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Crypto-Islamic Practices Among the Moriscos: Strategies for Preserving Muslim Identity Under Pressure from the Spanish Inquisition

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the phenomenon of Crypto Islam (the secret practice of Islam) among the Moriscos descendants of Spanish Muslims who were forced to convert to Christianity following the fall of Granada in 1492 as a response to the repressive pressure exerted by the Spanish Inquisition from the 15th century through the early 17th century. This study analyzes the strategies employed by the Moriscos to conceal their Islamic identity during a period when freedom to practice other religions was severely restricted. The study employs a literature review method with a descriptive historical approach, examining sources such as books, historical records, and other materials. The results of the study indicate that the Morisco community employed various adaptive strategies to preserve their Islamic identity, including the use of the Aljamiado language as a means of spreading Islamic teachings and prayers amid limited access to, the practice of worship in secret within private spaces, the utilization of fatwas on taqiyyah that allowed for the concealment of identity for safety, and the use of apocalyptic narratives and prophecies to strengthen internal community solidarity. This study confirms that crypto-Islam is not merely a passive act of concealing one's beliefs, but rather an active and organized religious-cultural strategy in the face of systemic repression. This phenomenon sets an important precedent in the study of the resilience of religious minority identities under pressure from premodern confessional states. These findings also expand our understanding of the dynamics of relations between religious majorities and minorities in early modern European history.

Keywords: *Moriscos, crypto Islam, the Spanish Inquisition, religious identity, 16th-century Spain*

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Iberian Peninsula in the early modern period holds a highly complex narrative involving the interplay between religions, state power, and the collective identity of a community, namely the Moriscos. The term "*Moriscos*" refers to a group of people of Muslim descent in Spain who were forced to convert to Roman

Catholicism following the fall of the last Islamic political power in Granada in 1492. The conquest of Granada by the combined forces of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile marked the end of seven centuries of Islamic rule on the Iberian Peninsula and signaled the beginning of Spanish Christian rule, which sought to unify religious diversity under the banner of Christianity (L. P. Harvey, 2005).

Initially, following the treaty of Granada's surrender, known as the Capitulaciones de Granada, which guaranteed freedom of worship for the Muslim community living under Christian rule, a group known as the Mujedar emerged. However, these guarantees did not last forever. As a result of political and religious pressures that frequently intensified, a rebellion broke out in 1499 by the Muslim residents of the Albaicín district in Granada in response to the Christian government's policy of forced conversion. The rebellion ended in 1502 and led to the issuance of a royal decree stating that members of the Mujedar community who wished to remain in Spain were required to convert to Christianity. Later, the kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia also issued the same decree in 1526, promulgated by King Charles V in the wake of the Germanías uprising that occurred around 1520. Since then, there have been no legally recognized Muslim residents in Spain; all that remained were new Christian citizens, better known as Moriscos, a term that literally means "like the Moors." (Antonio Domínguez Ortiz & Bernard Vincent, 1979).

The pressures faced by the Moriscos also involved cultural and linguistic aspects, particularly through the *Pragmática Sanción* of 1567, which prohibited the use of the Arabic language, certain types of clothing, and various Andalusian cultural customs. This policy of forced assimilation sparked the Alpujarras Revolt (1568–1571) and ultimately led to the complete expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain between 1609 and 1614 under the reign of Philip III, forcing approximately three hundred thousand people to leave in a relatively short period of time. The official reason for this expulsion, namely the Moriscos' inability to renounce their traditional beliefs, essentially affirmed the success of crypto-Islam as a survival strategy, while simultaneously revealing its failure to convince the government of their apparent religious loyalty (L. P. Harvey, 2005).

This forced conversion did not immediately eradicate the religious beliefs and practices that had existed in the community for centuries. Many Moriscos, even though they had officially received the sacrament of baptism and were registered as Catholic Christians, still secretly practiced Islamic rituals (L. P. Harvey, 2005). In historical

studies, this phenomenon is known as crypto-Islam, which refers to the act of secretly adhering to Islam while outwardly demonstrating compliance with the state's official religion. Crypto-Islam among the Moriscos was not merely a passive expression of religious reluctance, but also an active, organized, and adaptive survival strategy in the face of repressive pressures coming from various directions, whether from civil authorities, the Church, or, most terrifying of all to them, the Spanish Inquisition.

The study of this phenomenon is of great importance because it represents one of the most well-documented examples of the resilience of religious identity among minority groups subjected to systematic state pressure, supported by direct written evidence from the relevant communities in the form of *Aljamiado* manuscripts, which are Spanish-language texts written using the Arabic script, and providing insight into the relationship between religion, law, and power during the era of early modern confessional states in Europe.

Historiography on the Moriscos has evolved through several key phases. Henry Charles Lea's early work, "*The Moriscos of Spain: Their Conversion and Expulsion*" (1901) , paved the way for research by highlighting the failure of the state's assimilation project. In the next wave, Antonio Domínguez Ortiz and Bernard Vincent, through "Historia de los moriscos" (1978/1997), combined an analysis of state policy with a more comprehensive study of the socioeconomic conditions of the Morisco community.

