

## NOTA BIBLIOGRÁFICA

### **The Tales of Feeling: Looking for Emotions in Andalusia**

#### Los cuentos del sentir: buscando emociones en Andalucía

Maribel Fierro

Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del Mediterráneo y Oriente Próximo, CSIC  
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4736-7224>

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Charles Hirschkind, *The Feeling of History: Islam, Romanticism, and Andalusia*, is an odd book to review from an academic point of view, as it is really more of an ideological manifesto for what the author calls “Andalucismo” than an informed and balanced work of scholarship.<sup>1</sup> I will first deal with the author’s project and I will end dealing with certain assertions by the author that are outright falsehoods.

The author (hereinafter CH) defines “Andalucismo” as “a modern tradition of critical reflection on the norms of European politics and culture based on a cultivated appreciation for the histories and legacies of southern Iberia’s Muslim and Jewish societies” (p. 3). The main points of which CH seeks to convince his readers are, first, that the problems Muslims face in Europe can to a large extent be solved by recourse to this “Andalucismo” and to what the people he associates with it think and do, and, secondly, that the movement’s detractors are not only wrong, but are in fact complicit in hindering the fulfilment of its mission (p. 11).

In Spain, including Andalucía (the region CH refers to as Andalusia), the word “Andalucismo” is used to refer to a specific political trend, that of the Partido Andalucista, active between 1979-2015, that was inspired by the thought of Blas Infante (1885-1936), a local nationalistic thinker who was executed by the Spanish nationalists at the beginning of the Civil War (1936-1939). CH’s definition of “Andalucismo” is confusing as he does not equate it with its normal use, and thus in principle it is more open but also imprecise. There have always been scholars and others who have tried to address the general concerns he mentions, as anybody familiar with the abundant literature on the long history of the attempts at integrating al-Andalus into the history of Spain and Europe knows.<sup>2</sup> But most of those who have carried out a critical reflection of the kind described by CH will not call themselves “Andalucistas”, while some of them may refer to themselves as “Andalusistas”, that is, involved in a critical reflection related to al-An-

<sup>1</sup> Hirschkind, *The Feeling of History*. As it will become clear in what follows, CH’s “Andalucismo” is mostly a construction of his own that sometimes coincides with what is normally considered to be Andalucismo as explained below.

<sup>2</sup> See for example García-Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano, *Un Oriente español* (English translation *The Orient in Spain*); Marín (ed.), *Al-Andalus/España*; Marín, *Testigos coloniales*; Fernando Bravo López, “Moorish Blood”, and the literature he quotes.

dalus—the name given by the Muslim conquerors to the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. Moreover, it is unclear whether some of those whom CH casts as “Andalucistas” would themselves identify as such: for example, Javier in Chapter 3 is a convert to Islam and a musician who has a critical approach (and therefore doubts) about the character of the music he performs, and at no point claims to be an “Andalucista”.

The documentary *Las llaves de la memoria*—which was recently translated for Arabic-speaking audiences—is a sort of public “manifesto” of the “Andalucismo” that CH has in mind, and I recommend it to those who want to get the gist of it more quickly than by reading CH’s book. The participants wax poetic about how the history of Andalucía has been “lobotomized,” “hidden,” “silenced.” One of them—known for his oratorical panache—goes into an explanation of the supposed Arabic origins of such terms as *flamenco* in a display of surreal etymology that reveals the sort of engagement with history that is at stake (the interested reader can watch this part with English subtitles here: <http://legadonazari.blogspot.com/2019/04/documental-las-llaves-de-la-memoria.html>).<sup>3</sup>

A recurrent motif in CH’s defence of “Andalucismo” is the existence of a reality that the powers that be have deliberately hidden and suppressed from the present-day inhabitants of Andalucía, the region of Spain where Muslim political control lasted the longest, and to which, therefore, the name “al-Andalus” is most often associated. In this view, such reality has long been concealed not only from the people of Andalucía, but from Spaniards more generally, from Europeans and, indeed, from all humankind. In CH’s own words: “medieval Muslim Iberia did not disappear from history with the seizure of Granada in 1492 by Christian armies, as our history books have it. Rather, *forced into hiding* [emphases are mine] it continued on as an invisible warp within the fabric of Spanish society” (p. 1).

