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## **STRUCTURAL DELUSION, RELIGIOUS ANXIETY, AND A MELODRAMATIC PRIEST: EXPLORING MACRO AND MICRO INFLUENCES ON THE CÓRDOBAN MARTYRS**

Emma K. Friesen  
*Seattle Pacific University*

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STRUCTURAL DELUSION, RELIGIOUS ANXIETY, AND A MELODRAMATIC PRIEST: EXPLORING  
MACRO AND MICRO INFLUENCES ON THE CÓRDOBAN MARTYRS

by

EMMA FRIESEN

FACULTY MENTORS:

DR. ALISSA WALTER AND DR. RAPHAEL MONDESIR

HONORS PROGRAM DIRECTOR:

DR. CHRISTINE CHANEY

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# ABSTRACT:

After escaping the assassination of the Umayyad royal family in Damascus, a member of this family, Abd al-Rahman I, fled to the Iberian Peninsula to establish a new Umayyad Empire (756-1492 AD). Famous for its pluralistic polity, unparalleled scholarship, artistic prowess, and more, this empire rightfully established itself as a powerful political force. Many scholars emphasize the unique *convivencia*, or coexistence, that characterized Islamic Spain during these centuries while others thoroughly question this reality, concerned that it ignores the cultural strain that is inevitable in such a diverse society. In this essay, we find ourselves balancing a middle position, recognizing that both perspectives offer truth and are essential in order to glean meaningful lessons on what it means to shape a society that thrives amidst diversity. Serving as a tangible example of the cultural tension in Andalusia is a group of radical Christians known as the Córdoba martyrs. These 48 Christians experienced structural restraints primarily as a result of Islamic law as well as individual religious anxiety, which led them to seek the unprecedented act of “voluntary martyrdom”. In order to fully understand the tension they experienced and how it contributed to the eventual dissolution of Umayyad Spain, both the micro and macro influences on their decision must be explored. Through their story, we witness the power that inhabits both their individual narratives and macro structures. Their experience offers meaningful contributions to the macro-micro discussion present across all disciplines and highlights the importance of the micro perspective that is often discounted, especially in sociological inquiry. Scholars from every discipline need to acknowledge and consciously wrestle with this relationship in order to engage in truly robust research. With more knowledge of the interaction between structural and the individual, we can better understand how to use both micro and macro

sources of power to build a world where social structures are more just, and a diversity of individuals and groups can flourish.

## INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC SPAIN:

Islamic civilization began as small group of Muslims in the city of Mecca under the leadership of the prophet Muhammad (570-623 AD). Before he became a prophet, Muhammad was known for his trustworthiness, his mediation and conflict resolution skills, his heart for the marginalized, and, naturally, his spiritual inclination.<sup>1</sup> He carried this excellence into his role as the leader of the *umma*<sup>2</sup> and offered the promise of individual salvation alongside a hopeful vision of a just and unified community that mirrored the nature of God.<sup>3</sup> When Muhammad died in 632 AD, the Umma faced their first major challenge as a community. Although Muhammad was truly irreplaceable, they needed to select a new leader. Two major schools of thought arose in debates over who should inherit Muhammad's authority. Those falling under the Khalifa model believed that whoever is the most qualified to fill his role should do so. Those adhering to the Imam model believed that there was something special about Muhammad's bloodline and that the legacy of Muhammad must be carried on through his family in leadership. This quarrel over Muhammad's successor still divides Muslims into the two main sects of Islam: Sunni Muslims following the Khalifa model and Shi'a Muslims following the Imam model.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tamim Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), 18-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Umma*: term used to describe the broader entirety of the Muslim community in the world.

<sup>3</sup> Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-40.

Although not without intense disagreement and violence, the umma managed to choose, and thrive under what are known as the four original Caliphs: Abu Bakr (r. 632-634 AD), Umar (634-644), Uthman (644-656), and finally Ali (656-661). To put it concisely, Ali did not come to power through communal consensus or popular support, but through forced appointment by rebel leaders within the umma. As a result, civil war broke out. A man named Mu'awiya—an elite man from Mecca who was not from Muhammad's bloodline—emerged as the winner of that civil war. Mu'awiya established a hereditary monarchy, known as the Umayyad Empire, with the capital of the broader Islamic Empire now located in Damascus. Although a hereditary monarchy significantly deviated from original Khalifate structure, it operated with relative success under the Umayyads. Islam spread across North Africa and Arab culture spread to the north, shaping the beginnings of a mixed cultural identity throughout the empire.<sup>5</sup> Due mainly to Arab ethnocentrism, spiritual and financial corruption within the monarchy, and spiritual revivals among citizens, anti-Umayyad leaders surfaced among the polity looking to stage revolution and restore members of Muhammad's bloodline to the throne. Invited as dinner guests to the King's court, these leaders assassinated the entire Umayyad royal family and established a new empire known as the Abbasid Empire (750-1258AD).<sup>6</sup> However, one member of the Umayyad royal family managed to escape: a man named Abd al-Rahman I.

After evading his own assassination, Abd al-Rahman I traveled all the way to the Iberian Peninsula to establish a second Umayyad Empire (756-1492 AD). Given the unique cultural context of Iberia, this Umayyad empire was deviant in many ways from the original. When migrants from the east took over Spain from the Visigoths, a group of ethnically German

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<sup>5</sup> Walter, "The Umayyad Empire," Lecture on Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Walter, "The Umayyad Empire," Lecture on Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020.

Christians, it took only a few generations before a thriving diversity of ethnicities and interrelations between religious groups gave Andalusia a distinct cultural identity.<sup>7</sup> There were political leaders of every background on all levels of government, there was intermarriage across religious lines, and a flourishing of collaborative scholarship. Scholarship prospered in Baghdad under Abbasid rule, but the medley of cultural backgrounds in Andalusia made an especially unique environment for riveting discourse and discovery across a variety of disciplines.<sup>8</sup>

When Muslim leaders first arrived in Christian Visigothic Spain, they constituted a religious minority. However, starting in the mid-700s through till about the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Islamic civilization became the dominant influence in the Mediterranean.<sup>9</sup> While initially Islam was not the quantitative majority in Andalusia, what mattered was its political hegemony. Given that Muslims were initially outnumbered by Christians, “the Muslims had every reason to allow a great deal of autonomy to any Christian community that recognized their authority and paid the *jizya*.”<sup>10</sup> Forced conversion is condemned by the Quran, but Muslim leaders were able to encourage conversion by implementing policies that offered civil advantages to those who converted.<sup>11</sup> Conversion, therefore, was not always primarily about an individual spiritual experience, as is often the Western Christian perspective, but involved considering the practical and social consequences of conversion.<sup>12</sup> Many non-Muslims would convert to Islam

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<sup>7</sup> María Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002), 28.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-35.

<sup>9</sup> Walter, “Diversity and Hybridity in the Western Muslim World,” Lecture on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Chapter 1, <https://libro.uca.edu/martyrs/martyrs.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Quran 2:256

<sup>12</sup> Jessica Coope, “Religious and Cultural Conversion to Islam in Ninth-Century Umayyad Córdoba,” *Journal of World History* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 48.

because they desired “to enjoy full social and legal status in the community.”<sup>13</sup> By 961 CE the Iberian Peninsula was fifty percent Muslim and eighty percent by 1105 CE.<sup>14</sup>

Naturally, alongside Islam, the Arabic language penetrated every social space. Even in Christian spaces, Mozarabs, the label for Arabized Christians, began to adopt Arab-Christian mixed names and the Catholic Church held mass and developed rites in Arabic rather than Latin.<sup>15</sup> Many church leaders lamented this shift away from Latin, seeing a change in language as threatening their faith,<sup>16</sup> but “Arabized Christians, along with their name, became the very symbols of the endurance of Christianity alongside Islam.”<sup>17</sup> There is no strong historical evidence that Christian laypeople felt this threat and actually embraced the linguistic beauty and elegance that defined the Arabic language.<sup>18</sup> While the cultural landscape of Andalusia under Umayyad rule was not a pluralist paradise, expectations and norms of mutual respect between diverse groups allowed for thriving on all levels of society.

Islamic law is a fundamental piece of every Muslim’s pursuit of a righteous life. In the case of Islamic Spain, Muslim rulers embraced Islamic law in an effort to create a just society for all of its subjects. *Sharia* is a broad term encompassing the general governing body of Islamic law which uses primarily the Qur’an and *hadith*,<sup>19</sup> to offer instructions on living righteously. The Qur’an is the central source for Islamic law offering legal proscriptions for individual and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>14</sup> Jessica Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba: Community and Family Conflict in an Age of Mass Conversion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 117-118; Walter, “Diversity and Hybridity in the Western Muslim World,” Lecture on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, 67-70.

<sup>16</sup> Coope, “Religious and Cultural Conversion,” 55.

