Convivencia and Conversos: Problematizing Identity

by

Arielle Erin Golden
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INTRODUCTION

During Medieval and early modern times, the religious groups of the Iberian Peninsula underwent periods of oscillating religious tolerance. From 711-1391, an often-idealized coexistence – *convivencia* – occurred, between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities. There is evidence of a remarkable cultural exchange between these three religious groups, the result of relatively tolerant policies and regular social and economic interactions between the groups under leaders from different religious affiliations. With the rise of monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, relative tolerance and cultural understanding disappeared in favor of an overarching Catholic hegemony. Forced conversions created a population of *conversos* – Jewish converts whose children and all following generations were prescribed the same title, and who were eventually the subjects of harsh inquisitorial procedures regarding their sincerity as Catholics. The adaptations, ideologies, and lifestyles these two periods – the *convivencia*, or coexistence, and time of the *conversos* – reflect and illuminate many of the issues underlying the contemporary debate between the individual and social conceptions of the self. The discussion of identity construction and the politics that help shape it often become represented as a dichotomy in dialogue, and take form as either individualistic or social. This investigation will examine the *convivencia* lifestyle and that of the *conversos* in light of their similarities to and commentary regarding these two ways of constructing identity.
Identity

Identity is at once complex and amorphous; and first, we must understand its meaning. According to its semantic use, identity differs slightly from a self-definition. We can see this if we focus on the linguistic aspects of the terms. One can “identify with” or “identify as” to describe himself, whereas one can “define as” but not “define with.” Self-definition, therefore, implies a more independent way of seeing oneself. It does not have to do “with” another entity, and exists alone. Identifying “as”, similarly, also implies a personal reflection, but the expression “identify with” suggests dependence on or at least affiliation with another entity. Indeed, from the Latin, “identitas,” from “idem” or “the same.” Here, I will use the two interchangeably for the sake of simplicity. Additionally, it is important to note that in practical terms, all self-definitions and identities are influenced by and reflective of external contacts.

Identities are intricate. They are how we define ourselves according to our own perceived contexts. They are riddled with tension; we can find drastic differences between one’s public and private identities. There are discrepancies between the introspective, emotional identity and the practical, external one. Especially in the case of the conversos, as we will see below, the space between a public identity and a private one is tense and volatile. This is especially true when it is confronted with potentially harmful legal personal risks and repercussions, which can force change on the public identity while straining the more reluctant private side. Finally, identities differ with changes in environment, and are thus extremely unpredictable. At the same time, a declared identity offers a measure of predictability in how that subject
will perform. We can observe patterns in how people react to environmental changes in some historical instances, and draw on them to aid in our current modes of self-definition and analysis. We can see that despite the colloquial use of the word, the notion of an unchanging, fixed identity is not a reality, but a process. At least to some extent, it is a concept contingent on external circumstances.

On one hand, we must try to understand the social and political processes that make us who we are. The constructed realities that provide the opportunity to define ourselves give us meaning and purpose. On the other hand, the variation in social identities is a force of change, historically and socially. It is tempting to attribute the consequences and evidences of the *convivencia* and *converso* cultural lifestyles to their particular political backgrounds. However, many of their dilemmas are reflected in the modern-day debate between socially- or culturally-based identities and individually based ones. Regardless of our increased rights of interaction and freedom, the modern figure suffers from the same essential dilemma of self-definition, as did these historical persons.

My interest in this particular historical moment piqued when I was introduced to the *converso* historical issue in one class, and the notion and conflict inherent in discussions of sincerity in another. If Spaniards from the Middle Ages agreed to become baptized as a result of political coercion and declared themselves Christians, were they, truly? In the case of *marranos* (Jewish forced converts who continued to practice Judaism in secret,) were they Jewish? Were they Catholic? Were they both? What did their private
lives and identities have to do with their public ones, and to which were they truly committed?

* * *

The relationship between individuals on one hand and society on the other generally define the concept of an identity. It seems easy to create a simple dichotomy: in some environments, people define themselves according to their community, and in others, people define themselves according to their personal experiences and interactions, thus creating a unique identity for each person. However, there are shades of grey. Most identities are probably some combination of these two definitions of identity. Indeed, one of the main problems between the individualized conception of the self and the social conception of the self is the notion of experience. Since it is often described as experiential, identity construction can be considered a process. It is not an inherent, static quality that everyone possesses at birth. On the contrary, it is a dynamic continuum that is dependent upon environmental factors, political and otherwise, thus it cannot be considered isolated within a body. Experiences are formed through interactions with the world, and therefore even personal or unique experiences are dependent on some sort of community.

The term “individual” has, throughout history, been subject to many different definitions. The beginnings of the doctrine of individualism, which stresses the importance of self-reliance and independence, discuss the tabula rasa\(^1\) metaphor to explain the individual, which says that he is formed by

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\(^1\) Traces of this idea can be found since the beginning of philosophical thought. Notably, this concept appears in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas,
personal experiences. Later, the individual was held to all of his actions, as well as subject to (and responsible for) his free will. One of the most important modern explanations for an individual’s place in society is in his inalienable individual rights. The individual as I discuss him, as did other writers about the individual notion of the self, is someone who is generally dependent on himself. He is constructed as his own unit rather than dependent on another specific entity or entities, and is responsible for his actions and choices. This does not mean that he is not at all influenced by external factors. For the sake of simplicity, the “individual” often becomes idealized and more theoretical in liberal writing, seeming to exist truly on his own. However, he is a member of social groups, and is inevitably influenced by these communities. The main point of divergence from socially based identities is that this individual chooses who influences him, and is ultimately the master of his own experiences. He is a voluntary member of his communities, and is influenced, but not shaped by, his surroundings. The individualistic perspective of identity construction is a useful lens through which to see converso habits and adaptations in early modern Spain.

The concept of “community” is more generalized, but can nonetheless be utilized as a counterpoint for the individual in terms of identity. The communitarian conception of the self, as opposed to the liberal one, emphasizes the decisive role of the subject’s surroundings. Communities are...
considered formative of its members, rather than vice-versa.\footnote{This is the basis of communitarian thought, a modern strain of political and philosophical theory, led largely by a few major communitarians, including Charles Taylor and his Sources of the Self (1989,) John Rawls and his A Theory of Justice (1971,) Alasdair Macintyre’s and his work, After Virtue (1981,) and Michael Walzer.} The communitarian perspective is especially important in discussions of political protections of groups, such as multiculturalism and pluralist democracy. In the late Middle Ages and early modern period of the Iberian Peninsula, subjects under the convivencia model left evidence of a largely community-based society in the form of cultural exchange between well-established, legally recognized groups. We can reflect on these evidences through the perspective of communitarianism as a way to understand how identity construction through a primary religious community paved the way for the notable convivencia lifestyle. These exchanges, as we will see, were the result of multicultural policies applied to this communitarian society.

It is clear, through these debates and historical examples, that the tension between the individual and the community is one that largely makes up the core of an identity. Identities are truly more exercises than real, static entities; the dichotomy between individual and community is more between movements than particularized environments. Differentiating between individualism and community-based self-definition is only the beginning of parsing out the real approach we take to define ourselves. We cannot mistake this debate for an argument between two opposing sides. Many problems arise when we stress the stark duality in this debate because real life does not exist in either individuality or community. Rather, it is on a spectrum, with varying degrees of both individuality and communality, which can be
changed or varied at any time by surrounding circumstances both within and out of the subject’s control. When these notions are considered concrete and easily defined, productive rhetoric cannot proceed in a true-to-life manner, because this kind of simplicity is not believable. My project, which will highlight the differences between the cultural exchange of *convivencia* and the adaptive, creative spirit of the *conversos*, will demonstrate this grey area through a historical investigation. This will help us to understand the myriad ways that subjects can use their identities, however they were formed, towards a goal of creative production, regardless of the political background. Additionally, as we investigate the means through which they created new spaces in seemingly restrictive environments, we will begin to think about why, even today in our modern and free society, contemporary figures undergo and experience similar dilemmas in identity and self-conceptualization.

* * *

This work will use two powerful historical models to examine the contingency of identity, its ramifications, and its pervasiveness in our mindset, even today. In order to fully understand our identities and how we define ourselves, we must look back to history and see how our historical counterparts did the same. However, these two models do not present a perfect dichotomy. The difference between the *convivencia* period and later *conversos* is more problematic. The conceptualization of the two as such different examples of identity construction is a generalization, albeit a useful one. As paradigms, these two periods can help to isolate means of self-definition through an examination of lifestyle. We can more soundly
understand social processes through this paradigmatic use. We can understand the two periods better by understanding how they related to each other. The process of moving from one model to the other will isolate discrepancies, as well as illuminate how the subjects within them differ.

This exercise applies directly to us modern thinkers, because in trying to understand how our ancestors understood themselves, we reveal prejudices and isolate problems in our own judgments of them. I will examine the two aforementioned ways of seeing oneself – through individualism and through community – by looking at two historical identity structures from the Iberian Peninsula. While using this duality is important, it is just one factor in the wider study of history, which teaches us valuable lessons about identity formation, then and now. Through examining history, we can identify trends and generalizations about groups, and use these trends to isolate causes and sources. This particular moment in history will illuminate the reactionary facet of its subjects to changing power politics, and their struggles with their identity. With these in hand, we can make a crucial comparison to ourselves by focusing on the similarities of our identity struggles with those of our predecessors, regardless of political framework.

*Convivencia*

The first of the two identity structures is that of the subjects of *convivencia*. This term has been the center of much historical and semantic debate throughout history. Spanish historian Ramón Menéndez Pidal, 1869-1968, first used the term in his work in philological study, *Orígenes del Español*
Throughout this paper, I use Spanish historian Américo Castro’s definition of the term. In his work, which I will discuss in Chapter One, he used the idea to further his efforts to create a model for modern Spanish identity based on convivencia, or “coexistence.” Castro’s term refers to the period in Spain between 711 and 1391, when Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived within the same kingdoms in Spain in relative tolerance. While Castro’s viewpoint is often criticized as idealized or naïve, many of the effects of this coexistence prove to have profoundly affected the lifestyles of its inhabitants and cannot be ignored. As I use the term here, it also involves the definition by American historian David Nirenberg. Nirenberg maintains that violence and conflict are two inherent parts of the convivencia lifestyle.

Convivencia, then, is a time when the three cultures lived in the same place, and did not attempt to expel or eliminate each other, even when the ruling religion changed. Different lifestyle adjustments and political edicts point to a truly unique way of coexisting. On a closer level, the convivencia framework provided a comfortable background for community-based identities. Since members of this existence were legally recognized as coexisting with each other, that is, each religious group was tolerated, the community mentality was reinforced. Citizens were part of a group, largely free to interact with others but bound to their respective communities by their religious background. These individuals could therefore define themselves strongly as part of a certain religion, while enjoying the freedom to interact

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with others, taking advantage of the innovation of each group and enjoying a symbiotic relationship.

This relative freedom (varying in degree at different times according to the ruler and political and social climate) afforded subjects under *convivencia* the opportunity to exchange ideas and inspirations with each other, enabling them to provide new perspectives and ideas to the comfort of one’s secure community. For them, self-definition was contained and shaped by being a member of a certain group, while open to the possibility of sharing lifestyle choices with separate groups around them. Relying on the support of their own group, there was an open space between communities in which they could create and develop new additions to their current condition.

I will investigate the effects that the interchanges of *convivencia* might have on the conception of the self. Interchanges in power, tolerance, violence, true aesthetic understanding, and other factors will serve as examples of the *convivencia* lifestyle and how it can affect how its subjects see themselves.

Community-focused identity exemplified during the *convivencia* period is not exclusive to this historical moment and political situation. While it seems a natural step to observe how people define and explain themselves using their political, economic, and social climate, we will see these are not the only factors that matter. The pervasiveness throughout time of these issues in creating a certain mode of self-definition suggests that there are other integral issues at play, and the group-based lifestyles of the members of the *convivencia* cannot wholly be explained by their historical context. The way in which we relate to others must contribute to this issue – it happens on a personal level, and always has. Since we see history from a distance, it is
tempting to blame the actions and reactions of those subjects on power politics. However, the issue of identity basis continues to reappear, suggesting it is more than politics that make this happen. What is to blame?

Conversos

The second identity structure that I will isolate is that of the Spanish conversos, forced converts from the late Spanish Middle Ages. These converts, whose existence began roughly in 1391 with riotous pogroms, were long suspected of practicing their old religion in secret, or at least not being devoted to the faith of Catholicism. The 1492 expulsion under monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella sought to eliminate completely the converso problem, which was suspected of polluting sincere converts and infecting them with the desire to practice their old religion in secret. Members of now-illicit communities that remained in Spain in favor of baptism created the official “problem” of conversos. The converso problem was a complex issue that was due largely to the ambiguity of the term and the effects of the resulting confusion. While I will go into further detail regarding who was considered a converso in its different capacities in Chapter Two, the label converso can be applied to almost anyone from the fourteenth through the seventeenth century who was not considered to be purely Spanish Catholic by others, or did not consider himself to be so.

The conflict of the conversos regarding self-definition involves many factors that contributed to their confusing new, forced lifestyle and attempts to find an identity within a new framework. Their background as outsiders within Spanish society, legal statutes that made non-Catholic behavior illicit,
and the methods with which they adapted to their new legal status all contributed to the identity issue.

*Conversos* underwent drastic changes in how they related to the communities around them, and how they fit into each of these. *Conversos* of all degrees of sincerity were no longer allowed to claim a spot as part of their old groups, which were now illegal (those which were not Spanish Catholic,) and they were forced to find and build a public identity that took into account their background, legality, and needs. They had no choice but to construct a novel way defining themselves according to their new circumstances, which eventually led them to more opportunities for creative self-definition, without the constraints of a traditional and unchanging community to which they would have otherwise belonged. Like the subjects of *convivencia*, they were also able to find a new space to allow their own creativity to flourish and synthesize their own body of experience. In their case, however, it was through an individualized process of development without a historical set of rules.

The undeniably more individualistic aspect of *converso* construction when compared to the *convivencia* lifestyle lends itself to a more subjective opportunity to construct identity. *Conversos* occupied a new, unique space in society, which lent itself to a wholly new place for creative production and inventiveness, and subjects of *convivencia* shared in the open space between their closed communities.
Modern considerations

Despite a drastically more free and forgiving society in terms of interactions between communities of all sorts, the modern figure undergoes many similar dilemmas to his historic counterparts. Second-generation immigrants are just one example of this, and the ongoing debate regarding multiculturalism, political pluralism, and liberalism serve as evidence that these identity-related issues are still very much a concern.

Identity construction currently has inherent in it many similar problems to those of the historical figure. Although it seems obvious to blame the dilemmas from history on the political background, there are more personal issues at play. Contingent identity is an inherent part of the human condition, regardless of governmental policy, and no allowance of immigration or interdependence can eradicate it completely. Our personal interactions, a constant throughout history, factor into this timelessness, as does the constancy of a tense relationship between our public and private selves.

