RiMe

Rivista dell'Istituto
di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea

ISBN 9788897317746 ISSN 2035-794X

numero 11/I n.s., dicembre 2022

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.7410/1574

Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea
Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche
http://rime.cnr.it

Il presente volume è stato pubblicato online il 31 dicembre 2022 in:

This volume has been published online on 31 December 2022 at:

http://rime.cnr.it

CNR - Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea
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Sito web │ Website: www.isem.cnr.it

RiMe, n. 11/I n.s., dicembre 2022, 165 p.
ISBN 9788897317746 - ISSN 2035-794X
DOI https://doi.org/10.7410/1573

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Medieval Iberia, Essentialist Narratives and Globalization

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Date of receipt: 28/06/ 2022
Date of acceptance: 17/01/2023

Abstract
The academic study of the Middle Ages started out over the nineteenth century, in a historical context shaped by the rise of the liberal revolutions and nationalism, as well as the globalization of capitalism as a result of the industrial revolution and colonialism. This context helps understand the strong essentialist bias of the narratives about the medieval period, as clearly revealed by the Spanish case. The new wave of capitalist globalization after 1989 brought about a new rise of essentialist narratives that came hand in hand with the consolidation of increasingly multicultural and multiethnic environment in the most advances societies. This contradiction stands as a stark challenge for medieval studies in the years to come.

Keywords
Middle Ages; Globalization; Essentialist Narratives; Capitalism; Reconquista.

Resumen
El estudio académico de la Edad Media se inició a lo largo del siglo XIX, en un contexto histórico marcado por el auge de las revoluciones liberales y el nacionalismo, así como por la globalización del capitalismo como resultado de la revolución industrial y el colonialismo. Este contexto ayuda a comprender el fuerte sesgo esencialista de las narraciones sobre el período medieval, como lo revela claramente el caso español. La nueva ola de globalización capitalista posterior a 1989 trajo consigo un nuevo auge de narrativas esencialistas que vino de la mano de la consolidación de un entorno cada vez más multicultural y multiétnico en las sociedades más avanzadas. Esta contradicción representa un gran desafío para los estudios medievales en los años venideros.

Palabras clave
Edad Media; Globalización; Narrativas esencialistas; Capitalismo; Reconquista.

Alejandro García-Sanjuán

Introduction

The 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall marked a sharp rise of capitalist globalization, a fact that did not go without academic consecuences and sparked increasing interest in global processes across history. In this context, the notion of the Global Middle Ages consolidated in recent years as a fresh approach to the study of said historical period (Hermans, 2020; Heng, 2021).

This tendency is apparently at odds with the ideological context in which the academic study of the Middle Ages first developed over the 19th century. Because of the influence of nationalism and romanticism, the consideration of the medieval period as a crucial historical moment in essentialist narratives thrived in different scholary traditions (Geary, 2002). Spain is not an exception in this regard, although, as Th. Glick pointed out, the influence of ethnocentrism has been particularly intense in the Spanish scholarly tradition (Glick, 1971).

Over the 19th century, narratives drawing on the eternal essences of the nation ran parallel to the globalization of capitalism, driven by the industrial revolution and colonialism. To a certain extent, the apparent contradiction between essentialism and globalization remains in force today, since, as the Spanish case reveals, the ever-growing 21st-century capitalist globalization goes in tandem with a new wave of essentialist narratives pointing at the Middle Ages as the birth-moment of the nation.

On the other hand, the coincidence between the early essentialist narratives and 19th-century globalization could hardly be considered merely as a fluke. As L. Hunt points out, history developed as scholarly discipline hand in hand with the growing conviction of Europe's superiority over the rest of the world (Hunt, 2019). This arguably explains why the strong imprint of colonialism stands as a substantial component of essentialist narratives, largely aimed at legitimizing the European domination over peoples and nations considered barbaric or backward.

