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## Article

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ARTICLE

# Inhabiting Heritage: Living with the Past in the Albayzín of Granada

Chris Moreh<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Southampton, GB  
c.moreh@soton.ac.uk

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This paper is an exploration of the ideological struggles reflected in the urban conflicts taking place in an inhabited World Heritage site, the 'old Moorish' neighbourhood of Albayzín in Granada. Centring its discussion on a theorisation of 'heritage', the article introduces the concept of 'heritagification' as a useful way of understanding the local historical-political dimensions of urban conflict in populated World Heritage Sites, defining it as the localised material and empirical manifestation of a universal ideological principle. In the Albayzín, the article argues, the main struggle develops around providing the neighbourhood with a future meaning, function and inhabitants. Competing perspectives are heavily influenced by visions of the past, the main divide stretching between Muslim and Christian interpretations of the neighbourhood's historic heritage. The article describes, using qualitative data, how heritagification ascribes its own logic and value system to processes of urban change, promoting a version of historical truth that is best able to capitalise on the urban heritage of the neighbourhood.

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## 1 Introduction

The ambiance suddenly changes as you turn right from that wide and busy avenue skirted by impressive imperial-style buildings and world-brand stores, and you find yourself on a narrow street, having to move along with a crowd chattering in a diversity of tongues. On the sides you glimpse kebab buffets and souvenir shops, their entrances masked by the heap of cloths and bags hanging from the jambs and lintels. Turn right again, and you'll be facing a steep stairway up the hill, fringed by the same colourful merchandise and bearded men in long tunics flinging in all their charm to catch your attention. Chatter flies low above your head, and the smell of fruity smoke arising from hookahs hits you in the face. The buildings seem rather small and shaky, with narrow and uneven windows, giving the impression that they are moving along with you on these winding alleys. You feel lost, but soon you run into a wall guiding your way further. Suddenly you hear an engine, as if coming from another world, one you've left behind somewhere in the future. It's a minibus, slowly bumping along on the cobblestones, compelling you to cling against the cold surface of a building wall while it passes. Finally you reach a square packed with tourists and street artists. On the left you see an old church, its steeple, crowned with a large cross, reaching high into the skies. On the right, the majestic view of the medieval fortress lying on a hilltop. You are absorbed into the scenery, everything turns silent, distant and motionless until a quaint, unworldly voice disrupts your contemplation; it is the *adhan*, the Islamic call to prayer, recited from a nearby minaret. You are, indeed, in the Albayzín, the old Moorish neighbourhood of Granada (adaptation from field notes, 8 April 2011).

The above description could be a passage from the diary of anyone visiting the neighbourhood for the first time. The Albayzín has gone through considerable transformation since becoming a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1994, allowing for such highly romanticised and orientalist depictions as the one exemplified here. The passage, however, is *allegorical* in the anthropological sense that it encapsulates, through a sensory description of urban symbolism, the core politico-ideological

tension inherent in the site (see Clifford, 1986). It is the aim of this article to unpack this 'tension', the historical roots of which stretch back to the late-15<sup>th</sup>-century Christian-Castilian conquest of the Emirate of Granada, and which has remained an often-remarked-upon feature of the neighbourhood. As García Lorca (1898–1936), the ill-fated local bard noted a century ago, the streets of Albayzín unfold 'a tragedy of contrasts':

Everything reveals a mood of infinite woe, an oriental curse that has befallen these streets. . . . All that is tranquil and majestic in the Vega and the town, is rife with angst and tragedy in this Moorish district. Arabic evocations are everywhere. Blackish and mouldy arches, paunchy and flat houses with ornate galleries, mysterious hovels with oriental outlines . . . . Then a vagueness in every gaze that seems to dream of things past . . . and an overwhelming fatigue. (García Lorca, 1994: 147. Translated by the author)

The tensions, contrasts or conflicts of the present, however, are closely related to the transformation of the *human architecture*—conceived as both architecture built *by* people, and *the* population itself—that has taken place in the neighbourhood over the past twenty years. The contemporary experience is somewhat a return to the early-twentieth century diversity, following decades of steady de-population and urban decay (Cabrera Medina, 2009). However, the popular characters of the Lorcan 'tragedy'—the pious nun, the foul-mouthed goatherd, the big-eyed prostitutes and the Gitano musicians (García Lorca, 1994: 147)—as well as the characteristic personage of the 1980s, the elderly peasant, the sole surviving vestige of the town's rural past, have mostly been replaced by the alternative youth, the new-age artist, the foreign exchange student, the North-African migrant, and the Muslim convert among others (Abend, 2008; Bahrami, 1998; Duque Calvache, 2010; Flesler, 2008; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012b; Rosón Lorente, 2008).

The various factions and frictions caused by the new diversity have received considerable scholarly attention in recent years, as did those relating to local projects of urban renovation (for the latter, see, for example, Barrios Rozúa, 2002; Cabrera Medina, 2009; Castelló Nicás, 2003; Hita Alonso, 1996). The human and

urban aspects of change are intertwined through the process of *gentrification*, a vernacular of which has been identified and described in depth by local researchers (Duque Calvache, 2010; Duque Calvache, Susino and De Pablos, 2013; Rosón Lorente, 2010). While the process was classically discussed in terms of class conflict over urban space<sup>1</sup>—and this is certainly a significant aspect of its manifestation in the Albayzín—the Granadan neighbourhood confers upon gentrification an additional level of ideological struggle over the ownership of historical *heritage* and historical *memory*, one revolving around ethno-religious dichotomies in which discourses of Christian continuity are set against what many perceive as a ‘return of Islam’ (Rosón Lorente and Dietz, 2011). This central antagonism is evident in the very denomination of the district, having two different popular spellings: *Albayzín* and *Albaicín*. According to Duque Calvache (2010: 115) the former is used if wishing to emphasise the older days of the neighbourhood, its Moorish past and exoticism (e.g. in UNESCO documents), while the latter alludes to a more recent past of a bucolic Catholic working-class community (e.g. in local official documents). I have opted for the first spelling not in order to reinforce a romanticised vision instead of a more realistic one, but as a constant reminder of the *existence* of such imagery in relation to local cultural ‘heritage’.

