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Spanish-Maghribi (Moroccan) relations beyond exceptionalism: a postcolonial perspective^{*}

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ABSTRACT

Spanish-Maghribi relations can be considered within a very unique framework of geographical and historical confluences. This paper explores how the interwoven pasts of Spain and the Maghrib generated a particular rhetoric of exceptionalism that not only fostered colonial intervention in North Africa, but still permeates current institutional and academic literature. By problematising past and present from a postcolonial perspective, we would like to transcend the rhetoric of a splendidous shared past and a unique colonial experience.

KEYWORDS Spain; Morocco; Western Sahara; Maghrib; colonialism; Africanism; postcolonialism; Al-Andalus; shared past; exceptionalism; ambivalence

Recent Spanish publications, such as *El protectorado español en Marruecos: la historia trascendida*, a voluminous 'institutional' publication released in 2013 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Protectorate in Morocco, still proclaim in various ways the unique character of Spanish colonialism. Moreover, this uniqueness is usually placed within the broader exceptionalism of Spanish/Arab-Islamic relations, which allegedly is the result of unique geographical, historical, human, cultural, linguistic, and literary confluences. Among the many episodes highlighted as representative of these distinctive perennial relations, the splendour of Al-Andalus together with the 'exceptional' Spanish colonialism in North Africa stand out. But many other phenomena are also recurring features of this narrative, from the forced conversions and expulsions of Andalusí Muslims and Jews during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, up to the more recent Maghribi

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immigration flows to Spain, and even to the terrorist attacks in Casablanca (2003), Madrid (2004), and Barcelona (2017).

Historical correspondences have generated a particular rhetoric of exceptionalism structured around the narrative of a privileged relationship between these two neighbouring territories, which is nonetheless inhabited by paradoxes and silences (Mateo Dieste 2003). This exceptionalism usually assumes a circular understanding of the shared history. For example, the increase of migratory flows from Morocco to Spain has often been metaphorically

AQ2 ally interpreted as the return of the Moors, or of the Moriscos.¹ By doing so,

very different historical episodes, such as the conquest of Granada (1492), the process of ethno-religious cleansing between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the economic migratory flows at the end of the twentieth century are connected as if they had been experienced by the same people. Such references to the past were also common tropes of the colonial discourse. Spanish colonial agents often argued that the Protectorate (1912–56) was a way to give back to Morocco, to compensate for the amazing legacy of Al-Andalus. Coinciding with the colonial intervention and the Spanish Civil

AQ3 War (1936–9),² the first Islamic cemeteries and mosques since the conquest of

Granada were opened on the Iberian Peninsula (Martin-Márquez [2008] 2011, 236). Interestingly, some of these cemeteries – most of which were closed after the Civil War – were eventually reopened to bury Moroccan immigrants at the end of the twentieth century.

However, this narrative of historical and cultural entanglement between Spain and the Maghrib is far from being a novel idea. References to a shared past, the circular understanding of history, and the use of hybrid categories such as *hispanoárabe* or *hispanomarroquí*, reveal that what we are confronting here is a phenomenon of construction of identity in relation with Al-Andalus and the Maghrib. Indeed, these ideas can be traced back precisely to the origins of the construction of Spanish national identity around the *sixteenth* century (García-Arenal 1999; Fuchs 2009; Hertel

AQ4 2012; García-Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano 2013; Feros 2017). Thus, it is

impossible to understand the construction of modern Spanish national identity and its historical narratives without considering the problematic presence (or absence) of the Arab/Muslim component (López García 2011; García-Sanjuán 2016). The mere existence of Al-Andalus has always fostered heated debates concerning the continuities and ruptures of Spanish history. In fact, this ambivalent/polyvalent past – whether embraced or stigmatised – has simultaneously served to unite and separate (Arigita 2009, 232; Hirschkind 2014, 233; Hertel 2017, 8).

Therefore, the insistence on exceptionalism can be traced back to the first stages of early modernity, which suggests that it is indeed a manifestation of the long-term construction of Spanish national identity based on an ambivalent relationship not only to its own past, but also with (North) Africa.

However, as we hope to show, it is not an exclusive feature of narratives regarding Spanish and Maghribi relations. Postcolonial approaches demonstrate that exceptionalism is a recurrent outcome of the ambivalent nature of discourses on colonised territories and national formations around the globe. Hence, by problematising past and present from a postcolonial standpoint, we question the notion of exceptionalism and advocate for new taxonomies that transcend the rhetoric of a splendidous 'shared past' and a 'unique' colonial experience. We argue that the colonial dimension is intimately intertwined with Spanish national identity and the ambivalent discourse towards the Maghrib in general, and Morocco in specific. Moreover, we believe that the emotional entanglements characteristic of these national/colonial imaginaries are still very much alive and continue to permeate Spanish historiography, politics, and literature. Borrowing from Stanard (2016), we argue that 'the colonial past is never dead.'

Giving a chance to a postcolonial perspective

Due to the commemorations of the centennial of the establishment of the Spanish Protectorate in the North of Morocco in 1912, and the fortieth anniversary of the withdrawal from the Western Sahara by Spain in 1976, publications tackling various aspects of the Spanish colonial experiences have been relatively abundant recently. In discussing some of this literature – which includes institutional as well as more academic works – we argue that too often the discourse remains caught in what Young has described as the 'postcolonial condition' (Young 2012), which involves a certain unawareness of the fact that many legacies of colonialism are in fact still operational. Utilising postcolonial theory as a tool to look at the topic of this special issue might sound outmoded. Nevertheless, we argue that a postcolonial critique still offers possibilities to tackle Spanish-Maghribi relations from new perspectives. First and foremost, there has not been much interaction between postcolonial theory and the peculiar colonial (and post-colonial) context of Spanish-Maghribi relations. In general works on postcolonial studies, such as *Key concepts in post-colonial studies* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998) or *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Schwarz and Ray 2004),