Before proceeding any further, a few preliminary remarks seem in order. As F. Rodríguez-Mediano has cogently argued, essentialist narratives are meant to boiling down highly complex historical processes to the language of identity, the "origins" and the "roots". A rhetorical operation said autor defines as "el atajo pseudo-intelectual que vincula el pasado con la nación, el sentimiento de pertenencia y las herramientas de inclusión y exclusión" (Rodríguez-Mediano, 2020, p. 25). In other words, essentialist narratives weaponize the past in order to set parameters of belonging and exclusion in the present. While historical knowledge aims at

approaching the past critically, essentialism creates highly toxic narratives that need to be urgently faced head-on by academic historians.

Understanding the extremely complex scholarly context about medieval Iberia requires a careful look to different national narratives frequently developed in a dialectical relationship. Rather than "essentialism", we need to talk in terms of "essentialist narratives", in the plural. However, Spanish essentialism deserves a special attention, since it has traditionally achieved higher levels of scholarly reach and influence. But even within this particular tradition we need to take into account the existence of two different approaches, as I am planning to show next.

Essentialist narratives about medieval Iberia have largely developed against the backdrop of two main global references, Europe and "Western Civilization". Actually, both notions belong to the same ideological pool, since Europe represents a staple of what M. Acién once called "continuismo burgués", that is to say, the essentialist narrative routinely featured as the unbroken historical continuity starting with Greek democracy and Roman law, going through medieval Christianity and culminating in modern liberalism (Acién, 2020, p. 182).

1. Origins and development of Spanish nationalist essentialism. Reconquista and Arab/Muslim Spain

Ever since the 19th century, Spanish scholarship about medieval Iberia largely contributed to consolidate a historical narrative drawing on Catholicism as the backbone of the national identity. Although the Catholic faith has been similarly used to build national identities in other European contexts, for instance in Poland (Porter, 2001), the peculiar mix of nationalism and Catholicism has been branded in Spain as National Catholicism (Botti, 1992).

Reconquista stands as one of the key concepts within a broader narrative pointing to Catholicism as the most salient feature of the Spanish national identity across history. Ever since the 19th century, it has been consistently featured in terms of a drawn-out eight-centuries long liberation struggle turning Spain into a nation "shaped against Islam" (Ríos Saloma, 2011; García-Sanjuán, 2018a; García-Sanjuán, 2020). Antagonism against Islam thus became a substantial part of a pervasive and deeply entrenched narrative about the origins of the Spanish nation (Álvarez Junco, 2001, p. 218).

Together with the influential Reconquista narrative, 19th-century Spanish nationalism developed a second approach to medieval Iberia which, to a certain extent, arose out of the contradictions of the first one. The longstanding Muslim presence in large areas of Iberia,

reaching eight centuries in the southernmost territories, was too long a period to be dismissed as uninportant. Besides, foreignizing the Muslim presence in terms of an "anti-Spain" against which the Spanish nation became shaped raised sharp contradictions with regard to ongoing official policies affecting the most outstanding elements of the Islamic legacy: let us remember that the Alhambra of Granada became "national heritage" (monumento nacional) in 1870, and so did the Mosque of Córdoba a few years later (1882).

Understanding the consolidation of this second approach likewise requires looking at the 19th-century academic context, which marks the beginnings of Arabic Studies as an independent scholarly discipline. In Spain and for natural reasons, this new field of study focused from the outset on the local Arab tradition (Monroe, 2021). In a moment when the academic practice inextricably intertwined with the nation-building project, the Arabists were bound to contribute to the national narrative, and for obvious reasons their job could not just simply consist on praising the nation's foe. The notion of Arab/Muslim Spain thus developed as a way of Spanishizing their object of study (Manzano, 2000a).

Over the 19th century, therefore, two different approaches developed in Spain, drawing respectively on the concepts of Reconquista and Arab/Muslim Spain. The evolution of the scholarship on medieval Iberia across the 19th and much of the 20th century heavily revolves around the relationship between these two essentialist and apparently contradictory notions: while Reconquista points to a rather exclusive Catholic national identity, Arab/Muslim Spain, in contrast, gives the Muslims their place in the national narrative.

