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NAVIGATING IDENTITIES: THE CASE OF A MORISCO SLAVE IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY NEW SPAIN*

In 1660 Cristóbal de la Cruz presented himself before the commissioner of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Veracruz, Mexico, claiming to be afflicted by doubts about the Catholic faith. Born in Algiers and captured at the age of nine or ten by a Spanish galley force, he was taken to Spain, where he was quickly sold into slavery and baptized. Thirty years later, De la Cruz denounced himself to the Mexican inquisitorial tribunal and proceeded to recount to the inquisitors a detailed and fascinating story of his life as he crossed Iberian and Mediterranean landscapes: escaping from his masters and being re-enslaved, encountering Muslims and renouncing Christianity, denouncing his guilt remorsefully before the Inquisitions of Barcelona and Seville, and moving between belief in Catholicism and Islam. His case provides important insights into the relationship between religious identity and the regulatory efforts of powerful institutions in the early modern Spanish world.¹

De la Cruz's case fits into the broad context of negotiating enslavement and religious identity in a multi-confessional environment in which Spanish authorities sought to enforce restrictions on religious beliefs and practices in the ongoing attempt to create a unified Catholic nation. His case sheds light on the complex and sometimes ambivalent position of individuals who attempted to navigate the oppressive structures of the Inquisition, which continued to pursue matters of religious orthodoxy even years after the Moriscos were expelled from Spain in 1609-1614. The doubts that De la

* Based on research in Spain with support of a Fulbright Fellowship, Sept. 2001-Aug. 2002, and in Mexico, with support from both the Program in Latin American Studies and the Graduate School at Princeton University. I thank Liam Brockey, Anthony Grafton, Molly Greene, and Kenneth Mills for their insightful comments.

¹ This paper will focus on the third trial of Cristóbal de la Cruz in Mexico, using records from the Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (hereafter AHN). This is part of a larger study that traces De la Cruz's experiences as he moved across Spain, the Mediterranean, and Spanish America. All translations from the original Spanish are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Cruz expressed during his trials reflect similar preoccupations of other individuals who were positioned between belief systems that were conceived of as mutually exclusive.

Many of the experiences that De la Cruz related in his testimony take place in the context of the contested encounters between Muslims and Christians in the western Mediterranean during the seventeenth century. Molly Greene has argued that the clear distinctions that historians have drawn between Christian and Muslim and between foreign and local are not particularly useful in considering the complexity of shifting commercial relationships in the seventeenth-century Mediterranean.² Greene argues that the increased participation of northern states in Mediterranean trade networks added a new dynamic to commercial relations between Christians and Muslims, and produced “ambivalence over which type of community—national or religious—mattered most in the Mediterranean world.”³ She shows how this ambivalence played out in the case of Christian and Muslim corsairs by highlighting the role of religious identity in corsairing practice. As a result of the legitimacy of the practice of enslaving members of other religious communities and the prohibitions against enslaving members of one’s own, in accordance with the principles of just war, “the ability to establish the identity of a merchant, a ship, its cargo, or its crew, was vital.”⁴ Because there existed a number of legal structures across the Mediterranean to which individuals could bring grievances that hinged on their religious identity, “the absence of an enforcing state added to the general confusion, as it allowed for a considerable amount of opportunism in deciding on the identity of people and things.”⁵ The Spanish Inquisition became one of numerous sites at which religious identity could be contested perilously.

During the seventeenth century, religious identity continued to influence legal status and inter-confessional relationships in the Spanish world. For renegades in the Mediterranean who wished to return to their communities in Spain after living under Ottoman rule, the Inquisition became the required point of passage. This powerful institution promoted self-denunciation in order to achieve reconciliation with the Church and reinsertion into Catholic

² Molly Greene, “Beyond the Northern Invasion: The Mediterranean in the Seventeenth Century,” *Past & Present*, 174 (February 2002), p. 52.

³ Greene, “Beyond the Northern Invasion,” p. 58.

⁴ Greene, “Beyond the Northern Invasion,” pp. 58-59. For a discussion of “just war” see Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the origins of comparative ethnology* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 32.

⁵ Greene, “Beyond the Northern Invasion,” p. 59. Jonathan I. Israel also provides a compelling discussion of the complexity of religious identity within Jewish communities in *Diasporas Within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World Maritime Empires, 1540-1740* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

society. To encourage renegades to return to Catholicism, inquisitorial tribunals in both Spain and Spanish America issued a number of edicts of faith. During the ensuing periods of grace, individuals could denounce themselves and be absolved with only minor sentences.⁶ It was perhaps in response to one of these edicts of faith that De la Cruz denounced himself before the Inquisition in New Spain.

During his trial, De la Cruz described the encounter that prompted him to present himself before the commissioner of the Inquisition in Veracruz. Returning from a trip to collect seven hundred pesos for his master, Pantaleón Fernández, from a ship docked in San Juan de Ulúa, he came across a ship's barber speaking with a stevedore of another vessel.⁷ Listening closely to their conversation, De la Cruz overheard the barber quoting Saint Augustine, saying, "Quien [sic] fecit te sine te non salvavit [sic] te sine te."⁸ De la Cruz soon "began to . . . ponder [these words], saying to himself by God if this Saint says these words that this Christian is saying, how can I save myself being in a state of mortal sin, because if these words say 'He who made you without you will not save you without you,' then I, who am in mortal sin, will not be saved without doing something on my part."⁹ Continuing to mull over the conversation that he had overheard, De la Cruz claimed that he had begun "for a few hours" to forget about Islam, but then "fell back into it with ease. Afterwards, being encouraged by the said words and believing that if he did not do something on his part he would not be saved, he said to himself, come what may . . . that they give me leave like others who have been before the Holy tribunal, to save my soul. . . . I must go quickly and denounce myself before the commissioner who will perhaps remove me from my doubts, by providing some people to instruct me."¹⁰ De

⁶ For a discussion of renegades in the Mediterranean see Bartolome Bennassar and Lucile Bennassar, *Los cristianos de Alá: La fascinante aventura de los renegados* (Madrid, 1989) and Molly Greene, "Beyond the Northern Invasion," pp. 58-59.

