

FAITH AS AN INSTRUMENT OF INTEGRATION AMONG ISLAMIC IMMIGRANTS: THE CASE OF EXTRAMADURA (SPAIN), A NEW CIVILIZATION*

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Abstract

The present investigation is about the basic support—from the standpoint of religiosity—that Islamic immigrants who arrive to the Independent Community of Extremadura, along with Latin Americans, contribute to the newly arrived workers in Extremadura.



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1 Faith as an Instrument of Integration in Islamic Immigrants: The Case of Extremadura (Spain), A New Civilization

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The present investigation is about the basic support—from the standpoint of religiosity—that Islamic immigrants who arrive to the Independent Community of Extremadura, along with Latin Americans, contribute to the newly arrived workers in Extremadura. The selected theoretical model is different from the

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one presented by Samuel Huntington, with his mythical book: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). In the mentioned text, Latin American countries are considered as their own civilization and “confronted” with the west –fundamentally as a danger to the U.S. The greatest differences between nations are now cultural rather than political, economic, or ideological. It is still manifested in his text, that the cultures and cultural identities would be shaping the levels of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War period of the world. My position would be more in consonance with authors –like professor Tomás Calvo Buezas–who understand that a new civilization is dawning. The religious contribution of the Latin-American immigrants and the religious experience of Islamic immigrants reinforce Claude Levi-Strauss’ (1973) position—that civilization implies the coexistence of culture—because of the almost 15 years of coexistence of all of them. The sample population will be Islamic immigrants who live in Extremadura—national Moroccans who came from the countryside of Oujda (province in north Morocco—and that as of 1991, were settled in the orography that conforms the Tietar River, which irrigates the cultivation of tobacco in the zone of Talayuela, and the Latin American immigrants who also work in that locality. In Extremadura, 57% of the immigrant population is of Moroccan nationality, concreting a nucleus (more than 50% in the Talayuela zone). The religious experience is deeply marked by the rural surroundings that are similar to their place of origin. This substantively marks their actions; and for that reason, the analysis is centered on these groups which are fervent believers in Allah.

NATIONALITIES (Talayuela)	Year 2001	Year 2002	Year 2003
ALGERIA	32	47	38
ARGENTINA	0	1	0
BRAZIL	5	6	8
BULGARIA	0	1	1
COLOMBIA	27	32	29
CUBA	1	1	1
ECUADOR	146 (3.3)	127 (2.7)	110 (2.5)
FRANCE	3	3	3
ITALY	1	1	3
JORDAN	0	1	2
LITUANIA	6	6	1
MOROCCO	4.122 (93.2)	4.401 (93.3)	4.050 (93.2)
MAURITANIA	0	1	1
LOW PAISES	1	1	1
POLAND	5	5	3
PORTUGAL	23	32	30
CZECH REPUBLIC	2	3	3
REP.DOMINICAN	6	1	3
RUMANIA	14	13	13
SENEGAL	29 (0.7)	30 (0.6)	35 (0.8)
The UKRAINE	2	2	1
ETIOPIA	0	0	1
The PHILIPPINES	0	0	1
RUSSIA	0	0	1
SYRIA	0	0	4
SWITZERLAND	0	0	1
TOTAL	4.425	4.715	4.344

Table 1

Figure 1. Picture of evolution of foreigners by nationalities of the municipal register of Talayuela (2001-2003).

Source: My own elaboration through data of municipal register of Talayuela

Religiosity is an exponent of integration for the Islamic immigrants who live in Talayuela (Cáceres). Through field work, we investigated to find if the religiosity of the Islamic immigrant in Extremadura is a factor of integration or of a more or less latent conflict; that is to say, up to what point does he or she accommodate to the welcoming society, or otherwise legitimize the attitudes and actions of revolt that can generate situations of violence like those of March 11th. At the same time, cultural or social factors, when

mixed with religiosity, serve as an integration process or feeds to the confliction potential, serving as broth of culture to pre-terrorist attitudes.

