



GRITIM

Working Paper Series

**Number 3, Winter 2009**

*"iMezquita No!": The Origins of Mosque Opposition in Spain.*

*Avi Astor (University of Michigan)*

[aastor@umich.edu](mailto:aastor@umich.edu)

**Grup de Recerca Interdisciplinari en Immigració - UPF**  
**Departament de Ciències Polítiques i Socials**  
**Universitat Pompeu Fabra**  
**[www.upf.edu/gritim](http://www.upf.edu/gritim)**  
**[gritim@upf.edu](mailto:gritim@upf.edu)**

The **purpose of the GRITIM-UPF Working Paper Series** is to disseminate academic research work-in-progress that contributes to the European approach on immigration and diversity. The main framework is related to GRITIM-UPF three main priorities: multidisciplinary, innovation, and transfer of knowledge. Its contents are related to its research areas: immigration and governance, immigration and society, immigration and law, economics of migration, immigration and the dynamics of diversity, immigration and communication and immigration and humanities. *GRITIM-UPF Working Papers* will be published quarterly (at least one per term, four per year).

*GRITIM-UPF Academic Committee:*

Ricard Zapata-Barrero	Department of Political and Social Sciences
Neus Torbisco	Department of Law
Hélène Rufat	Department of Humanities
Miquel Rodrigo	Department of Journalism and Communication
Libertad González	Department of Economics and Business
Teun van Dijk	Department of Translation and Philology
Amparo González	Department of Political and Social Sciences

Further information and requests can be addressed to [gritim@upf.edu](mailto:gritim@upf.edu)  
Working Paper Series, as well as other information related to research on immigration can be received  
by subscribing at GRITIM Distribution List: [www.upf.edu/gritim/distribució](http://www.upf.edu/gritim/distribució)

***Abstract***

This paper examines why mosque opposition has been more frequent in Catalonia than in other Spanish regions. A comparison is conducted between the metropolitan areas of Barcelona, where opposition has been most prevalent, and Madrid, where it has been strikingly absent. A relational approach is employed to highlight the factors in Barcelona that have complicated the reception of mosques and the populations they serve. These factors include pronounced socio-spatial divisions and a lack of confidence in the state's commitment to managing the challenges that accompany immigration. The prevalence of these factors in Barcelona has resulted in the integration of mosque debates into more general struggles over urban privilege and state recognition, explaining the high degree of opposition. These findings highlight the importance of studying conflicts related to religious and cultural diversification *in context*, as such conflicts are inextricably linked to the lived spaces and local structures in which they develop.

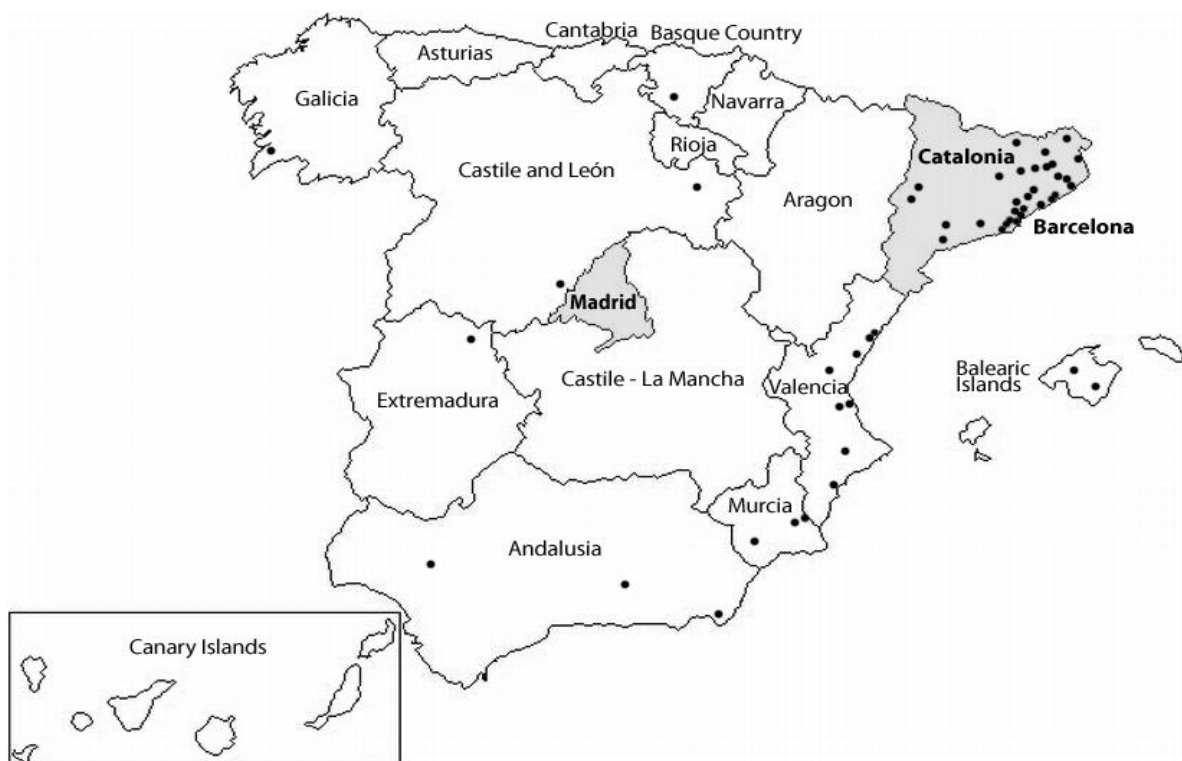
***Keywords:*** Spain, Islam, Mosque, Immigration, Intergroup Conflict

***Author's biographical note***

**Avi Astor** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan. He has a B.A. in Philosophy from Brown University and an M.A. in Sociology from the University of Michigan. His research interests include ethnic conflict, immigrant incorporation, urban sociology, and comparative-historical methods. He was a visiting scholar at GRITIM-UPF, in the Department of Political and Social Sciences, from 2008 - 2009.

Although Islam has had an important influence on Spain historically, it is only within the last 30 years that Muslims have re-emerged as a significant presence in Spanish society, primarily due to immigration from Africa and South Asia. The growth of Spain's Muslim population, which now numbers over a million, has led to the creation of an elaborate network of community structures to accommodate its religious and social needs. These structures, however, have not always been welcomed by host communities. This is most evident with respect to houses of worship, as opposition to mosques has occurred in 51 different Spanish municipalities. While the presence of opposition to mosques is not particularly surprising or unique in the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> world, the level of regional variation within Spain is striking. In most regions with large Muslim populations, opposition to mosques has been quite rare, whereas in Catalonia opposition has taken place in 30 different municipalities (Figure 1 and Table 1). The aim of this paper is to shed light on the factors that account for why mosque opposition has been more frequent in Catalonia than in other regions of Spain. In examining this question, I focus specifically on the metropolitan areas of Barcelona (Catalonia), where mosque opposition has been the most frequent and intense, and Madrid, where opposition has been surprisingly absent.

**Figure 1: Municipalities Host to Mosque Opposition in Spain**



Source: Author's review of Spanish press and SOS Racismo's annual reports on racism in Spain.

**Table 1: Muslim Communities, Mosques, and Mosque Opposition in Selected Regions**

Autonomous Community	Muslim Population	% Total Population	Mosques	Cities Host to Mosque Opposition
Catalonia	326,697	4.4	135*	30
Madrid	220,418	3.5	68**	0
Andalusia	206,568	2.5	72	3
Valencia	148,108	2.9	63	8
Murcia	68,352	4.7	42	3
Canary Islands	58,635	2.8	17	0
Castile La Mancha	40,782	2.0	36	0
Melilla	37,763	51.5	4	0
Aragon	35,685	2.7	25	0
Balearic Islands	32,431	3.0	25	2
Ceuta	32,374	41.2	37	0
Castile and León	25,233	1.0	12	2
Basque Country	20,627	1.0	14	1
Extremadura	15,571	1.4	8	1
Navarra	13,310	2.1	12	0
La Rioja	12,373	3.9	10	0
Galicia	8,762	0.3	13	1

Sources: For Muslim populations and Islamic entities, Observatorio Andalusi (2009); for total populations, Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2008 municipal censuses); for municipalities host to mosque opposition, the author’s review of Spanish press and SOS Racismo’s annual reports on racism in Spain.

\* According to the Generalitat, Catalonia’s Regional Government, there are 169 mosques in Catalonia.

\*\* According to the Fundación de Pluralismo y Convivencia, a governmental foundation based in Madrid, there are roughly 80 mosques in Madrid.

### Theories of Intergroup Conflict

A substantial amount of recent work on intergroup conflict has focused specifically on relations between immigrant minorities and their host communities, a fact that is not surprising given the magnitude of population movements within and between countries over the last fifty years. Despite the extensive literature on this topic, however, theories of intergroup conflict have remained relatively thin and have not developed significantly since the seminal works of scholars such as G. Allport (1954), H. Blaylock (1967), M. Sherif (1966), and H. Tajfel (1978). Recent work has done little to advance our understanding of why certain recipient contexts are characterized by high levels of tension and conflict between newly-arrived immigrant populations and their host communities, while others are not.

Existing theories of intergroup conflict may be distinguished broadly by their emphasis on either cultural or material sources of contention. Scholars who focus on the cultural dimensions of conflict generally point to the detrimental impact of xenophobic attitudes and other types of social prejudice on intergroup relations. Most argue that

although “old-fashioned” prejudice premised on the innate biological inferiority of minorities has fallen into disfavor, prejudice remains present in a “symbolic” or “modern” form constituted by unacknowledged negative sentiments toward certain minorities and beliefs that the cultural norms and practices of these minorities violate core principles and values of majority society (D. KINDER & D. SEARS, 1981; J. MCCONAHAY & J. HOUGH, 1976; J. MCCONAHAY, 1986; F. PINCUS & H. EHRLICH, 1994; D. SEARS ET AL., 1979; D. SEARS & P. HENRY, 2003). Recent work emphasizing the cultural dimension of conflict has placed particular significance on the role of national identity. Specifically, scholars have argued that negative reactions toward immigrant populations derive largely from the threat they are perceived to pose to national cohesion and cultural values (M. HJERM, 1998; 2004; N. LEWIN-EPSTEIN & A. LEVANON, 2005).

In the case of Spain, those partial to cultural explanations of ethnic conflict might argue that mosque opposition in Spain is rooted in the deeply-entrenched negative images of “Moors” present in the Spanish imaginary. Given that North Africans are the most significant Muslim collective in the country, these images may have a particularly detrimental influence on Muslim immigrants. Moreover, terrorist attacks and other episodes of contention involving Muslims over the past decade have reinforced negative sentiments and beliefs about the incompatibility of Islam with Spanish values. With respect to Catalonia in particular, it might be added that the strength of national identity in the region has created an especially high degree of concern regarding the threat posed by Muslim immigrants to Catalan identity, culture, and values. For example, A. Prado (2008) argues that the high level of mosque opposition in Catalonia is the product of a general intolerance of Islam that has deep historical roots in the region.

The historical and contemporary ‘Othering’ of Muslims certainly contributes to the emergence of tension surrounding mosques. Negative stereotypes help to explain, in part, why mosques are generally perceived as a threat, as opposed to a potential source of social and cultural enrichment, or why they are viewed with more suspicion than Protestant churches, despite the fact that both cater largely to immigrant populations. However, in the vast majority of instances, mosques are established without complaint from local residents. Moreover, prejudices against North Africans and fears regarding Islam are common throughout Spain, but mosque opposition has occurred very unevenly across regions. If prejudices and fears were the main cause of opposition, we would expect a high degree of opposition in Madrid, which has Spain’s second largest

Muslim community, hosts at least 68 mosques, and suffered a direct attack by Muslim extremists in 2004. Yet opposition has been completely absent in Madrid.

Finally, as I will explain in more detail below, it is doubtful that mosque opposition in Catalonia is reducible to the region's strong national identity, given that many of the communities that have mobilized against mosques in the region are composed of internal migrants and their offspring.<sup>1</sup> The most intense conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim populations, including the 1999 riots in Terrassa and episodes of mosque contention in Premià de Mar, Santa Coloma, and Badalona, were organized by residents of predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> If attitudes toward Muslim immigrants are indeed more negative in Catalonia than in other Spanish regions, this is likely more so the *consequence* than the *cause* of contentious local relations (H. BLUMER, 1958; M. SHERIF, 1966).

Realistic conflict theory provides a 'materialist' alternative to theories that attribute conflict to prejudice, intolerance, or other 'irrational' sentiments. Proponents of realistic conflict theory assert that discriminatory attitudes and practices result from objective or perceived conflicts of interest rooted in competition over economic resources or political power (H. BLALOCK, 1967; R. LEVINE & D. CAMPBELL, 1972; M. SHERIF, 1966). Competition increases the salience of ethnic boundaries and leads members of majority collectives to fear that minorities threaten their individual welfare or group position (H. BLUMER, 1958; L. BOBO, 1983; S. OLZAK, 1992). From this perspective, mosques may be viewed as symbolic of a new presence that threatens the economic livelihood and political dominance of autochthonous residents.

