

HOME

Converso Reclamation of Islamic Identity in Granada, Spain



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The wrought iron gates facing the plaza stand wide open in the warm summer air. Dozens of people from all walks of life stroll around the grounds of the *mezquita mayor* (great mosque) of Granada, chatting, shopping, sipping tea, or studying manuscripts. Tourists clutching expensive cameras mingle seamlessly with *tulab* (students) entering the mosque to study the word of Allah. The bustling throng fills the narrow plaza separating the mighty Church of San Nicolás, a former mosque itself, from the *mezquita*, binding together two reminders of Granada's long history. Above the scene, the mighty Alhambra palace, jewel of Spanish Islamic architecture, shines over the city.

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The historical roots of Islam in Granada provide crucial context for understanding the contemporary situation of Muslims living there today. Granada, a city situated in eastern Andalusia in southern Spain, possesses immense symbolic power as the final Muslim state in Western Europe. Founded by Muslims in the eleventh century, it served as a magnet for Muslim refugees during the Christian *reconquista*, or reconquest, of the Iberian Peninsula during the Late Middle Ages. After its fall to the Catholic Monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand in 1492, it took on great significance for the kings of Spain, standing as a reminder of Christianity's supposed triumph over Islam. Only with the transition to liberal democracy in the 1970s has Muslim-founded Granada truly begun to represent the new, multiethnic reality gripping contemporary Spain. The story of Granada is much deeper than simple winners or losers. The city stands at a

historical and political crossroads: founded by Islam, conquered by Christians, peopled by descendants of both and, in the present day, site of a mass migration of Muslims northward into Europe. Granada's legacy is truly cosmopolitan, overcoming divisions between Islam and "the West."

The *conversos* personify this mixed legacy. A community of some 500-2,000 based in the *Albaicín* district of Granada, the *conversos* are a heterogeneous group of people born principally to non-Muslim families. Hailing from Western Europe and North America, most are white and of middle- and upper-class extraction.¹ Drawn to Granada starting in the 1970s, the eldest *converso* generation's initial interest in Islam stemmed from varied causes: "philosophical critiques of Western European politics and Enlightenment values, aesthetic interests in Sufi practice, the influence of platonic and romantic relationships with Muslims...and more."^{2 3} In this, Granada's legacy as a haven for Muslims has persevered. Above all, the *conversos* reflect the inversion of traditional association with one particular culture. They have "developed a unique Muslim European identity, portraying themselves as having successfully integrated Western and universal Islamic values as well as resurrecting or continuing the Muslim legacy of al-Andalus [Islamic Iberia]."⁴ In this, the *conversos* refute monolithic association or identification with some of the characteristics of that define either the "Western" or "Islamic" worlds. Instead, their community embodies a cosmopolitan hybrid of these cultures, a distinctiveness that characterizes

¹ Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, "Managing Muslim Visibility: Conversion, Immigration, and Spanish Imaginaries of Islam," *American Anthropologist* 114.4 (2012), 611-623, 612-13. Note that I utilize the complex term "non-Muslim" to depict the *conversos*' neighbors, whether Catholic, secular, etc. "Non-Muslim" does not depict a unified category, but rather Spanish Muslim anxieties about engaging the Granada's non-Muslim social majority as an audience for Islam. See Rogozen-Soltar, 614.

² *Ibid.*

³ Sufism is a "mystical Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God." *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Sufism," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/571823/Sufism> (accessed March 6, 2015).

⁴ Elena Arigita, "Representing Islam in Spain: Muslim Identities and the Contestation of Leadership," *The Muslim World* 96 (2006), 563-584, 569.

the region of Andalusia and the city of Granada itself.

This paper argues that the identity of Granada's community of *converso* Muslims can be understood in relation to the historical and contemporary political situation of both Spanish Islam and the city of Granada. Granada, as a European city with strong Islamic heritage and active Muslim communities, exemplifies hybridization between Islam and Catholic Spain. Due to their origins and faith, the *conversos* similarly represent this cosmopolitan blend. In their very natures, both the *conversos* and the city belie the notion of separate, monolithic cultural constructs of "the West" and the "Islamic world."

This paper incorporates analysis of secondary research and primary sources, including personal interviews, to explore the question of *converso* identity in Granada. The limitations of utilizing personal interviews should, however, be considered. I conducted a number of the interviews cited in this paper myself, employing a script of my own design. Methodologically, my influence on the interview process may have affected the results due to the politics of location and socioeconomics. As a white, upper-middle class American, my background and culture likely impacted both the questions I posed to my interviewees and their responses. For example, my inquiries regarding some of the migrants' migration stories may have addressed sensitive topics, and my subjects' responses or my interpretations influenced by my background. Though personal interviews can provide invaluable insight into local communities, they also run the risk of generalizing a larger group from the experiences of a few.

Conversos, al-Andalus, and Granada: Bound to History (711-1492)

On a bright autumn morning in Granada's Plaza Nueva, I sat down with Khadija, a young Muslim woman of South African descent, to talk about her hometown. "Granada is one of those

places, historically, that has a long-running Muslim heritage. All I have to do is look at the Alhambra and say, ‘It is there!’...Muslims were intelligent, kind, admired here. People studied how the bird flies, and knew that it flew by the power of God.”⁵ Khadija gushed about her city, a citadel deeply rooted in Islam. Her words evoked Granada’s history, descended from the scientific and cultural advancements of al-Andalus. From this Islamic past, the *converso* population of Granada derives much of their identity as a cosmopolitan, hybrid community.

The Caliphate of Córdoba and the Cultural Zenith of al-Andalus

Islam forms an integral component of Spanish history. For nearly eight centuries, between 711 and 1492 C.E., it held sway over a massive area of the Iberian Peninsula as the dominant religious and political force. Following a lightning-fast conquest in 711, successive Islamic polities grew, flourished, and faded, indelibly influencing Spanish society, culture, and politics. The history of Islam in Granada can be traced back to more than two centuries after the Muslim conquest. By this period, Islam touched all corners of Iberia, and the area where Granada would later grow was but a sparsely populated valley. The heart of power in al-Andalus stood in the city of Córdoba, founded centuries prior as a Roman colony. In 929, Córdoba’s emir Abd al-Rahman III declared himself caliph, or successor to the Prophet Muhammad, touching off a remarkable period of cultural development. Córdoba witnessed massive growth in population, learning, and economic and political influence throughout the Mediterranean world.⁶ It tightened its grip throughout all of al-Andalus, concentrating power in the person of the caliph. For a nearly one hundred years in the tenth and eleventh centuries, Córdoba stood as the most populous and scientifically advanced city in the Mediterranean basin: a Saxon nun in faraway

⁵ Khadija (name changed to protect privacy), interview by author, Granada, Spain, October 15, 2014.

⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Córdoba,” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/137374/Cordoba> (accessed April 15, 2015).

Germany even called it the “ornament of the world.”⁷

Two important legacies from Córdoba have had profound effects on the *converso* community of present-day Granada. First, the remarkable cultural achievements of the caliphate and its successor states left lasting impressions on the Spanish psyche, Muslim and Christian alike. The great mosque of Córdoba, one of the best-known Islamic constructs in the world, survived numerous changes of rule and religion and today serves as the city’s cathedral.⁸ The polymath Averroes contemplated Islamic philosophy, jurisprudence, and mathematics from his home in Córdoba. Scientific and philosophical advancements made there influenced navigation, trade, and Islamic thought around the Mediterranean basin. In essence, Córdoba represented a pinnacle of Islamic influence on contemporary Spanish society, driven by the scholarship of these philosophers.⁹ Centuries later, as Khadija noted, those lessons passed on to the city of Granada, where studies of nature and philosophy carried on.

