

Muslim and Jewish Minorities in the Medieval Iberian Peninsula After Reconquista: The right of return to Spain for Moriscos and Sephardim

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I. Introduction

The Muslim and Jewish minorities of Medieval Iberian Peninsula were the scope of many studies especially regarding the concept of “Convivencia” that assumed the golden age of peaceful coexistence between them under the Muslim rule. Many studies have proved the intolerance and persecution those minorities faced after the Reconquista under the rule of the Catholic monarchs enforcing them to convert to Catholicism. The Spanish Inquisition showed the most brutal expression for that discrimination for both minorities. The last episode of those persecutions was crystallized in the mass expulsion for both Jews and Muslims.

In 2015, the Spanish Government has issued a law granting the Spanish citizenship to the descendants of Jews who faced that expulsion. This act showed a restitution for Jews while ignoring to issue a similar law for Muslims raised a debate about the basis on which the Spanish government differentiate between the two minorities lived on its land for centuries before their tragic expulsion.

This study will try to search answers for relative questions, like; what is the difference between the status of those two minorities? and what is the justification on which the Spanish government issued the law that establishes the right of obtaining the Spanish nationality for Jews of Spanish ancestors (Sephardic Jews) while ignoring to give the same right for Muslims of Spanish ancestors (Moriscos)? This would contribute to clarifying an important issue since the debate about it is still continuous. Thus, the importance of this study derives from the role it may play clarifying the reasons for the doubled standard policy taken by Spanish government towards the two religious groups which can have a serious impacts on the international relationship between Spain and other countries especially Muslim countries, and also can have impacts on the internal Spanish society having both minorities of Jews and Muslims.

II. Legal Orientation:

The Sephardim¹, were mentioned in the Spanish Civil code within its article regarding granting nationality pursuant to residence, as it provided for requiring ten years’ residence, while five years shall be sufficient for persons who have obtained asylum or refugees, and two years for citizens by birth of some certain countries besides Sephardic Jews. More recently, on 11 June 2015, a new Spanish law was approved allowing descendants of Sephardim expelled from Spain in 1492 to acquire Spanish nationality with no obligation for abandoning their other nationality. On 1st of October 2015, this law was officially enacted declaring a deadline of three years for Sephardim to apply for obtaining Spanish nationality. Thanks to this law, Sephardic Jews have been exempted from the condition requiring their residence in Spain for obtaining the Spanish nationality, in addition to the allowance for their dual nationality².

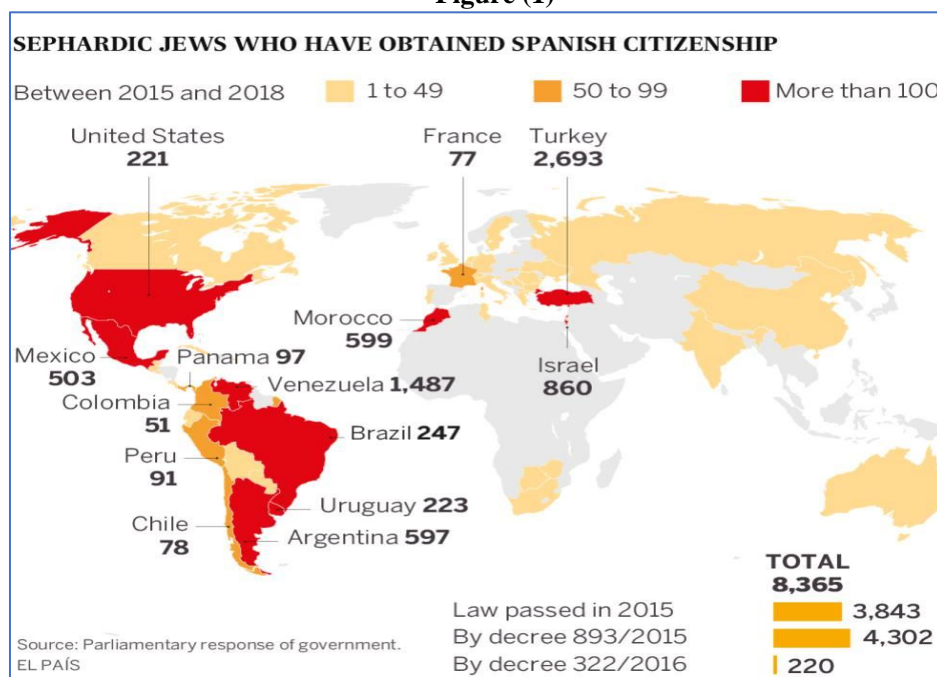
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¹ “Sephard” is the Hebrew word for “Spain”. Thus, Sephardim is the plural word for Sephardi which refers in Hebrew to those who are descendants of Jews that lived in the Iberian Peninsula before their expulsion in 1492. For more details about Sephardim via Encyclopaedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sephardi>

