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**The Cognitive Impact of Ethnic Conflict in Al-Andalus
A Study of the References of Conflict and Its Representations in Historical
Thought**

الأثر المعرفي للصراع الإثني في الأندلس – دراسة في مرجعيات الصراع وتمثلاته في الفكر التاريخي

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Abstract:

Al-Andalus witnessed, following the Islamic conquest, a continuous human influx from all parts of the Islamic world, which widely opened the door to the entry of ideas and religious currents of different doctrines and orientations. This endowed the country with a distinctive cognitive character and civilizational diversity. However, this diversity soon created an environment conducive to conflicts and polemics, whose echoes appeared in various forms of knowledge, especially in historical thought, which is considered a repository of human ideas, actions, and sayings. Consequently, it became the most affected by these clashes and ethnic tendencies, as it constituted a platform through which the historian expressed his views. Often, many historians were unable to divest themselves of their inclinations and orientations.

Keywords: al-Andalus; conflict; ethnic conflict; cognitive conflict; historical thought.

الملخص: شهدت بلاد الأندلس عقب الفتح الإسلامي توافدا بشريا مستمرا من كافة أنحاء العالم الإسلامي وهو ما فتح الباب واسعا أمام دخول أفكار و تيارات دينية مختلفة المذاهب و المشارب، و هذا ما أكسب البلاد خصوصية معرفية و تنوعا حضاريا، غير أن هذا التنوع سرعان ما خلق بيئة ملائمة للصراعات و السجلات التي ظهر صداها في مختلف أنواع المعرفة، خاصة في الفكر التاريخي الذي يعتبر خزانة لأفكار و أعمال و أقوال البشر، فكان المتأثر الأكبر بهذه الصدامات و النزعات العرقية، حيث شكل واجهة يعبر من خلالها المؤرخ عن آرائه، و غالبا ما عجز الكثير من المؤرخين عن التخلي عن نزعاتهم وتوجهاتهم

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأندلس؛ الصراع؛ الصراع الإثني؛ الصراع المعرفي؛ الفكر التاريخي

1. INTRODUCTION

Al-Andalus is considered among the regions that witnessed extensive human interaction following the Islamic conquests. This led to civilizational and intellectual interaction among the various ethnicities that constituted Andalusian society. Despite the policy of coexistence that the authorities attempted to establish in the country, deeply rooted ethnic solidarities prevailing in people's minds overshadowed this policy. As a result, an ethnic conflict emerged, intensifying or subsiding according to the prevailing political and economic circumstances. This diversity constituted a field for ideological divergence, which led to the emergence of a cognitive conflict based on polemics and boasting, reaching the level of belittlement and contempt.

Among the intellectual fields that were exposed to this confrontation, historical thought came at the forefront, as it was

concerned with recording events and military clashes among the ethnicities of Andalusian society. Often, the Andalusian historian belonged to one of these ethnicities and thus found it difficult to conceal his sectarian or ethnic bias within his narratives. Consequently, these tendencies appeared clearly in the writings of many Andalusian historians and continued to dominate the minds of some contemporary historians, especially when the conflict was related to their own people or one of their allies. Some adopted a boastful stance, others a defensive one, while some went so far as to accuse their opponents with charges that reached the level of excommunication.

Through this study, we attempt to trace these manifestations with the aim of identifying the resonance of ethnic conflict at the level of historical thought, as well as attempting to determine the references of this conflict in al-Andalus. In doing so, we rely on the

narrative-analytical method in a manner consistent with the premises of this study, whose problem revolves around the control of a set of frameworks over the beginnings of ethnic conflict and its cognitive impact during the period extending from the second to the fifth Hijri centuries, corresponding to the eighth to the eleventh centuries AD.

1.The Nature of Ethnic Conflict:

1.1 Ethnic Conflict:

Ethnicity is defined as a human group whose members share customs, traditions, language, religion, or other distinctive characteristics such as origin and physical features, and who live within a single society or alongside other groups different from them (Ashour, 2002, p. 26). As for ethnic conflict, its concepts have varied, but they converge on the idea that it is a confrontation between ethnic groups over a certain issue, which usually pertains to a political, economic, or value-based domain (Dakhala & Ben Aissa, 2022, p. 18).