It is indeed the case that Spaniards frequently complain about the competition brought about by immigrant businesses, as well as the disproportionate allocation of public resources to foreign populations. But again, such complaints are present throughout the country. In addition, mosque opposition has occurred primarily during a period of major economic growth and predominantly in a region with one of the highest

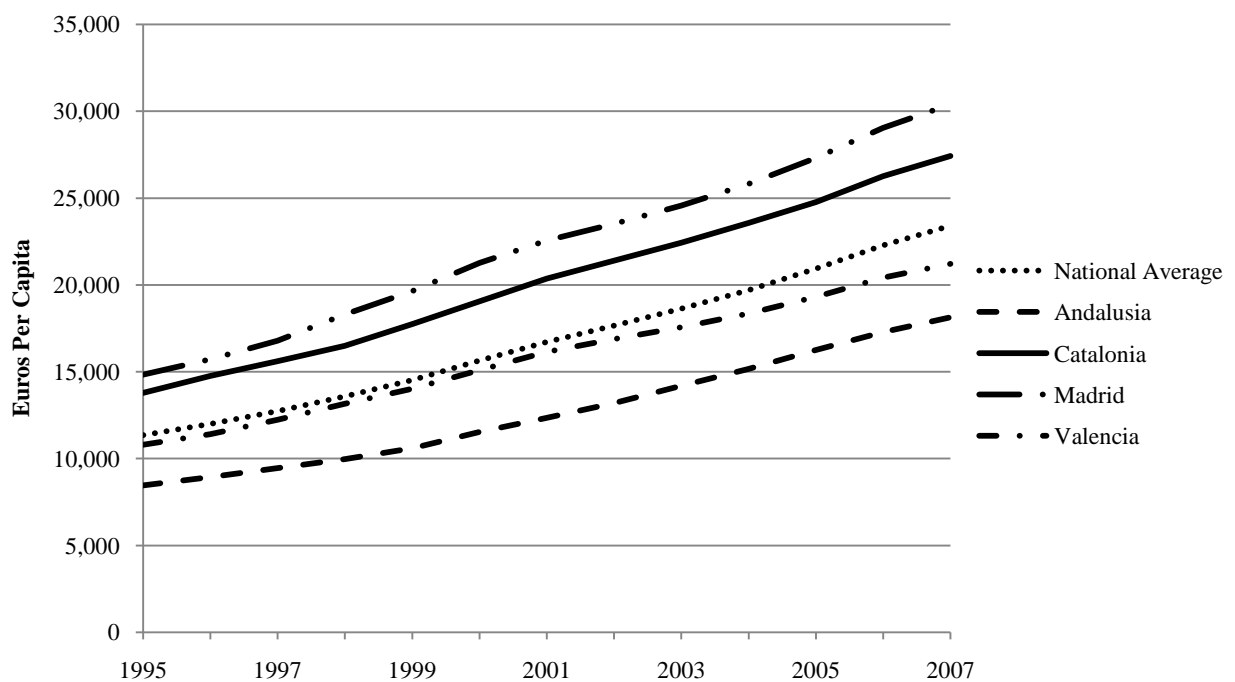
---

<sup>1</sup> Through my interviews, I discovered that many of these internal migrants can speak Catalan but elect to speak Spanish because it is the language of their peers, and they feel more comfortable speaking their mother tongue. In essence, they often choose to maintain their identities as migrants and feel little need to demonstrate their *Catalanidad* to others who reside in their localities. Hence, it is unlikely that their apprehensions regarding immigration derive primarily from fears that an increased presence of foreigners in their neighborhoods will hinder their being recognized as *Catalans*.

<sup>2</sup> The riots in Terrassa were catalyzed by a series of fights between North African and Spanish youth. Although mosques were targeted by vandals, the demonstrations and rioting that took place focused more generally on the presence of North Africans, as opposed to mosques *per se*. These events constituted the first major conflict between immigrant and native populations in Spain.

per capita incomes and lowest unemployment rates (Figures 2 and 3). In fact, between 1995 and 2007, when the vast majority of mosque opposition in Catalonia took place, the region's per capita income nearly doubled from 14,000 to 27,500 Euros.<sup>3</sup> If competition over scarce resources were really the main factor explaining mosque opposition, we would expect to see more opposition in Andalusia, which hosts one of the country's largest Muslim populations and traditionally has had one of Spain's highest rates of poverty and unemployment.<sup>4</sup> Finally, roughly three quarters of Muslim residents in Spain cannot vote because they lack Spanish citizenship, and hence it would be a stretch to claim that they represent a political threat, at least not a direct one (OBSERVATORIO ANDALUSÍ, 2008).

**Figure 2: Average Income in Spanish Regions with Over 100,000 Muslim Inhabitants**



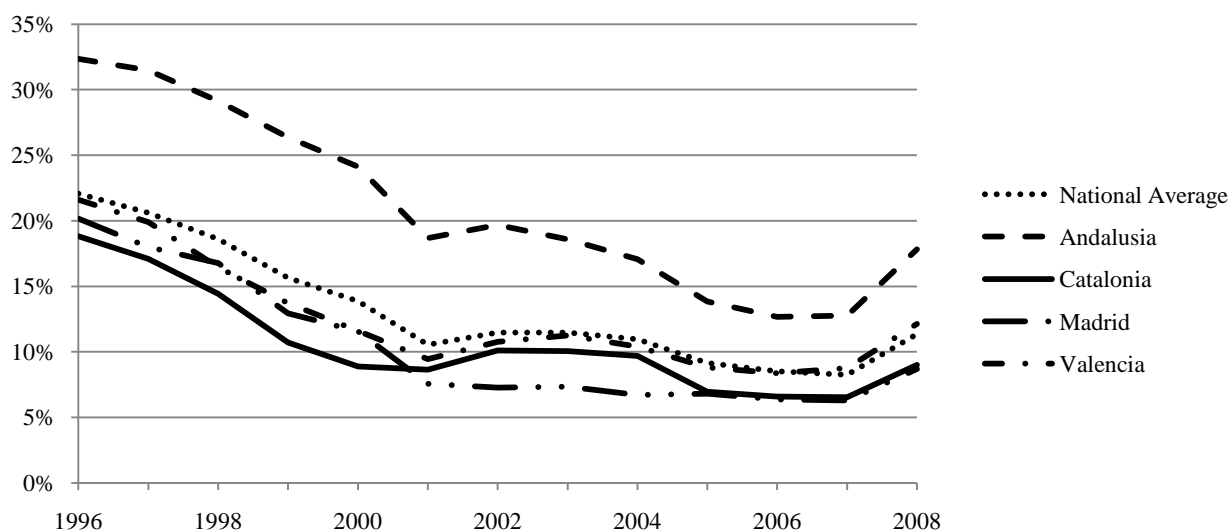
Source: Compiled by author using data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Encuesta de Población Activa.

<sup>3</sup> Although there were a few sporadic episodes of mosque opposition in Spain prior to the late 1990s, most notably in Granada (Andalusia) and Vic (Catalonia), mosque opposition did not begin to become commonplace or intense until the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Appendix).

<sup>4</sup> In fact, Seville, the city where the most intense mosque opposition in Andalusia has taken place, has a very small Muslim population relative to other areas of the region.



**Figure 3: Unemployment Rates in Spanish Regions with Over 100,000 Muslim Inhabitants**



Source: Compiled by author using data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Encuesta de Población Activa.

### **Toward a Relational Approach to Theorizing Contexts of Reception**

The shortcomings of both symbolic racism and realistic conflict theory for explaining mosque opposition and other episodes of contention between immigrants and their host communities reside in their relative inattentiveness to the broader network of relations present in contexts of immigrant reception. Generalized prejudices and concerns about competition manifest themselves in different ways and bear distinct relations to collective action, depending on the characteristics of the relational settings in which they are operative. Following M. Somers (1993, p. 595), a “relational setting” may be defined as “a patterned matrix of institutional relationships among cultural, economic, social, and political practices.” Theorizing contexts of reception as relational settings requires us to move away from attributing attitudes and practices toward immigrants to static and generic categorical distinctions, such as group membership or class position, and pushes us to examine the broader matrix of relationships within which such distinctions function. It also pushes us to look at how different spheres of interaction relate to one another, as opposed to examining any given sphere in isolation. For example, while economic competition certainly generates concerns about the entry of immigrant populations, such concerns take on different meanings and levels of significance, depending on the broader network of cultural and social relations within which they are embedded.

Advocating a relational approach to analyzing contexts of reception, however, is not synonymous with saying that all things are inter-related and thus matter equally. Rather, depending on the specific issue at hand, certain characteristics of relational settings are particularly significant.<sup>5</sup> With respect to social conflict during periods of immigration and ethnic diversification, I wish to highlight three factors that are especially important to consider: 1) the salience of social distinctions that pre-date immigrant arrival; 2) the extent to which these distinctions map onto spatial divisions; and 3) the perceived level of government responsiveness to local priorities and needs.

Where social distinctions along class or cultural lines are pronounced, struggles over local relations of privilege emanating from inequalities in urban life are likely to be prevalent. This increases the probability that the entry of immigrant newcomers will inflame pre-existing struggles that aim either to resist or defend extant relations of privilege. A related, but analytically distinct factor speaks to the extent to which such social distinctions map onto spatial divisions. In municipalities that are segregated along socioeconomic lines, lower-class immigrants are likely to settle in narrowly-circumscribed areas as a result of infra-municipal disparities in real-estate value. High levels of clustering increase the visibility of immigrants and concentrate in a few select neighborhoods the challenges brought about by their presence. In marginalized neighborhoods, this has the effect of evoking feelings among long-term residents of being overburdened by the changes associated with immigration, as well as concerns about incipient processes of ‘ghettoization.’ In more privileged areas, especially those that have elevated their status over time, residents are likely to fear that the entry of immigrant collectives both threatens the privileged status of their neighborhoods and places the improvements they have achieved in jeopardy. There are obvious parallels between such concerns and the concerns discussed by realistic conflict theorists, but realistic conflict theorists generally focus solely on competitive processes between individuals and groups, to the neglect of processes related to the specific places in which distinct groups coexist. Fears regarding immigration often relate centrally to transformations of *place* (i.e., neighborhood degradation, territorial stigmatization, and insecurity), which may include competition but are certainly not limited to it. Hence it is important to be attentive to the relations that residents bear both to their particular

---

<sup>5</sup> In M. Somers’ analysis of citizenship, for instance, solidarity and autonomy constituted preconditions for the emergence of associational and participatory practices that served as the bedrock for citizenship rights in England (p. 603).

neighborhoods and to their municipalities as a whole if we are to understand why immigrant presence is perceived as more threatening in some contexts than in others.

The final factor speaks to relations between local residents and their local governments. In municipalities where residents lack faith in the local government's commitment to protecting their interests and addressing their needs, residents are more likely to take their own initiative in defending the image and well-being of their neighborhoods. Given that the arrival of foreign, working-class immigrants is often associated with neighborhood degradation and decline, opposing the presence of immigrants and their communal structures is one key way that residents feel they may act to defend their neighborhoods. By contrast, in municipalities where local governments are perceived as responsive to residents' needs and priorities, residents are more likely to leave it to city officials and bureaucrats to address the challenges brought about by ethnic diversification.

As I will explain in more detail below, the timing of industrialization, past waves of internal migration, and the presence of a strong national identity in Catalonia have combined to generate significant social and spatial divisions between Catalan- and Spanish-speaking populations and neighborhoods in the region's industrial cities, which, in turn, have given rise to infra-municipal rivalries, inequalities, and deficits that have complicated the reception of mosques and the populations they serve. Specifically, debates about mosques, and immigration more generally, often have been integrated into broader struggles surrounding urban privilege that pre-date the arrival of Muslim immigrants to the region. Moreover, a general lack of confidence in local governments' commitment to protecting the image and well-being of certain neighborhoods has led residents of these areas to feel that they must take it upon themselves to protect against processes of degradation and decline associated with increased immigration. Since mosques are often perceived as 'magnets' that attract more immigrants to a given area, residents feel that opposing mosques is an effective way to limit further entry of immigrants into their neighborhoods.

### **Research Design and Methods**

Prior to discussing the methods that I employed to analyze mosque opposition in Spain, let me first clarify that the expression “mosque opposition” refers here to *organized* attempts by local residents to shut down an existing mosque or to prevent the establishment of a new mosque. Although I use the term “mosque” throughout, I am

most often referring to oratories, or prayer rooms, located in apartments, garages, and warehouses, as these are far more common than purpose-built mosques in Spain.<sup>6</sup> In most instances, mosque opposition has taken the form of petition campaigns that aim to dissuade local governments from authorizing the use of a given locale for religious worship. These campaigns are generally organized either by neighborhood associations or by *ad hoc* pressure groups formed specifically for the purpose of opposing mosques. They have varied in magnitude due to differences in both the size of the municipalities in which they have been initiated and the intensity of resident opposition. In many instances, petition campaigns have mobilized hundreds, or even thousands, of signatures.<sup>7</sup> There have also been instances, however, where such campaigns have gathered under 100 signatures. Since media coverage has not reported the total number of signatures gathered in all cases, it is unfortunately not possible to provide a systematic account of how petition campaigns have varied in magnitude.

