



universität  
wien

Institut für Religionswissenschaft

## Diplomarbeit

Titel der Diplomarbeit

### **Imagining Sephardic Diaspora**

Verfasser

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

**Magister (Mag.)**

Wien, April 2013

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt: A 057 011

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt: Individuelles Diplomstudium Religionswissenschaft UniStG

Betreuer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wolfram Reiss



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Approach & Research Question

Within the last few decades more and more attention has been drawn to the studies of Sephardic communities, especially in the fields of Jewish and Romance Studies. The growing interest in the history and language of Sephardic Jews has not solely been limited to the traditional and well-known cultural centres of Sephardic Jewry (e.g. in the former Ottoman Empire<sup>1</sup> or in the Netherlands<sup>2</sup>); in the recent past also smaller, however, no less significant and thriving Sephardic communities, such as the (historic) Sephardic community of Vienna have taken the centre stage of several studies<sup>3</sup>, exhibitions<sup>4</sup> and symposia<sup>5</sup>.

The aim of the present thesis is, however, to highlight another aspect of Sephardic Jewry, that goes a bit beyond the study of Sephardic history and language, namely the different notions of Sephardic diaspora and identity. Animated by these objectives I will try to find answers to the following question:

*Which mechanisms are responsible for the emergence of Sephardic identity and to what extent does the experience of diaspora play a significant role in the identity finding process of Sephardic Jews?*

Of course, in order to find an answer to this question, my analysis will heavily rely on the linguistic and historiographical studies about Sephardic Jewry that have been carried out so far. However, in order to gain deeper insights into the diasporic and cultural identity of Sephardic Jews, I have chosen a discourse-analytic approach. Since the so-called “linguistic’ turn” in the 1960s and the following “discursive’ turn” in the early 1980s, discourse analysis has become a popular methodological choice within most disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, in order to study “how our language use and [other] modes of representation fundamentally affect and shape our understandings of reality and our constructions of meaningful worlds”<sup>6</sup>. Also in the fields of the Studies of Religion discourse-analytical approaches have more and more frequently been applied over the recent years<sup>7</sup>, simply because such approaches not only provide new perspectives on

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<sup>1</sup> cf. e.g. Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000

<sup>2</sup> cf. e.g. Bodian 1997

<sup>3</sup> cf. e.g. Eugen 2001

<sup>4</sup> cf. the exhibition “*Die Türken in Wien*” organised by the Jewish Museum of Vienna (2010) and the Jewish Museum Hohenems (2011) about the Turkish-Israelite Community of Vienna (cf. <http://www.jmw.at/de/die-t-rken-wien> 25.3.2013; <http://www.jm-hohenems.at/index2.php?id=3030&lang=0>, 25.3.2013)

<sup>5</sup> cf. the conference “*Sefarad an der Donau*” organised by Michael Studemund Halévy at the Austrian Academy of Science (26.06.2011 – 29.06.2011) (cf. <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/vk/detail.do?id=92>, 25.12.2013)

<sup>6</sup> Moberg 2013, p. 4

<sup>7</sup> cf. Wijsen 2013, pp. 1-3

religion and religious phenomena as such but also because they offer new ways of (re-)evaluating and (re-)interpreting the research material (i.e. primary and secondary sources) at our disposal. In this regard, discourse analysis also turns out to be a very useful tool for gaining deeper insights into certain aspects of religion and religious communities, such as issues dealing with religious and cultural identity.

## 1.2. Theoretical Approach

So far, a variety of different discourse-analytic approaches have emerged which usually “share the same meta-theoretical underpinning, namely that of social constructionism”. Social-constructionist perspectives are usually associated with “post-structuralism” and “postmodernism/postmodern critique” and have so far been adopted by many different disciplines (e.g. philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology etc.)<sup>8</sup>. Marcus Moberg names four key assumptions which are commonly shared by most social constructionists: (1) “the view that conventional knowledge is based upon [an] objective unbiased observation of the world” has to be challenged; (2) “all modes of understanding are viewed as being intimately tied to a particular historical, social, and cultural context” which also implies that there are multiple possible constructions of the world; (3) “all forms of knowledge and understanding are consensual in character and 'sustained by social processes'”; (4) the convergence of knowledge and social precesses which will have “implications for what it is permissible for different people to do, and for how they may treat others”. Finally, Moberg concludes, “[d]iscourse is central to all of these key assumptions”<sup>9</sup>.

