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The Mediterranean Seminar Review

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Calderwood, Eric. *Colonial al-Andalus: Spain and the Making of Modern Moroccan Culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018. ISBN 9780674980327

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Eric Calderwood tracks “the footprints of al-Andalus in Morocco” (Calderwood, 9) and highlights their presence in art, literature, music, architecture, place names, “cuisine, clothing, handicrafts, dialect, and even temperament” (Calderwood, 7). He investigates the vestiges in an attempt to confirm the hybrid nature of Morocco’s Andalusí identity and revive anew the postcolonial debate. Calderwood, however, approaches it from a novel angle, while bearing in mind and opposing Spanish fascists and Moroccan nationalists.

According to Calderwood the much-proclaimed notion of *convivencia*, or peaceful cohabitation of the same space, in al-Andalus only aims at legitimizing Spanish hegemony and presence in Morocco. Indeed, the author re-examines Morocco’s history, digs extensively into the archive to bring to light hidden aspects of a colonial deployment of the legacy of al-Andalus as defined by the myth of *Convivencia*, and to emphasize the ever-present influence of the colonial past. To this end, he delimits/maps the geographies of Spanish dominion in Morocco that he thinks were marginalized in favor of the French colonial presence. To do so, Calderwood relies on varied sources in several languages: Spanish, Arabic, French, as well as Catalan. He suggests that these offer new insights and provide more vivid testimonies of the history of the region and its colonial past. He asserts that there are broader implications to the study of the history of the region, writing “I believe that this story has broad implications for postcolonial studies and for the study of Mediterranean cultural history because it challenges our understanding of the conceptual borders between Europe and Islam, and between colonialism and anticolonial resistance” (19).

Calderwood refers to Edward Said’s Orientalism, Foucault’s notion of power to examine the East/West dichotomy and investigate both discursive and geographical representations of the region. He focuses on the medieval history of al-Andalus situating it within the large sphere of Mediterranean Studies and locating it within the spiderweb of the Mediterranean paradigm of connectivity, a methodological move that not only views borders as porous or permeable in the mobility of both Spanish and Moroccans, but that also widens the scope of definitions for both sides.

The book is divided into 7 chapters and generously includes photographs of places and people, calligraphies, paintings, maps, newspaper articles, book covers, and posters related to the history of the region. Calderwood provides an extensively researched piece of work; he immerses into researching the past and present of Al-Andalus. He examines the process of its making as a geographical entity as well as a formed hybrid identity. Throughout the different parts of the book,

he digs into the literary and artistic productions of the region as an important part of the archive and as elements contributing to the making of history, only to notice a discrepancy between the personal and the political or the proclaimed version of the history of this contact zone. At the heart of these contradictory views is the myth of *convivencia*, much propagated by the Spanish as part of their modern colonial enterprise in North Africa.

Calderwood's *Colonial al-Andalus* blends stories with history and provides readers with a very insightful piece of research about the heritage of the al-Andalus, re-examining Spanish orientalism and rethinking the relics of colonialism in Morocco. The author invites us to reconsider the hybridizing processes and remains of the region in an attempt to investigate Spanish-Moroccan bonds with the objective eye of a historian whose claims are based on what was stored in the archives and reported in recorded narratives. The book is thus an important contribution that puts both Moroccans and Spaniards face to face with their past and present.



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Author's Response:

The author was provided with an opportunity to respond to the review, but declined.