

Sepharadim/conversos and Pre-modern Global Hispanism

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ABSTRACT

Sepharadim participated in the Hispanic vernacular culture of the Iberian Peninsula. Even in the time of al-Andalus many spoke Hispano-Romance, and even their Hebrew literature belies a deep familiarity with and love of their native Hispano-Romance languages. However, since the early sixteenth century the vast majority of Sepharadim have never lived in the Hispanic world. Sepharadim lived not in Spanish colonies defined by Spanish conquest, but in a network of Mediterranean Jewish communities defined by diasporic values and institutions.

By contrast, the *conversos*, those Sepharadim who converted to Catholicism, whether in Spain or later in Portugal, Italy, or the New World, lived mostly in Spanish Imperial lands, were officially Catholic, and spoke normative Castilian. Their connections, both real and imagined, with Sephardic cultural practice put them at risk of social marginalization, incarceration, even death. Some were devout Catholics whose heritage and family history doomed them to these outcomes. Not surprisingly, many Spanish and Portuguese *conversos* sought refuge in lands outside of Spanish control where they might live openly as Jews.

This exodus (1600s) from the lands formerly known as Sefarad led to a parallel Sephardic community of what conversos who re-embraced Judaism in Amsterdam and Italy by a generation of conversos trained in Spanish universities. The Sephardic/Converso cultural complex exceeds the boundaries of Spanish imperial geography, confuses Spanish, Portuguese, Catholic, and Jewish subjectivities, and defies traditional categories practiced in Hispanic studies, and are a unique example of the Global Hispanophone.

KEYWORDS

Amsterdam; Conversos; Sephardic; Ladino; Judeo-Spanish

This volume makes clear the need (or at least the desire) for a discussion of global Hispanism across regional and chronological specializations within Hispanic Studies. There is much to be gained by reading the Hispanic culture of a single moment and place in light of global practices and phenomena. Most theories of Hispanism, global or otherwise, flow from the experience of colonialism and tell the story of subject peoples and colonial administrators. This collection of essays pays special attention to areas of *hispanofonía* that are generally neglected by Latin American and Iberian studies. The case of the Sepharadim/*conversos*¹ is exceptional in that once expelled from Spain, the Sepharadim/*conversos*' engagement with Castilian and with Spanish culture was not defined by Spanish coloniality, but rather by diaspora from Spain. As we will see, the most 'Hispanic' moment of Sephardic/*converso* culture takes place in Amsterdam, outside the sphere of Spanish political power. Their religious and cultural heritage (diasporic Jewish), literary languages (Hebrew and Spanish), and trans-Imperial subjectivity set them apart as a curious case in the panorama of global Hispanism. Also, the relationship of Sepharadim/*conversos* to the Spanish language does not sustain the philosephardic vision of the early twentieth century that early twentieth-century Spanish writers such as Ángel Pulido (1904,

1993, 2006) and Ernesto Giménez Caballero articulate. If the national literatures paradigm of literary history that shaped academic Hispanism in the twentieth century tends to exclude all production that falls outside of national or colonial territory, the Spanish philosemitic discourse adduces to the Sepharadim/*conversos* a monolithic and two-dimensional Spanish national essence or identity (Rohr 2011; Friedman 2011) to which actual Sephardic/*converso* cultural practice does not give voice. The goal of this essay, then, is to demonstrate the complex and ambivalent Hispanophone identity of the Sepharadim/*conversos* during the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, as a critique of both Spanish philosemitism and academic Hispanism's interpretation of the Sephardic/*converso* experience.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, specialists in premodern Hispanic studies began to issue calls to rethink the field in ways that made meaningful connections with the currents of thought that had been transforming Colonial and Latin American studies since the 'theory revolution' of the 1980s (Dagenais and Greer 2000; Fuchs 2003; Cascardi 2005). This emerging discussion of global Hispanism all but omitted the Sepharadim and *conversos*, whose study suffers a double marginalization in the field for being geographically and religiously outside the scope of most specialists in Hispanic studies. Jewish religion and Hebrew language do not typically form part of the Hispanist's training except among specialists in Sephardic or Latin American Jewish topics. In the 2004 *Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, John Dagenais (2004, 54) and María Rosa Menocal (2004) both called for renewed attention to Sephardic literature, a tradition, in Menocal's words, "part of a Spanish tradition defined now as being multifaceted and encompassing languages that would later be rejected and exiled" (2004, 71). In the pages to follow, I will attempt to answer their call, by framing the Sepharadim/*conversos* as part of a global *hispanofonia*.

