Reviving al-Andalus

Commemorating Spain's Islamic heritage in the context of democratic transition*

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Throughout Europe, references to heritage have figured centrally in recent polemics surrounding Islam. Right-wing populists and ideologues across the continent have invoked the urgency of safeguarding European values and preserving national (Christian) heritage when advocating policies that restrict the admission of Muslim migrants and refugees, or that limit the liberty of Muslim minorities to express their religious identities (e.g. via bans on the use of headscarves or face veils). In countering such positions, progressives and others on the Left have commonly pointed to the significant historical presence of Muslim civilisations in certain parts of Europe and to the contributions Muslims have made to European heritage and culture. As highlighted by the contributions included in this volume, these debates have unfolded differently in distinct parts of Europe. Their discursive, performative and spatial dimensions and ramifications must therefore be analysed in light of context-specific entanglements of national identity, religion and politics.

This chapter examines the legal and spatio-material recognition of Islam as part of Spanish cultural heritage in the aftermath of Spain's transition to democracy. As an 'edge' territory located at Europe's southern frontier (Whitehead et al., 2019), Spain's geographic proximity to North Africa and historical engagements with Islam have played a formative role in its development as a nation. Over the course of Spanish history, these engagements have been a source of both pride and stigma. On the one hand, Spain's Islamic patrimony is one of its most distinctive and defining features. Granada's Alhambra and Cordoba's Mosque-Cathedral (*Mezquita-Catedral*) attract millions of visitors each year, and are recognised as core sites of national heritage not only in Andalusia but also across the country. On the other hand, the legacy of *al-Andalus* (711 C.E.– 1492 C.E.) and Spain's Moorish heritage have made it susceptible to orientalist discourses that locate it beyond Europe's frontiers (Rogozen-Soltar, 2007; Tofiño-Quesada, 2003). The deep ambivalence and multivocality characteristic of Spain's relationship with its Moorish heritage make it an especially illuminating site for studying how complex and variegated historical entanglements with Islam may influence contemporary dynamics surrounding Muslim incorporation.

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As in other European contexts, debates regarding Islam have become more prominent in the Spanish public sphere over the past several decades due to rising levels of Muslim migration, as well as fears regarding Islamic extremism. Since the late 1990s, a substantial Muslim population has emerged in Spain, primarily due to migration from North Africa and South Asia. There are currently about two million Muslims (roughly 4.3% of the total population) and 1,600 mosques dispersed throughout the country, most of which are small oratories or prayer rooms located in nondescript apartments or warehouses. The regions with the largest Muslim populations in Spain are Catalonia (~564,000), Andalusia (~341,000), Madrid (~299,000) and Valencia (~221,000), though sizeable populations may also be found elsewhere in the country (Observatorio Andalusi, 2020; Observatorio del Pluralismo Religioso en España, 2019).

Islam's renewed presence in Spain has coincided with a series of major political and social transformations, including the transition from dictatorship to democracy, the disestablishment of the Catholic Church and progressive secularisation of the populace, and the shift from a religiously homogeneous to a religiously diverse national community. Grappling with the legacy of *al-Andalus* and its place in Spanish history, and addressing the challenges of social integration and religious accommodation, have significant implications for Spain's development as a modern, democratic and plural society.

The legal and material infrastructure for accommodating the religious needs of Muslim minorities in Spain has been shaped by a series of developments that occurred in the decades following its transition to democracy in the late 1970s. During this period, municipal governments and business entrepreneurs in several Spanish regions supported the construction of large and ornate mosques financed by wealthy Arab donors. In 1992, the Spanish government signed a generous cooperative agreement with the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE) that entitled Muslims to a series of special rights and privileges. These developments were not the outcome of Muslim minorities' prolonged struggle for acceptance and accommodation. Indeed, it was not until the onset of the 21st century that Muslim immigrants began to have a sizeable numeric presence in Spain.

The erection of several major mosques and the establishment of an official accord with the CIE led to a curious situation in which Islam achieved a relatively high degree of visibility and recognition at a time when the actual presence of Muslims in Spain was still quite limited. In this chapter, I show how the commemoration of Spain's Islamic heritage and the support given to large-scale mosque projects during the 1980s and 1990s were driven by the interplay of: 1) symbolic projects of national redefinition that sought to fashion a new Spain liberated from Franco's National Catholicism and the country's long history of religious intolerance; and 2) economic undertakings promoting foreign investment, tourism, and urban revitalisation. I argue that initiatives seeking to render Spain's Islamic legacy visible during the 1980s and 1990s could be pursued without major social obstacles or political risk as a result of the relative invisibility of the country's modest Muslim population at the time. When Muslims did begin to have a more substantial presence in Spain, the legal and spatio-material recognition granted to

Islam during the post-transition period did little to shield them from the effects of escalating prejudice and discrimination. Since such recognition was primarily the result of top-down initiatives rather than grassroots struggle, it had limited efficacy for promoting generalised reflexivity regarding Spain's approach to dealing with its Islamic past or its increasingly multicultural present.

The political antecedents to Spain's first modern mosques

Prior to Spain's democratic transition, the country was ruled by Francisco Franco's dictatorial regime (1939–1975), which was highly repressive of ethnic and religious diversity. Despite Franco's repressive domestic policies, he placed great effort in developing diplomatic ties with the Arab world in the context of Spain's international isolation and economic stagnation following World War II. Spain's rich Islamic heritage proved a valuable resource for cultivating relations with Middle Eastern elites, which later contributed to Arab interest and investment in Spain.

When the United Nations (UN) was formed in 1945, its leadership voted to exclude Spain and passed a resolution the following year recommending an international boycott of Franco's dictatorship. Shunned by the major Western powers, Franco sought to strengthen ties with the Middle East and Latin America through forging a series of economic and cultural agreements. By cultivating close relations with Middle Eastern and Latin American leaders, Franco hoped to obtain the necessary votes to lift the UN's diplomatic ban. He was also eager to develop new forms of economic cooperation that might give a boost to Spain's distressed economy. Moreover, he perhaps naively believed that an alliance with powerful Arab leaders would help Spain deflect criticisms of its ongoing colonial presence in North Africa (Algora Weber, 1995; Rein, 1998).

