

The Once and Future Al-Andalus

by Hugh Fitzgerald



“We will recover al-Andalus, Allah willing. Oh dear Andalus! You thought we forgot about you. I swear by Allah we have never forgotten you. No Muslim can forget Córdoba, Toledo or Xàtiva. There are many faithful and sincere Muslims who swear they will return to al-Andalus.” – Islamic State video, January 31, 2016

Muslims are keenly aware that they once controlled most of the Iberian Peninsula, and that it took the Christians 700 years of war, the Reconquista, to recover, kingdom by kingdom, all of that territory. The final victory over the Muslims took place in 1492, when the Kingdom of Granada was won by the Christians. There are now many millions of Muslims all over Europe, in France, Great Britain, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia, always much in the news because of the disruptions that they cause, as they challenge the laws and customs of the Infidels, vacuum up every conceivable welfare-state benefit, repay their benefactors with skyrocketing rates of criminality, and commit acts of

terrorism as a useful adjunct to the relentless demographic conquest and stealth jihad inflicted on their unhappy hosts. And Spain, though it does not as yet have as large a Muslim presence as that found elsewhere in Europe, remains quite special in Muslim hearts. For on the To-Do list of Muslims, the lands that were once part of Dar al-Islam are those that should be the first to be recovered for Muslim rule. As it says in the Qur'an 2:191, *"Expel them from wherever they have expelled you."* And for several years, some Muslims in Spain have been conducting a campaign on social media in support of the Islamic State, while the Islamic State, for its part, has continually called for the "return" of Spain to Muslim rule, as in a video it produced in Spanish in which an IS spokesman says: "I say to the entire world as a warning: We are living under the Islamic flag, the Islamic caliphate. We will die for it until we liberate those occupied lands, from Jakarta to Andalusia. And I declare: **Spain is the land of our forefathers and we are going to take it back with the power of Allah.**"

In 2014 Spain and Portugal offered a "right of return," that is, a granting of citizenship, to the descendants of Sephardic Jews who had been expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. The two countries were attempting to offer both sorrowful recognition of, and a kind of recompense for, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497. At once Muslim groups demanded that descendants of those Muslims (Moors) expelled from Spain be granted Spanish citizenship. Spanish and Portuguese authorities rejected this demand which, had it been accepted, would no doubt have led to a flooding of Arabs into Spain and Portugal, by the millions, bringing Spain and Portugal much closer to becoming part of Dar al-Islam yet again. The Portuguese lawmaker who drafted the Portuguese law of return firmly replied that **"Persecution of Jews was just that, while what happened with the Arabs was part of a conflict [the Reconquista]."** Similar statements came from the Spanish, who reminded Muslims that it was they who had settled in and colonized Spain, and they were a military foe who,

finally defeated only after 700 years of the Reconquista, were in a far different position than the inoffensive Jews who had lived in Iberia for centuries before Christianity arrived, but had never tried to conquer or colonize it.

This distinction has infuriated the Muslim Arabs of today. They claim that the expulsion of the Muslims was identical to that of the Jews, refusing to recognize the fact that the Jews were never a colonial power, unlike the Muslim Arabs, and that they never posed a military threat to the Christians of Spain and Portugal, again unlike the Muslims. In fact, there was not one but several expulsions of the Muslims, or Moors. The Mudejars were those Muslims who remained in Spain after the Reconquista and who, in the early 16th century, were forbidden the outward practice of Islam. Eventually those among them who converted to Catholicism, or seemed to, were called by another name – Moriscos – and were regarded with suspicion by the Spanish, who did not always trust the sincerity of their conversions, and worried about possible plots by the Moriscos to take Spain back from the Christians. To prevent any such reversal, between 1609 and 1614, in a series of expulsions, the Moriscos were forced out of Spain, with decrees covering the various regions being passed at different dates, and with varying degrees of success. Most of them went to Morocco.

It is on this basis that Muslim Arabs are now demanding their own “right of return” to Spain and Portugal. The flavor of their fury can be tasted in an essay published in the Morocco-based Spanish-language newspaper *Correo Diplomático* by the Morisco-Moroccan journalist Ahmed Bensalh, who wrote that the “decision to grant Spanish citizenship to the grandchildren of the Hebrews in Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, while ignoring the Moriscos, the grandsons of the Muslims, is without doubt, flagrant segregation and unquestionable discrimination, as both communities suffered equally in Spain at that time. The decision could also be considered by the international community to be an historic act of absolute

immorality and injustice...This decision is absolutely disgraceful and dishonorable."

An act of "absolute immorality and injustice"? It was the Muslim Arabs who seized Spain from the Spanish, not the Jews. It was the Muslim Arabs who occupied the Iberian peninsula, and who fought the indigenous Christians tooth and nail to keep them defeated and down. What must the treatment of the Christians in Spain have been like to keep them fighting for 700 years? Certainly there was not that imaginary **convivencia** in which Karen Armstrong and Maria de Menocal so devoutly believe. Ahmed Bensalh then made a threat to Spain of the or-else variety: "Is Spain aware of what might be assumed when it makes peace with some and not with others? Is Spain aware of what this decision could cost? Has Spain considered that it could jeopardize the massive investments that Muslims have made on its territory? Does Spain have alternatives to the foreign investment from Muslims if they ever decide to move that capital to other destinations due to the discrimination against Muslim?"

Fortunately, neither the threat nor the preposterous claim by the descendants of the Muslim invaders of Spain that they have a moral right to receive Spanish citizenship, has changed Spanish minds. Because if they were to obtain such citizenship, Muslims would indeed stream into Spain.