L. P. Harvey's contributions through his dissertations titled "*The Literary Culture of the Moriscos, 1492–1609*" (1958) and "*Muslims in Spain, 1500 to 1614*" (2005) form the primary foundation in English-language literature, particularly regarding the role of *Aljamiado* manuscripts in preserving Islamic teachings in secret. His views were later criticized by Trevor Dadson, who emphasized that the diversity of the Moriscos' levels of assimilation was more complex than previously thought. The theological dimension was expanded by Louis Cardaillac through "*Morisques et chrétiens*" (1977) , while Anwar Chejne, in "*Islam and the West: The Moriscos*" (1983), offers a broad sociocultural synthesis based on *Aljamiado* sources.

Contemporary studies further enrich these historiographical perspectives. Mary Elizabeth Perry (2005) adds an analysis of gender and individual experiences; Mayte Green-Mercado (2019) examines the use of apocalyptic prophecies as a means of collective mobilization ; while Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers (2014) situate the expulsions of 1609–1614 within the broader context of the Mediterranean diaspora. On the other hand, Álvaro Galmés de Fuentes and Luce López-Baralt delve

into a philological study of the *Aljamiado* corpus, while John H. Elliott and Antonio Feros provide a political-economic framework regarding the formation of the Spanish state and the dynamics of court factions that influenced policies toward the Moriscos(Corteguera, 2002; Elliot, 1963). In addition, Christina Rhein (2021) examines the development of crypto-Islam inside Moriscos community.

Overall, previous research has tended to remain fragmented along thematic lines, whether textual, theological, gender-based, or diasporic, and few studies have brought together the various strategies of crypto-Islam within a single integrated analytical framework or systematically compared variations in these practices across regions and periods.

Based on the above discussion, this study seeks to answer three key questions: (1) what historical context enabled the emergence of crypto-Islamic practices among the Moriscos; (2) what strategies did they devise to covertly maintain their Islamic identity, encompassing textual, ritual, religious legal, and collective narrative dimensions; and (3) how did the Spanish Inquisition respond, and to what extent were its surveillance mechanisms effective?

To conceptually elaborate on this strategy, this study employs the framework of taqiyyah within the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, namely a form of dispensation that permits the concealment of one's beliefs for the sake of safety when under pressure. In the context of the Moriscos, this concept evolved into a collective and organized practice, rather than merely an individual act. This framework is enriched by the idea of private space as an arena of "hidden identity," where religious instruction, worship, and life-cycle rituals could take place with more manageable risks compared to public spaces under the strict surveillance of Christian authorities.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the Moriscos' crypto-Islamic strategies, while also contributing to a conceptual understanding of taqiyyah as a socially collective phenomenon, rather than merely an individual legal doctrine. Furthermore, this study offers a comparative perspective for research on the resilience of minority religious identities more broadly, a theme that remains relevant in various contemporary contexts where minority groups face pressure from the state seeking to homogenize the identities of its citizens.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Aljamaido Literature as a Medium for Transmitting Faith

Aljamiado literature, which consists of Spanish-language texts written using the Arabic script, became one of the key tools in the Moriscos' crypto-Islamic strategy. The use of the Arabic script to write Spanish served two primary functions. First, this method allowed Islamic teachings and knowledge to be passed down to generations of Moriscos who were beginning to lose the ability to use Arabic in their daily lives. Second, the use of the Arabic script also provided a certain level of protection, as many Christian authorities, including most inquisitors, were unable to read such writings. These conditions made *Aljamiado* manuscripts relatively easier to preserve and circulate on a limited basis among trusted members of the community (L. P. Harvey, 1958).

The *Aljamiado* manuscripts discovered by philologists reveal a diversity of content and genres. They include translations and brief commentaries on verses of the Qur'an, collections of daily prayers, practical treatises on fiqh concerning ritual purification, prayer, and fasting, as well as various religious stories adapted from the tales of the prophets. One example is the "*Leyenda de Yusuf*," which retells the story of the Prophet Joseph with an emphasis on the value of patience in the face of oppression. This theme is strongly linked to the life experiences of the Morisco community, who lived under pressure and surveillance (L. P. Harvey, 1958).

In the *Aljamiado* tradition, one of the best-known figures is *Mancebo de Arévalo* (the Young Man of Arevalo). He was a Morisco writer and traveler who, in his works, combined discussions of religious practices with accounts of spiritual journeys. Some sections of his works also provide insights into how to maintain Islamic faith in circumstances where religious expression had to be concealed. One piece of advice that emerges is the importance of maintaining an outward appearance that conforms to the demands of a Christian environment, while preserving Islamic beliefs in one's inner life (Chejne, 1983).

The role of *Aljamiado* literature as a medium for learning became increasingly important as the Moriscos' access to open religious education grew more limited. The closure of mosques and restrictions on the use of the Arabic language meant that the transmission of Islamic knowledge had to occur through more covert channels. These manuscripts then circulated within households and kinship networks. Some of them were copied by hand by people who still knew how to read and write Arabic. Although this

ability was becoming increasingly rare, some members of the community continued to preserve it because this skill was necessary to ensure the continuity of their knowledge and religious identity (Barletta, 2005).

