

# Across Difference: Portuguese Muslim Youth as Portuguese Youth? <sup>1</sup>

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## 1 Introduction

For around 30 years, Muslims have represented the largest non-Christian religious minority in Portugal. This “New Islamic Presence” is largely the result of the post-colonial movement of Muslims of Indian/Mozambican and Guinean backgrounds to Portugal, and is estimated to be in the region of between 30,000 and 40,000 people in scale (Tiesler 2000; 2001; 2005). The discussion which follows focuses on studying Muslim youth, adopting the original perspective of exploring everyday issues, such as educational and occupational experiences, rather than exceptional matters: issues of security, religious extremism and violence, nevertheless presumed to be of over-riding importance to young Muslims. In this investigation, we also explore the experiences of Muslim youth in the city of Lisbon in juxtaposition with a further group of young people drawn from a broad range of social backgrounds in the same city.<sup>2</sup>

Studying Muslim youth in Portugal presents challenges in respect to what to study and indeed who to study. As Herrera (2005) has argued, youth in general and young Muslims in particular have long been treated as a social problem. Such research deficiencies can lead to a disproportionate “Islamisation” of the object of study (in this case, Muslim youth) and strengthening of the Islamicisation of public and academic discourses (Tiesler 2006). In short, nearly everything and anything these young Muslims do, think, affirm or negate, appears to derive from their “Muslimness”, i.e. an Islamic particularity, rather than from other factors such as socio-economic class, gender or educational background, not to

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of this other group of Portuguese youth, see Cairns and Smyth in this volume.

mention the impact of living in a particular place at a specific moment in time. While it is valid to ask how young Muslims use their "Muslimness" as a social capital type resource, for example in attaining social mobility, to see such capital as an essentialist property is problematic, since at least in Portugal, there are these aforementioned other influences to consider, along with what could conceivably be termed "Portugueseness".

## 2 Methodology

The research which forms the foundation of this chapter surveyed young Muslims as much in terms of their Portuguese identities as their status as Muslims. This is an original approach, with few prior works having presented comparisons between Muslims from diverse backgrounds and other ethnic or national groups (see Abranches 2007; Bastos et al. 2005). Fieldwork consisted of a quantitative survey, conducted in Lisbon, of university students alongside a further survey of young Muslims associated with the Islamic Community of Lisbon (CIL). The majority of these Muslims take part in the life of the CIL, which while acting as an umbrella organisation in formal and informal matters for Sunni Muslims, by no means implies that Islamic community life in Lisbon is somehow a singular experience.

Regarding the make-up of the university-based sample, hereafter referred to as the initial sample, 45% were male 55% female and 95% were under 25 years old. The young Muslim sample was 55% male and 45% female, with 73% aged under 25, from a wider range of educational backgrounds compared to the initial sample. The same basic questionnaire was administered to both groups. The questions themselves, while diverse in scope, all related to various aspects of these young people's life experience, for instance, family and community attachments, work and study orientations, in addition to gathering information on future life plans. In total, 240 young people were included in the survey: 200 in the original sample alongside 40 young Muslims.

All of the young people surveyed were asked to provide information about their personal backgrounds, particularly in respect to self-perceived ethnic status and/or nationality. While the young people in the initial sample described themselves predominantly as Portuguese (84%), 9% were of African origin, mostly Cape Verdean, with 6% from other European countries. In relation to the national backgrounds of the young Muslims, almost all were Portuguese nationals/citizens born in Portugal to parents from Mozambique who were also Sunni Muslims of Indian origin. Regarding marital status, both groups of young people were overwhelmingly single: 94% of the initial sample and 80% of the young

Muslims. In respect to the remaining cases, the initial sample included seven married young people, two fiancées, two divorcees and one cohabiter. Out of the 40 young Muslims, four were married, three engaged and one divorced. Very few of these young people had children: five in the initial sample and three of the young Muslims.

## 3 Analysis

Out of a large body of data, a number of prominent themes have been chosen to illustrate the individual orientations of these young people to work and study and their experiences of family relationships and community attachments. The question of future geographical mobility has also been included, namely whether or not these young people see themselves living in Portugal in the future on a permanent basis. This latter issue is particularly important if we wish to assess how deeply grounded these individuals are in their communities despite, or perhaps because of, family histories of migration.