In addition to initiating petition campaigns, residents have taken to the streets on occasion to demonstrate in opposition to mosques.<sup>8</sup> Street demonstrations generally have taken place in historically symbolic plazas that are emblematic of the neighborhoods or municipalities in which they are located. Notable anti-mosque demonstrations have occurred in the Catalan municipalities of Mataró, Premià de Mar, Reus, Santa Coloma, and Viladecans, as well as in Seville (Andalusia) and Talayuela (Extremadura).

The few instances where local governments have closed mosques or prevented the opening of new mosques in the absence of popular mobilization are not included in the definition of mosque opposition used in this paper.<sup>9</sup> Nor does this definition include isolated instances of vandalism, such as the spray painting of mosques. Part of the problem with including instances of vandalism is that, in contrast to petition campaigns and street protests, they are not always viewed as ‘newsworthy,’ and hence it is difficult to determine exactly where and when they have occurred. A review of the Spanish

---

<sup>6</sup> “Purpose-built mosques” are mosques that are originally designed for the purpose of prayer. They are easily identifiable from the outside by their architecture. Despite having Spain’s largest Muslim population, Catalonia does not possess a purpose-built mosque.

<sup>7</sup> The largest campaign was organized in Badalona (Catalonia), where 20,800 signatures opposing a mosque in the city were presented to the municipal government in 2007. Campaigns that have mobilized over a thousand signatures have also been carried out in seven other municipalities in Catalonia, three in Valencia, one in Andalusia, and one in Murcia.

<sup>8</sup> Almost all street demonstrations have been accompanied by petition campaigns.

<sup>9</sup> Such instances are more common in Catalonia than in other regions of Spain as well, but they often appear to be the result of purely technical decisions based on the compliance of mosques with municipal ordinances.

media indicates that vandalism has been much more common and serious (i.e., the burning of mosques) in Catalonia than elsewhere in the country.<sup>10</sup> But very often, such acts are isolated to a few individuals and hence may not reflect broader sentiments of the community.

Documentation of mosque opposition was obtained from a thorough review of articles that have been digitized and indexed in the online databases of *My News* and *WebIslam*. These databases include articles from major newspapers and news wires, such as *Europa Press*, *El País*, *ABC*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, and *La Razón*, as well as a wide selection of provincial and local dailies from regions throughout Spain. Information was also collected from the annual reports of SOS Racismo, an NGO dedicated to fighting racism and discrimination. These reports contain extensive documentation of inter-ethnic contention throughout Spain and have devoted a significant amount of attention to mosque opposition. Analyzing these sources enabled me not only to document the presence of opposition, but also to see how local residents have publicly articulated their reasons for opposition, the different actors that have been involved in mosque polemics, and the trajectories these polemics have followed over time.

In addition to a review of Spanish press and the annual reports of SOS Racismo, ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews were conducted in Catalonia and Madrid between June of 2007 and December of 2009. I focused on the metropolitan areas of Barcelona (Catalonia) and Madrid, which I selected due to the stark discrepancy between the reactions evoked by mosques in their industrial cities, despite the similarities of these cities with respect to a range of demographic, social, and economic indicators.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, the areas of Barcelona and Madrid constitute the two largest industrial centers in Spain, contain several municipalities with populations of over 100,000 inhabitants, host proportionally similar immigrant populations, and are home to the country's largest Muslim communities. Yet 14 municipalities have been host to mosque opposition in Barcelona, while not a single municipality has been host to mosque opposition in Madrid.

---

<sup>10</sup> Incendiary devices were used to set fire to mosques in the Catalan municipalities of Girona and Sant Boi de Llobregat. Attempts to burn mosques were also made in Cervera and Terrassa, which are also located in Catalonia.

<sup>11</sup> The metropolitan area of Barcelona is defined in accordance with the specifications of the *Pla Territorial General de Catalunya*. This is the definition used by the Statistical Institute of Catalonia. The metropolitan area of Madrid is defined in accordance with the Statistical Institute of the Community of Madrid's zoning classification, *NUTS 4*.

In Barcelona, fieldwork was conducted in Badalona, Mataró, and Santa Coloma, while in Madrid, it was conducted in Fuenlabrada, Getafe, and Parla (Table 2). Municipalities in Barcelona were selected so as to obtain a diverse sample of neighborhoods that have been host to mosque opposition. In Badalona, opposition has occurred largely in the most marginal of neighborhoods, in Mataró on the border between one of the poorest neighborhoods and a more affluent neighborhood, and in Santa Coloma in a lower middle-class neighborhood of relatively high status within the city. In Madrid, municipalities were selected for their comparability to those selected in Barcelona with respect to the size of their overall and foreign populations. In addition, they host some of the largest Muslim communities in the region.

**Table 2: Selected Characteristics of Research Sites**

Metropolitan Area	Municipality	Total Population	Foreign Population	Muslim Population	Mosques
Barcelona	Badalona	215,000	13%	14,000	1
	Mataró	120,000	16%	10,500	3
	Santa Coloma de Gramenet	117,000	19%	8,500	2
Madrid	Fuenlabrada	195,000	12%	6,000	2
	Getafe	164,000	14%	4,000	2
	Parla	108,000	24%	8,000	1

Sources: Compiled by author using data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2008 municipal censuses) and information collected at research sites.

A total of 121 semi-structured interviews were conducted in Barcelona and Madrid between 2007 and 2009. Initial interviewees were identified based on their public involvement in mosque disputes or by their activity in relevant associations and organizations in areas of focus. Additional interviewees were recruited either by means of “snowball sampling” or in public settings, such as bars, shops, and recreational facilities. They included members of neighborhood associations and local residents, leaders of Muslim religious and cultural associations, municipal and regional government officials and bureaucrats, intercultural mediators, a journalist and a Catholic priest. Presidents and other officers of neighborhood associations played a particularly important role as informants, as they were the most in touch with general community sentiments and received the majority of complaints surrounding mosques. In some cases, these officers themselves were instrumental in organizing mosque opposition campaigns. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and later translated into English.

The ethnographic component of my fieldwork consisted of observing social dynamics in city plazas, talking informally in bars and restaurants, and visiting religious centers. In addition, I participated in interreligious dialogues, attended community

forums and celebrations, and went to several neighborhood association meetings. In one of my research sites in Barcelona (Badalona), opposition to a proposed mosque emerged unexpectedly during the course of my fieldwork in 2009. Having the chance to actually see a mosque polemic in process and to speak with relevant parties added a layer of richness to my data that would not have been possible had I relied solely on residents' recollection of past events and media coverage.

### **Migration and Urbanization in Barcelona**

The reception of mosques in the metropolitan area of Barcelona has been complicated by the pronounced social and spatial divisions that exist within its industrial and formerly industrial cities. Prior to discussing the relation between these divisions and mosque opposition, it is important to understand their precise character, as well as how they have evolved over time. Poorer neighborhoods in Barcelona's major cities are mainly composed of Spanish-speaking internal migrants to the region and their offspring. Wealthier neighborhoods, by contrast, are generally composed of either long-standing residents whose roots in Catalonia extend for generations or internal migrants who have been able to elevate their social status over time. These patterns in turn are traceable to the historical evolution of the area through successive waves of migration.

Migration to Barcelona has been driven largely by its traditionally strong industrial sector. While most regions of Spain did not industrialize until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Barcelona underwent significant industrialization during the early- to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The demand for labor generated by its industries, especially those devoted to textile production, metal fabrication, and chemical processing, has attracted migrants from rural areas of Catalonia and other regions of Spain for over 100 years. The entry of internal migrants to the region reached its peak between 1960 and 1975, and came to be known colloquially as the “pacific invasion” (S. GINER, 1980; J. RECAÑO & A. SOLANA, 1998; L. RECOLONS, 2003). During this period, migrants came primarily from Andalusia, Extremadura, Murcia, and other regions that were distant geographically, culturally, and linguistically from Catalonia.

Upon arriving to Barcelona, these migrants faced a significant degree of discrimination and spatial segregation in the cities in which they settled (F. CANDEL, 1965; C. SOLÉ, 1982). Their difficulties integrating into urban life derived, in part, from the broader context of national struggle taking place under Franco's dictatorship at



the time. In an effort to centralize Spain, Franco had banned the use of Catalan in public life and had discouraged its private usage through propaganda campaigns. The rapid entry of internal, Spanish-speaking migrants to Catalonia was perceived by many as part of a more general assault upon Catalonia's language and culture (J. COLOMER, 1986).

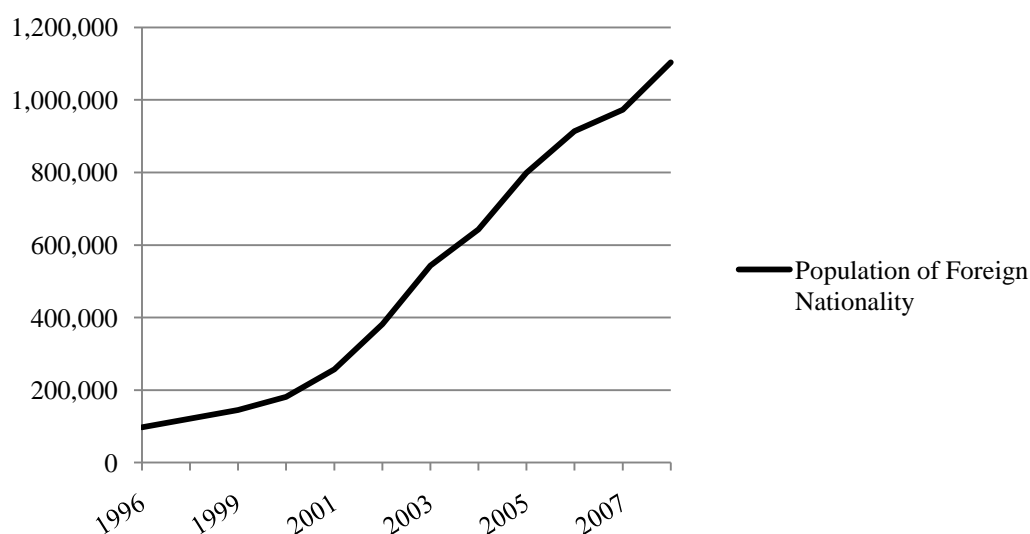
Arguably more important than the exclusivity of native residents, however, were a host of urban factors that limited the integration of internal migrants into the cities in which they settled. By the time the major migration boom between 1960 and 1975 took place, many city centers in the Barcelona metropolitan area were already well-developed, densely populated, and expensive, largely due to the transformations brought about by prior waves of migration. In combination with a general lack of urban planning and regulation, as well as rampant speculation, this led to the relegation of internal migrants to marginalized peripheral "suburbs" composed of shanties and other types of seriously deficient "infra-housing" (J. COSTA ET AL., 2003; J. REQUENA HIDALGO, 2003; C. SOLÉ, 1982; J. VILLARROYA I FONT, 1999).

### **Continuities between Past and Present**

Toward the middle of the 1960s, a general loosening of the Franco regime's repressive approach toward addressing community complaints and claims enabled civic associations to voice their discontent with the conditions present in peripheral neighborhoods and to place pressure on city authorities to address municipal deficits. Civic struggles intensified during the waning years of the dictatorship, and their impact became visible upon Spain's transition to democracy in 1978, as significant investments were made to rehabilitate marginalized neighborhoods. The infrastructural deficiencies and spatial divisions rooted in the chaotic development of the 1960s and 1970s, however, have lingered on to the present, especially in cities in Barcelona (J. COSTA ET AL., 2003). Moreover, many of the deficits and problems that seemed to have been receding in poorer neighborhoods since the 1980s have re-emerged and worsened in recent years as a result of the confluence of two related developments: 1) significant growth in Catalonia's overall population, primarily due to foreign immigration; and 2) a major rise in the price of real estate and consequent decline in access to affordable housing (Figures 4 and 5) (O. NEL·LO I COLOM, 2008).

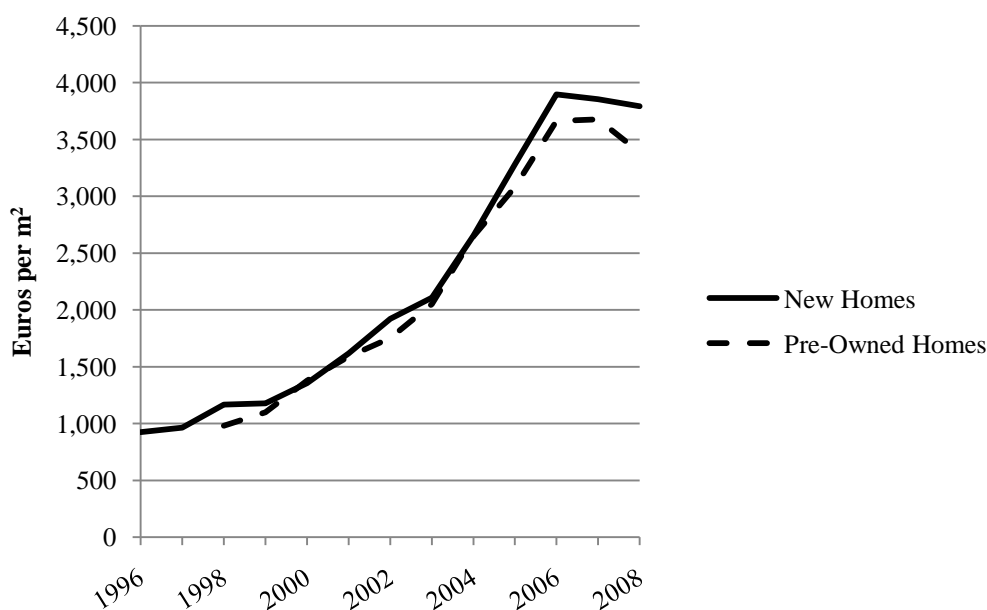


**Figure 4: Evolution of Catalonia’s Total Foreign Population (1996-2008)**



Source: Compiled by author using data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

**Figure 5: Evolution of the Average Price of Housing in Catalonia (1996-2008)**



Source: Compiled by author using data from the Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Medi Ambient i Habitatge.

