

Changing Paradigms: Islam and Muslims in Spain

Laura Mijares

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

laura.mijares@filol.ucm.es

"Moros vienen". Historia y política de un estereotipo. By Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste. Melilla, Instituto de las Culturas, 2017. Pp. 233. ISBN 978-84-938599-3-0.

Musulmanes, jóvenes y ciudadanos. Un estudio etnográfico en la Comunidad de Madrid. By Salvatore Madonia. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2018. Pp. 233. ISBN 978-84-00-10409-2.

Identidades a la intemperie. Una mirada antropológica a la radicalización en Europa. By Jordi Moreras. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2018. Pp. 271. ISBN 978-84-7290-901-4.

Islam y desposesión. Resignificar la pertenencia. By Luz Gómez García (ed.). Madrid: Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo, 2019. Pp. 272. ISBN 978-84-948759-6-0.

Edward Said openly lamented in his prologue to the second edition of the Spanish translation of *Orientalism* that he had not been able to include Oriental Studies carried out in Spain in his analysis of the connections between empire and Orientalism. He wrote in that preface that the long Muslim presence in Spain, "still present in the current culture of Spain" (Said, 2003: 9), made this country an exception in the context of the general European Orientalist model. As a result of that particularity, analyses of Arabic-Islamic contexts by Spanish academics should lack the ideological traits of other Orientalisms, such as those from England or France, and it could be expected to have given the Orientalism of Spain particular characteristics. What is certain is that Spanish Orientalism was for a very long time on the periphery, both politically and epistemologically. It was distinguished most importantly by its twin status as both a producer and a subject of Orientalism (Cardeira, 2016). Nevertheless, that peripheral position, far from prompting the creation of Spanish Orientalism's own less limiting and essentialist analytic frameworks, may have led in fact to a mere replication (Mijares, 2017). Since the seventeenth century, Spanish Orientalism has sought to secure a prominent position in the major academic centres, and this requires it to excise any non-Christian roots from Spanish history (Rodríguez Mediano, 2006; García-Arenal, 2016). Although since the nineteenth century Orientalism in Spain has revolved around the study of al-Andalus, translating and analysing literary, legal and biographical works of all kinds from the Andalusí period, the analytic framework within which that study is carried out fluctuates between

“otherness and the deep essentialism of what it is to be Spanish” (Macías Amoretti, 2017: 49). The study of “our domestic Orient”, al-Andalus as conceived by Bernabé López García (2016), combines with the work of Spanish Africanists who focus on the “nearest Orient” to Spain (McSweeney and Hopkins, 2017), which is Morocco. Soldiers of the imperial army stationed in the Spanish protectorate in Morocco undertake academic work with a civilising mission similar to the mission of the great imperial enterprises. In that context, Morocco gives Spain the chance to position itself as a modern power, via an interesting twist in which only by “orientalising” others can Spain hope to escape its own marginal position in the Orientalist scheme (Cañete, 2009). This is a double Orientalism, which in the case of Spanish–Moroccan relations comes to be defined by a construct of the “Moor” as the ancestral enemy of Spain (Mateo Dieste, 1997; Martín Corrales, 2002; Bravo López, 2012; López García, 2016). Nevertheless, that construct is also determined by ambiguities and ambivalences, an interesting alternation between fear of the “Moor” and love of the “Moor”, which also gives rise to the idiosyncrasy of works on the “other Orient” written by Spanish Africanists (Mateo Dieste, 1997; Gil-Benumeña, 2018) – an ambivalence that obviates the idea of good and bad Orientalisms, as shown in the works of Gilbert Achcar (2016), critical of Said's excessively cultural analysis.

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) anthropologist Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste's book *“Moros vienen”: Historia y política de un estereotipo* [“The Moors are coming”: The history and politics of a stereotype] is a revised, updated

version of his monograph on the same theme published twenty years ago (Mateo Dieste, 1997). The author presents an excellent tour of Spanish Orientalism, showing how the past and the present connect in the construction of the "the Moorish" over the course of Spanish history. He shows how that image, forged on the basis of changing, context-dependent stereotypes that are renewed and self-renew over time in the Iberian Peninsula, takes new forms and, above all, "gives rise to a series of paradoxes that distinguish the case of Spain from others, like the British or the French, whose orientalisms were not 'home-grown'" (p. 22). Nevertheless, it is very important to note that Mateo Dieste is not talking about an essentialised linearity; rather, his work, centred on old and new lines of social differentiation, continuous yet changing, shows how images of the "Moor" change with every turn in history, falling time and again into different patterns. Whilst from the fourteenth century to the eighteenth, the image of the "Moor" occupied a central place in theological cosmology to identify, above all, a religious enemy, from the eighteenth to the first half of the twentieth century, the "Moor" was racialised by scientific theories and positioned within an evolutionary racial hierarchy with the so-called "other peoples". From the second half of the twentieth century, with the gradual abandonment of racist explanations, a culturalist explanatory framework was adopted, putting the focus on cultural differences to legitimise social and political hierarchies and so eventually justifying inequality and the exclusion of certain groups.