<sup>17</sup> Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, 69.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *Hadith*: recollections of Muhammad’s life, relationships, statements, teachings, etc. Another source of information in the formation of Islamic Law. Originally hadith was passed through oral transmission but was eventually recorded in writing so that scholars across a vast Islamic empire might analyze a common source for application of hadith principles in everyday life.

communal living as well as general ethical boundaries, providing “criteria for discernment between not only truth and falsehood, beauty and ugliness, but also good and evil.”<sup>20</sup> It would be incorrect, however, to describe sharia as a rigid legal system, when in many ways it is flexible. In fact, there are four separate primary schools of Islamic law, divided largely by geographic regions spread throughout Europe, Asia, and North Africa. Each of them comes to unique conclusions about various legal questions, but all of them are accepted as orthodox in the eyes of the others.<sup>21</sup>

Umayyad Spain largely followed that of the Maliki school. Two principles buttress the approach of this school. First is *‘amal ahl al-Madinah*. This principle emphasized following the *sunnah*<sup>22</sup> and *hadith* traditions practiced by those in the city of Medina, as “it was at Madinah where the Prophetic tradition grew, [where Muhammad’s] companions taught and practiced it.”<sup>23</sup> The second principle is *maslahah*, which emphasized that the overall purpose of Islamic Law was the practice of the “common good and welfare of mankind.”<sup>24</sup> In instances of unclear instruction from the Qur’an, keepers of the law should abide by this principle. The authority and practice of Islamic law in a large state was unique because “medieval Islam did not have anything comparable to the political separation between spiritual power and secular power in medieval Europe.”<sup>25</sup> In Islamic empires, including the Umayyads of Spain, “Islamic Spain *sharia* pervaded every aspect of life, from the private and familiar to the social and public sphere.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, et. al., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2015), xxvi.

<sup>21</sup> Walter, “Hadith and Islamic Law,” Lecture on Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> *Sunnah*: the prophet Muhammad’s life as an example for how to live righteously.

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad Khalid Masud, “A History of Islamic Law in Spain: An Overview,” *Islamic Studies* 30, no. 1/2 (1991): 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Darío Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2016), 150.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.



Sharia provided a framework for the construction of all social structures in Islamic Spain and established norms for relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim populations. While explicitly a product of Islam, sharia deeply influenced the lives of non-Muslim constituents of Umayyad Spain.

Muslim empires in other regions and time periods each developed their own way of governing in accordance with Islamic teachings. The centering of Islamic teachings in Umayyad Spain included maintaining a unique relationship with the Christians and Jews under their governance. Islam was politically dominant and eventually held the quantitative majority, but the Quran places Muslims under a special covenant known as a *dhimma* with Christians and Jews. This covenant meant that these peoples “were granted religious freedom, not forced to convert to Islam...[and] they could share in much of Muslim social and economic life.”<sup>27</sup> The Quran recognizes that Muslims can agree in many ways with these *dhimmi*<sup>28</sup> due to their common reverence for the same God.<sup>29</sup> In assimilating into Islamic culture, many Christians also recognized that, on the most fundamental levels, Islam and Christianity held many of the same beliefs; many felt that “accepting some aspects of Islamic culture was simply a question of common sense and good manners and had no serious religious implications.”<sup>30</sup> There are a myriad of irreconcilable theological differences between these groups, but their unique relationship and context resulted in widespread mutual respect. Jews and Christians were

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<sup>27</sup> Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Dhimmi*: a term used to refer to Christians and Jews, as these were the religious groups protected under the *dhimma* covenant.

<sup>29</sup> Quran 3:64, 29:46

<sup>30</sup> Coope, “Religious and Cultural Conversion,” 59.

protected under this covenant, but Islamic political hegemony maintained that Islamic sharia law pervaded every aspect of the lives of all Andalusians.<sup>31</sup>

For example, Jews and Christians could peacefully practice their own faith, although not always publicly, but they had to pay a tax called the *jizya*<sup>32</sup> with “willing submission” in order to maintain a peaceful co-existence, have the ability to participate in other sectors of society, and to contribute to the well-being of the state.<sup>33</sup> Non-Muslims converted to avoid the tax and to have greater access to certain social spaces,<sup>34</sup> but the tax was also not extremely outrageous as to be oppressive to the other monotheistic faiths.<sup>35</sup> The *jizya* was intended to be an avenue for non-Muslims to contribute to the well-being of their community as Muslims do when participating in *zakat* (charity). The *jizya* tax is just one example of how the intersection of legal and religious structures had a particularly heavy influence on patterns of social control in Islamic Spain.

Islamic law infiltrated the lives of everyone that lived in Andalusia, but as with any legal system, the existence of law does not necessarily mean that it is comprehensively or regularly applied—there was no sense of a zero-tolerance legal system in Andalusia.<sup>36</sup> When an Islamic legal system was first established in Andalusia, Christians could, for the most part, operate in the same way as they had under Visigothic rule.<sup>37</sup> While there were indeed laws that highlighted

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<sup>31</sup> Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 138.

<sup>32</sup> *Jizya*: tax levied on non-Muslim members of a state governed by Islamic Law.

<sup>33</sup> Quran 9:29

<sup>34</sup> Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 187.

<sup>35</sup> Whether or not the *jizya* tax was extremely oppressive to non-Muslims is heavily debated by scholars. Some scholars who are suspicious of *Convivencia* (coexistence) within Islamic Spain argue that *jizya* was extremely oppressive and existed “to remind [the *dhimmi*] of their submission.” However, for example, when Muslim rulers took over the Byzantine Empire, most Christians were not threatened by the tax because “the *jizya* would generally be less than the taxes they had been paying to their Byzantine overlords.” On top of this, Muslim governance offered Christians more freedom with religious practices. Overall, the *jizya* was not unbearable as compared to typical taxation within any state, but definitely indicated differential treatment of non-Muslim subjects under Islamic rule. Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 330; Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted*, 47.

<sup>36</sup> Coope, “Religious and Cultural Conversion,” 51.

<sup>37</sup> Charles L. Tieszen, “From Invitation to Provocation: “Holy Cruelty” as Christian Mission in Ninth-Century Córdoba,” *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 24, no. 1 (2012): 23.

certain expectations for dhimmi activity, such as prohibiting any flamboyant displays of worship that drew significant attention away from Islam, or the jizya tax, “for the most part the laws designed to keep Christians and Muslims at what the jurists regarded as the proper social distance went unenforced in ninth-century Córdoba.”<sup>38</sup> While there was a relatively flexible legal system in Córdoba, some activity, like blasphemy and apostasy—the primary crimes of the Córdoba martyrs—were taken very seriously. In situations involving these (and other) acts, legal scholars and political leaders began to escalate their enforcement of laws.<sup>39</sup> It is in these crevices, in these messy nuances of Islamic law that one witnesses the cultural strains present within a diverse Umayyad Spain.

Although faithfully attempting to tolerate and respect the practices of other monotheistic faiths, division arose in Andalusia when Islamic legal scholars grappled with a myriad of questions regarding how the dhimmi fit into Islamic law. The individuals tasked with understanding and developing Islamic law are known as the *ulama*.<sup>40</sup> They “defined the law, controlled the courts, ran the educational system, and permeated Muslim social institutions. They had tremendous social power throughout the civilized world, the power to muster and direct the approval and disapproval of the community against particular people or behaviors...the ulama were not (and are not) appointed by anyone...[they become part of the ulama] by gaining the respect of people who were already established ulama.”<sup>41</sup> It was these clerics that sat down with individual situations and determined the most appropriate legal approach. Minute legal

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<sup>38</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 1.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 139.

<sup>41</sup> Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted*, 98.

discrepancies needed examination in order to provide instruction on how to live most righteously.

The concerns within Islamic law that were particularly pertinent to the culture of Andalusia, and in the case of the Córdoba Martyrs, were those regarding interreligious marriage. In both Islamic law and in European society generally, religion traditionally followed the father. This meant that children with Muslim fathers were legally Muslim even if the children wanted to be Christian or had a Christian mother. Under Islamic law, it was considered permissible for a Muslim man to marry a Christian woman, but not for a Muslim woman to marry a Christian man.<sup>42</sup> Any children out of these mixed marriages were legally considered Muslim and it was intended that they would be raised and treated as such.<sup>43</sup>

Legal considerations in the cases of these *neomartyrs*<sup>44</sup> revolved primarily around the reality that many of them came from these mixed marriages. Many of them chose to practice Christianity, effectively apostatizing their legal identity as Muslim.<sup>45</sup> As mentioned earlier, conversion or faith in Islam was not as simple as declaring personal belief in the message of God given through Muhammad, but it was also a legally binding, public identity. This difference in the conditions of conversion and their interreligious parentage created immense confusion and tension between the martyrs' religious identities and legal expectations, which, as will be elucidated in the following sections, played a significant role in their decision to become martyrs.

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<sup>42</sup> Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 346; Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 1.

<sup>43</sup> Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, 67.

<sup>44</sup> The term "neomartyr" is often used by scholars to differentiate Christians killed under Muslim rule from the "palaemartyrs" of imperial Rome. It is a linguistic choice designed to name the contexts of these martyrs as distinct; Eulogius and Alvarus, *The Eulogius Corpus*, trans. Kenneth Baxter Wolf (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Interreligious marriage, along with other cross-cultural disputes, such as laws regarding purity, cuisine, and scholarship meant that division festered within the culture of tolerance fostered in Andalusia.<sup>46</sup>

The remaining sections will explore the relationship between the legal and religious structures of Andalusia and the individual stories of these martyrs offering further insight into the connection between macro and micro levels of society.

