Urbanization, Inequality, and the Right to the City: Notes from the Cañada Real

In European cities such as Paris and London, Berlin and Barcelona, the confluence of contemporary urbanization and increased heterogeneity has profoundly impacted city form and city life. New spaces marked by both ethnicity and income disparities have reshaped these elderly metropolises. The primary means of capital accumulation has become inextricably tied to real estate, the construction industry, and urbanization. In turn, the city has become more fractured, divided between those who control this capital accumulation, and those upon whose backs this urbanization occurs. Meanwhile, in the North Atlantic, major metropolises have been profoundly impacted by the spatial implications and consequences of immigration. At the same time, new articulations of citizenship, posited on political association and belonging on the urban, rather than national level, have emerged, often drawing on the idea of the right to the city. Through new forms of urban citizenship and belonging, those who were previously excluded from the capitalization of land can gain access and make claims upon the body of the city.

To examine these ideas of urbanization/urbanism as capital accumulation, the resulting inequalities of urban geography, and the concept of the right to the city as a means of addressing this inequality, I will examine a large squatter settlement on the outskirts of Madrid, and the relationship this community of 40,000 has to the formal city. This case will allow me to interrogate the ways in urbanism results from the ‘worlding’ projects that look towards real estate as the prime motor of the economy. In turn this urbanism creates fractured geographies that prove to exclude the very people who contribute to this production of space and its attendant accumulation of capital. Further, the
case of the Canada Real will allow me to explore how inequality is not only defined and reproduced through capital but also through ethnic concerns that mark these differentiated geographies. I will then turn to articulations of an urban citizenship that serves as a means of both appropriating the spaces of the city and claiming a participatory role in the urban arena, thus allowing inclusion to the previously excluded.

This paper seeks to demonstrate the way in which inequality in a particular western metropolis is increasingly fractured and splintered, dispersed across the discreet geographies of the urban. However, even while inequality has been furthered by the logic of late capitalism, those who bear the brunt of these destabilizing forces are increasingly differentiated by ethnicity. In turn, they use informality as a tactic in procuring and producing space, reacting against the hegemony of capital. The city is thus a site of ethnic informality, a process by which this new urban poor create terrains in which they are agents of their own accumulative processes. Finally, new articulations of citizenship allow these urban denizens to make claims upon the body of the city, permitting them to legitimize their spatial practices.

An Introduction to the Cañada Real

If we leave the center of Madrid and travel to the southeast, the city begins to dissipate, giving way to the ochre tones and vast plains of the central plateau. The capital is still felt, its presence evident in the congested traffic, the plethora of colorful billboards, and the suburban landscapes that spring up almost spontaneously out of red brick and concrete. We are at the edge, the periphery, which not long ago contained vast emptiness that went on for miles in every direction. Unchecked growth and real estate speculation has caused the Spanish capital to consume its hinterlands. The Madrid Manuel Castells describes in *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) has been absorbed into a giant metropolis of 6
million residents. At this metropolitan beast’s southeastern edge, an invisible community lives, its 40 thousand residents uncounted in any census, its 5,000 structures built without any kind of permit, and often by the resident’s own hands. We have arrived at the Cañada Real Galiana, an informal settlement that follows the snaking route of an old livestock trail. Around 15 kilometers in length, this settlement crosses through several different municipal areas, and is built illegally on protected land.

Forty years ago, the farmers who led their herds through this area began to construct small makeshift structures. Far from the purview of the state or the local authorities, these individuals took it upon themselves to build small structures that somehow served their livelihood: makeshift lean-tos to shield themselves from the elements, or a small residence in which to pass the summer months. One by one, a small community sprung up over time, as a place where people might spend a few days or months (Cadierno, et al.: 2007). The early structures here were one-storied, modest and inconspicuous against the background of the cattle trail. People developed this area for different uses, establishing small farms, storage facilities, or summer homes along the path (Franchini: 1988). In a 1992 article from El País, the newspaper described the diverse activities that took place in the settlement: ‘[People have settled here] to construct their permanent home or a weekend vacation cottage. Others have a storage unit, a workshop, or a livestock pasture. There are even sheds to hide the drug trade.’ Further, when El País reported on the settlement at the Cañada Real in 1992, 2,000 people lived there, a number that now seems quaint in comparison. Today, when speaking of this settlement, we often refer to its 40,000 inhabitants.

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1 ‘2.000 personas ocupan ilegalmente la antigua Cañada Real, por donde discurrirá la M-50,’ El País, August 31, 1992.
Madrid’s Contemporary Urban Development: Towards the Glittering Façade of Modernity

The city of Madrid has pursued strategies to reposition itself on the map through worlding projects that rely on international finance, star architects, and the capitalization of land as a means of competing with other major cities. In Madrid, new urban projects that emerged during the decades after the end of the dictatorship took place on a grand scale and while aided by the state, were largely funded by and linked either directly or indirectly to the private sector. The Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) was in power when Madrid began to formulate its grand plans. The PSOE emphasized issues of social justice and the right to the city in its planning documents, but ‘the emphasis on slick outward appearances did not always coincide with the planner’s diagnosis of the city’s problems or the solutions they presented’ (Compitello, 2003, 405).² However, Madrid’s urban development programs would also serve to further inequality, creating splintered geographies of rich and poor.