Culture Wars

The notion of the American “Culture Wars” is a fitting example for how the debate between these two conceptions of identity formulation is still very present in modern society. This example ties in closely with the notion of an identity as inextricably connected to one’s nation and political surroundings. It also calls into question the emphasis on individual and community identity. The term has a vague historical background, but was concreted into a book in 1991 by James Davison Hunter. Hunter argues that
the concept is one that has grown stronger throughout United States history, taking off in earnest during the 1980’s Reagan-era politics. He highlights the state of the nation before the Culture Wars: Religions were in conflict, but it was less serious. Protestants, Catholics, and Jews all shared a common belief in Scripture, and their disagreements focused mostly on how they interpreted and lived based on this shared idea. However, there has been a slow but steady fundamental shift in the dividing line between cultural values in the United States. Now, the old allegiances have been somewhat erased, and replaced with two competing tendencies to define a “moral reality.”

The dividing line no longer sits evenly between religions, as it did upon the founding of the United States, as well as in the Spanish Middle Ages and early modern period. Rather, it deals with more basic, fundamental moral principles regarding how public and private life should be. This has changed the “sides” of the war to the point where orthodoxy now rules one side, uniting former antagonists. Orthodox wings of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism now align under the notion that there is a single transcendent moral authority that dictates ideality. On the other hand, team progressivism tends to “resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life” based more on rationalism. This division is growing deeper even today, and just one year after the 1991 release of Hunter’s book, conservative politician Pat Buchanan made his infamous Culture Wars speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention,

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5 Hunter, Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America. 43.
in which he whittled the argument down to right versus wrong. In one sense, he is getting at the core of the argument: the two factions of the war are fighting to create an America that is all “right.” However, it is the subjectivity and disagreement over what constitutes “right” and “wrong” that pave the way for such a central argument, one that creates almost certain crucial disconnects in communication between the two sides.

The Culture Wars discussion has pinpointed an ideological dilemma within a wider consideration of cultural progression, and analyzed it in order to better understand its subjects – us. Hunter uses this largely historical estimation to begin an influential theoretical discussion of society. While the Culture Wars do not discuss two sides that align perfectly with individual and community-based identities (just as the convivencia and converso paradigms do not,) they provide an example of how this divide can occur. In the case of the Culture Wars, the orthodoxy side of the debate looks to a more communitarian, traditionalist idea of the self, where the progressive side finds meaning in a more liberal, or individualist, idea of government and policy. To really understand how we see ourselves, we must make an important comparison to the past. We compare contexts and circumstances, and isolate causal structures for our modes of self-definition. In exploring a past society, we have an idea of how societies interact in their “natural” environment” (that is, not experimentally created,) and can collect legitimate evidence for our behavioral trends. Finally, we gain a better formal

understanding of ourselves by examining the processes and steps that brought us here.

The two periods I have chosen from the late Spanish Middle Ages and early modern period lend themselves to a like comparison of circumstances with each other and with the modern age. We can isolate and analyze contemporary issues and mysteries through the retrospective and analytical investigation into our history. With a problem as widespread and enigmatic as how we define ourselves, we can use these two significant moments to find similarities between how people react to their environment, and how their lifestyle choices reflect their notion of identity. From these telling evidences that largely transcend time and borders, we can make new discoveries about contemporary life.

The Culture Wars framework lends itself to a discussion of globalization, bringing us to a crucial point in how citizens of the world see themselves today. Modern day globalization refers to the increasing connectedness between countries around the world. This connectedness can manifest through economics, social interactions, immigration, cultural adaptations, and many other factors that affect lifestyle. While it sometimes refers to more social and individual aspects of the word, such as the deconstruction of national identity in favor of a more global identity that seems, simultaneously, more local, globalization also refers to the economic effects of eased trade restrictions across borders and a more open economic

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7 According to American Sociologist Saskia Sassen
system.\textsuperscript{8} The effects of increasing globalization will doubtless alter the course of American Culture Wars, as the runoff from this conflict leaks out into the rest of the world. This notion begs the question: How does the world deal with plural cultural identities, especially those at odds with each other?

Taking advantage of the aforementioned connectedness that we can feel and associate with historical figures, we can reflect on what we have learned about ourselves, about these figures, and about the space between us. From this understanding, one that spans the time periods as well as mindsets and lifestyles, we can theorize about its modern, relevant implications. The historical discussions serve as models to explain our historical predecessors, and offer us a comparison to ourselves.

One important factor to keep in mind throughout the movements from historical to theoretical discussions and back again is that this is not an attempt to link Spanish historical figures to the modern Spanish condition. I use the two paradigms of \textit{convivencia} and \textit{conversos} because they are fitting examples that demonstrate extreme cases of certain political environments. We cannot mistake making sweeping connections to history for linking ourselves directly to the period in question. Instead, we can make associations, attempt studies in comparisons and contrasts, and develop theories that highlight these connections, always considering context.

\textsuperscript{8} This aspect of globalization was defined by Tom Palmer of the Cato Institute.
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Considering all of these factors, we can glean some insight into identity construction as influenced by external factors, how subjects of this process react to their surroundings, and how they relate to our modern debate about different ways to discuss and form an identity. We will see through historical investigation into the Iberian Peninsula that social identities do, indeed, change according to their surroundings, and the extent to which we are constituted of a kind of mix of partial identities made up of both individual and community based developments, according to our various social and ideological investments. In modern, free nations, we are able to associate with various groups, rather than being politically or traditionally restricted to one religious community. Our freedom of communication encourages this, and demonstrates a different kind of pluralist view of identity construction.

During this period in Spain, the two identity structures – subjects under convivencia, and the conversos – could not have existed simultaneously. In contemporary society, these two structures both exist, and this is possible for a number of reasons. This happens largely on a personal level rather than a political one. Instead of a political restriction serving as the main impetus for reactions to a liberal or social conception of the self, the debate plays out in the private sphere due to many reasons, including the secularization of government and its considerably greater freedoms in interaction. Nonetheless, we can see ourselves in both models. Under a purely traditional liberal (market-driven) paradigm, we are all a type of converso. We are all considered by the government to be private individuals, and are not bound
by our affiliations to social groups or other commitments. We make our own way and exist in spaces that are of our own individual creation, and we are all influenced, to different degrees, by our surroundings.

This comparison highlights a crucial aspect of the two historical models. Despite the characteristic political repression and forced nature of the converso lifestyle, these figures were forced into a never-before-seen place in society, and had no choice but to create a new life for themselves. While morally, it is less desirable than the convivencia model, which is characterized by the freedom of its subjects within their religious groups, it too opened a wide space for creative and cultural production. While the converso experience is traditionally viewed as negative, and by most accounts it certainly was, this was one positive and impactful outcome of the newly created converso legacy. Likewise, while the convivencia model seems to be restrictive in its stringent requirements according to religious community, it opened a new space for cultural and creative invention between these borders, and allowed for a productive interchange.

In this work, I attempt to explain the contingency of identity and the modes of its construction through two historical frameworks. I will highlight these historical models, demonstrating how easy it seems to link these historical identity constructions to their harsh political contexts. We will examine the similar debates that are still active today revolving around the very same issues of identity, effectively illuminating evidence that identity is not only contingent on external circumstances, but that these circumstances themselves are not concrete.
We must keep in mind that if we consider any of these issues from a purely culturalist, social, or individualist standpoint, we will be missing the whole picture. Identity construction is special because of its variability of form and influence. This is made especially clear when we understand that we can experience both individualist and community-based conceptions of the self, in the same society, in the same lifetime, even in the same individual. Both philosophies do have room for nuanced interpretations because that is how they exist in reality.
Convivencia, or coexistence, is a highly disputed period in Iberian history. It began in 711 at the onset of the Muslim Umayyad conquest and ended in 1492 with the Spanish Inquisition. During this time, Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived under common rulers, and interacted with each other at various levels – the degree to which constitutes much of the debate today. The remarkable cultural exchange that occurred in these times between the strictly defined religious communities is a powerful story of how political framework influences the manner in which identities and entire cultures are shaped through social groups, and the grand opportunity for inventiveness that it presents.

The Convivencia Debate

Américo Castro, 1885-1972, is a Spanish cultural historian who began a long-lasting debate about the true identity of the Spaniard. His historical view of Spain is founded in convivencia, or coexistence, and he introduces a modern take on Spain based in these terms. Castro introduces many of the problems that come with the unavoidable space between the individual and the collective, and the limitations in considering a people as removed from the various communities that surround them. Castro grew up in Spain, and later studied in Germany and Paris, all the while focusing on history. Politically, he considered himself liberal, and in 1938, two years after the start of the Spanish

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Civil War, Castro was exiled to the United States, where he taught in a number of different universities. In 1954, he published his defining work, *España y su historia (Cristianos, moros y judíos)*\(^{10}\) (its English translation is entitled *The Structure of Spanish History,* ) which defined his perspective regarding finding the truth in Spanish identity. A crucial component to his thesis is the importance of religious groups and their effects on the wider Spanish culture, propagating a multicultural identity and lifestyle that was, in his time, out-of-reach for Spaniards under the Franco regime.\(^{11}\) Due to the time of its publication and Castro’s background as an exile, his writing seems to point to a somewhat idealized, past Spanish mindset that cannot be recovered during a regime that practiced censorship and coercion.

Castro states his aims explicitly: “The pacific *convivencia* of the three castes, braided with the latent or manifest desire of destructing it, situates us in front of the key problem of true Spanish history.”\(^{12}\) While the evidence of *convivencia* is indisputable, to Castro, its potential in modern society is thwarted by Spain’s position under the Nationalist party. Franco identified himself with the “Catholic Kings,” remembered for leading Spain during its transition from the Medieval to the early modern period, as well as for their strict monarchy and powerful noble and ecclesiastic class. Spanish historian

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\(^{10}\) Its English translation is entitled *The Structure of Spanish History.*

\(^{11}\) Francisco Franco, 1892-1975, led the Nationalist party during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. After the War, he maintained control of the country and put into effect harsh measures in order to quell dissident views. Upon his death, Spain transitioned into a democratic state with the eventual establishment of a new constitution.

\(^{12}\) Castro, *La Realidad Histórica De España, Edición Renovada.* 38. Tr. Arielle Golden. “La convivencia pacífica de last tres castas, trenzada con el latente o manifiesto, afán de destruirla, nos sitúa frente al problema clave de la historia auténtica española.”
José Luis Villacañas explains the charisma and leadership prowess that the Catholic Kings had: “[The Crown of] Castile … learned to differentiate politics from the two monarchs. Before, nobody did this… [Isabella was a] miracle of masculine spirit in the body of a woman, much like the Virgin.”

Castro recounts Spanish history in a tragic yet noble way, harkening back to the open policy of *convivencia* while keeping in mind the limitations of Spain’s position during its Civil War, and connecting this mindset to that of Spaniards under the Catholic Kings, Ferdinand and Isabella.

Castro’s idea is not based on a wholly harmonious existence, but simply coexistence, living in proximity of other groups and taking on certain characteristics that were once exclusively their own. While David Nirenberg later elaborates this idea as explicitly including violence, Castro focuses on the productive outcomes of *convivencia*. He explains his theory,

> During [the tenth through fifteenth centuries] the definitive structure of Hispanic life was forged. It is not possible to break up this history into stagnant pools, or to divide it off into parallel, synchronous currents, because each one of these three groups was part of the circumstances projected by the other two.

The basic premise of Castro’s take on Spanish history revolves around the transmission of ideas between the three major religions in Spain during the

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Middle Ages, and the resulting hybrid nature that it created within its inhabitants due to these cultural interactions.

For Castro, the resulting hybrid identity of *convivencia* was forged out of necessity. All three cultures filled deficiencies with borrowed components from the tangential or commingled margins of their communities. With this idea, Castro introduces the notion that a *convivencia* type society – one rooted in separate communities existing and sharing together – is able to gain new components without losing pieces of themselves. He notes, “the Spanish Christian, without anywhere to go outside his own beliefs, saw that it was impossible to extract from the Christian community all that was necessary to survive; he had to accept as inescapable fact various superiorities offered by the Muslim and Jewish ways of life.” According to Castro, this example of sharing habits between cultures could apply to capabilities in the economic sphere – different communities excelled in different fields. The remarkable cultural exchange that took place in architecture, design, philosophy, and other important fields also proved that different cultures recognize their own respective needs and how they then shared these solutions with each other. One populace can identify within itself a void, and satisfy this by borrowing from another community. These communities exchange such products with confidence and security because each is established legally as an entity, and its members do not expose themselves to accusations of heresy, so long as they continue to identify with their group. It is a kind of

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16 Castro, La Realidad Histórica De España, Edición Renovada, 43. Tr. Arielle Golden. “el hispano-cristiano, sin otro horizonte que el de sus creencias, veía que no podía extraer de la comunidad cristiana cuante le era necesario para subsister; hubo de aceptar como realided ineludible diversas superioridades musulmanes y judías.”
communitarianism, and even more an example of multiculturalism, but very amorphous and open to change.

Castro makes a case for a more globalized identity and coexistence at the most integral level. When he states that “history can become universal... by virtue of the fact that values can be universalized, can spread, near or far, from people to people,” it seems that he views the fluid lifestyle of *convivencia* as the future of interaction and identity, and the history of ideas as the most reliable and defining source of who a people really are. The only force stopping Spain from embracing this is its current leadership and tragic view of the past. This component of his theory simultaneously coincides and is at odds with that of Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, whose work in historical analysis disputes Castro’s, and whose ideas challenge the *convivencia* theory of identity.

Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, 1893-1984, was a Spanish medieval historian. His work includes a notorious dispute with Américo Castro regarding the validity of Castro’s theory of *convivencia*. They come from relatively similar backgrounds, and differ in age by only a decade. Albornoz, too, was a renowned intellectual in Spain and Europe at large, a self-proclaimed liberal democrat. In 1936 he, too, was forced into exile, and escaped to Argentina where he taught at various universities and continued the study of history for the remainder of his life. As Albornoz scholar and historian David Sven Reher notes in the introduction to his translation of Albornoz’ *Spain, a Historical Enigma*,

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[Castro’s theory] leads him to a number of existentialist and largely pessimistic and deterministic conclusions such as: the inability of the Spaniards to realize themselves in scientific and technological endeavors; or the history of Spain as ‘the history of an insecurity’ or a ‘life of longing’…  

Albornoz finds Castro’s weaknesses to lie in his research that is limited to the investigation of the elites, and his over-valuation of literature rather than economy. Additionally, he is unhappy with Castro’s estimation of modern Spanish society’s inability to come to terms with its history. In his work, Albornoz defends a Spanish identity rooted largely in a culture of Spain before the Arab invasion. He introduces his España, una enigma histórico with a point-by-point critique of Castro’s work: “Américo Castro considers every attempt to harmonize and to universalize man and the generalization and abstractions of historical intellectualism, idealism and materialism failures because they consider him an ‘integrated being.’”  

Albornoz pinpoints his central disagreement with Castro: just because a group of people enters into contact with a new or foreign group does not mean that they begin exchanging or conjoining identities. The two historians have long been considered opposites in their views of how Spanish history is and should be seen. For Albornoz, this process of cultivating a new identity takes thousands of years to establish, and a few centuries of harmonious and interactive existence does not a new Spaniard make.

