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Do the Andalusian Caliphates offer a good model for intercultural citizenship?

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This paper has its origins in a family visit in 2011 to the Alhambra palace in Granada where I purchased a copy of Maria Rosa Menocal's study of the Caliphates and Taifas of early medieval Al- Andalus. Entitled 'Ornament of the World' the history made an impassioned case for considering Al-Andalus as a representative of an alternative culture to the dominant European (Frankish) cultures. Reflecting on some ethnographic work I have been conducting across the UK on religious education and multiculturalism, desirous of finding a way through the morass of contemporary education that would enhance individual and collective solidarity across conflicted ideologies and besotted by the halcyon ideal of an ancient way of life that might provide signposts or metaphors as a resource for thinking about multicultural education I thought Menocal's work deserved further attention. Of course the sub-title of her volume rather gives the game away suggesting that this is a story of 'how Muslims, Jews and Christians created a culture of tolerance in Medieval Spain'. The argument is not unfamiliar in popular conversation (and indeed in some academic circles) about medieval Islamic Spain and entails the suggestion that a consequence of the doctrine of the *dhimmi* (peoples of the book who, under Islamic law, benefitted from a doctrine of non harm and protection if living in the midst of the Islamic community) were indeed offered extended civic protection. But more than this Menocal argues that Al –Andalus under the Umayyad caliphate rivaled the Roman Empire in establishing political and social order in a Spanish kingdom ravage by Visigothic barbarity and incompetence. In doing so she highlights a single Spanish Christian, Isidore of Seville, as a light shining in the darkness, attempting to preserve the fragmentary remains of classical civilization. But, for Menocal, Isidore is the exception that proves the rule (a point to which I shall return shortly). Her claim is that the protection of the *dhimmi* went far beyond the normal rights and curtsies of protection.

> '…beyond the fundamental prescribed posture, Al Andalus was, from these beginnings, the site of memorable and distinctive interfaith relations. Here the Jewish community rose from the ashes of an abysmal existence under the Visigoths to the point that the emir who proclaimed himself caliph in the tenth century had a Jew as a foreign minister.'
> (Menocal 2002)

For Menocal, Al- Andalus represented and continues to represent one of the most important sites of intercultural understanding in the oriental/occidental political imaginary. The capacity for Muslims, Jews and Christians to interpenetrate each other's cultures over centuries is much underestimated in contemporary political and social thought. Such tolerant interfaith relations, she argues, are nurtured by the layering of cultures, by intermarriage, by exchange of ideas, by the re-deployment and re-shaping of prior intellectual resources. All this matters because Menocal goes on to claim that this culture of tolerance was replaced by one of religious suppression and brutality; indeed a brutality that would appear from the rhetoric to have little parallel, and which is rooted in the Christian desire for religious purity precipitated by, amongst other things, Urban ll's summons in 1065 at Clermont to a crusade to regain the Holy Lands for Christendom. It also matters because she draws parallels in sharp relief with the burning of books in

Sarajevo in 1992, an event she sees an echo of this earlier religious intolerance. For Menocal the project of the book is an ethical one - to expose, to restore and ultimately to valorize a vision of actual religious tolerance that might provide some kind of lodestar for our own times. Moreover, it matters because this reading of history offers an explicit ground for the teaching of religion in European schools as articulated in the relatively recent Toledo Guidelines.

> What awareness of Toledo suggests is that it is vital to grasp the confluence rather than the clash of civilizations. Throughout Europe—as with the church of San Roman in Toledo—there are layers of civilization built on and interacting with other layers. Modern-day Europe is the result of the interweaving of migrations of disparate peoples, interactions of religions within a cradle moulded by Christianity and by other religious and cultural forces for more than twenty-five centuries, through borrowing, copying, transforming, transmitting, and absorbing.