1.2 Cognitive Conflict:

Ethnicity is defined as a human group whose members share customs, traditions, language, religion, or other distinctive characteristics such as origin and physical features, and who live within a single society or alongside other groups different from them (Ashour, 2002, p. 26). As for ethnic conflict, its concepts have varied, but they converge on the idea that it is a confrontation between ethnic groups over a certain issue, which usually pertains to a political, economic, or value-based domain (Dakhala & Ben Aissa, 2022, p. 18).

Cognitive conflict falls within the various forms of conflict; it is primarily a value-based conflict, that is, one related to values. When values collide, they are expressed cognitively. Acquired beliefs among individuals are considered one of its most important causes, as these acquisitions explain to the individual what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is unjust, thus making the defense of them a legitimate right (Al-Sheikh & Sahwan, 2017, p. 817).

Different values in themselves do not constitute a conflict; individuals and groups

can coexist despite the presence of different value systems. However, this type of conflict arises when one party attempts to impose its values on another, or calls for adherence to a specific value system while opposing difference. This is one of the causes of cognitive conflict referred to by Michel Foucault in his diagnosis of the nature of conflicts and his examination of the elements of the epistemic system in which sharp conflicts usually arise as reflections of political or material conflicts (Ayadi, 1994, p. 67).

Accordingly, it can be said that cognitive conflict is the product of one of the conflicts that are usually political. This conflict begins mildly and increases in intensity until it reaches military confrontation, driven by interests. Thus, knowledge in its various forms becomes an echo of the clash. Conflict in general, and cognitive conflict in particular, are linked to multiple frameworks and references that control its outbreak when a set of factors is available. The psychological reference has identified a set of factors for intellectual conflict among individuals or groups, namely (Badawi, 2024):

- The desire for self-realization.
- Hatred.
- Bias and prejudice.
- Pride.
- Frustration.

Social interaction.

2. Frameworks and Backgrounds of Cognitive Conflict in al-Andalus:

2.1 Social Background:

Andalusian society was characterized by a diverse ethnic composition, which endowed this society with cultural richness and created civilizational diversity. This diversity was reflected in the customs and traditions of Andalusian society and influenced prevailing mentalities. Andalusians' clothing, food, dialects, and forms of celebration were diverse and varied, distinguishing the modes of life within Andalusian society and imposing upon it continuous polemics that accompanied the presence of Muslims there throughout eight centuries.

Andalusian society was also organized in the form of a class-based society, as it knew the concept of ranks, titles, and honors. This idea appeared in a number of Andalusian historical sources, such as the book of Sa'id al-Andalusi (al-Andalusi, 1912). This characteristic manifested itself among Andalusians in literature and poetry; thus al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbad wrote to Ibn Zaydun saying:

"O you who have descended below me in rank,

Yet you hold in my soul the highest stations" (Khaqan, 1989, p. 56).

This way of thinking opened the for boasting among Andalusians. Political authority played a major role in laying the foundations of class disparity; 'Abd al-Rahman al-Awsat divided the ranks of those in service (al-Qurtubi, 2003, p. 137). Thus, honorific discourse became strongly present in Andalusian society, and competition for professions and higher ranks increased in order to obtain an honorable title.

2.2 Cultural Background:

Despite the prevalence of the idea of cultural prosperity and coexistence in al-Andalus throughout the Muslim presence there, a careful reading of the historical sources that addressed the social and cultural situation of the country during the period under study leads us to say that this coexistence was relative and temporally discontinuous. This, in turn, negatively reflected on the cultural situation. Most Andalusian elites were imbued with a spirit of fanaticism, boasting, and competition, which exposed knowledge to confrontation. Consequently, polemics emerged between those who differed ethnically and against everything that contradicted what was prevailing, whether this contradiction was local or foreign, all under political presence.