The Architecture of Aspiration

For largescale projects, the government turned to star architects forged in the crucible of the private corporate sector. One of the most celebrated projects of the late 1980s-early 1990s was the new train station at Atocha, in the south, designed by the increasingly prominent Rafael Moneo. The train station, which promised a rational, simplified design that would untangle the messy strands of rail lines, was immediately celebrated both in Spain and abroad. What we fail to remember, however, is that Moneo, who went on to design many museums and public buildings, got his start designing massive office blocks for major Spanish corporations. His first emblematic buildings were designed for Bankunión and Bankinter, two major Spanish banks. When the Bankunión building was

² I do not use the term ‘right to the city’ offhandedly. Compitello has shown in several articles the importance of LeFebvre in influencing discourse within Spanish culture and planning.
unveiled, ‘it became a monumental presence on Madrid’s Paseo de la Castellana, and to the man in the street it stood for architecture at its most modern’ (Larson, 397). The architect most celebrated for his work within the public realm, as the man who reinvented the famous train station, emerged first as an architect for the corporate sector. The aesthetic that he brought to the Atocha train station, however celebrated, was the same aesthetic that began to appear a decade or so earlier along the Castellana. Indeed, much of the urban development that took place in the young democracy was centered around the Castellana, the North-South boulevard that runs the entire length of the city. This development was centered around largescale projects that celebrated finance and international capital.

Indeed, it was this development along the Castellana that would come to define the new Madrid. At one end, Moneo’s Atocha station welcomed travelers to the new Spanish capital. However, the serious construction was taking place at the other end of this grand avenue, as a new landscape of corporate Spain rose along the edges of the capital. Malcolm Alan Compitello, a scholar who has worked extensively on Madrid, urbanism, and culture, writes: ‘From the 1970s on, the Castellana began to replace the Gran Vía as the central axis of Madrid’s urban development’ (Compitello, 1999, 209). This is evident in architectural magazines from the era, including Arquitectura y Vivienda, and Urbanismo, the official publication of the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid (The Official College of Madrid Architects). The local government promoted the new corporate development along the Castellana as being central to the contemporary image of Madrid. Published by the Comunidad de Madrid in 1998, Urbanismo y arquitectura en el Madrid actual (Urbanism and Architecture in Contemporary Madrid) was a didactic guide for schools about the capital city. An image of the Castellana, with the corporate headquarters of BBVA, one of the largest Spanish banks, was on the cover. The narrative told on the pages within privileges the corporate development along the
Castellana. The first architectural projects presented as emblematic of the contemporary city are the new skyscrapers located along the northern section of the Castellana. This kind of development has continued, largely unabated, under the auspices of the government.

International architectural projects, relying on a complex web of land, capital, and construction capabilities, were symptomatic of the Spanish economic climate of the time. Spain encouraged a rapid rate of privatization, as well as high rates of foreign investment. While the governing party preached the language of socialism, they pursued economic policies that were anything but: ‘The PSOE solution to fixing the crisis in capitalist accumulation that had gripped the Spanish economy since the late 1970s was to embrace the economic policies of neoliberalism’ (Compitello, 2003, 406). The ‘worlding’ of Madrid and the Spanish economy is evident in the very pages of the architecture magazines that reported on new urban developments in the capital. Urbanismo printed English translations at the foot of every page, thus anticipating a foreign audience of professionals. A perusal of copies of Urbanismo from 1992 reveals advertisements for an Italian industrial design firm, Greggotti Associati, and reviews of architecture works written in English. Articles covered different architectural and urban projects throughout Spain and Europe. Editions from 1995 only reveal more advertisements for foreign products, including American plotters and doorbells from the multinational LeGrand.

The Splintered Landscape of Inequality

When we speak of Madrid, we understand it to be a city of heaving life, modern and glittering, large and populous. However, the projects that influenced this understanding were accompanied by deepening inequality, as capital was concentrated in the center. These official narratives of Madrid
and her development largely ignore the massive transformations that occurred outside of the city, as suburban growth continued at an unprecedented rate, devouring the countryside. Because of competing interests, both political and private, the Madrid region has not approved a general plan for its territory since the mid-80s. As a result, each municipality has pursued its own development, abetted in large part by the once powerful construction industry. Thus the metropolitan area of Madrid ‘clearly shows the trend of dispersed spatial development: the establishment of the second and third ring motorways around the city [for] suburban development’ (Tosics: 2004, 74).

Infrastructure projects, such as the creation of these multiple ring roads, have aided the establishment and growth of many new towns. This spatial development is reflected demographically as well: while in 1950, Madrid city accounted for over 85% of the region’s population, by 2005, it only accounted for 52% (www.caue.de/promode/mathews.pdf). The polishing of Madrid’s center city image was thus accompanied by an outward expansion that drove people and development into the hinterland.

