A B S T R A C T
In this article, I explore articulations between ritual practice, public sociality, and the politics of immigration in Catalonia (Spain). I investigate phenomena associated with a vernacular interculturalist project known in Catalan as convivència (living together), an alternative to both xenophobic and liberal multiculturalist discourses circulating in Europe. I focus on the capacity of ritual practice to shape embodied socialities between hosts and immigrants and contextualize these dynamics by asking, what congeries of history, public reasoning, techniques of sociality, and policy feed momentum toward polarization or toward pluralism? [ritual, public sociality, migration, the senses, Islam, Europe]

few hours before dawn, January 10, 2006, I awoke to sounds of tumult I could not readily interpret. Furniture knocked over and smashed? A drunken altercation? Then, the low thunder of footsteps…boot steps?…in the stairwell. I heard no voices and thus rejected the fleeting hypothesis of inebriated uproar. The puzzle snapped together: It must be an arrest. I considered it unsafe to peek outside the door and ultimately slipped back into sleep.

The radio alarm reawoke me at 7:00 a.m., and the staccato voice of a news announcer reported that Operation Jackal had carried out a nationally coordinated raid against “Islamic terrorist” cells in Madrid, the Basque country, and, with by far the greatest number of arrests, the Catalan city of Vilanova i la Geltrú, where I lived. A television news report included footage of the raid at multiple locations in Vilanova. One of the men arrested was the head of the Muslim cultural association, another was the owner of a halal butcher shop, and another was the imam of the mosque. Because the imam held the keys to the mosque, the congregation was unable to enter it that day, Eid al-Adha (the Feast of Sacrifice), one of the most important holy days of the Muslim calendar, adding further distress to a community in shock. (See Figure 1.)

That morning in the central plaça, I encountered a large group of Muslim men gathered before the city hall. An older, bearded man was making a statement to the press about the timing of the police action on the holy day. He declared the raids “an attack against Islam.” Whether calculated or not, the timing maximized the anguish and isolation precipitated by the raids. In addition, familiar lines of communication were cut off by the raids: Three of the men detained had served as community liaisons to the city and were familiar to many people through media interviews and their public involvement. The impact on the Muslim community’s ethical obligations seemed insensitive to the point of cruelty, and the raids effectively severed relations between the Muslim community and city government (Diari de Vilanova 2006b).
Remembering the vituperative, violent backlash by U.S. vigilantes following 9/11, I feared a similar reaction in Vilanova i la Geltrú. The mayor responded at once, cautioning that no one should jump to conclusions, that the detained should be presumed innocent until proven otherwise, and that the convivència (literally, living together) that all Vilanovins enjoyed should continue. The town council hastily provided a public building as a temporary mosque, enabling group prayer on the holy day (Diari de Vilanova 2006b). The office of civil rights received no reports of actions against Muslims, and none of my informants over the ensuing months, Muslim or otherwise, thought there had been any local retaliation.

In the days that followed, I saw matrons in my neighborhood making friendly overtures to headscarf-garbed Muslim women and their children. I witnessed groups of local activists joining Muslim vigils and press conferences in support of the rights of the detained and to refute the equation of Islam with terrorism suggested by the national media. Standing before television cameras in the central plaça, a man and a woman representing the Muslim Neighborhood Association denounced terrorism as far from the true Islam and said that the majority of Muslims did not believe in it. “Islam is about peace and convivència with one’s neighbors,” they averred. The editorial staff of the local newspaper also invoked convivència, warned against equating Islam with terrorism and against xenophobia, and called for the rapid reestablishment of the severed links to the Muslim community—points echoed by others in subsequent days (Diari de Vilanova 2006c). In short, the community response to this traumatic event appeared to be in contrast to the reported rise of xenophobia—particularly against Muslims—in other parts of Europe.

Below, I complicate my narrative of apparent mutual goodwill and unpack the notion of “convivència,” but I also draw attention to the local response to Operation Jackal as a turning point and as a kind of social fact with consequences. In another such turning point, in November 2009, 57 percent of Swiss voters cast ballots to ban the construction of minarets in their country. Ayman Ali, the secretary-general of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe, expressed the concern that the Swiss vote could contribute to the “rise of extremism on both sides” (Cumming-Bruce 2009). The Swiss government, which opposed the measure, attempted to control the damage, but the vote manifestly escalated the polarization of Swiss society. Although the sense of injury experienced by Swiss Muslims may not be a decisive tipping point toward specific consequences, it is now in place as a building block, or perhaps stumbling block, affecting host-immigrant relations in Switzerland and as a piece of the larger discourse of the place of Islam in Europe.

At any given point in a multiethnic society, processes such as integration, accommodation, discrimination, and polarization may take place simultaneously. The discourses of nativists and of defenders of human rights may not
resonate with equal force among the publics to which they are directed, but they are both present. The balance of public reasoning is dynamic and emergent but will be consequential at given points, as in the case of the Swiss referendum and the Vilanovin response to Operation Jackal. And yet, on a future day, Swiss Muslims may be accommodated and Vilanovins may lash out against the immigrants in their midst. Thus, my task is not to postulate a Catalan utopia or a Swiss dystopia but to ask what congeries of history, public reasoning, techniques of sociality, and policy gain momentum for polarization or for pluralism? How does a community cultivate the virtues it aspires to?

The balance of this article falls into three parts. The first puts the response I witnessed to Operation Jackal, and to immigration broadly, in the historical-regional context of Catalonia and the local context of Vilanova i la Geltrú, demonstrating the salience of the region’s sociopolitics. In the second part, I present an ethnographic account suggesting that embodied ritual sociability is a virtuous practice and generative node in the political direction of the region. I argue that ritual practice links sensory-affective experience to an emerging ethical discourse—a sensory politics—that helps shape host-immigrant relations in a distinct way that is enmeshed with but not reducible to ideology, political economy, media representations, or familiar liberal paradigms of living with difference. Finally, I explore the discourse of convivencia as a language of virtuous aspirations that serves as a resource to Catalans and Muslim immigrants for the mutual accommodation of difference and which, thereby, overruns the boundaries of the imagined dichotomy between European secular modernity and Islam, perhaps affording a view of the shores of utopia where alternate social possibilities may be articulated and enacted.

**Catalonia and Vilanova i la Geltrú**

As a context for the reception of immigrants, Catalonia is distinct from other European politides in several ways that I briefly outline here. The first is that the Catalan government, with the support of much of the population, conceives of itself as having a minority identity to assert in distinction to that of Spain. Popular allegiance to the Catalan language and aspirations to some form of recognized nationhood draw force from the campaigns of the Francisco Franco dictatorship (1939–75) to replace the Catalan language, symbols, institutions, and leaders with those of the national center based on Castilian norms and the authority of Madrid (Guibernau 2004; Hargreaves 2000; Llobera 2004). The dominance of Castilian norms is still regarded as a threat by many Catalans: a fear fueled both by obsessively charted linguistic trends highlighting the tenuous vitality of the Catalan language (Pujolar i Cos 1995) and by expressions of anti-Catalan sentiment.

