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**Mary Elizabeth Perry: The Handless Maiden**

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## INTRODUCTION

### FROM THE SHADOWS

**T**WENTY-FOUR SHIPS that crowded into the port of Seville in late November 1570 brought human cargo—some 5,000 women, children, and men.<sup>1</sup> Moriscos, that is, Muslims or their descendants who had been baptized, came as defeated rebels from the Kingdom of Granada. Two years earlier Moriscos had revolted against Christian rule, their rebellion spreading quickly from the Alpujarra Mountains near Granada throughout much of Andalusia. After his armies had finally subdued the rebels, Philip II had ordered the dispersion of some 50,000 Moriscos of Granada throughout the Kingdom of Castile. Now bowing to royal directive, the Count of Priego officially received into the city and lands of Seville 4,300 uprooted Moriscos whom the ships brought into port this November day. The remaining 700 Moriscos traveled on to other regions nearby.

Officials in Seville and in most of the cities and towns ordered to receive Moriscos acquiesced only reluctantly. They would have to find housing for the newcomers and jobs or charitable programs to feed them, tasks that could be of frustrating immensity. Officials had to try to keep the newcomers under some form of surveillance, for they were reputed to be spies of the Turks and had fought for two years against the king's armies. Despite royal attempts to outlaw their religion and culture, Moriscos remained suspect as false converts. Many Catholics believed that these people continued to practice Islam, to speak and pray in Arabic, and to carry out their own rituals of birth, marriage, and death. Rather than fellow subjects of the same king, the Moriscos of Granada seemed to be suspicious foreigners and internal enemies.

Despite this hostility, some officials such as Priego could not help but be moved to pity as he looked upon the Moriscos who had just arrived aboard the twenty-four ships, "so shattered and poor and robbed and ill," in Priego's words, "that there was great compassion."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This and all information about the arrival of the Granadan Moriscos in Seville in 1570 is from a report of December 15, 1570, to Philip II, in Archivo General de Simancas (hereafter AGS), Cámara de Castilla, legajo 2157.

<sup>2</sup> AGS, Cámara de Castilla, legajo 2157. The phrase quoted is "tan destrosados y pobres y robados y enfermos que fue gran compasion." In this and all other quotations from unpublished historical documents, I have preserved the original spelling, punctuation, and diacritical marks.

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Apparently attempting to explain to Philip II his reactions to those who had so recently battled against the king's armies, Priego described the passengers as weak and starving. Some appeared to be dying and suffering great need, he reported. Since they were not able to beg alms to sustain themselves, Priego decided to dispose of them as quickly as possible, placing the able-bodied with masters and the ill in hospitals. The count directed the residents of the city who received the Moriscos to treat them well and to keep spouses together as well as children with their parents. He noted the obligation to baptize children of two years and younger, and especially to teach the Christian faith to the newcomers.

It would be easy to move quickly past Priego's report, with its odd mixture of conquest and compassion, to simply conclude that the count was providing yet one more example of the wages of war and rebellion. Yet to dismiss the report panders to traditional views of history as the centuries-long story of victors and vanquished, always written by the victors. Moreover, to ignore this document would be to lose sight of a significant scene in a morality play far more complex than the usual Reconquest drama of Good Christians against Bad Muslims. In fact, Christians held many different attitudes about Moriscos, perhaps because Moriscos varied widely in their responses to Christianization. What follows is a story of Christians wrestling with their consciences while developing political power, and of Moriscos refusing to remain victims, finding impressive strength even in defeat.

### **From Muslims to Moriscos**

The arrival of thousands of Moriscos in the city of Seville in 1570 signaled the beginning of a new chapter in the complex and deeply rooted Christian-Muslim relationships of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>3</sup> During the previous eight centuries, people of the two faiths had lived through periods of comparative harmony and through times of overt violence as Christians sought to wrest control of the various Iberian kingdoms from Muslim domination. This Reconquest reached a climax in 1492

<sup>3</sup> Moriscos, of course, were technically Christians because they had been baptized. However, many suspected them of being Christian in name only. Throughout this study I use the term "Christian" to refer to Christians without Muslim ancestors, to distinguish them from Moriscos. The religious conflict is more complex than Christian against Muslim, as many Moriscos had become sincere Christians and many Christians were also suspected of not being "true" Christians. Those Christians with either Jewish or Muslim ancestors were frequently called "New Christians," in distinction to "Old Christians," those with neither Jewish nor Muslim ancestors.

with the surrender of the last Muslim ruler in Granada—indeed, the last on Iberian soil. Probably none of the Moriscos who entered the port of Seville in November 1570 was old enough to remember the entry of Ferdinand and Isabel into the city of Granada to accept that surrender. They may have heard a grandparent or great-grandparent tell of this event, however, and of the guarantee that the Catholic Kings made in the document of capitulation that their new Muslim subjects would be free to practice their own faith and live according to its law.<sup>4</sup> Handed down over the generations, Morisco memories also told of the increasing zeal of some Church leaders, such as Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, to convert Muslims and to reclaim those Christians who had earlier converted to Islam.