Real estate developers are not the only agents of this impressive, widespread change. City and regional planning has played a key role in fostering this outward expansion. Even while Madrid has not revised its general plan, local planning authorities in and around Madrid aggressively pursued measures that would allow them to capitalize and develop land (Lopez: 2007). During the 90s and early 2000s, Madrid and its suburbs all carried out urban planning schemes that rezoned land. This allowed them to convert land that was previously ‘tierra no urbanizable,’ or protected land destined for other uses, to enter into the capital accumulation of the real estate market. The resulting maps are astonishing: in several municipalities, particularly in the poorer regions of east and south, the amount of land available for development increased by over 100% (Lopez: 2007, 239).
This real estate development and capital accumulation has created a fractured geography in the Madrid region. While certain areas have become incredibly valuable, capital accumulation has been unequally distributed across the territory (Rodriguez Lopez: 2007, 140). The spatial dynamics of wealth and poverty are marked by extremes: some areas of the region record median incomes of almost twice that of their poorer counterparts (Ibid, 142). The northern and western regions of Madrid have become increasingly wealthy, simultaneous to construction of new suburban offices for many multinational corporations. Meanwhile, the southern and eastern areas have become poorer, as the old industrial areas of the metropolitan region have experienced disinvestment and decay (Ibid, 144). Inside of the capital city, meanwhile, neighborhoods such as barrio Salamanca are now exclusively the province of the wealthy, whilst barrio Lavapies or Vallecas are more ethnic, more crime-ridden, and less desirable. Major urban development has not only created expansion and urbanization, but also spatial inequality.

The Ethnic Component of Spatial Inequality

Simultaneous and complementary to this urban development has been the emergence of a separate population differentiated by ethnicity. The neighborhoods of Vallecas and Lavapies are not only more economically disadvantaged, but also much more ethnically diverse. The heterogeneous population of the Cañada Real is indicative of the major demographic shifts that have taken place over the last twenty years, and the attendant self-segregation is indicative of the lingering hold of xenophobia. Much of the population is composed of immigrants from either North Africa or Eastern Europe. The Moroccan population first appeared fifteen years ago, and their numbers have quickly surged.

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3 As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I used to live in Lavapies. I knew people who had never been in the neighborhood, even though it is in the center of the city. People used to tell me to watch that I did not get stabbed.

4 There is no official census of the Cañada Real. No one I have spoken with or contacted is able to give me even an estimate of numbers, beyond the 40,000 residents.
This growth corresponds to the recent immigration numbers, which has shown that the Moroccan community has swelled tremendously since the turn of the millennium.

Spain, which has always had a fairly heterogeneous population composed of catalanes and vascos, andaluzes and gallegos, now has a more complex heterogeneity, as it finds itself an uneasy host to Latin Americans, Asians, Eastern Europeans, Sub-Saharan Africans, and North Africans. Currently, Spain records 5,262,095 foreign born residents, a number that has jumped almost 1000% in the last ten years (Eurostat).\(^5\) Meanwhile, the largest immigrant group to emerge out of this long period of transformation has been that of Moroccans, who have made the northern voyage to take up residence in a country that has long been hostile to their interests. Official numbers from the Oficina de Trabajo e Inmigración indicate that there are almost 800,000 Moroccans in Spain legally. These numbers, however, do not take in to account the thousands in the country illegally.\(^6\) Meanwhile, the Romanian and Bulgarian populations are quickly gaining in size. In 2007, the state reported that Romanians numbered 400,000, and Bulgarians 100,000.\(^7\)

**Narratives of Xenophobia and Discrimination**

This recent immigration has reignited hostile tensions between the host country and what it often views as uninvited, unwanted guests. Moroccan immigration, unlike that of Latin Americans or Filipinos, presents a particularly problematic situation for Spain and its peoples, who have long held notions that negatively portray their southern neighbors. Spanish scholar Ricard Zapata-Barrero has put forth the idea that feelings of xenophobia and exclusion towards Moroccans contributes greatly

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\(^5\) This number includes both EU and non-EU.

\(^6\) It is very difficult to find an estimate of the number of ‘sin papeles.’ Even the Ministry of Education and Sciences says: ‘Es difícil establecer que parte de los trabajadores que llegan a España lo hacen por via irregular.’ (It’s difficult to establish what part of workers who arrive in Spain come irregularly).

\(^7\) ‘La comunidad rumana en España se multiplica por dos en los seis primeros meses de 2007.’ *ADN.* August 12, 2007.
towards the creation of Spanish identity and citizenship: it ‘is not a contingent fact but a substantive element of the process of Spanish identity building, without which Spanish citizenship cannot be understood’ (Zapata Barrero: 2006, 144).

This identification through discriminatory exclusion is particularly evident if we look at the official national dialogues Francisco Franco created during his almost forty years in power. Explicit declarations throughout popular culture condemned the legacy of Moorish Spain. Catholicism is not a white religion, yet it was understood as racialized within the Spanish context, embracing only a white brotherhood. For example, several comics from the 1950s approved by the state, which extended vast control over cultural production, depicted stories ‘set in Moorish Spain and sanctioning racist violence in the name of chivalry’ (Labanyi: 1995, 211). In a series of strips from El Guerrero del Antifaz (The Masked Warrior), the chivalrous hero is always depicted fighting his dark, Moorish opponents, who are portrayed as heathens and heretics (In Labanyi, 212). These depictions of the glory and superiority of Catholics above their Moorish neighbors reflected the predominant concept of race within the Franco regime. The state perpetuated notions of ‘one blood, with one ideal and one noble purpose’ (Evans: 1995, 216). These ideas were particularly evident in cinematic productions from the era that depicted chapters from the nation’s past, in which the idea of raza sought to differentiate Spaniards completely from their Moorish and Jewish counterparts (Ibid). Celebrations of Spain’s Catholic everyday heroes involved these condemnations of the ethnic other.