Francoism not only proved the large compatibility between both approaches within Spanish nationalism, but did it showing their extremely useful political and ideological potential. Eager to gain full support from the Catholic Church, Franco consistently drew on the notions of Reconquista and Crusade to legitimize the 1936 coup against the Republic (Casanova, 2001, pp. 43-53). At the same time, however, the need to justify the presence of Riffian fighters in his troops explains the francoist rhetoric drawing on a deeply rooted affinity between the Spanish nation and Islam. The Catholic priest M. Asín Palacios (1871-1944), the most outstanding figure of Spanish Arabic studies back then, assumed the job of legitimizing the apparent contradiction of Muslim warriors fighting a Catholic Crusade, a circumstance he basically explained in terms of a joint fight of faithful believers (Catholics and Muslims) against the reds and atheists (Bornstein, 2020).

Although Francoism could be fairly described as an obscene forty-year long National Catholic orgy, only from a very narrow approach might Spanish essentialism be exclusively identified with the dictatorship or its most devout followers. A committed Republican and anti-francoist exile but, at the same time, a faithful Catholic believer and a patriotic historian, Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz (1893-1984) embodies the complex contradictions of Spanish

essentialism (García-Sanjuán, 2017). In line with 19th-century scholarship, he praised the Reconquista in terms of "the key to the history of Spain", and put it in a global context from a two-pronged approach: describing Spain as Europe's "sentinel" against Islam, on the one hand and, on the other, featuring the Reconquista as a feat of freedom that brought Spain back to Western civilization (Sánchez-Albornoz, 1929, p. 4; Sánchez-Albornoz, 1983, pp. 33, 40, 48). Meanwhile, and without apparently being aware of the contradiction, Sánchez-Albornoz enthusiastically promoted the idea of the deep Spanishness of Iberian Muslims, with statements as eloquent as the one branding the well-known polymath Ibn Hazm (m. 1064) as "the Moorish link in the chain binding Seneca with Unamuno" (Sánchez-Albornoz, 1965, p. 113).

After a longlasting coexistence across the 19th and much of the 20th century, the two paradigms of Spanish essentialism faced radically different scholarly fates. Arab/Muslim Spain could not survive the devastating criticism launched in 1976 by P. Guichard (1939-2021): his myth-shattering approach is just one of the reasons why he should be fairly considered as the founder of the modern studies on al-Andalus (García-Sanjuán, 2022a). Although his contribution represents the first effective critique of Spanish essentialism, Guichard ironically rendered a very useful service to that narrative. The notion of Arab/Muslim Spain, in fact, raised obvious and awkward contradictions with the Reconquista. If the essence of Spain was Catholic, how to explain, then, that the Muslims of al-Andalus were as Spanish as the Catholics? And how to understand that Spain was a nation "shaped against Islam", if the Muslims were equally Spaniards? Guichard unintentionally got Spanish nationalism rid of a highly problematic notion. Why Spanish nationalism finally dropped Arab/Muslim Spain and, conversely, remains to this day unflinchingly clung to Reconquista is not difficult to ascertain: ever since the 19th century, Reconquista stands as the most faithful expression of the Catholic identity of the Spanish nation.

Contrary to what it may appear at first glance, however, the essentialist narrative of the Reconquista is not limited by national scholarly boundaries, neither does it belongs exclusively to Spanish nationalism. In an article on the influence of the neo-Gothic influence within the Asturian, Leonese and Castilian monarchy, a well-known French medievalist makes frequent references to "Espagne" and "les espagnols" and draws in concepts such as "nation" and "conscience nationale" (Rucquoi, 1992). The case of the American scholar S. G. Payne is even more eloquent, as he features the Reconquista in terms of "the most influential event in Spain's history" and "a huge and singular feat" that makes the history of Spain absolutely unique (Payne, 2017, pp. 47-48). Over the years, Reconquista has become a global

scholarly notion, and its political role, as shown below, has likewise outreached far beyond the local limits of Spain..