Spain usually appears as coloniser of Latin America and the Philippines, with hardly a reference (if any) to the modern colonies in Africa. *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures – Continental Europe and its Empires* also contains an eloquent absence of any references to Hispanophone African works from Equatorial Guinea and the Maghrib (Moroccan and Saharawi) within the debates on postcolonial literature (Poddar, Patke, and Jensen 2008). Furthermore, since Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the reception of postcolonial studies in Spain has been more than cold (for a variety of very particular reasons), and generally limited to academics dealing with English literature.³

We argue that coloniality/nationality and the complex intermingling of the postcolonial condition are still very relevant in the Spanish-Maghribi context. If in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* Forsdick and

AQ8 Murphy (2014) problematised the relationship between metropolitan France

and its former colonies (mainly Algeria), we propose to analyze the relationship between metropolitan Spain and its former colonies in North Africa (mainly Morocco). Moreover, we argue that the complexity of these bilateral/multilateral, multifaceted and fluctuating relations (López García and Hernando de Larramendi 2008) forces us to move beyond hegemonic discourses, which are still strongly marked by a colonial rhetoric and nationalist political agendas. As underlined by Jonathan Wyrzten, we urgently need to write 'new colonial histories that are both postcolonial and post-nationalist histories that do not reproduce the teleological assumptions in either but instead capture the complexities, contingencies, nuances, and contradictions' (2015, 7).

We rely primarily on the paradigm of the postcolonial as 'a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention,' as developed by Robert Young in *Postcolonialism – An Historical Introduction* (2001, 65). In Young's view, postcolonial theory was born to 'undo the ideological heritage of colonialism', not only in the decolonised countries, but also in the metropolis (2001, 65). Therefore, a postcolonial perspective seeks to reconsider the history of colonialism from a critical standpoint, contesting assumed legacies of the past, as well as their uses in the present (Young 2001, 66). Moreover, as pointed out by Hassan, 'ambivalences and contradictions' can not only be found in colonial writing but also – and more importantly with regard to our article – in current writings about the colonial (2002, 50).

There are many reasons why we claim that Spaniards (as well as Moroccans and Sahrawis) still maintain an 'ambivalent' relation with the colonial past. It is precisely this ambivalent nature that is key to understanding the pervasiveness as well as the contradictory character of these representations. In general, colonial interventions were based in the idea of the universality of the civilising mission and hence on the possibility of the transformation of the 'other' in accordance with a certain self-image. This idea relied on the notion of a common nature, which contradicts the still frequent interpretation of colonial discourses as exclusively based on a rhetoric of antagonism. Furthermore, it generated the vision of a unique historical connection, a 'shared identity' that facilitated a will to assimilate and, ultimately, intervene in these territories, as well as the national formation of the metropolis itself. However, this shared identity had and has to be constantly cancelled out to maintain the distinctions that articulated and articulate these representations: 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 1994, 122).⁴ This is precisely the basis for the ambivalent nature of colonial/national representations and the key to

understanding the dependences and reiterations of a discourse that constantly oscillates between assimilation and rejection. The only way to neutralise this discourse and its lasting repercussions is to explicitly show the fallacy of its system of representation, and to expose the unexceptional character of its supposed distinctiveness.⁵ Our contribution reveals the risks of this persistent rhetoric of uniqueness and exceptionalism that ultimately leads to the whitewashing of the colonial past as well as of Spanish fascism.

Transcending colonial histories?

Africanism, the ideology of an intimate historical connection between Spain and Africa, was virtually hegemonic during the Francoist regime. Africanists fostered the idea of a Hispano-Moroccan *brotherhood* based on the shared past emanating primarily from Al-Andalus, but also nurtured through the idea of common anthropological origins.⁶ Accordingly, the Africanist discourse developed the belief that the Spanish colonial authorities were better placed than other colonial agents to understand the 'soul of the *indigene*' (Mateo Dieste 2003, 225). It has also been argued that Africanism as well as the colonial violence exerted during the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco were instrumental for the development of the militaristic and ideological impulses that supported the armed action against the Second Republic, which ultimately culminated in the Spanish Civil War and, later on, in the Francoist dictatorship. In the colonies, Africanism functioned as an ambivalent system of representation, which identified the potential for civilisation based on historical and cultural analogies between the two territories, while simultaneously arguing for the necessity for military intervention due to the North-Africans' lawlessness. Likewise, the troops of the rebel faction that rose, led by general Franco, against the democratic Republic initiating the Spanish Civil War, were instructed to civilise the unruliness of the Republicans, who were constantly portrayed as Africans (Nerín 2005, 195–222).

However, this ideological system preceded the establishment of the Spanish North-African colonies and, in fact, actually served to foster colonisation. By the end of the nineteenth-century, Africanism had already become a major aspect of the Spanish ideological framework (González Alcántud 2002). In 1884, Joaquín Costa, who could be considered the main Spanish colonial propagandist of the late nineteenth century, thus argued for an intervention in North of Africa by referring to the idea of brotherhood:

... for some years now, Spain suffers from nostalgia, and it is the nostalgia of Africa ... Spain and Morocco are like the two halves of a geographical unit ... Is it blood that separates us, Spaniards and Moroccans? On the contrary, there exists between Spaniards and Moroccans a certain kind of secret powerful attraction that can only be explained by some ethnic kinship. (Fernández Clemente 1977, 50)

At that time, the rhetoric of a shared history between the Iberian Peninsula and the Maghrib was not only advocating for a colonial intervention in North Africa; the reference to the African character and backwardness of the Spanish population was also a constant feature of the modernising rhetoric of the industrial and intellectual elites. By the turn of the century, Africanism had already acquired a central role in the Spanish national imagination, and the African origin of the Iberian peoples and the continuous connections between both territories characterised much of the historiography written at that time (Cañete 2011a). It should be noted, though, that both the national construction and the colonial impulses were the results of a long process of identity formation and representation shaped by the marginalisation of the country *vis-à-vis* other European nations, especially France (González Alcantud 2006; Cañete 2011b). This situation led to the proliferation of references to the special connection between Spain and North Africa that ultimately backed the colonial intervention. What is more puzzling, however, is that the same rhetoric of exceptionalism continues to permeate contemporary literature.