⁷ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 21r.

⁸ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 21v. I left the Latin spelling in the original as it was transcribed in the document.

⁹ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 21v. "Y que este confessante...aprehendio las dichas palabras segun las dexa dichas y comenzo a machinar y discurrir con ellas diziendo entressi valgame Dios si este Sancto dize estas palabras como dize este christiano como puedo yo salbarme estando en pecado mortal porque si estas palabras dizen quien te hizo a ti sin ti no te salbara sin ti luego yo que estoy en pecado mortal no me podre salbar sin hazer algo de mi parte."

¹⁰ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 21v. "Y penssando en esto comenzo por algunas horas a olvidar la secta Mahometana pero que luego reincidia en ella con eficacia pero que despues incitado de las dichas palabras creyendo que si no hacia algo de su parte no se podia salbar dijo entressi venga lo que viniere que se me da a mi que me den baja como a algunos o algunas que an estado en el sancto tribunal salbesse mi alma y mas que corra por donde quissiere yo me tengo de yr a denunciar ante el comissario que quicas el me sacara de las dudas dandome algunas personas que me dotrinen."

la Cruz claimed that he had also been moved to denounce himself because “he was excommunicated for what he felt to be his grave faults and errors, and upon confessing them to a Mercedarian friar in the city of Santo Domingo . . . [who] did not want to absolve him, and this distressed him, and thus he appeared before the commissioner of his own will.”¹¹

The sense of urgency that emerged in De la Cruz’s initial testimony arose frequently throughout the trial and raises the elusive question of his motivations in seeking out the Inquisition. De la Cruz’s need to present himself to the inquisitors as repentant, desirous of instruction, and committed to being a good Catholic was crucial to his survival. The doubts he proceeded to voice about the sacraments reflect a dual purpose: he cast himself as receptive to Catholic instruction while attempting to ameliorate his status as a slave, a strategy that had produced results on two previous occasions. De la Cruz had denounced himself to the inquisitorial tribunals in Barcelona in 1653 and in Seville in 1655. In both cases he was given minor sentences and was removed from the galleys where he had been a slave. De la Cruz’s actions during his third trial, this time in New Spain, were influenced by knowledge gained during both his previous experiences with the Inquisition and religious instruction following each of his sentences. His actions probed the tension between inquisitorial narratives that were crafted carefully, and often along predictable lines, by Spanish authorities aiming to expose heresy and individual struggles with these parameters, whether to improve physical conditions in this world or to attain salvation in the next.

During his first hearing on 8 May 1660, De la Cruz began to express to the inquisitor Licentiate Don Bernabé de la Higuera y Amarilla the thoughts about which “he became so frustrated . . . that he was unable to persuade himself, and desired greatly to find reasons that would answer his doubts.”¹² In an apparent appeal to the ability of the Inquisition to correct his beliefs and set him on the path to salvation, De la Cruz voiced a series of doubts concerning transubstantiation and the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance. He questioned, “Since they say the Lord God is so powerful, how could He enter the body of a sinful and bad man” through the Eucharist? He said he believed this to be “impossible, since He is so good, to enter into the

¹¹ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 4r. “Y este confessante entro en considerazion de como se podia salbar si de su parte no ponía alguna diligenzia quando estaba excomulgado a lo que le parecia por sus graves culpas y errores y que confesandolos con un religioso mercenario en la ciudad de Sto Domingo de la ysla Espanola no le havia querido absolver y esto le traya congojado y assi de su propia voluntad se presento ante dicho comissario.”

¹² AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\4f. 4v. “Y se ve tan encarnizado en estas dudas que no se puede convençer a ssi mismo y dessea grandemente hallar raçones que le convençan de estas dudas.”

body of a sinful and bad man.”¹³ Similarly, in terms of penance, De la Cruz wondered how a confessor or a priest could “pardon him his sins and remove them, being a man like himself and subject to sin.”¹⁴ Concerning the Mass, De la Cruz expressed disbelief that “a sinning man such as the priest, so subject to sin like this confessant, can with the words that he says convert bread into the body of our Lord Christ and the wine into his blood, that he held this to be impossible.”¹⁵ De la Cruz then claimed that on several occasions, while hearing Mass, “he would ask himself why God would descend for those words that the priest says and why all the turns and benedictions performed by the priest were necessary.”¹⁶

In the next part of his statement De la Cruz appealed for mercy to the Inquisition, stressing that he had denounced himself voluntarily and was only seeking instruction in how to free himself from his persistent doubts, become a good Catholic, and thus attain salvation. The doubts that De la Cruz expressed were not uncommon responses to official Catholic doctrine in Spain and the Spanish Americas during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The inquisitorial records are full of not only Moriscos and conversos, but also ‘old Christian’ heterodox beliefs. These doubts reveal the limits of religious instruction that De la Cruz encountered following his baptism in Seville and during the course of his three inquisitorial trials.

Alongside this knowledge of Catholicism, De la Cruz was aware of Islamic beliefs and practices that he claimed to have observed intermittently from the time of his childhood in Algiers and that figured prominently in his testimony. He described numerous encounters with Muslims during the years he spent in Spain and when he ran away to Algiers as a young man, escaping the galleys. He related the experience of meeting on the island of Santo Domingo a Muslim named Abderhaman, in whom he confided his thoughts about Catholicism. De la Cruz claimed to have spoken with “a

¹³ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 104f. 5r. “En quanto a la duda del santo sacramento de la eucharistia que como siendo como dizen un señor tan poderosso dios como se mete en el cuerpo de un hombre pecador y malo que esto tiene por impossible, que siendo tan bueno se entre en el cuerpo de un hombre pecador y malo.”

