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# THE LOOMING SHADOW OF THE CRESCENT: ISLAM IN SPAIN

*Rajiv Mehrotra*



## Introduction

Over the past three decades, Spain's rapid economic growth has transformed it from a net exporter of people to a nation that now takes in almost one third of the European Union's total immigration influx. (Tremlett) These great migratory flows into Spain have thus brought to its longstanding, homogeneous Spanish Catholic landscape a set of very diverse communities (North African, Middle Eastern, Latin American, Eastern European, Asian, etc.). Though Spain cherishes its constitutional ideals of state equality, neutrality and tolerance, acclimatizing to this relatively sudden influx of immigrants has not taken place smoothly. While Latin Americans and Eastern Europeans are considered culturally similar to Spaniards, the influx of immigrants from North Africa, most of whom are Muslims, and the escalating number of conversions to Islam since 1975 have regularly stirred heated political controversy. They have also been the cause of many discomforting questions over the extent of reli-

gious tolerance in Spanish society. The integration of Muslims into the Spanish mainstream has, therefore, been one of the most perplexing issues that Spain has had to deal with in recent years.

The main cause of the uneasiness stems from the notion that Muslims cannot be integrated into the Spanish mainstream and that their values and culture serve as a threat to the Spaniards and the prevailing Catholic Church. Memories of a troubled past — the rule of the Moors and the Spanish Inquisition — coupled with the recent rise of Islamophobia and xenophobia in the wake of the September 11 attacks in the U.S. and the March 11 bombings in Madrid have further caused Muslims to be viewed with an attitude of extreme "otherness."

Nevertheless, the Islamic presence in Spain is affecting not only the nation's demography but also its identity and national policies. Spain needs its immigrants, not least because it is facing a severe labor shortage and a shrinking population. ("Survey: Europe's Magnetic...") Thus Spain's challenge is twofold. On the soci-

etal level, it must integrate a marginalized Muslim population that is increasingly resisting assimilation and is challenging the nation's cherished ideals of equality and tolerance. On the national level, Spain has to modify its laws and policies for this purpose. Moreover, it has to deal with a number of new phenomena that are developing as a result of the Islamic presence in Spain, which might affect the nation's foreign policy, terrorism and its very identity.

In this article, I analyze the current state of Islam in Spain. I contend that Spain has been working hard to bridge the gap between historical misperceptions and the reality of a Muslim minority presence in Spain. However, Spain's unique model of integration still requires considerable work. I briefly comment upon the historical background of Islam in Spain and discuss the dynamics of the Muslim community that is emerging in Spain. I also critique the Spanish government's initiatives in such areas as education and legal recognition that are of considerable importance to Muslims. I conclude by arguing that despite these challenges, many new developments are emerging in Spain that give hope for the future, and I offer some suggestions that might further advance the integration process.

In this article, the terms "Muslims" and "Islam" are not meant to imply a sect of people who are devoutly religious and who follow all the tenets of the religion. In fact, such an assumption would mistakenly imply that Islam is a unified religious body in Spain, when in fact it is a highly fragmented one. Instead, in using these terms I am simply referring to people who call themselves Muslims regardless of their religious propensity.

### **Demographics: A Heterogeneous Society**

Demographically, the growing presence of Islam in Spain since the 1970s is attributable mainly to two phenomena: an increase in the number of immigrants from neighboring Islamic countries, chiefly Morocco (Gaya), and a strong tendency among Spaniards for conversion to Islam, especially in such cities as Cordoba and Granada. (Dietz and El-Shohoumi, p. 77)

According to the U.S. Department of State's *Annual International Religious Report* of 2004, the number of Muslims in Spain is close to one million ("International Religious Freedom..."), more than an eight-fold rise since 1992. Nearly 60,000 to 70,000 of these Muslims are of Spanish birth. (Moreras, p. 130) This includes the children of immigrants and the residents of Ceuta and Melilla, the two Spanish enclaves in Morocco. In addition, there are nearly 250,000 legal resident Muslims in Spain, with about 30,000 of them holding Spanish citizenship and the rest on work contracts. (Moreras, p. 130) The number of Spanish converts, that is Spaniards who have accepted the Islamic faith since General Franco's death in 1975, may be as high as 15,000. ("Country Profiles: Spain") The remaining overwhelming percentage of the Muslim population are present illegally in Spain. (Moreras, p. 131)

