

Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature

Volume 33

Issue 2 *Identities on the Verge of a Nervous
Breakdown: The Case of Spain*

Article 3

6-1-2009

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Recommended Citation

Fanjul, Serafín (2009) "Uses of a Myth: al-Andalus," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 33: Iss. 2, Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1700>

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Uses of a Myth: al-Andalus

Abstract

In the last two decades, the Spanish press treatment of the Muslim world reflects a change of tone from unsympathetic to enthusiastic, although the information is still marred by confusion and ignorance. This change of attitude has occurred in other Western countries as well, and it is due in part to immigration trends, control over oil resources, and the relativism of official discourses towards the Third World. In the case of Spain, however, there is an additional internal element at play: the mass-media reinvention of a mythical al-Andalus as a tolerant and pluralistic society. This idealized interpretation of seven centuries of Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula is fraught with ignorance and distortion of the historical record but is not new. The mystification of al-Andalus has its precedent in romantic accounts that saw in “Muslim Spain” a differential fact that reinforced the exotic image of the country. It can be attributed also to the strategy to “hispanicize” al-Andalus employed by Arabists and historians to make the subject matter appealing to unsympathetic Spanish audiences conditioned by the myth of the Reconquest. Intended or not, the manipulation of the myth of al-Andalus as a historical fact has ideological and political implications that demand an objective and balanced consideration.

Uses of a Myth: *al-Andalus*

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(Translated by Margarita Pillado)

A review of the Spanish press of the eighties, especially in the early part of the decade, reveals an evident confusion with the meaning of concepts such as “Arab” or “Islam” motivated by ignorance and distrust, if not by ill-will. Rather than criticize the journalists and the print media, I simply want to call attention to the existence of such confusion. I focus on the printed press because it is easier to obtain and analyze than radio, television broadcasts, or the digital press, which was non-existent at the time. Broadly speaking, the attitude towards all things Arab was unsympathetic and cautious. The Left still remembered “Franco’s Moors” and the *Caudillo*’s “traditional friendship” towards the Arab World. The Right, on the other hand, continued to exploit with various degrees of conviction the image of the medieval Moors of the Reconquest—the cruel and cunning raiders vanquished by the Catholic Monarchs—independently of the appropriateness or fairness of that image. Even average citizens, more preoccupied with some of the domestic problems that Adolfo Suárez, José Calvo Sotelo, and Felipe González appeared incapable of solving—terrorism, economic crisis, unemployment, the first stirrings of a breakdown of national unity—cautiously voiced their concern at NATO’s denial of protection to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla (F. Suárez de Oca 10), or at the “invasion” of Arab money that was buying real estate, health centers, and even the will of some powerful players in the Costa del Sol (Rosa Hernández 9). Papers also reported the occasional news about some city officials’ budding outbursts of “racism”—carefully printed between quotation marks—such as the incident involving the mayoress of Boadilla

(“La alcaidesa de Boadilla” 19).

There was a background of deficient information and little intention of approaching the subject in a serious manner (as a point of clarification, the current situation does not seem to have improved much). In connection with the first Iraq war, for instance, Spaniards were reading “Saddam Hussein es un sunita, es decir un musulmán flexible” ‘Saddam Hussein is a Sunnite, that is, a flexible Muslim’ (Pedro González 6).¹ Articles from a few years earlier were full of inaccuracies, such as reducing to seven the twelve Shiite Imans or confusing an Abbasid with a Ba’athist (Javier Valenzuela 8). We could also read shocking and adulatory remarks related to the influence of Saudi money in some Andalusian towns: “lo malo no vino con los árabes rubios de ojos azules, con la saga de los omeyas, sino con sus acompañantes africanos” ‘the problem did not come with the blond, blue-eyed Arabs, from the Omayyad saga, but with their African companions’ (Pedro Crespo 16).

Declarations by novelist Alfonso Grosso that his book was more sympathetic to Israel than to the Arab countries echoed this prevailing anti-Arab attitude: “diez años más de administración árabe de Jerusalén hubieran terminado con todos los fundamentos arquitectónicos y paisajísticos de nuestra cultura judeo-cristiana” ‘ten more years of Arab involvement in the administration of Jerusalem would have destroyed all the architectural and landscape foundations of our Judeo-Christian culture’ (34). Statements by Pedro José Ramírez expressed a similar mood when he advocated the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel in light of the historic animosity between Spain and “the Arabs” (referred therein as a bloc). He supported his position with a comprehensive list of confrontations, rivalries, and bloodshed over the last century:

La Marcha Verde sobre el Sahara; el hostigamiento, captura y a veces asesinato de nuestros pescadores; las amenazas continuas de Hassan con relación a Ceuta y Melilla; la invención argelina del problema de Canarias y su grotesca internacionalización; o – por no prolongar demasiado la lista – el eficaz entrenamiento de los terroristas de ETA en campos militares situados en Argelia, Libia, Líbano y Yemen del Sur. ... El mundo árabe es una realidad cultural y religiosa, pero también una gran ficción política que se esfumaría el mismo día que desapareciera el conflicto con los

judíos ... desde el desastre de Annual hasta la campaña de Ifni el único pueblo que durante el siglo XX ha estado en guerra con España ha sido el pueblo árabe.