Of course, CH knows that the Islamic past is almost everywhere evident in the Iberian Peninsula and always has been. The travellers and tourists, from inside and outside Spain, who visit Cordoba, Granada, Seville and so many other

places, encounter this “medieval Muslim Iberia” in the palm trees of Elche, as well as in buildings, objects, names and archaeological sites in places as far away from Andalucía as Pamplona where an eighth-century cemetery with Muslim graves has recently been excavated with extensive coverage in the media. Books are also witnesses to this non-disappearance: the literature on al-Andalus—by scholars, novelists, political activists of different stripes, journalists, in internet sites, etc.—is massive and continues to grow each year. No history book about Spain’s Medieval past can possibly ignore al-Andalus outright, as one of the most pervasive Spanish national myths, that of the Reconquista, could not exist without it. Another matter is how the authors of those books put the history of al-Andalus to work. The way historians inspired by Franco’s National-Catholic ideology treat the subject is deeply biased (also deeply emotional, something that CH certainly would appreciate) and their approach deserves criticism. But even in books whose authors stick to the most conservative understanding of Spanish national history, al-Andalus—perhaps even referred to as Muslim Spain; nationalistic writing is often paradoxical—is present and some room is inevitably given to its “legacy”, whatever this is considered to be. In other words, even when the full breadth of this legacy is denied, it is talked about. Terms like *alcázar*, *alcántara*, *alcolea*; place names like Benimamet, Alcira, Albacete; expressions such as *ojalá*, cannot but keep al-Andalus very much present. Moreover, al-Andalus is a recurrent theme in the Spanish media, be it the Cordoban Mosque and the appropriation of the ownership of its building by the Church or the Muslim attempts to pray there; the discovery of archaeological remains at construction sites; politicians’ rhetoric exalting the Reconquista; villagers’ initiatives in promoting “Juegos moriscos”, etc.

So, what might it mean to say that al-Andalus went “into hiding”, as CH would have it? Is he referring to the terrible experience of those Muslims who were forced to convert and then expelled? This, already a widely studied topic, certainly deserves to be dealt with once and again. Is CH pleading for better ways in which al-Andalus can be woven into the narrative of Spanish and European history? This—again a widely studied topic—is a matter of concern for many, including some of those CH presents as opponents of “Andalucismo”. Is he referring to

<sup>3</sup> The degree of distortion displayed in such approach to historical realities and events is well described in <https://www.expo flamenco.com/firmas/critica-libro-antonio-manuel-flamenco-arqueologia-de-lo-jondo-pseudoflamencologia-en-el-siglo-xxi-farsa-de-lo-flamenco>.

the attempt of certain institutions to manipulate the historical record? This again is certainly important: for example, the historians specialists on the history of al-Andalus, Eduardo Manzano and Alejandro García Sanjuán, have played a prominent role in denouncing the way in which the Catholic Church—helped by a decision taken by the conservative government led by José María Aznar (1996-2004)—is presently dealing with the Mosque of Cordoba.<sup>4</sup> A reader of CH's book ignorant of this would probably be surprised by their protagonism in such issue, a protagonism that has no parallel among CH's "Andalucistas". In fact, both historians are harshly criticised by CH who—uninterested in their work as it is not "emotional"—finds them to fall short of his "Andalucismo".

