

Review Essay

Feeling Bad about Emotional History: The Case of *Andalucismo*

Charles Hirschkind. *The Feeling of History: Islam, Romanticism, and Andalusia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021). ISBN 978-02-2674-695-1. Price: \$27.50 (paper), \$95.00 (cloth).

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“What does it matter the story is false, if the feeling it raises is true?”¹

Abstract

This article presents a critical review of The Feeling of History, a recent work by the American anthropologist Charles Hirschkind. In this book, the author treats Andalucismo, a political movement that arose in modern Andalusia early in the twentieth century and was chiefly characterized by an extremely positive view of the Islamic Iberian past (al-Andalus)—a tendency that is certainly unusual in Spain and goes against the prevalent Spanish nationalism. In his book, Hirschkind not only develops an uncritical view of Andalucismo and its intrinsically emotional reading of the past but also legitimizes a rather farfetched conflation of modern Andalusia and al-Andalus. Moreover, he offers an extremely shallow and unnuanced reading of current Spanish scholarship on the Middle Ages, branding it wholesale as an heir to Francoism. He also lends legitimacy to those who call into question the origin of al-Andalus in the Islamic conquest of 711 CE—representatives of an unscholarly approach that has been largely dismissed by academic outlets since the 1970s. Burdened by heavy ideological prejudices and hampered by the author’s limited knowledge of the most recent academic historiographic debates in the field of Iberian medieval studies, the book represents a failed attempt to present the Anglophone readership with a consistent introduction to Andalusian nationalism together with a critical appraisal of the Andalusian nationalist interpretation of the medieval Iberian past.

Introduction

As in many other modern states, diverse national feelings coexist in today’s Spain. Although many Spaniards would be reluctant to admit it, Spanish identity shapes the mainstream nationalist feeling in the country. Spanish nationalism reached its most radical expression during the forty years of Francoist dictatorship (1936–1975), when the regime

1. “Qué importa que la historia sea falsa, si el sentimiento que provoca es verdadero?” El Roto, *El País*, April 9, 2014.

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sought to turn Spain into “one, great, and free” nation, as its official motto declared. Francoist nationalism, usually known as National Catholicism, banished any other form of collective identity in the country. Small wonder, then, that in August 1936, upon the outbreak of the Civil War, Francoist forces arrested and killed in Seville the founder of Andalusian nationalism (*Andalucismo*), Blas Infante.

Franco’s demise in 1975 and the passing of the 1978 constitution ushered Spain into its current democratic period, which brought with it a new territorial structure, made up of so-called autonomous communities. With their own parliaments and institutions, the new *autonomías* emerged as a suitable framework in which different local national feelings, marginalized and harshly repressed by the Franco regime, could thrive. Although *Andalucismo* reached its peak in the years of the Spanish “transition” to democracy (1975–82), it never achieved strong popular support or significant scholarly legitimacy. To the best of my knowledge, Hirschkind’s *The Feeling of History: Islam, Romanticism, and Andalusia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), represents the most substantial academic legitimation so far of this local form of nationalism in Spain.

In what follows, I lay out why I find this book deeply troublesome and disappointing. Before proceeding any further, however, I have to make clear my specific goals in this essay. Virtually every book is open to criticism from different perspectives; I will limit myself here to issues that concern me as a historian and a medievalist. More specifically, I wish to draw the reader’s attention to Hirschkind’s misguided and distorted portrayal of Spanish scholarship on the Middle Ages and to the way his book, in line with recent precedents, lends legitimacy to an old and well-known academic fraud about the origins of al-Andalus.

From al-Andalus to Andalusia: *Andalucismo*

The case of *Andalucismo* is peculiar insofar as it represents the only form of Iberian nationalism that looks to al-Andalus for the historical grounding of its collective identity. Drawing on the etymological connection between Andalusia and al-Andalus, Blas Infante sketched a historical account according to which the Castilian conquerors (the “Spaniards”) had stripped the “Andalusians” of their country and their national identity since the thirteenth century. It goes without saying that al-Andalus and Andalusia are radically different historical realities, and therefore that conflating the people of al-Andalus with modern Andalusians represents a serious mistake. But such conflation is part of any national narrative’s mythology.

Like any other nationalism, *Andalucismo* looks at the past through a rather emotional lens. Analyzing and explaining its relationship to the past represents a relevant scholarly subject that helps us answer significant questions about the reception of al-Andalus and the medieval Iberian past in modern Spain and Andalusia. However, studying, explaining, and understanding a phenomenon is very different from assuming and legitimizing particular theories about it. Here lies one of the the main problems with *The Feeling of History*: it is a book that not only examines but fully embraces *Andalucismo*. What it offers, therefore, is not just a scholarly presentation of *Andalucismo* but a study that draws on the Andalusian nationalist approach to the past. In other words, Hirschkind embarks on a full legitimation

of the Andalusian nationalist envisioning of al-Andalus and endorses this approach as a valid and legitimate counternarrative to the traditional Spanish nationalist account of medieval Iberia. Far from shattering myths, however, *The Feeling of History* proves that there is no valid alternative to carefully crafted historical knowledge when it comes to dismantling deeply ingrained myths about the past.

Drawing on the writings of the philosopher and activist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–63), the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), and Ananda Abeysekara (an expert on Buddhist studies), the book’s introduction develops a methodological framework intended to justify emotional history as a valid and legitimate academic approach to the past as historical knowledge. Hirschkind points out that “our relation to a given past may not be one of indifference or neutrality . . . it may rather be affectively structured in a way that asks of us a unique attunement and response.”²

Emotional envisionings of the past are radically opposed to the academic study of history: historical knowledge is built not on feelings but on documents, data, and sources. Emotions and feelings are legitimate objects of study for historians, but not legitimate methodological approaches for the academic study of history. In other words, the history of emotions is one thing, and emotional history is another. A twenty-first-century academic work by a social scientist (certainly not a historian) endorsing and justifying an emotional and therefore nonacademic approach to the past is not just a striking novelty but an indication of a much more worrying issue: unscientific tendencies are making their way into academia.

