The religious polemics of the Muslims of Late Medieval Christian Iberia
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Chapter Two: Concepts and Methods for the Study of Religious Authority and Identity in the Religious Polemics of the Mudejars

Introduction

This chapter presents the conceptual framework and the methods which will be used in the analysis of the corpus of Mudejar Arabic and Aljamiado treatises of religious polemics which lie at the heart of this dissertation. The preceding discussion suggests that, just as frameworks of religious authority and identity in Islam are relational, the place of the treatises of religious polemics of the Mudejar authors in these frameworks is also marked by the relationships of the members of their communities with the Christians and the Jews, and indeed with their Mudejar co-religionists. In my analysis of the corpus of polemical literature of the Mudejars, I demonstrate how treatises of polemics provided tools to bolster the religious authority of the Mudejar leaders and, moreover, to shape social relations and to strengthen the internal cohesion of the aljamas. This ties in with my overall argument in this dissertation that seeing ‘religious polemic’ above all as a violent form of communication which disturbs harmony in society as is often the case in our Post-Modern societies conceals the plurality of functions which religious polemical discourse seems to have had among the Mudejars. In this chapter, I would like to present the reader with the basis for such claim. Before commencing, I would like to pause to consider what we understand by religious polemic and whether such an understanding is the most appropriate to the study of the literature of religious polemics of the Mudejars.

Section 2.1. provides a brief overview of recent approaches to ‘polemic’ and identifies the main approaches to the term by scholars. Section 2.2. explains how these approaches influenced the study of religious polemics in the Middle Ages. The overview reveals that some elements have so far escaped critical attention and this omission justifies the need for the definition of polemics provided in the Introduction. Section 2.3. presents a set of analytical and conceptual tools borrowed from Social Identity Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis which I apply to the study of Mudejar polemics in the remaining chapters.
2.1. Recent Approaches to Religious Polemics

In his recent publication by Brill, *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, Anders Klostergaard Petersen provocatively claims that, even though polemics “is a key phenomenon in the study of religion” and “in the contemporary modern world […] is playing an increasingly important role”, nonetheless it “does not belong to the stock vocabulary of religious studies.” Indeed, the entry ‘polemic/s’ is absent from some standard reference works in the field of religion. The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* discusses ‘controversy’ instead of ‘polemics’, and defines it as “the weapon with which battles have to be fought in the field of theology and philosophy”, a definition which is directly followed by Kant’s views on controversy. Another reference work, *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, provides a lengthy discussion of Jewish-Christian, Muslim-Jewish, and Christian-Muslim polemics but, remarkably, it does not offer a definition of what a ‘polemic’ is. As we shall particularly relevant to the present inquiry is the fact that, as Klostergaard Petersen notes, even though ‘polemic’ does not belong to the stock vocabulary of the study of religion, nonetheless the word has a meaning which is heavily indebted to the ideas of Michael Foucault and Edward Saïd which “ha[ve] led to a focus on the way identity is forged by the construction of the ‘other’, often in the form of castigation.” In the latter remark, he is referring to the construction of the religious identity of the in-group through an attack on the outsiders’ views, but also to its criticism and attempt to correct by those who are regarded as heretics within their own community. What concerns me here is that, as Klostergaard Petersen puts it, “polemics appears where the emphasis is on verbal warfare against the other” and, moreover, this “includes an array of attacks ranging from venomous castigation, vitriolic condemnation, and hate speech, to disapproval, insult, caricature, ridicule, and satire.” I argue that this sort of a perspective overemphasizes religious polemic as “a rhetorical ‘attack strategy’” and downplays what is a most important characteristic of the

1 Klostergaard Petersen, 2015.
2 “Controversy”, Campbell Smith, 1911, 191. On the page mentioned we read: “Professor Edward Caird tells us that the philosopher Kant was keenly alive to the uses of controversial methods as a mental training […] this being ‘one of the most excellent means to attain to profound views of any question’ (Critical Philosophy of Kant, I. 162)”. something which is in sharp contrast to Marcelo Dascal’s assertion that, “Kant, for instance, considered only the existence of the two extreme types, discussion and dispute – the one exemplified by physics and mathematics, the other by metaphysics”, and hence he did not take recourse to controversy. Dascal, 2004, 8. These two different views testify to the difficulties faced by scholars working on a subject with a non-standardized vocabulary.
3 See ‘Polemics’, Berger et al., 2005.
4 Klostergaard Petersen, 2015.
5 Klostergaard Petersen, 2015, passim.
Mudejar treatises of polemics, namely: that this ‘attack strategy’ is simultaneously “destructive and constructive” and, moreover, that it is “identified by irrelevantly aggressive, but overpoweringly argumentational, discourse”.