Although using culture to legitimise inequality and discrimination is normal in the processes of differentiation applied to certain minority or minoritised groups, it is certainly more than apparent in the case of Muslim populations. As racist rhetoric lost its former academic and social prestige, the paradigm of the "Moor" gradually transformed itself into another, that of the migrant worker. From the enactment of the first "Law Concerning Foreigners" in 1985, the study of Maghrebi populations, principally Moroccan, became part of more general sociological discussions of the immigration of foreign workers. Some academic migration studies also focussed on the capacity of certain groups more than others to integrate because, as Mateo Dieste explains very clearly, cultural fundamentalism takes root amongst migration experts too, to explain inequality and discrimination. Reminding us of the work of Verena Stolcke (1995), the author shows how cultural differences become a habitual tool to explain and legitimise inequality. Similarly in line with the work of anthropologists such as Lila Abu-Lughod (2002), Mateo Dieste considers that this cultural framing meets a clear objective: to distinguish those who are "from here", or who are integrated into certain values, from those who are not. Even though before the 2000s sociological studies of Muslim populations were scarce, classification systems operated within cultural frameworks to argue, for example, that Moroccan communities are the most difficult to integrate (Sartori, 2001).

9/11 and, particularly, the terrorist attacks on Madrid's suburban rail network in March 2004, drastically changed this situation. Caught up in the wake

of other developments, Islam and Muslims became a subject of study. The change of paradigm is apparent: Moroccans, as well as being foreign migrant workers, start to be seen as Muslim men and women (Mijares y Ramírez, 2008). The focus continues to be on integration and its difficulties, but now Islam and Muslimness are seen as the most obvious obstacle to what is meant by successful integration. Foreign workers whose religion is Islam – in Spain, principally Moroccans– are now distinguished by their religious difference, making way for what Meghan Benton and Anne Nielsen (2013) call the public anxieties about Muslim integration. Common to much sociological and anthropological output concerned with Muslim communities in Spain since the 1990s is the use of the paradigm of foreignness, although their status as outsiders has nothing to do with where they were born. In Spain, there are currently nearly two million Muslims. Of these, a little less than 50% are of Spanish nationality, whether they were born in Spain, have Spanish parents or grandparents, have become Spanish by naturalisation, have embraced Islam out of choice or are citizens of the cities of Ceuta and Melilla (Observatorio Andalusí, 2020). That reality does not, however, prevent Muslims from being seen as “others” who are beyond integration, whose identities stand in opposition to European identity.

In fact, sociologist Salvatore Madonia's book *Musulmanes, jóvenes y ciudadanos: Un estudio etnográfico en la Comunidad de Madrid* [Muslims, young citizens: An ethnographic study in the Community of Madrid], is part of

this new line of research that looks at Muslims as new socio-political actors. His work deals specifically with the issue of young Muslims, that is, those Muslims who are, or the majority of whom are, Spanish, or who have lived for most of their lives in Spain. Following in the wake of seminal works in the field such as that of the anthropologist Virtudes Téllez (2008; 2011), he undertakes fieldwork in Madrid with young Muslims who, following the attacks of March 2004, decide to come together to raise their voices to counter society's negative vision of Islam and of Muslims in general. Madonia approaches these young people from a position of otherness, that is: seeing them, as they think that the society in which they live in Madrid sees them, as a group that is outside and that does not legitimately belong to that society. The author presents these young people to us from the perspective of the "other", showing how they construct and reconstruct their Muslimness in a context in which they find themselves in a minority and how, from within that Muslimness, they formulate their claims with the intention of being fully integrated. For those young people, Madonia maintains, the production of an indigenous Islam becomes an ideological and political, but also a cultural, issue, in their struggle in mainstream society to claim legitimate membership in it. The book, which seeks to explain how processes of othering affect young Muslims, stands completely within the paradigm of integration, by which I mean that it follows the line of work that considers Muslims as quintessential "others".

