



Reconstructing 'True Convivencia': The Roles of Muwalladun, Mozarab, and Jews in Coexistence in Al-Andalus During the Golden Age of Umayyad and First *Taifa* Periods

Mohammad Nor Bin Zaidi

Master's student at the Department of History and Civilisation
International Islamic University Malaysia
Norzaidi9@gmail.com

Abstract

This article investigates the unique interaction between three social groups; *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs* and Jews, that lived together during Muslim Spain's era (732 CE-1492 CE) with the focus on unravelling the socio-cultural mechanism behind this interaction which led to the culmination of an interesting period known as "*la Convivencia*". Viewing this topic through socio-cultural lenses, this article considers this approach the best method to understand *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs* and Jews' interaction by assessing them as undergoing the process of acculturation and assimilation. This article aims to address the scholarly gap which, due to the lack of socio-cultural perspective of *La Convivencia*, led to some scholars denying the existence of this period. The presence of diverse communities in *al-Andalus* created multiple variables that pushed for coexistence like the emergence of new social groups, *Muwalladun*, which were affected by the influence of dominant Arabic culture and increased their rapid conversion to Islam due to equal opportunities for social mobility as Muslims. In addition, a similar role was exercised by *Mozarabs*, who built a connection with the brothers in faith in northern Iberia, spreading their tolerant attitude and knowledge gained in the south through trade and immigration. As for Jews, they benefited tremendously from this interaction; with the Muslims as the model and benchmark, their society prospered and flourished to the point of creating the Jewish Golden Age.

Keywords

Muwalladun, Mozarab, Jews, La Convivencia, coexistence, tolerance

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji secara mendalam **interaksi unik** antara tiga kelompok sosial (**Muwalladun, Mozarab, dan Yahudi**) yang hidup berdampingan di Spanyol Muslim (732 M - 1492 M), dengan fokus pada pemahaman **mekanisme sosio-kultural** yang mendasari dinamika tersebut, yang berujung pada puncak periode "*la Convivencia*". Melalui lensa sosio-kultural, penelitian ini menganggap pendekatan tersebut sebagai metodologi optimal untuk menganalisis interaksi ketiga kelompok tersebut sebagai proses **akulturasi** dan **asimilasi**. Pendekatan ini bertujuan untuk mengatasi kesenjangan keilmuan yang, akibat ketiadaan perspektif sosio-kultural terhadap *La Convivencia*, telah menyebabkan beberapa akademisi menyangkal eksistensi periode tersebut. Kehadiran komunitas yang beragam di *al-Andalus* menciptakan **variabel multifaktorial** yang mendorong koeksistensi, seperti munculnya kelompok *Muwalladun* yang terpengaruh budaya Arab dominan, memfasilitasi konversi cepat



mereka ke Islam berkat kesempatan mobilitas sosial yang setara. Peran serupa juga dimainkan oleh Mozarab, yang menjalin koneksi dengan saudara seiman di Iberia utara, menyebarkan toleransi dan pengetahuan yang diperoleh dari selatan melalui perdagangan dan imigrasi. Sementara itu, kaum Yahudi sangat diuntungkan dari interaksi ini; dengan menjadikan Muslim sebagai model, masyarakat mereka mengalami kemakmuran hingga menciptakan **Zaman Keemasan Yahudi**.

Katakunci:

Muwalladun, Mozarab, Jews, La Convivencia, coexistence, tolerance

Introduction

La Convivencia was a Spanish term for coexistence. It was coined by a Spanish cultural historian, *Americo Castro* for a period of religious coexistence and religious-cultural tolerance between three major social groups in *al-Andalus* under Muslim rule: Muslims, Christians and Jews. It was a disputed topic, and much debate existed about its relevancy and practical existence. *Muwalladun* or *Muladi*, by definition, were Muslims of Hispano-Roman descent or the descendants of a mixed marriage between Arab or Berber with Hispano-Roman who lived in *al-Andalus*. At the same time, *Mozarabs* or *Musta'rab* were the Iberian Christians who lived under the rule of Muslim Spain. The Jews in this context refer to Sephardi Jews who lived or migrated to Spain. All these social groups were instrumental in the creation of *Convivencia*. The interaction between *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs* and Jews was extensively discussed by historians but usually under the framework of political and religious history. The old narrative of this particular period was that these three groups clashed throughout the medieval era. However, through the socio-cultural methods, this interaction is much more humane than what has been portrayed by previous historians. This article emphasises the use of the term *Muwalladun* instead of Muslims - usually consisted of Arabs and Berbers due to the size of population, which was the majority of the medieval Iberian population within the period of the studies. Even though Arabs and Berbers indeed contributed towards the realisation of *La Convivencia*, their role as the elites and rulers will prevent this article from analysing the situation in a socio-cultural perspective. Besides, by the time of Abd-Rahman III (r. 912 CE- 961 CE), the term Arabs, Berbers, and *Muwalladun* became loosely interchangeable (Sullivan, 2012). It also has sociological significance in contributing to the flow of discourse with the other two social groups.