What William Connolly describes as the image of a centered national majority surrounded by marginalized minorities is disrupted in the Catalanian case by intranational difference, which complicates the dynamics of native-immigrant difference. The situation in Catalonia suggests an image of multiple minorities with lines of affiliation between them that are not necessarily mediated by a national center (cf. Connolly 2005:59–67). This is not to say that members of these multiple minorities receive equal treatment or inhabit an identical range of social positions in Catalonia; they do not (see SOS Racisme-Catalunya 2006). It is to say that Catalan social, political, and cultural orientations toward immigrants must be seen not only as distinct from those of Switzerland and France but also from those of Spain.

A second factor underlying Catalan distinctiveness also dates to the time of the dictatorship, particularly the latter decades. Primarily for economic reasons, a vast number of rural Spaniards, predominantly from Andalusia, migrated to the industrial zone of Catalonia. By 1970, nearly half of the population had been born outside the territory (Laïtin 1989). Whereas some in the Franco regime imagined that this internal migration would have a castellanizing effect and contribute to its project of national unity-conformity, many Andalusians, sometimes described as “fugitives of fascism” (Candel and Cuenca 2001:14), shared Catalan aspirations to democracy and autonomy and supported Catalan resistance toward the Spanish state (Llobora 2004:149–157). The contemporary left-leaning political consensus of Catalonia rests on the alliance of natives and immigrants. Thus, Catalans cannot afford to be chauvinist and must forge a mutually acceptable compromise on cultural issues, such as linguistic policy, with those of Andalusian origin (Hargreaves 2000:33–35). Such practices of compromise are now rooted in the intimacies of family life, as many Catalans today have at least one family member of extraterritorial origin.

This earlier and massive wave of immigration has given rise to a set of commonly encountered attitudes. Catalan identity, for instance, is rarely considered to reside in genetic or racial origin but in residence, voluntary self-identification, political commitment to regional autonomy, and use of the Catalan language. Even though the processes of evaluation pertaining to each of these criteria are variable, they add up to an attitude I heard summarized as follows: “Successfully integrating to Catalan society does not require giving up who you are.” Of course, even in a more dialogical host-immigrant relationship, the burden of adaptation falls on the newcomer. Some of my Catalan informants acknowledged the relative ease or difficulty experienced by members of different immigrant communities in settling in. For example, referring to the dilemma of Muslim families who must decide whether to let their daughters participate in physical education classes with boys,
my barber remarked sympathetically, "It costs them a lot to integrate."

However, many of my interlocutors, native and newcomer, participated in the discourse of permeable identity. The following verbatim utterances from three different acquaintances are representative: “I’m Catalan, with Andalusian roots”; “I’m from Morocco. I don’t think I’m Spanish, maybe Catalan, definitely very Vilanovin. And my daughter is Catalan, all the way”; and “I’ve lived here half my life, I consider myself equally Moroccan and Catalan. I go to Morocco every summer. When I’m here, I miss Morocco, when I’m there, I miss Catalonia.” The last comment in particular highlights the acceptability in the Catalan context of divided allegiances, which are often incompatible with citizenship in the modern state. There is too little history to evaluate the extent to which patterns of social integration of the current wave of immigrants from North Africa, South America, and eastern Europe will follow or diverge from that of immigrants from within Spanish borders. However, the ways that many Andalusians have become allies and full participants in Catalan civic life while maintaining ties to the south highlights what Mahmood Mamdani (2001:264) notes as the important distinction between cultural and political identity.

Public reasoning about immigration in Catalonia draws on the largely successful integration of the earlier wave of immigrants to the region to militate against appeals to xenophobia. Although I did encounter concern about criminal elements within South American and eastern European communities, both in the news media and in informal conversation, it did not escalate into general alarm or blanket generalization. Catalans commonly speak of their territory as a land of passage (terra de pas) and a land of welcome (terra d’acollida). The opening line of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy reads, “Catalonia has been shaped over the course of time through the contribution of the energy of many generations, traditions and cultures, which found in Catalonia a land of welcome” (Generalitat de Catalunya 2006:7). During informal discussions about immigration, I often encountered positive statements about the ways that immigrants “enrich” the host society as well as the indifferent shrug, “We’re used to it.”

I also found rhetorics of Othering to be less pronounced in Vilanova than elsewhere. For example, the term immigrant, which carries class connotations, is largely avoided in favor of newcomer (nouvingut), shifting the language of social policy to that of hospitality. This may be a minor factor, but I would remind the reader of the rhetorical work done in the United States by the term illegal alien in dehumanizing people with irregularities in their immigration status. In another example, the much-discussed issue of the headscarf worn by some Muslim women turned out to be a nonissue in Vilanova. In France, the headscarf worn by a Muslim female has been interpreted as a sign of gendered oppression or dangerous fundamentalism, and more broadly as an indicator of the incompatibility between Islam and modern European life (Asad 2006; Bowen 2007). When I asked Vilanovins about the practice, they responded dispassionately, a few commenting, “My mother (or grandmother) always covered her head in public,” hailing their own family members into the situation as sharing a practice with Muslim women. In contrast to dominant French discourse, the Catalans I spoke with refused the positional center they could have claimed and declined to place Muslims on the wrong side of such ideological axes as liberated-oppressed, modern–backward, or secular–fundamentalist.

The site of my field research, Vilanova i la Geltrú, is a provincial capital city with over 60 thousand inhabitants, 40 kilometers south of Barcelona. During the four-year period prior to my arrival in 2005, the foreign-born population had increased from 2 to 12 percent, with the newcomers predominantly from North Africa, South America, and eastern Europe (Ajuntament de Vilanova i la Geltrú 2004). I resided in Vilanova for ten months, and my primary points of engagement with my interlocutors arose via participant-observation in free language classes at the Center for Linguistic Normalization (North Africans, eastern Europeans, Latin Americans, and Andalusians); in a ritual crew of castellers, the Bordegassos (predominantly Catalans and Andalusians and some South Americans); and as an active parent at my daughter’s preschool, Espai Nexes, where the majority of students’ families were Spanish born, with Magrebin and other immigrant families present as a minority. During the course of my research, I did encounter vehement frustration with members of one group of newcomers to Vilanova who were, moreover, branded with a mocking epithet and had scorn heaped on them during Carnival, a time when all sorts of dirty laundry are aired. This exception to the more measured attitudes toward immigrants in general draws attention to two additional facets of social life in Catalonia that have bearing on relations with immigrants, as I explain subsequently. The problematic newcomers to Vilanova were, in fact, other Catalans who had relocated from Barcelona to take advantage of lower housing costs and to flee metropolitan clamor for an imagined provincial tranquility. The antipathy in this case was not toward Barcelonans in general, many of whom were fully integrated members of the community. The rancor focused on the specific behavior of those among the newcomers who “complain without participating,” “criticize and look down on us,” “just come here to sleep,” or “barge in like they own the place.” Thus, specific practices, rather than essentialized difference, are more salient to the ways Vilanovins evaluate the integration of immigrants into their community.