¹⁴ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 104f. 5r. “Y que como un pecador (diciendolo por el confessor) le puede perdonar a este sus pecados y quitarselos siendo un hombre como el y sujeto a pecar que los tiene por impossibles.”

¹⁵ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 104f. 5r. “Y en quanto a la duda que tiene acerca del santo sacrificio de la missa es que como por las palabras que dize un hombre pecador como el sacerdote tan sugeto a pecar como este confessante puede por aquellas palabras que dize converter aquel pan en el cuerpo de Cristo nuestro señor y el vino en su sangre que lo tiene este por imposible.”

¹⁶ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 104f. 5r. “Y assi algunas vezes que ha oydo missa a estado diciendo entressi que para que baxara dios por aquellas palabras que dize el sacerdote para que eran menester tantas bueltas y bendiciones como haze el sacerdote.”

Muslim who was not baptized who was there [in Santo Domingo] as a cook on a ship that was in the port called Jesus María, and the said Muslim replied that if he had these doubts, why had he become a Christian?"¹⁷

De la Cruz also claimed to have had a number of conversations with Muslims in Spain preceding his arrival in Spanish America. It is significant that De la Cruz described interactions with Muslims during a period approximately forty years after the expulsion of the Moriscos from the Peninsula. Bernard Vincent has argued that in spite of the expulsion, some Morisco families remained in Spain and were regarded with suspicion by authorities in Granada well into the eighteenth century.¹⁸ De la Cruz had also interacted with corsairs in the Mediterranean, as a "renegade" according to the inquisitors, before he was captured by a Spanish galley force and denounced himself to the Inquisition in Seville. His testimony depicts a multi-confessional world in which members of different religious communities spoke about their beliefs with one another and attempted to make sense of a variety of attitudes toward religiosity. At the beginning of his trial in New Spain, as in his previous trials, De la Cruz was just as frank with the inquisitors about his commitment to Islam and the attraction of Muslim practices as he was about wanting to learn to be a good Christian.

De la Cruz admitted to the inquisitors that while he was sailing between Cadiz and Santo Domingo, he would often "fall into the habit and custom that he had of observing" Islam by invoking Muhammad and God and praying "in the language of Muslims."¹⁹ Several of the invocations that De la Cruz mentioned were recorded and translated into Spanish, such as "Mehamet and arçolha, which mean in the Castilian language 'Muhammad close to God,' *abdelcadher*, which means 'powerful one, remember your servant,' [and] *abdelcadher xilale*, which means 'do not forget it.'"²⁰ The transcription of prayers in Arabic was not uncommon in the inquisitorial records of trials of Moriscos. This raises the question of how the Inquisition responded to the presence of Muslim prayers in New Spain, a tribunal that

¹⁷ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 104f. 16v-17r. "Las comunico en la Isla de Santo Domingo con un moro sin baptizar que alli estava que era cozinero de un navio que estava en aquel puerto llamado Jessus Maria y el dicho moro le respondio que si tenia estas dudas para que se havia buuelto christiano."

¹⁸ Bernard Vincent, *Minorías y marginados en la España del siglo XVI* (Granada: Meridional Impresores, S. C. L., 1987), pp. 142-143. Vincent cites fears that Moriscos had plotted a failed uprising in 1650, and in 1727-1728 he identifies 226 individuals accused of practicing Islam by the Inquisition of Granada.

¹⁹ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 104f. 3v. "Que muchas vezes que solia este confessante tropeçar o caer en el havito y costumbre que tenia de la guarda de la secta de Mahoma le invocaba y a dios en Lengua de Moro."

²⁰ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 104f. 3v. "Mehamet y arçolha que quieren dezir en Lengua Castellana Mahoma junto a dios, abdelcadher, que quiere dezir, poderosso acuerdate de tu sierbo, abdelcadher xilale que quiere dezir no lo olvidas."

had much less exposure to Islamic beliefs and practices than the peninsular tribunals, although Moriscos, North African slaves, Muslims from the Philippines, and renegades were tried there from its establishment in 1571.²¹ De la Cruz's discussion of these prayers was not merely part of a recycled accusation by inquisitors of anyone accused of *Islamismo*. He himself had brought them up to express his interest in the correct path to salvation. Once prosecutor Andres de Çabalça delivered the formal accusation, De la Cruz was read the charges and given a chance to respond to each point. When shown the portion of his confession referring to the prayers in Arabic, De la Cruz corrected the inquisitors, saying that he did not invoke Muhammad by saying, "Mahamet and arçola because that is incorrectly written, but by saying, *Laila ulala mohamat uhuersolala*, which in the Castilian language says 'Muhammad close to God,' and that he called on and invoked Muhammad, believing that he was a true prophet and powerful to free him of his tribulation and the cares in which he found himself."²²

At the end of De la Cruz's response, inquisitors added that the words "Laila ulala mohamat uhuersolala are being said along the streets by the Christians when they renounce the law of our lord God and the holy faith in Berberia, and that by saying them, this confessant was constant."²³ This phrase refers to the *shahada*, or profession of faith for Muslims, that constitutes the First Pillar of Islam and is translated as, "There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God."²⁴ When said with conviction, the *shahada* marks an individual's conversion to Islam.²⁵ Bartolomé Bennassar and Lucile Bennassar note the presence of the *shahada* among renegades and corsairs in the Mediterranean.²⁶ In their inquisitorial testimonies, individu-

²¹ Solange Alberro provides a thorough study of the Mexican tribunal in *Inquisition et Societé au Mexique, 1571-1700* (México: Centre d'Etudes Mexicaines et Centraméricaines, 1988); also see Richard E. Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1969). While conducting dissertation research in Spain and Mexico, I was able to examine a number of cases that dealt specifically with individuals accused in New Spain of practicing Islam.

²² AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 19r. "Y llamaba a Mahoma no era diziendo Mahamet y arçola por que esto esta mal escrito sino diziendo Laila ulala mohamat uhuersolala que en lengua Castellana quiere dezir Mahoma junto a dios y que lo llamaba e imbocaba a Mahoma creyendo que era berdadero propheta y poderoso para librarlo de su tribulazion o cuidado en que se hallava." I have left the transcription as it originally appeared in the document, as heard and transcribed by the notary. The standard transcription of the *shahada*, or profession of faith, is *La ilaha illa Allah wa-Muhammad rasul Allah*. Sylviane A. Diouf provides a discussion of the *shahada* and the Five Pillars of Islam in *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

²³ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 19r-19v. "Y que estas dichas palabras *Laila ulala mohamat uhuersolala* las ban diziendo por las calles los christianos quando reniegan de la ley de dios nuestro señor y de la santa fee en berberia y por que el dezirlas este confessante era continuo."

²⁴ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, p. 49.

²⁵ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, p. 49.

²⁶ Bennassar and Bennassar, *Los cristianos de Alá*, p. 350.

als who had professed these words upon becoming renegades attributed a range of meanings to them, from incomprehension to full understanding and knowledge of Islam.²⁷ While inquisitors considered the mere pronouncement of the shahada, and the accompanying gestures, to be a sign of apostasy, the extent to which individuals understood their own actions and performed them willingly varied. De la Cruz's knowledge about Islam and contact with Muslims during the course of his life suggests that he was aware of the meaning that the shahada held for Muslims, as well as what it implied to inquisitors.

De la Cruz then described another event that occurred while he was sailing to Santo Domingo. He recalled that "sometimes when it was calm, the soldiers and sailors and this confessant would also swim in the sea, which he did with the intention of doing the *çahala* [and] bathing in the way that is customary for the Muslims . . . although this bath should be done in water that is fresh and not of the sea."²⁸ Here De la Cruz refers to the *salat*, or prayer that was preceded by ritual ablutions, marking the Second Pillar of Islam and conducted five times a day, if circumstances allowed.²⁹ De la Cruz noted that he had had to be careful when performing the ritual ablutions in public "because those soldiers and sailors are so skilled and accustomed to seeing Muslims and renegades, [that] he did not do those ceremonies because the said sailors and soldiers could not help from seeing him."³⁰

The caution and secrecy with which, De la Cruz claimed, the ritual bathing took place is intriguing in light of the concept of *taqiyya* that was associated with many Moriscos' continued practice of Islam in secret. Meaning precaution in Arabic, *taqiyya* referred to the permission for Muslims living under adverse conditions to perform the exterior acts of the religion being imposed on them, as long as they remained faithful to Islam in their hearts.³¹ A *fatwa* issued in 1504 to the Moriscos of Granada by the Mufti of Oran, Ahmad ben

²⁷ Bennassar and Bennassar, *Los cristianos de Alá*, p. 352.

²⁸ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 104f. 3v. "Y que navegando desde España a la Isla de Santo Domingo algunas vezes que havia calma se echavan a nadar a la mar los soldados y marineros y este confessante tambien lo qual havia con intencion de hacer çahala que es bañarse como lo acostumbra los moros por ceremonia de los de la ley de Mahoma, aunque havia de hazersse este baño en agua dulce no del mar."

²⁹ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, p. 59.

³⁰ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 104f. 4r. "Que la ceremonia de el bañarse en observanzia de la ley de Mahoma es labarsse los ojos, las orejas, la voca, y los codos, y las partes vergonzosas pero que el no lo hizo en las oçassiones que se baño en el mar con los soldados y marineros en las oçassiones que dexa dichas en la audiencia antecedente porque aquellos soldados y marineros son tan practicos y acostumbrados a ber moros y renegados no lo acia aquellas ceremonias porque los dichos marineros y soldados no lo echassen de ver."

³¹ Cardaillac provides a useful discussion of *taqiyya* in *Moriscos y cristianos: Un enfrentamiento polémico, 1492-1640* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1979), pp. 85-98.

Yuma'a, addressed the question of how they could remain good Muslims in a repressive Catholic society.³² Some of the prescriptions contained in the fatwa included the maintenance of prayer "even if it is done by means of signs," and compliance with the ritual of purification: "You should wash in the sea or in a river, and if this has been prohibited, [you should do this] by night, and it will work as if it had been done during the day."³³

When he responded to the accusations against him later in the trial, De la Cruz provided a more detailed account of this event. He stated that at about ten o'clock that morning, he was standing by the stove watching the swimmers and "thinking about nothing in particular when one of the swimmers asked this confessant 'maestro Cristóbal, why don't you throw yourself into the water and remove the grease' but that this time this confessant did not throw himself in."³⁴ However, after everyone had finished eating their meal they began to swim again, at which point, De la Cruz gave in and joined them. Once in the water, he began to wash himself, "without saying anything and with neither malice nor intention of stopping being a Christian, nor any other thought other than washing himself."³⁵ While he was in the water, several of the people swimming with him began to reminisce saying, "Hey Cristóbal, we remember the old times when we did the *zahala*," to which he exclaimed, "Leave me with a thousand devils! You think you are still in Algiers."³⁶ However, soon after this exchange he claimed to have bathed again, this time "with the desire to be a Muslim . . . and saying while washing himself, in the *Aznata* language, which in Spanish means the Arabic language, *abdecader silali*, which means 'powerful lord remember me,' and in this way he did the *cahala*."³⁷ De la Cruz then added that by performing the *zahala* and ritual bath,

³² Cardaillac, *Moriscos y cristianos*, pp. 86-88. A copy of the fatwa dated 3 May 1563 is published in Pedro Longás, *La Vida Religiosa de los Moriscos* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1990).

