

Article

We Have Come Back Home: The Spanish-Moroccan Community, Collective Memory, and Sacred Spaces in Contemporary Spain

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Abstract: This paper examines the role of Islamic sacred spaces in Spanish-Moroccan identity negotiations in contemporary Madrid, Spain. In doing so, I explore how these sacred sites produce diverse meanings and practices that resist the Spanish states hegemonic narratives of place. I argue that the multilayered resistance via the “memory” and “place” of these sacred sites ostensibly reconciles and situates Spanish-Moroccans within the larger Spanish imagined community. The paper will first discuss the trans-local experiences of the Spanish-Moroccan community and how their liminal state of being neither “here or there” necessitates an anchor (Muslim sacred spaces) to the new home context. I will then outline a brief historical narrative of the Muslim presence in Spain and then analyze the meanings attached to the sacrality of Islamic monuments and mosques to the Spanish-Moroccan community. Finally, the paper will explore how the historical memories and their discursive meanings attached to these sacred sites allow Spanish-Moroccans to produce counterhegemonic frameworks that challenge and reshape nationalistic spaces.

Keywords: collective memory; sacred places; mosque; monuments; Muslim; Spanish-Moroccans; migrants

1. Introduction

In contemporary Spain, memory is increasingly playing a dynamic role in how Spanish-Moroccan minorities are collectively responding to the formations of national identity construction and integration. In this respect, Spanish-Moroccan communities are challenging not only the “collective memories” of a hegemonic Catholic Spanish state with their presence but also the process of recreating and reconstructing what it means to be a “Spaniard” in contemporary Spain (Rogozen-Soltar 2012; Martin-Marquez 2014). The history of Islam and the Moors in the Spanish context allows Spanish-Moroccan identities to evolve through the permeable boundaries of inclusivity and exclusivity to reformulate the meanings that restructure and unify the larger Spanish imagined community around their presence. This is important because Muslim memories of Spain’s Islamic past situates and anchors the identity of Spanish-Moroccans towards an inclusive, albeit unequal, multicultural Spanish state (Rogozen-Soltar 2017, p. 3). The central frameworks that are currently shaping these contested memories are the sustained presence of Islamic sacred sites. These spaces include mosques, tombs, and old Islamic castles that become “fluid, transnational spaces, which are defined as both a social terrain that reflects migrants’ bi-culturality and a fragmented, diffused geographical reality” (Mendoza 2006, p. 539).

These sacred spaces facilitate their identity negotiations which allows the Spanish-Moroccan community to articulate agency in defining their presence and grandeur narratives in the nexus of reformulating a place and home in contemporary Spain (Rogozen-Soltar 2017). This negotiation

of place allows the “minorities in son of the soil ideology states to enter into a new polity which requires them to reterritorialize within a new a civic order, whose ideology of ethnic coherence and citizenship rights they are bound to disturb” (Appadurai 1997, pp. 56–57). The centrality of religion, memory, and identity politics in a Europe that is increasingly shifting right has forced the Muslim communities to develop identities that resist and subvert the dominant narratives about their presence (Rogozen-Soltar 2012; Martin-Marquez 2014). The Spanish sacred sites not only empower the Spanish-Moroccan community but also evoke diasporic consciousness (Finlay 2017) and “meanings assigned to the place” (Luz 2008, p. 103).