Political authority was strongly present in directing Andalusian culture to achieve political purposes (Al-'Adl, 2021, p. 2041), which indicates the immanence of power referred to by Foucault (Deleuze, 1987, p. 28). Accordingly, it can be said that al-Andalus was among the environments where

politics and culture were most intertwined, often at the expense of freedom of expression. Democracy is the condition that distinguishes the genuine intellectual from the false intellectual who aligns himself with the existing authority as it wishes (Hussein, 2016, p. 09).

Religious Background:

The Iberian Peninsula experienced an important religious transformation after the Islamic conquests, as it moved from the prevailing Christian religion to the spread of Islam, which soon became established as the official religion of the state. Nevertheless, religious freedom was recognized after Islamic rule, which explains the persistence of other religions alongside Islam. At the level of doctrinal affiliation, once the Islamic conquests were completed, the country began to witness the arrival of doctrinal schools and numerous religious and intellectual currents that were new to the region.

Given that the religious domain is one of the fundamental pillars in the establishment of Islamic states, the strength of the Islamic state in al-Andalus was influenced by this domain. It often adopted it as a lifestyle and political approach to legitimize everything political. The Arab group was considered long-established in Islam, whereas the group of the Muwalladun was newly converted, with unstable and uncertain doctrinal sentiments, in need of strong spiritual leadership to convince and unite them. The Berber group, on the other hand, exhibited moderate religiosity with varying levels of religious commitment. In their view, leadership had to assume a religious character to facilitate dealing with it (Haqi, 2001, p. 201).

On the other hand, there was an important segment of Andalusian society that monitored this transformation, attempting to coexist with it and within it, without granting Muslims absolute authority in managing their systems. These were the People of the Covenant (Ahl al-Dhimma), especially since this transformation affected both their religious and temporal authorities. Thus, this new religion became a subject of criticism whenever political shortcomings appeared

against them, thereby constituting an important party among the sides of the cognitive conflict between the ethnicities of al-Andalus (Bouafia, 2019, p. 93).

At the internal level, the rulers of al-Andalus often relied on a religious group to assist them in matters of governance and politics, legitimizing decisions and policies. This group was usually composed of jurists, judges, and advisers (Al-Kubaisi, 2004, p. 108). In return, they obtained major privileges and proximity to power. This situation constituted a field for intellectual confrontation between court jurists and jurists committed to religious principles.

3. Representations of Ethnic Conflict in Historical Thought:

Ethnic conflict in al-Andalus cast its shadow over knowledge in its various fields, becoming an echo of diverse conflicts. Since historical thought is the field most capable of capturing this echo and most affected by tendencies and tensions being the platform through which historians express their views on historical events it was the first to be influenced by sectarian and ethnic fanaticism. This was particularly evident among Andalusian historians who lived through these conflicts. As for contemporary historians, some retained entrenched biases, while others held rigid opinions that the objective historical method failed to eliminate. This becomes evident in contemporary historians' treatment of certain issues that constituted points of contention among Andalusian ethnic groups.

The writings of the historian Ibn Hayyan al-Qurtubi (d. 469 AH / 1086 CE) reveal a clear intellectual conflict in his work al-Muqtabas. Although he was Arab only by allegiance being from a Spanish family that embraced Islam and was favored by 'Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil his Umayyad loyalty was complete (Ismail, 2000, p. 206).

Ibn Hayyan is criticized for his strong bias toward the Umayyads, which led him to attack the Berbers of al-Andalus, mentioning their affairs with contempt and holding them responsible for the Great Fitna, which he termed the "Berber Fitna." He states in one

passage that Caliph al-Mustansir "did not employ the Berbers except the most despicable among them, their servants and slaves, dark-skinned and black, calling them al-Tanjiyyin, confining them to the lowest duties, assigning them the least wages, and assigning them the harshest services" (al-Qurtubi, al-Muqtabas, 1965, p. 190).

