

MOROS EN LA COSTA: ISLAM IN SPANISH VISUAL AND MEDIA CULTURE*

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Recibido: 29 Agosto 2011 / Revisado: 17 Octubre 2011 / Aceptado: 15 Enero 2012 / Publicación Online: 15 Octubre 2012

*Research for this article was generously funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Resumen: Muslims in western media can be portrayed as antiquated, un-modern, bellicose fanatics who lack reason and exhibit certain physical characteristics. Medieval polemics *islamified* Muslims for westerners who had relatively little contact with Islam. The discourse of islamification is one that still dominates the representation of Islam, although it has evolved over the centuries. This article examines the representation of Islam in Spanish and European media culture in terms of medieval and modern orientalism, and an apparent fusion of these two representational modes in contemporary media representations that include newspapers, painting and political illustration.

Palabras clave: media, Islam, islamification

“Rubia, con ojos azules...y terrorista islámica” (ABC.es, 10/3/2010)

“La religión en la BBC a cargo de un musulmán” (larazon.es 14/5/2009)

“Merkel premia al dibujante de las caricaturas de Mahoma” (El País, 9/9/2010)

Islam in western media is constructed by westerners who are more likely to identify with Christianity, or who view democracy as contrary to and incompatible with Islam, a perspective expressed by some Spanish academics and political leaders¹, and one demonstrated by the newspaper headlines above. These polarities, note humanists Edward Said and Silvia Nagy-Zekmi, enforce the perception of occidental eminence over cultures, peoples and nations that the western world perceives as weaker than itself, as deviant or unknown. The Spanish media and others throughout the western world convert that which lies outside its borders into a marginalized other whose at-times attributed characteristics surface in the west as negative cultural, racial and linguistic markers critical of the marginalized cultures².

Over the centuries, however, Islam has been viewed and manifested differently in the west. Said described the emergence of Islam and its conversion in the eyes of westerners from “a demonic religion of apostasy, blasphemy, and obscurity” into a “political force” that dominated parts of the world for centuries³. This transition was in part facilitated by modernity, a scientific period “freed [...] of the superstition and ignorance” displayed by medieval Christian

polemicists such as Peter the Venerable and Barthélemy d'Herbelot⁴. Said's relegation of the medieval relationship between Islam and Catholicism to a categorically religious one in representation, rather than one with political implications, inadequately accounts for the use of this same polemic today.

Images of the medieval Muslim characterized as a Saracen, Moor or Turk still dominate contemporary visual culture, so that "Depictions of Middle Eastern terrorists by Hollywood and transnational wire services seem to bear a striking resemblance to the Muslim characters of European polemics penned a thousand years ago"⁵. In a modern context, "Violence committed by militant Muslims is usually placed within journalistic frameworks whose cultural roots are hundreds of years old. For example, editorial cartoons draw on images such as the bloodthirsty Saracen wielding 'the sword of Islam' embedded in medieval European literature"⁶. This is precisely the theme behind some of the images published in 2005 by a Danish newspaper that provoked wide-spread protest in the Muslim world, and one that is reproduced in the work of Spanish cartoonists as well as other western artists.

The institutionalized proclivity to represent Muslims thusly is married to a contemporary discourse that equates modernization with westernization, a discourse that is championed by western states and categorizes non-western states as *un-modern* ones reflective of the medieval image of Islam. Complicating this proclivity is the lack of definition and differentiation in Spanish culture between Arabs, Muslims and Berbers, as well as the conflation of cultural islamification with linguistic arabization⁷. The western representation of Islam may not have changed much over the centuries, and Spain in particular reconciles its Islamic past by imposing these historiated and antiquated visions upon modern-day Islam and the memory of its past on the Iberian peninsula.

In this essay, I reconsider the characterization of Islam today in light of its historical conceptualisation in the west, as well as the implications of these representations on orientalism and islamophobia, two dominating discourses that pervade Spanish and western media. The former, designed to marginalize an enemy centuries ago, is one that we still employ toward a perceived, and in many ways constructed other in today's media culture.

1. WESTERN EPOCHS OF ISLAM.

Said explains that the modern age of orientalism made Islam and the east familiar, accessible and representable for other scholars and the reader alike, whereas earlier, medieval orientalism ensured that these spaces remained "distant, marvellous, incomprehensible, and yet very rich"⁸. These two ages of Islam inform Said's distinction between a medieval, religious polemic and a modern, politicized one.

In his twelfth-century *Book Against the Sect or Heresies of the Saracens*, Peter the Venerable exhorts his Christian reader to learn about Islam rather than to remain ignorant of it, so that he may know his enemy⁹. An early thirteenth-century polemist also working in Spain, Mark of Toledo, in his translation of the Koran accuses Muhammad of suffering from fantastic illusions, "leading astray uncultivated people", promoting himself as either an emissary or a prophet, "and explaining to them lessons that he made up"¹⁰. While writing about the Muslim conquest of Spain, Mark fused religion and war together as common characteristics of Islam, such that the Iberian peninsula was won by deceptive preaching and military defeat, and "in many places where many priests formerly offered divine obedience to God, loathsome and criminal men now make supplications to Muhammad" in "profane temples" used by Muslims¹¹.