Recently, scholars such as Adam Lifshey (2012) have argued for more global visions of the history of Hispanic culture that include former Spanish colonies such as the Philippines and Equatorial Guinea alongside Spanish-speaking Spain and the Americas:

Asian and African literature in Spanish emerges in moments of late colonialism that do not fit into the accepted frames of when, where, how, and why literatures in Spanish outside of Spain came into existence. The tradition...is invisible to nearly all those who study or teach in Spanish programs worldwide (2012, 6).

Like the material Lifshey studies, the Sepharadim/*conversos* lived throughout and beyond the boundaries of the Spanish, Portuguese, and Ottoman Empires. Theirs was, and continues to be, a global hispanophone culture, yet their literature is all but invisible to most hispanists.

Who are the Sepharadim/*conversos*?

The Global Hispanophone as a category of critical inquiry seeks to deconstruct the concept of *hispanidad*, or a sense of pan-Hispanic cultural commonality as a legacy of Spanish colonialism. While philosephardic writers such as Ángel Pulido and Ernesto Giménez Caballero attempted to enlist the Sepharadim as agents of Spanish colonialism and cultural imperialism in Morocco and the Ottoman Empire,² the history and cultural practices of the Sepharadim (as do those of all the peoples swept up in the dragnet of *hispanidad*) tell a different story. Spain was to be sure a place

of origin, sometimes a source of nostalgia at times, but a nostalgia tempered by the trauma of expulsion and the bitter memory of persecution and Inquisition.

Sepharadim is the Hebrew plural of Sephardi, the *gentilicio* or demonym for Sepharad, which is the Hebrew word for the Iberian Peninsula.³ There is an unbroken Jewish presence on the Iberian Peninsula going back to at least the Roman period and possibly before. Jewish culture famously flowered during the Andalusí period, after which Jews served as a key colonial elite in the transition to Christian rule. Jewish fortunes on the Peninsula went, on the balance, gradually downhill between 1150 and 1350, culminating in the infamous pogroms of 1391 that triggered a wave of mass conversions to Catholicism and created a class of conversos or New Christians who were technically Christian, but whose spiritual beliefs and practices varied wildly and produced some very innovative hybrid forms (Bodian, 1997, 97; Cardoso 1979, 90–91; Meyerson 2010).

Eventually the large numbers of judaizing conversos (real or imagined; the distinction is still the major bone of contention among specialists), now technically Christian heretics, spurred the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in 1478 and led to the eventual expulsion of Jews from the Spanish kingdoms in 1492, from Portugal in 1497 and Navarra in 1498. Tens of thousands of Peninsular Jews chose conversion over exile. These conversos, joining those who converted in the wake of 1391 and largely free of the social restrictions Jews experienced in Christian society, entered the Church, the royal administration, and other sectors of public life closed to them as Jews and soon became a very powerful elite who attracted no little resentment and suspicion from other, so-called ‘Old’ Christians.⁴

What might have looked like the end of the Sephardi period was really just the beginning of the Sephardi/*converso* period, and some conversos continued to practice various forms of Jewish spirituality for centuries, despite (and in some cases thanks to) the constant threat of punishment at the hands of the Inquisition (Gitlitz 2002). Literary scholars and cultural critics often imagine conversos and Sepharadim as two related, yet distinct groups whose cultural practice formed separate spheres (Wacks 2015, 2–4). The documentary record both confirms and denies this rift, depending on the angle from which one views the problem. Inquisitorial records suggest that religious and cultural identity was fluid, emergent, confused, and often contradictory. Some conversos/Sepharadim alternated between identities as was convenient: Jewish in Italy, Catholic in Spain.

What is gained by reading the culture of the Sepharadim/*conversos* as part of a global cultural system? For one, studying converted and unconverted Sepharadim together as speakers of Spanish (and Portuguese, to be fair, as we will see) allows us to form a more comprehensive theory of Sephardic cultural production in its engagement with Imperial powers and languages. Living across at least three empires (Spanish, Portuguese, Ottoman), and a number of other societies, the Sepharadim/*conversos* are a unique case of a hispanophone cultural group living largely outside of Spanish imperial power yet intimately bound to it. Their deterritorialized, diasporic Hispanicity challenges some of our basic assumptions about Hispanic culture (Wacks, 2015, 8–33).

