

## Postdoctoral Project Proposal

### Arabic in Spanish Literature: Language Contact, Self-Perception, and the Image of the Other

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In the past decades, Hispanic studies have shown an increasing interest in the exchanges between the so-called “three cultures” of medieval Iberia—Muslim, Christian, and Jewish—and in the role played by the Semitic heritage of the Peninsula in the forging of Spanish culture and literary tradition.<sup>1</sup> Having moved beyond a somewhat romanticized image of “convivencia”, historical, literary, and linguistic studies of medieval Iberia have come not only to delineate different forms of contact between the different groups inhabiting the Peninsula, but also, at times, to question their very definitions and boundaries.<sup>2</sup> Studies of early modern, i.e., post-1492, Iberia have been increasingly focusing on the processes of cultural inclusion and exclusion involved in the construction of a Spanish identity; the representation, lived experiences, and cultural production of the newly created *morisco* and *converso* minorities (i.e., converts from Islam and Judaism and their respective descendants).<sup>3</sup>

Other studies reconstructed the long process of eradicating not only Islam, but also Arabic language and culture from the landscape of the Peninsula, a process that began with banning the writing and circulation of Arabic texts, continued with prohibitions on speaking Arabic, and culminated with the expulsion of the *morisco* population between 1609 and 1614. Still others examined knowledge of Arabic in early modern learned circles—based, in great part,

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<sup>1</sup> For a series of studies of the cultural production of Medieval Castile and the theoretical and methodological considerations of the challenges posed by its multi-linguistic and multi-religious character, see Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Rouhi, *Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Since the launching of the term “convivencia” by Américo Castro as part of his theory of Spanish cultural identity as a blend of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish elements (*España en su historia: cristianos, moros, y judíos*, Buenos Aires: Losada, 1948) and its rebuttal by Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz (*España: un enigma histórico*, Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1956), the term has been at the center of many debates both within historiographical discourse, and among students of Iberian cultures, primarily regarding the lack of tolerance characterizing many of the interactions between the groups in medieval Iberia. See David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996; and his more recent *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 2014. In these two works, the scholar defends the fruitfulness of the term by showing that conflict, violence, and even persecution are not incompatible with cultural interdependence and confluence. For a recent re-evaluation of the term see Ryan Szpiech, “The *Convivencia* Wars: Decoding Historiography’s Polemic with Philology”, in Suzanne Conklin Akbari & Karla Mallette (eds.), *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2013: 135-161.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Kevin Ingram (ed.), *The Conversos and Moriscos in Late Medieval Spain and Beyond*, Leiden: Brill, 2009-2015, 3 vols; Ruth Fine, Michèle Guillemont, & Juan Diego Vila (eds.), *Lo converso: orden imaginario y realidad en la cultura española (siglos xiv-xvii)*, Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2013; Luce López-Baralt, *La literatura secreta de los últimos musulmanes de España*, Madrid: Trotta, 2009; Vincent Barletta, *Covert Gestures: Crypto-Islamic Literature as Cultural Practice in Early Modern Spain*, Minneapolis MN: U of Minnesota P, 2005.

on foreign experts whose knowledge was acquired in North Africa or in the Levant, rather than in the Peninsula—as well as the scholarly debates regarding its religious identity; its uses; and its place in the cultural imagination of early modern Spain.<sup>4</sup>

The research I plan to conduct in the upcoming years is intimately related to this latter line of scholarship, and focuses on the ways Arabic was perceived, imagined, and experienced in late-medieval and early modern Hispanic culture. In a series of articles, I will study the representation of Arabic in different sources—lexicographical and meta-linguistic writings; literary works; travel accounts; and Inquisition records of cases dealing with renegades and returnees from North Africa—and explore the interplay between different forms of knowledge of Arabic and about it—and different forms of ignorance thereof—in the construction of Spanish self-identity and in the shaping of the Arabic-speaking other's image, be they Iberian or from other parts of the Mediterranean.

The first article in the series—which I will be completing shortly—is dedicated to the representation of Arabic in early modern Spanish lexicography, and is based on over a thousand Arabic etymologies of Castilian words present in the *Tesoro de la Lengua Castellana o Española* (Madrid, 1611), and other, minor linguistic works from the sixteenth century. Through an examination of the authors' meta-linguistic and historiographic postulates *vis-à-vis* their etymological practices, I reconstruct the different histories of the Spanish language they narrate, and highlight the contradictory role Arabic plays them, resulting, *inter alia*, from tensions between the philological desire to explore the past and the explicit commitment to a greater project of forging a (proto)national identity, premised on the negation, minimization, and foreignization of the Peninsula's Arabic heritage.

The second phase of the project, which I plan to carry out while at the Zvi Yavetz School for Historical Studies, will be dedicated to the ways Arabic and its speakers were conceived in late-medieval and early modern Spanish popular culture, and in particular to representations of Arabic in literary sources of the time. I will focus on the phenomenon of code-switching, i.e.,

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<sup>4</sup> While historiographic writing on these topics is too wide to be reviewed here, a few salient works dealing with early modern language politics and the eradication of Arabic *vis-à-vis* the rise of humanism, and the project of forging a Spanish (proto)national identity are Mercedes García Arenal, "Is Arabic a Spanish Language? The Uses of Arabic in Early Modern Spain", 10th James K. Binder Lecturship, San Diego, UCSD, 2015; Mercedes García-Arenal & Fernando Rodríguez Mediano, *The Orient in Spain: Converted Muslims, the Forged Gospels of Granada, and the Rise of Orientalism* (tr. Consuelo López-Morillas), Leiden: Brill, 2013; Seth Kimmel, *Parables of Coercion: Conversion and Knowledge at the End of Islamic Spain*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 2015; Luce López-Baralt, *A zaga de tu huella: La enseñanza de las lenguas semíticas en Salamanca en tiempos de san Juan de la Cruz*, Madrid: Trotta, 2006; or Valeria López Fadul, "Language as archive: Etymologies and the remote history of Spain", in Mercedes García-Arenal (ed.), *After Conversion: Iberia and the Emergence of Modernity*, Leiden: Brill, 2016: 95-125.

moments in which Spanish texts switch to a language explicitly marked as Arabic—albeit represented in Latin characters—and examine them in a corpus of works pertaining to popular—performative and oral—genres such as the ballad or the drama, and in widely-read narrative genres which circulated in late-medieval and early modern Spain.