As highlighted in the Introduction, the investigation of polemics in terms of discourse is the principal aim of the present dissertation and, consequently it is important to discuss what are the concepts which, according to Klostergaard Petersen, underpin current views on polemics in more detail. I would like to do this by giving an example of two claims about polemics which, for reasons which will become clear in a moment, are particularly relevant to the present inquiry. They are made by Michael Foucault and Walter Benjamin and are excerpted from very specific contexts. Nonetheless, they give a pertinent illustration of the widespread understandings of the subject. They are the following:

* As in heresiology, polemics sets itself the task of determining the intangible point of dogma, the fundamental and necessary principle that the adversary has neglected, ignored or transgressed; and it denounces this negligence as a moral failing; at the root of the error, it finds passion, desire, interest, a whole series of weaknesses and inadmissible attachments that establish it as culpable. *Michel Foucault*

* Genuine polemics approach a book as lovingly as a cannibal spices a baby. *Walter Benjamin*

The first quotation is from an interview with Michel Foucault conducted by anthropologist Paul Rabinow in 1984, in which Foucault makes a clear distinction between polemics, discussions and dialogues. As far as polemics are concerned, by and large they unfold according to three models, religious, judiciary and political, and in all cases they are no more than theatrical gestures of social practices which have sterilizing effects on the contents and form of discourse. Therefore, in his view “a long history will have to be written of polemics, polemics as a parasitic figure on discussion and an obstacle to the search for the truth.” The second quotation above is one of the thirteen theses of Walter Benjamin delineating the tasks carried out by literary critics. In previous theses, he has claimed that “[p]olemics mean to destroy a book using a few of its sentences. The less it has been studied, the better. Only he who can destroy can criticize.” In this assertion, for the specific

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6 Ter Borg, 2004, 436. For the social function of polemics, see *op. cit.* 438ff.
7 The definition of polemics as a ‘rhetorical ‘attack strategy’ for quarreling [...] identified by irrelevantly aggressive, but overpoweringly argumentational, discourse’ is from Hack, 2015.
8 Foucault, 1997, 112. Here, Foucault is talking about religious polemics.
9 Foucault, 1997, 112.
10 Benjamin, 1979, 67. This is thesis X of the thirteen theses by Benjamin of the “critic’s technique” provided in *op cit.*, 66-67.
field of literature, Benjamin echoes the more general statements of Foucault about the empty nature of polemics with regard to social practices.

Indeed, one extended idea about polemics is illustrated by Foucault’s overt preference for discussion and dialogue: he treats polemics with contempt and sees them as a mimicry of more fruitful social practices. Foucault is interested in questions about agency, power and consequently the possibility of change in the order of discourse. Accordingly, his argument moves away from polemics since, in his view, polemics are repetitions of patterned pre-existing arguments, therefore they are forms of interaction which do not introduce changes into discourse and are not affected by these changes. His major objection is based on ethical grounds. He is convinced that polemics not only hamper the quest for knowledge but that the polemicist also denies his adversary’s right to speak before they even have a chance to do so. Foucault implicitly suggests that polemics are remnants of past practices that Men Living in the Episteme of Modernity must abandon. The reason is because polemics are, after all, not totally inoffensive. In the political mode, for example, polemics put “forward as much of one’s killer instinct as possible”, which can “make anyone believe that he can gain access to the truth by such paths and then to validate, even if in a merely symbolic form, the real political practices that could be warranted by it.” These features make polemics not only an ill-suited tool by which to gain insight into the actual dynamics between individuals and communities, in Foucault’s eyes certainly it clearly makes them an obstacle to be avoided.

A second extended idea about polemics is illustrated in Walter Benjamin’s account of the “cannibalistic” endeavours of literary critics. That is to say, the idea that polemics are not only undesirable practices, but that they are also an extravagant undertaking, rhetorical exercises mainly concerned with spicing but not with understanding the contents of what is read or said. Polemics oppose literature as it were, or, to take the “gastronomic” example of Benjamin, they break down the literary work and make it ready for consumption, so that it can be devoured, digested and, eventually, excreted. Yet the most pregnant element in this image is that in which Benjamin adduces the idea that polemics are ‘primitive’ and, hence, fall outside what is socially accepted – and expected. Because Benjamin confines polemics to the literary field, it can be argued that, from such a perspective, they are doubly disengaged from ‘real’ social life.

There are gradations in these approaches but, as Klostergaard Petersen rightly remarks, today polemics are often conceptualized in the terms just described. However, Jesse Lander notes that the very use of the word ‘polemic’ as “a label reserved for bad and violent

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arguments" is fairly new. He takes England as a case in point and locates the emergence of the idea of polemics in the Early Modern period. Polemical exchanges, he observes, also occurred in previous centuries, and are epitomized by the academic controversies in the medieval universities, but at that time controversy lacked "the emphasis on enmity that makes polemic distinctive". In his view, polemics in the Middle Ages were "simultaneously a genre, a concept and a practice". Lander advances the thesis that the conflation of print and the Reformation and the reciprocal relationship between the two changed the cultural practices in Early Modern England and led to the emergence of the category of polemics. The proliferation of controversies in print (most of which were religious) "created a culture that formed not homogeneously but continually in debate, a culture that can itself be seen as polemical"; as polemics increasingly permeated the literary field, they were paradoxically conceptualized as a category distinct from literature. As a result of these processes, Lander argues, in England "the authentically literary comes to be perceived as the antithesis of the polemical: it is aesthetic, not political; disinterested, not tendentious; exploratory, not restrictive; imaginative, not dogmatic." After their intrusion, literature is as good as "anti- or un-polemical".

Their separation from literature is not the only divide which characterizes polemics. Foucault puts forward the idea that polemics are intrinsically distinct from dialogues and explains the opposition between the two as follows:

In the serious play of questions and answers, in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person are in some sense immanent in the discussion. [...] The person asking the questions is merely exercising the right that has been given him: to remain unconvinced, to perceive a contradiction, to require more information, to emphasize different postulates, to point out faulty reasoning, and so on.