The paradigms and the rhetoric clearly change to adapt to new systems of social classification and differentiation. Returning to Mateo Dieste and his book, *"Moros vienen": Historia y política de un estereotipo*, the peninsular consciousness has constructed over history widely disseminated categories that, although they may change, come and go in new forms to be a central feature of the public sphere. That is the case with the *jihadist*, the new figure around whom processes of social differentiation now also revolve (Ramírez, 2016). The new paradigm of "radicalisation" has managed to thoroughly embed itself in sociological work dealing with Muslim communities. This was only possible because various actors, including the media, universities and certain think tanks, have undertaken an intense normalisation effort which means that, today, an unquestioned relationship has been established between Islam, violence, oppression and lack of democracy.

It is on the figure of the *jihadist* that the book of another anthropologist, Jordi Moreras, focuses. In *Identidades a la intemperie: Una mirada antropológica a la radicalización en Europa* [Unprotected identities: An anthropological look at radicalisation processes in Europe], the author puts forward a view that is critical of the approach particularly taken within institutions to "radicalisation" as a social phenomenon. The book shows that there has in effect been a change of paradigm and that researchers' concerns about Islam and Muslims have grown when it comes to addressing the phenomenon of radicalisation and *jihadism*. It offers a state-of-the-art review in which the author analyses the emergence of a

new field of knowledge associated with Islam and with Muslims that has made the issue of radicalisation its organising principle. Nevertheless, the author shows the lack of agreement that exists regarding the definition and content of radicalisation, highlighting how, despite the term having become a buzzword, it has still not ceased to be under-theorised. Its repeated use has led not to better definition, but rather to the opposite – to its meaning becoming ever more tangled with usage that is often careless if not irresponsible. The same thing is happening with empirical research and projects intended to prevent this supposed radicalisation. The growth in the number of works devoted to prevention and penalisation of the processes of violent radicalisation since 2008 is further evidence of that change of paradigm in the conceptualisation of Islam and Muslims. The priority given to the security aspect is a feature shared by many such works, which also leads to impossible classifications of the profiles of suspected terrorists, motivations leading to radicalisation and the dynamics that favour it. The author is critical of the fact that some of these works lack the relational dimension that would make them more rounded and informed.

Moreras's book also has an empirical part, in its fourth and final chapter, which is devoted to the analysis of *salafiyya*, as the author prefers to call the neo-fundamentalist-inspired movement that other writers call *salafism*. From his point of view, it is not so much a movement as a frame of reference, a current, whence his preference for the first term. What is more, his fieldwork is focused not on an analysis of *salafism* as a political movement, but rather on the

"implantation and development of the quietist, literalist or puritan currents of *salafiya* at the heart of Muslim communities in Catalonia" (p. 181). Starting from the errors that, according to the author, other researchers and experts have committed, Moreras's analysis seeks to offer a rigorous work with an integrated and non-a priori approach, avoiding, for example, theoretical simplifications that simply identify *salafism* with "Muslim extremism". The author shares the view of researchers who have worked on the salafist movement in other contexts such as the French (Adraoui, 2008; Amghar, 2011), concluding like them that we must discard arguments that blame these communities for the increasingly vigorous processes of radicalisation. Moreras offers an alternative interpretation that dwells on explaining that, at least in Catalonia, this tendency is first and foremost nourished by personal commitment born of strong religious conviction.

These changes of paradigm around the "Moor", the immigrant and ultimately the Muslim, are the fruit of epistemological twists that over recent years have given rise to the appearance of new analytical trends. We see an increasing number of works that, distancing themselves from the paradigm of foreignness and otherness, approach the question of Islam and Muslims from new critical positions. Among them is the work edited by Luz Gómez, *Islam y desposesión: Resignificar la pertenencia*. [Islam and dispossession: Reinterpreting belonging]. Although this book goes beyond the theme of Islam in Spain, since it contains a significant number of articles about social, artistic and doctrinal movements in the Arab-Islamic world, it also contains others devoted to

discussion and analysis of the relationship between legitimacy and power from a transnational perspective on Islam. The editor makes a clear commitment to approaching the question of Islam and Muslims from the notion of a deterritorialised Islam, highlighting "the inclusion of contrahegemonic Islamic voices and authorities that empower historically inferior subjects" (p. 14). The various chapters of the four parts of the work maintain a fluid dialogue between the here and the there, showing that the struggle between different currents within Islam has become more diversified than ever and that, consequently, so has control over the interpretation of Islam with the evident proliferation of its centres of authority.