I intend to show below that lending academic legitimacy to an emotional approach to the past represents a huge scholarly mistake. Arguably the most glaring evidence for this in *The Feeling of History* lies in Hirschkind’s ideas about current Spanish historiography and, in particular, in his utterly uncritical approach to negationism.

It has been frequently said that nationalism could not exist without a particular historical narrative. In this respect, *Andalucismo* suffered from extreme intellectual indigence until the mid-1970s. A notary by training, Infante was never able to produce a well-grounded presentation of the Andalusian people’s historical evolution. But building a suggestive national project requires a consistent national account, and this is where Ignacio Olagüe’s (1903–74) outlandish narrative about the origins of al-Andalus came in handy for Andalusian nationalists.³

The story of this amateur historian has been told many times,⁴ especially after the 2006 book *Historia general de Al Ándalus* lent, for the first time, scholarly legitimacy to his ideas.⁵ This review is not the right place to retell that story at length:

2. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 23.

3. I. Olagüe, *Les arabes n’ont jamais envahi l’Espagne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969); idem, *La revolución islámica en occidente* (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 1974).

4. A. García-Sanjuán, “Denying the Islamic Conquest of Iberia, a Historiographical Fraud,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 11, no. 3 (2019): 306–22.

5. E. González Ferrín, *Historia general de Al Ándalus* (Córdoba: Almuzara, 2006); idem, *Cuando fuimos árabes* (Córdoba: Almuzara, 2017). See also González Ferrín’s rather enthusiastic presentation of Olagüe’s work in a recent online interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdrqef9ViGE>.

seasoned specialists from Spain (P. Martínez Montávez), France (R. Le Tourneau, P. Guichard), and the United States (J. T. Monroe) have unequivocally refuted Olagüe's claims.⁶ In a nutshell, Olagüe argued (only rarely attempting to prove his claims) that the Arab and Islamic conquest of Iberia in 711 CE never happened. Instead, he contended, after a civil war that destroyed the Visigothic kingdom early in the eighth century, a slow, smooth, and rather unnoticeable process gradually turned the local unitarian Arians into full-fledged Muslims. Therefore, according to Olagüe, al-Andalus was the product of local, not foreign, forces. This nativism made Olagüe's approach irresistible to Andalusian nationalists in the 1970s and 1980s. It also explains why, as Hirschkind acknowledges,⁷ Olagüe's thesis fascinated the many local Andalusian converts to Islam in the late 1970s: he provided them with a local Islam of their own.

An English-language book on *Andalucismo* could have been an excellent opportunity to offer an international scholarly audience a clear picture of the origins and evolution of this peculiar form of nationalism. It could likewise have provided a suitable framework for developing a more nuanced and historically contextualized understanding of how the brainchild of Olagüe, a follower of fascism, could, many decades later, thrive in a radically different ideological context—in other words, how Olagüe's negationism (that is, denial of the historicity of the 711 Islamic conquest of Iberia) ended up legitimizing a reading of the past narrowly associated with a form of nationalism that was diametrically opposed to the kind of radical Spanish nationalism that had originally inspired Olagüe. Let us remember that Infante, the founder of *Andalucismo*, died at the hands of Francoist fascists, and that Olagüe's fascist beliefs in the 1920s and the 1930s played a key role in shaping his revisionist approach to Spanish history.⁸ It is no wonder that Olagüe's closest friends, who were fascists, enthusiastically welcomed his earliest historical contribution, which included a moving personal dedication to his beloved friend Ramiro Ledesma Ramos (1905–36), the founder of the oldest Spanish political fascist organization who was killed in Madrid upon the outbreak of the Civil War⁹.

Nothing of this history, however, is to be found in Hirschkind's book. Instead of adopting a critical approach to Infante's thinking and Olagüe's fantasies (which survive in their academic proxies), the book is even more explicit and unapologetic in its legitimation of negationism than its American precedents were.¹⁰ In 1975, J. T. Monroe described Olagüe's

6. For an extensive review of the opinions of the aforementioned authors as well as others, see A. García-Sanjuán, *La conquista islámica de la península ibérica y la tergiversación del pasado*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2019), 138–54.

7. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 86.

8. M. Fierro, "Al-Andalus en el pensamiento fascista español: La revolución islámica en Occidente, de Ignacio Olagüe," in *Andalus, España: Historiografías en contraste, siglos XVII–XXI*, ed. M. Marín (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez and CSIC, 2009), 325–50.

9. A. García-Sanjuán, "Ignacio Olagüe y el origen de al-Andalus: Génesis y edición del proyecto negacionista," *Revista de estudios internacionales mediterráneos* 24 (2018): 173–98.

10. K. B. Wolf, "Negating Negationism," *Pomona Faculty Publications and Research* 394 (2014), http://scholarship.claremont.edu/pomona_fac_pub/394; idem, "Myth, History, and the Origins of al-Andalus:

Les arabes n'ont jamais envahi l'Espagne as “not a scholarly work” and branded Olagüe’s approach anti-Semitic.¹¹ As an amateur historian, Olagüe could not be expected to possess full command over either the historical sources or the extant scholarship about the origins of al-Andalus. However, the same lenience cannot be extended to his current scholarly followers, and this is why in 2013 I went a step further than Monroe did and called the reengineering of Olagüe’s original negationism not just unscholarly but a scholarly fraud. It is striking, then, that this new negationism has continued to gain traction in sectors of American scholarship over the past years.

