Managing Muslim Visibility: Conversion, Immigration, and Spanish Imaginaries of Islam

Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar

ABSTRACT This article explores the efforts of Muslims, particularly European converts and Moroccan immigrants, to represent Islam in southern Spain. It examines Muslims’ different representational strategies; their debates about representation; and related tensions between converts and immigrants regarding religious authenticity, representational authority, and social inequalities. The article contributes to understandings of Islam in Europe by examining how Muslims’ representational practices unfold in Andalusia, a social context shaped by both pan-European, secular concerns about Islam, and a longstanding local tradition that both shuns and celebrates Spain’s Muslim heritage. The author argues that converts’ and immigrants’ different placement in Spanish racialized imaginaries of Islam, uneven access to romantic historical narratives of Muslim Spain, and distinct structural positions in Spain’s political economy converge to produce an unequal multiculturalism. This is expressed in converts’ and immigrants’ racial, gendered, and class-based anxieties about representing Islam in Spain. [immigration, conversion, Islam, Europe, minorities, representation]

ABSTRACTO Este artículo investiga las diferentes motivaciones y estrategias utilizadas por musulmanes, tanto conversos Europeos como inmigrantes Marroquíes, para dar una buena imagen del Islam en la ciudad de Granada, España. A través de una descripción etnográfica de sus diversas prácticas de representación, el autor analiza varias cuestiones que dividen la población musulmana en Granada, sobre quiénes protegen la autenticidad religiosa y quiénes tienen la autoridad de representar el Islam en Andalucía. Estas discusiones entre musulmanes conversos e inmigrantes reflejan las desigualdades entre ellos, y sus diferentes posiciones dentro de las estructuras políticas, sociales, y económicas en Granada. Además, resultan de las distintas maneras en las que los conversos y los inmigrantes son vistos y tratados en Granada, una ciudad en que opiniones sobre el Islam han sido siempre influidos por una dualidad de la memoria histórica local, en la que se celebra y se suye a la vez del pasado musulmán de Granada.

When I asked Lara, a young Spanish Muslim, to tell me about relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in Granada, Spain, she compared past and present: Before, people might have laughed and been like, “Oh, there go the Muslims,” but they were respectful. . . . But now I see a lot more confusion. On a global level, there’s all this media imagery of terrorists, and now people think of Muslims as terrorists. These days in Granada you hear of really bad things, even acts of violence. It could be because there are so many Moroccans here now, and people think they’re taking their jobs.

When Lara was born in the 1980s, most of Granada’s Muslims were European (mainly Spanish) converts like her parents. Today, the city’s growing Muslim minority is mostly comprised of Moroccan immigrants. Although Lara ostensibly blamed rising racism on heightened global antipathy toward Muslims, she also subtly faulted the growing Moroccan population, nostalgically invoking a past in which European converts monopolized the image of Muslims in Granada. Latifa, a Moroccan immigrant roughly Lara’s age, answered the same question about relationships with non-Muslims by saying the first thing I needed to know was that “the Muslim community is divided” between European converts and Muslim immigrants. Like these two women, other Muslims in Granada consistently answered my questions...
about their relationships with non-Muslims by broaching the issue of differences within the Muslim community.

Anxiety over public opinion about Islam, Muslims’ responsibility for representing Islam to their largely Catholic and secular neighbors, and the attendant risks and challenges of this work were constant themes of conversation during the fieldwork I conducted about social encounters between and among Muslim immigrants, converts, and non-Muslim Spaniards in Granada from 2007 to 2009.1 Lara’s and Latifa’s comments hint at what I argue in this article: that Muslims in Granada experience their efforts to represent Islam to wider Spanish publics as hinging on their ability to manage tensions within the city’s diverse Muslim population. These tensions reflect converts’ and immigrants’ vastly different access to social and political resources, a disparity produced by the different ways convert and immigrant Muslims are incorporated as minority subjects in Granada. This article traces how converts’ and immigrants’ different social positions within Spain stem from and sustain distinct material limitations, strategies for minority representation, and different experiences of the moral and political stakes of managing how their communities figure in Spanish imaginaries of Islam. Ultimately, this is most powerfully expressed in the ways convert and migrant Muslims disassociate from one another. Converts often claim to practice a “culture-free” Islam, which they contrast to Moroccans’ “traditions,” using a discourse that cloaks convert religiosity within an unmarked category of “European” and marks migrant Muslims as outsiders. Migrants, on the other hand, largely accuse converts of exclusionary social practices, and both groups worry about the other’s potential contribution to public perceptions of Muslim extremism.

Methodologically, the article unpacks these issues through an ethnographic analysis of how Muslims manage widely circulating discourses about Islam in everyday encounters. Ethnographic work on the politics of minority representation has richly demonstrated the complex predicaments of minorities facing pressures to conform and become intelligible to majority societies, often by focusing on mass mediation and NGO representation (Henkel 2006; Naficy 2001; Shryock 2004). In this article, I examine more individualized anxieties about representation. In Granada, converts and immigrants explicitly engage both with one another’s and with non-Muslims’ ideas about Islam in their efforts to conceptualize and practice “Muslim representation,” and it is through analysis of their differentiated experiences of minority representation that the inequalities and tensions among them become clear. This article thus takes up the well-established anthropological tactic of studying everyday interactions to elucidate the power-laden nature of larger sociocultural processes (Bourdieu 1977; Goffman 1959). It moves the discussion of representation out of the media, courtroom, or social services office and into the minutiae of everyday life in less-institutionalized urban spaces that are no less important to larger processes determining where and how Muslims may (or may not) fit into European nation-states.

This research builds on a growing literature on Muslims in Europe, in which anthropologists have explored both Muslims’ migratory experiences and non-Muslim, European anxieties about Islam (Asad 2003; Bowen 2006; Dietz and El Shohoumi 2005; Ewing 2008; Fernando 2010; Mandel 2008; Silverstein 2004; Suárez-Nava 2004). Much of this work has productively demonstrated how limitations intrinsic to various forms of European secularism and liberalism engender different degrees and modes of sociopolitical exclusion for Muslims. In one sense, this article extends such scholarship by asking how Muslims navigate the burdens of representing Islam to non-Muslim Spaniards in a social context in which secularism and European modernity are increasingly equated, with Islam constructed as antithetical to both.