The commemoration of the centennial of the founding of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco led to several publications, such as *Al servicio del protectorado de España en Marruecos 1912–1956* (2012) and *El Protectorado español en Marruecos a los 100 años de la firma del Tratado: fondos documentales en la Biblioteca Islámica Félix M^a Pareja* (2012). These publications still uphold – both directly or indirectly – the idea of an exceptional Spanish colonial experience. One great example is the pretentiously entitled *El protectorado español en Marruecos: la historia trascendida* (2013), a tome of uneven quality that argues for the uniqueness of Spanish colonialism in multiple ways. Paid for by one of Spain's most powerful corporations, Iberdrola, which has important economic interests in Morocco, it must be considered an 'institutional' publication. Most importantly, the book features contributions by public officials, including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of both Spain and Morocco, who authored the prologues.

Although offering an exhaustive and useful documentation of the Spanish protectorate, we consider this edited book to be highly problematic. To begin with, the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs praises the initiative's 'academic' character (vol. 1, 13) in his prologue, despite the fact that it is not really a scholarly publication, but rather a political and economic initiative involving academics. The contributors to the three volumes, both Moroccans and Spaniards, represent an amalgam of reputable academics, diplomats, and military personnel, the latter of which give voice to the colonial Africanist discourse in its purest form. They also include Moroccan authors who write in Spanish, Spanish Hispanists, and 'sons' of the Protectorate, that is Spaniards who were born or lived in Morocco and offer nostalgic testimonies of an 'oriental' country.

A long and shared history is claimed throughout this publication as a key argument for Spanish-Moroccan exceptionalism. For instance, both ministers argue that the 'shared history' (vol. 1, 14 and 17) and brotherhood between both countries extends far beyond the Protectorate, reaching as far back as Al-Andalus. The Moroccan minister even includes the Moriscos as evidence of the strong relations between both countries, whereas his Spanish counterpart focuses on the 'fraternal' relationship between the two royal families. One of the editors also describes a shared past from well before medieval times up to the Protectorate, and emphasises the current 'excellent' relations between both governments (vol. I, 9), without ever providing a nuanced explanation of the experiences, which 'Moroccans' and 'Spaniards' have allegedly 'shared'.⁷

Furthermore, the theme of uniqueness is also assumed by the Moroccan scholars contributing to the tome. Among them is the coeditor Fatiha Benlabbah, the director of the Instituto de Estudios Hispano-Lusófonos, a think-tank for cultural diplomacy in Rabat. Moreover, Mohammed Dahiri, who wrote a review (2014) of the same 'academic' book to which he contributed a chapter, lauds its focus on 'the relations between Spain and Morocco during that unique historical period' (a euphemism for the colonial period). The chapter 'España en Marruecos: una reflexión en el cine' claims from the start that the history of Spain and Morocco is a 'different history' (vol. 2, 13). Filled with clichés – at times it seems as if it seeks to recreate the atmosphere of the movie *Casablanca*, but in the Spanish Protectorate – this chapter is paradigmatic of the entire publication: it is well-documented, but ideologically problematic, not only with respect to colonialism, but also regarding the Spanish Civil War. As pointed out by Stearns, nostalgia can be treacherous and hamper 'an accurate representation of the past' (2009, 356). Presenting a largely nostalgic vision regarding the colonial era and containing many chapters of dubious academic value, *El protectorado español en Marruecos: la historia trascendida* – contrary to its title – seems more like a lost opportunity to transcend colonial historiography in a meaningful way.

As similar project is *Al servicio del protectorado España en Marruecos 1912–1956*, which was published by the Spanish Ministry of Defense in 2012. Enrique Vidal de Loño, the army officer and director of the Instituto de Historia y Cultura Militar who authors the preface, explains that this publication – the catalogue of a homonymous exhibition hosted by the Museo del Ejército in Madrid – aspires to commemorate the centennial of the Protectorate, while especially emphasising the contribution of the Spanish army.⁸ The general argues that the exhibition (and the publication) inevitably deal with the crucial role of the Spanish army in 'pacifying the territory to be civilized' and 'bringing peace to a land in permanent struggle' (2012, 8). He specifically describes the contributions of the Spanish army not only concerning the Protectorate, but also with regard to the development of the Moroccan nation, in very positive terms. Accordingly, the book includes chapters with titles such as

'La Pacificación del Protectorado de Marruecos' and 'El Protectorado en Paz (1927–1956)'. In one of them, José Martínez de Merlo argues that once the country had been 'pacificado' (pacified), the following thirty years until inde-

AQ11 ppendence were characterised by 'total harmony' (2012, 25). In a similar vein,

285 and probably under the spell of the colonial-military rhetoric of pacification, the chief editor of *El protectorado español en Marruecos: la historia trascendida*, Manuel Aragón Reyes, argues in his introduction that, despite several warlike incidents at the beginning of the colonial era, more than two-thirds of the Spanish Protectorate were indeed characterised by 'peaceful' coexistence,

290 (2013, vol. 1, 29).⁹

It goes without saying that a postcolonial perspective must resist such hegemonic and persistently haunting views of the past, especially the colonial past. Even if there once was a period characterised as 'pacificación' by the colonial rhetoric, in the twenty-first century such terminology is highly problematic, because it reproduces the official discourse of Spanish colonial rule.