These meanings reinforce historically rooted memories that undergird the identity of Spanish-Moroccans as Spaniards and Muslims (Finlay 2017; Rogozen-Soltar 2017). In acknowledging the differentiation between poetic power and the politics of space (Robin and Strath 2003), this paper explores Muslim sacred sites in contemporary Spain. It mainly draws on the particular ways that Spanish-Moroccan memories are “claimed, owned, and operated,” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, p. 8) to legitimize and reconcile their identities to the Spanish national narrative. In the post 9–11 and 5–11 Madrid terrorist attacks, these sacred sites imaginatively rework their presence to manufacture new collectivities that are historically rooted to a perceived common past. To understand these collective remembrances and emerging discourses, the paper will first discuss the trans-local experiences of the Spanish-Moroccan community and how their liminal state of being neither “here nor there” necessitates an anchor (Muslim sacred spaces) to the new home context. The paper will outline a brief historical narrative of the Muslim presence in Spain and then analyze the meanings attached to the sacrality of mosques and monuments to the Spanish-Moroccan community. Ultimately, the paper explores how the historical memories and their discursive meanings attached to these sacred sites allow Spanish-Moroccans to produce counterhegemonic frameworks that challenge and reshape nationalistic spaces (Luz 2008). Finally, to capture and understand the textured identities of Spanish-Moroccans, I conducted in-depth interviews with 33 Spanish-Moroccan citizens in Madrid and utilized the participant observations of Moroccan majority neighborhoods and three neighborhood mosques in Madrid, Spain.

2. Trans-Locality, Immigration, and Sacred Spaces

The recent shift in transnational migration studies toward what Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) call the “third perspective” reveals how migrants are active agents in shaping both the homeland and the receiving countries in relation to culture, politics, and economics (Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Kivisto 2001; Levitt 2001). This encapsulates the notion that nationalism is not always defined strictly by territorial boundaries but also by different forms of loyalties that exist among variegated groups of people who experience identity politics differently than what is expected of the state. These sacred sites experientially frame and localize their identities while simultaneously superimposing them to larger global processes and scapes that move beyond the nation state (Bhabha 1994; Appadurai 1996).

Brickell and Datta (2004) suggest, “that localities need not necessarily be limited to the shared social relations of local histories, experiences, and relations but can connect to wider geographical histories and processes—in a way that articulates a ‘global ethnography of place’” (p. 3). Thus, in viewing my participants from within the paradigmatic lens of trans-locality, I was able to gain insight into the manifold ways their relationships with these sites are being produced and reproduced as a byproduct of both their Spanish and Moroccan experiences. Nevertheless, while studies that emphasize trans-local experiences tend to “ignore” the local, Kastoryano suggests that in no way has this led to the erosion of the local, the as it only facilitates change and redefinition of how states are shifting in order to adapt to both the reordering of society and the global system (Kastoryano 2002, p. 4). This double rootedness, Rogozen-Soltar argues, allowed the Muslim migrant community of Granada to “emphasize their Moorish ancestry, attachment to territory, and their ancestors’ role in creating Granada’s built landscape” (Rogozen-Soltar 2017, p. 103). The far-reaching projections of religious institutions and their accompanying identities, “help immigrants imagine their homelands in the diaspora and inscribe in

their memories worldviews into the physical landscape and built environment" (Vasquez 2005, p. 38). Beyond the historical landscapes, Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2009, p. 257) argue, the mobilization of religious identities is key to creating places of belonging (Levitt 2003, p. 851) in receiving contexts. They contend that new immigrants create religious structures and organizations and build sacred sites as a means to transform and reframe the receiving context. For my participants, these sacred sites helped "repair" and "regain" a "sense of identity continuity" (Milligan 2003, p. 381) anchoring their identities in a past that allows Spanish-Moroccans to articulate their identity and meaning in the future. Abdel Qadr describes this "identity continuity" when he visited the Islamic-Moorish sites in Toledo, Spain:

"I feel a deep sadness whenever I go to Toledo, and I try to go at least once a month to visit and also take my family out. It's a great sadness that Spain was once a great Arab country. While Spain was in light, . . . the whole of Europe was in darkness. When the Muslims were scientists and scholars, they can do anything. Now, we look to America for everything that we do. But, this is history and now is now, but going to these places reminds us of our past and who we were." Abdul Qadr (Interview 2011)

3. A Note on History

To understand how sacred spaces are impacting identity negotiations among the Spanish-Moroccan community, we must consider the history that has shaped the contemporary relationship between Spain and its Muslim minorities. This history which predates modernity and European colonialism not only set the foundation for European imperialism but also formulated the racial ideologies and ensuing hierarchies that enslaved millions in the Americas and around the world. In situating the contemporary experiences of Spanish-Moroccans in a larger historical context, it reveals how these sacred spaces, "shape the trajectory of historical experiences" (Al Maguer 1994, p. 3) and the particular ways they institutionalize these ideological processes in contemporary Spain. The collective remembrances surrounding these sites are critical to the contested memories employed by Spanish Catholics and Muslims.