2. A Colonialist Narrative

The notion of colonialism has been raised with regard to the Islamic conquest of Iberia and the origins of al-Andalus (Ortega, 2019, pp. 43-46) and likewise with regard to the territorial expansion of the Christian Northern Iberian kingdoms across the Islamic lands, which resulted in political and social structures branded by some specialists as colonies, very openly in the case of the Kingdom of Valencia (Burns, 1973 and 1975; Torró, 2006), and less explicitly in Andalusia (González Jiménez, 1994, p. 28).

By the same token, ever since the 19th-century the notion of Reconquista has been deeply shaped in colonial terms, wheter as a "civilizing" or a "liberating" mission. This is shown, for instance, by a well-known 1891 equestrian monument of King James I in Valencia which. This is shown, for instance, by a well-known 1891 equestrian monument of King James I in Valencia which commemorates his 1238 taking of the city: the inscription reads that he "entered Valencia victoriously and turned it free from the Islamic yoke" (Pingarrón, 1999; De las Heras, 2000). It is fair pointing out that, according to medieval war rules, this "liberation" went together with the expulsion of the local population. The biased rhetoric drawing on the pairing "liberation"/"yoke", heavily loaded with ethnocentric prejudices, is likewise to be found in scholarly publications across the 19th and the 20th century. In one of his earliest articles, for instance, Sánchez-Albornoz claimed: "it terrifies me to think what would have been the fate of Spain if all of it had been left yoked to Islam" (Sánchez-Albornoz, 1929).

As a scholarly device primarly aimed at Spanishizing al-Andalus, Arab/Muslim Spain represents as colonialist an approach as Reconquista, and actually explicit supremacist claims are to be found in the writings of Spanish experts on Arabic studies. Writing from Cairo in 1928 to his master Asín Palacios, a then young E. García Gómez (1905-1995), bound to become the most influential Spanish Arabist across the second half of the 20th century, described the Egyptians as "riffraff" (gentuza) and wished them to be definitely "hit on the head by the Europeans" (García Gómez, 2007, p. 68). Al-Andalus, in fact, has been widely used as an ideological tool to justify Spanish colonialism in Northern Africa, especially in present-day Morocco (Calderwood, 2018).

Medieval and Arabic studies developed similarly strong nationalits and colonialist approaches to medieval Iberian past, but there is a substantial and extremely significant diference between both academic disciplines. Specialists on Arabic studies have developed a much more critical look at their own tradition, including significant efforts to unveil the links with the colonial endeavor in Northern Africa, especially Morocco (López García, 2011; Marín, 2009; Marín, 2017). In contrast, and with very few exceptions (Manzano, 2000b), not only medieval historians have shown no similar criticism of themselves, but they rather developed an annoyingly self-satisfied look that includes glowing appraisals of the most outstanding and vocal representatives of Spanish essentialism, as revealed in the case of Sánchez-Albornoz, for instance (Ladero, 1998).

3. Essentialist Narratives in the 21st Century. The New Globalization: the Clash of Civilizations

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR marked the end of the liberalism-communism dialectic, triggering a new twist in the essentialist account of the "Western civilization". With the communist threat gone, Islam came to play the role of the West main antagonist in the doctrine of the "Clash of Civilizations", the new narrative aimed at legitimizing capitalist domination worldwide. More than a fresh approach, however, it rather represents a turning back to old prejudices and stereotypes, since the lingering hostility between Islam and the West stands as a pervasive feature of 19th-century essentialist narratives.

The Clash of Civilizations doctrine set off a new rise of essentialist narratives in a context largely featured by increasingly diverse, multicultural and multiethnic societies, in Europe as elsewhere, in which Muslim communities represent a relevant component. While these narratives about the medieval period are primarly aimed at reinforcing mechanisms of exclusion, the ever-growing arrival to European university classrooms of students with varying cultural and religious backgrounds raises the scholarly challenge of critically approaching the deeply sectarian nature of essentialism (Vargas, 2022).