If September 11, 2001 marked a before and after in international relations, and by extension in the daily coexistence between individuals of different cultures that inhabit the same geographic and temporary place, March 11th also marked that duality in our country. In accordance with Samuel Huntington's thinking, civilizations like the western, the Muslim, and the Chinese, - among the main ones - are replacing previous ideologies and nations, reason why the great differences between nations are now cultural more than political, economic, or ideological. Cultures and cultural identities shape the levels of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War period of the world. Following the American trail - with a certain European slant -, Giovanni Sartori, in his book *Pluralism, Multiculturalism and Foreigners: an Essay on Multiethnic Society* (2001), maintains that there are civilizations that are "pregnant" with conflict with others; thus it is said that "the problem is the Islam" with respect to the integration of its believers in the western societies.

Mikel Azurmendi, like many, maintains that the immigrants must be treated as individuals, adapting their individual projects to the welcoming society, and not as cultural groups that destroy coexistence. That's why every cultural manifestation of the Islam believers must be rejected. Similarly, Miguel Herrero de Miñón, "advises" to receive immigrants who share our western patterns, in detriment of "others" more difficult to integrate. In another conciliation slope, Ryszard Kapuscinski is in favor of prudence, not to emphasize the opposite elements, because otherwise the "clash of civilizations" has no turning back, nor winners or losers, we'd all lose.

More optimistic on the result of possible multicultural scenes are the academics and intellectuals Sami Nair, Tomás Calvo Buezas, Bernabé Lopez, Joaquin Arango, and many more. For them, the planet, the Europe of the future, and therefore Spain, will be more and more a pluricultural and multiethnic mosaic, nourished with emigrants and ethnic groups of the Third World, with differentiated ways of life from those of the western cultures. If we don't learn to coexist together in the differences, increased racism and xenophobia is foreseeable, with a new outbreak of ethnic conflicts, and therefore of the terrorism as an "entrenched" answer of the minorities. For these authors, cultural diversity is a wealth of all complex, democratic, and plural societies. Dynamic cultures and artistic creativity can only evolve and transform if there is a dialectic interaction between plurality and homogeneity, generating new syncretic impulses and influences that dynamize the established cultural forms. The history of civilizations is the history of the encounters of different people.

In this dilemma of opinions, some voices consider the inevitable confrontation between the two civilizations: Muslims and the western civilization, the first one with "bloody borders." Others emphasize the enriching challenge that involves the permanent encounter of the variety of ways "of being human." The two visions are conscious of the risks that coexistence entails from very distant values. Next to the rejection of the Muslim immigrants on behalf of the welcoming society, is the organized terrorism on behalf of those who feel "outraged" in their identity, which is fed from their religious sphere. This brings about our investigation, through the field work in Extremadura, to show if the Islamic religiosity of the immigrants who arrive at Extremadura is a factor of integration, or the opposite, as a brake for the coexistence in the new society. Does Islam integrate or even reinforce its positions of origin, reaching a radical position of terrorism? This is the basic question in the process of this investigation. The young immigrants who arrived with their parents, do they assume Islam as a global answer in their new lives? Or on the contrary, do they renounce it? It is easier to investigate on Christian religiosity of the Latin American immigrants who in the beginning - considering the slope of Liberation Theology - occupied sacred and identical settings. In reality, I describe different religious experiences from the immigrants and their consequences in Extremadura society.

2 Religious Experience of the Moroccan Immigrants

SURA I

In the name of GOD, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

SURA II

Verse 255- profession of Muslim faith.

GOD: there is no other god besides Him, the Living, the Eternal. Never a moment of unawareness or slumber overtakes Him. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth. Who could intercede with Him, except in accordance with His will? He knows their past, and their future. No one attains any knowledge, except as He wills. His dominion encompasses the heavens and the earth, and ruling them never burdens Him. He is the Most High, the Great.