This article examines this ideological struggle by articulating a concept of *heritagification* which takes its cue from a ‘critical’ understanding of *heritage* (see Winter, 2013), and describes the localised material and symbolic manifestations of this universal ideological principle. The concept thus allows us to see certain processes of gentrification as shaped by the universalising ideology of heritage, mediated by institutions through which unequal power relations at the local level are created and upheld, and having a direct impact on the constitution of the local population. As such, the proposed concept goes beyond that of ‘heritagisation’, which has been applied—and seems grammatically better fitted—to merely highlight the *constructed* nature of ‘heritage’ (see Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013; Walsh, 1992).

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<sup>1</sup> One famous textbook definition of *gentrification* describes it as ‘the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use’ (Lee, Slater and Wily, 2008: xv).

In our case—as in many other contexts (see, for example, Evans, 2002; Herzfeld, 2009; Rubino, 2005; Shaw, 2005, for examples from Canada, Italy, Brazil and Australia)—the main ideology and surveillance over *heritagification* is provided by UNESCO through a specific ‘heritage discourse’ (Smith, 2006). Locally, the institutional structures channelling the universal ideological principles into urban practice are supported by the municipal and regional governments, as well as by private enterprise, religious institutions, and the civil sphere, and this article pays special attention to this institutional power-structure with the aim of harnessing its explanatory potential.

The starting contention in any discussion of *heritagification* must be that ‘heritage’—as an ideology and an institution—directly and indirectly affects processes of urban change by way of intervention in the value system of the global market and in local socio-political power relations. Reaching such a contention requires a contextualisation of ‘heritage’ as a concept, and its description as a phenomenon. The *concept* of heritage is itself one riddled with contradictions, and in the following section I will outline some of its foundational dichotomies, between its material and immaterial aspects, essential and constructed features, and its universalism versus particularity. The later sections of the article will turn to a description of the *phenomenal* manifestation of heritagification in the Albayzín, building on findings from a fieldwork carried out in April 2011, with the aim to provide an assessment of the ideological struggles reflected in the urban conflicts taking place in the World Heritage neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The analysed data have been obtained through a combination of sources and methods: observation and personal field notes; archival material of local newspaper articles; notes from informal discussions with residents, local entrepreneurs and tourists; personal minutes of weekly meetings of the Lower Albayzín Residents’ Association; photo-documentation; as well as ten formal interviews with representatives of residents’ associations, religious leaders and urban planning professionals. Although the formal interviews and personal minutes were collected over a short period of one month during April 2011 due to funding constraints, the informal discussions, and most of the field notes and archival material were gathered or identified during a previous exchange semester in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Granada in 2008–2009.

## 2 Heritage and memory: a critical connection

Following an initial rejection and a decade of planning and commitment to rehabilitation, the Albayzín was finally granted World Heritage status on 17 December 1994, being included in the extension of the UNESCO designation which had been afforded to the Moorish fortress of the Alhambra and the gardens of Generalife in 1984. The decision had been long in the waiting, and was not the least surprising; as the body of experts recommending the extension made clear, the Albayzín ‘has a universal value which is complementary to and chronologically earlier than the site already on the List’ (ICOMOS, 1994: 63), alluding to the remainders of an 11th century Zirid wall. This assessment epitomises the main ideological principles underpinning the contemporary institutional conception of ‘heritage’, a critique of which is a necessary step in discussing *heritagification* phenomena.

The core propositions of a critical understanding of heritage are best summarised by Laurajane Smith (2006: 3–4. Emphasis in original), according to whom ‘all heritage is intangible’, ‘not *inherently* valuable’, and without any ‘innate meaning’; it is, fundamentally, ‘a discourse’, understood as ‘a form of social practice’. Adopting a similarly Bourdieusian vocabulary, Michael Herzfeld describes ‘heritage’ in terms of ‘a new global *habitus* in which dominant interpretations of history spatially reinforce current ideologies’ (2010: s259. Emphasis in original). Interestingly, in a book focusing specifically on ‘built heritage’—a very *tangible* matter—Françoise Choay (2001) deems the broader field of historic heritage to refer ‘at once to an institution and to a mentality’ (2001: 1). These assertions may surprise us when we consider that the standard dictionary definitions of ‘heritage’ are anchored in the historical social structures of European individualism and property rights. The term—as ALSayyad (2001: 2) points out—‘derives from the Old French *eritage*, meaning property which devolves by right of inheritance in a process involving a series of linked hereditary successions’; or—as Choay (2001: 1) highlights—it refers to ‘inherited property passed down in accordance with the law, from fathers and mothers to children’. Such understandings have played a crucial role in the national movements of the nineteenth century, which extended the idea of cross-generational inheritance

from the familial domain to emerging national entities, a procedure reliant on a significant degree of imaginative construction—as famously argued by Anderson (1991). In the nationalist toolkit, ‘heritage’ provided the only tangible link between the struggles of the present and a future modelled on an idealised past.<sup>3</sup> The aims of national unity had thus been promoted through an ‘authorized heritage discourse’ underpinned by technical and aesthetic expertise, and institutionalised in state administrative bodies (Smith, 2006: 11). This Eurocentric experience and *historical habitus* was later given universal recognition, and among the organisations whose primary role is heritage administration—what Smith (2006: 87) calls ‘authorizing institutions of heritage’—the one with the greatest authority today is UNESCO’s 1972 World Heritage Convention.<sup>4</sup>

One aspect of ‘heritage’ that plays a critical role in understanding the mechanisms of conflict in populated heritage sites—the foremost arenas of *heritagification*—is its relation to historical ‘memory’. In this respect, the institutionalisation of heritage has again played an important role. As Walsh (1992: 87) argues, ‘those who decide what is worthy of preservation and how it should be preserved, are basically deciding what is worth remembering’; and since historical memory rarely goes uncontested, authorising institutions and discourses also decide *from whose perspective* it will be remembered. Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) accurately point out the exclusionary nature of heritage, as it can logically only belong to *one* group of people, and therefore ‘any creation of heritage from the past disinherits someone completely or partially, actively or potentially’ (1996: 21). It is the political function

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<sup>3</sup> It is ironic but true, as Schildgen (2008: 167) finds, that ‘in Europe in the nineteenth century, recovering the medieval heritage became one of the cultural means to build nationalism, even though the European Middle Ages had no political entity parallel to the modern nation’.