Islamophobic ideological frameworks that have been imposed on the Spanish-Moroccan community have their origins in 13th and 14th century Spain, as the Reconquista of Spain from the Moors necessitated racial projects to construct a State that is exclusively Catholic and white (Harvey 2005; Flesler 2008). The anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish religious discourses reinforced racialized ideological frames to include only the Catholic faithful who had untainted, pure "Spanish" blood (Majid 2009). These policies were institutionalized with the downfall of every major city in Moorish Spain and would eventually justify the murderous inquisition campaigns of 1478 which forced the Jewish community to convert to Christianity, migrate to regional states, or be killed. These policies would later be applied to the Spanish Muslim populations beginning with the fall of the last Muslim kingdom of Granada in 1492 until the forced conversion and expulsion of all Muslims was accomplished in 1609 (Flesler 2008). As Martin-Marquez notes "the ceremony held every January 2nd in the Al Hambra Palace in Granada to mark the end of the Reconquest celebrated, paradoxically, the definitive absence of the Moors, not the legacy of their nine-centuries-long presence." (Martin-Marquez 2014, p. 16). One only has to attend the tens of festivals in contemporary Spain and in the former empire that emulate and celebrate the nostalgic memories of Moorish defeats that symbolically rid Spain of the "Muslim impurity" (Rogozen-Soltar 2007; Flesler 2008; Fuchs 2008).

The Muslim conquest and centuries-long presence in Moorish Spain is not only important in the construction of the Spanish identity but central in contemporary Muslim collective memory as it is often highlighted in Muslim intellectual discourses and Islamic movement frames (Majid 2009). Islamic Spain is considered by some to be the Muslim beacon and highlight of Muslim civilization in the modern Muslim world (Majid 2009). The foundation of Maliki Islamic law which governs many contemporary Muslim states including Morocco was developed in Islamic Spain, as were some of the great Islamic philosophers and scholars who are foundational to contemporary Islamic thought and

law. In fact, Spain's historical connection to Morocco was reflected in the 2011 Moroccan constitution which propagated, "the idea that modern Moroccan culture descends directly from al-Andalus" or Southern Spain (Calderwood 2018, p. 18). This Calderwood states allows Al-Andalus to be a "powerful tool for understanding social relations in Morocco and also for mapping Morocco's understanding of its place in the world" (Calderwood 2018, p. 18). As one of my participants Amin explained regarding the sacrality of Spain in Muslim historical consciousness, "Spain is in the blood of every Muslim, not just the Arab, but every Muslim" (Interview 2011). Amin's statement exemplifies the position of contemporary Muslim thinkers and movements that point to Spain and its sacred sites to reconstruct and reclaim the glories of the "Ummah" or the global Muslim community.

These sacred sites have had a dramatic impact on contemporary Spanish identity politics as they challenged the fixed boundaries around Spanish identity in the post-Franco era which acknowledged its Muslim past. The presence of these sites shapes the experiences of Spanish-Moroccan minorities in contemporary Spain as they are bounded to the political and social projects that emanate from them (Rogozen-Soltar 2017). This is best explained in Mohamed's statement referring to the importance of this history and the role of sacred sites in legitimizing their presence as Spaniards. Mohamed states, "Spain does not belong only to the Spanish . . . but the world, Muslim and non-Muslim, and even if Alejandro or Marco want to deny it, they can't because every day when they go to work or shopping, they see Morocco." (Interview 2011). Thus, when Mohamed claims the non-Muslim Spanish communities "experience Morocco" in Spain, he is reflecting on the similarities between the sacred landscapes in contemporary Spain and Morocco that were established by previous Muslim empires. The collective remembrances of the grandeur of the Moorish empire induced what many Muslims cite as the golden age of Islam (Menocal 2002). Alternatively, for the non-Muslim Spaniards, this historical moment represents a period that references "an embarrassing and tragic Muslim occupation" (Rogozen-Soltar 2017, p. 3). This history consequently produces multiple narratives surrounding Spanish-Moroccan identity and the memory of place and home (Flesler 2008).