Most immigrants usually find work in low-paying jobs such as agriculture (picking fruit), construction, and domestic services — occupations that more educated Spaniards have now left for higher-paying jobs in the services sector. The immigrants are typically hired on extremely flexible, informal, and temporary work contracts, without the obligatory provision of social security. This makes their economic state very fragile. (Dietz, p. 1091)

The converts, on the other hand, are relatively well off. Most are of Spanish origin and hold Spanish citizenship. Though small in number, they are a powerful sect in Spain and are more readily accepted in society, know the Spanish culture well, and possess a stronger voice in claiming rights for Muslims. Since the signing of the Agreement of Cooperation with Islamic entities in 1992 (to be discussed later), these converts have put forward several demands for better integration in Spain and have also played major roles in the nation's many Islamic associations.

### **Being Muslim in Spain: Confronting the Historical Misperceptions**

Despite the relatively recent rise of Muslim immigration and conversions, the Islamic-Spanish nexus is not a new phenomenon. Rather, unlike most EU states, Spain shares a

long and deep historical past with Islam. The common history dates back to 711 when the Moors (rulers from North Africa) established their eight-century-long rule in Spain. The glory of the Moorish rule, however, weighs heavily on Spanish thinking in the present. (Moreras, p. 130) In fact, the Christian *reconquista* of Granada in 1492, when the last Muslim king was banished from Spain, and the ensuing Spanish Inquisition, when the remaining Muslims were either proselytized or expelled, are often claimed as the events that cleansed the land of impure blood. (Dietz and El-Shohoumi, p. 77)

The Spanish state has since that time been held together by its cultural and Catholic homogeneity. In fact, the “official” interpretation of history given in the historiography school until recently stressed the Roman-Visigoth-Christian roots of Spain and firmly denied the Muslim legacy. (Martín-Muñoz, p. 49) Islam has thus often been perceived as the religion of foreigners who cannot be integrated into Spanish society. Moreover, the conflictive relationship with Morocco during Spain’s colonial reign in the 19th century and Franco’s involvement of Morocco in the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to help defeat the Republican government (Martín-Muñoz, p. 49) have worsened this feeling and have ignited a fear of the return of the *Moro*.

Lately, this perennial fear has increased due to such world events as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iraq war. The result is that there has been a gradual build-up of a circle of stereotypes of Muslims and Moors, which have worked to reinforce the image of Islam as alien and a threat. While this mind-set has been recently changing, such prejudices still affect many Spaniards.

For instance, in a 2000 field study, Gunther Dietz, an anthropologist at the University of Granada, found that many Muslims in Spain complained of overt discrimination against their children by non-Muslim fellow pupils, who constantly stigmatized them as Moors. Moroccan men were often stereotyped as Moors looking for the “Arabic revenge,” and women were often blamed for breeding Muslims who would one day fight to reclaim the lost land of Al-Andalus. (Dietz and El-

Shohoumi, p. 95) In a similar study performed by Gema Martín-Muñoz, many educated Moroccan immigrants expressed frustration at being discriminated against at work because many Spaniards did not want to be seen on the same footing as a Moor. This meant that, despite having appropriate educational qualifications, many Moroccans are relegated to low-level jobs and many Spaniards stubbornly object to their promotions. (Martín-Muñoz, p. 51) In the same study, Muslim women were found to be discriminated against because of their *hijab* (woman’s veil). Women wearing the veil were frequently told that they “should not exaggerate [their Muslimness and Moorish culture]” and were often asked to “take them off” for work. (Martín-Muñoz, p. 51) In fact, in 2002 the *hijab* stirred great controversy when a 13-year-old Moroccan girl was denied admission into a Catholic school because she wore a “symbol of submission.” (Daly) While Madrid’s Minister of Education, Carlos Mayor Oreja, finally ordered that the girl be accepted into a public school (Fraerman), it shows how resistant Spanish society is of anything that is Arab and Muslim.