<sup>4</sup> Among the earliest specialised national institutions and legal devices were the 1807 *Danish Royal Commission for Antiquities*, the 1882 *Ancient Monuments Protection Act* in Britain, or the 1904 German *Heimatschutz* (Walsh 1992: 70–72). Internationally, the *Charter of Athens* was adopted in 1931, in 1964 the *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* (Venice Charter), and in 1965 the *International Council on Monuments and Sites* (ICOMOS). The Spanish Historical Heritage Law (*Ley del Patrimonio Histórico Español*) was adopted in 1985, some months after the first World Heritage Site designations—including to the Alhambra in Granada—were assigned in Spain.

of 'heritage' in promoting and undermining claims to power and legitimacy which is being denounced by critical approaches.

Theorists have most often addressed the relationship between built heritage and memory by identifying opposing cognitive mechanisms at play. Choay (2001), for instance, distinguishes between 'affective memory' and 'cognitive memory', and relates them to 'monuments' and 'historic monuments' respectively. Following Alois Riegl's (1903 [1982]) insights, she argues that while 'monuments' are human universals deliberately erected for commemorative and affective purposes—a function gradually erased by modernity due to the development of more effective mnemonic techniques—the 'historical monument' is a European invention, whose value and meaning is cognitively constituted *a posteriori*. Similarly, Nora (1989: 13) contrasts a lived, embodied, 'true' memory with a modern, 'archival' one, famously advocating a scholarly endeavour to salvage the former. Yet, while in this sense designated heritage sites are 'historic monuments' governed by 'cognitive' or 'archival' memory, the memorial function they play locally can be highly complex and contradictory. Positing the same dialectic, Herzfeld (1991) has addressed precisely this complexity when, while looking at the temporal aspects of everyday life in a Cretan town of mixed Venetian and Ottoman urban heritage, he differentiated between 'social' and 'monumental' time in the struggle over the ownership of local history. The difficult relationship between heritage and memory comes to the fore in many situations where sites are being reclaimed as group heritage by different factions, such as in the case of the Great Mosque of Cordoba or in the Albayzín of Granada (Rogozen-Soltar, 2007; Ruggles, 2010; Schildgen, 2008: Chp. 4). Essentially, heritage sites are what Nora (1989) calls *lieux de memoire*; such 'places of memory' are 'simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. Indeed, they are *lieux* in three senses of the word—material, symbolic, and functional' (1989: 17–18).

Returning to our *lieux*, the historical heritage of Albayzín has entertained the memory of many over the past decades, coalescing with the regional nationalist movements that emerged in the late 1970s following the death of Francisco

Franco. According to Dietz (2004), classically, Andalusian nationalism has built on three sources to emphasise the region's particularity: the '*gitano* legacy', the '*fiesta* legacy' and the '*moro* legacy'. The *gitano* legacy is centred on the art of flamenco and a romanticised vision of the 'gypsy way of life' which has continuously increased in popularity since the late 1950s (Dietz, 2004: 1095). The religious *fiestas* reflect popular Catholic traditions, and revolve around local patron saints and competing religious fraternities. The Albayzín is central to festivities such as the Holy Week processions or the Festival of the Crosses (*Fiesta de las Cruces*) involving the adornment of the countless stone crosses skirting the streets and squares of the neighbourhood. These deeply rooted expositions of Christian faith and popular culture starkly contrast with the urban features relying on the *moro*—or Moorish—legacy, the latter building chiefly on neo-Moorish decorative architecture, and more recently on the presence of North-African migrants (see **Figures 1** and **2**). For many regionalist groups, the Islamic Middle Ages represent the historical period when the essence of Andalusian nationhood was formed, and the memory of *Al-Andalus*—of Moorish Spain—still haunts Spanish society today. It is often invoked in political discourse, emphasising either the vision of a 'clash of civilisations' or, on the contrary, the idyllic ideal of *convivencia*—the assumed peaceful cohabitation of Christians, Muslims and Jews during Moorish times (Abend, 2008; Coleman, 2008; García-Sánchez, 2014; Hirschkind, 2014; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012a; 2012b; Suárez-Navaz, 2004: Chp. 7).

What the three 'legacies' have in common, however, is that they have all been redressed for tourist consumption; even the 'Holy Week of Granada' has been designated as a 'Fiesta of International Tourist Interest' by the State Department for Tourism in October 2009. World Heritage designation further transforms historic heritage into a 'brand', a 'trademark', by acting as an 'authenticity stamp', whereas it is precisely the authenticity of a place that may dilapidate in the process (Rakić, 2007: 216). While from one perspective—adopting the phraseology of UNESCO—the different 'legacies' are being given *universal* recognition, their commodification can also be seen as a 'neoliberal hijacking of history'—in the fitting words of Herzfeld (2010).



**Figure 1:** Palm Sunday procession along Calle Elvira (Author's photograph).



**Figure 2:** Moorish style doors (Author's photographs).

For the Albayzín, becoming a World Heritage Site also contributed to the consolidation of its 'myth'—propagated by orientalisations like the one we witnessed in Lorca's prose—now institutionally proclaimed (Cabrera Medina, 2009). For UNESCO, 'much of the significance of the Albayzín lies in the medieval town plan with its narrow streets and small squares and in the relatively modest houses in Moorish and Andalusian style that line them' (ICOMOS, 1994: 64). The logic of *heritagification* further demands that the human and social 'architecture' of the neighbourhood enhance this *universal* significance, introducing a value system by which forms of population change that do not necessarily adhere to classical patterns of gentrification become economically advantageous for the global forces of 'cultural capitalization' (Kowalski, 2011). At the same time, the *heritagified* urban space morphs into a symbolic battlefield for different 'legacies' competing over the ownership of historical memory.