To a certain extent, the old Reconquista narrative, tainted with francoist National Catholicism, turned out unfit in the new post-1978 Spanish democratic context, in which claiming the Reconquista entailed the risk of being branded as a Francoist nostalgic. Late in the 20th century, the Clash of Civilizations provided a much-needed new ideological context in which the Reconquista narrative could thrive. In Al-Andalus contra España. La forja del mito, Arabist and former member of the Spanish Communist Party S. Fanjul took on the task

of turning the traditional narrative suitable for the 21st-century context. Not by chance, his book matched the heyday of the conservative administrarion led by J. M. Aznar (1996-2004), a head of government keen of the idea of Spain as a nation shaped against Islam (Aznar, 2007, p. 162).

The underlying argument of Al-Andalus contra España, clearly outlined in the book-title, reveals the classical essentialist opposition between the Spanish nation and Islam. This alleged antagonism comes in tandem with an assessment of the balance between conservative and progressive historical myths. Writing 25 years on Franco's demise, Fanjul claimed that, while conservative myths would be merely a dying breed, the progressive ones, conversely, would be sharply on the rise, chief among them the idea of al-Andalus as a paradise of religious tolerance, a myth aimed at undermining the Spanish nation (Fanjul, 2000; Fanjul, 2004).

Thanks to Fanjul, the integration of the "myth of al-Andalus" narrative within the essentialist account of the "Western civilization" has been very successful, at least judging from the mushrooming of appalling by-products authored by scholars lacking every previous expertise in the field of al-Andalus (or even medieval Iberia) who basically limit themselves to follow the path set up by Fanjul. The starting premise of this scholarship runs as follows: the prevailingly leftist academic stablishment has sistematically and willingly concealed the murky side of the Islamic past, so that, far from a "Paradise" of tolerance, al-Andalus would have been rather a "hell" of ethnic and religious violence and brutal discrimination against religious minorities (Christians and Jews) (Fernández-Morera, 2016; Sánchez Saus, 2016; Conrad, 2020). Alleged scholarly concealing of the darkest features of Islam or Islamic history by the left is frequently branded by French conservative sectors as "islamo-gauchisme", a notion that recently sparked wide political, social, and academic controversy (Louati, 2021).

4. The Reconquista strikes back

The 22 years gone since the publication of Al-Andalus contra España prove to what extent the strategy claiming the end of Spanish nationalist historical myths and the alleged "myth of al-Andalus" is merely the necessary excuse to reinforce the most rancid essentialist narrative about medieval Iberia. Not only Fanjul himself ended up embracing the idea of Spain as a nation "shaped against Islam", but, far from vanishing, conservative myths gained much traction over the last few years, including the francoist rhetoric of the Reconquista as a sectarian device to tell apart the good Spaniards from the bad ones (Sánchez Saus, 2019).

The revival of the Reconquista narrative in current Spain runs parallel with the consolidation of an independent political option on the far right. Over the last few years, this sector carried out an all-out offensive based on the Reconquista, first using it as political rallying cry and of late trying to consolidate that narrative in public institutions in order to turn it into the official version of the medieval past (Ballester Rodríguez, 2021; Rodríguez-Temiño and Almansa-Sánchez, 2021). In this regard, bills have been filed at all different administrative levels (local, regional and national) aimed at making public commemorations coincide with the dates of medieval Christian conquests. To this effect, a proposal recently filed at the national parliament by the far right seeks turning January 2 into a national holiday in commemoration of the 1492 Taking of Granada, which marks the end of the Reconquista.

