

Reconquering Andalusia: The Muslim Cities of the West

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Abstract

*Despite their Western location, major cities of Andalusia, Spain such as Granada, Seville or Córdoba have always been vivid representations of the oriental city in the Western mind. Centuries of Moorish rule in the region was brought to an end in 1492, with the conquest of Granada by the Catholic Kings. Under their rule, Renaissance in Andalusia had a particular objective among others: Christianization of the region. The Muslim empire of the Morisco-Spaniards was almost completely annihilated, after enjoying a prosperous civilization for eight centuries; however, its representativeness of the Muslim city does not seem to fade away. From its typical *mocárabes* to the impressive columns of the Cathedral-Mosque of Córdoba, this research tries to identify the evident role of the Andalusian cities in constructing the Muslim city image, also through the way that these cities are used as the setting for the “oriental city” in movies, series or advertisements.*

Keywords: Andalusia, Spain, Muslim city, Oriental city, the Alhambra, Image, Identity.

1. Introduction

Despite their western location and their Catholic population, major cities of the Andalusian region of Spain, such as Granada, Seville or Cordoba were deeply marked by the Muslim rule in the Iberian territories that lasted from 711 to 1492, and hence, have always been vivid representations of the *oriental* in the Western mind. Indeed, the Moorish-influenced architectural style that dominated these cities is one of the many cultural phenomena that are internationally considered as distinctively Spanish like flamenco or bullfighting – even though the territory has been almost completely Catholicized in the past five centuries.

Edward Said harshly criticized the *Cambridge History of Islam*(1970), the two-volume reference book for various points, and among them was a definition of the “Islamic geography”: “the Central Islamic lands are defined as excluding North Africa and Andalusia, and *their* history is an orderly march from the past till modern times” (Said, 1978: 303). Nonetheless, as we will be dissecting in this research the image of these *excluded* lands are highly representative of the Muslim city and are highly significant to the construction of Orientalism.

In fact, Victor Hugo declared in his *Les Orientales* (1829) that Spain also was *oriental*. This perception owed mainly to the rich heritage of Islamic architecture left behind by the Moorish rule on the Iberian Peninsula and was also confirmed by Said, who said Spain could easily claim a place in the historiography developed around Orientalism. An Orientalist discourse was indeed initiated in Spain by the mid-XIXth century and it was one of the first destinations to be explored by the Orientalists – until their attention was shifted to more distant and exotic lands of the *actual* Orient (2001).

The rich culture of Andalusia provides us with various visual and architectonic clues that contribute to the image of a Muslim city, from its typical *mocárabes* to the impressive 856 columns of the Cathedral-Mosque of Cordoba. The way the Andalusian cities were represented first through the testimonies of travellers, journalists, novelists and painters, later through photography and finally through cinema provides us with the clues for the ineradicable oriental image that still pertains, though the Moorish rule in the region had been terminated over five centuries ago. Though the three great cities of Andalusia owed their original city structures to five centuries of Muslim rule, the Muslim city image was more of a Christian construct after the reconquest – based on the mythification of the earlier habitants of these city fabrics.

As Renaissance started to conquer Europe, centuries of Moorish rule in the Iberian Peninsula was brought to an end in 1492, with the conquest of Granada by the Catholic Kings. Under their rule, Renaissance in Andalusia had a particular objective among others: Christianization and transformation of the region. Yet it is indeed the majestic Muslim culture and Muslim image of the city where we find the clues of this geopolitical situation in the “taking” of Muslim Granada by the Christian kingdoms, and in the culmination of a process like the conquest of Al-Andalus, that was of great political and cultural impact in the Mediterranean basin in the passage from the Medieval ages to the modern, in terms of both Christian, Muslim and even Jewish cultures (Díez, 1998: 10). This particular point that makes it interesting to investigate the merge between the old Islamic and new Christian needs in a multicultural city, and particularly in its core, in the Alhambra, under the hegemony of Christendom.