In fact, what CH is taking up is a sort of conspiracy theory espoused by a few individuals whose agenda he has adopted as his own, putting them together with others under the label of "Andalucistas," although, as mentioned earlier, it is unclear if some of those would actually identify with this label. My own definition of what CH considers to be "Andalucismo" is more restrictive: it is a specific way of relating to the history of al-Andalus and Spain that has at its core the conviction that the power structure has deliberately repressed some essential element—never actually defined in clear terms—that needs to be uncovered in order to make for a better, healthier, and truer world. It is this uncovering that legitimizes the existence of CH's "Andalucismo": those who subscribe to it need to perform "historical therapeutics" because they have themselves already diagnosed the existence of a buried past.

CH considers his "Andalucistas" approach to indicate a special "sensitivity" to which he obviously feels attracted, convinced as he is that it enables us to open up "the historical borders of al-Andalus onto our present and in so doing so [sic] proffer a different historical geography from which to think about contemporary Spain and Europe and their relation to Islam and the Middle East" (p. 5). He does not seem to be bothered by the fact that such sensitivity does not differ from that found in similar approaches that are put to work for other and sometimes opposite ends: for example, those opening up

the historical borders of the Vikings or the Crusaders onto our present. Regarding the nationalistic background of "Andalucismo", CH states his conviction that its value lies elsewhere: it does not "anchor a pre-given identity so much as unsettle the grounds on which existing identity formations rest." Some of the "Andalucistas" CH cherishes have, however, proposed interpretations of the alleged "buried past" that have specific implications: thus, the fascist Ignacio Olagüe—by proposing that there was no Arab conquest—got rid of the "Semitic" element in Spanish history that he found troubling and transformed the achievements of al-Andalus into yet another example of those of an eternal "Spanish" people. In any case, unsettling "the grounds on which existing identity formations rest" is the starting point of any emerging nationalistic vision, not the end of its aspirations. The failure of political Andalucismo—the Partido Andalucista disappeared from the electoral scene in 2008 and was dissolved in 2015—explains why its ideology has found but a muted echo in school textbooks and nurtured just a small body of propagandists. Not that CH is always inclined to look fondly upon the unsettling of existing identities: in an article he wrote dealing with the case of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, accused of apostasy in 1993 and condemned for his thought, Hirschkind was quite critical of the Egyptian thinker's attempt at unsettling received modes of thinking about the Qur'an.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of "Andalucismo" as defined by him, CH finds little to fault. His book is intended as a criticism of all those who have criticised "Andalucismo" per se or via the specific work of some of its champions such as Ignacio Olagüe and Emilio González Ferrín. He proceeds as follows:

- representatives of "Andalucismo" are discussed and certain aspects of their biographies (for example, connections with Spanish colonialism, with fascism or just with bad scholarship, although this is never acknowledged as such, only as "unconventional") are justified, dismissed or counter-balanced with the positive aspect of their mission of "uncovering" and "unsettling". Moreover, the stories his favourite "Andalucistas" tell about themselves are taken at face value, without subjecting their claims to critical inquiry;

<sup>4</sup> [https://elpais.com/elpais/2015/02/05/opinion/1423137778\\_840752.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2015/02/05/opinion/1423137778_840752.html) and <https://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20180915/451813441496/mezquita-cordoba-iglesia-niega-informe.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Hirschkind, "Heresy or Hermeneutics".

• critics of “Andalucismo” or better, of the work of specific “Andalucistas” are then dealt with and their views are discussed, misrepresented or only partially quoted in order to pave the way for dismissing them as complicit in the alleged erasure of the past. In their case, and contrary to CH’s general stance with those he labels as “Andalucistas”, everything they say is suspect.

As I count myself among the critics of some of the “Andalucistas” mentioned by CH, I read the book out of a desire to understand why 200 pages needed to be written in its defence, and in hopes that I might actually learn something from it. But CH has failed to convince me that the “Andalucismo” he defends—with its largely unfounded historical claims (in which regard it does not differ from other Spanish or European nationalist movements), and for all its poetic forays into a “hidden” reality—represents a valid way to “unsettle” prevalent narratives about the history and identity of Europe, despite the fact that this is an endeavour I am very much interested in and that I take quite seriously as a scholar. Neither has it convinced me that some of those he labels as “Andalucistas” are the ones getting this necessary work done, or that all of their “unsettling” might be of any help to the actual Muslims living in Europe today. On the contrary, in my experience their approach tends to create only more hostility and, what is more damaging, derision.