Misunderstanding Spanish Historical Writing

A few words of clarification concerning the notion of negationism are in order. In my 2013 monograph I gave the name “negationism” to Olagüe’s ideas. Being aware of the Nazi parallel, I declared explicitly that I did not mean to draw a moral equivalence between the two phenomena.¹² Ignoring this explicit statement, Hirschkind claims: “In comparing González Ferrín’s work to the discourse of Holocaust denial, the term negationism’s primary referent, García Sanjuán invites us to view the text as a morally reprehensible act of historical distortion.”¹³ Like others before him,¹⁴ Hirschkind is here rehearsing an extremely simplistic argument. Although there is an obvious moral difference between doubting the Holocaust and calling into question historical events twelve centuries ago, it is indisputable that the term negationism has over the last few years been applied to positions on many issues other than the Nazi genocide. According to the sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris,

in recent years, the term has been used to describe a number of fields of “scholarship,” whose scholars engage in audacious projects to hold back, against seemingly insurmountable odds, the findings of an avalanche of research. They argue that the Holocaust (and other genocides) never happened, that anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change is a myth, that Aids either does not exist or is unrelated to HIV, that evolution is a scientific impossibility, and that all manner of other scientific and historical orthodoxies must be rejected.¹⁵

A Historiographical Essay,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 11, no. 3 (2019): 378–401; H. Fancy, “The New Convivencia,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 11, no. 3 (2019): 295–305.

11. J. T. Monroe, review of *Les Arabes n'ont jamais envahi l'Espagne*, by I. Olagüe, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6, no. 3 (1975): 347–48.

12. García-Sanjuán, *La conquista islámica*, 80: “No pretendo establecer una equiparación moral entre ellos.”

13. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 91.

14. Wolf, “Negating Negationism”; J. Lorenzo, review of *La conquista islámica de la península ibérica y la tergiversación del pasado*, by A. García Sanjuán, *Medieval Encounters* 20 (2014): 273–75. See my reply to Lorenzo: A. García-Sanjuán, “Response to: Jesús Lorenzo,” *Medieval Encounters* 21 (2015): 136–38.

15. K. Kahn-Harris, “Denialism: What Drives People to Reject the Truth,” *Guardian*, August 3, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/03/denialism-what-drives-people-to-reject-the-truth>.

In other words, “negationism” refers to all challenges to knowledge that is based on the interpretation of empirical and reliable evidence through recognized methodologies. Calling into question such well-researched and well-known historical processes as the Islamic conquest of Iberia fits this label well. Indeed, Wikipedia deems the denial of the Islamic conquest of Iberia a form of historical negationism alongside denial of the Holocaust and other episodes in more recent history.¹⁶

Let us now focus on Hirschkind’s reading of current Spanish historical writing. According to him, by rejecting negationism, Spanish historians today ironically share views held by Francoists. The second chapter of the book (“The Difficult Convivencia of Spanish History”) opens with the bold statement that medieval Iberian studies is “a field entrusted to maintain order over the inconvenient and unwieldy eight hundred years of Muslim rule on the peninsula.”¹⁷ Even more explicitly, when discussing Maribel Fierro’s approach to negationist literature, Hirschkind declares: “Spanish Arabism remains haunted by early associations with and accommodations made under National Catholicism.”¹⁸

I am anything but uncritical of my own discipline. In fact, over the last ten years, I have made academic outlets that continue to cling to the Francoist tradition a focal point of my scholarship.¹⁹ I firmly believe that we are currently witnessing in Spain an insufficient academic reaction to an all-out offensive by the far right to resuscitate the Francoist, National Catholic narrative of the *Reconquista*. However, Hirschkind’s unnuanced tarring of the entire field of Spanish medieval and Arabic studies with the same brush is a gross oversimplification. A close reading of the book shows that Hirschkind’s grim outlook on Spanish historical writing is the result not of a careful and comprehensive appraisal but of a reckless and dramatically mistaken decision: taking negationism as a reliable map for his journey through medieval Iberian scholarship’s troubled waters.

Misinterpreting Negationist Academic Literature

The unfortunate consequences of this decision are not difficult to ascertain. First and foremost, Hirschkind’s perception of negationism is unrealistic and farfetched. The informed reader will be surprised by the claim that González Ferrín’s writings on the origins of al-Andalus are “based on a rereading of the limited historical evidence currently

16. “Historical Negationism,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_negationism.

17. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 69.

18. *Ibid.*, 88.

19. A. García-Sanjuán, “La persistencia del discurso nacionalcatólico sobre el medievo peninsular en la historiografía española actual,” *Historiografías: Revista de historia y teoría* 12 (2016): 132–53; *idem*, “Al-Andalus en la historiografía nacionalcatólica española: Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz,” *eHumanista* 37 (2017): 305–28; *idem*, “Rejecting al-Andalus, Exalting the Reconquista: Historical Memory in Contemporary Spain,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 10–11 (2018): 127–45; *idem*, “Cómo desactivar una bomba historiográfica: La pervivencia actual del paradigma de la Reconquista,” in *La Reconquista. Ideología y justificación de la guerra santa peninsular*, ed. C. de Ayala and S. Palacios, 99–119 (Madrid: La Ergástula, 2019); *idem*, “Weaponizing Historical Knowledge: The Notion of Reconquista in Spanish Nationalism,” *Imago Temporis: Medium Aevum* 14 (2020): 133–62.

available.”²⁰ Hirschkind exhibits both a complete ignorance of the historical sources and a gullible attitude toward negationist literature, as when he reports uncritically that “according to González Ferrín, the conflicting views in this particular debate devolve almost entirely on the interpretation of two coins.”²¹

Like any other form of negationism, denial of the Islamic conquest of Iberia relies on disregard of the empirical evidence, and an overriding disdain for historical sources thus represents its most salient feature. Much ink has been spilled over the last fifty years on exposing the sham that this approach represents. Although Hirschkind ignores most of the academic literature on negationism, he draws extensively on Fierro’s 2009 article and on my 2013 monograph.²² Consequently, his appraisal of González Ferrín’s alleged “rereading” of the sources suggests that he either has decided to ignore the critics he cites or simply does not understand what negationism really is.

