

Introduction

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On March 18th 2018, the Islamic Community of Lisbon, the leading representative association for Islamic issues in Portugal, celebrated its 50th anniversary. The celebrations took place in Lisbon Central mosque and among its guests were the Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque, from Cairo, the secretary general of the United Nations, António Guterres, the prime minister of Portugal, António Costa, the president of the Portuguese Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, representatives of the Catholic church and other key figures in interfaith dialogue. The celebration lasted two days and had an extensive coverage in news reports, in mainstream media, reinforcing the visibility and centrality of this institution in all things Islamic.

In November (2018), in Athens, a procession celebrating the *mawlid-un-nabi*, the anniversary of Prophet Muhammad, was organized, departing from Omonoia Square, while the negotiations continue for the construction of a central Mosque in the city to serve its growing Muslim population. This is an old claim that, for one reason or another, was never fulfilled since the 80s, in spite several plans to conclude it.

In Helsinki, on the other hand, the polemics around the construction of a central Mosque continue. In spite of dozens of small mosques, several Muslim associations, including the Finish Muslim Union, have been claiming, for years, the construction of a central Mosque in the city, therefore giving equality of place to Islam in relation to other religions. As soon as the project became public though, it was strongly contested by extreme right-wing movements that mobilized several Islamophobic/racist arguments against it.

On Christmas Day last year (2018), the Muslim Sisters of Eire organized the distribution of survival bags (with food, tents, warm clothes, sanitary products, and others) called “Bags for Life,” to homeless women and men in Dublin. The objective was to lighten the load of those in need, in this period of the year, and included Muslim and non-Muslim women, with very diverse backgrounds and histories. With this campaign, the association also wants to increase public awareness about the role of Muslim women as Irish citizens and as key actors in promoting the wellbeing of the wider society.

These four initial vignettes hint at the larger objective of this edited volume: all of them address common issues about the public recognition of Islam, claiming a place for Muslims, making citizenship claims through care,

and manifestations of Islamophobia and racism, in four different countries, Portugal, Greece, Finland and Ireland. The objective of this edited volume is precisely to address these and other issues about Muslims and Islam focusing this time in the margins of Europe. Discussions and research about Islam and Muslims in Europe have tended to focus on a small number of Western European countries due to their large Muslim populations and their social and political significance. Most notably, much of the research concentrates on the experiences of Muslims in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom.¹ The exact size of the European Muslim population remains disputed, but data provided by *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*² and the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*³ suggests that between 17.5 and 19.1 million Muslims were living in the European Union around the year 2010, which is 3.5 to 3.8 per cent of the total EU 28 population (500 million people). French, German and British Muslims constitute alone, over 11 million and, thus, two-thirds of all European Muslims.

Whereas there are legitimate and worthwhile reasons for the great interest in Muslim lives in these countries, it is nevertheless important to broaden the study of Islam and Muslims to other European countries. For example, Larsson and Račius argue for the inclusion of Muslim experiences from the Baltic rim to balance the view that Islam is a new religion in Europe by reminding us of the need to bring forth the manifold Muslim experiences from different European societies.⁴ Many others have also lamented the lack of information from smaller countries, despite its importance. While some steps in that direction have already been taken, including the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*,⁵ we feel that the study of the diverse experiences of Muslim(s) Europe(s) require more attention on countries with smaller and comparatively understudied Muslim populations in order to continue broadening the picture of European Muslims and Islam. It is precisely with this objective in mind that this edited volume focusses on Muslims at the four corners of the European Union today, namely, Finland, Greece, Ireland and Portugal.

1 Marcel Maussen, *The Governance of Islam in Western Europe. A State of the Art Report*, IMISCOE Working Paper No. 16 (Amsterdam: IMISCOE), 6.

2 Pew Templeton Global Religious Futures Project. *The Future of the Global Muslim Population. Projections for 2010–2030*. (Washington: Pew Research Center, Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2011), 161–162.

3 Jørgen S. Nielsen et al., ed., *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe. Volume 5* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

4 Göran Larsson and Egdūnas Račius, “A Different Approach to the History of Islam and Muslims in Europe: A North-Eastern Angle, or the Need to Reconsider the Research Field,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3/3 (2010): 351–352.

5 The first Yearbook was published in 2009; see: “Yearbook of Muslims in Europe,” Brill, accessed November 5, 2013, <http://www.brill.com/publications/yearbook-muslims-europe>.