### **3 Albayzín, 'a neighbourhood destined to be inhabited'**

The Albayzín is a divisive neighbourhood among Granadinos. Surveys have shown that, on the one hand, it is the most rejected and disliked district among the young population, while, on the other hand, its 'noble' parts are where most people would like to live (Fernández Gutiérrez and Jiménez Bautista, 2000). One reason for the high levels of rejection, contend Fernández Gutiérrez and Jiménez Bautista (2000), is that the medieval urban morphology and its askew character make it hard to be approached by car, and that the youngsters especially find it difficult to orientate within the neighbourhood. Yet, as the local researchers conclude, 'we, Granadan citizens, prefer and/or fantasize about being able to live in the "noble" parts of the idyllic neighbourhood of Albayzín' (2000: 275).

This paradox is explained by the discrepancies in the quality of housing in different parts of the neighbourhood. The upper—*noble*—segments are dominated by *cármenes*, large closed-off estates serving mostly as weekend- or holiday residences to wealthy Granadinos.<sup>5</sup> The lower streets, meanwhile, are characterised by

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<sup>5</sup> Originating from the Andalusian Arab word *karm* (meaning 'vineyard'), the *cármén* is a traditional Andalusian estate composed of a house and a series of gardens and orchards. Originally open spaces,

older and ruinous buildings, which nevertheless are among the historically most significant. They have been the focal points of the various urban rehabilitation projects undertaken since the UNESCO World Heritage designation, and have in recent years become attractive to the Moroccan migrant community, international students and alternative youths, following a long period of abandonment and deterioration (Rosón Lorente, 2008). Older residents still recall the time when the lower parts of the neighbourhood became depopulated; Manuel, for instance, reminisces about the old days of that crowded, narrow street we first turned onto on our imaginary stroll in the opening paragraph:

In the seventies and eighties it used to be a vegetable market, ideal for shopping on your way back from town. You could find everything there, not like today, this cheap junk they sell to tourists, but everyday things, food, clothes . . . And then, I don't know why, probably because the houses were in such a bad condition that they were about to collapse, this area was abandoned. In those years many people left Albayzín and moved to the outskirts where they could buy a new-built apartment with all the amenities they could wish for. (Manuel, interviewed by author, 13 April 2011)<sup>6</sup>

The renovation of the buildings has been more or less successful, with yet much to be done. At the same time, as Hita Alonso (1996) observed, the aim of 'rehabilitating' a historical neighborhood has shifted in both discourse and practice toward 'revitalization', denoting a more dynamic process involving active social planning. The verdict is that 'the Albayzín is a neighborhood destined to be inhabited' (De Pablos and Cabrera Medina, 2005: 267).

The two main local institutions involved in projects of urban revitalisation at the time of the fieldwork were the *Albaicín–Granada Agency*—under the auspices of Granada City Council—and the *Rehabilitation Office of Albaicín*—belonging to

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they are today 'closed paradises', isolated from curious gazes by thick walls (Barrios Rozúa, 2002). In **Figure 2** (left) we can see the gate of *Cármen de la Media Luna*.

<sup>6</sup> Interviewee names have been changed to maintain the anonymity of the sources.

a public sector company of the Government of Andalusia. In carrying out their respective duties the two institutions are also taking a stance on the future of the neighbourhood, and their opinions and objectives often conflict, not least because the local and regional governments have long been led by competing political parties.<sup>7</sup>

The *Albaicín–Granada Agency* was established in 1998 to manage the European funds for urban revitalization and, according to its website, 'besides its statutory duties, as permanent observatory of Albaicín, of safeguarding the values for which it has been designated World Heritage by the UNESCO, is in charge since 2008 of managing the Tourist Plan of the city of Granada' (Agencia Albaicín–Granada, n.d.). This dual commitment reflects the institutionalisation of the blend between heritage and tourism that describes all World Heritage sites. However, in populated sites exposed to processes of heritagification, it also determines the constitution of their inhabitants. In this respect, the *Agency* is more inclined towards a fluid, flexible vision for the neighbourhood, and tends to agree with the pragmatic argument shared by private investors, that 'if we wouldn't have the tourists and the students, Granada would disappear!' (Angel, manager of a real-estate agency, interviewed by author, 19 April 2011). According to the managing director of the *Agency*, 'we must facilitate, not *impose* but *facilitate* hotels', with the condition that 'a hotel should always be in an old, renovated house, keeping everything as it was' (interviewed by author, 28 April 2011).

The *Rehabilitation Office*, on the other hand, has as its main objective 'to fix the population, to stabilize it, including attracting new residents', and is more inclined to the view shared by many residents that the neighbourhood is slowly turning into a 'thematic park'. As its technical director expresses it, 'I find it good to have housing for tourists, but when everything becomes that, we can no longer speak of a neighbourhood, right?' (interviewed by author, 15 April 2011). The *Office* has been

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<sup>7</sup> The *Junta de Andalucía* (Government of Andalusia) is the devolved institution representing the Autonomous Community of Andalusia. Since its constitution in June 1979 it has been uninterruptedly governed by the Socialist Party (PSOE), while the City Council has been under the administration of the conservative Popular Party (PP) since 2003.

managing renovation works since 2002, gradually extending its mission from lower Albayzín to the entire district. Not long before my fieldwork, it had moved its headquarters from the city centre to a newly renovated building on the *Calderería*—a street famous for its oriental souvenir shops—this way getting physically closer to the neighbourhood. This move, according to its director, was essential in order to reinforce the institution's image of being an organic part of the neighbourhood and sharing the aims of its inhabitants, rather than being perceived as an administrative unit belonging to the distant regional government. Instead of 'the expulsion of residents and the creation of a building that would serve as a hotel, student accommodation, or for people who come for the weekends'—as the director deems to be happening all too often with projects led by the rival *Agency*—the *Office* sets certain requirements for those participating in their programmes: 'when people receive our aid, they have to guarantee that for a certain period they maintain the old tenants, who will pay a low rent, a protected rent [*renta protegida*]' (Technical director of the *Rehabilitation Office*, interviewed by author, 15 April 2011).