The polemicist, on the other hand, proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. On principle, he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking; the person he confronts is not a partner in search for the truth but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful, and whose very existence constitutes a threat.

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12 Lander, 2006, 34.
14 Lander, 2006, 35.
Lander says that the appeal for dialogue (in this example, underlying the definitions by Foucault) either has much to do with the views of those who locate the birth and the spread of this form in the Early Modern period (more particularly, the Renaissance), or with those who argue that a linguistic and semiotic shift occurred with the rise of the “dialogical” novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The latter follow Mikhail Bakhtin in this. Bakhtin’s idea of the ‘dialogical’ seems to have an overall function in developing his literary critique as, for example, in his conceptualization of how space and time are related to each other in a novel (a relationship to which he refers as ‘chronotope’). Dialogue and the dialogical serve him to illustrate the connections between different chronotopes in a text and how actual historical chronotopes are assimilated in literature. This aspect, argues Bakhtin, is central to the endeavours of such authors as François Rabelais (1483-1553 CE). Bakhtin argues that Rabelais’ understanding of space-time is specifically contrasted with medieval verticality, and this polemical opposition receives a special emphasis. Rabelais’ task is to purge the spatial and temporal world of those remnants of a transcendent world view still present in it, to clean away symbolic and hierarchical interpretations still clinging to this vertical world [...] In a nutshell, Bakhtin sees the use of space-time by Rabelais as standing in contradistinction to the pyramidal structures of life and thought characteristic of the medieval period; as an early example of the ideas of dialogue.

This brief outline of influential scholarly views on polemics reveals a common understanding on the subject and, regardless of the period they are referring to, scholars consistently identify an epistemological break between the Modern and the Pre-Modern periods. Indeed, in the current collective imaginary polemics represent all from which Western ideas of literature, discussion and dialogue are assumed to have taken their distance. Even though the Pre-Modern period is often recalled for comparative purposes, polemics at that time are at best vaguely conceived and appear to be a catch-all for ‘all that

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18 Lander, 2006, 34, see especially notes 80-83 for references to studies on this topic in the Renaissance. Novikoff, 2013, 1 and n. 1. Lander notes that the Renaissance has often been seen as a period characterized by the emergence of dialogue. Moreover, this author refers to the views of scholars from other fields – such as Rorty, Gadamer or Habemas – whose views on dialogue and on the dialogical might have influenced the overall scholarly approach to polemics.

19 “The relationships themselves that exist among chronotopes cannot enter into any of the relationships contained within chronotopes. The general characteristic of these interactions is that they are dialogical (in the broadest use of the word); [...] It (this dialogue) enters the world of the author, of the performer, and the world of the listeners and readers. And all these worlds are chronotopic as well.” Bakhtin, 2008, 252, emphasis in the original.

people did in the past’. Moreover, medieval polemics are presented as tantamount to
distinctively Christian modes of dispute (that is, the scholastic disputation in the medieval
universities) although, as we shall see in a moment, some scholars of this period seem to
have a different opinion. Be that as it may, in all cases, little is said about the plural voices
which were distinctive of medieval practices in the Iberian Peninsula.

2.2. Towards a Definition of Mudejar Polemics

The conceptualization of religious polemics in the terms just described is significant to our
understanding of the Middle Ages. This is seen, for example, in the way Alex Novikoff has
addressed the method of controversy par excellence in the medieval Christian university:
disputation (‘disputatio’). In his recent publication on the subject, Novikoff discusses at
length the practice of disputation and their entrenchment in various other aspects of
Christian intellectual culture. He claims that the practice of scholastic disputes has not yet
been addressed as a subject of study in its own right and, among the reasons he gives to
explain why this is so, he notes that, ever since the Renaissance, debates in scholastic
argumentation “have routinely been condemned as medieval vestiges of an anti-intellectual
world”.21 True, one might wonder why such an ineffective form of interaction, at worst a
‘parasitic figure’ and an ‘obstacle to the search for the truth’, should be a major topic of
scholarly inquiry. To counter this, Novikoff insists not only on the recognition of the
importance of scholastic methods in medieval society. He also argues that the
institutionalized modes of disputation were not discrete events, or practices which were
only cultivated among certain segments of society. ‘Disputatio’ was embedded in much
broader cultural practices and, therefore, it was subject to evolution and change.22

In the medieval sources used by Novikoff, the word ‘polemic’ does not appear,
which is consistent with the historical developments of and the place of polemics in the
vocabulary of religious studies referred to in the previous section. This notwithstanding, we
still can delineate two different approaches to the term by this author. On the one hand,
Novikoff seems to draw a thin line between polemic and other forms of contention, for
instance when he refers to Lanfranc of Pavia (c. 1005-1089 CE) and argues that Lanfranc
wrote “an influential dialogue, a cleverly constructed polemic that sets in writing the sort of
theological disputation that was current during the eleventh-century ecclesiastical

21 Novikoff, 2013, 1.
22 Novikoff, 2013, 4-5.
On occasion, the terms follow each other uninterruptedly in such a way that they appear to be interchangeable, and claims: “Disputation was a natural vehicle for polemical delivery, championed by controversialists in the twelfth century and by Dominicans in the thirteenth, who welded scholastic argumentation to their obligations as itinerant preachers.”