It is a self-evident truth that European culture indeed represents this process of layering and of complex cultural interaction producing new cultural forms, inventions and ideas; to suggest this is to suggest little more than that notions of racial or ethnic purity and their concomitant social and cultural practices have little traction in the understanding of otherness. Any basic history of the creation of Europe will lead to such a conclusion. Moreover, the Toledo principles are designed to function as a pan-European approach to religion that foregrounds three dimensions of religious education –Learning *about* religion, learning *from* religion and learning *in* religion (Schweitzer et al 2009). The impulse here is grounded in a belief that religious education can survive in recognizable form across the quite different ideological and pedagogical settings of state and church schools because it offers certain family resemblances. It is not that the two entities are co-terminous but that the activities designated in, say a Lutheran or Catholic school, as religious education are recognizable as such by colleagues working in a non-religious setting. It is one with the belief held by Menocal that there are overarching claims to continuity and coherence which belie seeming difference. In order to reinforce the Toledo claim that religious education should be taught in the space of a liberal imaginary the authors try to establish continuity with this earlier idyll. Hence, we are invited to recognize that:

> 'in those violent times, well known "golden ages" emerged in medieval Spain, when religious tolerance was accepted by rulers, and some of the great accomplishments and precursors of models of peoples learning from each other with respect were achieved.'

But this liberal imaginary must find an explanation for the failure of these halcyon days to endure; and the explanation appears to lie in the Christian re-conquest of Spain; a re-conquest that is in the popular (and in this case official) imagination the cause of much late Middle Ages pain and suffering, and with consequences that run into early modernity and beyond. Religious intolerance is often seen to have its roots in the emergence of a particular Roman Catholic supremacy.

> 'But golden ages may come to an end. In ____, when the Christian "reconquest" of Spain was completed, the new emerging and powerful Christian Kingdom of

> Spain imposed a uniform religious rule in the territory ushering in a period of religious intolerance, mirroring what was taking place across many parts of Europe. Muslims and Jews were given the alternative of conversion or exile, and later Protestants were persecuted. The very country that had provided significant and progressive models of tolerance turned towards religious intolerance, as many other European countries in those times. Those days of course are long past but they stand as a reminder that the spirit of tolerance can be lost unless continued vigilance is exercised. In the rich tapestry of history, Toledo is thus a reminder of the flourishing that is possible when religions live together with understanding and a reminder of how easily this flourishing can be lost, if mutual understanding and respect.'

This *modern* version of history is echoed in Menocal's own reflections where she observes that Cervantes' Don Quixote is penned in the full knowledge of the tragedy that had befallen Toledo as a great centre of learning and translation. In Don Quixote 'the glory of Toledo's- and Spain's- past as the great center of interfaith confluence and as the nonpareil center of translation for all of Europe is alluded to through its ruin, which was the all-too-visible reality by the turn of the seventeenth century'. (Menocal 2002, p.258)

Alternative accounts of the Andalusian idyll.

It would be remiss of any scholar who looked to the past to provide a normative metaphor for the present not to enquire as to the verisimilitude of the claims to and descriptions of such an intercultural idyll. Do the claims for the *Ornament of the World* stand up to a more refined analysis of the conditions and do those conditions themselves point to workable strategies that might be subsequently reconfigured and employed in our own context? Can the normative claims made on behalf of the Andalusian caliphate in the 9th century really provide a resource for our own time; a time certainly straining under the weight of migrations, varied and various economic implosions and intimations of cultural retrenchment. To answer such a question we need to look at Al-Andalus in the context of the wider political impulses and imperatives of Europe and the Levant. Other readings of the same period offer a rather more conditional account of the golden age of Al-Andalusian caliphate, a more nuanced account of the Visigothic period that preceded it and a more complex analysis of the circumstances which precipitated the demise of this age of putative tolerance.

As this is not an essay in history per se I will confine my remarks to a couple of observations about each of these issues. Before doing so it is important to acknowledge that the sacramental worldview of the early Middles Ages is displaced by the scientific (Eagleton 2012). Consequently any attempt to recuperate a political imaginary has to engage with an uncomfortable feature of hermeneutics- that is, whatever view we have of the world, it wasn't theirs. Add to this the very limited documentary and archeological evidence at our disposal and all our claims to unearthing the Andalusian caliphates as a model must be subject to careful conditionality.

