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## CONSTRUCTING THE MUSLIM “OTHER”: NATIONAL IDENTITY, HISTORICAL EXCLUSION AND DIGITAL DEMAGOGUERY IN CONTEMPORARY SPAIN

This study interrogates the persistence of anti-Muslim sentiment in contemporary Spain through John A. Powell’s concept of **othering**, situating it within a broader historical and structural continuum. Moving beyond interpretations of Islamophobia as isolated prejudice, it argues that anti-Muslim xenophobia is rooted in enduring national narratives and identity anxieties. Muslims are constructed as the “Other within” – formally part of the nation yet symbolically excluded from the national imaginary. Through historical references such as the forced conversions, persecution, and expulsion of converted Muslims in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, alongside the enduring mythologies of the Reconquista, the study demonstrates how Spanish national identity has long been predicated on religious and cultural exclusion. These legacies are not static; rather, they are continually reactivated in contemporary discourse, particularly within the digital sphere. Drawing on data from the OBERAXE and the Spanish Ministry of the Interior, the study shows how far-right actors strategically deploy historical memory online to portray Muslims as foreign, unassimilable, and threatening. This digital demagoguery – driven by nativist, racist, and xenophobic appeals – facilitates a process of strategic othering that combines symbolic exclusion with political instrumentalization. This process is further reinforced through institutional practices and legal frameworks that fail to fully address historical exclusions, contributing to the continued marginalization of descendants of the expelled Moriscos in civic and cultural terms. Ultimately, the paper contends that the production of the Muslim “Other” is not peripheral but central to contemporary Spanish identity politics – digitally rearticulated as cultural defense, yet structurally anchored in centuries-old patterns of exclusion.

**Key words:** Othering, John A. Powell, Spain, Muslims, national identity, digital demagoguery

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