SURA CXIII: THE SURA OF DAWN NACIENTE

Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of daybreak.

From the evils among His creations.

From the evils of darkness as it falls.

From the evils of the troublemakers.

From the evils of the envious when they envy."

Morocco is an Islamic state, an Islamic country, with Islamic towns; as are their inhabitants, in Morocco and in the zone of Talayuela. Moroccan immigrants in Talayuela are, according to their definition, religious. They believe in the Oneness of God, they believe Mahommed was sent by God, they believe in the angels and demons, there is nothing more than the Absolute one, and that death and poverty are relative. They have the obligation to go, once in their lifetime, to Mecca; to give alms; to fast in the Ramadan; to abstain from eating impure animals; and to have five daily prayers. They are thankful by the expressions of the prophet and hospitable because every person is the disguised face of Allah.

I find myself before a group that "is culturally religious" I can ask myself if they are all like that and to what degree. Before this question, I found different levels of belief and different commitments before it.

3 Moroccans with a Lot of Faith: Islamic Sanctity

For Madani, his belief in Islam is everything; every moment of his life is guided, measured by the expression of his faith. "None equals Him!" This phrase is from SURA CXII, it is radically true for Madani. It fulfills all the rules of his faith; he is "incapable" of going off course, to do something that contradicts the Koran. Madani is happy at his 48 years, with his wife and eight children, with his seasonal work away from his loved ones, in a country he barely understands and with an uncertain future. He has all the conditions to think of life as a burden, and nevertheless..., the answer is his God, Allah, the Eternal one. Alan Wats, (1995, p. 19) stated, "the difference between the modern, educated, uncertain, and neurotic believer, and the calm dignity and inner peace of the old fashioned believer, makes him an enviable man." That is Madani for us: an enviable man, who comes from a countryside of the Third World, a man with little "culture," a man with few things, many "burdens" however..., AN ENVIABLE MAN.

4 Moroccans with Faith: Follow the Rules

Just as Madani, Mohammed, 34 years old, married and with three children, also comes from rural surroundings, with little academic culture and great faith in Allah. For him, the most important thing is family; a family which involves all types of kinship, and his God. He lives with Mohammed of 47 years and Said of 27; the three have the same type of faith, the three represent the convinced Moroccans, "I seek refuge in the Lord of daybreak" (SURA CXIII). The carpet facing the East is their most valuable relic in their house, from which they say their daily prayers. If they are busy with field work, they stop and look for the answer of life, which is Him, the Eternal one. They do not drink alcohol, do not eat impure animals, they respect their elders, they do not rob, they comply with fasting of the Ramadan. Everything can happen nothing has importance, nor poverty or wealth; everything is good.

Beza and Achor can also be put in this group; they are socially worse off than their previous companions, but are also integrated in this type of religiosity. If Madani is an isolated case of "Islamic sanctity," Mohammed, Said, Mohammed, Beza, and Achor are the most numerous group of Moroccan immigrants of the zone, as far as their religious expression. They are part of the simple people of the countryside group, those that do not question their faith, as if they had read the text of the Cloud of Unknowing, which says: "thought cannot understand God" (English Anonymous of the XIV Century, 1995:182).

5 Moroccans with Faith: God Encircles both Religions (Islam and Christianity)

Not everyone forms part of this unbreakable faith, others are capable of coexisting with our culture without being belligerent, and understanding that there is a God that encircles both religions, Christianity and Islam. This is Haly's belief; God understands everything, and that whole gives him tranquility and allows him to adapt to his new life. Haly and Habbas are young university students from urban zones. Both are married to Spaniards; both assume their faith and extend it to the new adopted faith or live without becoming attached to the strict norms of their Moroccan companions. In his ample faith, alcohol and women are included; giving alms is not, nor is it necessary to fast during Ramadan. The important thing is to be "good people" and to help others. To respect and to be respected is Habbas' motto.