Hirschkind’s further remarks confirm his strikingly shallow understanding of negationism. He writes, for example: “While González Ferrín’s downplaying of the military dimension of the arrival of Islam in Iberia is certainly unconventional, many parts of his narrative on the porosity and slow consolidation of Islam during the eighth and ninth centuries have gained increasing acceptance in recent decades.”²³ For starters, casting as merely “unconventional” a scholarly fraud consistently and explicitly rejected by professional historians for the past half-century points to a clear failure to grasp the true nature of negationism. Second, claiming that denialist literature “downplays” the military dimension of the arrival of Islam is inaccurate, as González Ferrín actually denies it altogether. Further, the latter claims that what arrived in Iberia in 711 was not Islam but something that he calls, in his distinctly abstruse and pretentious style, “another variety of unmistakable prior recognition” (“otra variedad de indudable reconocimiento previo”)—a phrase that sounds as meaningless in English as it does in its original Spanish.²⁴ This is just one of many examples of the empty verbiage that characterizes negationism.

I wonder whether scholars would dare to indulge and legitimize negationism so openly in connection with a different historical event, such as the 1620 arrival of the Pilgrims in what is today Massachusetts. The possibility of such absurdity was raised already forty-five years ago by Monroe in his review of Olagüe:

The reader, left exhausted and suspicious over the political and chauvinistic motives of the author, is likely to wonder whether Mr Olagüe will continue in this line of research, and eventually show that the Romans never conquered the Mediterranean basin, that the Normans never invaded England, and so on. Will he perhaps even show that the Spanish never conquered an empire in America?²⁵

20. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 74.

21. *Ibid.*, 177.

22. *Ibid.*, 86–95.

23. *Ibid.*, 95.

24. González Ferrín, *Historia general de Al Ándalus*, 185.

25. Monroe, review of Olagüe, 348.

On the other hand, I would have been grateful to Hirschkind for taking the trouble to clarify which specific parts of scholarly negationism have gained “increasing acceptance” in recent decades and what the evidence for this acceptance is. I am not aware of any specialist in early Islam or the history of al-Andalus ready to endorse González Ferrín’s claim that Islam “as such,” or “full-fledged” Islam (whatever that means), did not exist before the year 800²⁶ (in Hirschkind’s words, “before the ninth century, Islam has yet to coalesce into a distinct civilization”²⁷); that the Arab governor of Qayrawan, Mūsā b. Nuṣayr, was a mere “personification” (“una personificación”);²⁸ or that the name Muḥammad does not appear in the 98/716–17 bilingual dinar struck in Spania/al-Andalus,²⁹ to mention just a few of the most blatantly unfounded negationist claims. For Hirschkind, however, my pointing out of these features serves to make my account of negationism “highly distorted.”³⁰

One is similarly left to wonder which precise parts of negationism “cohere with current historical research.”³¹ If we look at the most recent and reliable revisionist academic literature about early Islam, negationism clearly does not fit in. Fred Donner, for example, has argued that “during the late first century AH/seventh century C.E. and early second century AH/eighth century C.E., the Believers’ movement evolved into the religion we now know as Islam.”³² Largely in accordance with the traditional account, Donner asserts that what he calls “the Believers’ movement” expanded rapidly upon Muḥammad’s demise through military conquests, and he devotes a full chapter (“The Expansion of the Community of Believers”) to these conquests. The mainstream nonrevisionist academic literature pleads for an even earlier origin of Islam; indeed, in 1981, Donner himself devoted a book-length study to the early Islamic conquests. So it is difficult to identify any part of the academic denialist literature that would “cohere with current historical research” on early Islam, whether revisionist or nonrevisionist. The reason is simple: as pointed out years ago by Guichard, Monroe, and others, and much to the chagrin of its current proponents and followers, negationism does not meet academic standards.

The same applies to negationist claims about the process of the Quran’s canonization. González Ferrín recently published an article in a volume edited by Carlos Segovia in which

26. González Ferrín, *Cuando fuimos árabes*, 235.

27. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 82.

28. González Ferrín, *Historia general de Al Ándalus*, 179. According to the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, “personificación” entails the attribution of the features of rational beings to things that are irrational, inanimate, disembodied, or abstract. It is not clear in which of these categories González Ferrín means to place Mūsā b. Nuṣayr. The latter three do not fit well an entity mentioned by his personal name in written documents, literary sources, and coins; see the recent article by Y. Benhima and P. Guichard, “Mūsā ibn Nusayr: Retour sur l’histoire et le pouvoir d’un gouverneur omeyyade en Occident musulmán,” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 66 (2017): 97–116. Nor is it evident on what grounds Mūsā b. Nuṣayr could be branded an irrational being.

29. González Ferrín, *Historia general de Al Ándalus*, 194.

30. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 92.

31. *Ibid.*, 93.

32. F. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), 194–95.

he argued that the Quran was compiled only after 800 CE. In a Twitter thread, Marijn van Putten exclaims that the article “makes me feel like we have stepped into a time machine, all progress of the past decades is ignored.”³³ Reviewing González Ferrín’s handling of the relevant manuscript evidence, van Putten concludes that “it’s rather clear that he has never actually looked at any of these manuscripts, otherwise he would not suggest something so absurd. And indeed, his discussion on early manuscripts makes it quite clear he is utterly clueless about them.”³⁴ Segovia and González Ferrín are close collaborators, and Nora K. Schmid’s review of Segovia’s *The Quranic Noah* (2015) indicates that Segovia and González Ferrín share the same ungrounded approach to the origins of Islam.³⁵ Both Van Putten and Schmid point out that even as negationism gains visibility through international scholarly outlets, its pushing of standard academic boundaries is becoming increasingly clear.³⁶

As noted earlier, academic negationism regarding the Islamic conquest of Iberia first surfaced in Spain, and consequently Spanish scholars were the first to address it. Their work, however, has not always been duly acknowledged, at least not as much as in other cases. In this regard, it is worth recalling the enthusiastic reaction provoked by the “surgical dissection” of van Putten’s thread.³⁷ By contrast, when dealing with the much more exhaustive and comprehensive rebuttals of negationism written by Spanish critics and published in scholarly venues (not on social media), Hussein Fancy was much more lukewarm in his response.³⁸ The justification for this stark contrast is not evident.