He also attributes part of the blame for this fitna to al-Mustansir himself, stating: "... and what resulted from his excessive reliance on them and his kindness toward them, which after him became a reason for their advancement over the Andalusian troops, their destruction of the Umayyad kingdom, and their unleashing of the devastating fitna" (Hayyan, 1965, p. 189). Many of Ibn Hayyan's interpretations thus bear a clear racist tendency against all who opposed the Umayyad party in al-Andalus, establishing a form of class superiority (Ismail, 2000, p. 211).

It appears that this Andalusian sense of superiority toward the Berbers was not solely caused by the Cordoban fitna, as it existed before it and characterized Andalusian rulers and commoners alike. Ibn Hayyan mentions in the same work that Caliph al-Mustansir once saw a soldier in a procession in al-Zahra riding a horse with a saddle of Moroccan manufacture. He became extremely angry, reproached his chamberlain for negligence, warned his soldiers and servants against imitating the Berbers in military attire or ordinary dress, and ordered the saddle to be burned before the troops as a deterrent (al-Qurtubi, al-Muqtabas, 1965, p. 190).

Ibn Hayyan was not the only historian whose writings displayed bias. Although Sa'id al-Andalusi (d. 462 AH / 1069 CE) authored Tabaqat al-Umam, ranking nations based on knowledge, he classified the Berbers among nations unconcerned with knowledge, describing them as characterized by tyranny, ignorance, aggression, and injustice (al-Andalusi, 1912, p. 16).

It appears that Ibn Sa'id was not successful in this classification, as numerous Moroccan scholars populated al-Andalus across various fields (Boubaya, 2011, p. 227). However, the

Great Fitna intensified the spirit of fanaticism and drove Andalusian elites to denigrate the Berbers and deny their civilizational role.

Many biased Andalusian historians resorted to incorporating and employing certain hadiths to demean the Berbers whenever possible. Ibn Hazm stated: **“The disbelievers among the Berbers were the worst of disbelievers, for they were neither People of the Book nor adherents to a revealed law, and their Muslims are the worst Muslims and the most hasty among them”** (Haqi, 2001, p. 140).

A critical examination of the validity of these statements reveals their incompatibility with reason and logic, as the Prophet ﷺ believed in the Book of God, which established piety as the criterion of merit and rejected pre-Islamic lineage-based superiority, as stated in the verse:

“O mankind, indeed We created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.” (Quran, al-Hujurat: 13)

It is also reported that the Prophet ﷺ said in his sermon on the Day of the Conquest of Mecca:

“O people, Allah has removed from you the arrogance of ignorance and its pride in ancestors. People are of two kinds: a pious believer, noble and honorable to Allah, and a wicked transgressor, despicable to Allah... People are the children of Adam, and Adam was created from dust, so it is not fitting for one whose origin is dust to display arrogance and pride.” (Reported by al-Tirmidhi and authenticated by al-Albani; narrated by Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar; Sahih al-Jami’, no. 7867; al-Tirmidhi no. 3270)

How, then, could the Prophet ﷺ utter statements contradicting the Book of God?

The same biased tendency was adopted by the historian al-Hamawi, who claimed that the Berber lineage traced back to remnants of the people of Goliath who fled to the Maghreb after Talut killed him. He also transmitted a narration denying their descent from Barr ibn Qays ibn ‘Aylan and instead

associating them with tyrannical peoples fought by David and Talut (al-Hamawi, 1977, p. 369). Despite many sources affirming their descent from Barr, al-Hamawi conveyed a degrading image, describing them as “the harshest of God’s creation, the quickest to sedition, and the most obedient to callers of misguidance” (al-Hamawi, 1977, p. 370). He even cited a hadith he claimed was prophetic: “There is no creation more evil under the sky and upon the earth than the Berbers...” (al-Hamawi, 1977, p. 369).

Some poets also cast doubt on their lineage, such as Ibn ‘Ammar, who congratulated the Banu ‘Abbad after the defeat of Badis ibn Hubus (465 AH / 1073 CE) before al-Muzaffar ibn al-Mu‘tamid, labeling them Jews in one of his poems (Khaqan, 1989, p. 265).