The Green March over the Sahara; the harassment, capture and the occasional murder of our fishermen; Hassan's continuous threats to Ceuta and Melilla; the Algerian invention of the Canary Islands problem and its grotesque internationalization; or—not to extend the list too much—the efficient training of ETA terrorists in military camps located in Algiers, Libya, Lebanon, and Southern Yemen. ... The Arab world is a cultural and religious reality, but also a great political fiction that would vanish the same day the conflict with the Jews would disappear ... from the Annual disaster to the Ifni campaign the only people who have waged war against Spain in the twentieth century have been the Arab people. (3)

Contradicting his own thesis, Ramirez implies that “the Arab world” is a unitary and collective entity, but this is not the case. It is true that the Arab people enjoy a remarkable unity thanks to its language and the uniformity brought about by Islam. However, as Bassam Tibi explains in *La conspiración* ‘The Conspiracy’, they live in a political chaos continually reflected in the dreadful relations among the Arab states:

El sentimiento de pertenencia y lealtad de la población sigue refiriéndose a las tribus, estirpes y clanes y su clientela étnico-religiosa, y no a estados nacionales sustancialmente existentes. El concepto de “nación árabe”, que pretende abarcar a todos los árabes, es tan artificial como las actualmente existentes fronteras legales entre los estados árabes, trazadas durante y después de la primera guerra mundial por las potencias coloniales francesa e inglesa.

People's feelings of loyalty and belonging continue to refer to tribes, lineages, and clans and to their ethno-religious clientele, not to the national states substantially in existence. The concept of an “Arab nation” that claims to encompass the totality of the

Arab people is as artificial as the legal borders currently existing among Arab states drawn during and after World War I by the French and English colonial powers. (86)

Hence, it can be surmised, that towards the end of Franco's dictatorship and at the beginning of the eighties, Spanish society as a whole was not pro-Arab. At best, it harbored a vague folkloric attraction superficially related to a mythical Moor from an unspecified location—usually Southern Spain—that would envelop and mask feelings of fear, distrust, repulsion, superiority, and in the best of cases, a condescending paternalism that has found its place in popular folkloric celebrations. However, if we opened a blank parenthesis in 1975 and closed it in 2005—as if awakening from a thirty-year coma—we would be quite surprised to read the following announcement in *ABC*, a major Spanish newspaper of today:

El Castillo de Niebla albergará las 'Veladas Andalusíes,' un programa de cenas amenizadas con música, danza y teatro de al-Andalus, que tienen como objetivo reproducir y recrear la cultura islámica que dominó la Península Ibérica durante ocho siglos. Las veladas, que cuentan con el apoyo del Ayuntamiento de la localidad, incluyen en su edición de este año cuatro menús diferentes, omeya, almorávide, almohade y nazarí y tendrán lugar todos los domingos de julio y agosto a partir de las 22.30 horas.

The Niebla Castle will host "Andalusí Evenings." Seeking to reproduce and recreate the Islamic culture that dominated the Iberian Peninsula for eight centuries, this dinner program features musical entertainment, dance, and theater from al-Andalus. Sponsored by the local town council, this year's evenings include four different menus—Ommayyad, Almoravid, Almohad, and Nasrid—and will take place every Sunday during July and August starting at 22:30. (43)

If we overlook the text's linguistic and historical inaccuracies—there was no such thing as theater in al-Andalus or such alleged gastronomical traditions—its joyful enthusiasm cannot be attributed solely to an obvious tourist appeal. It reveals an opinion gone to

the opposite extreme of what we have commented on above, that is, a consolidation and normalized acceptance—even with a sense of elation—of human communities previously called into question. In principle, the change would call for self-congratulation were it not for some nagging questions immediately arising: has Spanish society become Arab-loving? If so, what role have the mass media and political powers played in this prodigious phenomenon? Have the causes of resentment that have fed the historical mistrust towards the Arab disappeared from the cultural, religious, and political spheres of the country? What new factors have come into play to arrive at the present state of affairs? Is this change a symptom of a sincere attitude or a response to circumstantial pressures, especially in relation to image?

Spain, as well as other Western countries, has been affected by general factors that are transforming some attitudes towards the Arab people and Islam: the demographic explosion of the Muslim world, the subsequent migration that reaches Spain, the control over oil resources by a good number of Islamic states, our nagging conscience towards the Third World, and so on. But, similarly to what occurred in the nineteenth century with the nostalgic resurrection of a mythical al-Andalus, there has also been a highly exploited internal element at play in the case of Spain that is absent from other European countries (with the exception of Bosnia or Sicily): the massive media-driven campaigns to revive the Islamic past of certain regions of the country. In that regard, Spanish Television Channel 2 and Andalusian *Canal Sur* have reached delirious levels of informational intoxication in their re-creation of a twenty-first century version of Hispanic Islam adapted from a sweetened and imaginary tenth-century model. They purposely ignore the most decisive factor in the configuration of Spanish identity—the defeat of Islam in the peninsula—and jump over everything that has occurred during the last five hundred years that has affected the personality, the collective psychology, the culture, the feelings, and even the political enterprises of the Spanish nation.