Yet in the case of southern Spain, the celebration of Muslim identity as a source of local pride (even among non-Muslims) is just as strong as vehemently secular, anti-Muslim sentiment, and this is sometimes expressed in conversions to Islam. The existence of a highly vocal convert community of Spaniards and other Europeans, who have chosen Granada as a “natural” site for developing what they call a “European Islam,” helps complicate the image common in European political discourse of a secular Europe facing off against an influx of non-European Muslims, an image popularized by Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” model (1998). Ethnographers have already made especially important steps in highlighting the intersections of social inclusion and exclusion in an increasingly plural Europe (Bowen 2010; Partridge 2012; Ticktin 2011). This article furthers that project by attending to the ways in which some Europeans go beyond rejecting or tolerating Muslims and instead actively celebrate Islam, but it does so with an eye toward the restricted fashion of such celebrations. The following ethnography demonstrates the sometimes-overlooked diversity of Muslims in Europe, the complicated relationship between inclusion and exclusion, and the ways that Islamophobic and Islamophilic discourses bleed into one another.

**MUSLIMS IN GRANADA TODAY**

The difficulty of approximating undocumented migration patterns and the lack of a category for religious affiliation in the Spanish census make population estimates for Muslims in Granada vary widely. However, most agree that somewhere between 5,000 and 25,000 people, or 2 and 10 percent of the city’s population, is Muslim (INE 2008). The vast majority are migrants, and only between 500 and 2,000 are converts (Coleman 2008).

The so-called “return” of Muslims to Granada in the 20th century can be understood as a two-part process beginning in the late 1970s with Spain’s transition from fascism (and enforced Catholicism) to democracy. In the ensuing climate of social experimentation, a broad movement of Spaniards and
other Europeans in Spain converted to Islam. Many became followers of Sheikh Abdulqadir, a Scottish-born convert to Islam with a global Sufi following in Europe, North America, Africa, and Latin America. Known as the Murabitun, they have been alternately characterized as an antiglobalization, anticapitalist movement joining a political-economic critique of Europe with public religiosity (Bubandt 2009) or as the moderate branch of Islam most open to and accepted by the Spanish state (Leman et al. 2010). The converts I came to know in Granada were a heterogeneous group of people with varying degrees of knowledge about and interest in the global Murabitun movement. Importantly, many of the convert Muslims in Granada today, particularly younger and more recent converts, do not consider themselves Murabitun, although many frequent Granada’s Murabitun-run mosque and are educated about Islam by older Murabitun converts.

Converts I interviewed (both new and old) cited diverse reasons for their initial interest in Islam: philosophical critiques of Western European politics and Enlightenment values, aesthetic interests in Sufi practices, the influence of platonic and romantic relationships with Muslims, personal traumas that prompted reevaluations of spirituality, and more. Older converts recalled their conversions in the 1970s as natural progressions from their participation in counterculture movements. Many of these converts narrated their conversion processes in terms of their desire to reclaim a non-Catholic tradition in the wake of Franco’s demise, disillusionment with the failure of 1960s radical politics, and an interest in Islam as a means of promoting Andalusian autonomy within Spain’s newly federalized democracy. To be sure, these are not “real” political or sociological explanations to which one can reduce (or supplant) converts’ religious interest in Islam. A search for such explanations may unintentionally imply a kind of reticence to take seriously converts’ religiosity. However, I mention these narratives here to help illustrate the heterogeneity of convert Muslims in Granada. Just as their processes of becoming Muslim, their religious convictions, and their political leanings varied, so did converts’ socioeconomic positioning in Granada. However, the majority of my convert interlocutors were middle-class or upper-middle-class residents who owned homes or businesses, including lawyers, doctors, restaurant and café owners, artists, and tourism entrepreneurs.

Many converts in the 1970s and 1980s in Granada were Andalusian, but others were from northern Spain, northern Europe, or North America. Importantly, despite being born outside of Spain, non-Spanish converts do not consider themselves (and are not considered locally) to be “migrants,” a term reserved for foreign-born residents considered non-white and from countries deemed politically and economically “below” Spain. By the same token, children born to convert parents referred to themselves as “converts,” despite being born Muslim. These seemingly small details highlight how the terms convert and migrant have become indexical of institutionalized European–non-European binaries among Muslims in Granada.

The second prominent group of Muslims to arrive in Granada in the 20th century has been Moroccan immigrants. As with other Spanish cities, Granada’s Moroccon population reflects the ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic diversity of Morocco (cf. García Sanchez 2010). Most of my research participants were from northern Morocco and came to Spain as seasonal labor migrants working in agriculture and construction and as domestic workers, university students, and small-business owners. Many were women emigrating to reunite with husbands or on their own. Some were the first and only members of their families to emigrate, hoping to send remittances to extended families in Morocco. Others had family networks spread across North Africa and Mediterranean Europe. The majority resided in Spain with legal residence, but a significant minority experienced undocumented status at some point during my fieldwork. Despite the historical prevalence of Sufism in Morocco, my Moroccan interlocutors were far less likely than converts to identify as Sufi or to participate in activities such as teaching about Islam or attending religious classes or discussions of Islamic texts.

The “non-Muslim” majority receiving Granada’s new Muslim residents is equally heterogeneous and includes devout and nonpracticing Catholics, staunchly secular people, wealthy business and landowners, middle-class Andalusians, the unemployed, Roma, European expatriates, and migrants from Latin America and elsewhere, all of whom exhibit varied attitudes toward Islam and multiculturalism, some of which I describe below. My Muslim research participants occasionally recognized this heterogeneity in their complex and contextual identifications with or against various non-Muslims. For instance, many of my Muslim interlocutors saw Catholicism as enormously influential in shaping Andalusian public life. Many resented this, complaining about Catholic triumphalism, especially during public religious events like Andalusia’s famous Holy Week processions, which a Moroccan Arabic teacher described to me as “celebrating the Inquisition.”

