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# Cultural Memories of the Expulsion of the *Moriscos*

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*Violins are weeping over the Arabs leaving al-Andalus,  
Violins are weeping over lost time which will never come back  
(Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish<sup>1</sup>)*

In 2009 it will have been 400 years since Philip III expelled the *Moriscos* from Spain. It is therefore time to consider what remains of this tragedy in present-day Spanish collective memory. As opposed to the history as written by the victors it is necessary to also listen to the voice of the descendants of the victims, recovering their own historical memory. As a symbol of the reparation of an historical injustice the present-day Spanish state may grant the descendants of the expelled *Moriscos* the right to Spanish citizenship, as has already happened with the descendants of the Sephardim or Spanish Jews. In this article I consider four forms of memory of the expulsion of the *Moriscos*, embodied respectively in History, Literature, Art and Popular Culture. In the section on History, I analyze the works of Gregorio Marañón and Henry Kamen. Literary memory will be represented by the figure of the Morisco Ricote in Part II of Cervantes' *Quixote*. For Art, I will look at a series of paintings commissioned by Philip III and at a painting competition held in Madrid under Philip IV. Popular culture is represented by the celebrations of 'moros y cristianos,' or 'Moors and Christians,' an old tradition that is still alive.

## Recovering the historical memory

We have a 'duty of memory' towards the victims of history, according to the philosopher Reyes Mate. To narrate means to remember, to make present the memory of history's losers. Over the last few years we have witnessed the recovery of the memory of the victims of the Spanish civil war. As soldiers on

the Republican side, their blood covered the battlefields of Spain. As the losers of the Civil War, they pined away in Spanish concentration camps, or spent years in refugee camps in the south of France or North Africa. Innumerable families were sent into long and painful exile, and hundreds of thousands of people would never return to their homeland. The Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory has worked over the last decade toward recovering the memory of the victims of the Civil War and of the years of violent repression that followed under Franco. But this is not the only 'duty of memory' we Spanish owe the victims of our history.

The year 2009 marks the fourth centenary of the Edict signed by Philip III of the expulsion of the Moriscos, the Moors still living in Spain after the Christian conquest of Granada. So what remains today in the collective memory of the Spaniards of this tragedy, given that for generations they have been educated to oblivious and/or forgetful of this part of history?

As opposed to the history written by the winners, it is necessary to listen to the voice of the victims and their descendants. In 2008, the Islamic Board of Spain will organize the First World Congress for the Recovery of Andalus Historical Memory. This will bring together representatives of multiple countries – North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, America and Asia – where the Moriscos who were expelled from Spain established themselves. As the news agency Europa Press commented recently, this Congress will be the fruit of a series of meetings held over the last two years. In July 2006, as the result of a summer course that took place at the University of Cordoba, it was suggested that Spanish nationality be granted, under certain circumstances, to the Andalusíes, the descendants of the expelled Moriscos, as has offered been already to the Sephardim, the descendants of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. In November 2006, the Second International Encounter of Education and Culture of the Alliance of Civilizations, at Chauen, in Morocco, approved the so-called 'Declaration of Chauen', requested Spanish nationality for the descendants of the Moriscos expelled from Spain, and recommended the formation of a group of experts to study the legal conditions. Finally, in March 2007, likewise in Chauen, the first League of Families of Andalusí origin was founded. It looks, then as if the memory of these victims is being recovered, and that the necessity of a historical reparation with a high symbolic content is being considered.

The recovery of this particular historical memory acquires a new light from the perspective of recent Moroccan immigration into Spain. Moroccan immigration affects all of Spain, but is particularly thick in Andalusia, with immigrants, on many occasions, settling the same districts from which their ancestors were expelled 400 years ago; specialists have even spoken of a 'return of the Moriscos'. In fact, Spanish society is not monolithically Christian any more, and the need for a culture of tolerance is being considered, accommodating the three

religious groups that in the past coexisted in Al-Andalus. This new multicultural society looks back to a past in which Jews, Christians and Muslims managed to create a culture of tolerance in which the Arts, Literature and Philosophy could flourish, supported by the framework of a prosperous economy. Rosa Maria Menocal's book, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*, even though, to a certain extent, it idealizes the past, also illuminates the hopeful possibilities for the present and the future of our multicultural society. Harold Bloom is right when he says that:

I come away from a reading of Menocal's book with a sense of loss, another tribute to her evocative power. Our current multiculturalism, the blight of our universities and of our media, is a parody of the culture of Cordoba and Granada in their lost prime. All the cultural achievements so passionately described by Menocal, from the Alhambra to the poetry of Judah Halevi, were *aesthetic* triumphs, strong in conception, exquisite in execution. As a contribution to cultural memory, in its best aspects, *The Ornament of the World* is an authentic and heartening gesture of the spirit.<sup>2</sup>

### **The memory of the historians**

There is an immense bibliography on the Moriscos, so I can only speak here about two authors. First, Gregorio Marañón, whose *Expulsion and Diaspora of the Spanish Moriscos* was discovered and published only two decades after his death. Marañón analyses the economic, political, religious, social and cultural causes that contributed to the expulsion of 300,000 people, many of them women, children, and old people; in some parts of the country this amounted to the loss of one third of the population. Marañón also discusses the disastrous economic consequences of the expulsion. He even mentions the sufferings of the expelled Moriscos: 'and the truth is that given our psychology of today, the hardness with which those Christianized and Hispanicized Moriscos were dealt disgusts us. They went crying to our beaches, they risked everything, in the end, showing their Muslim tenacity, and they only survived through the hope of returning'.<sup>3</sup> Still, Marañón, a liberal intellectual with a painful experience of exile of his own, justifies the exclusion. In effect, he aligns himself with the idea of Spanish Empire and the need for the religious homogeneity of the nation by the exclusion of 'a strange and hostile people'.

Henry Kamen considers Spain as a country constantly producing exiles from the beginning of the modern age, creating its sense of internal cohesion as a nation precisely by these expulsions. Starting with the Jews and Arabs in 1492 and ending with the massive exile of the Republicans after Franco's victory in the Civil War in 1939, many more expulsions have taken place, among them the Moriscos in 1609. With reason, Henry Kamen insists on characterizing the

expelled Moriscos as Spaniards, because for many generations they had lived in the Peninsula. The attempt of the Spanish monarchs to create an ethnic, religious and cultural homogeneity does not imply that we have to define only the Christians as Spaniards. Kamen has also concerned himself with investigating the forms of survival of the memory of the Moriscos in North Africa:

The vast majority of expelled Spaniards had to settle for a new life in the Muslim territories of North Africa. Others managed to negotiate with the Ottoman authorities of eastern Europe, in order to migrate to the Balkans. A decade later an agent of the English government in Morocco reported that he found Moriscos there who ‘complain bitterly of their cruel exile, and desire deeply to return under Christian rule’. The émigrés from Hornachos settled in what had been the desert town of Rabat in Morocco, and gave it a new life; others settled in Salé, just across the river from Rabat. Through the centuries these émigrés have managed to retain a certain nostalgic and imagined folk memory of the land from which they came. Their houses, their vocabulary, even their music, retain vestiges of the Andalusia that had been their home, and the guitar their music-players strum in the streets at night is the guitar that sings of lost Granada. The memory survives. A whole quarter of the city of Tunis is called Zúqaq al-Andalus, recalling the exiles who once lived there.<sup>4</sup>

The same thing happened in the other cities of Morocco and Tunisia to which the Moriscos emigrated, and where they tried to conserve their religious customs, the style of their houses, their cultural traditions and their music, with the Andalusies guitar and Andalusian traditional songs still surviving. In the Peninsula itself, on the contrary, although the traces of the dramatic fact itself remained visible for decades and deeply affected popular conscience, officially silence reigned as to the Muslim heritage in Spanish culture:

Historical memories of Islam’s fundamental role in the peninsula were consciously blotted out for over three hundred years. A few thinking people, mainly writers and poets, preserved the links, though usually in a minor and subdued way. Ironically, it fell to exiles of a later date, intellectuals who, like the Muslims, were driven out of their country for reasons that others had decided, to restore contact with the culture that had once dominated Spain.<sup>5</sup>

Henry Kamen’s conclusion is that the mass ejection of the Moriscos, that is of Spaniards whose ancestors had lived there for so many generations, ‘was a policy that would eventually have a fundamental impact on Hispanic culture’.