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19 Sánchez-Albornoz, Spain, a Historical Enigma. 49.
This tugs at the heart of Albornoz’ issue with Castro. He claims the “vitalist concept of history” does not coincide completely with Castro’s conception of cultural history as defining. While cultural evidence is important for defining a people, it is not the only component that needs to be taken into account. Castro, he finds, builds history according to cultural evidence and does not include what is vital – from the Latin vitalis, of belonging to life – that is, what is a necessity for living.

While he uses this concept as a point of departure to separate himself from Castro, I think this is a point around which the two historians’ conceptions of history may be reconciled. Albornoz states,

> Ideas… have overcome all obstacles, conquered all resistances, and sooner or later have won over all the communities whose historical life occurred under the wings of a unit of culture and have decisively influenced in the approximation or unification… of its vital contexts. Thus we may not underrate the history of ideas to devote ourselves to a simple classifications of forms of life in function of the historical groups we call peoples.21

Albornoz here makes a point that ideas are a large part of what truly defines a people. Ideas as the basic premise for identity construction encompass both vitalist and cultural evidences. If Castro indeed excluded important components of history from his analysis, like economics or the perspective of the poor, he still incorporated the impressive exchange of ideas from the period. And while Albornoz does not find this sufficient, the exchange of ideas as a primary mover in the study and analysis of history is a crucial point for them both.

20 Sánchez-Albornoz, Spain, a Historical Enigma. 56.
21 Sánchez-Albornoz, Spain, a Historical Enigma. 57.
An alternative evaluation supports the thought of culture as not just the practice of a group of people but how they think and formulate ideas that ultimately lead to these practices. Here, even though in most respects the two are seen as polar opposites, I have found that Castro and Albornoz’ theories of analyzing Spanish history converge. Castro says, similarly, in *The Structure of Spanish History*, “History can become universal... by virtue of the fact that values can be universalized, can spread, near or far, from people to people.”\(^{22}\) For two historians who are often at odds, both agree that it is not simply the practices and lifestyles that define a group forever, but *why* the group adapts to these lifestyles and *how* they arrived at such an end.

Nonetheless, Albornoz does his best to differentiate himself from this superficial idea of history. He emphasizes that simply adopting pieces of other cultures does not mean the entire national identity will be altered forever. This is especially true when these cultural pieces are not wholly integrated, or “which never triumphed totally”\(^{23}\) in Spain as they were in their original form. For example, Spanish architecture today is not characterized by Islamic geometric patterns as it was during the *convivencia* period. Ultimately, if these new practices do not leave a lasting impact on the culture, they cannot be considered part of the vitalist historical construction. This strong point is bolstered by the suggestion that following the period of *convivencia*, Western civilization and culture spread and “made Spanish Christianity feel more strongly each time, the seduction of what was European at the same time as their attraction for what is Islamic decreased...

\(^{23}\) Sánchez-Albornoz, *Spain, a Historical Enigma*. 196.
little by little even the last echoes of Mudéjar\textsuperscript{24} architecture disappeared.”\textsuperscript{25}
The robust Spanish identity of Castro’s work that encompassed and embraced Muslim, Jewish, and Christian heritage was left by the wayside, according to Albornoz, as time went on and leaders changed.

\textit{Importance of this debate}

Besides spotlighting an important difference in historiography and perspective regarding the history of the Spaniard, the debate between Américo Castro and Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz is a significant demonstration of how history can be used to both discover causal relations in the past, and highlight important components of our modern selves through this analysis. They argue that it is best is to take a historical investigation, formulate from it a theoretical approach to modernity, and focus on our notion of self-definition, that which arises from novel ideas. While they use specifically Spanish history to construct a theory of Spanish identity, I believe that our two examples of subjects under convivencia and conversos offer a template from which we may theorize about the process of identification more generally and reactions to changes in the infrastructure of political, religious, social, and economic contexts.

While the discussion about convivencia may indicate a systemic reliance on religious toleration, this can hardly be the full explanation for the three cultures living side-by-side. As American historian Stuart Schwartz explains, “in early modern times almost no one believed religious toleration to be

\textsuperscript{24} Mudéjars were Muslims living under Christian rule.
\textsuperscript{25} Sánchez-Albornoz, \textit{Spain, a Historical Enigma}. 205.
beneficial in either political or religious terms.”

Rather, they were concerned with political stability as demonstrated through unity between leader and subject. At the same time, this would have been destabilized had any one of the three cultures shown a high degree of intolerance to another; not only did each have an important niche to fill in society, but the sheer numbers of each group insured their continued roles.

There are many other historical estimations on the history of this period. Some tend to see this segment of Iberian studies as a series of tolerant periods punctuated by a series of intolerant ones. The conception of *convivencia* as Américo Castro envisioned it carefully avoids any discussion of conflict as playing into the identity of Spaniards because of this relatively harmonious period. David Nirenberg largely agrees with Castro’s idea that identities were formed because of this interchange, but adds that violence, conflict, and friction between the groups contributed considerably to this construction. Heinrich Graetz, 1817-1891, was a Jewish historian and is sometimes credited with starting the utopian myth of the *convivencia* period in terms of Jewish communal flourishing. Salo Wittmayer Baron, 1895-1989, did not buy into the “neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish history” but rather insisted on an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Jewish

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history. Eloy Benito Ruano largely agrees with Castro’s estimation, adding, “social or aesthetic phenomena such as Mozarabism and Mudejarism, whose hybrid essence, while fecund, defines their respect denominations.” As we can see, there are many conceptions of what this period meant, both to its subjects and to future generations looking back in retrospect. This debate highlights the varying perceptions that are utilized to examine this history, and the basis for a modern Spanish identity. It is vital that we look closely at how these subjects formed their identities through evidences of their habits, in order to understand how they define themselves.

**Historical background**

Throughout Christian rule in Europe, Jews were often tolerated by Christian rulers in the name of Christianity to preserve their place as witnesses. St. Augustine explains this in his *City of God*, which he wrote soon after the sacking of Rome. He proclaims, regarding the Jews:

> But that suffices us which we have from the books of our enemies, which we acknowledge in that they preserve it for us against their wills, themselves and their books, being dispersed as far as God’s Church is extended and which they themselves do read, foretells them. ‘My merciful God will prevent me. God will let me see my desire upon mine enemies. Slay them not, lest my people forget it, but scatter them abroad with Thy power.’ Here did God show mercy to His Church, even by the Jews His enemies, because, as the apostle says, ‘through their fall cometh salvation to the Gentiles.’ And therefore He slew them not, that is, He left them their name of Jews still, although they be
the Romans’ slaves, lest their utter dissolution should make us forget the law of God concerning this testimony of theirs.”

As witnesses, Jews were an indispensable part of Christian life. They were also economically important in many Christian lands. In the Iberian Peninsula, they had a greater presence in urban areas than did Muslim communities, owing to their positions as craftsmen and involvement in commerce, forcing economic interactions from the onset of the coexistence. Their intertwining communities were a traditional lifestyle, not an anomaly.

On the Iberian Peninsula, there were far fewer Jews in total than Mudéjars under the Crown, who often held positions as vassals of lay and ecclesiastical lords. Just as the dhimmi, Jews and Christians under Muslim rule in al-Andalus, were levied a special tax according to their lowered yet legal status as an agreement regarding social status in the land of another religion, Muslim vassals paid higher rents and taxes for smaller parts of land than Christian tenants. Even though extra taxes and other special treatment implied a definite second-class citizenship, it was still a kind of citizenship in the first place. These subjects had rights, albeit limited ones, and this was better than having no rights at all. This does not mean that Jews and Muslims were singled out among the populace under the Spanish Ancien

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31 Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 27.
32 Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 29.
Régime. Rather, they served as just another privileged group in the extensive hierarchy under the Spanish monarchs. Because of their unique and necessary economic positions, Jews and Muslims interacted with each other and with Christians, creating a kind of economic *convivencia* out of necessity. Their roles were determined by their subordinate but crucial position, as the politically inferior religions generally filled positions that would otherwise be open, with no skilled employee to step in. While they did not live together in complete equality and harmony, there was a definite tolerance, and daily interactions, especially in the marketplace, demonstrate the high rate of communication between the three religions.

While the period involved more tension, political dilemmas, nuanced social interactions, and many other complicating factors than I have discussed above, it is not the result of an effort to proceed with the often-idealized and seemingly naïve perspective that the three religions interacted in complete harmony. The years of *convivencia* were riddled with violent acts and tense relationships. Even the political environment, which is said to have been the cause for such a fluid exchange of ideas, contributed to the strain between communities. Under each new ruler, groups were assigned different societal roles and degrees of subordination. However, rather than a total history of

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34 This term was coined by historian Alex de Tocqueville, 1805-1859. It is applied pejoratively to French politics before the French Revolution. The Ancien Régime generally refers to European governments that require centralization to overcome confusing hierarchical systems based on privilege and family history.


the period, I will be focusing on the proof of certain interactions and exchanges, emphasizing only small components of their existence – the evidence of their *convivencia* in cultural terms. Additionally, these cultural evidences serve as an example of a multiculturalism of an earlier time. Through a socially based identity and mutual toleration, groups were given specific protective rights, to further their security under the ruling power.

During the Spanish Middle Ages until 1492, the Iberian Peninsula was rife with examples of cultural *convivencia* – Muslims, Jews, and Christians living side-by-side, under relatively tolerant policies, enriching their cultures with components from the ones around them. Different cultural markers prove interactions between the groups. Architecture is one art form that changed drastically due to the cross-influence of aesthetic priorities. Scientific research branched out between the religions – Islam was no longer the only religion that emphasized astrology, for example – and the new scientific knowledge was shared through social interaction. Defining this new research required and encouraged new efforts in translation. These translation projects brought with them a great transference of new knowledge and tolerance between the cultures, as access to their findings was now available to a wider segment of the population. Philosophy, too, became an integral part of the teachings of all three religions, particularly Maimonides and Aristotle, who were ultimately absorbed into the wider religious texts. All of these shared foundations of knowledge were made possible as a result of the tolerance of all three cultures.

Subjects in the framework of *convivencia* identified closely with their religious community, and were secure enough in these positions that they
were able to identify problems or weaknesses in their own cultures and adopt a component from one of the communities surrounding themselves. This allowed for large shifts in characteristically “Christian” architecture, as well as many other cultural changes. Despite the strict affiliations to a certain religion by each subject, creative synthesis was widespread. This lifestyle, rooted in communitarianism while welcoming multiculturalism, provides us with an important comparison to ourselves, and our contemporary conceptions regarding multicultural policies, so similar in form to those of the past.

Architecture

Synagogues and churches of this time began adopting some architectural and design styles from their Islamic counterparts, the mosques. Islamic aesthetic tradition favors the geometric arts above the use of iconic and direct images. Abstract patterns, meditative designs, and symbolism were largely used for creative expression within the walls of mosques. While Islamic art displayed mathematical patterns as representative of philosophical values, it also demonstrated that this math was crucial to the art, because of its status as a universal language. Narrative imagery was replaced by abstract symbolism in many churches and synagogues, as a result of the Islamic rule of al-Andalus, and the reappropriation of many buildings, as well as attempts by leaders to appease their varied subjects. Mozarabs, or Christians governed by Muslim rule, did not explicitly convert to Islam (nor

did their descendants,) but adopted elements of the Arabic lifestyle and integrated them into their own. While it is indeed difficult to pinpoint exactly who deserves credit for a certain aesthetic style, the ornamental motif definitely speaks to a profound intimacy with Islam from the time of its rule beginning in 711.

One of the most emblematic examples of this three-way exchange of ideas is the church Santa María la Blanca in Toledo, originally the Ibn Shushan Synagogue, or the Congregational Synagogue of Toledo. The Toledan Jews for whom the synagogue was constructed spoke Arabic fluently, and considered many factors of Islamic culture as theirs, too. Its understated linear program reflects the modest synagogue architectural traditions of the time, but “only in the carved stucco capitals of the piers does the decoration erupt in what might be considered opulent and mannered fantasies of pinecones and interwoven bands in massive and deeply drilled forms”\(^{39}\) These are iconic of Islamic geometric design.

While the structure is now owned and run by the Catholic Church, the building itself speaks to the complex cultural history that nourished it. This visual vocabulary began under the Almohad dynasty, and after centuries of rule, eventually integrated into the Jewish and Christian culture. At this point, the style lost its primarily religious implications, as it was adopted by other religions to further political and aesthetic goals. And while Mann,  

\(^{38}\) See Figure 1, Appendix.  
Glick, and Dodds find that some historians believe that “The Jews in Spain would never exercise that level of cultural sympathy with the architectural traditions of the Christians however long they survived under their rule,” it is undeniable that both Christian and Jewish subjects in al-Andalus embraced this language of Islamic design.

Santa María la Blanca is one of four distinctly Mudéjar Sephardic synagogues in Iberia. The synagogue of Córdoba, built in 1315, contains a wall inscribed with the lyrics of the “Song of Songs.” This Scriptural text, as it is carved into the wall, demonstrates an intimate understanding of Islamic design tradition. As the viewer attempts to differentiate between what is abstract and what is writing within the image, and simultaneously tries to gain religious meaning from this exercise, he enters into an extended, meditative relationship with the work of art, in which writing and design, taken together, become the messengers of significance.” This profound understanding of Islamic aesthetic practices demonstrates the integral part that it played in the Córdoba Jewish population of the time. The relationship between the two cultures was not superficial or simply neighborly. After years of exchanging ideas and the resulting changes in thought and perspective, the two cultures overlapped in many of their priorities and way of life.

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40 Mann, Glick and Dodds, Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain. 118.
41 Mann, Glick and Dodds, Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain. 123.
The Arabic intellectual interest in science, particularly astronomy, eventually permeated both Jewish and Christian intellectual spheres. The revival of interest in philosophy and its relation to religious conviction introduced astronomy to other communities, especially its relation to each respective religious calendar. They made new advancements in finding tools to compute the skies, uniting all three communities in scientific interchange. Al-Andalus experienced a particularly potent spike in interest in botanical and pharmacological work as a result. Astrolabes, for example, were tools for practical astronomy and altitude measurements, and were further developed in al-Andalus, contributing greatly to fields including navigation and astronomy.

With the new scientific advancements and shared achievements of science thinkers on the Iberian Peninsula came the necessity for access to these new advancements in all three cultures. The new shared scientific progress was socially significant. With new discoveries comes the introduction of new terms into the scientific lexicon. To standardize and assure these developments, scientists and thinkers needed to interact socially, and agree upon new terms and concepts.

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42 Mann, Glick and Dodds, *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*. 85.
43 See Figure 2, Appendix.
Translation and philosophy

These academic interactions culminated in enormous efforts in translation. These efforts demonstrate not only the great progress that was made at the time, but the atmosphere that existed for such collaborative works. These efforts make clear the security that each culture must have felt with its own identity. Sharing knowledge in the sciences is a very real sign of trust, and implies a sense of academic camaraderie; it represents a willingness to share that requires confidence in one’s social position, stability and status, as well as social interaction on a personal level.