To those raised on such memories, it would not seem strange that the Muslims of Granada rose in rebellion against their Christian rulers late in 1499. From the Albaicín quarter of Granada, the rebellion spread into much of Andalucía, and it would not be quelled by Christian forces until 1501. Mass conversions of Moriscos and great fires to burn their Arabic writings on Islam quickly followed. And in 1502 came a royal decree that any Muslim who wanted to remain in the Kingdom of Castile would have to convert to Christianity. Some twenty years later Charles V extended this decree of expulsion to Muslims in all of his Spanish kingdoms, and Church leaders validated the forcible baptism of thousands of Muslims during the Germanía Revolt. A royal pragmatic of 1567 forbade any use of the Arabic language and all Morisco customs.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, then, Moriscos on the ships in the port of Seville in 1570 knew of increasing oppression against not only the faith of Islam but their Hispano-Muslim culture as well.

As his soldiers finally defeated Morisco rebels in 1570, Philip II attempted to shatter the rebellious Morisco community from Granada. Authorities dispersed these people throughout Castile, isolating individual family units in new locations under tighter surveillance by Christian authorities. Yet the relocated Moriscos would develop a variety of strategies for survival and resistance against their rulers. And because of their very success, even when surrounded by Old Christian neighbors—that is, those without Jewish or Muslim forebears—this relocation would be merely the first step of a much more extensive diaspora. Within forty years of their arrival in Seville, these

<sup>4</sup> For the terms of capitulation, see Luis del Mármol Carvajal, *Historia del rebelión y castigo de los moriscos del reino de Granada* (1600), in *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles* (Madrid: Atlas, 1946), 21:146–150.

<sup>5</sup> An excellent chronology of this increasing oppression is in Mercedes García Arenal, *Los moriscos* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975), 15–17.

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Moriscos and some 300,000 others would be formally expelled from the Spanish kingdoms.

Politics and religion clearly intertwine in early modern Spain, but not merely in the close collaboration of Crown and Church. It is true that the centralizing monarchy sought the support of the Church, and that this partnership increased the power of the Church. Yet the story of the Moriscos reveals a politics of religion that embraces far more than this collaboration. It demonstrates the significance of religion for a minority group hoping to survive but also to preserve its own identity. It tells of a fledgling state attempting to unify many diverse subject groups against a religious minority that became a convenient common enemy. And it reveals the use of religion to legitimize opposition and the many ways that an apparently powerless minority could use religion to develop its own forms of power.

As religious minorities, Jews and Muslims shared similar experiences of oppression and resistance in this period, but they differed as well.<sup>6</sup> Both groups had faced expulsion from the Spanish kingdoms unless they converted to Christianity, and both Judeo-conversos and Moriscos lived in early modern Spain as minorities suspected of being false converts. Yet Judeo-conversos often enjoyed a higher socioeconomic status than Moriscos. Frequently Judeo-conversos engaged in commerce or professions that brought in some wealth, but Moriscos were more likely to be agricultural laborers, artisans, itinerant merchants, or silk weavers. Judeo-conversos tended to have fluency in more languages and to be more highly educated, although this advantage declined with the passage of purity of blood statutes, which prohibited their entry into some universities.

Armed rebellion was less an option for Judeo-conversos than for Moriscos. From their own history of armed action against Christians beginning in the eighth century, Moriscos knew a Muslim tradition of countless battles during the Reconquest and their rebellions during the sixteenth century. In contrast, Judeo-conversos had a longer tradition of living peacefully within, or even assimilating into, Christian societies. Moreover, Judeo-conversos could not count on groups of their own people from other parts of the world to rally to their side in battle against Hispanic Christian rulers; in contrast, Moriscos were sharply aware of Muslims in nearby North Africa and the Ottoman Empire who held out the promise of armed assistance for them.

<sup>6</sup> For an important discussion of differences between the histories of Moriscos and Jews in Iberia, see Teófilo F. Ruiz, *Spanish Society, 1400–1600* (Harlow, UK, and New York: Longman, 2001), 101–103.

### Assumptions and Approaches

To begin to consider the story of the Moriscos, we need to look at some assumptions and approaches that we might use. Although most histories are written from the standpoint of victors who had the power to write and preserve reports of the past, this book will explore the story of the Moriscos from their own viewpoint. This is not to argue that all Moriscos were the same, for these people varied widely by generation, class, place of origin, and length and location of residence in Iberia. Examples of Moriscos in various parts of Spain reveal the diversity of minority strategies for accommodation, resistance, and developing power. Not intended to be a definitive study of Moriscos, this book offers a different perspective to a growing body of scholarship throughout the world.