Córdoba’s second legacy to the *converso* community can be found in the spirit of *convivencia*. *Convivencia* refers to “Spain’s national history of religious pluralism,” and is embodied in the *converso* community. Throughout the Islamic period in Spain, religious tolerance formed a key societal element. Under Muslim rule, Christians and Jews lived protected as *dhimmi*, or “Peoples of the Book,” paying a simple tax to escape persecution.¹⁰ In this relatively tolerant atmosphere, dozens of noted philosophers of multiple faiths rose to prominence. One of the most influential Cordovan thinkers was Moses Maimonides, a Jewish astronomer and philosopher whose writings included dozens of works on medicine and the

⁷ See María Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002).

⁸ “History of the Mosque,” Cathedral of Córdoba, <http://www.mezquitadecordoba.org/en/history-mosque-cordoba.asp> (accessed March 9, 2015).

⁹ Chris Lowney, *A Vanished World* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 65.

¹⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Jizya,” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/304125/jizya> (accessed March 8, 2015).

Torah.¹¹ Maimonides' faith and notoriety in Córdoba exemplify the pluricultural and plurireligious atmosphere of medieval Córdoba. Similarly, the *conversos* reflect this legacy of Islamic tolerance created in Córdoba. Born of predominantly Christian families in Europe and North America yet adherents of Islam, the *conversos* of Granada see themselves as inheritors of *convivencia* and the productive mix of religions. In Granada, the *conversos* find the inheritance of Córdoba's cultural and scholastic achievements.

Granada: Refuge of Muslims Then and Now

The cultural and religious legacies of the Córdoba caliphate reflect much of the cultural patrimony honored by the *converso* community of Granada. Yet, the city of Granada, founded by Muslims and capital of al-Andalus for over two centuries, holds an even stronger symbolic significance. Granada's contemporary status as a refuge for Muslims has deep historical roots,



¹¹ Heather Ecker, *Caliphs and Kings* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2004), 138.

dating back to its foundation in 1013. In the early eleventh century, as the Córdoba Caliphate fell into decline, small and competing petty kingdoms, or *taifas*, emerged from the rubble. Zawi bin Ziri, a chieftain of Amazigh (Berber) extraction who had helped foment the fall of the caliphate, carved out a new *taifa* on a low plain along the River Genil, southeast of Córdoba (see figure 1). With the regional unrest generated by the collapse of central authority in Córdoba, Ziri's new state found itself under constant threat of attack and destruction. With this reality in mind, he ordered the abandonment of his own capital, Elvira, and initiated a mass exodus to *Gárnata al-Yahūd*, a small Jewish settlement a few kilometers distant.¹² There, in 1013, Ziri and his subjects established a new city: *madinat Garnatah*, or Granada.

The basis of Granada's foundation is critical in the understanding of the *converso* community it houses today. Granada was founded as a completely Islamic city from its inception. Unlike many of Spain's other cities, such as Córdoba, Seville, and Cádiz, which all have Ibero-Roman origins and histories of institutional Christianity predating the Muslim conquests, Granada was founded centuries later. This fact, coupled with its role as the final Islamic holdout in Europe five centuries later, lent Granada great symbolic importance. Granada has been termed Spain's "Muslim city," due to its foundation, history as a safe haven, and location as the swan song of Islam in Spain.¹³ This distinction characterizes both the city and, consequently, the *conversos* living there.

Granada's initial success as a city, and the groundwork for its legacy as a safe haven for Muslims, lay in its topography. The choice for the new city's location proved immensely successful: Granada appears to be among the most secure locales in Iberia. Surrounded on three

¹² Room, Adrian, *Placenames of the World* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2006), 149.

¹³ Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, "Granada as Muslim Homeland: Moroccan Migrant Narratives of Return and the Politics of Spanish Multiculturalism," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the Council for European Studies, Omni Parker House Hotel, Boston, MA, March 22, 2012. http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p547231_index.html

sides by rugged mountains, the city lays nestled upon two hills, protected by high walls.¹⁴ It can only be accessed through one uphill course, so defenders naturally enjoy an advantage.¹⁵ Below the city spreads the *vega*, or meadow, of Granada, a remarkably fertile territory celebrated by Andalusian writers for centuries for its abundance. Fourteenth century Granadan polymath Ibn al-Khatib described the *vega* as an Eden: “God has spread out on the *vega* a plain traversed by rivers and streams, dotted with well-situated farms and orchards...the air is healthy, numerous are the gardens, luxuriant the groves.”¹⁶ Equipped with such formidable fortifications and a nearly inexhaustible economic hinterland, Granada flourished.

Zawi bin Ziri’s choice to establish his new political center in a small Jewish settlement continued the spirit of *convivencia* inherited from Córdoba. The structure of his new city promoted inclusion. Jews possessed a large, protected swath in the center of Granada directly across from the main marketplace, the *alcaicería* (see figure 2). This position gave them an intimate connection with the commercial life of Granada, as goods came in from the fertile *vega* for sale. Granada’s rulers also sought counsel across confessional lines. Samuel ha-Nagid, a Jewish courtier and Talmudic scholar originally from Córdoba, settled in Granada upon its foundation in 1013. There, he played a key role in royal power struggles and ultimately became vizier to King Badis in 1038. At Ha-Nagid’s direction, Granada “surged to victories over rival Muslim states,” securing his lord’s territorial boundaries and guaranteeing his own family’s prominence for years to come.¹⁷ Ha-Nagid’s story illustrates the tradition of *convivencia* in Granadan society, one carried on by the diverse *converso* population a millennium later.

¹⁴ William H. Prescott, *The Art of War in Spain: the Conquest of Granada, 1481-1492* (London: Greenhill Books, 1995), 237.

¹⁵ Derke W. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (New York: Longman, Inc., 1978), 162.

¹⁶ Camilo Alvarez de Morales y Ruiz-Matas and Emilio Molina López, *Reino de Granada*, Tomo I: El Islam (Granada: Junta de Andalucía, 1991), 14.

¹⁷ A. Katie Harris, *From Muslim to Christian Granada* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 96-98.