The perception of Muslims as fanatical and bellicose opponents of the west is one that

has endured in literary representation over the centuries, and it remains today a prevailing stereotype of Islam, as is the perception that mosques are unholy, irreligious places diametrically opposed to churches and sacred space. The growing threat of Islam before the turn of the first millennium became embellished by writers who had no direct contact with Muslims, such that “Europe began to know Islam and Muslims in absentia”¹². Rather than historiographical accounts of contact, or polemicist ones such as those prepared by Peter and Mark, legendary stories boasting the luxurious if degenerate way of life led by Muslims spread throughout Europe in text, image and song¹³. They catalogued the adventures of Christian heroes such as Rodrigo or the Cid, and the deviant deeds of Muslim warriors such as Saladin, as well as tales about the prophet Mohammad. These narratives are strongly evidenced by an entire corpus of chivalresque literature popular during the late medieval and early modern periods, epitomized by titles such as *Tirant lo Blanch* (1490), and inspired by legends circulating during medieval times, and they reappear in early modern works of fiction such as *Don Quijote* (1605-1615).

Many of the qualities and traits ascribed to Islam in those medieval legends were transferred to more scientific and philosophical writings of the eighteenth century and beyond. In the play, *Fanatisme ou Mahomet le prophet* (1736), Voltaire characterized the prophet as a barbarous fanatic who was also sensual¹⁴. A similar image of him and of Islam were proffered by José Joaquín de Mora in 1826, who complimented Muhammad for animating such a powerful and large empire, “que convirtió unas tribus barbaras desunidas, en un estado inmenso, floreciente, rico y conquistador”. Upon the conquest of Córdoba, however, Mora banishes Islam from the modern political scene: “los perdemos de vista cuando, privados de la mas bella joya de su diadema, se pierden ellos mismos en la barbarie y en la oscuridad en que todavia yacen”¹⁵. The Spanish translation of Garcin de Tassy’s *La*

leyenda de Mahoma adornada con su retrato (Barcelona: Herederos de Roca, 1840) ironically, given Islam’s position on figural representation, offered the reader a portrait of the prophet. The image was a generic one depicting an older, bearded man wearing a turban twice the size of his head, and donning robes decorated with vegetal embroidery. The work was intended to illuminate the reader, to make Islam knowable and in a way, facilitate the intellectual conquest of the topic through works such as this one, so that the reader would have “una noticia mas exacta de Mahoma”.

On the one hand, these works attempted to inform the reader about Islam. They used scholarly methodologies and sources, which embodied the orientalist renaissance. On the other, they ensured that Islam remained unknowable by recycling medieval representations of it, and by allowing them to archetypically reconstitute Islam using exaggerated characteristics, such as the overlarge turban in the aforementioned portrait. As Said notes about this period of orientalism, “before the advent of the United States, Islam existed in a kind of timeless childhood, shielded from true development by an archaic set of superstitions, prevented by its strange priests and scribes from moving out of the middle ages into the modern world”¹⁶. These perceptions in modern western representation of Islam demonstrate that westerners have an efflorescence of cultural and religious attacks on Islam from individuals and groups whose interests are informed with the idea of the west (and the United States, as its leader) as the standard for enlightened modernity. Yet far from being an accurate description of ‘the west’, such an idea of rightful western dominance is in reality an uncritical idolization of western power¹⁷.

By the 1920s, more than three quarters of the Muslim world was controlled by Europeans. Chris Allen sustains that by the second half of the twentieth century, after the landscape of colonization had shifted dramatically in favour of the Muslim world,

they were no longer orientalised so much as politicised and militarised from the perspective of Europeans. After the cold war, the western world's perception of its enemy deliberately shifted "from reds under the beds to fanatics in the attics"¹⁸. Like Said and Allen, Karim assesses the vacuum of political inquiry after the cold war as one of the principal causes for machining Islam as the next or at least most provocative enemy to western way of life, although his rationale is somewhat subjective. He believes that military officials felt threatened by redundancy after the cold war, and thus "faced with the loss of their *raison d'être*, some of the military and intelligence-gathering establishments began searching for new enemies"¹⁹.

In media and scholarship, Islam implies immediacy, and is treated as a child-like entity without a past and bereft of a profound period of growth. In light of the demonstrated propensity to replicate historical stereotypes and representations over the centuries, Muslims and westerners alike are "doomed to endless self-replication"²⁰ which ensures that the stereotype of an antiquated culture is maintained. These repetitions make the discourse of *islamification*, the process through which westerners represent Muslims, more apparent over several frames of reference, whether those frames are temporal, spatial or cultural.