Much of this study focuses on women's experiences, which I believe deepens our understanding of all Moriscos. We can see these women as representative of all Moriscos who were disempowered and made into "others" in early modern Spain. Marginalized as members of an ethnic minority, Morisco women were still further disempowered by patriarchal assumptions of their own culture.<sup>7</sup> Yet their presence in early modern Spain raises many questions essential to an understanding of the Morisco story. How did Moriscos survive in an increasingly hostile environment, and how did they attempt to preserve their culture? How did traditional gender roles change in the context of oppression? What insights can the lives of these women provide in a study of minority strategies for surviving among hostile and suspicious neighbors? How did women lead and energize resistance against oppression? How did they transform the home into a space of resistance?

As we explore these questions, we see that Moriscas' lives reveal the complexities of cultural accommodation and resistance to oppression that traditional historical interpretations often overlook. Through their experiences, we become aware of the political significance of everyday rituals and the active roles of ordinary people in making history. Overshadowed by armed rebellions and political decrees, Moriscos found strength in their own legends, such as that of the Handless Maiden, Carcayona.<sup>8</sup> Quietly many of these people devised what

<sup>7</sup> Here and throughout, I use the terms "patriarchy" and "patriarchal" to refer to that system in which certain males are privileged to exploit or objectify women, children, and other males.

<sup>8</sup> Francisco Guillén Robles, *Leyendas moriscas sacadas de varios manuscritos existentes en las Bibliotecas Nacional, Real, y de D. P. de Gayangos*, 3 vols. (Madrid: M. Tello, 1885), 1:181–221.

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anthropologist James Scott calls “weapons of the weak.”<sup>9</sup> Avoiding overt confrontation, Morisco women and men sought to preserve their identities and their culture. Within their homes, they observed Islamic fasts and donned clean clothing on Fridays. Men such as Luis de Berrio of Baeza wrote copies of the Qur’an in his home and women such as Isabel de Silva of Jaén carried copies of Arabic writings between households, hiding them beneath their skirts.<sup>10</sup>

Yet most historical documents make no mention of the power of such covert resistance and leave many Moriscos voiceless in the shadows. Morisco women do not appear at all in many documents that focus on royal decrees, armed rebellions, and military concerns about Morisco aid to the Turks. In other sources, such as local and Inquisition records, Morisca voices can be heard only indirectly. Such evidence must be read “against the grain,” with special attention to questions of power relationships, euphemisms, silences, and formulaic expressions. Most Moriscas neither read nor wrote, yet they had a rich oral tradition, some of which was captured through transcription. During the sixteenth century Morisco women and men hid some of these writings because Christian officials ordered the burning of documents in Arabic and Aljamía, a Castilian dialect written in Arabic script. Although we do not know how many Moriscos owned or read these books and papers, the discovery two and three centuries later of hundreds of the hidden writings provides a valuable source of information about Morisco beliefs and traditions.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), develops this theme very thoroughly in his study of a Malaysian village. Such weapons include foot-dragging, minimal compliance, and feigned lack of understanding.

<sup>10</sup> Rafael Gracia Boix, *Autos de fe y causas de la Inquisición de Córdoba* (Cordova: Diputación Provincial, 1983), 210 and 272.

<sup>11</sup> Ottmar Hegyi, *Cinco leyendas y otros relatos moriscos (ms 4953 de la Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid)* (Madrid: Editorial Gregos, 1981), describes the development of Aljamía, 11–16. For more on these concealed writings and their discovery, see A. R. Nykel, *A Compendium of Aljamiado Literature* (New York and Paris: Macon, Protat Frères, 1929), 29–30; Luce López-Baralt, *Islam in Spanish Literature: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 171–174; Julián Ribera and Miguel Asín, *Manuscritos árabes y aljamiados de la biblioteca de la junta* (Madrid: Junta para Ampliación de Estudios é Investigaciones Científicas, 1912), v–xviii, 138, 156–157; Gerard Wieggers, *Islamic Literature in Spanish and Aljamiado* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1994). Note that López-Baralt, *Islam in Spanish Literature*, describes an earlier discovery of hidden Aljamiado and Arabic writings in 1728 in Ricla, 172. More information on burning of Arabic writings is in Antonio Domínguez Ortiz and Bernard Vincent, *Historia de los moriscos: Vida y tragedia de una minoría* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1978), 19–21; and in Nykel, *Compendium*, 27–28. An analysis of the range and significance of these writings follows below in chapter 1.