For CH, his “Andalucistas” are the ones best equipped to carry out this noble task, mostly because of their stance’s emotional appeal. Emotions loom large in CH’s appraisal of “Andalucismo”. Feelings are more attractive to deal with than scholarship, and can be more effectively used to rally wills and followers. But emotions linked to identity discourses and the past are also highly flammable materials, as our own times never tire of reminding us. It could be concluded based on CH’s passionate defence of “Andalucismo” that the ends justify the means: the emotions that “Andalucismo” stirs up, and the actions it seeks to encourage, are good in and of themselves because they (apparently) go against the existing European political order. This is the feature of “Andalucismo” that redeems it in the eyes of CH, making it different in kind from other similar nationalistic endeavours. But when emotions reign supreme, anything goes. Societies in which emotions regarding a disputed past are used to rally people to a

cause are more likely than not to fail at offering safeguards for their citizens, especially those that constitute a minority. Muslims are not the only group in Europe who have to struggle for their legitimate place in the societies in which they live, and the ways they can undertake this fight are many. CH’s “Andalucismo” is not the most appropriate way because, as mentioned, it can often be easily derided and because it is not, in fact, interested in Islam or Islamic culture. The “Andalucistas” that want to stir emotions are not really curious about al-Andalus as an Islamic society: for example, they largely ignore Andalusi authors who have been hugely influential among Islamic readerships, such as Abū ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Barr, Abū l-Walīd al-Bāḡī or Ibn Fīrruh al-Šāṭibi.<sup>6</sup> They are only attuned to that which can be most easily “sold” to modern Western audiences and thus they invent an al-Andalus of their own. Also, CH has nothing to say about those who in Navarra, Cataluña, Murcia or Castilla-La Mancha inside Spain engage in a cultivated appreciation for the histories and legacies of Iberia’s Islamic past, a past that is also present in their own territories. And what about those who engage in the same appreciation in Japan and the Czech Republic among many other places, are all these also “Andalucistas” or are they just engaging in a cultivated appreciation of al-Andalus that knows no frontiers? Al-Andalus should not be confused with modern Andalucía, this being the reason that a difference is made by informed scholars between “andaluz” and “andalusí”. “Andalucismo” is not there to reveal anything “hidden” about Andalusi reality, but rather to carry out a highly selective reading of the past with a mind to the present (although again, they are by no means the only ones who view the past through such a lens). The “Andalucismo” that CH falls for is not really grounded in any “cultivated appreciation for the histories and legacies” of al-Andalus, hence his exclusive focus on emotions, gestures and music.

For CH, any reluctance to engage with this facile emotional discourse about al-Andalus and its legacy translates into a denial of such legacy and alleged “debt” (p. 90). But this is the way in which CH builds the necessary legitimacy for his support of what he calls “Andalucismo”, not the reality on the ground. As he specifi-

<sup>6</sup> The “Andalucistas” of Olagüe’s school (see below) are not in fact interested in Islam—only in an Islam of their own invention—and only marginally in the Imazighen (Berbers).