Contrary to the characterization of the southern European public sphere as historically weak (Kleinsteuber 2007), a prominent feature of Catalan society is the long-standing pattern of assemblearisme, or voluntary
democratic association. Vilanovins have formed a dense network of hundreds of civic and cultural organizations, including 15 neighborhood associations, 55 athletic groups, 65 beneficial associations, seven political parties, 25 nonprofit organizations, and 108 cultural entities, among them, dozens of traditional ritual crews such as the one I describe below (Ajuntament de Vilanova i la Geltrú 2007). This organizational density is overlaid on a population density of 1,768 inhabitants per square kilometer (Ajuntament de Vilanova i la Geltrú 2004:12), a conjuncture producing webs of physical proximity and social engagement. Assemblies provide a medium for social integration, which the Andalusians embraced and the criticized Barcelona snubbed. In theory, this associative world should help facilitate the integration of Vilanova’s new immigrants, but to date, their participation has been quite low, at least among the organizations I canvassed, in which I found a few South Americans and Sub-Saharan Africans but very few North Africans or eastern Europeans. Although bigotry could well be a contributing factor in this differential low participation, I find other explanations worthy of consideration.

The most obvious factor explaining the presence of some South Americans is that they and the inhabitants of Catalonia share the Castilian language in common, as virtually all Catalan speakers are bilingual. Thus, language is less of a barrier to participation, or to extending, comprehending, or responding to an invitation to do so. This same communicative facility takes longer to achieve for those in the process of acquiring either or both of the locally used languages. A second consideration in the overall low participation of newcomers is that the priorities and interests cultivated within different immigrant communities may not correspond to those of the Catalan associative world. It is not the case that North Africans and eastern Europeans held themselves apart from local life in other contexts. Members of both of these communities availed themselves of a range of social services and evening courses, particularly language classes, in significant numbers. North African and other immigrant mothers were widely involved in their children’s schools, where they built relationships with educators and other parents. Children of all provenances took part as performers in the intensive cycle of public rituals even though most are ostensibly Catholic religious observances. Many North Africans were avid spectators of these events, some of them explaining to me that the lively street processions reminded them of their own festivals in Morocco. Both my Moroccan and Catalan interlocutors tended to talk about the similarities of their practices and shared traits as “Mediterranean,” as I further explore. The Catalan associative world may not turn out to be a primary medium of integration for the current cohort of adult immigrants, but, for those who participate, it is a medium through which virtuous dispositions toward social engagement are cultivated.

A dimension of social life providing the conditions for various forms of sociality is that of residential proximity. Unlike the condition of physical isolation of French banlieues, wherein the children of immigrants may grow up as marginalized from the center of French national life as their parents, in most of Catalonia, immigrants have not settled in enclaves but live distributed among the rest of the population. Sharing residential buildings, schools, shops, clinics, parks, and other public spaces is no guarantee of social harmony, but it does facilitate contact and create conditions of relative equality in essential spheres of life such as housing, health care, and education. The Catalan capital of Barcelona is an important exception to the pattern of residential proximity. Immigrant communities have settled in enclaves there, and host–immigrant conflicts are regularly reported and analyzed (see Actis 2002; Aramburu Otazu 2002; Aranda and Cruz 2005; Barcelona Independent Media Center 2004; Delgado 2002; Delgado et al. 2002; Martucelli 2002; Palacín 2002; Pi-Sunyer 1993).

Vilanova’s municipal policies also serve to mitigate against both structural and symbolic inequalities between Spanish-born or other E.U. citizens, legal residents with current visas or work or residency permits, and residents whose immigration documents are expired, incomplete, or nonexistent. Any of these people are eligible to become, in Vilanovin municipal parlance, local citizens. Before a newcomer to Vilanova can open a bank account, enroll his or her child in school, or conduct many other types of transactions, he or she must seek the sponsorship (empadronament) of the municipal government. The streamlined process consists of completing a one-page form and returning an hour later to pick up a letter of sponsorship. There is no fee. Whether one’s status is documented or undocumented with respect to the European Union or the nation of Spain is immaterial. The newcomer’s data are entered into the town’s demographic database, and he or she is handed a booklet and told, “Welcome to Vilanova.”

The booklet is titled Useful Guide for Newcomers to Vilanova i la Geltrú and is published by Vilanova’s Office of Civil Rights. The 2004 edition contains identical information in Catalan, Castilian, Arabic, Russian, French, and English. The booklet describes the city and the rights and duties of its citizens, the country of Catalonia, and social services provided. The rights held by each person according to his or her legal immigration status are listed. Significantly, the town guarantees identical rights to citizens and noncitizens, such as access to education, health care, and other social services, with the exception of rights located beyond the local sphere, such as voting in national or region-wide elections. All sponsored persons do, however, have voting rights in municipal referenda. In these ways, the municipal government has attempted to minimize the structural inequalities between natives and newcomers (Oficina de Drets Civils 2004). Local solidarity activists were also
involved in a regional campaign to extend voting rights to undocumented immigrants for Catalonia-wide elections (SOS Racisme-Catalunya 2007).

The existence of egalitarian legal structures is no guarantee of social equality. In the United States, for example, data revealing disparities in law enforcement, incarceration, access to credit, unemployment, education, and so on, break down starkly on racial lines despite decades of legal equality (Bonilla-Silva 2006; U.S. Census Bureau 2003). Absolute parity is, of course, not found in any human society, and any assessment of the degree of equality might draw on quantitative and qualitative factors such as legal statutes, levels of material well-being, patterns of injurious speech or imagery, discriminatory treatment, access to and control of material and symbolic capital, and perceptions, for example, by immigrants of the degree to which the host society meets their expectations of fair treatment. Thus, in addition to the kind of analysis made through the frame of political economy, or that of the politics of representation, the dispositions of both host and immigrant communities must be acknowledged to play a critical role in the constitution of their relationship. I now turn my attention to the place of more intimate forms of sociality in the congeries of host-immigrant relations in Vilanova i la Geltrú.

Ritual sociality

*Castells* (literally, castles) are the most ephemeral architectural structures in the world. Made of living human bodies, they are avidly appreciated throughout Catalonia for achieving altitude, complexity, and grace and as models of integrated cooperation. An athletic activity that is not a sport, castell making involves no individual champions or professional players. The spirit of competition, although present, is neither absolute nor unmitigated; the members of what would appear to be competing crews take part in helping other crews make successful castells.

Often as the culmination of a lengthy ritual procession of dancers, dragons, devils, giants, and big-headed dwarfs, a crew of *castellers*, consisting of more than a hundred members, gathers within a plaça tumultuous with spectators. Directed by a technical team and accompanied by strident music that pierces the auditory muddle, the crew forms a tightly interlocked base of bodies standing on the ground. Climbers stand on the shoulders of those below to form a structure of one to five columns capped by a child as young as five years old, who must salute the plaça with one hand before the castell can be considered complete. The tallest of these trembling structures may reach ten persons standing one on the other. The formation of a castell is both exhilarating and terrifying to witness from within or at close range. (See Figure 2.)

In April 2006, having been invited by an acquaintance, I began my training as a member of one of Vilanova’s castell crews, the Bordegassos (Lads). I met another newcomer, Pedro, who had arrived from Argentina a few months before. He had been invited to join by Nofre, a young member of the crew with whom he worked on a construction site. Over the coming months, two of Pedro’s Argentine friends would join him in Vilanova as new members of the Bordegassos. Crew members gathered several times a week to rehearse the intricate choreography of forming human towers, bases, and buttresses that, skillfully coordinated, might reach 50 feet or more in height. Typically performed during summer saints’ day festivals, often in suffocating heat, making castells is physically strenuous, is productive of intense sensory and affective experience, and entails a degree of real danger.