Additional information comes from material culture, such as the veil. By tradition, many Muslim women customarily concealed the face in public, but Christian authorities had banned the veil. Viewing it as a symbol of Muslim culture, they assumed it was further evidence of Moriscos' clinging to their former religion. Yet non-Muslim women had covered themselves, as well, perhaps enjoying the anonymity and allure of the veil. Christian officials had to pass laws many times prohibiting any woman from concealing her face.<sup>12</sup> Figure 1, which presents a German traveler's drawing of a Morisca from Granada in the early sixteenth century, illustrates how these women at that time covered themselves when they went outside their homes.<sup>13</sup>

Most Westerners of the present time assume that prohibitions against the veil would have been an important means of liberating Muslim women from a very male-centered culture, but it is far more likely that for Moriscas in sixteenth-century Spain these prohibitions attacked a culture that they strongly wished to preserve. In many ways, the veil symbolized their identity as women, for their culture used the veil as a major marker that defined gender. Moriscas who accepted this gender prescription, even as a strategy for maintaining their own cultural identity, present one more example of the many ways that women themselves have helped to perpetuate very patriarchal traditions.<sup>14</sup>

And yet the veil could have meant more than the seclusion of women, their objectification, and the wrapping of their bodies to prevent anyone other than the male owner from viewing them. Concealing themselves provided anonymity for women and some protection from unwanted attention. Behind their veils, they were able to withdraw and assume a mask that let the masked one see without becoming open to

<sup>12</sup> For example, in 1639 the city council of Seville approved for the fourth time in only a few years the prohibition against women's covering their faces; see Archivo Municipal de Sevilla (hereafter AMS), Sección 4, siglo XVII, Escribanías de Cabildo, tomo 29, número 18.

<sup>13</sup> Christoph Weiditz, *Das Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz* (The Netherlands, 1531–1532) (Berlin and Leipzig: Von Walter de Gruyter and Company, 1927). I want to thank Ida Altman, who first told me of this source. The drawings have been reproduced in Christoph Weiditz, *Authentic Everyday Dress of the Renaissance: All 154 Plates from the "Trachtenbuch"* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); cf. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), who concludes that veiling speaks of sexuality and chastity and is best understood as "the covering of sexual shame," 162. But also see Trinh Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 151.

the other's gaze. Paradoxically, women who covered their faces accepted the female identity of Muslim culture; but at the same time, they could construct their own identity, subverting their oppression and transforming it into a strategy for protection and a base for liberation. A convention that symbolized their conformity to their own male-dominated culture, the veil also became a symbol of resistance against those who would attack their cultural identity.

Tradition has veiled Moriscas—not only through Muslim costume, but also through histories that discount or completely overlook the lives of these women. In fact, a veil of phallogentric assumptions has covered most women of the past with unquestioned assertions that they have been mere pawns or passive victims, exotic ornaments perhaps, but in the background far behind the “real” actors in history—men with military might and political power. It is true that some historians have noted the existence of a very few women, but usually because they acted either as treacherous Jezebels or as “manly women.”<sup>15</sup>

History has obscured Moriscas not only with sexist attitudes, but also with racist assumptions that the lives of minority people have little effect on the drama of the past.<sup>16</sup> At most, this history has assumed, minority people play a few supporting roles or, occasionally, a role as victims or rebels. Their struggles and triumphs are so marginalized by many historians that we may not even be aware of their presence in an

<sup>15</sup> Manly women did not have to dress like men in order to behave with the courage, daring, and strength attributed to men in the early modern period; but they often did. For more on this subject, see Carmen Bravo Villasante, *La mujer vestida de hombre en el teatro español: Siglos XVI–XVII* (Madrid: Sociedad General Española de Librería, 1976); Vern and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992); Melveena McKendrick, *Women and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Study of the Mujer Varonil* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (Brighton, UK: Harvester, 1981); Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Cross-dressed in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London: Pandora Press, 1989); and Annie Woodhouse, *Fantastic Women: Sex, Gender and Transvestism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> I use the term “racist” here because people of Muslim ancestry were commonly believed to have genetically inherited certain characteristics and limitations. See Miguel Angel de Bunes Ibarra, *La imagen de los musulmanes y del norte de Africa en la España de los siglos XVI y XVII: Los caracteres de una hostilidad* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1989); and Thomas F. Glick, “On Converso and Marrano Ethnicity,” in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*, ed. Bernard R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 59–60.

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“invisible invisibility.”<sup>17</sup> As minority women, then, Moriscas are twice veiled—once for their gender and again for their ethnicity. And, paradoxically, these women who had been veiled by their male-dominated culture serve as a metaphor for Morisco men who became increasingly disempowered in the sixteenth century and turned all the more often to hiding themselves behind a veil of apparent assimilation.

With conscious effort, we can allow these people to reveal themselves and counter their obscurity in history. Through attention to subtext and silences, we enable them to emerge from behind the veil of indirect historical records filled with omissions and unspoken assumptions. Acknowledging a veil of protective silence, we listen for quietly clandestine conversations at the neighborhood fountain or within the churches that Moriscos had to attend. We look to find more layers of meaning hidden below the surface of official documents, such as lists of Moriscos relocated in the Great Dispersion of 1570, the records of those penanced by inquisitors, the numbers of those enslaved or slain.