The term “discourse” has been strongly coined by Michel Foucault<sup>10</sup> who used it in order to refer to representations (e.g. constructed through language) which are responsible for our understanding of reality; Foucault's aim was to reveal the continuing effects that discourses have on modern society and culture<sup>11</sup>. However, by now also other definitions of “discourse” have been developed, for example that of Vivien Burr who holds that

*“[a] discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light.”*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Idem, p. 6

<sup>9</sup> Idem, p. 7-8

<sup>10</sup> cf. Foucault 1972

<sup>11</sup> Moberg 2013, p. 7

<sup>12</sup> Burr 2003, p. 64 in Moberg 2013, p. 9

Other theorists, such as Stuart Hall, are especially “interested in empirically exploring the function of discourse in relation to certain social phenomena (such as religion, for example)”<sup>13</sup>. This is why Hall – on whose theoretical considerations my own analysis rests upon to a large extent<sup>14</sup> – defines discourses slightly differently, namely as

*“ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society.”*<sup>15</sup>

As a matter of fact, it has to be recognised that there is not just one single definition of discourse but a large variety of definitions. According to Marcus Moberg, it is not only unattainable to find an “‘all-purpose’ definition” of discourse “but even undesirable” since the particular concept of discourse has to be “understood *in the context of [its] particular piece of research*”<sup>16</sup>. Such an open – one might say even volatile – definition of discourse makes this concept of discourse especially attractive for the Studies of Religion which have always had troubles to define their own topic of research. Thus, since there is no such thing as a neutral or innocent (“unschuldige”) theory defining religion, Hans G. Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad suggest that we should rather think of religion as a discourse or a field of discourse (“*Diskursfeld*”) in which particular identities and definitions (including scientific ones) are constructed, boundaries are drawn and spaces of power (“*Machträume*”) are occupied. Consequently, Kippenberg and von Stuckrad describe the Studies of Religion as a sort of meta-discipline which aim it is to describe the definitions within the field of discourse in which the Studies of Religion themselves are operating<sup>17</sup>. Discourse analysis, then, turns out to be an useful tool which “provides researchers with a particular way of approaching how people use language and other modes of representation in order to construct particular versions of certain phenomena and states of affairs and to make them *meaningful* in particular ways”<sup>18</sup>. In this context it is important to note that from a social-constructionist point of view *meaning* is always understood as something that is being *produced* or *made*, thus, it is not *a priori* inherent, permanent or static<sup>19</sup>. The same is true about religion in this context, which is why Moberg holds that religion within discourse-analytical approach must be regarded “as an ‘empty

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<sup>13</sup> Moberg 2013, p. 9

<sup>14</sup> cf. Chapter 2.2 and Chapter 2.4.

<sup>15</sup> Hall 1997, p. 4 in Moberg 2013, p. 9

<sup>16</sup> Moberg 2013, p. 9

<sup>17</sup> Kippenberg, von Stuckrad 2003, p. 14

<sup>18</sup> Moberg 2013, p. 11

<sup>19</sup> Idem, p. 10

signifier' that has no intrinsic meaning in itself"<sup>20</sup>.

By "[d]oing' discourse analysis" the researchers also have to be "attentive to how they themselves play a highly active role in the very production and construction of their own research material" which becomes especially important when collecting relevant data for analysis. Furthermore researchers "need to openly acknowledge that it was they themselves who chose the topic of research in the first place, who formulated a particular research agenda, and then set out to gather various types of data around it"<sup>21</sup>.

Concerning the application of discourse analysis in the Studies of Religion, it is important to note that there are different ways of applying that analytical approach. Therefore, Moberg suggests three different kinds of approaches that he conceptualises as first-, second-, and third-level approaches<sup>22</sup>.

In a first-level approach the concept of discourse is usually employed in order to conduct a "*meta-theoretical reflection*" on theories "within the field of religious studies itself"<sup>23</sup>, for example by calling into question traditionally applied definitions, models and approaches for explaining religion and religious phenomena. A good example for such a first-level approach is the work by Angelika Rohrbacher<sup>24</sup> who is analysing the "Western" academic perspectives towards "Eastern spirituality" which Rohrbacher – following Gregor Ahn<sup>25</sup> and Jürgen Osterhammer<sup>26</sup> et al. – clearly exposes as Amero-Eurocentristic discourses within the Studies of Religion which result in a rather biased than neutral perception of non-European/American religious on behalf of researchers in the West<sup>27</sup>.