In any event other readings of the rise of and ultimate displacement of the Visigoths offers a somewhat more subtle account of their achievements. Their intellectual achievements are

not, as Menocal would have it, reduced to the singular personality of Isidore but have a somewhat longer duration with an architectural and cultural style that extends that of the later Roman republics (2004). That much of Visigothic culture and governance is non-retrievable points not so much to its non-existence as to the successive layering of subsequently successful conquests. Of particular concern in this story is the treatment of Jews. While Isidore disapproves of the forced conversion of Jews he is not the only one. In the Fourth Council of Toledo (633) forced conversion is also criticized and in 638 Braulio, who had inherited Isidore's intellectual leadership in Toledo was asked by the 6th Council of Toledo to reply to criticism from the Pope, Honorius I that the Visigothic church was failing to take sufficiently repressive measures against the Jews. (Collins ibid).

The emergence of the 'Ornament of the World' assumes that there was a period of authentic tolerance. Such an assumption is predicated on the belief that, uniquely in the early middle ages (most especially the 10th century) Andalusia offered opportunities for career advancement to those not of the ruling religion. These claims are in turn predicated on the success of an extraordinarily modest number of successful Jews and on the suggestion that Visigothic Christians developed more indigenous forms of religious expression and later became known as Mozarabs. In the case of the first, perhaps exemplified in the figures of Hasdai ibn Shaprut and Samuel the Nagid, we have examples of men accepted at the centre of the Court. Samuel, born into a wealthy Malagan mercantile family, and who becomes the vizier of Granada, is to be considered a great manager of the affairs of state, including the re-building of the Alhambra. While references are made to prosperous Jewish traders, the singling out of individuals as examples of a state of politics is, as Arendt (1951) is apt to point out, likely to mislead, ignoring as it does, the often quite marked distinctions between parvenu and pariah, where the former are encouraged to see themselves as disassociated from the latter. The foregrounding of such individuals runs the risk of ignoring the rather banal if distasteful facts that non-Muslims were not equals, that they had to pay punitive taxes and they couldn't always openly practice their religion.

Equally, when one looks at the end of the Andalusian caliphates and the long dwindling decline of the 'Ornament of the World' and the Muslim taifa's, matters are no less likely to get complicated. The decline of this world into, what is often characterised, as a more barbarous period of intolerance against Islam and Judaism does not, as Menocal appears to think, arise exclusively as a consequence of the re-Christianisation of Iberia with its more authoritarian Roman ways. Rather, the Middle Ages witness quite stark rises in sectarianism and nationalism across Europe, north and south, fuelled by dwindling resources, plague and shifts in economic security. Running against previous practices Teutonic knighthood becomes exclusively German; Poland witnesses deep anti-German racism; Ireland sees the withdrawal of English Norman knights back inside the Pale and a turning away from previous practices of intermarriage and so forth. (Barlett 1993)

Rather than seeing the fall of an Islamic ornament as a consequence of the rise of Rome it may be better to consider the disappearance of this order, such as it was, as a consequence of changing economic pressures which expose, in the end the fragility of our endeavours to create cultures of tolerance. Changes in inter-cultural relations are not self-evidently a function of the rise of a kind of Christian barbarism *per se* but, more likely, as Marx would have understood it, of a decline in material conditions.

On contemporary Education

1.