Our focus on Morisco women challenges superficial conclusions about all Moriscos. Far from being powerless, Moriscas direct us to consider more encompassing definitions of power. Although they held no political offices, directed no armies, and rarely held power *over* others, they clearly developed power *with* others and assumed leading roles in guiding their people and preserving their culture or assimilating to Christian culture. By prescription, most Moriscas were expected to live in domestic seclusion; in actuality, however, many of them transformed their homes into sites of assimilation—or into cells of resistance, as they taught Arabic prayers to their children and observed the holy fast of Ramadan. Morisco women and men used bonds of family and kinship and adapted the structures of their community to survive waves of increasing oppression throughout the sixteenth century.

To study Moriscos actively seeking to resist and survive oppression precludes the traditional paradigm of center and margins. Assuming that the real agents of history are at the center of power and all others simply provide context, this paradigm easily regards Morisco women as members of a culture dominated both by its own men and by victorious Christians. Such a definition overlooks any historical agency exercised by these women and reduces them to victims who acted only in obedience to orders or to resist only out of desperation. Likewise, if we regard Morisco women and men as marginal, we see them only from the perspective of those at the center of official power. We accept

<sup>17</sup> Ada María Díaz, “Toward an Understanding of Feminismo Hispánico in the USA,” in *Women’s Consciousness, Women’s Conscience*, ed. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 51–61.

a set of hegemonic assumptions decreed by those in power which serve to preserve the whole notion of hegemony—that is, that one elite group dominates through controlling institutions and ideas to which others are expected to conform. To subject Moriscos to a paradigm that strengthens and validates the very hegemony that oppressed them betrays their lives and denies their role as agents in history.

Equally serious, this paradigm overlooks differences within both center and margins. Christians who defeated Muslims in Granada in 1492 and subsequently worked to consolidate a monarchy and empire included a great diversity of people within their centers of power, ranging from religious zealots who hated Muslims to landed nobles sympathetic to the Muslims who would become their vassals and extract with their labor the wealth of the land. Muslims also varied considerably, for they came from different lands outside Iberia, lived for different periods of time within the Spanish kingdoms, enjoyed varying amounts of wealth, and experienced widely ranging degrees of assimilation. Those who lived in mountainous and rural regions had far fewer contacts with Christians than did urban Muslims, who even intermarried with Christians and learned their language. Moreover, Moriscos who were forcibly baptized during such violent events as the Germanía Revolt differed from those whose families had converted voluntarily centuries before.

The assumption that Moriscos can be studied as a single homogeneous group of minority women overlooks their many differences from one another and subjects them to further oppression. Women of color have insisted that race plays a very significant role, not only in marginalizing them from an Anglo-male-dominated center, but also in the ways they define themselves and resist domination. These women do not want others to define them, as cultural critic bell hooks points out, nor do they want others to interpret their experiences.<sup>18</sup> They resist domination not only from a patriarchal center, but from other marginalized peoples as well, because allowing other people to describe them erases or transforms their differences, reinscribing “patterns of colonial domination, where the ‘Other’ is always made object, appropriated, interpreted, taken over by those in power, by those who dominate.”<sup>19</sup> In my judgment, this argument applies to both women and men of any race, class, or ethnicity.

<sup>18</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 55.

<sup>19</sup> hooks, *Yearning*, 125, and 151–152. See the thoughtful discussion of problems with using “marginality” and “other” in discussions of the past, in Mark D. Meyerson, introduction to *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Change*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), esp. xii–xiii.

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Although it would be easy to become lost among several layers of difference as we consider the Morisco community in early modern Spain, it is possible to recognize these people as having multiple identities that include sameness as well as difference.<sup>20</sup> Yet to reduce difference to binary oppositions, such as same/different or center/margins, completely overlooks the intermingling of categories and limits the study of Moriscos.<sup>21</sup> Instead, we can move beyond categories of race, ethnicity, class, and gender to examine intersections of differences where more than two polarized categories exist and where categories may bleed together and intermingle. For example, we can see Moriscos as a group identified as both racial and ethnic: racial, because many believed they inherited cultural distinctions through their blood; and ethnic, since many also believed that education and "Christianization" could erase their differences.<sup>22</sup>

The issue of difference becomes so complex that it seems to defy any theoretical analysis, forcing us to beat a hasty retreat to the comfortable old center/margins paradigm where differences exist but remain well concealed by a simple opposition. Unwilling to simply reduce differences to a center/margins opposition, however, we can ask questions about these differences. And we can consider not only those questions that distinguish our subjects, but also those that make us subjects in our interactions with and responses to our subjects.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), found in studying black women writers that these women "speak from a multiple and complex social, historical and cultural personality" that produces "a multiple *dialogic of differences*," but at the same time they carry out "a *dialectic of identity* with those aspects of self shared with others," 147, author's emphasis.