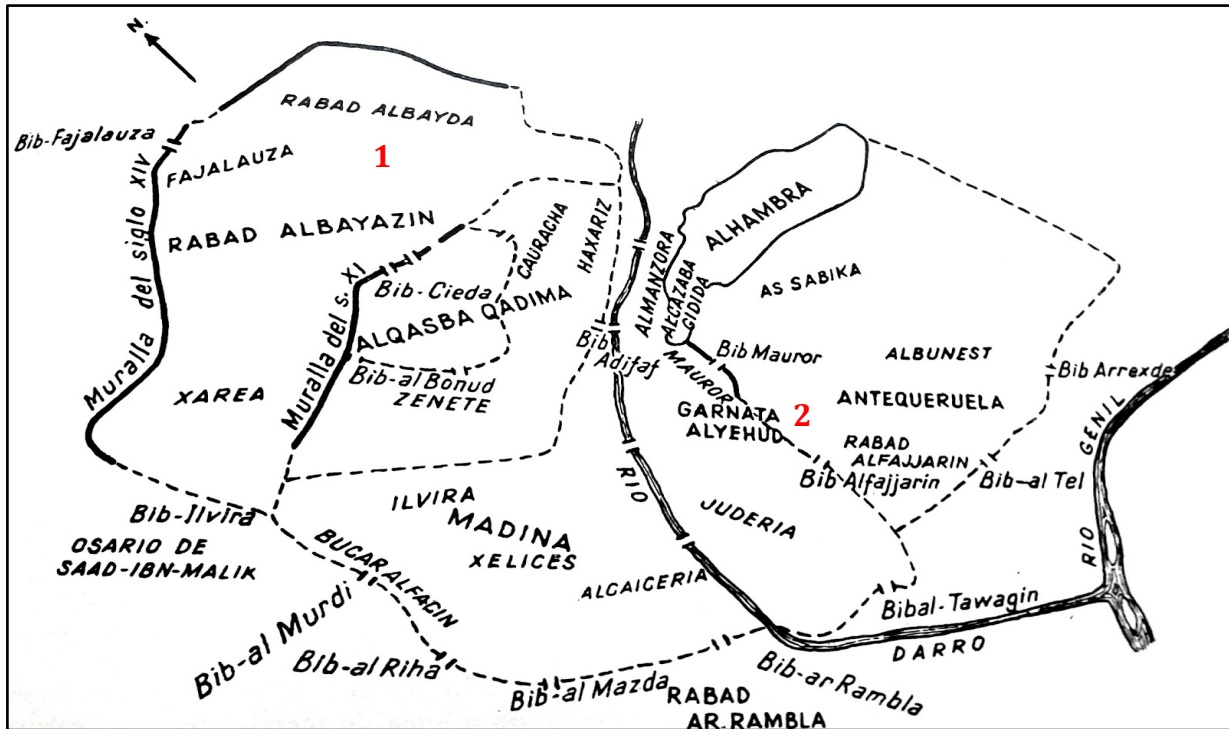


Figure 2: Granada neighborhoods in the 14th century. The Albaicín (#1) and the Jewish Quarter, consisting of the Judería and Garnata al-Yehud (#2) can be seen.

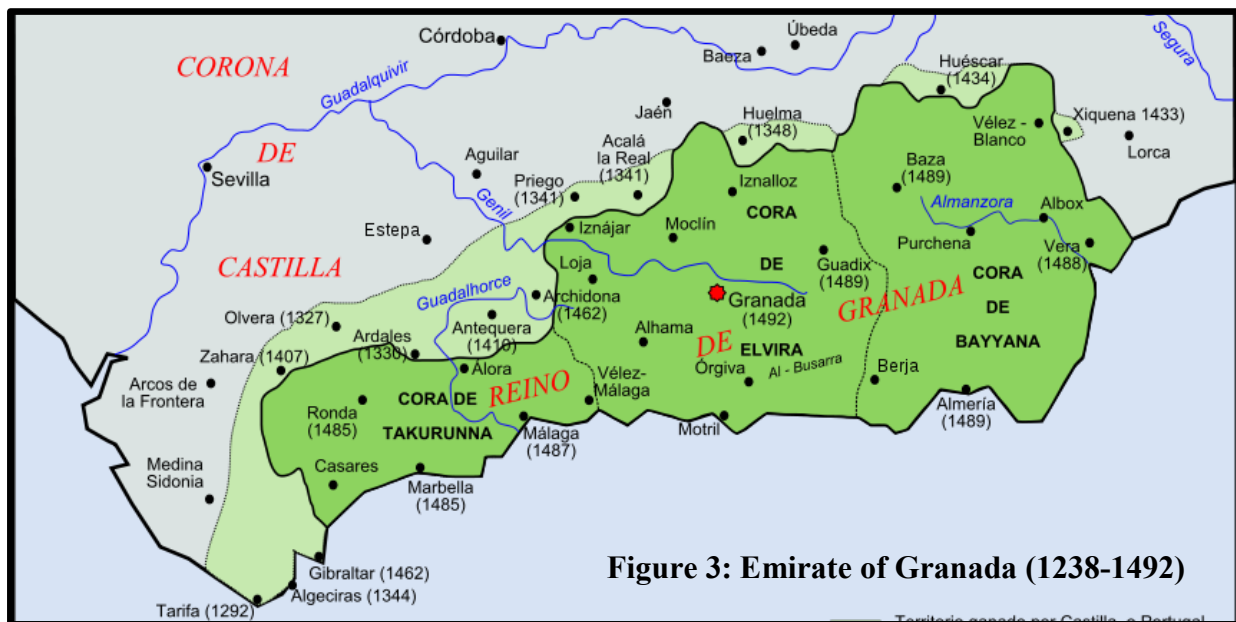
Following its foundation and consolidation high in the hills of the Sierra Nevada, Granada's stature as a safe haven grew. As the *Reconquista* by the Christian kingdoms of León, Navarre, Aragón, and dominant Castile gathered speed throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, towns inhabited by Muslims for centuries came under alien dominion. In many of these settlements, the old system of *convivencia* propagated under Islamic dominion largely dried up. To the Christian kings, the *Reconquista* represented nothing less than a holy war, supported wholeheartedly by the Pope in Rome.¹⁸ Naturally, then, as the cross rose over each town conquered by the Christians, thousands of Muslims fled their homes and became refugees.

In 1212, a huge army massed under Alfonso VIII of Castile at Las Navas de Tolosa. The subsequent defeat of the Almohad Caliphate, the rulers of al-Andalus since the mid-12th century, saw the end of centralized Islamic power over large swaths of Iberia. In swift succession, the

¹⁸ Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 214.

cities of Seville and Córdoba, administrative and ceremonial centers of Islamic power in al-Andalus for five centuries, fell to Castile. By the middle of the thirteenth century, only Granada remained independent, and then only as a tributary state of Castile. As figure 3 shows, Granada stood surrounded on all sides by the increasingly powerful Crown of Castile, buttressed by only its vital trade connection with Muslim North Africa by the Mediterranean Sea, and by the strong fortifications surrounding the city itself.

For the refugees whose cities had been captured by Christian forces, Granada remained a beacon of safety. Throughout the succeeding two centuries, thousands of Muslims migrated to Granada, establishing themselves along the outskirts of the city. In many cases, nearly the entire population of a city would uproot for Granada. For example, upon the conquest of Baeza, north



of Granada, in 1226-27, a massive band of refugees from that city founded a new neighborhood named for their lost home: the *Albaicín*.¹⁹ Today, the *Albaicín* forms the center of Granada's historic Muslim quarter and, notably, also hosts the mosque of Granada's *converso* community. In this, it continues to serve as a refuge for Muslims in the contemporary period. As Aixa, a

¹⁹ E. Villar Yebra, *El Albaicín* (Granada: Ediciones Albaida, 1997), 43.

young member of the *converso* community notes, Granada remains as it was in 1227 when the citizens of Baeza fled there: “It doesn’t matter where you come from, you’re there for the love of Islam.”²⁰ In this, the historical legacy of medieval Granada sustains the identity of the *converso* community as a haven for Muslims.

Conversos and Catholic Spain (1492-1975)

Granada’s respected position as a safe haven for Muslim refugees did not survive the Middle Ages. In the late fifteenth century, after years of minor skirmishes in which the increasingly isolated emirate lost swaths of territory, the Crowns of Castile and Aragón initiated a major campaign against Granada.²¹ Gradually whittling away at Granada’s ports, thus hobbling the city economically, the Christians managed to bring the emirate to its knees in a ten-year war (see figure 3).²² Despite its favorable topographic situation, without access to its Mediterranean ports for trade with friendly Islamic states in North Africa, Granada could not withstand a long siege. Religious invective helped spur the Christians’ effort: in 1485, Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragón convinced Pope Innocent VIII to declare the Granada War a crusade, granting it additional funding, materiel, and troops.²³ Finally, on January 2, 1492, following a lengthy siege, Isabella and Ferdinand rode into Granada in triumph. Islamic Granada was no more.

