

(Re)imagining Ramadan: The Significance of Festival Discourse in Pérez de Hita's *Guerras civiles de Granada*

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Over the centuries, the *Guerras civiles de Granada* has experienced controversy in categorizing the work within a particular critical framework. Critics such as María Soledad de Carrasco-Urgoiti remarked, “it is a playful handling of facts and fiction” (120). Menendez y Pelayo claimed the first part of the the *Guerras civiles* to be a “novela histórica” (2, 134), and Diane Sieber noted that within the context of prescribed historiographical tradition the work was considered historically authoritative (291). Perhaps Rhona Zaid provides the most appropriate commentary by succinctly condensing over four centuries of criticism regarding the unique nature of this work by illustrating that, “literary authorities claim it is too historical, while historians allege it is too literary” (315). Indeed, Pérez de Hita’s work is a colorful merger of literary design, historical precedence, poetic sensibility, imagination, and an artful display of storytelling.

My interest here is the nature of Pérez de Hita’s rhetorical tactics in his presentation of what appears to be a serious attempt to write a legitimate history of Moorish culture. Legitimizing historiography, according to Marina Brownlee, is essential if one is to establish cultural authority within a given social system. As such, Pérez de Hita’s narrative strategy illustrates a discernible relationship between Spain’s marked culture of celebration and that of the literary production of sixteenth century authors and historians.¹ From the standpoint of how festivity was utilized to argue a unique perception of Moorish history, I will illustrate how Pérez de Hita’s historiographical text combines festival narratives with specific Morisco cultural practices in order to authenticate history and mitigate the strained relationship between the Christian and Muslim communities of late sixteenth-century Spain. Although I recognize the complex nature of Orientalist discourse at work throughout southern Spain, my discussion will focus strictly on the use of festivity to negotiate a (re)writing of history. By recontextualizing specific cultural practices common within sixteenth-century Moorish communities, an affable history emerges well within the ideological boundaries of Spanish hegemony that governed Christian consciousness.

Although there is relatively little information regarding the biographical data of the life of Pérez de Hita, particularly with regard to his family and educational background, what is known, however, suggests an extensive familiarity with Morisco history, religious practices and culture.² Geographically, Pérez de Hita was well positioned to personally witness the negative byproducts of Spain’s forceful attempt to assimilate the subjugated Morisco people of the Grenadine community. Scholars tend to agree the author was born between 1544 and 1550 in the province of Murcia (Blanchard-Demouge, Zaid, Bryant, Carasco-Urgoiti) and most likely lived near Lorca, just thirty-eight miles from the border of Granada. Professionally, Pérez de Hita was known as a Master *zapatero* or shoemaker, and was an officer in his local guild; a position that would have provided Hita with abundant opportunities to participate actively in civic festivals and religious celebrations.³

Knowledge of Pérez de Hita's familiarity with the Morisco community may also be attributed largely to his personal associations with the Moriscos themselves. Shasta Bryant's introduction of the first volume of the *Guerras civiles*, has noted key moments of Hita's life that may serve to explain better his relationship with the Grenadine population (ix). It is clear that Pérez de Hita had a connection with a distinguished resident of the town of Mula, don Luis Fajardo, the Marqués de los Vélez. This would have given Hita access to libraries and other resources that helped his literary ambitions, including contact with other prominent members of the Spanish elite. Carrasco-Urgoiti's biographical research of Pérez de Hita also points out the author's efforts to meet with Moriscos and question them regarding their personal experiences. (76). One such interview included Fernando de Figueroa, the lauded Tuzaní, who spoke with Hita at length regarding his experience fighting in the Alpujarras (76).

In addition, while in the service of the Marqués, Pérez de Hita personally fought in several campaigns against the Moriscos beginning in 1568 with the second Alpujarras Revolt and is listed on the roster of military personnel in 1571 (Bryant xi). Similar with other Golden Age literary masters like Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca, Hita's military service ingrained within his consciousness an intimate familiarity with the enemy and ultimately, influenced the ethos of his perception of the world around him. Indeed, anecdotal accounts of the author saving the lives of several Moorish women from a handful of Spanish soldiers seeking revenge and lust, as well as being enlisted to guard a band of captured Moorish prisoners undoubtedly provided Hita with abundant fodder to feed his curious imagination and embellish his storytelling.

