CHAPTER 8

The Moriscos Who Stayed Behind or Returned

Post-1609

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On August 11, 1615, fully a year after Philip III had officially declared a successful end to the Morisco Expulsion, the Council of State received a letter from the Count of Salazar. He wrote that “so many Moriscos have returned to Murcia, Andalusia and Old Castile that it seems as if the expulsion never took place.”¹ In this paper, I will not explore Salazar’s reasons for exaggerating the return.² The vast majority of the Moriscos left between 1609 and 1614. The small numbers that obtained exemptions, secretly stayed or quietly returned could no longer be Moriscos, a group which had not been easy to define before or during the Expulsion. After generations of conversion they were accepted as the Old Christians they had become. They hid and presumably lost any vestiges of Islam. Neighbours and friends would not have mentioned their ancestry openly. The Moriscos that remained cut themselves off from a Muslim past and assimilated into a Christian identity.

We can, however, recover the drama of those that tried to stay or return. In their 1978 history of the Moriscos, Antonio Domínguez Ortiz and Bernard Vincent remarked that dry, official documents can tell dramatic family tales – such as the case of an Old Christian coachman who wanted to go into exile with his Morisco wife and daughter.³ The vicissitudes of the Moriscos remaining in, or returning to, the Peninsula cannot be entirely recovered. However, an attempt to do so reveals a spectrum of identities in Early Modern Spain.

I will examine documents from three kinds of cases: those involving exempted Moriscos, those providing evidence on brief Morisco returns to the Peninsula and those which show the actions that the Hispanic Monarchy took to punish disobedience. Over time, accusations of hidden Moriscos emerged, leaving evidence which can help historians to examine questions of change and continuity over time within the Peninsula. Although the Moriscos in Spain after 1609 deliberately disappeared, analysis of their significance has fostered

¹ AGS, Estado 259.
many interpretations. With hindsight, we have been too hasty to decide on the triumph or tragedy of the Morisco Expulsion, overlooking the human elements of resilience, contingency and agency.

**Deliberation, Delay and Disobedience**

When the King and Council of State considered expelling the Moriscos, they did not want to expel them all at once. They determined early on to follow a step-by-step process whereby Moriscos from various kingdoms would be expelled and sent off through designated ports. They chose to begin in Valencia and then proceed to Castile, Aragón and lastly Murcia. To their surprise, however, the Moriscos, their aristocratic lords and their neighbours turned the Expulsion into a frustrating five-year process.

On April 4, 1609 Philip III chose to expel the Moriscos. The Council of State decided on a plan for expulsion and prepared the stage for their departure. On June 21, 1609 the King ordered the Expulsion to begin in Valencia; royal officials were assigned to travel there and inform the archbishop and the Viceroy. On September 22, 1609 the Valencia decree was published. For the next two months, Moriscos moved to the ports, soldiers marched into the countryside and houses were emptied. Although the Expulsion from Valencia was not as smooth as imagined from Madrid, it proceeded along the lines that the King expected. If there were any hiccups, it was because there were many Morisco children who needed care and housing. Even the exception of allowing six out of every 100 households to stay was revoked on January 9, 1610. The Bishop of Orihuela noted that every Morisco of Elche wanted to leave, although the Duke of Maqueda encouraged many to stay.

The Expulsion of the Moriscos from the other kingdoms did not go as smoothly. On December 28, 1609 the Moriscos from Old and New Castile, Extremadura and La Mancha were given permission to leave. Then two weeks later, on January 12, 1610, official orders to expel the Moriscos of the two Castiles,

5 Francisco Javier Brotons Gonzálvez, “Notas sobre la expulsión de los moriscos de Elche,” in L’expulsió dels moriscos: Consequències en el món islàmic i el món cristià (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya), 1994, 296–299. The Duke of Maqueda was also the Marquis of Elche, Jorge de Cárdenas y Manrique de Lara (1584–1644).
6 Florencio Janer, Condición social de los moriscos de España: causas de su expulsión, y consecuencias que esta produjo en el orden económico y político (Madrid: Imp. de la Real Academia de la Historia), 1857, document CXXII, 339–340.