In courting Arab elites, Franco and other regime officials strategically referenced romanticised ideas of *convivencia* (coexistence)¹ and cultural interchange between Muslims and Christians during the period of *al-Andalus*. Together with the respect that Franco was able to command due to his charismatic persona, the deep nostalgia for *al-Andalus* in the Middle East contributed to the resonance of such rhetoric among influential Arab leaders (Algora Weber, 1995). In addition to employing symbolic rhetoric, Franco arranged a series of diplomatic encounters during the 1940s and 1950s. Arab leaders were invited to visit Spain's Islamic patrimony, as well as the royal palace in Madrid. Spanish ambassadors embarked on several diplomatic 'missions' to the Middle East. Franco's regime also supported the establishment of educational centres such as the Hispano-Arab Institute of Culture and the Farouk I Institute of Islamic Studies to facilitate exchanges between Spanish and Arab students and scholars. Through these initiatives, Franco enhanced cultural and economic ties with several Arab countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Yemen, Iraq and Saudi Arabia (Huguet Santos, 2005; Rein, 1998).

The substantial effort that Franco put into fortifying relations with the Arab world seemingly contradicted the decidedly anti-Arab and anti-Muslim domestic propaganda that his regime disseminated. 'National Catholicism' was the regime's

ideological lynchpin, and celebrating the Christian defeat of the ‘ruthless’ and ‘barbaric’ *moros* (Moors) was central to the nationalist narratives advanced in political speeches, school textbooks, and Spanish media. Although relatively few religious minorities resided in Spain during Franco’s rule, those that did were highly constrained in their ability to express their religious identities outwardly (Morán, 1995). With regard to foreign diplomacy, however, Franco and his associates were perfectly content to appropriate romanticised representations of Spain’s Islamic heritage developed by liberal historians in order to portray Spain as a bridge between Eastern and Western civilisations. Such representations were mobilised during the 1950s to promote a Mediterranean pact between Spain and the Arab Middle East, though this idea never gained sufficient traction among Arab leaders to come to fruition (Logroño Narbona, 2014).

Franco’s experience as a military officer in North Africa and his familiarity with Moroccan culture contributed to his personal sense of proximity to the Arab world. Between 1912 and 1936, he served roughly 14 years in campaigns to establish and maintain Spain’s colonial presence in parts of present-day Morocco. During the Spanish Civil War, he recruited 70,000 Moroccan mercenaries, the so-called *Regulares*, to assist with the rebellion against the Republican government (Seidman, 2015). A small mosque in Cordoba called the ‘Morabito’, which is still in use today, was originally built to meet the religious needs of these troops. At the conclusion of the war, Franco enlisted several Moroccan soldiers to serve as his personal bodyguards. He would later make a point of having these bodyguards accompany him while engaging in diplomacy with Middle Eastern leaders (Rein, 1998). Such diplomacy was a key antecedent to the construction of Spain’s first modern mosques.

A major mosque in the Spanish capital

After 39 years in power, Franco’s rule finally came to an end with his death in 1975. By that time, roughly 20% of Spanish imports came from the Middle East, and the difficulties resulting from the 1973 energy crisis created new impetus for securing long-term agreements for the importation of oil and gas (Huguet Santos, 2005). As Spain transitioned to democracy, Adolfo Suarez’s centre-right administration (1976–1982) sought to maintain positive relations with the Arab world. State officials also perceived close ties with the Arab world as crucial for improving general relations and commercial engagements with Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, and for resolving lingering tensions surrounding the North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla (Segal, 1991).

Relations with the Arab world in the aftermath of Spain’s democratic transition, however, went beyond the pursuit of strictly diplomatic and commercial objectives. A central aim of Spain’s first democratic administrations was to repair the tarnished image that Spain had acquired during Franco’s rule. With the transition, conservatives and progressives alike partook in the construction of a more modern and cosmopolitan Spain, in part by supporting initiatives that demonstrated a greater openness to religious plurality. Large-scale mosque projects were welcomed as symbols of Spain’s new and more inclusive course of societal development.

Madrid, Spain's capital city and centre of diplomacy, was a logical destination for the country's first modern mosque. In 1976, delegates of 18 Arab countries with diplomatic representation in Madrid came together and developed a proposal to jointly fund the construction of a large Islamic centre with the aim of strengthening relations between Spain and the Arab world. Madrid's municipal government welcomed the proposal, and the following year it donated a 20,000m² parcel of public land to the Muslim World League, which assumed responsibility for managing the project. The practice of ceding public property for the establishment of religious structures had been quite common in the case of Catholic Churches. The city's donation to the Muslim community was thus not viewed as particularly abnormal or controversial. Other cities including Valencia and Fuengirola (Andalusia) would later follow Madrid's example.

When negotiations surrounding the cession of land for the proposed centre were finalised, an extravagant ceremony celebrating the agreement was held at the luxurious Zarzuela Palace. A number of illustrious figures attended, including King Juan Carlos I, Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia, an array of Arab ambassadors, the heads of several Spanish ministries, and the mayor of Madrid, Enrique Tierno Galván. Aureate discourses harking back to the glory of *al-Andalus* and praising Spain's strong relations with the Arab world abounded, reflecting the project's highly symbolic and diplomatic objectives ('España regala', 1977).

In 1978, representatives of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya took measures to obtain a legal permit for the Islamic centre, paving the way for its construction. In March of the following year, a competition was organised to collect ideas for the centre's design. A total of 453 projects proposed by 840 architects from 45 different countries were presented. Two teams composed of Polish architects won the top two prizes for the competition, and the winning design served as the basis for the eventual mosque. Part of what made the design appealing to judges was that it fused Western and Oriental styles, and incorporated elements typical of the Hispano-Islamic tradition. The interior of the mosque, for instance, included columns and double arches that closely resembled those of Cordoba's Mosque-Cathedral, making it a visual reminder of Islam's historical presence in Spain.