The period of *Convivencia* was proposed by historians, starting from the *Umayyad* rule of Andalusia in 732 CE until the fall of the *Nasrid* Kingdom of Granada in 1492 CE. Under the context of the socio-cultural narrative, the Muslim rule of *al-Andalus* can be divided into two periods; the first one was both the *Umayyad* Emirate/Caliphate and the First *Taifa* period, and the second one was the North African Berber dynasties, which were *Almoravid* and *Almohad* period. In the first period, Christians and Jews enjoyed a relative tolerance policy imposed by the *Umayyad* and the *Taifa* kings, which encouraged the development of long-lasting traditions and the impression of both cultures in the later period. However, during the second period, *Almoravid* and *Almohad's* approaches were conservative in that various restrictions were imposed on them, and the tensions rose to the point of a massacre.

This article chose 912 CE- 1110 CE as the specific timeline because it was the peak of *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs* and Jews' interaction and can be considered the "true" period of *Convivencia*. It started from the reign of Caliph Abd Rahman III (r. 912 CE- 961 CE) of the *Umayyad* Caliphate of Cordoba until the end of the First *Taifa* period in 1110 CE after *Almoravid's* complete conquest of southern Iberia. The relevance of this period was when the policies adopted by Abd Rahman III opened the possibility of healthy multi-way conversation within the layer of Andalusian society compared to his predecessors. There was an active period of inter-ethnic interaction during the First *Taifa* period. The period went up to 1110 CE because the treatment done by North African dynasties strained the relationship between these three social groups (Wasserstein, 2019).

The main primary sources used in this article are *al-Bayan al-Mughrib fi Akhbar al- Andalus wal-Maghrib* (Book of the Amazing Story of the History of al-Andalus and Maghrib), shortly known as *Bayan al-Mughrib*, which was one of the surviving records about the history of al-Andalus, North Africa, and their contemporaries of that period. However, this record has many lost chapters, and most of the copies were translated into Spanish and French. This article uses the French translation written by Edmond Fagnan. Another primary source this article refers to is the English translation of *Indicus Luminosus*, written by Paulus Alvarus, one of the Christian chroniclers that described the Christian society at that period. Despite its hostile tone, it became a valuable source for the socio-cultural interpretation of Andalusian society at that time.

The existing literature about this topic such as *Convivencia: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Medieval Spain* by Mann, Glick and Dodds (1992) proposes an extensive research of the interaction between Muslims, Christians and Jews in general. However, they did not focus on the issue of *Muwalladun* and *Mozarabs* as culturally significant in the process of the inter-ethnic interaction. This article aims to identify the culmination of *La Convivencia* in medieval Iberia due to the role played by *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs* and Jews during their daily interaction rather than to view their interaction through a political top-down approach. The article's data analysis is done through a socio-cultural approach by assessing a general account of the interaction between the targeted groups through their political or economic functions within the Andalusian society and the biography of several contemporaries of the particular period. Using socio-cultural historical framework that emphasises history from below, this article discusses the factors that make *Convivencia* practical.

Method

This article employs a **qualitative historical research methodology** to investigate the socio-cultural mechanisms underpinning "la Convivencia" in al-Andalus, diverging from traditional political and religious frameworks by adopting a **history-from-below perspective** that emphasizes the daily interactions of *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs*, and Sephardi Jews, aiming for a more nuanced and "humane" understanding of their coexistence. The study precisely delimits its temporal scope to **912 CE – 1110 CE**, identifying this period from Caliph Abd al-Rahman III's reign through the First *Taifa* period as the "true" epoch of *Convivencia*, chosen for its policies fostering multi-way societal conversations and active inter-ethnic interaction before the strain introduced by the conservative North African Berber dynasties. Primary data are drawn from *Al-Bayan al-Mughrib* and the English translation of

Indicus Luminosus, with analysis utilizing a **socio-cultural historical framework** to assess interactions through both general accounts and the biographies of contemporaries, thereby exploring the practical factors contributing to Convivencia and addressing existing scholarly gaps by focusing on the culturally significant roles of Muwalladun and Mozarabs beyond a top-down political analysis.

Results and Discussion

The Emergence of Andalusian Society

Initially, to understand this unique interaction and how these social groups contribute toward coexistence, a background stage needed to be set up with the socio-cultural situation of *al-Andalus* before the reign of Abd Rahman III (r. 912 CE- 961 CE). The history of Muslim Spain was not without conflict between these social groups. Since the first arrival of Muslim armies on the Iberian shores, ethnic tension already existed within the Muslim circle between Arabs and Berbers. Some historians viewed this issue as a nuance of political aspirations. Nevertheless, it gave the idea that even Muslims who adhered to egalitarian tenets could not escape ethnic conflict in their history.

