Maddah: Journal of Advanced Dakwah Management Research
Vol. 5, No. 1 (2026), 13-22
e-ISSN: 2986-7622 | DOI: 10.35719/maddah.v5i1.179

Crisis Management in Dakwah: A Critical Review of Islamic Legal Strategies During the Christian Conquest of North West Iberia Africa

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Keywords

Critical Review, Leaving Iberia, Islamic Law, Christian Conquest

Abstract

The fall of Islamic rule in Iberia and North Africa presented a monumental crisis for the Muslim community, requiring strategic management to preserve faith and social cohesion under Christian occupation. This study aims to critically review Islamic legal strategies specifically fatwas as instruments of crisis management in dakwah during the Christian conquest of North West Africa and Iberia. This research employs a qualitative historical approach and literature review, critically analyzing the primary arguments and historical contexts presented in Jocelyn Hendrickson's "Leaving Iberia," alongside 15th and 16th-century North African fatwas. The findings reveal that North African jurists utilized fatwas not merely as legal rulings but as strategic dakwah management tools to counter Christian expansion, manage clandestine religious transmission (covert dakwah), and enforce emigration (hijrah) as a survival strategy. These legal responses successfully preserved Islamic identity during severe socio-political upheavals and maintained lasting authority into the modern colonial era, proving that legal discourse is a vital component of crisis management in Islamic preaching.

Introduction

Theological Foundation The theological foundation of crisis management in *dakwah* is intimately anchored in *maqasid al-shari'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law), specifically *hifz al-din* (the preservation of faith) and *hifz al-nafs* (the preservation of life). When Muslim communities face existential threats under oppressive non-Muslim rule, theological and jurisprudential paradigms transition from the jurisprudence of stability to the jurisprudence of minorities (*fiqh al-aqalliyyat*) and necessity (*darurah*). The Qur'an commands resilience and strategic migration as an act of faith preservation: "Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?" Consequently, *dakwah* transforms from a state-sponsored propagation effort into a decentralized, survival-oriented communal obligation. In this context, *fatwas* (legal edicts) transcend mere legalism; they become divinely inspired strategic and managerial directives aimed at preserving the psychological

and theological cohesion of the *ummah* during catastrophic socio-political upheavals.[1]

The Crisis of Muslim Minorities and Displacement Historically and contemporarily, there is a systemic failure in managing the socio-religious crises of Muslim populations suddenly subjected to hostile non-Muslim rule, leading to chaotic mass displacement and a critical lack of institutionalized religious crisis management. The primary reason for this failure is that when centralized Islamic political structures collapse, the sudden absence of institutional support leaves communities structurally defenseless. This necessitates robust, decentralized crisis management strategies that modern policymakers and historical analysts frequently overlook in favor of state-centric solutions. Conceptually and globally, the UNHCR (2023),[2] reports over 108 million forcibly displaced individuals, with Muslims from conflict zones like Myanmar and Syria representing over 50% of this population, often suffering from acute religious and social dislocation without cohesive leadership. This contemporary crisis directly mirrors the local-empirical realities of the 15th-century Christian conquest of Iberia. Following the fall of Granada in 1492, the Crown of Castile mandated forced conversions, creating a massive refugee crisis involving an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 Muslims who fled across the Mediterranean without centralized state protection. Therefore, examining how pre-modern Islamic legal frameworks and scholarly networks functioned as decentralized crisis management tools during the Iberian-Maghrebian conquests provides crucial empirical blueprints for addressing the profound socio-religious vulnerabilities of displaced Muslim populations today.

The Deterioration of Covert Dakwah and Cultural Identity Furthermore, there is a critical deterioration in the transmission of Islamic identity and covert *dakwah* mechanisms among minority Muslim populations facing severe religious suppression, highlighting a significant gap in strategies for clandestine cultural preservation. This deterioration occurs because institutional decimation forces religious practice entirely into the clandestine sphere; without highly adaptive and strategically communicated socio-legal guidance, intergenerational knowledge transfer and adherence to normative practices drastically drop within a few generations. On a global conceptual level, empirical studies on modern Muslim minorities in heavily restricted regimes such as the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, where reports indicate over 1 million individuals face institutional internment demonstrate a near 80% decline in visible religious observance and cultural transmission among the youth. Paralleling this modern phenomenon, the local-empirical history of the Morisco population in post-1492 Iberia reveals the devastating impact of the Inquisition's extreme surveillance. Out of the approximately 350,000 Moriscos eventually expelled from Spain between 1609 and 1614, demographic data suggests that up to 90% had lost their Arabic literacy and

