Jamón and Halal
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Through the 1950s in particular, but even up to today, narratives about Órgiva and the Alpujarra have represented the area as a space of primitiveness—whether this was sought after as an antidote to modernity, or considered in need of development—and, intertwined with this, as a site of the vestiges of medieval Muslim Iberia. As Órgiva received many newcomers, starting in the late 1990s British residents’ memoirs, the Hablamos de Órgiva project, and several television shows appeared, offering new narratives about the area. In many of these narratives, and particularly the televisual ones, the presence of tensions regarding language and lifestyle, of groups rejected elsewhere in the country as antithetical to Spanishness (Muslims and Maghrebi migrants), or of orgiveños’ ties to labor migration are minimized or completely erased. This impedes the narratives’ ability to consider the dynamics involved in the practice of tolerance in Órgiva—and the sites at which that dynamic gives way to rejection. At the same time, some of these new narratives about Órgiva point to the migration memory of orgiveños and the role of estrangement in the convert experience, elements of the town’s cohabitation dynamic that were echoed in my fieldwork.

The local narratives of lived experience in Órgiva that I gathered point to the ongoing negotiation of difference in the town, the
positioning of the different community groups vis-à-vis civilizational hierarchies, and the role of power within coexistence. These oral narratives about life in the town also point to the bridges or spaces of mutual recognition that foster connection, self-reflection, multifaceted identities, and more sustainable tolerance. Most of the television depictions of Órgiva, by mobilizing the narrative of happy harmony that has been built around the concept of *convivencia*, have labeled the town as tolerant or as an example of *convivencia*. This oversimplification obscures from view the tensions and ambivalences that are part of the texture of coexistence in the town and may make the work of toleration—open discussion of differences—more difficult to enact. A community that is labeled or self-labeled as tolerant, but doesn’t question the extent or workings of that tolerance, may avoid the process of recognition, estrangement, and self-reflection and be less likely to reach sustainable tolerance.

As seen in the preceding chapters, tolerance in Órgiva is built through layers of outbound and inbound migration. The departure of orgiveños as economic migrants created the conditions of possibility for Britons and other Europeans to settle there. The hippie or “alternative” movement served as an incubator for the start of the convert and Sufi community, which in turn has made Islam (by virtue of being viewed as an “Islam-lite” and of being practiced by Spaniards and other Europeans) less threatening to the townspeople, and created a more familiar (and welcoming) environment for Maghrebi immigrants. At the same time, the alternative movement has brought to the town certain behaviors that have been much more of a rallying cry for local protest than working immigrants and even unaccompanied migrants from the Maghreb.

Many outside accounts of the town engage in different forms of *convivencia*-washing and, whether or not they reference the Sufi community, they omit the particular dynamic between Maghrebi migrants, converts to Islam, and orgiveños’ use of the term *moro*, as well as the active rejection of street-dwelling or off-the-grid alternatives that arises every so often. On the one hand, invoking the *convivencia* model can be a useful reminder that diversity itself is an Iberian
tradition. On the other hand, it has led to concentrating attention on the confluence of religions, with negligible attention to intra-Muslim issues and the deep differences in lifestyle—and conceptions of tolerance—between alternatives and others in the town. The focus on internationalism (referred to in the shows as “cosmopolitanism”) and religious harmony—without noting the issues between those who embrace rules-based governance and accept at least to some extent the capitalist system, and those who reject as much as possible the capitalist system—has led to a limited portrait of the town and an underdeveloped conceptualization of difference and tolerance.

Even in a town that is relatively peaceful compared to nearby locales, there are some hotspots of friction—some types of difference that community members have a hard time tolerating and occasionally publicly reject. Tolerance is weakest in Órgiva, and occasionally finds its limits, at the juncture of class and lifestyle aspirations: those who are dwellers interested in maintaining state authority and dominant understandings of progress reject the most extreme members of the alternative community who live off-grid. Interestingly, of the other three most notable friction points, two are intra-national and two are linked to linguistic tensions. Some metropolitan Spaniards view orgiveños as ignorant hillbillies (catetos) and the orgiveños are aware that they are largely marked as such by their far-from-standard regional dialect. Also related to language and the prestige accorded to certain dialects or, in this case, languages, the orgiveños are irked by the incomers who insist on speaking to them in English, or are incapable of basic communication in Spanish. And last, there are some tensions—or more precisely apprehensions—on the part of the Maghrebi migrants toward the unaccompanied minor migrants from Morocco, apprehensions stemming from concerns regarding potential negative effects on the Maghrebis’ quality of life in Órgiva. Thus, the friction points at which tolerance is most vulnerable, or where it finds its limits, are largely intra-European or intra-national: between all other inhabitants and the most anti-establishment alternatives; between orgiveños and residents from urban, cosmopolitan areas of Spain associated with progress, or from other parts of Europe—primarily
England—that are similarly located in terms of civilizational prestige, and finally between Maghrebi immigrants and the undocumented immigrant youths who the adult migrants see as a threat to their image and/or to the inclusive diversity they find in Órgiva.