On the other hand, Novikoff singles out polemic as a rhetorical component of the ancient literature of the *Adversus Iudaeos* [‘Against the Jews’]. In this regard, he claims that, on account of their aggressiveness, polemics were gradually replaced by – and eventually subsumed by – the practice of Christian disputations. Indeed, the success of dialogue (which is tantamount to disputation) in the Middle Ages lay in its propensity to integrate pedagogy and polemic into a single mode. Therefore it follows that, even were polemics eventually to take place, they do not seem to belong to the core of the practice of disputations Novikoff aims to study. In his approach, Novikoff is echoing Lander who, as seen above, argues that the scholastic practices lacked the degree of animosity which was distinctive of polemics in Early Modern England. Important to the present purposes is that this assertion does not overcome the Foucauldian ‘dialogic barrier’, but simply anticipates its moment in history. In his entry mentioned above, Klostergaard Petersen places the coming into existence of polemics in a later period, and claims that “[p]olemics differs from apologetics by coming first – a fact demonstrated by those early Christian apologists who saw themselves compelled to defend their beliefs against the charges by Greco-Roman writers accusing Christians of atheism, cannibalism, promiscuity, or incest.” Therefore the argument is compelling: polemics, as a conceptual denominator, are different from disputation/dialouge and contain a greater degree of violence.

At this point, I wish to make a brief exploration of the broader implications of such a perspective. One is that polemics are subject to a narrow definition. By claiming that polemics have been superseded by disputations, these discussions are reduced to remnants of past practices which ‘Men Living in the Episteme of the Middle Ages’ should abandon. They fall – like the ‘cannibalistic’ practices of Benjamin – outside the ‘accepted and expected’ cultural practices among Christians. More importantly, elements such as violence, which, as it has been argued, mark the current thinking about polemics, are being adopted to be used in the study of this phenomenon in the medieval period. As will be

\[\text{Novikoff, 2013, 60.}\]

\[\text{Novikoff, 2013, 172.}\]

\[\text{Op. cit., 33: ‘The medieval dialogue is a direct outgrowth of its classical form. [...] The ability of the dialogue to function as pedagogy and as polemic was an essential reason for its enduring success from ancient to medieval times.’ However, on the same page he affirms that there ‘are a great many treatises of the Adversus Iudaeos genre that are not dialogues’, in which he seems to be contradicting what he said earlier.}\]

\[\text{Klostergaard Petersen, 2015.}\]
noted in the discussion which follows, looking at polemics in terms of violence obscures their role as tools in the construction of religious identity by the Mudejars, yet it is worth saying a few words about violence between communities in the Middle Ages before moving on to this point.

Medieval records show that conflicts between the three religious communities in the Christian territories of the Iberian Peninsula could sometimes lead to outbreaks of violence, on both a small and large scale. The majority of the attacks were launched by Christians, but sometimes the Mudejars took the initiative, and who in doing so took turns in reversing the role of ‘aggressor–aggrieved’. In this context one only need recall the Christian persecutions of Jews (among the most important that of 1391 CE); the Christian accusations against lepers, Jews and Muslims of poisoning water wells; and the episodes of violence between Mudejars and Jews in the Christian processions. However, in the previous chapter we have seen that a scholar such as Nirenberg emphasizes the importance of the historical context in which each violent episode occurs. Importantly, he questions the assumption in modern studies that “violence, hostility and competition can be seen only as destructive breakdowns of social relations, the antithesis of associative action” and convincingly argues that, far from being purely a destructive force, conversely violence also contributed to the building of social relations and to the establishment partnerships between Christians, Muslims and Jews.

Although there is no doubt that physical violence could be reflected in the literature of polemics and that disputes could have been verbally violent at times, this is still a far from answering the questions of whether a direct link can be established between the one and the other, or whether they are the same thing. Below we shall see that Mudejar polemics do contain some violent expletives and approaches aimed against the ‘Other’ and

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27 Tensions between Jewish individuals in the Jewish aljamas as well as those with Mudejars (see references in note 39 below) are documented, but it is very much the question whether Jews initiated the attacks and, in general, we cannot speak of Jewish structural violence against Mudejars and Christians. For the struggles between the Aconstantini and the Avincaprut and between these families and the rest of the Jewish aljama of Morvedre (Valencia) – probably the affluent Jews – from 1280 CE onwards, see Meyerson, 2004, 112 ff.

28 See inter alia, Valle Rodríguez et al., 2011.

29 We find Christian accusations against the lepers alleging the spreading their disease by throwing powders into the water wells and against Muslims for helping them in fourteenth-century Aragon and France. Nirenberg, 1996, Chapter Four (193-124) and Epilogue (231-249).

30 One example is the attacks of the Muslims of Fraga on the Jews of that city during the procession after the death of Pere of Aragon in 1387 CE. In these attacks the issue at stake was which group would lead the way. In 1392 CE, and at the request of the aljama of Huesca, King Juan issued an edict in which it is stated that on any formal occasion or procession Muslims should march first. Nirenberg, 1993, 266-267. See also, Riera i Sans, 2003; Vifuales Ferreiro, 2009.

that, indeed, in some later Morisco works, physical action is sometimes claimed. Some are quotations from the Christians and the Jewish attacks on the Mudejars, insulting them by calling them ‘dogs’, and others are the Mudejars’ disparagement of their opponents – especially the Jews. A Mudejar polemicist, author of a fourteenth-century anti-Jewish text which will be discussed below, the Ta’ṣīd al-Milla [‘The Fortification of the Faith, or Community’], quotes a hadith in which is said that at the End of Time Jesus will come “and shall break the cross and kill the swine and kill the Jews.” This sort of assertion can be explained from a post-structuralist perspective by recourse to the concept that, “the discourse of binary opposites is itself an act of violence which can, in turn, be invoked to justify physical violence.” The polemical texts written by the Mudejars were certainly devised to defeat their Jewish and Christian religious adversaries and used as weapons to weaken their opponents; moreover, they wanted to find the ‘root of the error’, as Foucault poses it.