295 Moreover, it establishes a fictitious division between a complicated period (violent and including episodes of genocide during the Rif wars in the 1920s) and a supposedly golden age under the shared rubric of the colonial

AQ12 era.¹⁰

300 Another anniversary that has been commemorated lately is Spain's withdrawal from the Western Sahara in 1976, which led to the publication of works such as *Sáhara Occidental. 40 años después* (2016). In contrast to the predominantly nostalgic, even paternalistic, tone with regard to colonial Morocco, the depiction of Spanish relations to the Western Sahara is much

305 more self-critical. It goes so far as to exhibit signs of guilt for the withdrawal, which is considered as a neglect of Spain's legal and moral responsibilities towards the Sahrawi people (Barreñada and Ojeda García 2016, 7). Moreover, the hasty withdrawal, usually referred to as 'abandono'¹¹ (abandonment), is often considered as treasonous, even though the anticolonial liberation movement of the *Polisario Front* was created to fight for independence against the Spanish colonisers.

Nonetheless, *Sáhara Occidental. 40 años después* seems far more rigorous than the commemorative publications dealing with Spanish colonialism in Morocco. It includes different views of the conflict, yet is surprisingly void

315 of references to the colonial period, as if the 'conflict' had begun *ex nihilo* in 1975. Equally surprising is the total absence of Sahrawi voices 'speaking' in the publication, given the relevance of Hispano-Sahrawi brotherhood as well as the fact that many publications concerning the Spanish protectorate include Moroccan authors.

320 Again, the many political and emotional implications of the Sahrawi question should be taken into account. The editors of *Sáhara Occidental. 40 años después* paint an accurate portrait of the complex sensitivities prevalent in Spanish society (especially among the political left, grassroots movements,

and the regional nationalists) towards the Sahrawi cause that include human rights defenders, nostalgics of the colonial era, and viscerally anti-Moroccan attitudes (Barreñada and Ojeda García 2016, 8). Campoy-Cubillo has rightfully pointed out that the rhetoric of Hispano-Sahrawi fraternity (an echo of the Hispano-Moroccan fraternity of the Africanist discourse) has 'survived until the present.'¹² Moreover, he points out how this Hispano-Sahrawi fraternity has been re-articulated into one of resistance, especially in the realm of Spanish popular culture, which regularly reveals a special fascination with the Sahrawi cause (2012, 153). The resistance (against Morocco) of the Sahrawi people, dispersed throughout 'occupied territories,' refugee camps (Tindouf), and diasporic communities abroad, is often praised in the book.

It should be recalled that the Western Sahara became a Spanish province in 1958, and that Morocco instigated the Green March in 1975 to prompt Spain's withdrawal while Franco was on his deathbed. Furthermore, the *Polisario Front* is the only Arab liberation movement whose acronym is formed by Spanish words (Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro), and the proclaimed Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic the only Arab 'state' where Spanish is the second official language after Arabic. The hitherto final episode of this complex entanglement occurred with the Spanish government's announcement in 2016 that it would open a branch of the Instituto Cervantes in El Aioun. As a consequence, the representative of the Polisario Front in Madrid protested against this initiative, arguing that it served the Moroccan political agenda. It is worth recalling that the very dynamic pro-Sahrawi activists in Spain have for many years been calling for the opening of a centre of the Instituto Cervantes in the Tindouf refugee camps.

These are some of the many reasons why Campoy-Cubillo has characterised the history of the colonisation and decolonisation of the Western Sahara as 'schizophrenic' and 'rhizomatic' (2012, 159). Here we need to remind ourselves that Spain's 'schizophrenic' relationship with its colonial past, still operational, is the result of the ambivalent and contradictory nature of the ideological system of Africanism that used geographical determinism, idealised shared pasts, and alleged genetic affinities to justify the colonisation of North Africa.

Colonial burdens

The ideological burdens of Africanism have not started to be seriously addressed until quite recently when, by the end of the twentieth century, the first academic works 'deprived of colonial nostalgia' appeared (Mateo

AQ13 Dieste 2003, 27). *El colonialismo español en Marruecos* (1973) by Miguel Martín and *El colonialismo hispano-francés en Marruecos* (1976) by Victor Morales Lezcano had already begun to affect changes in the dominant discourses. Since then, many works tackling different aspects (mostly political

and military) of Spanish colonialism in (North) Africa have been published. However, following Majumdar's definition most of these publications can be characterised as 'histories of colonial rule' (2011, XI). They hardly take into account what Young highlights as the main focus of postcolonial studies, namely the subjective experiences of colonised people (2001, 64). Most of these works fail to reflect on the nature and current implications of Africanism, which still facilitates the proliferation of works influenced by this ambivalent colonial ideology.

If the 'manipulative use of the past' and the search for affinities was characteristic of all colonial discourses, especially in the Spanish case (Tofiño-Quesada 2003, 142), its endurance nowadays is deeply worrying. As previously discussed, vestiges of this discourse are quite evident in such commemorative publications as *El protectorado español en Marruecos: la historia trascendida*, whose chief editor, Manuel Aragón Reyes, argues for the heroism of both coloniser and colonised (2013, vol. 1, 29), whereas the chapter contributed by Pando Despierto highlights the 'biological-historical cell' of these 'Siamese twins' (vol. 3, 13). Yet even more troubling is the reiteration of some of those ideas in contemporary academic literature.