From a linguistic perspective, the *Aljamiado* manuscripts reveal an intriguing blend of Spanish and Arabic elements. Studies of the glossaries and critical editions compiled by philologists, including Álvaro Galmés de Fuentes, show that these texts employ Spanish grammatical structures while retaining a number of Arabic words, particularly terms related to fiqh and theology. The use of these terms indicates an effort to preserve Islamic religious concepts even as they were conveyed through a language that was becoming increasingly familiar to the Morisco community (Rhein, 2021).

Aljamiado literature also contains more than just practical religious knowledge. A number of manuscripts address eschatological themes, such as the signs of the end times and the hope for liberation for oppressed communities. Such themes are then linked to prophetic discourse, which is further explored within a narrative-mobilization strategy (Green-Mercado, 2019). Thus, *Aljamiado* texts not only serve to preserve and transmit religious knowledge but also function as a means for the Morisco community to make sense of their experiences of suffering and to maintain hope amid prolonged oppression.

In addition to doctrinal and narrative texts, the *Aljamiado* corpus also includes more personal works. One such work is "*Coplas del Alhichante de Puey Monzón*," (*Pilgrim's Songs by Puey Monzón*) which recounts the journey of a Morisco pilgrim to Mecca in the early sixteenth century. This account indicates that, despite facing increasingly restrictive conditions, some Moriscos still sought to undertake journeys and religious practices that connected them to the Islamic world beyond the Iberian Peninsula (Ruata, 1897). Such journeys naturally carried risks, as they could arouse suspicion if discovered by the authorities (L. P. Harvey, 1958).

The manner in which the manuscripts were stored also reveals efforts to protect the texts from potential discovery by the authorities. A number of collections were found in clay jars buried beneath the floors of houses or hidden behind wall structures. These practices indicate that the manuscript owners were aware of the risks involved if such religious texts were discovered. The discovery of collections such as those found in Almonacid de la Sierra in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries subsequently became an important source for philologists in reconstructing the richness and diversity of the *Aljamiado* textual tradition (López-Baralt, 1985).

Overall, these findings indicate that *Aljamiado* literature serves a broader purpose than merely serving as a medium for preserving Islamic teachings. It is an integral part of how the Morisco community preserves knowledge, passes on its religious identity, and makes sense of the circumstances they face. Through these texts, religious practices can continue to be passed down even as the space for practicing them openly grows increasingly limited.

Private Spaces as Hidden Places of Worship

Next, regarding ritual strategies, specifically how the Morisco community adapted the practice of worship from public to private spaces. As public spaces came increasingly under the supervision of Christian authorities, the home became a relatively safer place to carry out religious practices. A number of Inquisition trial records examined in various studies reveal a pattern of accusations against Moriscos who prayed secretly in their homes. They did so by closing the windows and limiting the possibility of outsiders seeing their activities. Children were also monitored to ensure they did not inadvertently reveal the family's practices to Christian neighbors (Lea Charles Henry, 1901).

The same was true regarding personal hygiene practices. Some Moriscos continued to perform wudu and take full baths, even though these practices could arouse suspicion because they were associated with Islamic hygiene traditions. For both inquisitors and informants, the habit of bathing or cleansing the body in a certain way could serve as a sign used to identify someone suspected of still secretly practicing Islam (Antonio Domínguez Ortiz & Bernard Vincent, 1979).

Religious practices took place not only in daily worship but also in various rituals related to the life cycle. Circumcision, for example, was still performed by some Morisco families even though this practice carried a high risk of being discovered by Christian authorities. A similar situation occurred with funeral rituals. Some families strive to secretly wash the deceased and arrange the burial site in accordance with Islamic rites. In certain situations, they even exploit loopholes in the cemetery administration system or offer bribes to those involved so that the burial process does not fully follow Christian rites (Antonio Domínguez Ortiz & Bernard Vincent, 1979).

Avoiding certain foods and beverages was also part of the strategy to preserve religious identity. Avoiding pork and wine, for example, was one way to demonstrate one's commitment to Islamic teachings. However, adherence to these prohibitions was

not always absolute. Under certain circumstances, there are religious views that allow for exceptions to these rules when necessary to ensure safety. This demonstrates that the ritual practices of the Moriscos did not take a uniform form but continually adapted to the social conditions and risks they faced.

The gender dimension was also an important part of these ritual strategies. Mary Elizabeth Perry points out that Morisco women played a major role in preserving religious traditions within the family. The household became an important space for women to fulfill this role, while men were relatively more often present in public spaces through economic and social activities, which made them more vulnerable to scrutiny. In daily life, women helped teach prayers to children, prepared meals in accordance with Islamic dietary restrictions as far as conditions allowed, and passed on knowledge regarding religious practices to the next generation (Perry, 2007).

