentalism in Pakistan and later in the wake of the Iranian revolution (1989) worldwide led Aga Khan to insist on and promote the islamization of his Community. A substantial shift can be observed, a rapprochement to mainstream Islam with more prominence given to the figure of the Prophet and the use of quranic phrases in Arabic recited on official occasions.

Since 2010 the Ismaili Centre in Lisbon has organized special lectures on the occasion of the *milad (mawlid an-Nabi)* evoking the Prophet's legacy.

Instead of concluding remarks, opening of new avenues

The specificity of the Ismaili does not allow for concluding remarks.

“The concept of the Imamate as expounded in the Ismaili thought makes clear the notion that the role of hazar imam (present living Imam) or imam-e-zaman (Imam of the time) is to offer the believers continual guidance on spiritual and temporal matters in accordance of the principles of Islam (as interpreted by the Imam), and in relation to the circumstances of the historical age and time”⁶³.

This perspective make the Ismaili envisage a constant evolution according to the guidelines transmitted. Therefore in a rapidly changing global context further changes or adaptations of social institutions and religious practices may occur.

No doubt that the implantation of the seat of the Shia Imami Ismaili Imamate in Lisbon projects the Ismaili of Portugal in an outstanding position for the time being. The manifest interest in an enlarged cooperation and investment in Africa displayed by

⁶² The Nano Wisdoms Archive of Imamat Speeches, Interviews and Writings <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1732/> consulted May 10th 2016.

⁶³ Zulfikar Hijri, *Socio-Legal Formation of the Nizari Ismaili of East Africa*, in: F. Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History*, p. 153.

the Aga Khan IV enables the Ismaili of Portugal to play a relevant role in this exchange due to the knowledge of the Portuguese language as far as lusophone Africa is concerned and of the existing business relations.

Furthermore, in what concerns Portugal, innovative educational activities through the Aga Khan Academies and the Aga Khan University are underway.

The provisions of the Protocol of 2015 establish a minimum period of 25 years cooperation (Article 19.2), just the lifetime period of one generation. Given the age of the Aga Khan IV (b. 1936), viewed as “a visionary leader”⁶⁴ it is most likely that within this period a new Aga Khan will be invested and other innovative guidelines are likely to follow.

⁶⁴ D.M. Poor, *op. cit.*, p. 107.