After the complete conquest of Andalusia in 732 CE, the social situation of *al-Andalus* was composed of a minority of Arabs and Berbers who governed the majority Hispano-Roman population and some minorities of Jewish and Visigoth descent. The Arab settlers were divided into two subgroups: the *Baladis* (early Arab settlers mainly from Yemen) and the *Shamis* (Arabs of Syrian origin who came in a later period). Both subgroups are also referred to as Kalbites and Qaysites, respectively. These Arabs formed an Arab aristocracy and occupied all the urban settlements in *al-Andalus*. Berbers can also be divided into two subgroups: the *Baranis* (Berber tribes that lived in the area between Algeria and Morocco) and the *Butr* (Berber tribes that lived in the area between Tunisia and Egypt). Most of these Berbers were sedentary, unlike the Nomad Berbers. They formed their aristocracy that occupied the rural settlements of Andalusia. The presence of Berbers was heavily needed by Muslim authority in Andalusia because they formed the bulk of Muslim armies against the Christian Kingdom of Asturias in the north. The Arabs and Berbers always had constant power struggles because both groups feared being influenced by each other through the Arabisation of Berbers and the Berberisation of Arabs (Glick, 2005).

The Christians under the Muslim rule were mainly Hispano-Romans and Visigoths. Both Christians and Jews were treated as *dhimmis* (Protected people) according to Sharia law as they were the *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book). This treatment granted Christians and Jews a relatively autonomous life in which they governed their communities though only limited to religious and legal organisations. Politically, they were still subject to Muslim rule. In general, their social situation improved under the later rule of the *Umayyads* (Collins, 1995). *Umayyad* administration in *al-Andalus* before Abd Rahman III (r. 912 CE- 961 CE) practised tribalism and Arabism at its finest and treated *Muwalladun* and *Mozarabs* as inferiors which became among the catalysts of various ethnic tension incidents such as the Berber Revolt (740 CE-743 CE), the collapse of *Umayyad* Caliphate of Damascus in 750 CE, and the Ibn Hafsun Rebellion (883 CE-928 CE).

The Role of *Muwalladun*

As the Andalusian society evolved, so did their socio-cultural situation, according to the political climate of *al-Andalus*. Between the 9th and 11th centuries, a significant shift in Andalusian demography occurred. A new social group, *Muwalladun* or, in some historical writings, Neo-Muslims, emerged due to various period variables such as social mobility, religious enlightenment and assimilation. This article highlights *Muwalladun* as a distinct group rather than grouping it with Arabs and Berbers because their unique existence built the bridge between Muslims and Christians in Iberia. After the 10th century, the term *Muwalladun* becomes insignificant because they were absorbed by Arabs and Berbers culturally, making it difficult to differentiate them as they adopted or assumed the Arab/Berber tribal lineage. This led to the changing of their names and completely erasing their Iberian heritage. The *Muwalladun*'s Iberian heritage was erased because of "Islamic clientage" known as *mawl* -, this means the Arabs and Berbers accepted *Muwalladun* as clients of their tribes and became Muslim automatically (Glick, 2005). This article views this idea as questionable. It does have some truth, where the *Muwalladun* assumed Arab and Berber tribal lineage, yet it was more cultural than religious. To call it "Islamic clientage" implies this process as a systematic conversion to Islam. Two main reasons contributed to the rise of *Muwalladun* as a social group: first, the mass and rapid conversion of Hispano-Romans and Visigoths to Islam and second, the intermarriage between Arab/Berber and Christian women.

The mass and rapid conversion of the Iberian natives to Islam was phenomenal. It can be linked to the benefit of social mobility and the attractiveness of Islamic teachings. The religious motive behind their conversion was in question; however, the *Umayyad* authority was tolerant by not forcing Christians and Jews to convert but rather treated them as *dhimmis* who were entitled to an autonomous status. Consequently, due to their experience with the cruel Visigothic rule, which saw many Hispano-Romans being tortured and mistreated, Islam became the beacon of hope for them to embrace compared to Christianity (Imamuddin, 1981). Conversely, despite Islam treating the people of the Book positively as *dhimmis*, in practice, *Umayyad* administrations imposed certain limitations on their political, legal and social standings (Glick, 2005). The conversion to Islam can be viewed as an opportunity to be treated equally and access many rights accompanying it. This benefit of social mobility can be considered among the reasons behind rapid conversion.