6 Moroccans with a More Relaxed Faith

Taib, 24 years old; Mahjoub, 28; Kados, 30; Arby, 28; and Abdendi, 36, form, along with others, the group of young people who follow Allah's will in a more relaxed form. Some are university students, others are not but they hold certain academic culture. All have been in Spain for several years and some in other countries. They are religious but..., they are not infatuated with their God. They are "almost" westernized; but most don't eat pork. They are flexible regarding their faith and spend their lives arguing "other values" more than those which are strictly religious. In spite of their flexibility, or perhaps for that reason, they constitute a group of disillusioned Moroccan immigrants of the First World system. When you do not have a religious anchorage, the disillusionment is worse, which puts them at risk of radicalizing their positions as they do not receive benefits from the new culture. Arby has a scheme of returning to Morocco and marrying a "radical" woman, that is to say, those that assume the faith in a total form; he probably won't, but he thinks about doing it, we believe it's his answer to the lack of expectations here.

Brahim and Bouzki bet on Islamic radicalism. Giles Keppel (1994, p. 30) says: "Without a job, possibilities of prospering, and without ideologies that allow to dream in a different world, religions, and not only Islam, constitute an attractive supply of social integration and individual hope." Peculiarly, we believe that this group of people, with a nomadic faith, is that which eventually comes to compose Islamic radical groups. Men as Madani or Mohammed do not need more extremism or violence in their lives, but those who are discontent with both systems do.

7 Moroccans Who Complain about Their Faith

If all the previous people can be described as religious men who assume the cultural values of their surroundings, and religion is a marrow aspect of the Moroccan society, then it is practically a theocratic government that directs the intentions of Morocco. The previous, as we say, are part of the many that make up the religious fan of the nation. Moktar and Yahya are "different" from the system. They are the only ones we have heard complain about the faith of their ancestors. To them, Islam is a Chinese tale; it is worse than that, it is the base of the system that strangles its nation. They come from Jerama, a mining city; the city of disease and death of many, and the city of wealth for a few. Moktar and Yahya denounce this robbery of the State, the religious State. Their religion is to fight for their own. They do not believe in anything more than the liberation of the nation. Their faith is the democracy of the land, the government of those who do not govern. They, the poor men, are the good ones. The rich ones – those who hold the power of the State – are bad. Religion is the fight for liberation, the fight of the poor – their fight. They intellectualize their atheism and turn it into a fight as an exit to their pain; they untiringly work for the rights of Moroccan immigrants. Instead of not drinking alcohol, they speak at bars of how to obtain better homes and better wages. Instead of fasting, they visit each other to become stronger, instead of praying, they work to obtain equality for all. As Alan Wats (1995, p. 19) indicated

it seems [mankind] is incapable of living without the myth, the belief that routine and exhausting work, the pain and fear of this life, have some meaning and an objective in the future. New myths are born instantly..., political and economic myths with outlandish promises of the best futures in the present world. Those myths provide the individual with a certain sensation that a meaning exists, making them become part

of a vast effort in which they lose part of their own emptiness and solitude. Nevertheless, the violence itself of these political religions reveals the hidden anxiety, because they are nothing more than the oppression of men who shout and support each other in the dark.

8 Moroccans Who Momentarily Overlook Their Faith

Rakea and Abdelkarin believe in Allah, but do not practice their faith lately. For a while, they have not prayed as they have not had strength. Everything goes wrong, and when everything goes wrong, one cannot direct her or his self to the Great One. "This is almost opposite of us, for we remembered God when things go wrong to ask for help." Rakea cries when telling that he does not pray, as if she is ashamed of it. She doesn't even condescend to approach, even in thought, to the "King of men." Later, when things improve, when there is work, she will return to her daily prayers of thanksgiving.