## **The Muslim Community: Dynamics and Implications**

The “Spanish experience” and the historical prejudices existent in Spain are having a deep impact on the manner in which the Muslim community is emerging in Spain. On the other hand, Islam itself is affecting Spain in a variety of ways. In this section, I discuss this two-way interaction of the Spanish-Islamic nexus and illustrate many of the consequent challenges for the integration of Muslims in Spain.

### **Redefinition of Identity and Emergence of a Segregated Community**

The Muslim population of Spain is a changing entity and to refer to it as a monolithic group is misleading. Muslims in Spain are falling victim to just such a vision of Islam and, as illustrated earlier, are often subjects of historical misperceptions and societal rejection. The result of this stereotyping is that many

dejected and economically marginalized Muslims tend to find solace among others who have suffered similar negative responses and are often found clustering in communities with other Muslims in the suburbs of Madrid, Barcelona and Andalusia. Muslims living in these clusters often suffer from a depressed socioeconomic status. This depressed state is often attributed to the philosophy and practice of Islam itself (Cesari) that develops into a self-fulfilling prophecy of being poor and Muslim. Moreover, Spaniards generally see these “ghettos” as encroachments on their land and as breeding grounds for criminals. Thus, as psychologist Walter Stephan’s threat theory explains, Muslims are collectively seen as a threat to Spaniards (Stephan et al., p. 574), and often the wrongdoing of one Muslim tends to reflect upon the entire Muslim community. The prime example of such stereotyping was witnessed in the Spanish city of El Ejido, where in early 2000 many Spaniards took to violent racist attacks in response to the killing of a young Spanish woman by a deranged Moroccan. (Bond) Many Moroccan immigrant houses were burned, and nearly 50 Moroccans were attacked during the incident.

The stereotyping and discrimination against Muslims in Spain, however, tend to bring about a sense of re-Islamization among the Muslims. In other words, the more Muslims are discriminated against based on their religion, the more they fall back upon Islam and claim it as their badge of identity. In fact, in many cases Muslims who had not been devoutly religious in their home countries tend to accept Islam more strongly as exhibited by the increasing number of women wearing the *hijab*. (Martín-Muñoz, p. 52) The religious identity is thus not lost, but altered in a special way. Many Muslims, especially young Muslims, tend to resist assimilation or complete immersion in the Spanish mainstream, which they feel will strip them of their Islamic identity. (Martín-Muñoz, p. 51) They are usually more willing to integrate with Spanish society and respect the national norms and institutions, but at the same time they also strongly maintain their distinct Islamic identity. (Savage, p. 31) They thus often involve themselves in learning more about Islam and also work hard to pass on the

important tenets of Islam to their children. This is especially visible in many of the Muslim women who immigrate to Spain on their own. They usually marry men of Muslim origin to maintain their Islamic identity and, since many of them are well educated, deeply stress the importance of religious education for their children. (Martín-Muñoz, p. 54) However, in order to avoid direct confrontation with Spanish society, many Muslims indulge in a “low profile” position, personalizing the practice of Islam while remaining covert about it. The result is that Muslims often form closed societies in Spain, centered especially around mosques, where they spend time with others who feel the same way. This pushes Muslims further away from mainstream Spanish society.

The situation is worsened by the fact that there is also a huge divide within the Muslim community itself. The Spanish converts, who represent the official voice of Islam in Spain, have few contacts with the immigrant population, which constitutes the overwhelming proportion of the Muslim presence in Spain. The reason is partly that Muslim converts think of the “immigrant” Islam as backward and thus form their closed societies with other converts. It is also partly due to the fact that the immigrants themselves do not like to get involved with the converts since most Muslim immigrants reside illegally in Spain. (Dietz and El-Shohoumi, p. 83) As a result, many of the demands put forward by the Spanish converts do not reflect those of the greater Muslim community in Spain, making the integration process even harder.