Besides the commemorative publications, many other reflections on colonial history have appeared in the twenty-first century; even crucial aspects of Spanish-Moroccan relations not usually tackled by the political historiography – such as education, science, technology, language, medicine and translation during the colonial period – have started to be addressed. For instance, *Regenerar España y Marruecos: ciencia y educación en las relaciones hispano-marroquíes a finales del siglo XIX* (2011) tackled the need to overcome the 'reiterative' nature of the topics addressed in the bibliography on Spanish colonialism.¹³ Yet no matter how rigorous and useful these contributions are, it still seems difficult for academics to resist the allure of the idea of exceptionality. Apparently, the continuing prevalence of such ideas in academic publications derives from certain lack of self-awareness and the failure to critically reconsider the underlying ideological principles. Consequently, a profound ambivalence continues to endure within most scholarship concerning the colonial past. More troubling still, this ambivalence contributes to the whitewashing of Spanish colonialism.

In one of the best accounts published in the last two decades, *La 'hermandad' hispano-marroquí. Política y religión bajo el Protectorado español en Marruecos (1912–1956)* (2003), Mateo Dieste argues convincingly that the memory of the Spanish colonial past in North Africa is still muzzled by both the rhetoric of 'brotherhood' (*hermandad* hispano-marroquí – and Saharawi, we might add) and of the 'shared past' (*pasado compartido*, Mateo Dieste 2003, 24). However, Mateo Dieste also argues that the colonial relation between Spain and the Maghrib differs in many aspects from other colonial contexts,

especially because of geographical proximity and the centuries of historical interaction (2003, 27). This interpretation echoes somehow Edward Said's formulation of imperialism as 'a dominant metropolitan center ruling a distant territory' (Said 1994, 9). Indeed, in his preface to the second Spanish edition of *Orientalism*, Said himself argued for the Spanish case being 'a remarkable exception' in contrast to the general pattern of European Orientalism for which the Orient is 'always something that is outside' (Said [1978] 2002, 9–10).¹⁴

The exceptionality of the Spanish case is also repeated by Campoy-Cubillo, who argues that Spain's *fraternal* relation with the Maghrib is 'atypical in the context of European colonialism ... Spaniards presented their cultural affinity to the Maghribis as the main reason why they, and not others, would be able to develop a successful colonial project' (Campoy-Cubillo 2012, 9). More recently, Yolanda Aixelà has argued that a more flexible management of identities in the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco – as opposed to the French Protectorate –, especially regarding the Arab/Amazigh divide, was instrumental for the proliferation of political contestation against colonial rule. As key features of this exceptionality, Aixelà identifies the promotion of the Arabic language and Islamic religion by Spanish colonial authorities, suggesting that, 'Certainly, the Spanish *indigene* policies had a religious dimension that gave greater credibility to the discourse of the Hispano-Moroccan brotherhood and to the community of blood anchored in the Andalusian past' (Aixelà Cabré 2015, 47). Along the same lines, in *Los traductores de España en Marruecos (1859–1939)* Mourad Zarrouk underlines the 'harmlessness' of Spain's linguistic policies in Morocco when compared to the French protectorate (2009, 12), though he admittedly also argues that translators were an 'instrument of political control and dominance over the colonized subjects' (2009, 195).¹⁵

In contrast to this supposed harmlessness, we should not forget that the colonial discourse, as an ideological system, manifests itself not only when referring to a shared past; indeed, it also permeates all instances of Spanish cultural imagination. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that references to religious and linguistic affinities and their civilising and educative dimensions were recurring elements of the Spanish colonial discourse – especially its claims of exceptionality – in general, and of the self-understanding of the Francoist regime in specific (González González 2014, 20). As underlined by Martín Corrales, Spanish colonial authorities and the regime 'cherished the strange and inconceivable idea that Moroccans in the Spanish zone did not want independence' (2017, 19).

Let us now take a look at how these religious and linguistic assimilationist dimensions were not mere coincidences of the Spanish policy in North Africa, but rather an integral part of the colonial discourse, especially its claims to exceptionalism and the rhetoric of a shared past. As already

mentioned, the Africanist discourse often drew on Al-Andalus – on ‘glorious Spanish Islam’ – to justify the colonial project (Rodríguez Mediano 2011;

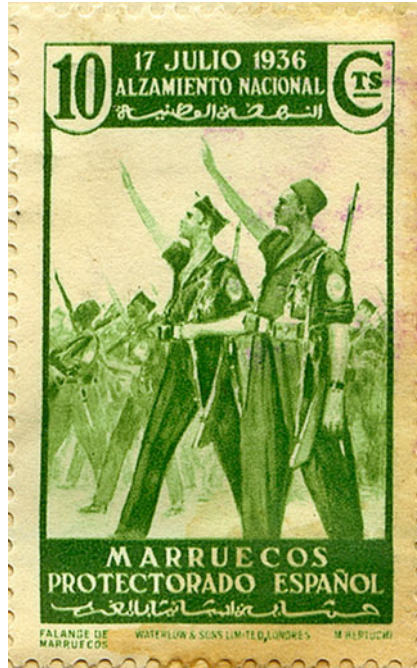
AQ15 López García 2012). Nineteenth century academics tried to assimilate this

historical juncture as ‘Muslim Spain’ by creating a ‘Spanish Islam’ that was necessarily different from the Islam across the Straights of Gibraltar (Manzano 2000, 28).¹⁶ At the same time, the proponents of the Spanish colonial discourse argued that Islam in Morocco had ‘degenerated into fanaticism, [and had] nothing to do with the civilised Islam of Al-Andalus,’ which made colonial intervention necessary to restore that ‘civilized’ Spanish Islam of Al-Andalus (Mateo Dieste 2003, 225). It was even argued that Spaniards were not moved by material interests but by a ‘spiritual task’ (Mateo Dieste 2003, 28–29).

