CHAPTER FIVE

VIOLENCE AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN EARLY MODERN VALENcia

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But realizing that those of this kingdom [Valencia] and of that of Castile were continuing in their harmful intentions, and given that I have heard on sound and true advice that they were persisting in their apostasy and perdition and were seeking to harm and subvert people of our kingdoms through their envoys . . . and having had entrusted to our Lord, and trusting in his divine favor concerning matters related to his honor and glory, I have resolved that all of the Moriscos of that kingdom be expelled and sent to the land of the Berbers.¹

The royal decree ordering the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain in 1609 offered a clear and concise explanation of violence among Old Christians and Moriscos in the preceding decades. King Philip III and the members of his council justified this measure through the notorious apostasy of the Moriscos, as well as their treason against the Habsburg monarchy. These two arguments established the connection between violence and religious identity in the eyes of the establishment. The Moriscos brought harm to the Christian faith through their obstinate and continued heresy, and carried out acts of violence against the Spanish as a prelude to the coming Ottoman invasion. From this perspective, the expulsion did not exclude a minority of Spaniards on the basis of their ancestry, but rather ended the Islamic era in Spain by reuniting the Moriscos—Muslims in their hearts—with their coreligionists in the Maghreb. The king’s favorite, the Duke of Lerma, and the Archbishop of Valencia, Juan de Ribera, arrived at the same conclusions via different routes, through reasons of state and theological arguments respectively. Their views on violence and apostasy made possible a defense of the expulsion in the face of the objections of dissident councilors, the Moriscos themselves, and their Old Christian seigneurs. The official order of expulsion insisted on drawing a clear line between faithful Christians and rebellious Moriscos, with little

acknowledgment of those aspects of Morisco Spain that failed to conform to this polarized view.

The expulsion decrees of 1609–14 brought to an end a century of efforts to police the Moriscos, assimilate them into Spanish society, and convert them to Christianity. A decade into his reign, Philip III undertook the drastic measures that his father had always declined to implement, despite the opposition of some of his advisors. In some senses, however, the final deportation represented the capstone of decades of legislation targeted at the Moriscos, rather than a departure from previous policies. Civil officials in Valencia and other Morisco areas had already passed a series of laws disarming the Moriscos, limiting their movements toward the coast, and banning them from professions such as butcher. These efforts indicated a desire both to assimilate a New Christian group and to subdue a potential internal enemy. The institutional Church, by the same token, urged the Moriscos to become sincere Christians while treating them as inferior members of the flock. Rather than a simple victory of persecution over evangelization—of the reason of state over spiritual obligations—the expulsion constituted the culmination of both impulses. A century of failed attempts at conversion led even the pacific Archbishop Ribera to agree that preaching, parish reform, and inquisitorial leniency had all had no effect upon the apostate Moriscos, “wizened trees, full of knots of heresy.” The waters of the sacrament of baptism had not washed away the Islamic beliefs of the Moriscos, and thus Ribera endorsed the expulsion out of a shared belief in the insurmountable differences between Old Christians and New. In agreement with the decree of 1609, the archbishop argued that the Moriscos’ well-known predilection for violent acts prefigured their inevitable revolt against the Christian establishment.

Whereas the proclamations of the king and his agents offer a stark portrait of an intransigent and subversive community, the surviving documentation from other sources reveals a dynamic Morisco population marked by temporal change and regional variations. The extensive records of the Inquisition include many examples of Moriscos who resisted evangelization, but also communities that exhibited a higher degree of assimilation.

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2 Josep Lluís Canet and Diego Romero eds., Crides, pragmàtiques, edictes, cartes i ordres per a l’adminitració i govern de la Cuitat i Regne de València en el segle XVI, València, 2002, vol. II.

3 On the evolving Morisco policy of Ribera, see Benjamin Ehlers, Between Christians and Moriscos: Juan de Ribera and Religious Reform in Valencia, 1568–1614, Baltimore, 2006, chs. 4–6.