Due to unforeseen difficulties with funding, the mosque was not built until nearly a decade later, when Prince Fahd assumed responsibility for financing its construction. The formal name chosen for the centre was the 'Islamic Cultural Centre and Omar ibn al-Jattâb Mosque of Madrid' (CCIM). Saudi Arabia's leading role in bringing the project to fruition resulted, in part, from the strong relations it had developed with Spain starting in the 1960s. In 1966, Franco had awarded Faisal bin Abdulaziz, the Saudi king and father of Prince Fahd, the prestigious Order of Civil Merit Collar for his diplomatic and commercial collaboration with Spain. In celebration of the occasion, King Faisal was invited to Madrid to receive the honour, and a special event in praise of his presence was held at the iconic Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba. Spain's importation of oil from Saudi Arabia had also grown significantly since the 1960s, further tightening relations between the two countries (Huguët Santos, 2005).

As the CCIM was being completed, an organisation called the Muslim Association of Spain spearheaded the construction of a second mosque, formally

Figure 5.1 The Islamic Cultural Centre and Omar ibn al-Jattâb Mosque of Madrid
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named the 'Abu-Bakr Mosque' in Madrid's Tetuan neighbourhood. The project was designed and directed by a prestigious architect from Cordoba named Juan Mora Urbano. Although it was not as grand as the CCIM, the Abu-Bakr Mosque gave Islam a visible presence in the Spanish capital. The mosque, which was also dubbed the 'Central Mosque of Madrid', was inaugurated in 1989.

The CCIM opened 3 years later in 1992, a year chosen for its historical marking of the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Granada, the last bastion of Muslim rule. The Spanish king and queen, the mayor of Madrid, Prince Salman of Saudi Arabia, and the prince's son Mohammad were among those who attended the inaugural ceremony. The CCIM later became the headquarters for the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI), an Islamic federation that competes with the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (UCIDE) for national representation of Spain's Muslim population. UCIDE evolved from the aforementioned Muslim Association of Spain and has its headquarters at the Abu-Bakr Mosque.

Media coverage of Madrid's two main mosques was generally positive, framing them as a symbolic bridge between Spain and the Islamic world, and an additional attraction in the city. In an interview with the Spanish daily newspaper *ABC*, Rafael de la Hoz, the CCIM's principal architect, compared it to two large mosques being erected in Paris and Rome, and stated: 'Ours is going to be the most important; in the end, we are the occidentals most connected to the Muslim world by the enormity of our common past' (Borroso, 1988, p. 33). His comments were reflective of how, at the time, having a large and visible mosque that highlighted Spain's unique connection to the Islamic world provided a means for Madrid to distinguish itself and elevate its prestige vis-à-vis other major European capitals.

The symbolic politics of national redefinition and Islam's official recognition

As part of the commemorative events of 1992,² the Spanish state also signed an historic cooperative agreement with the CIE. The CIE emerged as a consequence of the Spanish state's demand for a single national interlocutor that could represent the country's Muslim population in conversations with state agencies.³ Its executive board included representatives from FEERI, which was initially led by Spanish converts to Islam, and UCIDE, whose leaders were mainly professionals of Middle Eastern origin. Relations between the two federations have always been soured by rivalry, contributing to the CIE's general inability to reach consensus on key issues (e.g. fair and democratic procedures for determining its leadership and representation). The inefficacy of the commission has resulted in a relatively large proportion (approximately 30%) of Muslim associations electing not to affiliate.

The 1992 agreement with the CIE, which has been considered 'one of the most liberal in Europe' (Zapata Barrero, 2006, p. 150) conferred Muslims a series of rights and privileges, including the protection and recognition of mosques as inviolable spaces, the right to religious accommodation in public institutions (e.g. the military and state prisons), the right to Islamic religious education in schools receiving public funding, the legal recognition of marriages performed in accordance with Islamic law, tax exemptions for Islamic associations, the right to take time off from work to celebrate Muslim holidays and the right of Muslim associations to participate in the conservation of Islamic historical sites and artefacts.

Similar agreements were established with Spain's Jewish and Protestant federations. These agreements were made possible by the state's prior recognition of Islam, Judaism, and Protestantism as 'deeply rooted' (*de notorio arraigo*) religions (Fernández-Coronado, 1995). By formalising relations with Islamic, Jewish and Protestant federations, Felipe González's Socialist administration aimed to promote a new image of Spain as a modern, plural society that had transcended its legacy of religious intolerance. The strategy of reviving memories from Spain's distant past, moreover, provided a means for elites to engage in the process of national redefinition without directly confronting the more recent and still divisive memories of fascism and dictatorship. Since the challenges of Muslim integration and religious diversity were not yet an issue of public concern due to the limited presence of religious minorities in the country, the agreements posed little political risk.

Muslim leaders were not passive bystanders to this process, but rather actively took advantage of the favourable structure of opportunities that existed following Spain's democratic transition. The extension of official recognition to Islam was formally requested by the Muslim Association of Spain the same year that it had inaugurated the Abu-Bakr Mosque. In soliciting recognition, the association's president, the Syrian-born doctor Riay Tatary, strategically leveraged Islam's historical legacy in the Iberian Peninsula to demonstrate its 'deep rootedness' in Spanish society.⁴ The following excerpt is taken from the request submitted by Tatary in 1989:

The Islamic religion is of the spiritual beliefs that have configured Spain's historical character. Our culture and tradition are inseparable from the religious principles which have cultivated the deepest essences of the Spanish people and being. The Islamic faith, for its scope and number of believers, has achieved deep rootedness in Spain.

(Tatary, 1995, p. 167)

Although there were just seventeen Muslim associations registered in Spain when the request was submitted, the bid for official recognition received unanimous support from the state's Advisory Commission on Religious Liberty. The 1992 cooperative agreement between the state and the CIE was likewise approved by unanimous vote in both houses of the Spanish Parliament. During parliamentary discussions on the agreements, elites from across the political spectrum praised Spain's diverse religious history, emphasising the importance of correcting for historical injustices and recovering Spain's lost cultural and religious heritage (Astor, Burchardt, & Griera, 2017).