² Details about this law; the formal website of the Spanish Ministry of Justice: <https://www.fcje.org/english/>

Royal Decree of 20 December 1924 sets the general rule for obtaining Spanish nationality requiring five years residence in Spain, but as the Spanish Civil code gives Sephardi Jews an exception for this requirement, they are exempted of this condition as they only need two years of residence in Spain to obtain the Spanish nationality. And according to the recent law of 2015 for Sephardim, they need only two requirements to obtain the Spanish nationality; first is to show a proof for their Sephardic status and second is to show proof of special connection to Spain. Furthermore, the law declared that the proof of the Sephardic status can be confirmed by many means, which show the intention of facilitating the submission procedures for the applicants³. As for proving the special connection to Spain, the law also shows an attitude of facilitating it providing that the proof for that special connection to Spain can be even simply through being a member of a Spanish cultural or sports club. Moreover, in 2015 and 2016, the Spanish government has issued two decrees subsequent for this law in order to facilitate the activation for this law, which resulted in the gaining of Spanish nationality for 8,365 applicants by 2018 (Fig. No. 1). Also, in 2018, Spain's Cabinet has approved to extend the deadline of applying for obtaining the Spanish nationality which should have expired in October 2018, but the Spanish government spokesman, Inigo Mendez de Vigo, has declared this approval for extending this deadline until 1st of October 2019. (AFP 2018)

Figure (1)



Source: (González 2018)

Majority of Sephardi applicants who succeeded in obtaining Spanish nationality came from Turkey (2,693 persons), while only 257 persons of them went through the original process due to the law of 2015, while the rest obtained citizenship through the facilitated fast-track method established by the subsequent decree followed that law (González 2018). The map in Fig. 1 shows that besides Turkey, most Sephardic Jews who obtained the Spanish nationality since 2015 came from Latin American countries (mostly from Venezuela with 1487 persons), Israel (860 persons), USA (221 persons) and France (77 persons).

³ The Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that the proof of Sephardic status can be confirmed by various simple evidentiary means, for details see: [http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Consulados/LOSANGELES/en/ServiciosConsulares/CSLA/Paginas/CSLA%20\(English\)/Nationality-for-Sephardic-Jews.aspx](http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Consulados/LOSANGELES/en/ServiciosConsulares/CSLA/Paginas/CSLA%20(English)/Nationality-for-Sephardic-Jews.aspx)

