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Reflections On Al-Andalus: Islamphopbia And Convivencia In Contemporary Discourse

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Abstract

9/11 has played a major role in renewed discussions about racism, national identity, and multiculturalism. The wide discourse on racism is deeply rooted in American history and complicated by the "us" versus "them" divide which seems to dominate the post-9/11 political and cultural discourses. One aspect largely neglected by scholars is the presence of Al-Andalus as a trope in a considerable number of political speeches, and how the cultural history associated to this place was appropriated and distorted in different manners by various political players. This paper, however, investigates the revitalization of the history and the reshaping of the cultural memory of Al-Andalus (Moorish Medieval Spain) and its deploying as an important element of contemporary political ideology in post-9/11 political discourse to create further divisions and cultural exclusion. It is also the aim of the present study to provide instances of Andalusian counterdiscourse as reflected in narratives written by Arab-American women writers, in order to reactivate the Andalusian heritage as a source of inspiration for convivencia, for a harmonious multicultural coexistence.

Key words: 9/11, Al-Andalus, Arab-Americans, immigration policies, racism

Anti-Arab Racism: A Chronological Overview

Since the very first wave of immigrants to the United States, Arabs and Muslims have suffered from being racialized and discriminated against, and this has intensified like never before as a result of the events of September 11, 2001. The post-9/11 kinds of discrimination and marginalization have constructed the presence of Arab-Americans as 'aliens', in other words, Bill Ong Hing describes it as de-Americanzing the Arab:

> what has been happening to Muslims, Middle East, and South Asians in the United States in the wake of September 11 is a process of ostracism from American community—a de-Americanzation process—that we have witnessed before….You Muslims, Middle Easterners, and South Asians are not true Americans (2002: 4).

As far as institutionalized racism is concerned, it started with the ratification of the Naturalization Act of 1790. In fact, the 1790 census divided races into six types, five of them consisting of free people "free white males", older than fifteen and older than twenty-one, "free white females" younger than fifteen and in general, and all the others,

while the “slaves” represented the sixth category. Later in 1820, the census added the categories of “free colored persons” and “foreigner not naturalized”. The 1830 census employed the categories of “free white persons”, “free colored persons” and “slaves”. And the 1850 census only had two categories: free inhabitants and slaves. However, the year 1860 was marked by “contemporary 'racial' categories” (Yanow 2003: 82), divided as: white, free colored, Indians, slaves. Later on, race and ethnicity merged together in the creation of census categories and all these legislations carried on implicitly or explicitly the concept of ‘alien’ that restrains the immigration to the United States.

In terms of eligibility for citizenship, racism was the most challenging issue and a crucial condition to access the right of naturalization that aliens or skin-color immigrants had to face in the United States. In 1906, the Arab-American immigrants claimed that they were qualified to be American citizens, considering the fact that they were “white”, taking into account their heritage and civilization, as well as their Christian religion. Nevertheless, the court ruled against in a series of lawsuits filed by Arab immigrants for naturalization as U.S. citizens (Carlisle 2011: 28-9).

The debate was whether Arabs were “white”, “Asiatics” or which type of whiteness categories they fit in (Bayoumi 2015: 27). In November 1909, the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. started investigating the ancestry of the Arab-American communities, to decide if they should be entitled to U.S citizenship or excluded. This case was clearly illustrated by the story of George Shishim. He was originally from Lebanon and served as a policeman in Venice, California. He arrested a white American man whose father was a lawyer, but the law stipulated that a colored man could not arrest a white man, so his status as ‘white’ was questioned in court. In the beginning, Shishim was described as having Chinese-Mongolian ancestry, but later the court ruled that people of Lebanese-Syrian and Arab descent are ‘white’. In one of the court sessions, Shishim declared: “If I am Mongolian, then so was Jesus, because we came from the same land” (Hitti 1995: 21-23). In the 1920 census, Syrians and Palestinians were classified under the category of “foreign-born white population” (Naff 1985: 117).

In terms of intensifying anti-Arab feelings, in 1972 the “Special Measures” or “Operation Boulder” were implemented by the Nixon administration as a precautionary step for ensuring the national security after the terrorist attack in Munich. The Arab-American communities were the special target of Nixon's Boulder. As Susan M. Akram, a clinical professor of law at Boston University states, “Nixon Administration's ‘Operation Boulder’ [was] perhaps the first concerted US government effort to target Arabs in the US for special investigation with the specific purpose of intimidation, harassment, and to discourage their activism on issues relating to the Middle East” (Al-Saadi 2013). The expansion of racism interestingly contaminated the lexical field of the word “Arab”. Page 47 of the Merriam-Webster Thesaurus from 1976 offers as alternatives of the word “Arab” the following words: vagabond, tramp, hobo, clochard and vagrant. American racism towards Arabs was also evident in a different situation, when William Grawn Milliken, Governor of Michigan, in a statement he made on NBC, linked the economic contraction of Michigan with “those damn Arabs” (Hitti 1995: 48-52).

