

# H-Net Reviews

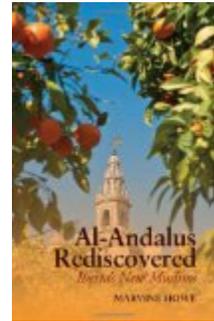
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Marvine Howe. *Al-Andalus Rediscovered: Iberia's New Muslims*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. v + 289 pp. \$25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-70274-4.

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Published on H-SAE (September, 2013)

Commissioned by Michael B. Munnik



## Is Iberia Different? Islam and Migration in Spain and Portugal

Veteran journalist Marvine Howe has accumulated a wealth of knowledge about Spain and Portugal from years of reporting. She puts this experience, along with her extensive contacts in the region, to good use in *Al-Andalus Rediscovered: Iberia's New Muslims*, a journalistic overview of how the state and the citizens of these Iberian countries are responding to their growing Muslim and migrant populations. While the book's title implies a focus on Islam and Iberia's Islamic past, the main focus of the text is on contemporary responses to migration in the region, including but not limited to Muslims. This book is not written from a conventionally academic perspective, but it is a thorough and accessible primer on Islam and migration that will be of interest to a broad non-academic readership and of use to students and scholars new to topics such as Islam, migration, or Mediterranean Europe.

The goal of Howe's book is to introduce the reader to a broad spectrum of issues related to Islam and migration in Iberia. Throughout, the author circles back to several core questions: How are Muslims (both converts and immigrants) and migrants integrating into Iberian societies? Do Iberia's experiences of medieval religious pluralism and twentieth-century trends of mass labor emigration make Iberians more welcoming than their northern European neighbors to new Muslim and migrant residents? And how are EU policy pressures and the current European economic crisis affecting the growth of anti-immigrant or Islamophobic sentiment? Howe answers these questions by presenting a picture of Muslim and

migrant populations more or less at ease in Iberia, despite hiccups and occasional racism and exclusion. She believes that Iberia's supposed history of religious pluralism during al-Andalus makes the region uniquely suited to successful inclusion of migrants and religious diversity. While the book acknowledges the darker sides of medieval Iberian history (inter-religious conflict, the Reconquest, and the Inquisition), the legacies of these violent processes are less apparent in Howe's account of the present. For Howe, what jeopardizes the positive "Iberian model" is the current economic crisis and a broader EU anti-migrant, anti-Muslim ethos.

Howe covers these themes primarily by reporting on her interviews with a range of people, accompanied by references to opinion polls and news coverage. For ethnographically inclined readers, the interview material can productively be read as a study of how Iberians in positions of relative power and authority view (or see fit to represent) the state of Islam and migration in Iberia. These people run the gamut of official Iberia, from religious and cultural leaders, through academics and intellectuals, to government and third-sector officials. The result is a fascinating look at how those "in charge" of managing Islam and migration in Iberia think and talk about the issues they face and, in particular, how they represent their activities and constituencies to an outside reporter.

Three early chapters, "Gate Crashers," "Moorish Legacy," and "The Early Newcomers," plus a later chap-

ter, "Jewish Roots," offer a recent history of the growth of migration and Islam in Iberia as well as a sense of how Iberia's much older history of religious pluralism figures in contemporary approaches to diversity. These chapters nicely depict the Iberian public's growing interest in the region's Muslim and Jewish heritage, though they also hint at the limits of this heritage in fostering concrete forms of inclusion beyond tourism and intergovernmental dialogue. Howe describes the efforts of individual Iberians to create associations and activities commemorating Iberia's multireligious past, especially the Jewish past, but also notes that such activities remain small scale, rarely reaching large audiences or having an impact on contemporary policy.

The chapters "Spain's 11 September" and "The Radical Fringe" address the specter of "Islamic terrorism" in Iberia, covering the events surrounding the March 11 train bombing in Madrid and Iberian counterterrorism efforts. Howe qualifies her inclusion of this material by emphasizing that "Iberians by and large contend they do not feel especially threatened by Islamic extremists" and she briefly acknowledges that an increased focus on security may hinder social inclusion of new Iberian residents (p. 139). Still, the implicit rationale for including these chapters seems to be that the threat of terrorism must be a direct and obvious part of any discussion of Muslims in Europe—an implication that may be unsettling for some readers. While they include discussions with imams, these chapters focus on interviews with Iberian counterterrorism officials and thus primarily present the state's views on Muslims and security. Future research might productively engage this perspective by asking how security concerns or antiterrorism policies affect Muslims and migrants in Iberia and how those populations experience and respond to non-Muslim Iberians' anxieties about terrorism.