King Alfonso X of Castile, 1252-1284, commissioned a group of translators to collaborate in translating a whole host of texts into Castilian. The court provided patronage for their efforts. While there were translation endeavors before this particular group, Alfonso X’s team received more visibility and protection. Using Castilian as the shared language of the translators and Toledo as the nourishing culture, Alfonso created a multireligious team to incorporate the Jewish and Muslim learnings into Spanish and European culture. While the teams examined many abstract intellectual writings, their work with each other proved fruitful and of great academic value. Working together for the king consolidated the knowledge of three religions into one readable form, exemplifying the convivencia mindset of a sharing spirit coupled with a pride and belonging to one entity.

A most impressionable example of this openness to surrounding cultures through translation is in the tomb of King don Ferdinand III of Castile, 1217-1252. The tomb was built the year of his death, originally part of the converted mosque of Almohad. His son, King Alfonso X, commissioned its construction, and integrated his passion for translation and the implementation of Castilian as a common language into the structure.

Inscribed on the tomb is the king’s epitaph in four languages. While Castilian was still on the rise as a shared language, it appeared next to Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin, and demonstrated Alfonso’s true commitment to casting it as the true vernacular of his kingdom. It is significant indeed that while the epitaph appears in each language, each language maintains the particularities of the culture from whence it came, while retaining the original meaning of the message. Even the dates of death inscribed in each language reflect the calendar used by the speaker of each language respectively.

Aside from the literal translation, the implications of such a project are remarkable. An ornate tomb is meant to be visited by the people reverent to the deceased in order to pay respects. The inclusion of all four languages on the tomb invites visitors from all four backgrounds to visit and understand completely their place. Including all four languages acknowledges, officially and eternally, the existence and prevalence of speakers of these languages at the time of its construction, and welcomes them to join together in mourning and recognizing King don Ferdinand. Ultimately, this is a poignant reflection

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of *convivencia*, as it brings the three major cultures together for a single purpose, while simultaneously acknowledging, respectfully, the differences between them and allowing them to recognize these differences themselves and feel comfortable with them.

More specifically, each translation imbued the culture that it represented into the meaning of the epitaph. The Latin translation, for example, proclaims Ferdinand as king of “Hispania”, while the Arabic translation calls him the leader of “Andalus”. The Hebrew translation says that he seized all of “Sefarad”, and finally, the Castilian translation declares him ruler of “all Spain.”46 The mere fact that such distinctions were allowed is a telling piece of evidence of the openness of the time to different cultures and their respective beliefs.

Translation efforts and their profound implications for mutual understanding extended into the field of philosophy. The *convivencia* lifestyle fostered a kind of competition between the cultures. Out of the tolerance from one community, another could feel encouraged to grow intellectually to match a certain level of intellectual curiosity and growth. Coupled with the translation ability developed from knowledge of their religion, this created a new intellectual class that transcended religious borders.

The philosophy of Aristotle presents a telling example of how the study of and belief in a certain philosophy spread throughout the various religious communities. Originally, the grammatical structure and lexical capabilities of Arabic made it subject to early translations from Syrian, which was translated from the original Greek texts. The similarities in structure

46 See Figure 3, Appendix.
between the two languages allowed it to translate abstract ideas and express them coherently, eventually inducting Aristotelianism as philosophy itself.\textsuperscript{47} The trend of translating philosophy continued in the Iberian Peninsula, and eventually included Jewish authors like Maimonides, who wrote in Arabic. This was eventually translated into Hebrew. All of these evidences of the creative productivity of the \textit{convivencia} time period are a testament to the potential in a multicultural society rooted in traditionalism – an extreme kind of communitarianism. The implications for such findings are very relevant to the discussions of political theory even today, despite the seemingly outdated government under which it thrived.

\textit{Theoretical considerations of identity}

From these examples of the significant cultural exchanges of Spain from 711-1492, we see that political and cultural influences work outside of the community-based identity in \textit{convivencia}. Tolerant policies encourage a security in one’s group, and as this group is safe from harm, it can more readily exchange ideas and habits with those that surround it. Identities within these communities are rooted within legally recognized groups that come equipped with legal separations (i.e. restrictions on intermarriage.) Individuals see themselves as part of this group, and have greater freedom to adopt the concepts and practices of others without risk of losing their own membership.

\textsuperscript{47} Mann, Glick and Dodds, \textit{Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain}. 103-4.
While this is certainly evidenced here, all three groups did not equally share the exchange. The subjects under Islamic rule, for example, would have exhibited more signs of Islamic culture than of another group, largely a result of political motives. Mozarabs, for example were allowed to construct churches under Islamic rule. Often, these structures contained the characteristic red and white horseshoe arches\(^{48}\) because Mozarabs of the time and place had adopted it as their own. They were also paying homage to the ruling party of the time and the symbol served as a reminder of the strength of Islamic leaders of the past\(^{49}\); both in and out of the Iberian Peninsula. They were a reflection both of the interactions between the groups under \textit{convivencia}, and of esteem for their leaders.

In many ways, the \textit{convivencia} paradigm prefigures modern ideas of multiculturalism, communitarianism, and interdependence. The group mentality that is reinforced through a program of mutual tolerance, acceptance, and openness is one that can be seen through a positive light. Community members find an identity by looking around themselves and comparing their community to those around them. This both reestabishes their connection to their original group and offers them the freedom to exchange ideas with surrounding communities. They are reflective, as implies the definition of the term identity, and gain personal meaning referentially.

\(^{48}\) See Figure 4, Appendix.  
\(^{49}\) Mann, Glick and Dodds, \textit{Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain}. 126.
It is tempting to look back to this period of convivencia and see only the negative aspects of community-based identity – a system which thrived on homogeneous group membership and restrictive laws regarding moving between these groups seems, to the modern mind, oppressive and intolerant. However, the solace that each member felt as an established member of his group enabled, as we have seen, a truly remarkable exchange and growth between the three cultures. This safety in belonging opened up a new space for creative production and growth. During this period, the established place subjects felt in their communities endowed them with the ability to make strides in connecting with each other, and creative production in art, architecture, translation, and other crucial components of culture.

The cultural hegemony towards which the Inquisition strived was not based on Spain’s popular intolerance of or shelter from other customs. The Expulsion of 1492 was not preceded by a wide support for universal Catholicism. On the contrary; religious practice was a mixture of community-specific traditions, even amongst Christians. It contained “superstitious folklore and imprecise dogmatic belief… everyday religion among Christians continued to embrace an immense range of cultural and devotional options.”\(^{50}\) It was not until after the Muslim caliphate had been in power for a few centuries that movement towards this universality began on the part of the monarchs.

While this does not completely stamp out individualism, it does restrict this concept when compared to another identity structure that began

in 1391, that of the forced converts in the Iberian Peninsula, or *conversos.*

Unlike the comfort and security inherent within belonging to a group with legal status and rich history bound by land, the *conversos* were forced to carve out a new place for themselves in society, and essentially began charged with the task of finding their own niches somewhere between their Catholicism and their old religion.
CHAPTER TWO: CONVERSOS.
FORCED CONVERTS OF SPAIN AND THEIR IDENTITY STRUGGLES

The *converso* problem in Spain began with the onset of forced and coerced conversions of Jews in 1391 in Medieval Spain. While the Inquisition, a moment of persecution notorious for its treatment of Jews, did not begin until 1492, it did not create the *converso* problem; instead, it attempted to solve it. This preexisting problem needed to be addressed because of profound complications in the social hierarchy brought about by the confusing status of *conversos*. The *converso* issue in Spain brought many problems to the fore – issues of sincerity and difference that the conversions had attempted to quash in the first place. Suspicion about the authenticity of all converts paved the way for the Inquisition, and forced its subjects to find an identity based no longer in an established religious group, but rather as solitary entities. Even though the *conversos* were forced into this position, the various means of adapting present a fascinating study in constructing an identity in this time without the resources of a community, religious or otherwise.

In the early Middle Ages, Jews of the Iberian Peninsula were tolerated and considered part of the larger community. The government provided them with favorable provisions to settle in towns or cities, and offered them special privileges because they served as an intermediary between Christians and Muslims in economic terms, did not demonstrate a threatening will to dethrone the king, and were seen as generally trustworthy. While isolated incidents of intolerance occurred before 1391, pogroms began in earnest and
The Jews’ true persecution in the region commenced at this time. In 1268, for example, the King confiscated Jewish property and reallocated their synagogue to the Dominicans. In 1381, they suffered from an attempted massacre but fought back. Throughout these two centuries, animosity rose slowly because of papal decrees and increasing Catholic orthodoxy in the Crown. From 1390 to 1391, various church authorities stripped the Jews of their synagogues and forcibly baptized their slaves. Following these years, the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula were no longer regarded, as they had been before, as prominent citizens. The aljamas, Jewish quarters, shrunk in size as Jewish communities slowly dispersed and lost members to forced conversion throughout the Crown.

Before the expulsion of 1492, Jews and Christians of al-Andalus were subjects of Islamic law. As both religions were “of the book,” they were considered dhimmi. With this, both were tolerated, yet expected to pay the jizya, a special tax levied to ensure both the protection and the subordination of its subjects. If Christians and Jews paid their owed jizya, they were both allowed to practice their religions. For example, Jews could live in a community with a synagogue, Jewish court, scribe, butcher, and other required components of their lifestyle, often in the aljama. However, the progress of the Reconquista slowly overtook Islamic rule in the Iberian Peninsula, eradicating it completely in 1492, and with it, the protection for the dhimmi. Before the 1492 proclamation, the position of the conversos was regulated by a 1393 decree that prohibited them from socializing with

members of other religions and required them to wear distinguishable clothing, but there is no evidence that this law was followed.\textsuperscript{52} In 1442, Christians were prohibited from bequeathing property to Jews in their wills. These decrees and their consequences increased in complexity, and culminated in the 1492 expulsion, an attempt to eliminate the unforeseen confusion that \textit{converso} status had caused earlier when it did not result in the absorption of these New Christians.

The degree of the Jews’ suffering alternately diminished and intensified following the 1381 attacks, and ultimately ended in a decree commanding their expulsion in 1492. Part of the impetus for this was largely European political philosophy of the time that religious uniformity under one leading party was the launch point for world power.\textsuperscript{53} The Spanish monarchy was so devoted to this notion that they even imposed limitations on local Christian cults, regionally specific deviations of Christianity that were not heretical in themselves, but seemed suspicious enough because of their varying practices and iconography.\textsuperscript{54} This increasingly singular perspective of Catholicism encouraged a largely binary view of life. Under the monarchy of Ferdinand and Isabella, Spaniards were encouraged to model themselves into a single ideal – one that emphasized the power of high birth, faith in Catholicism and the clergy that represents it, and confidence in the monarchy that ruled. To pursue these demands, they established decrees that forced either conversion to Catholicism or expulsion, and other edicts to homogenize Spain. Ferdinand and Isabella’s practice reflected a popular Latin saying in

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\item \textsuperscript{52} Kamen, \textit{The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision}. 15.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Carr, \textit{Spain: A History}. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Carr, \textit{Spain: A History}. 133.
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\end{flushright}
the Holy Roman Empire in the sixteenth century, *Cuius regio, eius religio*, “whoever runs the territory also decides the religion of his subordinates.”

Unfortunately for the Catholic Kings, this was not a vision shared by the entire kingdom. While the degree to which populous Spain supported the Inquisition is a debated topic, it is certain that when the Crown first introduced it, the Inquisition was not widely welcomed by the people. As Henry Kamen notes, the Holy Office maintained that a widespread sense of justice was the justification for a large support and need among the people. On the other hand, some critics assert that it was a “tyranny imposed by the state upon the free consciences of Spaniards.” In either case, monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella had the last word in the matter, and so it was.

The 1492 Inquisition required that all Jews under the Crown either convert to Catholicism or be expelled. This created problems on legal and social levels, and begged questions of sincerity and absorption of all subjects of the Crown. Through the act of eliminating all of the Jews from Spain, the monarchs removed the obstacle of religion itself, avoiding the problematic side of assimilating the *conversos* completely. They did not seek to expel an entire people, but instead an entire religion. This was a very impactful decision. The expulsion avoided the religion problem completely in eradicating religions; there was no religious war, no religious expulsion for Spanish citizens to consider critically. Elsewhere in Europe, intellectualism was concerned with how to solve religious war between communities. The great effect on European discourse because of the Enlightenment regarding

tolerance and interactions between communities was rendered irrelevant in Spain. Officially, there were no religious differences to discuss.

**Historical background**

The term “converso” is very ambiguous as a historical and nominal term. It might refer to a forced convert, a forced convert who practices his old religion in secret, a convert who sincerely takes on his new Catholicism, the children of, or future generations of aforementioned converts, and within these discrepancies, conversos represented all degrees of sincerity in their new religion and lifestyle. The converso identity is anything but singular. As Eloy Benito Ruano observes, there are five levels of converso disposition; these include authentic Christian belief, practicing heterodoxies within Christianity, Talmudists, incredulity, and vacillators. 57 Although Spaniards argued that the conversion to Christianity was invalid in the Christian sense, a common retort was that the converts had chosen conversion rather than exile or death. In this way, they used their free will to decide to convert, resulting in a valid conversion to Christianity. 58 So, putting aside the possibility of invalid conversion, the new Christians were formed from many different situations, and each dealt with his new label differently.

While not explicitly conversos, many Spaniards experienced a converso-like position. For example, many Spaniards were either opposed to the Inquisition or not convinced that members of the Catholic Orthodox church

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58 Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision. 70.
themselves believed in the righteousness of the forced conversions. Like Judeoconversos, these Spaniards had to save face when they entered the public sphere. Within each of these groups are many subgroups, containing varying degrees of devotion towards Christian doctrine and different convictions regarding a public identity. However, we must remember that many Spaniards of all religious backgrounds underwent similar dilemmas in accommodating their public identity with the legal one, simply due to varying practices of and beliefs in Catholicism. There was also a significant problem with moriscos, forced converts of Islamic origin. Due to their location of lower economic and social impact, and the complications of problematic treatment of moriscos in history, I will focus specifically on Judeoconversos, keeping the similar yet distinct experience of the moriscos in their own individual context.

Upon forced conversion, conversos were introduced to a new way of life based on a split identity. The new need to incorporate two lifestyles and backgrounds into one became crucial, but remained illicit. This legal requirement to turn all previous religious convictions inward sparked a new way of thinking, and forced the conversos to create for themselves a new life, one of precarious balance, according to their needs, complicated by the illegal status of their former lifestyles. They constructed a new life, existing in a field between opposing polarities. They pieced together Christianity and their now-illicit religion, and they created a life through newfound ways of encountering and embracing religiosity, faith, works, and culture. On one hand, much of the new converso population attempted assimilation on both the public and private level, and on the other, many felt they needed to
incorporate the historical identity with which they were raised into a new, legal permutation of themselves.