The growth in Catalonia’s population over the past decade has resulted primarily from the large-scale entry of working-class, non-communitarian immigrants to the region. These immigrants have been attracted by Catalonia’s high demand for labor, especially in the sectors of construction, services, and agriculture. The demand for construction workers, in particular, was driven by a nation-wide real-estate boom during

which the cost of housing increased dramatically.<sup>12</sup> While many profited from the boom, affordable housing became increasingly difficult to access for a large segment of Catalonia's population, most notably the masses of laborers who had entered the country to meet the high demand for construction workers.

Although the boom was a nation-wide phenomenon in Spain, it had a particularly significant impact on exacerbating infra-municipal inequalities in Catalonia due to the pre-existing socio-spatial divisions characteristic of municipalities in the region. Specifically, the vast majority of newly-arrived, working-class immigrants to the region were forced to reside in the poorest of neighborhoods, generally located in peripheral areas or old and rundown historical centers, which already suffered from overcrowding and poor infrastructure.

By contrast, municipalities with less pronounced infra-municipal inequalities, such as those located in the metropolitan area of Madrid, foreign immigrants were able to settle more evenly across neighborhoods. Indeed, a recent study demonstrates that the concentration of immigrants in select areas reaches more extreme levels in Barcelona, particularly in cities that have been host to mosque opposition, than in other metropolitan areas with large Muslim populations, such as Madrid and Valencia (J. LÓPEZ REDONDO & A. REY CARNEIRO, 2008). Similarly, a study by Colectivo IOÉ (2005) advances data showing that 26% of immigrants in Catalonia live in buildings in which more than half of the residents are of foreign origin, compared to just 17% in Madrid and 13% in Valencia.

### **Socio-spatial Divisions and Mosque Opposition**

The relatively heavy clustering of working-class immigrants in narrowly circumscribed areas has reinforced extant divisions between privileged and marginalized neighborhoods in Barcelona's metropolitan area. Residents of marginalized neighborhoods frequently complain that they have been disproportionately burdened by the heavy influx of immigrants in recent years and voice fears about the danger of their neighborhoods becoming "ghettos." Moreover, given that poorer neighborhoods, as opposed to wealthier ones, tend to be more densely populated and more lacking in basic municipal services and facilities, working-class residents often

---

<sup>12</sup> It is not the place here to go into the complex array of factors that contributed to the elevation of housing prices in Spain between 1996 and 2007. For a succinct summary of the major explanations advanced by experts on the subject, see O. Nel-lo (2008).

associate the concentration of immigrants in their neighborhoods with growing urban deficits and problems of overcrowding.

Mosques in particular are perceived not only as symbolic of immigrant presence but as ‘magnets’ that attract more immigrants to a given area, heightening fears of ‘ghettoization,’ increased territorial stigmatization, and processes of neighborhood degradation. This is exemplified by the following excerpt from a recent manifesto written by residents opposing a mosque in Artigas, one of the poorest neighborhoods of Badalona:

[W]e do not estimate that the opening of a mosque in our neighborhood is acceptable, in these moments, for (the sake of) coexistence and for (the sake of) impeding our conversion into a ghetto, if we are not one already. We are concerned that that mosque, moreover, will be converted into a county-wide referent for Muslims, leading to an even greater over-occupation of public spaces which generates problems of coexistence.

Comparable views have been expressed in other cities, such as Mataró, where socioeconomic divisions across neighborhoods are similarly stark. Purificación, a 64-year-old resident who signed a petition to oppose a mosque on the fringe of her neighborhood in 2001 states:

If they put a mosque here, we will be crowded to the maximum... This is a small neighborhood and the moment they place a mosque here, all the Muslims would come here from all of Mataró and from Mataró’s surroundings.

Reflecting on the opposition that took place in Mataró in 2001, Roser, a 50-year-old resident, adds:

This is already a ghetto... For people from the outside, this is a ghetto. Just imagine if there was a mosque here.

According to newspaper reports, concerns about the formation of “ghettos” have been associated with the presence of mosques in a number of other Catalan cities as well, including Banyoles, Igualada, Lleida, Premià de Mar, Reus, Sant Feliu de Guíxols,

and Viladecans. It is important to keep in mind, however, that although residents often refer to their neighborhoods as “ghettos,” these neighborhoods are quite distinct from traditional racial or ethnic ghettos found in the US. That is, they are not ethnically homogenous, the majority of residents are still native to Spain, and they remain functionally tied to more affluent neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it is precisely because these neighborhoods remain ethnically diverse and enjoy a decent level of urban infrastructure and amenities that they have taken on the features of what G. Suttles (1972) has termed “defended neighborhoods,” including sharp boundary definition and defense, and practices of exclusivity toward those perceived as ‘outsiders’ or ‘invaders’ (J. RIEDER, 1985; T. SUGRUE, 1996).

In some cases, Muslim communities have attempted to establish mosques in more affluent neighborhoods, often at the behest of city governments trying to evade mosque conflict and ethnic clustering by ceding land in neighborhoods with less dense immigrant populations. Nevertheless, opposition has emerged in many of these neighborhoods as well. In articulating their reasons for opposition, residents frequently raise concerns about the negative impact a mosque would have on the image of their neighborhoods and the value of their homes, and voice fears that the problems suffered by poorer areas (i.e., crime and drugs) might enter their neighborhoods along with the immigrant populations served by mosques. In Santa Coloma, for instance, one of the most intense mosque polemics in Catalonia surfaced in 2004 when a Muslim community in the city opened a small oratory in the lower middle-class neighborhood of Singuerlín, a neighborhood consisting mainly of internal migrants to Catalonia but with very few foreign immigrants. For weeks, residents of the neighborhood protested each night outside the mosque, shouting insults and using noisemakers to disrupt evening prayers. Many carried pre-printed signs stating, “No to the mosque in Singuerlín. Residents, support the neighborhood. We do not want another Fondo,” referring to the city’s most ethnically diverse neighborhood.<sup>14</sup> Jaume, an intercultural mediator who played an active role mediating the dispute recalls:

---

13 Here, I draw on L. Wacquant (2008, p. 160), who defines the term “ghetto” as “a homogeneous social formation, bearing a unitary cultural identity, endowed with an advanced organizational autonomy and institutional duplication, based on a dichotomous cleavage between races (i.e., fictively biologized ethnic categories) officially recognized by the state.”

14 For a powerful visual rendering of the conflict in Singuerlín, see ARANDA, A. and G. CRUZ (directors). (2005). “¡Mezquita No!” Spain: A Contraluz Films and Tururut Art Infogràfic.

One of the greatest worries that (those in) Singuerlín had was that they did not want – these are their words, eh – they did not want to resemble Fondo. It (the mosque) would have the effect of bringing more immigration... And one of the preoccupations was precisely that, that they did not want Singuerlín to be converted into a Fondo – viewing Fondo as something bad, no? Or with negativity, which does not have to be the case.

Similarly, in Granollers, another city in the Barcelona area, the acquisition of an apartment intended for a mosque in the middle-class neighborhood of Tres Torres generated significant opposition in March of 2001. According to local media coverage, residents were concerned primarily with the impact that a greater Muslim presence would have on their neighborhood’s image, real-estate value, and level of security.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to opposition in marginalized neighborhoods, opposition in neighborhoods of higher standing thus aims to *maintain* certain places as spaces of privilege.

As a consequence of these two types of opposition, mosques in Barcelona often have been treated as ‘hot potatoes,’ encountering opposition in multiple neighborhoods by residents seeking either to resist or maintain extant infra-municipal hierarchies of privilege.<sup>16</sup> In the face of such opposition, local governments and Muslim communities often have no recourse other than to locate mosques in non-residential areas, most commonly in industrial warehouses far away from where most Muslims actually live. While this may provide a short-term solution to the conflicts that have emerged, it contributes to the peripheralization of Islam from urban life, hinders residents from growing accustomed to mosques in their neighborhoods, and delays the process of cultural and religious acceptance.

### **Relations with Local Governments**

Mosque opposition would likely be less prevalent in Barcelona if residents in neighborhoods where mosques have been proposed had more confidence in their local governments to manage the challenges associated with immigration and ethnic diversification. As stated above, most of these neighborhoods are inhabited largely by internal migrants who suffered extreme neglect by local authorities during the 1960s

---

<sup>15</sup> GIMÉNEZ, R. (2001). “Los marroquíes se retiran de Tres Torres.” *Revista del Vallés*, March 30: 7; LACRUZ, D. (2001). “Un 62% de los vecinos no quieren tener una Mezquita árabe en su calle.” *Revista del Vallés*, March 30: 10.

<sup>16</sup> I thank Mikel Aramburu for this analogy.

and 1970s, when Franco was still in power. Efforts to locate mosques in these neighborhoods often spark memories of past failures by local administrations to prioritize their needs. A common complaint among residents is that other services and facilities, such as libraries, day care centers, and police stations, are of greater importance than mosques. Local governments, they argue, should prioritize these services and facilities, rather than mosques and other structures that damage the image and well-being of their neighborhoods. For this reason, several of the most intensive mosque opposition campaigns have centered their complaints on the cession of public funds or land for mosque establishment.<sup>17</sup>

Even in neighborhoods that have improved significantly over time, such as Singuerlín in Santa Coloma, many residents maintain an activist orientation and perceive their local governments as unresponsive to their needs for services and facilities. For instance, Juan, the president of the local neighborhood association remarks:

Facilities have arrived because the people have fought. If they hadn't fought, there would be no facilities... It is lamentable. I trusted that when democracy arrived, all this would not have to happen – there wouldn't be demonstrations, politicians would build facilities – but I see that this is not the case. Everything must occur through struggle... And democracy should not be like this. I don't want to live like a “*Maharaja*” (high king) or be gifted anything, but I am paying my taxes and I have the right to have them build me a health clinic, a day care center, a school.

In several instances, feelings of discontent with the state are bound up with perceptions that local governments favor wealthier central neighborhoods where residents have deeper roots in the region. This contributes to a sense of *relative* deprivation with respect to the allocation of attention and resources, and reinforces distrust in local governments.<sup>18</sup> Issues related to immigration in particular, especially those dealing with the establishment of minority businesses and houses of worship, have

---

<sup>17</sup> The use of public funds or cession of public land was central to mosque polemics in several municipalities in Catalonia, most notably Badalona, Lleida, Reus, and Santa Coloma.

<sup>18</sup> For a theorization of the connection between perceptions of relative deprivation and contentious action, see the work of T. Gurr (1968; 1970).

become one of the focal points of resident discontent with local governance.<sup>19</sup> For instance, José María, a 57 year-old migrant from Extremadura and active member of a coalition against a proposed mosque in Badalona, emphatically states:

You've seen how deteriorated the neighborhood is. It lacks trees, it lacks benches, there is trash everywhere, there are rats bigger than this table, they don't clean the trash bins. They want this to be a ghetto... Why don't they bring all this to the center – these (immigrant) shops... why don't they place them there, in the center of Badalona? They say they belong here. (There) they don't give them permits, but here they do. Here they don't check the permits or anything. So what happens – do they think we're stupid or what? We pay taxes just as they do! Everyone pays, everyone pays!

Given that resistance to mosques is bound up with broader perceptions of unfair treatment by local governments, the state is often identified as one of the main culprits by those opposing mosques. For example, the aforementioned manifesto opposing the new mosque in Badalona begins by stating:

We the residents of Artigas and Sant Roc denounce the state of degradation, lack of security and coexistence that we have in our neighborhoods. *The disinterest and neglect of the city government in controlling the state of the area* -- over-occupied apartments, businesses without license, occupation of public thoroughfares and private spaces with a complete lack of compliance with urban norms and (norms of) coexistence by groups of people of different ethnicities -- has provoked an over-occupation of space that makes it impossible to live and work in normality and to coexist (emphasis added).