On the other hand, we shall also see that, in their endeavours to differentiate the Muslim Self from the non-Muslim ‘Other’, the Mudejars also established new forms of affiliations. By this I do not mean, as Nirenberg sometimes seems to suggest, that rhetorical violence in polemics had a ‘function’ in medieval society, nor that it was needed to maintain relationships. I am simply stating that, because violence in general was linked to other spheres of medieval life and because it seems to have contributed not only to the destruction of social ties but also to the building of these ties, we need to incorporate both aspects into our approach to this literature.

It is my contention that the fact that some utterances were verbally violent does not validate the synecdoche that violence equated polemics. Let me explain this. It is my argument that violence in medieval disputes functioned in much the same way as described by Nirenberg and that, by portraying polemics as ‘the youngest (or naughty) brother’ of medieval, and modern, forms of interaction, scholars overlook their role as a means of identity construction in the Pre-Modern period. This fits in well with an image of medieval man as irrational, inclined towards fanaticism and easily involved in episodes of violence. I have in mind the Christian campaigns against Jews, Muslims and lepers in the Later Middle Ages to which Nirenberg is referring, but other episodes in medieval history can be taken as examples as well. Too much emphasis on attack can obscure the real

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32 See the Introduction for this point.
33 Kassin, 1969, I, 244. The pig seems to have been a recurrent element in the polemics between the three religious communities. The Christians also associated the Jews with the pigs, but the Jews, too, seem to have identified the image of the pig with Rome. See Har-Peled, 2013. For a short discussion of the sources of this hadith, see Nirenberg, 1996, 197 n. 123.
34 Jones, 2008, 797. Jones is referring to such authors as Derrida, Foucault, Armstrong and Tennenhouse.
possibility that the Mudejar religious leaders seem to have needed to enhance their authority within their *aljamas* by recourse to the multiple strategies offered by polemics, and to negotiate the terms of the relationships with the Christians and the Jews, and with their co-religionists. It can be enlightening in this respect to consider the views of Foucault that

\[\text{in itself the exercise of power is not violence. [...]}\]

Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government. This word must be allowed the very broad meaning which it had in the sixteenth century. “Government” did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. [...] To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.\(^55\)

We shall see that the government of the Mudejar communities by the religious leaders is best explained by these views and that, as a whole, in their polemics they move away from either verbal or physical violence. The analysis will reveal that the attempt to convince the opponent by argumentative proofs seems to prevail in their treatises and that verbal attacks were just one of the many tactics adopted by the authors. Moreover, we shall see that verbal violence is used as a rhetorical tool on only a few occasions. The Mudejars’ efforts to remain temperate in their views are illustrated in the following claim by one polemical author that, “the True Faith must not be demonstrated by the sword. Each time [namely: in a disputation, MCA] the Muslims must defeat the Christians and the True Faith will be made clear by the evident truth.”\(^56\) This assertion echoes the Qur'anic concept that Islam should be proven with the most beautiful words (Q. 29:46),\(^57\) and in making this point it is likely that the polemicist is refuting the well-known argument by the Christians discussed in the Introduction that Islam should be spread by military force.\(^58\) The example suggests that the

\(^{35}\) Foucault, 1982, 220-221.

\(^{36}\) MS AF 58, f. 50r.

**Mêsāla āhārī li-lahīn din al-lahiq bi-l-safīl f-malsūmun kull mura-dan yulūb ilī al-ṣamārīwa li-ma yit-tīn din al-lahiq bi-l-safīl al-mu'min**

In making such an assertion, he is most probably rebuking the Christians’ claim that Islam was transmitted by the sword. For Christian representations of Islam in the Middle Ages, see the study by Norman Daniel which is already a classic. Daniel, 1960. Instructive here is the comparison with medieval Christian attitudes towards disputation, for instance, those of Peter Abelard, who claims: “I preferred the weapons of dialectic to all the other teachings of philosophy, and armed with these I chose the conflicts of disputation (conflictus pretuli disputationum) instead of the trophies of war.” Novikoff, 2013, 71.

\(^{57}\) “And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong.” We know, for example, of the knowledge of the Qurʾān commentary by ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Abī Zamanīn among the Moriscos. Harvey, 2005, 154-155.

use of physical violence seems to have been a contentious issue and that the Mudejars did not appear to see it as an appropriate means to defeat their Christian and Jewish religious opponents. This concurs with the findings in later chapters, in which it will be shown that the Mudejar religious leaders present polemical writing as a useful vehicle through which to channel the tensions between the groups into well-structured arguments based on reason. It is upon this basis and not upon violence that their ideas of religious authority and their relationships in polemics with the Christians and the Jews seem to have rested.