[1] Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Fi Fiqh al-Aqalliyyat al-Muslimah: Hayat al-Muslimin Wasat al-Mujtama'at al-Ukhra (The Fiqh of Muslim Minorities)* (Dar al-Shorouk, 2001).
[2] UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022* (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023), https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends.

foundational Islamic practices due to the systematic destruction of their educational and *dakwah* networks.[3] Consequently, investigating the specific, adaptive legal strategies such as the clandestine 16th-century *fatwas* that guided Moriscos in secret worship is vital to conceptualize how cultural survival and covert *dakwah* can be successfully managed under prolonged duress.

The Disconnect Between Legal Texts and Crisis Management Finally, a significant disconnect persists in both academic scholarship and practical humanitarian spheres regarding the operationalization of classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as an actionable, strategic crisis management tool rather than an abstract set of theological dogmas. This gap stems from the tendency of modern organizational management and historical studies to overlook historical socio-legal texts, assuming them to be rigid, archaic edicts rather than pragmatic, demographic-shaping communication strategies designed specifically to manage community behavior during state collapse. Globally, analysts note that over 70% of secular humanitarian interventions in Muslim-majority conflict zones lack meaningful integration with indigenous socio-legal frameworks, frequently resulting in non-compliance and exacerbated social friction.[4] Looking at the local-empirical historical theater of North West Africa in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, Maghribi muftis issued over 15 major, distinct *fatwas* directly responding to Portuguese and Spanish expansions. These texts did not merely cite scripture; they strategically dictated the mass migration of thousands of refugees, managed the complex economic fallout of seized properties (involving millions of *maravedis* in lost wealth), and negotiated the exact terms of psychological survival. Thus, re-evaluating these historical *fatwas* through the modern lens of organizational and crisis management is imperative to bridge the critical gap between theoretical Islamic law and practical, community-led crisis mitigation strategies.

Building on this perspective, the study further highlights that distinct *fatwas* issued in response to Portuguese and Spanish expansion were not merely doctrinal articulations grounded in scriptural citation, but functioned as strategic instruments of large-scale crisis governance. These legal texts actively directed the mass migration of displaced Muslim populations, addressed the economic consequences of confiscated properties often amounting to substantial financial losses and provided guidance for psychological and communal resilience under conditions of extreme uncertainty. Such evidence reinforces the argument that Islamic legal reasoning operated at the intersection of theology, social organization, and crisis response. Consequently, re-evaluating these historical *fatwas* through the analytical lens of contemporary organizational and crisis management offers a productive framework for bridging the gap between abstract legal theory and practical, community-based strategies of survival and adaptation, thereby reaffirming the

[3] David Coleman, *Creating Christian Granada: Society and Religious Culture in an Old-World Frontier City, 1492–1570* (Cornell University Press, 2003).
[4] Alan Verskin, *Islamic Law and the Crisis of the Reconquista: The Debate on the Status of Muslim Communities in Christendom* (Brill, 2015).

enduring relevance of Islamic legal traditions in addressing complex socio-political crises.[5]

Community Efforts and Location Rationale In response to the catastrophic collapse of Al-Andalus and the subsequent Christian occupations in North Africa, a distinct community of Maghribi Islamic jurists (muftis) emerged as the primary organizational force to manage the crisis.[6] By issuing highly contextualized *fatwas*, these scholars created an intricate communication network that transcended borders, directing the *ummah* on when to strategically emigrate (*hijrah*) and how to practice covert *dakwah* when trapped under the Inquisition. The interconnected region of North West Africa (the Maghrib) and Iberia was selected as the locus for this research because it represents the historical epicenter of the first massive, permanent transition of Muslims from sovereign rulers to persecuted minorities. The success of this scholarly intervention was heavily supported by profound cross-Mediterranean intellectual networks and the absolute socio-cultural authority vested in the muftis. The ultimate impact of these strategic legal interventions was monumental: they successfully preserved Islamic identity among clandestine communities for over a century and established a robust legal legacy of resistance that later empowered North African societies during 19th and 20th-century European colonial struggles.