### **Rise of Crime and Terrorism**

The chemistry resulting from Muslims’ encounters with Spanish society, like in other parts of Europe, frequently makes certain individuals more susceptible to crime and recruitment into terrorist networks. (Savage, p. 33) Muslims who turn towards crime usually engage in petty offenses, such as credit card fraud, robbery, and excessive drinking. This is seen in the nearly 6,000 Moroccans and Algerians present in Spanish jails since 2003. (Jordan and Horsburgh, p. 187) These Muslims are also more likely to be influenced by

recruiters, especially in Spanish jails, who incite them to become *ihadists* as a means to atone for their “sins.” In fact, many of the 13 Muslims arrested for a court bombing plot in Spain in 2004 had been earlier arrested for petty crimes like fraud or robbery and were later recruited for terrorist activity in the Spanish prisons. (“13 Islamic Radicals...”) Their time in prison, investigators argued, transformed them into Martyrs for Morocco, a terrorist group. (McLean)

While such events are still not common in Spain, the March 11 bombings that left almost 200 people dead suggest that these activities could be increasing. From March 2004 to June 2005, there were already 26 arrests in relation to the bombings, and many of the arrested were Muslims from Morocco. (Goodman) In fact, the example of Sarhane Ben Abdelmajid Fakheth shows how Muslims in Spain can become more susceptible to terrorist activity. Fakheth was once a “soft and well-educated” person, who came to Spain on a scholarship to study economics. After coming to Spain, however, he rarely spoke with his co-workers and after attending the M-30 mosque in Madrid, turned towards extremism and eventually became involved with the March 11 bombings. (Wright)

The Spanish government, however, has been working hard to improve the situation of its Muslims in order to discourage terrorist activity. For example, in early 2005 Spain allocated \$429,000 in order to provide legal status to almost 800,000 immigrants, many of them Muslims. (Andalusi, “Spain Reconciles...”) Similarly, in 2002 Spain set up a plan whereby foreign workers, especially Muslims, could work in Spain for up to nine months on seasonal contracts and after completing three years of seasonal work could become legal immigrants. (Arango and Martin) This, Spain expected, would allow immigrants to be paid at least the minimum wage in jobs with social security and retirement benefits. However, despite more than 30,000 seasonal work permits approved that year, only about 9,000 were finally issued. (Arango and Martin) These examples show that the integration of Islam to discourage crime and terrorist activity in Spain might be a much harder challenge for the government than it appears to be.

## Reformulation of Foreign Policy

While Islam is affecting the societal structure of Spain, it can also affect Spanish foreign policy for at least two reasons. First, as in the rest of Europe, Spanish Muslims seem to relate more deeply with the global *umma* (brotherhood of Muslims) rather than with just domestic issues like unemployment and education. (Savage, p. 39) This means that such events as the Iraq War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will energize Spanish Muslims more strongly than national issues. The prime example of a change in foreign policy due to this factor was witnessed in 2001, when Spanish Muslims and Spaniards came out in millions to protest the Iraq war and Spain’s decision to send its troops to Iraq. In fact, when Spain finally pulled its troops out of Iraq in 2004 in response to the Madrid bombings, it was in clear opposition to the Spanish-U.S. foreign policy that had existed.

Secondly, Spain has many Muslim immigrants from neighbors like Morocco and Algeria, which means that Spain’s security policies relating to Islamic terrorism are largely defined by this proximity. This was clearly visible after the March 2004 bombings in Madrid where most of the suspects arrested were Al-Qaeda-linked Moroccans. This has soured the already fragile relationship between the two nations, and Spain has had to increase its security to battle illegal immigration from Morocco. Moreover, many of the steps taken by Spain to integrate its Muslim population have also affected how Spain deals with other nations in the EU. For example, Spain’s allocation of \$430,000 to legalize many of its Muslim immigrants (discussed earlier) has led to heated debates between Spain and nations such as the U.K. and Germany. The German Interior Minister Otto Schily has expressed concern that immigrants benefiting from the amnesty will now be able to move freely throughout Europe. This Spanish move, according to many EU states, appears to breach the principle of a common EU immigration policy, a principle which Spain has supported up to now. (“Concern Spain Is...”)

## **Government Initiatives: The Model for a Healthier Society**

Despite the problems discussed above, the Spanish government has been working hard to develop a model for integrating its Muslims. Actually, many scholars laud Spain's Muslim integration model as probably the most advanced in the EU. ("Muslims in Spain") In the next section, I evaluate this model by outlining Spain's initiatives in three major areas of importance to Muslims: legal recognition, the incorporation of Islam in the educational system, and the importance of mosques.