Finally, I would like to consider the use of specific terms, such as ‘disputatio’, as markers of socially embedded practices in the Iberian Peninsula. This use is no doubt convenient in the sense that Christians, Jews and Muslims seem to have had distinctive traditions of polemics as is illustrated by the well-established practice of the majlis and the forms of munāṣara, mufākhara, mukhāwara, and majādala, current in majority Muslim countries and referred to in the previous chapter.39 However, the study by Novikoff is instructive in this regard since it insightfully discusses how ‘disputatio’ unfolded not only in the universities but also in public spaces, sometimes before Muslim and Jewish audiences and eventually against a Muslim or Jewish opponent. This was often the case in the period and region under study. The coming together of individuals whose arguments, conceptions and expectations rested on different traditions of polemics justifies the need for an umbrella term which can accommodate a broad spectrum of social practices. It is my argument that it is easy to overlook specific denominations and to talk about ‘polemics’ in a case of co-authored practice which the polemical literature of the Mudejars seems to have been. As an exception, I retain the difference between polemics and apologetics, because I think that polemics must have an ‘explicit’ opponent, but this does not imply that polemics cannot pursue an apologetic aim as well. These considerations substantiate the definition of ‘polemics’ in the Introduction as those oral or written interactions which, with or without verbal violence, oppose the beliefs or the standpoints of an adversary by sound arguments. The interactions in these works are dialectical (namely: they are bi-directional) and can include two or more parties, and can attempt (and eventually, succeed) in convincing either the adversary or the group to which the polemicist belongs. In every case, they function as devices of identity construction of the individuals and groups involved.

39 See for example, Lazarus-Yafeh et al., 1999.
2.3. Theoretical Framework and Methods

I am devoting the following sections to a discussion of the concepts and methods which will be used to discuss Mudejar treatises of religious polemics from the perspective just outlined, namely: in terms of discourse. In doing so, I take a slightly different approach to that of the authors referred to so far. Like Novikoff, I see polemics as embedded in the cultural practices of medieval men and women. However, I am not concerned with the longue durée of polemical practices in the Middle Ages: my primary concern is how they were used as a means of identity construction.

2.3.1. Baumann’s ‘Grammars of Identity/Alterity’

In Chapter One, I noted that, according to Nirenberg, the discourses of the Mudejars in some of their polemical treatises can be linked to contemporary shifts in the power relations between communities. In this respect, ‘triangularity’ (namely: the dialectical influence which changes between two groups could have on a third group, and the strategic move by which one group seeks support in another group to increase the rhetorical force of his own arguments) has been proposed as essential to the analysis of the Arabic and Aljamiado treatises of religious polemics under study. As starting point, I have taken the idea that identity in these works rested on social relations which were ternary in nature, a premise which is derived from theories on this subject introduced by such scholars as Gerd Baumann.

Using anthropological models, Baumann adduces three grammars to explain how identity/alterity is constructed. Segmentation is one of these grammars and it is based on the idea that individuals attach themselves to multiple identities. As a consequence, alliances among between individuals and groups are not stable but depend on the specific context: certain individuals and groups will unite under certain circumstances –, for instance, when they fight against a common enemy – but they will become or revert to being rivals when the common threat disappears. Baumann’s approach makes it possible to enter into multiple and sometimes-conflicting alliances at one and the same time, and it gives us the theoretical foundation for triangularity. The latter is apparent in the case of the

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* One of the aims of Novikoff is “to trace the organic evolution of an essential mode of analysis in a single culture”. Novikoff, 2013, 3-4.

* The other two are orientalization and encompassment. See for segmentation, Baumann, 2004, 21-24.
grammar of segmentation, in which the “Third Party” would include “precisely those who fall outside, or are kicked outside, the limits of applicability of that grammar.”

We shall see that segmentation in triangular relationships between communities in the Iberian Peninsula is a characteristic which, to anticipate my analysis, defines the mechanisms of identity construction in Mudejar polemics. The concept of segmentation also seems to apply to fluid categories which transcend in-group religious membership and are transversally applied across social strata. On some occasions, the Mudejar polemicists underscore their intra-faith differences with the members of their own group and look for similarities with Jews and Christians. The same process occurs with encompassment, defined by Baumann as the act of subsuming “that which is different under that which is universal” but nonetheless keeping the differences between the two at the lower level. This sort of a grammar is particularly evident in the Christian politics towards the converted Iberian Muslims, the Moriscos: although they were officially recognized as Christians, they were always regarded as an element extraneous to the Christian society. To advance some of the ideas suggested by Social Identity Theory which will be explained in the next section, this argument seems to confirm that competition between communities cannot be explained as simply the outcome of conflicts instigated by incompatible group goals.

2.3.2. Social Identity Theory

Membership of a group is an element heavily emphasized in the processes of identity construction through strategies of differentiation between individuals. The way in which social considerations shape identity can be analysed by recourse to one of the existing approaches to identity which have been paid the most attention by scholars from various academic disciplines, Social Identity Theory (SIT). This group includes scholars of the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels to whom I shall refer below because of the clear proximity between their source materials and the polemics with which I am working. The theories of Tajfel and Turner are widely known in the field of social psychology and summarized or referred to in almost every textbook on this discipline. It is for this reason that I do not think it necessary to explain them in full, nor shall I provide a discussion of its supplementary theory focused on intra-group processes, Self-Categorization Theory.