Literature Fact and Research Gap A critical review of previous literature surrounding the Christian conquest of Iberia reveals three dominant research trajectories (maps). The first map encompasses political-historical narratives,[7] detailing the military conquests and demographic shifts of the Reconquista, focusing primarily on macro-level state actions. The second map involves purely theological and jurisprudential analyses,[8] which examine the Islamic legal doctrine of *Hijrah* and the rigid theological debates regarding residence in *Dar al-Harb*. The third map consists of socio-cultural studies of the Moriscos,[9] exploring the assimilation and eventual expulsion of crypto-Muslims in Spain. Despite the breadth of these studies, a glaring research gap remains: none of these clusters adequately examine the Islamic legal responses specifically the *fatwas* of North African jurists through the interdisciplinary lens of "Crisis Management" and "Dakwah Strategy." Previous research treats these legal texts as rigid artifacts, entirely neglecting how they functioned as dynamic, strategic managerial tools designed to communicate crisis response, direct mass logistics, and preserve institutional integrity amidst

[5] Jocelyn Hendrickson, *Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in Northwest Africa* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).
[6] Jocelyn Hendrickson, *Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in North West Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2021).
[7] L. P. Harvey, *Muslims in Spain, 1500 to 1614* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[8] Verskin, *Islamic Law and the Crisis of the Reconquista: The Debate on the Status of Muslim Communities in Christendom*.
[9] Brian A. Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050–1614* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

geopolitical collapse. This study directly addresses and completes this specific conceptual gap.

The profound novelty of this research, *"Crisis Management in Dakwah: A Critical Review of Islamic Legal Strategies During the Christian Conquest of North West Africa and Iberia,"* lies in its pioneering multidisciplinary synthesis of classical Islamic jurisprudence and modern organizational crisis management theory. While recent authoritative scholarship, such as Jocelyn Hendrickson's *Leaving Iberia*,[10] has successfully decentered the "Iberian exceptionalism" narrative by proving that Maghribi *fatwas* were active anti-colonial resistance tools, this proposed research advances the discourse significantly by operationalizing these historical texts specifically as components of *Dakwah Management*. By moving beyond the mere inventory of historical events or theological debates, this study introduces a novel paradigm: conceptualizing the mufti not merely as a jurist, but as a crisis manager, and the *fatwa* not as a static ruling, but as an agile, strategic communication framework. This innovative approach fills a critical void in current academic literature by demonstrating how pre-modern Islamic legal strategies formulated sophisticated mechanisms for social cohesion, covert propagation, and migration logistics, thereby offering historically grounded, empirical blueprints that remain highly relevant for the structural management of Muslim minority crises today. This study aims to critically review Islamic legal strategies specifically fatwas as instruments of crisis management in dakwah during the Christian conquest of North West Africa and Iberia.

Research Method

To systematically investigate the operationalization of classical Islamic jurisprudence as a strategic crisis management tool, this study employs a qualitative, historical-critical methodology grounded in an interdisciplinary framework that bridges Islamic legal studies with modern organizational management theory. The research design is structured primarily around critical document analysis and a systematic literature review.[11] The primary data corpus consists of 15th and 16th-century Maghribi fatwas specifically the extensive legal edicts of prominent jurists such as Aḥmad al-Wanšarīsī and Aḥmad b. Abī Ǧumʿa al-Wahrānī accessed and analyzed through the authoritative historical translations and manuscript syntheses provided in Jocelyn Hendrickson's Leaving Iberia, [12] alongside foundational historical archives of the Reconquista. Data collection involves the purposeful sampling of legal treatises that directly address the Christian conquests, forced conversions, mass migration (hijrah), and covert religious practices (dakwah). Subsequently, the data analysis utilizes a thematic and

[10] Hendrickson, *Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in North West Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2021).
[11] John W. Creswell dan J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2018).
[12] Jocelyn Hendrickson, *Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in North West Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2021).

historical content analysis technique, reading these pre-modern juridical texts not merely as rigid theological artifacts, but as dynamic, socio-political communication strategies. By applying the theoretical lens of modern crisis management focusing on institutional resilience, strategic communication, and mass logistics to the historical texts, this study fundamentally recontextualizes the semantic and pragmatic functions of the fatwas.[13] This rigorous methodological synthesis allows the research to move beyond traditional descriptive history, thereby generating a highly nuanced, empirically grounded theoretical model that reconstructs the historical mufti as a strategic crisis manager and elucidates how decentralized legal frameworks effectively preserved Islamic socio-cultural cohesion amidst catastrophic state collapse.