## EULOGIUS:

Structural realities of law and religion are not simply abstract, macro realities, but have significant implications for the material lives of everyday people. As has been made clear in the previous section, Islamic hegemony replacing that of the Visigoths called for many shifts in the daily lives and experiences of the local Christian population. While life in Islamic Spain was characterized in many ways by interreligious coexistence and collaboration, there was an unavoidable tension between the personal Christian religious identity and the structural constraints of Islamic law and politics. It was in the tension between religious identity and cultural systems that the 48 Córdoba Martyrs blasphemed Muhammad and Islam and/or apostatized their legal status as Muslims and were executed by Islamic authorities in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. As has been elucidated, social structures and conditions are significant in the story of these martyrs because they influenced their religious identity negotiation. These individuals were struggling to reconcile their strong religious convictions with *perceived* structural threats (i.e.

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<sup>46</sup> Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 178-183.

jizya, restrictions on public worship, etc.), which are as real as empirically verifiable ones.<sup>47</sup> The uniqueness of these martyrs' story is seen in the relationship between their individual worlds and structural realities.

The stories of these neomartyrs would have been lost to history if it were not for the conviction of one Córdoba priest named Eulogius. A radical Christian layman named Paulus Alvarus also contributed to writings about these martyrs, but Eulogius is the famous and primary hagiographer of the Córdoba Martyrs. Eulogius and Alvarus' primary motives in telling their stories was to exalt them as champions of the Christian faith and to disparage Islam and Muhammad as wicked and immoral;<sup>48</sup> they wanted to illuminate the deficiencies of Islam and Muslim persecution of Christians, as well as chide the Christians that accommodated Muslim rule and Islamic culture. To condemn Islam and Muslim persecution of Christians, Eulogius told stories of past martyrs in Córdoba and used intense, violent language to describe a faith he so despised. To venerate the martyrs, he used embellished, affirmative language as he compared them to martyrs of pagan Rome.

Given that Eulogius' is the only person who wrote a detailed account of these martyrs, scholars often hesitate to use him as an accurate representation of the martyrs' stories. Many scholars make one appropriate disclaimer: Eulogius offers valuable insight into martyrs'

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<sup>47</sup> Sociological and cultural studies theory recognize that the way people *perceive* reality can be just as powerful in influencing human behaviour as empirically verified "reality". This phenomenon can be explained by the infamous Thomas Theorem that, summed up by its creator William Isaac Thomas says, "If men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." This is relevant to the martyrs, especially in relation to Eulogius' claims of systematic oppression against Christians. There was certainly social tension and inequality in Islamic Spain, but with no widespread, systematic oppression these martyrs were largely responding to *exaggerated perceptions* of persecution. Nonetheless, they all still decided to participate in voluntary martyrdom, emphasizing that this perception was enough to influence their choices; "Thomas Theorem," Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803104247382>.

<sup>48</sup> Tieszen, "Holy Cruelty," 23.

experiences, but his perspective is also thoroughly biased.<sup>49</sup> True to the hyperbolic nature of the martyrology genre, he is adamant about facets of the martyrs' stories and the realities of Islamic Spain that stretch the truth.<sup>50</sup> For example, many scholars agree that he exaggerates the presence of direct, comprehensive persecution from Muslim authorities in Spain.<sup>51</sup> Eulogius and Alvarus wrote that the "cultural mixing between Christians and Muslims"<sup>52</sup> was a massive threat to Christians under Muslim rule and they thoroughly "feared diversity";<sup>53</sup> they did not entertain any evidence or possibility of peaceful coexistence between the two faiths. He may not be the most dependable source, however, when one understands who Eulogius was and cautiously analyze his writings, one can understand his motives and strategies.<sup>54</sup> If approached with a critical eye, recognizing the hyperbolic inflation of the martyrology genre, his writings can be extremely valuable in understanding both the micro and macro facets of intercultural relationships in Islamic Spain.<sup>55</sup>

At the time of these neomartyrs' campaign, "the sceptical response to the neomartyrs was in all likelihood the dominant one among the Christians of mid-ninth-century Córdoba."<sup>56</sup> Many assimilated Christians condemned the martyrs because they did not want to associate with

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> According to Charles L. Tieszen, Eulogius and Alvarus' writing is "a mix of hagiography, a defence of the martyrs against those who condemned their actions and their verbal attacks upon Muslims and Islam." Jessica Coope writes that their biography of Muhammad "is a bizarre combination of what to a Muslim would have passed for distorted fact...mixed with grotesque invention." (48) These men possessed an adamantly anti-Islamic perspective and in order to express their abhorrence and justify the actions of the martyrs they needed to strategically hyperbolize the structural persecution and general plight of the martyrs. This means that their writing, while is useful and whose intelligence should not be underestimated, is not a wholly accurate account of the martyrs. Tieszen, "Holy Cruelty," 48; Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, 48, 23.

<sup>51</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 8; Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 78-82; Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Tieszen, "Holy Cruelty," 23.

<sup>53</sup> Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, xii.

<sup>54</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Introduction.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2.

<sup>56</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 66-67.

anything that would potentially “draw undue attention to their inferior religious status or arouse suspicions about their contribution to Islamic society.”<sup>57</sup> Eulogius denounced this sentiment and the Christians that expressed it, writing his martyrology with the belief that these martyrs deserved to be recognized and celebrated as champions of the Christian faith.<sup>58</sup> Eulogius saw the negative reaction to the martyrs and he responded by writing “apologetic treatises extolling their fortitude and defending their memories from the attacks of unsympathetic Christians” and eventually also composed their martyrology.<sup>59</sup>

In his martyrological efforts, Eulogius attempted to equate the experiences of the Córdoba Martyrs with those of Christian martyrs of the Roman empire in earlier centuries;<sup>60</sup> he believed this strategy would make their holiness unquestionable. Many Christians rejected this attempt because “the actions of the new martyrs simply did not fit the time-honoured primordial narrative inherited from the early Church.”<sup>61</sup> Kenneth Baxter Wolf, in his book *The Eulogius Corpus*, which translates and offers commentary on Eulogius’ martyrology, offers three main points of criticism of this comparison.

First, opponents of Eulogius’ reverence for these martyrs referenced the absence of miracles as evidence of a lack of divine inspiration for their deaths. Many Christians felt justified in their expectation of miracles as they were clear, empirical evidence indicating the divinely willed nature of these martyrdoms.<sup>62</sup> Second, given the lack of an acutely persecutory context in Córdoba, as existed for much of Roman history, many Christians refused to recognize the

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<sup>57</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 5.

<sup>58</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 66.

<sup>59</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Introduction.

<sup>60</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>62</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 6.



grievances of these martyrs as legitimate. Again, majority Christian opinion recognized that they had the Muslim governance to thank for their religious freedom and access to the majority of social positions and spaces.<sup>63</sup> Finally, Roman martyrs were under pagan rule, whereas the Córdoba martyrs shared the same God as their Muslim rulers; this made for unique religious tensions in Andalusia as compared to Rome. While there was not complete social equality in Islamic Spain, Muslim rulers respected Christians as “people of the book,” and established the *dhimmi* covenant to honor this.<sup>64</sup> Christians largely returned this respect and “saw Muslims as people who worshiped God in accordance with their own distinctive “law”.”<sup>65</sup> There are several major doctrinal differences between the faiths, but each group respected the other given their reverence for the same God.<sup>66</sup>

Although these criticisms are logically sound given the inconsistencies in the parallels Eulogius draws between Roman martyrs and Córdoba ones, Eulogius offers curt rebuttals. Eulogius argued that miracles were unnecessary for these martyrs—in Rome it was appropriate “to crown the martyrs of God with miracles, because they were trying to establish with strong roots the initial spread of Christianity.”<sup>67</sup> Christians in Spain were already convinced of the legitimacy of the Christian faith and therefore, miracles were not necessary in Córdoba. Eulogius also referenced Pope Gregory I’s commentary on the book of Job which claims that “at the end of this age...miracles will be absent from the church,”<sup>68</sup> signaling Eulogius believed the “End of

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<sup>63</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 8; Tieszen, “Holy Cruelty,” 23.

<sup>64</sup> Quran 29:46, 3:64

<sup>65</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 83.

<sup>66</sup> Quran 29:46, 3:64; Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 83.

<sup>67</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 175 (Memoriale Sanctorum 1.14).

<sup>68</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 174 (Memoriale Sanctorum 1.13).

Time” was upon them.<sup>69</sup> His third and final response to the miracle critique is that the martyrs’ critics were “unworthy of witnessing them.”<sup>70</sup>

To counter the argument that Christians in Spain did not experience persecution, Eulogius listed “the destruction of churches, taxation, the cursing prompted by the tolling of bells, restricted interpersonal contact between Christians and Muslims, calumny, mockery, rock throwing, and hatred of priests” as examples of persecution.<sup>71</sup> Eulogius needed to inflate the persecution experienced by Córdoba Christians to ensure that their deaths would not appear as merely suicide.<sup>72</sup> Eulogius countered the argument that Muslims were not pagans and worshipped the same God as Christians by emphasizing the other theological differences between the faiths. For many Christians in Spain at that time, all that mattered was that Muslim leaders shared the same God and “the significance of the countless differences in belief and ritual that separated the two religions paled by comparison.”<sup>73</sup> Eulogius admonished this complacency as he argued that it denied the all-too-critical Christological differences between the faiths.<sup>74</sup>

Along with working to venerate the martyrs, Eulogius’ other purpose in writing their martyrology was to disparage Islam and its prophet, aiming to shape public image of Islam into a primarily negative one. In their writings, Eulogius and Alvarus “believed Muslims had no right to exist and depicted them only through the most hateful stereotypes.”<sup>75</sup> Eulogius did not have much direct contact with the martyrs, but the first few martyrs were apparently clear in their beliefs about Islam. According to Eulogius, they told the authorities that “we declare your

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<sup>69</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 71.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 8.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Chapter 7.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, xii.

prophet to be a precursor of Antichrist and the author of a prophane dogma” and that they “bemoan your blindness and ignorance.”<sup>76</sup> Using this strong language in his telling of the martyrs’ stories Eulogius strategically criticized Muhammad and Islam in a way that would justify the suicidal behaviour of the martyrs and place Islam in a bad light.