The Fall of Granada in 1492 marked the passing of the Spanish Middle Ages and set the stage for a new treatment of Islam in Spain: erasure. The legacy of the succeeding five centuries stemming from this treatment has had a tremendous impact on Muslim life in contemporary

²⁰ Aixa (name changed to protect privacy), interview by author, Granada, Spain, October 15, 2014.

²¹ L.P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain, 1250-1500* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 254.

²² Prescott, 211.

²³ O’Callaghan, 214.

Granada, especially among the *converso* community. Two elements effectively demonstrate the great lengths to which Catholic Spain went to obliterate Islam: first, the early relationship between the Catholic authorities and Muslims of the newly conquered city; and second, changes made to the structure of city itself by the new Catholic rulers.

In the 1491 treaty ending the conquest of Granada, the Catholic Monarchs promised autonomy and toleration for the city's remaining Muslim population. At first, Islamic law continued to prevail amongst Granada's Muslims, and all mosques were maintained.²⁴ A new *ayuntamiento*, or city council, included twenty-one notable Muslim figures.²⁵ Unlike the case of Spain's Jews, as evidenced by the harsh Alhambra Decree of 1492, the capitulations did not (at least, immediately) force all Muslims in Granada to convert or leave.²⁶ Nevertheless, the goodwill between native Muslims and conquering Christians dissolved within ten years, often because commerce between them resulted in excommunication from the Catholic Church.²⁷ In 1501, the Christians quashed a nascent revolt in the untamed and mountainous Alpujarras region of Granada's frontier. In response to the rebellion, the monarchs initiated a program of forced conversion on the city's remaining Muslims.²⁸ After 1501, Islam would remain an unrecognized religion in Spain until 1992. Granada's period of *convivencia* had ended.

In order to impress their victory upon the *granadinos*, the Catholic Monarchs set about altering the very fabric of the city. Throughout the first years of the sixteenth century, Isabella and Ferdinand ordered the destruction of Granada's celebrated Jewish quarter to make way for a new hospital and church.²⁹ In 1501, in response to the rebellion in the Alpujarras, the monarchs

²⁴ Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 316.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 326.

²⁶ L.P. Harvey, *Muslims in Spain, 1500-1614* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 29.

²⁷ Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 333.

²⁸ Harvey, *Muslims in Spain*, 30.

²⁹ Harris, 11.

forcibly consecrated all of the city's mosques as churches.³⁰ Finally, upon the death of Isabella in 1504, Granada became the burial site for the Catholic Monarchs. With this highly symbolic act, the monarchs aimed to solidify the victory of Catholicism over Islam, burying themselves on the land where Granada's *mezquita mayor* once stood. Granada would lack a *mezquita mayor* until 2003.³¹

The contemporary Granada in which the *conversos* live today was shaped dramatically by waves of Catholicization and the destruction of many of the city's Islamic vestiges. A slow process of change totally altered the fabric of the city. Though by the late sixteenth century, decades after the expulsion or forced conversions of the Jews and Muslims, "Granada was still a multicultural, multiethnic city" and "the streets and structures of the urban landscape still recalled their presence," the program of urban repurposing had begun to take its toll.³² As figure 4 shows, Granada by the 1560s appeared to be a typical Christian city, with crosses adorning the former minarets of mosques, now churches. For today's *conversos*, those churches serve as a reminder of a lost past. The *conversos*' contemporary mosque, for example, stands alongside the Church of San Nicolás, a former mosque that dwarfs the modern one.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³² *Ibid.*, 28.



Figure 4: Granada in 1563, from *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*

Even centuries after the city's layout changed and Christianity came to dominate religious dialogue, discourses on Granada's Islamic past claimed the superiority of the Christian-Spanish majority society over Islam. Writers such as José and Manuel Oliver Hurtado, commenting in the late nineteenth century, asserted that the descendants of southern Spain's Muslims, called *moriscos*, had attempted to mimic the culturally superior Christians:

When a country finds the intellectual culture of its neighbor superior to its own, and it owes the better part of its own culture to that neighbor, it comes to take on the habit of copying and mimicking that neighbor throughout. This is the case today between the Andalusian Moors, by their relations with the Gallegos (the Christians of Castile and León): you see how much they resemble [the Gallegos] in costume and attire, and in their customs, even to the extreme of placing images and reproductions on their walls, inside their buildings and in their concealed chambers.³³

Here, the Hurtados point out *moriscos*' supposed penchant for copying northern Spaniards,

³³ José Oliver Hurtado and Manuel Oliver Hurtado, *Granada y sus Monumentos Árabes* (Madrid: Carlos Bailly-Bailliere, 1875), 328. Translation mine.

directly claiming that Muslim and Muslim-influenced culture was inferior and dependent upon the Christians' own. This attitude perpetuates the narrative of Islam's inimical role in Christian Spain, one prevalent among Christian Spanish stories surrounding Granada.

In addition to the simple narratives of Spanish cultural dominance, foreign commentators also expanded the dismissive and devaluing perspective regarding Granada's Muslim past.

Albert F. Calvert, an English writer remarking on the Alhambra in 1908, mused,

Power and strength impressed our [English] mediæval ancestors far more than grace and luxury...with the Muslim it has always been otherwise. The Oriental mind delights in display, and eastern potentates have never been able to resist a tendency to ostentation. Magnificence, therefore, not power, was the essential element of the architecture of a Moorish court.³⁴

By commenting on the Alhambra as though its Muslim rulers were infantile fops concerned only with ornamentation, Calvert portrays Islamic Granada as backward. Along with the Hurtados' commentaries, this selection demonstrates that Islamophobia in Spain persisted from the Middle Ages into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It even forces today's *conversos* to grapple with that legacy as part of their communal identity, especially as they relate to the city of Granada and prevalent perspectives on Islam there.

Calvert's commentary illustrates a larger point regarding the city of Granada: that it holds the distinction of being Spain's "exoticized," Oriental, Muslim city. Granada's history as the final Muslim state in Western Europe, coupled with many of its intact Islamic monuments (the Alhambra chief among them), has led to an vision of the city that Edward Said would categorize as "Orientalized." Orientalism, defined by Said as "the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny and so on," assumes that

³⁴ Albert F. Calvert, *Granada: Present and Bygone* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1908), 109-110.

there exist essential differences between “the West” and “the Orient.”³⁵ Muslims, a group classified by Said as “Oriental,” founded and ruled Granada for five centuries, so the city retains its association with Orientalism. Despite Granada’s cosmopolitan history detailed above, it has served as a paradigm for Orientalist writers for its visible Islamic heritage.

The idea of Orientalism as an essential distinction between an “Eastern” and “Western” world does not stand among Granada’s *conversos*. Though, like Calvert, commentators have described the city in Orientalist terms, the *conversos* experience it as a cosmopolitan, hybrid construction. In their eyes, Granada belongs to both the Western and Islamic (or “Oriental”) worlds. Fatima, a *conversa* of Austrian-Egyptian descent and lecturer at the University of Granada, told me of her move to Granada: “[It] gave me the feeling that it was a great mixture between the Orient and the Occident—a place where I could *be* both.”³⁶ This quote by an educated *conversa* resident of Granada carries immense significance. Fatima employed the terminology of Orientalism, contrasting the Western and Eastern worlds and seemingly endorsing the idea of inherent difference. Yet, Fatima and her community identify with the city—a place where they can identify with both Islam and a Western heritage—showing that the divisions between those cultures stand as social constructions, not inherent facts. By embodying both the Western and Oriental “worlds,” Fatima and her fellow *conversos* defy Orientalist, essential characteristics.