III. Historical background for Jewish and Muslim Minorities in the Iberian Peninsula

1. The emerge of the Jewish Minority in Spain

The word “Sepharad” had appeared in verse 20 of the biblical book of “Obadiah” as a name of a place where Jerusalemites exiled. Actually, there is no consensus on the exact location of “Sepharad” mentioned in that verse. However, by the late Roman times, connections between this word of “Sepharad” and “Spain” began to appear among Jews believing that Spain is that place called “Sepharad”, which seems to be welcomed among Jews of Iberian peninsula giving them a special status supported by that holy mentioning of their place of exile. The first arrival of Jews in Spain was within the sixth century B.C. according to the story mentioned in Obadiah book about the exiles from Jerusalem to Sepharad. Archaeological records prove the settlement of Jews in Spain including the tombstone of Merida which belongs to the sixth century. Under Roman rule, Jews had a settled life but sometimes suffered discrimination which can be seen in the canons declared by the Council of Elvira in the beginning of the fourth century, through its decrees ordering Christians not to share their meal with Jews and warning farmers not to let Jews bless their fruits, and other orders that reflect the attitude of limiting close relations between Christian and Jews. But this attitude became stronger after the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity in the fifth century as Jews began to suffer more formal persecution adopting the Anti-Semitism (Gerber 1994, 2-6)

The Visigoth rule of the Iberian Peninsula witnessed a series of laws against Jews. On this context, we can refer to the laws issued by Visigoth Kings of Spain prohibiting Jewish traditions like; the celebration of Jewish festivals and the circumcision of the children. Other laws included depriving Jews of the right to testify against Christians in a court of justice. A research paper by the American historian Bernard Bachrach concluded that in the period of the Visigoth rule of Spain (589-711) there were seven Kings who adopted anti-Jewish legislation, besides nine monarchs pursued policies varied between neglecting to support Jews. (Bachrach 1973, 15, 34)

Egyptian historian Mu'nis explained that Visigoths rule could not stabilize their authority on the beginning because of their Monarchs' disputes for power from one hand, and from the other hand, their being Christian Arians lead to religious conflicts with the Iberian people who were Catholics. This religious conflict continued until the Visigoth King Recaredo converted to Catholicism in 587 declaring it as the official religion. (Mu'nis 1959, 14) Thus, it seems that since then, Visigoths strengthened their policy of oppression for Jews, and supported the church continuous attitude of separating Jews from Christians in Spain. Even some Western historical sources stated that Jews in Spain under the Visigoths rule were suffering severe persecution that drove them to seek help from Muslims which explain the welcoming attitude of those Jews for the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. On this context, Heinrich Gratez stated that in 694 there was an attempt by Jews of Visigoths Spain entering an alliance with Jews in Africa aided probably with Muslims to overthrow the Visigoth rule. But this attempt was discovered, and those Jews involved in that plot were enslaved accordingly. (Roth 1976, 145, 146)

This also may explain calling the period of Muslim rule (8th - 11th century) the “golden age” for Jews in the Iberian Peninsula, describing the previous age of their being severely persecuted under the Visigoths rule. During the Muslim rule, Jewish intellectual life flourished through their contributions to various fields including philosophy, translations, medicine, and mathematics. Many Jewish figures served in the Muslim court in high positions including the post of Vizier which is the highest assistant for the Muslim ruler. This atmosphere encouraged many North African Jewish to immigrate to Al-Andalus during this era, which increased the Jewish population, making Al-Andalus the biggest center of Jews by then. Unfortunately, that Golden Age declined under the rule of Almoravids and the following Almohads dynasty, as intolerance showed up sometimes. However, Jews continued to contribute

mainly to economic life in many fields. (Weiner n.d) By the end of Muslim rule of the Iberian Peninsula, the estimated number of Jews is about 100,000 persons that almost half of them were living in Granada. (Wasserstein 1995, 101)

2. The emerge of the Muslim minority in Spain

The first arrival of Muslims in Spain was in 711 beginning an age of Muslim rule of the Iberian Peninsula⁴. The emerge of concepts like “Convivencia” describing the Muslim rule of the Iberian Peninsula prove the general attitude of peaceful coexistence among all religions under Muslim rule, that there is almost no claims for enforcement for Iberian people to convert to Islam, as Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula adopted policy guaranteeing freedom of faith, while the natural social interaction between Muslims and Iberian population resulted in the gradual increase of Iberian Muslims forming the majority of people in Al-Andalus by the end of Muslim rule. (Ahmed 2019, 99)