In the 1980s, racial profiling as a new phenomenon emerged, in connection to crime

and national security: “Racial profiling is treating someone first as a ‘suspect’, based solely on the false belief that a person's race, ethnicity, and/or religion alone is sufficient predictive indicator of potential criminal behaviour” (Audi 2002: 12). These realities urged the establishment of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) in 1981. However, ADC was targeted by two terrorist attacks, one in Washington, D.C. in 1985, and the other in Santa Ana, California, which resulted in the death of Palestinian-American Alex Odeh, who was the West Coast-regional director of the ADC, a fervent anti-discrimination militant (Hitti 1995: 85).

Furthermore, Dr. Azizah Al-Hibri, a professor of law, spoke in the House Judiciary Committee in response to the Comprehensive Antiterrorism Act of 1995, which followed the Oklahoma bombing. She stated that Muslim Americans suffered and struggled to prove that they were innocent:

> They were subjected to both official and unofficial acts of harassment, intimidation and discrimination. These acts included detention and interrogation of Muslim by law enforcement officials, media broadcast of opinions by so-called 'experts' which conflated the latter's political views with a negative stereotype of Islam, individual scorn and even mob reprisal attacks (1997: 179).

In the aftermath of 9/11, the declaration of “the war on terror" by the Bush administration immediately targeted Arab and Muslim Americans as potential threats and suspects of terrorist acts. Addressing the danger posed by this situation, Leila Nadya Sadat, a professor of International Criminal Law, quoted Peter Kirsanow, a member of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, who pointed that “if there is a future terrorist attack on America and it comes from the same ethnic group that attacked the World Trade Center, you can forget about civil rights” (Audi 2012: 13). He also proposed to construct internment camps, if the Arab terrorists were to be embroiled in any attacks against the United States. Thus, Sadat noticed, it was obviously repeating the same scenario of the Japanese Americans during the World War II (Audi 2012: 13).

Following the backlash of September 11, 2001, Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians faced different levels of discrimination. The Department of Justice (DOJ) announced the enforcement of a new “special registration”, or the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), a policy targeting foreign men, particularly immigrants from the American Muslim communities from twenty-six countries, who were asked to register within a designated time and place. In addition, this implementation of the Special Registration program was behind many cases of detentions in the various “call-in” groups, as they were known as, although it was not proven that they had committed any crime or had connections to any suspect groups (cf. Audi 2012: 14; Bayoumi 2015: 52).

In contrast, the duality of standards and the ambivalence of speech were geared by George W. Bush in more than one case, when he addressed the Arab and Muslim American community after 9/11, stating “there are thousands of Arab Americans that live in New York City who love the flag just as much [as other Americans]” (qtd. in Audi 2012: 17-18). On a different occasion, he pointed out that “America counts millions of Muslims amongst our citizens, and Muslims make an incredibly valuable contribution to our country. Muslims are doctors, lawyers,

law professors, members of the military, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, moms and dads. And they need to be treated with respect. In our anger and emotion, our fellow Americans must treat each other with respect" (Hanley 2001: 1).

The fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States stipulates the protection of the rights of citizens, granting them "equal protection of the laws". Moreover, the first and the fifth Amendments reinforce the same right of the citizen and prohibit any kind of discrimination by law. In accordance with this view, the Civil Rights Act and the Privacy Act have been a tool to prevent any errors, corruption and discrimination within or inflicted by the government (cf. Audi 2012: 8). The contribution of Arab-Americans to American culture was one of the focal points of the annual conference of American Studies Association in Hartford, Connecticut, in 2003, followed by "America and the Orient" in 2004, the title of the annual convention in Mannheim, organized by the German Association for American Studies and other American Studies Associations which joined this talk (Hornung 2012: 1). Thus, these political circumstances have generated the creation of a counter-discourse by Arab-American literary scholars in response to the consequences of 9/11 events which consistently aim to reconstruct and reconfigure their Arab-American identity.

Translating Al-Andalus in Contemporary Political and Cultural Discourses

Over the past decades, culture of fear is easily control the common consent of civilized communities for war through political mechanisms. In the wake of 9/11, various wars have been called on Muslim and Arab communities such as war against terrorism, war on terrorism, anti-terrorism and war on terror and all these wars have been carried within its elements a certain ideology to establish fragmented culture which is the key source for culture wars. Indeed, the results are diverting the populations from what is worthwhile contribution to multiculturalism by imposing instead a continuous fear of the 'other' and constructing a paradigm of "us" and "them".