At the time of the fieldwork around six hundred houses had already been renovated, and the director of the *Office* expressed his satisfaction with the progress achieved in socially stabilizing the neighbourhood. By 'protecting' the rent, the government was admittedly pursuing the double aim of keeping in local residents, while encouraging a diverse and intercultural future for the neighbourhood. The first low-rent apartments in houses renovated by the *Rehabilitation Office* were leased in 2007 'to youngsters and immigrants' (Technical director, interviewed by author, 15 April 2011), a move which, nevertheless, displeased many of the residents. As Maria put it:

they lease some apartments on protected rent . . . to immigrants or young delinquents who have just come out from prison, to young solitary mothers, to people with problems. They say that they are helping the most vulnerable in society, and we agree that they need help and support. But what they do, they do it with a [hidden] reason; I don't know what it is—perhaps to scare those who still didn't sell—but they have something in mind; because

the neighbourhood is becoming more dangerous. . . (Maria, interviewed by author, 11 April 2011)

While the ulterior motives behind the social planning undertaken by local authorities may be less sinister than assumed by many older residents, it nevertheless fully conforms to the values of heritagification. North-African migrants are of particular significance due to the assumed 'authenticity' that their visible presence can provide to the marketable Moorish imagery that earned the Albayzín 'universal' recognition. It is thus unsurprising that both the *Rehabilitation Office* and the *Albaicín-Granada Agency*, despite their different politics and many disagreements, agree upon the benefits of Arab-Muslim presence.

## **4 Immigration, Islam and the memory of Moorish Spain**

### **Immigrant Islam beyond the aesthetics of orientalia**

Contemporary immigration to Spain began early on in the democratisation process at the end of the 1970s, and intensified during the following decade. Besides Hispanophone South-Americans, the largest group among the new arrivals was that of North Africans, the majority from Morocco (Izquierdo Escribano, 1992; López García, 1993). This period marked the radical transition of Spain from a country of emigration to one of immigration, a hitherto unfamiliar position for Spanish society. In the year in which my fieldwork was conducted, 6.7% (16,098 people) of the Granadan population had been migrants; of these, 3,513 (21.8%) were of Moroccan origin (INE, 2011).

Many of the Moroccan migrants in Granada have discovered a niche economic opportunity in setting up or finding employment in souvenir shops trading in goods that could be described as 'orientalia', and in this way reinforcing the 'Moorish' character of the neighbourhood which attracts millions of tourists every year (Rosón Lorente, 2008). Although the stigmatisation of migrants and Islamophobic sentiments has been increasing since the beginning of Spain's immigration experience, the involuntary contribution of the Moroccan migrant community to the revitalisation of the Albayzín is acknowledged both by the local authorities and

some older residents. For Manuel, although he considers the merchandise sold in the souvenir shops 'cheap junk', the fact that the streets of lower Albayzín finally have a purpose is unquestionably a positive development:

When the Moors [*moros*] came—I think it was in the beginning of the 90s, the end of the 80s—they opened these shops you see today. If you ask me, there are problems with them, but if you ask me, it's better to have them than to have no one. It is better to have these shops than to be totally depopulated. (Manuel, interviewed by the author, 13 April 2011)

The managing director of the *Albaicín–Granada Agency* expresses a similar opinion regarding Moroccan migrants and their ethnic businesses:

The Muslims, the Moroccans to be precise, they are very good for the neighbourhood, contrary to what many people are saying. I find it positive. I find it very positive to have people of other nationalities and religions. I say this as a Catholic, because that is what I am, it is not that I am Muslim or anything. (Interviewed by author, 28 April 2011)

At the same time, the *Agency* is aiming for a balance between the Moorish and the rural-popular legacies of the Albayzín. As the director stresses, 'we need to settle artisans, because that's a very local activity. Like the Moroccans who have their shops underneath their flats, we also need artisans living above their workshops' (Managing director of the *Albaicín–Granada Agency*, interviewed by author, 28 April 2011). Needless to say, re-enacting the artisanal heritage is no less a fiction than the one represented by the Moroccan souvenir vendors; and paradoxically, the artisanal economy of the neighbourhood was sentenced to death by the earliest post-Reconquista urban reforms in the sixteenth century, with the partial vaulting of the river Darro—separating the Albayzín from the hill of the Alhambra—that had been essential for the artisans to easily dispose of their waste (Isac Martínez de Carvajal, 2007).

Due to the special role of Muslim migrants in the local economy, *Islamophobic* sentiments are complemented with an *Islamophilia* that can simultaneously better

accommodate immigrants while at the same time making them feel ‘ “instrumentalised” by orientalist tourism policies’ (Dietz, 2004: 1101). Raising the question of *authenticity*, the products and vendors are expected to create a supposed *oriental* atmosphere acting upon all five senses. This, of course, is a more general characteristic of the fusion between heritage and tourism. As Boniface and Fowler (1993: 5) point out, ‘tourism distorts reality, obliging people to produce themselves for tourist consumption’. This also holds true for places. The process of ‘engagement’—as ALSayyad (2001) refers to it—is one ‘through which the gaze transforms the material reality of the built environment into a cultural imaginary’ (2001: 4). In the Albayzín this cultural imaginary is that of a reborn *Al-Andalus* complete with its urban, human and sensorial features. These provide the neighbourhood with a capacity for heritagification that the Alhambra lacks, the latter being a historic monument whose meaning and significance is frozen in time. Despite resting on the higher ground of historical authenticity, the Alhambra will nevertheless remain unable to emulate the experiential simulacrum of the Albayzín. In the transfiguring process of ‘engagement’—to draw a geological analogy—while the Alhambra serves as the marble of Moorish heritage, the Albayzín acts as its soapstone.

