

## Migration and Religion in Spain

by  
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During the dictatorship of Franco in Spain, the Christian-Castilian nexus through its ideology of ‘national Catholicism’ was explicitly exploited. Only after its end in 1975, the step-by-step secularization of the Spanish state developed, coinciding with a process of increasing religious pluralisation. Apart from Muslim immigrants and converts, both the immigration of EU and Latin American citizens and the recent, but massive, conversion to Pentecostalism by the Spanish *gitano* (Roma) community has strengthened the formerly practically non-existent presence of Protestant Churches. Nevertheless, this religious diversity has neither been properly understood nor accepted by mainstream public opinion or state institutions. The Catholic Church has successfully resisted a complete secularization of the Spanish institutional, seen in the example of the educational system.

Thus, an ever more visible tension appears between the political transition towards democracy and the respective ‘religious transition’. From the mid-seventies until the beginning of the nineties, Spanish society underwent a vibrant, speedy, and complex process of institutional democratization, social pluralization, and ‘Europeanization’. These developments succeeded in effectively (re-) integrating the country in the whole of European democratic societies. Both the growing detachment of ever more Catholic Spaniards from their church and the growing numbers of non-Catholic immigrants challenged the de facto monopoly of the Catholic Church. According to several opinion polls, Catholics still maintain the vast majority, but two different trends are particularly illustrative: on the one hand, due to demographic changes and to immigration, the absolute as well as relative number of Catholics has constantly been decreasing in the last years. Whereas the percentage of Catholics was still 90% in 1978, this number decreased to 80% by 2005. On the other hand, these opinion polls show that ever more Catholic Spaniards, and above all young people, express a growing distance towards the church as an institution, towards its representatives, and its moral guidelines, particularly on sexuality, contraception, homosexuality and marriage.

### **Trends in Spanish immigration patterns**

The abovementioned trend of an increasingly weakening Catholic Church within Spanish society is indirectly promoted by religious pluralization induced by immigration. Due to the remarkable increase of immigrants in the Spanish population during the last years, it has been widely claimed that this country has changed from being a classical country of emigration to becoming a country of immigration. During the 1980s and 1990s, Spain has experienced – like other southern European countries – decreasing emigration whilst simultaneously becoming a place of destination for immigrants. This ‘uneasy transition’ (Cornelius) reflects a highly heterogeneous migration pattern made up of Spanish ‘return migrants’, European retirement migrants, non-EU immigrants, as well as other migrants from diverse backgrounds. The Spanish ‘guest workers’ migrate to western and northern Europe and do not succeed in definitively integrating into their host society; they tend to re-migrate to their regions of origin once they retire, sometimes alone, but often together with their children who settle down in a country which the second generation only knows from short holiday trips. Secondly are the many European retirement migrant, often termed ‘trans-migrants’, who spend half of the year in their country of origin and half of it on the Canary or Baleares Islands, or on the southern Spanish Mediterranean shores. Non-EU immigrants increasingly choose Spain no longer as a

mere transit route – often due to post-colonial links that still exist between the Spanish peninsula and its formerly dependant Latin American as well as North African territories [?]. Finally, there is a growing diversity in the immigration population from Eastern European and from other non-EU countries. These migrants often choose Spain either for temporary work or as a ‘port of entrance’ to the whole EU Schengen territory.

According to a number of sources, the non-EU population living in Spain is estimated to be over 2.5 million people. This number includes both documented and undocumented persons as well as residents and people with a working-permit. These immigrants come mainly from North Africa – especially Morocco and Algeria -, from Latin America – in particular, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Colombia -, Asia – basically from China and the Philippines -, and South Africa – particularly from Senegal and Nigeria. Meanwhile, immigration from other countries is increasing rapidly, as in the cases of Ecuador and China, or eastern European countries such as Romania, Poland and the Ukraine. The majority of these persons, especially Maghrébien migrants, have been shifting from choosing Spain as a mere transit route on their way towards France or Belgium to settling down more permanently in their northern Mediterranean neighbour country. The most striking feature of this immigration model lies in the fact that it is a very recent phenomenon; migrants have been settling down only in the last years. This ‘age effect’ means that, demographically, the immigrant groups are made up of predominantly young people.

There are two basic elements that shape the demographic and social profile of immigrants coming to Spain. On the one hand, although the percentage of immigrant population in the country remains low, its composition is highly heterogeneous. Noteworthy differences appear between nationalities regarding gender, skills, migratory projects and degrees and types of labour market integration. On the other hand, their geographical distribution throughout the country is very diverse. Their labour market integration is limited to a reduced number of sectors, showing a rapid tendency towards segmentation. Foreign workers are in demand in labour sectors where there are insufficient local workers, i.e. for those domains of work that nobody wants because of economic and/or social reasons, or labour conditions. Consequently, immigrants have to work in degrading sectors like agriculture, construction, manufacturing, domestic services, or in the broader service sector. Immigrant enclaves in the secondary labour market are characterized by their unstable and short-term employment, high workers' rotation, low salary and its nearly total lack of ascending mobility. In addition, most of these jobs are inserted into the shadow economy where almost no labour inspections, where all too often exploitation and abuses occur. Consequently, the integration of foreign workers into these occupations contributes even more to their stigmatization as a marginal group, working at the margins of the labour market in specific geographic areas. The legal category of ‘foreigner’ is thus complemented by the connotation of marginality and inferiority.