Indeed, the role of the Catholic Church in public life is hotly debated in Spain, and some of my nonreligious research participants worried that Spain would never be secular enough to be fully European, not just because of the growing Muslim community but also because of Spain’s history of national Catholicism and public religious display. These anxieties mirror longstanding scholarly depictions of Spain as outside of Europe because of pathological religious fervor and supposed Catholic obsession with penitence and pain (e.g., Mitchell 1990). Antagonisms between devout Catholics and secularists also contributed to Muslims’ occasional sense of affinity with, rather than against, Catholics. During moments of highly publicized secular critiques of religion, as when an atheist organization ran ads on the sides of buses denouncing belief in God, some of my Muslim research participants were prompted to consider Catholics as allies in the defense of religiosity. Andalusian conversations about multiculturalism must be understood, then, not as a case of...
Islam’s interaction with a singular, secular mainstream but, rather, in terms of complex triangulations between heterogeneous secular, Catholic, and Muslim actors. In discussions about representing Islam, though, my Muslim interlocutors frequently spoke of non-Muslims as a generic mass of inquisitive outsiders, imagined as ignorant and fearful of Islam. My use of the term non-Muslim in this article, then, does not reflect the existence of such a unified category but, rather, my Muslim interlocutors’ anxieties about engaging the city’s non-Muslim social majority as an audience for Islam.

HISTORICAL AMBIVALENCE IN SPAIN’S “MUSLIM CITY”

In Granada, new Muslim residents’ efforts to navigate relationships with non-Muslims and with one another take place in a context of widespread anxiety and ambivalence about Spain’s growing Muslim minority. Debate about Islam in Spain is sometimes cast as a new phenomenon stemming from the transition to democracy and ensuing transformation from a country of emigrants to a destination for immigrants, of them Muslim (Cornelius 2004; De Lucas and Torres 2002). Yet how to grapple with the legacy of Spain’s 800-year Moorish period is actually one of the oldest questions of Spanish national (and Andalusian regional) historiography and politics (Aidi 2006; Beckwith 2000; Doubleday and Colman 2008; Menocal 2002; Soifer; see also the influential debate between Castro 1977 and Sánchez-Albornoz 1976). As the longest-held Muslim territory of Moorish Spain (al-Andalus), the region of Andalusia and the city of Granada have long symbolized “Arab Spain.” As a result, debates about the city’s Muslim minority today are refracted against “stubbornly persistent conjurings of the Muslim past in local debates over Granada’s civic identity from the seventeenth century to the present” (Coleman 2008:164).

In fact, many Granadinos exhibit what Engseng Ho has termed the “cultural schizophrenia” (2006:xxi) of societies with long histories of population mobility and entanglements with outsiders—they both celebrate and rue their region’s Muslim history, alternating between inclusionary and exclusionary discourses about Islam in Granada today. On the one hand, many in Granada feel compelled to purposefully include Muslims—both Muslim people and ideas about Muslim identity and heritage. The reasons for this active engagement with Andalusia’s Moorish roots range from the local economy’s dependence on Arab- and Muslim-themed tourism to demands for regional political autonomy that require demonstrations of historical and cultural difference from Castilian Spain to the predominance of proudfull regional-identity narratives based on notions of Muslim heritage as the genesis of all things Andalusian, particularly positively valued things (Dietz 2004). Examples I heard referenced tended to be of an aesthetic, sensory nature: the Moorish legacy in art, architecture, food, music, and even social characteristics attributed to the “persona” of Granada, such as a passionate constitution and a unique ability to tolerate difference. The latter is summed up in what many Granadinos call convivencia, a reference to the supposed (although much-debated) harmony among Jews, Muslims, and Christians in medieval Granada, today asserted as a basis for modern tolerance of minorities. When I asked about the Muslim minority today, many Granadinos simply replied that the city is unequivocally antiracist. When I asked for examples, speakers often eluded the present by citing the past as an enduring model of multiculturalism, in exclamations such as that offered by Marta, a young Granadina volunteer in an immigrant social-services agency. Marta repeatedly told me that Granada had a unique capacity and responsibility for inclusion of Muslims. When I asked her to elaborate on this in an interview, she declined to point out particular political or social institutions or movements in the city today and, instead, exclaimed, “Why, this is the city where Muslims, Jews, and Christians all lived together!”

On the other hand, a longstanding fear of and racism toward Muslims, known by their epithet moros (from the historical word for Moors), has been foundational to the construction of modern Spain (Martin Muñoz 2003). Since the transition to democracy, Spaniards, including Andalusians, have focused on demonstrating the nation’s emergence from the isolation of the fascist years, establishing Spain as fully modern and European (Collier 1997; Maddox 2004). For some, a Muslim minority threatens this project, as the specter of an “Islamic influence” has figured prominently in historical narratives that place Spain, particularly Andalusia, outside of Europe (DeGuzmán 2005). Ideas about immigration and religious minorities are thus partially shaped by pan-European notions of secularism as definitive of Western modernity. However, dominant modes of negatively imagining Muslims are more strongly rooted in the local historical narrative of dangerous, invading immigrant “moros,” conflated with medieval Moors (Flesler 2008). This historically anchored anxiety about Islam tempers inclinations to celebrate Andalusia’s regional Muslim heritage or to welcome new Muslim residents. Muslims, especially Moroccan immigrants, are routinely ranked lowest in opinion polls about attitudes toward minorities (behind Roma and other migrant groups), and anti-“moro” sentiment has only increased since the 2004 train bombings, attributed to Al Qaida (Zapata-Barrero 2006). In short, Muslim history—a history that is very much alive but in ambiguous and contradictory ways—strongly informs Granada’s unfolding politics of multiculturalism.

Not only do these twin, historically rooted Islamophobic and Islamophilic discourses intermingle in Granada, but each of these tendencies also differentially enables (or impedes) the possibilities for social inclusion for different groups of Muslims. Converts and immigrants are not uniformly discriminated against by anti-Muslim sectors nor are they able to harness celebratory discourses about Islam to protect and empower their communities in equal measure. For instance, Moroccans are more readily slotted into the dangerous “moro” category than converts. Moroccans are more visible
as racial, religious, and national outsiders. Their physical appearance, accented Spanish, and structural marginalization in the labor market all mark them in more permanent and publicly inescapable ways. Moroccans are also stigmatized as immigrants, the fact of mobility itself constructed as a marker of otherness and a priori marginality (Suárez Navaz 2004; cf. Lemon 2000). Immigrants are at once more vulnerable to housing and labor discrimination and acts of hostility or violence, and less able to access local networks of support, police, or legal aid in response to these problems. Paul Silverstein argues that racialization, defined as “the processes through which any diacritic of social personhood—including class, ethnicity, generation, kinship/affinity, and positions within fields of power—comes to be essentialized, naturalized, and/or biologized,” has become “an inescapable social fact” for Muslim migrants in Europe (2005:365). In Granada, issues of class difference, alienness, and historical memory of the Moors conspire to “racialize” Muslim immigrants, not through any universal racial categories but, rather, in terms of locally particular understandings of difference.