For many residents it is precisely the oriental *feel*—authentic or otherwise—of the neighbourhood which is displeasing:

We don’t have anything against [the Moroccan migrants], it is everyone’s right to live and make a living wherever they want. But they need to learn a few things [about] how to behave, because every country has its own rules, and in Spain we usually keep our merchandise inside the shop; but they put it out on the street, as you could see, and these streets are much narrower than a normal street. If you also put your merchandise out there, then no one can pass. . . It is terrible when you go to town, and you have to squeeze. . . And the vendors are also out there all day long, sitting on their small chairs with their legs outstretched, and they wouldn’t move an inch if you wanted to pass. . . (Maria, interviewed by the author, 11 April 2011)

As a result of such practices, the streets of lower Albayzín become sites for everyday symbolic clashes between opposing manifestations of *habitus*, which fits into the more general controversy over the presence of *otherness*—especially Islamic otherness—in diverse European public spaces (see Göle, 2014).

To understand the wider struggle over the ownership of local historical heritage, however, one must look beyond the aesthetics of *orientalia*. The popular denomination of North-African and Middle-Eastern migrants as ‘moros’ introduces a deeper dimension than that of anti-migrant prejudices. García-Sánchez (2014) points out that ‘moro’ had initially referred to the ‘North African Muslim armies’, then to the medieval inhabitants ‘of mixed Arab and Berber origin’ of Al-Andalus, before becoming ‘a naturalized, albeit pejorative, category to refer to contemporary Moroccan immigrants’ (2014: 44–45). Due to this heavy semantic load, the term enhances fears that the migrants are about to ‘take over’ the neighbourhood, and it raises concerns that the assumed ‘takeover’ could be seen as an *inherited right* instead of a clear sign of the residents’ *openness and hospitality*.

I have nothing against them, *everyone with their religion*; they are coming here *because we invited them*, because they are good for the economy . . . But now we have gone too far, and they are everywhere. It is disturbing for us to see their women, how they dress, how they are treated; this, we don’t do in Spain. They are *trying to take over*, this is what I think. And the government allows them to do what they want; but what they don’t see is that *it’s happening all over again*, and in couple of years it will be too late; we’ll be living in Morocco. (Carlos, interviewed by author, 21 April 2011)

It becomes obvious from the concerns voiced by Carlos that the issue is not primarily about immigration but about Islam, and the fact that ‘it’s happening all over again’ clearly connects present-day phenomena with the Moorish ‘invasion’ of the 8th century. Carlos’s position replicates wider racialised and gendered European discourses on Islam that not only prevail in popular rhetoric but have also become deeply impregnated in everyday- and professional practices (Rogozen-Soltar, 2012a;

2012b; Scott, 2007). As Rogozen-Soltar has conclusively argued, '[i]n Granada, these gendered parameters for categorizing immigrants are further compounded by the locally resonant, historically rooted fears of a Moorish "reinvacion", a militarized vision that is distinctly masculinized' (2012a: 644; see also Flesler, 2008). Such fears have remained latent in Spanish society for centuries, resurfacing almost instantaneously with the earliest reappearance of the Muslim *other*. In one of the earliest assessments of the incipient North-African immigration, Bernabé López García (1993), the renowned historian of Morocco, had sought to show that the new geographic patterns of settlement and economic activity precisely replicate those of sixteenth-century *Moriscos*—Muslim converts to Christianity following the banning of Islam—before their final expulsion by 1614.

While immigrant Islam is certainly fuelling such superficial assessments of a 'return' of the Moors, the main ideological conflict over heritage and memory is being played out around the deeper historical relevance of local Islam, primarily between Catholic traditionalists and Spanish converts to Islam, congregants of the *Islamic Community in Spain (Comunidad Islamica en España)*, initially known as the *Society for the Return of Islam in Spain* upon its creation in 1980 (Abend, 2008; Bahrami, 1998; Calderwood, 2014; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012b). It is in the context of the conversion movement that the emphasis placed by the director of the *Albaicín-Granada Agency* on him *not* being a Muslim, in the excerpt above, gains particular significance.

### **Indigenous Islam and contested heritage**

Members of the *Islamic Community* pose a particular threat to those concerned about the 'takeover' of Islam in the neighbourhood, as their *right to presence* is hard to dispute. While North African migrants have the 'right to live and make a living wherever they want' as long as they 'learn a few things [about] how to behave' (Maria, quoted above), and as for their faith, 'everyone with their religion' (Carlos, quoted above), the Spanish converts were referred to in the interviews I conducted with local residents as 'disturbed', 'mentally challenged', 'terrorists' who are 'selling out their country' and their 'inherited religion'. The converts are primarily incriminated with committing

the unforgivable sin of renouncing their inherited Catholic identity: 'their parents were Catholics, their grandparents were Catholics . . . You can be a bad Christian, and going to church today is not the same as it used to be in my time, but to give away what you have inherited from your parents, this, I cannot understand' (Carlos, interviewed by author, 21 April 2011).

The history of local Islam can be traced back to the late 1970s, when a group of young Spanish hippies living south of Granada, in the mountainous region of Alpujarra, converted to Islam. The director of the local mosque, himself already born into the religion, recalls the memories of his parents, onetime members of the first hippy colony: 'it was an age when there were many hippies looking for alternatives and voicing their opposition to the system, and they found Islam. They realised that Islam offers satisfactory answers to many of the issues they were raising' (interviewed by author, 18 April 2011). The conversions have been since the beginning part of a larger international movement initiated by a Scottish convert who had taken the Muslim name of Shaykh Abdalqadir As-Sufi al Murabit and became the representative of a Moroccan Sufi order in the 1960s, later establishing the Murabitun World Movement with centres in London and California (Abend, 2008; Calderwood, 2014; Coleman, 2008). The decision to make Granada the heart of the movement is a fusion between local historical symbolism and global anti-capitalist critique. The higher aim of the movement is to restructure global economic and political mechanisms following Islamic principles; according to As-Sufi's vision, 'men must begin to trade and exchange, hand to hand, and transfer across distance without recourse to the financial instruments and institutions of capitalism . . . Ahead lies vast expansion for the post-terrorist and post-political stage of Muslim growth' (As-Sufi, 2014).<sup>8</sup>