A second-level approach, in turn, takes "a step further by primarily utilizing the concept of discourse in order to highlight the character (and often defects) of scholarly theorizing *within particular sub-fields* of religious studies" (e.g. sociology or anthropology of religion); furthermore a second-level approach serves a useful point of departure for the analysis of religion in relation to certain phenomena such as secularization or fundamentalism<sup>28</sup>. Also for inquiries relating to religious and cultural identity discourse-analytic approaches provide a solid theoretical basis. Many of these theories applied to second-level approaches within the Studies of Religion were originally evolved in and for other disciplines (e.g. political science, history); however, these "borrowed"

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<sup>20</sup> Idem, p. 13

<sup>21</sup> Idem

<sup>22</sup> Idem, p. 5

<sup>23</sup> Idem, p. 13-14

<sup>24</sup> cf. Rohrbacher 2006

<sup>25</sup> cf. Ahn 1997

<sup>26</sup> cf. Osterhammer 1998

<sup>27</sup> Rohrbacher 2006, pp. 5-6

<sup>28</sup> Moberg 2013, p. 14



theoretical approaches allow scholars of religion to analyse religious phenomena from a different kind of angle. A good example for such a fruitful adoption are the theoretical considerations of Eric Hobsbawm about the construction of collective identities. One of his most popular models (“invention of tradition”<sup>29</sup>) has been adopted by several scholars of religion in order to find new answers for the emergence of religious traditions<sup>30</sup>.

A third-level approach, finally, fundamentally rests upon the both previously mentioned approaches and primarily focuses on “conducting *actual discourse analyses* in relation to different types of empirical and ethnographic material”<sup>31</sup>. Many third-level “studies draw on interview material”, as well as “other types of written material” (i.e. media related to the group that is researched, such as books, magazines, web-pages ect.) since interview material alone “rarely works in isolation”<sup>32</sup>.

As Moberg holds, discourse analysis within a third-level approach perfectly serves for examining religious groups and communities that have “spread on a transnational scale” (e.g. diaspora communities). It allows to analyse the differences among people belonging to a certain (e.g. ethnic or religious) community and how individuals affiliated with that community construct themselves (i.e. their identities, their communities) “across various geographical areas and social and cultural”, as well as temporal contexts<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, Moberg emphasises the fact that a third-level approach should be grounded in not just one but in “*multiple* second-level approaches”. The theories provided by second-level approaches are insofar important if not fundamental as the “leap from first-level meta-theoretical reflection directly to third-level implementation in practice is often too great”<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, James V. Spickard reminds us to keep in mind that theories in general – including theories based on discourse analysis – “are supposed to be falsifiable”. Nevertheless, since theory-building usually enjoys higher status than theory-testing, many scholars tend to “claim paradigmatic status” for their favourite theories which themselves are, in fact, narratives or discourses<sup>35</sup>. Hence, we have to recognise that there are also other theoretical approaches besides the discourse-analytical ones which, in practice, may support very similar but sometimes also quite different conclusions.

For my own analysis of Sephardic diaspora identity I chose two principles, or in Moberg's

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<sup>29</sup> cf. Hobsbawm, Terence 1983; the term will be further explained in Chapter 2.2.

<sup>30</sup> cf. van Henten, Houtepen 2001

<sup>31</sup> Moberg 2013, p. 14

<sup>32</sup> Idem, pp. 20-21

<sup>33</sup> Idem, p. 23

<sup>34</sup> Idem, p. 19

<sup>35</sup> Spickard 2006, p. 179 in Moberg 2013, p.18

sense, two second-level approaches which have been drafted in order to theorise group identity. The first approach that will be discussed in detail are theories by Benedict Anderson concerning national identity. The second main approach applied to my analysis are the models of cultural and diasporic identity which have been evolved by Stuart Hall. While Hall's theoretical approaches explicitly build on the concepts, such as discourse and narrative<sup>36</sup> according to the usual practise within constructionism and postmodernism, Benedict Anderson's theories are predominantly grounded in historical materialism which, in turn, is heavily based on the methodological approaches of Karl Marx. However, Anderson was very much aware of the methodological affinity of his own approaches with discourse analysis, thus, he himself states that his theories were actually designed in order “to combine a kind of historical materialism with what later on came to be called discourse analysis”<sup>37</sup>. Just like Eric Hobsbawm<sup>38</sup>, whose theoretical approaches will also be featured in my own analysis but who “does not practice discourse analysis” in its proper sense either, also Anderson is providing a theoretical approach that serves as a good “example of what a discourse analysis of discursive and political processes could look like”<sup>39</sup>. Indeed, Anderson's theories has given a new and fresh impetus to discourse analytical approaches<sup>40</sup>.

