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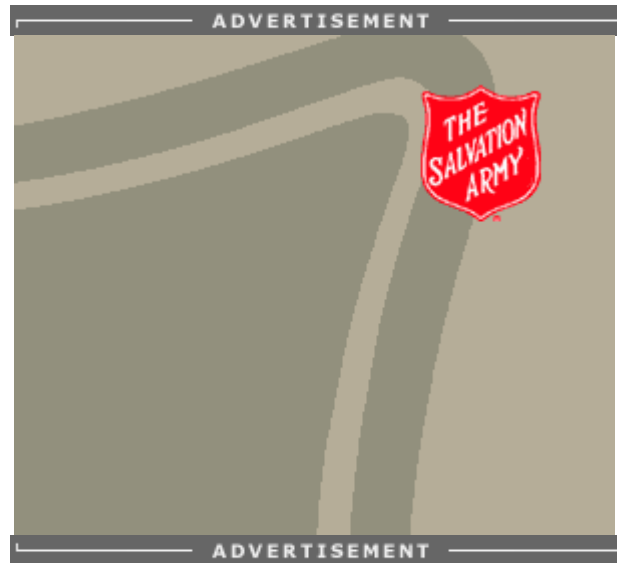
# Islam's Claim on Spain

■ In Granada, once the center of a rich Muslim culture, adherents are trying to reassert th amid a climate of suspicion.

By Tracy Wilkinson, Times Staff Writer

GRANADA, Spain — Across a valley of fragrant cedars and orange trees, worshipers at the pristine Great Mosque of Granada look out at the Alhambra, the 700-year-old citadel and monument to the heyday of Islamic glory.

Granada's Muslims chose the hilltop location precisely with the view, and its unmistakable symbolism, in mind.



It took them more than 20 years to build the mosque, the first erected here in half a millennium, after they conquered the objections of city leaders and agreed, ultimately, to keep the minaret shorter than the steeple on the Catholic Iglesia de San Nicolas next door.

Cloistered nuns on the other side of the mosque added a few feet to the wall enclosing their convent, as if to say they wanted neither to be seen nor to see.

Many of Spain's Muslims long for an Islamic revival to reclaim their legendary history, and inaugurating the Great Mosque last year was the most visible gesture. But horrific bombings by Muslim extremists that killed nearly 200 people in Madrid on March 11 have forced Spain's Muslims and non-Muslims to reassess their relationship, and turned historical assumptions on their head.

"We are a people trying to return to our roots," said Anwar Gonzalez, 34, a Granada native who converted to Islam 17 years ago. "But it's a bad time to be a Muslim."



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Spain has a long, rich and complex history interwoven with the Muslim and A its position as the center of Islamic Europe in the last millennium to today's cc vast influx of Muslim immigrants.

For more than seven centuries of Moorish rule, "Al Andalus," or Andalusia, w Muslim caliphs who oversaw a splendid flourishing of art, architecture and lea when Granada fell to Christian monarchs Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand

Muslims were expelled or exterminated in the Inquisition that followed, but th Moors is seen throughout Andalusia, Spain's southern tier, in its language, pal Alhambra, and food.

Unfortunately for Spain's Muslims, the militants who swear loyalty to Osama history buffs too. In claiming responsibility for the March bombings, they cite Andalus" as motivation.

"We will continue our jihad until martyrdom in the land of Tarik Ben Ziyad," communique issued after the massacre, alluding to the Moorish warrior and or conqueror of the Iberian peninsula.

Spain today, like most of Europe, is struggling with ways to accommodate its Muslim community while keeping tabs on those who might turn to radical vio

Converts like Gonzalez are a small percentage of the nearly 1 million Muslim living in Spain — a number that has probably doubled in the last decade. The the Muslims are immigrants — mostly from Morocco, frequently on the marg often at odds with native-born Muslims. Most of the suspects arrested in the M tore apart commuter trains in the morning rush hour were Moroccan.

A relatively homogenous society ever since the 15th century expulsions, Spain Muslims than France or Germany. Yet only in Spain is the debate fraught with and deep-rooted cultural echoes.

Spaniards sometimes refer to Arabs, derogatorily, as Moors. And it doesn't he dictator Francisco Franco rose to power on the back of Moroccan troops whor launch the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

In Granada, the old Moorish hamlet of Albaicin, now a gentrified neighborhood and white-washed villas, spills down the hill from the Great Mosque. It could town on the West Bank or in Morocco, if perhaps a little more picturesque.

The narrow, winding streets are full of teashops, butchers and bakeries selling *kenafa*, a fresh soft cheese. Locals greet each other with "As-Salaam Alaikum signs in stores wished a "Feliz Ramadan" to passersby.

At the University of Granada, it is not uncommon to see a woman in a hijab, t scarf. In the pharmacology school, about 40% of the 2,100-member student bc or Muslim countries, according to the student association.