While immigrations, marriages, political alliances, and a whole host of other factors may impart a kind of dual identity to the people it affects, a forced conversion calls upon the most foundational of one’s inclinations, rendering the process reactionary rather than fluid, as it might be with voluntary lifestyle changes. This is especially true of the period, one in which the social framework of a subject is founded entirely in religious affiliation.

Until this period, dualities were used to separate opposites: spiritual-carnal, good-evil, black-white. When *conversos* entered the Spanish scene, they were forced to occupy a space between two polar identities. The forced change in religion was spurred on political grounds, but reverberated in the deepest corners of its subjects’ selves, taking from them of choice in the conversion but opening them to a new world of individualism not yet known.

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There are three ideas that make up what would become the philosophically distinct and historically significant lifestyles and ideologies of *conversos*, which formally prefigured identity structures in the modern world today. The first condition that contributed to the *converso* mindset was the preexisting Christian world, to which all first-generation *conversos* were exposed, albeit as outsiders before their forced conversions. The notion of a societal outsider suddenly forced to become a legal yet problematic part of the inside, helped to shape *converso* thought. While the first generation *conversos* were certainly affected by their position as outsiders that quickly become part of the Catholic fold, they were also undoubtedly molded also by
their earlier lives in the Jewish community. Religious tradition had, before conversion, a social base, as well as a determined lifestyle. The loss of this would have been quite distressing. The second condition was the political impetus that drove *conversos* to adapt in certain ways to their new lifestyle. The statutes of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) imposed stringent legal restrictions on Spaniards that could not prove their Catholic heritage. These limitations had a great influence on the structure of the new, unique *converso* lifestyle, as well as ideas regarding the importance of bloodlines when determining honor. These statutes did not affect the first generation of conversions, because it was these conversions that first created the *converso* problem, however they were responsible for perpetuating a truly unique *converso* issue. The statutes questioned the sincerity of supposed Christians, quickly and efficiently casting doubt on all who were anything but proven committed Catholics. Additionally, these statutes affected all generations following converted parents, causing the decree to remain a source of contention and confusion for generations. Thirdly, the *conversos* were therefore made to feel otherness very acutely, even as self-proclaimed converts. This relationship to the rest of the world as an “other” created a breeding ground for new and creative thought, as they were not able to fit snugly into any boxes of identity previously created for their legal neighbors. Finally, *conversos* used the three aforementioned factors – the preexisting Christian world, *limpieza de sangre* and other political restrictions, and their place as “other” – in order to construct a new identity for themselves in their daily lives and thoughts. The *conversos* chose different aspects of different
ideologies and lifestyle details to create a unique identity on a spectrum that ranged from devoutly Spanish Catholic to insular and secretly Jewish.

The novelty of the *conversos*’ position in society – one whose openness to new synthesis contradicted exactly the aim that Ferdinand and Isabella called for when they declared the Inquisition was a defining feature. Since their in-between position had not been seen before in this form, *conversos* were handed a way to think outside the box. They were inventive and constructive, using pieces of their old lives, Catholicism, and some new elements to piece themselves together.

These three components of *converso* identity came together to create a unique new way of being and seeing oneself. *Conversos* employed many methods in order to adapt to these new restrictions that dictated how they were allowed to exist as a public entity, which had grave implications even for the private sector of their lives. To find a new identity between two poles was a unique experience in a period of political extremes, and this search had a profound effect on Jews, Spaniards, and Europeans for years to come.

*Outsiders from the beginning*

Tolerated, to some degree, politically and socially, Jews and Muslims of the Iberian Peninsula before forced conversion were outsiders looking into the majority Catholic world in their Christian-rulled home. This exposed them to the day-to-day routine of Catholicism, but imbued them with a sense of not belonging to the general populace. The political and social tolerance of the *convivencia* period combined with a distinctly unique upbringing outside of the Catholic community to create a markedly different ideology before
conversion. Such people were, due to their religious ancestry, excluded from the noble bloodlines of the Spanish *hidalguía*, and therefore not eligible for positions of social honor. This exclusion held true even after conversion. These blood-related notions insisted on a deep reliance on ancestry and the ranking of nobility reflected this directly. Even prior to the beginning of forced conversions, the position of non-Catholic ethnic groups predisposed them to think and see things differently than their Christian neighbors. Their place as outsiders looking into a world to which they did not wholly belong afforded them an opportunity, even before forced conversion, to offer a new perspective and background on the Iberian lifestyle from within an accepted community. We saw this in the previous chapter, where each religious group served also as a social community and foundation for identity.

*Limpieza de sangre and repercussions*

> With my knees bent  
> And in great devotion  
> In days set for holiness  
> I pray, rosary in hand,  
> Reciting the beads of the Passion,  
> Adoring the God- and- Man  
> As my highest Lord,  
> But because of the remnants of my guilt  
> I cannot lose the name  
> Of an old Jewish son of a whore  

The context in which *conversos* grew to deal with their issues regarding new dual identities was one of rich cultural history and social contradictions.

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59 *Hidalguía* was the term for the Spanish nobility.  
Orthodox Catholicism in Isabella and Ferdinand’s Spain, a largely formalistic tradition, encouraged an impossible ideal of purity on its subjects. This forced new converts to emphasize the appearance of such an ideal, and learned to do this so well that new measures were put into place to find the impure even among those who did not lay claim to it. In order to avoid this reliance on external signs, statutes of *limpieza de sangre* were imposed in order to filter and stratify the populace. Since religion was not readily apparent in the skin color or facial structure of its constituents, members could not be easily identified, isolated or persecuted. This ideal of purity seems opposed to the real life population of Spain, which was filled with many varying communities, as evidenced in Chapter One. Requiring proof of blood purity in many communities ensured that even committed converts could not be revered as purely Spanish Catholic, and forced introspection upon even the most convinced New Christian. The statues of *limpieza de sangre* were therefore responsible for what is a largely existential dimension of *converso* identity, and one that prefigured, in many ways, the modern condition in its reliance on partiality and non-teleological foundation.

The *limpieza de sangre* requirements were a product of the large wave of conversion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This was an unusual task, because there is no physical appearance or lifestyle that betrays a non-believer. Because of this problem that was so far beyond skin-deep, new laws were created to root out the untrue. They followed the forced conversions, which were a failed attempt to homogenize the populace. Paradoxically, in order to right this wrong, they instituted these blood purity requirements, tools of exclusion. The results of such practices forced these groups to
become isolated in wholly different ways, and victimized even people whose intentions were true to the throne, and recent histories clean. The laws encouraged new forms of expression for the frustrated and oppressed and the issues they brought to the fore. Disparaging remarks emphasizing the Spanish bloodline and heritage bubbled to the surface, and manifested in different forms. The issues and ideologies associated with limpieza de sangre edicts also spread to the general Catholic population. New forms of expression, especially ones that consider issues of deceit and independence from the Spanish hegemony emerged from Spanish culture. In one instance, picaresque literature worked to counter the importance placed on bloodlines. These laws also caused many conversos clung even more tightly to their genealogical past in order to maintain a connection with Judaism.

The picaresque genre, a monumental new step in Spanish literature, featured the Spanish anti-hero, anti-hidalgo, and anti-honored. The general tone of this genre is based around the theme that antiquated Spanish values of honor benefit only those with a lineage conducive to distinction, and incapacitate those without the benefits of a bloodline. While not expressly converso, many pícaros (roguish, poor, clever protagonists) must find ways around Spanish cultural norms, especially those regarding social standing, to survive. The picaresque is one way in which identity issues very connected to converso struggles leaked into the rest of Spanish society.

One example of this is the story of Lazarillo de Tormes, thought to have been authored anonymously in 1554 and is considered one of the first modern picaresque novels. Lazarillo contains no direct mention of religions other than Christianity, but many ideas that reflect closely the plight of the conversos,
including a scathing attack on ideals of honor and hidalgo lifestyle. The protagonist, Lazarillo, encounters a series of different masters, and with each experience is required to lie, cheat, and deceive in order to gain an honest piece of bread from a dishonest master. He uses his ability and cleverness in order to thwart an evil priest, a corrupt and poor squire, as well as other sinister characters, all of whom reached their high station in life through birth, and not through achievement.⁶¹

Such ideas of honor were out of the conversos’ reach. They, along with many other Spaniards who were not born into the nobility, began to express a certain longing for a system in which virtue was honored above bloodline. Lazarillo alludes to the possibility of a more just way of determining honor, through his dealings with masters who, while born into nobility and of high social status, exhibited very little sense of justice or morality.⁶² The desire for such an institution was echoed by the plight of the conversos. Their new unique status offered them a trapdoor into the Christian world. They were allowed access into the general population, but remained extremely limited in status. From their stunted position, conversos and non-nobility Spanish began to explore the possibility of an honor system based on virtue rather the old hidalguía system, which based social status on lineage. These notions eventually gave way to a system in which upward mobility was a possibility, and individuals were free to strive for more.

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⁶² Anonymous, Vida De Lazarillo De Tormes Y De Sus Fortunas Y Adversidades.
Conversos were certainly invested in this idea, as evidenced by the collection of the Biblioteca Barcarrota, a library found hidden in 1992, within the walls of a building during its renovation. This collection of books includes Lazarillo de Tormes, as well as works “included in Inquisitorial indexes of prohibited books of the time.”\textsuperscript{63} Two common topics among them are humanism and Jewish motifs. After an examination of the contents of the library, it was concluded that the original owner was probably a converso, because of various thematic threads in the library’s contents. For example, one of the works contained a “mysterious circle cut out of paper on which, in addition to a Star of David, displayed the name of God in Hebrew.”\textsuperscript{64} Additionally, a name inscribed in the circle reads “Branadao,” the surname of a known Portuguese-Jewish humanist. The constant Erasmian references in this collection are a testament to the converso sympathy with one strand of the humanist movement that attempted to move towards a merit based system, which I discuss below.

Genealogical factors were another issue that pervaded not only converso society but society in general. These discussions surfaced not only because of the new limpieza de sangre laws but also due to the longstanding Spanish emphasis on bloodlines as social determiners, creating yet another avenue through which conversos needed to find their place. The idea of


\textsuperscript{64} Fernando Serrano Mangas, "El Elemento Hebraico Y La "Biblioteca De Barcarrota", " HOY 5 de febrero 1996. Tr. Arielle Golden. “el misterioso círculo recortado en el papel en el que, además de una estrella de David, figura la palabra “tetragramaton” (forma criptica de designar el nombre de Dios en hebreo.”
inheriting the *converso* “gene” was a serious one, especially after a few generations and the implementation of blood purity laws. At this point, it raised doubt regarding the New Christians, and complicated who was considered a Jew and who a Christian. Conversos’ new position in society did not get rid of this sense of alienation. They reoriented themselves to accommodate a new kind of alienation, one that legally placed them simultaneously between pure and impure of blood.

*The spectrum of adaptation*

The compass of identity on which the *conversos* were forced to find their place was laid out between Judaism and Christianity. While they were expected to assimilate into Christian society, their varied attempts, some drastic, some subtle, to preserve Jewish identity introduced them to a new way of being an “other.” Identity was supposed to be predicated mainly on birth and was particular and unchanging, to preserve the unity under the monarchy. This binary factor in Spanish daily life was superficially enforced, but expected nonetheless. This black and white ideal on the part of Spain was completely incompatible with *converso* needs. First generation *conversos* that were not committed to Catholicism could not convert wholly to Christianity in the spiritual (and therefore Christian) sense because the memory of their past cultural and religious life could not be erased through baptism. Forced conversion opened a new door for the *conversos*, and with it came the

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possibility of reframing their attaining an identity in a newly pluralized context rife with in-betweens.

On a more individual level, Georg Hegel’s concept of the “other” as opposed to the self, can help to understand the converso position. As Hegelian scholar Philip Kain notes throughout his work, difference is a necessity for identity, but otherness creates an indelible comparison to the surrounding society, one that reaches into the depths of self-definition. For Simone de Beauvoir, this concept is broader, encompassing the minority as “other,” (specifically of women) in her work The Second Sex. Aside from providing a completely new understanding of gender, this work takes the concept of the “other” and explains it in terms of dominance and submission. De Beauvoir’s conception of the “other” may be applied to the converso position, as they, too, were in a position of great inequality and were made to feel, because of their converso status, that they were separate from the start, and separate by bloodlines. They were not a unified community, because the Inquisition would have punished any known meeting of these disparate groups. Instead, they were left in this new space, charged with finding a place in it.

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The Jewish conversos adapted to the new environment in many different ways, each to suit his particular need. As we will see, they personalized Christianity to their daily lives to make it more meaningful.

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This attempt was in direct opposition to the binary and increasingly intolerant nature of Spanish Catholicism under Ferdinand and Isabella. The conversos’ personalizing such a state institution began a process that set them apart from other Spanish identity structures of the time, particularly the mindset of convivencia. They appropriated Jewish ideas into the Christian framework to keep a vestige of their old lives within while remaining legal citizens. They manipulated rhetoric (both secular and religious) in order to keep their Judaism with them at all times, and to situate themselves in part of a uniquely Jewish converso history, not as a singular community, but as a classification of people that adapted as only them, as singular entities, were able. This happened on many different levels, with both cryptojews and committed Christians alike. Conversos’ adaptations in reconstructions of their new lives spanned from their seemingly deliberate inclusion of Judaism to only vestigial traces of their old lifestyle. They employed these methods in order to accommodate an uncertainty of how they were supposed to be seen, and they wanted to see themselves.

The appropriation of Jewish ideas to Christianity was a major factor in the superficial assimilation of conversos, and helped each subject to find an identity using legal vocabulary. Conversos used the rhetorical material offered by Christianity (and often limited to Spanish Catholicism) as a framework, in which they could place their vestigial Judaism. Those who wanted to seem outwardly Christian but remained inwardly Jewish in their own ways manipulated common religious words to appease the law. Rather than finding salvation in Jesus, they might think of Moses as their savior instead while attending mass. Instead of using the common word for God, Dios,
which ends in s, rendering it pluralized according to Spanish grammar, Jews might say Dio, minimizing the s sound in order to emphasize Judaism’s foundation in the belief in one God rather than the Holy Trinity of Christianity.

In addition to religious and spiritual rhetoric, the conversos manipulated legal Catholic rhetoric to situate themselves in ancient Jewish history. Just as modifying the words themselves was a way to stay attached to both worlds, changing the way in which they told history enabled them to see themselves from a different standpoint. Reshaping history helped them to discover new ways in which they related to past figures of Judaism, and kept them connect to their backgrounds.

The story of Esther is one with which the conversos sympathized strongly. In the traditional tale, the heroine, Queen Esther, saved the Jews from certain annihilation in a politically hostile environment, while secretly practicing Judaism herself. She became a sort of special champion for the conversos, especially those that still practiced Judaism in secret, and later victims of the Inquisition. Some conversos, however, took this story one step further, and referred to her as the proverbial “Santa Esther” (Saint Esther.) She became their Jewish patron Saint, a stunning example of the conversos’ appropriation of Catholic ideals into a repressed Jewish background. The converso community also made many connections between Spain and ancient Egypt, the land in which their peoples had been enslaved and oppressed in

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68 Yovel, The Other Within, 229.
biblical history. Spain, for them, became the new “land of exile,” a new hope for redemption. Many *conversos* used the material of Christianity to satisfy their own needs and found whatever Judaism they could within that template.

