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Family Matters: Muslims in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America

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Abstract

History has so far paid scant attention to Muslims in the earliest phase of colonizing the Americas. As a general policy, the Spanish Crown prohibited all non-Catholics from going to early Spanish America. Nevertheless, historians recognize that a few Muslims managed to secretly cross the Atlantic Ocean with the European settlers during the sixteenth century. Later they imported African Muslim slaves but historians considered both Africans and the indigenous peoples passive participants in forming Latin American society until evidence refuted these erroneous views. Furthermore, the public had assumed that only single Spanish men went to the American unknown until historians challenged this view, and now women's role is fully recognized in the colonizing enterprise. Additionally, despite the ban on non-Catholics, researchers found many Jews in the Americas, even if the Spanish Inquisition found out and killed almost all of them. In line with revisionist history, my research pioneers in three aspects. It demonstrates that Muslim men and women went to early Spanish America. Also, the Spanish Crown allowed Muslims to legally go to its American colonies. Additionally, the documents substantiate my new findings that Muslims went to sixteenth-century Latin America as complete families. They mostly proceeded out of Spain as the wards or

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servant-slaves of Spanish settlers after superficially converting to Catholicism. The present study follows two case studies that record Muslim families in early sixteenth-century Spanish America. Paradoxically, their very persecutor—the Spanish Church and its terrible Inquisitorial arm—established their contested belief in Islam.

Keywords

settler, servant, slave, conquistador, Cuba, agency, Inquisition, New Spain, *morisco*, Muhammadan, *taqiyyah*.

Introduction

The dawn of the sixteenth century witnessed the beginning of unprecedented transcontinental traffic and the reordering of society on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, two iconic events in 1492 transformed the Atlantic and Islamic worlds, the fall of Muslim Granada and the opening of a navigable sea route from Spain to the Caribbean. Both events impacted Muslim families and their relocation to Latin America.

A trickle of transatlantic migration began slowly growing when settlers started taking along slaves after Hernán Cortés led Spanish colonization to the American continent in 1502. Initially, slaves were of varied skin colours, castes, and creeds, including Spanish Muslims, enslaved when they offered resistance to excessive taxes, social ostracism, and other problems. Slaves worked inside settler homes as domestic servants and outside in multiple productive activities. The authorities allowed Spanish families to have domestic servants as an incentive to migrate, stabilize settler communities, and transplant Spanish culture abroad when few were willing to venture into the American unknown. In the face of this early colonial demand for domestic servants, there was a supply of captured Muslims in Spain.

During the sixteenth century, the Spanish Crown offered Muslims of Spain the choice between exile to foreign lands and conversion to Catholicism. Few persons were willing to leave their ancestral home, and those who left Spain always hoped to return one day. Similarly, those who chose to, or were forced to, convert did so almost always with the hope to continue to practice their religion secretly. Moreover, when the Crown mandated that even converts could only remain in its domains enslaved to practising Catholics, Muslims and others often accepted this option. As a result, Spanish society was transformed from religious plurality to homogenous Catholicism, and slavery became an instrument for non-Catholics to remain in Spain.

Slavery further transformed the nascent Spanish state and transatlantic societies during the sixteenth century. Slavery was not yet institutionalized into its later rigid form but continued as it had existed for long, with elements of adoption, apprenticeship, and bonded servitude. Traditionally too, slavery was colour blind and stigma-free. It could mean defeat in war or politics. However, the enslaved could overcome these setbacks and even transform into ruling slave dynasties. Under early modern Christian rule, the Muslims of Spain fell into both categories of apprentices and defeated prisoners. By the seventeenth century, this changed and radically transformed transatlantic societies. Slaves became chattel, saleable property with no rights, often branded to remain a slave for life, distinguished by skin colour and against whom the ideology of racism was institutionalized. However, by then, few Spanish Muslims were available for enslavement.

Sixteenth-century Europe underwent a further transition in the basic concepts of social formation. From several autonomous kingdoms, Madrid centralized power, including the power to tax people. Feudalism began to end and mercantilist capital took over. The extended household of the Iberian Peninsula began to break up. It came under the pressure of colonial migration and presented new possibilities for independence and acquiring wealth beyond the restrictions of patriarchal property accumulation through inheritance. At the same time, sixteenth-century migrant families were forced to coordinate their activities and practices in different parts of the world. The present research shows that Muslim families that accompanied Spanish settlers to Latin America faced these multiple difficulties, making family matters take precedence over their religion.

The struggle between survival and religious practice took a peculiar form for Muslim families in the Spanish domain. Politically defeated and targeted by the Crown and Church that scattered their communities and even their families, Spanish Muslims could only hold on to some form of syncretic belief. The authorities baptized them, gave them Christian names, and even changed their name to *morisco*, or little moor. Some *moriscos* genuinely converted to Catholicism. Others secretly remained faithful to Islam.

On the one hand, the Spanish Church suspected genuine converts of apostasy and heresy. However, on the other hand, secret Muslims forgot the Arabic language and only vaguely remembered Islamic prayers and cultural practices. As a result, the line became forever fuzzy between convert and practising Muslims in the Spanish territories.

Due to their formal conversion, documentation is scarce about

Muslims in Spain and more so in colonial Latin America. Therefore, it is difficult to establish their numbers, location, practices, and reconstruction of their biographies and family narratives. This difficulty is compounded by the desire of both the Spanish colonial authorities and of the Muslims themselves to erase their religion and distinct identity from public view and the historical record. The authorities wanted to project a Catholic settler society, whereas the Muslims' survival in Latin America depended upon avoiding attention to their religion, which makes the historians' task extremely complex.

Spanish authorities also obfuscated the presence of Muslims by employing complicated terminology for their religion and race. Among other epithets, they called Muslims *musulmanes, mohmentanos, moros, mudejares, esclavos blancos*, and *moriscos*. Occasionally the terminology caused utter confusion when the colonial authorities applied similar terms to indigenous Americans, African slaves, and children of mixed marriages. To cite one example, Mexican authorities also considered the children of brown Mexican and black African parents as *morisco*.

Literature has often discussed the idea of documenting Muslims in early Spanish America. We may cite colonial memoirs and historical fiction. The novel *Lucas el morisco o el destino de un manucrito encontrado* describes descendants of Muslims in Latin America, including colonial Chile.[1] Stories abound about Emir Cigala/Gregorio Zapata, who arrived in present-day Bolivia in 1561.[2] Laila Lalami's novel *The Moor's Account* is based on Mustafa Zemourri/Estaványico/Stephen documents.[3] Mustafa was part of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's 1528 expedition to Florida leading to Texas. This voyage places Mustafa, a Muslim man, amongst the first recorded explorers of North America. These were all men and the evidence to date remains sparse on Muslims in Spanish America.