Therefore, while some elements of the *moros vs. cristianos* mentality do arise, what divides the residents of Órgiva the most is not religion, but social class and conceptions of civilizational prestige, in which some extra-local groups display a presumption of greater sophistication that can be understood as a form of colonial attitude, while other groups (the Maghrebis) fear losing the modicum of acceptance that they have attained because of a lack of urbanity or tolerance on the part of the MENA youths. All these differences are publicly tolerated, except for, occasionally, the tensions with the street-dwelling and off-grid alternatives.

The specific factors that create more egalitarian tolerance in Órgiva are the bridges between communities, primarily those of migration memory, feminism or women’s issues, and Muslimness or broader spirituality. These alliances are based on and enhance the perception of common strands in identity narratives and, thus, facilitate recognition-based tolerance. Contrary to the cultural schemas of *moros vs. cristianos* thinking, it is the last of these that is most tentative.

Since 1492, the Alpujarra has served as a refuge for Muslims fleeing and/or resisting the imposition of Catholicism in Iberia and the rising nationalism of the Catholic Monarchs. Soon after the *morisco* rebellion was quashed, the region also became a refuge for the impoverished from other parts of the Iberian Peninsula, especially Galicians. In a similar trajectory, today the Alpujarra is a refuge for Northern Europeans and metropolitan Spaniards, European converts to Sufi Islam, and a small contingent of Muslim economic migrants from North Africa. In Órgiva in particular, the residents seek to build community in order to have a space in which to take refuge—whether from a moribund, depopulated rural setting; from modern urban life in a consumerist, capitalist system; from a national Catholic culture that rejects converts to Islam; or from discrimination against North African migrants elsewhere in Andalucía. The converts and North
African immigrants specifically seek different forms of visibility and invisibility (accepted visibility and normalcy). These two sectors of the community, while both are placed by orgiveños in the same category of moros/Muslims, actually differ greatly in terms of religious and cultural practices.

However, the presence of the convert Sufi community allows the North African immigrants to find a culture of acceptance, a refuge from Islamophobic attitudes found in other parts of Spain—specifically through the converts’ and others’ recognition of the migrants and the migrants’ own practice of tolerance toward the converts. The Sufi converts welcome the immigrants as Muslims and as potential bearers of authenticity and linguistic knowledge, whereas the Muslim immigrants, while often not agreeing with the Sufis’ religious practices or conceptions of what is halal, at least appreciate the spiritual outlook of the Sufis (one shared by many in Órgiva), and benefit directly from the Sufis’ presence as community members who help to normalize Islam and the cultural practices of Islamicate societies. For these reasons, rather than refuse to share their knowledge of Arabic and Islam, or reject openly and without mitigating statements the Sufis’ claim to being Muslims, the Maghrebi migrants who are practicing Muslims tolerate practices of which, to varying degrees, many do not approve.

Órgiva has long been the site of many forms of inter-cultural contact and population movement. The latest of these layers is one in which the presence of an unusually large number of European converts to Islam helps a relatively small number of Muslim migrants from the Maghreb enjoy a higher level of tolerance—visibility with acceptance. Maghrebis may not seem significant as a small minority within the town; however, North Africans are a sizable, visible, and often rejected minority group in the rest of Spain and Europe. Observing how they live and how they are treated in a setting in which they do not represent a demographic threat sheds light on issues that go beyond perceived economic impact. In Órgiva, recognition is a crucial element of equitable toleration that is more viable in the long run. Moreover, by highlighting or creating dual identities, Órgiva’s cross-community
bridges allow for the circulation of power and a more sustainable type of intergroup toleration. These bridging alliances allow for two-way recognition and toleration between otherwise strongly bounded identities. Rather than impose assimilation, the toleration process in the town allows groups to live side by side with transversal alliances that, interwoven with various types of estrangement, heighten awareness of identities as myths or cultural narratives. The bridging dual identities highlight common threads in identity narratives and the ideologies that produce them. In this way, they make community members more aware of the constructedness of group boundaries and the role that each community member plays in evaluating what will or will not be tolerated and how they participate in the multi-directional exchange of acts of tolerance, in which community members can both exert power and be empowered.

Additionally, the toleration dynamic in the town, and specifically the ongoing redefinition of the concepts of *moro* and *musulmán*, are working to recalibrate existing conceptions of Christian Europe as the hallmark of tolerance. European and Maghrebi Muslims have an active role in asserting and exercising power within the toleration process. Acknowledging this shakes assumptions about civilizational differences on the basis of levels of tolerance, or the ability to tolerate. Moreover, the category of Muslim is being redefined outside of ethno-racial categories. This means that while liberal discourses of tolerance take advantage of the power dynamics that are part of toleration without recognizing them, in Órgiva the process of reconfiguring essentialist East/West identities is also recalibrating the established correlation between modernity, Europeanness, and tolerance, and inversely, Islam and intolerance. Toleration in this Andalusian town breaks down essentialist East/West identities by both redefining the concept of “Muslim” and providing examples of toleration among community members of a multiplicity of faiths, including Islam. The practice of toleration in Órgiva is creating a new relationship between tolerance and established civilizational orders: East vs. West, Islam vs. Christian Europe.