While the *conversos* worked tirelessly to manipulate the Catholic foundation to fulfill their Jewish needs, many Christian ideas pervaded their lives and philosophies. Since Jewish practice was forbidden, many “converts” with stubborn Jewish convictions had only their memories to keep their Judaism. For these *conversos*, the simple knowledge of their Jewish pasts was all they had to sustain themselves. In these cases, the ritualistic and physical practices of Judaism were sacrificed and replaced with only religious consciousness. According to Yirmiyahu Yovel, “in the absence of institutionalized Jewish life, ideas and attitudes about Judaism among the *conversos* assumed a folkloristic and relatively primitive character.” They relied heavily upon esoteric knowledge of their secret Jewish past, and these *conversos*, just like the Christians around them, stressed belief over practice in their religious lives. This intangible factor was an important part of their ability to assimilate into Christian society without losing their old selves completely. At the same time, they moved even closer to the Christian mindset when they placed faith over ritual.

Some *conversos* were later recognized as devoted New Christians and renowned authors, through their published works and public acts. *Converso*

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70 Yovel, *The Other Within*. 229.
71 Bodian, “Men of the Nation”: The Shaping of Converso Identity in Early Modern Europe.” 56.
Juan de Valdés wrote the *Dialogue on Christian Doctrine.*\(^72\) His writing contains many Jewish messages and even some specifically un-Christian ideas. He does not discuss the crucifixion, and does not emphasize Jesus. He gives God the Father complete precedence in the work of Christ. Like other *conversos,* Juan de Valdés found his place on the spectrum between Judaism and Christian culture, and was able to appear closer to Catholicism than, perhaps, he really was. His humanistic teachings are part of a school that encourages individualistic choices and freedom. Christian humanism reconciles this idea with the principles of Christianity, rendering it a legitimate new pathway of thought for even the most convincing New Christians.

An emphasis on individuality grew out of this period. We can find a distinct *converso* interest in this idea, as evidenced by the aforementioned Biblioteca Barcarrota. Enlightenment thinkers consider this growth of humanism as a precursor to individual freedom. In Spain, it was no doubt a product of the times as it was in many other European countries, but also made relevant by the pervasive statutes of *limpieza de sangre* and associated ideas. The humanism that grew out of the Renaissance was based first on the practice of studying only the classical texts rather than resolving differences between their critics.\(^73\) While this humanism was at first applied only to scholarly pursuits, it eventually grew into a philosophy that stressed individualism, sincerity, and earned honor. Works such as Erasmus’ *The Praise of Folly* and Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration On the Dignity of Man* encouraged the search for knowledge and the responsibility of man. These

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\(^72\) Yovel, *The Other Within*, 251-2.

tasks, laden with man’s capabilities rather than those passively endowed on him by a higher power or lineage, as propagated by the system of hidalguía, led followers into the Early Modern Period. While these authors were far removed geographically from the conversos, and there are many differences between their backgrounds, converso experiences under limpieza de sangre statutes and the Inquisition led them to similar conclusions. They were forced to find a strong foundation to serve as their defining aspects, as bloodlines could no longer reliably serve up this function.

The personal creativity and individuality that was required to adapt in such a novel way to new circumstances did not completely stamp out the idea of community. Especially for first-generation conversos, who were themselves forced to convert and expected to leave their community behind, it was particularly difficult to leave their group. As Kamen observes, “There is no systematic evidence that conversos as a group were secret Jews. Nor is it possible to build on this fragile evidence any picture of a converso consciousness whose principle feature was the secret practice of Judaism.” The notion of converso community is dependent on which generation is considered, as well as the particular case in question. He notes,

The existence of the Inquisition forced Jews to revise their attitude to conversos. When the great conversions took place at the end of the fourteenth century, Jews may have felt that the neophytes were still their brethren. A century later, the perspective was somewhat different. Jewish dignitaries, scholars and leaders had, not always under active persecution, voluntarily embraced the Catholic faith.

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74 Hollister, Medieval Europe: A Short History. 363.
75 Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision. 64
76 Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision. 17.
There are various cases of Jews themselves testifying against supposed conversos, as well as cases of Christians reporting non-conversos to the Inquisition. Ultimately, it is impossible to pinpoint the idea of a static converso community or mindset. The converso “identity” is not a singular entity, but rather a mode of adaptation, a process.

As time went on, and conversos became farther removed from the original familial converts, they dispersed further from each other, in public action, religious conviction, lifestyle, and geography. This pattern continued, lessening the possibility for a converso community with each generation. As members moved away from their original communities under political pressure, the converso existence became an increasingly individualistic phenomenon. This is a result of oppressive circumstances, it is certainly not a liberal paradigm, but it does encourage a liberal ideal. Its subjects are not held to a certain community as a basis of themselves. While conversos almost certainly empathized with each other, they were unable to do this in the public sphere without risking accusations of heresy, and therefore cannot have had a true, all-encompassing community that their legally Jewish predecessors would have had.

Further generations of conversos, those that were expelled and lived as ex-Spaniards elsewhere, took this identity structure further. They created a sort of endemic converso position, but without an attached homeland. They moved according to tolerant policies, but were no longer members of a

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bordered nation. They were forced to see each other as the foundation of their identity, history, and traditions, rather than a location and its attached culture. This idea prefigures the condition in a globalized society – unrestricted in some way by borders, and motivated by factors other than a physical plot of land. They were connected by a prior exclusion, an experiential link. Outside of Spain, they were able to unite over cultural and historical likenesses, rather than religious affiliation. This, for Yovel, formed a figurative archipelago of identity.78 Conversos were dispersed, but maintained economic ties to one another and shared values, especially in the case of the Portuguese community. In this case, their identity was shared, and based on secular ties. Once out of Spain and away from risk, they were able to form groups bound not by location but by common interest and background.

This feature of expulsion is a crucial one in investigating individualism in identity construction. Expelled individuals are removed from their homeland and must construct a life according to new needs. The dispersion following expulsion created the opportunity for wider economic exchange and eventual interdependence, paving the way for just one means of establishing global citizenry. As an identity, this prefigured a central issue in the modern condition: living in a global sense, rather than a tribal or insular one. Some 100,000 Jews entered into Portugal following the expulsion, and there established a new community.79 At this point, the converso existence ties in closely with that of subjects of convivencia. Conversos in this situation were connected by background, and often by skilled trade. Despite a shared

78 Yovel, The Other Within. 311.
79 Ortiz, Los Conversos De Origen Judío Después De La Expulsión. Tr. Arielle Golden. “Unos 100,000 judíos entraron en Portugal.” 81.
religious background, it was their secular connections that gave them a group to which they could belong, regardless of their religious status. Even committed New Christians, for example, were expelled when judged unfavorably by the Inquisition.

Theoretical considerations of identity

The identity struggles of the *conversos* seem, at first, to resemble in many ways the idea of *convivencia*. Both required its subjects to take certain aspects of certain cultures, and create with these elements a new way of thinking and doing. Both result in an infinite range of outcomes, and infinite mixes of aspects of different worlds in pluri-identities. However, the background, impetus and process for creating these new mixed identities differs greatly between the two structures, and it is this divergence that makes them so dissimilar, and in their historical contexts, does not allow them to exist simultaneously.

Both forms of identity result, partly, from the context of power politics. *Conversos* were as they were because they were restricted from practicing their religion and told to adopt a new one. Subjects of *convivencia* existed in a political climate allowed them to freely exchange ideas and practices with neighboring groups, without fear of legal repercussions and with the comfort of belonging to an established group. Christians living during *convivencia*, for example, could become even stronger by adopting Arabic philosophy. *Conversos*, on the other hand, were forced to weaken their previous selves in order to make room for the new Christianity forced upon them.
In terms of what is gained and lost in each case, the *convivencia* model is more conducive to accumulating different ideas and habits from other cultures and philosophies. Due to the political freedom that encourages *convivencia* to thrive, subjects living in these conditions could *add* new ideas to their lifestyles without detracting from their own. *Conversos*, on the other hand had to adjust their previous situation in order to accommodate a new, politically forced one. They were required to detract from what was previously there in order to bring in something new. Unlike *convivencia*, living as a *converso* does not accommodate past ideas and habits, or personal needs to incorporate them.

This is a fundamental difference between the two ideas. While Spain’s *conversos* were forced by power politics and social backdrops to find a new identity between two poles (that of their old religion and that of Catholicism,) subjects under *convivencia* experienced a fluid transmission of ideas, resulting in the possibility of a similarly mixed perspective and lifestyle. Political stability encouraged this and allowed social interaction. For the *conversos*, political force did not make up the impetus for such change. *Conversos* are legally restricted from expressing their original religion, and all that it entails. No public institutions will recognize their identity as such, and they must therefore find a new, socially acceptable way of thinking and being. Many choose to practice their old religion in secrecy, but those that do not often find ways to incorporate the vestiges of such thinking into a wholly new way of life.

The political background of the time defines, partly, how its subjects will create an identity in the public sphere. In the case of a political restriction
that limits even the most basic elements of its subjects’ lifestyles – for example, making non-Catholic practice illegal – the *converso* identity structure takes hold. The structure is a reactionary one, enacted in response to a limitation and forced change imposed by the government. *Convivencia*, on the other hand, comes about after a fluid allowance of politics. If the political environment is right and encourages transference of ideas between people rather than forcing separation and limitation, ideas and habits can transfer fluidly between them. Ideas are spread and reinforced, rather than repressed, altered, or discarded. Subjects of *convivencia* are not forced to compromise one side of their identity in favor of a new one. They are eased into a life of interdependence, encouraged by a type of globalization, and prefigure, in many ways, the modern condition.

These crucial political backdrops from the Spanish Middle Ages and early modern period – those which allowed *convivencia* and forced *converso* existence – change drastically when applied to modern society. Contemporary life brings with it, for those who live in free societies, the inherent “modern” condition of freedom to interact and personal freedom. However, fragments of both *convivencia* and *converso* identity still play large parts in modern life.

Many basic *convivencia* ideals remain ideals today. Efforts towards multiculturalism policies represent the political basis for a *convivencia*-type ideology, while globalization has exposed new cultures and peoples to each other, offering a way to transfer ideas cross-culturally. The communitarian philosophy relies on the community for a basis of identity rather than relying
solely on the individual, which reflects some tenets of *convivencia* existence and ideology.

Globalization has also brought with it effects that echo *converso* mentalities. Immigration across borders has created undeniably hybrid identities in second-generation immigrants. The liberal idea of individualism and making one’s own self-actualization reflects closely many dilemmas in the creation of *conversos*. On a foundational level, the modern situation is very different from the *conversos*. One group is in this position as a result of a voluntary move, whereas the other came about because of forcible conversion. They are both pulled in two directions by surrounding social pressure; towards their parents’ home country, and towards their new home. While the political environment for second-generation immigrants is not as legally oppressive as it had been in the Middle Ages, subjects remain in the undetermined middle of two ends.

In the modern world, both identity structures emerge. They would not have been able to coexist in their original states of the Middle Ages, and it seems, as the debate between the individual conception of the self and socially based identity rages on, that we are currently struggling with the same internal issues as our historical counterparts. As representative of the individualist construction of identity, *conversos* play a telling role. They were no longer grounded in a legal community and had no single model one which they could base their existence. Each subject had to use pieces of the lives surrounding him to construct, according to his own specifications, a new lifestyle. This is not a liberal idea because it does not occur in a liberal
framework, but this pick-and-choose model of identity was a novel way of discovering oneself, albeit in a repressive society.

A look at the modern debate between the liberal conception of the self and socially based identity, as well as the ideology behind efforts towards multiculturalism politics and related frameworks shows us that these issues are still very much alive. It seems we cannot blame the actions of subjects under convivencia or conversos totally on their political background. If we could, this would not be an issue today. The convivencia period was characterized by an identity rooted, it seems, wholly in religious affiliation, whereas conversos were not allowed to consider such a community as their own any longer. They had to find an identity along a spectrum of Catholic and Jewish, public and private, and piece together new factors to create a new self-conception that defined them. This individualistic tendency, while brought about by an antiquated system of religious homogeneity, is still debated today, suggesting that neither the dependence on one’s religious group, nor the antiquated, repressive system are to blame for these constructs.
CHAPTER THREE: CONVIVENCIA, CONVERSOS, AND US.
CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES OF INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL
CONCEPTIONS OF THE SELF

These two moments in Spanish history, that of convivencia and that of the conversos, offer a pair of striking examples that demonstrate the important effects of political framework on identity construction. That said, we need to be circumspect as it is not only the Spanish monarchy that did this, and the continued discussion about these vital issues is evidence for their continued relevance. I will discuss these contemporary problems and debates below and investigate how they relate to the periods of convivencia and conversos, and why they still represent matters of relevance for the modern subject. These examples are particularly cogent when considering the debate between liberalism and multiculturalism, as well as communitarianism, or socially--based identities. The considerations of the two aforementioned moments in Spanish history shed some much-needed light on the debate, particularly when finding the good that can be produced under various governments and policies.

The paradigms of conversos and the period of convivencia offer evidence for what people do when faced with certain social and political forces. A shift that restricts a group that until then was legal and defined will necessarily create a group of people who no longer belong where they did before. Likewise, a political background that encourages strong ties to one’s religious community provides more room, legal space to interact and share with neighboring groups. The converso and convivencia models provide us with a unique opportunity to see the modern debate between proponents for a
liberal identity and those for a socially based identity. We can reflect on the previously discussed reactions of historical subjects of these two periods to their political backgrounds and surroundings. We must keep in mind that the two paradigms are just that – paradigmatic, and serve merely as models of these ideas. Their use does not indicate that all members under the convivencia model felt the same way about their identity, merely that patterns emerge that suggest it was not anomalous. More pertinent to ourselves, however, we can see how very comparable their identity struggles are to ours. The contemporary discourse in philosophy, political theory, and sociology regarding identity construction as an individualized entity versus a communal one deals with many relevant issues and can help us to see more clearly the complexity and problematic nature of attributing historical reactions to politics, and politics alone.

Charles Taylor states, there are three “axes” of moral thinking\(^\text{80}\), the degree of each varying greatly between cultures. The first is a sense of respect and obligation to others, second, a sound understanding of what makes a full life and third, dignity. We must consider all three of these concepts to understand fully how people arrive at a personal philosophy, and how it manifests through identity.

In the periods we have studied, it seems that convivencia and converso models would have been incompatible with each other, and could never have existed side-by-side. The nature of the political background that framed the converso existence was based on intolerance and efforts towards religious

intolerance, whereas the *convivencia* model resembled a kind of multiculturalism – one that encouraged strict group boundaries, to be sure, but at the same time allowed interactions and influences between them. Both cases seem, from a contemporary standpoint, to be antiquated and anti-progressive.