cally mentions my name on this topic, I might point out that I am presently an advisor for a documentary produced by the Spanish History Channel on the legacy of al-Andalus, and this in spite of the fact that legacy is not a word of my liking as it is not that of “debt”—be it with reference to al-Andalus, Rome or Greece. If we want to rewrite the history of Spain and Europe, the terms we use should be subject to discussion and possibly changed. *The European Qur’an* (EuQu) project—financed by the EU and directed, among others, by Mercedes García-Arenal from the CSIC in Madrid—aims at studying the ways in which the Islamic Holy Book is embedded in the intellectual, religious and cultural history of Medieval and Early Modern Europe (of course, she will never refer to herself as an “Andalucista” for doing so). The project analyses how the Qur’an has been translated, interpreted, adapted and used by Christians, European Jews, freethinkers, atheists and European Muslims in order to understand how the Holy Book has influenced both culture and religion in Europe (<https://euqu.eu/>). This important scholarly project that, along with other European projects, is actively engaged in a massive effort to transfer its discoveries to society at large, has nothing in common with some of CH’s “Andalucistas” who often represent the other side of the coin to that which they allegedly seek to combat. Serious things should be taken seriously. If certain approaches to the legacy of the Classical world are routinely criticised as biased and distorted, why should similar approaches to the legacy of al-Andalus be seen as acceptable? Just to compensate? Distortion is distortion, be it related to Ancient Greece or to al-Andalus.

Let’s be clear. “Andalucismo” has the same right to produce myths as any other nationalistic trend does in open, democratic societies like Spain. History is not the only way to approach the past, and al-Andalus can be re-created, invented and enjoyed through poetry, music, novels and every other resource of human imaginative powers. “Andalucistas” are not a homogenous group: unlike others who exploit their academic positions to lend their work a patina of scholarship, José Miguel Puerta Vilchez is a rigorous and excellent scholar.<sup>7</sup> Scholars can ap-

proach the study of “Andalucismo” from different angles according to their discipline, as in the case of anthropologist José Antonio González Alcantud in his books on cultural ideas about al-Andalus—books seldom quoted by CH who is also an anthropologist and this in spite of the fact that they are closely related to his. For historians, the discourse that those CH claims to be “Andalucistas” generate about al-Andalus is an object of study in its own right, and when what they find in it is false historical knowledge, then it is their obligation to call it out as false, not extol it as unconventional—in the same way that, to give a contemporary example, Trump’s denial of Biden’s victory is baseless, not bold. The fact that other discourses about Islam that today enjoy a foothold in Spanish and European societies have also produced false knowledge does not make it acceptable to do the same in reverse. Beliefs, of course, can be unconventional, but then we are in the realm of belief, not history. While historical knowledge is not necessarily divorced from emotion, emotions that arise directly from beliefs are of a different nature. I very much doubt that this is the best path to create more inclusive societies: the end result will likely be a clash of emotional outbursts. The followers of “Andalucismo” as described by CH—like followers of other nationalistic trends—run the risk of getting lost in a world of their own creation that is by itself exclusionary, even if it originally arises from a desire to compensate for others’ acts of exclusion.

In my experience, scholars are more willing to accept -isms such as “Andalucismo” the more remote they are from the societies in which they live. Local, endogenous similar “-isms”, when dealt with by inside scholars, seem less likely to garner the indulgence and sympathy that CH bestows upon his distant object of study, perhaps because in such cases they have a better grasp of historical knowledge and find it harder to dismiss it. With this caveat in mind, those interested in reading in English about how an American anthropologist has found the -ism that will save Spain and Europe from their ignorance and that will make life easier for Muslim immigrants will surely find CH’s book satisfactory.

Now let’s turn to the outright falsehoods I mentioned at the outset of this review. On p. 175

<sup>7</sup> In the Acknowledgments to his book *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought*, Puerta Vilchez thanks me for having been “instrumental in persuading Brill to publish the translation” of the previous Spanish version. I doubt Puerta Vilchez would define himself as “Andalucista”, but if he does I have no

problem with those who are scholars, I have problems with those who claim to be scholars while their writings indicate the contrary.

the author states: “Numerous authors have insinuated that despite González Ferrín’s long-standing support for leftist causes, he is a Falangist in disguise. Much of the campaign against him (though not all, by any means) has been waged by the Department of Jewish and Islamic Studies at CSIC in Madrid”.

