

The “Islamisation” of Immigration: Some Hypotheses about the Spanish Case

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The way of managing Islam in Spain, as much from the point of view of the religion as that of organising cultural-related matters, is not necessarily in keeping with the theoretical guidelines for so-called immigrant integration models. In other words, it does not depend on those models which manage immigrant statutes. In reality, the way of approaching the management of Islam in Spain was a result of the attacks which occurred on 11 March 2004.

The Management of Islam and Integration Models

The management of Islam can be defined as the way in which host countries organise and manage all issues connected with the Muslim religion. There are several ways of doing this and these depend as much on distinct historical trajectories, as the set-up in different states. These various ways are revealed in aspects such as colonial relations between the country of origin and the host country, the presence of the countries of origin as managers, the nature of Muslim communities, etc. A first approach involves the state of the host country not managing religious matters directly, whatever faith it may be, leaving the responsibility to the parties concerned. A second approach involves the state actually regulating religious matters.

In addition to these approaches, and to the differences that can also be discerned within

the same model, what is certain is that the most important concern with regard to the organisation of Islam within Europe is that it depends, more than anything else, on the characteristics of the people who make up these communities. Thus, we can maintain that one of the main peculiarities of Muslim communities in Europe is that usually these are found within groups of immigrants, or those of immigrant origin, resulting in three significant consequences. Firstly, religion-related claims are made by communities composed of individuals who do not enjoy the same rights as nationals. Secondly, for states, the management of Islam forms part of immigration organisation as opposed merely to religious minority management. Thirdly, Muslim countries of origin can control the way in which they are organised within Europe.

Thus, in the majority of European countries, the management of Islam has always depended on immigration management and

therefore on the so-called integration models.¹ Spain was going to be an exception to the rule. Nevertheless, the attacks on 11 March 2004 reversed the approach to the issue the country appeared to be taking.

The Organisation of Islam in Spain

Unlike a good many European countries, in Spain issues related to the management of Islam have traditionally had little to do with immigration and, therefore, with immigrant integration models. The Spanish approach is rooted in the signing of the Cooperation Agreement between the Spanish State and the Comisión Islámica de España [Islamic Commission of Spain] (CIE) on 28 April 1992. One of the most interesting aspects of signing this agreement is that it helped to enable the CIE to bring together the two large institutions that officially represented Islam in Spain: the Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas [Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities] (FEERI) and the Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España [Union of Islamic Communities in Spain] (UCIDE).

Unlike in other European countries, the most novel aspect of these organisations is that in principle none had any link whatsoever with employment immigration. One of these, the UCIDE, was founded by a particular group of immigrants coming from the Arab East (Syria and Palestine) who emigrated to Spain

as students or professionals from the seventies onwards.² The other, the FEERI, primarily consists of Spanish Muslim converts. Although the two organisations draw together Muslims belonging to the educated elite, Spanish and foreign alike, there are differences in terms of their claims. For the UCIDE, it is essential that religious needs are met. For the FEERI, it is more about seeking recognition of religious diversity in a state in which they are citizens.³ In as much as their positions differ, so also do their implementation instruments.

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The agreement regulates the Muslims' right to interrupt work on Friday for prayer, or to substitute public holidays laid out in the Spanish Workers' Statute for Muslim holidays stipulated in the agreement. Equally, for state schools, the possibility is being considered of recognising prohibited foods, as well as regulating the teaching of the Muslim religion, acknowledging it alongside the Catholic religion.

The agreement was signed at a time when Moroccan immigration, which makes up the majority of the Muslim population in Spain, was high in number, but had not even reached half the figure that exists at the time of writing.⁴ On the other hand, it is important to

1. Nevertheless, it is certain that in recent times identifying Islam with the immigrant population or those of immigrant origin is becoming increasingly common in Europe. According to Allievi, factors such as the terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid and London, as well as theories by researchers such as Samuel Huntington or Bernard Lewis about the so-called "clash of civilisations", led to immigrants becoming Muslims (S. Allievi, "How and Why 'Immigrants' Became 'Muslims'", *ISIM Review*, no. 18, Autumn 2006, p. 37).

2. Nevertheless, Allievi remarks that the first mosques in Italy had the same origin (S. Allievi, "Sociology of a Newcomer: Muslim Migration to Italy. Religious Visibility, Cultural and Political Reaction", *Immigrants and Minorities*, no. 2/3, July-November 2003, pp. 141-154).

3. J. Moreras, *Musulmanes en Barcelona. Espacios y dinámicas comunitarias*, Barcelona, CIDOB, 1999.

4. According to figures from the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs (www.mtas.es), on 31 December 2006, the number of Moroccans living legally in Spain was 543,721.



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remember the fact that in the agreement, immigrant representatives are absent, since at that time they were not interested in the religious issue, nor were they significantly high in number. As had occurred previously in Europe, religious regulation had not been considered imperative in the early immigration years.