### **Legal Framework and Islamic Associations**

The present legal framework for the Islamic Commission in Spain is derived from the Constitution of 1978, which "provides for the protection of rights of worship and mandates government cooperation with religion, [and] establishes a framework which allows for greater religious pluralism and tolerance." (Motilla, p. 577)

On April 28th, 1992, the Comisión Islámica de España (Islamic Commission of Spain [CIE]) signed the Agreement of Cooperation with the state, marking the legal recognition of the Islamic presence in Spain. Reaching such an agreement was an important step for Muslims since it brought about the legal recognition of mosques and cemeteries, the freedom to exercise and promote religious activities, certain tax benefits, acceptance of religious marriages, and commemoration of Muslim religious holidays. (Hunter, p. 168)

The road to reaching this accord, however, had several obstacles. The state put intense pressure on signing agreements with Muslim federations rather than denominations. This meant that the numerous denominations present in Spain, such as the Asociación Musulmana en España, Comunidad Islámica de España, and Comunidad Musulmana de Al-Andalus, had to join forces. Consequently, two federations eventually emerged in Spain. In 1989 the Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas (FEERI) was created, consisting of associations of Spanish converts to

Islam. A year later the Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España (UCIDE) was created, which consisted of many Muslims from Middle Eastern countries who were now naturalized citizens of Spain. (Moreras, p. 132) Finally in 1992 the FEERI and the UCIDE joined to form a single entity, the Comisión Islámica de España (CIE), the Islamic Commission of Spain.

The diversity of opinion in the CIE, ironically the official "unified" voice of Islam in Spain, has continued to grow even after the merger; and the struggle for power between the two federations has rendered the group almost inoperative. (Moreras, p.132) Unfortunately, the commission has also been unable to awaken the interests of the immigrant Muslim community, which has come to believe that the agreement does not respond to their immediate religious needs. (Moreras, p.132) These factors have undermined the working of the CIE. In fact, the central and local governments frequently look upon the demands put forward by the CIE with suspicion and as acts to only further the political interests of the federations and not the Islamic community as a whole. (Moreras, p.132)

Moreover, the inconsistency of Spain's model of religious integration with the idea of religious equality presents a further obstacle to healthier ties between Islam and the state. There have been three different agreements signed with three religious minorities in Spain: the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE), the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain, and the Federation of Israelite Communities in Spain. However, the text of the three agreements is virtually identical, leading to the impression that all the religious groups face the same challenges. (de la Hera, p. 389) This raises the question whether the treaties were a result of true bilateral negotiations where the individual needs of each group were respected. Likewise, a separate but vastly different agreement signed with the Catholic Church is a source of further problems. The Catholic Church still receives benefits from the Spanish state, such as "temporary cooperation" in the form of financial aid until the Church can "stand on its own feet" as well as numerous tax benefits, while the agreements with the other religious groups contain no such advantages.

This disparity in treatment of the Catholic Church and the other groups has often been brought up in heated debates. (Motilla, p. 584)

### **Islam in the Education System**

Religious education is a primary demand of many Muslims in Spain. The reason is that for many transnational Muslims, religious education serves as a tie to the Islamic community. In fact, many older generation Muslims feel that the younger generation might drift away from the “good behavior” of Islam. For this reason, they advocate sending their younger generations to schools that will provide them with religious education. Spanish converts also strongly support religious education because they feel such a step would promote Islam more effectively in the Spanish mainstream.

In 1992 the Spanish government made the CIE responsible for identifying a curriculum for the teaching of Islam, appointing teachers, and providing material sources for the program. Finally, after extended debates over the religious curricula submitted separately by the FEERI and the UCIDE in 1996, the CIE and the Ministry of Justice and the Interior and the Ministry of Education and Science signed the agreement for religious education in Spanish schools. (Moreras, p. 132) This opened the door to the real possibility of Muslim students receiving Islamic education in public schools. (Moreras, p. 132)

Nonetheless, the framework for Islamic education has been marred with controversy. During the negotiations, the UCIDE and the FEERI rejected each other’s proposed list of teachers, and an impasse was reached. This severely affected the cities of Melilla and Ceuta, which consist of a significant Muslim population. The non-implementation of the accord meant that many classes had to be cancelled. (Moreras, p. 133) Moreover, a lack of resources for teaching and frequent heated debates about the role of religion in schools have made the situation even worse.