Not being a specialist in medieval studies, Hirschkind appears unable to understand a scholarly debate largely alien to his professional training. As a result, he is forced to rely on others’ opinions. His main guide in navigating the choppy waters of Iberian medieval historiography is Kenneth B. Wolf’s review of my 2013 monograph, in which Wolf offered a largely uncritical portrait of González Ferrín’s negationism.³⁹ Wolf’s role needs to be carefully considered, since he not only introduced academic negationism to American scholarship but did so by granting González Ferrín the academic credentials that most specialists have never accorded him. To set the record straight: negationism has never

33. M. van Putten (@PhDniX), Twitter thread, December 6, 2020, <https://twitter.com/PhDniX/status/1335676197498478593>. Van Putten is referring to E. González Ferrín, “What Do We Mean by the Qur’ān: On Origins, Fragments, and Inter-Narrative Identity,” in *Remapping Emergent Islam: Texts, Social Contexts, and Ideological Trajectories*, ed. C. A. Segovia, 221–44 (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2020).

34. Van Putten, Twitter thread, December 6, 2020.

35. N. K. Schmid, review of *The Quranic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet: A Study of Intertextuality and Religious Identity Formation in Late Antiquity*, by C. A. Segovia, *Der Islam* 97, no. 2 (2020): 617–22.

36. González Ferrín, *Cuando fuimos árabes*, 62, disingenuously complains about the Spanish academe’s positivism and lack of openness to what he calls “interpretive novelty” (“novedad interpretativa”).

37. <https://twitter.com/PhDniX/status/1335676197498478593>.

38. Fancy, “New *Convivencia*.”

39. See Wolf, “Negating Negationism” and “Myth, History, and the Origins of al-Andalus,” as well as my reply to Wolf: A. García-Sanjuán, “La tergiversación del pasado y la función social del conocimiento histórico,” *Revista de libros*, July 9, 2014: <https://www.revistadelibros.com/discusion/la-tergiversacion-del-pasado-y-la-funcion-social-del-conocimiento-historico>. Hirschkind ignores this latter publication.

been regarded as a valid academic approach in Spanish scholarship, and there is no debate on this point.⁴⁰ For its part, academic negationism has never responded to its critics. Its sole response has consisted of scorning them as promoters of a smear campaign aimed at discrediting Olagüe's followers. Given the unambiguous rejection of negationism by the experts, one wonders about the reason behind the growing number of American scholars (Wolf, then Fancy, and now Hirschkind) willing to take seriously negationism as an academic approach. It is galling to witness the scholarly legitimation of telling of the past that no expert has ever considered worthy of the slightest academic credit.

Contradicting this consensus of nearly fifty years and following the precedent set by Wolf in 2014, Hirschkind argues that however questionable it is, negationism nonetheless merits academic consideration. Addressing my critique, he alleges that my "determination to demolish González-Ferrín's credibility" has led me to "misrepresent or too readily dismiss the serious aspects of the latter's work."⁴¹ I do not believe that González Ferrín needs my help to demolish his scholarly credibility, but I do wonder what those "serious aspects" are. Luis Molina, a seasoned and highly regarded Arabist and one of the leading experts on Andalusí Arabic, went so far as to dismiss González Ferrín's work as "bullshit"⁴²—an exceptionally harsh public assessment by one scholar of another's work, and one that conveys the vehemence with which Spanish scholars reject negationism's academic pretensions.

Strikingly, Hirschkind ignores not only almost the entirety of Spanish academic literature about negationism but likewise much of the recent and rich Anglophone scholarly production on *Andalucismo*. For instance, he never mentions the books of Christina Civantos⁴³ and Jose Luis Venegas,⁴⁴ and his references to Eric Calderwood's important work⁴⁵ are not particularly substantive. Because he avoids dialogue with these authors, Hirschkind does not pay sufficient attention to political *Andalucismo* and, as a result, downplays the

40. The same is true also of other European scholarly traditions, especially the French; apart from the pioneering work of P. Guichard, "Les Arabes ont bien envahi l'Espagne: Les structures sociales de l'Espagne musulmane," *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 6 (1974): 1483–513, see the much more recent article by P. Guichard and P. Sénac, "Les débuts d'al-Andalus: Des textes, des monnaies et des sceaux," *Le Moyen Âge* 128, no. 3–4 (2020): 511–37, where, quoting González Ferrín, they decry the "inanity" of publications casting doubt on the reality of the Arab conquest.

41. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 92.

42. L. Molina, review of *La conquista islámica de la península ibérica y la tergiversación del pasado*, by A. García-Sanjuán, *Medievalismo* 25 (2015): 455–59. Hirschkind ignores both this review and a previous contribution by the same author on the same topic: L. Molina, "La conquista de al-Andalus, tergiversada: ¿Mala ciencia, ensayo, ficción?," *Revista de libros*, September 1, 2014, <https://www.revistadelibros.com/discusion/la-conquista-de-al-andalus-tergiversadamala-ciencia-ensayo-ficcion>.

43. C. Civantos, *The Afterlife of al-Andalus: Muslim Iberia in Contemporary Arab and Hispanic Narratives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017).

44. J. L. Venegas, *The Sublime South: Andalusia, Orientalism, and the Making of Modern Spain* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018).

45. E. Calderwood, *Colonial al-Andalus: Spain and the Making of Modern Moroccan Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018).

fact that the Andalucistas are responding to Spanish nationalism and complex regional dynamics (e.g., the competitive relationship between Andalusia and Catalonia).