My pioneering findings contest received knowledge about the absence of Muslims, especially Muslim women, in early colonial Latin America. I examine their legal status, find their accompanying families, and interrogate the historical record: How did migrant Muslim families negotiate transatlantic family and kin relationships at the dawn of European imperialism? Did they factor economic survival into these negotiations? Were the authorities concerned with their capital accumulation? My central concerns are families among post-1492

[1] Adriana Arriagada de Lassel, *Lucas el morisco o el destino de un manucrito encontrado* (Toledo: Editorial Azacanes, 2005).

[2] See José María Gonzílez Ochoa, "Gregorio Zapata," in *Diccionario Biográfico electrónico*, https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/100428/gregorio-zapata.

[3] Laila Lalami, *The Moor's Account* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014).

individual Muslims in Latin America. I take the example of two women, one slave and one free, who happened to be Muslim. On a broader scale, these family histories offer a contribution to transnationalism in the early modern period.

In sixteenth-century Latin America, the overwhelming majority of Muslims were women who accompanied wealthy Spaniards across the Atlantic to recreate Spanish society. They came in significant numbers, either as part of extended households or as members of their own small families. Their priority was the survival of their nuclear family. Their extended family in Spain was better forgotten, especially for the official record. Only secondarily they managed to maintain their religion and culture. After all, like all Spanish immigrants, they had to make their way in an oft–hostile environment, but, in addition, they had to hide visible signs of their Islamic identity. They could not create Muslim communities to practice their religion correctly. We will find that they took the important decisions of their lives in the best interests of their families rather than as individuals and utilized family networks to articulate and negotiate economic survival in early colonial Latin America. Their families mattered enormously to them and the anguish of separation echoes painfully in their transnational stories.

A Cuban Muslim Slave

The first family history takes us to early sixteenth-century Cuba. Its main protagonist is a female Muslim domestic servant who was not the only white home-helper in the Americas. An early reference to Muslim women servants in Cuba concerns a cleric who established his household on the island and obtained a travel permit for his Muslim servants from the House of Trade (Casa de la Contratación) in Seville. Miguel Ramírez, the Franciscan Bishop of the islands of Cuba and Jamaica, obtained official permission to transport two Muslim women to "Fernandina" as the Spaniards then called Cuba. The permit dated March 20, 1528, exempted him from paying the mandatory export tax and permit dues for servants.[4]

Women were active in the colonization of Latin America as domestic servants, leaders, and owners of enslaved servants. Most prominent women were the relatives of governors, but sometimes they were important in their own right. Isabel de Bobadilla was Governor (1539-43) of Cuba when her husband went to discover Florida; Aldonza Villalobos Manrique became Governor of Venezuela when her father died in 1526

[4] *Archivo General de Indias* (henceforth *AGI*), Seville, Indiferente, 421, L.13, fols. 68r-v.

(and effectively during 1541-1575); Maria Álvarez de Toledo y Rojas governed Santo Domingo during 1514-1523 in the absence of her husband Diego Columbus, the son of Christopher Columbus; and her cousin Beatriz de la Cueva was briefly the first woman Governor in the Indies (Guatemala) in 1541. Beatriz famously came to the Indies with twenty women retainers who could have been Muslim in keeping with the times, as we shall see in the extended Bobadilla and Arias Dávila families.

Isabel de Bobadilla was the daughter of Maria Peñalosa and Pedro Arias de Ávila (also known as Pedrarias Dávila), Governor of Panama (1514-1526) and founder of Panama City, and later Governor of Nicaragua (1527-1531). She was the owner of several enslaved Spanish Muslim women.[5] The names Bobadilla and Peñalosa ring out repeatedly among the nobility and clergy of sixteenth-century Spain and Spanish America. On February 16, 1538, the Spanish Crown issued a Royal Order addressed to the officials of the House of Trade to give a permit to doña Isabel de Bobadilla to transport to Cuba three Muslim women for her service.[6]

Isabel de Bobadilla was married to Hernando de Soto, Governor of Cuba, and served in his stead as Governor when he was officially sent to explore the peninsula of Florida. Isabel had a sister called Maria de Peñalosa, and they were daughters of Francisco Bobadilla, who in 1499 had become the successor to Christopher Columbus as Governor of the Indies. Doña Maria was the wife of Rodrigo de Contreras, Governor of Nicaragua. Both these sisters, Rodrigo de Contreras, and his son-in-law Pedro de los Ríos[7] (who became Nicaragua's Governor after Rodrigo went to defend himself in the Madrid court successfully) had obtained permits to transport enslaved Muslim women to the Caribbean islands before they had migrated from Spain. In one sample document, "doña Maria and her daughter in Cuba" were authorized on February 11, 1536, to acquire a Muslim woman from Spain on their own authority.[8] In this terse statement, we find Maria de Peñalosa y Bobadilla acting on her own

[5] Ibid., Patronato 1, 203 and 258, cited in Josefina Muriel, *Las mujeres de hispanoamérica: Época colonial* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992), 232.
[6] *AGI*, Indiferente, 1962, L.5, fols. 331r-331v.
[7] Bartolomé Tello, resident of the city of Granada, in the province of Nicaragua, against Rodrigo de Contreras, Governor of that province, on the right to half of the duties of the Indian village of Mombacho. Ibid., Justicia, 343, Nº 1, 1542-1547.
[8] Ibid., Sección V, Audiencia de Santo Domingo, Cuba, Registros de Oficio y Portes, reales ordenes dirigidas a las Autoridades y Corporaciones de la Isla, años 1529-1550, est. 79, caj. 4 leg., 1, tomo 2, f. 58 cited in José Torre Revello, "Esclavas blancas en las Indias occidentales," *Boletín del Instituto de Investigaciones Históricos* 6, nos. 33-36 (1927-1928): 267.

and coordinating transatlantic efforts with her daughter to obtain personnel for their households in the Indies. The Spanish Crown encouraged married couples to colonize the Americas, as it expected that the establishment of households would lead not only to a stable society but also to the flourishing of Spanish culture and norms, including language and cuisine. Nevertheless, single persons did go to the Americas, and among them were several *solteras* or single women. Leonor Bobadilla was one such young woman, who was in the entourage of Isabel Bobadilla and Hernando de Soto. Leonor was a distant cousin of Isabel. She was the daughter of the Count of Gomera, the island where this entourage that included two other families made its first stop en route to the Indies. The Count had given his daughter to be Lady Bobadilla's "daughter," or maid-in-waiting. Since Leonor was 17 years old and extremely beautiful, de Soto and his wife hoped to arrange a good match for her.[9] Thus, the de Soto household had collaborated with the Count to extend his family ties into Latin America, accumulating in return the goodwill of both father and daughter and her future husband.