These hostilities have not necessarily dissipated in Spain’s democratic era, and continue to be enunciated throughout more recent histories of migration and settlement. An early look at the question of immigration to Southern Europe, written in 1999, found that in Spain: ‘Moroccan immigration is perceived as the least desirable and the most problematic, challenging and
‘threatening’, both for Spanish society in general, and for the authorities,’ an idea that emerges ‘as a consequence of historically-grounded prejudices against ‘los moros’ (King and Rodríguez-Mezuigo: 1999, 63). Moroccan immigration, within the popular Spanish imaginary, constitutes a reverse reconquista, an idea that emerges in various dialogues. In a lecture from 2004, a few months after his party lost re-election following the train bombings, the former president Jose Maria Aznar gave a speech at Georgetown University, in which he stated ‘Spain’s problem with Al-Qaeda and Islamic terrorism…begins more than 1,300 years ago, in the eighth century, when Spain [was] invaded by the Moors’ (Flesler: 2009, 56). While Aznar was speaking specifically of terrorism in the wake of the biggest attack on Spanish soil, the same notions he espouses permeate much of the discussion surrounding immigration. Moroccans in Spain, numbering close to a million, are seen ‘as Moorish invaders,’ and ‘the language of hospitality quickly turns into a language of military defense against a potential enemy’ (Flesler: 2009, 57). While the Spanish government no longer speaks the racist, pro-Catholic language of the former dictatorship, those same sentiments continue to permeate much of society.

These discriminatory sentiments are coupled with the particular concept of race within Spain. Concepts of race in Spain are not necessarily analogous to their other counterparts in the west. Rather than simply exclude Moroccans or Eastern Europeans on the basis of their supposed racial inferiority, Spanish culture often designates the superiority of an invented Spanish race. *Hispanidad* has been a powerful concept that dominated Franco’s dialogues on Spain and her peoples, positioning people who were both biologically and linguistically Spanish as celebrated members of a racial elite (Labanyi: 1995).
Even while Spaniards might no longer speak openly about *hispanidad* or *raza*, I have heard people talk of their own superiority as ‘pure-blooded *ibericos,*’ which often leads to the denigration of Moroccans. One memorable conversation involved a highly educated woman telling me that she and her husband were true Spaniards because they came from the north, where the blood was pure and the people lighter. The above comic strip from *El guerrero del antifaz* comes from a website dedicated to attacking the Spanish Prime Minister and the ‘tormento del islam,’ or the torment of Islam. The strip was included in a blog post entitled ‘*El guerrero del antifaz:* The battle of Christianity against the Moorish savagery of Islam.’ While these are both isolated incidents, they are evidence of larger trends. In a suburb of Madrid, a recent furor unfolded after a young woman, of Moroccan origin, was told she couldn’t wear her headscarf. The online message boards of the various newspapers exploded with comments, mostly negative towards the young woman. These notions, while they may have dissipated, still maintain their hold in Spanish society.

**Daily Exclusions**

Against this backdrop of persistent, insidious racism and xenophobia, Moroccans in Spain face documented exclusion from both the labor and housing markets, thus allowing for the possibility of informal housing production as an accessible alternative. Different forms of scholarship have repeatedly revealed the discrimination Moroccans face in finding and securing housing and work, as anxieties regarding immigration manifest themselves in space. Moroccans are often identified as criminals, and thus ‘anti-migrant discrimination is exercised by landlords who claim to be concerned about alleged criminal activities and notably drug trafficking’ (King and Rodríguez-Melguizo: 1999, 67). In interviews with immigrants from different countries, a team of Spanish researchers found that Moroccans faced more discrimination than other ethnic minorities. Interviewees discussed the

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8 [http://zapaterolandia.blogspot.com/2008/10/el-guerrero-del-antifaz-la-lucha-del.html](http://zapaterolandia.blogspot.com/2008/10/el-guerrero-del-antifaz-la-lucha-del.html)
everyday practices through which they found themselves excluded from public life, and the
incivilities they encountered that enforced these exclusions and marginalization. One woman said:

‘No, at times, when I argue with someone, sure they say “go back to your country”,
“go back to your country” and stuff. For example, if you get on the metro,
sometimes they give you bad looks, if you have headscarf, bad. For example, the
headscarf, and you don’t take off your headscarf because everyone has his religion.
The headscarf is a religious, but it’s not a matter of state or anything. [...] For example,
if you wear the headscarf you can’t work’ (Ed note: sic) (Agudelo-Suarez, et al: 2009,
1869).

Here we see in the personal narrative of a young Moroccan woman this connection between
geography and the body, as the broader impetus to exclude on the national level is re-inscribed on
the physical presence of a young woman as she moves through urban space. More general concerns
of immigration become entwined with the specific anxiety over the specter of the immigrant in the
city.

While the ethnographic process reveals these interwoven narratives of geography and the body,
surveying unmasks the stark reality of widespread, categorical exclusion. A study on Moroccans in
Spain published in 2005 found that regardless of legal status, Moroccans often found work that was
only temporary, and thus unstable (Aparicio, et al: 2005, 149). Many were out of work, and had
failed to find any kind of employment since their arrival in Spain. Furthermore, despite the existence
of official state organizations dedicated to immigrant integration, the vast majority of surveyed
people stated that they found both employment and housing through informal networks of friends
and family. In terms of housing, ‘housing depends in large part on the social capital of immigrants…
and implies the lack of housing opportunities from more ‘institutional’ mechanisms’ (Aparicio, et al:
2005, 167). A third of survey respondents indicated that they encountered landlords who did not
wish to rent to Moroccans, echoing the earlier study I cited above. Moroccans continuously find
barriers that prevent their entry in to both solid employment and housing, thus reinforcing their marginalization and exclusion from mainstream Spanish society.