While Eulogius was only one man with a perspective that contradicted the majority Christian opinion, his storytelling was anything but harmless. In his embellished depictions of intense Muslim persecution, he shaped these martyrs into victims that created further antagonism between Christians and Muslims. These martyrs violated widespread boundaries of mutual respect between the faiths, and while not the initial source of the tension themselves, there is certainly a connection between their actions, Eulogius’ portrayal of them, and historical events that followed. After the death of the last martyrs in 859 AD, this episode was treated by Muslim authority as just an isolated episode of Christians adjusting to Muslim rule.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the flourishing of Córdoba dramatically expanded, its prosperity in intellect and scholarship, material wealth, art, and more earning it the befitting name of “ornament of the world.”<sup>77</sup> Ego boosted by this prosperity, Abd al-Rahman III officially declared that his Emirate in Córdoba was now a Caliphate, naming himself the first official Caliph of Umayyad Spain in 929 AD. This was perhaps a justified move given Córdoba’s cultural and political prowess, but this decision “helped trigger particularly hostile and rivalrous reactions, from both the Christian north and the Islamic south” in Northern Africa.<sup>78</sup> With this decision, Abd al-Rahman III pitted himself directly against two major rival caliphates in the Muslim world at the time: the Abbasids in Southwest Asia (790-1258 AD) and the Fatimids of Northern Africa

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<sup>76</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 212 (Memoriale Sanctorum 2.4.3).

<sup>77</sup> Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, 33.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

(969-1171 AD); eventually Umayyad Spain would also run into trouble with the Islamic fundamentalist empires of the Almoravids (1089-1147 AD) and Almohads (1121-1269 AD) in Morocco.<sup>79</sup>

In 1009 AD, about 150 years after this martyr episode and 80 years after the establishment of the new Umayyad Caliphate, political in-fighting began in Andalusia.<sup>80</sup> This in-fighting marked the start of Umayyad downfall leading up to the dissolution of the caliphate into separate *taifas*, or “city-states,” in 1031 AD. A fractured state means increased vulnerability to the ploys of other political groups, including Christian groups in northern Iberia and the rival Islamic polities in northern Africa. Christian kingdoms in the north took this chance to reclaim Iberia with the first signs of the infamous *Reconquista* appearing in 1085. While the martyrdom episode was initially seen as a slight glitch in interreligious relationships, during the Reconquista it was becoming clear that Eulogius’ writings were more powerful than initially thought. His storytelling and arguments formed an image of the intensely persecuted Christian under Muslim rule and established these martyrs as a potent symbol for the Reconquista.

Interreligious disputes were not the impetus for all battles and political negotiations during the Reconquista. In fact, there was plenty of interreligious collaboration influencing the shifting of borders and leadership in Iberia during the 11th and 12th centuries.<sup>81</sup> However, these images of the persecuted Christian and the infidel Muslim that Eulogius had crafted, alongside the use of Saint James, affectionately known to northern Christian kingdoms as the “Moor or Muslim slayer,” as the patron saint of the Reconquista negatively altered the relationship between Islam and Christianity that was once defined by religious tolerance and collaboration.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>80</sup> Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, 36.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 42-44.

When the final *taifa* of Granada fell into the hands of Queen Isabella I of Castille and King Ferdinand II of Aragon, these leaders forced the expulsion of most Muslims and Jews occupying Spain, shifting the demographic landscape of the once diverse and tolerant Andalusia.<sup>82</sup> While certainly not the sole causal mechanism of these dramatic historical and structural shifts, one can clearly understand how the micro realities of these martyrs and the telling of their stories came to have significant implications for macro structural realities of Spain and interreligious relationships.

It would be irresponsible and wrong to wholly conflate Eulogius' sentiments and motivations with the those of the actual martyrs. Although the specific details of the martyrs' stories might be exaggerated or even inaccurate, what came to matter is that Eulogius' rhetorical strategies and storytelling crafted and helped establish a potent image of the oppressed Christian under Muslim rule. The backlash expressed by these martyrs may have appeared a relatively insignificant mishap at first, but they foreshadowed a larger fracturing of Umayyad Spain.<sup>83</sup> These stories, these martyrs' individual realities and identity negotiations, came to hold significant weight in the structural upheaval of Islamic Spain. In the next section, the crises experienced by these martyrs and their individual motivations will be elucidated to create a complete picture of the relationship between their stories and structural change.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>83</sup> Walter, "Divisions in Islamic Spain," Lecture on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

# MOTIVATIONS OF THE CÓRDOBAN MARTYRS:

Despite the relative lack of structural threats against their faith, 48 individuals still made the decision to publicly blaspheme Islam and Muhammad and/or apostatize their legal Muslim status. Given the relative lack of legal restrictions on the practice of Christianity and general persecutory context in Islamic Spain, “the initiative behind the spontaneous martyrdoms had, therefore, to come from the victims themselves.”<sup>84</sup> Here is where the importance of the stories of these martyrs becomes essential to our understanding of macro structural realities in Islamic Spain—a macro understanding to Andalusian history and society is incomplete without the insight offered by the individual level stories of these martyrs. As one uncovers the micro motivations behind these Christians’ voluntary martyrdom and the nuances of their religious identity negotiation it becomes clear that this level of analysis is essential to our understanding of the nature of interreligious relationships and legal structures in and the deterioration of Islamic Spain. These individuals were primarily motivated by several interrelated factors: individual spiritual anxiety amidst a rigid penitential system and tensions within interreligious families, a slight discomfort with the dominance of Islamic culture that pervaded their lives, and a desire to express disdain for Islam and therefore a robust Christian faith.

Eulogius’s account of the Mozarab martyrs begins with the actions of a priest named Perfectus in the year 850 AD. One day strolling on the streets of Córdoba, Perfectus was confronted by a group of Muslims inquiring about his views on the relationship between Islam and Christianity. He first shared about his beliefs as a Christian but hesitated to share his

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<sup>84</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 8.

opinions on Islam and the prophet Muhammad given the legal repercussions that existed for dhimmi displays of disrespect towards the prophet. The inquirers insisted he share his thoughts with the promise that they would not report him to the authorities. After listening to his scathing judgement of Muhammad and Islam, the Muslim men said their goodbyes, respecting their initial agreement. When they saw him again, however, they took him to a judge who convicted him of blasphemy, exacting execution as his punishment.<sup>85</sup>

Even though Perfectus “ultimately turned his arrest into an opportunity for martyrdom, he clearly did not enter Córdoba that day with any such intention,” which was the case the remaining martyrs.<sup>86</sup> Eulogius chooses to include his story because it “presumes the existence of a social environment within which it was not unusual for Christians and Muslims to engage in impromptu religious exchanges bound by mutually understood rules of engagement.”<sup>87</sup> By relaying Perfectus’ story, Eulogius establishes Muslims as villains who do not hesitate to persecute a humble man engaging in common, friendly discourse. From here, Eulogius can proceed to frame the deaths of the remaining martyrs that intentionally sought execution as the fault of these heathens—the actions of these Muslims serve as a microcosm of the persecutory context other Christians felt the martyrs were missing. While historical evidence reveals that Christians of Islamic Spain did not experience the elaborate torment of those in Rome, Eulogius attempted to establish a persecutory context akin to that of the pagan metropolis.<sup>88</sup> Although Eulogius begins with the story of Perfectus, his forced encounter with Muslim authority is distinct from the remaining martyrs’ intentional interaction with that same authority.

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<sup>85</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 92.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 8.

The martyr that established the precedent of voluntary martyrdom was a scribe-turned-monk named Isaac. In his book *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Kenneth Baxter Wolf explains that while Eulogius did not offer extensive details about Isaac, some appropriate assumptions can be made about his journey to martyrdom that offer insight into the experiences of the group of martyrs as a whole. In his life, Isaac served as a *kâtib*, a scribe or secretary in the Islamic government, then, to put it simply, he relinquished this role to join a monastery and from here found his way to a judge to blaspheme Muhammad. Wolf suitably frames Isaac's decision to leave his position as a scribe and join a monastery around the Catholic ritual of penance. Penance in the Christian church is ritual used to "provide the Christian guilty of committing a heinous sin with a way of restoring the spiritual purity of the newly baptized."<sup>89</sup> Understanding Isaac's journey through his various roles and the nature of the penance structure in the Christian Church at the time is important to the broader understanding of the individual religious motives behind this voluntary martyrdom.<sup>90</sup> This spiritual anxiety fueled by concerns about one's individual eternal condition was one of the primary driving forces behind these martyrs' voluntary martyrdoms.