<sup>21</sup> Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices*, quoted in Sidonie Smith, "Who's Talking / Who's Talking Back? The Subject of Personal Narrative," *Signs* 18:2 (Winter 1993), asks us to look at "intermediary spaces where boundaries become effaced and Manichean categories collapse into each other," 406.

<sup>22</sup> Biological determinism is evident in assumptions of purity of blood laws, discussed in Albert A. Sicoff, *Los estatutos de limpieza de sangre. Controversias entre los siglos XV y XVII*, trans. Mauro Armijo (Madrid: Taurus, 1985). For assumptions of cultural transmission of difference, see Francisco Borja de Medina, S.I., "La Compañía de Jesús y la minoría morisca (1545-1614)," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 57 (1998): 3-136.

<sup>23</sup> To approach difference "objectively" precludes any recognition of our own subjectivity, which is the product not only of our position but of our historical context. Subjectivity asks us to look at the construction of meaning and to be aware of our participation in this construction. It includes pluralities of identification as well as interaction as subjects with our historical subjects. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), refers to this interaction as endless, a "to-and-fro movement between the written woman and the writing woman," 30.

Difference provided identity for Moriscos, and it was through their difference from a dominant norm that their Christian rulers most often identified them. Here it is important to acknowledge that norms and differences are constructed, not innate.<sup>24</sup> Violent and hierarchical rather than neutral, difference is postulated through opposition in which one term is marked as deviating from the unmarked term assumed to be the norm. In early modern Spain, many who tried to explain Morisco difference fell back on three fallacious explanations: those of biology (that difference results from the innate essence of a subject), objectivity (that difference can be observed neutrally), and naturalization (that difference occurs within a universal category of nature unaffected by a particular context).<sup>25</sup>

The study of Morisco difference can reduce them to a colonized group, which raises significant methodological problems. We want to avoid colonizing our subjects and making these people into “objects,” but our sources seem to work against us. A major problem in writing history is that so many historical documents reflect an elite male viewpoint from the center, an “imperialist gaze,” which construes the other as a mere object and exercises an exclusive subject-defining status for itself.<sup>26</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has noted that historians’ knowledge of subaltern or insurgent subjects is so dependent on elite or counterinsurgent documentation that they can see subalterns only in contradistinction to the elites.<sup>27</sup> Even the language we use to describe them imposes hierarchical assumptions on them. As we seek actors in history other than elite males, we try to respect them—and this raises the issue of positionality. Where can we stand when we speak of others in a culture so permeated by a dominant viewpoint? Is there, in fact,

<sup>24</sup> Feminist scholars argue that the differences of Moriscos and other minority people are social constructions that should be critically analyzed. Discussing the problem of writing “the history of difference,” Joan W. Scott has noted that historians often present “experience” as “evidence for the fact of difference, rather than as a way to explore how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world.” See her essay “Experience,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 22 and 25.

<sup>25</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), passim; for more on Moi’s theory, see Paul Julian Smith, *Representing the Other: ‘Race,’ Text, and Gender in Spanish and Spanish American Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 28. Sidonie Smith, “Who’s Talking/Who’s Talking Back?” esp. 402, suggests that one way to avoid these fallacies is to read the sources to hear “the polyphony of voices, to sort through various truth claims and interpretations.”

<sup>26</sup> Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 47.

<sup>27</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), esp. 197–211; and P. J. Smith, *Representing the Other*, 18.

any position “‘outside’ that dominance which is uncompromised by it”?<sup>28</sup> Must we become outsiders in order to write about women and disempowered men as active agents of the past, or to escape the “otherness” imposed by the dominant center?<sup>29</sup>

Two cultural critics suggest ways to solve these problems, but each warns us against making Moriscos into objects of study and “objective” discussion. “A conversation of ‘us’ with ‘us’ about ‘them,’” observes Trinh Minh-ha, “is a conversation in which ‘them’ is silenced. ‘Them’ always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence.”<sup>30</sup> Certainly Morisco women and men stand speechless in most historical records; but to fill their silences with my own voice and speak for them is to reduce them to objects, as bell hooks observes, and to transform myself to colonizer.<sup>31</sup> Warning of mistakes to avoid, hooks and Trinh urge us to recognize differences among and within minority people, within ourselves. We who seek to know more about Moriscos begin by recognizing our differences from them—differences not only in geography and time period, but also in culture and ethnicity. At the same time, we try to avoid romanticizing them into exotic unreal creatures, as Westerners have done so often when describing people from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.<sup>32</sup>

All of this raises the methodological question of how historians can possibly avoid colonizing the people they describe. After all, we historians decide which sources we will use and how we will interpret them. We select examples and organize ideas, attempting all the while to impose meaning on the past. Some historians have restored dignity and agency to ordinary people in the past, and women historians have demonstrated the politics of gender-specific experience.<sup>33</sup> In critiquing

<sup>28</sup> P. J. Smith, *Representing the Other*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Vinay Bahl, “Cultural Imperialism and Women’s Movements,” *Gender and History* 9:1 (April 1997): 5.