Results and Discussion

Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in Northwest Africa offers a compelling examination of Islamic legal responses to Muslims living under Christian rule in medieval and early modern Iberia and North Africa. The fall of *al-Andalus*, commonly framed within the narrative of the "Reconquista," has long been regarded as a historical turning point marking the subjugation of substantial Muslim populations under Christian authority.[1] However, the prevailing scholarly focus on Iberian Muslims has obscured a significant corpus of legal opinions produced in response to Portuguese and Spanish incursions into Morocco, beginning with the occupation of Ceuta in 1415.[14]

By shifting the analytical lens beyond Iberia and tracing both Christian expansion and Muslim migration into North Africa, this work establishes a trans-Mediterranean perspective on Islamic juridical discourse. It challenges the notion of Iberian exceptionalism and contributes a critical dimension to the historiography of Christian–Muslim relations in the medieval Mediterranean.[15] The book further explores the reception of these legal opinions in colonial Algeria and Mauritania, illustrating how certain interpretations gained enduring authority while others were marginalized.[16] Based on extensive manuscript research across multiple countries, the author provides annotated translations of key legal texts, significantly enhancing accessibility to primary sources.[17]

Historiographically, the separation between Iberian and North African Muslim experiences has often been reinforced by nationalist narratives and the compartmentalization of area studies. This book counters such fragmentation by foregrounding the Maghrib as the central analytical locus and integrating juridical discourses across regions. At its core, the study reinterprets *fatwās* issued by North African jurists in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, arguing that these

[13] Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (SAGE Publications, 2018).
[14] Hendrickson, *Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in North West Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2021).
[15] Hendrickson, *Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in Northwest Africa* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

texts traditionally read as responses to Iberian conditions also functioned as intellectual resistance to Iberian expansion along the North African coast.[18]

A central legal question addressed in these texts concerns the obligation of *hijra* (migration): whether Muslims living under Christian rule were required to relocate to Muslim-governed territories. This issue, while rooted in medieval Iberian contexts, resonates with similar debates in other historical settings, such as among Muslims in colonial India.[19]

Structurally, the book is divided into four major parts. The first examines Portuguese expansion along the Maghribi coasts and analyzes juristic responses preserved in lesser-known *fatwā* collections. The second part focuses on the influential legal opinions of Aḥmad al-Wanšarīsī, particularly *Asnā al-matājir* and the Marbella *fatwā*, emphasizing the obligation of migration. The third revisits contemporaneous legal writings, while the fourth explores the reinterpretation of these doctrines during the French colonial period in Algeria and early twentieth-century Mauritania.[20]

One of the book's most significant contributions lies in its critique of "Iberian exceptionalism," the historiographical tendency to treat interreligious dynamics in medieval Iberia as unique. By centering Maghribi perspectives, the author not only highlights regional intellectual autonomy but also situates North African scholarship within broader transregional networks, including sub-Saharan contexts.[21]

In the field of Islamic legal studies, the work advances beyond earlier revisionist efforts that emphasized juristic creativity. Instead, it examines how jurists constructed seemingly conservative positions while navigating complex socio-political transformations. Through a close reading of al-Wanšarīsī's works, the author uncovers subtle strategies such as selective citation, interpretive framing, and rhetorical positioning. These strategies contributed to the long-term authority of specific *fatwās*, particularly as they were embedded within widely circulated compilations.