Isaac's voluntary martyrdom was extremely attractive to other Christians concerned about their eternal status and the threats they believed their faith faced from Muslim authority and culture. Isaac initially fled to the monastery as a result of spiritual anxiety and his use of martyrdom to quell those fears was quite ingenious. Wolf emphasizes this saying that, "martyrdom was in fact a perfect solution to the spiritual anxiety produced by an inflexible penitential system. Not only did it epitomize self-abnegation and separation from the world, but

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<sup>89</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 9.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*



it guaranteed that there would be no opportunity to sin again. It represented a uniquely inviolable stage of penitential discipline.”<sup>91</sup> According to Eulogius, Columba, one of the martyrs to follow Isaac, “suffered from overwhelming anxiety about her own spiritual shortcomings, a profound uncertainty about her own ability to resist temptation.”<sup>92</sup> She ended up fleeing to the same monastery as Isaac, Tabanos, with hopes that the discipline of the monastic life would alleviate her anxiety. Her voluntary martyrdom became her last effort to enshrine her name in heaven.

In her analysis of the context and motivations of these martyrs, scholar Jessica A. Coope explains that this spiritual anxiety drove many of the martyrs to monasteries because these salvation-related fears and strict asceticism were cornerstones of monastic life in Córdoba.<sup>93</sup> She goes on to explain that because of this intense spiritual environment, monasteries were “ideal breeding grounds for radical thought.”<sup>94</sup> Since they were willing to do “whatever was necessary to affirm their Christians beliefs and discredit Islam,”<sup>95</sup> there was not much to question when considering the radical act of voluntary martyrdom.

Interacting with this individual spiritual anxiety is the martyrs’ second primary motivation: the tension within interreligious households as a result of many of these martyrs having a *legal* Muslim identity and a *chosen* Christian faith. Eulogius did not have a lot of direct interaction with many of the martyrs, but one of the martyrs that he interacted with in person was a young woman named Flora. Flora, like many of these martyrs, was born to a Christian mother and Muslim father meaning she was legally considered a Muslim. Her father died shortly after her birth and she grew up as a Christian, influenced by her mother. When she was older, she ran

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<sup>91</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 9.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, 22.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

away from home but was brought back to Córdoba by her Muslim brother, “a perfidious worshipper of that pestiferous teaching,”<sup>96</sup> and charged with apostasy. While she rejected this charge of apostasy on account that she had been Christian her whole life,<sup>97</sup> her legal status as a Muslim assured her conviction and resulted in violent flogging.<sup>98</sup>

After this punishment, Flora escaped to a Christian family member’s home and met Eulogius in her time there. After some time there, she eventually decided to return to Córdoba and met another woman, Maria, praying in a church. They made the decision that they would stand in front of a judge together, both taking their turns blaspheming Muhammad and proclaiming their faith in Christ. They were immediately imprisoned.<sup>99</sup> The two women were kept in a cell for several weeks while the “authorities tried to convince them to recant their statements”<sup>100</sup> before they were finally executed. In this time, Eulogius met them, encouraged them stand their ground and not to fear death.<sup>101</sup> Flora’s situation is not exceptional, as many other of these martyrs found themselves experiencing a certain dissonance between their own religious identity and their legally determined one.<sup>102</sup> Consumed by this dissonance, these martyrs looked to the example of Isaac and saw voluntary martyrdom as an opportunity to reconcile the tension between their religious and legal identities and express their disdain for Islam.

It is significant to note and understand the reactions that Muslim leadership had to these martyrs. Muslim leaders did not initially plan on or want to kill these dissidents—they were

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<sup>96</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 222 (*Memoriale Sanctorum* 2.8.5).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>98</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 224 (*Memoriale Sanctorum* 2.8.7).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>100</sup> Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, 25.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 26; Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 56.

<sup>102</sup> Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, 90; Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 9-10.

caught completely off guard by their strange and spontaneous death wishes. As was discussed in the first section, “in Islamic Spain legal restrictions against minorities were not always enforced, and sometimes were completely disregarded by the Muslim rulers.”<sup>103</sup> The legal system in Islamic Spain and sharia, while extremely important and revered, were not rigid, zero-tolerance systems. However, the case of these martyrs is unique because living in a religiously pluralist society meant that authority needed to take blasphemy and apostasy seriously. Initially these judges attempted to ascribe their behaviour to drunkenness or even psychotic episodes.<sup>104</sup> They, “tried to convince them to recant their statements...the government’s tactics centered on pressuring clergy, whom officials believed (correctly) were connected with the unrest.”<sup>105</sup> When these martyrs assured the judges that they were in their right mind and increasing numbers were following Isaac’s example, the emir at the time, Abd al-Rahman II, and other Islamic leadership decided harsher action was necessary.

Instead of jumping to violent punishment, leadership imposed other social sanctions to dispel these radicals while recruiting the help of Christian officials to condemn the lunacy of this pseudo-martyrdom.<sup>106</sup> Abd al-Rahman II responded to Isaac’s performance by issuing an “edict reiterating the penalty for blasphemy,” a response that indicates the novelty of the manner and content of his crime.<sup>107</sup> As more of these Christians approached judges, Abd al-Rahman II began to arrest Córdoba clergy and eventually decided to convene a council with them to review this episode.<sup>108</sup> When Abd al-Rahman II died in 852 AD he was succeeded by Muhammad I whose response took some of these initial measures even further. He enforced “many of

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<sup>103</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 6.

<sup>104</sup> Walter, “Divisions in Islamic Spain,” Lecture on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>105</sup> Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, 25.

<sup>106</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 1.

<sup>107</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 14.

<sup>108</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 6.

the dhimma restrictions that had either never been enforced in Córdoba or had long since been neglected”<sup>109</sup> such as demoting Christians in leadership and bureaucratic positions, especially those that held positions above other Muslims, and ordered the destruction of newly built churches.<sup>110</sup> Muhammad I was unable to fully implement both of these strategies, however, his response displays how seriously these crimes were taken and the efforts that were made to avoid killing these suicidal Christians.

Even after Muslim leaders arrested these Christians and granted their death-wishes, one can see flexibility throughout the process. Again, within Flora and Maria’s stories, they “were given a chance to renounce their Christian affiliations”<sup>111</sup> and “authorities tried to convince them to recant their statements.”<sup>112</sup> Those in power did not jump straight to violent execution as punishment. The actions of these martyrs were not handled perfectly, or non-violently for that matter, by Islamic leadership. However, again one witnesses a larger theme of these martyr’s story: despite the relative lack of structural impetus for their crimes *and* the grace woven into the response of Islamic leadership they still made their way to a judge to disparage Islam and its prophet. As a result of their death by Muslim sword, these “martyrs” became a symbol of Christian persecution by Muslims, eventually encouraging northern Christian Kingdoms to pursue their *Reconquista*. This highlights the significance of micro realities in this episode of executions because these micro pieces contributed to the gradual shift in structures and interreligious relationship in Islamic Spain.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., Chapter 1.

<sup>110</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 15-16.

<sup>111</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 26.

<sup>112</sup> Coope, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, 25.

Eulogius might recognize and honor their resiliency and dedication to the Christian faith, but in concurrence with Islamic leadership, the majority of Córdoba Christians felt differently about their actions. They saw their voluntary martyrdom as selfish acts and felt that they were “more concerned about their own salvation than about the fate of the Andalusian Christian community as a whole.”<sup>113</sup> The “audaciously suicidal behavior” expressed by these martyrs was “motivated by pride” and considered unacceptable and damaging to the larger Córdoba Christian community.<sup>114</sup> In their eyes these martyrs were simply unnecessarily drawing negative attention to Córdoba Christians and threatening their wellbeing. Most Córdoba Christians were comfortable accepting the “ambiguities associated with negotiating a course between Christian and Islamic Córdoba,” but these martyrs were the “small but vocal minority who preferred death to an uncertain religious identity.”<sup>115</sup> To this minority, the anxiety of their religious identity could only be assuaged, and their belief in the categorical heresy of Islam could only be expressed through this novel voluntary “martyrdom”.

Maintaining a unified state with a polity defined by its pluralism is a delicate balance and one that is bound to meet episodes of disruption. Given the specific legal, religious and overall cultural context of Islamic Spain, these martyrs became the ones to express and release some of this tension. The anxiety and discomfort experienced by these martyrs was real. Despite the absence of empirical or objective evidence of a comprehensive persecutory context in Córdoba, these Christians simply responded to perceived structural threats posed by Islamic cultural hegemony as well as individual religious fears. By exploring both the potential structural influences on their decision as well as the negotiations and choices happening at the individual

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<sup>113</sup> Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 9.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 9.

<sup>115</sup> Coope, “Religious and Cultural Conversion,” 59.

level of their stories, one can more fully understand how the macro and micro realms of society are interrelated and collaborate to create social reality.

## THEORETICAL DISCUSSION:

At this point, both the structural and the individual elements of the Córdoba martyr's stories have been extrapolated and the connections between the two elucidated. Despite the lack of significant structural impetus, these martyrs decided that disparaging their neighbors' faith and the voluntary execution that followed was necessary to show their devotion to their Christian faith and reconcile their spiritual anxiety. They responded to perceived structural restraints on their faith and voluntary martyrdom eventually became the defining facet of their religious identity negotiation. Any approach to the martyrs should appreciate the more micro analysis of the martyrs' religious bargaining alongside a macro analysis of social structures, especially a sociological approach. Broadly speaking, sociology holds preference towards the macro perspective. Perhaps this is justified, but the micro is an important level to be analyzed because avoiding it leaves ample room for misunderstandings of the truth of structural realities.