The embellished image of an idyllic al-Andalus (frequently accompanied by the word “paradise,” or in Arabic, *al-firdaws al-mafqud* ‘the lost paradise’) where practitioners of the “three cultures” and three religions lived in constant harmony is untenable and im-

possible to substantiate with any factual evidence as shown in the texts written by the people who lived at that time. al-Andalus was neither better nor worse than the rest of the contemporary Muslim world or Medieval Europe as far as moral categories are concerned, which ought to be the basis on which to build the whole argument. It enjoyed brilliant eras in certain arts—in architecture and in the assimilation of certain techniques—and managed to transmit to the rest of Europe the Hellenistic legacy received from the great cultural centers of the Orient (Nisapur, Baghdad, Cairo, Rayy), which was no small feat. However, it was, first and foremost, an Islamic country with all the implications derived from that fact. Even so, its peripheral location constituted an insurmountable obstacle that prevented al-Andalus from becoming the axis of anything in the Muslim world. One thing is certain, however: as soon as al-Andalus disappeared, it became the lost paradise mentioned above, a perpetual and tearful source of nostalgia and imaginary trips to nowhere, with little or no connection to the Spain that, since the Middle Ages, had been forming in a constant fight against peninsular Islam.

The mystification surrounding the concept of “al-Andalus” is manifest and ubiquitous. As Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada explains, once the political and social contexts of the late Middle Ages became a thing of the past, the latent imagery they inspired contributed to an idealized re-creation of al-Andalus based on circumstances that were historically factual but “capaces de segregar desde el primer momento sus propias fábulas” ‘capable of spinning their own fables from the very beginning’ (221). In fact, one of the most serious and frequent distortions regarding *andalusí* society and culture lies in its implicit representation as a homogeneous and unaltered historical continuum, as if the eighth-century invaders, Barbarians to the core and only halfway converted to Islam, were actually notable scientists, architects, and pilgrim-poets who “brought” us this or that, comparable to the Hispano-Arabs of four or five centuries later.

This confusion is the likely cause of copious anachronisms that plague so-called “historical novels” that depict Abd ar-Rahman II in the ninth century eating mangoes amid ornamental tiles and lush gardens decked with bougainvilleas and prickly pears. These novelists do not seem aware that the arrival of tiles date from much later, as do those exotic fruits and plants, which have nothing to do with

Arabs, ancient or modern. The enumeration of similar examples would be tiresome. The point is that political hegemony does not necessarily imply similar cultural weight in every field, sublime literary delicacies, or great technical development (even as late as 960 geographer Ibn Hawqal made fun of the limited skills *andalusies* displayed with the stirrups).

Both al-Andalus and the Christian kingdoms were two antagonistic and mutually exclusive powers involved in a fight for survival in radical and absolute opposition encouraged by two universal religions whose design was to embrace no less than the whole of Humanity. Clearly, if al-Andalus was to exist, Spain could not, and vice versa, as it indeed happened when Christian society triumphed and imposed a neo-Latin culture. Even if we decide to sing praises to tolerance, to the exquisite sensuality of the fountains of the *Generalife*, or to the great freedom enjoyed by eleventh-century women in Cordoba, we have to acknowledge also some historical facts that may offend our sensitivity: social alienation and intermittent persecution of Christians; mass flights of those Christians to the North until the twelfth century; forced conversions; mass deportations to Morocco during the Almohad empire; anti-Jewish pogroms, such as in Granada in 1066; repeated martyrdom of Christian missionaries while beautiful rooms were being erected in the Alhambra. ... Because history is the sum of all of this and from the general balance of those cruel events we have to draw appropriate conclusions. It is advisable to know the past and it is our duty to disseminate our findings, but we should avoid falling into a trance while invoking languid fantasies of yesteryear.

Understandably, the brutal, merciless, and obscurantist events of that time offend the politically correct sensitivity of official Spanish discourse. The Arab chronicles yield numerous examples of a kind of brutality that no politician currently in office would dare read out loud for fear of bringing to the surface an awkward part of the past that might blatantly contradict their official hallelujahs to the glorious Caliphate of Cordoba. However, reality is the sum of everything: “daba cuenta de que había arrasado el llano del enemigo y había talado los panes de los infieles, destruido sus bienes, quemado sus casas y matado a cuantos cogió, tanto al entrar como al salir el ejército se había apoderado de las cosechas de la ciudad