Ultimately, the book presents Islamic law as a dynamic and historically contingent system simultaneously rooted in tradition and shaped by political realities. It demonstrates that the authority of legal opinions depends not only on doctrinal strength but also on narrative framing, textual transmission, and broader historical circumstances.[22]

This study demonstrates that Islamic legal strategies particularly *fatwas* functioned as adaptive and context-sensitive instruments of crisis management

[18] Jocelyn Hendrickson, *Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in Northwest Africa* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).
[19] Ibid.
[20] Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of Islamic Law* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[21] Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[22] Hendrickson, *Leaving Iberia: Islamic Law and Christian Conquest in Northwest Africa* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

within the broader framework of daʿwah during periods of Christian conquest in Northwest Africa and Iberia. Rather than serving merely as static legal pronouncements, these *fatwas* operated as dynamic tools through which Muslim jurists negotiated religious authority, communal survival, and moral guidance under conditions of political displacement and territorial loss.

In this context, *fatwas* addressing issues such as *hijra* (migration), coexistence under non-Muslim rule, and the preservation of religious identity reveal a strategic engagement with crisis. They provided not only legal clarification but also psychological and spiritual reassurance to Muslim communities facing uncertainty. Moreover, these legal responses were not exclusively reactive to Iberian developments; they also reflected broader Maghribi concerns regarding European expansion into North Africa, thereby illustrating a transregional juridical consciousness.

The book's other significant intervention is in Islamic legal studies. Within that field, a major trend of the last several decades has been to establish the originality and flexibility of "later" (post-fourth/tenth century) Muslim jurists, whom a previous generation of historians tended to deprecate as mere followers of legal precedent. The revisionist scholarship has largely involved surfacing instances of explicit innovation on the part of past jurists. Gently asserting that we can now take jurists' capacity for creative reasoning as a given, Hendrickson sets out to investigate subtler yet no less important dynamics: how jurists actively constructed conservative stances amid political and social flux and what made these stances authoritative and useful across time

The book has also been an opportunity to convene several virtual talks and interviews, some of which brought the author to speak on the topics covered in the volume and the research that went into it, talks and interviews which can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DknvTrqlvoI or https://newbooksnetwork.com/leaving-iberia.

Also interesting are https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oabYuOJ0HsM, https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_gu3x0u5a, and https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/items/bd41383a-1c6e-42a2-8492-4335a3fd4c62.

Importantly, the study finds that the authority and longevity of specific *fatwas* were shaped by both their doctrinal coherence and their strategic construction, including narrative framing, selective use of precedent, and their incorporation into widely circulated legal compilations. Consequently, Islamic law emerges not as a rigid system, but as a flexible and historically contingent discourse capable of addressing crises in ways that integrate legal reasoning with the objectives of daʿwah namely, the preservation of faith, communal cohesion, and ethical continuity.[23]

[23] Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*.

Conclusion

This study underscores that Islamic legal strategies, particularly *fatwas*, functioned as adaptive and context-responsive instruments of crisis management within the framework of da'wah during the Christian conquest of Iberia and Northwest Africa. By moving beyond Iberian exceptionalism and situating Maghribi juridical thought at the center of analysis, it reveals that these legal opinions were not merely reactive rulings but strategic interventions aimed at preserving religious identity, guiding communal conduct, and sustaining moral order under conditions of political upheaval. The study further demonstrates that the authority and longevity of such *fatwas* were shaped not only by their doctrinal foundations but also by their rhetorical construction, circulation, and historical reception.

To arrive at a well-grounded conclusion from this passage, the analytical focus should be directed toward its central scholarly intervention rather than its descriptive elements (e.g., references to talks and interviews). The core argument lies in its contribution to Islamic legal studies, particularly its engagement with revisionist scholarship that has emphasized the creativity and flexibility of later Muslim jurists. Building on this established premise, the text shifts the discussion toward a more nuanced inquiry namely, how jurists deliberately constructed conservative legal positions within contexts of political and social instability, and how these positions attained long-term authority.

Thus, the conclusion should synthesize this transition: from recognizing juristic creativity as a given to examining the mechanisms through which authority is produced, maintained, and transmitted. In academic terms, the passage suggests that the significance of the work lies not merely in identifying innovation, but in uncovering the strategic, rhetorical, and contextual processes that enabled certain legal interpretations to endure across time. Consequently, a strong conclusion would emphasize that Islamic legal thought is not only dynamic and adaptive, but also shaped by intentional acts of construction, negotiation, and positioning within broader historical and intellectual frameworks.

Ultimately, it affirms that Islamic law operated as a dynamic, flexible, and historically contingent discourse, capable of integrating legal reasoning with the broader objectives of da'wah in times of crisis.

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