**The Legal Construction of a Class Apart**

We would think that in this first world nation state, the legal and regulatory systems might offer a solution to these problems of discrimination and its attendant informalities. However, the legal often serves to maintain immigrants in this murky state as ‘others,’ acting as a mechanism by which these xenophobic attitudes can persist and flourish. Kitty Calavita, who has written extensively on immigration and employment in Southern Europe, writes: ‘immigration laws, anchored by temporary and contingent permit systems, build in illegality,’ creating a kind of ‘institutionalized irregularity’ that allows both the economy to rely on immigrant labor and society to regard immigrants as a class apart (Calavita: 2005, p. 45). Rather than act as a means of obtaining citizenship and representation, the regulatory system often manages to obfuscate, creating what some have deemed an almost Kafka-esque state of confusion riddled with irregularities. Meanwhile, regardless of method of entry and legality of residence, immigrants find the Spanish economy impenetrable: ‘Just as there is no clear dichotomy between the illegal and the temporarily legal populations, so there is often little change in an immigrant’s economic fate when he or she achieves legal status’ (Calavita: 2005, 101).

Given the Spanish exclusionary attitudes and the manner in which law inscribes illegality and encourages informality, immigrant populations, particularly the Moroccan, constitute a separate contingent of urban poor. Questions of legality, racism, and subordination intermingle to produce exclusion, as a mix of ‘social attitudes, institutional discrimination, and the accumulation of discursive effects produced by the media tends to generate a system of internal frontiers and lines of
stratification’ (Rodriguez Lopez: 2007, 127). This class apart struggles to appropriate and maintain space in the city. Ethnic informality emerges in part out of these strands of discrimination and differentiation. The exclusion of immigrants has ‘both an institutional and juridical origin, as well as a derivation from the pure and simply logic of racism’ (Rodriguez Lopez: 2007, 126). Meanwhile, these factors work to both exclude ethnic minorities from the formal, both in terms of work and housing, while casting a negative pall upon any actions immigrant communities take that can be considered extra-legal, or outside the bounds of the formal.

**Creative Destruction: Growth and Change in the Cañada Real**

The creation of a separate, unequal population within Spanish society greatly aided the logic of post-Fordist capital accumulation and urban development. The major urban transformations I described above largely relied on a flexible labor force that was denied access to much of the formal market. The Cañada Real was one site where immigrant workers could find housing and appropriate urban space for their own purposes. During the beginning of the last decade, the settlement experienced explosive growth, corresponding to the major influx of foreign immigrants into Spain (Cadierno, et al.: 2007). This explosion in growth, meanwhile, was in tandem with the rapid urbanization of Madrid and much of its hinterland, and the Cañada Real acted as a warehouse for those upon whose backs this new Madrid was built.

Moroccans in Spain are overwhelmingly employed within the construction sector, which has been the driving force behind much of the economy prior to the current recession, and has many informal labor practices through subcontractors and day laborers. If one has spent any time in Madrid over the last few years, one is aware of the great pace and scope of urban projects that dotted the landscape. The *madrileño* skyline has a lacy corona of construction cranes that extend from
north to south, each engaged in some great modernizing project. Of the Moroccans who live in Madrid and are actively employed, over 50% work in the construction sector, according to the 2001 census (Lopez Garcia, et al: 2004, 342). This employment trend is evident in the Cañada Real, where many residents are construction workers (Cadierno, et al.: 2007).

The government’s feverish dreams of modernity and expansion thus contributed indirectly to the explosion of the Cañada Real. The economy, largely aided by the state, has subsisted on the construction industry. Construction in Spain has reinvented city centers, as in the case of Madrid, where a new series of skyscrapers at the northern edge of the city has sought to reposition the business and financial node of the capital. The city has been reshaped by the logic of capital, as creative destruction annihilated and re-envisioned space. Marx and Engels wrote:

 Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind. The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe.

Capital reinvents both itself and the geographies it consumes. This creative destruction was not limited to the confines of the city, but extended outwards to the hinterlands.

Over the last ten years, new towns have sprouted like weeds throughout the central plateau of the Iberian Peninsula. During my sojourn in Spain, I would regularly read reports of new constructions erected at an astounding rate. Tens of thousands of apartment units would suddenly appear in Mostoles, Madrid’s largest suburb with half a million people, which thirty years ago was just a dusty little town. In *Tintin in America*, the great Belgian cartoonist Hergé makes fun of the rapidity of
urbanization in America. One day, Tintin the boy detective strikes oil in some rural part of the
continent. Almost 24 hours later, an entire city has sprung up around him, and he is left bewildered,
wandering around Berman’s ‘forest of symbols.’ While Hergé’s vision of urbanization was
exaggerated for the sake of storytelling, I often had this same feeling as I traveled outside of Madrid.
As I headed out of the capital, I would observe a new mega-block of housing units or a humongous
shopping mall that had suddenly sprung up, where once rural prairie had ruled.