### **Literary memory: the ejection of the Moriscos in *Don Quixote***

The expulsion of the Moriscos left deep marks in Spanish Literature, but I am going to refer only to Cervantes, and more specifically to chapter 54 of the second part of his *Don Quixote*. Cervantes here expresses the point of view of a Morisco, called Ricote. The selection of the name is significant for the position

of Cervantes. Ricote derives from *rico* (rich), and he is a Morisco returning to his village, the same village Don Quixote and Sancho Panza come from in La Mancha, to gather the treasure he buried there before leaving Spain in order to look for a new place to live with his family. But Ricote is also the name of the last valley of the old Kingdom of Murcia from which the Moriscos were expelled, even though all of them had converted to Christianity. Cervantes expresses his solidarity with the expelled Morisco, understands their reasons, recognizes the point of view of the excluded, and gives to Ricote one of the most deeply felt and humane speeches in the entire novel, in many ways recalling the speech of Shylock, the Jew, in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Cervantes did not always hold the same opinion on the Moriscos. In the *Coloquio de los perros*, or instance, he wrote against the Moriscos in general. In the second part of the *Don Quixote*, though – published in 1616, only a few years after the Decree of Expulsion – Cervantes sympathizes with the exiled individual called Ricote.

In his long conversation with Sancho Panza, Ricote is presented to us as an educated, prudent, intelligent and sensible person who expresses himself perfectly in Castilian without any trace of his native Moorish language. He describes his personal itinerary since leaving Spain, how he entered France, went on to Italy and finally bought a house in a village near Augsburg, in Germany, where it was possible 'to live with freedom of conscience'. From there he returns to Castile disguised as a pilgrim – so that not even his former neighbour Sancho is able to recognize him – to gather his treasure and to try afterwards to cross from Valencia to Algiers where he knows that his family has been taken after the expulsion. Ricote is surprised that his daughter Ricota and Francisca Ricota, his wife, have gone to Barbary instead of to France, where they could live as Christians. He knows that they are 'Catholic Christians' and recognizes that he himself is more of a Christian than a Moor. Technically, he is a so-called 'nuevo cristiano' or 'new Christian', but actually he stands above all the religious dogmas of one or the other side and simply wishes to survive with his family in a country that has freedom of religion. He is always weeping, though, for Spain, the lost mother country.

With his typical irony, Cervantes puts in the mouth of Ricote praise of king Philip III and his Decree of Expulsion. Ricote recognizes 'the evil and foolish designs of our people' and justifies their expulsion, but expresses at the same time the terrible pain of exile, of being far away from the mother country:

In short and with good reason, the penalty of banishment was inflicted upon us, a mild and lenient one as some saw it, but which for us was the most terrible one to which we could have been subjected.

Wherever we may be, it is for Spain that we weep; for, when all is said, we were born here and it is our native land. Nowhere have we met with the

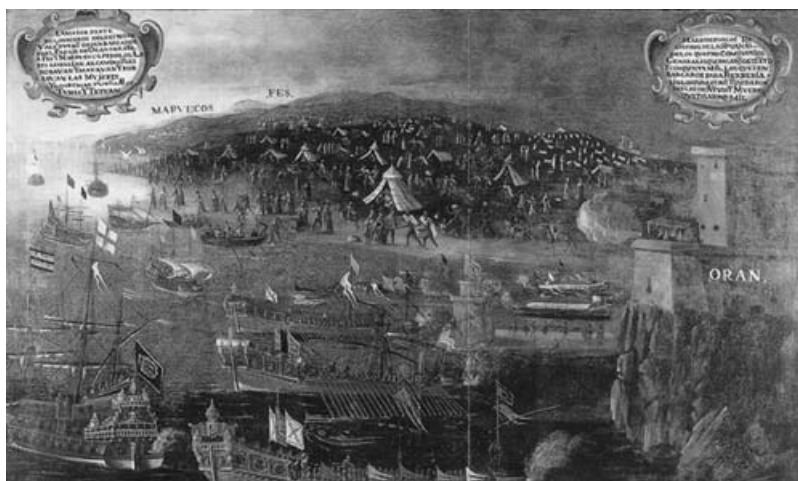
reception that we hoped for. In Barbary and other parts of Africa we expected to be received and welcomed with open arms, but that is where we are insulted and treated the worst.<sup>6</sup>