Fatima’s endorsement of Granada’s hybrid nature helps illustrate a point made by Said: “the difficulty with theories of essentialism and exclusiveness, or with barriers and sides, is that they give rise to polarizations that absolve and forgive ignorance and demagoguery more than they

³⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage, 1979), 2-3.

³⁶ Fatima (name changed to protect privacy), interview by author. Granada, Spain, October 16, 2014.

enable knowledge.”³⁷ As evidenced by the entire history of Granada and Andalusia, no “essential” culture can be proved to exist. Instead, both the city and the region exhibit a cosmopolitan, hybrid culture, one formed from a mix of ethnicities and religions over centuries. In this cultural milieu live the *conversos*: a group of people, based upon this shared history that identify with the amalgamated nature of their home. Though, as the following sections illustrate, the *conversos* constantly face religious resistance from non-Muslim members of society, they continue to embody mixed cultural heritage from their history.

Islam, the *conversos*, and Relations with the Spanish State

In its quest to make sense of Spanish identity and to establish itself in contemporary Granada, the *converso* community must negotiate with the Spanish state. The Spanish state has a long history of involvement in religious affairs, a trend that continues to the present and requires engagement from groups of all faiths. In considering its relationship with the state, it is helpful to consider Granada’s *converso* community from two perspectives, depending upon the level of government studied. First, the *conversos* can be considered as a part of the larger demographic of Spanish Muslims. Though Islam in Spain is not monolithic, the Spanish state has consistently treated Muslim communities as a single group in its dealings with them, thus affecting the outcome for Granada’s *conversos*. Second, the *conversos* can be seen as a local, independent community in its dealings with Granada’s municipal authorities, Muslim migrant communities, and non-Muslim citizens. The identity of Granada’s *converso* community, particularly as it relates to its legal place in contemporary Spain, remains heavily influenced by its dealings with the Spanish state.

³⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 31.

Faux-Monolithic Islam and Representation to the State

The relationship of Islam to the Spanish government has generally reflected a policy of one-size-fits-all treatment on the part of the state. This policy derives from the historical tension between the Spanish Crown and Islam, in which the former was defined in large part by its opposition to the latter. This formula of absolutism also helped stir up fervor for the Catholic Church. During the *Reconquista*, religious authorities allowed the image of Saint James (called *Santiago* in Spanish), patron saint of Christian Spain, to be reproduced as a crusader against Muslim “infidels.” The epithet *Santiago Matamoros* (literally, the Moor-slayer) came to define this religious figure, dead nearly six hundred years *before* the foundation of Islam.³⁸ The consequences of Islam’s long-running association with the enemy continue to influence relations with Spanish Muslims in the present day, helping cast them as unwanted “Others” in contemporary society.

With the exception of the short-lived, secular Second Spanish Republic of the 1930s, the Roman Catholic Church dominated every official religious discourse until the adoption of the current constitution in 1978. Virtually all education in Spain up to the 1970s took place in a clerical setting, and religious leaders manipulated power among royalty and the military. During the rule of Francisco Franco, authoritarian dictator of Spain from 1939 to 1975, the Catholic Church enjoyed the wholesale backing of the state.³⁹ Despite Spain’s transition to secular democracy in the late 1970s, the dominance of the Catholic Church continues to affect statecraft. The purportedly secular constitution presently in effect explicitly states, “the public authorities shall take the religious beliefs of Spanish society into account and shall consequently maintain

³⁸ Dana Leibsohn and Barbara Mundy, "Santiago Matamoros," *Vistas: Visual Culture in Spanish America, 1520-1820*, 2005, http://www.smith.edu/vistas/vistas_web/gallery/detail/santiago-matamoros.htm (accessed March 9, 2015).

³⁹ Carmen Benso Calvo, “Tradition and Innovation in the Practical Culture of Schools in Franco’s Spain,” *Paedagogica Historica* 42.3 (June 2006): 405-430, 407.

appropriate cooperation *with the Catholic Church and the other confessions.*”⁴⁰ Enshrined in the Spanish constitution stands a literal declaration of the “otherness” of Islam and any religion other than Roman Catholicism. Though Spain does not today claim to be an exclusively “Catholic country” as it did under Franco, a favorable position for the Catholic Church prevails even under its contemporary secular model. This formula, derived from the state’s historically comfortable relationship with the Church, affects liaisons with members of other religious groups.

These institutional barriers—the historical tendency of the Spanish state to oppose Islam and the continual legal recognition of the Catholic Church—have made Muslims’ dealings with the Spanish state difficult. Indeed, Islam did not achieve formal recognition from the state until 1992, when it could demonstrate the “legal condition of ‘being well established’”: a classification known as *notorio arraigo*...Muslims needed to provide proof that they were organized as a group with a significant number of members.”⁴¹ For Muslims in Spain, this legal requirement clashed with their history. For more than twelve centuries, Islam has lacked a centralized international governance structure like that of the Catholic Church, and thus could not apply for *notorio arraigo*. Each independent community of Muslims did not have adequate numbers to satisfy the legal requirements, and so Islam languished as an unrecognized religion for more than a decade. Only after the government took into account Islam’s legacy as “one of the spiritual beliefs that have formed the historic character of Spain” did it grant recognition.⁴² The experience of Spanish Muslims’ pursuit of *notorio arraigo* demonstrates the Spanish government’s tendency to treat Muslims as a monolithic group despite their diversity.

The propensity for this manner of treatment continued after the legal recognition of Islam. In April 1992, the Spanish government formed the Islamic Commission as a concentrated

⁴⁰ Spanish const. ch. 2, § 1, art. 16. Emphasis mine.

⁴¹ Arigita, 565.

⁴² *Ibid.*

representative body for all Spanish Muslims, despite wide-ranging regional and religious differences. The origins of the Islamic Commission reflect the inflexibility of the Spanish state: “the imposition of one single interlocutor to the State inscribes again in a broad attempt to transform Muslim communities in accord with the norms of social and political life in Spain, since it was obviously inspired by the relationship model between the State and the Catholic Church.”⁴³ Here, the heterogeneous and geographically diverse Muslims could not overcome the traditional church-state model at the expense of true leadership. When asked if the Islamic Commission effectively represented the Spanish Muslim community, one Granada *converso* reported:

No, it is very badly represented. These men don’t represent the Muslims, they represent a structure that they have created and this is the thing that we all talk about...What these people have done is use the democratic system to establish themselves. Their position doesn’t spring from the grassroots level but from their ability to manipulate the distribution of power.⁴⁴

The Islamic Commission, then, exists as a consequence of the Spanish state’s propensity to treat Muslims as a monolithic group. Instead of promoting representation and cooperation with the Spanish state, as was its intended function, the commission has become an instrument of “political intrigues” and arbitrary treatment among Muslim groups.⁴⁵

The tenuous situation of the Islamic Commission and Muslim representation to the state became exacerbated with the bombing of the Madrid subway in 2004. A terrorist attack propagated by radical Muslims, it was seen in Spain as that country’s version of September 11, 2001. The events of March 11, 2004 cast Muslims, and especially their leaders, into the national spotlight.⁴⁶ The morning of March 11, numerous coordinated bombings took place aboard

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 567.