### 1.3. Methodology

A large part of my thesis is based on secondary literature, thus, on the results of other researchers dealing with Jewish and Sephardic history. For instance, the given examples the chapter about ancient Jewish history primarily steam from a book edited and published by Michael Biale (“Cultures of the Jews”<sup>41</sup>); although the authors who have contributed to this book do not invoke discourse analysis *per se*, many of the examples apparently draw on theories which are related to discourse analytical approaches<sup>42</sup>. Any case, the secondary literature used in my thesis will be reread in interpreted by applying the analytical approaches (e.g. by Benedict Anderson and Stuart Hall)

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<sup>36</sup> Although Hall often uses the terms “discourse” and “narrative” as almost interchangeable synonyms, it is important to note that the two do not constitute exactly the same kind of thing. Following Lynn Abrams, a discourse “refers to a message which may be delivered and circulated by all kinds of modes of communication”; thus, a discourse is “quite complex and multilayered and *may be contained within a narrative*”[my emphasis]. Therefore “[i]t might be helpful to think of a narrative as the structure and of the discourse as the message within it”. Abrams 2010, p. 110

<sup>37</sup> Anderson 2006 (1983), p. 227

<sup>38</sup> Both, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm are to be ranked among Marxist/historical materialist theorists in the first place.

<sup>39</sup> Jørgensen, Phillips 2004, p. 46

<sup>40</sup> cf. Sarasin 2003, pp. 150ff

<sup>41</sup> cf. Biale (ed.) 2002

<sup>42</sup> e.g. Biale himself makes reference to Clifford Geertz (Biale 2002a, p. xvii) whose approaches mainly build on the idea of a “social discourse” (cf. Geertz 1973).

expounded in the second chapter of my thesis.

However, these approaches will not solely be applied to secondary sources featured in my thesis but also to a primary text. This text represents a chronicle that was published in Vienna in 1888. Its authors were two prominent members of the local Sephardic community, officially known as *türkisch-israelitische Gemeinde zu Wien*. My main interest will lie in the legendary account of the foundation of the Sephardic community which is displayed at the very beginning of the chronicle. By having a closer look at this foundational myth, interesting conclusions can be drawn about the prevailing identity discourses within the Sephardic community of Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century. In the course of working out the identity-establishing elements of this foundational myth, the literary-critical approaches of Florian Krobb (who analysed another version the same legend) and George Lukács turn out to be especially helpful. The same is true for Tamar Alexander-Frizer and her theoretical approaches about Sephardic folk narratives.

The analysis of the foundational legend will also include some selected data which was gathered during a research stay in London in May 2012 where I visited the archives of the Society of Genealogists (SoG)<sup>43</sup> in order to obtain first-hand genealogical data about Diego d'Aguilar, the supposed founder of the Sephardic community of Vienna.

Since my chief interests lie in the narratives featured in the foundational myth, linguistic aspects concerning the grammar, lexicon or syntax of the (Judeo-Spanish) text will hardly be discussed in the course of this analysis. However, the socio-linguistic aspects of Judeo-Spanish in general – mainly following the approaches of Joshua Fishman and Aldina Quintana-Rodríguez – will be discussed in the third chapter of my analysis in order to highlight the strong relations between language and cultural identity.

Eventually, my analysis will also be featured by a number of extracts which stem from two ethnographic interviews<sup>44</sup> which I conducted with Mordechai Arbell April 2011<sup>45</sup> and April 2012<sup>46</sup>. Mordechai Arbell is an outstanding personality who has a profound knowledge of the history of Sephardic Jewry and the Sephardic diaspora communities. He is also a founding member of the National Authority of Ladino in Israel<sup>47</sup> and in 2010 he received the Samuel Toledano Prize<sup>48</sup> for his

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.sog.org.uk/>, 28.3.2013

<sup>44</sup> An ethnographic interview is an *qualitative* interview especially used for the gathering of verbal ethnographic data, in my case about Sephardic communities in general and the Sephardic community of Vienna in particular. (cf. Flick 2009 [1995], p. 169f)

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbell (12.4.2011)

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbell (18.4.2012)

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.aki-yerushalayim.co.il/anl/index.htm>, 23.10.2011

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.samueltoledanoprize.org.il/index\\_files/aboutus.htm](http://www.samueltoledanoprize.org.il/index_files/aboutus.htm), 23.10.2011

life achievement for having spent a great part of his life researching Sephardic communities all over the world, predominantly in the Caribbean and Northern South America.