The research has a special focus on the Alhambra, as this “dreamy palace” is one of the pillars of the oriental image constructed around the Andalusian cities - and the last Muslim castle to fall. The Alhambra, literally “the red fortress”, was once the residence of the Muslim kings of Granada and their court, and was Christianized after the reconquest. It is now one of Spain’s major tourist attractions exhibiting the country’s multicultural history and one of its World Heritage sites to be carefully preserved (Unesco, 1984). At this point it is important to underline the fact that the Alhambra – though habited only two centuries by the Nasrid Royal Family and later five centuries by the Catholic Kings who made several adjustments, restorations and additions to the palace – is still considered today as one of the birthplaces of the *oriental symbolism* long after its Muslim habitants had left. As we read from Irving’s *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832), the Muslim empire of the Morisco-Spaniards that enjoyed a prosperous civilization for eight centuries was almost completely annihilated:

“Severed from all their neighbors in the West by impassable barriers of faith and manners, and separated by seas and deserts from their kindred of the East, the Morisco-Spaniards were isolated people. Their whole existence was a prolonged, though gallant and chivalric struggle for a foothold in a usurped land. They were the outposts and frontiers of Islamism. ... They have not even left a distinct name behind them, though for nearly eight centuries they were a distinct people. The home of their adoption, and of their occupation for ages, refuses to acknowledge them, except as invaders and usurpers. A few broken monuments are all that remain to bear witness to their power and dominion, as solitary rocks, left far in the interior, bear testimony to the extent of some vast inundation. Such is the Alhambra. A Moslem pile in the midst of a Christian land; an Oriental palace amidst the Gothic edifices of the West; an elegant memento of a brave, intelligent, and graceful people, who conquered, ruled, flourished, and passed away” (Irving, 1832/1974: 28-29).

Irving’s account is only one of the reflections – and definitely, a debateable one – of the way the depictions of the Andalusian Muslim city were interpreted in the West, as well as in the East. A reading of such representations through the architectural elements of the Andalusian urban settings, the *broken* monuments left behind by the once sophisticated Morisco-Spaniards, and a mixture of historical facts together with deliciously intriguing Moorish drama/fiction leads us to the image construct of the Muslim city within the context delineated in this research.

2. The Pattern of Representation for the Alhambra from the XIIth Century onto the XVIIIth Century

Constructing a mental image, we are always-already talking about an intersection of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. In this perceptive context, imaginary identification is how we see ourselves, while symbolic identification is how we identify with the gaze from which we are observed. The symbolic often influences the imaginary identification, in such a way that imaginary identification is also always “on behalf of a certain gaze in the other” (Arda, 2011: 72). In such a reading of Said’s *Orientalism*, the way Alhambra’s image was constructed in the Western mind provides us with ample evidence on the correlation between the construction of the image of a Muslim city as the construction of an unknown *Other*.

Historically, it was not until the XIIIth century that the Alhambra was considered as the residence of the Muslim kings of Granada, when Al-Ahmar, the founder of the Nasrid Dynasty, took up residence at the Old Alcazaba of the Albayzin in 1238, nonetheless felt attracted by the ruins on top of the Alhambra hill and embarked on the reconstruction of the building for the residence of his Court. The Nasrid Kingdom became the last Islamic sultanate on the Iberian Peninsula, and its capital Granada progressively received Muslim populations forced to retreat from the Christians. The city grew with the development of new suburbs and extended its walls nearly until it was conquered at the end of the XVth century and hence begun the Christianization of the Alhambra. Nevertheless, despite its relatively short history as the residence of the sultans, its reconquest and a wide range of variations, its most profound legends remained based on the Western interpretation of the Moorish fantasies and hence, the image of the Alhambra always remained *oriental*.

According to Michael Jacobs, the Moorish mythology that caught the attention of the Romantic travelers was not constructed in the Golden Age Granada, but it came into being with the collapse of Moorish Granada and found its tales in the mythification of the recent history of the city, such as the beheading of the Abencerrages in the Palace of the Lions, Abul-Hasan's love for the Christian captive whom he renamed Zoraya, or Boabdil's last sigh on leaving Granada – "Weep like a woman," his mother famously told him, "you who have not defended your kingdom like a man". Such stories carefully weaved the oriental pattern for the image of the Alhambra in the centuries following its reconquest (Jacobs, 2000: 156).



Figure 2.1 -The Capitulation of Granada:
Boabdil confronts Ferdinand & Isabella, Francisco Pradilla y Ortiz (1882).