Whereas the extent of interaction between speakers of Ibero-Romance languages and Arabic in the late Middle Ages varied greatly from region to region and changed according to the political circumstances, it is commonly assumed that, with rare exceptions, early modern Spanish readers had no command of Arabic, neither written nor spoken. Moments of code-switching, however, are not limited to early stages of the so-called “Reconquista”, nor can they be said to be confined to marginal literary works. In fact, they are found throughout the Spanish literary canon at all epochs, raising questions regarding their intelligibility, intended effects, and reception.

My study will focus on texts ranging from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth century, a timespan marked by significant changes in the status of Arabic in the Peninsula, resulting from the changes in power dynamics between Muslims and Christians—both in the Iberian Peninsula and in the Mediterranean space—and by the shift of contact zones between the languages from the Peninsula to the Mediterranean space. The texts in which I intend to examine the presence of Arabic are therefore divided into four clusters, corresponding to different constellations of cultural exchange between speakers of Castilian and Arabic, starting with fourteenth-century texts, in which Arabic is still widely spoken in the Peninsula and serves an explicit source of inspiration and cultural appropriation;<sup>5</sup> passing through a corpus of fifteenth-century ballads known as the *romancero fronterizo* [“Ballads of the Frontier”], depicting the final decades of the conflict with the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada;<sup>6</sup> reaching the sixteenth-century popular narratives and dramatic works, depicting noble, exoticized Moors as a time in which Arabic has become a minority language, whose speakers are fighting to legitimize their culture;<sup>7</sup> and culminating in Cervantes’s late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century *Quijote*

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<sup>5</sup> Two salient works in which code-switching occurs are Juan Ruiz’s *Libro de buen amor* [“The Book of Good Love”] (1330/1343), considered to be the most important work of Castilian verse of its time, which presents us with a rhymed dialogue between a go-between named Trotaconventos (literally “convent-hopper”) and a Moorish woman, whose resistance to being wooed is expressed in a series of answers, all given in Andalusí Arabic. The second one is Juan Manuel’s collection of framed *exempla*, *El conde Lucanor* [“Tales of Count Lucanor”] (1335), in which untranslated Arabic proverbs are brought in transliteration.

<sup>6</sup> Paloma Díaz-Mas (ed.), *Romancero*, Barcelona: Crítica, 1994. For a recent study of the *fronterizo* corpus, see Şizen Yiacoup, *Frontier Memory: Cultural Conflict and Exchange in the Romancero Fronterizo*, London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Of special interest is the tale known as *El Abencerraje* (a Hispanicized form of the protagonist’s name, Ibn Sarrāj), circulating both as a short story (published in 1561 and in 1565), and in a popular dramatized version by Lope de Vega as *El remedio de la desdicha* [“The Remedy for Misery”] (1596).

and dramatic works, taking place in the space between Spain, Algiers, and Istanbul, and in which Muslim, *morisco*, convert, and renegade characters express themselves, with considerable frequency, also in Arabic.<sup>8</sup>

In order to evaluate the cultural significance of code-switching and the changes it undergoes over time, I will address the linguistic, philological, and literary problems that arise from the texts in each cluster, and reconstruct—when possible—their reception history. I will begin by suggesting a taxonomy of Arabic appearances in the texts, accounting for the different linguistic elements present in the texts (exclamations, single words, whole phrases); the register to which they pertain (Classical Arabic, Andalusí, North African, or other dialects; Arabic-Spanish hybrids; Arabisms; pseudo-Arabic gibberish), and, when pertinent, evaluate their accuracy. From a philological perspective, I will examine the relevant passages in the known manuscripts and printed editions, looking for orthographic variants, errors, and marginalia that could shed light on the degree to which copyists, printers, and readers who handled the texts understood the Arabic passages, as well as on their responses to them over time. Accounting for the genre conventions to which each text adheres, I will then evaluate the different literary functions of Arabic, examining in particular the use of Arabic speech as a means of characterization; the degree to which language becomes a marker of religious otherness *vis-à-vis* the presence (or absence) of a notion of culture that is separable from creed; the recourse to Arabic (or pseudo-Arabic) sounds in order to provoke certain responses in readers; and, most importantly, the different manners in which familiarity with Arabic and ignorance thereof interplay within a given text, and between a given text and its readers. Considering on the one hand the cases in which the presence of Arabic points toward a deeper understanding of the Arabic-speaking other, and on the other those in which it reinforces a stereotypical representation of the other, I will reflect on the cultural implications of code-switching and the changes they undergo over time.

Whereas the immediate contribution of the proposed study is to fields of Hispanic cultural history and literary studies, my examination of the Spanish case will draw on, and hopefully also contribute to, broader theoretical discussions on contacts between cultures and languages; the performative and social functions of code-switching and the ways in which they manifest themselves in the cultural production of contact zones; and the place of language in establishing—or challenging—the boundaries between self and other in multicultural contexts.

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<sup>8</sup> Of special interest here are Cervantes's captive comedies, *Los baños de Argel* and *La gran sultana*, written in the 1580s and published in 1615.