This historical excursion is no idle or dilettante delight but raises two important ethical educational issues and a further prudential question about the nature and implications of participation in democratic society. First, is a question as to whether or not we may use historical resources as part of an imaginary, even where the imaginary may be, in some regards, over-romanticised and disconnected from the complex historical circumstances within which it is located. In other words, 'is it ethical to create a metaphor or series of metaphors based on a very particular and partial reading of history?' This in turn leads us to ask some supplementary normative questions. Can we freight the past with the concerns of the present in our educational endeavours and how should we read history as an ethico-educational task? Just as historians such as Tom Devine accuse Michael Gove of whiggery and mis-placed chauvinism in his desire to render a particular version of history as concerned to cultivate a certain nationally-loaded version of history (Higgins Guardian 2011). By the same token it behoves more liberally inclined educators to avoid the lens of a kind of 19th century liberal imaginary as providing the only or indeed most appropriate lens to draw on the past. To see the Andalusian caliphates as a proto-liberal culture of tolerance would be to mis-understand what is meant by tolerance. Andalusian Muslims were little different from their neighbours, they advanced territorial claims with some brutality; they also partook in the early Middle Age energies of trading services and support with who ever might offer most positional advantage. They were not uniquely civilised in a sea of barbarity and intolerance. At the same time as much learning was going on in Andalusia so too much scholarship existed in the East (in Byzantium) (Phillips 2009). As Collins observes,

> The Umayyads did not follow the earlier Roman emperors in endowing the main cities of their state with new religious and recreational buildings, or try to enhance their amenities. Their existence was justified by the success of their claim to be good Islamic rulers, repressing dissent and evil-doing within the *Dar al-Islãm* and conducting jihad effectively in the Dar al-Harb. Hence the emphasis in our sources, which derive from official records, on the number of heads of infidels sent back to display on the gates and walls of Córdoba, and on the salutary crucifixion of heretics and rebels. For such ends they took the taxes and tolls from Muslims and non-Muslim inhabitants of the towns and districts of al-Andalus. It is therefore not surprising that in the course of these centuries their activities beyond their frontiers were frequently hampered by the need to restore and reimpose their authority within them.' (Collins, 2012, 27)

The consequences of over burdening particular readings of human history may result in nullification rather than effective appropriation. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the treatment of the evolution of American Founding and constitutional history where the Tea Party and its scions has isigetically appropriated the likes of Jefferson and Franklin, the separation of church and state as ever less trustworthy tools in their war against what they

consider to be the predations of liberalism (Lepore 2010). These things matter. The stories we provide for ourselves about the founding conditions of our social (and in this case democratic) traditions shape our social practices and their concomitant attachments. It matters what we tell ourselves about our history and the way we appropriate it. This matters because a condition of the maintenance of an advanced liberal democracy is that we don't tell our children lies about our own story

2.

Education documents in liberal democracies abound with the claims of global citizenship and multiculturalism, two distinct conceits that are frequently, if not invariably, wrapped around each other. For example the Victorian (Australia) government's document, 'Education for Multicultural citizenship' (State Government of Victoria 2009) suggests that,

> Multicultural citizenship denotes active participation in our multicultural society and respect for our similarities and differences. Global citizenship denotes an awareness of our interconnectedness with people and environments around the globe, and contribution to a global society and economy. Global and multicultural citizenship are two sides of the coin: one internally focused, the other externally focused. Together, they promote social cohesion and economic advantage locally and globally.

The report goes on to extoll the civic virtue of knowing about the other and accepting similarities and differences as if these were matters of little or no complexity. For instance, it is unclear what is meant by active participation in our multicultural society. Hence we might enquire if it is possible to be active in a multicultural society in a non-multicultural way. The problem here is not merely semantic. Here multiculturalism is founded on rather flimsy notions of acquaintance with the other's social, cultural and religious practices.

3.