These housing units multiplied exponentially, constructed by an informal, temporary labor force.
The construction industry was able to take advantage of a post-Fordist relaxation and informal-
ization of labor (Calavita: 2005). Like agriculture and tourism, Spain’s other two major industries,
construction operated through a series of sub-contracting that employed a flexible labor force.
Overwhelmingly, this labor force was composed of immigrant workers, who could not afford to
pursue other more permanent forms of employment (Calavita: 2005, Corkill: 2001, Rodriguez
Lopez: 2007).

We might think that with a surplus of housing, those who needed housing most would be able to
attain permanent, regularized tenure. However, while immigrants built this vast new housing stock,
they were not actually the intended consumer for the resulting product. In his critique of the
increased Muslim presence in Europe, the conservative Christopher Caldwell writes about the
housing boom in Spain: ‘Immigrants are more likely a cause than a symptom of the building boom.
The houses the newcomers are building are their own’ (p. 41). This is a rather charming notion of
sweat equity that is ultimately false. New housing in Spain has largely been meant for a middle class,
and was priced accordingly. At the same time, developers went about creating these new units
simply because they could; upon completion, many units stood empty (Lopez: 2007). With only
temporary employment and its meager attendant salary, immigrants employed as laborers in the construction industry could not afford the astronomical down payments and subsequent mortgages for new housing that was greatly overvalued. The housing problem in Spain ‘is not a lack of units, but rather a poorly distributed stock, with segment of the population without the economic capacity to access [housing]’ (Lopez: 2007, 235). The Cañada Real, home to many immigrant construction workers, offered a viable alternative for people looking to own their own homes. Thus while the formal city grew, its informal analogue also expanded, offering shelter to the laboring bodies of Madrid’s transformation.

Certainly the city is also a site of exclusion from political membership, where the stigma of being foreign, or appearing to be foreign, can be acutely felt. In the banlieue, for example, we see the tangible effects of exclusion and discrimination. Etienne Balibar writes of the postcolonial condition of these European cities: ‘it tends to reproduce a sort of apartheid in Europe on the level of citizenship that ‘sets apart’ populations of immigrant origin’ (Balibar, 2005: 48). The Spanish city, similar to its French counterpart, has become disarticulated, its various segments containing distinct populations. Even while the government preaches the language of tolerance, belonging, and integration, the lingering effects of colonialism, of racism and intolerance for the other, stratify space. In these cities, the city air does not make men free, but rather chutes them in to discrete areas where rage and violence can murmur and mingle. The tension, between the country as immigrant receptor and the nation of Franco’s ‘Una, Grande, y Libre,’ creates friction and contradictions. Ultimately, it is also convenient to the functioning of late capitalism to have a separate underclass, which can take on the flexible work that post-Fordism engenders. In the end, it is in the city where we see the stark reality of this condition of contradiction, of the fissures and factions that spring

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9 Spain leads the rest of Europe in unoccupied housing.
The Paradigm of Alternative Spatial Production

Indeed, it is within the Cañada Real that residents can be masters of their own space, controlling its production and reshaping it for their own needs. For example, Moroccan Zohra Gaabouri and her family have spent years putting together their house, about which she pronounces: ‘It’s my house and I want it to be beautiful.’ Rather than renting or buying a house using more formalized mechanisms, here this family can control their space, making and remaking it as they see fit, to their own demands. Zohra details how she and her husband did everything: ‘All of this I did myself, with my hands.’ Rather than be alienated from the production of urban space, this woman and her many neighbors have appropriated it for themselves, shaking off the constraints of the dominant formal market. Informality thus became a tactic to resist the hegemony of the state.

This kind of informal spatial production is tied inextricably to sensibilities of urban belonging and placemaking. Zohra tells El Pais, after showing her house and detailing the process by which it was built, ‘this is my children’s life and their city.’ Through the juxtaposition of words and ideas, we see that self-help housing and membership within an urban community are linked concepts, one following the other. To destroy Zohra’s house would also mean rejection from the urban. The residents of the Cañada Real have enunciated and staked claims on their right to the city, offering this terrain as informally produced, yet no less integral to the urban fabric. The formal market was often impenetrable for many poor families, leading them to search for an alternate means of appropriating space.

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
Claims: Right to the City, Derecho al Techo

In recent years, the concept of citizenship has been fundamentally re-worked in certain circles. In ‘Uprisings in the Banlieue,’ Balibar addresses ways in which universalized concepts of citizenship break down. The limits of citizenship coalesce in space, inflicting exclusion and differentiation. What is universal in writing and the discourse of politicians is highly stratified and unequal in practice. By re-inscribing citizenship on the smaller unit of the city, urban denizens can claim their ‘right to the city,’ reconfiguring their environments to suit their own purposes, and fighting against the injustices of inequality. The right to the city becomes a formulation of urban citizenship. Further, as capitalism’s logic is now dependent on urbanism, claiming the ‘right to the city’ can become a means by which those who produce space control the mode of production. I will now turn my attention to the particular claims residents put forth that constitute their demand for a ‘Right to the city.’ In claiming rights, residents of the Cañada have made moves to demonstrate that they are not marginalized, but rather integral members of an urban society.