Nevertheless, Islamic education in Spain has evolved. In 2000, schools in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla were finally allowed to teach Islamic subjects. In January 2005, under the new government of Prime Minister Zapatero,

Spain opened the gates for teaching Islamic subjects at public schools in other major cities of Spain with a significant Muslim presence. While many right-wing and pro-Catholic Church parties have objected, claiming that only Spanish teachers should teach Islam, the government has rejected these ideas as “unrealistic” and equivalent to the idea of Muslim teachers teaching Catholicism. (Andalusi, “Finally, Spanish...”) The Spanish government is also seeking help from Morocco by trying to reach an agreement similar to the one between Italy and Morocco under which Morocco sent 30 teachers to teach Arabic to Moroccan immigrants in Italy. (Andalusi, “Finally, Spanish...”) These steps indicate a growing recognition of Islam in Spain; and the permission to teach religious (Islamic) subjects in schools, a right once proclaimed as belonging only to the Catholics, is acclaimed as promoting religious equality within Spain.

While Islamic education has finally arrived in schools, it is important to stress that the negotiations process took over a decade, despite the fact that the clause for religious education was present in the agreement signed in 1992. This illustrates that Spain is still relatively slow in putting words into actions when dealing with Muslims.

### **The Importance of Mosques**

The third area that many Muslims in Spain feel is important for their integration is the building of mosques. Mosques in Spain serve a dual purpose. Not only are they places of worship, but they also tend to be home to many social gatherings where Muslims can meet others like themselves, where familial ties can be strengthened, and where a sense of belonging to a greater community can be realized. This makes their presence an integral part of society. As in the rest of Europe, Spanish Muslims attach great passion to building and maintaining mosques, there being almost 400 mosques currently in Spain. (Wilkinson)

However, though allowed by the law, the building of mosques is frequently met with opposition from Spanish society. The mosque is often regarded as an encroachment of the land and adds fuel to the old fear of the “return



of the *Moro*.” In fact, in the city of Premia de Mar, where a mosque was to be built in 2002, a huge demonstration with racist overtones took place to prevent it. As a result, later that year local authorities pledged to lease a plot of land outside the city to the Muslim community for 15 years, on the condition that they waived their claim to the land in the city center. (Orlov et al., p. 124)

Lately mosques and *imams* (preachers) have also caught the media eye, mainly in regard to the March 11, 2004, bombings in Madrid. It was believed that many of the accused were members of so-called “garage” mosques. The Spanish government suspects that these makeshift mosques, without adequate finances to fund themselves, receive funding from outside sources such as Saudi Arabia. According to the Spanish government, Saudi Arabia advocates the more fundamentalistic Wahabbi Islam, which sometimes makes these mosques incubators for terrorism. Spain therefore proposed a bill to subsidize mosques, hoping to control this external financing. While this bill faced severe criticism and was even called “unconstitutional” in that it represented state funding for religious purposes, many scholars like Abraham Barrero, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Seville, have argued in favor of it. He has noted that in the Constitution there is a “cooperation” clause allowing the government to actively support the religious life of its people. (McLean) Furthermore, in order to protect its Muslims from fundamentalistic influence, Spain is seeking to provide its mosques with *imams* from Morocco who will perform prayers in Arabic but give sermons in Spanish.

Another move of the Spanish government that has been met with heated debate is the monitoring of Spanish mosques and sermons. The Association of Immigrant Moroccan Workers (ATIME) has welcomed this idea as a step to fight terrorism; but the President of the CIE, Mansur Escudero, has called such ideas “surreal” and an attack on “religious freedom.” (“Spain to Monitor...”) While the proposal to monitor the mosques has since been dropped, Escudero has claimed that he would meet with the government once a month in order to find a way to “satisfy public safety concerns while respecting religious freedom.” (Fuchs, p. 3)

## Future Prospects: The Spanish Way

Spain holds an exemplary track record of coping successfully with change. This is widely visible in the transition of Spain from a Catholic state to a Muslim state in 711 and back to Catholicism in 1492, from Franco’s dictatorship to democracy, and from a nation with a single state religion to one that now cherishes its religiously pluralistic character. And now, despite the challenges brought about by a burgeoning Muslim population, it seems natural that Spain will once again be successful in its efforts to accommodate its Muslims. In fact, over the past few years, many new phenomena have emerged that suggest that such changes are already underway.