When the large entourage arrived in Cuba, the Governor and his wife busied themselves with setting up a household and establishing a government. De Soto also began preparations to embark upon his exploration of nearby Florida. Such missions were an attractive means to enrich conquistadors, especially as the chief appointed Explorer, to whom the Spanish Crown might grant land, various rights over the new domain, and high social status. While preparing for the mission, de Soto's men were left with plenty of free time devoted to social diversion.

Not surprisingly, the young and beautiful Leonor attracted the officers' attention, and Nuño Tovar, de Soto's Chief of Camp and companion from earlier days in Nicaragua, began to court her. Unfortunately, this led to her becoming pregnant, and though Tovar sought forgiveness and married Leonor, de Soto was not appeased. He refused to give Tovar adequate rank in his exploratory army, and, as fate would have it, both men died in the disastrous mission to Florida.[10]

Why was de Soto furious with Tovar's romantic alliance with Leonor? Tovar had done the "right thing" by marrying her; they were in love; he was an eligible bachelor; he had a bright future ahead; he had

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[9] Charles Hudson, *Knights of Spain, Warriors of the Sun: Hernando de Soto and the South's Ancient Chiefdoms* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 52.

[10] Theodore Maynard, *De Soto and the Conquistadores* (London: Longsman, Green, and Co., 1930), 133-34 and Nancy O'Sullivan-Beere, *Las mujeres de los conquistadores: La mujer española en los comienzos de la colonización americana* (Madrid: Compañía Bibliográfica Española, 1956), 291.

earned the trust of the Governor and patriarchal head of the de Soto-Bobadilla house. Nevertheless, he had undermined de Soto's role as arbitrator of social alliances, and he had done so in full view of the entire settler community. The Governor had not adopted a beautiful daughter, the bearer of an honourable and noble name, and brought her across the ocean just to see his authority challenged. He had aimed to arrange her marriage to display his power and prestige and enhance his social networks and wealth, but Tovar had short-circuited that carefully wired construction.

There are several other stories about young women in the entourages of important women, such as Doña Maria de Toledo, who went to the Americas to find suitable husbands. They often managed to make good matches and, like Leonor Bobadilla, lost their husbands to war and repeatedly married, sometimes up to four times. In the process, they usually accumulated wealth and family connections. Such women were always in the market to import Spanish female domestic help. For example, Isabel came to the Indies with three enslaved women—possibly *moriscos*—who had been Christians since before they were twelve years of age.[11]

Documents on the Bobadilla family allow a partial reconstruction of the story of one such Muslim woman, named Isabel, not to be confused with her owner or the owner's relatives by the same name. She was a companion to Isabel Bobadilla, who, we know, was the wife of Hernando de Soto, Governor of Cuba.[12] Isabel the Muslim was easily distinguishable from her mistress in person, as she was branded on the face. The owners of white Spanish Muslim slaves usually branded their wards on a visible part of the body. Branding was one of the few methods to recognize a free Spaniard from a slave. Like branding animals, branding people also signified chattel property and displayed the owner's wealth and status.

In keeping with her social standing and wealth, Lady Bobadilla possessed two other Muslim women servants whom she brought to America.[13] The three women arrived in Havana, Cuba, under a permit dated February 16, 1538.[14] As we have already learnt, Lady Bobadilla assumed the governorship of Cuba during her husband's absence and was later widowed in 1542. Soon afterwards, she freed her Muslim slave Isabel. Even though Isabel Bobadilla formally declared her slave to be

[11] Hudson, *Knights of Spain*, 48.
[12] Revello, "Esclavas blancas en las Indias occidentales," 268.
[13] Juan F. Maura, "Esclavas españolas en el Nuevo mundo: una nota histórica," *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 2 (1993): 192.
[14] *AGI*, Indiferente, 1962, L.5, fol. 239v.

free, however, in the documents, the Muslim continued to be called a slave. After gaining her freedom, Isabel married a fisherman Alberto Díez, continued to reside in Havana and had two daughters.

Some years later, Lady Bobadilla returned to Spain and took the freed Muslim woman and her daughters as her companions. According to her travel permit in Madrid, where she had been born, the companion applied to return to Cuba to be with her husband Alberto Díez. She could not have done that unless she had accumulated the economic means—or at least the necessary sponsorship—to make the return trip with her two daughters. Initially, the House of Trade in Seville that authorized travel to and from the Spanish colonies had an objection to the Muslim's return trip. Later it granted her the following travel permit in January 1546:

> Officials of the Emperor and my Lord the King who reside in the city of Seville in the House of Trade of the Indies, on behalf of the Lady Isabel de Bobadilla, widow of the Explorer Lord Hernando de Soto, [who] has recounted to me that the time that she and her said husband went to the Indies, among the other people that they took along, a white woman [Muslim] slave, branded on the face, born in this city, called Isabel and after the death of her husband she freed [Aorro[15]] her. The said slave Isabel married in Havana Alberto Diez, a fisherman, with whom she had two daughters, and she [Lady Isabel de Bobadilla] brought with her for service during the time that she would be in this kingdom the said Isabel [who had] left there, in the said city of Havana, the said husband and house and to which the said Muslim slave wishes to return and where stayed [behind] her said husband and that you [all] did not wish to allow her to go, for which she is aggrieved and has supplicated me. [You are] required to allow the said Muslim Isabel to freely go to the said city of Havana or as my order is carried out by the Council of the Indies of your Majesty along with certain information that was placed before them, it was agreed that they would be sent this Letter of mine so that you and I express willingness to allow, and agree to allow, the said Isabel to go to the said city of Havana and make her life with her said husband and to take with her the children that she had with him without putting, or agreeing to put, any hurdle [in their way]. Dated in the city of Madrid, 13 January, in the year 1546.[16]

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[15] *Ahorrar* or "de a ya horro" meant to manumit a slave. *Diccionario de la lengua española*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1984), 1:47, and updated Spanish transcription in Maura, "Esclavas españolas," 193.

[16] *AGI*, Indiferente, 1963, L.9, fols. 318r-v; transcription in Maura, "Esclavas españolas," 193-94 and Revello, "Esclavas blancas," 269: "Oficiales del emperador y rey mi señor que residís en la ciudad de Sevilla en la Casa de la Contratación de las Indias por parte de dona Isabel de Bobadilla viuda mujer que fue del Adelantado don Hernando de Soto me ha sido hecha relación que al tiempo que ella y el dicho su marido pasaron a las Indias

The document makes it evident that Lady Bobadilla had appealed to Prince Philip—who was to become Philip II, King of Spain, in 1556—on behalf of her Muslim female companion. In its original form, the document uses two epithets interchangeably, *esclava blanca* or white woman slave and *morisca* or converted Muslim woman, both terms meaning follower of Islam. The Muslim woman exercised considerable agency to successfully use her influence with Lady Bobadilla, a significant political player in both Spain and its colonies, to contact the highest Spanish authorities to reunite her scattered family. Her family mattered enormously to both her and the authorities on both sides of the Atlantic.