In fact, the consequences were raising xenophobia against Arabs and Muslims inside and outside the United States, which created binaries based on 'we/they', 'inclusion/exclusion' and 'self/other'. In this sense, Arab Americans have been identified as 'alien enemies' in the dominant U.S. imaginary that required the construction of adversarial frames, indelibly shaping xenophobia. Accordingly, September 11, 2001, was a phenomenon of high complexity in terms of contradictions of political, social, and cultural nature. It remains alive to be worth sources for political actors to establish a well-constructed process of continuing culture of fear particularly when this process has been attached with the cultural history of Al-Andalus in order to legitimize their act of "ethnic cleansing" by reviving an old phobia of 711 and the Muslim invasion to European peninsula.

Arabophobia and Islamophobia have been ethnicized through Al-Andalus history in post-9/11 political discourse. Nevertheless, some essential theoretical questions are raised in this discussion, including: how the legacy of Al-Andalus has been reconstructed in post-9/11 political discourse and counter discourse? On the one hand, José María Aznar, Spain's former President, connected the legacy of Al-Andalus with a constant threat to the security and integrity of the Spanish state in the modern world (Tremlett 2008:xvii). Furthermore, the old fear and

phobia of returning the Moors 711 have been associated with Arab and Muslim immigrants to Spain in the 21st century and this was obvious in the Spanish political discourse and migration policy (Dietz 2004:1100). On the other hand, the fall of Muslim Spain has inspired different extremist groups such Al-Qaeda, with Osama bin Laden mourning Al-Andalus immediately after the 9/11 attacks and more recently ISIS claiming that "We will take Spain back" (Kern 2014:1). These types of discourses only create further divisions, cultural exclusion and consistently promote and structure culture of fear.

In terms of political and social constructionism, what happened in the post-9/11 era is deeply rooted in 1492, establishing a culture of violence towards Arabs and Muslims communities. This brings us to the question of whether Muslim identity and culture are as bloody as they are portrayed or whether they are shaped by concerns and fears arising from political discourses, especially when they are linked to the history and culture of Al-Andalus. The history of Al-Andalus started in 711 and the year 1492 represented the end of Islamic Spain, when the Spaniards removed the last Muslim dynasty by the Reconquista of Granada.

However, the medieval Islamic civilization of Al-Andalus designated and produced not only a material culture which is reflected by Madīnat al-Zahrā and Alhambra in Granada, or Mezquita-Catedral of Cordoba, but also established the "Golden Age of culture", characterized by cultural tolerance, a cohesive sense of inclusion and cohabitation between three different communities (Christians, Muslims, and Jews). Stereotypically, the Middle Ages are depicted as a long period of darkness, ignorance and intolerance with blood shed. It is interesting that we mostly tend to ignore those before us intentionally-hence all the negative press and misrepresentations. To a certain extent, this was just a typical period of the history of Europe and the present-day learning, literature, science, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy were integrated into the process of European thought and practice, as evidence of the knowledge of that time. On the other hand, these three faith communities were prominent parts of the history and culture of Europe, and this seven centuries long chapter tells us about the kind of tolerance and cultural coexistence among the three religions.

In contemporary literature, Arab-American diasporic literature is a type of writing which forges a collective cultural memory through the reinvention of cultural symbols (the Andalusian legacy) aimed at establishing a counter discourse in order to reactivate the Andalusian heritage as a source of inspiration for convivencia, and for a harmonious multicultural coexistence. Cultural memory, in the post 9/11 era, has advanced to prominence in minority groups and communities. It has configured their identity through the lens of the past, rather than that of the present. Jan Assman defines culture memory as "the faculty that allows us to build a narrative picture of the past and through this process develop an image and an identity for ourselves" (Meckien 2013:1).

In a related context, Toni Morrison, writing about the function of cultural memory as counter-discourse to break off the social and cultural hegemony in the community, states that "the images [of historical sites] that float around them the remains, so to speak, at the archaeological site-surface first, and they surface so vividly and so compellingly […] to a reconstruction of a world, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written and to the revelation of a kind of truth" (Morrison 1998: 195). In this sense, the Arab-American writers aim to

deconstruct any attempt of reactivation the old phobia of returing the Moors or Muslims 711 that determined its production to create culture exclusion but instead they seek to bring back the Moorish multiculturalism to be a model in the contemporary world. Moreover, the complexity of political and social contexts of the modern world has inspired the Arab-American women writers to create a historical encounter where Al-Andalus can be seen as source of resisting the dominant identity, culture and politics.