Interestingly, a leftist party or coalition has been in power in 24 of the 30 municipalities that have been host to mosque opposition in Catalonia, demonstrating that mosque opposition is not simply a matter of ideological conservatism. This trend may be explained largely by the fact that many of these municipalities are host to large

---

<sup>19</sup> With respect to immigrant businesses, the primary complaints among residents relate less to crude competition and more to the impact of these businesses on the image of their neighborhoods. Many believe that having too many immigrant businesses makes it unappealing for people of higher status to visit or settle in the neighborhood.

populations of migrant workers who were once active in the labor movement and historically have leaned toward socialist or communist parties. As a consequence, however, conservative opposition parties, most notably the Popular Party and *Convergència i Unió*, have taken advantage of resident discontent to make electoral gains in municipalities where they have traditionally had little sway among voters. In some cases, most notably Premià de Mar and Badalona, they have had significant success through fomenting anti-mosque discourses.<sup>20</sup> These discourses, however, are not successful solely because they are anti-mosque, but rather because they speak to real concerns that residents have about the degradation of their neighborhoods, the misuse of public resources, and the general inattentiveness of local governments to the needs of long-standing residents.<sup>21</sup>

### **A Point of Comparison: The Case of Madrid**

Given that the population of Madrid's metropolitan area, like that of Barcelona, grew exponentially due to internal migration and historically has been relatively activist in orientation,<sup>22</sup> should we not expect to see similar dynamics between successive waves of migrants in the two areas? Why has organized opposition to mosques been absent in Madrid, despite the fact that the region hosts Spain's second largest Muslim population and suffered a terrorist attack in 2004? The answer, I argue, lies in the distinct way in which municipalities that host large Muslim populations in Madrid have developed socially and spatially over time, as compared to municipalities in Barcelona.

A major difference between large municipalities in the metropolitan areas of Madrid and Barcelona is that, with the exception of the capital city of Madrid itself, municipalities in Madrid have much less pronounced infra-municipal inequalities, despite the similarity of their overall size to large municipalities in Barcelona. This has resulted from the distinct way in which they have developed historically. In contrast to

---

<sup>20</sup> In Premià de Mar, the critiques suffered by the Socialist mayor during a heated mosque polemic in the city between 2001 and 2002 by both mainstream and far-right opposition parties led to the election of a right-of-center administration in the following election. In Badalona, the Popular Party's active involvement in anti-mosque discourses and signature campaigns has led to steady gains in the past two municipal elections.

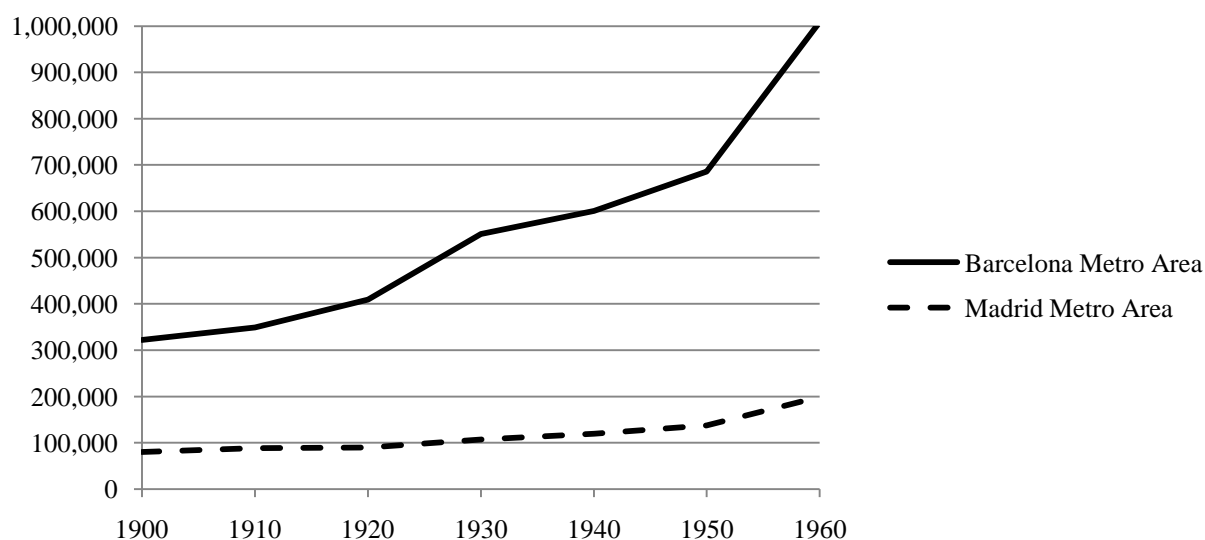
<sup>21</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to address all of the influences that opposition parties, and in some instances far right parties, have had on the intensity and trajectory of mosque polemics in Catalonia. While it would be a mistake to claim that mosque opposition has been orchestrated entirely by opposition parties, it is important to recognize the role they have played in legitimating resident opposition.

<sup>22</sup> Internal migrants to Madrid, like those to Barcelona, have a legacy of working-class activism and had to struggle very hard to pressure local administrations to address deficits in municipal services and infrastructure upon arriving to the area (A. BIER 1980).



Barcelona, Madrid’s metropolitan area did not grow significantly until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For it was not until then that major industrial development came to Madrid. Hence, whereas the population of Barcelona’s surrounding area already had ascended to nearly 700,000 inhabitants by 1950, what would later become Madrid’s metropolitan area had a combined population of less than 150,000 at this time.

**Figure 6: Evolution of the Metropolitan Areas of Barcelona and Madrid (1900-1960)\***



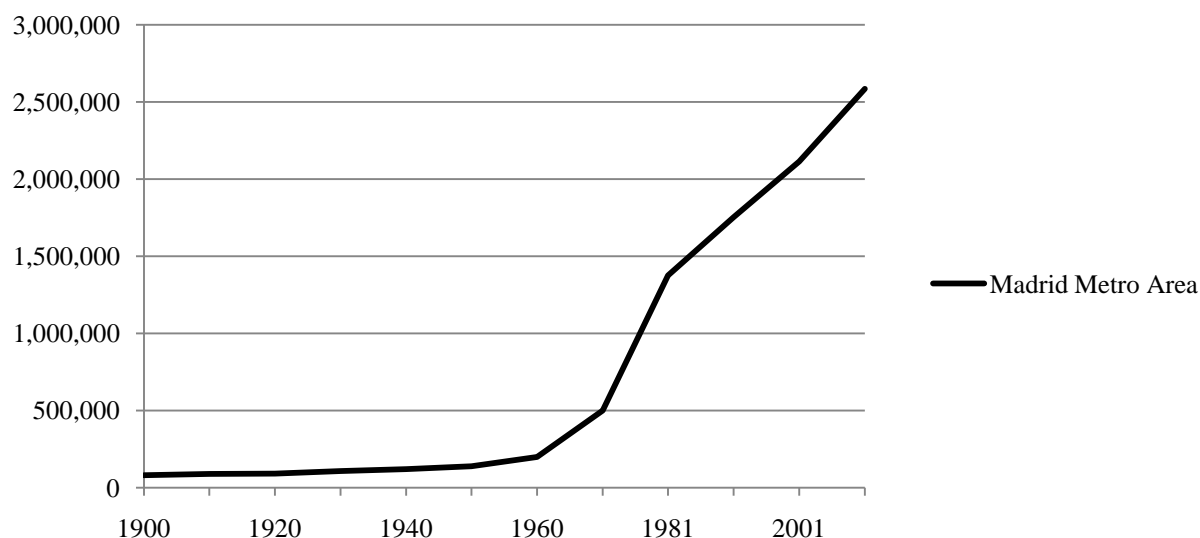
Sources: Compiled by author using data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística and the Instituto de Estadística de Cataluña.

\* The municipalities of Barcelona and Madrid are not included in this figure.

With the development of significant industrial production in Madrid during the late 1950s and early 1960s came the creation of a series of “dormitory suburbs” surrounding the capital city (F. BECKER ZUAZUA, 2007; R. LÓPEZ DE LUCIO, 1998; R. MÉNDEZ GUTIÉRREZ DEL VALLE, 1995). Municipalities in Madrid’s “inner ring,” such as Getafe and Leganés, began to experience major population booms in the 1960s, while municipalities in its “outer ring,” such as Fuenlabrada and Parla, did not experience major population booms until the early 1970s (J. RODRÍGUEZ JIMÉNEZ & G. GÓMEZ-ESCALONILLA, 2008). Rather than developing piecemeal, as did cities in Barcelona through successive waves of migration, municipalities in Madrid ballooned in size and grew rapidly into cities within the span of a couple decades (Figure 7). Given this more compressed time frame, most neighborhoods were constructed in a similar manner and hosted comparable proportions of internal migrant populations, resulting in a greater degree of infra-municipal social and economic equality. This equality was facilitated by the fact that most internal migrants to Madrid

either circulated within the same region or came from contiguous regions (A. BIER, 1980). The absence of a strong national identity and distinct language in Madrid, moreover, facilitated the acceptance and incorporation of migrants into social life. Indeed, the relative ease with which internal migrants were integrated in Madrid has led to the disappearance of term “internal migrant” as a meaningful social category, whereas it is still commonly used to describe collectives residing in Catalonia.

**Figure 7: Evolution of the Metropolitan Area of Madrid (1900-2008)\***



Sources: Compiled by author using data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

\* The municipality of Madrid is not included in this figure.

Still today, cities in the Madrid metropolitan area typically display a great deal of homogeneity in neighborhood character. Although some upscale housing has been built in the peripheries of these cities in recent years, disparities between neighborhoods remain much less pronounced than in Barcelona. As a result, real estate prices vary less, resulting in a less concentrated distribution of new immigrant populations. This claim is supported by a comparison of census data showing the distribution of foreigners across census tracts in the nine largest cities in Madrid and Barcelona (see Appendix).

Given that the city of Madrid itself has been the political capital of Spain for several centuries, it has more in common with major cities in Barcelona than do the municipalities in its metropolitan area, insofar as it has grown steadily over a relatively long period of time. As a result, the city of Madrid, not unlike cities in Barcelona, has a large diversity of neighborhoods that are readily distinguished by the socioeconomic status of their inhabitants. Still, neighborhood differences in Madrid are not as stark as in Barcelona. This is reflected in the distribution of immigrants across neighborhoods.

Although Madrid and Barcelona are both 17% foreign in composition, Madrid has just three census tracts in which 50% or more of the residents are foreign, compared to 20 in Barcelona, despite the fact that Madrid has roughly twice as many residents as Barcelona. Moreover, Barcelona has five census tracts in which 60% or more of the population is foreign with a peak of 83%, while the maximum in Madrid is 56%.<sup>23</sup>

The differences between Barcelona and Madrid are more pronounced, however, when we move outside the capital cities themselves to the major municipalities in their metropolitan areas. Despite the fact that major cities in Madrid have attracted large immigrant populations over that past 15 years, not a single one possesses a census tract that reaches 50% immigrant in composition. By contrast, five of the Barcelona metropolitan area's eight largest cities possess census tracts that are over 50% foreign, and in some cities, there are tracts that reach 60% or 70%. With respect to mosque opposition and other types of ethnic conflict, the most intense cases have taken place precisely in the cities that exhibit the highest levels of immigrant concentration and spatial segregation, including Badalona, Terrassa, Mataró, and Santa Coloma (see Appendix).

In Barcelona's cities, foreign populations tend to cluster spatially around the periphery, whereas they tend to cluster around the center of Madrid's cities. However, the disparities between center and periphery are much more pronounced in Barcelona than in Madrid, as many neighborhoods in Barcelona's metropolitan area have remained untouched by immigration, while others have experienced major ethnic diversification. This has contributed significantly to the feeling that here are “two Badalonas,” “two Matarós,” or “two Santa Colomas,” one of which is central, affluent, and well-accommodated, and the other of which is peripheral, poor, and neglected. In Madrid, by contrast, the neighborhoods that have remained untouched by immigration are less numerous and are mostly new urbanizations located in city peripheries. Such neighborhoods are generally strictly residential in character and are not viewed with envy by those residing in city centers.

Given the more equal distribution of immigrants across neighborhoods in Madrid, residents do not fear that immigration will exacerbate extant infra-municipal divisions

---

<sup>23</sup> In addition to the fact that immigrant clustering is less pronounced in the capital city of Madrid than in the city of Barcelona, the presence of two large, purpose-built mosques in Madrid, one of which was inaugurated in 1988 and the other in 1992, may play a role in explaining the absence of opposition in Spain's capital, as these mosques provide large and well-accommodated spaces for worshipers to gather in the city. Even with these two mosques, however, there are 19 other oratories serving the city of Madrid's Muslim population, according to data from the Fundación de Pluralismo y Convivencia.

or engender ethnic “ghettos,” despite the fact that the overall level of immigration is similar in proportion to that in Barcelona. To be sure, it is not the case that established residents in Madrid have no complaints whatsoever with regard to immigration. They frequently complain about how unfair preference is given to foreign immigrants with respect to social services and tax breaks, and immigrants are often associated with delinquency and crime. With respect to mosques in particular, residents sometimes complain about noise, traffic, crowding, and other such issues. However, such complaints are individual in nature and do not lead to organized protests that mobilize large segments of the community, as they do in Barcelona.

The case of Parla, which has Madrid’s second largest Muslim community and one small basement mosque, is particularly illustrative.<sup>24</sup> The dearth of space for Muslims to pray has led worshipers to spill out into the streets on Fridays and major holidays, generating complaints by some residents who live in the building where the mosque is located. The president of the local neighborhood association remarks:

Of course we have received some complaints, above all when it is Ramadan or one of their holidays because of course mosques, they’re called mosques but they are not adequate for the... Muslim population here in Parla. So, they have to do it (pray) in the street... Of course cutting off a street, where residents do not have access to their home... It bothered people.