de San Esteban, ¡Dios la aniquile!” ‘He reported he had devastated the enemy terrain and had destroyed the wheat of the infidels, destroyed their property, burnt down their houses, and killed everyone he captured. Both entering and exiting, the army had seized all the harvests from the city of San Esteban. May God annihilate it!’ (al-Razi et al. 278); “irrumpió con ellos el chambelán Badr en terreno enemigo, hollándoles los sagrados y asolando el país, con la destrucción de cosechas, edificios y recursos ... la fortaleza fue tomada al asalto el 29 de julio de 920. ... Los combatientes fueron pasados a cuchillo, teniendo lugar su suplicio en presencia de al-Nasir [Abderrahmán III]” ‘Chamberlain Badr burst into enemy territory with them, trampling down their sanctuaries, razing the country, and destroying harvests, buildings, and resources ... the fortress was seized July 29, 920. ... The combatants were put to the sword, their punishment taking place in the presence of al-Nasir [abd-ar Rahman III]’ (Ibn Hayyan et al. 117, 127).

This minimal anthology, showing us the other side of the coin, does not imply a condemnation of al-Andalus or the passing of a moral judgment—everyone acted in the same brutal manner. It represents an attempt to offer a more even-handed representation of al-Andalus by stripping it of any exoticism and visceral reactions either way. Inevitably, however, one could ask coldly whether the return to the European (Greek and Latin) civilization was beneficial to the Iberian Peninsula; whether we should have crushed and hidden the brilliant Roman past as it was done in North Africa; whether we should enjoy something of the many good things that in every respect we have accomplished since 1492. One could also ask, on a different note, whether there is any logic to the attitude of certain Spaniards named López, Martínez, or Ruiz, who claim that their true culture is Arab although they only speak Spanish and exhibit the same phenotype as people from Santander or Asturias. If this were not pathetic, it would be funny.

Another important element that must be addressed in the discussion of al-Andalus is the confusion with vocabulary and terminology, which must be clarified before going deeper into our analysis. I am referring in particular to conceptual mistakes created and encouraged outside of Spain by the translation of certain Spanish words in other languages, especially in French. The French adjective

andalous has two distinct translations in Spanish: *andaluz* (inhabitant of or related to the current region of *Andalucía* ‘Andalusia’) and *andalusí* (related to al-Andalus), which can be qualified further as *hispanoárabe* ‘Hispano-Arab’ or *hispanomusulmán* ‘Hispano-Muslim.’ Also, in more general and popular terms, there is confusion with the word *moro* ‘Moor,’ which up until the nineteenth century designated a “Muslim” or “an inhabitant of North Africa” without any pejorative connotations. But the prevalent use of *andalous* by French writers and historians (our bridge to twentieth-century Europe) has contributed significantly to the dissemination of an erroneous concept: the existence of a racial, social, cultural, and mental continuity between *andalusíes* and *andaluces*. The confusion between al-Andalus and Andalusia has contributed to the interchangeability of the term to the extent that even die-hard Andalusian politicians utilize either word to mean the same thing. There are two major objections to such an assumption. First, in Arabic, al-Andalus does not refer to Andalusia but to Islamic Hispania, regardless of its reach—the river Duero in the tenth century or Algeciras in the fourteenth century. The second objection, as important as the first, further differentiates the territorial scope of *Andalucía*, for although the word dates back to the Christian conquest of the Guadalquivir River valley in the thirteenth century, it is not applicable to the region known today as *Andalucía* until 1833, when Javier de Burgos divided the country into the same administrative regions and provinces still in use today and incorporated the territory known as Kingdom of Granada—current provinces of Málaga, Almería, and Granada—to a larger administrative unit named *Andalucía*. Therefore, it is absurd to imagine an Andalusian motherland whose identity can be traced back to the beginning of time, with Argantonio, the mythical Tartesian king c. 1000 BC, dancing flamenco and Abd er Rhaman (any of them) taking pleasure in the spirit of the future poetry of Federico García Lorca. A purely administrative decision generated, artificially, an identity concept. *Andalucía*, however, became the name of a territory different from the Kingdom of Granada, as proven repeatedly by all the available administrative, historical, and literary documentation from the nineteenth century.

The same confusion can be observed in the use of the words “Spain” and “Spaniards” applied to the historic region of al-Andalus

and its inhabitants—a deplorable translation that is ideologically charged, even if its promoters did not intend for it to be that way. In a commendable effort to make the history and society of al-Andalus more accessible to their readers, many nineteenth-century historians and Arabists, such as Reinhart Dozy and Évariste Lévi-Provençal used the concept of “Spain”—whose historical validity does not start until the fourteenth century—to refer to al-Andalus without taking into account that the former represents a political, cultural, and social reality quite different from the latter; in fact, it represents its complete opposite. Expressions such as “Spanish Moors,” “Spanish Arabs,” or simply “Spaniards” in reference to al-Andalus Muslims are a common occurrence in historical writings even by contemporary authors such as Pierre Guichard, Rachel Arié, and Bernard Vincent. I do not mean to deny the inhabitants of al-Andalus a Spanish identification—neither good nor bad in itself. What I want to stress is that they did not consider themselves Spaniards, an identity they detested.