Among Arab-American women writers are Diana Abu-Jaber, Laila Lalami, and Mohja Kahf who deploy the Andalusian chronotope in their novels, similarly to other who might and might not belong to the same canon of literature as Radwa Ashour, Jurji Zaydan, Edward Said, Salman Rushdie, Tariq Ali, Mahmoud Darwish, Ahmed Shawqi, Nizar Quabbani, Amin Maalouf and other prominent writers. All of these thinkers have been drawn to the Andalusian past in an effort to reconstruct their own historical identity, and to understand their relationships with other groups.

Jordanian-American Diana Abu-Jaber's Crescent (2003) attempts to offer an insight into the Arab-American communities to create a meaningful conversation of Al-Andalus as a source of cultural memory. Crescent seeks to reconfigure Arabness in the worldly necessities of Arab contemporaneity, and to aid in the reshaping of their identity through the metaphor of cultural memory. As Nouri Gana states, "Crescent is indeed a refreshing reminder of the socio-cultural idioms of conviviality that marked the Andalusian past" (2008: 235). Crescent addresses Al-Andalus' cultural history as an example of multicultural cohabitation of our shared humanity, and only through it will one overcome the blind policy that seeks to exclude the other's identity.

Laila Lalami's Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits (2005) presents Arab struggles for dignity and hope. Lalami is preoccupied about contemporary Arab sociopolitical conditions, which have become a vulnerable base for any transformational ideology. She has contributed with other intellectuals in re-addressing the ideal past as response to the fractured of social and cultural realities as Salamn Rushdie in his novel The Moor's Last Sigh (1995) when he dramatized the modern India by attaching it with the history of Al-Andalus. Atef Laouyene, in his 2007 essay "Andalusian Poetics: Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh and the Limits of Hybridity", states that Rushdie employed Al-Andalus in his novel "as a kind of metaphor for modern India and for the ruptures of cultures not only in India but in the modern world" (Laouyene 2007:144). Lalami's protagonists are engaged in cultural, political, and economic conflicts to perpetuate the lives of Arabs and Muslims not only in the Arab continent but also beyond the border. Thus, re-activating the cultural memory of Al-Andalus and the historical reality help to re-design the fragmented nature of the current dominant social, cultural and political realties in the Arab world.

Mohja Khaf's The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf (2006) attempts to create an alternative perspective to Western perception of Muslims women, by using the cultural history of Al-Andalus, particularly Andalusi women's history, to challenge the stereotypical image of Muslim women as oppressed women. Kahf seeks to show that cultural identity of Al-Andalus was colored by gender and she connected directly culture memory in relation to women's history to recreate a conversation about the women's concerns in that particular period and link it with feminist movements in the

contemporary literature. As a result, a discourse on Al-Andalus as a cultural memory in relation to women's writing in the context of Al-Andalus history is required to investigate how these women enjoyed the freedom of speech and to study the women's emancipation through there literary texts.

When and where communities and minority groups are facing cultural exclusion, this might build a desire of returning to a 'place' that contributes to the re-building of cultural identity and gender identity as well. In this sense, Al-Andalus is a site that creates a bridge between three distinct religions by forming an identity based on caring for others and being cared for, on respect for the land, and on living together as Edward Said states:

> In its medieval heyday, Andalusia, established by the Arab general Tariq bin Ziyad and continuously fought over by numerous Muslim sects (among them Almoravids, Nasrids, and Almohads) and by Catholics as far north as Galicia, was a particularly lively instance of the dialogue, much more than the clash, of cultures. Muslims, Jews, and Christians co-existed with astonishing harmony. Today its periods of fruitful cultural diversity may provide a model for the co-existence of peoples, a model quite different from the ideological battles, local chauvinism, and ethnic conflict that finally brought it down—and which ironically enough threaten to engulf our own 21st-century world (2009:1).

Conclusion:

To conclude, Arab-Americans as long with other minorities in the United states have long been seen as foreigners no matter how long history and contributions they have in America. It is important to bring in the harassment and racialization that the Arab-Americans have to face, whether by individual citizens or Government authorities, shows that cross-racial identification is a controversial issue and problematic one in social and political contexts. Thus, it reveals particularly aftermath 9/11 that the Arab-American communities become the major challenge to the U.S. policy racial thinking. The present study investigates (re)configurations of Arabness and their epistemological implications against the backdrop of identity politics and identity ascription in before and after 9/11.

What I am seeking to present in this paper is what the history and culture of Al-Andalus mean in a global context. In the aftermath of 9/11, in particular, what the world has been faced of political and social conflicts, culture clashes, different wars, and various measures of ethnic cleansing, all these together constitute a new image that marks Muslims and Arabs as an enemies which led to a collapse in their identity. Thus, some writers and intellectuals generate a counter discourse showing that the culture history of Al-Anlalus can be seen as "viable multicultural model", the cause of resistance to religious and ethnic separation as well as to a stereotype, and source that contributes to the reconstruction of a shared identity.

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