Deep inside the base of the castell, where I was habitually assigned, sounds are muffled, save for heavy breathing, sight is limited to a range of mere inches, and the odors of sweating comrades almost supersede anxious fears that one’s bones might crack or that the tons of human flesh towering above might plummet earthward. Whereas the climbers above can hear the shouts of the crew chief, communication inside the castell is capillary, addressed to those whose bodies are entangled with one’s own. One makes or
responds to such groans as “To the left!” or “More chest!” to keep the castell balanced. In the overheated atmosphere, one’s attention is aimed both toward disciplining one’s own body and affective state and also assessing and responding to the collective body with which it is enmeshed.

Castellers often recall the fear they felt before attempting a difficult castell, and spectators also report feeling a chill of pure elation when the construction is successful, of anxiety when a trembling castell appears to be on the brink of collapse, and of deep concern for the frightened, crying children after a fall. Minor injuries are common, and an ambulance always stands by. Serious accidents are rare, but a 12-year-old girl from a nearby town died from cranial injury subsequent to a fall during my stay.

Before every performance, castellers help one another to wrap a long woven sash around the waist to provide lumbar support and serve as a hold for climbers. The phrase posar la faixa (to put on the sash) also means to become a casteller and has been explicitly linked to the integration of immigrants as castellers and as members of Catalan society. (See Figure 3.) In an article titled, “Castells: Gateway of Entry: Youth of Other Cultures Are Putting on the Faixa,” Cristina Sáez evoked the well-worn trope of Catalonia as a frontier territory:

The past—and also the present—teaches us that the Catalan associative world is an effective instrument for the integration of newcomers to the social fabric of the country. And in this sense, castells constitute a gateway of entry to our culture and idiosyncrasies, wherein one may encounter people of any social condition, ideology, age, sex, physical characteristics and origin, and wherein they unite to achieve a common objective: to build a castell. [2005: 28]

Sáez recounted a string of specific examples, one involving the Bordegassos, of castellers’ solidarity extending beyond the plaça to help undocumented immigrants get papers, find jobs, and rent apartments. Sáez reported the account of a 26-year-old Argentine: “I spent quite a while looking for a place in Vilanova without finding one. By chance, the treasurer of the crew heard about it and he was the owner of several properties and he got me one of them. Other members of the crew also helped both me and my wife to find jobs” (2005: 30). In these cases, the embodied solidarity of ritual activity bore a clear affinity to solidarity in other social spheres.

Pierre Bourdieu (1977:72) posited a transposable quality to dispositions, which may be thought to include the kinds of sensory orientations and ethical attitudes cultivated by the castellers. He claimed that dispositions have the adaptive capacity to structure and become relevant to social contexts beyond their original application (Jenkins 2002:78) and more specifically, that temporary sensory–affective states such as the collective excitement produced by ritual could produce “lasting dispositions” attuned to the objectives of the ritual action (Bourdieu 1977:167). I do not think it possible to prove direct causality between sensory–affective experience and particular social actions.

Figure 3. Bordegassos help one another put on the faixa (sash). Photograph by the author.
in other contexts, nor do I think this is Bourdieu’s argument. I also note that the virtuous dispositions cultivated by the castellers are to some degree reflexive and intentional and may be acquired by outsiders, thus, conceptually exceeding Bourdieu’s framework of the habitus. Without attributing overriding determinant properties to any sphere of experience, I argue that embodied ritual sociality is a generative node in the congeries concerning host-immigrant relations.

To present one example, the casteller slogan fem pinya (literally, we make a pinecone, i.e., a tightly interlocked, organic entity) carries the extended sense of acting in solidarity used in many other social contexts, from neighborhood cooperation to international aid. I employ the notion of “sensory politics” to point to the capacity for sensory-ethical dispositions to resonate with practices in social spaces beyond their original context. The processes by which adults new to a social space can acquire the habitus pertaining to it is absent from Bourdieu’s explanation, yet this is precisely the challenge faced by immigrants and, to a lesser degree, by host communities as they adapt to one another.

The members of the crew also practice a form of linguistic pluralism or non-code-switching bilingualism in which speakers accommodate to one another without converging on a single language and, thus, allowing it to become dominant over others (cf. Woolard 1989). Native speakers of Castilian, who may passively understand but not actively speak Catalan, speak Castilian and are understood. Native Catalan speakers speak Catalan and are also understood, the dialogue of the speech community flowing smoothly over the border of the language communities (see Silverstein 1998). I encountered this practice too in many nonritual ambits of Vilanovin life.

In the 19th century, the crews who made castells were exclusively composed of young male laborers and a few children. Toward the end of the Franco dictatorship, young women and the youth of “good families” began to participate, leading to the openness of castells today (Guinovart i Callejón and Orriols i Caba 2002). As I witnessed it, the normative, largely unspoken dispositions cultivated through the pursuit of castells included cooperative, respectful, and playful attitudes between members of different-age cohorts, males and females, Catalan and Castilian speakers, natives and newcomers, professionals and laborers, and a wide range of physical types, including several people with developmental disabilities. These dispositions were modeled by the behavior of the crew members, and new initiates were instructed by those around them. The first time I joined the pinya, the person next to me said, “Take off your watch, you could scratch someone.” It is through such ad hoc instruction that one learns what is considered appropriate for a casteller. (See Figure 4.)

During one performance, Magi, a member of the Bordegassos, led me to the balcony of the city hall to watch a castell in progress from above, which he said was an excellent way to understand its structure. Magi explained that strength is not the most important asset but, rather,
the technique learned by all of the crew for the positions they occupy and their effective deployment by the technical team. I was beginning to understand that the integration process included physical practice, verbal instruction, and demonstration. (See Figure 5.)

Magi explained that castellers need four qualities: strength, balance, bravery, and practical reason. These traits are understood as collective as well as individual, and the discourse of making castells highlights the physical, affective, and social aspects of the training of the human being that Marcel Mauss invoked in his essay “Techniques of the Body” (2006). Mauss (2006:81–83) elucidated the socially specific education of the body, which he identified as both technical object and technical means. The training of castellers entails a specific cultivation of the self in which embodied practices, sensory and affective experiences, and ethical orientations are interlaced. In Aristotelian terms, the ritual dispositions of the castellers can be seen as virtues cultivated through practice that enable a casteller to regard him- or herself as a person who embodies qualities of excellence and practical and moral wisdom and who contributes to collective well-being.1

Virtuous practices

Although crews of castellers throughout the region have relatively high levels of new immigrant participation, including North African, there were fewer than half a dozen extra- Iberian newcomers active in the Bordegassos during my time there, and none of them were from North Africa. I do not deny that ritual action itself facilitates integration for the immigrants who participate, but that is not my point. My argument is that ritual practice is a medium for the cultivation of community-oriented virtues that overlap with virtues articulated through other forms of public reasoning and sociality, including those cultivated by Vilanova’s Muslim community. Before I develop this argument, I respond to a possible critique of the effect of ritual sociality such as that produced by making castells. The creation of affective ties through ritual or everyday conviviality could be seen as having two opposing social effects: stimulating integration not only into the social sphere but also into civic and economic life or, conversely, making inequality more palatable. In many contexts, both effects could occur. For example, although membership in the Bordegassos resulted in at least one newcomer obtaining housing and employment, the South Americans I knew merely remarked on ways that participating in making castells made them feel themselves to be part of the community. Rather than claim that Vilanovin ritual sociality produces tangible material effects, on the one hand, or some kind of false consciousness, on the other hand, I would point out that, in everyday lived experience, structural and affective spheres of life are inextricably entangled.