³³ Longás, *La Vida Religiosa de los Moriscos*, p. 305. "Mantened la oración, aunque lo hagáis por medio de señas...Para cumplir con la purificación, os bañaréis en la mar o en el río; y si esto os fuese prohibido, hacedlo de noche, y os servirá como si fuese de día."

³⁴ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 17v. "Y este confessante los estava mirando nadar desde el bordo del navio junto al fagon sin pensar cossa ninguna y uno de los que nadaban dixo a este confessante maestro Cristobal por que no os arrojaís al agua y os quitais la graça, y que por entonzes este confessante no se arrojo a ella."

³⁵ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 17v. "Sin dezir cossa ninguna ni tener malicia, ni animo de dexar de ser xpiano ni otro pensamiento mas que labarsse."

³⁶ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 18r. "Le dixeron algunos de dicha nao, ala Christobal nos acordamos otra vez del tiempo antiguo hacemos la zahala y este confessante respondio dexadme con mill diablos, pensais que estais todavia en Argel."

³⁷ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 18r. "Y que quando se lababa assi esta segunda vez se lababa con animo de ser moro...diziendo quando se yba labando en lengua aznata que en español quiere dezir lengua arabiga abdecader silali que quiere dezir señor poderosso acuerdate de mi, y que en esta forma hizo el cahala."

“the Muslims believe that they are freed of their guilt” and “undress themselves of the character of baptism” if they had been baptized.³⁸

Gretchen Starr-LeBeau has argued that “rituals surrounding birth” were among a number of markers “central to the consistent maintenance of one’s religious identity” and were a method of “welcoming one into that community.”³⁹ She notes how the practice of washing away the baptismal oil and chrism from a recently baptized child, while having no real effect for ecclesiastical authorities as an “unbaptism,” had “spiritual and emotional implications . . . making it one of the more serious acts committed by Judaizing conversos in Guadalupe.”⁴⁰ Although individuals could not formally renounce their membership in the Christian community, the “unbaptism” identified by Starr-LeBeau would have held private meaning. In a recent study, Mary Elizabeth Perry notes how Moriscos in Spain had similar practices by which Moriscos welcomed newborn infants into their homes.⁴¹

Both the contact that De la Cruz had with other Muslims and the social pressures faced by individuals who were between religious communities become evident in other parts of his testimony. De la Cruz’s experience on the ship between Cadiz and Santo Domingo was not the first time that he moved between Catholicism and Islam. He described several of his interactions with Muslims in Spain, in situations where religious identity became charged. De la Cruz was accused of having apostatized eight years after being baptized, in order to “live as a Muslim,” which he did for ten to twelve years.⁴² The prosecutor’s formal accusation related how, in Madrid, De la Cruz ate meat on Good Friday as the guest of a Muslim woman and in the company of other Muslims. De la Cruz told them he “renounced God and the holy Catholic faith and the Holy Mother, and that on another Good Friday he had told the Muslims, while making fun of the penitents, that they were brutes who spilled their blood for the piece of wood that they carried there, and that he renounced this and all the teachings of the Catholic faith, and that if the Virgin had really remained one, only she would know.”⁴³

³⁸ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 105f. 18v-19r. “Creen los moros que quedan libres de culpas y que se rraen y desnudan del caracter del baptismo que antes quando an ssido bapçiçados rezibieron.”

³⁹ Gretchen Starr-LeBeau, *In the Shadow of the Virgin: Inquisitors, Friars, and Conversos in Guadalupe, Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 71.

⁴⁰ Starr-LeBeau, *In the Shadow of the Virgin*, p. 73.

⁴¹ Mary Elizabeth Perry, *The Handless Maiden: Moriscos and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Spain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 41.

⁴² AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 105f. 8v. “apostato de nra. sta. fee catholica juntandosse a los ocho años de bapçiçado con otros moros y renegado de la ley de Dios y biviendo como moro...y que havia bivido por tiempo de diez o doze años como moro.”

⁴³ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 105f. 8v. “Siendo guesped en Madrid de una mora un viernes sancto havia comido con ella y otros moros carne y havia dicho que renegaba de Dios y de su santa fee catholica y de

Several years later, in 1652, while toiling as a slave “in Christian dress” on a Spanish galley, De la Cruz told a Christian on the ship that “he renounced him and his law and the ladder of Christ.”⁴⁴ De la Cruz then allowed his hair to grow in a style attributed to Muslims. He managed to live as a Muslim during the course of six months, before being reprehended by a friar and other Christians on the galley and returning to Catholicism. The issue of physical appearance was significant throughout his trials. An individual’s conversion to Islam was identified by Spanish authorities as involving not only the verbal renunciation of Catholicism, but also the assumption of the dress and customs of Muslims under Ottoman rule. Bennassar and Bennassar cite numerous examples in the Mediterranean of Europeans caught wearing “Muslim” or “Turkish” dress, and link the renunciation of Catholicism with the assumption of a new religious identity that also involved changes in name, appearance, and dietary practices.⁴⁵ The practice described by De la Cruz of growing one’s hair in a *copete*, in which the head was shaved except for one strand, also appears in a number of the inquisitorial cases discussed by Bennassar and Bennassar.

During his first trial in Barcelona in 1654, De la Cruz described the conditions in the galleys and the reasons for and events leading up to his self-denunciation: “Before the second time that he said he returned to Islam, he said many times, being a slave on the said galley ‘I renounce God, I renounce the person who raised me in this world, evil was the person who gave me the law of Christianity . . . while we are seeing that we Christians are here beating others to death,’ and he said this with great impatience and despair of the poor treatment that was done to him by some who believed he was a renegade, and that after the said blasphemies other Muslims encouraged him to let his hair grow thus [with a *copete*], and asked him why he did not say that he was one, to which this accused responded that he did not dare to declare himself a Muslim, even though he wanted to, for fear of the Inquisition.”⁴⁶

su Santa Madre y que otro viernes sancto havia dicho a los moros haziendo burla de los penitentes que eran unos brutos que derramaban su sangre por un pedazo de palo que llebaban alli y que renegaba del y de todo quanto enseñaba la fee catholica y que la Virgen si lo havia quedado ella se lo sabia.”