Indeed, the view that Islam and the Muslim world are out-moded and un-modern is one of the defining concepts of islamophobia and demonstrates the presumed or anticipated collision of western values with those of Islam. The schism between east and west, or an orientalist view of the world, was one that developed in modern times after emerging in the eighteenth century during a period of academic study known as the oriental renaissance²¹, although awareness of this geographical and conceptual polemic certainly predates the modern period, and perhaps is rooted in the bipartite division of the world by Greek thinkers such as Eratosthenes (c. 276-194

BC), who joined Europe and Africa into one continent, with Asia forming the other.

Other characteristics of islamophobia were identified in the Runnymede Report (1997), produced by the Runnymede Trust, a group whose mandate includes multi-racial and ethnic diversity in pluri-cultural space such as the United Kingdom, for the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. According to the Runnymede Report, islamophobia happens when Islam is seen as monolithic and static rather than diverse and dynamic; when Islam is seen as Other and Separate rather than similar and independent; when Islam is believed inferior not different; when Islam is perceived as an enemy not a partner; when Muslims are viewed as manipulative not sincere; when 'racial' discrimination against Muslims is defended rather than challenged; when Muslim criticism of 'the west' is rejected and not considered; and, when anti-Muslim discourse is seen as natural and not problematic²². Allen concludes his argument with an updated definition that positions islamophobia next to racism as similar ideologies²³. While medieval and early modern islamophobia was directed at Muslims by Christians who objected to the faith of Islam, contemporary islamophobia no longer finds the faith reprehensible so much as the people; it has become personal as the rhetoric became 'anti-Muslim' and 'anti-terrorist' rather than 'anti-Islamic', although examples of the latter form of discrimination still exist²⁴.

In Spanish media reports, as well as visual culture, certain cultural markers dominate how Islam is represented in Spain and throughout the western world. Visual and textual vocabularies describe these cultural characteristics and help ensure the continued marginalization of Muslims. The content of contemporary media representations frame Islam as a negative cultural influence within the country through topics such as the veil, polygamy, clitoral ablation, immigration, and terrorism. Symbols such as the crescent moon, mosque, burka, and turban have dominated the European visualisation of

Islam since the middle ages, and these symbols encourage the perception that Muslims belong to the greater, homogenous whole of Islam rather than originating from various nation states, racial and linguistic heritages, geographical regions, religious traditions, and socio-economic statuses. When counter-cultural behaviour such as terrorism becomes associated with these symbols, the effects easily spread to different segments of the Muslim world and result in racism and ethnocentrism²⁵.

2. REPORTING ON ISLAM.

Spanish newspapers like *La Razón* are particularly critical of Muslims. A recent study found that 50% of the articles published in national newspapers in 2008 about or related to Muslims was negative in tone, 39% neutral, and only 11% positive²⁶. *La Razón* published earlier that year an article titled “Los islamistas iban a atacar el transporte público en Barcelona”; it revealed that the attacks would have involved “diversas acciones terroristas suicidas” and “atentados de carácter yihadista”. A section of the article was subtitled “Clases de Islam’ en la mezquita de Hospital”, which clearly attaches a religious context to a story otherwise about violence²⁷. The article was accompanied by a photograph of the mosque, and the reader cannot escape the intersection of text and image upon glancing at the page. The headlines succinctly connect the threat of terrorism against Spain by Muslims and the visualization of the mosque provides a spatial context in which the reader will situate the planning of the attacks. By identifying the attackers as “islamicists” and “jihadists”, the article allows the reader to associate international terrorism with domestic spaces allocated to Muslims and that may be situated in the vicinity of the reader’s home.

Readers are organized into communities of interpretation that collectively process information, observations, and symbols, all of which is easily delivered through newspapers, television and visual culture, as well as the internet, and “together, this

powerful concentration of mass media can be said to constitute a communal core of interpretations providing a certain picture of Islam and, of course, reflecting powerful interests in the society served by the media”²⁸. These communications effectuated by and through media must follow a set of conventions in order for the content of the story to be comprehensible by the reader, which lends a uniform character to the content of the communication²⁹.

While the western world hosts a variety of media outlets, the quality of circulation experienced by one media outlet relates to the potential size of its audience and therefore the influence its communication has upon the community of interpretation. In this sense, an analysis of the content published by the outlets with the greatest circulation will reveal the universal characteristics that govern how Islam is represented in the media; in Spain, these outlets include the newspapers *El Mundo*, *El País* and *La Razón*, among others. With the rise of the internet emerged a second resource that indicates the popularity of certain information. Simple conceptual searches portray an organized, interpreted entity from the internet that confirms what we already know about Islam in the eyes of the westerner.

A visual search in Google.es for the term “Islam” reveals mosques, crescent moons, men reading the Koran, and maps of the Muslim world. On the third line of image results are a pair of satirical cartoon depictions (Fig. 1). The organized concept of Islam in mainstream media “represents a resurgent atavism, which suggests not only the threat of a return to the middle ages but the destruction of what is regularly referred to as the democratic order in the western world”³⁰, an admittedly reductionist, coercive and oppositional viewpoint, according to Said, that nonetheless maintains Muslims in the eyes of westerners as devils attacking their realm.