Are the Sepharadim hispanophones?

In the year 1300, it was difficult to say what a Hispanophone was, religion notwithstanding. There was as yet no country called *España*, no national language referred to as *español* (Dagenais 2004, 40–44). While Alfonso X of Castile-León (1252-1284) did espouse what we may call some proto-imperial linguistic policies (Bossong 1987; Cárdenas 1990; Rojinsky 2010, 59–91), Hispanism as policy was still centuries in the future and would not really take recognizable shape until the reign of Emperor Carlos V, and arguably later (Menéndez Pidal 1943, 31–33). If by ‘Hispanophone’ we mean simply speakers of Castilian/Spanish, there are many Sefaradim/conversos who fall into this category. By the fifth century CE, Hebrew had ceased to be a Jewish vernacular, and so Peninsular Jews spoke the various vernaculars of the Peninsula: dialects of Latin, Arabic, Tamazight (Berber). By the later years of Christian rule, Sefaradim were generally native speakers of Ibero-Romance dialects (Galician, Astur-Leonese, Navarrese, Castilian, Catalan, etc.). Although they wrote almost exclusively in Hebrew, their literary practice belies their participation in the vernacular culture of the times (Wacks 2015, 129). Until the fifteenth century, the only (surviving) significant work in a Peninsular vernacular by a Jewish author is the *Proverbios morales* of Shem Tov ben Isaac Arduziel of Carrión (ca. 1335). However, during this period we do see an increasing use of the vernacular within the Jewish communities for paraliturgical and administrative purposes, if not for *belles lettres* (Abrahams 1981, 261). Despite this Sephardic ambivalence toward vernacular *literature*, it is clear that the Sefaradim were full participants in the vernacular *culture* of the times. The descendants of the exiles in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa continue to speak a dialect of Castilian to the present day, and for centuries continued to sing the songs, tell the stories, and practice the folkways they had learned in Spain and Portugal. In this sense, at least, their Hispanophone *bona fides* are quite solid, even if the Spanish Empire had no interest in them as subjects. The feeling was, especially in the Early Modern period when conversos living within the Spanish Empire were in real danger of being denounced to the Inquisition, mutual.

The Sefaradim/conversos have lived as Hispanophones in a multicontinental diaspora for half a millennium. Historically, the vast majority of Sefaradim have never lived in the Hispanic world, and only a small minority have lived as Spanish subjects. In this respect the study of their culture challenges many of the assumptions and habits of mind of Hispanism. Hispanists tend to focus their attention on Spain and the territories conquered by Spain. In early modernity the most significant concentrations of Sefaradim lived in the Ottoman Empire, The Netherlands, Italy, and England, while only a few lived openly as Jews in Imperial lands (Israel, 1997, 223). They are Hispanophones whose culture existed largely outside of the state structures that defined Hispanic studies.

To complicate matters, studies of the Sefaradim tend to exclude *conversos*, those Sefaradim who converted to Catholicism, whether in Spain or later in Portugal, Italy, or the New World. Philologists do so for linguistic reasons: conversos tended to speak normative Spanish, while Sefaradim are believed by some to have spoken a distinct dialect of Castilian even before their Expulsion from Spain and Portugal. However, Isabel the Catholic herself complained in the very Edict of Expulsion of 1492 that it was the social entanglement of the conversos with the Sefaradim that caused so much trouble, and this was the basis for her justification of the expulsion of the Sefaradim. This suggests that it was the cultural similarity –and not the difference— between Jews, conversos, and Old Christians, that was problematic for the state. To

wit, it is most likely that the Castilian spoken by Sepharadim/conversos was the same as that spoken by Christian Castilians, at least in the fifteenth century.⁵

The Sepharadim who chose to leave Spain rather than to convert were soon joined by Portuguese Jews in 1497 and settled in communities in North Africa, Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, Italy, and beyond. The Ottoman Sultan Bayazid II is said (legendarily) to have remarked (and I paraphrase), “how foolish these Catholic Monarchs, who impoverish themselves by sending away their Jews, and send them to me, making me rich in the process!”⁶ In some cases they joined other Sepharadim who had left in the previous century on the heels of the pogroms of 1391. In others, they joined communities of North African, Romaniote (Greek-speaking, formerly Byzantine), and other Jews, often overwhelming and assimilating the established communities by their numbers and cultural prestige.