4. Memory and Monuments

Studies on collective memory have traditionally focused on national contexts, whereas the shift towards the relationship between national and transnational memory is an important development in the field (Nelson and Margaret 2003). While visits to these sites are often characterized in the Spanish milieu as a touristic haven, for my participants these sites of memory also functioned as sacred pilgrimage spheres (Turner 1997). These spaces came into being as the Spanish-Moroccan community poured their "hopes, prayers, and aspirations" (Eade and Sallnow 1991, p.15) to ascribe and construct meaning to them and to their presence in Spain. Similar to how sites in the Holy Land associated with Jesus have become sacred and integral to the Christian faith community over time (Halbwachs 1992), the sites that were identified by my participants to be important to their identities are often ruined mosques, mosques turned into Churches, and old Moorish palaces. Halbwach's work articulates how a city like Jerusalem, full of historically significant sites of memory, real and unreal, have become important and embedded in Christian consciousness and identity:

"For the Christian world, Jerusalem was the holy city par excellence. But this image vastly differed from the actual city of the epoch, with which the Christians who lived there were familiar . . . Time was at work here as elsewhere to erase more and more traces of the past. But when the Christians living in Europe talked of Jerusalem, they had quite different mental representations: a supernatural city where the majesty of the Son of God had never ceased to radiate; an external city where what had been the framework and the support of the event told in the Gospels was expected to be miraculously preserved. It seems that they never doubted for an instant that the city would appear to them just as it had appeared in the past. What did they know of successive sieges that had left no stone unturned, of reconstructions, of changes in the direction of streets, in the situation and appearance of houses or districts? They knew very little of these matters." (Halbwachs 1992, pp. 230–31)

I asked my participants questions to explore how these sacred sites of memory and identity are providing the Spanish-Moroccan community with the necessary cultural and symbolic capital to construct and articulate their narratives. Every single participant in my study expressed that these sites maintained and enhanced an important role in linking and consolidating their capacity for memory to contemporary Spain (Kong 2010, p. 758). As Karim emphatically stated, “These [sacred sites] are everything for all of us. Aren’t you proud of this history when you see the Al Hambra? Aren’t you amazed at what we once were as Muslims? These things are important because they show our history in this land. This is where our grandfathers were and now; we are back.” (Interview 2011). When I pressed him about what he means by grandfathers he said, “our people, the Muslims.” The contested sacred spaces have become critical institutions in the construction of identity for Spanish-Moroccans as they legitimize their presence in Spain to the collective memory of a “glorious Islamic” past “that differentially enables the possibilities for social inclusion for different groups of Muslims” (Rogozen-Soltar 2012, p. 614). These processes largely draw on the intersection of the physical site along with the memories of the past to become the symbolic power that challenges the culture of marginality and the feelings of exclusion from Spanish society. Conversely, it strategically constructs an encounter with the national culture to legitimize their migration, life, and citizenship in contemporary Spain.

Halbwachs (1992) exposes the creation of this symbolic order as a result of the encounter described above (Karim) and shows how once the individual experiences the site of memory and its bounded sacredness; it shapes their emotions and orientations (Martin-Marquez 2014) as result of that site being in an “alien” environment. The individual actively participates in a process wherein there is a conscious attempt to reconstruct and reimagine a memory to the current sociopolitical and economic context. One of my participants Tariq emphatically stated, “Even the Spanish know that we belong here. I mean everybody from northern Morocco has ancestors that are from here. The Spanish recognize the Jews who were kicked out and even gave them citizenship, but we Muslims who were here and were also kicked out are not even mentioned in their books or the law.” (Interview 2011). Tariq was referring to the legislation which the Spanish government passed in 1992 and 2012, which allows Sephardic Jews who can prove Spanish identity to receive full citizenship while not acknowledging the other victims of the Spanish inquisition, the Muslims. Memory is deployed around these sacred spaces because these institutions anchor their identities to Spanish history, while also providing a succinct response to the Spanish public who dismiss and decenter their historical narratives of place.