The generous set of rights and privileges established by the 1992 agreement between the state and the CIE thus grew out of the celebratory climate surrounding religious diversity characteristic of the period. Elites from across the political spectrum saw religious diversity, which was still relatively minimal in Spain at the time, as a tool they could leverage to support the construction of a more modern and open society. Their target audience was not just religious minorities, but also the broader Spanish populace, as well as the international community. This was especially apparent in the case of the agreements with the Muslim and Jewish federations, which were accompanied by a series of symbolic acts. For example, a large exhibition celebrating Spain's Muslim and Arab heritage was organised at Granada's Alhambra, and King Juan Carlos gave a speech highlighting the deep connections between Spain and the Arab world at the ruins of the medieval Medina Al-Zahara palace in Cordoba. In a similar fashion, an event was organised at Madrid's central synagogue during which the king spoke of the need for historical reconciliation with the Jewish people. The president of Israel, Haïm Herzog, was among those invited to attend (Astor, Burchardt, & Griera, 2017; Rozenberg, 1996).

Major mosques as instruments for economic development

Two years after the inauguration of the CCIM and the signing of the 1992 cooperative agreement between the state and the CIE, a major mosque was built in Valencia. The decision to erect the 'Great Mosque of Valencia' – formally named the 'Xúquer Mosque' – did not respond to the needs or demands of Valencia's modest Muslim community. It resulted, rather, from a broader strategy of urban and economic development pursued by Valencia's city government at the time.

The first Muslims to arrive in Valencia were Middle Eastern students who took advantage of the educational opportunities offered by the city during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Towards the late 1980s, Valencia's Muslim population

underwent modest growth with the arrival of immigrant workers from Morocco, Algeria and Senegal. A small community of Spanish converts to Islam also emerged during this period. None of these groups, however, were particularly numerous prior to the late 1990s, when North African immigration began to increase sharply (Buades Fuster & Vidal Fernández, 2007).

Although the Xúquer Mosque was over 1,600 m² in size and had sufficient capacity for 500 worshipers, very few Muslims attended the mosque when it was initially opened in 1994. Aside from the fact that Valencia's Muslim population was still relatively small, a number of the Muslims who did reside in the city, especially students or former students of Middle Eastern descent, opposed the mosque project because it was financed with Kuwaiti capital, which they felt might compromise their ideological autonomy.

The impetus for building a major mosque in Valencia grew out of the connections with the Arab world that had been developed by Valencia's then mayor, Ricard Pérez Casado. In 1984, Valencia hosted a meeting in which the Kuwaiti-based Arab Towns Organization (ATO) and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces signed an agreement promoting economic, cultural and educational collaboration between Arab and Spanish cities. The meeting resulted in a commitment by several Arab donors to support the restoration of the Almirante Baths, an iconic Arab monument in the city. The donors also pledged to establish an Arab cultural centre in the city and to assume the costs of publishing the writings of Arab poets and scientists from Valencia.

The construction of the Xúquer Mosque was made possible by the city government's cession of a large plot of land for the initiative in 1988. In ceding land for the mosque, Pérez Casado sought to enhance Valencia's image as a global city and to promote tourism from wealthy Gulf countries. The ties he had forged with the ATO proved useful, as it was capital from Kuwait that ultimately financed the mosque's construction. The capital from Kuwait was channelled through an association called the Islamic Community of Spain, as the Kuwaiti organisation financing the mosque lacked juridical status in Spain. As a result, the Islamic Community of Spain was technically the owner of the Xúquer Mosque. However, responsibility for managing the mosque was delegated to a newly formed association called the Islamic Cultural Centre of Valencia (CCIV). The Xúquer Mosque remained the only mosque with visibly Islamic architecture in Valencia until 2014, when a second major mosque was inaugurated in the region's southern city of Alicante.

Municipal officials were not the only domestic actors that facilitated the construction of major mosques during the 1980s and 1990s. Business entrepreneurs helped to create a climate conducive to the erection of major mosques by fostering Arab tourism and investment in southern Spain. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the Saudi Royal Family and other Middle Eastern elites began to purchase properties and initiate large-scale construction projects along Andalusia's southern *Costa del Sol*. Their interest in the region derived, in large part, from their nostalgia for Islamic Spain. Establishing a presence in Andalusia held great symbolic significance, as it represented a tangible way of reconnecting with, and in a sense reclaiming, the splendour that was once *al-Andalus*.

Marbella was one of the first destinations for Saudi tourism and investment in southern Spain. Companies like Panorama, Marbella's longest established real estate agency, played an important role in encouraging wealthy Saudi elites to invest in the now posh resort town. Christopher Clover, an American who is currently Panorama's managing director, provides an account of the emergence of the 'Saudi and Pan-Arabian market'.⁵ He relates how a client of Panorama who had real estate dealings with King Fahd introduced him to the Saudi Royal Family during the late 1970s. These contacts, along with Clover's ties to the Saudi Consul in Málaga, facilitated a close working relationship between Panorama and the Royal Family. The expansion of Saudi investment in Marbella, in turn, inspired other royalty and business moguls from the Middle East to invest in municipalities along the *Costa del Sol*.

In 1981, the Saudi Royal Family funded the construction of a large, ornate mosque in Marbella. The Marbella mosque was officially called the Mosque of King Abdul-Aziz al Saud. It was built on a 10,500m² parcel of land that the family had previously purchased in the town. Like the Abu-Bakr Mosque in Madrid, it was designed by the Cordoban architect, Juan Mora Urbano. The mosque's façade was styled in accordance with Hispano-Islamic and North African architectural traditions. However, the minaret and other core elements of the mosque's exterior were of Ottoman inspiration and gave the mosque a distinctly modern appearance that resembled some of the newer mosques in Saudi Arabia. This fusion of styles was perhaps meant to signal a connection to local Islamic architectural tradition while simultaneously gesturing towards a more modern, cosmopolitan, and Saudi-inspired future (Moreno Fernández 2001). The Saudis also constructed an extravagant royal palace that they tellingly named *al-Nahda* (Revival) in the vicinity of the mosque (Shannon, 2015, pp. 34–35).