These roles have become increasingly important as access to formal religious education has become more limited. Although literacy, including *Aljamiado* literacy, is not always widely possessed by women, they can still play a role in the transmission of religious knowledge through practice and learning within the family. Thus, the continuity of Islamic traditions depends not only on the existence of religious texts or figures but also on the daily activities carried out within the home. In this context, the domestic sphere becomes one of the primary spaces for Morisco women to preserve the religious practices and identity of their community (Perry, 2007).

In addition to religious practices directly related to Islam, this study also found a number of cultural customs that help preserve the Moriscos' collective identity. One of these is the zambra, a form of traditional Andalusian music and dance that is still performed at various family celebrations, including weddings. Its survival became increasingly important after the *Pragmática Sanción* of 1567 restricted Morisco cultural practices. This ban subsequently contributed to the outbreak of the Alpujarras Revolt because, for some Moriscos, the regulation was seen as not only addressing religious issues but also disrupting their way of life and cultural customs (Antonio Domínguez Ortiz & Bernard Vincent, 1979).

The use of spoken Arabic within the family environment also follows a similar pattern. Although its use has continued to decline due to prohibition policies and the increasing prevalence of Spanish, Arabic has persisted longer among women and older generations. Conversely, younger generations, who interact more frequently with people

outside their community, tend to become increasingly accustomed to using Spanish. This situation demonstrates that the household serves as a space for preserving not only religious practices but also the cultural elements that shape Morisco identity.

Thus, the ritual strategies employed by the Moriscos were not merely an effort to secretly resume the practice of Islam. These strategies also encompassed the management of daily life, the transmission of customs within families, and the preservation of cultural elements deemed essential to the community's identity. The domestic sphere ultimately became a crucial space for the continuity of that identity, particularly because women played a significant role within it in preserving and passing down traditions from one generation to the next.

The Taqiyyah Fatwa as Collective Legitimacy

Taqiyyah is a principle in Islamic jurisprudence that allows a Muslim to conceal or disguise their beliefs when facing a real threat to their own safety, that of their family, or their honor. In such circumstances, a person may even display outward behavior that appears to contradict the beliefs held in their heart. However, such actions do not constitute an abandonment of faith, as those beliefs are still preserved and held firmly in the heart (Nur Muhammad et al., 2021). The practice of Islamic crypto-Islam among the Moriscos was not only based on personal decisions but also had a basis in religious legitimacy. This legitimacy stemmed, among other things, from fatwas issued by Muslim scholars outside Spain. One of the most important is the Fatwa of Oran, issued in 1504 by Ahmad ibn Abi Jum'ah in response to a request for guidance from the Muslim community in Spain, which was facing pressure to convert (Del Mar Rosa-Rodriguez, 2009; Stewart, 2006). This fatwa grants leniency in observing certain Islamic rules when a person is under duress. Among these are the permission to consume pork or alcoholic beverages if forced to do so, to perform prayers in a manner not easily recognizable by Christians, and to conceal one's identity as a Muslim when such disclosure could endanger one's life. In such circumstances, faith in the heart remains the most important thing (L. P. Harvey, 2005).

The Oran Fatwa is significant because it provides a religious basis for Muslim communities who must conceal their identity and religious practices. With this basis, concealment is no longer understood merely as a personal choice made under duress, but is accepted as part of the effort to preserve one's faith under certain circumstances. Louis

Cardaillac notes that such fatwas were known and utilized within the context of Morisco religious life. The concept of a distinction between inner beliefs and outward actions also emerged in various debates between the Moriscos and Christian authorities, particularly when they faced accusations of having abandoned Islam (Armistead & Cardaillac, 1979). In this context, the concept of taqiyyah for the Moriscos can be seen as a practice that is not merely individual in nature. The understanding that it is permissible to conceal one's beliefs in certain situations developed within the community and became one of the foundations for coping with the pressures of daily life. This indicates that the practice of crypto-Islam has broader social and religious dimensions, as the act of concealing one's Islamic identity was supported by an understanding of religious law that developed within the community.

In addition to the Oran Fatwa, there are also indications of religious counsel from scholars in North Africa and the territories of the Ottoman Empire (Stewart, 2006). Such counsel generally emphasized the importance of maintaining Islamic faith even when religious practices could not be carried out openly. From some perspectives, maintaining one's faith inwardly was viewed as a temporary measure while waiting for an opportunity to relocate to regions where Muslims could practice their religion more freely.

This perspective may also help explain the existence of covert migration efforts from Spain to North Africa during the sixteenth century. For some Moriscos, this migration became an option as life in Spain grew increasingly difficult and their cover could no longer be maintained in the long term. However, the decision to leave Spain was not always easy, as the journey to North Africa carried its own risks, and not everyone had the opportunity to undertake it (García-Arenal Rodriquez & Wiegers, 2014).

Nevertheless, not all Moriscos accepted this religious dispensation in the same way. Some of them still felt inner conflict when they had to perform acts that outwardly contradicted Islamic teachings, including when they had to deny their Islamic identity in front of Christians. Thus, the existence of the fatwa did not mean that the entire Morisco community practiced taqiyyah in a uniform manner.