Pérez de Hita's participation in religious and civic festivals as a member of the *zapatero* guild, further supplied the author fertile ground within which to foster his literary deftness. He actively organized civic festivals, composed autos for the celebration of Corpus Christi and wrote a civic history of the town of Lorca titled *Libro de la población y hazañas de la muy noble y muy leal ciudad de Lorca*. As his first major literary work, the *Libro de Lorca* was an epic poem that according to Blanchard-Demouge, most likely gave Pérez de Hita the inspiration for the *Guerras civiles* (xviii). The accounts represented in the work are highly fictitious and recount aspects of popular chivalric tales based on local legends and the heroic deeds of the ancestors of Lorca (Carrasco-Urgoiti 80). Yet, the work also demonstrated instances of legitimate historical precedence. Incorporated into the work include accounts of Hita's personal experience with civic festivities and the production of spectacle, which would later be represented through the figure of the Moor in the *Guerras civiles* (81).

Many of the aspects of the festivals reproduced in the *Guerras Civiles* de Granada are therefore highly accurate to the traditions of the day and reflect the author's own experience and expert knowledge of the power spectacle possesses to engender sentiment and manipulate perception, albeit ephemerally. The reproduction of these highly charged events in the form of text operate to sway the flow of human perception and greatly influence the way communities give significance to their surroundings. From a phenomenological stance, and more specifically, Husserl's notion that human understanding is continually evolving within a flux of consciousness, bears light on how narratives may operate to mediate the temporality of human interaction and experience (Critchley and Barnasconi 84). The resilience of Pérez de Hita's

efforts lie in examining how he made use of his text to situate apparent dissimilar cultural activities, such as Ramadan and the festival of Saint John, within a framework common to both Muslims and Christians.

Sometime before the fall of Granada in 1492, we are informed in the *Guerras Civiles* that a spectacular festival will take place during Ramadan. The last Moorish king of Granada, Boabdil, organized the festivities, complete with banquets, bullfights, processions, and various competitions of horsemanship and displays of bravery. However, the author is quick to clarify that the days of fasting have ended; otherwise, it would appear unfathomable to mount an intense celebration during prolonged periods of fasting and prayer.

Llegado el día de la fiesta, que era por el mes de setiembre, cuando ellos guardaban su Ramadán, acabados los días de su cuenta de su ayuno, mandó traer veinte y cuatro toros de la sierra de Ronda, muy extremados (55).

The quotation is somewhat ambiguous as the reader is informed that the festival took place during Ramadan, yet they had finished their days of fasting. Traditionally, what marks the end of Ramadan is the period of *Eid ul-Fitr*, which is a time of congregational prayers, and visits to family and friends to thank God for all blessings; it is a time of forgiveness, moral victory, peace, fellowship, brotherhood and unity. Either way, the holy Islamic period of Ramadan is utilized here as a form of catalyst of the *concertada fiesta* for which everyone had waited. In anticipation of the festival, the author postpones the reader on three separate occasions in order to weave the history of a Moorish love story set within the milieu of two warring political factions within Grenadine society, the Zegries and the Abencerrajes.

The three interruptions provide the author generous space to relate a love story based upon Moorish society and customs, all of which bear a remarkable connection with dominant Christian perceptions. The two Moorish lovers, Zayda and Zayde meet in Almería on the day of San Juan, a significant day of celebration shared with all cultures throughout the Peninsula. Sixteenth-century Catholicism marked this day to commemorate the nativity of Saint John the Baptist and it is one of the oldest feasts instituted to become an integral part of both the Greek and Latin liturgies honoring a saint (Souvay “St John the Baptist”). Although this is not the case with Islamic tradition, the figure of John the Baptist was well known and respected among the Muslim population. The name John or Yahyā as it is known in the Qur’an, is John the Baptist, and is considered a prophet in light of Islamic tradition (Asad 6: 83-87). Independently, Ramadan is a unique cultural and religious staple of the Muslim community and does more to distance itself from outside ideologies than act as an element of unification. Yet, it is not so remotely displaced when juxtaposed together with socially congruent traditions that both communities share in common.