In their new homes in Tetouan, Izmir, Salonica, and elsewhere, Sepharadim continued to speak their language. What exactly we should call this language has been a bone of contention between specialists, though the Sepharadim themselves seem less troubled by this question, content to refer to it variously as *judezmo*, *ladino*, *haketia*, *muestro español*, or *spanyolit* (Bunis, 1992, 402; Díaz Mas 1992, 74–75). By any name –why not call it Sephardic Spanish, or the variety of Spanish spoken in the Sephardic world– their language was primarily medieval Castilian, which came to dominate and assimilate the other Ibero-Romance dialects spoken by the exiles, who came from all areas of the Peninsula (Attig 2012, 836). Memories of this early linguistic diversity persist in Sephardic folklore, in a rhyme collected in the twentieth century describing the unintelligible (to Castilian speakers) dialect of the Galician exiles: “somos gallegos, no nos entemdemos [sic]” (‘We’re Galicians, we don’t even understand each other!’) (Nehama 1935, 27).⁷ To this base of medieval Castilian, the Sepharadim added bits of Hebrew drawn from ritual and communal life, Arabisms, Turkish loan words, Italian and French influences (Díaz Mas 1992, 89–90).

Here, the *hispanidad* of the Sephardic community is revealed to be every bit as much a construction as that of Spanish subjects, whose linguistic and ethnic diversity (Basques, Galicians, Asturians, Catalans, etc.) is plainly evident. Eventually, however, through both sheer numbers and greater social prestige, the Castilian-speaking Sepharadim came to dominate their neighbors who spoke other Ibero-Romance dialects, and Judeo-Spanish, in all its varieties, preserved more features of Peninsular Castilian than of the other dialects.⁸

A well-documented corpus of Sephardic folklore and written literature demonstrates that Sephardic Spanish, written in Hebrew letters until the twentieth century, was a very productive language for centuries.⁹ While Hebrew continued to be the prestige literary language in most Sephardic communities into modernity (as it had been in Spain), Sephardic authors began to experiment with Spanish as a literary language as early as the fifteenth century, when they translated parts of the liturgy and, in one case, the *Takkanot of Valladolid*, the Jewish community charter, into Spanish for the benefit of community members who did not read Hebrew (Moreno Koch 1987). A late fifteenth-century *aljamiado* (Spanish written in Hebrew letters) manuscript, from Spain or Italy, Parma 2666, is a compilation of learned texts including courtly Spanish *cancionero* poetry, Aristotelian philosophy, and other genres typical of the Spanish court (Hamilton 2014). This manuscript demonstrates the extent to which some Jews had begun to use Spanish as a language of learning within the Jewish community. This was far from the norm in

the Ottoman Sephardic press, in which Hebrew titles dominated, despite the viability of Sephardic Spanish as a vernacular. One area of religious life in which the Sephardim did use written Spanish was in their responsa, or legal decisions. Annette Benaim has edited a sizable corpus of such responsa written in Sephardic Spanish, and explains Spanish enjoyed sufficient prestige in the Ottoman Jewish communities to be used in contexts normally reserved for Rabbinic Hebrew (2012, 18).

The prestige Spanish enjoyed in the Sephardic world made possible its development as a literary language as well. While scholars tend to locate the origins of Sephardic Spanish literature in the eighteenth century with the publication of the Biblical commentary *Meam Loez* by Rabbi Isaac Huli, Olga Borovaya has recently shown that there is a significant corpus of Spanish-language publications by Sephardic authors working in the Ottoman Empire beginning in the sixteenth century. These include works of geography, such as Moses Almosnino's *Grandezas de Constantinopla*, (later also published in Spain in Roman characters for an ostensibly Christian audience), Almosnino's compilation of Aristotelian philosophy, *Regimiento de la vida* (Salonica, 1564), the anonymous religious polemic *Fuente clara* (Salonica ca. 1595), and *Mesa de el alma* (Salonica, 1568), an abridged translation of Rabbi Joseph Karo's Hebrew Talmudic digest, the *Shulkhan Arukh* (Venice, 1565) (Romeu Ferré 2007; Borovaya 2017a; Borovaya 2017b, 45;). *Fuente clara* and other works were published to cater to recently arrived conversos as yet ignorant of Hebrew. These and other travelers coming from Spain brought Spanish books that circulated in the Sephardic community and thus created linguistic and literary connections to the Peninsular linguistic communities (Borovaya 2014). This process of recasting Spanish learning in a Sephardic key, and in the Spanish language, mirrors the same process described by Mabel Moraña taking place in Latin America among Creole elites in creating what she calls a *creole archive*:

With the advancement and consolidation of colonialism, the Spanish language was also crucial to the organization and transmission of a *creole archive* that would define the cultural parameters of a new, emerging American elite which, in spite of its subaltern position to Peninsular sectors, would claim the right to re-discover, register, and interpret pre-Hispanic cultures as part of the process of the 'invention of traditions' initiated by Spanish missionaries and men of letters soon after the 'discovery.' (Moraña 2005, xi)

Sephardic intellectuals such as Almosnino and others in the sixteenth century, and those working in Italy and Amsterdam in the seventeenth, engaged in their own interpretation of Hispanic culture outside the borders of the Empire (Wacks 2015, 191–196). As we will see, the massive influx of conversos to the Western Sephardic communities during the seventeenth century gave rise to a Sephardic literary boom that was very much global in its perspective.¹⁰

This story, however, starts much earlier and on the Iberian Peninsula itself, and brings us directly into the Sephardi/converso question. In Spain, until 1492, conversos lived in constant contact with professed Jews, and the tension between the two groups and vis-à-vis the Christian majority defined their experience. It would be, at least officially, one of the main justifications for their expulsion by the Catholic Monarchs (Suárez Fernández 1991, 307). The enforcement,

legal, and penal practices of the Inquisition shaped converso consciousness. In the most direct way, conversos living in Spain or its territories from 1480 forward lived in constant fear of the Holy Office (Melammed 2004, 26–28). Apart from the resulting atmosphere of terror that affected all conversos regardless of their actual religious convictions or practices, the workings of the Inquisitions' institutions shaped converso culture in unintended ways. Inquisition prisons were informal Jewish schools where traditions were transmitted mostly in Spanish. Inquisitorial literary genres, the written records of legal proceedings, also helped to shape certain converso texts. The *Relación* of Antonio de Montezinos mimics the structure of the *discurso de vida*, or biographical statement required of most defendants before inquisitorial tribunals from the middle of the sixteenth century (Perelis 2016, 15–17). Sephardic poets working outside the Peninsula cultivated a genre of elegies commemorating victims of the Inquisition (Bodian 2007, 188–189). In this way, converso education, spirituality, and writing, all took cues from Inquisitorial practice, for which Spanish –and a particular legal register of Spanish– was the official language.¹¹ In this way, Spanish became a language of Jewish religious practice as Hebrew became less prevalent due to conversion, expulsion, and Inquisition.

Hispanists who have studied converso literature are not in agreement as to what this term might mean: literature by conversos, literature about conversos, or literature written in a *converso* voice (Hutcheson 1996; Edwards et al. 1997; Aronson-Friedman 2000; Kaplan, 2002). It is difficult to say. To begin with, there is no one *converso* experience or subjectivity: conversos, even those living in Spain in the fifteenth century, represented a wide variety of experiences, spirituality, and practice (Faur 1992, 41; Gitlitz 2002, 82–85).

The annexation of Portugal by Spain in 1580 opened a floodgate of *converso* migration from Portugal and the Portuguese Empire to Spain and the Spanish Empire. The fact that the Spanish Inquisition did not prosecute crimes committed against the Church in Portugal, together with Castile-Aragón's superior economy, encouraged many Portuguese conversos to cross the border into Castile-Aragón and from there to many of the Spanish Empire's territories, where inquisitorial surveillance and control was less rigorous than in Castile-Aragón proper (Graizbord 2004, 20–21). These migrants became bilingual in Portuguese and Castilian; many became educated at Spanish universities and published works in Spanish. At this time many of Spain's literary lights were conversos or descendants of conversos (Roth 2002, 156–182).