But he adds that the complaints were minimal and always individual. The vice-president of the mosque echoes this point:

They were individual complaints... Moreover, from the same person... But I can only understand that the complaints are caused by or originate from the use of the sidewalk and not for any other reason.

Despite the fact that mosques in Parla and other cities in Madrid generate the same types of complaints regarding noise, traffic, and crowding in the streets that are heard in Barcelona, these complaints remain tied to practical difficulties presented by mosques and prayer gatherings themselves, and they are not connected by residents to more

---

<sup>24</sup> Only the city of Madrid has a larger Muslim community than Parla within the Madrid metropolitan area.

general struggles regarding urban privilege and state recognition, as they are in Barcelona. The reason is that foreign immigrants as a whole have followed the model of internal migrants in dispersing relatively evenly across neighborhoods, and so few residents feel unfairly burdened by the problems associated with foreign immigration. Moreover, there is generally less concern about certain neighborhoods becoming the locus of immigrant concentration and activity. For this reason, residents interviewed in Madrid never cited fears about their neighborhoods becoming “ghettos,” as was commonly the case in Barcelona, and often made explicit reference to how the even distribution of immigrants across neighborhoods has hindered the emergence of social conflicts. Given the absence of pronounced socio-spatial divisions in Madrid’s metropolitan area, the idea that a mosque might exacerbate imbalances in the distribution of immigrants or threaten the privileges enjoyed by certain neighborhoods is simply not something that occurs to residents of cities in Madrid’s metropolitan area.

## **Discussion**

The analysis advanced above suggests that socio-spatial divisions and inequalities, as well as perceptions that local governments are unresponsive to the needs of certain neighborhoods, have played a powerful role in contributing to the emergence of mosque opposition in Barcelona. This is not to minimize the relevance of prejudices against Muslims, North Africans, and immigrants in general, or the significance of fears related to economic competition. However, focusing on these factors alone, as has been the case in most recent work on attitudes and practices toward immigrants and other minorities, risks overlooking how characteristics of the relational settings within which distinct groups coexist influence the texture of their interactions. Specifically, contention surrounding the presence of mosques and other issues related to immigrant presence is more likely to occur in settings characterized by: 1) strong social distinctions; 2) coinciding spatial divisions; and 3) perceptions among long-standing residents that local authorities are inattentive to their needs and priorities. When these factors are present, immigrants are likely to cluster heavily in narrowly-circumscribed areas, increasing their visibility and the likelihood that their presence will be integrated into more general struggles surrounding urban privilege. In addition, it is more probable that residents will feel the need to take their own initiative in opposing immigrant presence, as opposed to leaving it to local governments to manage the challenges brought about by ethnic diversification.

The relational approach advanced in this paper bears certain parallels to the “figurational approach” advanced by N. Elias (1965) in his now classic work, *The Established and the Outsiders*. Both approaches emphasize the importance of focusing on the character of relations between different actors and groups, as opposed to their ascribed attributes, for understanding the texture of intergroup relations. However, the approach advocated in this paper requires that we go beyond looking solely at imbalances in power between different groups and pushes us to examine how intergroup relations are mediated by the concrete *settings* or *places* in which diverse groups interact, as well as by the relations that these groups bear to governing entities. Long-standing residents often perceive the entry of immigrants into a given neighborhood not only as a threat to their position vis-à-vis the newly-arrived immigrants, but also as a threat to the image of their neighborhoods vis-à-vis other neighborhoods. Moreover, as the examples cited in this paper illustrate, concerns provoked by immigration frequently relate more centrally to transformations of place (i.e., rising levels of insecurity, increased territorial stigmatization, and decreased prospects for neighborhood revitalization) than to direct competition over economic resources and political power. The specific utility of conceptualizing contexts of reception as relational settings and analyzing the processes elaborated above is that doing so helps to explain why such concerns are more salient in some contexts than in others.

The settings in Barcelona and Madrid that have been discussed in this paper are relatively large municipalities with over 100,000 inhabitants. In explaining differences in how residents have responded to mosques in each metropolitan area, I have argued that the neighborhood and city are the relevant units of analysis, given that mosque opposition has centered largely around struggles over *infra*-municipal privilege and recognition. In other instances, it may be the case that analyzing similar processes requires utilizing distinct units of analysis, since many people, especially those residing in smaller municipalities, assess their status and the status of their surroundings in relation to other municipalities in the vicinity, as opposed to other neighborhoods.<sup>25</sup> In determining which units are appropriate to a given analysis, scholars must be attentive to the subjective frames within which residents understand their social position and evaluate their experiences. The more general point is that the boundaries of relational

---

<sup>25</sup> With respect to mosque opposition, for instance, there appear to be some cases where residents fear that the establishment of a mosque in their municipality will lead to an influx of immigrants from other, more working-class municipalities in the area.

settings should not be assumed to be the same in all instances or to coincide perfectly with administrative categories, but rather must be determined in accordance with the frames of reference that people use in their everyday lives.

Highlighting the relevance of relational settings and the historical development of these settings in Barcelona for explaining current contention surrounding mosques is by no means a call for radical particularism in the study of ethnic conflict. While it is true that factors particular to Barcelona, such as the strong national identity of its inhabitants and the timing of industrialization in the area, are crucial for understanding the development of social and spatial inequalities that have complicated the reception of mosques, similar processes may be seen elsewhere in Spain as well. In Seville (Andalusia), for instance, where the most intense and enduring episode of mosque contention outside of Catalonia has taken place, the main arguments employed by those opposing the erection of a mosque in their neighborhoods similarly have related to more general feelings of marginalization and urban injustice. Specifically, residents of Bermejales and San Jerónimo, two peripheral neighborhoods of the city, have complained that they lack needed facilities and services that ought to be prioritized over mosques, and that their communities should not be the “trash bin for what is not desired by other neighborhoods.”<sup>26</sup> Although discussing the case of Seville in detail is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that its traditionally robust economy in comparison to the rest of Andalusia parallels Catalonia’s strong economic standing relative to Spain as a whole in key ways, and has led it to follow a similar course of urban development through successive waves of migration to that followed by industrial cities in Barcelona. Consequently, social cleavages and neighborhood inequalities are similarly pronounced in Seville. The presence of such cleavages and the manner in which they map onto urban space cannot be ignored if we are to understand how established residents react to mosques and other structures that serve immigrant populations.

In addition to helping us understand reactions to immigration, the conclusions drawn above may have implications for understanding more generally how settled

---

<sup>26</sup> See “Los vecinos de San Jerónimo entregan mañana 3.000 firmas contrarias a la ubicación de la mezquita.” (2009). *Europa Press*, November 3; Unas 200 personas se concentran en Los Bermejales contra la mezquita y denuncian un 'boicot' a la protesta.” (2005). *Europa Press*, March 19; “Vecinos de Los Bermejales amenazan con ‘echarse a la calle’ si se sigue adelante con el proyecto de la mezquita.” (2006). *Europa Press*, September 30; “Vecinos de Los Bermejales piden dotaciones sociales en los terrenos de la mezquita.” (2004). *ABC*, March 12; “Vecinos de San Jerónimo se reúnen hoy con urbanismo para expresar su rechazo a la mezquita, con 2.000 firmas.” (2009). *Europa Press*, September 30.



communities react to the perceived threat posed by outsiders. Consider, for example, popular movements known as “NIMBY” (‘Not in my backyard’) campaigns, particularly those related to facilities serving stigmatized populations. The complaints voiced by participants in such campaigns bear a striking resemblance to the complaints raised by those opposing mosques in Spain. Yet such campaigns are all too often reduced by scholars to clear and straightforward instances of racism and efforts to maintain certain places as spaces of “white privilege” (P. HUBBARD, 2005a; 2005b; R. WILTON, 2002). Indeed, several scholars have become increasingly critical of the usage of the acronym NIMBY in a pejorative manner to denote the irrationality and selfishness of those engaged in local protest, and have called for a more theoretically rigorous framework for analyzing the causes of local opposition (K. BURNINGHAM, 2000; P. DEVINE-WRIGHT, 2009; W. KEMPTON ET AL., 2005; M. WOLSINK, 2006). Analyzing the places in which such opposition tends to occur as relational settings and exploring the relevance of the processes discussed in this paper to other types of local opposition campaigns could move us closer to developing such a framework.

### **Conclusion**

Since the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, explanations of mosque opposition and other episodes of contention surrounding Islamic presence have tended to focus exclusively on crude xenophobia or alleged cultural incompatibilities. In most cases, such explanations have the effect of reinforcing the reductive dichotomy of “Islam versus the West” that has come to dominate popular debates concerning the periodic tensions that have emerged surrounding Muslim integration. Part of the reason that this paradigm continually reproduces itself through work on this topic is that academics and non-academics alike are often inattentive to important features of the relational settings in which Muslims and non-Muslims coexist and interact. This trend is not unique to studies of tension surrounding Muslim presence in Western contexts, but rather is common to studies of intergroup conflict in a variety of settings. The main aim of this paper has been to develop the theoretical tools necessary for analyzing responses to ethnic and religious diversification *in context*, and in so doing, to make possible richer and more nuanced analyses of the sources of conflict between long-standing residents and newly-arrived minorities.



## References

- ALLPORT, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
- BECKER ZUAZUA, F. (Ed.). (2007). *La economía de la Comunidad de Madrid*. Madrid: Editorial Centro de Estudios Ramón Areces.
- BIER, A. G. (1980). *Crecimiento urbano y participación vecinal*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.
- BLALOCK, H. M. (1967). *Toward a theory of minority-group relations*. New York: Wiley.
- BLUMER, H. (1958). Race prejudice as a sense of group position. *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 1(1), 3-7.
- BOBO, L. (1983). Whites' opposition to busing: Symbolic racism or realistic group conflict? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(6), 1196-1210.
- BONACICH, E. (1972). A theory of ethnic antagonism: The split labor market. *American Sociological Review*, 37(5), 547-559.
- BURNINGHAM, K. (2000). Using the language of NIMBY: A topic for research not an activity for researchers. *Local Environment*, 5, 55-67.
- CANDEL, F. (1965). *Los otros catalanes*. Madrid: Península.
- COLECTIVO IOÉ. (2005). *Inmigración y vivienda en España*. Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales, Subdirección General de Información Administrativa y Publicaciones.
- COLOMER, J. M. (1986). *Cataluña como cuestión de estado: La idea de nación en el pensamiento político catalán (1939-1979)*. Madrid: Tecnos.
- COSTA, J., GARCIA, E., TATJER, M., VILANOVA, J. M., VASCONCELOS, C., ANTÓN, R., GARCIA, L., & ALGABA, A. (2003). Infrahabitatge a Catalunya. *Scripta Nova. Revista Electrónica De Geografía y Ciencias Sociales*, 7(146(049)).
- DEVINE-WRIGHT, P. (2009). Rethinking NIMBYism: The role of place attachment and place identity in explaining place-protective action. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 19, 426-441.
- ELIAS, N., & SCOTSON, J. L. (1965). *The established and the outsiders*. London: F. Cass.
- GINER, S. (1980). *The social structure of Catalonia*. Sheffield: Anglo-Catalan Society.
- GURR, T. R. (1968). A causal model of civil strife: A comparative analysis using new indices. *The American Political Science Review*, 62(4), 1104-1124.

- GURR, T. R. (1970). *Why men rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- HJERM, M. (1998). National identities, national pride and xenophobia: A comparison of four western countries. *Acta Sociologica*, 41(4), 335-347.
- HJERM, M. (2004). Defending liberal nationalism -- at what cost? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(1), 41-57.
- HUBBARD, P. (2005a). 'Inappropriate and incongruous': Opposition to asylum centres in the English countryside. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 21(1), 3-17.
- HUBBARD, P. (2005b). Accommodating otherness: Anti-asylum centre and the maintenance of white privilege. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30, 52-65.
- KEMPTON, W., FIRESTONE, J., LILLEY, J., ROULEAU, T., & WHITAKER, P. (2005). The off-shore wind power debate: Views from Cape Cod. *Coastal Management*, 33, 119-149.
- KINDER, D. R., & SEARS, D. O. (1981). Prejudice and politics: Symbolic racism versus racial threats to the good life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40(3), 414-431.
- LEVINE, R. A., & CAMPBELL, D. T. (1972). *Ethnocentrism: Theories of conflict, ethnic attitudes, and group behavior*. New York: Wiley.
- LEWIN-EPSTEIN, N., & LEVANON, A. (2005). National identity and xenophobia in an ethnically divided society. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 7(2), 90-118.
- LÓPEZ DE LUCIO, R. (1998). La incipiente configuración de una región urbana dispersa: El caso de la Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid (1960-1993). In F. J. MONCLÚS (Ed.), *La ciudad dispersa* (pp. 169-196). Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona.
- LÓPEZ REDONDO, J., & REY CARNEIRO, A. (2008). Inmigración y segregación en las áreas metropolitanas españolas: La distribución territorial de la población no europea en el período 2001-2006. Working Paper #35. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Territorials.
- MCCONAHAY, J. B. (1986). Modern racism, ambivalence, and the modern racism scale. In J. F. DOVIDIO, & S. L. GAERTNER (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 91-125). Orlando: Academic Press.
- MCCONAHAY, J. B., & HOUGH, J. C., JR. (1976). Symbolic racism. *The Journal of Social Issues*, 32(3), 23-45.
- MÉNDEZ GUTIÉRREZ DEL VALLE, R. (1995). La nueva industria en la Comunidad de Madrid. In J. BOSQUE MAUREL, & R. MÉNDEZ (Eds.), *Cambio industrial y desarrollo regional en España* (pp. 415-447). Vilassar de Mar: Oikos-Tau.