The aforementioned cartoon clearly associates moderate Islam with modernism,

as the character that embodies this conceptualisation wears a suit and shoes. His beard is trimmed and his manner docile. Radical Islam is personified as a shoeless, beturbaned fanatic bereft of the willingness or ability to take care of his beard, eyes crazed, and a sword raised in the air rather than the finger extended by Moderate Islam. According to the text, both personifications of Islam pose a threat to Christianity and its converts. The Spanish webpage on which it

was posted described and translated the image as “Islam moderado, Islam terrorista, el mismo mensaje. Cuando el Islam sube al poder, indefectiblemente establece la Sharía. ‘Si os convertís al cristianismo, moriréis’”. Either the image or the text that described it became highly circulated information that ensured this particular image would surface near the top of the Google.es image results.



Fig. 1. This English-language cartoon was posted on a Spanish-language site in 2009, and appeared in a google.es image search for the term ‘Islam’. <http://neorural.wordpress.com/2009/01/05/islam-moderado-islam-terrorista-el-mismo-mensaje/>

Journalists frame their reports on Islam dramaturgically, which infuses the representation with a series of known archetypes and performers, plots and scenes, all of which comments on and helps maintain some form of universal order: “neither the west or the orient exist as absolute categories but are conceptualized in relation to each other [...] [t]hey are not clearly demarcated or static geographical regions of the world, but are continually redefined by history and ideology”³¹. This historical and ideological framework is polemical, which is perhaps one of the

universal and ordering principles that has governed the relationship between Islam and the west in the latter’s visual and textual culture. In this sense, one is represented by that which the other is not, or one’s series of codes implies the parallel code in the other’s series, as the crescent is to the cross, or the place of women in Islam as opposed to Christianity. Archetypes give way to tense relationships between hostages, victims and assailants, heroes and villains, just war, jihad and (counter) terrorism, and so on. These vocabularies and visual indices are

maintained by networks and preferred meanings.

The development and use of a fixed vocabulary became the focus of a conference organized in 2008 by the Islamic Cultural Centre of Valencia and the High Islamic Commission of the Community of Valencia. It explored the representation of Muslims and Islam by the Spanish media. Journalists, academics, and regional and national interest groups attended with the intention of facilitating “a bidirectional debate that would define concepts related to the Islamic world and used by media professionals, in order to prevent misinterpretation and biased viewpoints”.

The objective of the conference was to produce a manual for journalists intended to function as “an easy-to-use tool” for improving the accuracy of any report related to Islam. This manual would also ensure consistency from one news story to the next. The conference was financed by the Foundation for Pluralism and Convivencia, the Immigration and Citizenship Office, and RENFE, Spain’s national train company that was so affected by the terrorist attacks of March 11th, 2004. Unfortunately, the manual was never completed.

The production of a conceptual and lexicographical manual about Muslims to be used by journalists and partly financed by a national entity such as RENFE demonstrates the attempt, however unintentionally, to control how Muslims are described in news stories. When a term such as *terrorist* is replaced by *extremist*, the information conveyed by the sentence changes, and the original intent of the author, and the impact the text had on its original target audience, is lost. Extremist in this sense implies a religious or ideological fundamentalism rather than an overt threat to people and cultural spaces. The succession of one term over another implicitly highlights common cultural and social attributes of both terrorists and extremists from the perspective of the writer: when Islam is portrayed as violent and dangerous, the man

who blows up people and places overlaps with the man who fanatically follows his religion.

In Spanish media the conceptually-manifested syntagmatic interrelations that construct Muslims in representation can be thematically treated. Polygamy is a cultural stereotype of Islam today and, interestingly, one used by the New Spain Inquisition to prove that the accused was a morisco, or a Christian converted from Islam. In 2008, *El Mundo* headlined that “El Gobierno paga pensiones a viudas de polígamos de Túnez y Marruecos”. The perceived deviancy of polygamous marriages rather than those that Spaniards typically form between one man and one woman was furthermore conflated with certain views on homosexuality in *El País*: “Líderes musulmanes y directores de mezquitas exigen que se legalicen las segundas mujeres ‘ya que se han regulado los matrimonios entre homosexuales’³².”

A second issue related to women is clitoral ablation. Juan José Téllez notes that it is a practice exercised in various places of Africa and Asia for centuries, and in Columbia after 1492. Despite not being a religious custom, but rather a ritualistic one attached to certain tribes, “there is a sociological tendency to identify these practices with Islam, even though believers of other religions, including Christianity, perform these procedures”³³. While the concern of women’s groups such as the Spanish Association of Women against Mutilation, is principally that of protecting women who live as disadvantaged entities within non-western societies, mass-media consistently associates the mutilation of women’s genitals with Islam. A 2010 article published by Rosa Montero in *El País*, titled “Olvidadas” in reference to the repression of women, describes the bomb attacks launched by the Taliban on a Pakistani school for girls. The article also references Afghani schools for girls, burkas, hell, horror, ablation, barriers to education, South African Apartheid and Al Qaeda, all in three paragraphs of journalistic prose.