<sup>30</sup> Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, 67.

<sup>31</sup> hooks, *Yearning*, 151–152.

<sup>32</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, the thoughtful introduction to *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), esp. 2–5; E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 76–136; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Joan Wallach Scott and Louise Tilly, *Women, Work and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978). Most notably for Spain, see Luis R. Corteguera, *For the Common Good: Popular Politics in Barcelona, 1580–1640* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); and Ruiz, *Spanish Society*. For Moriscos in particular, see E. William Monter, *Frontiers of Heresy: The Spanish Inquisition from the Basque Lands to Sicily* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), esp. 226–227; and Bernard Vincent, “Las mujeres moriscas,” in *Historia de las mujeres en occidente*, ed.

traditional history, these historians have made us more aware of the politics of representing people from the past, yet we continue to struggle with the question of how to develop a healthy collegial relationship between our subjects and ourselves.<sup>34</sup>

One way to acknowledge the variations of Moriscos and their diverse identities separate from our own is to recognize persons and call them by name. Throughout this book I will use names whenever possible, to superimpose on numbers and general categories individuals such as Lucía de la Cruz, Joan Valenciano, and Juana the slave. Although many Moriscos had Muslim names and may have continued to use them privately, these have been lost to us because Christians prohibited them and imposed Christian names in baptism. With regret for their lost Muslim names, we can nevertheless deliberately state their only available names as a political act—just as bell hooks named her mother and grandmother “in resistance” to the erasure of minority women from a “history recorded without specificity, as though it’s not important to know who—which one of us—the particulars.”<sup>35</sup>

Listening to hooks and Trinh, I have tried to develop a methodology for studying Moriscos that looks for the particulars and values the differences. Consciously I have adopted three specific approaches: recognizing subtexts, contextualizing Moriscos’ lives, and questioning assumptions of the paradigms we use. With this methodology, I believe that we can challenge traditional interpretations which place powerful men or impersonal forces at center stage. Moreover, we can replace that old center/margins model for history with a tapestry paradigm of many weavers—the Moriscos of early modern Spain, the many people with whom they lived, the historian who knits together a variety of sources, we who live in the present time, and those who come after us.

### Telling the Morisco Story

In telling the story of the Moriscos, the seven chapters that follow will examine a small part of this tapestry. Chapter 1 considers memories and legends that Moriscos brought with them during the relocation of

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Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, trans. Marco Aurelio Galmari (Madrid: Taurus, 1992), 3:585–595.

<sup>34</sup> A discussion of the significance of “the politics of representation” for colonized groups is in hooks, *Yearning*, 72. For feminist concerns with the political consequences of theoretical positions in history, see Judith Bennett, “Feminism and History,” *Gender and History* 1:3 (1989): 251–272; and Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), esp. 15–17.

<sup>35</sup> hooks, *Yearning*, 116.

1570. In Spain they lived with buildings and monuments, fountains and gardens that served as reminders of times past when Muslims ruled. Memories of actual events from the medieval past intertwine with imaginative metaphors carved in stones and written in stories, such as that of Carcayona, the Handless Maiden. The epitome of the idealized Muslim woman, Carcayona also represented the hopes of an increasingly oppressed people in the sixteenth century. Her story shows how legends could empower Moriscos to resist the prohibition of their religious beliefs and culture.

Christians clearly acknowledged Muslim difference, and the terms of the surrender of Granada in 1492 declared that Muslims would be free to continue their own religion. Heavy-handed attempts to convert them, however, led to an armed rebellion of Muslims that began late in 1499 and ended in 1502 with the royal decree that Muslims who wanted to remain would have to convert to Christianity. Chapter 2, "Madalena's Bath," analyzes the process by which Muslim difference became transformed into Morisco deviance. Not satisfied with prohibiting Islam, Christian officials went on to forbid all expressions of Muslim culture. They sexually stigmatized Moriscos, portraying the women as promiscuous and lewd, the men as perverted and effeminate. Assuming that Moriscos threatened the purity of their society, Christian authorities punished them and prohibited expressions of Muslim culture and the embodied knowledge by which they identified themselves.

In the face of increasing prohibitions on their culture, Moriscos withdrew into their homes, where they hoped to continue some of their traditional practices. Chapter 3, "Dangerous Domesticity," shows how the home became a primary forum for resistance against Christian regulations. Here women in particular taught their children the Arabic language and prayers of Islam. They observed Islamic dietary restrictions and Muslim customs of eating and bathing. Gathering in their homes, Moriscos circumcised their sons and observed the fast of Ramadan. As Christian officials expelled male religious leaders, Morisco women took on the primary responsibility for preserving Muslim identity. Their homes became increasingly dangerous, with Christian officials entering them unexpectedly to look for signs of resistance. Not surprisingly, Inquisition records show the active roles that Moriscas played in this resistance and, in addition, the rituals of punishment imposed on them.