Jacobs highlights the transitions between the imaginary, the symbolic and the real as he emphasizes, "The poetic distortions of history that were already widely circulating in the immediate wake of the Reconquest pandered to Christian notions of Moorish savagery, and above all, of Moorish sensuality". One of the most famous amorous tales that alimanted the Alhambra in the imaginary mind was The Story of the Abencerrage and the Beautiful Jarifa, dated c.1550, which was the supposedly true story of the love between a noble Moorish captive and the daughter of a Christian governor. This story became a great influence in the tale of a secret romance of the Abencerrage leader Aben-Hamet and Boabdil's betrothed Zoraida, who used to meet secretly behind a rosebush in Generalife – as was told in the two-volume historical novel by Ginés Pérez de Hita, *The Civil Wars of Granada* (1593).



Figure 2.2 –Massacre of the Abencerrages Mariano Fortuny Massal(1871).

Though Irving's research following the facts and the authentic documents indicate them to be mostly fantasies and he defines Pérez de Hita's book to be "a mass of fiction, mingled with a few disfigured truths, which give it an air of veracity" (1974: 57), such tales have proved to be a rich resource for various novels, poems, plays, ballets and operas that began to proliferate in the XVIIth century. In the tragedy written by the English poet John Dryden in 1672, *The Conquest of Granada*, the mythical love affair between Zoraida and Aben-Hamet was popularized. The tale of the Abencerrage leader and Boabdil's wife was also picked up by the seventeen-year-old Mozart to become the subject of his opera, after constructing the basis for Pancrace Royer's historical ballet, *Zaida, Queen of Granada* (1739) in France. Yet another opera of three acts, called *The Abencerrages*, was composed by Cherubini Luigi in 1813.

The endless variations of the name Zoraya, Zoraida, Zaida, or the changing protagonists in the supposed love affairs between the Moorish noblemen and beautiful Christian captives in these stories, serve to provide clues for the imaginary nature of their foundation. *The Civil Wars of Granada* by Pérez de Hita and Jean Pierre Claris De Florian's fable "Gonsalvo of Cordova" are commonly blamed for the distortion of the historical facts as the latter "bears internal evidence of its falsity; the manners and customs of the Moors being extravagantly misrepresented in it, and scenes depicted totally incompatible with their habits and their faith, and which never could have been recorded by a Mahometan writer" (Irving, 1974: 57-58). Nonetheless, all these works echoing with the names Granada and Alhambra have given the city and its beautiful palace a wide fame in the Western world in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, as sightseers were beginning to arrive motivated by intellectual curiosity as well as a taste in Moorish romance. The significance of such imaginary investment in the Alhambra was eloquently described by a French prisoner in Granada as the Alhambra being "famous" rather than "known" (Jacobs, 2000: 158).

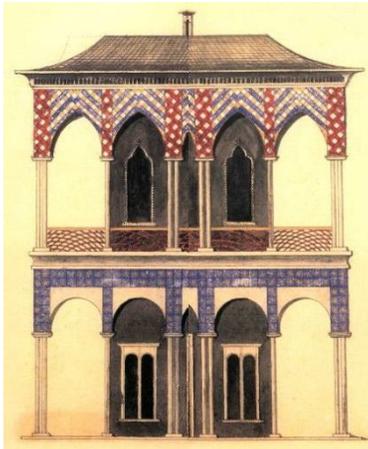


Figure 2.3–The Alhambra became a legend in Europe long before many people had any idea of what it actually looked like. Johann Heinrich Müntz's 1750 design for a pavilion in London's Kew Gardens, for instance, though known as the "Alhambra", bore no relation whatsoever to its namesake.

Nevertheless, for the English travellers of the XVIIIth century, the Alhambra became the "ultimate example of a style so important for the evolution of Gothic architecture that even the tracery of Gothic stained-glass windows was thought by some to derive from filigree Moorish stuccowork" (Jacobs, 2000: 162). This renewed fascination for the Arabic history was part of the increasing Western obsession with the Orient, an obsession developed in a period when Islam had stopped being a threat for the Western world and in terms of Granada led to increasing visits by those succumbed by such obsession as the city was known as the "gate to the Orient" by the beginning of the XIXth century.

Widely accepted appreciation for the level of civilization and aesthetics reached by the Moorish kings in the case of Alhambra was expressed by one of its French visitors in 1807, writer François René de Chateaubriand, as "worthy of being compared even to the Greek temples". This comment, a very obvious indication of the mutable aesthetic norms of the Western taste, was later confirmed by his revealing observation as the monument being "one of those buildings from the *One Thousand and One Nights* that one sees less in actuality than in dreams".