The importance of *Muwalladun* in Andalusian history can be presented with their origin and nature. Since they were Christian at first, they understood the Iberian customs and traditions, and the descendants of Arab-Iberians/Berber-Iberians might also be educated in Iberian culture by their Iberian mothers. Since *Muwalladun* have a close affinity towards the Christian Iberians, it can be concluded that they will always have good interactions and could intermingle with each other well. Besides, *Muwalladun* also preserved their *Mozarabic* languages, making extensive exchanges with *Mozarabs* possible. The problem of certain historians was that they defined the concept of *dhimmis* and the autonomous status of religious groups (Christians and Jews) as being enclosed or isolated within the community. However, it was the opposite. The evidence can be seen in the rise of middle-class people of various religious backgrounds, either Muslim or Christian, or Jews, between the 9th and 11th centuries. The emergence of the middle-class highlighted the existence of literate and skillful

people such as merchants, artisans, smiths and others. If the idea of lacking religious, social or cultural cohesion due to being segregated by *dhimmis* status is true, this social class would not emerge because their main occupation depended on being involved in daily interactions with other people. Thus, the *Muwalladun*, as a new social group that encompassed the traits of both Muslims and Christians, became the socio-cultural bridge between these groups and provided a good foundation for inter-ethnic interaction.

The Role of Mozarabs

Muwalladun and *Mozarabs* are sometimes used interchangeably because of the conversion to Islam, and their similar cultures can be considered indistinctive unless they pronounce their religion. Much of the history of *Mozarabs* was rather vague and less recorded. However, the popular one came from the individuals who worked under Abd Rahman III (r. 912 CE- 961 CE), such as Recemendus (Rabi' Ibn Zayd), while another came from the one who was involved with the Martyrdom of Cordoba in 850 CE, like Paulus Alvarus (800 CE-861 CE) who wrote an account from the Christian perspective in regards to the Emirate of Cordoba. Generally, his account criticised the Muslim authority, which was motivated by his religious fanaticism (Gil, 1973). The role of *Mozarabs* in contributing to *Convivencia* can be assessed during the First *Taifa* period (1009 CE-1110 CE). There were records of *Mozarabs'* trade activities across Iberia, especially to the north. They acted as the intermediaries between Muslims in the south and the Christians in the north. These actions showed an active cultural exchange between Muslims and Christians. The Christians recorded the *Mozarabs* who migrated to the north in the 11th century as having Arabic names, indicating that many of the *Mozarabs* have been acculturated into Arabic culture. *Mozarabs* were also instrumental in spreading knowledge to the northern Christians. Their immigration to the north usually led to the creation of Christian elites. The *Taifa* rulers also employed some of them as diplomats. The *Mozarab* population experienced a steady decline in the 11th century, but a portion was concentrated in Malaga and Valencia.

The reason behind the emergence of *Mozarabic* culture can be attributed to inspiration drawn from Muslims as they attempted to imitate Muslim culture and behaviours. The inspiration motivated *Mozarabs* to participate in Cordoba's "nearly" cosmopolitan society. Another interesting occurrence were the *Saqaliba*, slaves of Slavic origin who had been imported starting from the reign of Abd Rahman III (r. 912 CE- 961 CE). They involved in various occupations, such as eunuchs in the harem, palace guards, artisans and others. Some historians claimed that the backbone of the Andalusian economy was slave labour, but this claim was a generalisation of the complex economic structure of *al-Andalus*. The *Saqaliba* did play some roles in the Andalusian economy but not a major one; if this kind of situation happened, where did the Muslims, *Mozarabs* and Jews (famous as merchants and had extensive trading networks across the Mediterranean Sea) gain their income from? The Caliphate of Cordoba also, at some point in history, had achieved economic prosperity through the contribution of these three social groups, especially the Jews. The introduction of *Saqaliba* into Andalusian politics was a political move to balance the Muslim and Christian influence despite *Saqaliba* being Christians in origin, they were supposedly not to be affiliated with any faction and only answered to the Caliphs (Scales, 1993).

A noteworthy case of unique inter-ethnic interaction was the story of *Rodrigo Díaz “El Campeador” de Vivar* (1043 CE-1099 CE), better known as *El-Cid*. El-Cid was an evolved word of As-Sayyid meaning the Lord. It is an honorific title given by the Muslims to him. He was a notable figure in Muslim and Christian Spanish literature. He was a Christian knight who served Muslim and Christian kings during the First *Taifa* period. His armies were composed of Christians, *Mozarabs* and Muslims. *El-Cid* befriended King al-Mustain II, the ruler of Taifa of Zaragoza, and helped him negotiate peace with various Christian rulers. It did portray that regardless of their religion, the interaction between these social groups was not restricted to their religious domain but went with the flow of the political situation at that time.