The tale of the two lovers furthermore contributes to dismantle negative perceptions and create proximity through familiar standards of behavior. When Zayda meets Zayde for the first time, he is the captain of a renegade pirate ship and is well respected by his crew who happen to be Christian privateers or “despojos cristianos” (47). Zayde falls in love with Zayda and immediately forsakes his dubious past life and returns with her to Granada as a worthy suitor. While in Granada, Zayde is aligned with the Abencerraje faction and is highly regarded as an

expert fighter and horseman. According to Carrasco-Urgoiti and Rhona Zaid, Hita's chivalric, albeit superficial, depiction of the valiant Moor Zayde, would not have been considered offensive to Christian sensibilities. Zaid remarks that,

The depiction of the Moor in Spanish literature as gallant and chivalric was a poetically appealing image. For all that he represented as a once brilliant and refined civilization, he is also represented as a defeated race, this element being necessary and beneficial to inspire melancholy. Rather than denigrating the Moor, now a conquered enemy, chroniclers now can present him a prototypical chivalric image: a night errant almost as capable of acts of derring-do and courtly love as his Christian counterpart. (318)

As a poetically appealing image to late sixteenth and seventeenth century Christians and a prototype of gallantry, the figure of Zayde further spans the fissure separating the two cultures. Zayde's close association with Christian privateers as well as his position as leader among them, affords the author sufficient cultural equity to establish a more seamless connection in order to continue his narration of the public festival.

Pérez de Hita's narrative discourse attempts to fashion a new historical context housed within a ludic frame that consolidates two ideologies at variance. This is not so distant from the Bakhtinian perspective of heteroglossia, which identifies the ability language – and by extension narratives – possesses to transform reality and alter what we experience (*Dialogic* 293). By nature, the various modes of communication inherent to human interaction create a unique space whereby interpretation may proliferate within discourse. Consequently, for Pérez de Hita, this meant the possibility of displacing hard-line perceptions with socially congruent alternatives that invite a reconciliation of difference. A merger between the two communities must have seemed insurmountable, particularly in the face of xenophobic Christian attitudes that judged Morisco exteriority as menacing; both to the security and well being of the state as well as the authority of the Catholic Church (Root 122). Yet, by extolling a common enemy through such virtues as morality, integrity and sincerity, a world of ideological equivalences begins to take shape. The reader is thus able to gaze through an altered lens of commonality where the distance once felt between the two communities has become greatly diminished.

The unifying nature of celebration is an expressive phenomenon, explain critics such as Fernando Rodríguez de la Flor and Galindo Blasco, in which public festivals possess a centralizing power capable of influencing the collective imaginary through the fabrication of what they consider a national mirage (*Política y fiesta* 14). The effect is vortical in nature as celebration amasses every aspect of cultural precedence and generates a unique ludic space, thereby transforming the community into new urban landscapes and redefining traditionally held notions of city. In the case of Granada, the matter of course follows the same model: The author is able to appropriate the city for his own purposes through a process of redefining conventional postures on historical reality made possible by rooting festival narratives into the fabric of the text. The new landscape, although a metaphorical creation of the collective imaginary, becomes a locus whereby the (re)negotiation of the past is possible while at once “silently” signaling the author's contemporary reality (Guillén 178). Ultimately, this corollary gives significance to the ever-shifting cognitive space found in everyday social practices and communicative exchanges.