I am deeply aware of the difficulty of countering ideas so inimical to the image of Spain developed abroad, but I consider it my obligation to do so, even if the task is unpleasant. The myth of al-Andalus has been based on images repeated mechanically without regard to verified and verifiable facts. Nineteenth-century French and English travelers painted a petrified portrait of Spain, and of its most “picturesque” region, Andalusia, that far from reflecting a coherent reality was an accumulation of the most shocking and exotic elements for the benefit of those who flocked to the Peninsula eager to experience the oddity of the environment. However, foreign travelers also witnessed other numerous and concrete realities they had to acknowledge, albeit briefly and reluctantly, being as they were too similar to their own context. Magic, mystery, and “true” typicality were the expectations every European traveler journeying south over the Pyrenees wanted to see fulfilled. Thus, in 1872 Edmondo de Amicis complained that the Spain he saw did not correspond to the images and stereotypes so meticulously described by his predecessors:

“Alas!” I said to my companion, “how badly a high hat looks in the streets of Cordova! How have you the heart to fasten fash-

ion plates to this beautiful oriental picture? Why don't you dress like the Arabs?" Dandies, workmen, and girls passed. I looked at them all with curiosity, hoping to find some of those fantastic figures which Doré pictured to us as the representatives of the Andalusian type; with the dark brown coloring, those thick lips, and great eyes. I met none of them however. On going towards the heart of the city, I saw the first Andalusian women, ladies, young ladies, and women of the people ... In their dress, with the exception of the so-called *mantilla*, there is no difference between the French women themselves and our own; they wear great masses of false hair, in braids, bunches, and long curls; and short petticoats, full ones and those with plaits; and shoes with heels like the point of daggers. The ancient Andalusian costume has disappeared from the city. (281)

It is not surprising that Spanish romantic writers, faithful followers of their French models, found evidence of the Arab presence in every corner in which they looked. They assimilated the mechanism so well, they absorbed the formula so intensely, that when Pedro Antonio de Alarcón disembarked in Morocco in 1859 he had no qualm in affirming that the authentic Moors were those found in books and that true reality was what was provided by literature: "Era un verdadero moro, esto es, un Moro de novela" 'He was a true Moor, that is, a Moor from a novel' (214). At that time the book functioned similarly to the television of today in that it disseminated a virtual reality that prevailed over concrete facts and objects. Although the myth of al-Andalus is not the only element in the construction of a picturesque and stereotypical landscape sold for its commercial value, it does represent an important contribution to the formation of the Spanish image abroad. In and outside of Spain, "the Moorish element," the old Muslim presence, typifies the least European and most foreign and picturesque element of all Spanish history and, strictly speaking, it is. Or it was, because it is one thing to talk about the past or study, and an altogether different thing to verify what does survive from those times and to what extent the past was or still is alive in our society.

When nineteenth-century Spanish Arabists and historians began publishing their first historical compilations, translations, and

poems from al-Andalus, they knew that society's environment and attitudes were adamantly unfavorable towards the historical context they were trying to revive. The materials they brought to light clashed with the accepted representation of the Spanish nation. On the contrary, romantic narratives on the same subject were easily accepted because the fictional nature of the work allowed for greater freedom and flexibility. In addition, "old Christian" Spanish writers from the sixteenth and seventeenth-century had already developed the idealized universe of the *novela morisca*, the *romances fronterizos*, and the *poesía morisca*, depicting quite a different reality from the regrettable social conditions endured by real Golden Age *moriscos*. Lacking this artistic advantage, historians and Arabists had to neutralize the contradictions inherent in their work and reconcile their admiration for the Catholic Queen with their sympathies towards the *moriscos*. This explains why, until recently, this group of professionals had devised various strategies to bring their reconstructions of the past closer to the sensitivities of their contemporary readers. Attempts from historians to Hispanicize (or even Europeanize in certain cases) the Muslims from al-Andalus and their virtues—tolerance in particular—responds to this strategy. The case of Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz serves as a good example, given his known lack of enthusiasm for the Moors:

Otogaban a la mujer una singular libertad callejera de difícil vinculación con los usos islámicos; lo comprueban algunas noticias de *El collar de la paloma* de Ibn Hazm y varias conocidas anécdotas históricas. Y le concedían una consideración y un respeto de pura estirpe hispánica. Pérès ha señalado la situación dispar de las mujeres hispanas frente a las orientales. ¿De dónde sino de la herencia temperamental preislámica podía proceder esa gracia, esa súbita vibración psicológica, esa espontaneidad de Ibn Guzmán cuyo nombre – Gutmann – y cuya estampa física (era rubio y de ojos azules) acreditan a las claras su estirpe hispano-goda?