The passionate, improvident investments human beings around the world make in their sensory and affective
experience belies the implication that forms of play, aesthetic and emotional life, and the aspiration to live convivially with others are ontologically second to the putatively real world of economics and institutional politics. Neither natives nor newcomers participate in Vilanovin ritual life to improve their material condition, and, in many cases, time lost from work and money spent—lavishly during Carnival—have the opposite impact. In Vilanova, the pursuit of the aesthetic experience of entering into a collective, embodied dimension of existence is valued even when it appears counterproductive to other objectives.

In tracing paths between ritual practice and the politics of immigration, I am following the work of two ethnographers of Iberian ritual, Stanley Brandes (1988, 1991, 2006) and Dorothy Noyes (2003), both of whom have explored articulations between seemingly quaint traditional practices and the fields of power, social positioning, and change. My attentiveness to the embodied dimension of ritual practice draws on the work of Charles Hirschkind (2006:29) to move the sensory in a political direction by seeing the array of the senses as a medium for ethical engagement. My argument is not that a given ritual gesture, sensation, or attendant affect has any inherent political valence but that embodied experience becomes meaningful through social practice and context. The ritual practice I have briefly described shapes and stabilizes the relation between sensation and signification, dampening the volatility of their arbitrary link. Thus, although the virtuous solidarity cultivated by the Bordegassos may be consistent with the municipal policy of local citizenship, it must also be placed in conversation with the discourse of convivência and the virtuous and civic aspirations of the Muslim community before its import to broader host–immigrant relations can be fully assessed.

**Convivência**

We can define convivência in the broadest sense of the concept, to live in the company of others with whom we interact with empathy, sharing, communication, and the regulation of conflict. One should bear in mind that when people live together, conflicts arise: this need not be seen as a problem but rather as an impetus to change. From this definition we understand convivência (active relations between neighbors), in contradistinction to coexistence (minimal, passively produced relations between neighbors), and to hostility.

—Plan for the Convivência of Vilanova i la Geltrú

**Convivência** is a key term of popular discourse in Catalonia. It derives from Spanish historian Ramón Menéndez Pidal’s characterization of the contemporaneous emergence of and competition between variant forms of early Romance languages in the Iberian Peninsula. Pidal’s disciple Amérgio Castro developed the term in reference to the idealized cultural interaction between medieval Jews, Muslims, and Christians and the emergence of their self-awareness as ethnic groups as a product of their collective consciousness (Glick 1992). More-recent historians have rejected Castro’s portrayal as too psychological and romanticized, presenting only the positive relations between the groups while downplaying the conflicts between them and ignoring the evidence that the three faith communities never lived together on equal terms (Kamen 1997). In contemporary Castilian, **convivência** continues to refer to the historical coexistence of Christians, Muslims, and Jews in medieval Iberia, but it now carries connotations of mutual interpenetration and creative influence as well as mutual rivalry and conflict (Glick 1992). Whereas liberal Spaniards often evoke historical convivência as a way of claiming a multicultural legacy, evidence suggests that the term is gaining traction with regard to contemporary immigration outside Catalonia. In reference to another Iberian context, Lílana Suárez-Navaz, describes convivência as the “dominant construction of difference” that has a “transformative effect on the way people behave and identify themselves, and it shapes the sociopolitical struggles of enfanchise ment of immigrants in particular countries and locales” (2004:194). Suárez-Navaz uses the concept to explore “processes of claiming space, rights, and cultural practices that go beyond the intentions of the state” (2004:194). Rather than spaces of pure resistance, she conceptualizes convivência as a complex approach to power and resistance that transcends the temptation to portray social structure as cleanly polarized between dominators and dominated (Suárez-Navaz 2004:194). I think her insights applicable to the Catalan case as well.

Toward the end of my residence in Vilanova, I conducted a series of semistructured interviews, each beginning with a request that my respondent tell me how he or she understood the term **convivência**. I was surprised that none of my respondents made reference to Iberian history. Many of the responses were short and tended toward consensus: “to live with one’s neighbors in mutual respect,” “give and take,” “respect, learning, and collaboration,” “to share a common space with respect for others,” and “it requires respect for different manners of living and the customs of the people while respecting basic human rights.”

When asking about the challenges Vilanovins faced in implementing convivência, I was surprised that few of the examples had to do with host–immigrant interactions. Several individuals raised the problem of noisy bar patrons waking neighbors. Some also expressed anger that the city had closed a bar in response to complaints. According to my interlocutors, the conflict should have been resolved at the neighborhood level rather than by an officially imposed ruling. Other examples addressed use of the plaça, the preeminent shared public space, in which, for example, seniors reading newspapers on a bench are sometimes accidentally
struck by balls kicked by children. Whereas, at the policy level, convivència is often concerned with intercultural difference, among ordinary people, convivència frames all social interaction. In this way, convivència, in contrast to multiculturalism, tends to de-reify identity: in the scheme of Vilanova’s public reasoning, it is not primarily conceived of as an orientation toward the relations between “us and them” but “how we work things out among ourselves.”

Two city government staff members working on Vilanova’s General Plan for Convivència had longer answers for me. Boumediene, a native Moroccan man, explained that *convivència* is derived from *convivre* (to live together) and means “to share a place, a determinate space, with a healthy disposition and under conditions of equality.” Arantxa, a woman with Basque roots, answered, “We can speak of convivència when there is an interaction between diverse members of a community but not when indifference or hostility is demonstrated. This is not to say that it doesn’t produce conflicts but that these serve to generate change, they reveal the points of view of different positions.” These responses indicate that convivència is not exclusively, or even primarily, conceived of as a conscious attitude, as is the concept of “tolerance,” but is rooted in the purposeful interactions of living bodies, copresent in public space. Because convivència encompasses a dialogic relationship between aesthetic experience and government policy, it constitutes an explicit exemplar of sensory politics.

Today in Catalonia, convivència expresses a commitment to pluralism and mutual cultural interchange that does seem to result in concrete practices of solidarity, the opening of various public spaces for immigrants, and comparatively lower rates of xenophobic acts than reported in the United States, France, or Britain (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Violence [EUMC] 2004). But it is also often vague or idealistic. It is deployed both by those who see it as a charter for radical structural change and by those who relate it solely to notions of civility and hospitality. In this way, members of the Muslim community who invoked convivència themselves also criticized the mayor for using the term to “calm” and “normalize” the situation following Operation Jackal without recognizing the impact of the assault on their lives (*Diari de Vilanova* 2006a).