In contrast, my convert interlocutors were far less likely to experience financial hardship, housing shortages, or legal problems as a result of discrimination. I found that when stereotypes about converts did arise among my non-Muslim interlocutors, they often portrayed converts as sinister traitors or gullible fools, duped into a new-age cult. Without the social markers that allow easy identification of immigrant Muslims, converts may be envisioned by some Europeans as a kind of “sleeper cell” that can plot Muslim takeover all the more easily (Ozyurek 2009). Yet in practice, this ability to pass unnoticed allows many converts in Granada to avoid being recognized as Muslims on a daily basis. Most convert men are virtually undetectable as Muslims in routine public interactions, and the vast majority of convert women with whom I worked wore a style of headscarf that resembles trendy scarves worn by “hippies” rather than obviously Muslim garments.

Converts in Granada have also been more able to situate themselves within romantic narratives about medieval Islamic civilization’s lasting contributions to Spain. Today, a central manifestation of this celebratory remembrance of al-Andalus is Granada’s thriving Arab- and Muslim-themed tourism industry. Convert Muslims have visibly dominated the touristic rehabilitation of the city’s Moorish-built Albayzin quarter over the last decade (Rosón Lorente 2008). The neighborhood employs Moroccan men, and a few women, as salespeople, but the majority of Moroccan employees I interviewed in the neighborhood worked for convert or non-Muslim employers. In contrast, the converts I interviewed in the area owned their own businesses. The uphill section of this fashionable neighborhood is home to many convert families, some of whom also live in the city center. My Moroccan research participants overwhelmingly lived and worked in geographically and socially peripheral zones of the city. Converts and immigrants thus experience starkly different placement within competing, historically rooted imaginaries of Islam, as well as different locations in Spain’s racial hierarchy and legal system, labor, and housing markets.

**REPRESENTATIONAL IMPERATIVES AND PRACTICES**

In this context of regional ambivalence about Islam, how did converts and immigrants go about trying to represent Islam? Why did they spend so much time thinking and talking about representation with me in the first place? My Muslim interlocutors articulated their keen interest in representation in relation to a number of factors. First, they were highly aware of the growing visibility of Islam in national media and political discourse. Many complained about “the media,” sensing that the daily barrage of images of clandestine migration from Morocco (often of capsized boats and drowned or rescued migrants) in national news reinforced stereotypes of Muslims as a foreign threat. Others focused on sensationalist news coverage of Islamic terrorism. One Moroccan woman told me as we sat in her living room, a TV news program buzzing in the background, “I can kind of see how people are racist. I’m not saying they’re right—it’s wrong—but it’s what they see on TV, in the media, that’s all they hear about us.” This woman was commenting on an increasingly hyperbolic tone in public discourse about Islam. For example, when Muslim groups demanded an apology after an anti-Islamic speech by Pope Benedict the XVI in 2006, a former Spanish president and leader of Spain’s conservative party, Jose María Aznar, countered that the Pope need not apologize because “No Muslim has ever apologized to me for conquering Spain and being here for eight centuries. The West didn’t attack Islam, they attacked us” (Agencias 2006). Many Muslims spoke to me about this and other highly publicized political commentary about Islam as examples of the government’s hostility toward them.

My Muslim interlocutors were often unaware or skeptical of state-level Muslim associations’ abilities to counter this perceived anti-Islamic stance. The state, patterning its efforts to engage with Muslims on relations with the Catholic Church, has “demanded a single interlocutor” with which to interact on behalf of all Muslims (Diez De Velasco 2010:247). In response, since the 1980s a few Muslim associations, often led by converts hoping to serve as “brokers” between “Islam” and “the West” (Leman et al. 2010), have emerged to jockey for primacy as liaisons with the state. But these associations are largely unsupported by Muslims in Spain, who consider them undemocratic and utterly divorced from the lives of Spain’s Muslim residents (Arigita 2006).

Muslims’ sense that they themselves bore responsibility for representing Islam stemmed from their appraisal of these national issues, from Granada’s particular union of the Islamophilic and Islamophobic discourses described above, and from the general saturation of the city with Muslim- and Arab-related imagery, architecture, and even regional Spanish colloquialisms like, “I shit on the Moors!”
As a result, many considered active work to improve public opinion of Islam a personal and communal duty. Two brief examples—the construction of converts’ public-oriented mosque and a Moroccan woman’s experience of being called on by a stranger to answer for Islam—are instructive. They demonstrate both how Muslims in Granada arrived at a strong imperative to represent Islam and the uneven ways this imperative arose for different Muslims.

The Mezquita Mayor de Granada (The Grand Mosque of Granada), a beautiful, whitewashed mosque high in the hills of the Albayzín neighborhood, opened in 2003 and enjoys a stunning view of the Alhambra—for many the culmination of Moorish architecture in Spain. Despite financing from Sharjah and a Moroccan Imam, the foundation leaders and the majority of congregants are converts. The Mezquita Mayor is the most publicly recognized mosque in Granada and the one that non-Muslims are most likely to encounter, given its privileged location. The general public can meander through the gardens, take organized tours, purchase souvenirs, peruse literature about Islam, or take Arabic courses. Occasionally, convert women sell baked goods outside.

This representational work results from a combination of converts’ own imperatives for openness and those imposed by local skeptics about Islam during the roughly 20-year struggle to build the mosque (Rosón Lorente 2008). Many of my convert interlocutors, especially members of the Murabitun community, felt strongly about the Islamic concept of dawa, which they understood primarily as the spreading of Islam to new converts. They aimed to create a welcoming and informative environment at the mosque to accomplish this. Converts’ theologically motivated outreach was conditioned by their concerns with Islam’s negative public image. This was clear when a Spanish convert friend startled me one day after the Friday khutbah (sermon) by turning to me to say, “See, Mikaela, it’s not like what you might think. You might think in the mosque they talk about terrorism, or who knows what, you know, fanatical stuff. But, see? It’s just about, you know, ‘Be virtuous!’ and nothing more.”