⁴⁴ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 105f. 9v. “Y que por el año de cinquenta y dos poco mas o menos estando trabajando en cadaques en traje de xptiano en las galeras y hablando con un xptiano havia dicho que renegaba del y de su ley y de la escalera de xpto...y que por esto se havia dexado el copete como moro y bibio como tal como seis meses hasta que movido de las reprehensiones de un frayle y otros xptianos havia tenido animo de dejar de serlo.”

⁴⁵ Bennassar and Bennassar, *Los cristianos de Alá*, p. 370.

⁴⁶ AHN, Inq. libro 734, f. 231v. “Y que antes de la segunda vez que ha dicho que se bolbio moro, dixo muchas veces siendo esclavo de dicha galera, Reniego de dios, Reniego de quien me crio en el mundo, mal haya quien me dio la ley de xpno y el alena que la pretende tener, quando estamos viendo que nos xpnos a otros estan aqui matando a palos y que esto lo decia con impaciencia grande y casi

Finally, however, De la Cruz confessed to have given in to their insistence and returned to Islam, saying, “Come what may, even if they hang me or burn me, it is better to die in one law than to live in many. I want to be a Muslim. And with this he left his hair in this fashion.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, De la Cruz claimed that he would occasionally hear Mass and pray the *Pater noster* or *Ave Maria* while living as a Muslim because he did not believe that Islam was necessarily better than Christianity. De la Cruz then “declared that the principal motive that obliged him to become a Muslim the second time was the desire to go about freely and to work freely, where he wished, with other Muslims, and to not find himself in the oppressive slavery suffered by the Christian slaves.”⁴⁸ De la Cruz ended his testimony for that particular hearing with a plea that “he would rather suffer here [in the Inquisition] a thousand travails and tortures than return to the galleys, because if he returns he fears that there it would be worse.”⁴⁹

Throughout the trial before the Mexican Inquisition, approximately ten years after the events he described in Spain, De la Cruz expressed a great deal of uncertainty concerning his adherence to both Islam and Catholicism. While this may have been on the one hand a tactical move that enabled him to present himself as repentant and receptive to Christian teachings, the degree to which he voiced his ambivalence is compelling. De la Cruz did not simply renounce his prior Islamic practices in favor of reassuming a Catholic identity. Instead, he conveyed a deep interest in his own salvation and an uncertainty about which of the two faiths was the “true” one in which he could be saved. In his formal accusation, prosecutor Andres de Çabalça noted that while De la Cruz was a slave in the galleys, “he was always doubting whether the true law was that of the Muslims or of the Christians, and that sometimes he was moved and inclined to believe that the law of the Muslims was the most true, and so he practiced it with other Muslims, on many occasions doing the *çahor* and the *çahala*, and other times he was so confused that he did not believe either the law of the Muslims or of the

desesperado del mal tratamiento que se le hacia por unos y otros teniendole por renegado, y que despues de dichos blasfemias le hacian instancia otros moros para que se dejase el cabello como tal, y que por que no decia que lo era, a lo qual respondia este Reo que no se atrevia a declarar por moro aunque lo deseaba por temor de la inquisicion.”

⁴⁷ AHN, Inq. libro 734, f. 231v. “Y continuando dichos moros en sus instancias dixo este en una ocasion venga lo que viniere que aunque me haorquen o me quemem mas vale morir de una ley que no de tantos, yo quiero ser moro, y con esto se deço el cabello como tal.”

⁴⁸ AHN, Inq. libro 734, f. 232r. “Y declaro que el fin mas principal que le obligo a bolberse moro la segunda vez fue el deseo de andar deserrado y trabajar libremente donde quisiera con otros moros y no verse en la esclavitud grande que padecen los xpnos esclavos.”

⁴⁹ AHN, Inq. libro 734, f. 233r. “Y que quiere antes padecer aqui mil trabajos y tormentos que bolber a la Galera porque si buelbe teme que en ella ha de ser peor.”

Christians, but he was always more inclined to believe the law of the Muslims because it was broader, and although a few times he decided to not think about these matters and believe in the law of the Christians because it was more true and safe, this only lasted while he was not in the company of Muslims, because when dealing with them he returned to his said doubts.”⁵⁰

Çabalça’s statement carried a characteristic insistence that the accused was impenitent, and clearly aimed at requesting the most severe punishment, thus provoking further confessions. Çabalça’s language was strong as he argued that De la Cruz had acted with “malicious sagacity” to “amend, revoke, and vary his confessions” in order to suit his purposes.⁵¹ He maintained that De la Cruz’s real intention had been to renounce Catholicism so that “if at the moment that he renounced God a whole world had been put in front of him, he would have trampled over all of it to be a Muslim.”⁵² This image overlooked the nuances in De la Cruz’s response and reflected the Inquisition’s emphasis on Catholicism as the only “true” religion, ignoring the variations of experience and doubts that individuals may have faced.