⁴⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 570.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 571.

commuter trains headed toward Madrid's city center, causing 191 deaths and more than 2,000 injuries.⁴⁷ Immediately, international focus centered on Muslim migrant communities and their imams (religious leaders), questioning the possibility of their ideological roles in the bombings. In January 2006, the Spanish government initiated "Operation Jackal," orchestrated to purge "Islamic terrorist" cells throughout the country. Numerous innocent Muslim community leaders were detained, including many of the men who had liaised with the government.⁴⁸ These events showed the fragility of the Spanish government's relationship with Muslims. By arresting many of the representatives of that community, the state deprived itself of meaningful interlocutors and allies. Additionally, it perpetuated the narrative of state-sponsored Islamophobia by targeting Muslims at the expense of community upheaval. Despite Spain's growing Muslim population and process of secularization, Islam remained an unofficial state opponent.

In the final analysis, the relationship between Muslims, and especially the *conversos*, and the Spanish state must be understood within the framework of the massive change occurring in contemporary Spain and the government's limited capacity to accommodate it given the country's secularization. As Gunther Dietz notes, a complex dichotomy strongly affects this relationship. First,

[T]he 'return of Islam' to the Iberian peninsula challenges the process of secularization which the Spanish state and society are currently undergoing; in this perspective, a fundamental contradiction resides in the relation between an all-encompassing, comprehensive world view—formerly Catholicism, nowadays Islam—on the one hand, an Western meta-religious laicism on the other hand.⁴⁹

Here, the tension between secularization and religious tradition, especially in its relation to the

⁴⁷ "Madrid Attacks Timeline," BBC News, March 12, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3504912.stm> (accessed March 10, 2015).

⁴⁸ Brad Erickson, "Utopian Virtues: Muslim Neighbors, Ritual Sociality, and the Politics of convivencia," *American Ethnologist* 38:1 (Feb. 2011), 114-131, 114.

⁴⁹ Gunther Dietz, "Frontier Hybridization or Culture Clash? Transnational Migrant Communities and Sub-National Identity Politics in Andalusia, Spain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30.6 (Nov. 2004): 1087-1112, 1096-97.

state, complicates the government's treatment of Muslims. On the other hand, "this perspective is constantly contradicted by an ancient rivalry which has been constitutive of the emergence and shaping of Spanish national identity, but which persists still now inside the Spanish and Andalusian majority society and culture: the perceived antagonism between Islam...and Catholicism."⁵⁰ The government's attempt to reconcile this clash of contemporary reality and historical tradition has been to deal with Islam as a monolith, for that is the only avenue it has experience with, thanks to its experience with the Catholic Church.

Additionally, the relationship of Spanish Muslims to the state, and particularly the *converso* community of Granada, can be understood as fraught by ideological rigidity generated by centuries of history. From the symbol of *Santiago Matamoros* to the extreme responses to the 2004 Madrid bombings, Muslims continue to exist, in a sense, as unofficial enemies of the state. Attached to a historical model of strong church-state relations, the government forcibly treats all Muslims as a monolith, denying the diversity of their origins, practices, and interests. In the case of the *conversos*, the Islamic Commission has devolved into a tool of power lacking adequate representation throughout the Muslim communities of Spain. Relations with the state, then, help define part of the *converso* identity: one that is strongly Islamic. As demonstrated, the *converso*'s interests remain forcibly united with other Muslims by the state's strategies of representation in the Islamic Commission.

Local Friction and the Construction of a New Mosque

A paradigmatic example of the complex relationship between Muslims and the Spanish government can be found in the construction of a *converso* community's mosque in Granada. Since the official recognition of Islam by the state in 1992, the small *converso* community had

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1097.

aspired to build its own mosque, a pivotal component in the creation of a stable community. They chose a plot of land in the historic *Albaicín*, centuries ago the heart of Islamic Granada, to be the site of their new spiritual home. Immediately, however, their initiative met with obstruction on virtually all sides. The *conversos* found that, despite the legal status of their religion and their generally European origins, “the Spanish and Catholic majority society” reacted with “rejection, complete ignorance and a lack of interest when interacting with Muslims.”⁵¹ In sum, the *conversos* encountered the age-old historical mistrust of Islam.

The concerns of non-Muslims resonated throughout every stage of the mosque’s construction. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, “representatives of local Catholic parish churches, religious fraternities, cultural heritage foundations as well as ‘associations of consumers and housewives’” successfully lobbied local politicians to block the creation of the mosque.⁵² Ironically, even cultural heritage groups dedicated to preserving the original character of the *Albaicín* district, once the center of Muslim life in Europe, fought strongly against the mosque’s construction. Mounds of bureaucratic red tape and delays for slow archeological excavations mothballed the project for years. Some anti-mosque activists raised many of the Islamophobic concerns mentioned above by Dietz. One Catholic neighbor feared that having “a Muslim community center in the middle of their neighborhood would ‘attract lots of criminals, illegal immigrants, homeless people and all these hippies hanging around here.’”⁵³ As the entire episode showed, the reintegration of Islam into contemporary Granada could not be solved simply by state recognition. The *conversos* waited for years to create their new spiritual home, and only succeeded in 2003 (see figure 4).

Even months following the completion of the Granada’s mosque, many of the *conversos*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1092.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1102.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

continued to express concerns over their position in the city's social fabric, especially due to commonly held stereotypes regarding Islam. One young *converso* gushed during a Friday sermon in the *mezquita*: "See...it's not like what you might think. You might think in the mosque they talk about terrorism, of who knows what, you know, fanatical stuff. But, see? It's just about, you know, 'Be virtuous!' and nothing more."⁵⁴ In this defensive explanation, one can see a remaining tension between the *converso* community and the larger society surrounding it, unceasingly paranoid following the events of September 11 and the 2004 Madrid bombings. Despite the physical integration of the mosque into the *Albaicín*, a stubborn ideological gap persists, based largely in history. Muslims and non-Muslims work and live side by side in relative harmony, a reminder of the legacy of *convivencia*, yet tensions remain due to historical animus, ignorance, and popularized images of Islam from well-publicized terror attacks. These mixed relations help explain the *converso* identity: straddling both Islam and non-Muslim Spain, working to overcome misunderstanding on the part of the latter.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Rogozen-Soltar, "Managing Muslim Visibility," 616.



***Conversos* and Muslim Migrant Communities**

The *conversos* in Granada share representation of Islam and similar struggles of identity with another group: Muslim migrants. Hailing primarily from North Africa and the Middle East, and especially from Morocco and Senegal, Granada's migrant communities manifest a distinct collective identity from the *conversos* in four significant ways: economic activity, national origin, religious interpretation, and experience of migration. Relations between the two groups are often fraught because of the cleavages those distinctions present. Nevertheless, these factors strongly help determine their communal identities in Granada. As their experiences with both non-Muslims and migrant Muslims show, the cosmopolitan *conversos* do not belong totally in either world: Islamic or Spanish.

Economic concerns influence both the *conversos* and migrants in different ways, but for the latter group, economics frame a key component of their identification with Granada. In contrast with the *conversos*, who typically first came to Granada for personal connections with relatives or acquaintances, economic necessity usually draws migrants to the city.⁵⁵ “Construction, street vending, agriculture, [and] tourism” often serve as migrant employment, due in part to migrants’ comparatively low wage demand.⁵⁶ The University of Granada also attracts highly skilled immigrants. Despite these trends, economic opportunities remain scarce while countless migrants find themselves without work. Taken together, the impact of migrants’ economic concerns typically outweigh those of the *conversos*. Most *conversos* enjoy middle- and upper-class status in Granada, living as home and business owners, “lawyers, doctors, restaurant and café owners, artists, and tourism entrepreneurs.”⁵⁷ Two of the elder *conversas* I interviewed noted that economic concerns played virtually no role in their move to Granada. Instead, as most *conversos* agreed, community far outweighed material need in their choices.