Her reflexive defensiveness was also informed by efforts from local non-Muslims to prevent the construction of a mosque in the city’s treasured Albayzin. Many converts bitterly recounted the long struggle to obtain final permission for the mosque. The mosque foundation’s leaders, among other compromises, promised to keep the mosque open to tourists and the local public for part of each day. The prolonged resistance to the mosque certainly indicates a level of local trepidation about converts. Yet their ultimate success in opening the mosque in Granada’s prized tourism neighborhood also reflects their greater ability to satisfy local demands for certain kinds of openness and self-representation.

Muslim immigrants also experienced a strong imperative to constantly display, explain, and otherwise represent Islam (and immigration). Yet they came to their preoccupation with representation differently. Without the theological impetus to spread Islam or the institutionalized means of representation that were both forced on and sought by converts at the Mezquita Mayor, many Moroccans found the responsibility to represent Muslimness thrust on them in public settings. Such encounters were persistent, often gendered, anxiety-producing events. Hana, an Arab woman from the Gulf region who had lived in Spain for nearly twenty years when I met her, still feared these kinds of situations in public, explaining that they had increased since she began wearing a headscarf five years ago. One afternoon, following a public talk about Israel, Hana told me, a woman near her in the audience “took advantage of the fact that I’m a Muslim to ask me about Islam. She asked me if it was true that in the Koran, it says a man is allowed to hit a woman.” Hana recalled that she had hesitated before saying that as far as she knew, the Koran did indeed give men this permission, but that one must also take into account the various interpretations of the Koran and the fact that such violence is not necessarily practiced just because it is textually permitted. Hana agonized at length about her response. Had it been accurate? Had she made herself or her religion look bad? While she appreciated the Spanish woman’s desire to learn about Islam, Hana found it vexing that she had asked her to explain Islam’s position on violence toward women because she was not a religious scholar and was not sure of her own position on the issue.

Hana’s experience illustrates how strangers hold Muslim immigrants responsible to account for a wide variety of questions related (or thought to be related) to Islam, regardless of their relevance to the original reason for a given encounter. Her story was not an isolated case but, rather, was one of many such stories told to me by Muslim, usually migrant women who had been abruptly approached in offices, stores, or on buses or sidewalks by strangers with (occasionally violent) commentary about their headscarves. Such calls to representation are clearly gendered. Headscarves have become such a strong signifier of Muslim difference that some non-Muslims may feel comfortable asking women in headscarves to explain and defend all manner of topics about which they are curious. Furthermore, Spain increasingly resembles the rest of Europe in that calls for gender equality and denunciations of Islam, especially practices like veiling, are becoming nearly synonymous (Auslander 2000; Bowen 2006; Scott 2007). In Granada, Muslim immigrant women are approached because of their physical visibility and interrogated because of their supposedly subordinate status in Islam, creating a constant source of stress surrounding public spaces. I turn now to a discussion of how the divergent ways representational imperatives arose for convert and immigrant Muslims engendered distinct practices of representation.

**MOSQUE MEDIATION**

My convert interlocutors’ representational efforts revolved around their mosque and reflected attempts to reconcile their competing desires for positive publicity, on the one hand, and for privacy, on the other hand. My encounter with a convert named Muna exemplifies this tension. I met
Muna, one of the first times I attended a lunch at the Islamic Studies Center, adjacent to the Mezquita Mayor. As I entered the women’s hall, the floor dotted with ornate rugs and communal bowls of couscous, a convert named Belén steered me away from Muna, saying, “Uh-oh, we don’t want to sit by her.” But when she noticed Muna glaring at us, Belén went over to her and soon returned, flustered, whispering that Muna was angry I had been brought to the mosque. According to Belén, Muna had admonished her for bringing an American outsider to the mosque “to criticize us!” A friend overheard and said wryly, “Muna is fanatical and should be ignored.” This prompted a discussion among the women eating with us, who took turns condemning Muna’s inhospitality and extolling “moderation.”

Muna and the women who sat with me that day took opposing approaches to dealing with an outsider. Muna reacted with anger and an attempt to avoid visibility, while the other women were performatively welcoming. Despite the contrast, these reactions reflected a shared hypervigilance of outsiders’ encounters with their community and the Mezquita Mayor’s balancing act between public outreach efforts and protecting private space for Muslim worship and sociality. The steady stream of global tourists, the impositions of neighbors, and converts’ own missionizing motives brought a steady public that ranged in composition from Andalusian schoolchildren to dreadlocked hippies from Madrid to elderly German tourists.

Convert women I spoke to about the mosque’s publicity offered differing analyses of this predicament. Some were enthusiastic that the mosque’s public facet improved Muslims’ reputation in Granada. One of the center’s couscous cooks described how tourists stopped by the kitchen door to say that it smelled good, giving her an opportunity to be friendly and show that Muslims were “good people.” The work involved in welcoming newcomers was tiring for some women, but those women invested in dawa described a steady public that ranged in composition from Andalusian schoolchildren to dreadlocked hippies from Madrid to elderly German tourists.

See how well behaved and well dressed these children are? It’s not in the other association. The women there, from where the classes are located to how they dress to how those kids behave, you can tell they are poor people, really very poor. But in this class it’s different. Their fathers are not laborers and working-class people. The majority are doctors and wealthy people.

Shaima’s closest friends in Granada were the women from the “very poor” association; these were the women with whom she drank tea, reminisced about Morocco, and helped to raise one another’s children. She genuinely loved her friends. Yet she was equally determined that they not be the primary Muslim immigrants with whom I interacted, despite the fact that they vastly outnumbered the “wealthy Arabs” in her neighborhood. Shaima’s desire to disrupt class-based stereotypes of Muslim immigrants reflects both the internal diversity of Granada’s immigrant Muslims and the fact that concerns about class and ethnicity always crosscut efforts to represent Islam in Granada.