Moroccan residents of the Cañada have used different strategies that allow them to attain a visibility in the city, thus drawing attention to their claims to space in the city. Scholars have posited that the very act of publicly occupying urban space, of displaying one’s body in areas where it is unwanted, is a counter-hegemonic activity that offers up a quiet resistance. One author writes, about a previous clash between Moroccan workers and Spanish locals in the town of El Ejido in the south:

While Spaniards try to contain them in areas outside town--by not renting them flats and by expelling them from Spanish bars, for example (some bars have a notice on the door saying ‘Forbidden to Foreigners’)–they do not hesitate to gather in the streets after work or to socialise in bars owned by compatriots downtown. In doing so, they give their presence a certain public visibility. These everyday life practices may not be considered by all of them to be acts of resistance, but in the context, they are a point of tension with many Spaniards, as these practices declare to all the presence in the region of a large contingent of people from the Maghreb (Potot:
Thus in putting forward their claims, Moroccan residents of the Cañada have taken to occupying public space *en masse* as a means of declaring their permanent presence in the face of exclusion. Following the authorities’ attempts to dismantle the settlement, residents took not to the streets, but to the public highway. Around 200 people marched down the A-3, one of Spain’s major highway routes, which runs from Madrid to Valencia and the coast. These actions have ensured that not only will people encounter protestors in these spaces, but also that they appear in images disseminated across the national media: a large mass of dark bodies working in solidarity as they move through the white spaces of the European metropolis.

Through public visibility, by staking a claim on the physical body of the city, Moroccan residents demand a kind of urban citizenship that has previously been denied to them. The claims that accompany this insurgency, this rebellion against the hegemony of a state that has long been in opposition to their interests, emerge in part from a notion of a contributor stake. After the police entered in 2007 to command and control the Cañada Real, residents put forth claims that related to the notion of a contributor stake. In *Insurgent Citizenship*, Brazilians organize their claims around property ownership, which ‘motivates both their claims and their duties in relation to the city’ (Holston: 2007, 260).

The act of paying for property, whether legal or not, becomes a central rallying point through which notions of citizenship and belonging are articulated. This same language of property rights is present in much of the discourse surrounding the Cañada. As in Brazil, the titles residents hold to their land

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13 *Unos 200 vecinos de la Cañada Real Galiana protestan contra el desalojo de ayer con una marcha por la A-3.* 
are illegal, but the act of having paid for them becomes a central point around which residents claim their right to the city. Many formal practices come in to contact with the informality and illegality of the Cañada. One example is the case of Zohra and her husband, who relate the story of their auto-constructions thusly:

Para conseguir su habitáculo, Zohra y su marido apostaron todo a una sola carta; compraron el terreno por 10,000 euros y firmaron un contrato con sus antiguos dueños españoles (a pesar de que nada en la vía pecuaria podía tener un propietario porque era terreno público). También pidieron un préstamo al banco para levantar la edificación... La mano de obra la pusieron ellos. "Todo esto lo he hecho yo mismo, con mis manos", reivindica orgullosos Boughaleb, cuyos 420 euros de paro, de los cuales 373 son para pagar la deuda con el banco, suponen el único ingreso de la familia actualmente. 

The act of signing a contract, regardless of its legality, and of going to the bank to ask for a loan, give these illegalities an air of the formal, the legal. They are the attendant customs that accompany a land transaction, and it is through performing these acts that the illegal gains legitimacy. Zohra and her husband have performed their duties as citizens in the urban landscape, recording their transactions and accessing the formal market of banks. The result of their hard work is a house of which they are proud: "Es mi casa y quiero que esté bonita." What emerges in not only an idea of sweat equity, but also of the contributor stake, of having followed the correct procedure by which one acts as a good member of a larger community.

This notion of the contributor stake, however, is not only an articulation of property and procedure, but rather constitutes itself in broader notions of participation. Indeed, it draws upon Holston’s earlier work on Brasilia, in which the anthropologist demonstrated that those who built the new city were not actually then able to inhabit it (Holston: 1989). As contributors, they were denied a physical stake in the city. The same notions of participation and belonging within the Madrid community are

15 Ibid.
enunciated in tales from the Cañada Real. The idea that these residents have taken part in Madrid’s urban project was enunciated clearly by one resident, who said: “The best is that many of the Moroccans who live in the Cañada Real worked on the construction of the M-30. Can you imagine a greater paradox? These guys, who helped create the construction boom, are now gonna be kicked out by people who want to speculate with this land!” The M-30 is an inner ring road that was built during the Franco regime. Over the last few years, the local government has decided to make a large portion of this road run underground. This project has been one of the most emblematic urban developments for Madrid, and its construction is largely dependent on Moroccan immigrant labor. The same people who are responsible for reshaping the city in the vision of Moncloa politicians are then denied the right to appropriate urban space for themselves.

This set of contributor rights, conceived of both as a proper enactment of citizens’ duties and as participation within a larger urban project, is not the only basis by which residents make claims to the city. The other set of claims were articulated within mainstream Spanish society before they became the rallying cry for the Cañada Real. This argument concerns human rights. In his article on the right to the city, David Harvey posits this right as a human right, as a necessary condition (2008). This postulation, however, is vague. Under what circumstances is the right to the city a human right? Further, how would urban society reproduce this right?