Similarly, Foucault's detailed reading of Diego de Velázquez's artistic masterpiece, *Las meninas*, also offers a useful perspective by which to view the interrelation between the cultural significance of Hita's festival narratives and the production of meaning. I refer to Foucault's proposal that spectacle and spectator are linked indelibly by what he terms a "doubly invisible" spatial reciprocity (The Order of Things 3). In other words, Foucault suggests that *Las meninas*, as a fabricated visual image or spectacle, is riddled with perspectival uncertainties that - through unseen reciprocity - subjugate the active gaze of the spectator. Again, cognitive space is an essential dynamic of this process as the spectator's stance, both ideological and physical, relative to the spectacle creates meaning well beyond the mere representation of the image.

Akin to the dualistic significance of the popular maxim, "listen to what I mean and not what I say," Foucault captures the essence of producing meaning through social interaction and discursive exchanges. What produces "splendour" within the public's critical mind's eye is not necessarily how the representation of spectacle is produced as much as it is the cultural significance seemingly "invisible" to this process, yet pervasive during the exchange. In other words, the relationships between individuals and institutions contain the automata of social systems, which perpetuate the legitimacy of their existence, inevitably disclose the "invisible," and subsequently reveal meaning.

Like Velázquez's mirror in *Las meninas*, festival narrations within a context of celebration likewise provided a "metathesis of visibility" that directly affected both representation as well as the dynamic space of interaction and exchange. I believe historiographical texts mediate these spaces by providing the means through which to "see" not necessarily what is represented, but the hidden and complex nature of what is meant. Texts by their very nature inevitably reveal the complexities that characterize social relations. In a very real sense, societies' collective systems of belief are a direct result of both face-to-face interaction and the power of institutions that seek to influence that system.

In part one, chapter six, of the *Guerras civiles*, for example, the context of a festival celebrated at the end of the fast during the Islamic holiday of Ramadan, illustrates such a transformative social space as discussed through a Foucaultian lens. Through a unique narrative approach to present history, the author illustrates an authentic historical referent, Ramadan, and paints a remarkable scene in which the intrigues of a love triangle combined with the violence that inevitably ensues, and merges these elements with the machinations of spectacle. Such discourse affords an opportunity through historical pretext to illustrate the customs, people, and politics inherent within the Moorish community. By providing the Christian public with an "authoritative" historical declaration illustrating the intricacies of the ever suspect Muslim social system, subtle commonalities could be established between the two cultures.⁴

Throughout the first part of the *Guerras Civiles*, particularly chapters six and nine, the reader experiences a rich amalgamation of cultural repertoire known very well within the sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish consciousness. Ramadan was widely recognized as paramount to Moorish tradition and the culture of festivity likewise constituted a fundamental characteristic of Hapsburg Spain. Independently, these two cultural practices constituted vibrant traditions deeply entrenched within Spanish society, and when wielded rhetorically exuded meaning well beyond mere religiosity and social commotion. As outward cultural practices, the

unique sacred experience of Ramadan and the hyperbolic descriptions of spectacles intrinsic to civic festivals are not synonymous, yet Pérez de Hita's work forges a fluid commonplace that effaces this dualism, thereby affording a reconciliatory context within escalating antagonism towards the Moriscos of his day.

Paul Julian Smith commented on the necessity of closely rereading Renaissance texts as elements such as excess and marginality call into question previously held stances on the inflexibility of Renaissance rhetorical precedence (1-3). Similarly, a rereading of a text like the *Guerras Civiles*, is equally constructive as elements of both marginality and excess saturated Spain's social system. Aspects such as Moorish apparel, colors and nomenclature became meticulously re-contextualized within the renowned tradition of excess inherent in festivity. Pérez de Hita efficiently strips these binaries of their independence as significant cultural practices and combines them to fashion a universal history capable of mitigating the negative perceptions so pervasive during the author's time. These social practices are essential to Hita's text and help to explain better his historical imagination, which works to seamlessly unify a polarized system of beliefs.