The Portuguese conversos were more confidently identified as Jews and had more and more recent Jewish education. Their arrival in the *converso* communities of Spain was an inspiration and a source of Jewish education to those Spanish conversos who sought it, even as the Inquisition's campaign of terror raged around them. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, many Portuguese and Spanish conversos emigrated to countries where they might practice Judaism openly. Large communities of Iberian conversos joined Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire, Italy, and Amsterdam (Israel 2002). The latter city, as a religiously tolerant hub of global commerce, became a mecca for Iberian conversos seeking to revert to Judaism. By the middle of the seventeenth century, Amsterdam had become the most important and economically powerful Sephardic community in the world (Swetchinski 2002).

Amsterdam Sepharadim were connected to communities in the Ottoman Empire via trade associations, but the more significant routes were North Africa/Amsterdam (Roitman 2011, 79). Venice was an important node linking Amsterdam and Iberia with the Ottoman Empire. The

rapidly expanding Portuguese empire was home to many Portuguese conversos (Roitman 2011, 92–97). The wealth generated by these Sephardic merchants provided for numerous influential religious academies or *yeshivot* and a rich artistic and spiritual life for Amsterdam Sepharadim. The role of Spanish in this environment was significant, and the Sephardic press at Amsterdam produced a robust corpus of works in Spanish, and to a lesser extent in Portuguese, written by and for Sepharadim, many of whom were raised as Christians and educated in Spanish universities (den Boer 2013). In short, it was a kind of parallel Sefarad, where Sepharadim continued to practice Spanish literature free of the restrictions of Church and Inquisition, under the aegis of a tolerant, multicultural, pluriconfessional regime where the Sepharadim were free to be Hispanophones –in every sense of the word– and Jews. The Amsterdam Sepharadim benefitted from the prestige of their literary legacy (authors like Lope de Vega, Quevedo, and Cervantes were well known throughout Europe) without suffering the oppression of the society that had produced it (Kaplan 2017, 22).

This flowering of Sephardic Spanish literature in Amsterdam was perhaps the peak Global Hispanophone moment of the Sepharadim. Authors such as Daniel Levi de Barrios penned works on secular and religious topics in the same crisp Castilian that flowed from the pens of Lope and Quevedo, but proclaiming the superiority of the God of the Hebrews and condemning Jesus as a false messiah: the experience of reading them is wildly dissonant for readers of Spanish who associate seventeenth-century Castilian with strict Catholic doctrine and Spanish *casticismo*. The Amsterdam Sepharadim mirrored the literary culture of the Peninsula in many ways, forming literary academies that imitated those they had left behind in Spain and Portugal (den Boer 1995, 135). They re-judaized Spanish poetics by shifting the symbolic center of their writing from classical antiquity to the world of the Hebrew Bible (den Boer 1995, 136). Their literature was patently Iberian but at the same time very Jewish, which calls into question the categorically Catholic nature of Hispanic literature of the time. Some genres, like the sermon, as cultivated by the Amsterdam Sepharadim, were a unique hybrid of Jewish, Christian, and Classical genres that defied easy categorization (den Boer 1995, 22–23). This stands in sharp contrast to the modern Spanish discourse of *hispanidad* that emphasizes a cultural similarity and unity between Spanish speakers of various regions and backgrounds. While it is true that Amsterdam Sepharadim/conversos were proud of their Iberian origins, their literary practice was so profoundly Jewish that it does not fit the idealized image of the universal *hispanidad* promoted by Spanish philosephardists.

We see this effect in the works of the Italian and Dutch Sepharadim themselves, who often wrote sermons and other texts in the more vernacular Portuguese, reserving Spanish for *belles lettres* and philosophical treatises (Kaplan 2017, 22). In the Western Sephardic communities, Spanish, while being replaced by Portuguese, Italian, French, and other languages as a vernacular, retained its status as a learned language used for religious learning. A parallel phenomenon took place in the East, where Judeo-Spanish and Ladino diverged, the former as a vernacular and the latter as a language of religious ritual and textual study sessions or *meldados* (>Sp. *medrar*) (Díaz Mas 1992, 72–73).¹² The influential *Biblia de Ferrara* (1554) was key in this process. Its Hebrew-inflected style, which the translator calls “nuestra language española” (Lazar 1996, 4) in the prologue, made Sepharadim feel closer to the Biblical Hebrew and shaped the literary register of many Sephardic authors (den Boer 1995, 39).