3. *The Image of the Muslim City as Constructed in the Alhambra*

Examining the way the image of Alhambra was constructed in the Western mind, we observe the advent of the orientalist thought and perspective even before it was identified and labeled as such. In the case of Alhambra, the orientalist dream and the myth attached to the place prevails even today, in spite of the fact that Granada has been Catholic ground for over five centuries by now. In the way the orientalist image was alimented, fortified and extended until today, we observe significant work carried out by a North American diplomat, Washington Irving, whose arrival at the Alhambra marks an important date for the premises. Despite his diplomatic duty of collecting data on the conquest of Granada for a future book, Irving had assumed a more romantic role of a journalist/novelist and had entertained an orientalist dream during the summer that he was accomodated in the Comares Palace in the Alhambra. In Irving's own words, from a letter to a friend, there he was "settled comfortably in one of the most extraordinary, romantic and delicious places of the world, having breakfast in the Hall of the Ambassadors, between flowers and fountains of the Court of the Lions and when not busy writing, I sit and enjoy reading a book in one of the oriental halls, or I stroll around in the courtyards, gardens and arcades, day or night, without anyone interrupting me. It totally feels like a dream, or maybe I was spelled right into a palace that belongs in a fairy tale" (Jacobs, 2000: 163).

Irving's dream resulted in a book called *The Alhambra* (1832), which was later more popularly called *Tales of the Alhambra*, which is still sold at the bookshop of the Alhambra venue translated to several languages. Although the book was set out to be a memoir of his days in the Alhambra it was interwoven with history as well as with legends, including several of the popular tales together with Chateaubriand's *Last Abencerrage*. Irving's work was repetitive, uncritically enthusiatic, and in need of a good editor, nonetheless it established a new genre of literature, a sort of a semi-novel structure that pervails until today. This new genre, which could be compared to a blog in our contemporary world of communication, was distinguished by the insistence of its authors in the authenticity and uniqueness of the experiences that were narrated. In the case of Irving, this quality was compensated by his time spent accomodated in the oriental chambers of the Alhambra, and his insinuation, though falsely, that there was no one around to disturb his (oriental) dream, except for the occasional native, or some other extravagant visitor – preferably a Muslim with a turban, or a beautiful woman. Despite the orientalist cliché, his work bore, Irving was at least able to give one of the most famous explanations to why Alhambra provoked a loss of rationality in its visitors, depriving them off of their critical faculties: "This sleepy old palace has one unique appeal which rests in its power to provoke vague fantasies and images of the past, and as such dress up naked realities with the illusions of memory and imagination" (Jacobs, 2000: 167).

While Irving mesmerizedly danced with the fairies of the past pleasures; in the meantime his contemporaries Girault de Prangey and Owen Jones were carrying out a more scientific work around the Alhambra: that of representing the monument through the detailed drawings that they realized. The illustrations and lithographs that construct de Prangey's book, *Arabic and Moorish Monuments from Cordoba, Seville and Granada* were drawn between 1832-1833, were scaled realistically and were accompanied by plans, elevations and detailed ornaments, as well as being very picturesque representations of the monument. De Prangey, who is today considered one of the pioneers of the *daguerreotype*, the first commercially successful photographic process, tried to recreate some of the original polychromatic patterns of the Alhambra, using an earlier form of a similar chromatographic technique.

His detailed record drawings of ornamentation, alternating with more atmospheric views of the city of Granada and the vistas of the Alhambra, captured the imagination of orientalists across Europe. De Prangey's portfolio must have been a revelation to those who had previously experienced the wonders of Moorish architecture only through monochrome engravings. Most of his original engravings were kept in the private collection of an architect/lithographer, Owen Jones, who was a great admirer of his work and followed his line of investigation to create a more detailed study of the ornaments of the Alhambra.

Owen Jones, working with Jules Goury, completed two volumes of plans, elevations, sections and details of the Alhambra (1842, 1845) constituted by detailed drawings on the spot, together with prints on paper and plaster molds, and collected samples of the original colors from under various layers of paint.

Jones's work had consequences that extended far beyond the realm of picturesque Orientalism. For the first time someone had analyzed in detail the principles underlying mathematical and geometric ornamentation of the Alhambra, whose complexities had generally been simplified or alleviated by earlier artists.