They granted women an exceptional freedom to roam the streets that is difficult to connect with Islamic customs; it is proven by some accounts found in Ibn Hazm's *The Dove's Necklace* and several well-known historical anecdotes. And they gave them a con-

sideration and respect of pure Hispanic stock. Pérès has pointed out the different situation Hispanic women had with respect to their oriental counterparts. Whence but from the pre-Islamic temperamental inheritance could such grace have come, such sudden psychological vibration, the spontaneity of Ibn Guzman, whose name—Gutmann—and his physical countenance (he was blond and blue-eyed) clearly prove his Hispano-Visigothic lineage? (*Islam de España* 65-66)

According to this, al-Andalus mythical tolerance towards women or other religions may have been the result of the Hispanic context.

The Arab or Muslim camp, however, emphasized then, as it does now, the unambiguous Arab character of al-Andalus's cultural glories, real or invented. Such tolerance, would demonstrate the integrationist capability of Islam and its respect for other beliefs. Both positions coincide with the results they produce: to promote al-Andalus as a model of tolerance, an island in contemporary Europe that could not be reproduced or found ever again, although this characterization, from an Arab perspective, does not usually extend to the rest of the Muslim world, for obvious reasons in my opinion.

A reasonable approach to the debate would recognize that the cultural climate of al-Andalus was ever-changing and subject to specific political and economic conditions that forced the Emirs to tolerate certain secondary freedoms regarding their subjected minorities—who paid high taxes—while clearly signaling their inferior status. The famous and much promoted Three Cultures lived in a *de facto apartheid* in which communities were close but separate. Each was governed by perfectly distinct judicial, economic, and social regimes that allowed, if circumstances so required, bloody persecutions, such as those perpetrated against Christians in the middle of the ninth century under Abd er Rahman II and against Jews in the twelfth century. Repression was so prevalent that when the Reconquest reached al-Andalus in the thirteenth century, the region had been “cleansed” of Christian presence, because of deportations to Morocco or exoduses to the Christians kingdoms. This conflictive relationship prevailed until Islamic hegemony in the region declined. What did not seem to wane was its ideology of confronta-

tion and contempt: in the settlement presented to Alphonse I the Battler at the surrender of Zaragoza (1118), the Moors demanded explicitly that no Jew be allowed in a position of authority over a Muslim. Almost four centuries later, towards the end of 1491, the Moors of Granada stipulated the same condition in their surrender to the Catholic Monarchs. And around the same time, Muslim *mufi* ‘jurisconsult’ al-Wansharisi forbade Muslims to remain in Christian territories for fear they would end up abandoning Islam, although there were also opinions to the contrary.

In other aspects of daily life in al-Andalus, the separation and subjection of religious minorities were the norm: mixed marriages were forbidden, as well as the riding of stallions in Muslim cities; there were food restrictions and laws enforcing color-coded clothing with discriminatory ends. In order to be objective and situate these facts in their context, it is necessary to point out that the same rules of separation and subjection of minorities were reproduced in Christian Spain after its triumph over al-Andalus. Having acknowledged that, I emphasize once more that I seek neither to demonize al-Andalus nor to idealize it. I strive to examine the period with logical and scientific criteria more adjusted to human realities.

The long period in the history of the Iberian Peninsula known as al-Andalus deserves to be studied with rigor and remembered with respect. However, a respectful attitude should not replace known cultural elements used as “differential facts:” the study and appreciation of the marvelous Islamic monuments of Spain should not be manipulated into founding political movements lacking more substantive platforms. The history of a land—and here we must differentiate the geographical territory from the population inhabiting that land at a given historical period—should not be taken as the basis on which to invent differential facts where there are none. To focus the discussion on a concrete area, let us consider Andalusia, the territory where Arab “influences” are used most frequently as differential facts. Appeals to this imagined and imaginary past may differ in tone—between corny and comic— but usually contain a significant dose of historical inaccuracy. If such creations were confined solely to a fictional realm, they could be appreciated as good—or very bad—literature. However, these fictional narratives tend to “create opinion,” which can only distort our understanding of the

period. See how a well-known author makes Boabdil the spokesperson of this mystification:

Aquí, en la Andalucía donde nacimos los nazaríes, existió ya Tartesos, un pueblo cuyas leyes se escribieron en verso, y ni siquiera Roma la civilizó, sino al contrario: Andalucía le dio sus mejores emperadores y pulió a sus soldados: como le dio luego al Islam su más lograda arquitectura y su sabiduría literaria y científica; como le dio a Europa zéjeles y jarchas y moaxajas para que sus trovadores se inspiraran. En Andalucía – conquistadora siempre de sus conquistadores, cuanto más de visitantes enamoradizos – convivieron todas las culturas, y en ella se fertilizaron unas y otras y procrearon. Por culpa de la intransigencia de los cristianos por un lado y de la intransigencia de los almorávides por otro, se apagó la hoguera maravillosa de una Península que, gracias a los andaluces, fue un faro deslumbrante.