A similar biased tendency appeared in historical thought in the work Tarikh Iftitah al-Andalus by Abu Bakr Ibn al-Qutiyya (d. 367 AH / 977 CE), in which he revealed his inclination through several narratives, particularly those concerning the meeting between al-Sumayl ibn Hatim and Artobas, king of the Goths. He portrayed the Arab as ignorant and backward while depicting the muwallad as civilized and refined. Thus, Ibn al-Qutiyya joined the ranks of biased historians, despite possessing both religious and worldly knowledge that enabled him to make an important contribution to Andalusian historical thought from a relatively advanced perspective (Ismail, 2000, p. 191).

On the other hand, early signs of conflict between Arabs and Berbers in al-Andalus appeared over settlement areas, leaving an imprint on historical material. Arabs were accused of injustice in land distribution, seizing the most fertile lands and leaving barren regions to the Berbers. This view was adopted by several contemporary historians such as Reinhart Dozy (Dozy, 1994, p. 157) and Lévi-Provençal, who stated that Arabs took lands near cities and pushed Berbers to outskirts and barren areas (Provençal, 1979, pp. 18, 20, 23). Although Ibn Hazm stated that Andalusian lands were neither divided

nor subject to khums, but rather governed by conquest (Ibn Hazm, 1987, p. 157), his early alignment with the Umayyad party suggests that his views served to justify Arab exclusion of the Berbers, who had participated alongside them in the Islamic conquest.

This unjust distribution policy and Arab monopolization of fertile lands clearly demonstrate the gradual centralization of social organization, revealing inequality within society and granting dominance to one group over another (Mohamed, 2019, p. 382). Arab fanaticism thus drove the Berbers toward rebellion and fostered natural aversion between them and the Arabs.

Although revolts by the muwalladun with ethnic backgrounds such as those of Abd al-Rahman al-Jiliqi, the Banu Qasi, and the Banu Amrus occurred, ethnic discourse did not emerge clearly in historical thought until the revolt of Ibn Hafsun. Their shu'ubiyya then appeared at the intellectual level, demanding equality with Arabs (al-Jahiz, n.d., p. 5). The first attempt in this direction was a work titled **al-Istizhar wa al-Mughalaba ala man Ankara Fadl al-Saqaliba**, which, by its title, indicates that it was written in response to denying their merit (Harun, 1951, p. 243).

Similarly, the policies of the Almoravids in al-Andalus were criticized, as some historians accused them of causing major disruption to Andalusian civilization due to their alleged roughness and Bedouin nature. Their era was described as one of stagnation and rigidity in intellectual life, with attempts to diminish the stature of Yusuf ibn Tashfin and his political and military efforts. Numerous letters imbued with fanaticism and lacking historical objectivity were authored. Aschbach, in his book *History of al-Andalus during the Almoravid and Almohad Periods*, stated that the arrival of Maghrebis in al-Andalus caused the collapse of its civilization and the loss of its wealth, accusing the Almoravids of neglecting sciences, suppressing philosophy and theology, and publicly burning their books (Aschbach, 1938, p. 434).

3. CONCLUSION

It can be said that historical thought in al-Andalus failed to completely abandon subjective tendencies. However, it made significant strides in transitioning from traditional historiography, influenced by the accumulation of knowledge and cultural competition witnessed in al-Andalus during the early Hijri centuries following its conquest. It benefited from scientific journeys between al-Andalus and other regions and drew upon multiple references imposed by the uniqueness of its environment. Its topics and fields diversified, yet political reference, sectarian background, and ethnic affiliation continued to shape historians' orientations and opinions. The civilizational framework in which thought emerges dictates its sources and determines its formation, placing the historian at a critical boundary between political, ethnic, or sectarian affiliation and the objectivity that reflects the historical moment in which he lived.

Many Andalusian historians stood at this boundary when writing about ethnic groups, and objectivity fell away for many of them when it came to matters of fanaticism.

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