The results of his study, later converted into *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856) became a key reference in the history of industrial design which also influenced profoundly XXth century abstract artists such as Piet Mondrian, in its detailed way of demonstrating how geometric motifs evolved through abstract representations of nature.

In *The Grammar of Ornament*, through Jones's very detailed aesthetic analysis of the Moorish ornaments, we learn to appreciate the advanced beauty of each element, each use of colour and every composition. According to Owen Jones "The Alhambra is at the very summit of perfection of Moorish art, as is the Parthenon of Greek Art" (1856: 67), and their ornamental art truly follows the universal principles of beauty, achieving perfection in the way that the nature is represented – principles which are not theirs alone, but common to all the best periods of art. The principles which are everywhere the same, the forms only differ (*ibid*).

The builders of this wonderful structure were fully aware of the greatness of their work. It is asserted in the inscriptions on the walls, that this building surpassed all other buildings; that at sight of its wonderful domes all other domes vanished and disappeared; in the playful exaggeration of their poetry, that the stars grew pale in their light through envy of so much beauty; and, what is more to our purpose, they declare that he who should study them with attention would reap the benefit of a commentary on decoration.

4. The Role of the Journalist/Traveller/Filmmaker in Constructing the Image and the Narrative of a City: The Eye of the Other

Journalism as we know today was born in England in the early XVIIIth century with the launch of the daily newspaper the *Daily Courrant* in 1702. Since then, a new concept of communication began to impregnate literate societies, introducing new ideas such as the public opinion or business press. This, together with the emergence of new technologies and technical innovations, encouraged the development of this new medium of social communication.

In the early days of journalism, people used to read newspapers at public places like cafés, or other similar gathering venues where they could comment on the news, hence the way such places changed and evolved also reflected in the evolution and development of journalism. Moreover, the information infrastructure benefited from advances in transportation and communication networks which favored the faster distribution of newspapers as well as allowing journalists to travel faster and to perform as reporters on the run.

Hence, the first travellers / reporters started to inform their readers on their journeys, telling their audiences the places, cultures, images and landscapes that they visited, those distant, exotic and unattainable geographies that they wouldn't have known otherwise.

Despite the way they oversimplified their observations, the romantic travellers of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries, the first reporters of their time, had a very fundamental role in describing Granada and the Alhambra, thereby contributing significantly to the creation of an oriental image of the city. Nonetheless, it should not be disregarded that these early reports coincided with the rush of Romantic travellers who visited Granada and the Alhambra seeking their own fantasies and creating clichés and stereotypes that often had little to do with the reality. Most of those travellers were fascinated by the charms of the city and its people. Many of them mingled with the common people as they wished, experienced their lifestyles and traditions, hence lived them more intensely than many native Spanish writers did. They described a particular Spain where all kinds of myths and stereotypes were incorporated, and this description survived during a long period of time. However, they also described the architecture, the forms and local colors. Their contributions created a wider interest in Spain, and especially in Andalusia, spreading the news about its charms and thereby helping the enhancement of its architectural and artistic heritage.

One of the pioneers of this movement was a British writer, Richard Ford, who visited the Alhambra in 1831. His visit was confirmed by his signature and the date of his visit in an inscription found on the cup of the famous fountain in the Court of the Lions. In addition, he also left his signature on the lookout Lindaraja and Comares tower¹. The pages Richard Ford wrote attracted the major number of travellers to Spain in the XIXth century.

¹ The travellers leaving their footprints on the monuments that they passed by was considered to be *normal* in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. That was why the Alhambra was marked with paintings and notes where travelers wanted to perpetuate their memory. This incident was reported by W. Irving in his *Tales of the Alhambra*, and hence the practice of signing a guest book was initiated.

His contributions were highly appreciated as besides having a pleasant and entertaining prose, he also published the first travel guide to Andalusia. His *A Handbook for Travellers in Spain* (1845) marked a defining moment in English travel literature, had a huge influence in making Spain trendy in England, as several travellers, artists, writers came over to experience the itineraries and places described by the author.

Other authors such as George Borrow, William Jacobs, Alexander Dumas, William George Clark, Pierre Louys, among others, helped to spread this romantic and Eastern atmosphere of the monument and the city. George Borrow (also known as Don Jorgito, or El Inglés) reached ten thousand copies with his *The Bible in Spain* just in the first two years of its publication in 1842. In France a similar movement was to arise and there would be many travellers and French authors, including Theophile Gautier to boost Orientalism and Spain's Arab-Muslim history.