The Role of Jews

The article has discussed the role of *Muwalladun* and *Mozarabs* in *Convivencia*. Now, the last social group is the Jews. The foundation of *Convivencia* was due to the achievement and development made by the Jews as a minority under Muslim rule in *al-Andalus*. Some historians viewed the Jews’ role as a blessing in disguise on account of the fact that they still faced discrimination in history. However, the Jewish accounts portrayed different expressions of their livelihood under Muslim rule, which was much brighter than under Christian rule. On a societal level, the Jews always faced suppression during Christian Visigothic rule, not only by the authorities but also the commoners (Cohen, 2021). In general, they were oppressed to the point of forced conversion to Christianity. The coming of Muslims to the Iberian Peninsula provided them with an opportunity to survive and strive, and later, as *dhimmis*, their situation improved.

Interestingly, the interaction between Jews and the other two groups increased dramatically during and after the reign of Abd Rahman III (r. 912 CE- 961 CE). Due to their advanced skills and talents in many aspects of economy and politics, many Jews were employed by the *Umayyad* court. These high-position Jews were regarded as their community leaders and voices. The Andalusian Jews at first lacked cultural development as they only relied on the oral transmission of knowledge passed down within their community for centuries. The rise of Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (915 CE-970 CE) however, made the Andalusian Jews experienced a widespread cultural revival. The Jews who lived in Andalusia were the most Arabized group compared to the *Mozarabs*. They viewed Arabic culture as rich and an opportunity to be used for cultural advancement. With prominent Jews like Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (915 CE-970 CE) being employed in public office, he benefited from his position for the Jewish interest domestically and internationally (Menocal, 2009). In *al-Andalus*, he financed the Jewish cultural institutions (*Yeshiva*) and became the patron for Jewish scholars (*Rabbis*). This situation also led to the patronage of outside Jews, such as Mizrahi Jews who originated from the Middle East and mastered *Rabbinic* knowledge and language to nurture the culture of Andalusian Jews.

Besides these aspects, the Jews also approached their cultural expression through the culture of their overlord, in which much Jewish literature was written in Judeo-Arabic. The Jews were inspired by Arabic poetry and produced many Hebrew literature with the style and standard according to the Hispano-Arabic style. They followed Muslim’s intense pursuit of knowledge by incorporating the same spirit in Talmudic studies. Their scholarship in science and literature was written in the Judeo-

Arabic language thus, pushed further their Hebrew language boundary. Due to this Jewish cultural revival, some historians call this period the Jewish Golden Age; however, it only materialised during the *Umayyad* and first *Taifa* periods. During the First *Taifa* period, some educated Jews assumed vizier positions in various

Taifa. The famous one was Samuel Ibn Naghrela (993 CE-1056 CE), also known as *Samuel Hanagid*, the Prince of Jews who served as vizier in the court of Zirid Granada. They spoke the Judeo-Arabic language and dressed similarly to the Arabs, which, from the outside, usually could not be differentiated from the Muslims. This interaction is not only limited to politics but also to the economy. The Jewish and Muslim merchants treated each other as equals and conducted their business through shipments across the Mediterranean Sea without issues (Goitein, 2015). This treatment occurred because Jewish merchants had a vast trade network in the Mediterranean Sea, which they had built through a high level of trust with other Jewish communities, especially in Cairo, the Levant and Constantinople. Jews were also typically known for having an occupation as money lenders, and Christian records portrayed their activities of lending money to Muslims and Christians as prevalent at that time.

Socio-Cultural Analysis of la Convivencia

In general, these three social groups, *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs* and Jews, have one thing in common: they were Arabized and influenced by Muslims (Arab and Berber) in every aspect of life (social, culture, religion, politics and economy). This similarity was the ultimate tool to create a harmonious interaction between these groups. It was far from the idea of cosmopolitanism or utopia, which was quite impossible and anachronistic because this particular period of Andalusian society was during the medieval era. Medieval Europe was famously known for its rigidity in the class hierarchy due to feudalism and almost non-existent social mobility. Nevertheless, this worldview of medieval practice was loosely applied in Muslim society at that time. There was evidence of social mobility within their hierarchy, such as a slave (*Saqaliba*) becoming a freeman, and in the case of Mujahid al-Amiri (d.1045 CE), a slave even became a ruler of *Taifa* of Denia (1010 CE-1227 CE) - which existed during First *Taifa* period (Wasserstein, 1985). Some historians might see this slave's ascension to the throne as a person who took advantage of the chaotic time after the disintegration of the Caliphate of Cordoba, which was true in a sense, but for the people of that region to accept this slave as a ruler showed a lenient attitude or a certain degree of social acceptance at that time for this practice to happen.