Critics agree that Pérez de Hita goes in and out of contemporary literary tradition in his depiction of the Grenadine Society. This literary flexibility is essential in order to produce a Moorish text congruent with contemporary social practices found in the communities to the north.⁵ Claiming that the *Guerras Civiles de Granada* was a translation from the Arabic by an imaginary chronicler named Aben Hamin, further demonstrates the author's a high level of resourcefulness and imaginative genius in presenting historical discourse. The festival celebrated during the month of Ramadan, for example, is not presented within the framework of a traditional *relación*, particularly as it is encased within the context of a love story. However, the narration is otherwise true to narrative-festival tradition. In highly Spanish fashion, the celebration begins with the traditional selection and preparation of the bulls for the bullfight. Pérez de Hita then establishes the magnitude of the occasion by underscoring social protocol in a who's-who style presentation of distinguished guests. Although not framed within the structural parameters of the highly popular and well-established tradition of the *relación*, this description is nevertheless well within the rhetorical boundaries known to that genre.

As the festival narration continued, Pérez de Hita remained focused on presenting an accurate account of events; however, his narrative does not escape the boundaries of the framed tale of the lovers in which the two rival clans are weaved seamlessly into customary festival activities. In doing so, the author is able to present a Muslim cultural exchange in the form of a classic battle between the forces of good and evil. The following illustrates this point:

Los cavalleros Abencerrages andavan a caballo por la plaça, corriendo los toros con tanta gallardía y gentileza, que era cosa de espanto. No avía dama en todos los balcones ni ventanas que no estuviesen muy afficionados a los cavalleros Abencerrages. Mas teníase por muy çierto que no avía Abencerrage en Granada, o en su Reyno, que no fuesse favorecido de damas y de las más principales; y ésta era la causa mas principal por donde los Zegríes, y Gomeles, y Maças, les tenían mortal odio y embidia (Guerras I: 55)

Pérez de Hita vilifies the Zegríes, the Gomeles, and the Maças, relegating them to the margins of Muslim standards of social propriety and approval. Their apparent envy (*embidia*) and hatred (*odio*) toward the more admired Abencerrajes exemplifies the classical confrontation between good (or those viewed as virtuous members of the community) and evil (those considered suspicious due to external social factors such as lineage, ethnic, economic, or social standing).⁶

The author continues to extol the Abencerraje persona by appealing directly to fundamental anxieties of the Christian soldier as well as the uneasiness felt by Christian families living in frontier communities. Human experience plays a vital role here as reports of Christians being carried into North Africa to be sold into slavery or ransomed permeated Spanish consciousness and played a significant role in the production of intense emotional sentiments. Cervantes' sixteenth-century work *El Trato de Argel*, pointedly encapsulates the disquiet tone circulating throughout Spain and the deep psychological toll that becoming a captive to the Islamic enemy produces. In the second jornada, the reader experiences a heartfelt scene of a Christian family being sold into slavery. Cervantes paints a sordid and dehumanizing setting typical of slave auctions as members of the family are individually negotiated and sold to various Muslim merchants.

The mother's loss of her young children to Muslim guardians, and by extension to a new way of life, is a fate worse than death, "¡Oh amargo y terrible punto, más terrible que la muerte!" (II 167-68). Such a fate is clearly articulated by the mother later in the experience as she expresses her fears of the social and cultural repercussions of forced assimilation. "Más miedo me queda a mí; de verte ir donde vas, que nunca te acordarás de Dios, de ti, ni de mí" (II 253-56). The mother's terror over what may befall her family is socio-cultural in nature and relate specifically to losing one's memory, particularly with regards to identity, God and family. Her fears are justified as the slave auctioneer comments on the mutability of youth and the culture from which they originate. "Estos rapaces cristianos, al principio muchos lloros, y luego se hacen moros mejor que los ancianos" (II 314-16). The volatile nature of one's individuality is exceptionally evident when dealing with adolescence and clearly illustrates how the social world alters perception, constructs a belief system and shapes behavior.