Community based upon nationality forms a key distinction between the *conversos* and migrants. While the *conversos* have established tight-knit communities, migrants face diminished family and communal support systems. Migrants’ struggles include a “weakly-knit migrant community network, with its newly-emerging ‘religious infrastructure’ of mosques, community meeting points, and stores which offer *halal* food as well as products from the region of origin.”⁵⁸ Lacking the necessities of home, migrants have become socially insular, associating only with fellow nationals. As Fatima, the *conversa* lecturer at the University of Granada notes,

⁵⁵ Gunther Dietz and Nadia El-Shohoumi, *Muslim Women in Southern Spain: Stepdaughters of al-Andalus* (La Jolla, CA: Center for Comparative Immigration, 2005), 16-17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Rogozen-Soltar, “Managing Muslim Visibility,” 613.

⁵⁸ Dietz, 1091.

the migrant groups “consist only of divisions—it’s not migrant communities, it’s nationalities.”⁵⁹ Ibrahim, a Senegalese migrant, affirmed this observation, noting that relatively little cooperation or understanding exists between Muslim communities.⁶⁰ Despite the intention of forming tight migrant communities, comparatively weak networks provide obstacles: “Whereas the migrant Muslims give the impression that they want intense community relations, the convert Muslims have succeeded in building up strong and stable, although rather small communities.”⁶¹ In this, the *conversos* evidence a greater sense of community, despite their heterogeneity.

Consequences of these differences in community have been exclusion and religious misunderstanding. In general, *conversos* maintain an ambivalent view of migrant Muslims, seeing them as affected by institutional and “cultural baggage in need of abjuration.”⁶² This so-called “baggage,” manifested as traditions, dress, and religious practice brought to Spain from North Africa emphasizes divisions between migrants and *conversos*, who see themselves as unhindered by cultural limitations. In the experience of migrants, these divisions are often expressed as slights considered unconscionable among many Muslims. For example, Mohammed, a Moroccan migrant, and a female friend once went to the *conversos*’ new mosque to explore, only to be denied entry. Mohammed explained that he and his head-scarfed friend were Muslims and wished only to see the mosque, yet was again spurned: ““They wouldn’t let me in! To a *mosque*! Which to me, as a Muslim, is a sacred place! I felt *rejected*, and by other *Muslims*!” Mohammed felt certain that he was denied entry because he was a Moroccan and, thus, not considered a part of the [*converso*] mosque community.”⁶³ In this instance, *converso* exclusivity led to the rejection of a fellow Muslim for reasons that, in the eyes of Mohammed,

⁵⁹ Fatima, interview by author.

⁶⁰ Ibrahim (name changed to protect privacy), interview by author. Granada, Spain, October 16, 2014.

⁶¹ Dietz, 1093.

⁶² Rogozen-Soltar, “Managing Muslim Visibility,” 620.

⁶³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 618. Emphasis in original.

demonstrated a lack of “fluency in both Islamic theology and social norms.”⁶⁴

Another instance of cultural miscommunication based upon religious difference can be found in *conversos*’ dress habits. A young Moroccan woman, Rana, expressed dismay at *conversos*’ tendency to “downplay the Islamic pillars and engage in unorthodox practices, sacrificing piety to appeal to Catholic or secular sensibilities.” She demurred:

They have different practices, ones that make you feel uncomfortable, like they wear makeup, and strong perfume, and a different kind of headscarf. You just don’t feel at ease praying [in the *converso* mosque]. The women are too focused on appearances, and not on the prayer...It’s an adaptation of Islam to the West. They wear those kinds of headscarves to avoid scaring people so much.⁶⁵

The accusation of associating appearance with impiety demonstrates a notable difference between the *conversos* and migrants, particularly regarding norms of modesty. Because the *conversos* uphold a less stringent form of Islam, their rules of modesty concern other Muslims. As Fatima explained, the *conversos*’ is a “decaf Islam,” less concerned about strictness in dress and more about worship—opposite the view of Rana.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the custom among *conversa* women to wear headscarves at all, even in this altered manner, continues to serve as a reminder of the *conversos*’ faith to non-Muslims. In this, the cosmopolitan *conversos* exist between cultures: too “Western” for some migrants, yet visibly Muslim to non-Muslims.

In analyzing these incidents, both typical of the *converso* community’s relations with migrants, one sees the consequences of divergent economic and communal experiences. The *conversos*, convinced that their community remains unimpeded by cultural “baggage,” indeed generated baggage by refusing admittance to Mohammed and his friend. Similarly, they deepened the divides between themselves and migrants by adopting more “Western” customs of dress, while appealing to non-Muslim fashion sense. They exhibited behaviors typical of the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Fatima, interview by author.

non-Muslim majority society: Arabophobia (by rejecting Moroccans) and, indirectly, Islamophobia (by rejecting fellow Muslims). By this rejection and by adopting non-traditional dress, the *conversos* demonstrate their identity: a hybrid between Islam and European Spain.

Questions over Arabophobia and Islamophobia, separating *conversos* from migrants, manifest themselves most acutely in the waves of illegal immigration constantly arriving on Spanish shores. Along with the Italian island of Lampedusa, Andalusia sees an enormous number of migrants attempting to enter Europe illegally.⁶⁷ Primarily, economic interest drives the waves of illegal immigration, and “as a result of Spain’s EU integration and its participation in the Schengen Treaty, the country’s southern shores are also strategically chosen as a point of entry, not only to Spain, but to the EU Schengen territory as such.”^{68 69} In recent years, this issue has grown to crisis proportions, as hundreds of migrants die trying to enter Spain. In Granada, located near the Mediterranean coast, the situation is among the most dire. In a single week in September 2013, for example, Spanish authorities discovered 194 migrants in the Mediterranean Sea off the Granada coast: some pregnant, some children, and twelve dead.^{70 71} These events demonstrate the difficulty of life among migrants, and the stark divide between them and the *conversos*. Virtually all of Granada’s *conversos* are legally present there and hold stable jobs, while migrants often struggle to feed themselves after their often-illicit entry into Spain. While embodying hybridized identity in many respects, the *conversos* enjoy the benefits of European

⁶⁷ Eric Lyman, “Tiny Italian Island Becomes Symbol of Europe’s Migrant Crisis.” *Washington Times*, March 8, 2015, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/mar/8/lampedusa-italy-becomes-symbol-of-europes-migrant/> (accessed March 9, 2015).

⁶⁸ Paul Schemm, “African Migrants Risk Lives To Reach Europe,” *Huffington Post*, April 9, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/09/african-migrants-europe_n_5117035.html (accessed February 25, 2015).

⁶⁹ Dietz, 1090. The Schengen Treaty, effective in 1995, eliminated border controls between the signatory nations, allowing goods, services, and personnel to travel freely between them.

⁷⁰ “12 Illegal Immigrants Die as Boat Capsizes off Andalucía Coastline,” *Spanish News Today*, September 16, 2013, http://spanishnewstoday.com/12-illegal-immigrants-die-as-boat-capsizes-off-andalucia-coastline_18668-a.html#.VO4uRL7lc5h (accessed February 25, 2015).

⁷¹ “45 Immigrants Rescued off Granada Coast on Saturday,” *Spanish News Today*, September 9, 2013, http://spanishnewstoday.com/45-immigrants-rescued-off-granada-coast-on-saturday_18597-a.html#.VO4uRL7lc5g (accessed February 25, 2015).