This sociological reflection on the Córdoba martyrs must necessarily begin with a brief outline of the foundational "micro-macro problem" that is found across all disciplines. It is this problem that should frame our understanding of the martyrs as their experience illuminates how both levels interact and together explain social occurrences. Sociology as a discipline is ripe with paradoxical dualisms and spectrums such as objectivism-subjectivism, materialism-idealism,

micro-macro, and more.<sup>116</sup> Scholars and theorists widely recognize the value of both ends of these pairings and are burdened with the responsibility of balancing their essential tension—the same attempt is being made in this paper through a socio-historical lens. The foundation of the micro-macro problem comes from then notion that the individual and society are “mutually defining each other,” they are “mutually creating” forces and “it is not possible to think of one of them without referring to the other.”<sup>117</sup> Approaching social reality from a contingent perspective of the micro-macro pair “implies that no event, no social interaction is finalized, completed, and ultimately encased in its own package of accepted and shared meaning. All micro-events are also macro-events.”<sup>118</sup>

Again, sociology traditionally privileges a macro perspective, perhaps rightfully given the advantages of this specialization and the broad absence of a structural imagination in much of Western consciousness. However, sociology also recognizes that “a micro-level descriptive analysis consists of “thick” contextualized polyvocal accounts of some set of social interactions” and is where researchers “come to recognize and appreciate individual creativity and cultural complexity.”<sup>119</sup> The “thick” context that is gleaned when the micro-narratives of the Córdoba martyrs are explored is invaluable to an understanding of broader structural change in Andalusia. While this detailed context is invaluable, the micro-level is not “simple or uniform”<sup>120</sup> and is “always thick with indeterminacies and idiosyncracies.”<sup>121</sup> This is seen in how the pluralistic nature of Andalusian society, while contributing to its cultural flourishing, naturally produced

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<sup>116</sup> Mikoaj Pawlak, “Part I: The micro-macro problem in sociology: theoretical background,” in *Tying Micro and Macro: What Fills up the Sociological Vacuum?* (Berlin: 2018), 20.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 21

<sup>118</sup> Victor C. Munck, “A Micro-, Meso-, Macro-level Descriptive Analysis of Disputes within a Social Network: A Study of Household Relations in a Sri Lankan Community,” *Anthropos* (1994): 86.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>120</sup> Pawlak, “The micro-macro problem,” 26.

<sup>121</sup> Munck, “Micro-, Meso-, Macro-level Descriptive Analysis,” 92.

social turmoil. Overall, with the limits of the micro-perspective in mind, without understanding their spiritual anxiety their interreligious familial contexts, one would fail to understand the complex motivations of the martyrs and the macro consequences of their actions.

The three men traditionally considered the “fathers of sociology”, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber, while not having the specific “macro-micro” problem terminology, all actively negotiated its ontology. While these three theorists are considered the founders of sociology, people engaged in sociological thinking before their time; future expansions of this paper and inquiries into the micro-macro problem must further explore these perspectives and more contemporary approaches to this question. When addressing classical theoretical approaches to this macro-micro problem it is important to differentiate between two seemingly synonymous but distinct pairs that characterize this problem: individual-society and agency-structure. The individual-society pairing is what the classical theorists are addressing, which focuses on making statements about the connection between individuals and their society;<sup>122</sup> it acknowledges the individual as the primary micro social entity.

Only traces of the agency-structure pairing are found in words of classic theorists, but it is the pairing that is now “at the center of the sociological debate.”<sup>123</sup> This pairing centers the nature of the individual as a subject who is “able to act while simultaneously being constrained by structure,” or, in other words, is in a reciprocal exchange of influence with social structures.<sup>124</sup> We witnessed the dynamic of this pairing in the story of one of the martyrs named Flora. Despite being legally considered a Muslim, Flora made the conscious choice to practice Christianity. She was constrained by sharia law but made her way to a monastery to avoid some

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<sup>122</sup> Pawlak, “The micro-macro problem,” 21.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.



of these restraints and to assuage her spiritual anxiety—acting upon faith and anxiety, Flora voluntarily sought out martyrdom. Many of these martyrs recognized the power of their individual agency, deciding to wield it in front of the structures they saw as oppressive.

In his work, Karl Marx provides “a quite persuasive theory of explaining the micro-level phenomena with their macro conditions” contributing significantly to an understanding of how individual agency is limited by social circumstances with an important emphasis on their material conditions.<sup>125</sup> For Émile Durkheim, the macro level of society is the most important subject of social analysis resulting in “quite a large distance between micro and macro” in his approach.<sup>126</sup> He saw sociological analysis as providing useful explanations for psychological phenomena, hence his brilliant social analysis of suicide, but micro-phenomena are of little importance to his overall approach. Rounding off the classical theorists is Max Weber who, out of the three, is perhaps the most illuminating with regards to the Córdoba martyrs. In opposition to Durkheim, Weber often uses the micro level as a point of departure in his explanations and names social action the subject of sociology, not society. For Weber, larger social structures exist “only in the sense that individuals attach meaning to them and thus they drive their actions.”<sup>127</sup> This concept of social action alongside the concept of methodological individualism are crucial to the story of the martyrs because they help elucidate how important their micro realities and perceptions are to the structural shifts related to their actions. While the classical theorists provide necessary insight into the micro-macro problem, one more contemporary theorist, James Coleman (1926-1995), offers an important analysis of this question along with a helpful hermeneutic to visualize this macro-micro relationship.

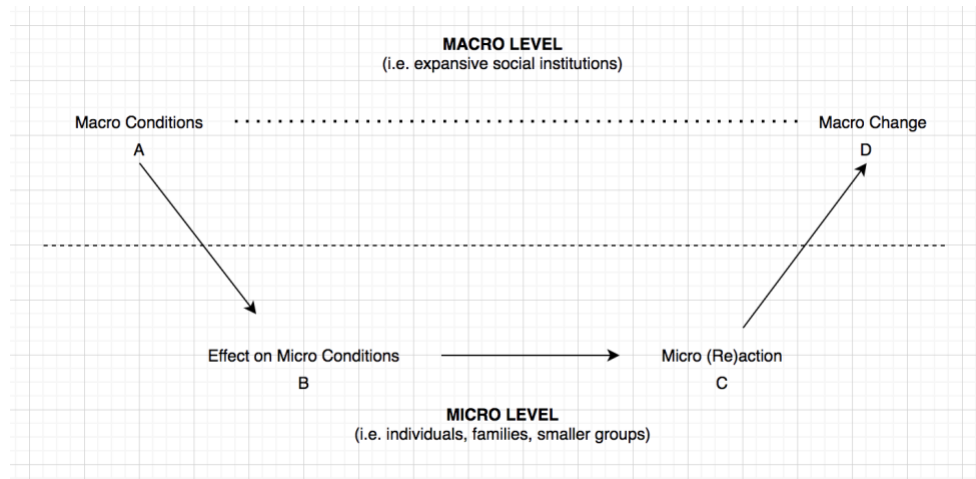
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<sup>125</sup> Pawlak, “The micro-macro problem,” 27.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

Coleman offers a helpful hermeneutic that is often used to understand the connection between micro and macro sociological realities. One is able to use “Coleman’s Boat” to see how the micro and macro sit in relationship with each other. A simplified version of this diagram is shown here:



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For Coleman, any social problem of interest ultimately lies at the macro level, but the micro level provides important perspective into how macro social change occurs; in this sense, he is Weberian in his approach. However, he deviates from Weber in that he does not believe “a simple aggregation of individual behavior” sufficiently explains social change and looks to recognize mediating institutions or social organization that facilitate the transition from micro to macro.<sup>129</sup> In the above diagram, Coleman visualizes how when macro social change occurs (point A), it directly affects the operations and lives of the micro social world (i.e. individuals, families, and smaller groups; point B). These micro subjects then respond to structural changes by

<sup>128</sup> This diagram is adapted from Coleman’s boat (Coleman 1990).

<sup>129</sup> Pawlak, “The micro-macro problem,” 37.

reorganizing their regular operations (point C) which then turn causes institutions to shift to meet their new needs, as is the basic function of a social institution (point D).