Misinterpreting National Catholic Scholarship

Another claim put forward in Hirschkind's book is that the mere fact of acknowledging the 711 Islamic conquest of Iberia, and therefore rejecting negationism leads, in effect, to National Catholicism:⁴⁶

García Sanjuán's campaign to discredit every aspect of the negationist thesis leads him not only to undervalue the parts of the thesis that cohere with current historical research but to seemingly embrace much of the conventional account propounded by National Catholicism, a view that García Sanjuán explicitly rejects as a nationalist myth. . . . The fact that scholars who are acutely attuned to the dangers of Spanish nationalism end up reaffirming some of the more problematic tenets of nationalist historiography (Islam as a violent intruder into Iberia, erasure of the Arab contribution to building what eventually becomes Europe) points to the political and ideological pressures under which historians of the period labor.⁴⁷

It is true that Vox, the new brand of the Spanish far right, has slammed González Ferrín for questioning the Islamic conquest, called him "Muslim-friendly," and charged him with "whitewashing Spain's history."⁴⁸ But that does not absolve negationism of its scholarly weaknesses. In fact, the narrative of *Andalusismo*, just like its apparent antipode, the traditional conservative account, relies on the perception of an unbroken historical continuity; from its perspective, in Hirschkind's words, al-Andalus and modern Spain and Portugal "cohere in a single continuous development."⁴⁹ On the other side, Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, the main proponent of traditional Spanish nationalist historical writing, once declared that Ibn Ḥazm represents "the Moorish link in the chain binding Seneca

46. González Ferrín, *Cuando fuimos árabes*, 237: "The Islamic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula is not just a historicist dogma but also a National Catholic requirement" ("La conquista islámica de la península ibérica no es sólo un dogma historicista, es también un requerimiento nacionalcatólico").

47. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 93.

48. On March 5, 2018, Vox tweeted, "The islamophile Emilio González Ferrín, falsifying the history of Spain, whitewashing Islam, and asserting in @el_pais [newspaper] that there was neither an Islamic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 711 nor a Christian reconquest . . . Post-truth = the new lie" ("El islamófilo Emilio González Ferrín falseando la historia de España, blanqueando el islam y defendiendo en @el_pais que ni hubo invasión islámica de la península Ibérica en el año 711 ni tampoco una reconquista cristiana . . . La posverdad = la nueva mentira"); https://twitter.com/voxnoticias_es/status/970653678289018881. Vox was reacting to a report in *El País* about González Ferrín's *Cuando fuimos árabes*: P. Rodríguez Blanco, "Cuando fuimos árabes: La posverdad sobre Al Andalus," *El País*, March 6, 2018, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/03/04/hechos/1520120370_739370.html. The same newspaper, however, later took a more critical stance: P. Rodríguez Blanco, "El 'fraude' que intenta tergiversar la historia de al-Andalus," *El País*, April 9, 2018, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/06/hechos/1523043230_705992.html.

49. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 1.

and Unamuno.”⁵⁰ Emotional history is the hallmark of every nationalist approach to the past. Although *Andalucismo* and National Catholicism obviously diverge in their respective approaches to medieval Iberia, at core they are more alike than they are different, which can hardly be seen as just a fluke.

The suggestion that rejecting negationism amounts to endorsing National Catholicism is absurd. Are Guichard, Monroe, and all the scholars who rejected negationism fifty years ago to be seen as National Catholic proxies? What is to be done with the Islamic conquests of, say, Syria, Egypt, or the Sassanid empire, to mention just a few of the territories targeted by the Arab conquerors before their 711 arrival in Iberia? Are these conquests likewise just part of a National Catholic myth? Should Walter Kaegi,⁵¹ Hugh Kennedy,⁵² and Robert Hoyland,⁵³ among other highly regarded specialists on the early Islamic conquests, also be considered advocates of National Catholicism? The origin of al-Andalus is inextricably intertwined with the seventh-century Islamic expansion, so questioning part of the process entails questioning all of it.

Portraying the Islamic conquest of Iberia as merely an element of a National Catholic narrative exemplifies the potentially toxic effects of the uncontrolled consumption of emotional history, especially by nonspecialist audiences but even by scholarly ones. But this is not the most serious problem raised by *The Feeling of History*.

Concealing the Islamic Past: A Conspiracy Theory

Hirschkind’s book opens with the following statement: “The argument I explore here can be simply stated: medieval Muslim Iberia did not disappear from history with the seizure of Granada in 1492 by Christian armies, as our history books have it. Rather, *forced into hiding*, it continued on as an invisible warp within the fabric of Spanish society” (emphasis mine). Later, in the conclusion, Hirschkind argues that *Andalucismo* deserves our attention, among other reasons, “for the way it brings to light a *past left in darkness*” (emphasis mine).⁵⁴

Early in the nineteenth century, Spanish scholars of Arabic studies inaugurated a strong scholarly tradition focused almost exclusively on the history of al-Andalus, and since that time, thousands of publications have appeared, in Spain and elsewhere, on this topic. Although it is true that medieval studies in Spain has largely ignored (but not concealed) al-Andalus, a growing number of historians and archaeologists currently work in this academic field. Over the last four decades, public authorities have funded dozens of research projects in Spain aimed at producing deeper and more refined knowledge of al-Andalus.

50. C. Sánchez-Albornoz, *El Islam de España y el Occidente* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1965), 113.

51. W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); idem, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

52. H. Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007).

53. R. G. Hoyland, *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquest and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

54. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 1 and 159.

A good number of Islamic monuments in Spain are open to visitors, and public exhibitions displaying all kinds of objects and artifacts crafted in al-Andalus are held regularly in different countries. In light of all this activity, how and when has the Islamic Iberian past been “forced into hiding”?

To the best of my knowledge, there is a single instance of a deliberate plan to conceal the Islamic Iberian past: the Mosque of Córdoba. In the last few years, especially since the 2006 claim on the building’s legal ownership made by the Catholic Church, the bishopric of Córdoba has taken a series of decisions clearly aimed at blurring the building’s Islamic past, chief among them attempts to remove the word “Mezquita” from its official name.⁵⁵ Some of the scholars scorned by Hirschkind as mere National Catholic proxies (see below) have been among the most vocal in condemning this trend. This is particularly true of the historian Eduardo Manzano of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), who authored a remarkably insightful op-ed pointing out that “the misappropriation of the building has prompted the kidnapping of its memory.”⁵⁶ Not long after its publication, Manzano’s opinion piece turned into a manifesto for the public ownership of the building, and it was signed by more than one hundred scholars from more than thirty research institutions.⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly, Hirschkind overlooks both Manzano’s contribution and its scholarly repercussions.⁵⁸ Readers may decide for themselves whether this omission amounts to concealment or reflects simple ignorance.