From existing literature on Portuguese youth, it is evident that the family is of paramount importance in the everyday lives of young people, with peer relationships also of major significance (see, for instance, Guerreiro and Abrantes 2004). We also know that the majority of the young people surveyed still live with their families: 76% in the initial sample and 85% of the young Muslims. These results are in line with recent European trends on youth home-staying implying that increasing numbers of young people are staying within the family home for longer periods (Bendit et al. 1999; Iacovou and Berthoud 2001). Furthermore, when questioned as to whether or not this housing arrangement was a satisfactory state of affairs, a clear majority agreed that it was "good to live with their parents", the young Muslims somewhat more so: 87% compared to 70% from the initial sample.

Family and peer relationships are explored in Table 1, which presents results of a series of binary linear regression analyses, with responses to various statements as the dependent variable in each case. While there are some interesting differences between the two samples, e.g. the young Muslims are more likely to feel "incomplete" without their families and live close to both their friends and family, and less likely to feel "incomplete" without their friends, with two notable exceptions these disparities are not significant to a meaningful level, implying that there is little difference between these two samples on most of these key indicators of family and peer relationships: these young people evidently share a high regard for both their families and their peer relationships.

*Table 1: Family and Peer Relationships via binary logistic regression between samples*

Statement	B	Exp (B)
I have many of the same friends today as I had when I was a child	1.439	4.217*
It's good to live at home with your parents	1.007	2.736*
I would feel incomplete without my family	.586	1.803
I see myself having many of the same friends in the future as I have today	.549	1.731
Most of my family lives near me	.466	1.594
Most of my friends live near me	.382	1.466
Having a good family life is more important than having a good job	.115	1.121
I would feel incomplete without my friends	-.322	.725
My family support me while I am studying	-.435	.648

\* Pearson chi square level of significance less than .05

Similarly high frequencies of young people in both samples agreed with the statement, "Having a good family life is more important than having a good job", 76% of young Muslims and 74% in the initial sample. Furthermore, while friendships were durable across the board, this was an area in which another significant disparity emerged: the young Muslims were four times more likely to have the same friends today as they had in childhood, 89% of young Muslims compared to 66% in the initial sample; 90% of the former and 83% of the latter also see themselves having many of the same friends in the future as they have today. Therefore, while friendship is evidently strong across the board, peer relationships are more durable for the young Muslims.

In respect to study and work orientations, a number of indices on study and work were included in the questionnaire to explore the significance of both of these areas in the lives of the young people surveyed. It should be noted that with the majority of these young people still being in full-time education, their opinions on, for instance, the Portuguese education system, are very much first-hand accounts, while their opinions of work largely relate to their anticipated future careers.

*Table 2: Study and Work via logistic regression between samples*

Statement	B	Exp (B)
Portugal has a good education system	.845	2.329*
Salaries are too low in Portugal	.178	1.195
My family support me while I am studying	.048	1.049
I have a fear of unemployment	.016	1.016
I have no career plans	-.069	.934
A person must have a job to feel a full member of society	-.386	.680
I don't like to study	-.386	.678

\* Pearson chi square level of significance less than .05

As we can observe from the above table, significant difference between samples was present in responses to only one of these statements, namely, a much higher level of agreement being made to the statement "Portugal has a good education system" amongst the young Muslims, although those in disagreement with the statement were still in the majority in both camps: 72% of young Muslims compared to 86% of those in the initial sample. This is an interesting dichotomy in respect to the degrees of negativity on display, taking into account the fact that responses to other questions indicate that these young Muslims, via travel and family relationships outside of Europe, are more likely to be able to make informed comparison with other countries' educational systems.

Large majorities in both samples where in agreement with the statement on salaries being too low in Portugal: 84% of young Muslims and 81% of the initial sample. Significantly more young Muslim females agreed with this notion, 100% in fact, compared to 83% of the young Muslim men. Regarding other results, fear of unemployment is prominent amongst both groups, 76% in agreement with the statement, with women in both samples being more apprehensive: 84% of young women beside 60% of young men in the initial sample and 82% of young Muslim women compared to 68% of young Muslim men. Similarly high numbers, 78% of young Muslims and 70% of the initial sample, also felt that "A person must have a job to feel a full member of society".

Prior studies also tell us that the lives of these young people can be complicated, with a labyrinthine series of choices and dilemmas to be made as they move towards a delineated future of unpredictable outcomes (Pais 1998; 2003). One shared characteristic of Portuguese youth would seem to be a close attachment to home, meaning not only, as previously discovered, living in the actual parental home, but also being embedded within the communities within which these individuals reside, not to mention Portugal itself, with future life trajectories also imagined at or within close proximity to home.