This particular piece illustrates the conceptually syntagmatic relationship between ablation and topics that western media relate to it, all of which stems from Islam. Similarly, another article published in June, 2010 in *El Mundo*, titled “El burka y todo lo demás” discusses plans to outlaw the burka. It also specifies other forms of unacceptable social conduct, including rape, communism, the destruction of the west as planned in mosques, ablation, and arranged marriages. In this sense, wearing the burka was equated with other behaviours viewed deviant by the western writer.

Legislated restrictions are not entirely unfamiliar to the modern Spaniard and Spain is not the only western country to publically debate the appropriateness of Muslim dressing habits in schools in recent memory. Many news headlines have highlighted the country’s discomfort with all forms of the veil worn by Muslim women. *El País* published an article titled “El [Partido Popular] restringirá el uso del velo en su ‘contrato’ para inmigrantes” in 2008³⁴. *El Mundo* looked upon the situation from another direction: “El [Partido Popular] regulará el uso público del velo para evitar la discriminación femenina”³⁵. The two newspapers promoted this story to their readers differently; the first one designed its headline to solidify the political position of the Partido Popular, while the second headline attracts readers interested in women’s issues and human rights violations. Ironically, it warns that both will be threatened if women were allowed to wear Muslim-style of dress at school or in the streets of Spain.

The implications of multiple syntagmatic associations such as *burka-immigrants-sexual discrimination* and *burka-ablation-apartheid* could be better documented so that we can appreciate which sub-concepts are most related to *burka* in the mind of the reader. A greater scale of investigation should be undertaken, particularly in terms of the affect the common syntagmatic context has on mass-produced information and the general public’s knowledge of topics

such as the burka. An example of this outcome can be found in the American readership of newspapers. Within six months of the September 11th, 2001 terrorists attacks, a newspaper opinion poll revealed gaps in the general public’s knowledge about the attacks, despite the respondents’ belief that they were well-informed on the topic. These gaps and errors included the belief that the terrorists from the attacks were all from Iraq whereas none were Iraqi nationals³⁶, a belief perhaps precipitated by the American military campaign into that country and by the conceptual syntagms developed in the media.

“Spain’s reaction to the migrants within its borders also demonstrates these representational strategies. As Juan José Téllez observes of the African migrants, *Estamos poco acostumbrados a esos visitantes y no sabemos cómo comportarnos en su presencia. Temerosos, les enfrentamos contra la infantería de nuestras ventanillas, la artillería de las leyes, la caballería ligera del burdo comentario de gente cuya sangre, hace siglos o hace años, vino de la otra esquina del mundo [...]*”³⁷

These opponents have several historical analogues, including pirates, Turks, terrorists, and so on. The Moorish corsair strikes fear into the Christian subject, who becomes alarmed, and this image is today preserved in phrases such as “hay moros en la costa”, advising precaution. Several other phrases exhibit this relationship, Luis Alberto Anaya Hernández notes, such that children are confronted with their parents’ bedtime advice, “Duérmate que viene el moro” rather than “Sleep or else the bogey man will come”³⁸, a phrase not used in English until the nineteenth century.

Spain has shaped how African migration is communicated in the European media. While many immigrants come to Spain legally and provide adequate documentation, most African migrants slip

past border authorities. If apprehended, they are usually given an expulsion order, which facilitates a second method through which residency can be gained: one can simply ignore the expulsion order issued after he has been apprehended³⁹, as Spanish authorities do not have the resources to track each migrant it expels when he may have no fixed address, nor assume the costs of repatriation. Between 2002-2003, for instance, only a quarter of these expulsions were actualized, meaning that 66,000 migrants remained in Spain despite their order of expulsion⁴⁰. Spain also naturalized undocumented residents through more than one amnesty programme over the last two decades, including its 2005 campaign through which it awarded 750,000 illegal migrants residency, which effectively gave them the freedom to cross into other EU nations⁴¹.

To prevent undocumented immigration, Spain has had some success after it erected fences, installed a radar system that helped identify incoming ships; it also patrols the air and the water⁴². These successes are important for reshaping Spain's reputation as a frontier for undocumented immigration within the European Union and its partner nations. Countries like England, France and Germany look upon the migrants as a social problem, while other institutions and national bodies believe they threaten the democratic fabric of European nations because they come from countries bereft of democracy and practice Islam. In England, for instance, immigrants who apply for citizenship are tested on the country's language, culture and history. It is a process "designed to mould their values into those deemed appropriate", an attempt to integrate immigrants into the greater community; similar practices inform the immigration process in most EU countries⁴³.