Let’s start with the second part. In a department which today lists more than twenty members, only two (Maribel Fierro and Fernando Rodríguez Mediano)<sup>8</sup> have ever written about González Ferrín (hereinafter GF). To state that such a campaign exists without offering any evidence or sources is just another indication of how far CH has gone in abandoning his scholarly responsibility to verify information. As for myself, I have always found GF’s writings on al-Andalus to be highly problematic from a scholarly point of view, and I have made public my view of his claims in academic forums where he has always had the opportunity to respond.<sup>9</sup> Together with Alejandro García Sanjuán we invited GF to the seminar we organized on *Hispania, al-Andalus, España y Portugal: identidad y nacionalismo en la historia peninsular*, which took place at Casa Árabe (Madrid) on 14-15 November 2016,<sup>10</sup> where he was given the same time allotted to the rest of the participants to present his views. We subsequently published his contribution in the book *Hispania, Al-Andalus y España: Identidad y nacionalismo en la historia peninsular* (ed. M. Fierro and A. García Sanjuán), as our aim was to offer readers a panorama of the different views that circulate on al-Andalus, including those with which we disagree.

As regards the first part, CH does not name a single one of such alleged “numerous authors”. Nobody to my knowledge among the scholars who reacted to GF’s contention (following the work of avowed fascist Ignacio Olagüe) that an Islamic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula never took place, has made any claims about his personal political affiliation. In my review,

<sup>8</sup> Rodríguez Mediano, “Culture, Identity and Civilisation”: on p. 56, he specifically differentiates between the fascist Ignacio Olagüe and GF.

<sup>9</sup> A critical approach to GF’s scholarship can also be found in the scholarly reactions to his writings on issues other than al-Andalus, for example, the Qur’an: <https://twitter.com/PhDniX/status/1335676197498478593>. It is noteworthy that in both cases the problem is the same: the standards of GF’s scholarship.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.casaarabe.es/eventos-arabes/show/al-andalus-identidad-y-nacionalismo-en-la-historia-peninsular>.

*Al-Andalus, convivencia e islam: mucho ruido y pocas nueces* (Revista de Libros, October 2018), I say regarding this claim: “Nadie duda que González Ferrín se inspirase en el libro de Olagüe, y ello no implica que colgase con sus ideas políticas: como él mismo afirma, las ideas viajan a menudo por caminos insospechados” (Nobody doubts that GF was inspired by Olagüe’s book, but this does not imply that he shares his political ideas: as he himself states, ideas often travel along unsuspected paths). I have never heard anyone claim that GF is a Falangist except from GF himself, which seems to indicate that he is the one circulating it in order to be able to then deny it. In this as in other unproven assertions, CH seems to have taken at face value everything he has heard from GF himself without subjecting it to any critical reflection. Again, in the defence of his “Andalucismo”, CH has not made any effort to check the sources he favours.

Moreover, CH did not ask permission from the alleged critics of “Andalucismo” to quote his conversations with them, and did not inform them that he was going to use them as “informants” for his book. In my case—as in the case of others with whom I have consulted—I do not feel I have been at all represented in what he has written: his alleged quotations cannot be trusted. To write a book claiming without evidence that the plight of immigrants of Muslim background can be eased by something called “Andalucismo” and to signal historians doing their job as its opponents is exposing them to become targets in the highly charged American academic milieu and such a project can only be described as irresponsible.

When one believes that some purported reality has been hidden from view and must be uncovered at all costs, anything goes—again, to give a contemporary example, as in Trump’s attempts to claim massive electoral fraud. In short, CH’s book fails as a scholarly inquiry and should be added to the file of writings that have more to do with what I would call “the politics of al-Andalus in the USA” than with any serious, rigorous approach to the study of how al-Andalus affects our present and is put to use in it.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For another example of such politics from an opposite perspective see Fernández-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, and my review in *Al-Qanṭara*, 39, 1 (2018), pp. 248-253, [on line] disponible en: <<http://al-qantara.revistas.csic.es/index.php/al-qantara/article/view/400>>.

## Reviewed book

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