Beyond the singular case of the Mosque, Hirschkind’s opening remark points to the realm of conspiracy theories. The same approach lay at the heart of Olagüe’s denialist ideas: he repeatedly suggested that historians had deliberately decided to ignore issues that would force reconsideration of the existing knowledge about al-Andalus.⁵⁹ In fact, however, it was Olagüe himself who concealed historical evidence that contradicted his fantasies, as I have shown in detail elsewhere.⁶⁰

More recently, González Ferrín, Olagüe’s most outstanding pupil, has taken up this line of argument, referring repeatedly to an “official” history—presumably juxtaposed with a concealed “real” one.⁶¹ He has also proven willing to apply this approach beyond the limits

55. E. Calderwood, “The Reconquista of the Mosque of Córdoba,” *Foreign Policy*, April 10, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/10/the-reconquista-of-the-mosque-of-cordoba-spain-catholic-church-islam/>.

56. E. Manzano, “El affaire de la Mezquita de Córdoba,” *El País*, April 14, 2015, https://elpais.com/elpais/2015/02/05/opinion/1423137778_840752.html.

57. C. Morán, “Cien expertos critican la situación de la Mezquita de Córdoba,” *El País*, November 3, 2015, https://elpais.com/politica/2015/11/03/actualidad/1446553126_305752.html.

58. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 59–63.

59. Olagüe, *La revolución islámica*, 16 (“Ignorándolos y no hablando de ellos, en un común y tácito acuerdo, han preferido los historiadores dejar a los españoles dormir durante varios siglos”); 274 (“La mayoría de los historiadores han generalmente olvidado o se han cuidado muy mucho de recordar”); 451 (“Los historiadores no habían tenido la valentía de declarar”).

60. García-Sanjuán, *La conquista islámica*, 243–63.

61. E. González Ferrín, “Historiología del Islam y al-Andalus, entre el post-orientalismo y la Historia Oficial,” *Imago crítica* 3 (2011): 71; idem, “711: Historiología de una conquista,” in *Al-Andalus y el mundo árabe (711–2011): Visiones desde el arabismo*, 67–90 (Granada: Sociedad española de estudios árabes, 2012), 70.

of the Islamic Iberian past: a few years ago, he expressed support for the most unhinged conspiracy theory in recent Spanish history, according to which the 2004 bombings in Madrid were the work not of al-Qaeda but of the Basque terrorist organization ETA.⁶² It is thus hardly surprising that González Ferrín would promote the idea of a conspiracy against himself in order to explain the heavy scholarly criticism to which he has been subjected.

González Ferrín's allegation of a conspiracy is based on two false claims. First, he claims that his critics label him a fascist because of his support for ideas originally put forward by the fascist Olagüe.⁶³ As evidence of this claim he cites four authors—but none of them in fact calls him a fascist.⁶⁴ To the contrary, two of them, Rodríguez-Mediano⁶⁵ and Fierro,⁶⁶ explicitly distinguish him ideologically from Olagüe.

The second false claim is that the CSIC is a National Catholic institution and leads the smear campaign against González Ferrín: "Spanish medievalism is fed by the CSIC, a Francoist construction that has inherited National Catholic sentiment."⁶⁷ Here, too, Hirschkind uncritically accepts González Ferrín's arguments and freely endorses the idea of a National Catholic plot led by the CSIC: "Numerous authors have insinuated that despite González Ferrín's long-standing support for leftist causes, he is a Falangist in disguise. Much of the campaign against him (though not all, by any means) has been waged by the Department of Jewish and Islamic Studies at CSIC in Madrid."⁶⁸

Who are these "numerous authors," and where is the evidence of their "campaign"? Accusing some scholars of plotting against another is an extremely serious step, and it is

62. E. González Ferrín, "El 11-M fue un atentado de ETA," *ABC*, June 20, 2004. The conservative government led by Jose Maria Aznar first advanced this theory in the aftermath of the attacks, and ever since it has been consistently upheld by most far-right outlets in Spain.

63. E. González Ferrín, "El islam y su expansión en Occidente: Efectos tomados como causas," in *Frontera inferior de al-Andalus: La Lusitania tras la presencia islámica (713–756 d.C./94–138 H)*, ed. B. Franco Moreno, 29–52 (Mérida: Consorcio ciudad monumental histórico-artística y arqueológica, 2015), 37: "Since Olagüe was a Falangist and denied the invasion, everyone who denies the invasion is a Falangist" ("Como Olagüe era falangista y negó la invasión, todo aquel que niegue la invasión es falangista").

64. F. Rodríguez-Mediano, "Culture, Identity and Civilization: The Arabs and Islam in the History of Spain," in *Islam and the Politics of Culture in Europe: Memory, Aesthetics, Art*, ed. F. Peter et al., 41–60 (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013); Fierro, "Al-Andalus en el pensamiento fascista"; E. Manzano, "Algunas reflexiones sobre el 711," *Awraq 3* (2011): 3–20; García-Sanjuán, *La conquista islámica*.

65. Rodríguez-Mediano, "Culture, Identity and Civilization", 56: "From a viewpoint clearly *opposed to the fascist ideology of Olagüe*, Ferrín postulates a similar argument about the nonexistence of the conquest" (emphasis mine).

66. M. Fierro, "Al-Andalus, convivencia e islam: Mucho ruido y pocas nueces," *Revista de Libros*, October 17, 2018: "No one doubts that González Ferrín is inspired by Olagüe's book, but this does not imply that he shares his political ideas: as he himself affirms, ideas often travel along unexpected paths" ("Nadie duda que González Ferrín se inspirase en el libro de Olagüe, y ello no implica que comulgara con sus ideas políticas: como él mismo afirma, las ideas viajan a menudo por caminos insospechados").

67. J. López Astilleros, "González Ferrín: Mi única idea sobre Al Andalus es su continuidad cultural," *Público*, November 2, 2018, <https://blogs.pUBLICO.es/otrasmiradas/16363/gonzalez-ferrin-mi-unica-idea-sobre-al-andalus-es-su-continuidad-cultural/>.