The reason why I contacted Mordechai Arbell in the first place was that I wanted to gain general information about the Sephardic community of Vienna in order to reconstruct its history and its community life. Mordechai Arbell is one of very few people still alive having a direct family connection to that community. Although the point of departure of both interviews was Vienna, Mordechai Arbell did not talk about Vienna alone but, in fact, related to many other Sephardic communities as well.

The cultural backgrounds of Mordechai Arbell are manifold. His family's roots lay on the Iberian Peninsula, the Balkans – more precisely in Bulgaria – as well as in Austria. When I asked him about his own (cultural) identity, he clearly defined himself as an “Sephardic oriented” Israeli; in the same breath he also explained why he chose this definition as a self-attribution in the first place:

*“[...]because...in Europe and in Israel people study only Ashkenazi history I have decided to stop working and dedicate my [life] to write a Sephardic [sic] History. And in places [where] the history was not written at all, I researched it and [wrote it down]. One of [those places I researched are] the big centre[s] of the Sephardic Jews which [existed on] the Caribbean islands. Then Philippines. Then Madras in India where Spanish-Portuguese Jews settled. Then Albania...and then finally Vienna.”<sup>49</sup>*

Indeed Mordechai Arbell has published various books and articles about numerous Sephardic communities around the world, including also the Sephardic community of Vienna<sup>50</sup>. All those places he has visited and researched have been significantly important in Mordechai Arbell's life. Thus, in the course of the interview he highlighted many different aspects of Sephardic life and history as well as identity, which brought me to the decision to select several statements his personal narrative in order to compare them to the wider discourses of and about Sephardic diaspora identity. Already by taking a closer look at Arbell's self-definition displayed above, we become aware of two aspects – that will be discussed later on – which are important for the constitution and consolidation of cultural identity in general: on the one hand the *positioning* within certain prevailing discourses (e.g. in reaction to the academic dominance of Ashkenazic historiography)<sup>51</sup>; on the other hand the *production* of texts or narratives (e.g. writing down the history of Sephardic communities)<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbell (12.4.2011)

<sup>50</sup> cf. Arbell 1996; Idem 1997

<sup>51</sup> cf. Chapter 2.4.

<sup>52</sup> cf. Chapter 2.1.

While the first interview, dating from April 2011, was mainly conducted in English in order to gain information about the Sephardic community of Vienna, the second interview, dating from April 2012, was almost entirely in Spanish and aimed at obtaining information about Sephardic identity in general and to reconstruct Viennese Sephardic identity in particular. My original plan to conduct both interviews in Judeo-Spanish, which Mordechai Arbells also speaks, failed for two reasons: first of all, Mordechai Arbell does not draw an exact line between modern Spanish and Judeo-Spanish (“It’s [both] Spanish”<sup>53</sup>); furthermore, I had the impression that it was somehow unnatural for him to speak Judeo-Spanish with a person that does not belong to his group, thus, someone who is not a Sephardic Jew him or herself. During the second interview, however, (Latin American) Spanish was the predominant language of conversation. The reason for this shift to another interview language (that both of us have in common), was that in the course of the first interview we found out that the two of us had spent parts of our lives in Panama in Central America<sup>54</sup>, as well as in other Latin American countries. Having found this “common ground”, Spanish was the most natural language to be adopted for the second interview. Following Marcus Moberg, this very circumstance shall remind us that

*“[the material gathered by means of in-depth interviews, which then becomes transcribed, assembled, analyzed, and eventually interpreted and presented, should [...] be regarded as something that researchers and informants, to a very significant degree, have constructed together”.*<sup>55</sup>

Also the two interviews I had conducted with Mordechai Arbell were transcribed<sup>56</sup> because, as pointed out by Jonathan Potter, an interview transcript constitutes an optimal medium for third-level discourse analyses:

*“If we have a transcribed record of discourse, rather than a set of formulations in note form, it places the reader of the research in a much stronger position to evaluate the claims and interpretations [on behalf of the interviewee].”*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbell (12.4.2011)

<sup>54</sup> In the 1970s Mordechai Arbell served as ambassador of Israel in Panama; I myself spent one year in Panama as an exchange student in 2000/01.