Among my research participants, Moroccan immigrants’ experiences of representation clearly differed significantly from those of converts. The next section addresses how these disparities relate to disagreements between and
among converts and immigrants about representation, religion, and minority politics. These tensions recall Michael Herzfeld’s definition of “cultural intimacy” as the anxieties of identity formation and representation that stem from group insiders’ “recognition of those aspects of cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but which nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality” (2005:3). For Muslims in Granada, the representational practices of fellow Muslims that were deemed embarrassing were vexing precisely because they did not provide an “assurance of common sociality.” Instead, they revealed the uncomfortable distances among Granada’s Muslims.

MOROCCAN AMBIVALENCE ABOUT CONVERTS

Among Moroccans, I encountered both celebration of conversion as a quasi-miracle and disparagement of converts as racist religious imposters. For some, the existence of European conversions to Islam signaled a potential for Muslims’ acceptance in Spain, and some Moroccans had positive encounters with converts. One young Moroccan woman who was the subject of a highly publicized headscarf affair recalled with gratitude how converts stepped in to offer her family their linguistic and social resources for handling the media. However, for many Moroccans, converts remained unknown, slightly suspicious entities. While they anticipated discrimination from Catholic or secular Spaniards, many Moroccans were surprised, and thus especially dismayed, to find tensions with converts. Those with negative views of converts often considered them racist and exclusionary.

Many Moroccans’ stories of the encounters that led them to such conclusions involved the converts’ mosque. Mohammed, a Moroccan in his early twenties, had come to Granada to study but found himself working to make ends meet. Sitting near the doorway of the Arab-themed tourism shop where he worked in the Alhambra, I asked Mohammed if he knew many convert Muslims. “Yes, actually I have a lot of contact with them,” he said, waving his arm toward the street, alluding to the close proximity of convert-owned shops. Mohammed said he had been pleasantly surprised to learn of the convert community on arriving in Spain. Then he frowned, whispering, “But the truth is, I don’t like most of them” and shared the following story.

One evening at dusk, Mohammed had gone up to the “convert mosque” with a female friend. They had heard it was an impressive building and wanted to check it out. When they arrived, some people were already inside the mosque for the evening prayer, but many were milling about on the patio, talking, laughing, and enjoying the view of the Alhambra. The gate was shut. When Mohammed waved the man he referred to as a “guard” over to open it, this man refused. Wondering how the “guard” could confuse them with tourists (particularly because his friend wore a headscarf), Mohammed explained, “We’re Muslims, and we want to see the mosque.” The convert man replied that visiting hours were over, that they could come in to pray if they wanted to but not just to see the patio. This angered Mohammed because he could see that many converts were chatting on the patio rather than inside praying. Recalling this, Mohammed shouted, “They wouldn’t let me in! To a mosque! Which to me, as a Muslim, is a sacred place!” Throwing his hands in the air and raising his eyebrows with incredulity, he continued, “I felt rejected, and by other Muslims!” Mohammed felt certain that he was denied entry because he was a Moroccan and, thus, not considered part of the mosque community.

Mohammed’s incensed reaction to being excluded from the Mezquita Mayor was echoed in many other Moroccans’ complaints about the mosque and about converts’ religious and representational practices more broadly. These complaints reflected Moroccans’ concerns about Muslim representation, as well as deeply felt aesthetic, religious, and political misgivings about converts. For instance, some Moroccans felt converts practiced an overly “strict” Islam that reflected a failure to be authentically Muslim. For Mohammed, converts’ inability to recognize that all Muslims ought to be welcome at a mosque was proof of their lack of fluency in both Islamic theology and social norms. Mohammed’s friend Yousef scoffed at orthodoxy as something only those new to Islam, or insecure in their religiosity, would emphasize. He combined concerns about religious practice and representation, worrying that converts’ “overly strict” observance gave the impression that Muslims in Spain were “extremists, like we’re all Wahabis or something.”

If sometimes united in their shared frustration with converts, Moroccans’ varied criticisms were motivated by multiple, often-opposing concerns, revealing the diversity of this community. In contrast to Mohammed’s and Yousef’s complaints of convert strictness, some pious Moroccans articulated precisely the opposite critique of converts, instead linking suspicions about converts’ representational agenda with their own concerns about proper pious comportment. They worried that converts’ interest in spreading Islam led them to downplay the Islamic pillars and engage in unorthodox practices, sacrificing piety to appeal to Catholic or secular sensibilities. A young Moroccan woman named Rana criticized convert women at the Mezquita Mayor along these lines. Her discussion illustrates how complex and politicized grievances about representation and religiosity become entangled:

> They have different practices, ones that make you feel uncomfortable, like they wear makeup, and strong perfume, and a different kind of headscarf. You just don’t feel at ease praying there. The women are too focused on appearances, and not on the prayer. . . . It’s an adaptation of Islam to the West. They wear those kinds of headscarves to avoid scaring people so much.

Rana explained that although she preferred the architecture of the converts’ mosque, she no longer prayed there because she felt distracted by convert women’s choices regarding modesty.

In addition to competing religious sensibilities and concerns about representation, critiques of converts were often profoundly political. My Moroccan interlocutors’ commentaries reveal discontent with converts’ perceived role in
cementing a politics of multiculturalism that enshrined inequalities among Granada’s Muslims. Rana, for instance, could not share convert women’s efforts to “avoid scaring people so much,” in part because convert-style headscarves violated her convictions regarding proper embodiment of Islamic womanhood and in part because Moroccan women’s more rigid racialization denied them converts’ ability to flexibly identify as both Muslim and Spanish or European. Those like Yousef, who thought converts portrayed Muslims as “all Wahabis or something,” feared the potential of perceived convert extremism to reverberate in discrimination toward immigrant Muslims. Moroccans’ criticisms of converts thus clearly focused on representation but were imbued with religious and political preoccupations as well.

CONVERT AMBIVALENCE ABOUT MOROCCANS

Many convert Muslims in Granada created their new Muslim identities in relation to their ideas of Moroccanness in a way that both placed Moroccans on a pedestal as “authentically Muslim” and disparaged Moroccans as racial or ethnic others who mistook “culture” and “tradition” for “real Islam.” I first visited Belén’s apartment shortly after she converted. She proudly showed me her Moroccan tea set and the cushions she had arranged to emulate a Middle Eastern sitting room, saying, “Now that I’m Muslim, and living with an Arab man as his wife, I always try to have snacks around and make tea whenever anyone comes over because it’s very important to Arabs and Muslims to be hospitable.” I encountered similar comments and practices even among convert women who had no social contact with Moroccan immigrants. Purchasing Moroccan-style clothing and cooking Moroccan foods allowed women to fashion new Muslim selves in tangible ways. Such practices also index the extent to which, in Granada, imaginaries of Islam are intrinsically bound up in ideas about Morocco, with Moroccans and Morocco-associated objects implicitly recognized as models for constructing authentic Muslim lives.