Upon the Muslim conquest for the Iberian Peninsula in 711, the number of Muslim conquerors is estimated to be about ten thousands soldiers of Berbers and Arabs, (Adams, et al. 2008, 726) while indigenous inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula were about 7 million Hispano-Romans. (Glick 2005, 14). By the end of the 10th century, the population of Al-Andalus reached the 4 million which is equal to the estimated figure for the indigenous Iberian inhabitants of the entire peninsula before the Islam rule. (Reilly 1993, 61) This initial numbers can give us a good overview for the extent of Islam’s spread in Al-Andalus knowing that later Christian Iberians who did not convert to Islam (Mozarabs) became minorities in Al-Andalus, while also there were Muslim minorities (Mudejars) living in the Christian Kingdom of the Iberian Peninsula. Moreover, other influence of Islam appeared on the spread of using Arabic among the Christians living in Muslim Spain, as it was stated that in the 19th century, Christian youths in Córdoba were speaking Arabic even better than Latin. (Colbert 1962 , 301) Muslim Spain showed great development in all intellectual and economic field comparing to other parts of Europe. Estimated statistics for populations of the year 1000 showed Cordoba having the biggest population of Europe (about 450.000 persons) and almost equal to Constantinople’s population. (Chandler and Fox 2013, 11)

There was a gradual emergence of this Muslim majority, since the conversion to Islam started slowly until the 10th century, as converts numbers didn’t exceed 25% of the population of Al-Andalus by then. The rate had accelerated during the reign of Abd al-Rahman III (912-961) to reach its peak with a number of Muslims representing 80% of the population by the year 1100. Thus, referring to the assumed number of 7 million Hispano-Romans in the Iberian peninsula in the beginning of Muslim conquest, we can estimate the number of indigenous Muslims of Al-Andalus to be about 2.8 million in the 10th century, and then to reach about 5.6 million of indigenous Muslims forming the majority of population of Al-Andalus by then. (Glick 2005, 23-24) It is worth mentioning that the population of the last Muslim kingdom of Al-Andalus was estimated to be about half million, among them 100 thousand had died or been enslaved upon the fall of the Muslim rule, while 200 thousand immigrated and the remained population was about 200 thousand living under the Christian rule after Reconquista. (Kamen 2014, 17)

Several theories tried to explain the reasons for the significant spread of Islam in Al-Andalus. The French historian Guichard adopted the scenario attributing Islam spread to migration of family groups from North Africa rather than intermarriage and conversions. The other scenario was adopted by Epalza suggesting the conversions within few generations after the conquest especially through intermarriage with Muslim soldiers for reasons like gaining better social status and avoiding taxes. Bullie is another scholar who adopted that scenario focusing on the role of later

⁴ The traditional story about the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula states that an oppressed Christian ruler of Ceuta called “Julian” went to Musa Ibn Nusair, the governor of North Africa, with a plea for help against King Roderick, the Visigoth ruler of Spain. Thus, Nusair sent General Tariq bin Ziyad leading an army of 7000 troops. In addition to other claims that the sons of Visigoth king Wittiza, who ruled the Iberian Peninsula before usurpation of his throne by Roderic, have asked help from the Muslim Governor as well. (Mu’nis 1959, 28)

conversions in the 12th century due to the increasing social contact or the enforcement of strict religious laws by the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties. The common factor appeared in those scenarios was the intermarriage which was frequent as concluded in many research papers depending on historical sources. A relatively recent Bioarchaeological study had presented biological data on southern Iberia stating that social conversion to Islam, had occurred in the first few centuries following the Muslim conquest. The archaeo-biological data of that study showed that Muslim males and Christian females comprised the majority of early Islamic style burials in southern Iberia, then the following centuries witnessed a consistent increase in Islamic burials which reflects the gradual conversion to Islam through intermarriage and exclude the scenario of enforced conversion. (Bolhofner 2017, 179-180)