As we move into modernity, we experience similar issues, but in governmental terms in the United States and other like democratic countries, they become secularized. The debate between individuality and socially constructed identities is no longer based wholly on how we express or affiliate with religion. The modern debate between the liberal and social conceptions of the self implies that it is currently possible to experience both models within the same political backdrop, because both notions allow room for change, and both cases are taken into account in the private sphere. The similarities between *converso* existence and individualism, and *convivencia* and multiculturalism tell us that there are more issues to consider when assessing how an identity, historical or otherwise, is constructed.

Indeed, it is tempting to examine *conversos* and subjects of *convivencia*, and conclude simply that the different political backgrounds (one of an almost multicultural nature yet restricted by community, the other oppressive towards all religious groups but one) are to blame for the different reactions of their constituents. However, the issues are rooted deeply in more than the government actions. The general view of historical society that we see from our modern standpoint does not, and cannot, encompass all of the nuances and small but significant changes that these figures underwent. Furthermore, the continuity of this debate throughout modernity is a testament to the
timeless nature of such dilemmas. Even in the absence of an oppressive authority, issues similar to the phenomena of *conversos* and *convivencia* still arise. While there is much evidence to show that individualized behavior of the *conversos* came about partially as a result of their changed legal status, and that culturally-based identities are a main factor in the habits of subjects of *convivencia*, the fact that such behavior and thought can occur today tells us that there are deeper issues to consider when defining constructs of identity.

**Limitations**

Before considering these identity processes and constructs, we must keep in mind the limitations of assessing an identity and affiliations. Secularization is necessarily implied by contemporary debates about identity construction, since they largely try to find meaning and how individuals find meaning in their lives – meaning which, for them, would lead to religion, as well as a group-identified moral compass. Discussing Luther’s crisis of faith, Taylor notes,

> For someone in Luther’s age, the issue of the basic moral frame orienting one’s action could *only* be put in universal terms. Nothing else made sense. This is linked, of course, with the crisis for Luther turning around the acute sense of condemnation and irremediable exile, rather than around a modern sense of meaninglessness, or lack of purpose, or emptiness. **81**

In this sense, the frame in history is fixed. Individuals were defined by their groups, and did not have options, because of their groups strict and unquestioned, unwavering religious affiliations. We must keep this in mind when comparing our own struggles with historical predecessors, as for them,

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communal identity construction was officially based on religious community rather than on personal needs. Another condition that cannot be changed according to personal needs is that of fixed groups into which the individual is born. While many of these are problematic in and of themselves (gender and racial identities, for example,) the sheer number of different crucial affiliations that differ in degree of permanency cannot all be joined or left with ease. Some of these include ethnic identity, national identity, and cultural identity.

Historical background

The belief that identity development is a self-sufficient process for each individual has been a main thread of liberal thinking that has been documented for many years since the Enlightenment. Thomas Hobbes, 1588-1679, is one thinker credited with a state of nature theory that paved the way for the conceptions of the liberal self. While the doctrine of atomism82 almost completely discounts the influence of community, Hobbes’ discussion opened the door to what would become the modern discussion on liberalism and its variations, as opposed to the more traditional, socially based identity. Hobbes introduces the notion that human reason gives us the power to disagree, and he advocates for a strong central authority so that individuals are able to pursue private interests.83 A few years later, John Locke’s, 1632-1704, emphasis on experience as the primary mover in constructing identity

82 Atomism (a somewhat antiquated theory in scientific terms) claims, that as the atom is the smallest unit and everything is made of atoms, nothing truly exists besides them.
brought us to the *tabula rasa* understanding of the self.\(^{84}\) This was directly influenced by a Latin translation of the Arabic philosophy by Ibn Tufail, written in the twelfth century.\(^{85}\) The Islamic-Andalusian origin of this philosophy is a remarkable vector back to the historical *convivencia* and *converso* issues so pertinent to this modern debate. John Stuart Mill, while continuing in the same vein as his predecessors in discussing individual development did make room for social commitment and expanded upon the notion of the social contract at a new level. He takes into account the importance of socialization on identity development when he states, “The social state is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that, except in some unusual circumstances or by an effort of voluntary abstraction, he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body.”\(^{86}\) So, Mill moves from a strict liberalism to a grayer area of self-definition, one that relies, at least to some extent, on surroundings.

Communitarianism as it is considered today only truly took to the stage of academia in the twentieth century. Its ideology of developing a socially based identity, however, came about much earlier, and communitarians claim that it stems from the philosophy of Aristotle’s *The Politics*. Critics, on the other hand, see it as more akin to early monasticism.

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\(^{84}\) This notion is focused on the idea that individuals are born with a “blank slate”, and are formed by their experiences and perception.


While it is often equated with nationalism\textsuperscript{87} because of the similarities between them, here the discussions I consider here will primarily focus on communitarianism more than nationalism, which some historians consider to be “a political-ideological construction that has developed starting in the nineteenth century in an effort to guarantee social cohesion of a collective based on an assumption of shared identity.”\textsuperscript{88} While there are certainly similarities between the two, nationalism has a more political end, whereas communitarianism, like \textit{convivencia}, is built within a smaller framework, and towards the goal of its community rather than that of the government imposing it. The \textit{convivencia} paradigm rested on a more cultural, religious, and familial affiliation, rather than one influenced exclusively by national borders and requiring total unanimity within its ranks.

\textit{Multiculturalism}

The contemporary discussion and consideration of individuals consider these persons to be under a liberal regime. This would entail a regime that recognizes its members politically as individuals, and \textit{conversos} did not end up with this kind of recognition. So when we make our comparison between individualism and \textit{conversos}, it is in the most abstract

\textsuperscript{87} Andrew Vincent, "Liberal Nationalism and Communitarianism: An Ambiguous Association (Rethinking Nationalism)," \textit{The Australian Journal of Politics and History} 43.1 (1997).

\textsuperscript{88} Ramón López Facal, "Enseñar Historia En Convivencia Plurinacional," \textit{Gerónimo de Uztariz} 17/18 (2002). 52. Tr. Arielle Golden. “\textit{es una construcción político-ideológica que se ha desarrollado a partir del siglo XIX tratando de garantizar la cohesión social de una colectividad a partir de una asunción de una identidad compartida.”
sense of the word. *Conversos* were individuals because they created an identity construct for themselves, using the means that were available.

Discussions of multiculturalism are a response to natural rights. Multicultural policies do not directly imply a theory of identity construction, but instead offer protection. A right is a possession, whereas a law is something to which someone is subject. Multiculturalism policy does not take into account how identities within the groups it protects are formed. However, it does reflect closely the conditions of subjects under *convivencia*. These community members were protected within their groups; for example, the *dhimmi*, or people of the book, in al-Andalus discussed above.

The *convivencia* lifestyle, while displaying many similarities to communitarianism, seems even more to propagate a strand of multiculturalism, within its context of emphasized religious difference. Multicultural citizenship gives special rights to cultural minorities – to regard people as members of a nation and also as a culture. While multiculturalism is not at odds with liberalism, which does make room for voluntary group associations that are considered private interests unaffiliated with rights as discussed below, it encourages developing a space for minority culture.

Will Kymlicka makes the case for a multicultural state. He argues in favor of special privileges for different groups within these states. In his landmark work, *Multicultural Citizenship*, Kymlicka argues the necessity for special laws that consider multiculturalism, and introduces deeper issues that concern those who consider themselves multicultural or those that are living

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89 Mill, "On Liberty". *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill.*
in a deliberately multicultural society\textsuperscript{90}. While this is quickly differentiated from more general human rights, (For example, the human right of free speech does not encompass language policies specific to different states,) it is particular to each group and the needs of each group according to its constituents. As Kymlicka puts it, “A liberal theory of minority rights, therefore, must explain how minority rights coexist with human rights, and how minority rights are limited by principles of individual liberty, democracy, and social justice.”\textsuperscript{91} In his work, he propagates the liberal conception of the self, which promotes individualism over community, but adds that cultures are what truly inform the worldviews of its members, and in this way can provide meaning for them without robbing them of their independence.\textsuperscript{92} It truly represents the integration of a synthesis of a convivencia reality and converso ideal, removed from its oppressive context.

Under the paradigm of convivencia, it is clear that the worldview of the members of each religious community was formed and upheld by their particular group. However, what makes this brand of multiculturalism so distinct is the fact that it occurred in a period of history that is considered, from a modern point of view, to be intolerant, but that it allowed the ‘special minority status’ (see discussion of the dhimma above) to allow interactions and exchange between well-established groups.

While multiculturalism is often affiliated with communitarianism, the two cannot be compared directly because multiculturalism is policy-based,

\textsuperscript{90} Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1995).
\textsuperscript{91} Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship. 6.
\textsuperscript{92} Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship. Chapter 4.
while the other refers to a more theoretical and philosophical idea. Multiculturalism is a political implementation of communitarian ideals, under conditions of mutual tolerance. The fallbacks of policy-based changes on identity rely, according to Eisenberg, on two primary issues. Firstly, communitarianism must be realized mostly through politics, and cannot manifest in its members without certain policies. This creates space to protect the capacities of the members of a group, but fails to actively develop them.93

For liberal thinkers, the development of capacities is what is truly at stake when they are subjected to communitarianism, and these capacities are what allow us to define ourselves.

Communitarianism

The communitarian idea of the self is a more recent debate, but the social development associated with it is reminiscent and telling in many ways of the model of convivencia in Spain. It reinforces established identities, not only by exchanging ideas with other cultures without losing a piece of itself, but also through a group mentality: finding an identity by comparing oneself to the surrounding community. These strong notions of kinship and belonging are the foundation for both the convivencia model and the communitarian philosophy.

Charles Taylor, born in 1931, defines identity as the set of commitments and identifications that frame the sense of what is good,94 but takes this farther and declares that without such a frame as formed by a

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community, there is no way to define oneself. He asserts that growth cannot occur on a solely individualistic basis; it is completely dependent on the surrounding, accepting community. While this is not in reference to exchanging with other communities, it is about the conditions that enable the exchange. Here, subjects of convivencia might agree – they are legally so comfortable within their own groups that they can adopt the habits of other groups without risking their own membership. This communitarian existence is rooted in community and allows for a certain moral orientation as dictated by the group. This idea is very problematic when considered within the converso framework, as they could not legally be members of the community to which they might have belonged, before forced or voluntary conversion. They were effectively forced out of a communitarian lifestyle, and into a more individualistic one (at least in legal terms.)

Communitarians believe in development through socialization of groups, or communities of interest. These communities of interest beget individuals, whereas the liberal stance declares that individuals beget their communities. According to the communitarian doctrine, liberalism falls short in its ability to acquire beliefs and morals. Without a surrounding community to dictate what is moral and best for the group, the individual will have nothing on which to base his foundational beliefs.

Taylor does not believe that one can be a self on one’s own. The self is relative to other selves and entities, those that provide direction, morals, spiritual guidance, and orientation. He notes that historically, groups hinged

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on their theological or metaphysical beliefs, but in the modern, liberal society, groups are more likely to be a space for a moral benchmark, not necessarily founded in religion or spirituality. The historical discrepancy is also the basis on which Culture Wars rely, when it notes that the wars began when the United States made a switch from being divided on religious grounds to being divided on essentialist moral grounds. The secularization of government and social groups has opened the door to a new dividing factor. This increased secularization is also a contributing factor to the reason that we, as a modern society, can now experience both of these identity constructions simultaneously; a notion that could not have been considered for subjects of *convivencia* or *conversos*. For them, factors that came as a result of power politics limited their interactions. In *convivencia*, they did not leave their religions, which were also their social groups. And *conversos* did not have a legal religious group any longer and thus had to construct a new way of being without such a framework. Our rootedness in groups or to ourselves hinges not on religious or familial affiliation, but on worldview, just as the Culture Wars explain. Socialization is the main factor in development, which is why we can safely say that identities are built around affiliations and responsibilities shared within the group, and this is the major idea behind communitarianism.

There are a few well-known disadvantages of communitarianism in today’s debate. While these may be applied to subjects of *convivencia*, we must remember that these were communities formed because of a common religion, and therefore individuals had little say in how the groups

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Eisenberg, *Reconstructing Political Pluralism*, 172.
developed; transition (conversion) between groups was controlled by authorities, and, more philosophically, transition would mean leaving the collective that shaped them for a different one with equal power over its members. One problem is that individuals have many attachments. This feature both does and does not apply to convivencia. Each subject had primarily one attachment, his or her religious community. However, it is the novel sharing between these groups during this period that made it so special. Communitarianism, therefore, is not exactly represented by convivencia. Yet another weakness of communitarianism, as stated by its critics, claims that it has an underdeveloped sense of the nature of community, and how it truly acts on individuals. Another issue that can arise is the chance that groups may use their autonomy to stifle pluralism and promote an immoral end, thereby transferring this immorality to group members. This is a hypothetical weakness of communitarianism, but relates closely to the periods in question. The pluralistic efforts of a community are a main factor that distinguishes modern communitarian thought from subjects under convivencia. Conversos are the subjects who truly felt the negative effects of this possibility. Ferdinand and Isabella, with the proclamation and implementation of the Inquisition, were attempting to stifle pluralism, which resulted in exactly the opposite, forcing these subjects, without communities, to become individuals. They pursued homogeneity in their kingdom, with a communitarian ideal in mind, in which society (and in their case, the two of them) shaped individuals. They forced subjects to be in groups not by choice, but by genealogy and religiosity. However, when they erased entire groups,

97 Eisenberg, Reconstructing Political Pluralism. 72.
whole communities were left alone in space, without a guiding assembly to lead them back to the path.

**Individualism**

The liberal conception of the self embraces one major value that encompasses all others. Its individualism is the defining factor, and covers personal philosophy as well as political theory; in both cases, however, it serves to ward off “encroaching despotism” by allotting the power to the individual, and labels the community influence as secondary. This implies a very close tie between a constituent and his independence. While he may gain a lifestyle influenced by a collective, the subject exists primarily for himself. In general, the liberal model of social life is based on the idea that individuals have their own goals for their own reasons, and they come together to make them happen. To construct an identity in this way, one must feel unique to a degree, and recognize the ability to make one’s own way. On the other hand, social-based and communitarian identity claims make the case for identity constructions that are formed primarily by the influence of the group. The converso lifestyle and habits seem to reflect many liberal notions of self-definition. As they were forced politically, out of their old communities, conversos lacked the crucial freedom that is an important part of the liberal

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99 Lehrer, "Individualism, Communitarianism and Consensus." 105.
conception of the self, and the ability to associate with any group that they wished. And while there are many essential similarities between _conversos_ and this notion of identity, it is important to remember the differences as well.

Avigail Eisenberg’s work, *Reconstructing Political Pluralism*, is a thorough examination of liberal identity conception as it stands opposed to communitarianism, and how both ideas can fit into a politically plural society. According to her work, socialization can contribute to an individual’s growth, but it can just as easily “stifle and distort development” through oppressive means.¹⁰⁰ The liberal outlook accepts that the individual ultimately holds the power to shape and negotiate his identity, partly through the voluntary association with many groups, and the ability to change these groups if desired. This take on identity construction is a telling lens through which we may examine _converso_ reactions and habits. As it relies on a non-teleological view of the self, which denies a certain aim in favor of an individual’s capacity to develop as he wishes,¹⁰¹ liberalism insists that development must happen on a case-by-case basis. It is not attached to communal ends. This does not completely rule out the existence of social groups by any means. Social groups hinge on the idea that the liberal self is *voluntarily* associated with his social groups.