Al-Andalus remains on Muslim minds and on that To-Do List. Arab tourists flock to southern Spain, to see what they regard as the once-and-future Al-Andalus. At the Alhambra in Grenada, they can take triumphalist satisfaction in the mosque that was built nearby, on the highest ridge in the city, the first mosque to be built in Grenada in 500 years. And with its 45-foot minarets towering over a nunnery next door, the Spanish nuns complain of the call-to-prayer that wakes them too early, and keeps them up too late, and that disrupts the rest of their day, but it is the Muslims who have prevailed.

The opening of this mosque was the object of deep interest among Muslim Arabs, who took it as a sign of the rebirth of Islam in Al-Andalus. Al-Jazeera even broadcast the opening of the mosque to all of Arabdom, as if celebrating the establishment of an Islamic beachhead – which, in a way, it was. The Spanish government had thought, like so many other European governments, to win Arab goodwill. It thus allowed, over the objections of many Spaniards, the building of this mosque, inadvertently colluding in the physical declaration of the Muslim claim to Grenada – and never mind about the complaints of the nuns next door. But instead of winning Arab gratitude, the Spanish government simply whetted Arab appetites for more. Claims to Al-Andalus have multiplied. Osama bin Laden himself referred frequently to Al-Andalus, and the need to again make it Muslim. And so too did members of ISIS, beginning in 2014 and repeated most recently this January, when the Islamic State issued a threat that it would **“retake the land [of Spain] from the invaders.”** For Muslims, the Spanish are the invaders, and they the dispossessed but rightful possessors, who deserve to, and will, recover Al-Andalus. The Spanish don’t need reminding that while they have so far suffered only one major terrorist attack, the simultaneous bombing of four train cars as they travelled between Alcala de Henares and the Atocha Subway Station back in 2004, that attack killed 191 people and remains the deadliest single terror attack in Europe.

While at the moment ISIS’s dreams of glory seem to have been shattered in the its slow-motion defeat in Mosul and the certain surrender in coming months of ISIS’s last redoubt, in Raqqa, Muslims – not “extremists” but ordinary Muslims – still yearn for Al-Andalus. And one of the ways they can get to Al-Andalus is through two towns in North Africa, on the Moroccan littoral, that belong to Spain. Desperate Africans and Arabs try to get to those towns, Ceuta and Melilla, for once they set foot there, they have made it not just to Spain, but [to the European Union](#), and cannot, by the foolish commitments

European states have made in regard to “refugees,” be turned back.

There is the Guardia Civil, the barbed wire that caps the fences, even moats. But still the migrants manage to come, by the thousands, sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on everything from the weather, to the fickle behavior of the Moroccan government. The king of Morocco, like Khaddafy in Libya, can do a lot to prevent migrants from reaching Ceuta and Melilla, and does so if it suits him – that is, Spain offers a quid pro quo, with economic agreements deemed helpful to Morocco. And King Hassan can regulate the flow of migrants – increase or decrease it – depending on what he wants of Spain, and how much pressure he needs to apply to make the Spanish comply with his demands.

Where do the migrants come from? From Mali, Senegal, Mauritania, and Somalia, in sub-Saharan Africa, and from Arab countries – from Morocco itself, and now from Syria, too. Most of these migrants are Muslims. And while the world has not been paying attention, the [Muslim population of Spain rose by 800% between 2001 and 2014.](#)

Perhaps the Spanish need to rethink their African Tarbaby. When Morocco obtained its independence from France in 1956, Spain held onto the two towns of Ceuta and Melilla, the last bits of its once far-flung Spanish empire, mostly for reasons of historic memory and prestige. But there are no significant resources or other economic benefit to holding onto either town. They are not especially attractive to tourists. Close to 40% of the permanent population in those towns is Muslim, and that percentage keeps rising. For migrants, the easiest way to get from Africa to Spain, and thus to Europe, is through Ceuta and Melilla. Tens of thousands try every year to make it. Symbols of a past empire, these towns are a present drain on Spain, which has to pay for those now 10-meter high fences with barbed wire, for the sensors and cameras, for the helicopters and the speed boats, and for all those members of

the Guardia Civil, now almost one thousand of them in Melilla alone, and to the cost of preventing most of the tens of thousands of making it to Ceuta and Melilla one must add the cost of processing those migrants who did manage to get through, and the grim cost, too, for tending to the unluckiest of all, that is, the corpses of the drowned that the Spanish have to pull from the sea and bury.

Why not simply give Ceuta and Melilla to Morocco? The Moroccans will be ecstatic, will regard this as a triumph of the firmness of their diplomacy. Let them. But in fact it will be even more of a triumph for Spain, which will have unstuck itself from the Tarbaby of Ceuta and Melilla. The only people who will not be pleased with this will be those migrants from a half-dozen countries, all of them Muslim or mainly so, who had hoped to make it to one of Europe's welfare states but now finding that managing to make it to Ceuta or Melilla is no longer the same thing as making it to Spain, and thus to the European Union. Now, if migrants reach Ceuta and Melilla, they will still be in Africa. And the Moroccans, as one can imagine, will allow themselves to use methods for discouraging migrants travelling to what are now their territories that the Spanish, doing their worst, could never have used.

This headache can be cured. Don't make it easier, don't help swell the Muslim population of Spain or the European Union. Don't do anything more to a future Al-Andalus. Give up Ceuta, give up Melilla. Kutuzov defeated Napoleon's Grande Armee not by fighting, but by strategic retreat. History teaches that sometimes, less is more.

First published in