Cervantes knew very well the problems of the Moriscos and felt solidarity with them. Banished from their Spanish mother country for, among other reasons, not having converted ‘properly’ to Christianity, they were badly received in Muslim territories for being ‘Christians of Castile’. Many of them were robbed or assassinated in North Africa and the majority always lived with the desire of returning to Spain. According to Ricote, this desire was so great that all who could speak Castilian returned to Spain, leaving their women and children, feeling what is meant by the saying ‘Sweet is the love of one’s country’. Sancho listens to these and other matters of the Morisco Ricote and supports him, although he does not accompany him to unearth the treasure, giving up a possible reward. Finally, each follows his own way, and they separate with a great hug. Significantly, Sancho does not denounce Ricote to the authorities of the king.<sup>7</sup>

### **Art as propaganda against the Moriscos**

Maravall defined Spanish 17th-century culture as dominated by the power of the image, and as using art as a means of propaganda and social control in an urban society that could be considered an early ‘mass society’. In the case of the Moriscos’ expulsion there were two important moments when art was put at the service of the monarch’s policy. In the first place, only three years after the Decree, in 1612, Philip III commissioned a series of paintings on the ‘Expulsion of the Moriscos of the Kingdom of Valencia’, in order to illustrate what he considered as the main achievement of his reign. The pictures were painted between 1612 and 1613 by several Valencian artists and the king ordered copies of several of them to give as presents to certain nobles and to the supreme commanders who participated in the military-political operation. These paintings remained in private collections until about 25 years ago, and at the present time are in the Bancaixa Foundation in Valencia, where they were the object of an exhibition in 1997.<sup>8</sup> Possibly, they are the oldest pictorial documentation of an ‘ethnic cleansing’ in Europe. Four of the pictures display, with great realism, scenes of the Moriscos or ‘nation of the new Christians’ being expelled from the port of Valencia (Pere Oromig), from Vinaroz (Pere Oromig and Francisco Peralta), Dénia (Vicent Mestre) and from Alicante (Pere Oromig and Francisco Peralta).

Two other pictures delineate the rebellion of the Moriscos and their desperate fight against the Christian army in the mountains of the Kingdom of Valencia, the suicide of many women, and the surrender of the majority, who were then led to embark in the ports. Just a few resisted until the end in an unequal and hopeless



**Figure 1.** Vicent Mestre, *Disembarkation of the Moriscos in the port of Oran*, 1613, Centre Cultural Bancaixa, Valencia.

fight. Jerónimo Espinosa painted the *Rebelión de los Moriscos en la Sierra del Laguar* and Vicent Mestre the *Rebelión de los Moriscos en la Muela de Cortes*.

The last of the pictures of the series documents the *Disembarkation of the Moriscos in the port of Oran* and is a work by Vicent Mestre (Figure 1). The conjunction of image and written text is interesting: in addition to visual illustration, each painting mentions the names of the cities concerned, or important personages, and there are also one or two ‘cartouches’ with brief texts that explain and interpret the scene, so that it is possible to consider them as authentic political emblems. For example, the picture of the disembarkation in Oran contains two explanatory ‘cartouches’. The first says that ‘most of the Moors of the kingdom of Valencia were disembarked at Oran in order to go to Fez and Morocco, but they were robbed and killed and their women were raped by the “Alarbes” [tribes of the region]: others went to Algiers, Tunisia and Tétouan’. The second text, like those in many of the other paintings, lists the numbers of the exiled in a bureaucratic language without any human consideration: ‘It was found by the registries of the Customs of the four General Commissioners that 150,000 were deported to Barbary, without taking into account those who were killed and over 1,000 who remained in the Kingdom, alive or dead’. These official figures do not take into account people deported in private ships or sent to European ports, so the real numbers are actually much higher. The army, the bureaucracy, the political institutions of the monarchy and also the Church were involved in this ethnic cleansing.