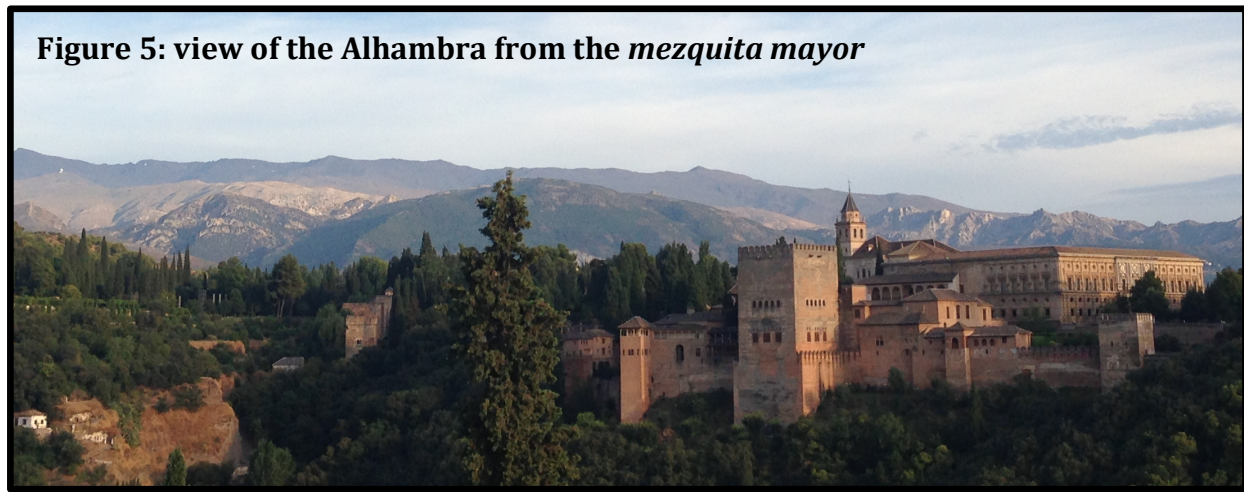
and North American origin and socioeconomic stability. These privileges influence *converso* identity to an equal extent as their religion.

The often-fraught relations between Granada's *converso* community and its migrant coreligionists demonstrate two important truths: that Islam in Spain is not monolithic, and that the members of the *converso* community cannot neatly identify with either the "Western" or "Islamic" worlds. In Granada, cleavages between the two groups exist based largely upon economic need, community affiliation, religious interpretation, and migration status. As the above analysis shows, the *conversos* exhibit cosmopolitan traits that cross cultural divides. In comparison with the migrants, who struggle with clinging to national identities in an alien land, the *conversos*' identities reflect a new political hybridity of identity, between Islamic and Spanish.

Conclusions: *Conversos*, Granada, and Andalusian Identity

As this paper has demonstrated, Granada's *converso* community inhabits a historical and sociopolitical crossroads: between the vaunted past of Islamic al-Andalus and a burgeoning multicultural society in the contemporary city. On a higher scale, however, Granada and its *converso* community reflect a longer-running discourse in Andalusia: a mix between Christian and Ibero-Roman heritage and Islamic and North African roots. As history shows, Spain is a profoundly hybridized country, and Andalusia, as the region closest to Africa, stands at the heart of that process. Andalusia takes its name from Islamic al-Andalus, and the influence of Islam on its architecture, toponymy, urban planning, and language is ubiquitous. While medieval and early modern Spanish (especially Castilian) culture emphasized hostility toward Islam, Andalusia could not easily shake its Muslim heritage. The monuments of al-Andalus that dotted the

countryside and cityscapes captured the imagination of both locals and foreign visitors, and nowhere more so than in the Alhambra of Granada (see figure 5).



These reminders of al-Andalus and pressures to move toward a multicultural society have resurrected a positive association with Islam in contemporary Andalusia, one embodied by the *conversos*. These “Andalusian regionalist strategies of Islamophilia, which claim that a ‘return of Islam’ and/or the pluri-religious society of Al-Andalus will empower the region’s ongoing search for a supra-local, but sub-national and non-Castilian common identity,”⁷² are well underway. As explained above, the *conversos* draw on the refugee legacy of Granada’s past to provide a safe haven for Muslims today. Most *conversos* are foreign-born, resisting the dominant ethnocentric Castilian narrative. What’s more, Granada’s *converso* community claims the celebrated Spanish principle of religious tolerance and coexistence, *convivencia*, as their own because of their city’s role as the last Muslim kingdom of Spain. The *conversos* help embody many of the elements that help define contemporary Andalusia, and thus their identities can be understood in relation to their homeland.

Granada and Andalusia bridge the Islamic and Catholic Spanish worlds, and the

⁷² Dietz, 1087.

conversos personify that connection. Andalusia's role in Spain's "still recent integration into the European Union and its subsequent role as a European 'gate-keeper' at the margins of the continent [are] ambiguously re-defining the region's self-perception."⁷³ Andalusia balances its position in Spain, a member of the European Union and an avowedly Catholic nation for most of its modern history, with its historical and contemporaneous ties to North Africa and Islam. In like fashion, the *converso* community continues to grapple with its own identity, especially regarding Islam and Granadas's migrant communities. Khadija, the young *conversa*, explained that Granada and Andalusia's cultural bridge helps define this identity:

I think our mosque community is—a lot of people aren't from Granada—they're much more open to outsiders. If we believe in the same things, despite color, it's about love for God and each other. People come on quests for knowledge—from east to west—and the Quran makes us protect them.⁷⁴

There is a community bound by faith and a connection to their city, forged from a cosmopolitan attitude. Established decades ago amid the birth of a new, democratic Spain taking its first steps toward multiculturalism, the *conversos* draw on the legacy of *convivencia* and cultural advancement left by the pinnacles of al-Andalus, Córdoba and Islamic Granada. The *conversos* endured a deeply engrained Islamophobia prevalent throughout Spanish society that affected their relations with the government. Their communal identity can only be characterized as cosmopolitan and mixed: a blend between Islamic faith and origins in Europe and North America. As their experiences with both non-Muslims and migrant Muslims demonstrate, the *conversos* fit neatly into neither world. Like Granada and Andalusia, the *conversos* straddle cultural divides, representing a new, multiethnic society.

⁷³ Dietz, 1089.

⁷⁴ Khadija, interview by author.

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Figures

Figure 1: *Taifas* [map]. Scale not given. “Islamic Legacy and Viticulture.” Vine to Wine Circle. <http://www.vinetowinecircle.com/en/history/islamic-legacy-and-viticulture/> (accessed February 25, 2015).

Figure 2: Maurel, Joaquín. *Plano de la Granada musulmana* [*Plan of Muslim Granada*]. 1988. *El Jardín del Albaydero*. <http://eljardindelalbaydero.blogspot.com/2012/07/antiguas-casernas-y-almunias-del-nuevo.html> (accessed December 10, 2013).

Figure 3: *Reino de Granada*. November 30, 2007. Wikimedia Foundation. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emirate_of_Granada#mediaviewer/File:Reino_de_Granada.svg (accessed February 25, 2015).

Figure 4: Braun, Georg, et al., eds. *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*. Vol. 1. “Granada.” Cologne, 1563. Plate 4.

Figure 5: “Alhambra.” Granada. September 6, 2013. Personal photograph by author. JPG file.

On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this capstone.

- EJPL