IV. The Status of Jews and Muslims after the Reconquista

1. The status of Jews after the Reconquista

After the Reconquista, at the beginning of this era, despite the policy of enforced conversions to Christianity, Jews of Spain continued to maintain their economic status of the urban middle class engaging in various fields that they used to do since the Muslim rule like; merchants, tax collectors, physicians, and artisans. (Melammed 2010, 155) The year 1391 is considered as a turning point in Spanish history as the end of the age of tolerance and beginning of a new age of persecution against the Jews. The first spark of those events was through the hatred campaign Ferrand Martinez, a churchman in Seville, started in 1378, calling for the destruction of the Jewish synagogues, the removal of Jews from any influential positions and separating them from Christians. As a result, a massacre for Jews occurred in 1391 causing the death of many of them and conversions for many, in addition to the conversion of the Seville's synagogues into churches. Other Spanish cities followed Seville in this attitude, beginning with Toledo, and reaching Madrid and other cities, where Jews were attacked, and many have been killed. (Bloomberg 2000, 154-155)

The estimated number of the Jewish population of Spain in the next year of those massacres indicates the death of about 100 thousand Jews and the conversion of another 100 thousand Jews while some other 100 thousand Jews could survive fleeing to Muslim lands. The year 1391 began a new classification within the Spanish Society with the emerge of the new converts called "conversos" due to the collective conversion of Jews by then, which was questionable in regards with the long Judaic tradition of choosing martyrdom and not conversion. There were even voluntary conversions among Jews after the cessation of the enforcement of 1391 adding more than 50 thousand Jews conversos to Christianity by 1415. Some of them were seeking their self-interest through this conversion, while others were enforced by their fears. (Gerber 1994, 113-117)

Those conversos faced a new series of persecution with the beginning of 1449, due to the claims for discriminatory Purity of Blood started in Toledo and then applied throughout Spain. This new chapter of Jews life in Spain included a new term of "Marranos" relative to those conversions, which refer to the Jews who were enforced to convert to Christianity through persecution and continued practicing their Judaism secretly. By the mid-15th century, the Marranos wealth grew, and they appeared in high positions in the royal court, and church. Their social position also grew through intermarriage with the noble families resulting in a wave of hatred against them from the old Christians, suspecting them of being infidel concealing their secret faith of Judaism. (Roth, Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain 2002, 82) As a result, in March 1473, riots and massacres carried out by fanatical mobs against Marranos started in Cordoba spreading into other cities of Spain. The tribunal Spanish Inquisition (1478-1834) for the punishment of heresy has been introduced within those actions. Accordingly, in 1480, about 300 Marranos were burnt due to the Inquisition trials and their estates were reverted to the Spanish authority. (C. Roth 1959, 20-23)

2. The status of Muslims after the Reconquista

The Muslim Rule of Spain ended by the Reconquista leaving a majority of Muslim population in Al-Andalus. After Reconquista, this Muslim population shrank gradually till it totally vanished through the expulsion of the last Moriscos by the 18th century.

A new classification emerged in Spanish society since the Muslim rule, referring to a group of Muslims “Mudejars”, who lived in the Christian Kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula. Those communities of Mudejars appeared for first in the 5th century in Castile as a consequence of the capture of Toledo and continued through the Reconquista that ended the Muslim rule leaving a large community of them. Among those Mudejars, the largest group was in the Kingdom of Valencia where they kept using the Arabic on contrary to other Mudejars who used the Romance like other Spanish people. Those communities of Mudejars have vanished within the 1520s through the policies of persecution and enforced conversions to Christianity. (Harvey 1994, 176-178)