As a side-line effect, the conservative offensive reignited an old academic debate about the notion of Reconquista that goes back to 1978, with the publication of the path-breaking work by A. Barbero (1931-1990) and M. Vigil (1930-1987), the earliest scholarly critical approach to that concept. At present, three different positions coexist in Spain. Although it could hardly be considered mainstream, the traditional approach shows no sign of fading, perhaps not so much for having convinced active followers but for the reluctant attitude of a large passive sector that rather stay out of the fray when it comes to debates that involve political and ideological issues and clashing with colleagues. The second corresponds to scholars who reject Spanish nationalism but, at the same time, claim the Reconquista remains a useful and effective scholarly notion if stripped away from all its ideological burden. For these authors, however, Reconquista does not define the whole medieval Iberia, nor a historical process lasting eight centuries, but simply an ideology of territorial recovery that developed unevenly and irregularly in the different Iberian Christian medieval kingdoms (García Fitz, 2019; De Ayala, 2017; De Ayala, 2022). For the third, more critical sector, this second group of scholars are making heavy weather of replacing the notion of Reconquista when, in fact, there are valid alternatives ("feudal conquest" or just simply "Christian", "Castillian", "Portuguese", "Catalan" or "Aragonese" conquest). On the other hand, and much to the chagrin of those promoting an unladen version of the Reconquista, the notion has been actually reloaded in recent years, becoming a global ideological reference for far right and white supremacist groups worldwide, as shown, for instance, in the terrorist attacks of Norway (2011) and New Zealand (2019) (García-Sanjuán, 2019a; García-Sanjuán, 2022b). For this and other reasons, this sector rejects the notion altogether. While

reluctance to rely on the notion of Reconquista seems gaining scholarly traction of late, under the present circumstances it looks reasonable to expect the debate to rumble on.

5. The Christian roots of Europe

As pointed out above, Europe represents one of the global frameworks in which essentialist narratives about medieval Iberia have developed. As an essentialist rhetoric putting forward the idea of the Spanish nation's eternal Catholic identity, the Reconquista perfectly fits within the narrative claiming the Christian roots of Europe, a staple when it comes to understand how and why Spain belongs in the so-called "Western Civilization". This rhetoric became particularly influential after 1986, when Spain entered the European Economic Community, a crucial event that prompted a reconsideration of Spain's role in global history.

Not by chance, the narrative of the Christian roots of Europe is best represented by well-known National Catholic historians like L. Suárez Fernández (b. 1928), a member of the Opus Dei with a long track record of service to the Franco regime (Suárez, 1986), and the priest José Orlandis (1918-2010), likewise a committed follower of the same Catholic lobby who authored several works on the Visigothic period (Orlandis, 2004).

In line with the current political agenda of the far right in different European countries, especially Poland, Hungary and Italy (Melguizo, 2020), the narrative of the Christian origins of Europe is at present promoted in Spain by Catholic sectors. That is specially the case of Fundación Universitaria San Pablo CEU, a private University owned by another influential Catholic lobby (Asociación Católica de Propagandistas) aimed at evangelizing public life. The scholarly activities of CEU members basically consist of Catholic propaganda, as revealed, for instance, in the 2008 summer course held in Covadonga in which Cardinal Cañizares, together with other high-ranking members of the Spanish Catholic Church, took part. Faced with an alleged surrender of contemporary European societies to what they brand in terms of "progressive frenzy", the editors of the volume gathering the contributions to this seminar claim their goal is "to help protecting Europe's identity", as well as the affirmation of its "Catholic character", a brazenly essentialist proposal seasoned with references to "Europe as the name given to Charles Martel's fighters who faced the Moorish invasion, Europe as the expression coined by Bede the Venerable to

name what was neither Asian nor Muslim" (López Atanes and Rodríguez de la Peña, 2009).

Vocal representatives of this narrative are likewise to be found beyond the most devout Catholic groups, thus revealing the wide reach of deeply ingrained National Catholic stereotypes across different scholarly sectors. Fanjul, for instance, claims that "Iberia is a European territory that has long proclaimed that identity, with overwhelming cultural and linguistic roots attached to the Neo-Latin world and a long-standing predominance of Christianity" (Fanjul, 2004, p. 22). Using a much more explicit language and in the framework of an academic conference on the origins of the Kingdom of Asturias, Latinist López Pereira bitterly complains about young people ignoring the Christian roots of Europe.

