In the rise of Muslim associations in Spain four events have been crucial. First, the legal enactment of freedom of religion in 1967 coincided with the appearance of Muslim associations mainly founded by the Muslim population from Ceuta and Melilla and students coming from Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine. In 1970 and 1971 the Jamaat Ahmadia of Islam in Spain and the Muslim Association in Spain were registered in the Muslim Communities Register. Following this, in 1979, Spanish converts to Islam created the Muslim Community of Spain.

The second event was the recognition in 1980 of Islam as a deeply rooted and clearly established religion in Spain because of its evident integration into Spanish society. The current structure of the Comisión Islámica de España (CIE) – an umbrella organization representing Muslims – was created with the formation of the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI) and the Spanish Islamic Communities Union (UCIDE). Ever since, Muslim associations have had to register within one of these federations.

Thirdly, the signing of the Cooperation Agreement between the Spanish State and the Spanish Islamic Committee in 1992 enabled Muslims to practice their faith, at least in theory. The fourth event was the increase in numbers of Muslim migrants, since the early 1970s, and the settlement of their families mainly in the 1990s, thanks to the 1985 Immigration Law.

During these years, the majority of Muslims registered their associations in registers for minority religious groups with a few registered as social and cultural groups. In general, associations were created on the basis of origin (Spanish converts to Islam or migrants) and their status in Spain (workers or students). Three different groups represented the members of Muslim associations: Muslim migrants settled before the Spanish current democracy, Spanish converts to Islam, and different migrant groups arriving in the 1980s and 1990s.

This changed after the March 11 train bombings when the offspring of migrants, young Spanish converts, and young migrants living in Madrid decided to create new organizations and to revitalize others. While old Muslim associations used religious registers, these new associations appeared in social and cultural ones, outside the two Muslim federations. Their members do not speak as migrants but as natives who simply practice another religion. Also they prefer to participate in society as young Muslims regardless of where they were born, what their family origin or their social status is; and ask that their participation not be limited to religious activities.

They are mostly between twenty and thirty five years old, male and female, highly educated and interested in reflecting on the meaning of being a Muslim and ways to express that meaning to non-Muslims. While in the past Muslim associations worked to achieve the institutionalization of Islam in Spain, these new associations take advantage of that legal recognition in order to show who they are. This concern determines their activities, as well as points to a new social situation. On the one hand it shows the increase of Spanish Muslims in society and their effort to combine Islamic belief with Spanish nationality. On the other hand, it shows the increase of Spanish Muslims in society and their effort to combine Islamic belief with Spanish nationality. On the other hand, it shows the increase of Spanish Muslims in society and their effort to combine Islamic belief with Spanish nationality. On the other hand, it shows the increase of Spanish Muslims in society and their effort to combine Islamic belief with Spanish nationality.

To this end they organize seminars and training meetings. Apart from reflecting on the notion of being a Muslim and working on broader social issues, these organizations and federations have more interest in addressing broader issues related to the social position of Muslims in Spanish society. This was mainly achieved by arranging debate meetings rather than by offering social services. In these meetings they would discuss topics such as the clash of civilizations, Orientalism, unemployment among Muslims, stereotypes, marriage, and so on. Although these organizations thus focus on different kinds of activities, they both aim to be recognized as embodying good Muslims.

The search for the meaning of being a Muslim started after 9/11 among some Muslims in Spain, but became urgent after the attacks of 11 March 2004. Muslims in Madrid went through that event as Madrilenians, but at the same time were confused when the train bombings were connected with terrorists who claimed their acts in the name of Islam. That claim motivated Spanish Muslims to know more about their religion, especially young Muslims who, for the first time, organized themselves outside the existing Muslim federations, taking an active social and political role after that unforeseen event. But this also reflects the global desire of Muslim groups all over the world to change the stereotypes non-Muslims have about them. This is another important feature of the new Muslim associations: they are part of and participate in global debates, which shape their concerns, activities, and goals. The new associations are still few, but their participation, as we have seen, means a change in Spanish Muslim associational life.

Notes
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Virtudes Téllez Delgado is a Ph.D. student at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, and member of the Research Group for the Anthropological Study of Cultural Heritage and Popular Cultures at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). She was Visiting Fellow at ISIM in 2008. Email: tellez@cie.csic.es