Anas’s account of his first visit to Abdurahman park in Madrid reveals the importance of this living milieu. The park was named after the founder of the city of Madrid and reflects the sacredness of not only the symbolic meaning of the name which is recognized by Muslims as one of the ninety-nine names of God but also an acknowledgment of the sacredness of this site as evidence of the Muslim founding of Madrid. Anas states, “When I first visited Abdurahman park, it was a good feeling to know that the city, the capital of Spain was established by Abdurahman. I mean, the fact that they changed the name to Abdurahman park shows that the Spanish acknowledge our presence.” (Interview 2011).

The mobilization of memory was also employed by Ahmed regarding his experience of visiting the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba. The mosque-cathedral is especially important in the Spanish collective consciousness as it is a site promoted by the Spanish state to attract the millions of tourists who visit Spain each year. This came to a head recently when several Muslims were arrested for praying at the mosque-cathedral leading to protests and movement mobilizations to overturn the ban. Ahmed stated, “The first time I visited the mosque of Cordoba, I was shocked that Muslims built the mosque the way it is. I mean it is better than any mosque I have ever seen in Morocco. This shows how strong the Muslims were; God willing this will be again. . . . Look, when we see the situation, we find that the mosque is important because the Spanish can’t deny we were here! It’s right in front of them. . . . They can’t deny it. You know, I find it ironic that most of the Spanish I speak with don’t know Muslim history in Spain; they think we were savages who just ruined everything and didn’t really

have a civilization . . . but I just say, ‘See what is in front of your eyes.’” (Interview 2011). The, “conflict and contestation involved in the production of the sacred site” (Luz 2008, p. 1036) produced many emotive displays by my participants, including a mixture of frustration and anger with the authorities’ attempts to de-link the Spanish identity from Islamic sacred sites and hints of pride in the historical rootedness of their identity in the land they now call home.

Moreover, the strategic encounters with these sacred sites grounds the historical reality wherein the Muslims were always present in the larger Spanish narrative. This sense of belonging was articulated and embedded in their historical memory and in the sacred sites—such as the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba, the Al Hambra Palace in Granada, and the grand Mosque-Cathedral of Sevilla, which spatially dot the physical landscape (Calderwood 2015). These politics of place “enables them to resist and subvert state and majority control over their symbolic space” (Luz 2008, p. 1038). The rich and complex identities that emerged as a result solidifies their presence in Spain; as Sadaf illustrates, “When I came to Spain, my family in Morocco first asked me whether I saw the mosque (Cordoba), and they all asked me to pray two rakaats for them. I couldn’t pray there, but it made me feel like Morocco and that we lost a lot, but the fact I am here and we have mosques and a community of Muslims from all over the world makes me feel like this how it should be.” (Interview 2011). The centrality of the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba in Sadaf’s migration experience is key to her identity negotiation and integration into the larger Spanish imagined community in which she views as a byproduct of the larger history of the Moroccan Muslim presence in Spain. Moreover, the diversity of Muslims in Spain is also referenced by Sadaf to reflect on the role that the mosque-cathedral plays in reinforcing her ties to the global Muslim community that link their religious identities to the Spanish Muslim sacred landscape (Calderwood 2015). Thus, this empowering narrative appropriates the centrality of the mosque-cathedral in the continuity of her new identity as a Spanish Muslim.