The prince of Spain issued the required return travel permit in 1546 for Muslim Isabel to go back to Havana.[17] The Muslim woman returned to Havana accompanied by her children, and the story ends there, at least in the archives of the Indies. We can imagine her living happily ever after in the balmy port town of Havana, with Alberto Díez, her fisherman husband, and their two daughters, and maybe more offspring. The girls had lived in Spain for three years and absorbed its culture during their stay. With the accumulated social capital from service among the Spanish nobility, they would be much sought after in the colonies. These Muslim women raised the status of the humble fisher family and opened the door for their accumulation of wealth in the Indies.

The term *esclava blanca* or white enslaved Muslim woman that describes the slave Isabel in this early Cuban-Spanish family requires elaboration. Spaniards used it to distinguish these white-skinned slaves from the black slaves they had begun to purchase in bulk from Africa. The Spanish slave markets contained some persons of fair skin who had

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entre la otra gente que llevaron fue una esclava blanca herrada en la cara nacida en esa ciudad que se llama Isabel y que después de muerto el dicho su marido ella la Aorro la cual dicha Isabel se caso en la Habana con Alberto Diez pescador de quien tiene ya dos hijas y que para su servicio al tiempo que ella vino a estos reinos trajo consigo a la dicha Isabel y dejo allá en la dicha villa de la Habana al dicho su marido y casa y que ahora la dicha esclava se quiere volver donde quedo el dicho su marido e que vosotros no la queréis dejar pasar de lo que recibe agravio y me fue suplicado os mandase que libremente déjaseles pasar a la dicha villa de la Habana la dicha Isabel morisca o como la mi merced fuese lo cual visto por los del Consejo de las Indias de Su M[ajestad] juntamente con cierta información que ante ellos fue presentada fue acordado que debía mandar dar esta mi Carta para que vos y yo túvelo por bien porque vos mando que dejéis y consistáis pasar a la dicha villa de la Habana la dicha Isabel a hacer vida con el dicho su marido y llevar consigo los hijos que del tuviera sin que en ello le pongáis ni consistáis poner impedimento alguno. Fecha en la villa de Madrid a 13 de enero de 1546 años."

[17] Maura, "Esclavas españolas," 193.

become prisoners-of-war in the Balkans or captured off the Barbary Coast, present-day Maghreb, the Mediterranean coast of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. All these areas were under Ottoman or other Islamic rulers, and most of their inhabitants were fair-skinned.

The Spanish forces also captured fellow Spaniards during the frequent Muslim rebellions within Spain, such as the Alpujarras revolt of 1568-70 in the Kingdom of Granada. During this rebellion, the parents of our second protagonist, Maria Ruíz, sent her off to Ciudad Real in the Kingdom of Castile. Such Spanish Muslims were likely to be as fair-skinned as any other Spaniard. The Spanish authorities coined the term *morisco* in the sixteenth century to designate converted Spanish Muslims. The same authorities had earlier designated the followers of Islam as *musulmanes* or *mohometanos*. They called unconverted or practising Muslims living under Christian sovereignty *mudéjares.* With the forced conversion, the term began to die out, to be replaced with *morisco*. By the eighteenth century, the term *morisco* also faded away on the assumption that only Christians, or properly speaking, Catholics, remained in the Spanish domain.

How can we best describe this group of Muslims, by religion or by race? After all, a change of faith did not change one's origins. Did they descend from European stock, or were they descendants of Muslim Arab migrants to Spain? In reality, they were both, because, during 800 years of Islamic rule in Spain, many natives had converted to Islam voluntarily or by force. Under Islamic rule, Arab culture dominated much of the peninsula. The Arabic language had functioned as the *lingua franca* and continued to be spoken in Southern Spain as late as the seventeenth century. Thus, markers, such as race, language, culture, or formal religious conversion, were not accurate guides for figuring out who in sixteenth-century Spain was Muslim.

Was it possible to distinguish the Muslim and *morisco–esclavo blanco* populations according to their belief and practice? As the sixteenth century advanced, such questions became more complex after the Spanish Crown and Church enforced widespread conversion from Islam to Catholicism. In the end, it did not matter if the conversion was forced or voluntary, as even voluntary conversion was an active act of disguise or *taqiyyah*. Religious practice in public made it difficult to distinguish a secret Muslim from a Christian. As racism began to set into the popular imagination during the following centuries, the *morisco* slowly began to be imagined as dark-complexioned—much like the "Moor" in the English language—and thus seen to be a race apart. In our second story, about Maria Ruíz in Mexico, she had no obvious visual markers, which forced

the Inquisition to delve into the confusing details of her religious practices to ascribe such terms to her as *morisca* and *mahometana*.

Studies on slavery in Spain indicate that 93 per cent of white slaves were Muslims who were captured in Spain.[18] White slavery in Spain diminished in direct proportion to the snuffing out of revolt by its Muslims or *moriscos*. We have already seen that white Muslim slaves were branded to tell them apart from free white people—Spanish law prohibiting the enslavement of fellow Catholics. In contrast, the Spanish Church threw into the Inquisitorial fires Jews, Protestants especially Lutherans, witches, other "deviants," and Muslims. Spanish historiography has, therefore, long recognized that the term *esclavo blanco* camouflaged the appellative *musulman*.[19] We conclude the fortunes of our Cuban story about the Spanish-Cuban, transnational, five-member Muslim family of Isabel and Alberto Diez. While we do not have details about their religious beliefs or practices, we know that they struggled to remain united after their double transatlantic voyages. To broaden the inquiry and encounter practising Muslims, we will dig deeper into the archives.

A Mexican Free Muslim

Our second narrative comes from the Mexican Inquisition records in the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City.[20] The story concerns a Muslim woman whom the Inquisition alternatively called *mahometana* and *morisca*. Her baptized name was Maria Ruíz.[21] Like Isabel, we do not find out her birth name. Maria's immediate family had legally emigrated from Spain to Mexico for economic reasons and not clandestinely because of religious persecution. Maria affirmed this to the Inquisition, stating that her husband Rodrigo Deza, then 50 years old, was a wine merchant and had had no trouble with the Inquisition either in Spain or in Mexico. The record does not elaborate on whether Rodrigo imported

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[18] Aurelia Martín Casares, *La esclavitud en la Granada del siglo XVI* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2000), 179.