The last Muslim kingdom to surround to Christian forces was Granada, resulting in a large community of Mudejars who were supposed to be protected according to the Granada’s surrender treaty signed in 1491. The estimated number of Granada’s population is 500 thousand of Mudejars. Among them, 100 thousand died or were enslaved while 200 thousand immigrated. However, those remained Mudejars gradually disappeared due to the policies of conversions, which started smoothly through church activities encouraging charitable persuasion and using Arabic in religious services. Eventually, this attitude soon showed ineffectiveness, which led to adopting rigorous policies to enforce conversions. Those policies soon provoked revolts among Mudejars ended with the announcement of the city having no Muslims and turning all mosques into churches in January 1500. Accordingly, the Moriscos⁵ status officially took the place of the Mudejars by 1501. Moreover, the following stage was for eliminating all the aspects of the Muslim or Arab culture. The Royal Decree of October 1501 ordering the burning of Arabic books shows this. In 1526 authorities of Granada issued further regulations to prohibit Arabic and all other forms of Moriscos’ former culture including clothes, circumcision, ritual slaughter of animals. Those regulations strengthened through the Spanish Inquisitions. (Kamen 2014, 17-18) On 12 February 1502, Mudejars of Castile faced the same destiny being forced to choose between baptism or exile. Mudejars of Aragon survived longer due to their economic importance as a source of taxation and a substratum of agriculture and industry. However, they all soon turned to Moriscos by 1526. Gradually, Muslims vanished from all regions of Spain. (Meyerson 1991, 14-15)

V. Discussing the right of return to Spain for Moriscos and Sephardim

1. The common destiny of expulsion

The common destiny of Muslims and Jews after the end of Reconquista by 1492 can be seen in the persecution with forced conversions, suspicions of new Christians (of old Jews and Muslims), Spanish Inquisitions, and finally expulsion for them all. Only the starting time for this destiny was different, as it started earlier for Jews soon after the end of Reconquista wars in 1492 in the same year of facing several attacks of Christian fanatic mob in the 14th century, forcing many of them to convert. For Muslims, they didn’t face this persecutions until the fall of the last Muslim of Granada, as they were supposed to be protected based on the terms of capitulation agreement, which was soon violated with the forced conversions vanishing the Muslim populations in Spain by the beginning of the 16th centuries, and starting the new status of Moriscos who faced suspicions of being crypto-Muslims same like conversos of Jews faced before.

⁵ The word “Morisco” means in Spanish “Little Moor”, referring to the Spanish Muslims who became baptized Christians. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Morisco>

The main reason for establishing the Spanish Inquisitions in 1478 was due to “Judaizing” (crypto-Jews practice). From 1478 to 1492, they arrested those conversos who were suspected of practicing Judaism. Then, inquisitors urged the Spanish Monarchs, to expel Jews from various cities to stop their contacts with conversos. Despite those partial expulsion took place within 1482-1486, crypto-Jews were still found by inquisitors. Eventually, their final solution was the expulsion for the entire Jewish population. By that time the Reconquest of the last Muslim Kingdom was achieved, and only two months after, on 31st of March 1492, the expulsion edict was issued forcing Jews to choose between baptism or leaving Spain by 31st of July without taking any valuables. Tragically, some of those Jews faced death in the sea while fleeing. The estimated number for Jews who were expelled is about 160 thousand while the remaining conversos continued to face the Inquisitions until 1521 as the Inquisitions started to target other forms of deviations from Catholic faith by then. (Homza 2006, xv-xxx)

The Moriscos faced the same destiny of expulsion same as Jews after suffering Inquisitions within the 16th century till the official edict of Moriscos expulsion in 4th of April 1609, ending with the expulsion of about 300 thousand Moriscos by 1614. (Homza 2006, xxxv) 1502 witnessed the first decree of expulsion for Muslims through the Inquisitions due to the royal decree of 12 February declaring the expel for Castile’s Muslims who do not accept baptism. And sooner Muslims in other parts of Spain were subjected to the same forced conversion ended with Aragon in 1526. After the vanishing of Muslims in Spain, the Inquisition then focused on the Moriscos, who were suspected same as the Marranos before. Moreover, expressions of culture of Moriscos were banned by Philip II in 1566, leading to a wave of revolts among them continued for the following three years. (Coleman 2003, 6-7)

It is important to recognize the fact that not all Iberian Jews descendants were expelled as many of them continued living as Christians in Spain, while almost all Muslim Iberians including Moriscos were expelled. Of course, there are some exceptions for Moriscos who could remain in Spain hiding from the Inquisitions, but that was not officially declared until the modern ages when some of those Moriscos ascendants in Spain searched their roots.

