THIS PROJECT WE CALL SPAIN: NATIONALITY, AUTOCHTHONY, AND POLITICS IN SPAIN’S NORTH AFRICAN EXCLAVES


This dissertation begins by uncovering a puzzle in Spain's two North African cities: why are significantly fewer native-born and foreign-born residents of Melilla Spanish citizens than comparable residents of Ceuta, despite the two cities sharing many social, political, economic conditions? In addition, why are the lowest rates of Spanish citizenship in Melilla found in the census tracts with the highest concentration of Muslim residents whereas in Ceuta nearly all residents—regardless of religious categorization and birthplace—are Spaniards?

Spurred by these questions, I then trace how variation in the constitutive elements of ethnic identity categories across the cities generate similar names of categories but different shared meanings of the categories, sub-national “Spanish” identities, and activations of the identities. I argue that the most influential variation in the constitutive elements regards imagined, historical collectives defined and differentiated by their relative power, or “political homelands.” In Ceuta, I identify the political homelands of “Spanishness” and “Arabness,” or to use the generalizable terms, “titular” and “indigenous.” In Melilla, I identify the political homelands of “Spanishness” and “Amazighness” (or, “Berberness”), or to again use generalizable terms, “titular” and “autochthonous.” By drawing such distinctions in political homelands, I mean to underscore the impact of double-colonization: in Melilla more so than in Ceuta, Muslims residents are tied to shared political memories of autochtony and being colonized by, first, invading Arab armies and settlers, and second, French colonizers and post-colonial pan-Arab nationalists.

This dissimilarity in political homelands helps to produce different conceptualizations of being “Christian” and “Muslim” across the cities. The prevailing indigenous political homeland among Muslims in Ceuta helps to generate a “cultural identity” understanding of the Muslim category, which is more easily nested within the dominant Spanish category and reconciled with the Spanish nation state through its multicultural institutions. In contrast, the “national identity” understanding of the Muslim category in Melilla is less easily reconciled with other categories, as well as the nation state. These differing identities result in dissimilar behaviors when activated in specific contexts, such as the dominant “cultural identity” for Muslims in Ceuta leading to higher levels of Spanish citizenship and the dominant “national identity” for Muslims in Melilla leading to lower levels of Spanish citizenship.

I evaluate my argument in the final part of the dissertation through an ecological inference analysis of the cities' two most recent local elections, occurring in 2007 and 2011. Supporting the notion that a “cultural identity,” with its weaker ethnic boundaries, is prevalent among Muslims in Ceuta, I estimate that residents of census tracts with large Muslim populations in Ceuta vote across ethnic lines—and for the mainstream center-right party—at significantly higher rates than their compatriots in Melilla. In support of the argument that a “national identity,” with its stronger ethnic boundaries, is prevalent among Muslims in Melilla, I estimate that residents of census tracts with large Muslim populations in Melilla vote for the local party “of Muslim persuasion” at significantly higher rates than their compatriots in Ceuta. These findings are further bolstered using a second indicator: electoral volatility, a marker of more fluid ethnic boundaries, has been higher in Ceuta than in Melilla since the cities have become self-governing.

This project provides several contributions to the study of ethnicity, ethnic politics, and Islam in Europe. To
take one example, it stresses that ethnicity and nationality are not interchangeable, and that "ethnic groups" are not homogenous. This challenges the widespread use of nationality and ethnicity in the migration, ethnic studies, and political science literature. More generally, however, the project as a whole offers a detailed model of how research can approach ethnic politics when ethnicities are constructed and fluid, as is the case with today's Muslim residents of Europe.

Adviser(s): Edgar Kiser Katherine Stovel
Status of Research: Completed/published
Research Type: Graduate Dissertations
Related Fields: Africa Nationalism Political Sociology Race and Ethnicity

Department of Sociology · University of Washington · 211 Savery Hall, Box 353340 · Seattle, WA 98195-3340
Main Office: (206) 543-5882 · Student Services: (206) 543-5396 · Fax (206) 543-2516 · Email: uwsoc@uw.edu

Copyright © 2015-2020 University of Washington · Privacy · Terms · Site Map · Contact Us

Source URL: https://soc.washington.edu/research/graduate/project-we-call-spain-nationality-autochthony-and-politics-spains-north-african