[19] Jalil Sued Badillo and Angel López Cantos, *Puerto Rico Negro* (Rio Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1986), 35; Lutgardo García Fuentes, "La introducción de esclavos en Indias desde Sevilla en el siglo XVI," in *Actas de la II Jornadas de Andalucía y América* (Huelva: Excma. Diputación de Huelva, 1983), 258; and Manuel Lucena Salmoral, *La esclavitud en América española* (Warsaw: Universidad de Varsovia, 2002), 15.

[20] For more details, see Rukhsana Qamber, "Inquisition Proceedings against Muslims in 16th Century Latin America," *Islamic Studies* 45, no. 1 (2006): 47-56.

[21] Antonio Garrido Aranda, "El morisco y la Inquisición novohispana: Actitudes antiislámicas en la sociedad colonial," in *Actas de la II Jornadas de Andalucía y América* (Huelva: Excma. Diputación de Huelva, 1983), 517-18.

wine from Spain or was a merchant for Mexican producers.[22] The paradox of Muslims selling wine, eating pork, and attending Church was not unusual. Faced with persecution, extreme torture, heavy fines, ritual public shaming, and burning at the stake, the Muslims of Spain took refuge in the provision for *taqiyyah*, or dissimulation, to preserve their lives while secretly holding fast to their Islamic beliefs as best as they could.

The Mexican Inquisition recorded Maria's story as part of her trial. The Inquisition scribes wrote out these documents in the difficult-to-decipher, archaic sixteenth-century Spanish paleographic script and terminology. The available Inquisition documents inform us that Maria went before the Inquisition Tribunal in Mexico City in self-confession in 1594. Her trial and punishment became part of the second *auto de fé,* or public penance during 1595-1596. The Inquisition held these religious trials and the second *auto* was amongst the most important *autos* in Spanish America. According to the existing Inquisition record, Maria appeared voluntarily before the judges of the Holy Inquisition in Mexico City because she wanted to confess her previous disavowal of Christianity and continuing belief in Islam. Maria stated that she feared for her afterlife and now desired to enter the Christian fold. Since she was a baptized Christian and had confessed to her crime, the judges called Maria a *mahometana* or "Muhammadan" and charged her with apostasy. [23] They immediately arrested and sent her to the secret Inquisition prison. The tribunal pronounced Maria's sentence during its ninth sitting.[24]

The chronology of Maria's life can be pieced together from her diverse hearings before the prescribed panel of three Inquisition judges. Maria was born in Albolote, a small village in the Sierra de Alpujarras in Granada, Spain.[25] Her family was *morisco* or forcibly converted/secret

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[22] Wine production began in Mexico under Hernán Cortes on March 24, 1524, and flourished in the northern provinces, With Spanish wine thus facing colonial competition, the Council of the Indies in 1595 attempted to prohibit vine cultivation in Mexico and Kings Felipe III and IV repeated the prohibitions in 1620 and 1628 respectively. "Historia del vino en México," 6-7, http://repositorio.uaaan.mx:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/1273/VINOS%20DE%20MEXICO%20Y%20SUS%20REGIONES%20PRODUCTORAS.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[23] Maria Elvira Sagarzazu, *La conquista furtiva: Argentina y los hispanoárabes* (Rosario: Ovejero Martin Editores, 2001), 134.

[24] Unless otherwise stated, the information is taken from *Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City*, Inquisition, vol. 151, exp. 5, Tomo 2, fols. 1r-34v.

[25] Maria Ruíz is referred to as being from the "Alpujarras," a mountain district in Southern Spain, and she went on trail during 1596. Julio Jiménez Rueda, *Herejías y*

Muslim. In her testimony of August 8, 1594, she mentioned that her siblings had participated in the *morisco* revolt of 1568-70. The Alpujarra Mountains were the centre of this last major uprising of the Muslims of Spain against Spanish religious persecution. At the time, Spain was still in its evolutionary stage and comprised several kingdoms such as King Fernando's Castile, Queen Isabel's Aragon, and Amir Boabdil's Granada. The story we are following thus takes us through momentous changes in Spanish political life, from the end of the so-called Christian Reconquest to the formative stages of the Spanish nation-state and the establishment of its colonial empire.

Some researchers have written about Maria's Inquisition but dismissed her religious beliefs, biography, and transatlantic family matters. This is due to her deliberately confused testimony, spread over several hearings, and the fragmentary nature of the record. We begin with Maria's statement that she was a "child" (*niña*) when her parents brought her to Ciudad Real from Albolote "after the *morisco* uprising." The period of her childhood remains vague and indeed was not then fixed at 18 years. Later, Maria mentions that she was about six or seven years old during the rebellion. Assuming that her parents left as soon as the fighting broke out in 1568, Maria was born in 1561 or 1562. Therefore, when her Inquisition trial began in 1594, she was 32 or 33 years old. By early modern standards, Maria's childhood was a distant past, and the best part of her life was over. At about seven years of age, Maria's parents placed her in the house of an Old Christian woman in Ciudad Real. Old Christians were persons possessing genealogy that the Church deemed impeccable, for which it issued a certified document for *limpieza de sangre* or purity of blood. To be "pure-blooded Catholic," a person had to have Catholic parents, grandparents and great-grandparents on both sides. Many other Muslims from the Alpujarra region had also moved or been displaced and dispersed to Ciudad Real in the kingdom (now province) of Castile. This was in keeping with Crown policy to disperse Andalusia's Muslims to other parts of Spain, especially Castile. Additionally, Church and the Crown often separated Muslim children from their parents and placed them, with or without servitude, in the house of Old Christians to indoctrinate them into Christianity. [26]

Maria appears to have moved a few times from the house where her

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supersticiones en la Nueva España: Los heterodoxos de México (México: Imprenta Universitaria, 1946), 206.

[26] Antonio Muñoz Buendía, "La infancia robada: Niños esclavos, criados y aprendices en la Almería del antiguo regimen," in *Héraldica local*, ed. Maria de los Desamparos Martinez San Pedro (Almería: Instituto de Estudios Almerienses, 2002), 71.

parents first left her in Cuidad Real. However, she did not make it clear to the Inquisition where she went, for how long and why. Nevertheless, Maria learnt about Catholic rituals from her adopted family in Ciudad Real. This knowledge of Christianity saved Maria and other *moriscos* from the roving Inquisitorial spies.[27] One may conclude from this part of Maria's story that Spanish authorities achieved their goal of converting the Muslims to the Catholic faith and teaching them its rituals by Old Catholics who took Muslim children into their households.