After years of increasing oppression, an armed rebellion erupted in 1568 among Moriscos in the Alpujarras, a mountainous region near Granada. Chapter 4, "With Stones and Roasting Spits," describes Moriscas' experiences in the almost two-years-long war. A Christian eye-

witness reported that his forces had killed some women among the enemy “because they fought as men although they had no weapons but stones and roasting spits.”<sup>36</sup> In contrast, another account tells of Zarçamodonia, who donned helmet and armor to slay with her sword the Christian enemy.<sup>37</sup> Other reports describe Moriscas seeking to protect their families, moving into caves higher in the mountains as Christian forces slowly gained control over the rebels. Victorious soldiers captured and enslaved many of these women and children. A smaller number escaped to what they hoped was safer ground, only to be ensnared by Philip II’s order to uproot some 50,000 Moriscos from the Kingdom of Granada and disperse them throughout Castile.

Chapter 5, “Patience and Perseverance,” analyzes the tremendous project of relocating Moriscos of Granada throughout Castile—both as punishment for their rebellion and as a strategy to neutralize their power. Reports and census documents on Moriscos in Seville after 1570 indicate the many ways that Moriscos struggled to keep their families alive and intact. Women’s work made a major difference in the survival of their families, especially in the many female-headed households and households of enslaved Moriscos. Local records show how Morisco slaves lived and worked. The Inquisition case of Juana, slave of Francisco de Piña in Gibraltar, details the example of a Morisca slave prosecuted for attempting to leave Christian Spain in the boat of other fugitives who had set sail for Muslim North Africa. Rahma, the wife of Job in the Morisco version of the Old Testament story, personifies the hopes and struggles of these people.

The debate among Christians about how to solve “the Morisco problem” ended abruptly in 1609 when Philip III issued the first of several decrees expelling Moriscos from his kingdoms. Chapter 6, “The Castigation of Carcayona,” considers several other proposals for dealing with Moriscos as well as the poignant discussion over whether expelled Moriscos should be required to leave their young children behind to be raised as Christians in Spain. An analysis of external and internal issues facing the central monarchy reveals the political imperatives that played a major role in the decision to expel some 300,000 Moriscos. Some reports of the expulsion emphasized the great sorrow of those who had to leave their homes for distant lands, but others

<sup>36</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid), hereafter BN, ms R 31.736, *Relación muy verdadera sacada de una carta que vino al Illustre Cabildo y regimiento desta ciudad* (Seville: Alonso de la Barrera, 1569): “y entre ellos algunas mugeres porque peleavan como los hombres con que ellas no tenían mas armas q piedras y assadores.”

<sup>37</sup> Ginés Pérez de Hita, *Guerras civiles de Granada (1595–1597)*, ed. Paula Blanchard-Demougé (Madrid: E. Bailly-Bailliére, 1913–1915), 2:252–253.

described the Moriscos singing and dancing as they left, the women dressed in their jewels and best clothing.

Chapter 7, “Warehouse Children, Mixed Legacies, and Contested Identities,” asks what happened to the Moriscos after the expulsion. Authorities took hundreds of young children from their Morisco parents so they could be raised as Christians in Spain. To placate nobles whose wealth depended on Morisco vassals, Philip III allowed about 6 percent of the Morisco population to remain in his kingdoms. He also exempted from the expulsion Moriscos who had taken religious orders and Moriscas who had married Old Christian men. The case of Beatriz de Robles provides an example of a Morisca married to an Old Christian who did not have to leave during the expulsion. Later, however, inquisitors prosecuted her, not for following Islam, but for fashioning her own assimilated identity—one that seemed to them too close to the heresy of illuminism. Appearing especially in the sixteenth century in Spain, this heresy emphasized individual experience of God without any need for priest or Church. For the most part, Morisco slaves remained in Spain under the control of Christian owners. Some Moriscos left Spain but returned later, attempting to escape detection. Whether they departed or stayed in Spain, Moriscos left mixed legacies, contested identities, and the timeless legend of the Handless Maiden.

In the following pages this book will attempt to hear the voiceless, see those who have been veiled, and illuminate some of the spaces of history still in the shadows. By focusing on the experiences of women of this persecuted minority group, I hope to make some contribution to providing a broader definition of power, a better understanding of the dynamics of difference and deviance, a closer examination of the politics of religion, and a deeper appreciation for how ordinary people—both women and men—became active players in the drama of human history. For us in the twenty-first century, the stories of these people present important lessons in faith, culture, and power.