One of the intriguing findings of this study was the emphasis on traveling to sacred sites as a means to physically and emotionally connect with their religious identities. Eickelman and Piscatori (1990) argue that various forms of travel and what they call the “journeys of the mind”, have historically contributed to Muslim identity formation. Nearly all of the participants in this study have travelled to visit sacred sites (Al Hambra; Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba; the Mosque-Cathedral of Sevilla) in the Spanish context to address questions of place, identity, and belonging. In fact, many of the first-generation Spanish-Moroccan migrants intended to visit these sites even before they set foot in the Spanish context. Abdul Qadr relates, “I read so much about Al Hambra, and I swear to God, the first thing I did was move to Granada . . . so I can be next to it. I left after a year, but when I drive to Tarifa (from Madrid), I stop in Granada and visit my brother and Al Hambra even though it’s expensive.” (Interview 2011). Another participant Muneer cited a different reason for visiting the sacred sites: to intimately engage with the monuments (Cordoba Mosque). He said, “I take my kids so they can get to know themselves and who they are in this country. So, when they say you are different in school, which happens to my kids a lot, they can ask them . . . ‘Do you know your history? Do you know who made Spain?’” (Interview 2011). The process of travel to these sacred spheres acts as pilgrimages to excavate and engage their identities to challenge Islamophobic representations and discourses about the Muslim presence in Spain.

The accumulation of symbolic and cultural capital emanating from these sacred spaces allowed my participants to challenge their societal standing, identity, and roles they occupy in Spanish society. For example, many of my participants support the call to allow Muslims to worship alongside the Catholic community in the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba (Calderwood 2015). This assertiveness is reinforced by perceptions of place that these sacred sites reinforce for the community. Layla reinforced this sentiment by stating, “I remember when I went to the Cordoba mosque. I wanted to pray just to feel connected and slap the Spanish in the face, but there were signs everywhere forbidding the Muslims from praying there, so I didn’t. But, I was about to, and my brother was also telling me not too, as it’s not our right. But, I heard the politicians are at least discussing the possibilities.” (Interview 2011).

Other participants did not want to impose themselves on the larger Catholic community and were satisfied with the recognition of these sites as historically connected to the Muslim community. Abdul Qadr states, “It is better not to create problems, as the Spanish government and people recognize it as a historical site and the world knows it’s a mosque. That is enough. As long as we have our own mosques that we can pray in, that’s all that matters. But, it would be a dream if it did happen.” (Interview 2011). These monuments facilitate religious/cultural identities that are reformulated around a Spanish imagined community to create conceptions of home while fostering the emergence of a collective Spanish-Moroccan identity. These monuments also challenge Islamophobic conceptions of these sites, which seek to deny and, at minimum, challenge the presence of Muslims and Spanish-Moroccans from contemporary Spanish identity (Calderwood 2015).

5. The Mosque

The mosque in its religious functions performs multiple roles for the Spanish-Moroccan community, including establishing community institutions, access to resources, and a place to fulfill their religious rights. The active resistance experienced in establishing these religious institutions are fraught in both a historical memory of a Muslim “take over” and by the “symbols of an immigrant presence that threatens to undermine the conditions necessary for maintaining cohesive and dignified communities” (Astor 2012, p. 323). However, for my participants, the sacred symbols that emanate from these contemporary structures enables the migrants to ostensibly embed their identities in Spain but also sustain their religiosity in the course of their everyday lives. For first-generation Spanish-Moroccans, it was also viewed as an active, living sanctuary in a foreign land. Aisha best captures this sentiment stating, “I would say the mosque is really important for my family. It keeps us connected to Muslims, and we have things to do. It gives my husband a place to interact with people, and my kids go there on Saturdays to learn Islam and Arabic. In fact, before I married Nabil, I asked him how life was like in Spain, and when he told me there was a mosque in Madrid, my heart became open to marrying him and coming to Spain.” (Interview 2011).

