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Muslim Spain's Collective Memory of al-Andalus

Claire Oxford

Travis C. Landry

Kenyon College, landryt@kenyon.edu

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Muslim Spain's Collective Memory of *al-Andalus*

Spain's historical memory of Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula, *al-Andalus* (711-1492) is complex, with competing narratives on both sides of Spain's ideological spectrum. While conservatives such as Claudio Sánchez Albornoz in *España: Un enigma histórico* (1975) treasure the centuries-old story of the Reconquest and Spanish Inquisition's heroism in expelling the Moors, Américo Castro's *La realidad histórica de España* (1954) lauds Islam's contributions to Spanish society, privileging *al-Andalus* as an example of *convivencia* (or "coexistence") between Muslims, Jews and Christians that left its mark on the Spanish landscape, architecture and people. These arguments for reinterpretation contest the legacy of *al-Andalus* and continue to influence Spanish discourse on issues pertaining to the contemporary Muslim community (i.e. the protection of religious freedoms, the realities of terrorist threats from al-Qaeda and ISIS, and the tensions that arise with an increase in immigration to Spain from Muslim-majority countries — primarily Morocco). By analyzing fictional or semi-autobiographical literature written by Muslims in Spain, we find narratives that frequently complicate the binary of hegemonic memories of *al-Andalus* by subverting prevailing narratives that either demonize Muslims in Spain as "moros" reinventing the Peninsula principally through migration or conversion, or romanticize the tourist-brochure brand of coexistence that often belies enduring social, political and economic inequalities and discrimination in contemporary Spain.

While the autoethnographic texts I analyzed are not meant to be entirely representative of the thoughts and narratives of all Muslims in Spain — who are a part of an incredibly diverse group in terms of religious interpretation, ethnic identity, and migrant or native-born status — they do reflect important and often-voiced opinions that articulate some of the primary ways in which Muslims in Spain selectively remember and forget *al-Andalus*.

al-Andalus

By Claire Oxford '18

Academic Advisor: Associate Professor of Spanish Travis Landry



"I want to stop thinking of you, of your air, your light. You know, from Morocco you can see Spain, but it doesn't work like that in the opposite direction. The Spanish don't see us, they don't give a damn, they've no use for our country. I'm in my little room, it smells musty in here; there's only one window and I don't dare open it" (71).

—Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Leaving Tangier*

"This way of telling history to foreigners seems nice to me. It doesn't pretend to remind new generations of what really happened when the Arabs were expelled from al-Andalus. The Inquisition. The killings. The collective expulsion. All of these things don't serve to attract tourists... Suddenly I felt that my presence in that scene was an even greater extravagance than the tournament on the beach. On top of that, I was fed up with remaining at the party pending police uniforms, when I had to vanish. I went home without the festivities having ended. But I knew its ending very well" (38-39).

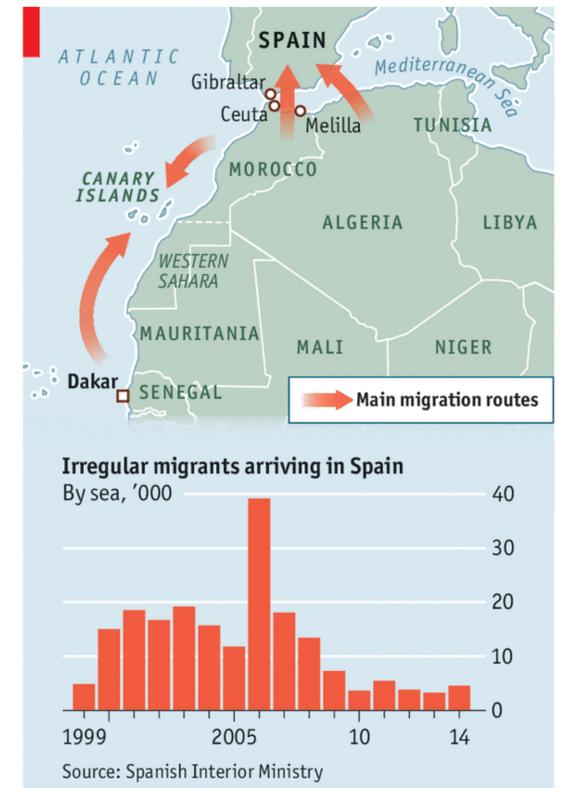
—Rachid Nini, *Diario de un ilegal* (transl. to English)



"Maybe I should explain to you: you are Catalan, but always hold onto the old roots of your parents that will nourish you. Always keep in mind that there will be people in your life that will reproach these roots. But when you feel rejected, my child, think about all the friends, boys and girls, that you have, and you will counter the weight of rejection, one should not always be accepted by everyone, one is as one is, he knows where he is from and all he carries within" (255).

—Najat El Hachmi

(transl. to English)

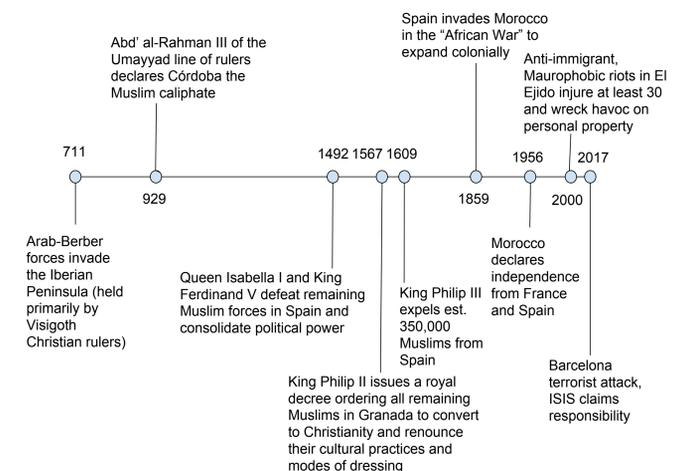


Economist.com

Migration Patterns to Spain: 1999-2014

"Forward defence." *The Economist*, 15 Oct. 2015.

Important Dates



Key Theoretical Phrases

- Historical Memory
- Autoethnographic Literature
- Maurophobic / Maurophilic
- *Convivencia*