A decade later, the Saudis initiated a second major mosque project in the nearby coastal town of Fuengirola. The project was directed by the Suhail Foundation, whose president, Mohammed Bashir Kurdi, was the Saudi Consul in Malaga at the time. The mosque, which was also called the Suhail Islamic Cultural Centre, was built on land ceded by the local city government. Its construction was completed in 1992, and it was officially inaugurated in 1993.

In 1996, the Suhail Foundation launched an additional mosque project in the city of Malaga and once again hired Mora Urbano as chief architect. The municipal government, then headed by the conservative Popular Party (*Partido Popular*, PP), agreed to sell the foundation a plot of land where the mosque would be constructed for 425 million pesetas (about 2.5 million euros). The project encountered a degree of resistance from representatives of the Socialist Party and the United Left – Green Party, who argued that the PP had acted with too much urgency and had not properly consulted residents living in the area designated for the mosque or the local Muslim community before arranging the deal with the Suhail Foundation. In defending the project, the urban planning official and future mayor of Malaga, Francisco de la Torre, argued that the mosque was a 'positive' development which, in addition to bringing in significant revenue, gave the city 'an open and cosmopolitan image' (Souviron, 1996).

Figure 5.2 The Mosque of King Abdul-Aziz al Saud in Marbella. Photograph by Avi Astor.

After four official hearings in which the project was debated, it was finally approved in December of 1996. Prince Abdul Aziz bin Fahd, the son of King Fahd, symbolically laid the first stone a year later. The project ended up costing over 22 million euros, more than double the original budget. The mosque, which was also called the ‘Andalusian Cultural Centre’ (*El Centro Cultural Andalusi*), was not opened for general use until 2007 due to a delay in funding for its construction. The sources of this delay remain somewhat unclear, though they likely stemmed from a combination of internal problems within the Saudi Royal Family and the unexpectedly high cost of the building’s construction.

Hall (1993, p. 279) has argued that general policy ‘paradigms’ specify ‘not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing’. The ideas, norms, and values that comprise particular policy paradigms shape the policymaking process by setting the terms of political debate and determining the range of possible disagreements and solutions (Surel, 2000). At the time of the debates that took place over the Suhail Foundation’s mosque project in Malaga, it was essentially taken for granted that attracting Arab investment through the promotion of a major mosque was a positive development for the city. The mayor and other public officials representing the PP never questioned the threat that the mosque might pose to Spain’s Catholic identity or the potential dangers of Islamic fundamentalism – two issues that leaders of the PP would later bring up repeatedly amid debates over matters pertaining to Islam – since these issues had not yet become part of the political agenda. Moreover, the politicians who were initially reluctant to approve the sale of the land to the Suhail Foundation never criticised the mosque

project as such. Their criticisms centred exclusively on the transparency of the process by which city officials had pursued the project. Once all the relevant groups and associations had been adequately consulted, the project was approved without significant difficulty.

Although public officials and local businesses generally welcomed Arab investments in southern Spain, some Spaniards experienced the arrival of 'petrodollars' to the *Costa del Sol* with trepidation. Reflecting on the Marbella mosque project and other Saudi investments in the region, Pedro Crespo, a distinguished writer, journalist and lawyer who founded the Association of Editors for Spanish Newspapers, wrote an alarmist editorial in *ABC* entitled 'Moors at the Coast' (*Moros en la costa*), a phrase employed during the Middle Ages and early modern period to warn of Moorish raiders landing in Spanish coastal towns:

This invasion, at the moment profitable for the invaded, and welcomed, could be considered a form of historical redemption, or the beginning of a new historical era, now without Florinda la Cava or Don Opas to bungle the landing.⁶ But it would always be an invasion of caliphs. The evil did not arrive with the blond-haired and blue-eyed Arabs, with the saga of the Ummayyads, but rather with their African companions... There truly are Moors at the coast, though not all the Moors nor all the coasts are equal.

(Crespo, 1981, p. 3)

The analogies that Crespo employed in the editorial were illustrative of how negative representations of *al-Andalus* within the Spanish collective imaginary could be mobilised to criticise the growing presence and influence of Arab elites in Spain. He warned that the Marbella mosque was a point of reference that might attract Muslims to Spain from Morocco and other African contexts, which, as in the past, threatened the security and values of Spanish society. Crespo's words were somewhat prophetic insofar as it was the subsequent arrival of working-class North African migrants to Spain that would later arouse significant public concern. He added that the contingent of 'special' visitors from the Gulf should not lose sight of the fact that they were visitors in a land that was not their own.

Cordoba: from meeting point of religions to locus of territorial dispute

Crespo was not alone in voicing concerns about the ventures and dealings of Arab elites in Spain during the 1980s. Discourses warning of Arab intentions to appropriate Spanish lands and re-establish *al-Andalus* surfaced on several occasions in the context of local disputes surrounding the use and ownership of religious buildings in Cordoba. The eruption of such disputes represented a rupture from the highly positive atmosphere surrounding inter-faith relations that existed in Cordoba during the 1970s.

Prior to Spain's democratic transition, Cordoba had re-emerged as a site of encounter between Muslims and Christians. Beginning in the 1960s, Catholic activists who drew inspiration from the Catholic ideal of ecumenism – an ideal the

Church had begun to prioritise with increasing rigour following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) – became increasingly active in reaching out to other religions. Ecumenism, in the original sense of the term, refers to the promotion of unity among Christian faiths. However, its meaning was extended to include the promotion of inter-faith dialogue and understanding with non-Christian faiths as well (Aloisi, 1988).