The polarization of democracies with states that observe Islam remains a prevalent western discourse, and they could be reconciled upon recognizing that the two cultural institutions need not oppose one another, or alternatively by suppressing one

over the other⁴⁴. In the meantime, articles such as one published in October 2006 in an online journal criticise the Spanish government's subvention of a book for Muslims, deciding it constituted political wrangling by the country's prime minister, all the while concluding that Muslim countries would never support publishing the Bible; the article is titled "Moros en la escuela: Polémica decisión de [Zapatero] al financiar un libro de texto para niños musulmanes".

A similar polemic in 2005 led to an international debate that resulted from publishing cartoons of Mohammad in Denmark, and their subsequent republication in other forums. Allen believes the incident epitomises the "clash of civilisations' thesis" because it demonstrated the cultural and social differences between the west and Islam. The incident also provoked protests throughout the Muslim world, who found the cartoons offensive and in poor taste, whereas the western media publicised and subsequently justified the publication of the cartoons as a matter of free speech and democracy. The conceptual opposition of democracy and freedom against Islamic fundamentalism was typified in the media by a few violent incidents and protests rather than the more common, peaceful ones. These cartoons, it should be noted, could have not been published, if simply to prevent offending the readership of the newspaper unnecessarily. After all, this is exactly why cartoons of Jesus were rejected for publication by another editor of the Danish newspaper, because "they might provoke public outcry", which demonstrates the double standard at play in western media⁴⁵.

3. VISUALISING ISLAM, THEN AND NOW.

The representation of Islam in painting and political posters is also syntagmatically guided and controlled by visual indices of description, and these indices have remained unchanged for centuries. Reconquered by Spanish Catholics in 1236, post-reconquest

Córdoba adopted some of the symbols from the mosque that was established there a few centuries before, and which it later adapted to become a cathedral, as emphasized on a 1440 stamp that symbolized the city with the mosque, its arches and two palm trees⁴⁶. Twelfth-century Muslim geographer Edrisi compared the mosque to the Cathedral at Santiago de Compostela and to the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem⁴⁷, an ironic juxtaposition of spaces given the mosque's subsequent conversion into a cathedral as well as its distinct architectural design. The mosque-cathedral of Córdoba today stands as a tourist monument that has retained its purpose as a church while functioning as a museum of relics and religious articles from both Islam and Christianity, and an art gallery of sculpture and painting.

One such painting is located in a chapel situated along the perimeter of the prayer

room named for Santa Teresa (Fig. 2). Dating from the early eighteenth century, Antonio Palomino captured the moment in Spain's history that facilitated the conversion of the mosque to a cathedral: the fall of Córdoba to King Ferdinand. The virgin and her son reign over the scene and remind the viewer that this moment held not only geo-political significance, but also a cultural and religious one. Palomino represented the defeated Muslim force with turbans topped by token crescent moons reaching out from their supplicating position at the feet of the king. Their cloaks contrast with the armour worn by the king and his soldiers; their robes hang about their bodies whereas the king's cape buffets majestically behind him, caught by the wind of change that would usher in a new era, as he simultaneously reaches for the key to the city.



FIG. 2. The Fall of Córdoba to King Ferdinand (Rendición de Córdoba a San Fernando), c. 1712. Antonio Palomino. Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba.

Behind this scene is the mosque in which the painting's viewer stands in order to consume the historic moment with which he is confronted in the painting, and he finds himself considering multiple visualizations of the space he occupies during the act of viewing the painting. Depending on the viewer's cultural background, he may identify with one of the two archetypes represented by Palomino, the white Christian that dominates the scene or the faceless, marginalized Muslim. His self-identification has a spatial implication because he is standing in a building that was both a church and a mosque, a space that, for all the functions it has today, ceased to function as a mosque. The mosque had been architecturally adapted two centuries before Palomino into a cathedral with chapels along its perimeter; the viewer stands in one of these appropriated spaces and consumes a scene in which the city's fall to Catholics is symbolized by the surrender of the key to the city. Today's viewer can purchase a replica of this key at one of the many tourist shops that neighbour the mosque-cathedral. These keys are numerous, it must be noted, because the target consumer identifies its importance as a symbol of the reconquest, and likely aligns his identity with that of the king as a Christian or as coming from Christian heritage.

Other than the Muslims in the foreground, and our knowledge that the buildings in the

background relate to their infrastructure, there is little of Islam within the painting whereas it contains biblical characters at the top, and the now-sainted king and his countrymen occupy the greatest area. Despite the scant traces of Islam, the viewer knows that the historic moment represented by Palomino took place in a Muslim city at the cusp of being politically converted. Similarly, within the mosque-cathedral today, the tourist knows he is standing in a building repurposed as a cathedral, but other than the great spans of arches in the prayer room, he encounters little of Islam within the building. Reflecting from all sides of the prayer room are chapels, paintings, gravestones, and sculptures of historic figures from the reconquest and later in Spain's history, along with saints and biblical characters. The arches of the prayer room symbolize Córdoba, as they did in the fifteenth century on the city's seal, and as they do today on Spain's two Euro coin, minted in 2010. After winning the war, Catholics assumed the greatness of this monument to Spanish Muslim civilization within their territory. The mosque-cathedral was then promoted as a monument to the reconquest⁴⁸, which is how it stands today, and the arches iconicize it while the western tourist ensures its signification and relevance by inscribing himself within the historical moment as a Christian, or as a non-Muslim.