These differences demonstrate that the experience of crypto-Islam among the Moriscos was quite diverse. Some individuals or families chose to conceal nearly all of their religious practices to minimize risk, while others sought to maintain as many Islamic practices as possible, even though this might increase the likelihood of being detected. This variation indicates that legal-religious strategies are not only related to rules

permitting disguise but also to how each individual and family interprets and applies such leeway in accordance with the circumstances they face.

Profetical and Apocalyptic Discourse

Crypto-Islam is not only about maintaining one's faith privately and in secret, but also has a collective dimension that can foster hope and encourage communities to act together. This is evident in the use of prophetic narratives known as jofores. According to Mayte Green-Mercado, these apocalyptic prophecies stem from various traditions. Some are linked to Islamic eschatological traditions, while others draw elements from Christian and Jewish prophetic traditions that developed on the Iberian Peninsula. For the Morisco community, these narratives served as a means of sustaining hope for the coming of liberation. This hope was often linked to the possibility of assistance from Muslim powers outside Spain, particularly the Ottoman Empire (Green-Mercado, 2019).

Jofores narratives were increasingly used in the lead-up to and during the Alpujarras Revolt of 1568–1571. Under intense pressure, some rebel leaders utilized these prophecies to bolster confidence and unite their followers. Current political events were then interpreted as signs believed to have been foretold, particularly regarding the potential return of Islamic glory in Andalusia (Green-Mercado, 2019). For a population facing oppression, such narratives served not only as stories about the future but also provided a reason to maintain hope and persevere.

These conditions demonstrate that the practice of crypto-Islam is not always carried out secretly solely as a form of self-protection. In certain situations, particularly during political crises, beliefs that had previously been kept hidden can evolve into a source of inspiration for collective mobilization. Nevertheless, these messages are still conveyed through symbols, prophecies, and prophetic language. This approach made it more difficult for Christian authorities to directly substantiate the narrative of resistance as a basis for legal action.

At the same time, the emergence of hopes for assistance from Muslim forces outside Spain also highlighted the limitations faced by the Morisco community. They were in a very weak position compared to the military might of the Spanish state. Therefore, the likelihood of winning an open resistance without outside assistance was very slim. This was ultimately evident in the failure of the Alpujarras Revolt, which was

subsequently followed by a massive internal deportation of the Morisco community from Granada (Antonio Domínguez Ortiz & Bernard Vincent, 1979).

Thus, prophetic narratives such as jofores have a broader meaning than mere religious prophecies. For the Morisco community, these narratives served as a source of hope that helped them maintain a sense of solidarity and resilience amid ongoing pressures. At the same time, the hope for outside assistance also reflects an awareness that changing the political situation requires a force capable of countering the power imbalance they face. In this context, jofores can be understood as part of the Morisco community's strategy for survival, for maintaining hope, and for envisioning the possibility of liberation from the conditions they endure.

The Plomos del Sacromonte Case

This study also identified another type of strategy with distinct characteristics: the syncretic-accommodative strategy. This strategy can be observed in the case of the *Plomos del Sacromonte*, also known as the "Tin Books of Sacromonte." Between 1595 and 1606, a number of tin plates inscribed with Arabic text were discovered in a cave on Valparaíso Hill in Granada, which later became known as Sacromonte. The texts claimed to originate from the early disciples of Saint James, who were said to have written in Arabic during the first century CE (Garcia-Arenal & Mediano, 2013). Their content includes Christian teachings, but these are conveyed using concepts and terms that bear similarities to Islamic tradition, including the use of certain titles reminiscent of terms found in Islamic tradition.

In historiography, these documents are generally regarded as forgeries. A number of historians attribute their composition to members of the Morisco elite who possessed a good education and proficiency in Arabic. The two names most frequently associated with this case are Miguel de Luna and Alonso del Castillo, who were known as Morisco translators and scholars and had connections to the Christian elite in Granada (Garcia-Arenal & Mediano, 2013).

The *Plomos del Sacromonte* case differs from the strategy of "crypto-Islam," which essentially seeks to conceal one's Muslim identity. In this case, the approach taken appears to seek common ground between Arab heritage and Christian identity. By creating a narrative about the origins of Christianity that incorporates Arabic language and cultural elements, the Arab heritage of Al-Andalus can be positioned as a legitimate

part of Spain's Christian history. In this way, Arab cultural elements can be preserved and gain legitimacy without having to openly declare an Islamic identity (Garcia-Arenal & Mediano, 2013).

This case is significant because it demonstrates that the Moriscos' response to assimilation pressures did not always take the form of concealing their Islamic identity. Among certain groups, particularly those with greater access to Christian intellectual circles and centers of power, there was an opportunity to employ more accommodative strategies. Rather than maintaining a strict boundary between Islamic and Christian identities, this strategy sought to construct a new narrative that allowed both Arab heritage and Christian identity to be situated within the same framework.