The predominance of Spanish over Portuguese in the literature of the Amsterdam Sepharadim –among whom Portuguese was for many the *lengua madre* and Spanish the language of Jewish learning– was probably due to a desire to reach more conversos beyond Amsterdam who might be convinced to return to Judaism.¹³ Because Hebrew was out of reach for so many newly reverted conversos, Spanish experienced a sort of classicization, standing in for Hebrew as a sort of quasi-sacred language, until the level of Hebrew in the community could reach levels comparable to those elsewhere in the Jewish world (Méchoulan 1987, 42). Outside of Amsterdam, the extent to which Sepharadim were readers of Spanish books is difficult to assess. We know that Spanish continued to enjoy some prestige as a literary language in places like Venice, where Flemish Printer Daniel Bomberg's 1525 edition of Maimonides' *Mishne Torah* has a dedication written in Spanish (Marzo Magno 2013, 71). Rabbinic sources are fairly silent on the circulation of Spanish (as opposed to Hebrew) books, in Sephardic communities outside of Iberia. While there were large communities of both conversos and Jews in cities where presses published books in Spanish (Amsterdam, Antwerp, Rome), and documented connections in the book trade between these cities and the Ottoman East, sources on the experience of the Sephardic communities limit themselves primarily to the case of Jewish books published in Hebrew, but indicate the high level of interconnectedness that the international Jewish press made possible (Ruderman 2010, 102). What we *do* know is that Sephardic writers working both in Italy and in the Ottoman Empire made translations of popular Spanish works such as Fernando de Rojas' *Celestina*, Rodríguez de Montalvo's *Amadís*, and Francisco López de Gómara's *Historia de las Indias* into Hebrew. It is possible that they made these translations for the benefit of non-Sephardic Jews who read Hebrew (and not Spanish), but that they themselves were regular readers of the original Spanish titles coming out of Amsterdam, Venice, or Spain itself, rabbinic objections notwithstanding (Wacks 2014). One testimony is the complaint of Rabbi Menahem di Lunzano, who, during an extended stay in Jerusalem, chastizes the Sephardic Jews there for reading *Amadís de Gaula* (Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, 1507) and *Palmerín de Oliva* (Francisco Vázquez, 1511) (blockbuster chivalric novels in Spain) on the Sabbath instead of books of Jewish learning (Wacks 2015, 197–198).

As these remarks suggest, the situation for the Sepharadim in the Ottoman Empire was very different from that in Amsterdam. There, Sephardic Jews and New Christians formed an indispensable class of imperial administrators (Levy 1994, 28). Thousands of Iberian Jews and conversos poured into the Ottoman Empire, beginning in the fourteenth century and steadily increasing throughout the sixteenth. In many cases the Sepharadim overwhelmed local communities and assimilated them culturally. In this way Sephardic Spanish gained numbers of new speakers who had no historical connection with Spain, mimicking the colonial expansion of Spanish in the Americas within the Ottoman Jewish context. Because Hebrew was so well established as a language of Jewish learning, the overwhelming number of books printed for Jews in the Ottoman Empire were written in Hebrew. There was, however, a steady trickle of titles in Sephardic Spanish, followed by a stream of religious literature in the nineteenth century, and a torrent of both religious and secular works in the twentieth century (Díaz Mas 1992, 132–150; Lehmann 2005; Borovaya 2017a; Borovaya 2011).

In both cases, Western and Eastern Sepharadim/conversos formed an important and mostly overlooked (in Hispanic Studies) group of hispanophones whose practice of the Spanish

language (and in many cases, Portuguese as well) fell outside the sphere of Spanish Imperial power and whose identity as hispanophones did not respond to official discourses and practices of *hispanidad*. They fell beyond the reach of the Imperial *hispanidad* of Nebrija and Carlos V. The literary activity of the Amsterdam Sepharadim/conversos mirrored, but also parodied that of the Spanish *academias*, and their counterparts living in the Ottoman Empire likewise developed a hispanophone identity that fell outside the reach of imperial power and the influence of the Church.