In the case of Washington Irving, the most acknowledged of all authors to ever visit the Alhambra, the descriptions were reinforced by a deep knowledge of Spain's culture and history, and in particular the Islamic culture of the Renaissance, because the first job he had during his first visit to Spain in 1826, was the study of the new-world-related documents at the Escorial. Irving was recognized as the first American-Hispanist, he lived in Spain for long durations. He was the U.S. ambassador in Madrid and was responsible for preparing important documents related to the Iberian Peninsula. Even before his first visit to Granada, he had mentioned the city in a story entitled "The Student in Salamanca" (1822) which was very much influenced by stories he read when he was younger – like *The Civil Wars of Granada* by Ginés Pérez de Hita. Such readings influenced him and caused him to create a mental image of the city, with a special emphasis on its Islamic period, converting Granada into a scene of romantic ideas with a strong Arabic character – hence the oriental image of the city flourished and shined further with Irving's contributions and survived until today.

In 1908, the editor of *La Vanguardia*, Miquel dels Sants Oliver meticulously analyzed the vast number of major authors that had visited Spain in the previous century and had contributed to the myth of Spain as a romantic country par excellence (1974: 213). He concluded that the imported vision and interpretation of Spain was almost better than the native, the image suggested by foreigners such as "violent Spain and the color of blood", by Mérimée, or "the Spain of pleasure and death" by Barres, among others, was much more attractive when compared to the descriptions by Spanish authors like "the Spain of eagles and the conquerors of gold" in Heredia's poem or the "maceration" of Spain as expressed by El Greco.

Definitely, the most important contribution made by these authors to the audiences was to deliver them the feeling that the city produced in them as actual travellers, and hence they evoked the image of Muslim Granada, both because it was the most distant referent with respect to their original cultures, and also for the tragic past that they transmitted of Granada being the last city of Al-Andalus taken by the Christian culture. Interestingly, once this image was constructed for Granada, it remained intact throughout the XXth century and reached until today, reinforced by new communication technologies that have expanded the image of Granada always related with the Alhambra and the Moorish architecture – thereby highlighting at all times, its *oriental* character.

5. The reflection of archetypes that forge the Oriental city image in the movies representing Andalusia: 1492 and The Fountain

In the investigation of Alhambra's image as representative of the image of the Muslim cities of Andalusia, we examined various forms of representation as they evolved throughout centuries, nonetheless our research remains incomplete without examining how this oriental image persists using the cinema as its contemporary medium. The clash of East and West in the processes of the reconquest and the Christianization of Andalusia, have proved subtle in travellers' accounts, however the transformation is strongly expressed using the audiovisual tools provided by cinema in the examples that we undertake in this section. In the Ridley Scott movie *1492* (1992), as they enter Granada, right after its fall and as the Muslims are fleeing its grounds, Don Luis de Santangel tells Christophe Columbus: "Moors built Granada centuries ago. Now we've taken it back. But it's a tragic victory for us. We're losing a great culture. But I suppose there is a price to be paid for every victory, isn't there Señor Columbus?" (*min* 22:20). We observe how the Muslim symbols are taken down and the Muslims being forced to adapt to the consequences of the reconquest, as the Catholic rulers of the city settle in together with their own symbolism.

In the dichotomy between the idea of East and West, we can speak of a *relationship* (whether it is, in different contexts, either to differentiate oneself or to complement) while we remain in the field of culture.

But when we consider this dichotomy within the ideological-religious terrain, then, we are no longer talking about a *relationship*, if not a dominant notion of *opposition*. To clarify this point, it would be sufficient to mention the existence of the *Inquisition*, to understand that the game of East-West cultural relations, beyond sociological or even political aspects, would come to be truncated and converted into destructive oppositions, when we shift our consideration from the earthly and temporal powers to eternal and divine powers. The power play becomes even more complex when we think – beyond the oppositions that were established between the emirs and sultans of Islam and the Catholic kings – that the Inquisition itself supposed a confrontation between the cross and crown. The same complexity rests also in the *Capitulations* that the Catholic Kings gave the Muslims of Granada, in the city's Reconquest, guaranteeing them to freely exercise their religion, their law, language and customs (that were gradually less and less respected until the complete expulsion of the Moors).