Fewer chapters in the book deal with Islam and Muslims in Spain and Europe than with Islam in Islamic contexts. Nevertheless, those chapters address themes such as the role of imams (Elena Arigita), the application of Islamic law in immigrant Muslim communities (Sonia Prieto Monteagudo), the characteristics of *salafism* as a current of Islam (Luz Gómez) and as a movement (Rafael Ortega), and new artistic production ranging from literature (Gonzalo Fernández Parilla and Jesús Zanón), rap (Jairo Guerrero) to art (Moisés Garduño García). The work as a whole shows that the reality of Islam becomes more complex if we approach it from a glocal perspective. Awareness of that complexity is necessary, not only to avoid simplification, but also to include to the greatest extent possible alternative visions to delocalise the processes by which Muslims are affected in situations where they are not in the majority. A clear example is the case of

imams, whose work in Spain, as Elena Arigita (pp. 21–38) explains, is affected by many factors, including conflicting transnational currents of Islam and the institutional context in Spain, dominated, as in other European contexts, by the security paradigm.

The four books discussed are devoted to the theme of Islam and the “Muslim question” in Spanish society and sit within the framework of a Spanish Orientalism that is peripheral and heir to the paradigm shifts seen in academia over the last thirty years. Spain's peripheral position is a geographic reality – but also an academic reality. The fact that the *Journal of Muslims in Europe* (JOME) has considered the possibility of giving more space to books not written in English is an indication of this. The lack of interest in works on the reality of Islam and Muslims in Spain is not just due to the language barrier. Apart from the existence of socio-political reasons, it is also a question of major academic centres. Reflecting on the scope offered by this peripheral position, Maria Cardeira (2016: 2) wonders, “Can the unrevealed peripheral approaches to the Orient produce or enlighten different frames that might induce different kinds of political representation of Islam and Arabs, or, better, de-centre the political talk from its obsessed focus on Muslims (and, ultimately, from all religious or/and cultural gate-keeping concepts)?” Although we are not in a position to give a categorical reply to that question, the texts discussed show that most of the explanations are still set within analytic paradigms shared by a dominant majority. Whether based on the figure of the “Moor”, of the migrant worker, of

the Muslim or more recently of the *jihadist*, it is difficult to assert with Said (2003: 10) that “instead of confronting each other with belligerence, Islam and Spanish culture inhabit each other”. Whilst it is certain that Islam and Muslims were an actual presence in the Peninsula from the eighth century, it is also certain that “looking at the world without othering” (Cardeira, 2016: 2) is now very difficult, if not impossible.

Nevertheless, I would not want to end without mentioning the new positions that are being formed and that may perhaps drastically modify those that have, until now, been the most important features of Spanish Orientalism. Not only through the gradual appearance of works by Muslim scholars, but also because, little by little, scholars are managing to explore the social and political actions of Muslims outside a frame of reference that understands Islam as an intrinsically political religion, and the integration of Muslims as an inherently complex matter. In this attempt to de-essentialise, it is absolutely necessary to de-Islamise, or at least diversify, the themes that we take an interest in when we study the dynamics affecting Muslims. In a recent article, Ángeles Ramírez and I wondered to what extent gender relationships between Muslim men and women were necessarily mediated by Islam. We asked ourselves that question as a result of fieldwork with a group of Muslim women in Madrid. One of our conclusions was that the existence of an Islamic relationship framework was determinative for only a small part of that group and that other factors, hardly explored in discussion of Muslim women, were having a greater influence on the relationships of those women

with their environment and, obviously, with Muslim men too (Ramírez and Mijares, 2018). Perhaps Spain's peripheral position is a good place from which to try to explore those other questions and to overcome the idea that there is a Muslim subjectivity that dominates every aspect of the lives of those people. By which I do not mean to say that we must stop analysing Muslimness as an organising and determinative principle for some communities. Islamophobia is there to remind us that this is a reality. In any event, this article is an attempt to encourage non-Spanish-speaking readers to explore Spanish works on Islam and Muslims and to take an interest in a peripheral but equally determinative context for the understanding of the reality of European Islam in general.

References

- Abu-Lughod, Lila (2002). Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others. *American Anthropologist*, 104 (3), pp. 783-790.
- Achcar, Gilbert (2016). *Marxismo, orientalismo, cosmopolitismo*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra.
- Adraoui, Mohammed-Ali (2008). Être salafiste en France". In: Bernard Rougier, Bernard (ed.) *Qu'est-ce que le salafisme?* Paris: PUF, pp. 231-243.
- Amghar, Samir (2011). *Le salafisme d'aujourd'hui: Mouvements sectaires en Occident*. Paris: Michalon.