Although convivència is distinct from xenophobia and liberal multiculturalism in various ways, as I discuss below, it does not exist in a pure state but jostles with these and other tendencies. For example, the liberal conception of the universal rights pertaining to identical subjects (Asad 2009:24) was the evident framework for a decision regarding use of the municipal pool. A local Muslim convert had petitioned the municipal government to schedule women’s-only hours at the public swimming pool, but her request was denied with the explanation that everyone had equal rights to use of the pool (*Diari de Vilanova* 2006d). In this case, the norm that accommodates the majority fails to provide space for the exercise of modesty practiced by pious Muslim females. The ostensibly universal rights to pool use, are, in fact, modeled on a set of cultural preferences that have an exclusionary effect. The popular articulation that “you can integrate without giving up who you are” is, in this case, overturned by a resort to universalist liberal ideology.

**Bell towers and minarets**

Despite the seemingly endless new construction in the region, church bell towers are still among the most conspicuous visual features of Catalan urban space. They serve as landmarks of orientation and familiarity, and the sound of their bells serves to regulate the soundscape by audibly marking distance, wind, and temporal divisions (cf. Corbin 1998). Vilanova’s central bell tower at the church of Sant Antoni has come to symbolize a local point of view, both through a panoramic photographic image of the town taken from that magisterial vantage point and as a journalistic metaphor. The opinion page of Vilanova’s newspaper is titled “From the Bell Tower.”

Throughout southern Europe, the idiom of the bell tower as the focal point of community allegiance (Pitt-Rivers 1954:6) has long figured in anthropologists’ conception of local community, even when unifying tendencies are seen in tension with processes of polarization (Gilmore 1980:215). Although this *campanilismo* has been characterized as a kind of local chauvinism, particularly through hostility to rival towns or regions, it has also been positively described as the desire to peaceably live together with others from the same place (Gambino 1974:10). Convivència departs from the inward-looking localism of campanilismo, as an aspiration if not in practice, by opening the sense of local membership to those born beyond a locality’s borders.

On March 16, 2007, Conrad Rovira Pascual, a regular contributor to the *Diari de Vilanova* opinion page decen tered the characteristic gaze from the bell tower by titling his contribution “From the Minaret.” Rovira Pascual drew attention to the process of rapid change due to immigration and the uncertain future it portends. He argued that, although the practices of convivència had served well up to now, the future calls for greater proactivity (Rovira Pascual 2007: 15).

Arguing that the “long process of the convivència of cultures” requires vision, Rovira Pascual proposed that Vilanova build a mosque in the near future. The mosque should not be hidden away in an industrial park, he urged, but erected in the city center where it would be dignified by its situation. “I imagine the minaret of the mosque perfectly complementing the skyline formed by the bell towers of la Geltrú and Sant Antoni and the towers of the medieval quarter” (Rovira Pascual 2007: 15). This pluralized reimagining of the architectural elements of the cityscape
flowed into visual, auditory, and haptic imagery of pluralized public rituals (festes); of Muslims, feeling secure in their position, introducing new banners to Carnival parades, of Chinese bringing their dragons and firecrackers to join the local dragons and pyrotechnics, of Sub-Saharan introducing new steps to a Catalan dance, and so on (Rovira Pascual 2007).

Employing the medium of text addressed to readers, Rovira Pascual engages the idiom of embodied experience as an activist intervention into the local stance toward newcomers. Convivència, in his paradigm, focuses on the face-to-face encounters of daily business and on participation in the colors, sounds, movements, and images of festa. The physical profile of the heart of the city is also at stake, and, for Rovira Pascual, it must be opened to the town’s Muslim community in a grand, visible gesture that redefines emblematic local space as plural. As it was for the members of the Plan for Convivència technical team with whom I spoke, for Rovira Pascual, the lack of major conflict to date does not justify complacency, and he incites his fellow native Vilanova’s Muslims to initiate bold acts of solidarity with newcomers. Convivència, in his paradigm, focuses on the face-to-face encounters of daily business and on participation in the colors, sounds, movements, and images of festa.

In the 2006 inaugural session, the first-elected Muslim member of Catalonia’s parliament, Mohammed Chaib, also urged the construction of a large, dignified mosque and added that mosques have to be the patrimony of everybody in a neighborhood, open to neighbors and students, no different from the houses of worship of other faith communities. Chaib used the language of normalization in his address, thereby establishing a parallel between Catalan language rights (normalització lingúística) and Muslim rights to religious practice. In another parallel, Chaib made a call to Muslims to “facilitate the good convivència” and “to be tolerant, as much towards Islam’s critics as towards those who sympathize with Islam.” Linking convivència to Islamic values, Chaib reminded his Muslim audience that the Prophet said, “I was sent to avow pure tolerance,” and urged Muslims to “participate in the culture of the country that receives us” by learning its language, history, culture, and civilization (Playà Maset 2006: 1).

Both Rovira Pascual and Chaib invoked reciprocal gestures, utilizing tropes familiar to the Catalan public—convivència, normalization (equality), participation—and in Chaib’s case, framed to resonate with Islamic discourse. As I mention above, the leadership of Vilanova’s Muslim community also consistently links convivència to Islamic values, sometimes reminding its flock that “the Prophet enjoins us to greet our neighbors.” Whereas, for South Americans, a mutually intelligible language facilitates social integration, between Catalans and North Africans, mutually intelligible community values and social practices may serve a similar role: an opening to cooperative integration rather than a guarantee.

To the extent that European media discourse evokes two categories of Muslim—the unassimilable militant and the secular–modern Muslim—the many pious Muslims who aspire to live according to Islamic virtues are left unaccounted for. Core concerns of the contemporary Islamic revival movement include everyday practices of piety (Mahmood 2005), an aspiration to relocate political authority from elites to the sphere of collective daily life, and the embodiment of collective responsibility in “practices of public sociability” (Hirschkind 2006:2). Although there are considerable differences between what non-Muslim Catalans, Catholic or not, and pious Muslims might regard as virtuous practice, there are also notable areas of overlapping aspirations. The widespread Catalan distrust of the national government, and to a lesser extent, of elites in their own regional and local governments, and the importance placed on participation in local forms of decision making have affinities with what one might call the “populist” impulse of the Islamic revival.

Even though a shared preference for grassroots authority may be relatively inconsequential, the resonances between Catalan and Magrebi sensibilities and practices of sociability clearly overlap and touch ground in everyday neighborhood life. Through quotidian practices, the Vilanovin body is oriented toward a physically proximate and pleasurable sociability: kisses in greeting, elbows rubbed together convivially while standing at the café, flowing with the tide of foot traffic down the pedestrian pathways (rambles), and eddying in public squares to cohabit public space. In speaking to me, Vilanovins, both North African and Iberian in origin, sometimes pointed to these embodied patterns of daily public life as characteristics of a pan-Mediterranean society to which they consider they jointly belong. This is not to erase differences in motivation. If asked, Muslims may say they greet their neighbors because it is pious to do so, whereas non-Muslims may evoke politeness, civility, or solidarity. Differences based on religion, language, national origin, or political affiliation are certainly at play in Vilanova, but the salience of these categories is often tempered by the embodied solidarity of learning to collectively inhabit local space and to take satisfaction from that engaged coexistence.
I offer a caution here as well: that the shared convivència cultivated by a sector of Muslim and non-Muslim residents of Catalonia could be undermined from two directions. To the extent that Spanish and Catalan institutions inflexibly cleave to liberal universal doctrines, Muslim practices could be marginalized, as in the case of the swimming pool, fomenting dissatisfaction and a sense of injury and isolation. The other potential source of polarization is the recent rise of Salafism, a Muslim denomination active in some Catalan towns, whose adherents reportedly harass Muslims who socialize with Catalans (who are deemed ungodly) and persecute Muslim women who do not veil, sometimes using violence to enforce moral rules (Baquero 2009). The growth of either of these tendencies should be recognized as a threat to Muslim integration but not as a negation of the tendency toward intracommunal cooperation that is also present.