Given its deep associations with al-Andalus and a pre-modern timelessness, the Alpujarra is simultaneously isolated and unique,
Conclusions

and a concentrated version of Andalucía and Spain, as frontier zones between North and South and East and West, between modernity and “primitiveness.” Today, Órgiva’s residents are made up of survivors and seekers: dwellers who, though they may have never left the region, were nonetheless affected by migration, and journeymen of different types. Both the “backwards,” “primitive” dwellers and the journeymen of many stripes, including the Maghrebi migrants and the converts to Islam, participate in the toleration dynamic of the town. The town’s ongoing toleration process reveals that being able to tolerate “feeling strange,” to the extent of becoming aware that one’s community identity is a narrative subject to change, helps those with more power establish broader limits to their toleration. This is a transactional understanding of tolerance, but if mutual recognition of each other’s worth is part of the process, it is an empowering form of trade in which each actor has something to offer and the “capital” that is accumulated is a sense of self-esteem that is built in part by identifying as equitably and appropriately tolerant. *Al-ghurba saʿiba:* like emigration (or religious conversion), toleration is difficult, but if one wants what it has to offer, one needs to manage its estrangement well to make sure it doesn’t become treacherous—that is, a source of oppression and discontent. The community dynamic in Órgiva teaches us that tolerance is a multidirectional process (not a one-way street) that is intertwined with power, personal interest, and experiences of estrangement at all levels.

Órgiva is surrounded by rivers and mountains. Since the time when mules transported people in and out of the town, the main route between Órgiva and the winding road that leads to all points north and west had been a one-lane bridge spanning the Río Chico. When another vehicle arrived at the bridge first, one had to pull one’s own vehicle over and yield the right-of-way before continuing to cross. Now that has changed. It was determined that the single-lane bridge was no longer structurally sound and, in August 2019, construction of a new bridge began. The new, two-lane bridge was completed on January 31, 2020. In its official inauguration on February 13, 2020, by the president and other representatives of the Junta de Andalucía, the Junta’s president emphasized the bridge’s importance to the local Alpujarran infrastructure and the Junta’s commitment to investing
in improving all of Andalucía’s infrastructure. While regional politicians used the bridge as a showpiece of transportation infrastructure, it also serves as a symbol of the community structures and dynamics that support tolerance in the town: two-lane bridges facilitate two-way tolerance and the new bridge, while strange and unfamiliar, is a reminder of improvements that make life safer and more functional. This new bridge is a sign of an even more important type of progress, also gained through commitment and investment. But rather than a strictly monetary investment, the bridge is an investment in self and community and, rather than modernity per se, it creates healthy coexistence. More important than the built infrastructure of modernity, is the infrastructure of sustainable tolerance that is worked on every day by Órgiva’s residents. Their new bridge serves as a symbol of how bridges between communities and the two-way traffic of recognition-based toleration that includes productive estrangement create the ongoing negotiation that is the core of coexistence.

By recognizing the power differences, ideologies, and ambivalences that are at play, we can identify the bridges that open the door to dialogue and respect-based tolerance. Perhaps humans tend to want simple, easy, automatic tolerance—but it doesn’t exist. A more sustainable tolerance is reached when there is recognition of not only each other as worthy human beings, but of each party’s concessions and vested interests; rather than embracing a convivencia rhetoric, we need to acknowledge that living together is sometimes messy and always entangled with power. Together, the multiple, sometimes contradictory, narratives about this Andalusian town demonstrate how tolerance is negotiated and debated. While orgiveños and lifestyle migrants emphasized a dynamic of living in separate worlds, Muslim incomers—whether European converts or Maghrebi migrants—emphasized finding a (spiritual) home in the town. While the former group of inhabitants questions how much they want to live together (convivir) vs. how much they want to live side by side, the latter group is keenly aware of the relatively welcoming space that they find in the town. All of these constituents are engaged in a process of weighing the benefits and losses of different modes of coexistence. To avoid us-
Figure 12: An orgiveño and a convert to Sufi Islam wait their turn at the meat counter of a local grocery store that sells both cured jamón (hanging from the wall behind the counter) and halal meat.
ing tolerance as a way to mask differences and power relationships, tolerance needs to be recognized as an ongoing negotiation of what and how difference will be accepted—of what can be agreed upon as haram versus halal in the land of jamón, with its deep roots in diversity and mobility.