As I have suggested the High Middle Ages presage a period of scarcity, which raises interesting questions for our own time. If the fall of the *Ornament of the World* is not primarily a function of a growing dislike of the other in their otherness but of quite different, emotionally located notions of survival and threat then educating students to look at the other in their otherness may produce no more than a kind of exoticism which cannot stand up to the scrutiny of the very substantial resource pressures that have, in recent years (and not simply since the banking crisis), pressed in on liberal democratic polities. In my own recent ethnographic work on religious education in the UK, this is exemplified by a student who, on discussing the effectiveness of her Religious Education considered herself to be more multiculturally educated because, as she opined, 'If a Jew came around to tea I would know what to give them'. (Conroy 2012)

The Other and the Self

Assumptions about how we are to live with each other in the face of constrained resources and migratory pressures will require more robust educational practices than those currently

on offer; practices that rely on a transitory acquaintance of the other's otherness! As I have suggested all this matters because declarations such as the Toledo declaration are always in danger of offering a benign view of history where intercommunal relations can be harmonized by offering the other space. But, in the case of al- Andalus this is altogether more troublesome. It is not only that the Islamic caliphates appear to have been remarkably similar to their Christian neighbours in acquisitiveness, in their sporadic incursions into their neighbours territories and so forth. More than this, it must be remembered that whatever concessions were afforded *parvenu* Jews they still had to pay punitive taxes and were very much second class citizens. In any treatment of multiculturalism both then and now, class trumps religious affiliation. Given that economic migrants tend to come from the poor, the dispossessed and the aspirant rather than the successful their reception into dominant cultures is inevitably problematic. While the Toledo guidelines acknowledge that education on its own is unlikely to remediate the tensions that emerge when migratory patterns and economic dishabille visit, what appear on the surface, to be settled liberal democracies, they do nevertheless place a great emphasis on curriculum choice adopting certain well trodden paths of liberalism; a path striated with contradiction and confusion. Hence, all must be valorized and if there is to be any demurral from such valorisation on the grounds that religious communities have sometimes done 'naughty' things then this is to be historicized.

> Neutrality towards religion or belief means that the state may not be hostile toward religions or beliefs and must maintain an objective stance. However, objectivity sometimes requires raising issues about the negative role that members of religious or belief communities may have played at certain moments in history.

The Guidelines document promulgates an education based on the Rights of the other and the education of the self about the other. While it is important not to minimize Rights talk or teaching about the other what is surprising in a very extensive document is the scant attention paid to the phenomenological turn towards one's own beliefs and assumptions. The data cited in the report and elsewhere intended to extol the virtues of teaching religion for multicultural understanding relies on nominal and ordinal scales on self-reporting. As we saw in our own work self-reporting about durable habits of mind and consequent social practices may be somewhat less secure than is often imagined. (Conroy et al 2013) Here I wish to suggest that the absence of the turn towards one's own practices leaves a large gap in educational provision. Nowhere in the Toledo document is there explicit or concrete discussion of the self's own otherness with regard to one's accepted social, cultural and religious practices.

As we continue our search for metaphorical models that will somehow provide a pathway to intercultural equilibrium and through the 19th century liberal lens imagine we have found one only to see its solidity crumble in our hands as we realize that the imagined world is not entirely consonant with more nuanced readings of history. Al-Andalus was prey to the same economic and cultural forces with which we are confronted today and just as they were vulnerable so too are we. While I do not wish to delve into concepts of tolerance at the moment I do want to suggest that tolerance of the other requires a little more

intolerance of the self. Instead of focusing on the other it might be important to focus on the self – not as a form of narcissism but as a way of disclosing the self in the other. A turn to the pedagogies of *enstrangement* (Conroy 2009) may be of assistance here. By this I mean that we should attempt to surface, for our students, the sheer oddness of their own beliefs as we try to normalize or naturalise the other. Enstrangement suggests that it is the conditions of human being that gives rise to our sense of being a stranger. Creating the other as the proximate cause of my being strange is to ignore the conditions of my being. If teaching history is concerned with inviting students to understand how events shape social attitudes then it is important to provide an account that matches both the personal and the political complexity of human relations and interchange.

This requires careful consideration of one's own history neither needlessly valorizing nor needlessly pathologising it but subjecting it to considered critical analysis. In our attention to the weaknesses of Menocal's account we are reminded that it is in a nuanced and careful attention to our history, that we uncover the struggles that ground the rights and obligations evocative of and necessary to, a liberal democratic society .

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