For many of my participants, the mosque institution only became relevant when they left Morocco and migrated to Spain where their religious and cultural identities were no longer the primary identifier. This reflects Warner’s findings on diaspora communities and religion, where he found that immigrants often become more religious in their transnational disposition than they do in their home context (Warner 1998, p. 3). This occurs because, as Williams suggests in his work on migration and identity, “Religion is one of the important identity markers in helping them preserve individual self-awareness and cohesion in a group.” (Williams 1988, p. 11). According to Marwan, the mosque was his gateway into life in Spain and, more importantly, introduced him to Muslims of different ideological and cultural backgrounds, extending the boundaries of the sacred space that was traditionally only defined through the prism of Moroccan culture. He stated, “It is wonderful. You see all of the sons of Adam. And, brothers want to help you unlike others who don’t come to the mosque. When I came to Spain—and I am not afraid to admit it—the brothers collected money for me. I remember a Syrian doctor who came to me and gave me one hundred Euros: Just like that. That really made me feel the message of the messenger of Allah.” (Interview 2011). The sense of community articulated by Marwan was a result of his access to the mosque institution in Madrid, which allowed him to experience and engage with the diversity of the global Muslim community while reinforcing the primacy of his Muslim identity.

The mosque as a sacred space also introduced my participants to multiple avenues of social mobility and employment links that facilitated greater integration to the new home context. Karim, a second-generation Spanish-Moroccan activist, stated in definite terms that all the opportunities he received and the internships he participated in was from his networks at the mosque. He said, “Many of my Spanish friends often ask me ‘How do you know so-and-so?’ or ‘How did you get that opportunity?’, and I didn’t think about it, before but it all came from the mosque. I know doctors, lawyers, businessmen, restaurant owner’s people in all fields... so when I need something, I can always

have access to it from the community.” (Interview 2011). The mosque allows Spanish-Moroccans to solidify access to networks and share resources in order to facilitate individual and community growth.

Such perceptions of the mosque as a sacred sanctuary reinforces Muslim collectivities which becomes a critical force in engaging in both civil society and political life. Karim continues by stating, “I am grateful to have the mosque. I feel like we have a place here that is our own and the government recognizes as important. Whenever there is an election, politicians come to the mosque and makes the Moroccans here feel that we are represented in this country and we have somebody to speak for us.” (Interview 2011). This was also the general perspective among my participants who experienced daily forms of Islamophobic microaggressions; the sacrality of the mosque allowed my participants to resist these aggressions while finding identity and place in Madrid. Aisha’s experience with the mosque institution positioned her to connect with other women who wore the hijab to construct and inform their solidarity. She stated, “I love going to the mosque; it makes me feel like I am not alone. Other women are wearing the hijab, praying, and going through the same experiences as I am. Even Spanish converts are going through the same thing, especially if they wear hijab or have hostile families who didn’t want them to convert to Islam.” (Interview 2011).

For many of my participants and the newly arrived illegal and legal migrants, the mosque becomes an institution that they seek out whether or not they are religiously inclined. Moreover, the right-wing shift in Europe, coupled with the anti-Mosque protests and the daily experiences with Islamophobia have slowly prompted many of my participants to seek sacred sanctuaries where Spanish-Moroccan identity and community is constructed and embedded. In this context, the mosque not only becomes a critical resource for variegated forms of capital for my participants but also a site where identity narratives are negotiated and localized at the institutional level.

6. Conclusions

The role of mosques and monuments in Spanish-Moroccan identity negotiations reveals the importance of a sacred space in contesting counterhegemonic narratives of place. The historical memory of Islamic Spain was not only embedded in the sacred spaces that fill the Spanish landscape but also in new mosques that facilitate the Spanish-Moroccan identity formation in contemporary Spain (Rogozen-Soltar 2017). The meanings attached to these sacred sites produced socio-spatial boundaries that challenged the state’s historically rooted memory but also empowered diverse meanings and practices. While the Spanish-Moroccan community did not seek to claim the sacred spaces as exclusively Muslim spaces, they did want to “resist and subvert state majority control” (Luz 2008, p 1038) by forcing “diverse meanings and practices” (Eade and Sallnow 1991, p. 15). Moreover, these sacred spaces provide cultural and symbolic forms of capital for migrants who often are made to feel as though they are the Other. Thus, the sacrality of these spaces historically extended the continuity of identity from the home setting (Calderwood 2018) while providing the necessary resources for migrants to create a community and have access to social and economic networks and allowing new migrants to negotiate their place while expanding the boundaries of the imagined communities they have entered.

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