In response to the accusation, De la Cruz claimed to have denounced himself “with the desire and the will to save himself, and he was moved to do this because he found himself to be bewildered.”⁵³ He had been a Muslim “on the one hand, and on the other he had many doubts concerning the mysteries of the holy Catholic faith when he denounced himself.”⁵⁴ He claimed that his self-denunciation to the Mexican tribunal was not to avoid work, “because he found himself with so much rest and comfort in the house of his master Pantaleón Fernández that he did not have more work to do.”⁵⁵ Rather, he pleaded, he was

⁵⁰ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 10v. “Y que en tres años que havia estado en galera siempre havia estado dudando si era la cierta ley de los moros o la de los xpianos y que unas veces se mobia e inclinaba a creer que la ley de los moros era la mas cierta y como tal la practicaba con otros moros haciendo en muchas ocasiones el çaor y el çahala y otras veces se hallaba tan perplexo que ni creya la ley de los moros ni la de los christianos pero siempre se inclinaba mas a creer la ley de los moros por ser mas ancha y que aunque algunas veces proponia no discurrir en estas materias y creer la ley de los xpianos por ser mas cierta y segura esto solo le duraba mientras que no trataba con moros por que en tratando con ellos luego volvia a las dichas dudas.”

⁵¹ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 9r. “Procuero con sagacidad malicioosa este reo enmendar, rebocar, y bariar sus confessions...”

⁵² AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 9r. “Procuero con sagacidad malicioosa este reo enmendar, rebocar, y bariar sus confessions...que si en aquel instante que renego de Dios se le pusiera un mundo entero delante atropellara por todo por ser moro.”

⁵³ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 20v. “Y que se denuncio con animo y voluntad de salbarse y el moverse a ello fue porque se vey a como atolondrado.”

⁵⁴ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 20v. “A ssido de la secta de Mahoma por una parte y por otra con muchas dudas en los misterios de la sta. fee catholica segun se denuncio.”

⁵⁵ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 20v. “Pues se hallava en cassa de su amo Pantaleon Fernandez con tanto descanso y comodidad que no tenia mas travajo que cobrar.”

motivated by the desire for salvation. The impact of the inquisitorial insistence on a particular confessional narrative becomes clear in De la Cruz's response as "he remembered that it was true that he repeated the doing of the said çahala and ceremony [of bathing] many times, and he does not remember how many, and that sometimes it was with the intention of doing what Muslims do, and at other times it was without it, and that he does not remember distinctly or clearly."⁵⁶ By being asked to enumerate and confess the number of times that he had thought about assuming Muslim beliefs and practices, De la Cruz was confronted with the rigid structures of confession in which he was being instructed to order his experiences according to lapses in faith.

The inquisitors' assertion that De la Cruz was avoiding work was by no means innocent. Recent research on slavery and the Inquisition in Spanish America has documented the proliferation of cases during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of slaves renouncing Catholicism while being beaten by their masters. In an examination of more than one hundred inquisitorial trials between 1596 and 1669, Javier Villa-Flores has analyzed how Afro-Mexican slaves committed blasphemy in an attempt to "set limits" to the cruelty of masters, albeit at considerable risk to themselves.⁵⁷ Because the slaves committed blasphemy, they fell under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, which claimed it was the only institution with the power to absolve them. Villa-Flores provides evidence that "blasphemy was taught and transmitted among Afro-Mexican slaves as a strategy to prevent bodily harm," and he cites several slaves' references to learning from other slaves or by observing *autos de fe*.⁵⁸

In 1663, the same Andrés de Çabalça who was the prosecutor for De la Cruz's trial, complained in a letter about how slaves' renunciations of God were "intend[ed] to evade their master's service and escape his domination . . . [as a result,] they have represented a lot of work for this Holy Office, which is repeatedly overburdened with these kinds of cases."⁵⁹ This was the

⁵⁶ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 105f. 19r. "Y luego dixo que se acordaba y era verdad que havia repetido el hazer dicho çahala y ceremonia muchas vezes que no se acuerda quantas y que unas vezes era con intencion de hazer lo que hazen los moros y otras sin ella de que no se acuerda con distincion y claridad ni quantas vezes fue con la intencion ni quantas sin ella."

⁵⁷ Javier Villa-Flores, "'To Lose One's Soul': Blasphemy and Slavery in New Spain, 1596-1669," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82:3 (2002), p. 440. Kathryn Joy McKnight provides an in-depth examination of a blasphemy trial in "Blasphemy as Resistance: An African Slave Woman before the Mexican Inquisition," in Mary E. Giles, ed., *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 229-253.

⁵⁸ Villa-Flores, "To Lose One's Soul," p. 450.

⁵⁹ Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter AGN), Inquisición 502.385 (unfoliated), quoted in Villa-Flores, "To Lose One's Soul," p. 465. The translation from the original Spanish is his.

same year that Çabalça presented De la Cruz's accusation on 11 January 1663. The prosecutor stated unequivocally that, "On the two occasions that he said he had denounced himself to the Inquisitions of Barcelona and Seville. . . . I consider the appeal and excuse of his renunciations, blasphemies, errors, and apostasy to be the strain and maltreatment which was done to him in the galleys. Now that this motive has ceased, he takes as a pretext to see whether this Inquisition will remove him from his difficulties and doubts."⁶⁰ Çabalça also added, "To pretend that his presentation and denunciation to this Holy Office has been to see whether the Inquisition's ministers would remove him from his difficulties, well, he would leave [his difficulties] poorly when he has refused to want to know, on so many occasions when he has had dealings and lived with Catholics, what would be good for his salvation. And all this should be taken as the fiction and scheming of the accused, so malicious, as was demonstrated by the events and circumstances of both [previous] cases against him."⁶¹

Çabalça's experience with slaves renouncing Catholicism in order to avoid severe treatment from their masters becomes evident in his irritation with De la Cruz. De la Cruz's two previous self-denunciations before the Inquisitions of Barcelona and Seville parallel the strategies of slaves discussed by Villa-Flores. What makes De la Cruz's case before the Mexican Inquisition unique, but also evocative of other experiences during this period, is the length and richness of his testimony concerning religiosity. The number of times that De la Cruz sought out the Inquisition also appears to be relatively uncommon, and it is unclear whether other individuals denounced themselves repeatedly to the Inquisition under the ambiguous context of either evading the dire circumstances of their enslavement or being genuinely concerned with their salvation.