The Christian identity is likewise the underlying argument in works describing the 13th-century conquest of present-day Western Andalusia in terms of a comeback to the "European civilization", thereby outlining an exclusively white and Christian Europe from which Arab and Islamic components are apparently excluded. The academic origin of these works and the implicit nature of their essentialist rhetoric, which is not obvious at first glance, turns their toxic potential even more concerning with regard to general or non-specialized audiences.

6. Other essentialisms

Although the sharp rise of nationalism fuels the traditional hegemony of the Spanish nationalist narrative, Spanish essentialism could be hardly considered an exception in present-day Spain. Much on the contrary, it shares with other nationalisms the same interest in the medieval period as a turning point in the history of the nation. Such is, for instance, the case of Catalan nationalism, largely considered at present as the most dangerous threat for the unity of Spain, in which leftist groups embrace the epic narrative of the "Països Catalans" (Catalan countries) as a nation "shaped against Islam" and King James I as the "founding father" (Serra, 2016; Lillo, 2022).

Because the rhetoric of the Reconquista remains tainted with francoist overtones and represents the hallmark of Spanish essentialism, local nationalist tendencies avoid using it, although they still look at the medieval period as a crucial historial moment in the shaping of the nation. As pointed out above, that is the case of Catalan nationalism, and so is Valencian nationalism too, as revealed by the work of the local official chronicler of Valencia, fairly described by one of his followers as "a scholar that spreads enthusiasm about identity" (transmite entusiasmo identitario) (Baydal, 2018, p. 5).

The Valencian case points to one of the most salient features of essentialist historians, the role they play as collective identity guides, lecturing their fellow citizens on the correct identity they need to have. By assuming this role, historians completely subordinate historical knowledge to the politics of identity, drifting history apart from any form of rational wisdom. In spite of being strongly anti-academic, this feature appears likewise in different contexts, such as Andalusia, where the 13th-century conquest has become the origin of an essentialist narrative about the Andalusian identity: «It seems to me not only legitimate, but need to remember where we came from. That is our story. There is no other, no matter how much some insist on building a story that never existed» (González Jiménez, 2011, p. 105).

The narrative connecting the origins of Andalusia with 13th-century conquests arose early in the postfrancoist period, in a moment when local identities were gaining traction after a long period of silence under the dictatorship. At that time, significant scholarly sectors in Andalusia became concerned with the increasing influence of Andalusian nationalism, founded early in the 20th century by Blas Infante (1885-1936). A notary by training, Infante outlined an essentialist narrative at odds with Spanish nationalism and earmarked by a singular feature, unique among the different nationalist traditions in Spain, according to which the origin of the Andalusian people is to be found in al-Andalus. While Spanish nationalism has been traditionally conservative, Andalusian nationalists are progressive in their leanings, an orientation largely explained by the fate of Infante, killed in Seville by francoist forces in August 1936, upon the outbreak of the Civil War.

Their sharp conflicting nature notwithstanding, Spanish and Andalusian nationalism share some basic ingredients, thus revealing once more the underlying compatibility of apparently incompatible essentialisms. Ever since the late 1970s, after Franco's demise, Andalusian followers promoted a well-known fake narrative that first surfaced within Spanish essentialism (Acosta Sánchez, 1979). Fully convinced of the role of history as the most useful tool to reinforce national pride, seriously affected by pessimistic feelings in early 20th-century Spain, amateur historian I. Olagüe (1903-1974) aimed at rewriting Spanish history and claimed al-Andalus had little to do with the Arabs (Olagüe, 1974).