<sup>55</sup> Moberg 2013, p. 22

<sup>56</sup> Since the selected extracts of the interview transcripts which will be cited in the course of my analysis can not always be easily understood when taken out of their context, I decided to add my own comments and notes which appear in squared brackets [text]. These comments shall make the quotations from the interview more comprehensible for the reader. Occasionally, I will also exclude certain phrases from the selected extracts [...] because they are not relevant for what the interviewee actually wants to say. Of course, I did not have any intention of manipulating or correcting Mordechai Arbell's own words and sayings. If there is an expression that appears to be misspelled or incorrect (but was pronounced that very way in the interview) it is remarked with [sic]. Since the full transcripts of the two interviews are too voluminous (all together about 6h which equals 84 transcribed pages) it will not be annexed to the appendix of this paper. Instead, the transcribed material will be available on request.

<sup>57</sup> Potter 1996, p. 106 in Moberg 2013, p. 22

However, despite the great usefulness of interview transcripts it is “important to keep in mind that a transcription of an interview will always itself be a certain kind of construction that will never reflect recorded talk in straightforward ways”<sup>58</sup>. For exactly this reason – and in the very fashion of a narrative interview – the two interviews with Mordechai Arbell had been recorded without the use of a standardised questionnaire because when using such a questionnaire the interview tends to become too biased by constructing a narrative that rather reflects the questioner or the questionnaire-writer's opinions than the actual state of mind of the interviewee<sup>59</sup>. Thus, in the course of our conversation I was striving after phrasing my interview questions as open as possible which should be the aim of every narrative/qualitative ethnographic interview<sup>60</sup>.

#### **1.4. Structure**

As a first step the hypotheses, on which my analysis of Sephardic diaspora identity will rest upon, are going to be worked out. For this purpose the theoretical approaches of Benedict Anderson (Chapter 2.1.) and Stuart Hall (Chapter 2.2) and their considerations about national and cultural identity will be expounded in detail. Since my main focus lies on different conceptions of diaspora identity of Sephardic Jews, additional theory about diaspora will be discussed, predominantly by applying the theoretical considerations of Edward Said (Chapter 2.3.1.), as well as André Levy, Alex Weingrod and Roger Brubaker (Chapter 2.3.2.). All these approaches will serve as a point of departure for the final model that will be extensively discussed in this chapter, namely the model of cultural identity and diaspora by Stuart Hall (Chapter 2.4.). Finally, the main hypotheses of my thesis will be displayed.

In a next step the different mechanisms which are responsible for the constitution of ancient (i.e. biblical and Hellenistic) Jewish identity shall be brought into focus (Chapter 3.1.). The main reason for the digression on ancient Jewish history is to show that my previously formulated hypotheses perfectly serve as basis for the analysis of Jewish identity in general and Sephardic (diaspora) identity in particular.

Before actually proceeding to the analysis of Sephardic identity, the term “Sephardic” has to be examined, as well as the different types of meaning this term actually inheres (Chapter 3.2.). Since language is a very fundamental medium of identification, the language of Sephardic Jews will

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<sup>58</sup> Moberg 2013, p. 22

<sup>59</sup> Abrams 2010, p. 107-108

<sup>60</sup> cf. Flick 2009 (1995), p. 170

be discussed separately and in more detail (Chapter 3.3.). Also the difficulties concerning the correct designation of the language of Sephardic Jews will be addressed (Chapter 3.3.1.). In the course of my analysis I will use the terms “Judeo-Spanish” or “*Judezmo*” in order to refer to the vernacular of (Eastern) Sephardic Jews; both terms, as well as the other designating names for that language, will be examined in detail. Also the controversy about whether to label Judeo-Spanish as a language or a dialect (Chapter 3.3.2.), as well as the dissension about what languages Iberian Jews actually spoke before they were forced to leave Spain (Chapter 3.3.3.) will be discussed in detail because the questions which arose in these controversies reveal many details about the manifold components of Sephardic identity. In order to have a solid point of departure for the analysis of Sephardic history, the different notions of Sephardic homelands which go hand in hand with a diaspora experience, too, will be outlined (Chapter 3.4.).