I have suggested that the experience of having integrated a large immigrant population from southern Spain provides Catalans with resources from which to draw to similarly integrate the current wave of newcomers. A common objection to this suggestion is that Catalans will not treat “really foreign foreigners” the same way they did refugees from southern Spain because of prejudice. Another is that the newcomers share less history or fewer cultural practices with their hosts than southern immigrants did, which will impede their integration. Although these cautions are reasonable, the European tendency to dichotomize natives from their Others also merits prudent consideration of data that depart from expectations. Before addressing this tendency more broadly, I point out that, in this case, there was and still is a degree of prejudice toward southerners in Catalonia and that their integration was neither painless nor is it a completed process. That prejudice, however, does not dominate current social relations. In addition, I have demonstrated that many North Africans and Catalans share, and see themselves as sharing, aspirations to collective life and practices of embodied sociability. In any case, I hope I have shown that by claiming the history of integration as a resource for Catalans, I am not predicting their future application of it.

As Talal Asad (2003) and others have shown, the imputed incompatibility of Islamic ways of life and those of modern–secular liberal democracy rests on a host of untenable assumptions about the solidity of any of these concepts and their institution. Moreover, this incompatibility has been assiduously promoted as an ideological project to valorize an imagined rational, liberal West in contrast to an imagined irrational and illiberal Islam. Buying into such a framework entices Europeans to look at Muslims’ practices as evidence to support bias, for example, seeing a headscarf not as an unremarkable sartorial preference or mark of piety but as the sign of gender oppression or dangerous militancy (Bowen 2007). Likewise, Muslim protest against published caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed is not compared to Western restrictions on communication such as hate speech or child pornography but characterized as an intolerable infringement of the right of free expression (cf. Asad 2009).

I was surprised, following the 2006 raids, that Vilanovins did not unleash broadsides against Islam after waking up next door to allegedly terrorist neighbors. I did not expect that they would view headscarves as unremarkable pieces of cloth similar to those worn by their own mothers. A Catalan’s comment that “we and the Magrebins are more alike than either are to English or Germans” took me aback. But this was due to my assumption that most Europeans had internalized the discursive coherence of modern Europe. I suggest that ordinary Vilanovins have not fully bought into this conception and that their viscerally engaged framework of convivència falls, in part, outside of the dominant streams of European liberalism.

Although certainly conceptual, convivència is grounded in embodied practice linked to virtuous aspirations. The development of positive qualities by the castellers and everyday Vilanovin neighborliness may be attributed to the heritage of the European Romantic project of cultivating virtuous human subjects. The neighborliness of Vilanovin Muslims may, in turn, be linked to the pious virtues cultivated by Islamic revival movements. I cannot trace the genealogies of these virtues here, but I suggest that both communities may have common touchstones in Abrahamic moral virtues and Platonic–Aristotelian civic virtues and that such virtues encompass individual and collective practice. In any case, elements of both communities share aspirations to engaged, respectful coexistence and collective well-being that both articulate as “convivència.” Are these aspirations naïve, unrealistic, impractical, or, in a word, utopian?

Utopia

Utopia may be thought of as a subjunctive space of public reasoning, imagining, embodying, and aspiring to a happy future society. Plato’s Republic demonstrates the antiquity of utopian thought, but the discursive development of modern, rational utopias may be traced to Sir Thomas More (1947), who, in his 1516 Utopia, portrayed ideal forms of social organization in part to articulate aspirations to perfected forms of collective life and in part to critique the status quo of his time. The modern conception of the world as open to shaping by human agency is part of this branch of the social utopia that might be, leading to new kinds of urban planning, educational and penal systems, scientific inquiry, and applied ideologies of economic perfection, whether socialist, capitalist, or neoliberal. Modern utopia is characterized by coherent themes with complex genealogies. Campaigns for religious
tolerance, emancipation, universal suffrage, and human rights are aspirational and gain traction from the sense that such objectives are possible and that the status quo is not inevitable.

_**Utopia**_ means “no place,” but More also employed the term _Eutopia_, the good or happy place. Thus, utopianism has doubled referents: unattainable, rational social perfection and felicitous moral deportment with affective satisfaction. The life depicted on More’s island society bears out both meanings. This other utopia, or eutopia, cannot be said to be an entirely modern project but overlaps with long-standing popular imaginings of the land of Cockaigne, an earthly paradise elaborated in the folklore of the disenfranchised and embodied in the organized chaos of carnival. This eutopia is a land of plenty, of sensory pleasures, of social equality, of comeuppance for oppressors, and a place where irksome social rules may be broached with impunity (Del Guidice and Porter 2001). Although some pleasures of popular eutopia run counter to the virtues of sobriety and piety proposed by utopian social reformers or Islamic revivalists, the popular dream of collective happiness should not be seen as unvirtuous but, rather, as prioritizing different virtues. Vilanovin _convivència_ draws on both traditions, combining rational articulations of ameliorative social policy and the carnival fantasies of popular aspirations. Both utopian tendencies were also strongly present in what has been called the “counterculture” of the 1960s. Clarion calls to “free the people” or “free your mind” existed in competition, in dialogue, and often in combination in ways not necessarily contradictory for adherents.

Just as rational and popular utopias can be seen as different idioms for the development of similar social aspirations, they also imply consequential differences. In contrast to the multiplicitious promiscuity and heterodoxy of popular, carnivalesque utopias analyzed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), rationalist utopias have tended to valorize systemic consistency and to demand uniformity. The Russian revolution, for example, contained seeds of pluralist utopia that were suppressed under subsequent developments of Leninism and Stalinism (Serge 2002). Capitalist, Christian, Fascist, and neoliberal projects to convert the world, often forcibly, to the terms of their truths are also well-known. Modern states are often jealous of their subjects’ affective ties, and many require immigrants to renounce allegiance to the land of their birth.

The commitment to pluralism that features strongly in Vilanovin _convivència_ seems out of place within the dominance of the universalizing discipline of modern European states. It becomes intelligible in reference to two factors: ritual practice and Catalan history. The castells that I have described and the ritual acts of Vilanovin Carnival that I have recounted elsewhere (Erickson 2008) belong to the popular utopia. This is the utopia of sweating, enmeshed bodies, of intense affective states and shared experience, of a permeable sense of self and community that erodes difference, perhaps temporarily, but may also carry the sense of solidarity beyond the ritual sphere to add force to civic and neighborly virtues.

