

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANDALUSIAN GROUP IDENTITY

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Throughout its 700 years history, al-Andalus has consistently enjoyed an image of a "Paradise on Earth" in spite of its continuous internal economic, social and political problems and external threats. What did make it so successful in projecting an attractive cohesive image from generation to generation?

This question is not about a much discussed tangible success of the ruling class to build an economically prosperous state, but about the creation of a perception that would survive even until modern times. To answer this question we first have to understand how the Andalusian group identity was formed, what its main characteristics were, why they were viewed as attractive and how this information was transmitted and maintained.

While "what" questions are relatively straight forward and have been studied by the generations of scholars who pointed out religion and geography as uniting factors and Hispanics, Arabs, Berbers, Jews and Saqaliba as contributing groups; the "why" questions are more ambiguous as they involve both individual and group interests and an interplay between them.

The research for this study was conducted in 2005 in Southern Spain, which used to be al-Andalus. A combination of primary and secondary sources, and historical visual artifacts were used as a basis for this analysis. Theoretical grounding for this work was developed based on several social theories.

"Groupism" is a primary human behavioral pattern and represents the readiness to form groups around any observed or imagined differences in bodily or mental characteristics (Cavalli-Sforza, 2000). Groups are usually formed within the affinity networks, a type of informal institutions held together by bonds of affection, belief, family loyalty and common purpose (Ringrose, D., 2002). Group identity is being solidified as informal networks create social capital embedded in the ties between its members (Bourdieu, J., 1984). Andalusian composite group identity was developed through an interaction of various affinity networks through the processes of assimilation and accommodation (Piaget in Wadsworth, B., 2004) motivated by certain level of group needs (Maslow, A., 1949).

According to Maslow's hierarchy, human motivation progresses from survival material needs to higher order social and self-actualization needs as a function of overall well-

being of the community they live in. As al-Andalus' prosperity was increasing, the disparate ethnic groups of the Arabs, Berbers, Saqaliba, Jews, and the indigenous Hispanic Iberians of the 8th century became socially integrated "Andalusians" by the 11th century. The same prosperity that levied animosity among ethnic groups, also contributed to development of a multi-facet literary and artistic heritage which incorporated features of various group members thus creating a perpetuating example of a multicultural "Paradise on Earth."