- NEL•LO I COLOM, O. (2008). Contra la segregación urbana y por la cohesión social: La Ley de Barrios de Cataluña. In A. HERNÁNDEZ BONANCIA (Ed.), *Ciudades en (re)construcción: Necesidades sociales, transformación y mejora de barrios*. Barcelona: Diputació Barcelona.
- OBSERVATORIO ANDALUSÍ. (2008). Estudio demográfico de la población musulmana. Madrid, Spain: UCIDE.
- OBSERVATORIO ANDALUSÍ. (2009). El islam en España: Cifras y datos. Retrieved January 18, 2009, from <http://oban.multiplexor.es/cifras.htm>.
- OLZAK, S. (1992). *The dynamics of ethnic competition and conflict*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- OLZAK, S., & NAGEL, J. (1986). *Competitive ethnic relations*. Orlando: Academic Press.
- ORTIZ, D. G., MYERS, D. J., WALLS, N. E., & DIAZ, M. D. (2005). Where do we stand with newspaper data? *Mobilization: An International Journal*, 10(3), 397-419.
- PINCUS, F. L., & EHRLICH, H. J. (1994). The study of race and ethnic relations. In F. L. PINCUS, F.L., & EHRLICH, H. J. (Eds.), *Race and ethnic conflict: Contending views on prejudice, discrimination, and ethnoviolence* (pp. 3-10). Boulder: Westview Press.
- PRADO, A. (2008). *El retorn de l'islam a Catalunya*. Barcelona: Llibres de l'Índex.
- RECAÑO, J., & SOLANA, A. M. (1998). Migració residencial entre Catalunya i la resta d'Espanya. In S. GINER (Ed.), *La societat catalana* (pp. 221-239). Barcelona: Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya.
- RECOLONS, L. (2003). Enquadrament demogràfic de la immigració a Catalunya. *Qüestions De Vida Cristiana*, 211, 7-46.
- REQUENA HIDALGO, J. (2003). "La peor casa en el peor barrio": Barrios de inmigración y marginalidad en la periferia urbana de Barcelona. El caso de Badalona. *Scripta Nova. Revista Electrónica De Geografía y Ciencias Sociales*, 7(146(049)).
- RIEDER, J. (1985). *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against liberalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- RODRÍGUEZ JIMÉNEZ, J. L., & GÓMEZ-ESCALONILLA, G. (2008). *Fuenlabrada siglo XX: De un pueblo a una gran ciudad*. Fuenlabrada: Ayuntamiento de Fuenlabrada.
- SEARS, D. O., & HENRY, P. J. (2003). The origins of symbolic racism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(2), 259-275.

SEARS, D. O., HENSLER, C. P., & SPEER, L. K. (1979). Whites' opposition to "busing": Self-interest or symbolic politics? *The American Political Science Review*, 73(2), 369-384.

SHERIF, M. (1966). *Group conflict and co-operation: Their social psychology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

SOLÉ, C. (1982). *Los inmigrantes en la sociedad y en la cultura catalanas*. Barcelona: Península.

SOMERS, M. R. (1993). Citizenship and the place of the public sphere: Law, community, and political culture in the transition to democracy. *American Sociological Review*, 58(5), 587-620.

SUGRUE, T. J. (1996). *The origins of the urban crisis: Race and inequality in postwar Detroit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

SUTTLES, G. D. (1972). *The social construction of communities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

TAJFEL, H. (1978). *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. New York: Academic Press.

VILLARROYA I FONT, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Història de Badalona*. Badalona: Museu de Badalona.

WACQUANT, L. (2008). *Urban outcasts: A comparative sociology of advanced marginality*. Cambridge: Polity.

WILTON, R. D. (2002). Colouring special needs: Locating whiteness in NIMBY conflicts. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 3(3), 303-321.

WOLSINK, M. (2006). Invalid theory impedes our understanding: A critique on the persistence of the language of NIMBY. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 31(1), 85-91.

## Appendix

**Table A1: Cities Host to Mosque Opposition in Spain**

Region	City	Year(s) of Opposition
Andalusia	Granada	1985 – 2002
	Nijar	2004
	Seville	2004 – 2009 (Multiple Neighborhoods)
Balearic Islands	Felanitx	2008
	Marratxí	2005
Castile and León	Las Navas del Marqués	2004
	Soria	2003
Catalonia	Anglès	2007 – 2009
	Arenys de Munt*	2010
	Badalona*	2002, 2005 – 2007, 2009 (Multiple Neighborhoods)
	Balaguer	2008
	Banyoles	1999
	Barcelona*	2004, 2007 (Multiple Neighborhoods)
	Canet de Mar*	1995
	Cornellà de Llobregat *	2005
	Figueres	2002
	Girona	2008-2009
	Granollers*	2000, 2001 (Multiple Neighborhoods)
	Les Franqueses*	2003
	Llagostera	2004
	Lleida	2001 – 2009 (Multiple Neighborhoods)
	Manresa	2008
	Mataró*	2001
	Mollet del Vallès*	2004
	Montblanc	2007
	Premià de Mar*	1997, 2001 – 2002 (Multiple Neighborhoods)
	Reus	2001 – 2004 (Multiple Neighborhoods)
	Ripoll	2008
	Salt	2008
	Sant Boi de Llobregat*	2005
	Sant Feliu de Guíxols	2004
	Santa Coloma de Gramenet*	2004
	Santa Cristina d’Aro	2007
	Torroella de Montgrí	2001 – 2002
Vic	1990, 1998 (Multiple Neighborhoods)	
Viladecans*	2002, 2004	
Vilafranca del Penedès*	2004	
Extremadura	Talayuela	2006
Galicia	Vilaboa	2006
Murcia	Beniel	2009 – 2010
	Lorca	2006
	Murcia	2008
Basque Country	Vitoria-Gasteiz	2007

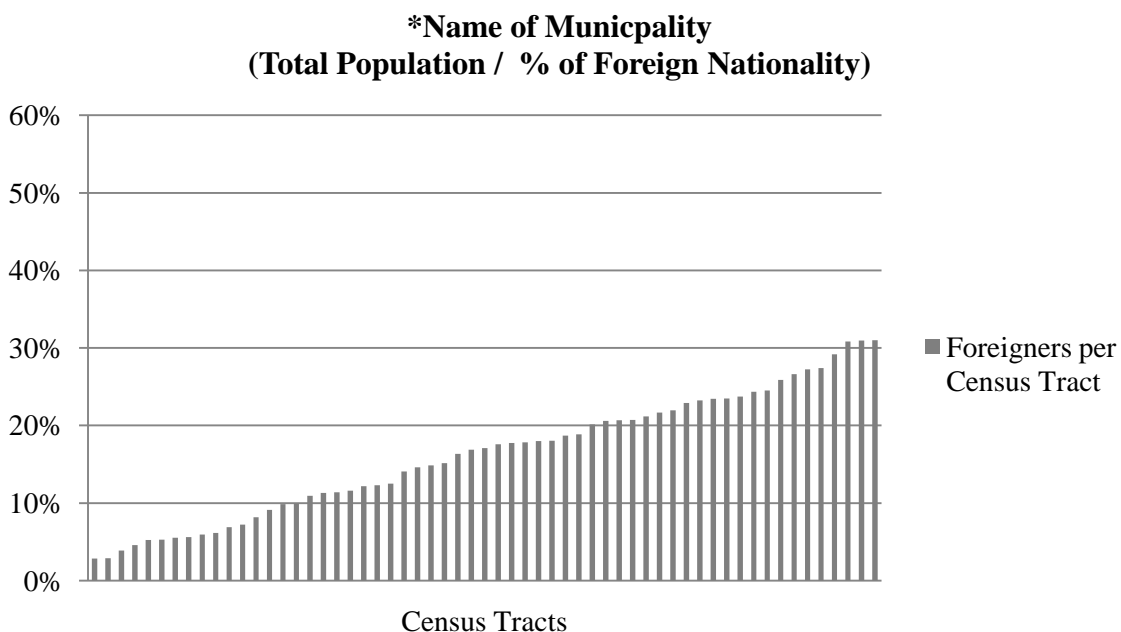
Valencia	Alicante	2005, 2009 (Multiple Neighborhoods)
	Alzira	2007
	Castellón de la Plana	1999
	Cocentaina	2008
	Cullera	2007
	La Vall d'Uixó	2009
	Llíria	2004
	Vila-real	2006

Source: Author's review of Spanish press and SOS Racismo's annual reports on racism in Spain.

\* Located in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area

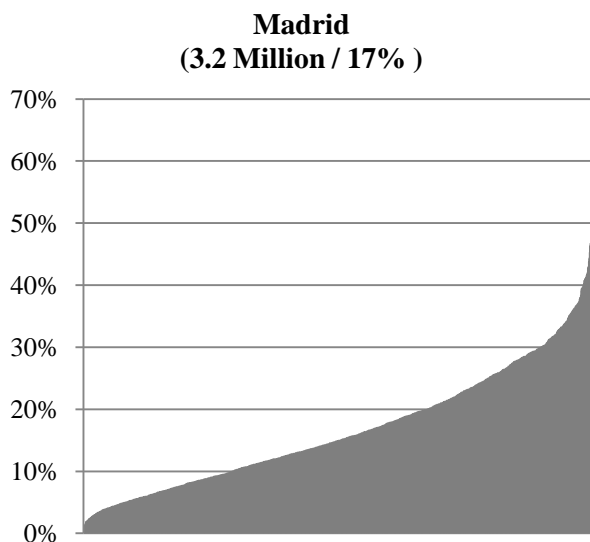
**Figure A1: Distribution of Foreign Populations in Madrid and Barcelona’s Nine Largest Municipalities**

Template

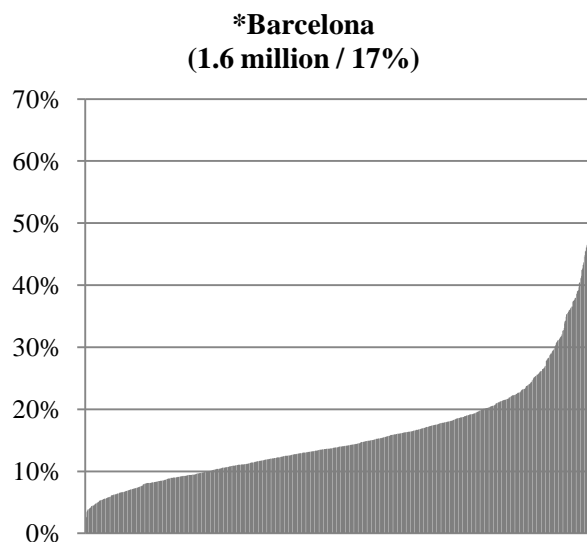


\*Host to mosque opposition

**Madrid**

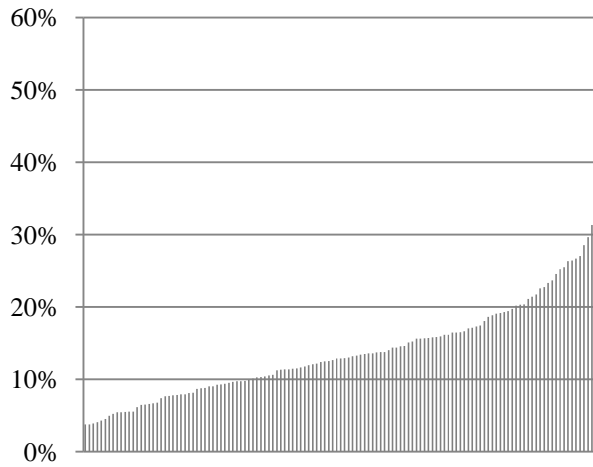


**Barcelona**

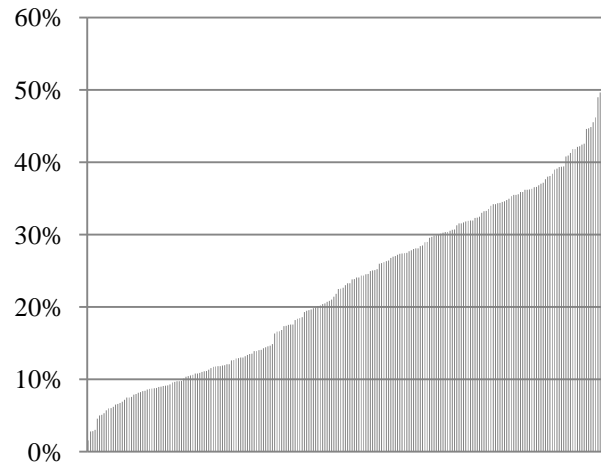




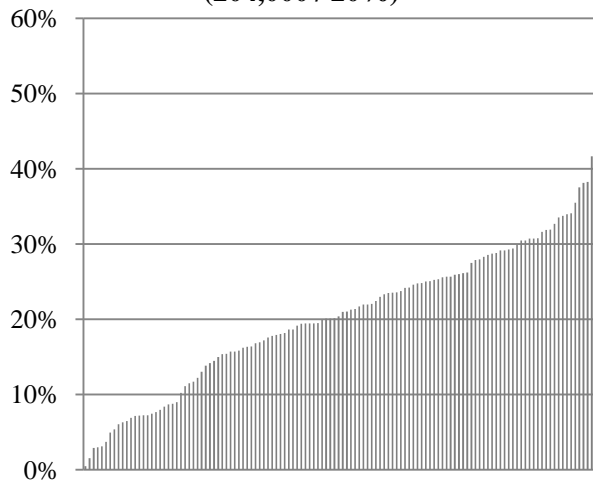
**Móstoles**  
(206,000 / 13%)