68. Hirschkind, *Feeling of History*, 175.

more serious still when done without providing any names a single piece of evidence in support of the allegation.

Meanwhile, even if the CSIC had started out as a Francoist institution (it was founded in 1941), the large group of medievalist historians, Arabists, and Islamicists currently working under its auspices in Madrid, Barcelona, and Granada can hardly be described as Francoist proxies.⁶⁹ Some of its members are not just uncritical of the origins of their own institution but among the most vocal critics of conservative scholarship in general.⁷⁰ Casting them as inheritors of National Catholicism involves an obvious untruth and represents another clear indication of the extremely problematic relationship of negationism with actual evidence. Obviously, the problem here is not the Francoist origin of CSIC but the fact that some CSIC members (especially Fierro, Manzano, and Molina) are among the most vocal critics of negationism.⁷¹

González Ferrín's denunciation of CSIC fits uneasily with his declared commitment to Karl Popper's maxim of "understanding the world as a sum of individuals, not of collectivities."⁷² By scorning the CSIC as a whole, he declines to extend the basic privilege of being seen as individuals to the members of the CSIC. And by insisting that the CSIC remains captive to its National Catholic origins more than forty-five years after Franco's demise, he provides a convenient explanation for its members' rejection of his ideas: its members necessarily hate González Ferrín, like they hate Américo Castro.⁷³

The contradiction inherent in González Ferrín's claims is quite obvious: if the CSIC were indeed a Francoist and National Catholic institution, why would its members wage a campaign to denounce someone as a fascist? It simply makes no sense. In any case, none of his critics at the CSIC has ever described González Ferrín as a fascist, nor is there any campaign to discredit him as one. Instead, as noted earlier, some of his critics have explicitly highlighted the ideological differences between him and the fascist Olagüe.

69. Ibid., 77: "An institution founded by the Franco regime and still subject to its looming shadow."

70. E. Manzano, "La construcción histórica del pasado nacional," in *La gestión de la memoria: La historia de España al servicio del poder*, ed. J. S. Pérez Garzón et al., 33–62 (Barcelona: Crítica, 2000); idem, review of *Al-Andalus contra España*, by S. Fanjul, *Hispania* 61/3, no. 209 (2001): 1161–64; idem, "De cómo la historia se ha convertido en una disciplina al servicio de los intereses conservadores," in *Hispania, Al-Ándalus, España: Nacionalismo e identidad en el medievo peninsular*, ed. M. Fierro and A. García-Sanjuán, 47–56 (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2020); F. Rodríguez-Mediano, "Al-Ándalus y la batalla del presente," in Fierro and García-Sanjuán, *Hispania, Al-Ándalus, España*, 23–32; Fierro, "Al-Andalus, convivencia e islam"; idem, review of *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain*, by D. Fernández-Morera, *Al-Qanṭara* 39, no. 1 (2018): 248–53. Hirschkind ignores all of these publications.

71. See Fierro, "Al-Andalus en el pensamiento fascista"; Molina, review of García-Sanjuán, *La conquista islámica*; idem, "La conquista de al-Andalus, tergiversada"; E. Manzano, "De como los árabes realmente invadieron Hispania," *Al-Qanṭara* 35, no. 1 (2014): 311–19; idem, "¿Realmente invadieron los árabes Hispania?," *El País*, February 13, 2014, <https://blogs.elpais.com/historias/2014/02/invasionhispania.html>.

72. González Ferrín, *Cuando fuimos árabes*, 86: "Mi convencido seguimiento de Karl R. Popper y la necesidad de comprender el mundo como suma de individualidades, no de colectividades."

73. González Ferrín, *Cuando fuimos árabes*, 85: "El odio del CSIC a la obra de Castro." See the recent article by M. García-Arenal, "Américo Castro en Estados Unidos," *Boletín de la Institución libre de enseñanza* 119–20 (December 2020): 287–300, the latest evidence of the steady interest in Castro among CSIC scholars.

González Ferrín's academic peers do not "have it in for him"; the reason for the torrent of criticism he has been subjected to in Spain for fifteen years now⁷⁴ is not that he has adopted the ideas of a fascist pseudo-historian but that by advocating them he—like Hirschkind after him—has lent academic legitimacy to a well-known (and well-worn) scholarly fraud.

Final Remarks

The Feeling of History is an academic book that gives international support to pseudo-academic ideas largely discredited among specialists over the last forty-five years and that makes sweeping and simplistic overgeneralizations about Spanish scholarship that include glaring untruths and false accusations.

Hirschkind does not limit himself to exposing and analyzing the historical and social phenomenon of *Andalucismo*. Instead, he fully embraces it (as he is well aware, noting that "the result may appear to some as partisan"). The most compelling evidence of the partisan nature of his approach lies in his unmitigated scorn for historical knowledge as a form of rational understanding of the past. Hirschkind alleges an intentional cover-up of al-Andalus, denigrates historians as Francoist proxies, and gives fuel to a well-known historiographical fraud. Science and scholarship promote rationality, not emotions, in order to understand human societies. Disregarding his obligations as a scholar and a social scientist, Hirschkind subscribes to a deeply reactionary tendency that promotes an emotional approach to the past as the basis for the construction of collective identity.

Hirschkind's legitimation of emotional appeals to the past raises the question whether he would be willing to take the same stance on phenomena similar to *Andalucismo*. For instance, would he legitimize the highly emotional envisioning of the medieval Christian past currently advocated by far-right organizations and groups in the USA and elsewhere? Or would he argue that emotional approaches to the past must be allowed only selectively? Once Pandora's box is open, who can control or close it? History is a highly flammable product, and the least a social scientist should do is handle it very carefully.

Lending academic legitimacy to emotional (nationalist) views of the past is not only a huge scholarly mistake that involves unacceptable distortion of the past but also a dangerous and thoughtless frivolity. As a scholar and a historian, I must confess that *The Feeling of History* left me feeling really bad.

74. A. García-Sanjuán, review of *Historia general de Al Ándalus*, by E. González Ferrín, *Medievalismo* 16 (2006): 327–32.

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