The first and probably most astonishing phenomenon was Spanish society’s response to the March 11 bombings. Even though the bombings were linked to Al-Qaeda, no increase in violence towards Muslims was observed (“International Religious Freedom...”), and Muslims as well as Spaniards rode out into the streets in huge numbers to condemn the bombings. In fact, in response to the attack, more than 50 anti-racist groups and other associations launched campaigns to counteract possible racist and xenophobic reactions. While some deterioration in attitude towards Muslims was observed after the attacks, the campaigns helped greatly to reduce their intensity. Following the attacks, the “Muslim factor” has also grown in importance in the government’s agenda, which until now only briefly mentioned Islam. The policies of Spain’s new Prime Minister Zapatero, such as religious education in schools and legalization of immigrant Muslims, are increasingly diverted towards the integration of Islam. In fact, Spaniards themselves are growing more aware of Islam and are willing to learn more about it.

Secondly, there is a development that, though perhaps troublesome for Spain, is a blessing in disguise for Islam. This is the diminishing importance of the Church and Catholicism in Spain. While 90 percent of Spaniards call themselves Catholics, fewer than one-fifth consider themselves practicing. (Vercher) This has downsized the importance of religion in the private lives of Spaniards and especially those of many young Spaniards, who

are growing up with Muslims, are better educated, and who do not feel threatened by Islam and its presumed “anti-Spanish” values. (Sanchez)

Last but definitely not least is the emergence of several decentralized grass-roots level associations in Spain. These associations have evolved in response to the weak immigrant community facilities and growing Islamophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes in areas where Muslim immigrants are concentrated. These pro-immigrant associations consist mostly of people who have been in Spain for some time, who know the social context well, who have stable economic situations, and who know what to give up and what not to give up in order to be a Muslim in Spain. (Martín-Muñoz, p. 52) In fact, many scholars feel that the boom of these associations in Spain is “clearly evidencing a bridging character between the native host and the migrant population.” (Dietz, p. 1102) These associations work side-by-side with the immigrants and also with the poorly developed system of social service provision in Spain. They have been a formidable force, despite their institutional dependence for funding. (Dietz, p. 1102)

## Conclusions

To a minority eager to be an equal part of society and yet unwilling to surrender its religious identity, the exact meanings of such terms as assimilation and integration become very important. Assimilation, followed in the French national context, is a process where individual beliefs are confined only to the private sector, and in the public sector every individual must express the beliefs of society. There is zero tolerance for any and all discrimination. The integration model, as applied in the U.K., supports mutual adaptation between the host and minorities, with both groups allowed the complete expression of faith in the private and the public spheres. This model, given its flexi-

bility, is more prone to accepting some forms of discrimination. Spain’s situation lies somewhere in the middle of these two models. Unlike France, Spain considers Islam as part of its cultural heritage. In fact, Spain’s Constitution requires that in order to be “registered” as a religious minority, the religion must have “deep roots” in Spain. On the other hand, unlike Britain, discrimination against Muslims in Spain is more culturally initiated. This means that Spain has to deal with much more intolerance towards Islam and thus needs to be more firm with cases of discrimination.

For this reason, it is probably more important to change society’s perception than to just change laws. I think education is the key — not just religious education but education that teaches about the Islamic past in Spain and that helps Spaniards and Muslims alike to confront the challenges of integration and the changes that they will have to undergo.

Secondly, Spain should promote links with Islam both at the national and at the local government levels. With increased political involvement, Islam could be given a voice that could help bring out its demands and delineate the areas where Spain should make advances. At the local level, Spain should look to work with grass-roots Muslim associations that seem to be in “better touch” with the needs and wants of the local Muslim.

Last, but not least, the media could play a big role in the integration process. Spain usually forms its image of Islam through the media, and the media in Spain has often over-inflated the “Muslim factor.” Thus a fair, enlightened, and responsible media could probably help change some misperceptions of Muslims.

The question, however, still remains: “Will Spain succeed in integrating its Muslims?” It is still probably too soon to answer for certain, but recent events suggest that Spain could very well be the country whose integration model will be emulated by others in the future.

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