In Spain, the first inter-faith organisations dedicated to relations between Catholics and Muslims were founded in Madrid.⁷ In 1968, Salvador Gómez Nogales, a professor from a private Catholic University in the city, and Dr. Hussein Munis, an Egyptian writer and scholar, jointly created the Association of Islamo-Christian Friendship (AIC). The following year, the AIC supported Father Emilio Galindo's founding of Darek-Nyumba, an organisation dedicated to promoting dialogue between Catholics and Muslims, and to facilitating the integration of Arab students studying in Madrid. During the 1970s and 1980s, Galindo and the AIC organised a series of meetings aimed at deepening the connections between Christianity and Islam, including two international 'Islam-Christian Conferences' held in Cordoba in 1974 and 1977.

Cordoba's symbolism as a meeting point between different cultures made it a particularly suitable location for the conferences, which brought Church officials together with political and spiritual leaders from several Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Tunisia. The sessions comprising each conference covered a range of topics, some theological and others political. As part of the proceedings, Muslims were invited to pray before the *mihrab* (prayer niche) of Cordoba's Mosque-Cathedral, an act that would generate controversy on multiple occasions in subsequent years (Astor, Burchardt, & Griera, 2019; Monteiro, 2011).

The first such controversy took place in 1982, when Julio Anguita, the charismatic mayor of Cordoba and a leading figure within the Spanish Communist Party, arranged for a contingent of Muslims to visit the Mosque-Cathedral during the first 'Hispano-Muslim Friendship Conference', an event similar to the Islamo-Christian conferences that had been organised during the 1970s.⁸ The contingent prayed before the *mihrab* without express permission, arousing the ire of Cordoba's Catholic leadership. The city's bishop called the act an 'outrage against our religious beliefs' that is 'deeply worrying to Catholics because it is a flagrant invasion of our sentiments' ('Nuevos roces', 1982, p. 33). The Mosque-Cathedral's canon and chief archivist lambasted Anguita for instigating the conflict:

So now a non-believing atheist party causes two religions to begin fighting with each other, and to begin -- above all the Muslims -- occupying lands that are not their own. I think it's an absurd position that, if it hurts anyone, it's the Muslim community itself because returning the Muslim religion to Cordoba at the hands of the Communist Party is the worst thing that can be done to the Islamic religion.

(‘El canónigo Nieto Cumplido’, 1982, p. 40)

Nieto Cumplido added that the Muslims had once tried to destroy the Mosque-Cathedral before being driven out of Andalusia. The great structure was still in existence today, he argued, thanks to King Ferdinand III's order to kill any Muslim who dared approach it. Nieto Cumplido's remarks made waves in conservative Catholic media such as *Tendillas* 7, which published an issue in 1982 with a cover photo of a Muslim pushing a wheelbarrow filled with the remains of a destroyed Mosque-Cathedral.

Hence, the very same act of prostration before the *mihrab* that had been celebrated by Catholic leaders just 5 years earlier was perceived, in this instance, as a form of 'spatial transgression' (Collins-Kreiner et al., 2013). A key difference between the two instances was the fact that the Muslims praying before the *mihrab* in 1977 had been expressly authorised to do so by the bishop. There was thus a clear understanding that the Church had the authority to decide which acts were permitted and which acts were not. In 1982, by contrast, the Muslims participating in the act were not doing so on terms laid down by the Mosque-Cathedral's Catholic administrators. Praying before the *mihrab* in this instance was thus interpreted as a performative act intended to challenge the building's status as an exclusively Catholic place of worship. Controversies over Muslims praying in or around the Mosque-Cathedral would later take place on several occasions during the 2000s and 2010s, in some instances leading to violent confrontations (Arigita, 2013; Astor, Burchardt, & Griera, 2019).

The anger expressed by Cordoba's Catholic leadership regarding the incident had been building since the previous year, when Anguita had taken steps to donate the Morabito and a vacant convent to the Muslim community.⁹ The decision to hand over the keys of the convent to a Saudi dignitary named Ali Kettani was particularly controversial, as the convent had originally been built upon the remains of an old mosque, and its cession was interpreted by some as a form of symbolic re-conquest. The temporal proximity of the transfer to the construction of Spain's first two modern mosques – the aforementioned mosque in Marbella and a mosque built in 1981 by the Ahmaddiya community in Pedro Abad, a small town 30 km outside Cordoba – added to the impression that Muslims were seeking to re-appropriate what was once theirs.

It is difficult to know with certainty whether the general public was at all concerned about these events, or whether the dramatic newspaper headlines they elicited were drummed up by journalists looking to sensationalise otherwise unnoticed local controversies. The little information that does exist suggests that the general public was not overly anxious about Islam's growing presence in Cordoba and the rest of Andalusia. The author of an article published in *ABC* in 1981 puzzled over the public's 'curious indifference' regarding Islam's recent overtures in Andalusia and attributed this apathy to the general perception of the polemics as 'more folkloric than anything else' (López, 1981, p. 30). Moreover, there were no media reports of public protests or petition campaigns aimed at preventing Muslim collectives from acquiring property and establishing mosques in Andalusia, or elsewhere in Spain, prior to the 1990s.¹⁰

For the vast majority of Spaniards, contact with Muslims remained minimal, and Islam's presence in Spain – both historical and contemporary – was still too abstract and distant to arouse serious concern. Although visible mosques were certainly

viewed as exotic, few perceived them as harbingers of any foreboding future developments. The specific segments of the populace that viewed mosques with apprehension tended to be less concerned with Islam's presence in Spain per se than with how it might be leveraged by anti-clerical activists, such as Anguita and the Spanish Communist Party, to wage subtle attacks against the Catholic Church's hegemony at a time when Catholic leaders felt especially vulnerable due to the Church's recent disestablishment and the progressive secularisation of Spanish society.