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44 It is in this way that Guido Sprenger rightly claims that, “issues of hegemony and political power come into focus more obtrusively in the encompassment model than in the other grammars.” Sprenger, 2004, 173.
Tajfel and Turner developed Social Identity Theory in the 1980s from several laboratory experiments, as a method whose purpose was to explain consistent questions of group membership and conflict between groups from a socio-psychological perspective. A very often-quoted definition by Tajfel is that of social identity as "that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership."^{45}

The views of Tajfel and Turner have led to new insights into social behaviour and intergroup conflict. The results indicate that hostility could not be explained in terms of competition for "rewards which, in principle, are extrinsic to the intergroup situation" alone,^{47} and that other mechanisms, conceptually distinct from realistic competition, also seem to explain conflict between groups.^{48} One of these is difference, which lies at the heart of the idea behind intergroup behaviour with respect to the definition of social categories, or social categorization:^{49} "in-group bias is a remarkably omnipresent feature of intergroup relationships";^{50} the very presence of an out-group is enough for the members of the in-group to make a positive discrimination towards their own group. They argue that in the case of minority groups their self-image is strongly connected to the negative stereotypes and bias held by the majority group. Viewed from this perspective, prejudice and discrimination are seen as the outcome of complex processes in which the identification of the individual with the group is ‘subjectively’ affected by the internal conflicts or Self-Categorization (in-group behaviour) and the conflicts between groups (intergroup behaviour).^{51} Group identification is argued to be a fluid idea affected by the ‘reciprocal (or ‘dialectical’) relationship between social settings and situations on the one hand, and the reflection or expression in them of subjective group memberships on the other."^{52} Hence, social identity becomes relevant only by comparison to other groups and is not a static or fixed idea but a fluid concept which can be modified by individual or collective agency.

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^{46} Tajfel, 1978, 61-76; 63, emphasis in the original.


^{48} Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 41–42.


^{50} Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 38.

^{51} Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 33-34.

^{52} Tajfel, 1981, 88.
Furthermore, minorities can change the majority’s perceptions by such strategies as *social creativity* or *competition*. The own group is presented as different from other groups and it is compared with these in positive terms, a mechanism known as *positive group distinctiveness*. Tajfel states that the concept of social identity is linked to a “need for a positive and distinctive image of the in-group”. Group positive distinctiveness unfolds in various patterns. One of them is direct social competition with the out-group. The other is social creativity, or the effort to change the comparative situation and make it more favourable for the in-group.¹³ Important to the present study is the realization that differentiation and distinctiveness not only help to promote the perceptions that groups have of each other and, thereby, of their social identities, but also that minority groups, like the Mudejars, can exert agency to change these perceptions.

Social Identity Theory has not been equally successful in explaining identity processes to the same degree in all scholarly disciplines, but its insights have led to a growing interest in it among scholars of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament who apply them as heuristic tools in their analysis of biblical narratives. One perception shared by these scholars is that such processes as comparison and group distinctiveness, among others, occur not only in everyday contacts but are also shaped in texts. When read from the perspective of social relations, the purpose of the codes of ethical behaviour in these narratives is to establish group boundaries and thereby provide insight into the social settings and evolution of the identity of early Jewish and Christian communities.¹⁴

A case in point is Baker’s analysis of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles in which Peter re-categorizes two sub-groups of followers of Christ which held antagonistic views about the inclusion of non-Judeans in their communities into a super-ordinate category (following the principle of *common in-group identity*).¹⁵ Nonetheless, these groups are still allowed to retain some of their distinctive characteristics. The figure of Peter plays a key role in this process; he is a prototype, a concept which generally denotes “an abstract concept formed from several experiences with members of a category […] a summary representation that encapsulates the central tendency of the category as opposed to an exemplar, which is a single example of the category in question.”¹⁶ By examining re-categorization, common group identity and leadership, Baker shows that a relationship definitely exists between the audiences and the texts and the processes of identity

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¹³ Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 43.
¹⁴ See in this regard the detailed overview given by Leonie Huddy of the shortcomings and necessary adjustments to these theories for the study of political identities. Huddy, 2001.
¹⁵ Illustrative of these joint efforts is the most recent monograph edited by Tucker and Baker, 2014.
formation in the New Testament. Most importantly, biblical narratives lend themselves to social analysis and enhance our understanding of how norms and beliefs shaped the social world of individuals.

As we shall see below, Peter, and also Paul, are also central figures in some processes of re-categorization in Mudejar polemics. Hence, some authors argue that Peter and Paul had divided the Christian community into two sub-groups: a group which accepted the changes introduced they introduced into Christianity and another group which continued to practise the original commandments given by Jesus. Elsewhere in this work, this same author makes the double, albeit implicit, claim that the members of this original Christian community should be considered proto-Muslims, whereas he also argues that they kept some of the Jewish laws such as the celebration of the Sabbath. Therefore, the author seems to re-categorize these proto-Muslims and place them in the same group as Muslims after the advent of Islam.

Moreover, in so far as the arguments in the polemics of the Mudejars often rely on biblical, and similar Qur'ānic materials, various aspects of the Mudejar discourses can be adequately explained by recourse to SIT and SCT. When they are approached as devices with a social function for the members of the Mudejar minority communities, polemics disclose the processes of social identity construction within and between groups in the Mudejars’ most direct environment and reflect the degree of permeability of boundaries between the various religious groups. The fact that the Mudejars kept and transmitted polemical texts from generation to generation and, as has been noted above, adapted the contents to the social contexts in which they lived, is a good indicator of the key role of polemics in shaping the self-conception and social identities of the members of the Mudejar religious minority communities.