In Spain, however, the concept of urban belonging formulated on the basis of human rights is not an abstract universalism. Rather it focuses on a specific case as it is laid out by the constitution. The constitution reads:

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In the early part of this decade, many in Spain began to observe an escalation in housing prices that was not matched by an increase in earnings. Meanwhile, developers, under the auspices of the government, went about constructing massive blocks of new housing, much of which is still empty. In 2003, on the 25th anniversary of the Spanish Constitution, a professor of constitutional law from the Universidad de Barcelona published a book outlining the ‘derecho a una vivienda digna,’ which quickly became a rallying cry for many focused on this debate and quickly entered the public imaginary (Pisarello: 2003). The theme of just, dignified housing was taken up throughout the national press, and regular demonstrations proclaimed the need for the ‘derecho al techo.’ Rather than rely on an abstract concept that based the right to the city on an appeal to human rights, the ‘vivienda digna’ movement spoke the language of human rights as it was legally defined within the parameters of the Spanish constitution.

Thus when authorities threatened to demolish the Cañada Real in 2007, the notion of a right to housing, as enshrined not in abstract theory but in law, had already been circulating freely through society. One popular slogan of this movement, plastered on stickers that were then affixed to park benches, bus stops, subway trains, and other urban ornamentation, proclaimed ‘No vas a tener casa en la puta vida’—you’re never gonna have a house in your fucking life (Figure 10). But the people of

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17 Viviendadigna.org
18 Ibid. ‘En España según el último censo de población y viviendas realizado en el año 2001, hay 3.091.596 viviendas vacías, a las que si se suman las 3.351.300 viviendas secundarias, encontramos un total de 6.442.896 viviendas que o bien no se usan, o bien se emplean con una intensidad reducida.’
the Cañada Real already had houses, albeit sub-standard, illegal ones. Shortly after the police tried to demolish a portion of the settlement in 2007, an organization dedicated to the ‘derecho a techo’ organized a demonstration there, thus allying the greater movement with the concerns of the marginalized community.\(^{20}\) The language of the movement, meanwhile, infiltrated dialogues on the Cañada. When putting forth their claims against demolition, residents used the same terms of the ‘Vivienda Digna’ movement. Images from demonstrations show young Moroccan families holding handmade signs reading ‘Derecho a techo,’ and ‘vivienda digna.’ At one demonstration, one woman said: ‘Nos están tratando peor que a los animales, quitándonos el derecho de nuestros hijos a un techo con el único pretexto de realizar negocios.’\(^{21}\) Officials have used the law as the major force to destabilize and de-legitimate the existence of the settlement. However, residents have learned how to make use of the same instrument, turning the law against the officials who claim judicial power over the marginalized territory of the Cañada. A movement that first addressed the mainstream concerns of a young Spanish population faced with an all-powerful real estate market is no longer a means of expressing concerns about the legitimate, legal market. It also becomes a justification for the illegal occupation of land and the informal construction of housing.

By appropriating these claims of a right to housing, the residents of the Cañada Real not only learn to speak the language of the mainstream and the politicians. The law, as articulated through this ‘right to housing,’ is a powerful tool that has allowed them to avoid eviction. Faced with conflicting claims, on the one hand, the state’s claim that these occupations are illegal and should be demolished, and on the other, the residents’ claim to the right to housing, the judiciary has found itself in a legal quagmire, unable to decided, neither for nor against. \textit{El Publico}, a leftist newspaper, reports on the work of Elena Martín, the spokesperson for one of the neighbor’s associations within

\(^{20}\) www.madrid.vdevivienda.org
\(^{21}\) Cientos de personas se manifiestan en la Cañada Real contra los derribos.’ \textit{El Mundo}. April 28, 2008.
the settlement. Elena has succeeded in continuously stalling any demolition:

Desde hace ocho años la agrupación [de los vecinos] ha conseguido paralizar en los tribunales 40 derribos, según explica. Las razones para las demoliciones, ordenadas la mayoría de las veces por el Ayuntamiento de Madrid, siempre son las mismas: **no hay licencia de construcción**. Pero los tribunales suelen fallar a su favor y casi siempre con el mismo argumento, que es el de garantizar el derecho a un vivienda. 22

As we see through the example of Elena and her organization, the ‘rights talk’ is not only a means of formulating these arguments from the peripheries. The law, so long used against these populations, now becomes their ally, offering a powerful challenge to the authorities in their quest to demolish the settlement. The periphery, long thought to be dirty and illegal, have begun to articulate their claims to belonging.

**Conclusion**

In appropriating this language, residents of the Cañada Real demonstrate the ways in which they are neither marginal nor antithetical to the dominant society. Writing about ‘crime talk’ in São Paolo, Teresa Caldeira states that residents of favelas ‘are considered outsiders…people who are not fully from the city’ (Caldeira: 2000, 79). Further, she points to how these prejudicial judgments fit in to broader classifications, citing Mary Douglas, who writes: ‘uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained’ (Douglas in Caldeira: 2000, 79). Perceptions of spaces that do not conform to the dominant spatial logic of the city lead inevitably to these discussions of filth and danger. While the Cañada Real developed in tandem to the city, the formal tacitly encouraging the informal, it is thus seen as in opposition, threatening, a tumor to be excised. By appropriating the language of the mainstream, these residents show the ways in which their spatial formulations are part of the dominant logic of the city, countering the prejudices and persecutions of the hostile hegemony. Further, by putting forward these claims, residents also become the

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22 ‘Un año después, la Cañada se une contra los derribos.’ *El Publico*. October 18, 2008.
masters of their own accumulative processes. Having long aided the capitalization of land, laboring to transform the urban into a site of spectacle, residents now proclaim their ability to produce and control space, independent from the worlding projects of the state.

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