The Catalan exception

By the mid-1990s, several large and visible mosques had been erected in Madrid, Andalusia and Valencia. In Catalonia, however, major mosques remained conspicuously absent, despite that fact that its capital, Barcelona, was Spain's second largest city and had attracted a significant number of Muslim students, business entrepreneurs, and workers (Moreras, 1999). Several factors impeded the establishment of a major mosque in the region. For one, Catalonia did not have the same diplomatic importance as Madrid or symbolic connection to *al-Andalus* as Andalusia, making it less attractive to wealthy Arab donors motivated by political influence or nostalgia. Secondly, unlike Valencia, whose mayor actively sought to foster ties with Middle Eastern elites and organisations in order to attract Arab investment during the 1980s, Barcelona did not have a city official or agency that took a comparable interest in strengthening relations with elites from wealthy Gulf states. Finally, by the time serious proposals to build a major mosque in Barcelona emerged during the late 1990s, there were already nine different Islamic places of worship in the city that catered to different segments of the local Muslim population (Moreras, 1999). This raised a series of dilemmas related to representativeness and influence that proved more problematic in Barcelona than in other Spanish municipalities where major mosques had been constructed.

According to Moreras (1999), efforts to establish a large mosque in Barcelona were initially undertaken in 1988, when a group of Muslims with ties to a local Palestinian association formed the 'Great Mosque Association of Barcelona'. Their activities, however, never materialised into any concrete proposal and the group dissolved within a short period. More significant efforts were made in the 1990s, when Muslim leaders attempted to enlist the city's support for a major mosque by strategically linking their proposals to broader projects aimed at enhancing Barcelona's international profile. In the aftermath of the 1992 Olympic Games, which played an important role in putting Barcelona on the map as a major global city (Kennett & de Moragas, 2006), affiliates of the Islamic Centre of Barcelona requested that the city government follow the example of Madrid and Valencia in donating space for the construction of a mosque. In 1994, Joan Gaspart, an influential businessman and president of a large tourist consortium, lent support to the request of Muslim leaders by declaring that Barcelona needed a large mosque to attract Arab tourism and to maintain its competitiveness with Madrid.

It was not until 1998, however, that more concrete talks regarding the establishment of a major mosque in the city finally materialised. That year, a contingent of

Middle Eastern diplomats visited Barcelona to view an exhibit on Islam in Catalonia at the Catalan History Museum. The diplomats took advantage of the occasion to meet with Jordi Pujol, the president of Catalonia at the time, in order to discuss viable options for building a large mosque in the city (Moreras, 1999). The following year, Barcelona's mayor, Joan Clos, established a special commission to gather and weigh the feasibility of different proposals for the construction of a mosque in the city. Clos' interest in expediting the establishment of a mosque was influenced by UNESCO's endorsement of Barcelona's proposal to organise and host a 'Universal Forum of Cultures' in 2004. Several Muslim leaders had highlighted how having a large and visible mosque would help to demonstrate Barcelona's plural and cosmopolitan character to the diverse array of nations represented at the forum. At this point, there was significant momentum for the establishment of a major mosque in the city, and it seemed all but inevitable that the project would come to fruition.

Somewhat surprisingly, just one proposal was submitted for consideration by the deadline set by the special committee in March of 2000. The proposal was put forth by Radi Mahmud Al-Shuaibi, a Palestinian who had been selected to act as spokesman for Saudi interests in Barcelona. Many expected a competing proposal from Morocco, as Barcelona had become a major destination for Moroccan immigrants, but Spain's North African neighbour proved unwilling to furnish the capital necessary for a mosque project that would be competitive with the Saudi proposal.

Although the city government initially supported Al-Shuaibi's proposal, several obstacles impeded its implementation. For one, finding a suitable place for the proposed mosque proved difficult, given the paucity of large spaces available in the urban core of Barcelona. Nevertheless, this is an obstacle that likely could have been resolved had there been sufficient political will and support from local Muslim communities for the project. From the start, however, questions were raised about the representativeness of the mosque and the type of Islam that would be transmitted should it be funded by Saudi Arabia. Antoni Comas, Catalonia's Director of Social Welfare, had voiced concerns about Saudi influence and the danger of the mosque becoming a centre of Islamic fundamentalism (Guia, 2014). Cardinal Ricard Maria Carles of Barcelona's Catholic Diocese criticised the project on various occasions for catering to a select group of Arab elites, rather than the broader Muslim community, and for being sponsored by a country that was intolerant of religious diversity. Most troubling from the administration's point of view were the criticisms advanced by representatives of several of Barcelona's local Muslim communities regarding Al-Shuaibi's legitimacy and the threat of undue Saudi influence on Muslims in the city, very few of whom were from the Gulf region. Al-Shuaibi defended the project, stating that it was a private endeavour of the Royal Family and need not appeal to all of Barcelona's Muslims. However, this made the project less enticing to city officials, and it was gradually pushed off the public agenda.

In March of 2001, the city government officially pulled the plug on the project, citing its unwillingness to donate public land for the proposed mosque. Specifically, city officials flagged the potential Pandora's box that donating property for a mosque might open, as other confessions might then feel equally entitled to receiving public donations for their respective places of worship. Here again, timing was critical, as

Barcelona's general populace had become much more religiously diverse by the late 1990s and early 2000s. Between 1996 and 2001, the number of foreign nationals residing in the city rose from roughly 26,800 (1.8% of the population) to 72,800 (4.8% of the city's total population). This rise was part of a larger wave of immigration to Spain that began towards the onset of the twenty-first century. From 2000 to 2009, Spain received an average net inflow of 500,000 foreign-born individuals a year, more than any other European country during the period (Arango, 2013). The number of foreign nationals in the country increased from about 542,300 (1.4% of the total population) in 1996 to nearly 1.37 million by 2001 (3.3% of the total population). By 2010, this number had reached 5.75 million (12.2% of the total population).¹¹

Many of the immigrants arriving to Barcelona and elsewhere in Spain were Muslims, Evangelical Protestants and Eastern Orthodox from Africa, South Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Other minorities, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Sikhs, and Buddhists, also came to have a more notable presence, especially in large cities. In Barcelona, there are now over 300 non-Catholic places of worship, many of which were established during the late 1990s and early 2000s.¹² As a result of heightened religious diversification, arrangements made with the Muslim community had potential ramifications for the city's dealings with other religious groups that had to be taken into consideration. Since large-scale mosque projects in other municipalities such as Madrid and Valencia had been undertaken earlier, when religious minorities in Spain were still few in number, questions of equity had not yet become a major issue of concern.