Moroccan student Amal Benyaich, a 20-year-old sophomore, said she general Granada but has occasionally endured insults shouted in public, especially afte

"How can your people do this?" someone demanded of her.

"Am I a terrorist?" she responded.

"I want them to understand what Islam is," said Benyaich, wearing a white hijab and a velvety red sweatshirt. "Terrorism is not a specific religion."

Spain is confronting the fact that a growing number of Muslim immigrants, who came to the country only to move on, or came to work and then returned to their home countries, now become a permanent fixture. Spain's low birth rate has widened the need for labor, and an underground network has made it easier for foreign workers to stay.

"Before, Muslims were guests who would leave. Today Islam is among us," said Saïd Bakri, the Syrian-born imam at Madrid's Abu Bakr mosque, one of the places attended by the bombing suspects.

For the Socialist government of Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, the challenge is how to integrate these residents.

Elected three days after the bombings, the government has cast itself in the role of the West with Islam, and Zapatero, in a major speech to the United Nations, announced an "alliance of civilizations" to prevent escalating conflict.

The prime minister's government is negotiating with two major Spanish Islamic groups an attempt to integrate Muslims into mainstream society as a way to prevent and reduce the alienation that feeds extremism and violence.

"Marginalization is a very dangerous thing," Luis Lopez Guerra, the senior Justice official in charge of religious affairs, said in an interview in Madrid.

"If you have people poor and without work, you run the risk of them feeling discriminated against, alienated from the values of the rest of society," Lopez said. "Police measures alone can't solve this."

And so, in a country where the Roman Catholic Church wields enormous power, the government has established a \$4-million fund for three "minority" religions — Islam, Judaism and Protestantism — and scrapped a previous administration's plans to make their study curriculum mandatory in public schools.

Among other, controversial recommendations, the government wants to require Muslim groups to register with the state. Also under discussion is a plan to license imams, support and regulate Muslim groups who complain that too many clerics are foreigners who are not Spanish, and that Saudi Arabia wields excessive influence over Spain's mosques.

The tension between Spain's non-Muslims and Muslims, both immigrant and native-born, remains raw. Although incidents of overt retaliation against Muslims are rare, they feel they are, in the words of Gonzalez, the convert, in the eye of the hurricane.

Like the society around them, Muslims in Spain are torn over questions of assimilation and cultural identity. The community is, moreover, fractured along generational and ethnic lines. Then there are the differences between immigrants and native-born Muslims, and between whom are converts.

In Granada, the onetime seat of Moorish rule, where many Muslims identify themselves as Andalusians first, then as Spaniards, a number of native-born Muslims say the challenge is to present what they describe as the moderate face of their religion and to promote "European Islam" that is tolerant and democratic.

"That's our struggle: to achieve a moderate balance against those extremists who are afraid of living in this society as Muslims," said Abdelkarim Carrasco, a real estate broker and president of the Federation of Spanish Islamic Entities, one of two major Spanish Islamic organizations negotiating with the Zapatero government.

Carrasco, 56, converted to Islam when he was 30 and moved to Granada from Madrid in 1980.

The Andalusian cities of Granada, Seville and Cordoba saw a wave of Islamic conversions in the 1960s and '70s spearheaded by the Sufi Murabitun sect led by Ian Dallas, a Scottish Scot, and joined by hippies in search of spiritual meaning. A later conversion movement evolved, independent of the influence of the Murabitun, which has been attacked as neo-Semitic.

Carrasco, whose passport retains his given name of Antonio, not Abdelkarim, says his Islamic past has made it more difficult, not easier, for contemporary Spain to accept him as a citizen.

"It is easier to be a Muslim in Munich than in Granada," he said. "In Germany there is something colder, new and distant. Here it is too close. You scratch the surface and the other [identity] comes out."

At the Great Mosque, built with money from the governments of Morocco and the United Arab Emirates, exquisite cobalt blue and teal green tiles, patterned after those found in the Alhambra, frame the ablution fountains. Silk carpets and teak doors decorate the compact courtyard which is already attracting tourists.

Mosque member Mohammed Jairudin, 64, a silver-haired actor who converted to Islam last year, told of the legal hurdles and neighborhood resistance he had to overcome to finally open the mosque. "Muslims, he said, have to live within the existing order because it is God's will."

"You are part of the system, or you leave," he said, seated in the mosque's garden under orange and jasmine, overlooking that breathtaking view that sweeps northward to the mountains. "I pay my taxes. I go to the mosque. No one bothers me. I do things my way, but I am."

It is not clear, however, that the group behind the mosque, followers of the Murabitun movement, shares that moderate sentiment. The president of the mosque foundation, Juan Ruiz, calls himself the Emir of Spain and has said Granada will return to its "true" Islam — after a 500-year interruption.

Mosque supporters say they are not attempting to launch the reconquest of Al-Andalus to show that Islam is not an alien faith.

"This country," Jairudin said, "has a debt to its Muslims: to recognize history."

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