Rather than the outcome of an early 8th-century conquest led by Arab armies acting at the orders of the Umayyad caliphs of Damascus, Olagüe came up with a nativist approach in which al-Andalus is explained exclusively as the result of the local context. By calling into question the arrival of foreign Arab conquerors he could rethink the whole history of al-Andalus from a different perspective. Taking the Mosque of Córdoba as a case in point, Olagüe claimed that such an extraordinary building could hardly be explained as the work

of backward Arab tribes, being rather just another brilliant outcome of the eternal Spanish genius.

As pointed out by different authors, Olagüe's approach can not be correctly understood without taking into account his strong personal commitment to fascism over the 1920s and 1930s (Fierro, 2009; García-Sanjuán, 2018b; García-Sanjuán, 2019b). Actually, the tendency to de-arabizing al-Andalus is narrowly associated to the substitution of "Arab Spain" by "Muslim Spain" within late 19th-century Arabic studies, a tendency that is not unrelated to anti-Semitism, as recently pointed out by J. P. Domínguez (2021). In the specific case of Olagüe's nativism, the paradox lies in the fact that Infante's followers ended up feeding on a narrative deeply reliant on the ideology of those who killed the founder of Andalusian nationalism.

Unlike the Spanish or Catalan, Andalusian nationalism suffers from a extremely weak political representation, to the point that it currently lacks any presence in official institutions. The Andalusian narrative, however, gained some traction in recent years, the Cordoba publishing house Almuzara standing as its most focal point, more frequently than not thanks to bibliographical by-products produced by unskilled and amateur historians (Sanmartín, 2006; Ruiz Mata, 2018). The recent book by Ch. Hirschkind (2020), harshly slagged off in several scholarly reviews (Fierro, 2021; Rodríguez-Mediano, 2021; García-Sanjuán, 2021), not only proves the influence of essentialist narratives among non-specialized scholarly sectors, but likewise reveals its huge potential in order to appeal international audiences..

7. Final remarks

Ever since the 19th century and within a context largely featured by the globalization of capitalism and the colonial endeavour, the medieval period played a key role in defining essentialist narratives about the past. Essentialism has been likewise a staple of the narratives about the Iberian medieval period crafted within the different national traditions that grew up in contemporary Spain across the last two centuries, whether Spanish, Catalan or Andalusian nationalism.

Essentialist narratives about medieval Iberia are defined by their nationalist as much as for their colonialist features. To a large degree, both Reconquista and Muslim Spain go hand in hand in much of what has been written on this topic across the 19th and most of the 20th century. The way they are portrayed varies, however, according to different scholarly traditions (Medieval/Arabic studies) and the different nationalist contexts in which they operate.

The post-1989 new wave of globalization brought about an increasing essentialist rhetoric at all levels, mainly in politics and in the media, but likewise in academic sectors. Just like in the 19th century and over the Francoist period, Spanish nationalism remains largely influential among the different essentialist narratives about medieval Iberia, a position recently boosted by the consolidation of the far right as an independent political option with significant institutional representation.

The rise of essentialist narratives in an increasingly globalized, multicultural and multiethnic world stand as a rerious challenge scholars have to face in the years to come, not only in the field of public debate, but in teaching and research as well.

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9. Curriculum vitae

Alejandro García-Sanjuán is currently Professor of Medieval History at the University of Huelva (Spain). His main field of research is Medieval Iberia, with a special focus on al-Andalus. His featured publications include *Till God Inherits the Earth. Islamic Pious Endowments in al-Andalus (9th-15th century)* (Brill, 2007), and *La conquista islámica de la península ibérica y la tergiversación del pasado: del catastrofismo al negacionismo* (Marcial Pons, 2019, 2nd ed.), Over the last few years he has worked extensively on the reception of Islamic Iberia in modern Spanish culture and scholarship and the influence of nationalism in shaping popular myths and prejudices about the past, as mirrored in notions such as *Reconquista* and "Muslim Spain".

Periodico semestrale pubblicato dal CNR
Iscrizione nel Registro della Stampa del Tribunale di Roma n° 183 del 14/12/2017