Coleman saw how sociology often ignores the dotted line on the top, the one that indicates how the original macro conditions find themselves transformed into a new macro reality. With this diagram he hoped to develop a model that made room for the micro level in sociological analysis; he appropriately saw micro reality as influencing the ultimate macro mechanism of social change and highlighted the irrevocable relationship between the two levels. This diagram can be seen as a bit reductive, so a few things must be made clear. At first glance, it appears that Coleman is taking a reductionist approach, claiming that the building block of structural reality is the individual, but this is not completely the case, as is explained in the previous paragraph. He is also not necessarily arguing that these macro-micro relationships happen in a neat, causal order as the diagram perhaps suggests. Finally, he is not suggesting a direct causal relationship between the micro and macro social change but, rather suggesting that the way micro reality adjusts to macro change can shift empirical understanding of macro mechanisms of social transformation (dotted line). Overall, with this multi-dimensional diagram, Coleman displays that the exchanges occurring between the micro and macro levels of analysis must be necessarily be “bidirectional or interactive rather than unidirectional” and are essential to sociological inquiry.<sup>130</sup>

If one takes this diagram and applies it to the story of the Córdoba Martyrs, the connections between Eulogius’ writing of their individual crises and the shadow they casted on the future structural change become clear. Their familial and individual religious motivations and

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<sup>130</sup> Munck, “Micro-, Meso-, Macro-level Descriptive Analysis,” 36.

perceptions of structural restraints are what drove their narrative and resulted in significant structural shifts, contributing to the eventual fracturing and Reconquista of Spain. If we use Coleman's diagram on the previous page to trace the martyrs' story, it might look something like this: the macro conditions of the legal and religious structures in Islamic Spain (point A) affected the micro realities of the martyrs because they perceived these structures to be restricting their religious identities and expression (point B). The martyrs responded to this perception and the religious anxiety it caused by approaching Muslim judges and apostatizing their legal Muslim faith and/or blaspheming the prophet Muhammad and Islam (point C). While not the lone causal mechanism of broader structural change, these choices contributed to the macro change in the Reconquista of Spain (point D).

Something that also must be explored sociologically in relation to the martyrs, is how many of the structural restraints described by Eulogius were either exaggerated or simply perceived to be real. As the Thomas Theorem states, "If men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."<sup>131</sup> Therefore, it must be noted that even if they were exaggerated or not empirically "real", these perceived structural influences still had drastic consequences in the lives and choices of these martyrs. In the first section of this essay, I explore the lack of intense structural oppression of Christians by Muslim rulers. This was never to imply that these micro choices were completely unprompted, but to further emphasize the weight of their micro perceptions and choices in the larger structural story of Islamic Spain. If put in light of Coleman's diagram, one can see that many structural threats were "real" to these martyrs, or at minimum to Eulogius, and they received a, albeit fanatic, micro level response.

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<sup>131</sup> "Thomas Theorem," Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803104247382>

Holding all of these theoretical considerations together one can conclude that if we take a purely macro approach with the martyrs' narrative, if we abandon the micro reactions and mechanisms of social change, we are left with a flaccid and uncomprehensive analysis of Andalusian society. Once again, in the words of Victor Munck, "the homogenous abstractions of culture produced by macro-level analysis always distort micro-level realities. Yet it is at this level alone that we begin to apprehend the multi-layered, overlapping webs that weave the individuals into community."<sup>132</sup> Neither macro nor micro analysis alone offers a sufficient understanding of Islamic Spain—both levels of analysis, and everything in between, must be used together. Getting caught in these "overlapping webs" is imperative to discerning how the micro narratives of the martyrs contributed to structural transformation of Andalusia.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS:

Given the cooperation between the three Abrahamic faiths in Andalusia, it is tempting to assume that that they simply existed in blissful co-existence with no inklings of conflict. Scholars of Islamic Spain blatantly disagree on whether a faithful analysis of Islamic rule emphasizes the tolerance expressed within the culture or the patterns of dysfunction and violence that existed. As illustrated in the dispute about jizya tax discussed earlier, one side of this argument claims that Christians were subjugated and held a position of oppression under Islamic Law. Their perspective frames the Islamic regime as a purely violent governance focused on maintaining Islamic hegemony at all costs, especially over the dhimmi.<sup>133</sup> They cite the various

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<sup>132</sup> Munck, "Micro-, Meso-, Macro-level Descriptive Analysis," 93.

<sup>133</sup> Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 328-329.

instances of social and political subjugation such as the prohibition of public worship, the jizya tax,<sup>134</sup> the destruction of churches and the illegality of new church construction.<sup>135</sup> According to this perspective laws created in regards to the *dhimmi* had a clear intent: “to remind non-Muslims of their inferior status”<sup>136</sup> and impose “humiliating conditions on Christian dhimmis to ensure that absolute power remained in the proper hands.”<sup>137</sup>

The other side of the argument honors the almost mythological *convivencia* or coexistence that was fostered in Islamic Spain. In her book *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*, María Rosa Menocal explores how under Muslim leadership, Spain possessed a distinct cultural identity due to interreligious relationships, diverse leadership and scholarship, an intense mixing of ethnicities, and more.<sup>138</sup> Sure there was jizya and prosecution of serious crimes such as blasphemy, but most Christians knew that it was because of the Muslim government that they had their religious liberties and often took their side in the condemnation of criminals in their community, including religious zealots.<sup>139</sup> This perspective does not deny the existence of hierarchy or oppression, but highlights the broader theme of cultural and religious tolerance in Islamic Spain. Both of these perspectives must be held together in our analysis of the martyrs even though the tension between them is daunting. If we thoroughly engage with the nuances of Andalusian history and honor these differing perceptions of cohabitation, there are valuable lessons to learn about what it takes to maintain a thriving, diverse society as well as how to

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 333, 367; Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Chapter 1.

<sup>136</sup> Coope, “Religious and Cultural Conversion,” 51.

<sup>137</sup> Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 329-330.

<sup>138</sup> Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, 28.

<sup>139</sup> Eulogius, *The Eulogius Corpus*, 8.

handle the division and unrest that are often birthed in these spaces, as we witnessed with the martyrs.

My own micro perspective on the martyrs aligns with Coleman's general presentation of the macro-micro relationship, although not completely. As a sociology student, I myself hold a bias towards a macro, structural perspective and often do not want to give serious consideration to micro narratives. I have been socialized into believing that the subjective realm of the human experience is a threat, rather than a valuable contributor, to scientific "objectivity". After all, it is this macro perspective that is largely absent from the broader American consciousness and sociology's emphasis on it helps expand peoples' sociological imagination. Coleman's diagram can be perceived as reductive due to its simplicity, but it is precisely because of its simplicity that I can clearly see the influence of micro social reality on broader structural change. Perhaps it is true as well, that it is easier to witness the legacy of the micro level when looking at episodes of distant history as I have done. Understanding the historical legacy and the role of the micro level in some of the phenomena sociologists study today is more challenging given their often shallow, widely erased histories. Micro narratives have a much clearer influence when you can see their longer-term participation in social rearrangement and are viewing them from a completely distinct cultural perspective. Given the many nuances, I cannot offer a step-by-step process for how sociologists might go about reconciling this micro-macro dilemma but finding meaningful ways to grapple with this problem is crucial to producing meaningful sociological research.

There is also something to be said about the dangers of over-emphasizing the structural, especially in the way that it can often abstract material experiences of oppression. This claim might seem paradoxical given how readily sociology illuminates the truths of social inequity, but

this danger of abstraction happens in every academic discipline. If we are to move beyond a sociology that simply helps us understand the social world to one that actively encourages social change in response to research findings, we must sincerely invest in a deeper understanding of the influence of the micro social world. Micro stories humanize and illuminate more about the social world than sociologists would like to admit—it makes one’s sociological imagination more robust. This is not to say that sociology does not currently utilize or honor data from the micro level. In fact, some of the more fundamental sociological theories, such as symbolic interactionism or rational choice theories, are not so macro and illuminate the subjective layers and elements of the social world. However, broadly speaking, it is of significantly less emphasis and importance in the sociological arena. If sociology truly is not intended to be deterministic, but systematic, then the micro deserves to be considered a more valuable piece of that system.

Understanding the micro-macro problem is certainly less straight-forward than one would hope, but researchers would be remiss to ignore micro influences and refuse to engage with this complex relationship—one loses out on critical mechanisms and nuances of the social world without it. While scholars continue to excavate the depths of this issue and its nuances, may we keep in mind that, in many ways, research is an act of storytelling—telling the story of Islamic Spain would be incomplete without delineating the micro realities of the Córdoba Martyrs. To reach a reliable sociological understanding of the world, we can no more prioritize the individual over the structural view than we can favor the structural outcomes over the individual motives and actions. Both ends of the spectrum must be tended to. It is the responsibility of scholars from all disciplines, but especially sociologists, to never take micro stories for granted in the pursuit of understanding of the social world.



## APPENDIX:

The impetus behind my research is a fascination with the connection between the macro and micro social worlds, specifically as it relates to sociology and history, but this is an inquiry that is central across all academic disciplines. The foundation of the micro-macro problem comes from the notion that the individual and society mutually define each other and are creative forces that cannot be thought of apart from one another. In the words of anthropologist Victor de Munck “All micro-events are also macro-events.” Sociology traditionally privileges a macro perspective, perhaps rightfully given the advantages of this specialization and the broad absence of a structural imagination in much of Western consciousness. However, again quoting de Munck, sociology also recognizes that “a micro-level descriptive analysis consists of “thick” contextualized polyvocal accounts of some set of social interactions” and it is here that researchers “come to recognize and appreciate individual creativity and cultural complexity.” Micro stories humanize and illuminate more about the social world than many sociologists would like to admit—it actually makes one’s sociological imagination more robust. Exploring this macro-micro connection and understanding its significance is a vital inquiry that must be taken seriously by all scholars and really all humans.