Yet other convert women explicitly rejected these practices. As one woman put it, “dressing up as Arabs” was counterproductive to the goals of establishing a European Islam and making Islam accepted in Granada. These women sometimes politely, sometimes bluntly, distanced themselves from Moroccans. In the words of Farida, a Granadina convert:

A lot of people confuse me with Moroccans, and once they think I’m a Moroccan, then they think, “Oh, stupid!” They think I can barely read and write, and this really bothers me. Because I mean, the fact that I wear a headscarf doesn’t have anything to do with being Moroccan, and besides, the Moroccans, I mean, maybe they’re a little lacking in the intellect department but they’re still people, and they work really hard.

Although intended as an antiessentialist argument about religion, and perhaps to defend Moroccans, Farida’s words also clearly reflect her assumptions about Moroccans’ racial alterity.

This desire to emphasize that being Muslim need not be linked to a particular ethnicity or nationality was further apparent in many converts’ insistence that they practiced a “pure” Islam, untainted by “culture,” “tradition,” or “backwardness.” These were terms many converts used to describe Islam as practiced by Moroccans and other non-European Muslims. A British expatriate explained to me that in contrast to immigrant-dominated Muslim communities, “We like it here because it’s not culture or tradition, it’s the purest Islam.” Her friend, a fellow middle-aged convert, had also moved to Granada to join the convert movement. She elaborated on what was special about having a community of European-born Muslims in Granada, saying, “We have the same culture . . . so this is my place.” Such assertions, while often purportedly about religious practice, ultimately revealed converts’ racial, class, and cultural anxieties about their co-religionists (cf. Ozyurek 2010).

When my convert interlocutors paired accusations of immigrants’ cultural misunderstandings of Islam with explicit claims of European ownership over religious purity, authenticity, and authority, I was struck by an apparent contradiction. How could converts, like the two women quoted above, both claim a bond based on their specific European cultural identities and claim that their brand of Islam was pure, unmoored to any particular culture or historical corruptions? By mapping cultural contamination onto Muslim immigrants and claiming culture-free Islam as their own, they subtly constructed “European” as an unmarked social category, from which difference was understood as deviance. Thus, through their discourse of culture-free Islam, converts made an argument not just about religious practice or authority but also about racial and cultural value.

Such discursive sifting of “true” or “pure” Islamic beliefs and practices from culturally based “traditions” is not unique to Granada’s converts. Similar distinctions are common to much of the heterogeneous yet globally reaching Islamic Revival, in which Muslims involved in piety and reformist movements increasingly participate in the active study of Islamic texts and theological debates, often in search of the “truest” forms of Islam (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). My convert interlocutors’ distinction between “pure” Islam and “tradition” particularly recalls the process Lara Deeb called “authentication” among pious Lebanese Shi’i women (2006) because of their emphasis on practicing both “true” Islam and “cultural authenticity.” Religion–culture distinctions have also characterized the arguments of “second-generation” Muslims born to immigrant parents in Europe and the United States, who seek to purify Islamic practice from the traditions of older generations and countries of origin from which they may feel disconnected (Bowen 2010; e.g., Ramadan 2004).

What is unique and somewhat startling among Granada’s converts is the exceptional degree to which this distinction maps onto and bolsters ideologies about the racial, ethnic, and gendered difference of Muslim immigrants. These narratives of purity distance converts from immigrant
Muslims, not only by relegating the latter’s practices to a realm of impurity but also through a subtly shifting use of temporality. Islamic reformists’ disavowals of “tradition” often imply a strong break with the past. The authenticating discourse of Deeb’s interlocutors, for instance, entailed “people’s sense of a clear-cut difference between ‘now’ and ‘then’” (2006:22) that was intimately connected to comparing “modern” versus “backward” or “traditional” Islamic practice. In contrast, my convert interlocutors articulated no such rupture. Instead, they positioned their Islam as historical or as a continuation of Granada’s medieval Muslim past. This small difference had significant consequences, as it allowed converts to claim religious authority and local belonging in ways that immigrants could not.

Converts staked their religious authority in the claim that they had no cultural baggage in need of abjuration. New to Islam, they had a clean slate and direct access to religious authenticity. The implication was decidedly political, as this claim allowed converts to sidestep criticisms of Islam as an unmodern, even terrorist religion, attributing such problems to other Muslims’ “ethnic” Islam. Their assertions also resonated, then, with liberal modern discourses about Islamic fundamentalism, in which an imagined “culture–religion” dichotomy has permeated attempts to discern good or better “kinds” of Islam or Muslims that may be more compatible with Western values (Shryock 2004, 2010). Yet consonant with their emphasis on a European identity, my convert interlocutors also consistently emphasized their conversion as a return to the religion and culture of al-Andalus. These conflicting impulses—claiming a fresh, ahistorical Islam and an historically rooted, Spanish Islam—were actually quite consistent with more general Granadino ambivalence about Muslims in Andalusia and Spain; these claims appealed both to local fears of and nostalgia about Islam.

Furthermore, it is significant that some converts in Granada, particularly older members of the Murabitun community, eschewed what they called “European ideals” but nevertheless articulated their differentiation from migrants through precisely a language of Europeaneness. A conversation I had with Widad, an elderly convert woman in Granada, illustrates how converts often disassociated themselves from immigrants to situate their own Islamic practice within liberal European social norms that they themselves also found wanting. Over two years, I had many conversations with Widad and her friends in which they offered vociferous critiques of “European values.” Widad advocated withdrawal from the global capitalist economy and critiqued what she felt was a Spanish obsession with individual freedoms at the expense of social and communal values.

Yet in the context of discussing Muslim immigration, Widad slipped easily from asserting that it is possible to be both Spanish and Muslim to asserting that, in fact, only Spanish and European Muslims lay claim to Muslim authenticity, to finally implying European cultural superiority, here through the idiom of gender equality. Over tea in her restored historic home in the Albayzin, Widad broached with me one day the issue of tensions with Moroccans, charging that, unlike converts, Moroccans practiced “tradition” and “not Islam.” Using these comments as a springboard for a gendered critique of Moroccan and Arab Islam, she said that she aimed to emulate the first Muslim women, who were dynamic and emancipated.