Beyond ‘Spanish Islam,’ religious affinities were promoted in different ways. Spanish colonial authorities and academics used Catholicism and Islam to highlight the Hispano-Moroccan brotherhood in the struggle against the Republicans. For instance, the prominent twentieth century scholar Asín Palacios specifically justified this alliance of Christians and Muslims fighting side by side during the Civil War against the shared enemy (1940). The involvement of a significant number of Moroccans in the war further complicated the emotional entanglements of Spanish colonialism. Suddenly, the violence of the colonial discourse and practice moved from the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco to the Iberian Peninsula. In accordance with this logic, the Spanish Civil War was a crusade undertaken by Franco, who led the African Spanish army in a rebellion against the Republic to fight the degenerate ‘atheists’ and ‘communists,’ who – according to this logic – were in need of colonial authority (Martín-Márquez [2008] 2011, 232). As in the Italian case, the insistence on the atypical and friendly character of the colonialism contributes to paint a positive picture of

AQ16 Spanish fascism (Mellino 2015, 463).

Mariano Bertuchi, one of the main agents of the representation of ‘oriental’ Morocco, served colonial and Francoist powers and contributed to the establishment of colonial institutions such as the Escuela de Artes y Oficios and the Escuela Preparatoria de Bellas Artes in Tetouan. He was also the author of institutional propaganda, which included many of the well-known posters of ‘Spanish Morocco’ (*Marruecos español*). Furthermore, together with the picturesque, orientalist, exotic portrait of Morocco, Bertuchi created fascinating images revealing the colonial ambivalence and tension between the impulse to *other* and the tendency to *identify with*. His bilingual (Spanish-Arabic) stamp from the Spanish Protectorate entitled ‘17 de julio de 1936 – Alzamiento nacional/*al-Nahda al-wataniyya*,’ which commemorated the beginning of the Civil War, represented Moroccan-Spanish fraternity in accordance with the fascist aesthetics of the regime.



Another strategy for emphasising the unique ties between Spain and Morocco involved the search for linguistic affinities. In an article on the substantial amount of materials produced during the Spanish protectorate to teach and learn Arabic, Moroccan dialect, and Berber, Juan Pablo Arias recalls the importance of *arabismos* and *hispanismos* in the Africanist discourse. He argues that the idea of a *shared language* due to these lexical connections served both as a means to show the essential 'unity' of Spain and Morocco and to – again – justify 'colonial intervention' (2012, 20).¹⁷ However, linguistic strategies were not devoid of the ambivalences that characterised the colonialist discourse. In *Escuela e ideología en el protectorado español en el norte de Marruecos*, González González describes how ambivalence was a natural aspect of colonial intervention through language and education, given that Spain, on the one hand, fostered the emergence of a Hispanophone (and therefore, presumably, Hispanophile) elite, while, on the other hand, it hampered the integration of that very elite into the colonial administration, fearing a loss of control (2014, 326).

Translation was also viewed as a tool to foster cultural relations and understanding between the two peoples. However, far from idyllic and harmless, it directly served the larger goals of colonial control and assimilation. One of the few exceptions that escapes this rhetoric is *Los traductores de árabe del Estado español* (2012). The authors devote several brilliant pages to the mechanisms of translations during the Protectorate. Far from the discourse about the

exceptional character of the Spanish colonial ventures, they claim that it served as a powerful tool for exerting colonial authority and violence in the colonial context:

... an instrument of war, domination, destruction and assimilation; in short, translation as a violent management of conflict and/or the imposition of asymmetric relationships. In this sense, the history of translation in colonial contexts is extremely indiscreet, and Spanish colonialism should not be an exception. (Arias Torres and García 2012, 23)

It might not be a coincidence that the first, and at the time most comprehensive histories of Morocco and of Moroccan literature, authored by Nasiri and Guennún respectively, were translated from Arabic into Spanish during the protectorate. *Versión árabe de la Guerra de África* (Cerdeira 1917) and *El genio marroquí en la literatura árabe* (1939) are both foundational texts in the making of modern Morocco and the first works of Moroccan authors translated into a European language. Even if certainly remarkable, these well-meaning institutional translations are highly problematic, because they were produced within a colonial intellectual framework. As Calderwood has highlighted, the Spanish translator Clemente Cerdeira attempted to undermine the authority and modernity of Nasiri as a historian through erasures and 'subversive footnotes':

If Cerdeira is bent on undermining al-Nasiri's authority as a historian, then why, one might ask, does Cerdeira translate his text in the first place? Paradoxically, al-Nasiri might be of interest to Cerdeira precisely *because* he is unreliable: if the 'protected' Other is inherently unreliable, 'misinformed,' and 'sly,' then it is important to monitor him for the security of the Protectorate. Indeed, Cerdeira's desire to understand the Moroccan 'version' of history inscribes his translation within the larger colonial project of *control* (the cornerstone of Lyautey's definition of the Protectorate). (Calderwood 2012, 413)

El genio marroquí en la literatura árabe, which is considered to be the first history of Moroccan literature and had first appeared in Tetouan in 1938, was immediately translated into Spanish and published by the Centro de Estudios Marroquíes, which was part of the Delegación de Asuntos Indígenas of the Alta Comisaría de España en Marruecos in Larache in 1939 (Fernández Parrilla 2006, 98). The words of the translators, Jerónimo Carrillo Ordóñez and Mohammad Tayeddin Buzid, in the preface are illustrative of the political agenda behind the book, which seeks a rapprochement with the Muslim world via the Protectorate in Morocco. More to the point, the colonial machinery pursued its *soi-disant* noble mission of civilisation and brotherhood amidst of the fratricidal violence of the Spanish Civil War:

Its reading [of *El genio marroquí*] inspired us to undertake the arduous task of its translation, driven by a single desire: to add our insignificant contribution to the work of approaching the Muslim world in general, and the Moroccan cultural

renaissance in particular. A work initiated by the New Spain, so wisely governed by the undefeated caudillo *Generalísimo* Franco. A task which, as part of an enlightened policy, is carried out in these lands by the intelligent ruler and distinguished Arabist, the Honorable High Commissioner Mr. Juan Beigbeder, to whom we offer our modest work in the hope that it will be to his liking. (Guennún 1939, 3)

The idea of a shared past as well as religious and linguistic affinities are important indications of the fundamental ambivalence of the Spanish colonialist discourse. Therefore, we should question the discursive genealogy of these claims in contemporary commemorative and academic literature. In these works, the critical analysis of the colonial experience frequently appears intertwined with claims about the uniqueness of the Spanish case based on the particular character of its common history with the territories of North Africa. Furthermore, such claims are not the exclusive domain of Spanish academics. Even Maghribis often display ambivalent attitudes towards the colonial past. Through oral interviews with former subjects of the Spanish protectorate, Mateo Dieste has shown the contradictory feelings many inhabitants of northern Morocco still have with regard to the former colonisers: while sympathetic towards the anti-colonial struggle and its heroes, they also express a nostalgia for the colonial era (2003, 40). Even academic historians defend the unique character of Spanish colonisation by contrasting it with French rule (Kenbib 2002, 64–67). Many Sahrawis display similarly ambivalent attitudes (Casielles and Fernández Parrilla 2017, 672).

Yet such fetishizations of the past not only distort the historical record, but also create an emotional discourse of brotherhood that continues to frame Spanish-Maghribi (Moroccan) relations until today; as González Alcantud has shown, the so-called Al-Andalus paradigm served (and serves) as the mythical basis for the belief in 'shared emotional ties' between Spaniards and Maghribis (2014, 61).¹⁸ We need to question such uncritical representations of the colonial past, which are not limited to Spanish history, but can be detected in many colonial discourses.

In conclusion: Spanish colonialism was (not) different

It is easy to see how the geographical proximity between the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa has enabled a *continuum* of historical connections, fostering a rhetoric of cultural connectivity. However, in the context of the Mediterranean basin, countless examples of similar historical and cultural links can be found (Dakhliya and Kaiser 2013). Even further south, in sub-Saharan Africa, anthropological connections –whether imagined or real – also served as pretexts for colonial intervention (Amselle 1990; Amselle and M'Bokolo 2005). In each case, the fundamental problem is not the historical connections that could be made, but rather the underlying motive for these

connections, their discursive genealogy, which always lays claim to an exception.

The comparison with other colonial interventions shows that similar claims regarding an exceptional relationship were – and still are – common-place. The survival of the myth of an atypical colonialism has been addressed in the Italian context, where the same idea of a more humane colonisation – the idea of being ‘closer’ to the natives than other European powers – is alive as well (Mellino 2015, 464). Of course, similar arguments differentiating the allegedly ‘civilized’ British model of rule from ‘the rapacious Spanish conquistadores’ were developed in the British empire (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998, 49). Likewise, in this case, the claim to exceptionality resulted from a rhetoric of imagined historical and cultural connections that fostered an assimilationist attitude towards the colonial territories (Goff 2005).

Ambivalence has always been a central feature of colonial discourses regarding North Africa (Laroui [1992] 2001, 164). Not only Spanish colonialism, but also the French conquest of Algeria was driven by an essential ambivalence, which shaped the attitudes of colonial agents. Moreover, it led to the emergence of a so called ‘mythological framework’ (Mahé 2001, 147–157), based on narratives of a shared history, that simultaneously promoted both policies of assimilation and differentiation in French Algeria (Cañete 2006). For this reason, the same discursive system could result in the most brutal actions against Algerian populations, while at the same time calling for the assimilation of local populations and the implementation of educative programmes (Le Cour Grandmaison 2005, 281–287). The Algerian case was but another example of a larger system of representations that emerged throughout the nineteenth century, which solidified national and colonial identities by putting forth contradictory visions of the Mediterranean as a unified cultural entity (Cañete 2010, 2012).

Contrary to most claims, Spanish *Africanismo* was all but exceptional. It was yet another of the many ambivalent discursive systems that supported colonial interventions through images of shared pasts. At the same time, it was inextricably linked to the formation of Spanish nationalism inside the metropole. Contrary to popular images of fraternity, the ‘true character’ of Spanish colonialism can be found in ‘a long and aggressive tradition’ (Martín Corrales 2002, 9), which – just as in the other cases mentioned above – actually revealed it as ‘pitiless, brutal and murderous’ (Mellino 2015, 465). The only way to really overcome the persistence of this colonial system of representations is to truly acknowledge its perverse duplicity that survives until today. By continuing to insist on the notion of exceptionalism, we simply replicate the very attitudes that gave birth to colonial and Civil-war massacres throughout the twentieth century.