Shortly after the Saudi proposal failed to materialise, the attacks of 9/11 took place in New York City, giving rise to widespread and powerful associations between Islam and terrorism. Gaining the political and public support necessary to realise a large-scale mosque project suddenly became immensely more difficult than it had been prior to the attacks. The window of opportunity for establishing a major mosque in Barcelona had closed, at least for the foreseeable future. Although Muslim leaders in Barcelona have continued to hold meetings on the matter and to lobby for a major mosque in the city, concrete steps towards the establishment of such a mosque have yet to be taken. A decentralised model of small and dispersed Islamic places of worship, or what Maussen (2009, p. 179) has called 'vicinity Islam', thus remains the status quo. This is not to say that a major mosque will not be built in the proximate future. If provisions are made to establish a large-scale mosque in the city, however, they will likely elicit a degree of controversy given the present climate surrounding Islam.

Conclusion

The analysis advanced over the course of this chapter illustrates how projects of national redefinition and urban renewal following Spain's democratic transition engendered a structure of opportunity conducive to the recognition and revival of Spain's Islamic heritage during the 1980s and 1990s. The support given by local governments to Muslim elites in their efforts to promote the construction of large and *visible* mosques was facilitated by the relative *invisibility* of actual Muslims due to their limited presence

in Spain at the time. The absence of significant political and social concerns regarding Spain's modest Muslim population enabled the 'Muslim question' to be treated as a purely symbolic matter, divorced from the problems of integration that were beginning to intensify in other European countries, such as France, the United Kingdom and Germany, where the demand for foreign workers had materialised much earlier than in Spain. The large-scale arrival of working-class Muslim immigrants to Spain during the 1990s and 2000s, and the emergence of notable conflicts between North Africans and Spaniards in several municipalities, coupled with the terror attacks of 9/11 in New York City and of 11-M in Madrid, generated a climate of fear that came to eclipse the celebratory atmosphere that had existed during the post-transition period.

The developments commemorating Spain's Islamic heritage following its democratic transition undoubtedly generated tangible benefits for some segments of the country's Muslim population. The major mosques constructed during the 1980s and 1990s provided spacious and comfortable spaces for prayer for certain communities, as well as visible contemporary symbols of Islam in which Muslims could take pride. The 1992 accord with the CIE facilitated subsequent claims for accommodation and opportunities for Muslim federations and associations to acquire limited public funding (e.g. from the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence) (Astor, 2017). These developments, however, did not significantly bolster general awareness of Spain's Islamic heritage in a sustained or reflexive manner, as one might argue has been the case with events like Black History Month in the United States. This is due largely to the fact that the developments commemorating Spain's Islamic heritage resulted from top-down initiatives driven mainly by the interests of political elites, business entrepreneurs, urban planners and wealthy foreigners, rather than more grassroots struggles and achievements. To be sure, local Muslim minorities were not passive bystanders to the developments that unfolded during the post-transition period. However, the efficacy of their actions depended on their close alignment with the objectives of the state and powerful economic actors.

Perhaps the emergence of a more robust and vocal cohort of second- and third-generation Muslims in Spain will lead to more bottom-up demands for public initiatives promoting recognition of Spain's Islamic heritage, as well as more reflexive awareness of the suffering and injustices caused by the Inquisition, Spanish colonial ventures in North Africa, and current forms of prejudice directed at Muslim minorities. Such recognition and awareness might be achieved, for instance, by incorporating more material on Spain's Islamic heritage within public educational curricula, by creating a cyclical commemorative event akin to Black History Month that provides regular occasion for national reflection on Islam's contributions to Spanish society or by developing other initiatives that involve a more active and expanded engagement with Spain's past and present relations with Islam.

Notes

- 1 The term *convivencia* was coined by Américo Castro in reference to 'the "coexistence" of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities in medieval Spain and by extension the cultural interaction and exchange fostered by such proximity' (Wolf, 2009, p. 72).

- 2 In addition to commemorating the conquest of Granada, the events of 1992 commemorated the 500th anniversary of Columbus' 'discovery' of the Americas and the Spanish Inquisition.
- 3 For a more detailed discussion of Spain's cooperative framework for religious governance and its requirements for representation, see Astor (2015).
- 4 Tatar passed away in 2020 after contracting COVID-19.
- 5 Panorama's Marbella office was opened in 1970s. A blog relating its history may be viewed at <http://www.panorama.es/es/blog/marbella-setenta-primeros-panorama/> (accessed March 4, 2020).
- 6 Florinda de la Cava and Don Opas were folkloric figures said to have been embroiled in the events that led to the Moorish conquest of Spain in the eighth century.
- 7 An association promoting relations between Jews and Christians had previously been founded in 1961 (Rozenberg, 2010).
- 8 Anguita was nicknamed the 'Red Caliph' due to his powerful appeal among Cordoba's electorate (Casas, 1990).
- 9 The convent in question was the Santa Clara Convent.
- 10 In the early 1990s, the donation of land for the mosque eventually erected in Fuengirola aroused a certain degree of controversy, as representatives of an opposition party in the town accused the mayor of fraud and corruption. However, there is no evidence to suggest that ordinary citizens opposed the donation, which was eventually upheld in court.
- 11 Data on the number of foreign nationals in Spain were obtained from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (<https://ine.es/>). Spain does not collect official data on religious identity.
- 12 Non-Catholic places of worship now outnumber Catholic churches (243) in Barcelona. More detailed information on places of worship in the city and the rest of Catalonia may be obtained from the websites of the *Observatorio del Pluralismo Religioso en España* (Observatory of Religious Pluralism in Spain, <http://www.observatorioreligion.es/>) and the *Mapa Religios de Catalunya* (Religious Map of Catalonia, <http://www.mapareligios.cat/>).

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