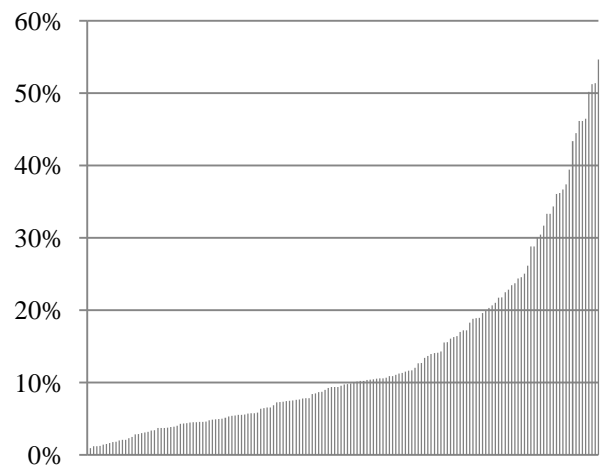
**L'Hospitalet de Llobregat**  
(245,000 / 21%)



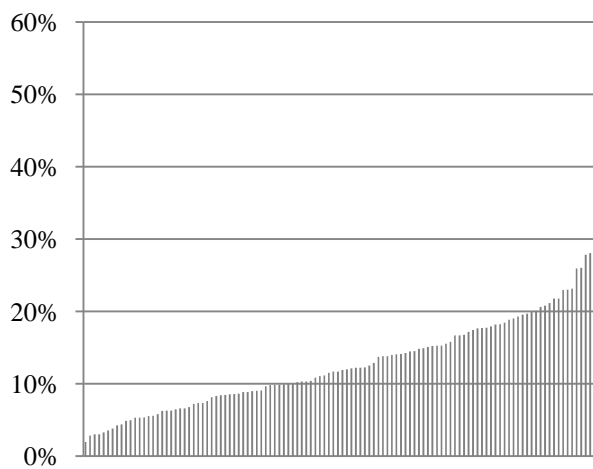
**Alcalá de Henares**  
(204,000 / 20%)



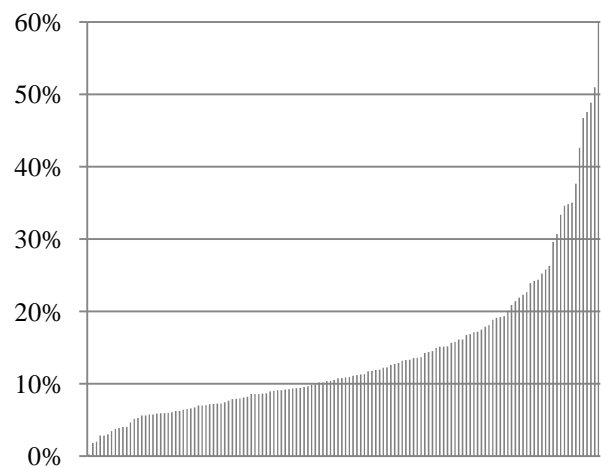
**\*Badalona**  
(215,000 / 15%)



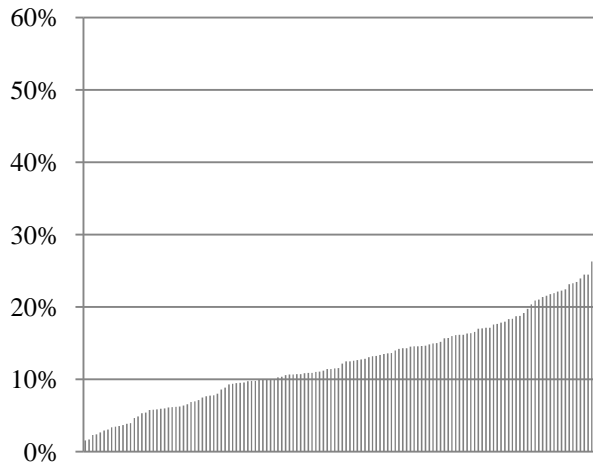
**Fuenlabrada**  
(195,000 / 12%)



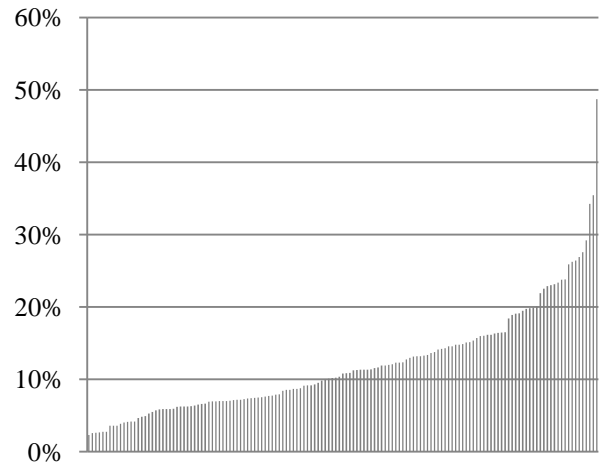
**Terrassa**  
(206,000 / 14%)



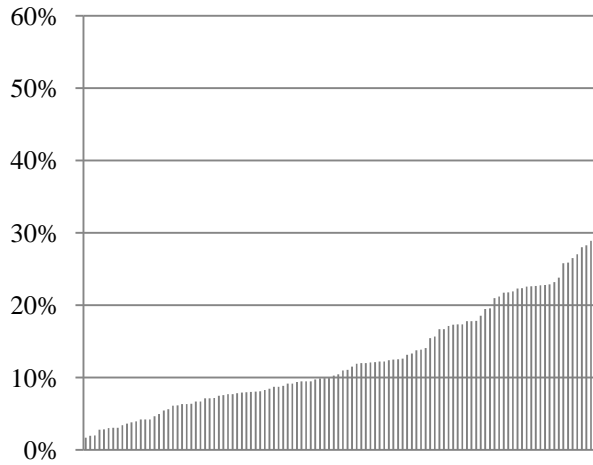
**Leganés**  
(184,000 / 12%)



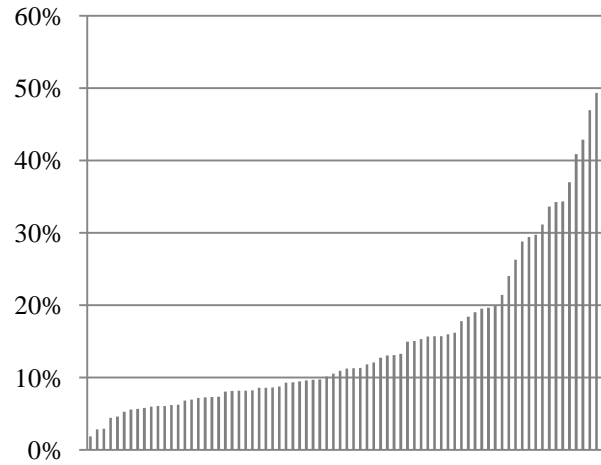
**Sabadell**  
(204,000 / 12%)



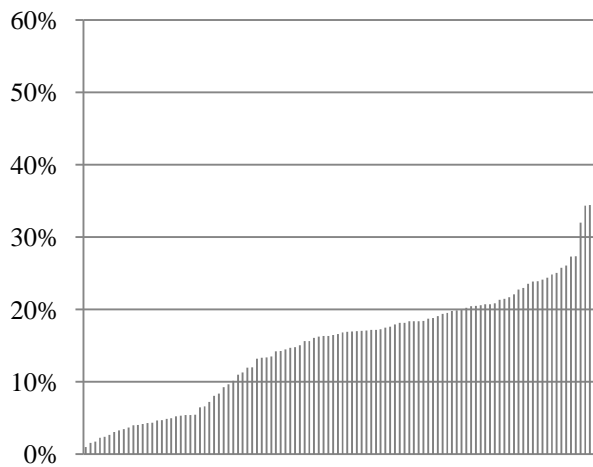
**Alcorcón**  
(168,000 / 12%)



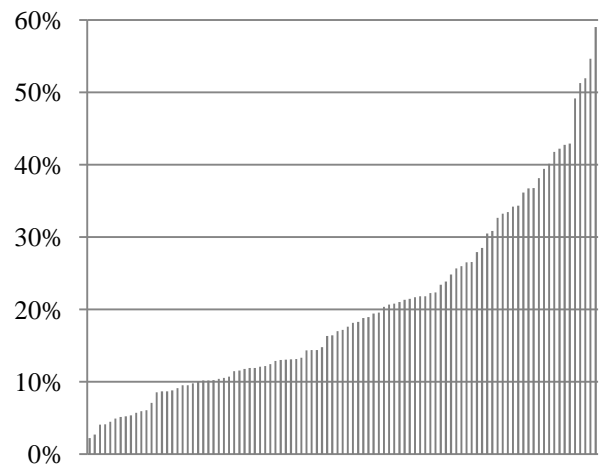
**\*Mataró**  
(120,000 / 16%)



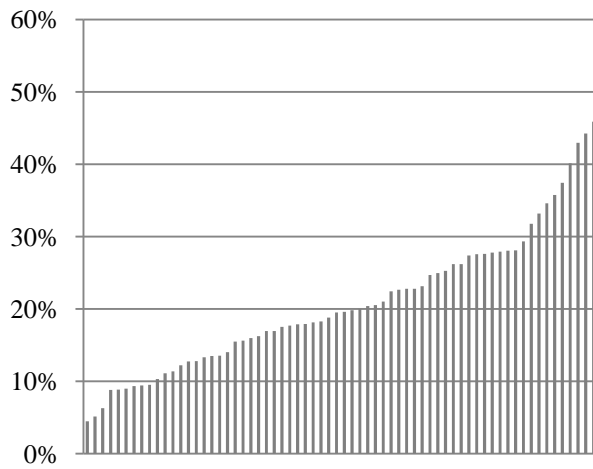
**Getafe**  
(164,000 / 14%)



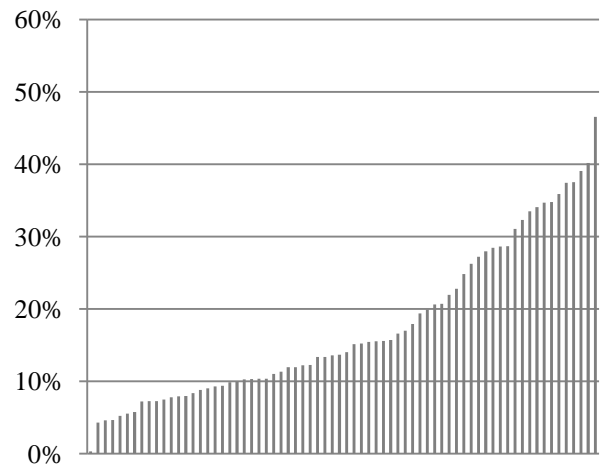
**\*Santa Coloma de Gramenet**  
(117,000 / 19%)



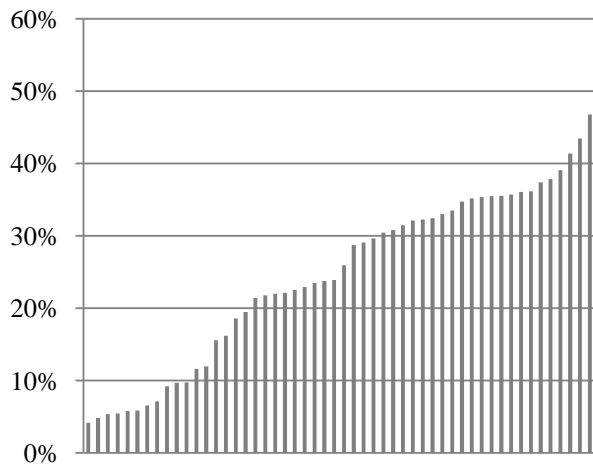
**Torrejón de Ardoz**  
(116,000 / 20%)



**\*Cornellà de Llobregat**  
(85,000 / 16%)



**Parla**  
(108,000 / 24%)



**\*Sant Boi de Llobregat**  
(81,000 / 9%)