Another set of chapters, "Iberian Outreach," "Muslim Solidarity," "Portugal's Central Mosque and Associates," and "Spain's Multiple Muslim Voices," describes the institutions in which the management of Islam and migration in Iberia is emerging. Howe traces both Spanish and Portuguese governmental and nongovernmental organizations' efforts at including and integrating Muslims and migrants into Iberian society. She also provides basic details on Muslim and migrant-run organizations and trade unions and describes her encounters with religious leaders in Portugal and Spain. Here, Howe examines the difficulty of uniting and representing diverse Muslim and migrant populations under national umbrella organizations, as well as the challenges of organizing and moni-

toring the messages of imams in mosques across Iberia. Interviews with leaders of these organizations provide a snapshot of their activities, goals, and messages, as well as brief but interesting life history accounts of many of the individuals interviewed.

A final set of chapters, "The Iberian Model," "Wrestling with Phobias," and "The Way of Dialogue," tackles questions of discrimination and tolerance. Howe's suggestion here is that because of their histories of cross-cultural pluralism and emigration, Spain and Portugal are naturally prone to accepting Muslims and migrants. This, of course, is the official narrative of many people in Iberia, including in governmental institutions, NGOs, and outside these contexts as well. And this may to some extent be true for many Iberians—Howe offers the example of Spanish and Portuguese officials' persistent refusal to engage in the exclusionary rhetoric of the larger EU, and the public insistence of Iberian leftist politicians that migration benefits the region. However, further research might home in on how this liberal rhetoric does or does not translate into inclusion of Muslims and migrants in everyday social and political life in Iberia. Moreover, critical analyses of migration policy have demonstrated the systematic political, economic, and socially exclusionary outcomes of Iberian migration policy (e.g., Kitty Calavita's *Immigrants at the Margins* [2005], Keshia Fikes's *Managing African Portugal* [2009], and Liliana Suárez-Navaz's *Rebordering the Mediterranean* [2004]), sympathetic government rhetoric notwithstanding.

Despite her position on the special nature of Iberia, Howe does address antipathy toward Muslims and migrants in Spain and Portugal, exploring expressions of intolerance from the far Right, as well as more mainstream forms of discrimination. She explains exclusion primarily as the unfortunate and inevitable result of the current economic crisis. It is certainly likely that the ongoing crisis has led to increasing strictures on migrants and Muslims. The Spanish government, for instance, has called for rolling back medical services to undocumented migrants, using recent economic woes as justification. Howe's analysis of the current economic climate is thorough and welcome. Yet scholars of the region would be advised to consider as well the historical complexities behind Iberian discrimination, as fears of Muslims and migrants predate the current economic decline and find their sources in more than economic matters.

Throughout the book Howe reports—and generally agrees with—the official Portuguese narrative that, in

contrast to Spain, Portugal has been more successful at including new Muslims and migrants than its larger Iberian neighbor. Howe does periodically acknowledge, though, that Portuguese social and political exclusion has tended to focus more explicitly on questions of race and on postcolonial African migrants. Portugal, then, is not necessarily more tolerant or accepting than Spain, as Howe sometimes implies; rather, its national discussions of social difference are framed more in terms of locally understood concepts of racial difference, rather than the religious difference commonly referred to in Spain.

Because Howe provides an abundance of information about Islam and migrant communities in a range of Iberian cities and relates them to a variety of other topics, this book will no doubt serve as a jumping-off point for readers across the social sciences and humanities who are developing research projects. Qualitative researchers might ask, for instance, how the discourses of those interviewed in this book are relevant for, similar to, or different from the way Muslims and migrants

in non-leadership roles or less institutional contexts experience and understand multiculturalism in Iberia; or how the engagement of Iberian counterterrorism officials with Muslim leaders is shaping religious and political affiliations in the region. Howe's interesting comparisons in this book—between Spain and Portugal, between Iberia as a whole and northern Europe, and, implicitly, between social and political discussions of “migration” and “Islam” as related but different categories for publicly framing and interpreting diversity—should inspire comparative research as well. Future comparative work might address whether Iberia's experiences with migration and Islam are similar to or different from those of fellow Mediterranean countries like Greece or Italy, or eastern European contexts, which, like Iberia, have long histories of Muslim-Christian interaction. This book will thus be helpful to those who are thinking of conducting research on Islam or migration in Iberia, or who are simply curious about multiculturalism in contemporary Mediterranean Europe.

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**Citation:** Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar. Review of Howe, Marvine, *Al-Andalus Rediscovered: Iberia's New Muslims*. H-SAE, H-Net Reviews. September, 2013.

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