Here in Andalusia, where we, Nasris, were born, there was once a people called Tartessus, whose laws were written as poems, and not even Rome civilized it; on the contrary: Andalusia gave her its best emperors and improved its soldiers; it also gave Islam its best architecture and its literary and scientific wisdom; it gave Europe *zéjeles* and *xarchas* and *moaxajas* to inspire its troubadours. In Andalusia—inveterate conqueror of its conquerors as well as of its enamored visitors—all cultures lived together, cross-fertilized, and procreated. Christian intransigency on the one hand and the intransigency of the Almoravids on the other extinguished the wonderful bonfire of a Peninsula, which, thanks to the Andalusians, was once a dazzling beacon. (Antonio Gala 331)

A wealth of similar examples can be found among many historical novels published in the last twenty years. In most cases, the ease with which such ignorance is displayed is perplexing. However, this extraordinary pseudo-cultural movement has been contested by many historians who have attempted to balance the scales and reach the general population. Alas, their efforts have met with very little success, in part because of the limited resources at their disposal. Shortly before his death, Sánchez-Albornoz, whose work has

been not only misinterpreted but also poorly analyzed and disseminated, attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to contain the avalanche of disinformation in publications that, unfortunately, failed to reach the Andalusian readers to whom they were directed. He wrote that in a trip to the region:

Encontró a Córdoba llena de carteles de propaganda islámica y se sorprendió de la cesión por el alcalde, para mezquita, del antiguo convento de las Clarisas. El de Granada y varios concejales se habían negado a participar en la fiesta de la Reconquista de la ciudad, por entender que se conmemoraba el aniversario de un día triste de la historia granadina. En Sevilla se habían repartido, al parecer, octavillas protestando por el culto de una “secta” – la religión católica – responsable del asesinato de millones de musulmanes andaluces.

He found the city of Córdoba full of Islamic propaganda and was surprised to learn that the mayor had handed over the site of the old Clarisa convent to serve as mosque. The mayor of Granada and several town councilors had refused to participate in the Reconquest celebrations because they found the anniversary commemorated a sad event in the history of the city. In Seville, pamphlets had been distributed to protest the religious practice of a “sect”—the Catholic religion—responsible for the murders of millions of Andalusian Muslims. (“Veleidades” 21)

A year later, the historian added:

La imagen de esa España enteramente islamizada que triunfa en mis sueños era cruelísima. Nunca se había descubierto el Sepulcro de Santiago, no había surgido la leyenda del Apóstol Caballero, no habían tenido lugar las peregrinaciones a Compostela y la cultura de la Europa cristiana no había pasado el Pirineo. No se habían escrito ni iluminado las maravillas de los llamados Beatos. No se habían construido nuestros templos prerrománicos en tierras cantábricas ni los de estilo mozárabe al sur de los montes, ni después las iglesias y monasterios románicos y góti-

cos. Nunca se habían alzado las grandes y bellas catedrales de Santiago, Zamora, Salamanca, León, Burgos, Toledo, Barcelona, Sevilla... No se habían escrito el Poema del Cid, ni los otros cantares de gesta. No se habían redactado los fueros municipales que garantizaron las libertades de ciudades y villas. Y no podríamos recrearnos leyendo al Arcipreste de Hita, a don Juan Manuel, al Canciller Ayala, (...) después no se habrían escrito la Celestina ni el Quijote; Lope y Calderón no habrían soñado con legarnos sus dramas y comedias; Quevedo y Tirso habrían guardado silencio; no habrían pintado el Greco, Velásquez, Goya ..., no habría surgido la leyenda de don Juan (...). Y, como no habríamos conquistado América, ni nuestra lengua ni nuestra cultura tendrían el vigor y la difusión lograda por las de nuestra España cristiana (...). No olvidéis, además, que no descendéis de los musulmanes que otrora poblaron nuestra tierra sino de los cristianos que la ganaron para la civilización occidental. Sabemos hoy con certeza documentalmente que Fernando III y Alfonso X expulsaron del Valle del Guadalquivir a la morisma y que fue repoblada por cristianos del Norte, como todo el país.

The image of a thoroughly Islamic Spain that triumphed in my dreams was most cruel. The grave of Santiago had never been found and therefore the legend of the Knight Apostle never existed. There were no pilgrimages to Compostela, nor did the culture of Christian Europe ever cross the Pyrenees. The marvelous manuscripts of the so-called Beati had not been written or illuminated. Neither the Pre-Romanic churches of Cantabria nor the Mozarabic temples south of the mountains had been built, nor, afterwards, the Romanic and Gothic churches and monasteries. The beautiful great cathedrals of Santiago, Zamora, Salamanca, León, Burgos, Toledo, Barcelona, and Seville had never been built. ... The poem of *Mio Cid* and other epic poems were never written. There were no municipal *fueros* to guarantee the rights and freedoms of towns and villages. We would be unable to enjoy the works of the Archpriest of Hita, don Juan Manuel, Chancellor Ayala ... and afterwards the *Celestina* or the *Quijote* would not had been written. Lope and Calderón would not have dreamed

their legacy of comedies and dramas. Quevedo and Tirso would have remained silent. The Greco, Velázquez, and Goya would not have painted... , the legend of don Juan would not have developed ... And because Spain would not have conquered America, neither our language nor our culture would have had the strength and dissemination achieved by those of our Christian Spain. ... Moreover, do not forget that you are not descendants of the Muslims who once peopled our land but of the Christians who won it for Western civilization. Today we know with documented certainty that Ferdinand III and Alphonse X expelled the Moors from the Guadalquivir Valley and the land was repopulated by Christians from the North, like the rest of the country. (“Sueño cruel” 14)