Maria's testimony at the Mexican Inquisition indicates that when she changed houses in Ciudad Real, she took the opportunity to visit her family home frequently. She informed her Inquisitors that she married at the age of 14 (or "12 or 14 years"). Thus, the 11 or 12-year earlier period with her extended family and her visits to home were sufficient for her to learn the basic tenets and rituals of Islam. Maria, therefore, correctly stated to the Inquisition that by the age of eleven years, she was a Muslim who practised the basic Islamic rituals. Spanish Muslim parents usually did not teach Islam to very young children as they could reveal their family's secret religion to Inquisitorial spies. However, at eleven years, Maria was old enough to practice Islam and, to save her family, be circumspect in the presence of possible Inquisition spies.

It was important for Spanish Muslims to be familiar with both Islamic and Catholic rituals for family survival. Maria practised both.[28] Furthermore, she knew since early childhood that the Catholic Church severely penalized her Islamic beliefs.[29] Suffice it to show here that Maria's mother followed these practices along with neighbourhood women. Mother cautioned daughter not to mention to other children their fasts or their foods—or more correctly to what they did not eat, such as pork. Her mother warned her that if she revealed this secret to other people, the Inquisitors would burn Maria alive.

It may be recalled that when the Muslims had to go underground in sixteenth-century Spain, they did their best to preserve Islamic orthodoxy through instruction to their children, whom they bound to secrecy. This practice emerges in great "pathos," argues Luce Lopez-Baralt in her study of the *morisco aljamiado*. This script comprised the Spanish language written in the Arabic alphabet. *Aljamiado* texts were so clandestine that one *morisco* father used it to teach Islam to his son in

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[27] Louis Cardaillac, "Le problème morisque en Amérique," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 12 (1976): 294-95.

[28] She did not name Ramadan or Eid, as mentioned by Cardaillac. Ibid., 295.

[29] These beliefs and rituals have been discussed in Qamber, "Inquisition Proceedings against Muslims in 16th Century Latin America," 21-57.

such secrecy that even his wife did not know about his lessons.[30]

Maria recalled her childhood erratically three decades later in distant Mexico. In her mind, Ramadan only came during the long, hot summer, as she had experienced in Spain. She had spent her adolescence and youth in Spain's sixteenth-century schizophrenic conversion culture. Maria was able to marry a non-Muslim for two basic reasons. First, she believed that Muslims could marry People of the Book, i.e., Jews and Christians.[31] Second, Catholics accepted marriage with Muslims who were formally converted to Christianity. By converting Muslims and Jews to Catholicism, the Spanish Church facilitated exogenous marriage to these groups. Since Maria had spent part of her youth with Catholic families in Ciudad Real, she was enabled to marry a Christian.

Maria's family comprised nine persons. Here parents were tenant farmers named Garcia Hernandez and Lucia Hernandez. She had four brothers, Miguel Hernandez, Diego Hernandez, Juan Garcia and Alonso Garcia, whereas Isabel and Leonor were her two sisters. Juan, her third oldest brother, assisted a carder (*cardador*) in Ciudad Real to comb out and clean wool or cotton fibres before it was spun into thread. Maria's youngest brother Alonso was a farmhand. He lived in the city of Llerena and was married to an Old Christian woman.

It is noteworthy that all the relatives whose professions Maria named were neither property nor capital owners. While describing her family to the Inquisition judges, she built up the argument that if they possessed property or capital, they would not have worked for other people but may have established their own enterprise, like her husband, Rodrigo. Maria thus suggested to the Inquisition that her family possessed no significant economic assets worth confiscating.

Maria's oldest sister Isabel was married to a *morisco* and also lived in Llerena. Maria said that she knew neither her sister's profession nor that of her brother-in-law. Maria had last seen her youngest sibling Leonor when Leonor was six or seven years old and lived in Ciudad Real. Maria's brothers seldom visited their parents' home, so she had never seen them practising Islam. At another hearing, Maria denied that her brothers Juan and Alonso and sisters Isabel and Leonor practised Islam. She left off this list her two oldest brothers, Miguel and Diego, whose Islamic

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[30] Luce Lopez-Baralt, "The Secret Literature of the Last Muslims of Spain," *Islamic Studies* 36, no. 1 (1997): 27.

[31] The Inquisition punished Maria for her Islamic beliefs and practices regardless of whether they conformed to Islamic injunctions mentioned, for example, in the Qur'ān 2:221; 5:5; and 60:10.

practices she may not have witnessed. In denying her siblings' religiosity, Maria protected them against the charge of apostasy. Extended family mattered to Maria even in far-off Mexico.

Maria made further attempts to protect her family against Inquisitorial enquiry. She stated that only her parents were Muslim. To add credibility to her narrative, she added almost as an afterthought that her older sister Isabel was Muslim. It is obvious that she also tried to defend this sister by highlighting that "Isabel participated in Christian festivals and was a good friend of Old Christians."

Maria protected her youngest brother Alonso García, also in Llerena, by testifying that he was "married to an Old Christian woman." Piecing together Maria's scattered statements, at least two of her family members, herself and Alonso, had married Catholics. She defended two siblings, particularly against Inquisitorial wrath, Isabel and Alonso. Maria provided as much protection against religious persecution for her family living in Spain, across the Atlantic Ocean from Mexico.

Maria recalled to the Inquisition that her parents often sent her brothers to ritually slaughter poultry and stock animals for home consumption. In addition, landlords often allowed their tenant farmers to raise domestic animals for their use. This added to tenant income, kept them complacent against landlord exploitation, and maintained the peace for the authorities. Moreover, it was in the authorities' interest to remove blockages in the production and consumption of animal products as farmers could market excess and the authorities could tax it and increase the Crown's revenues.

Setting aside the rest of Maria's religion-related discourse, her narrative indicates that her family comprises hardworking individuals. The Muslims of contemporary Spain despised begging for alms, as Maria indicated. Her siblings were labourers who did not own land or their own business. They were not the beggars, robbers or marauders who terrorized sixteenth-century Spain. Instead, they ascribed to a solid Muslim work ethic.

Maria mentioned that her brothers' religiously scandalous ideas and behaviour were at the heart of the Alpujarra revolt. This revolt was a major rebellion against the exaggerated conformity to religious belief the Church demanded from recently baptized Muslims.[32] Maria deflected the Inquisition's attention away from her family and focused it on herself. Thus, she prevented her family's suffering from the harsh

[32] Julio Caro Baroja, *Los moriscos del reino de Granada: Ensayo de Historia Social* (Madrid: Istmo, 1985), 34.

repression that the Spanish authorities imposed in the aftermath of the Islamic rebellion of the Alpujarras. She had placed her family in the midst of a general revolt but mentioned only nondescript professions for its members, carefully sabotaging future Inquisitorial attempts to track down her family in Spain. Maria had successfully established her Muslim connections and took on punishment, as would be proven by the outcome of her trial.