Groups can, and will, contribute to identity construction of individuals, but for liberals, these groups do not make the choices. In fact, what distinguishes individualism as an ethical philosophy of identity is that

¹⁰⁰ Eisenberg, *Reconstructing Political Pluralism*, 3.
individuals make their own choices in judging how communities will affect their development. In this sense, the individual is the true “negotiator”\(^{102}\) of this process. While the individual is isolated from his attachments, he is not impervious to them.

In many senses, the liberal conception of identity reflects the dilemmas and opportunities of the _conversos_ of Spain. The ways that _converso_ identity differs from liberalism are much easier to see. _Converso_ existence came about, more than anything else, because of a forced or oppressive act on the government’s part. Liberalism, on the other hand, stemming from the Latin root _liberalis_, or “of freedom,” seems, according to its most basic ideas, that it would only exist only in a mostly free society. In indirect ways, the forced position that created _conversos_ also gave them the opportunity to leave the _convivencia_ lifestyle from before, and to enter into society as a newly free agent in a novel way. As we saw in Chapter Two, _conversos_ adapted to this with many different behaviors to suit their varying needs. While there were exceptions – the creation of covert _converso_ communities, for instance, or alternatively through the complete absorption back into Spanish Catholic society – _converso_ identity was formed, in large part, by recreating oneself with a wholly new set of tools.

_Theoretical considerations of identity_

Making a theoretical comparison of the individual and social conceptions of the self can help to isolate problems and perks in each concept, as well as to reveal the nuanced nature of _convivencia_ and _converso_ models.

\(^{102}\) Eisenberg, _Reconstructing Political Pluralism_. 189
Detachment results from believing in liberal practices such as rights. Entanglement results from misunderstanding the constitutive nature of both the attachments which people inevitably possess and the respective claims on the self which accompany these attachments.  

Eisenberg warns us of confusing policy-based ideas with philosophically based ones, and helps us to understand the importance of making these two concepts compatible with each other.  

Kymlicka’s policy-based work tries to reconcile the two conceptions of identity formation, and rejects the traditional liberal idea that individuals are completely isolated units. On the contrary, the individual as a unit is an important part of culture, but is also influenced by and ultimately depend on his or her groups. Individuals and collectives converge in that both involve interest groups, but as Hannah Arendt discusses, the communitarian model is based on individuals sharing, whereas the Enlightenment model puts individuals together according to “certain facts and values, premises and conclusions.” Keith Lehrer finds room for reconciliation between the two, and proposes that this space lies where the individual has the right, and the freedom, to decline the process of joining a group and become an outsider. However, this does not encompass groups into which individuals are born, such as sex, and often gender.  

Eisenberg summarizes the other mitigating factor between the two sides of the debate in three points. Firstly, individuals, when given the

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103 Eisenberg, Reconstructing Political Pluralism. 177.  
104 Lusztig, "Canada’s Long Road to Nowhere: Why the Circle of Command Liberalism Cannot Be Squared." 462.  
106 Lehrer, "Individualism, Communitarianism and Consensus." 118.
freedom, will organize themselves into groups. Secondly, if they do not do this instinctually, they accomplish it as a deliberate act in order to acquire necessary resources. Thirdly, these groups do, indeed, contribute to development.\footnote{Eisenberg, \textit{Reconstructing Political Pluralism}. 3.} The question, she believes, is \textit{how much}? For example, many bonds between individuals and society are not voluntary, and therefore out of our reach. This space for reconciliation between cultural and individual is largely a result of a free and democratic society. Subjects of \textit{convivencia} and \textit{conversos} were not a part of a society in which social mobility and community choice were feasible to the degree to which they are today in free societies. Hence, modern citizens are capable of experiencing the pull, tension, and dilemmas inherent in both socially based and individually based constructions of identity.

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Today, we all experience different degrees of the tension that comes with individual, isolated development and with socially dependent development. There are groups among us that perhaps feel these tensions more acutely. For instance, second-generation immigrants, are forced to decide for themselves how they will develop, while experiencing social pressure from their families and home, institutions and friends in their country. While the crucial factor of the \textit{conversos}, their political repression, is not always an issue, and second-generation immigrants, unlike \textit{conversos}, can express any identity they wish in a political manner (within reason,) they have demonstrated a like necessity to find an identity somewhere between two poles. According to a study, the “origin, years of residence, educational...
level, occupation, and home are variables that predict the process of second-generation immigration”\textsuperscript{108} assimilation. We can see that all of these factors are at play, because the subjects will select components of various activities with which they identify.

\textit{Creative productivity}

If we take only traditional notions of the \textit{converso} experience into account, our assessment of their experience will be lacking. In traditional evaluations of the \textit{converso} legacy, the \textit{converso} is the victim of Spanish society. While this is absolutely indisputable, there is more to consider outside of this victim/persecutor dichotomy. In order to understand the true scope of the \textit{converso} experience, we have to find another perspective, one that involves daily interactions and personal choices in formulating an identity that fits the needs of the subject.

Taking the above into consideration, it seems that the subjects of \textit{convivencia} and the \textit{conversos} that followed were not simply products of a multicultural or oppressive society. While we can consider this fact as part of the source for many of their known habits and artifacts, the fact that many nations in the modern world are considered free, yet still grapple with these issues, tells us something more. The \textit{converso} lifestyle was more than just a result of an oppressive and persecutory government. As I discussed previously, \textit{conversos} were left in the lurch; they were forced into a newly

opened void in Spanish society. Their social status was confused, their “right place” uncertain. Because of this, they were handed the opportunity to create something completely new. They were forced to make their own place, and in doing so opened the door to an entirely new creative outlet, and forced to adapt to a new way of thinking. They found new ways to appropriate Christian ideas into an old, now-illicit framework. Some hid their old religion, practicing it in secret. Others became converts in earnest and encouraged their children to do the same. Many considered themselves to be sincere converts, even contributing to Christian writing while betraying Jewish ideas within a Christian work. In any case, each individual had to decide for himself how he would deal with the political change and had no singular community to look to as a model. We can only assume that he took more than pure convenience into consideration as a factor, on account of the sheer variety of reactions and ways that Christianity was combined with other lifestyles and habits.

The *convivencia* period, despite its strong community-based identities, likewise offered its subjects a space for creative production. While, as we saw earlier, the socially based identity is often criticized for being limiting and even oppressive due to the commitment of its members, *convivencia’s* strong communities encouraged a very unique kind of adaptation. Its members were engrained so strongly in their communities – legally, religiously, regionally, and historically – that there was room to move between them superficially without risk to their own identity or membership in the group.

The *converso* problem arose out of the 1391 pogroms, but this event does not explain why similar dilemmas of identity formation continue to
appear. Traditionally, the converso habits and convivencia lifestyle have been explained away by the power politics that drove them. I have found, after considering historical and theoretical issues inherent in the convivencia period as well as that of the conversos, that power politics are only one factor in the complex formation of identity. The current debate in political theory, and contemporary examples of subjects struggling with these very same issues serve as indisputable evidence that the tension between culturally- and individually-based identity is a defining feature of our humanity. While identities are shaped, changed, and left behind due to this context, the contingency with which identity is endowed cannot be attributed totally to political environment.
CONCLUSION

It is indisputable that the periods of Spanish *convivencia* and the later *conversos* both depict moments in history in which people lived under restrictive governing bodies. In the case of *convivencia*, subjects were limited to their own religious communities as a basis for identity, which enabled them, through their secure roots in these groups, to exchange ideas with other cultures. *Conversos* were persecuted for their prior religious affiliation, but nonetheless adapted by finding a new way of developing as an individual within society without an established religious group.

In examining the evidence of these periods in a new light, we can see that both groups were able to produce creative goods despite their limiting contexts. If, for a moment, we forget the persecutory and insular visions of the leaders of these times, we can appreciate the creative progress that these societies made. Regardless of the intentions of the rulers, whether they pursued a multicultural society or the complete opposite, subjects of these periods nonetheless demonstrated an admirable ability to create and adapt. This is an indication of the ever-triumphing desire to produce creatively, a facet of human behavior that still impresses us today.

Culture Wars are the result of secularization of communities and the growing emphasis on the non-teleological view of the self, the opposite of which can be found within communities in the *convivencia* model. These subjects emphasized religious groups so vehemently that it encouraged a sort of multiculturalism in its own right, resulting in the impactful cultural exchange of ideas. First-generation *conversos* were also rooted strongly in
religion until their forced conversion, after which they could not belong to a community, and had no choice but to select various elements of habits around them and piece together a new identity, as legal and fitting as they could.

This creative bug is not the only ingredient to our identities that has lasted centuries. The dilemmas of identity that arose in both the *convivencia* and *converso* paradigms are still in full form today. It is important to connect these historical moments to ourselves, through the contemporary, though abstract debates about the varying conceptions of the self and how identity is constructed. The breadth of contemporary rhetoric about individual and community-based identities is just one piece that is relevant of the discussion today. But the debate cuts deeper yet. Hunter’s Culture Wars are a substantiated and jarring example of the profound importance of this discussion, and its pertinence to ourselves is only too obvious, as it surfaces in our daily lives in power politics and ideological demonstrations around the country. And while the Culture Wars postulation presupposes a liberal regime as a background to its conditions, the underlying dilemmas are revealing of the longevity of the identity debate.

It is the subjectivity and disagreement over what constitutes ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ that pave the way for such a fundamental argument, both within the Culture Wars and in the debate between the culturally based and individually-based conceptions of the self. The more honest discussions about what constitutes the moral right and wrong happen as we reach an increasingly pure vision of our worldviews. This vision can come about with more freedoms, and less institutional hegemony to cloud our perspectives.
The American Culture Wars are composed of two sides: orthodox and progressive. The orthodox side embraces a traditionalist worldview, which is based on a more communitarian lifestyle. The orthodox vision is one that continues the traditions of the past, united in its belief in pre-established morals and custom. The progressive side, on the other hand, looks to a more individualistic worldview, one that emphasizes individualism in making a moral decision rather than a group consensus or a decision on behalf of a group.

Culture Wars are a fitting example of how modernization fits in closely with the paradigms of convivencia and conversos, and how a model that seems outdated in historical terms, under repressive politics, and generally unheard of in the modern age, can still stand. The underlying problem, as demonstrated by Hunter’s Culture Wars analysis, is that the issue of constructing an identity is founded on our most foundational inclinations.

Ultimately, there are evident parallels between the past and the present day, despite their spanning many centuries. We can see the utterly critical inclination on which this discussion hinges, and it seems only logical that it would span so many centuries. When we compare such illustrative models as *convivencia* and the *conversos*, we begin to isolate the underlying issues after peeling away the superficial ones. The government in power of the time has proven to be a formative piece of this puzzle, but there must be more. If there were not, liberal regimes would have wiped out such identity problems in a heartbeat. The ideology of the day, too, must factor in, but cannot be the only clue left. As it is, however, we are free of an oppressive government, free of an ideology based solely in religious and forcing only
homogenous communities, and yet we still suffer, discuss, debate, and experience the same critical tension that defines how the self is constructed and developed. In power politics, this tension often seems to swing as a pendulum, wavering from the culturalist perspective that aims to decentralize, to the liberal template that attempts to preserve the solitary agency of its citizens.

It seems that these considerations of identity are inherent in our very humanity. They are contingent on an individual basis, and formed largely, but not entirely by governmental and social influence. Our development is not either individual or collective, but rather a unique mix of the two, as swayed by our surroundings, and, most importantly, our interactions with each other.
**APPENDIX**

Figure 1: Church of Santa María la Blanca, Toledo, Spain

![Figure 1: Church of Santa María la Blanca, Toledo, Spain](image)

Figure 2: Astrolabe, astronomical computer

![Figure 2: Astrolabe, astronomical computer](image)


Figure 3: Translations to English from each façade of King Ferdinand’s Tomb

**Latin:** Here lies the most illustrious King Ferdinand of Castile, Toledo, León, Galicia, Seville, Cordoba, Murcia, and Jaén, who conquered all of Spain (Hispania), the most loyal, the most veracious, the most constant, the most just, the most energetic, the most tenacious, the most liberal, the most patient, the most humble and the most effective in fear and in the service of God. He conquered and all but exterminated the arrogance of his enemies, protected, raised up, and exalted the men who were his friends; he captured the city of Seville, the capital of all Spain, from the hands of the pagans and restored it to the Christians, and that is the city where he paid his debt to nature and passed to the Lord on the last day of May in the year of the Incarnation, 1252.

**Arabic:** Here is the tomb of the great king Don Ferdinand, lord of Castile, Toledo, León, Galicia, Seville, Cordoba, Murcia, and Jaén, may God be pleased with him, who ruled all of Spain (Andalus), (who is) the most faithful, the most veracious, the most enduring, the most just, the most valiant, the most propitious, the most noble, the most forbearing, the most visionary, the greatest in modesty, most suitable to God and His greatest servant. He died (God had mercy on him) on the Friday night and God raised him. He honored and ennobled his friends and took possession of the city of Seville, which is the capital of all of Spain, and in which he who broke and destroyed all of his enemies died on the twentieth of the month of First Rabia of the year 550 of the Hijra.

**Hebrew:** In this place is the tomb of the great king Don Ferdinand, lord of Castile, Toledo, León, Galicia, Seville, Cordoba, Murcia, and Jaén – may his soul be in paradise – who seized all of Spain (Sefarad) the upright, the righteous, the enduring, the mighty, the pious, the forbearing, the one who feared God and served Him all of his days, shattered and destroyed all of his enemies, praised and honored all of his friends, and took the city of Seville which is the capital of all of Spain, in which he died on the night of Friday, the twenty-second of the month of Sivan, of the year 5012 since the creation of the world.

**Castilian:** Here lies the most honored king Don Ferdinand, lord of Castile and Toledo, of León, of Galicia, of Seville, of Cordoba, of Murcia, and of Jaén, he who conquered all of Spain (toda España), the most loyal and most truthful and the most forthright, the strongest and most decorated, the most

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illustrious and the most forbearing and the most humble and the one who is most fearful of God, and the one who did the most service to Him; who broke and destroyed all of his enemies, who praised and honored all of his friends, and conquered the city of Seville which is the capital of all of Spain and died in it on the last day of May in our era, the year of 1290.

Figure 4: Characteristic white and red horseshoe arches, Mosque of Córdoba
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Dunlop, Steven J. "La Mezquita De Córdoba". Córdoba, Spain, 1996. Photograph. This mosque, known as "La Mezquita" -- Spanish for 'the mosque' -- is currently used as a cathedral. It features supporting columns made of talc (soapstone).2010. <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/ce/Mosque_of_Cordoba_Spain.jpg>.