The conversion movement also represents the symbolic antithesis of the official discourse regarding the Moorish past and the *Reconquista*. Based on Ignacio Olagüe's controversial 'Islamic revolution' hypothesis—itsself originating in Andalusian nationalist thought (Calderwood, 2014)—according to which Spain had not been invaded

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<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of the movement's economic ideals, see Bubandt (2009).

by Muslims in the 8th century, but rather the local population adopted Islam, many of the new converts see themselves as the spiritual heirs of *Al-Andalus* (Hirschkind, 2014). Some, like Abdul Haqq, the spokesperson of the *Islamic Community*, do not even consider themselves converts on these grounds:

I was born a Muslim, it's just that I wasn't conscious of it until I was in my late twenties. . . . The period of Catholic Spain is actually very brief over the long view of history. When the first Muslims arrived here from Africa via Gibraltar they were few. The majority of Muslims in Spain were natives who converted freely and naturally. (quoted in Sharrock, 2003: n. pag.)

The 'Islamic revolution' hypothesis is similar in its teleology to the attempts made by post-Reconquista Granadino officials to prove the historical precedence of local Christianity over Islam. In the effort to replace the cultural vestiges of the Moorish past, the unearthing in 1595 of a series of 'Lead Books' in the hills bordering the Albayzín had been crucial. Although later proved to be forgeries, the books attributed to Saint Cecil—a 1st century missionary considered the evangeliser of Illiberis (the Roman settlement preceding the medieval town of Granada)—made it possible to construe the Moorish era as merely a disruption to the Christian continuity of Granada, and attracted the worship of local Catholics for decades (Harris, 2007).

While the historical accuracy of Olagüe's thesis has been just as systematically refuted as had the authenticity of the Lead Books, they both attempt to validate contemporary claims by establishing the continuity of a spiritual heritage. Both propositions were, in their time and age, co-opted by local institutions and movements for their respective purposes. In the seventeenth century the case of the Lead Books had been vigorously promoted by the city council, and '[i]n positioning itself as the defender of the city's most ancient Christian antiquity, Granada's municipal council acquired some of the historical continuity it lacked' (Harris, 2007: 135). Today, the *Islamic revolution* thesis is directly or indirectly promoted by institutions such as the Andalusí Legacy Foundation (*Fundación El Legado Andalusí*) established in 1993 and working under the aegis of the Government

of Andalusia (Calderwood, 2014). The regional government was also involved in the republication of Olagüe's work in 2004, a questionable move according to historian Alejandro García Sanjuán:

The institutional support for the publication of a text so notoriously toxic to historical knowledge like that of Olagüe, is of enormous significance given the usual limitations to this kind of aid. I do not know if the Andalusian government applies similarly insufficient quality control parameters in other areas of their competence, but in any case, we must also acknowledge its role in promoting a fraudulent historiographical product. (García Sanjuán, 2013: 104)

It is fair to assume that the government's decision to fund and promote the book was not taken based on stringent historical considerations but, rather, driven by the logic of heritagification, which assigns value to a certain interpretation of local historical heritage. If the Albayzín is to live up to its *universal value* and become again the old Moorish neighbourhood, it must *acquire some of the historical continuity it lacks*. The conversion movement associated with the *Islamic Community* therefore plays just as significant a role in enacting the *essence* of indigenous Islam—paradoxically despite the fact that many of the converts are non-Spanish Westerners—as do the Moroccan migrants in providing the neighbourhood with an appropriate *aesthetics*. The antagonism between the two Muslim groups (for a more detailed ethnography of this, see Rogozen-Soltar, 2012b) is of course not restricted to the function they play in representing Islam, but also present in their access to economic and political power. For instance, the majority of the shops staffed by Moroccan migrants are in fact owned by convert Muslims (Rosón Lorente, 2008: 146), and it was the *Islamic Community*, rather than the migrant community, which managed to raise the funds and obtain the administrative approval to erect the Great Mosque of Granada (*Mezquita Mayor de Granada*), the first official Islamic place of worship in the Albayzín since the consecration of mosques in January 1500 (Contreras, 1979).

### **The Great Mosque as emblem of *heritagification***

The Great Mosque has been a controversial issue in the neighbourhood for decades, not least for its location, next to the church of San Nicolás and the most popular tourist viewpoint of the Alhambra, the *square packed with tourists and street artists* where our imaginary walk in the opening paragraph ended (**Figure 3**) (for a detailed discussion of the controversies surrounding the construction of the mosque, see Coleman, 2008; and Rosón Lorente, 2008). The land where the mosque was built had been empty and abandoned for a long time before the *Islamic Community* acquired it in 1981. The director of the mosque recalls seeing that plot of land as a 'dunghill' in his childhood, and telling his classmates: 'this is where the mosque will be built' (interviewed by author, 18 April 2011). According to him, the decision to build the mosque where it now stands was not a symbolic decision: 'it was just a good deal in a very beautiful place. Today you would need a fortune to buy a spot like this in the Albayzín'. However, according to a convert working as a real-estate agent in the neighbourhood since the 1980s, the view of the Alhambra must have been a sentimental factor, 'something to connect the mosque with the Muslim past' (Angel, interviewed by author, 19 April 2011).

The mosque was inaugurated in July 2003, but getting there took more than twenty years. Rosón Lorente (2008: 404) observes four stages in the development of the project from its initial planning and presentation (1984–1992), followed by the approval of the City Council and its fierce contestation by the locals (1993–1994), through a period of financial difficulties and changes in the actors involved (1995–1998), to the final construction work (1999–2003).