2. Analyzing the basis of Spanish policy towards Sephardim and Moriscos

Earlier to the date of issuing the Spanish nationality law of 2015 for Sephardim, there were attempts to acquire the right of Spanish nationality for Moriscos. The first attempt was in February 2002, when participants in the First World Andalus Congress⁶, sent a letter to King Juan Carlos I, the King of Spain by then, requesting for the recognition of the historical injustice of which the Moriscos have suffered in similar measurements that have been taken for Sephardic Jews. As there was no response for this request, another request raised in September 2006, asking for the rights of Moriscos to obtain the Spanish nationality. This second attempt was through a petition raised by the leftist group in the Andalusian Parliament. (García-Sanjuán 2018, 137-138) As in October 2006, a petition was submitted by the Andalusian Parliament asking for an amendment that would facilitate the obtaining of Spanish nationality for the descendants of Moriscos. All these attempts failed to gain any official response, which raised the complaints among Moriscos organizations for this doubled standard policy. (Diaz 2017, 220)

Searching for the basis for this Spanish policy, we have introduced the historical background for both groups. Historically, the only difference between them was the timing for arrival and expulsion of Spain. The different start for Muslims and Jews was represented in the status of “refugees” for the Jews’ case while “conquerors” was the status for the Muslims’ case. However, the end for them both was with the common destiny of persecution and finally expulsion. Between the start and the end, both Jews and Muslims mixed with the indigenous Iberian people through intermarriage or conversions. But there is an important point that we should note, which is that being Muslim is simply describing one’s religion, while Judaism includes identifying one’s race and not just religion. Thus, Jews

⁶ This event was held on 14 February 2002 in Chefchaouen (Morocco) where the largest Moriscos descendants live, on the memory of the Moriscos expulsion. (Escudero 2012) For details: <https://www.aljazeera.net/amp/news/reportsandinterviews/2009/4/10/أحفاد-مسلمي-الأندلس-يحلّمون-بالعودة>

usual attitude when living in different society is to stick together trying to keep the purity of their race. On the contrary, as Islam is a religion for all humanity, the attitude of Muslims is to mix with other societies hoping for the spread of Islam in those societies. Accordingly, when we talk about Moriscos which was the last status for Muslims in Spain before their expulsion, the word was made to refer to “Moro” (Arabs and Berbers of North Africa) stressing their non-Spanish roots, while this is a misleading title, as Muslim was just the religion and not the race, which mean that many of those Moriscos were also indigenous Iberian people chose Islam to be their religion, and even Muslims who were product of intermarriage, they also have the Iberian blood of one of their parents. Accordingly, the presence of indigeneity more exists in the Moriscos case rather than the Jews, who were a separated different race from the other inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula most likely. Anyway, both Muslims and Jews lived for centuries in Spain and were finally facing common destiny after the Reconquista.

A possible factor can be related to the negative view for the period of Muslim rule in Al-Andalus seeing it as a foreign occupation, and consequently considering Spanish people who accepted them adopting their faith betrayers for the Spanish nation. But actually, Jews of Medieval Spain would share the same situation of Moriscos accepting Muslim invaders and even more cooperating with them from the beginning due to the persecution they faced before the Muslim rule, as history proves.