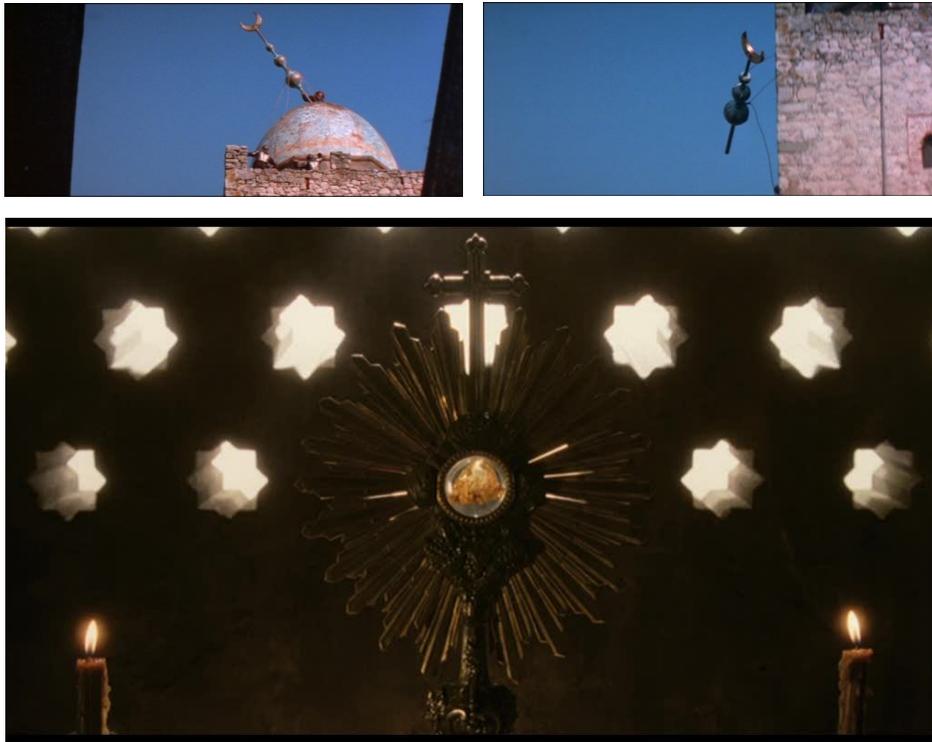


Figure 5.1 –(Top row)Filmstills from the movie *1492*.(Bottom)Filmstill from *The Fountain*.

Given the power of symbols to mold, to create a specific vision of the world, the replacement of the crescent moon for the cross was certainly crucial, in order to begin imposing on the society the hegemony of one culture over the other, mostly through destructive processes, and hence without actually allowing the co-existence of cultures. Nonetheless, the symbolism that the architecture itself brings about lasts and resists, there lays a pastiche of the East and the West, testifying to the underlying hybridization of the cultures. Something that is dragged up until from the XVth and the XVIth centuries is that on one hand we have territorial integrity, while on the other there is the ideological and religious integrity (which even today is an undeniable source of conflict and power plays). These contrasting trends also defended, on one side, a certain idea of syncretism (hybridization and tolerance) and, on another, that of fundamentalism (purity and intolerance). Ultimately, there was a question of power, economic and territorial, as well as ideological: Imposition of a certain world view at a time when the boundaries of the known were in constant flux both in geography and in science, hence threatening the stability and permanence of different powers.

Indeed, architecture is one of the strong holds in the representation process as linked to the cultures. The architecture of the Alhambra, and in general in all that which underlines a certain idea of dichotomy between the East and the West, in many cases, presents some visual peculiarities so strong and defined that it is usually sufficient to use its features for such identification. The same is also true in the case of this research, with the presence of Muslim culture in Andalusia in the representations of the ornamental or structural patterns in the architecture and the art of the region.

Hence, once again, the architectonic details – linked to the figures that they define or draw – are sufficient for recognizing a dichotomy between Muslim and Catholic iconography, firstly, in the non-representation of the human figure, due to the permanent obsession, and secondly, in the aspects related to the basic structural forms (mainly the columns, arches and vaults), spatial distributions, colors, and the strategies for the management of light.