For local Catholics the mosque remains a clear sign of the 'corruption within the City Hall', as Manuel explains: 'there is something fishy, because if you wanted to build a church, they would never allow it' (interviewed by author, 13 April 2011). Nevertheless, local Christian residents had been successful in persuading the authorities to demand that the planned minaret be shortened so that it would not overtop the spire of the nearby San Nicolás church (Coleman, 2008; Rosón Lorente, 2008). The approval of the local authorities, however, perfectly dovetails with the 'authorised



**Figure 3:** The Albayzín seen from Alhambra. Note the crowd on San Nicolás square, below the church spire on the upper left side. To the right we can see the shorter minaret of the Great Mosque (Author's photograph).

heritage discourse' regarding the Albayzín. It is hard to fathom in retrospect the fears voiced by locals back in 1993, that 'the construction of the mosque might have a negative effect on UNESCO's decision to declare the neighbourhood as World Heritage' (Rosón Lorente, 2008: 409). Such concerns were proved unfounded only a year later. The positive decision also disproved the residents' claim that 'the neighbourhood is known for its peasant-Gypsy [*payo-gitano*] ancestry, and the Muslim connotation it might acquire would not be true' (Rosón Lorente, 2008: 408–9). From the perspective of heritagification, the existence of a mosque in what presents itself as a Moorish district brings added value even if the edifice itself is newly built and bears no historical significance.

The *Islamic Community's* spokesman accurately predicted at the inauguration of the mosque that 'the call to prayer is undoubtedly going to be a tourist attraction, because even though it is so normal in the *rest* of the Muslim world it will have a special sound here' (Sharrock, 2003. *Emphasis added*). Since then the mosque

and the adjacent Islamic Centre have been welcoming believers and visitors, its open garden overwhelmed by tourists during opening hours (**Figure 4**). The Centre provides resources for documentation on the Moorish past, and organises various public events and conferences. The mosque appears now in every tourist guide and map, and it is undoubtedly the newest building in the neighbourhood to become immortalised on hundreds or thousands of photographs each day. Through this imagery reproduction, the Great Mosque is incessantly consolidating its significance as an emblem of the Moorish heritage, donning the characteristics of a simulacrum as proposed by Baudrillard (1988) in his famous biblical paraphrase; accordingly, representations of the mosque are not concealing the truth, but are ‘the truth which conceals that there is none’ (1988: 166). The Great Mosque thus represents the highest level of heritagification, a step beyond its *ideology*—if this is understood as ‘a false representation of reality’ (Baudrillard, 1988: 172)—in not only masking the absence of a real connection with the local historical heritage, but itself becoming that reality.

More than a decade since the completion of the Great Mosque, there are now plans in place for further development. Although the tensions around the mosque are far from having dissipated, its director is optimistic and believes that ‘things have now changed, and I am certain that the City Hall would agree with the extension of the mosque’ (interviewed by author, 18 April 2011). Yet, those who have been



**Figure 4:** The Great Mosque; its open garden on the left, and the private prayer hall on the right (Author's photographs).

opposing the building of the mosque in the first place would undoubtedly find it paradoxical that while 'there is not much available space left in the Albayzín' (Angel, director of a real-estate agency, interviewed by author, 19 April 2011), there is still room for a bigger mosque.

## 5 Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to examine the transformations in the *human architecture* of the Granadan neighbourhood of Albayzín following its designation as World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Various aspects of this broad topic have already received well-deserved, intense scholarly attention: projects of urban rehabilitation (Barrios Rozúa, 2002; Cabrera Medina, 2009; Castelló Nicás, 2003; Hita Alonso, 1996), processes of gentrification (Duque Calvache, 2010; Duque Calvache, Susino and De Pablos, 2013; Fernández Gutiérrez and Jiménez Bautista, 2000; Rosón Lorente, 2010), the emergence of new Muslim communities (Abend, 2008; Dietz, 2004; Flesler, 2008; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012a; 2012b), the ensuing cultural diversity and conflicts (Bahrami, 1998; Rosón Lorente, 2008; Rosón Lorente and Dietz, 2011), and the neighbourhood's relationship with its Moorish past (Calderwood, 2014; Coleman, 2008; Hirschkind, 2014; Rogozen-Soltar, 2007) have all been explored in depth. The contribution of this article, therefore, is to articulate a concept of *heritagification* which connects the urban, human and symbolic aspects of change. As I have argued, urban 'heritage' represents not a physical reality but an ideological principle which has the power to reshape historic monuments and urban settings, and endow them with new meanings. It revives and settles disputes over the ownership of historical memory, subjecting claims, interpretations and practices to the logic of 'universal value'. Through the process of heritagification, the ideology of heritage not only creates alternative realities for the global tourism marketplace, but also takes leadership in the neoliberal gentrification of populated heritage sites.

The main struggle in the Albayzín—as in other locations subjected to heritagification—develops around providing the neighbourhood with a future meaning, function and inhabitants. Competing perspectives are heavily influenced by different conceptions of the past, the main divide stretching between Muslim and

Christian interpretations of the neighbourhood's heritage. The 'authorized heritage discourse' of institutional actors interested in capitalising on the historical value of the Albayzín favours a more distant Moorish past (Smith, 2006). The urban paradox of the value system upheld by 'heritage' is that buildings and practices of little historical significance can become invaluable to the overall vision, as seen in the example of the Great Mosque.

The future of the Albayzín is unsettled, but it will surely remain characterised by the 'tragedy of contrasts' noticed by the poet García Lorca and the many travellers drawn to the neighbourhood over the course of history (see, for example, Viñes Millet, 1999). The struggle over its 'true' heritage will remain the main theme in this *tragedy*, and its 'truth' will probably only reveal itself in the myriad of romanticised and orientalist travel diaries yet to be written. The analysis of heritagification would suggest that a shift in the symbolic relationship between the Albayzín and the Palace of Alhambra is one possible development. While for a long period the Albayzín had mainly served to provide beautiful vistas of the Alhambra—the ultimate historic monument to Moorish Spain—through the process of heritagification the Alhambra itself may become an accessory to the Albayzín, a mere inanimate image of past glory inspiring the utopian ambitions of an organic neighbourhood.

### Competing Interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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