Late sixteenth-century Spaniards were fully aware of the transformative power of assimilation by witnessing decades of Morisca women echoing the same agony and desperation as Cervantes' Christian mother at the slave market. Therefore, tales of Muslim captors sympathetic to Christian detainees must have appealed to the restless psyche of frontier Christian life by linking past experience to an uncertain present and thereby creating hope for the future. Shortly after the end of Ramadan, the *Guerras civiles* reports of a festival where during a bullfight riders of the Abencerraje clan were praised not only for courage and bravery, but for their standard of behavior towards Christian captives. The narrator writes that,

Jamás hubo Abencerraje que tuviese mal talle ni mal garbo, y no se halló Abencerraje que cobarde fuese, ni de mal disposición. Eran estos caballeros todos a una mano muy afables, amigos de la gente común... Eran, finalmente, amigos de cristianos. Ellos mismos en persona se halla que iban a las mazmorras a visitar los cristianos cautivos, y les hacían bien, y les enviaban de comer con sus criados. (56)

It is clear Pérez de Hita intends to create a context of proximity by referencing sound historical circumstances and relating them to his agenda of cultural harmonization, and as Zaid commented, his “protopacifistic” sentiments (314). Furthermore, this vision of the Abencerrajes evidences an attempt to distance one Muslim clan from another through a process of segregation and association based upon standards of behavior. The Moorish history becomes much more tangible as the thread of common experiences bind the Abencerrajes (or true Spanish Muslims) to members of the Christian community. This text forges a perception of association by providing an analogous understanding of the primal conflict between good and evil in hopes that religious and cultural barriers become fluid and more accommodating. Whereas the demonized Moor is foreign, incongruent with Spanish Christian ideals and repugnant to society. Paula Blanchard’s work on the *Guerras Civiles* noted that the Moorish customs, dress, and ideals, which were analogous to cultural standards throughout Spain differentiated the Spanish Moor from Muslim populations in both Africa and the Orient (lxxxvi).

The very hyperbolic context of celebration and the production of spectacle created by Pérez de Hita provided an excellent opportunity to reveal internal discord between Moorish factions, particularly with regard to conversion. The theatricality that permeates Hita’s highly charged text showcases a clear similarity between Grenadine political dissonance and the players of the westernized vision of the re-conquest, where a romanticized vision of both victor and villain emerge. Interestingly, the representation of Hita’s villain tie directly to the perception of the Muslim converts, now Moriscos, as spurious in nature and not to be trusted. Marry Elizabeth Perry noted that Christians often “portrayed Morisco men as flabby and effeminate sodomites and pedaphiles” and women as “obstinate, Lewd, and treacherous” (188).

During the celebration of San Juan mounted by the king of Granada, a Moorish soldier well known for his courage in battling against the Christian armies emerges into an arena for a horsemanship competition. Dressed “a la turquesa,” the courageous Sarrazino marches proudly into the ring followed by a unique carro festival:

Trás él venía un rico y hermoso carro, labrado de mucha costa, encima del cual se hacían cuatro arcos triunfales de extraña hermosura, en ellos labrados todos los asaltos y batallas que habían pasado entre moros y cristianos en la Vega de Granada...Entre las cuales batallas estaba dibujada galanamente aquella que tuvo el famoso Garcilaso de la Vega con el valiente Audalla, moro de gran fama, sobre el Ave María que llevaba en la cola de su caballo...Debajo de los arcos triunfales se hacía un trono de Redondo...Encima del trono una imagen venía puesta de mucha hermosura...A los pies desta Hermosa imagen venían grandes despojos de militares trofeos, y allí el mismo dios de Amor, vencido y atropellado, quebrado su arco y rota se aljaba y saetas, las plumas muy hermosas de sus alas esparcidas en muchas partes. (85)

Sarrazino’s triumphal carro festival is a public exhibition representing the conquered Christian armies during the numerous attempts to capture Granada and unify the Peninsula. The figure of Garcilaso de la Vega as a defeated famous soldier who fought in the battles before the 1492 surrender of Granada is puzzling. Garcilaso did not participate in efforts to conquer Granada and his reputation as a soldier/poet was developed years later.