Benton, Meghan, and Nielsen, Anne (2013). Integrating Europe's Muslim Minorities: Public Anxieties, Policy Responses. *The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute*, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/integrating-europes-muslim-minorities-public-anxieties-policy-responses> [Accessed 15 March 2020].

Bravo López, Fernando (2012). *En casa ajena: Bases intelectuales del antisemitismo y la islamofobia*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra.

Cañete, Carlos (2009). *El origen africano de los íberos: Una perspectiva historiográfica*, Ph.D. Thesis, Departamento de Ciencias y Técnicas Historiográficas, Historia Antigua y Prehistoria, Universidad de Málaga.

Cardeira, Maria (2016). Southern Insights on the Orient and Western Orientalism. *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos* 21, pp. 1–11.

García-Arenal, Mercedes (2016). Introduction. In: Mercedes García-Arenal, ed., *After Conversion: Iberia and the Emergence of Modernity*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 1–16.

Gil-Benumeya, Daniel (2018). España y lo moro: Ambigüedades coloniales y políticas. *Viento Sur* 160, pp. 45–56.

López García, Bernabé (2016). Los arabistas españoles "extramuros" del orientalismo europeo (1820-1936). *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos* 21, pp. 107–17.

- Macías Amoretti, Juan A. (2017). El estudio de las ideologías y el pensamiento árabe contemporáneo en España: Una crónica desde los márgenes. *Awraq* 16, pp. 49–60.
- Martín Corrales, Eloy (2002). *La imagen del magrebí en España: Una perspectiva histórica, siglos XVI–XVIII*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra.
- Mateo Dieste, Josep Lluís (1997). *El "moro" entre los primitivos: El caso del Protectorado Español en Marruecos*. Barcelona: Fundación "La Caixa".
- McSweeney, Anna, and Hopkins, Claudia (2017). Editorial: Spain and Orientalism. *Art in Transition* 9 (1), pp. 1–6.
- Mijares, Laura (2017). ¿Orientalismos periféricos? Zonas de teoría y análisis del campo islámico en España. *Awraq* 16, pp. 19–34.
- Mijares, Laura, and Ramírez, Ángeles (2008). The "Islamisation" of Immigration: Some Hypotheses about the Spanish Case. *Quaderns de la Mediterrània* 9, pp. 189–193. https://www.iemed.org/publicacions/quaderns/9/q9_189.pdf [Accessed 15 March 2020].
- Observatorio Andalusí (2020). *Estudio demográfico de la población musulmana: Explotación del censo de ciudadanos musulmanes en España referido a fecha 31/12/2019*. Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España. <http://observatorio.hispanomuslim.es/estademograf.pdf> [Accessed 19 March 2020].
- Ramírez, Ángeles (2016). La construcción del "problema musulmán": Radicalización, islam y pobreza. *Viento Sur* 144, pp. 21–30.

https://vientosur.info/IMG/pdf/VS144_A_Ramirez_problema_musulman.pdf

[Accessed 19 March 2020].

Ramírez, Ángeles, and Mijares, Laura (2018). Rethinking Re-Islamization: On Muslims and Gender in Spain. In: Ana I. Planet Contreras, ed., *Observing Islam in Spain: Contemporary Politics and Social Dynamics*. Leiden, Brill, pp. 140–57.

Rodríguez Mediano, Fernando (2006). Fragmentos de orientalismo español del siglo XVII. *Hispania: Revista Española de Historia* 46 (222), pp. 243–76.

Said, Edward (2003) [1978]. *Orientalismo*. Barcelona: Debolsillo. Translation: M^a Luisa Fuentes.

Sartori, Giovanni (2001). *La sociedad multiétnica*. Madrid: Taurus.

Stolcke, Verena (1995). Talking Culture: New Boundaries, New Rhetoric of Exclusion in Europe. *Current Anthropology* 36 (1), pp. 1–24.

Téllez, Virtudes (2008). La juventud musulmana de Madrid responde: Lugar y participación social de las asociaciones socioculturales formadas o revitalizadas después de los atentados del 11-M. *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos (REIM)* 6, pp. 133–43.

Téllez, Virtudes (2011). *Contra el estigma: Jóvenes españoles/as y marroquíes transitando entre la ciudadanía y la "musulmanidad"*. Ph.D. Thesis, Departamento de Antropología Social, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.