Ultimately, the Catholic Church authorities declared the Sacromonte documents to be forgeries following a lengthy investigation that reached all the way to the Vatican. Nevertheless, the case remains significant for understanding the Morisco experience. The *Plomos del Sacromonte* demonstrate that Morisco communities did not respond to the pressure to assimilate in a uniform manner. In addition to concealing Islamic practices and beliefs, some of them also attempted to use language, history, and religious narratives as a means of preserving elements of their cultural heritage within a Christian environment. Therefore, the Sacromonte case reveals the diversity of Morisco strategies that went beyond the pattern of crypto-Islam alone (García-Arenal Rodriquez & Wiegers, 2014).

Regional and Temporal Variations in the Practice of Islamic Krypto

The intensity and forms of crypto-Islamic practices in Spain were not uniform. Each region had different social, political, and economic conditions, so the experiences of the Morisco community in preserving their identity and religious practices also varied. In the Kingdom of Granada, for example, the Moriscos constituted the majority group and still maintained strong ties to the Arabic language and the social networks inherited from Andalusian society. These conditions, particularly before and up until the Alpujarras Revolt, made crypto-Islamic practices relatively more organized and integrated into community life. Religious practices were not only carried out secretly by individuals but also became part of broader social relationships among community members (Antonio Domínguez Ortiz & Bernard Vincent, 1979).

The situation was different in northern and central Castile. In these regions, the number of Moriscos was smaller, and they tended to be scattered among the more dominant Christian population. These circumstances led to a more thorough process of assimilation. Historians such as Trevor Dadson even argue that by the early seventeenth century, some Morisco communities in the region had undergone a fairly profound process of assimilation (Dadson, 2012). This is evident, among other things, from the occurrence of intermarriage and the ability of some of them to understand Christian doctrine. These conditions subsequently sparked a debate over whether the term "crypto-Islam" could be used to describe the experience of the entire Morisco community in general, given that the degree of continuity in Islamic identity and practice varied from region to region.

In the Kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia, the relationship between the Moriscos and the landowning nobility also gave rise to a unique situation. The nobles had an economic interest in maintaining the presence of Morisco tenant farmers because they played a vital role in sustaining agricultural productivity. Based on this interest, some landowners pragmatically sought to protect the Moriscos from the Inquisition's overly strict scrutiny (Elliot, 1963). This protection ultimately created a sort of de facto space of tolerance. Although it was unofficial and could end at any time, this situation provided the Moriscos with an opportunity to practice crypto-Islam with relatively lower risk compared to some other regions. However, this space gradually narrowed as political pressure from the central government in Madrid began to intensify toward the end of the sixteenth century.

In addition to regional differences, changes over time also reveal significant developments. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the Inquisition's surveillance of the Moriscos intensified. These changes coincided with the strengthening of the Counter-Reformation movement in Catholic Europe and Spain's growing concerns about the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean region. The Spanish government feared the possibility of ties forming between the Ottoman Empire and the Morisco community within the country (Elliot, 1963). In this situation, the Moriscos faced increasing pressure to conceal their religious practices. Practices that were easily recognizable in public began to be abandoned or carried out with greater caution, while private religious activities, including the use of texts and the performance of rituals in secret, became increasingly important.

Chronologically, these changes can be understood through three main phases. The first phase, from around the 1520s to the 1550s, was a period when surveillance of the Moriscos was relatively lax. During this time, the Inquisition's attention was still largely focused on the Jewish conversos community and the emerging threat of Protestantism in Northern Europe. Consequently, the Moriscos' religious life still had greater leeway to continue, although pressure and restrictions remained (Lea Charles Henry, 1901).

The second phase lasted from around the 1560s until the Alpujarras Revolt of 1568–1571. During this period, assimilation policies targeting the Moriscos became increasingly harsh. One example was the *Pragmática Sanción* of 1567, also known as the anti-Morisco Pragmatic, which tightened various restrictions on the Morisco language, customs, and cultural life. This pressure helped fuel the outbreak of open resistance in the Alpujarras Revolt (Antonio Domínguez Ortiz & Bernard Vincent, 1979). At the same time, growing suspicion toward the Moriscos made them increasingly cautious in practicing their religion. Activities that had previously been carried out within the community began to be concealed more often to avoid accusations that could lead to legal proceedings.

The third phase spanned the period from the end of the Alpujarras Revolt until shortly before the expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609. During this period, Inquisition surveillance became increasingly intensive and systematic. Surveillance no longer relied solely on the interrogation of individuals but also drew upon a network of informants and records of previous cases. Information about a family or community could be used to identify patterns of behavior deemed suspicious. As a result, the Moriscos' freedom to maintain their religious practices became increasingly restricted (Dadson, 2012). Under these conditions, crypto-Islam developed not merely as a form of resistance against authority, but also as a way for the community to preserve their beliefs, identity, and connection to the religious traditions inherited from previous generations.

Responses to and Oversight Mechanisms of the Spanish Inquisition

The sixth finding concerns the Spanish Inquisition's response to the practice of crypto-Islam among the Morisco community. To monitor and detect such practices, the Inquisition operated through a number of regional tribunals under the coordination of the *Consejo de la Suprema y General Inquisición* (the Council of the Supreme and General Inquisition,). This surveillance was not only carried out by Inquisition officials but also

involved a network of informants known as familiares. They were spread across various communities and helped provide information regarding activities deemed suspicious. Such reports could come from neighbors, domestic servants, or even family members themselves, especially when there were disputes among them. These conditions indicate that surveillance of the Moriscos did not occur solely within courtrooms but also permeated the daily lives of the community (Lea Charles Henry, 1901).