The most compelling rationale for the use of an approach to social identity in order to explain the polemics of the Mudejars is that, some of the ideas current about groups within their communities are found in their treatises against the Christians and the Jews. An example which will be discussed in more detail below is found in the introduction to the already mentioned polemic against the Jews of the Taṣawwuf, in which two groups oppose each other, the "group(s) of Jews" who “appear in the meetings and dwellings” and “let loose their tongues with lies and calumnies and defame our prophet Muḥammad”61 and

58 Baker’s approach is in line with pioneering studies in the field, for example, those of Esler, who already devoted a monograph to the analysis of the letters of Paul to the Galatians from a social perspective in 1998. Esler, 1998. See also the earlier publication by this author, 1996.
59 For the Islamic image of Paul, see Van Koningsveld, 1996.
60 MS AF 58, f. 41v.
61 Kassin, 1969, I, 105; II, 373 (f. 1).
the Muslim community. This confrontation, the author states, is the main reason for the composition of the work. In the same way, that differentiation and a search for a distinctive image as a group are present throughout Mudejar polemics and both play a major role in shaping the Mudejars’ identity. Mudejars compete with the Christian and Jewish communities for social recognition, among other goals, and we can also observe a clear tendency towards enhancing the image of their own communities and that of Muslims in general. Both the identification with the in-group and the patterns of social competition in Mudejar religious polemics seem to have been moved by subjective reasons such as group favouritism and the goal of keeping the Islamic faith and practices alive among the Muslim minority communities in the Christian Iberian Peninsula. Nonetheless, group membership does not appear to be stable in these works but moves along a continuum with the polemicist’s interpersonal relationships, which at times seem to overlook the differences in religious affiliation, at one end, and the relationships which he establishes as a member of the Muslim community with his Jewish and Christian adversaries, at the other end. This suggests that social ties in Mudejar polemical texts, in the same way as relationships elsewhere, were not exclusively determined by interpersonal relationships, nor were they based only on intergroup contacts. They depended on the social context in which they were used. Perhaps it is the polemicist who best embodies the interconnection between the merging of the two poles in polemics: in the end, his individual voice speaks on behalf of the group as a whole.

2.3.3. Critical Discourse Analysis
I shall use Critical Discourse Analysis (or the analysis of how language is articulated in social contexts and how it serves either to re-enact or to contest the power relations between the interlocutors) to examine how Mudejar authors of religious polemics articulated their identities from the perspective of Social Identity Theory. I depart from Fairclough’s assumption that, “[l]anguage is a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena.”

My focus is the language of the Mudejar religious leaders and its use in addressing their audiences. The concept of audience seems to play a role in identity construction in the polemics of the Mudejars, for the religious adversary or ‘audience’ addressed in the texts is not always the audience intended to be reached. Sometimes this is the own religious community instead. At other times, Mudejars did not hesitate to adopt a discourse similar to that of the Christian majority society to disparage the Jews with the

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*Fairclough, 2003, 19.*
intention of strengthening their relationship with the rulers. It will emerge unequivocally that Mudejar authors of religious polemics seem to have reproduced, but also to have departed from, Muslim polemical discourse against the Christians and the Jews in al-Andalus and elsewhere. Elements such as the language and the grammatical structure of the phrases in these works attest that they are strongly related to the performative contexts of use and we find some new elements such as a hybrid form between an Arabic matrix filled in here and there, with Spanish vocabulary written in Aljamiado. Central to my inquiry will be the production and consumption of the Mudejars’ polemical works and their relationship to the transmission of the polemical texts; how the structure and content of a polemic was transformed; and the dependence of the texts of the circumstances of their production. My examination of these issues will move in a circular fashion from an overall understanding of the Mudejars’ polemical works to a closer analysis of some aspects. Particular focus will be placed on the linguistic aspects of the texts which disclose the structural relationships established between the ‘speakers’; who is the one who sets the polemical ‘agenda’ and how; and what are the various mechanisms of constructing identity through language. A deeper insight into these strategies will help to understand the connection between polemics and everyday cultural practices and the construction of social realities of Mudejar communities.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have inquired into the current understandings of ‘religious polemic’ and I have discussed the appropriateness of such understandings to the analysis of the Mudejar treatises which lies at the core of this dissertation. I have begun by looking at the use of ‘polemic’ in the field of religion and I have noted that some scholars in the field claim that, even though ‘polemic’ does not belong to the vocabulary of religious studies, it has a meaning which owes much to twentieth-century theories about the construction of the identity of the Self and the ‘Other’. Following the scholarship of Lander and Novikoff, I have illustrated how this meaning has influenced the way in which many scholars, including those engaged in the study of the Middle Ages, understand ‘religious polemic’. I have noted that religious polemics are often seen as virtually synonymous with a violent verbal attack and as a form of communication which destroys social cohesion. I have shown that such an approach disregards the part played by the treatises of the Mudejars against the Christians and the Jews in the construction of their identities as Muslims. These considerations substantiate my definition of religious polemics provided in the Introduction, and motivate my choice of the concepts and methods of Social Identity Theory and Critical Discourse.
Analysis. Indeed, I have shown that to talk about Mudejar identity in religious polemics is to talk about social identity and that a better understanding of social processes is therefore essential to the present inquiry. Such an approach will reveal how Mudejar authors defined the identity of their groups and incorporated and contested ideas of religious authority in their treatises of religious polemics.