As former targets of regimes that saw their difference as a threat to national unity, Catalans have pursued political projects that feature a refusal to assimilate, a defense of regional particularity (their own and others’), and broad-based bilingualism. Moreover, as left-leaning Catalans associate xenophobia, racism, and religious intolerance with the Franco dictatorship, many cultivate opposing virtues among themselves, corresponding to a degree of solidarity activity. Support for Palestine and the victims of Darfur is common throughout the region, and Catalan medical volunteers were first on the ground in Baghdad at the onset of the U.S. invasion there. These actions are not evidence of Catalan attitudes toward immigrants but should be taken into account in an assessment of the Catalan political landscape and of the ways that public virtues are enacted.

**Conclusion**

No social ideals are simply realized in practice nor are such aspirations socially inconsequential. Although “convivència” could serve as self-congratulatory rhetoric to gild the status quo in the way that “diversity” often does, in Vilanova, resources were dedicated to its implementation. I encountered a degree of self-directed vigilance, being told on several occasions by nonimmigrant Vilanovins words to the effect that “we still have a lot more to do to help immigrants become full members of the community.” To be sure, others I spoke to were glily optimistic or merely indifferent, and I was told that yet others resentfully perceived the social services extended to immigrants as taking something from themselves. Any of these attitudes might be mobilized as affective resources with consequences.

Paul Gilroy asks, “What critical perspectives might nurture the ability and desire to live with difference on an increasingly divided but also convergent planet[*]” (2005:3). Such perspectives may be aesthetic orientations as well as opinions or rational analyses. Gilroy elaborates the challenge of identifying “resources for the peaceful accommodation of otherness” (2005:6) against the fashion of appeals to absolute racial, ethnic, or national differences, in which context “the desire to dwell convivially with difference can appear naïve, trifling, or misplaced” (2005:5). I do not propose to offer anything resembling irrefutable proof that Vilanovin sensory-ethical practices of _convivència_ are the answer to Europe’s many entrenched patterns of discrimination and xenophobia. Instead, I offer my account of these practices as an installment of an unfinished narrative of emergent solidarities that have the potential to effect change. I suggest that the Catalan paradigm of _convivència_
constitutes a resource for the accommodation of difference and an intervention into identity-centered models of living with difference.

The modern construction of the self-owning individual subject underpins the liberal conception and application of rights. A political effect of the sensory experience of festa—the visceral experience of collectivity, of being-in-the-world that is a social world of many, of multiplicitous being untroubled by difference—temper or undermines the modern atomization of the social world into self-owning individuals. The ethical orientation of a community that creates its sense of being in part through rituals of embodied multiplicity, in part through dense webs of association and proximity, in part through actively remembering its persecution and its integrative capacity, and in part through a cultivated positive affect toward living with others should be accounted as distinct. Fear-mongering discourse about the threat posed by immigrants is present in Catalonia as it is in France and Switzerland yet, to date, has not gained traction in anything approaching the same degree.

I will be the first to caution that host–immigrant relations in Catalonia need to be studied over time to assess the extent to which they have stayed from the main paths of European liberalism, but I do not accept the argument that the reason that such relations in France or Britain are more polarized is that immigrants have been there longer and in greater numbers. This assumption is belied by the Swiss case, in which Muslim immigration is recent and small. As Arjun Appadurai (2006) has demonstrated, majority populations have frequently focused aggression toward minorities whose numbers are small.

The Vilanovin case does suggest several conclusions. First, the host–immigrant relations constituted by the Muslim population in Europe cannot be explained solely in terms of political economy, a conflict between secularism and religion, state policy, or media discourse. Although each of these elements factor into shaping social relations, none of them adequately account for consequential regional and local differences. Not all Swiss cantons supported the minaret ban (Cumming-Bruce 2009). In 2004, a group of neighbors on the outskirts of Barcelona banded together to oppose a mosque while other neighbors mounted counterprotests in support of the Muslim community (Aranda and Cruz 2005; Barcelona Independent Media Center 2004). These incidents remind scholars that the fact of a xenophobic act or utterance should not exhaust our analysis, which must encompass the context of its reception and response (cf. Butler 1997:2). In 2007, neighbors near the center of Vilanova i la Geltrú collaborated with city officials, businesses, and members of the Muslim community to realize the dignified mosque that had featured in their collective aspirations (Diari de Vilanova 2007). Attention to local forms of sociality—embodied, sensory, affective, ritual—attached to locally cultivated aspirations to virtuous collective life help account for the differences that are consequential to the material and experiential well-being of immigrant communities.

My approach to the sensory politics of immigration suggests that attention to embodied forms of sociality could help diagnose local and regional immigration politics elsewhere. I have also suggested that a reconsideration of utopia can help us see aspirations to ideal society not only as a rationalist project leading to intolerance for perceived imperfections, or as misguided dreaming, but also as practical, popular aspirations consequential to social coexistence, as in the case of convivència. As with all liberal utopian projects, perceived and celebrated progress is inevitably accompanied by contradictions and blind spots. It is also important to acknowledge that divergent interpretations of taken-for-granted social cues may generate conflict even in the presence of mutual goodwill (Moffat 1989). But clearly meaningful to European Muslims is whether their aspirations to practice their faith without undue hindrance are construed as a threat to be managed or as forms of life to be accommodated. A disposition to accommodate difference, however imperfectly realized, is consequential to the overall tide of host–immigrant relations, whether toward escalating polarization or toward forms of cooperation recognized by both host and newcomer. As scholars grapple with the problem of living with difference broadly, the practical concept of “convivència” has potential as a portable analytic to move us past dichotomous traps, break up the conceptual stasis of diversity and multiculturalism, and inject contingency, dialogism, and the smell of sweat to the sterile rationality of modern utopia.

Notes

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1. Here I am following Charles Hirschkind (2006:232 n. 4) in reclaiming learned virtuous practices as integral to processes of public debate, in contrast to theorists who conceptually confine political participation to the rational deliberation of autonomous individuals.

2. The Castilian and Catalan forms of the word are orthographically identical except for the direction of the diacritical mark.

3. Rates of reported xenophobic expression cannot be said to reliably measure the presence of prejudice but merely the rate at which it is reported. Immigrants targeted by injurious expression
may be afraid or unable to report it, averse to claiming victimhood, or unaware of the mechanisms by which to report such incidents.

4. Public kissing on the cheeks is common among both Iberians and North Africans but is patterned differently with respect to gender. Women kiss other women in both cases, men kiss other men less frequently in both cases, and Iberian men and women kiss in greeting, but Magrebín men and women, with few exceptions that I observed, do not kiss or otherwise demonstrate physical affection in public.

5. Visitors to Catalonia who have noticed that a great deal of sociality takes place in bars over alcoholic drinks will wonder to what degree this serves as a barrier to Muslim participation. Most southern European bars do not correspond to U.S. or British models of drinking establishments, and the distinction between bar and café is often hard to discern because, in most cases, alcoholic and coffee drinks as well as food are served at both. Nondrinkers, including children, are often present, and perceptible inebriation is uncommon. There is no social pressure to drink alcohol or to “drink up” or “have another” as with the rounds system. In my observation, Magrebín men often joined their coworkers in bars during breaks or after work, in some cases enjoying a beer or glass of wine, in others, sticking to soft drinks or coffee. Magrebín women tended to frequent café bakeries, where no alcohol was served, or to use the outdoor sidewalk seating of regular bars, where they enjoyed non-alcoholic drinks.


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Brad Erickson
Department of Anthropology
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 94720
ericksonbrad9@gmail.com