The investigation process typically began by giving those who believed they had committed an offense the opportunity to admit their guilt through an grace period or *edicto de gracia*. At this stage, a person who confessed voluntarily could receive a lighter sentence. However, once that period ended, the Inquisition could conduct a more thorough investigation. Inquisitions could take the form of interrogations of suspects and, in some cases, involved the use of torture to extract confessions. Under such a system, the Morisco community found itself in a difficult situation, as they had to practice their religion with great caution so as not to arouse suspicion (Antonio Domínguez Ortiz & Bernard Vincent, 1979).

Despite having a fairly extensive surveillance system, the Inquisition was not entirely able to put an end to crypto-Islam practices. Several factors limited the institution's capabilities. The number of officials available was not commensurate with the size of the territory and the large population that needed to be monitored. Furthermore, the Inquisition also relied on reports and testimonies from the public, which were not always accurate or objective. Personal disputes could even serve as a reason for someone to report another person to the Inquisition. In some regions, this situation was also influenced by the protection afforded by local nobles. The nobles had an economic stake in the Morisco community because many of them worked as farm laborers and played a role in agricultural activities. For this reason, some nobles sought to prevent the Inquisition from exercising overly strict oversight over their Morisco workers (Elliot, 1963).

Domínguez Ortiz and Vincent note that thousands of Moriscos were indeed tried by Inquisition tribunals throughout the sixteenth century. However, not all cases resulted in severe punishments. Most punishments took the form of fines, penance, or other forms of punishment, while the death penalty was not the most common form of punishment. This indicates that the Inquisition's involvement with the Moriscos was not only related

to efforts to punish them but also to efforts to continuously monitor and control their religious lives (Antonio Domínguez Ortiz & Bernard Vincent, 1979).

Nevertheless, suspicion toward the Moriscos grew over time. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the increasing number of cases involving them influenced the views of the Spanish political elite. The perception arose that the policies of conversion and assimilation implemented thus far had not been entirely successful. This situation subsequently became one of the justifications used to support the decision to expel the Moriscos in 1609. In this context, crypto-Islam can be seen as one of the ways the Morisco community maintained their faith amid pressures that persisted for over a century. However, their success in concealing these religious practices simultaneously made it increasingly difficult for the government to determine whether the conversion process had truly been successful (Dadson, 2012).

The decision to expel the Moriscos was not solely a matter of religion. A number of historians have pointed out that the decision made during the reign of Philip III was influenced by various political and economic interests. One of these involved the interests of certain members of the nobility in reclaiming agricultural land previously managed by the Moriscos. In addition, the Spanish Crown was also facing financial difficulties due to the protracted war in Flanders. Under these circumstances, the issue of the Moriscos became part of broader political considerations (Elliot, 1963).

Thus, the existence and development of crypto-Islam in Spain cannot be understood solely from a religious perspective. These practices were also closely tied to the social conditions of the Morisco community, the policies of the Inquisition, the economic interests of the nobility, and the political decisions of the monarchy. The Morisco community used crypto-Islam as a means of preserving their faith and identity amid pressure to assimilate. On the other hand, the continuation of these practices made the government increasingly suspicious of their religious loyalty. Ultimately, these various factors were intertwined and contributed to the process that led to the expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609.

Implications for Understanding the Resilience of Minority Religious Identities

By combining all the strategies outlined above, this study finds that the Moriscos' crypto-Islam operated as an interconnected system, rather than merely a collection of disparate practices. The legal-religious strategy through the Oran Fatwa provided

theological legitimacy that allowed ritual and textual strategies to be carried out without the burden of excessive spiritual guilt, while the narrative-mobilization strategy through the jofores discourse provided a collective framework of meaning that linked individual experiences of suffering to a larger eschatological narrative concerning the fate of the community as a whole. The private spaces, as explained through the concept of the "hidden transcript" developed by James C. Scott in his study of power relations between dominant and subordinate groups, functions as a material arena where all these strategies are concretely practiced, far from the direct scrutiny of the "public script" that the Moriscos were required to present before Christian authorities (Scott, 2017).

The findings of this study have several implications for research on the resilience of religious identity among minority groups. First, identity resilience does not depend on a single strategy but is shaped by various mutually supportive approaches, such as the use of texts, ritual practices in the domestic sphere, religious legitimization, and collective narratives. When pressure on one form of practice intensifies, communities can adapt by turning to other, safer methods.

Second, the existence of religious legitimacy, such as the Oran Fatwa, plays a crucial role in helping the Moriscos maintain their beliefs. This legitimacy provides a basis for them to continue their religious practices even when they must be carried out in secret. This demonstrates that religious authority and knowledge can help preserve the continuity of minority group identities in high-pressure situations.