All the believers try to be in Morocco during the month of Ramadan. They program their jobs to be able to spend that month with their people. There are no mosques in the zone, only a small premise that serves as a gathering place and for prayer – in one occasion the place was fitted to a celebration day; there are very few that are present throughout the year in this zone to construct one, and with few economic resources. Nonetheless, each house is a place for prayer.

9 An Example of "Integration"

Madani forms part of the Moroccan immigrants who are in Spain solely to make money by working, send it home, and to give a better life to his relatives. Madani is, apparently, a simple man, more so than the rest. He is 48 years old, has eight sons and was born in P.Berkane. He has been in Spain since 1990, hardly understands the language, and his formation is basic. He has been working for several years with the same owner, but he does not have a habitual salary for time worked. He begins work next to Ahmmed, both are the only ones to be wage-earners from the entire field. Ahmmed begins with the seedbeds and Madani with the transplants. Both work out in the sun. There is no schedule, and they only get a few hours of rest per day and Sunday afternoons off, for all of this they receive 900 euros a month. Madani is there till late November, after that he will work in the olive field in Jaén; he will be with some friend of other fields and will complete his work in Spain and return to Morocco in January, just before Ramadan. He has never missed this religious obligation, it is very important, even more than his life; as important or more than his family. He is a very religious man, which is reflected in his daily prayers, the exact fulfillment of the rules of the Koran. He helps those who have less and has a smile and a supporting shoulder for everyone.

Madani lives with eight companions in a house he rents from his employer. In the shared room is an old bed base, a foam mattress, and blankets. Besides his suitcase, his old clothes, and a carpet for prayer, these are his only belongings in Spain. He makes food with two others. Between the three, they share everything, but it is a group aside from the rest of the house. Sometimes they do common activities, for example a dinner at the end of the field work. He does not eat pork, does not drink, respects his wife, does not have a car, saves all the money for his family, and yet he always seems to be happy. He is always willing to work, never complains, he does not speak badly of his King: I can hardly believe it. They are of the kind of men who practically don't exist. For Madani everything is good, there are no "buts;" I cannot understand it. I see him walking down the highway when he needs to buy things; he never asks to be taken there, he only goes when it is convenient for those who live with him. The others treat him with the respect he deserves for his age, but his religiosity is, at times, an object of certain ridicule. He requested for family aid for his children, 3000 pesetas a month, but Social Security requested a certificate to prove that he did not receive it in Morocco, but he does not receive anything from his country.

Madani does all kinds of things in the field: changes sprinklers, gathers leaves, repairs the walkways. He is willing to work at any hour of the day, except those established for prayer. Day after day, facing Mecca, he offers the tribute of his prayer to Allah; he thanks Him for his luck, for everything life gives him. He is a true patriarch; he doesn't have eight children in vain. He distributes food with fairness, equal for all; he knows how to be fair. Almost everything he earns he saves to send to his family in Morocco, he only works

for them and nothing else. He spends his part on food for the three, for paperwork, and to travel. Madani is part of the Moroccan immigrants who are solely in Spain to make money by working, to send it home, and to give a better life to his relatives; dozens of people depend on him; his wife, children, brothers, nephews, cousins. He is responsible for feeding all these people. He has found a job with certain stability; he will return to his employer in the tobacco and olive field every year.

Madani does not dream of remaining in Spain and bringing his family; he does not dream about the glories of the western world, he does not hate his King or his God; he simply finds in our country the work he lacks in Morocco. Spain is only the means, not an objective. His objective is Morocco, his people, and Allah. He hardly speaks Spanish but that is not very necessary for he does. He fulfills his role and knows clearly what he wants. He is not integrated, nor does he need to be. He lives with us, feeds his family with his work, which is the only thing that matters to him and to his employers.