The Problem of Representation

Although, as we have already indicated, for years in Spain the issue of managing the Muslim religion was separate from immigration management, certainly an important event came to change the course of events and led to the adoption of trends seen in other European countries. In Spain, political interest in Islam, Muslims and managing the Muslim religion

and, especially, its association with immigration, was caused by the brutal attacks which took place on 11 March 2004 in Madrid. As is well known, the morning of that day, the terrorist organisation Al Qaeda blew up various commuter trains in the Atocha railway station and others in the capital's outskirts, causing 191 deaths. A few days later, surrounded by the police, some of the terrorists blew themselves up in a flat near to the capital.

Apart from other possible considerations about this event, what is certain is that items began to appear in the press on the small mosques and oratories that were in Spain and some associations of immigrants began to designate these as places that had prepared the groups that committed the attacks. From this time on, the great Asociación de Trabajadores Inmigrantes Marroquíes en España [Association of Moroccan Immigrant Workers in Spain] (ATIME) would claim the role of spokesperson for the State in all issues related to the Muslim religion. This was in spite of ATIME – an association strongly associated with immigration – having a marked trade unionist character since its foundation in 1989, reinforced by its intense relations with one of the most important unions: the Unión General de Trabajadores (General Union of Workers), linked with the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party). ATIME, being very close to the Spanish government, was traditionally its spokesperson in matters relating to Moroccan immigration, but not with regard to the management of Islam. This interest sparked intense contact between this immigrant association and the regulation of the Muslim faith. Its argument for doing this was to try to avoid a lack of control in the communities and the entry of extremist tendencies which are, according to the point of view of the association, those which were the cause behind the attacks such as that on 11 March in Madrid. Therefore, since March

2004, ATIME has sought to be involved in the management of Islam in Spain and to take charge of this issue by controlling imams and their ideologies, as opposed to other associations which theoretically are less representative. It is still a paradox that an immigrant association is claiming larger control of religious activities of the collective on the part of the state.⁵

Muslim employment immigrants have been meeting their religious needs in an informal way, with scarcely any relations with the state

However, in the new stage that, in our opinion, began with the 11 March attacks in Madrid, the CIE claimed a role as main representative of Muslims and this despite being an organisation established and developed apart from immigration. In this sense, the CIE does not approve of what it considers ATIME's sudden interest in these matters and considers the Commission itself to be the appropriate organisation to take care of the issue.

The "Islamisation" of Immigration

One can surely say that the Spanish case differs the most within the context of Europe. The interesting thing about this is that the concrete model for regulating Islam has been created by non-foreign Muslim communities detached from employment immigration. In addition, due to their social origins, they have a significant ability to exert pressure. This model has its origin in the presence of two elites – the first Spanish converts, and students from the Middle East, who were the first to demand mosques

and regulatory agreements with the state. On the other hand, and with a few exceptions,⁶ immigrant associationism is definitely developing apart from the management of Islam. Muslim employment immigrants, the great majority of which are Moroccan, have been meeting their religious needs in an informal way, with scarcely any relations with the state.

On the one hand, it was the natural increase of Moroccan settlement and, on the other, the 11 March attacks in Madrid, that made events gather momentum, causing both interests to merge. This confluence took place not without conflict, in a situation in which each actor wanted to maintain a series of prerogatives, as much about the Muslim community in general, as about dialogue with the State. The Moroccan representatives, immigrants up until this point, became Muslims and assumed an identity that moved them away from how they had been perceived heretofore by Spanish society. This was an image that corresponded with a political trajectory set out by its leaders and founders that was closer to seventies Moroccan left-wing feeling than that of religious leaders. Assuming this new Islamic identity could be considered a new strategy for finding more fluid forms of communication with power.

The fact that it was Moroccans themselves who were carrying out the "Islamisation" of immigration, and ended by identifying themselves as Muslim as a result, undoubtedly adds a twist to Allievi's hypothesis on the different approaches to the phenomenon of immigration from countries which are mostly Muslim, which in Europe is considered as a whole.⁷

In addition, this "Islamisation" of immigration is inciting popular feeling that is not at the present time, nor has it ever been, favourable

5. Even ATIME's current leader asked in the Moroccan press for a greater presence of the Moroccan State for regulating these issues (*Le Journal*, no. 152, 20-26 May 2004).

6. Except, of course, the small oratories organised by immigrants.

7. S. Allievi, "How and Why 'Immigrants' Became 'Muslims'", *ISIM Review*, no. 18, Autumn 2006, p. 37

towards the public expression of Muslim faith. Undoubtedly, it is connected towards a traditional and historic distrust towards the Moroccan. This “maurophobia”⁸ is an additional factor that currently needs to be taken into the equation when organising issues pertaining to Muslims and Islam in Spain. This is because in this country, “Islamophobia”, although also the

fruit of the new situation that has given rise to the presence of Muslim immigrants, has joined the pre-existing “maurophobia” that is much more connected with the Arab nature than Islam. However, the situation being what it is and recognising that the “problem” of immigration is not merely a management question, good organisation seems imperative.

8. E. Martín Corrales, “Maurofobia/islamofobia y maurofilia/islamofilia en la España del siglo XXI”, *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, No. 66-67, 2004, pp. 39-5