If this is the “famoso” Garcilaso widely known throughout sixteenth century literary circles, it is anachronistic indeed. However, poetically he is a significant hallmark of the “unifying” years that marked the conflictive mood widely pervasive within sixteenth century Spanish communities. Contemporary readers of the 1595 *Guerras Civiles* could easily identify with this figure as an exemplary individual and the quintessential representative of the great Spanish poets of the Renaissance. Claudio Guillén identifies Garcilaso as a significant cultural icon because he brought “considerable power to their longings for peace and harmony by inserting them within the traditional dynamics of the pastoral” (182). Furthermore, Garcilaso’s *Egloga primera* (1543), which came out shortly before the publication of the *Abencerraje*, contains an extensive dedicatory message to the Viceroy of Naples declaring that war and the imperial history of the Spanish empire as “polar opposites” to poetic leisure and music (182).

Sarrazino’s depiction of the God of Love, Eros, as vanquished, broken and mutilated strikes at the heart of the classic Renaissance ideals that Garcilaso and other popular poets of that period represented. Garcilaso’s standing as a popular Renaissance model of *armas y letras*, is key to Sarrazino’s animosity and fundamental to Hita’s rhetorical tactics that seek to frame clearly the true enemies of the Spanish Empire. The fame-seeking arrogance demonstrated by this figure clearly severs any possibility of alliance with the Christian communities. Likewise, such an illustration exposes how Spanish imperialistic undertakings create a socio-political and cultural severance that has been the driving force of the schism between the two groups. Sarrazino’s *carro festival*, therefore, is a parade of antagonism that embodies fierce elements of hostility inherent throughout the Moorish communities of the Peninsula.

Later in the celebration, the same Moor Sarrazino handedly loses to a valiant Moor from the *Abencerraje* clan during the same competition of horsemanship. What follows affords the reader a unique window into the ethos of Christian perceptions of the Muslim consciousness when confronted with failure and spiritual crisis. Shortly after losing the contest, Sarrazino storms out of the arena incensed with embarrassment and indignant for having publicly disgraced his clan. His reaction to the events is equally severe as he rabidly curses Islam and declares his allegiance to the Christian faith:

¡Oh Mahoma traidor, perro pérfido engañador, y en el tiempo que habías de favorecer mis esperanzas me faltaste! Di, perro, falso profeta, ¿Yo te había prometido hacerte de oro todo, si me dabas victoria en tal jornada como ésta y de quemar gran cantidad de incienso en tus arras? ¿Porqué, pérfido me desamparaaste?..don falso Mahoma, que por aprobio tuyo que me tengo de tornar cristiano. Pues es mejor su fe, que tu secta mala y llena de engaños. (90)

The impetus of Sarrazino’s repudiation of Islam is failure, yet it is too gratuitous and shallow to be sincere. His actions are hypocritical and exemplify contempt towards religion and the significance of one’s personal system of beliefs. Conversion in this context appears immediately distasteful and further distances the non-romanticized political factions from consideration for legitimacy. Authenticity is vital to public perception, as both respect and credibility become the driving force behind a meaningful and accurate assessment of faithful Spanish Muslims.

While Pérez de Hita's negotiation of discourse may be open to interpretation, the intertextual relationship produces a binding effect that mitigates – and by extension unifies – and gives power to his narrative; much like the impact spectacle possesses to grip onlookers in a unifying gaze of wonder. Conflict between the Grenadine tribes exemplified archetypical struggles intrinsic within many communities throughout the Peninsula. The Muslim society was thus no different fundamentally that its Christian counterparts to the north. Therefore, as the Abencerrajes faithfully maintain their standard of belief, they appear more worthy of consideration for public sympathy far more than the capricious tribes that merely convert due to overwhelming personal circumstances and loss.