Third, this study reveals a paradox in the strategy of concealment. The Moriscos' success in hiding their religious practices actually made it even more difficult for the government to ascertain their loyalty and reinforced suspicions toward that community. This situation ultimately contributed to the decision to expel them in 1609. Thus, a strategy of covert survival can help preserve identity for a certain period, but it does not necessarily eliminate structural pressure from the state.

Fourth, the case of *Plomos del Sacromonte* demonstrates that minority groups can also choose a different strategy, namely renegotiating their identity rather than concealing it entirely. This demonstrates that the responses of minority groups cannot be understood solely through a choice between assimilation and resistance. There are various strategies that fall between the two, including efforts to adapt and redefine identity so that it can be preserved.

Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of critically evaluating sources. The Inquisition records must be read with an awareness of the interests and perspectives of the institution that produced them. When compared with sources from the Morisco community itself, such as *Aljamiado* manuscripts, researchers can gain a more complete picture of their experiences and survival strategies. This approach can also be applied to research on other minority groups in different historical contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the various strategies employed by the Morisco community to preserve their Islamic identity while under pressure from the Spanish Inquisition during the sixteenth through early seventeenth centuries. In situations where practicing one's religion openly is becoming increasingly difficult, crypto-Islam is not merely a means of concealing one's beliefs, but has evolved into a conscious and ongoing effort to preserve the faith, traditions, knowledge, and sense of community that shape their identity. For the Morisco community, preserving Islam did not always mean engaging in open resistance, but rather finding small spaces in daily life where that faith could remain alive and be passed down. One such important sphere is the family, while Aljamiado literature serves as a means of preserving Islamic teachings and passing them on to the next generation in circumstances where religious knowledge is not readily available in the open. Religious practices have increasingly shifted to the home environment because it is relatively safer from surveillance, and in this process, Morisco women play a vital role in preserving religious customs, knowledge, and traditions within the family.

Amid the pressures they faced, the Oran Fatwa provided assurance that maintaining one's faith in secret remained grounded in Islamic teachings, while the jofores discourse helped the Morisco community understand their suffering as part of a shared experience. Under certain circumstances, this conviction and hope could even develop into the courage to resist, as seen in the Alpujarras Revolt. Nevertheless, the experiences of the Morisco community were not uniform, as they coped with pressure in different ways depending on their social circumstances and the environments in which they lived. The case of Plomos del Sacromonte, for example, illustrates that some groups sought to preserve their Arab heritage in a distinct way, by integrating it into their Spanish Christian identity, thereby demonstrating that the Morisco community had diverse choices and strategies for coping with the pressures of assimilation. These differences

were also evident in the practice of crypto-Islam across various regions, which was influenced by local social conditions, the size of the Morisco population, their relationships with the nobility, and their distance from the centers of power. As Inquisition surveillance grew stricter, religious life was conducted with increasing caution and increasingly took place in private spaces. Although the Inquisition had an extensive surveillance network, it was not fully able to stop crypto-Islamic practices, as religious beliefs and customs had become deeply rooted in family and community life. However, at the same time, the existence of these hidden religious practices actually fueled growing suspicion toward the Moriscos and ultimately contributed to the conditions that led to their expulsion in 1609–1614. Based on these findings, this study views crypto-Islam as a form of collective taqiyyah, a way of preserving one's faith that relies not only on individual courage but also on the support of family and community, knowledge passed down from one generation to the next, and a religious foundation that gives them the strength to withstand pressure. When practicing their religion openly was no longer possible, they found ways to preserve an essential part of their identity through family life, social relationships, and practices that may seem simple but hold great significance for the community's survival. At this point, a profound irony emerges: the more successfully the Moriscos concealed their religious practices, the more difficult it became for the Spanish government to determine whether they had truly abandoned Islam or not.

This uncertainty actually reinforced suspicions against them and helped drive the expulsion policy; thus, the strategy that for years had helped the Moriscos maintain their faith ultimately became one of the factors that made their relationship with the state increasingly tense and difficult. The experience of the Moriscos thus demonstrates that preserving one's identity in a high-pressure situation does not always have to take the form of open and violent resistance. Reflecting on religious teachings, maintaining rituals, even in secret, passing on knowledge to children, preserving family traditions, writing and reading in Aljamiado, and preserving collective memory can all be forms of struggle that are no less significant. Behind these actions lies the human effort to remain true to oneself when the surrounding environment seeks to alter or even erase that identity. The experience of the Moriscos shows that religious identity endures not only through large institutions or public spaces, but also through daily life,through families who continue to teach what they believe, through inherited memories, and through simple practices carried out in secret.

Ultimately, this study also has limitations because most of the primary sources used were obtained through transcriptions and previous researchers' analyses, and thus are not entirely based on direct readings of the original manuscripts and archives. Therefore, future research could expand on this study by directly examining the Inquisition archives and Aljamiado manuscripts, while also paying greater attention to the lives of the Morisco community after their expulsion, particularly in North Africa. Such a study is important not only for understanding how they carried their identities and experiences from Spain, but also how those identities subsequently adapted to new environments, changed in response to circumstances, and remained part of their collective memory.

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