The religio-socio-cultural shift in their interactions can be explained through two important socio-cultural activities: social assimilation and cultural acculturation. Both socio-cultural activities occurred due to the presence of a dominant culture. As a reminder, the dominant culture here was Arabic, not Islamic. There was a distinction between Arabisation and Islamisation. Western historians interchangeably used these processes as they viewed both as the same. However, it was different and happened simultaneously through a parallel process. The Arabisation of Iberian natives was cultural acculturation in which specific cultural markers within Hispano-Roman culture were still maintained but accommodated with the dominant Arabic culture. The result of this process created *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs* and Arabized Jews. Then, Islamisation was a religious transition accompanied by its principles. In some records,

Muwalladun, despite being Muslims, drank alcohol and celebrated Christian holidays (Collins, 1995). This portrayal led to the belief in a somewhat different version of Islam, which some historians assumed was the synthesization of Islam and local Hispano-Roman culture (*Muwalladism*). The article argued differently for this idea by highlighting the definition of Islamisation proposed by al-Attas (2011): the Islamization of particular cultural groups happened in a slow and steady process. It began with the emancipation from magical, mythical, animistic, and ethnic cultural traditions that were incompatible with Islam, followed by the liberation from secular control over one's intellect and language. Any fundamental and commendable aspects of pre-Islamic civilization that unite people and are deemed compatible with Islam are assimilated into Islamic civilization. Thus, historians should not make misleading academic guesses about Islamization without understanding its essence. Social assimilation referred to the Andalusian society as a whole. All social groups assimilated into a vibrant community of *al-Andalus* where the Muslims (Arab, Berber and *Muwalladun*), Christians (*Mozarabs*), and Jews intermingled in a subtle, harmonious environment.

The dominant Arabic culture contributed to the easiness of conversation between these social groups. Andalusian society might have been a monolingual or bilingual society at some point in history. In the acculturation process, many of the Jews and Christians started to speak in Arabic and also dress like Arabs. Both social groups also assimilated their language with the Arabic language and used Arabic script for daily transactions. The *Muwalladun* and *Mozarabs* (Arabised Christians) spoke the *Mozarabic* language. This dialect of Romance language borrowed some Arabic vocabulary and used the *Aljamiado* script, while the Arabised Jews used Judeo-Arabic, which they wrote in the Arabic language in Hebrew script. The prominence of the Arabic language as *lingua franca* in Andalusian society encouraged healthy interaction between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. This Arabisation of Christians was expressed negatively by Paulus Alvarus (800 CE-861 CE), a Christian theologian who commented on how his Christian youths were Arabised and forgot their own culture. Alvarus wrote:

Surely all the Christian youth who are outstanding in appearance, eloquent in tongue, conspicuous in habit and gesture, outstanding in heathen erudition, adorned with Arabic eloquence engage most avidly with the volumes of the Chaldeans, and read them most intently, and discuss them most ardently and bringing them together with huge zeal they spread them through praise with broad and restricted tongue, ignoring the beauty of the church and the rivers of the church, despising the things emanating from Paradise as the cheapest things? Alas, the Christians do not know their law, and the Latins ignore their language. (Al-Tamimi, 2021)

The acculturation and assimilation process happened within the Andalusian society in stages. In the early stages of the First *Umayyad* rule of Andalusia (732 CE-750 CE), most of the population was the Christian Hispano-Romans. The mass conversion to Islam and intermarriage heavily happened from this period and beyond. The intermarriage between Muslims and Christians not only occurred among Arab/Berber aristocracy but was also practised by the commoners. Caliph Abd Rahman III (r. 912 CE- 961 CE) was proof of this intermarriage as his mother was a Basque. His physical features were a fair complexion and a reddish beard which he

dyed black to look like an Arab (Idhari, 1901). This period was portrayed as a time of constant civil wars between various factions of Arab and Berber.

During this period, the Emirate of Cordoba (756 CE-929 CE) can be viewed as the middle stages in which the majority of the population was the new social group, *Muwalladun*. The major trend of this period was the fight for recognition by *Muwalladun* and *Mozarabs* through rebellions. This event happened due to them being treated as inferior to the Arab/Berbers. The reign of Abd Rahman III (r. 912 CE- 961 CE) was the stage in which the period of high cultural exchange with the caliph enforced several policies that further encouraged the interaction between Muslims, Christians and Jews, such as the abolishment of problematic Arab/Berber aristocracy and the incorporation of several Christians and Jews into public offices, for example, Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (915 CE-970 CE) was a Jew who was appointed as physician and vizier by Abd Rahman III. At the same time, Recemundus (Rabi' Ibn Zayd) was a *Mozarab* bishop who became Abd Rahman III's secretary and also ambassador to Otto I of the Holy Roman Empire (Wintle, 2003).