FIG. 3. Anti-immigration poster from www.nuevorden.net, titled “España islámica”, dated 2007.

Palomino anticipated that his spectator was Christian, and certainly the artist of an anti-immigration poster circulated after the Madrid terrorist attacks in 2004 presumed that his target audience would not be Muslim either (Fig. 3). The image alone portrays conflicting representations of Islam. In the foreground is a group of Muslims, the women’s faces covered by the veil, and with the exception of the sword, the men wear identical clothing to that donned by the personified fanatical and moderate Islams portrayed in the cartoon studied above. The men are bearded, wear robes and turbans, and the boys are similarly dressed; all of them smile benignly up at two Spanish politicians in suits asking them and the viewer for their votes. The viewer of the poster is forced at this moment to read the text in order to understand what the politicians are yelling at the spectators. The upper half of the poster, which also forms the background, was dedicated to the illustration of two buildings: a church in the midst of demolition, and a mosque under construction. The church, recognizable not by its cross, but by its broken gothic tower, is attacked by men wielding hatchets and a bulldozer, and overtop of this scene lingers a cloud, whereas no cloud hangs over the mosque, which bears bulbous domes and numerous minarets, all topped with crescent moons. The latter building is centred and takes up more visual spectrum than the church.

The viewer must realise the visually-communicated message that links happy Muslims with big mosques to poorly-maintained churches and the Spanish politicians that pander to them: Spain’s immigrant population threatens its culture, which in this case is epitomized by religion. Turning to the text, the constituted visual message is modified by the question put to the viewer: “Do you want your children to grow up in a consumerist, multicultural and multiracial society like that of the United States?” Apparently, the construction of a new mosque was intended to convey the cultural consumerism prevalent in the United States and to connect it with the perceived encroachment of immigrants. This particular poster furthermore portrays Spain’s social situation in the future, and depends on the viewer’s knowledge of Spain’s conflicts with Islam in order to project immigration as a threat to the country’s future.

Many of the visual symbols from both Palomino’s eighteenth-century painting of the fall of Córdoba and the anti-immigration poster are instantly recognized by the viewer as visual cues that indicate Islam, and for which visual and related textual vocabularies have been established. These two specimens of Spanish representation, separated by more than 300 years, hold many characteristics in common, despite being intended for distinct target audiences and circulated in different media formats.

First, both employ the iconic symbol for Islam, the crescent moon, in order to identify Muslim space in the 2007 poster, and people with a Muslim background, in Palomino. Second, both representations depict Muslims dressed in robes and turbans. The stature of both groups of Muslims is also interesting because each is shown to be subject to Spanish authority; in Palomino, their subjection comes at the expense of losing Córdoba and the imposition of a Catholic government and king, while the poster conveys the image of citizenship and the intendancy of Spanish politicians. Third, both representations reserve space for a mosque, and fourth, each contains strong religious themes that imply a polarity and struggle between Islam and Christianity, as well as the occupation of space. Fifth, the order of objects is similar in both representations: top to bottom, divine or spiritual presence, represented by the cloud and by the scene containing biblical characters; religious architecture; white Spaniards in a position of power; and subjectified Muslims. Sixth, in order for the reader to comprehend the significance of each representation, he would have to already possess knowledge of the political and historical events that motivated their production. And, seventh, both representations were created in recognition of these events, and in order to remind the spectator of them.

These two examples of visual media demonstrate that syntagmatic associations link symbols for Islam to topics such as immigration and war. They also reveal a similar organizational structure; the ordering, pairing and contrasting of the visual elements relates to textual descriptions found in print media. Many of the same conceptual associations were made in different periods and in different forms of media. As Said noted, these western concepts for Islam and the symbols that iterate them are not new and indeed have been replicated from the middle ages. These complex associations have formed feedback loops so that concepts such as terrorism also signify Islam as well as secondary

characteristics such as the burka and apartheid. Phrases such as *moros en la costa* have been combined and conflated with other terms, and reconceptualised for the western world's perceived conflict with Islam, particularly after the terrorist attacks of 2001 and 2004. The combination and conflation of key characteristics such as the veil and the mosque with non-western practices that Spaniards view as monstrous and inhumane, such as clitoral ablation and polygamy, ensure the continued representation of Muslims as enemies of Spain and the western world.