The other important moment was when the Spanish monarchy used art as a mechanism of propaganda for its decision to expel the Moriscos, and this took place under the reign of Philip IV, who fully identified himself with the decision taken by





**Figure 2.** Vicente Carducho, *Expulsion of the Moriscos*, 1627, Prado, Madrid.

his father. In 1627, a painting competition was held in Madrid with the expulsion of the Moriscos as the subject, and painters such as Velázquez, Cajés, Nardi and Carducho took part. Velázquez won the competition with his famous *Expulsion of the Moriscos*. The canvas was hung in a prominent place of the Palace of the Austrias in Madrid, the ‘Hall of Mirrors’, but was lost in the fire of 1734. The only good description of the painting is by Velázquez’ biographer, Antonio Palomino de Castro y Velasco. Other works also disappeared and only a preparatory sketch of Carducho’s painting is left, which is on display at the Prado (Figure 2).<sup>9</sup>

### **Popular memory: celebrations of ‘Moors and Christians’**

Performances of ‘Moros y cristianos’ are still being enacted in many towns of the old Kingdoms of Valencia and Aragón, where the Morisco population was very numerous and sometimes even constituted the majority until 1609. The event depends on popular participation and is in remembrance of the conflicts of the Middle Ages: the ‘Moors’ defend a castle that is conquered by the ‘Christians.’ The ritual became more and more complex over the ages, and one of its elements consists of exalting the Christian religion and insulting Islam. In recent years, in an increasingly multicultural society, with many immigrants of Moroccan origin, some of the offensive aspects touching Mohammed or the Islamic religion have been suppressed. What is being sought right now is a ‘proper’ balance between maintaining the old traditions and avoiding offence to the sensitivity and the religious beliefs of the Moroccan or Muslim immigrants in general. In fact, some Muslim religious authorities have even demanded the outright suppression of these celebrations because they consider them offensive to the Muslim community. Certainly, one can question the sense of maintaining this tradition in our present multicultural

society. In 2006, the celebration of Moors and Christians of Alcoy headed the parade of the Hispanic people in New York, although only the Christian army marched and not the Moors, in order to avoid hurting sensibilities after September 11th. These celebrations have their roots in history prior to the expulsion of the Moriscos, as Francisco J. Flores Arroyuelo writes:

The ritual confrontation between the armies of Moors and Christians appeared throughout the XVth century in the patios of the palaces and the market places of the villages, and in these celebrations, the conquest of the castle was represented in a theatrical form that, sometimes, also signified a political allegory or an adventure of cavalry. These celebrations, with a clear political exponent, were pastimes in which the figure of the monarch stood out and in which the participation of the nobility played an important role.<sup>10</sup>

During the 16th century, the celebrations changed form and were integrated into the Renaissance festivals, becoming a manifestation of the victory of the Christians in the conquest of Granada. The celebration served to remind the Moriscos of their defeat, and in many cases they were the object of ridicule. At the beginning of the 17th century, after the expulsion of the Moriscos, popular participation increased and was connected with religious celebrations. We can find descriptions of the celebration in the literature of the time, such as for instance in the picaresque novel *Vida y hechos de Estebanillo González*, published in 1646. It seems quite logical that the celebrations were staged in many of the towns where Moriscos had lived, in Granada, Almería, the kingdoms of Valencia and Aragón, or the present provinces of Alicante and Murcia. But they also extended to the north of Spain, to Galicia, Asturias, the Basque Country or Navarra, from which the Muslim presence had disappeared centuries before. And the celebration of Moors and Christians also emigrated to America, along with the image of Santiago Matamoros (Saint James, the Moors-slayer), to lands without any Arab population, probably because the conquerors looked upon the Indians to be the ‘new Moors’ to be conquered.

With his typical sense of humour, Manuel Vicent suggested some years ago, just after the conflict between Spain and Morocco over the tiny island of Perejil, that in the celebration of Moors and Christians a revolutionary fact was occurring: as now all the Christians want to play the part of Moors and Moroccan immigrants and other Arabs are often paid to play the part of Christians. Perhaps, he concluded, this paradox will bring ultimate peace and the end of racism. So, ‘ojalá’, which in Arab means ‘God would want it’.

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