In contrast, she lamented that today “the Wahabis want to put the women in the black sack. I wouldn’t want to live in Saudi Arabia or any of these countries where the women are treated that way. I’m, we’re, you know, we are Europeans; we’re not Moroccan or Tunisian. You know, we’re not Arabs!” Widad’s decision to frame her discussion of European Islam versus Moroccan or Arab Islam in terms of gender is just one example of how converts asserted a cultural superiority over immigrants. She established a strong distinction between, on the one hand, European converts, pure or real Islam, and cultural superiority (as evidenced by gender equality) and, on the other hand, Moroccan or Arab-born Muslims, tradition, culture, “impure” Islam, and cultural inferiority (as evidenced by gender inequality). This discourse of gender equality as a cornerstone of European identity is one that is often used to disparage Widad’s own religion, and it has become central to dominant European liberal discourses of modernity with which she herself is uncomfortable. Her decision to employ this widely circulating discourse of gender equality to distance herself from migrant and Arab Muslims is thus especially striking. It demonstrates that to understand forces like “Islamophobia,” scholars need to recognize and research how they pervade Muslims’ own narratives of self and other (cf. Shryock 2010).

**CONCLUSION**

Southern Spain, where historically rooted fear and hatred of Muslims coexists with equally persistent openness to and interest in Islam, offers an important window into questions surrounding the fate of Muslims in Europe. In Granada, both apprehension and excitement about Islam contribute to Muslims’ visibility, and many Muslims feel compelled to represent themselves and their religion. Yet European converts’ and immigrant Muslims’ unique experiences of the burdens of minority representation create pervasive tensions that map onto—and seem to be reinscribing—racial and cultural hierarchies in Spain. Even inclusive gestures such as the celebration of Granada’s Moorish past and Europeans’ conversions to Islam are structured and contained by normative ideas about race, religion, gender, and migratory mobility and thus entail their own limitations and exclusions. In particular, converts’ means of distancing themselves from migrants demonstrate how widely circulating ideas of Europe as an unmarked, non-Muslim space, and Islam as racially marked and foreign, exert formidable power over Muslims’ own forms of self-identification and representational politics, limiting the degree to which even European conversion movements can truly produce space for Muslim difference in Europe. It is not sufficient, then, analytically or politically, to point to Spain as a further example of “European Islamophobia” or as an antidote to this specter.
Both perspectives flatten the complexity of multicultural politics. To simply decry Spain as racist or celebrate its “convivencia” presupposes a degree of religious uniformity, or even solidarity, among Spain’s Muslims, a move that occludes the inequalities that both phobic and philic discourses about Islam produce within the Muslim “community.”

The representational politics among Muslim converts and immigrants discussed in this article have become apparent by placing religious conversion and immigration into the same analytic frame and by joining the anthropologies of Islam and of Europe. These combinations suggest the value of merging analytical ventures often conceptualized as distinct and of doing the same with seemingly disparate social categories. Andalusia’s Islamophilic tendencies and conversion movement suggest far more coincidence between the categories “European” and “Muslim” than we may usually assume. At the same time, Andalusians’ unique preoccupation with their Muslim history when compared to other Europeans, and the pervasive tensions between Granada’s Muslim converts and immigrants, suggests far less coincidence of political identifications and subjectivities within such categories.

The tensions that crosscut Granada’s Muslim “communities” indicate the need to keep a scholarly lens trained on the internal dynamics of minorities and marginalized communities. This includes the sometimes-surprising multiplicity of political identifications and social practices that may ensue from one apparently stable minority subject position. Beyond promoting a common anthropological interest in complicating understandings of seemingly monolithic identity categories, such a focus on multiplicity within minority populations should be important to those concerned with the interplay of social inclusion and exclusion and the means by which both occur. For in Granada, and surely in other zones of encounter, it is precisely these internal dynamics that make the political identifications, representational strategies, and other social practices of some members of minorities more flexible or successful, and of others, more fixed or circumscribed. Further study of the distinct means by which different members of minorities are enshrined as minority subjects by both exclusionary and welcoming voices, and the diversity of social possibilities and practices produced by unevenly enacted multiculturalisms, should be helpful for any context where hosts and guests, mobility and immobility, majority and minority meet.

Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar  Postdoctoral Associate and Lecturer, Council on Middle East Studies and Department of Anthropology, Yale University; mikaela.rogozen-soltar@yale.edu

NOTES

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1. This article draws from recorded interviews, informal conversations, and observations at research sites across Granada, including two Muslim women’s associations (one convert-run and one Moroccan association), several mosques, two human rights and migrant rights NGOs where I volunteered and conducted research, and Muslim-run businesses in the tourist neighborhood that I visited almost daily. Over two years, I was able to interview over 150 individuals and developed relationships with primary participants who I saw on a weekly basis. To protect my research participants’ anonymity, particularly that of undocumented migrants, I do not name most organizations and most names are pseudonyms. Among Muslim immigrants and Catholic and secular Spaniards, I worked with both men and women. Among converts, my interlocutors were mostly women, following their understandings of appropriatedness.

2. For research on women’s conversions to Islam in other contexts, see van Niewkerk 2006 and Ahmad 2010.

3. Debates surrounding Granada’s Toma festival typify these competing discourses (García Castaño 2000) but are outside the scope of this article.

4. Convivencia refers to Spain’s national history of religious pluralism but also has regionally particular valences. Granadinos consistently claimed convivencia as their own because Granada was the last Muslim kingdom of Spain. See Erickson (2011) for Catalanian uses of convivencia.

5. My Moroccan women interlocutors’ hijabs usually covered their hair, upper forehead, ears, and neck with two layers of close-fitting material. Most convert women wore a loosely wrapped, turban-shaped scarf that covered most of their hair, sometimes leaving the forehead, front hairline, ears, and neck uncovered. This style may be (although certainly is not always) confused by passersby with a bohemian fashion choice.

6. For a glimpse of this mosque’s self-presentation, including interviews and media appearances by the director, see the official website: www mezquitadegranada.com.

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