In order to explore this question for myself, I have analyzed the individual stories of a group of Christians from 9<sup>th</sup> century Islamic Spain known as the Córdoba or Mozarab Martyrs—struck with religious anxiety and burdened by what they perceived as a thoroughly oppressive Islamic state these martyrs voluntarily blasphemed Islam and the prophet Muhammad in front of a Muslim judge expecting and hoping that their punishment would be execution. As we will see, their historical episode illuminates how both the macro and micro social levels

interact and only together can they explain social occurrences. As fitting with our panel theme, I argue that with more knowledge of the interaction between structural and the individual, we can better understand how to use both micro and macro sources of power to build a world where social structures are more just, to build a world where a diversity of individuals and groups can flourish and thrive together.

In order to accurately interpret the decision of these martyrs to be voluntarily executed, we must understand a bit about the macro structural context of Islamic civilization, specifically Islamic Spain. Islamic civilization began as small group of Muslims in the city of Mecca under the leadership of the prophet Muhammad in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century (570-623 AD). Over centuries it expanded into vast empires, becoming one of the most powerful and influential civilizations in all of history. Included in this expansion was the establishment of the Umayyad Empire in Iberia by Abd al-Rahman I in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. When migrants from Central Asia and Africa took over Iberia from the Visigoths, who were a group of ethnically German Christians, it took only a few generations before a thriving diversity of ethnicities and interrelations between religious groups gave Iberia a very distinct cultural identity. There were political leaders of every background on all levels of government, there was intermarriage across religious lines and a flourishing of collaborative scholarship. The legacy of Islamic Spain still permeates many aspects of culture across the globe today.

The structures most pertinent to the story of the martyrs are that of *sharia*, or Islamic Law, and sharia's intersection with pluralistic religious life of Andalusia. Islamic law is a fundamental piece of every individual Muslim's pursuit of a righteous life and is also important to a government's participation in shaping a just *society* and a just *world* for all people. While explicitly a product of Islam, sharia deeply influenced the lives of the non-Muslim population of

Umayyad Spain. The centering of Islamic teachings in Umayyad Spain included maintaining a unique relationship with the Christians and Jews under their governance. The Quran places Muslims under a special covenant known as a *dhimma* with Christians and Jews. This covenant established that Jews and Christians “were granted religious freedom, not forced to convert to Islam...[and] they could share in much of Muslim social and economic life.” The Quran recognizes that Muslims can agree in many ways with these *dhimmi* due to their common reverence for the same God. While there was no doubt inequality in Islamic Spain, this covenant established widespread norms of mutual respect between the Abrahamic faiths.

Although Islamic rulers were faithfully attempting to tolerate and respect the practices of other monotheistic faiths, division arises in Andalusia when Islamic legal scholars grapple with a myriad of questions regarding exactly how the *dhimmi* fit into Islamic law. The Córdoba martyrs find themselves in the middle of these messy social and legal questions, specifically those regarding interreligious marriage. Under Islamic law, it’s considered permissible for a Muslim man to marry a Christian woman, but not for a Muslim woman to marry a Christian man. In both Islamic law and in European society generally, religion traditionally followed the father. This meant that children with Muslim fathers were legally Muslim even if these children wanted to be Christian or had a Christian mother. So when these martyrs that identify as Christian but are legally considered Muslim show up in front of a judge and apostatize and/or blaspheme their legal faith, problems arise. These religious and legal structures give us a glimpse into the macro context of Islamic Spain. If looked at more deeply, Islamic Spain teaches many lessons on how to coexist and flourish living with groups different from our own as well as this messiness of living amidst diversity. But my argument here is that the story of Islamic Spain and

the martyrs is not complete at this macro level. This is where we want to get into the micro stories of the martyrs and see their connection with these macro realities.

Amidst this macro-micro tension we can see that the martyrs themselves have a few primary, interrelated more micro motivations. First, they experience individual spiritual anxiety amidst a rigid penitential system in the Catholic Church alongside anxiety as a result these complexities of living in interreligious families. On top of this, they also had a certain level discomfort with the dominance of Islamic culture that pervaded their lives.

The martyr that established the precedent of voluntary martyrdom was a scribe-turned-monk-turned-martyr named Isaac. Isaac served as a scribe for the government. Then, to put it simply, he relinquished this role to join a monastery and from here found his way to a judge to blaspheme Muhammad. Scholar Kenneth Baxter Wolf suitably frames Isaac's decisions around the Catholic ritual of penance. Penance in the Christian church is a ritual used to "provide the Christian guilty of committing a heinous sin with a way of restoring the spiritual purity of the newly baptized." Isaac's voluntary martyrdom was extremely attractive to other Christians who were also concerned about their eternal status. Isaac initially fled to a monastery as a result of spiritual anxiety and his use of martyrdom to kind of quell those fears was actually quite ingenious. Wolf emphasizes this saying that, "martyrdom was in fact a perfect solution to the spiritual anxiety produced by an inflexible penitential system. Not only did it epitomize self-abnegation and separation from the world, but it guaranteed that there would be no opportunity to sin again. It represented a uniquely inviolable stage of penitential discipline." After Isaac, over the course of 9 years, from 850-859AD, 47 other Christians, ~even though their experiences were not homogenous~, experienced this same anxiety and made the same decision as Isaac.

One man, a priest named Eulogius, was the only person to substantially record the stories of the martyrs. Eulogius' primary motive in telling their stories was to exalt them as champions of the Christian faith and to disparage Islam and Muhammad as wicked and immoral. Eulogius offers valuable insight into the martyr's experiences, but his perspective is also thoroughly biased and, true to the nature of the martyrology genre, he is extremely hyperbolic.

In his embellished depictions of intense persecution of Christians in Islamic Spain, he really shaped these martyrs into victims that created further antagonism between Christians and Muslims. Eulogius' storytelling strategies, the choices he makes in portraying both the martyrs and Muslims, helps us make this connection between micro stories and broader structural transformation of Iberia. In 929 AD, several decades after the martyrs, Abd al-Rahman III officially declared that his Emirate in Córdoba was now a Caliphate. With this decision, he pitted himself directly against two rival caliphates in the Muslim world at the time: the Abbasids in Southwest Asia (790-1258 AD) and the Fatimids of Northern Africa (969-1171 AD). In 1009 AD, about 150 years after the martyrs, political in-fighting begins in Andalusia. This in-fighting marks the start of Umayyad downfall leading up to the fracturing of the caliphate into separate *taifas*, or "city-states". Christian kingdoms in the north took this chance to reclaim Iberia, with the first signs of this infamous *Reconquista* appearing in 1085.

Now what does this historical context, what does Eulogius' have to do with the martyrs and this macro-micro connection, exactly? Well, initially the martyrdom episode was seen as a slight glitch in interreligious relationships—but during the Reconquista it was becoming clear that Eulogius' writings were more powerful than initially thought. His storytelling formed an image of the intensely persecuted Christian under Muslim rule and established these martyrs as a potent symbol for the *Reconquista*. These images of the persecuted Christian and the infidel

Muslim that Eulogius had crafted negatively altered the relationship between Islam and Christianity, a relationship that was once defined by religious tolerance and collaboration. While certainly not the sole causal mechanism of these shifts, these stories, these martyrs' individual realities and identity negotiations, came to hold significant weight in the structural upheaval of Islamic Spain.

As mentioned at the beginning of the presentation, sociology as a discipline is intended to interact intimately with this micro-macro question and it is a central theoretical question. One sociologist by the name of James Coleman offers a very straightforward hermeneutic or diagram to help us visualize this connection. It is often referred to as "Coleman's Boat" or "Coleman's Diagram". Now, at first glance this diagram can appear a bit reductive but given that we don't have all the time in the world to extrapolate all of its value, let's just use it as a helpful visual for the moment. In this diagram, Coleman visualizes how when macro social change occurs (point A), it directly affects the operations and lives of the micro social world (i.e. individuals, families, and smaller groups; point B). These micro subjects then respond to structural changes by reorganizing their regular operations (point C) which then turn causes institutions to shift to meet their new needs (point D). With this diagram he hoped to develop a model that made room for the micro level in sociological analysis; he appropriately saw micro reality as influencing the ultimate macro mechanism of social change (indicated by the top dotted line) and the irrevocable relationship between the two levels. To apply the martyrs story to this diagram, their familial and individual religious motivations and perceptions of structural restraints are what drove their choice (point C) and resulted in significant structural shifts (point D), contributing to the eventual fracturing and Reconquista of Spain. To quote Victor de Munck once more, "the homogenous abstractions of culture produced by macro-level analysis always distort micro-level

realities. Yet it is at this level alone that we begin to apprehend the multi-layered, overlapping webs that weave the individuals into community.” Getting caught in these webs is imperative to discerning how the micro narratives of the martyrs contributed to structural transformation of Islamic Spain.

Between this structural understanding of Islamic law and religious institutions and, on the other hand, the individual religious and cultural anxiety, these martyrs make a strong case for the necessity of every scholar to tell stories through their research that sincerely explore every corner of the human experience. Without both the macro and micro levels there would be a fundamental historical and social misunderstanding of the broader trajectory of Islamic Spain—we would also miss the broader lessons this empire teaches us about how to flourish together in a pluralistic world and how to navigate the practical *messiness* of living in a diverse world. To reach a reliable sociological understanding of the world, we can no more prioritize the individual over the structural view than we can the structural outcomes over individual motives and actions. Both ends of this spectrum must be tended to. It is the responsibility of scholars from all disciplines, but especially sociologists, to never take the complex relationship between the micro and macro for granted in our pursuit of understanding the social world and helping make it more just. Thank you.

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