The last and continuous stage was the First Taifa period (1009 CE-1110 CE). During this period, the interaction between these three social groups became common and rigorous past the boundary of faith and culture. The distinction still exists; however, their social acceptance was already established, and the Mozarabs and Jews had already integrated within the Andalusian society and pledged their loyalty to their Taifa kings. Different Taifas have different policies toward Mozarabs and Jews, but generally, all of them enjoyed relative freedom and achieved a level of tolerance. Thus, these stages showed a delicate process that built up from resistance towards acculturation and assimilation and later evolved into mild interaction that led to rapid conversion. It ended with the social acceptance and Arabisation of these social groups, which laid the foundation or medium for them to easily interact and function within Andalusian society (Wasserstein, 1985).

The Myth of *la Convivencia*?

In another historical narrative, the *Convivencia* was considered a myth, that there was no such religious coexistence between Muslims, Christians and Jews within Spanish history. Some of the arguments against "*La Convivencia*" expressed by Fernandez-Morera (2016) was that the successful contribution of *al-Andalus* in culture and learning through the interaction between Muslims, Christians and Jews was only done by the upper echelon of Andalusian society and not the ordinary people. It was confirmed that the upper echelon of Andalusian society achieved culture and learning success, but these contributions were for the well-being of the polity and its ordinary people. If given time and a suitable education medium, it will eventually spread among the commoners.

Cohen (2021) argued that it was a myth created by Jews to condemn the Christians for their harsh treatment of them. A religious coexistence or tolerance could not exist in that particular era (medieval era). For this argument, Cohen (2021) believed that interaction between Muslims, Christians and Jews should be viewed objectively with chronological events. He agreed that the Christian treatment of Jews was harsh compared to Muslim treatment, but it did not produce a religious coexistence where everyone interacted freely. The article agreed that the so-called religious coexistence in practicality was impossible because his idea of coexistence was

the same as cosmopolitan or utopian environments, but if this coexistence was toned down and observed through a socio-cultural perspective, the subtle, harmonious interaction did exist, which can be concluded as mild coexistence. Lastly, some historians presented that the Muslim treatment of Christians and Jews throughout Andalusian history was the opposite of the *Convivencia*, which was also true during the *Almoravid* and *Almohad* periods. The historical records cannot deny that these dynasties did oppress both Christians and Jews, but to generalise this treatment as what Islamic teachings condoned was wrong. As the article proposed in the period earlier, at some point in Andalusian history, a version of coexistence did happen and created an everlasting legacy in various historical records.

The strong arguments against *Convivencia* that were constantly being used were the incident of the Martyrdom of Cordoba (850 CE-859 CE) and the Granadan Massacre (1066 CE). Both incidents involved the killing of Christians and Jews. It is undeniable that these events happened. However, their causes were justifiable based on that period. First, the Martyrdoms of Cordoba involved 48 Christians who were charged with apostasy and blasphemy because they insulted Prophet *Muhammad* ﷺ in public (Fierro, 2008). According to *Sharia* law, an insult against the prophet can be punished by death. The punishment was done according to the ruler's law, and the convicted breached their agreement as *dhimmis*. As for the Granadan Massacre, the killing of Joseph Ibn Naghrela (1035 CE-1066 CE), the son of Samuel Hanagid and thousands of Jews due to the consequences of *Joseph's* political intrigue backfiring. He sent a letter to al-Mu'tasim Ibn Sumadih (1051 CE-1091 CE), Almeria's ruler, stating that he would open Granada for invasion as long as al-Mu'tasim Ibn Sumadih appointed him as the Granadan ruler. However, Muslims discovered this plot, and it caused an uproar, which led to the massacre under the pretext that the Jews also breached the agreement as *dhimmis* (Fernández-Morera, 2016).

Based on these descriptions, the religious fervour during that period was high, and there was tension among social groups. Any antagonistic move by Christians and Jews could cause an unexpected reaction. The religious fanaticism of Christians at that time who felt that their religion was being threatened by Muslim rule caused them to publicly express their dissatisfaction by insulting the Muslim prophet, which led to their execution under the *Sharia* law. In contrast, the political miscalculation of Joseph Ibn Naghrela, who was ambitious and already despised by the masses due to his incompetence, led to dissent among Muslims and caused the massacre when his plan backfired.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the political overview of *Convivencia* always portrayed Muslims' cruelty when it comes to the treatment of non-Muslims, Christians and Jews, especially in the context of *al- Andalus*. However, not all the time throughout history saw this happen; a more focused approach and period should be used to analyse the actual identification of the "*Convivencia*". Through the social-cultural historical framework, there were pros and cons in reconstructing the narrative of a "religious coexistence utopia". However, a new narrative can be made with the assumption that socio-cultural interaction and tolerance did exist to a certain extent. The historical records and biographies did mention a positive outlook on several prominent figures due to

this coexistence in *al-Andalus*. The role of *Muwalladun*, *Mozarabs* and Jews contributed to this idea. *Muwalladun*, as a new social group, was a product of Muslim and Christian interaction and created a new perspective with this shared connection. *Mozarabs* and Jews who have been Arabised throughout Andalusian history also benefited from this connection of a vibrant community in *al-Andalus*.