Notes

¹ Laura Navarro García. "Racismo y medios de comunicación: Representaciones del inmigrante magrebí en el cine español". *Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación* 2009.6 (337-362), 338-339.

² Silvia Nagy-Zekmi. "Buscando el Este en el Oeste", in *Moros en la costa. Orientalismo en Latinoamérica*. Ed. Silvia Nagy-Zekmi. Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2008, 17. Also see Hernán G. H. Taboada. "La sombra del Oriente en la independencia americana" in Silvia Nagy-Zekmi, 25.

³ Edward W. Said. *Covering Islam. How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. New York: Vintage Books, c. 1997, 5.

⁴ E. Said, 25.

⁵ Karim H. Karim. *Islamic Peril. Media and Global Violence*. London: Black Rose Books, c. 2003, 2; also see 62-63.

⁶ K. H. Karim, 4.

⁷ A study dedicated to this topic is forthcoming by Dolores Mayoral Arqué, Fidel Molina Luque, and Lluís Samper Rasero. "Islamofobia o curriculum nulo? La representación del Islam, las culturas musulmanas y los inmigrantes musulmanes en los libros de texto Cataluña". *Revista de Educación*, 357 (2012).

⁸ E. Said, 27.

⁹ José Martínez Gázquez and Andrew Gray. "Translations of the Qur'an and Other Islamic Texts before Dante (Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries)". *Dante Studies* 125, 2007 (79-92), 83-84.

¹⁰ From the prologue of *Alcoranus Latinus*, cited in J. Martínez Gázquez and Andrew Gray, 86.

¹¹ Cited in J. Martínez Gázquez and Andrew Gray, 87.

¹² Chris Allen. *Islamophobia*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010, 27.

¹³ Norman Daniel also concludes that little was known of Muslims in this period. *Heroes and Saracens. An Interpretation of the Chansons de Geste*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984, 46.

¹⁴ C. Allen, 29.

¹⁵ From the preface to *Cuadros de la Historia de los Árabes, desde Mahoma hasta la Conquista de Granada*. Londres, Colombia, Buenos Aires, Chile, Perú and Guatemala: R. Ackermann, Strand: 1826. Tomo 1, iix-ix.

¹⁶ E. Said, 30.

¹⁷ E. Said, xxix.

¹⁸ C. Allen, 32-34, 46.

¹⁹ K.H. Karim, 3.

²⁰ E. Said, 40-42, 43.

²¹ E. Said, 4, 13.

²² C. Allen, 69-73.

²³ C. Allen, 69-73.

²⁴ C. Allen, 135.

²⁵ Navarro García, "Racismo y medios de comunicación", 339.

²⁶ Laura Mesa, Ed. *La imagen del mundo árabe y musulmán en la prensa española*. Seville: Fundación Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo, 2010, 47.

²⁷ Laura Mesa, Ed., 106, 113.

²⁸ E. Said, 47.

²⁹ E. Said, 49.

³⁰ E. Said, 55.

³¹ K.H. Karim, 56-57.

³² Laura Mesa, Ed., 126.

³³ Juan José Téllez. *Moros en la costa*. Madrid: Editorial Debate, 2001, 43.

³⁴ Laura Mesa, Ed., 120.

³⁵ Laura Mesa, Ed., 121.

³⁶ Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills. *At War with Metaphor. Media, Propaganda, and Racism in the War on Terror*. Toronto: Lexington Books, 2008, 17-18.

³⁷ J. José Téllez, 15.

³⁸ Luis Alberto Anaya Hernández, 247.

³⁹ Jorgen Carling. "Migration Control and Migrant Fatalities at the Spanish-African Borders". *International Migration Review*. 41.2, 2007 (316-343), 320.

⁴⁰ Carling, 324.

⁴¹ Hugo Brady. *EU Migration Policy: An A-Z*. London: Centre for European Reform, 2008, 11.

⁴² Haas, 11-12.

⁴³ Yann Algan, Christian Dustmann, Albrecht Glitz, and Alan Manning. "The Economic Situation of First and Second-Generation Immigrants in France, Germany and the United Kingdom". *The Economic Journal*, 120.542, 2010 (4-30), 7.

⁴⁴ Robin Wright. "Islam, Democracy and the West". *Foreign Affairs*, 71.3, 1992 (131-145), 16.

⁴⁵ C. Allen, 117.

⁴⁶ Reproduced in Manuel Nieto Cumplido. *La Mezquita de Córdoba: planos y dibujos*. Córdoba: Colegio oficial de Arquitectos de Andalucía Occidental, 1992, 143 (fig. 345). These palm trees are not visible in a second version of this stamp, also dated 1440, and reproduced in Francisco Cosano Moyano. *Iconografía de Córdoba*. Seville, c. 1995, 248.

⁴⁷ J. García Mercadal. *Viajes de extranjeros por España y Portugal*. 3 Vols. Madrid: Aguilar, 1952. Vol. 1, 207.

⁴⁸ García Mercadal, vol. 1, 207.