De la Cruz was not the only person tried by Mexican inquisitors for practicing Islam or being the descendant of Muslims. De la Cruz's descriptions

⁶⁰ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 105f. 13v. "En las dos ocasiones referidas que dixo haverse denunciado a las inquisiciones de Barzelona y Sevilla. . . .tomo por efugio y disculpa de sus reniegos, blasphemos, errores, y apostassia el rigor y maltratamiento que se le hazia en la galera y ahora que a cessado este motibo toma por pretexto el ver si le sacan en esta inquisicion de sus dificultades y dudas como si en materia de la fee catholica que proffesso en el Santo Baptismo las debia tener demas de que no es dudar ni dificultar."

⁶¹ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 105f. 13r. "El pretender que su manifestacion y denunciacion a este Santo Officio aya ssido por ver si en la Inquisicion sus ministros lo sacan de sus dificultades pues mal podria salir dellas quando se a negado a querer saver en tantas ocasiones como a tenido concurso y habitacion con catholicos lo que le conviene para su salbacion. Y todo se deve tener por ficcion y machina de este Reo tan malicioso como esta experimentado por los subzessos y circunstancias de ambas caussas seguidas contra el y lo que nuevamente sobreviene."

of his conversations with Muslims in the Caribbean are echoed in other cases from Spanish America. For example, in 1594, María Ruiz, a Morisca born in the town of Albolot in the Alpujarras mountains of Granada, denounced herself before Mexican inquisitors at the insistence of her confessor.⁶² Ruiz had been residing in Mexico City for approximately ten years, where she was married to an ‘old Christian.’ During her trial, Ruiz described her religious practices on both sides of the Atlantic that included praying in Arabic and invoking Muhammad.

Other cases suggest how knowledge about Islam circulated in Spanish America. In 1605 a “man called Zarate” was accused of saying that on Judgment Day, Muhammad would sit at Jesus’ feet and revoke the sentences he did not agree with.⁶³ In 1614 a fisherman named Diego was overheard praising Muhammad and his Paradise.⁶⁴ In 1616 Pedro Hernández, who was reputed publicly to be a Morisco, rebuked someone’s greeting by stating, “In this house we do not say ‘Praise Jesus’ but rather good evening.”⁶⁵ In 1651, Anton Rosado, a slave in Mexico City and the son of a Muslim woman from the Philippines, was accused of renouncing God while being abused by his master.⁶⁶ De la Cruz’s testimony provides fresh insight into the interconnected world in which these various individuals moved and raises issues in a Spanish American context that have been associated more frequently with daily interactions in the Mediterranean.

CONCLUSION

Cristóbal de la Cruz’s trial in Mexico was resolved eventually with his reconciliation into the Church, as had occurred after his previous self-denunciations before the Inquisitions of Barcelona and Seville. In 1665 inquisitors placed him in a convent, “to serve for as much time as would be necessary, under the care of competent religious to instruct him in the mysteries of the Catholic faith.”⁶⁷ De la Cruz’s repeated self-denunciations before the Inquisition were, on the surface, suggestive of resistance by means of a tactical assumption of a religious identity in order to ease the harsh conditions of his

⁶² AGN, Inq. vol. 151, exp. 5, f. 3r.

⁶³ AGN, Inq. vol. 276, f. 194r-194v.

⁶⁴ AGN, Inq. vol. 302, f. 104r.

⁶⁵ AGN, Inq. vol. 315, f. 352r-352v. “...respondio el dho Pedro Hernández no ha de aver aqui en esta cassa loado sea Jesuxpo sino buenas noches.”

⁶⁶ AGN, Inq. vol. 454, f. 443r.

⁶⁷ AHN, Inq. 1729, exp. 10\5f. 28r. “Y puesto en un convento el que pareciere al tribunal para que sirva en el todo el tienpo que fuere necesario encomendandole a religiosos de satisfaction para que le instruyan en los misterios de la fee catolica y bayan dando quenta al tribunal de como procede.”

enslavement. As De la Cruz's case demonstrates, the issue of religious identity was not simply performative. His urgent preoccupation with salvation, as well as his self-placement between two faiths while expressing uncertainty with each one, portrays the extent to which religiosity and a thirst for accurate knowledge that would inspire belief played a crucial role. The incompleteness of the methods of instruction used by Catholic authorities, such as the Inquisition, enabled De la Cruz to acquire a rudimentary knowledge about Catholicism, but a number of doubts remained unresolved. These doubts were not uncommon during the early modern period, comprising both critiques of Catholicism and genuine confusion about official teachings.

De la Cruz's case illustrates the position of an individual whose journey connects Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds. His account of discussing Islam with another Muslim in the Caribbean before arriving in New Spain indicates how knowledge about Muslim beliefs and practices traveled to Spanish America. Through informal networks of communication, conversations, or exchanged stories, individuals who spent time in North Africa or the Mediterranean carried their experiences with them in their daily encounters with others in Spanish America. It was precisely these exchanges that Spanish ecclesiastical authorities, especially the Inquisition, sought to control and curtail, as knowledge about "heterodox" practices could undermine efforts to convert indigenous peoples to Catholicism. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, royal decrees prohibited the emigration of Muslims and Moriscos to Spanish America. Nevertheless, as De la Cruz's case shows, individuals were able to circumvent these restrictions and settle overseas, either voluntarily or as slaves.

The experiences of Cristóbal de la Cruz are evocative of those of countless other individuals caught between two laws, Islam and Catholicism, that Spanish ecclesiastical authorities conceived of as mutually exclusive. Institutions such as the Inquisition attempted to direct individual beliefs according to established standards of religious orthodoxy. Yet, knowledge of multiple bodies of religious practice and a concern with personal salvation enabled De la Cruz, and others, to negotiate their position to some extent.

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