Convivencia cannot be perceived through the clash of civilisation paradigms that emphasise the dichotomy of Islam and the West. However, it has to be constructed through the accounts of contemporary Andalusians of that period, such as Ibn al-Qutiyya (d. 977), Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (915 CE-970 CE) and Paulus Alvarus (800 CE-861 CE). Besides, the period of *Convivencia* should be narrowed to the period proposed by this article, which was 912 CE-1110 CE. This period was the peak of these three social groups interacting, and it provided a general understanding of coexistence. In addition, the approach should be a socio-cultural method in order to gain a better impression of the social environment of that particular period. With this guideline, a *Convivencia* did happen in a short period, but the effect lasted until the end of the *Reconquista*.

Declaration of competing interest

There are no known conflicts of interest.

Journal History

Received : 20 February 2025

Accepted : 26 May 2025

Published : 09 June 2025

References

- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (2011). *Historical fact and fiction*. Penerbit UTM Press.
- Al-Tamimi, A. J. (2021, May 30). *Mozarabic Writings: The Indiculus Luminosus by Álvaro of Córdoba*. Pundicity.
- Barton, S., & Fletcher, R. (2013). *The world of El Cid: Chronicles of the Spanish reconquest*. Manchester University Press.
- Castro, A. (1971). *The Spaniards: An introduction to their history*. University of California Press.
- Cohen, M. R. (2021). *Under crescent and cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*. Princeton University Press.
- Collins, R. (1995). *Early medieval Spain: Unity in diversity, 400–1000*. Macmillan International Higher Education.
- Epafra, L. C. (2017). Judeo-Arabic as a Frontier of Interaction between the Jews and Muslims. *Insaniyat: Journal of Islam and Humanities*, 1(2), 87-97.
- Fernández-Morera, D. (2016). *The myth of the Andalusian paradise*. Open Road Media.
- Fierro, M. (2008). Decapitation of Christians and Muslims in the medieval Iberian Peninsula: Narratives, images, contemporary perceptions. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 45(2), 137-164.
- Glick, T. F. (2005). *Islamic and Christian Spain in the early Middle Ages*. Brill.
- Goitein, S. D. (2015). *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*. Princeton University Press.

- Gil, J. (1973). *Chronica Byzantia-Arabica. Corpus Scriptorum Musarabicorum*, 714.
- Idhari. (1901). *Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne* (Trans. E. Fagnan). Imprimerie orientale P. Fontana.
- Imamuddin, S. M. (1981). *Muslim Spain: 711-1492 AD: A Sociological Study* (Vol. 2). Brill.
- James, D. (2009). *Early Islamic Spain: The history of Ibn Al-Qutiyah*. Routledge.
- Karabell, Z. (2007). *Peace be upon you: The story of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Coexistence*. Knopf.
- Kennedy, H. (2014). *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A political history of al-Andalus*. Routledge.
- Lanz, E. L. (2002). *Marriage and Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*. Routledge.
- Mann, V. B., Glick, T. F., & Dodds, J. D. (Eds.). (1992). *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*. New York: George Braziller.
- Melville, C., & Ubaydli, A. (1992). *Christians and Moors in Spain: Arab sources*, Vol. 3. Liverpool University Press.
- Menocal, M. R. (2009). *The ornament of the world: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians created a culture of tolerance in medieval Spain*. Back Bay Books.
- Ritzer, G., & Stepnisky, J. (2017). *Sociological theory*. Sage publications.
- Sullivan II, J. F. (2012). *Contemplating convivencia: Cosmopolitanism, exclusivism and religious identity in Iberia* [Thesis, Georgia State University]. https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=rs_theses
- Tibi, A. T. (Ed.). (1986). *The Tibyān: Memoirs of 'Abd Allāh B. Buluggīn, last Zirid Amir of Granada*, Vol. 5. Brill Archive.
- Tieszen, C. L. (2013). *Christian identity amid Islam in medieval Spain*. Brill.
- Wasserstein, D. J. (1985). *The rise and fall of the party-kings: Politics and society in Islamic Spain 1002-1086*. Princeton Univ. Press.
- Wasserstein, D. J. (2019). The intellectual genealogy of Almohad policy towards Christians and Jews. In M. Garcia-Arenal & Y. Glazer-Eytan (Eds.), *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam* (pp. 133-154). Brill.
- Watt, M. W. & Cachia, P. (2017). *A history of Islamic Spain*. Routledge.
- Wintle, J. (2003). *The rough guide history of Spain*. Stylus Publishing.