In ancient times, the tools used to mold by those who held the power, to communicate and impose their vision of the world on to the society, were fundamentally painting and architecture, while today they are the audiovisual communication and mass media. And it is through the audiovisual and the mass media today that a series of archetypes around the ideas of East and West are transmitted which, precisely, strengthen the position of the dichotomy and opposition games, and these ideas become triggering ideas of an opposed position without a precise reason to be so, ideas that always-already exclude any thoughts of possible reconciliation with a reality that testifies the kaleidoscopic and multicultural state of civilizations.

Taking two examples of audiovisual representation of *orientalism* (Muslims) in the *western environment* of Andalusia – 1492 by Ridley Scott, and *The Fountain* by Darren Aronofsky – we see how the power shift brought about change and the replacement of all a number of forms of behavior, rituals, costumes and visual symbols in general, but also, at the same time, we also see how it was impossible to eliminate some remaining symbols – especially in terms of architecture, which always would witness (and had witnessed) the additive condition of culture and civilization, over the relatively subtractive condition on the hegemony of power.

However, we should not disregard the fact that the Hollywood industry always takes it upon itself, the duty of magnifying the visual clash between the two cultures through productions that are strongly based on the sets and on costumes of contrast. Something we can, for example, easily observe in seeing a Catholic throne and costumes in a dominantly Muslim architectural setting.



Figure 5.2 – Film stills from *The Fountain*.

But, in line with what we have been arguing, the simple coexistence of such elements from particular cultures, inevitably tell us about this additive construction, of the multicultural condition, of every culture that is complex and not isolated. We can even find meaningful games in the composition of the scenes by layering of the symbols that are put into play. Thus, if the image of the cross given above (figure) is imposed onto the wall with Islamic iconography of stars (background), we can read a certain idea of interposition and prevalence of what is Christian on what is Muslim, while we can also deduct some idea of survival of the latter with the former, or of coexistence of both.

Then, if in the previous case, we had Christianity represented by the *figure* of the cross imposing itself onto Islam, but, also inevitably framed in an Islamic background, in the following images shown below (scenes from two different films but with a strategy and a composition that is significantly similar), we have, in both cases, the queen of Castile (figure) and not on an Islamic background, but behind an Islamic frame. Hence, in these two cases, we can say that the background precedes the figure, reclaiming its preeminence on it (nothing more and nothing less than the Catholic Queen of Castile, in both cases). Thus we see how a Muslim ornamental detail, operating as a metonym of Muslim culture, is made so as to symbolically impose the conditioning of Catholic culture by the Muslim, at that time and under such circumstances.



Figure 5.3– (On the left) Film still from *1492*.(On the right) Film still from *The Fountain*.

In short, all of the audiovisual details tell us the inevitable and unbreakable relationship between East and West – regardless of their peculiarities and differences – almost appealing to a sense of wholeness in which such concepts would be merged, almost disappearing in a universal identity of the human condition. Beyond the mutual destructions that have taken place throughout history between the manifestations of such cultures, there remains to be resolved, at least, the ongoing implementation of the idea of the East that has been created systematically by the West, as a construct to be used in the service of certain powers (that are both temporal and eternal) and perhaps also begins to be work in reverse, in an equally dangerous way, in line with what Amin Maalouf calls *the murderous identities*.

6. Conclusion

The deliberate choice of analyzing the movie *1492* for the representation of this critical moment in history, together with the famous *Tales of the Alhambra* by Washington Irving allows us to take a communication perspective on the subject, as well as the obvious historical and architectural perspectives. As suggested by Owen Jones in his monumental *Grammar of Ornament*, “Architecture is the material expression of the wants, the faculties, and the sentiments, of the age in which it is created” (1856: 5). Nevertheless, the differences in the perception of the environment, or in this case a very significant multicultural space like the Alhambra, signal the conflicts between the needs and interests between individuals, groups and societies (Díez, 1998: 10), which is often not only our own perception of the achitectural space, but most likely, our perception formed by the accounts of others – journalists, novelists or filmmakers.

The processes of building the oriental image of Granada and the Alhambra, and the representations of this city in all relevant mediums from the reconquest of the city up until today construct the step-by-step pathway to a delicate interpretation of Orientalism as defined in the XXth century – “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (1979:3). Nevertheless, in the case of Andalusia, this orientalism is already conquered, tamed, managed – and even produced. As Jones puts it, “The principles discoverable in the works of the past belong to us; not so the results” (1856: 8).

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