In her discourse, Maria now turned to protect her nuclear family in Mexico. She testified that her husband Rodrigo Deza was an Old Christian. Moreover, he was "noble [meaning of good character] and well known." He, too, came from the city of Albolote in the kingdom of Granada.[33] To emphasize Rodrigo's religious credentials, she stated that whenever she visited her parents, they scolded her for marrying him.[34] They said she was a bitch for having wed an Old Christian. The family would also call her "a Jewish bitch, because she ate pork." They did not know any Jews and merely insulted her in the language that both Christians and Muslims used as abusive words.

Maria stated that she attended Mass to keep up appearances, especially as she was married to an Old Christian. However, she did not take the Eucharist. It is not clear what was Rodrigo's profession in Spain, but being an Old Christian he opened up most trades to him. Professional guilds required the *limpieza de sangre* certificate of religious purity for their members, and Rodrigo benefited professionally from his status as an Old Christian.

After their marriage, Maria Ruíz and Rodrigo Deza stayed in Spain for four or five years before coming to Mexico. While they were still in Ciudad Real, they had a son whom they named Francisco de Deza. He was eleven at the time Maria mentioned him in a 1594 hearing. After that, Rodrigo and his family of three moved to Mexico City, where they had two daughters, Maria and Isabel. The girls were respectively seven and four years old at the time of Maria's Inquisition trial, and it was nearly ten years since Maria, Rodrigo and Francisco had come to Mexico City. It appears that Maria was the only one among her extended family who emigrated from Spain. She kept her testimony simple to protect other family members by saying she did not know if she had grandparents or other relatives.

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[33] Rodrigo is said to be "noble y bien conocido," in Cardaillac, "Le problème morisque," 295.

[34] It is a continuing popular practice to sanction Muslim women who marry men of the Book. Lopez-Baralt, "The Secret Literature of the Last Muslims of Spain."

After migration to Mexico, Maria and her family set up house in the vicinity of Santiago in Mexico City. She stated to the Inquisition that she had never visited other parts of New Spain (Mexico). Maria was illiterate, telling the Inquisition that she did not know how to read or write. She affirmed that she had not spoken about or taught anyone the "sect of Muḥammed." She said that she had continued to practice Islam in Mexico and "bathe in the manner of the sect of Muḥammed." She further said that she did so, knowing full well that this "sect" was against the teachings of Christ. During the first few years of her residence in Mexico, she had kept up a Catholic façade. Eventually, she even accepted the Eucharist to please her husband. If she had abstained, "her husband would not understand and would suspect her." Maria was protecting her merchant husband from the Inquisition.

Maria's clandestine religious practices exemplify typical *taqiyyah*, or Islam's allowed dissimulation under severe duress. She revealed this camouflage when the judges questioned her about her belief in Christianity, and she responded, "Her parents made her do as they did [secretly] and said that the Christians went about blind." Spanish authorities and society were "blind" to Islamic practices mainly because Muslims performed vital tasks in Spanish society. They were skilled cooks, midwives, artisans, agriculturalists, horticulturalists, experts in sericulture, producers of fine silk, carpenters in techniques without nails (*carpintería de lo blanco*), and much more. The Christians instead were mostly military or religious men and women and had the feudal mentality of not dirtying their hands with manual labour, especially when they could be overlords to the Muslim peasantry. The historian Henry Kamen rightly argues that Christian landlords held that *mientras más moros más ganancia* (more Muslims, more profit).[35] Maria's story indicates the larger context of resistance by a rural family to preliminary steps towards free capitalist state formation.

Maria held that she had given up practising Islam three years before going to her parochial Church and confessed to being Muslim. However, her confessor was not empowered to absolve her, and he advised her to go before the Inquisition to seek forgiveness for the sin of not being Catholic. At the tribunal, she stated that she would rather face burning at the stake than be condemned to Hell in the afterworld. We shall soon return to her motives for facing the Inquisition.

The Inquisition judges also asked a little about Muslim prayers. In

[35] Henry Kamen, *Inquisition and Society in Spain in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Bloomington: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985), 103.

her answers, she shows how she struggled to maintain her religious identity in the face of threats to her and her family's survival—and she was thinking about both her own family in Mexico, with her husband and three children as well as her family in Spain, parents, siblings, and other relatives whom she did not know were dead or alive. Her family in Mexico as well as in Spain mattered to her.

Maria was determined to receive punishment from the Inquisition and save both her nuclear family in Mexico and her extended family in Spain. So naturally, she tried to mitigate her punishment by repeating till the end that she always doubted Islamic beliefs. She reinforced her stand by stating that about three years ago, in 1591, she began to earnestly believe in Catholicism. Her faith grew stronger with time. Like other accused, Maria tried to soften the judges' verdict by assuring them that now she truly believed in Catholicism.[36] Perhaps Maria was telling the truth because the Christian ambience of colonial Mexico City and isolation from practising co-religionists had made her emotionally turn away from Islam.

After its fifth hearing in the *auto*, the Inquisition appointed a lawyer to defend Maria. However, like most court-appointed defence lawyers, his goal was to confirm her confession and elicit information to unearth other non-believers. Given these goals, the defence lawyer did not save Maria from a verdict of guilty.

The Mexican Inquisition announced its sentence against Maria on Friday, March 1, 1596. The court held that she was a practising Muslim who believed in "the sect of Muhammed." She had done so since the time "she could use her head" (*uso de razón*). Furthermore, the court astutely noted that she had tried to hide her accomplices and had little desire "to satisfy the Church" by helping it find evidence against them. Finally, the Inquisition had recognized Maria's valiant and successful attempt to save her family from Inquisitorial wrath.

The head of the judicial bench recommended the standard punishment of confiscation of Maria's properties and "relaxation"—meaning death by burning at the stake—to the secular, or executing, arm of the Inquisition. However, the other two judges differed. They voted and found her guilty of heresy and apostasy and "invoking only one god." The court's transcriber used the small letter for God, indicating belief in a different god for Muslims than for Christians. It had effectively regarded Islam as heresy, making its followers targets for the

[36] Richard Kagan and Abigail Dyer, eds. and trans., *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 54-55.

Inquisition's persecution.

The Inquisition Tribunal ordered Maria to don the penitent's white clothing marked with a cross. It "admitted" or allowed Maria to formally reconcile with the Catholic Church and forbade her from leaving New Spain or Mexico for the rest of her life. The Church also confined her to a monastery. Furthermore, the Inquisition ordered the Church to instruct her in the Catholic faith because she was a Muslim or *morisca* and required such indoctrination. Furthermore, the Mexican Inquisition confiscated Maria's property, comprising the significant sum of 200 gold pesos. Since Maria was only a housewife, the only way that she had managed to save 200 pesos was with her husband's assistance. Rodrigo and Maria, along with their three children, had formed a united settler Spanish family in Mexico, and it greatly mattered whether or not they could survive inquisitorial inquiry.