### **Religious pluralisation and community-building**

As a result of the above stated long lasting tradition of state and church induced homogenization, non-Catholic religious communities barely existed in Spanish mainland society until very recently. Although Protestant, Jewish and Muslim communities slowly started to (re) settle in several Spanish cities since the seventies, they were not visible until the nineties. The most ‘invisible’ of all is still the Jewish community. It is currently made up of approximately 30,000 members, whose activities in cities such as Toledo, Girona, Ceuta, and Melilla are focused on the reconstruction, re-opening, and re-vitalization of their respective local synagogues. Protestant communities, on the other hand, were perceived as ‘foreigners’ or ‘tourists’ even though conversion to different Evangelical groups started early in the seventies. Today, there are approximately 2,200 Protestant congregations existing in Spain,

1,970 of whom are members of an umbrella organisation, the *Federación de Entidades Religiosas Evangélicas de España* (FEREDE). The first generation of Protestants that were perceived as ‘different’ was not made up of Protestant immigrants, but of Spanish Roma. Already in 1958, the *Iglesia de Filadelfia* Pentecostal Church initiated missionary as well as grassroots charity and welfare activities directed especially towards deprived urban Roma settlements. These settlements appeared during this period because of rural-urban migration towards Madrid, Barcelona and other growing Spanish cities. Starting from Balaguer in Catalonia, the Pentecostal Church quickly expanded to other *gitano* neighbourhoods, promising and promoting Roma upward mobility through ‘modern values’ such as an individual work and savings ethos, responsibility to one’s nuclear family instead of towards extensive kin relations, access to formal education and training also for Roma women, the reluctance to participate in overly expensive kin and/or communal fiestas, and the active rejection of alcohol and drugs.

Nowadays, it is estimated that at least 150,000 of the approximately 35,000 Spanish Protestants are of Roma origin. Apart from these Spanish converts, immigration has rapidly promoted the diffusion of Protestant congregations throughout the country. Strikingly, it is not immigration from historically Protestant regions of the world that promotes Protestantism in Spain, but the immigration of individuals and families who come from Catholic regions, especially South America, who have converted to different kinds of Evangelical faith before migrating. Therefore, these groups – there are estimated to be around 800,000 non-Spanish Protestants living in the country – have quickly joined Spanish Protestants as they not only share post-colonial links, but also similar conversion biographies that are frequently related to their social and geographical mobility.

Although these immigrant as well as native Protestant communities are currently the most successful non-Catholic congregations with regard to their internal organization, their broader claims, and to their access to religious education, there is another more important, more visible, and more stigmatized communities in contemporary Spain, namely Muslim communities. According to unofficial estimations based above all on the predominant ‘religion of origin’ of mainly Moroccan and Algerian immigrant populations, approximately 700,000 people may identify themselves as Muslims. The Muslim population of Spain is concentrated in the urban centres of the Madrid and Catalonia autonomous communities. Nevertheless, Andalusia is emerging as a third focus of Muslim population. In this latter case, Spanish converts to Islam are an increasingly important sector of the general Muslim population.

### **Muslims in *Al-Andalus***

The two different factors analyzed above, the recent nature of immigration to Spain as well as the rather novel trend towards the religious pluralization of the country's society, determine the situation of Muslim communities in Spain. On the one hand, after the slow beginning of family regrouping, immigrant communities, made up of mainly Moroccan foreign workers, have been appearing in recent years. Such groups rarely identify themselves in public as distinctively Muslim communities, but instead as foreign workers' associations in labour contexts and/or as parents' associations in school environments. On the other hand, the growing group of Spanish converts has started to build up a small but publicly significant minority of Muslim intellectuals who are overtly challenging the implicitly Catholic common sense of the Spanish and/or Andalusian host society. This phenomenon is apparent especially in Andalusia.

The main distinction between Muslims in Spain and particularly in Andalusia is that between migrants of Muslim origin and Muslim converts. The converts are mostly of Catholic

background and are either Spaniards or incomers from other Western countries who are ‘in search of Islam’ and its legacy of tolerance, as symbolized by the ‘myth of *Al-Andalus*’. Since the eighties, cities such as Granada and Córdoba, and especially their historical Muslim or Muslim-Jewish neighbourhoods, have become ‘poles of attraction’ for conversion-related north-south migration. Most converts implicitly distance themselves from the North African immigrants by distinguishing two kinds of Islam: the culturally and geographically rooted ‘traditional’ Islam, and the ‘universal belief system’ shared by the transnational *umma* of all fellow-Muslims. Accordingly, convert communities may be rather small locally, but they are integrated into transnational networks of fellow-converts who share the same schools of interpretation and, in some cases, the same religious ‘leaders’. While Muslim migrants tend to identify themselves in ethnic or national terms – e.g. as Moroccans or as Amazigh (Berbers) – the converts turn to the *umma* as their broader identity ‘horizon’.