Notes

¹ In this essay “Sepharadim” refers to Jews living in, or originating in, the Iberian Peninsula. “conversos” (literally ‘the converted’) refers to Sepharadim who have converted to Catholicism (circumstances irregardless), and their descendants.

² In a series of works written at the beginning of the twentieth century Pulido argued for restoration of Moroccan and Balkan Sepharadim as Spanish citizens and colonial administrators (Pulido 1904, 2003, 2006; Bel Bravo 1993; Alpert 2005). Giménez Caballero followed Pulido’s line, combining it with proto-fascist ideals (Friedman 2011).

³ The name ‘Sefarad’ is from Ovadiah 1:20: “the captives of Jerusalem, that are in Sefarad, shall possess the cities of the South.” While the location is historically uncertain but may refer to Lyria in Asia Minor, in Jewish tradition Sefarad has been associated with the Iberian Peninsula since the Roman Period (Gerber 1992, x).

⁴ For an overview of Sephardic/converso history, see Gerber 1992; Díaz Mas 1992; Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000; Roth 2002; Zohar 2005 .

⁵ See Díaz Mas 1992, 72–73; Attig 2012. While the philosephardic discourse of Ángel Pulido emphasizes the timelessness and perfectly preserved Castilian of (at least the Moroccan) Sepharadim, the reality, as described by scholars of Sephardic tradition such as Samuel Armistead and Joseph Silverman is more complex. Sephardic Spanish was not in fact a time capsule either linguistically or culturally; while it is true that the various dialects conserved features that later became obsolete in Peninsular speech communities, it also continued to evolve in its contact with South Slavic, Turkish, Arabic, French, and other languages. See Armistead and Silverman 1982; Díaz Mas 1992, 78.

⁶ Seventeenth-century Sephardic author Immanuel Aboab relates the famous yet unlikely apocryphal anecdote (2007, 304–305).

⁷ Gonzalo Correias records this saying, in a slightly different form, in his 1627 *Vocabulario de refranes y frases proverbiales*, as “o somos gallegos o no nos ententemos” (‘either we are Galicians [who are dull-witted] or we are not understanding one another’) (1967, 165). My guess is that the Sephardic communities adapted the version recorded by Gonzalo Correias to mock the non-Castilian speech of the Galician members of their communities.

⁸ In a 1964 remarks to the Sephardic community Tetouan, Spanish Hebraist Federico Pérez Castro claimed that the greatest evidence of Sephardic *hispanidad* was their cultural tendency toward imperialism, their having imposed (*impusieron*) Spanish culture on the communities

where they settled: “Tan profundamente calaron on el alma de nuestros judíos las raíces de los español, que los hispano-hebreos, al salir de España, si bien físicamente la dejaron atrás, se la llevaron consigo dentro de sus corazones, y en lejanas tierras, no sólo siguieron viviendo según nuestros modos, sino que los impusieron allí donde fueron a establecerse; fenómeno espiritual y social éste tan perfectamente español, que acaso sea el que más netamente defina su honda indentificación con España” (‘The roots of Spanishness took hold so deeply in the souls of our Jews that the Hispano-Hebrews, upon leaving Spain, although they physically left her behind, carried her with them inside their hearts, and in distant lands not only continued to live according to our ways, but even imposed these ways upon others wherever they established themselves; a sociospiritual phenomenon so perfectly Spanish that it may most clearly define their deep identification with Spain’) (Pérez Castro 1964, 83–84; Wacks 2015, 192).

⁹ For an overview of Sephardic folklore, see Díaz Mas (1992, 112–132) and Bunis (1992, 63–66). For studies of oral traditions see, for example, Armistead and Silverman (1992); Koén-Sarano (1994; 1996; 1999); Alexander (2008). On its decadence, see Harris (1994).

¹⁰ On the formation of these communities, especially their religious and cultural life, see Ray (2013).

¹¹ On the effect of Inquisition on the literature of Early Modern Spain, see Gitlitz (2002); Fontes (2005).

¹² In 2004 I attended a *meldado* (religious study session) in Seattle in which participants complained of the sixteenth-century Ladino translation of one of the Prophets: “I can’t understand this stuff! My grandparents didn’t talk like that!” The Judeo-Spanish of their elders was a far cry from the Cervantine Spanish of the Biblical text, much like English of the King James Bible to a speaker of contemporary American English.

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