Accordingly, we cannot find a logical basis for that differentiation between Jews and Moriscos historically. This leads us to search for other bases within the present time. On this context, after the November 2012 declaration of Spanish government of facilitating the gaining of Spanish nationality for Jews, a news analysis in the New York times was presented by one of the descendants of Sephardim who belongs to a family of the Marranos criticizing the Spanish offer as it excludes those Marranos from this privilege. She reported that those Jewish conversos who also suffered the same history of persecution like other Sephardim, must seek religious training and undergo formal conversion to Judaism in order to benefit of the Spanish offer and gain the Spanish nationality. As the law issued by the government is concerned with descendants of Sephardi Jews who are members of the Jewish community. So, the criticism on this issue is that Spain is apologizing for the past enforcement for conversions by urging conversions to Judaism for obtaining Spanish nationality as in the case of Marranos families, who lived as Catholics. (Carvajal 2012)

The economic factor is clear in the Jews case, on this vein, an article published in Israeli Journal stressed the economic importance of Jews for Spain to be behind this Spanish policy as Spain has suffered economic problems since the global financial crisis of 2008, with unemployment rate about 25 percent, and emigrations of young people. Earlier before those pro-Jewish legislations, Spain adopted some arrangements can be also described as pro-Jewish arrangements in tourism and commerce encouraging the establishment of Jewish quarters forming tourist routs linked with the Jewish heritage in Spain, to attract Jewish tourists. Thus, attracting Sephardi Jews to settle in Spain would include hopeful prospects of new investments and more flourishing of tourism. (Freund 2014) What support this trend is the former policies adopted by other countries seeking Jewish immigrants for supporting their economies, this can be found in examples like Mexico, Argentine, and Egypt in the 19th century, welcoming Jews for this economic factor. (Stavans 2014)

The demographic dimension could be a factor for this differentiation, as the demographic formation of the Spanish population would not face a serious change receiving some thousands of Jews in contrast with the expected Millions of Moriscos. The estimated numbers of Sephardic Jews of the world may not exceed 3 million, while Moriscos in Morocco would exceed this number besides other millions in other countries. An article published in the Haaretz Israeli Newspaper in 2014, referred to this demographic issue predicting that only a few thousand Jews would apply for Spanish citizenship while millions of Moriscos would apply if they had the same opportunity, stressing that this would form a danger for Spain increasing its Muslim population that could cause even civil conflict. (Diab 2014)

Muslims may be considered as a threat for the Spanish society on the light of the increasing stress on the concept of “Islamophobia” in Europe particularly.

Finally, “Islamophobia” can be suggested as another possible factor for Spain’s policy ignoring Moriscos. This trend can be supported by the Muslim terrors of Madrid 2004 and more recent attacks of Barcelona in 2017 followed by ISIS declaration about restoring Andalusia. (Rich 2017) Moreover, recognition for Moriscos includes the increasing of Muslim population in Europe where “Islamophobia” is stressed.

VI. Conclusion

This paper tried to search the basis for the differentiation concerning the right of return for the Sephardim and Moriscos who faced almost the same incidents that ended with their both being expelled from Spain. Our study started to search the difference between the two groups historically. In this vein, the difference between them was the older timing of arrival for Jews than Muslims. However, seeing that Muslims mixed with the indigenous Spaniards through intermarriage and conversions, the Moriscos roots would be older even than Jewish roots in Spain. Thus, our study concluded that historically there are no logical reasons for this differentiation regarding their right of return to Spain where for centuries was their homeland.

Searching the motives for the Spanish double standard policy, the economic motive was strongly suggested, as the Jews potential investment can present a remedy for Spain’s economic problem. On the contrary, granting Moriscos Spanish nationality indicates burdens rather than gains for Spain, since the numbers of Moriscos applicant for Spanish nationality is expected to be in millions mostly from Muslim Arab countries. This would suggest “Islamophobia” to be a possible factor for ignoring Moriscos right of return to Spain.

Further research would be useful to discuss clash between civilizations that could arouse due to such differentiation, and also relative issues of the right of return that could include discussing the policy of the Jewish country of Israel towards the right of return of Palestinians who are mostly Muslims as it likely represents a comparable case to Jews and Muslims of Spain.

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