Notes

1. As in *Inmigración magrebí en España: el retorno de los moriscos* (López García 1993); *The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration* (Flesler 2008), or *El retorno/el reencuentro: La inmigración en la literatura hispano-marroquí* (Rueda 2010). In his *Diario de un ilegal*, Moroccan author Rachid Nini wrote: 'Jokingly, I told him we were coming back. It is true that this time we were neither soldiers of an army, nor did we have a leader like Tariq Ibn Ziyad, but we were invading Al-Andalus again.' (2002, 98). In *Immigration, Popular Culture, and the Re-routing of European Muslim Identity*, Dotson-Renta has argued that Al-Andalus is also being revisited by immigrants in Spain and Europe as 'a means by which to claim insider status' (2012, 11).
2. For continuities between the colonial and the Civil War see for instance *Los moros que trajo Franco: La intervención de tropas coloniales en la guerra civil* (Madariaga 2002), *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Balfour 2002), or *La guerra que vino de África* (Nerín 2005).
3. Concerning the status of postcolonial theory in Spain, see Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla (2018) 'Disoriented Postcolonialities: With Edward Said in (the Labyrinth of) Al-Andalus.' This article explores how postcolonial studies, disassociated from their original intentions, were received in Spain more as a way of dealing with new 'English' literatures than as a critical tool.
4. The relational nature of this ambivalent discourse and its manifestation beyond traditional metropolitan/colonial boundaries was brilliantly formulated by James Baldwin in his novel *Another Country*: 'They keep you here because you're black, the filthy, white cocksuckers, while they go around jerking themselves off with all that jazz about the land of the free and the home of the brave. And they want you to jerk yourself off with that same music, too, only, keep your distance' (Baldwin [1960] 1993, 351). As underlined by Mateo Dieste, in the Spanish colonial context, the racial theories in vogue at the time led to a particular taxonomy of Moroccan subjects as 'inferior brothers' (2003, 29).
5. Very recently, [Stuurman \(2017\)](#) has shown that assimilationist narratives are not an exception but a recurrent feature of the ambivalent nature of discourses in situations of cultural contact.
6. A critique of the anthropological dimension of this ideological system, which claimed a common origin for the North-African and Iberian populations in antiquity, was presented in the early years of the Francoist regime by the Spanish anthropologist Caro Baroja ([1946] 2003, vol. 1, 107–128). Years later, the archaeologist [Tarradell \(1965\)](#) developed this critique further. For a more recent discussion of the anthropological dimension of Africanism see: Fernández Martínez (2001).
7. Though it is certainly more balanced and even calls for the need of a 'revision' of this historical period, in *El Protectorado español en Marruecos a los 100 años de la firma del Tratado: fondos documentales en la Biblioteca Islámica Félix Mª Pareja*, we can still find classic formulations of the 'fascinating period of the shared history between Spain and Morocco' by government officials (5).
8. In addition to mostly military personnel, this collective publication includes academics as well.
9. Side by side with the idea of the *pacification*, meaning indeed direct army intervention, the colonial discourse also developed the idea of the 'penetración

pacífica' (peaceful penetration), which is the nonviolent action through education and culture, as advocated by journals such as *España en África* that had been launched in 1905 by the Centros Comerciales Hispano-Marroquíes. According to González González, 'the discourse on Spanish-Arab friendship led to the creation of a series of cultural institutions designed to foster a shared past between the two peoples' (2015, 162) within the broader framework of Hispano-Arab fraternity that had been developed by Francoist regime. See also [Hernando de Larramendi, González González, and López García \(2015\)](#).

10. In many current writings about the colonial era, we can still find examples of the colonial Africanist discourse in its purest form: 'The overall result of the Spanish Africanism during its golden decade, the forties, is impressive: the dissemination of African culture in Spain, the contributions to the exploration of that continent, and the educational and cultural actions in Morocco and in Western and Equatorial Africa' (Molina 2006, 75). The author of the foreword to *Al-Andalus: una identidad compartida: arte, ideología y enseñanza en el protectorado español en Marruecos* (1999, 11–12), written almost on the centennial of the Spanish-American war of 1898, still proclaimed the 'excellence' of Spanish colonialism (acción civilizadora).

11. See also the prologues to *Aaiún: gritando lo que se siente*. Madrid: Revista Exilios y Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2006, edited by Generación de la Amistad Saharawi – the most articulate group of Sahrawis writing in Spanish – published to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the withdrawal.

12. Defenders of the Sahrawi cause claim that the Sahrawis are the only real 'Hispano-Árabe' people (Moya 2015, 298).

13. These attempts to broaden the horizons of the academic research on the history of the Protectorate can be traced back to works such as *El 'moro' entre los primitivos: el caso del protectorado español en Marruecos* (Mateo Dieste 1997), *El Protectorado español en Marruecos. Gestión colonial e identidades* (Rodríguez Mediano and de Felipe 2002) and *Ángel Cabrera: Ciencia y proyecto colonial en Marruecos* (De Felipe, López-Ocón, and Marín 2004). The XIII Congreso de la Asociación de Historia Contemporánea, celebrated in 2016, and its proceedings published in 2017 as *Historia, lost in translation?*, each devoted one panel to 'Las relaciones hispano-marroquíes en perspectiva: el legado científico y cultural', González Madrid, [Heras, and Pérez Garzón 2017](#).

14. In *Immigration, Popular Culture, and the Re-routing of European Muslim Identity*, Dotson-Renta naïvely claims that 'Islam has never been foreign when viewed through the lens of Spanish history' (2012, 49). Even worse, in so doing she relies on one of the most reactionary anti-Muslim writers, César Vidal and his *España frente al Islam. De Mahoma a Ben Laden* (2004).

15. Mourad Zarrouk just published another work: *Cerdeira. Intérprete, diplomático y espía al servicio de la Segunda República* (2017).

16. In *Crestomatía de árabe literal con glosario y elementos de gramática* (1939), the prominent arabist Miguel Asín Palacios declared that his book's ultimate purpose was to help students interpret texts in Arabic, mainly of 'Spanish Islam', which is to say Al-Andalus.

17. [González González \(2010\)](#) has rescued *Pequeño Vocabulario Hispano-Marroquí* ([1913] 2010), one of the colonial treasures dealing with the urgent need to collect the Spanish-Moroccan vocabulary. The book had originally been composed by two prominent Spanish Arabists in the service of the Junta de Enseñanza en Marruecos.

18. The Moroccan Hispanophone writer Mohamed Chakor poetically argued that 'between Morocco and Spain flows an interior river that has been uniting both countries since the dawn of time' (Chakor and López Gorge 1985, 27).

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