A number of statements were included on the questionnaire in relation to attachments to the communities in Lisbon in which these young people reside,

alongside broader identifications with Portugal and Europe. We can observe from Table 3 that in regard to liking (or not liking) where they live, there is no significant difference; likewise being more European than Portuguese (in total only 23% of all young people agreed) and feeling "at home" in Portugal. On this latter issue, a total of 90% of all young people were in agreement: 92% of young Muslims and 90% in the initial sample.

Table 3: Community Attachments via logistic regression between samples

Statement	B	Exp (B)
I always want to live in my area	1.076	2.933*
I regularly socialise in my own area	.958	2.605*
I feel at home in Portugal	.229	1.257
I don't like the area I live in	.170	1.185
I think of myself first and foremost as an individual	-.318	.727
I feel more European than Portuguese	-.265	.767

\* Pearson chi square level of significance less than .05

In respect to issues where significant difference did emerge: wanting to always live in present area of residence and socialising within one's own community, we can observe that almost three times as many young Muslims want to remain where they currently live and regularly socialise locally. There is also a suggestion that the young Muslims may be slightly less individualistic than their counterparts in the other sample, 75% of those in the initial sample agreeing with "I think of myself first and foremost as an individual" compared to 69% of young Muslims, although this difference is not statistically significant.

Regarding mobility aspirations within future working lives, the picture is largely one of consistency between the two samples, with equally high numbers of young people from both groups thinking that it would be good to work (77% overall) or study (82% overall) abroad. The one significant discrepancy to emerge out of Table 4 concerns working in Portugal but outside Lisbon: only 29% of the young Muslims would consider doing so in contrast to 57% in the initial sample. In respect to the question of always seeing oneself living in Portugal in the future, the difference between the two groups is pronounced but not quite statistically significant, with young Muslims over twice as likely to agree with this statement.

Table 4: Mobility via logistic regression between samples

Statement	B	Exp (B)
I see myself always living in Portugal in the future	.852	2.344
It's easier to find a good job abroad than in Portugal	.488	1.630
I would move abroad if it meant having a better life	-.081	.923
I would like to work in another country in Europe	-.292	.745
It's good to study abroad	-.381	.683
It's good to work in another country	-.386	.680
I would like to work in another part of Portugal	-1.186	.306*

\* Pearson chi square level of significance less than .05

#### 4 Discussion

In discussing these results, it is perhaps wise to retain a certain amount of caution, particularly considering the relatively small sample sizes and the differences in terms of the backgrounds of these young people, i.e. those from the initial sample being sourced from an educational context while the young Muslims were drawn from a specific social context. Despite these limitations, the two samples were comparable in terms of gender and age profile and, crucially, shared the same geographical context.

What we can observe is a picture of youth concerned with everyday issues relating to their educational experiences and career expectations. The young Muslims surveyed share many of the same concerns as their non-Muslim counterparts, for example, over how to initiate and maintain a career. These are common concerns in a national context of difficult economic circumstances. Within such a situation, young people are at risk of marginalisation and potentially placed in a position of dependency upon family. In both groups, we can observe indications of strong family relationships, not to mention close friendship ties and an attachment to their home city.

In putting these results into a broader context, as Portuguese youth, the social class origins of these young people should also be considered. The relatively privileged lives of these young people may contribute to their strong feelings of attachment to their families and their communities. It would be much more difficult to imagine them wanting to maintain strong ties to families and communities unable or unwilling to sustain them. It is conceivable therefore that the class origins of many of these young people is of more importance than other factors, such as gender or ethnicity, pointing to a continuing salience of social class, in line with other recent research findings (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004: 133).

In respect to community attachments, we can observe strong identification with place and country of residence, particularly amongst the young Muslims.

This finding is allied to aversion towards trans-national mobility, at least in terms of actual intentions. A further important theme to emerge from these results hence relates to the dichotomy between what could be termed a "global vision" (see Bauer and Thompson 2004) and substantive global action, i.e. actual physical mobility or at least mobility intentions. Within these results, this dichotomy is most evident when juxtaposing attitudes towards abroad, i.e. while most feel it "good to work abroad", actual mobility intentions are less pronounced. While it is possible to discuss this dichotomy in terms of the sedentary nature of Portuguese identity, or "monolithic versions of Portuguese-ness" (Noivo 2004: 255), within our context, there is perhaps a more prosaic explanation: strong family relationships and deep community attachments are probably more salient in mobility decision-making than adherence to a national identity constructs.

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