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, harmless lyrical exaltations have intensified in tone, from the pseudo-historical nonsense of Blas Infante to the anti-nationalistic fixation of Juan Goytisolo, who, not long ago, was stoking the same fires:

El enfrentamiento del castellanismo más mostrenco con las nacionalidades periféricas nos retrotrae a épocas que creíamos definitivamente extintas ... como dijo Américo Castro, un grupo humano que ignora de dónde viene tampoco puede saber a dónde va. A los mitos mortíferos de los radicales vascos, hacen eco, como ladridos de un can en la noche, los del españolismo más trasnochado. Volvemos insidiosamente a la apropiación estatal de lo religioso y a las arengas de la patria en peligro.

The confrontation of the dullest Castilianism with peripheral nationalisms takes us back to an era that we thought definitively extinct ... as Américo Castro said, a human group that ignores where it comes from cannot know where it goes. The deadly myths of Basque radicalism are echoed, like dogs barking in the night, by the most rancid *españolismo*. We return insidiously to the State appropriation of the religious and to the sermons of the country in danger. (5)

I do not know what Goytisolo means by “the dullest Castilianism”

or “the most rancid *españolismo*.” I cannot find them anywhere: he publishes in all kinds of newspapers, *ABC* included, a reflection of the tolerant attitude of both sides. Additionally, it would behoove him to keep in mind his own words regarding where he comes from: definitely not from the Abd er-Rahmans.

The proliferation of theoreticians and defenders of the al-Andalus cause only proves that the country is experiencing a trend in fashionable opinion, a politics of gestures easy to adhere to because it does not cost anyone anything. The pervasiveness of the stereotypical discourse towards the “Three Cultures” or towards Muslim immigrants has invaded and conquered the mass media to such an extent that we can only find either exaggeration (if there are positive things to report) or silence (if the issue is negative). Reporters seem morally obligated to omit any criticism of such immigrants, even if there are reasons for it, to avoid being characterized as racists, while at the same time they feel compelled to praise the benefits brought about by these foreigners, which in some cases are true and in others, not exactly. There are no subtleties in the discourse. Finally, Tibi effectively synthesizes the historical character of al-Andalus: “Islam was the culture of Arab Spain and Arabic was its language. No such thing as cultural relativism existed there” (“Muslim Migrants” 46).

In recent years, the uses of the *andalusí* past as a rhetorical platform has crossed paths with the PSOE’s foreign policy and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero’s chimeric “Alliance of Civilizations.” The government assures us that the policy touches upon national security, political cooperation, and education. Yet the question remains: what does Spain get in return? We do know exactly what we offer: generous residency permits, promotion of Islam *gratis et amore* in our lands, productive investments, unrecoverable loans, dazzling super sales that are never paid up; even a series of concessions that may affect our national security and sovereignty. What is the worth of the pompous statements on the Hispano-Arab brotherhood and the glories of al-Andalus made by a Saudi, Egyptian, or Syrian minister? Will they authorize without restrictions Christian proselytism in all Muslim countries? Will they abolish the family laws currently in force in their lands? Will they revise their History textbooks?

It does not appear that any of the above is likely to occur. The lack of reciprocity is the habitual norm in how Muslim nations

conduct their affairs with other communities. A single example will be enough. At one of the countless religion forums currently in existence in Spain, the Muslim representative, Riay Tatari, paid the usual compliments to Islam: “no hay religión en el mundo que propague la paz como el Islam” ‘there is no religion in this world that propagates peace like Islam;’ “El Islam da la mano a todas las religiones que llamamos a un único Dios” ‘Islam extends its hands to all religions that call God the One and Only;’ “Nunca se ha interrumpido la convivencia de los musulmanes con las otras religiones, porque en el Corán tienen su lugar y su respeto” ‘There has never been an interruption of the conviviality of Muslims with other religions because they have their place and their due respect in the Koran’ (“Encuentro de religiones” ‘Meeting of religions’ 36). Of course, when asked why Saudi Arabia forbids the dissemination of other religions except Islam, he replied: “Si allí no hay otra religión, no veo por qué vamos a crear un problema donde no lo hay” ‘If there is no other religion over there, I do not see why we are going to create a problem where there is none’ (36). Enough said; except that a few days later, the same person requested funds from the Spanish government to support courses on Islamic religion in Spanish elementary schools. In due time, he received what he wanted.

Notes

1 Translator’s Note: Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the secondary sources are mine.

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