Maria's punishment by the Inquisition in Spain would have been death, as recommended by the chief judge in Mexico. Her crimes would have included not naming accomplices, real or fictional. However, she showed tremendous agency, the ability to move powerful opposition in her favour. Her family mattered so much to her that she successfully convinced the court that neither her husband nor her children knew about her Islamic beliefs nor aided her in practising them. She had also made it clear that she had not shared her beliefs with anyone in Mexico City and, not having travelled to any other part of Mexico, did not convey Islam to anyone else. Maria's minimum punishment in Spain would have been at least a hundred lashes and several years' imprisonment.

The Mexican Inquisition sent Maria's trial documents to Llerena, Spain, where two of her siblings resided, sister Isabel Hernández and brother Alonso García. The Inquisition made Maria's verdict an example of leniency: *A ella sea castigo y a otros ejemplo* (To her be [awarded] punishment and to others, example). It believed that there might be more Muslims in Mexico who might also be induced to confess their secret beliefs upon hearing of Maria's lenient punishment. As Dressendorfer argues, the Inquisition did not want to alarm other disbelievers in Catholicism by awarding Maria harsher punishments than what it meted out to her. These punishments included public shaming, severe whipping, and death.[37]

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[37] Peter Dressendörfer, "Crypto-musulmanes en la Inquisición de la Nueva España," in *Actas del Coloquio Internacional sobre Literatura Aljamiada y Morisca*, ed. Alvaro Galmés de Fuentes (Madrid: Gredos, 1978), 486-90 and Cardaillac, "Le problème morisque," 295.

Maria's sentence requires more profound analysis than presented so far. On the one hand, the end of Maria's story fits neatly into the mould of sixteenth-century Spanish women as drawn by Mary Elizabeth Perry, especially for those "imprisoned" or isolated in monasteries.[38] On the other hand, Maria was quite different from the ordinary woman who entered seclusion in a house of God who had no decent alternative outside the nunnery. Maria was married, had children and her own narrative drew a rather pleasing picture of her domestic life: she was the wife of a respected and well-to-do Spanish merchant in Mexico; she was the mother of three small children; and her husband did not impose religion upon her. Therefore, the question arises as to why did Maria choose to give up her happy life, her wealth, her family, risk public ridicule, physical punishment, and the horrible prospects of death by burning at the stake?

The answer could lie in Maria's genuine belief in Catholicism, but it could also lie in the priorities of mothers, regardless of their religion or nationality and regardless of the times in which they live. In any case, Maria wanted to protect her family, particularly her children and her husband. She also struggled in her testimony to protect her siblings and other family members in Spain from persecution by the Inquisition. Her information was vague about their exact whereabouts; their professions would not make them stand out; they had participated in a rebellion of thousands of people; and her statements about them were contradictory so that they could not be easily located, nor could they be found out as Muslims. However, her words had enough substance to prove the Muslim antecedents that she was trying to establish for herself, knowing full well the cruel fate that consequently awaited her.

Conclusion

Both Maria Ruíz and Isabel successfully negotiated with the Inquisition and House of Trade respectively to place their nuclear families in the position to articulate their economic aspirations freely. Also, Isabel obtained return passage from Spain to Cuba for herself and her daughters, despite being once refused. Before the dreaded Mexican Inquisition, Maria cleared her immediate family's name of the possible suspicion of apostasy and heresy. Due to their wives' disparate negotiations, Isabel's husband did not have to give up his profession of fisherman, nor did Maria's husband abandon his wine business or suffer

[38] Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

the loss of status for being the spouse of a practising Muslim. The Inquisition resolved the ambiguity of Maria's situation as a crypto-Muslim. This was to the economic advantage of the three "stakeholders" in her trial: the Mexican Inquisition, her family, and the colonial authorities.

Isabel and Maria's extended families also benefited from these women's negotiations. The de Soto family expanded its network by granting Isabel her freedom and having an independent family. Also, Isabel Bobadilla de Soto renewed and strengthened her ties with the powerful Spanish authorities to obtain a return travel permit for her enslaved Muslim companions. By all available evidence, Maria's extended Muslim family did not suffer from exposure to the harsh Spanish Inquisition and actually benefited by severing their transatlantic ties.

Both Muslim women ably negotiated transatlantic family matters with the colonial authorities. Isabel obtained a permit to return from Spain to Cuba. She came back with her daughters having become valuable assets. Above all, Isabel obtained her precious certificate of liberty. At the end of her Inquisitorial ordeal, Maria had cleansed away her Islamic antecedents, benefitting her families in Mexico and Spain. Both Isabel and Maria served as shields to protect their respective families separated by the Atlantic Ocean.

Isabel in Cuba suffered a three-year-long separation from her family, but it was not permanent. Maria's suffering was perpetual enclosure in a Mexican monastery and a heavy fine for her family's liberty at the cost of her own. It is possible that her husband and three little children, Francisco, Maria, and Isabel visited her in the monastery. It is also possible that like her *morisca* mother had taught her in Spain, Maria and Isabel passed on the basic Islamic beliefs and rituals to their children. Could we imagine them secretly using the Arabic language and Islamic incantations, believing in Quranic stories, observing the five pillars of Islam and abstaining from food and drink prohibited to Muslims? Perhaps Isabel and Maria's Muslim families, like most clandestine Muslims, acted like non-Muslims only to thwart the discovery of their Islamic identity? This would have added to the diversity of religion and its continuity in early colonial Latin America.

Furthermore, the two Muslim women enriched colonial Spanish American society with the success of their husbands and their children. It was up to these women to erase their background of conversion plus Isabel's slavery and Maria's rebellious background. Isabel enabled her daughters to prosper, especially after their training in Spain. Maria's

children had the added advantage of having an Old Christian as their father. Their son Francisco, born in Spain, was an elite *peninsular*. The five children's only hurdle was their connection with Islam, which their mothers severed publicly. Thus both women helped their families blend in with the new settlers in sixteenth-century Latin America, gain acceptance as members of Spanish American society, and rise on the social ladder.

Both Muslim women suffered mental torture, if not also actual torture at the Inquisition (Maria) and as a slave (Isabel). They also suffered financial penalties and loss of identity as their birth names, cultural practices, etc., remain unknown. Nevertheless, the single and central concern of both Muslim women was always that their families mattered much more than the searing pain of separation from them.

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