Following Vincent Barletta's recent study of crypto-Islamic literature, the construction of perception ultimately shapes meaning through a transformative process resulting from a myriad of complex social activities whereby narratives act as the axis (xv). In other words, the written text is a "dynamic" and "shifting" communicative practice – and thereby performative in nature – that may be wielded to accumulate social power by the mediation and negotiation of human experience (xx). Barletta notes Briggs and Bauman's anthropological take on genre as a vital to this process:

Genre thus pertains crucially to negotiations of identity and power – by invoking a particular genre, producers of discourse assert (tacitly or explicitly) that they possess the authority needed to decontextualize discourse that bears these historical and social connections and to recontextualize it in the current discursive setting. (qtd. in Barletta, xx)

Pérez de Hita's retelling (decontextualizing) of both pejorative and idealized notions of the Western Moor may be replete with literary devices that decorate and even exaggerate his narrative, but as a performative text it is grounded in sound historical and social connections where past and present merge to form a discourse for the future. In this light, Pérez de Hita accrues a sense of cultural authority by artful blending text and social context in order to renegotiate Muslim identity and give significance and form to the experience of being Spanish.

In conclusion, Pérez de Hita offers a narrative discourse that produces an indelible link between text and two seemingly dissimilar cultural practices, festivals and Ramadan. While his text collectively underscored historical precedence, its function was euphemistic in nature and downplayed or minimized negative perceptions of the Moriscos.⁷ His text becomes a locus where cultural interaction and exchange are renegotiated and disseminated as legitimate historical discourse. The *Guerras civiles de Granada* was an attempt to produce an authentic version of history amidst strained relations culminating in the Alpujarras Revolt. Ultimately, Pérez de Hita's social world was one of festivity and religiosity, where neutralized dominant cultural mores could be neutralized in order to accommodate an idealized space of tolerance towards a not so distant enemy.

Notes

[1]. I refer to authors such as Andrés Bernáldez, Hernando del Pulgar, Esteban Garibay, and works like *Cronica de don Juan II*, *Cronica de don Álvaro de Luna*, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, and the many *Relaciones de sucesos* found throughout most cities in Spain.

[2]. The term Morisco was a name given to the *Múdejar* population, or Muslims under Christian rule, after forcibly baptized into the Catholic faith. These mass conversions began in 1500, eight years after the fall of Granada to the Catholic Kings, Ferdinand and Isabel, in 1492. By 1526, the entire *Mudéjar* community had been baptized or was forced to leave Spain.

[3]. The various workers' guilds throughout Spain routinely participated in public festivals and would contribute to the spectacles by creating *carros festivos*. These early modern parade floats were the pride of the guild and were typically adorned to such an extent as to draw awe and wonderment from onlookers.

[4]. I follow here the work of Diane Sieber, specifically her article *The Frontier Ballad and the Spanish Golden Age Historiography: Recontextualizing the Guerras civiles de Granada*, in which she reevaluates Pérez de Hita's work as historically authoritative. She argues that the author's use of ballads was well within the standards of late sixteenth-century historiography, thereby legitimating the *Guerras civiles* as much more than a work of "elaborate fiction" filled with "romances as entertaining poetic inventions" (291-92). Instead, the work was considered as an accurate history documenting the socio-political intricacies inherent to the Moorish community in Granada. Sieber, citing the writings of an eighteenth-century traveler, noted that the *Guerras civiles* was "generally received as undoubted facts, consecrated by fiction" (191), thereby further evidencing the text's cultural import within early modern European understanding of southern Spain.

[5]. I refer here to Zaid's mention that Pérez de Hita's text is exclusively from the Moorish point of view and he focuses on internal strife as well as customs and culture (321). In addition, Pérez de Hita refrains from using elements of the supernatural typically found in descriptions of chivalry.

[6]. Another example from the *Guerras civiles* illustrating the conflict between the Abencerrajes and other less-respected groups within the social sphere is found in one of the many ballads intercalated by the author. Here, the Abencerrajes become martyrs before the eyes of the public while other social groups are demonized for their part in their deaths. The following is an excerpt from the ballad:

En las torres del Alhambra
sonaba gran vocería
y en la ciudad de Granada
grande llanto se hacía,
porque sin razón el Rey
hizo degollar un día
treinta y seis Abencerrajes
nobles y de gran valía,
a quien Cegrís y Gomeles
acusar de alevosía. (180-81)

[7]. I am drawing upon Rhona Zaid's study of the *Guerras civiles* and how historians sympathetic to the Morisco cause frequently employed euphemisms in order to avoid prosecution (316).

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