Finally, apart from these ‘immigrated’ and ‘converted’ Muslim communities, the ‘nationalized Muslims’, i.e. native Muslim inhabitants of Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish enclave cities in northern Morocco, form a historically rooted third group. Reflecting old colonial practices, only the Spanish Catholic inhabitants of these cities, most of which are related to important military bases located within the cities, were considered fully ‘Spanish citizens’. The Muslim communities – in their majority ethnically Arabic in the case of Ceuta and Amazigh in the case of Melilla – as well as the Jewish and Hindu communities have been denied citizenship rights until the end of the eighties. Only then were they finally ‘nationalized’ as Spanish citizens. Today, non-Catholic communities are vital and visually present in both cities; their main religious feasts – such as Ramadan and Yom Kippur – are officially recognized. Yet, they are still victims of discrimination and are often excluded from Spanish neighbourhoods and institutions.

### **The Spanish state as manager of religious diversity**

Since the beginning of the nineties, the governing Socialist Party has begun reacting to religious pluralization by admitting and acknowledging this discrimination. It is hesitantly starting to recognize all ‘religions with *notorio arraigo*’, religions which are visibly rooted in the country. This change of attitude, induced mainly by the mentioned trends in immigration and conversion, unleashed a process of ‘de-monopolization’ of the Catholic Church. Since 1992, a series of high-level ‘agreements’ are being negotiated and signed between the Spanish state on the one hand, and the Muslim, Protestant and Jewish umbrella federations on the other hand. These ‘quasi-Concordats’ include wide ranging provisions and concessions in economic, cultural and educational terms, which attempt to equal the privileges included in the 1979 Concordat signed with the Vatican and are therefore praised both nationally and internationally by different religious communities.

Despite international recognition, the main challenge faced by the ‘minority religious communities’ lies in the actual implementation of these rather far reaching agreements. The Protestant and Jewish federations succeeded, to different degrees, in forcing governmental institutions to apply these agreements step by step. Basically, they financed parts of their community activities. The 1992 *Acuerdo de Cooperación del Estado Español con la Comunidad Islámica de España* is being applied only hesitantly. Officially, the Spanish government justifies this blockade attitude with a lack of a representative counterpart who can transfer and impose any high-ranking decision to the diverse range of local mosques and Muslim communities. In fact, and in contrast to the Jewish and Protestant federations, the so-called ‘Muslim Community of Spain’, who acted as a signatory in the 1992 agreements, is a loose coalition of the two main Muslim federations acting in Spain: the *Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas* (FEERI) and the *Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de*

*España* (UCIE). Both umbrella organizations differ from each other with regard to their internal organizational structure, as in the degree of autonomy of local communities, the percentage of mainly convert versus mainly immigrant member communities, as well as to the presence of purely Sunni or of also Shia Muslims among its local member communities. Consequently, the Muslim Community of Spain as its joint ‘superfederation’ is rather weak, both in relation to its member federations and local communities as well as vis-à-vis the Spanish central and regional governments, their main counterparts for negotiating claims, competences, and resources.

This organizational shortcoming and the weak pressure exerted by the Muslim federations against the Spanish state, however, not the only reasons why it is precisely the agreements signed with the largest religious minority that are not being implemented. Immediately after the signing of the agreements, a Conservative government replaced the original politicians who acted as signatories. The new state representatives overtly revealed their proximity not only to the Catholic Church, but even to such ‘fundamentalist’ Catholic lay organizations as *Opus Dei* and the *Legionarios de Cristo*. These politicians considered the previous agreements as an obsolete legacy from the former administration. Since the middle of the nineties, this official attitude of ‘deaf ears’ against Muslim claims-making is shared by many regional and local government levels, those who are in charge of authorizing the construction of mosques and prayer rooms, the concession of burial sites inside municipal cemeteries, the hiring of religious education teachers, the recognition of Islamic health practices in public hospitals, and the recognition of Muslim wedding practices.

Since the 9/11 attacks and particularly since the March 11<sup>th</sup> Madrid bombings, however, two processes are perceivable in Spanish public opinion and politics vis-à-vis the Muslim communities. On the one hand, pre-existing islamophobic and arabophobic tendencies regarding the ‘return of Islam’ are becoming more explicit; on the other hand, there is a growing conviction that religious pluralism is here to stay and that, accordingly, Muslims have to be integrated through a ‘Hispanization’ or ‘Europeanization’ of Islam. In this context, a governmental *Federación Pluralismo y Tolerancia* has been created to deal with minority religions. Particularly Islamic religious instruction is now being officially promoted and implemented through pilot-projects. As a result, religious education is currently a key issue in the domestic debates both on pending educational reforms in particular, and on pluralism and multiculturalism inside Spanish society in general.

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