10 Summary

In summary; I understand that Moroccan immigrants in the zone are mostly religious, as a cultural expression of their country of origin, transferring their faith to their new place of establishment. They transfer it with small modifications depending on different factors. I find individual elements of sanctity worthy to recognize and to envy. These people are transferred by their faith to a daily paradise in which the recognized hardships are transformed into praise to Allah, the Great one, the Only one, the Merciful one; it is as if nothing was real, nothing outside their circle of faith. Faith is very important to the majority; they must fulfill the norms of their God, the rules of the Koran, and they do. No one misses daily prayer in the month of Ramadan. They do not drink alcohol, nor do they go with women. They live like this in a natural way; it forms part of their original culture, their rural culture. In spite of the importance of the faith of the majority of the Moroccan immigrants, they do not have mosques to read the Koran and to pray, except for the place fitted for celebration days in Talayuela.

The immigrants who have university studies focus on their faith in a different way. They are more relaxed regarding their customs and quickly adapt to the laicism of customs of the place, or they look for arguments to interrelate both religious approaches: their own and the new one in their destination. On the other hand, I found that college students who intellectually strengthen their faith radicalize their positions until reaching an integrist exposition. No matter what, their principles are very radical, although their behaviors are very relaxed.

I also came across Moroccans who deny their faith. They are those who consider that faith as a “hoax,” “a deceit to the nation,” and prefer to dedicate themselves to work in unions and associations to defend the interests of their people. These are the atheists of Islam, convinced of the pain caused by the false hope in their nation. If the others pray, they do not; if the others do not eat pork, they do; if the others do not drink, they often get drunk; if the others are submissive to power and to God, they rebel. They tend to be college students with bad luck; they are intelligent people who rebel, mainly, against their “bad luck.”

It is easy to recognize that age, place of origin, cultural level, and time of permanence in Spain are factors that affect the way of living one’s faith. Without having exhaustive data we see that, except for exceptional cases, older Moroccans who come from countryside, with little academic level, children in Morocco, and just a short time in Spain, have a more rooted faith than the young people from urban zones, who possess greater academic studies, less familiar responsibilities, and have greater permanence in Spain. They tend to be relaxed about their customs and adapt better to the lay rate of the new culture. Some have a very rooted faith, but the adaptation to our culture implies changes, changes that some are already implementing in their religious way of life.

11 Conclusion: Religiosity as a Factor of a New Civilization

I compromised to show that the theory that has circulated with more vigor in the last decade on possible international confrontation—as is the clash of civilizations—has no sense in concrete scenarios, especially when these possible discrepancies are exerted in the same context of time and space. Talayuela, with a

population of less than 12,000 inhabitants, is able to live in a cultural diversity that encircles the “evils” to which are referenced by Samuel Huntington. I centered fundamentally in the religious monotheistic nuclei.

Contradicting the possibility of the fight of civilizations, the religious experience of the people, whatever it might be, can be exerted as a uniting factor of experiences that contribute to the integration in the most complex and deteriorated systems on the part of the receiving society. Supporting suffering situations, a lack of expectations, extreme poverty, marginalization, and an opening to new realities that end up becoming new perception, it is possible, from a firm belief in their God. The provisions filled with securities in their parents’ God serves them to “understanding” the new things even if it is not the best. I have seen how the experiences of the Islamic immigrants who work in Talayuela reinforces the faith for some, while others move away from it. I have not seen situations in which faith fights against the welcoming society, or in which those with no faith fight to obtain justice for everyone.

The past 15 years are a sample that not only diversity is possible, but that it is the real thing in many places of the world. Talayuela is one of them, but not considered in the framework of Professor Huntington. The battle to find the framework that makes coexistence possible after this apparent contradiction, is not other than to understand that we are at the beginning of a new civilization that will be fed by the multiple and complex diversity that has been formed throughout ten thousand years and that now pleads to be unified in that same diversity. Talayuela visualizes a future scenario – that already is present among their people – in which the fight to maintain the identity is not synonymous of a bloody conflict or of destruction of those who are different. Rather, it seems these experiences are telling us that it is possible to be diverse, in peace.

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