In the fourth chapter various stages of Sephardic history before (Chapters 4.1.; 4.2.; 4.3.) and after the expulsion (Chapter 4.4.) will be analysed. Especially two narratives that are frequently adopted after the expulsion of Spain – namely, the “Glory of Spain” (Chapter 4.4.1.) and the “Trauma of Expulsion” (Chapter 4.4.2.) – will be set out in detail because they appear to be central for the constitution of Sephardic identity. Equally relevant for the analysis of Sephardic identity are the different notions of Sephardic nationhood which will be expounded at the end of this chapter (Chapter 4.5.).

The two narratives about the past discussed in the previous chapter are also encountered in the foundational myth of the Sephardic community of Vienna which will serve as an example in order to examine the very mechanisms which are at work when a communal diaspora identity comes into being (Chapter 5.1.; 5.2.). As it allows us to draw important inferences about foundational myth in question, also the biographies, as well as their social and political environment of the two authors of the myth will be accurately discussed (Chapter 5.3.).





## 2. Imagining Diaspora Communities

### 2.1. Benedict Anderson's Conception of Imagined Communities

The following analysis of Sephardic identity is largely based on the theoretical approaches of the Irish born historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson. His reflections about nations and nationalism, especially in relation to emergence of print, were most famously discussed in his book “Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism<sup>61</sup>” which was first published in 1983 and reissued in 1991, including three additional chapters. Since its publication Anderson's book has had an enormous influence on the re-thinking of nations and nationalism in the light of modernity, comparable to the works of the Marxist historian Eric J. Hobsbawm<sup>62</sup> and of the social anthropologist Ernest Gellner<sup>63</sup>. Other than the latter two mentioned authors Anderson does not have such reservations towards nationalism which according to him “can be an attractive ideology” because of its “Utopian elements”<sup>64</sup>. Although heavily influenced by Gellner's notion about nations, namely that nations are mere inventions by nationalism in places “where they do not exist”<sup>65</sup>, Anderson developed this own concept of the nation; but instead of defining the nation as an invention he rather describes it as an “imagined community – [...] imagined as both inherently and sovereign”. Re-describing this thought more precisely, he claims that

*“[every nation] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...] Finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”<sup>66</sup>*

Although Anderson had primarily evolved this definition in order to analyse the mechanisms behind nation-building and the emergence of modern nations states, he did not want to have this concept solely understood as an exclusive model for the definition of the nation. As a matter of fact, quite the contrary is the case as he adds that indeed

*“[...] all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their*

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<sup>61</sup> Anderson 2006 (1983)

<sup>62</sup> Hobsbawm, Ranger 1983; Hobsbawm 1992 (1990)

<sup>63</sup> Gellner 1964; Idem 2008 (1983)

<sup>64</sup> cf. interview with B. Anderson: <https://www.uio.no/english/research/interfaculty-research-areas/culcom/news/2005/anderson.html>, 18.2.2013

<sup>65</sup> Gellner 1964, p. 169 in Anderson 2006 (1983), p. 6

<sup>66</sup> Anderson 2006 (1983), pp. 6-7

*falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”*<sup>67</sup>

The latter mentioned statement is especially important because by the fact that actually every community is somehow imagined, Anderson does not draw the conclusion that communities in general and nation in particular are *per se* false or unreal since categories such as true or false turn out not to be helpful for the distinction and characterisation of communities; instead Anderson suggests we should rather conceive the “style” in which communities are imagined; thus he forgoes to define what a community really, simply because it is virtually impossible to define an imaginative entity. Thus we can only analyse the imaginative processes.

In order to be able to describe the mechanisms of how communities imagine themselves, Anderson coined another term he calls “print-capitalism” and which is based on his theory that the emergence of nations and nationalism was only possible through the concurrent emergence capitalism<sup>68</sup>. To be more accurate, it was the creation of the print industry and the adoption of vernacular languages (e.g. modern German, French, Spanish etc.) instead of exclusive print languages (e.g. Latin, pre-modern Hebrew) that hitherto had been in use for the distribution of intellectual ideas<sup>69</sup>. Thus, according to Anderson, it was the invention of the printing technology and the distribution of printed books and media in vernacular languages that “laid the bases for national consciousness”<sup>70</sup>. Furthermore he describes three characterising features of print-capitalism.

First of all, vernacular languages had the power, other than the traditional print languages, to create an exclusive and “particular language-field” of people to which “*only those*” could belong who were speaking the same kind of language or at least a similar dialect. The media, such as books and newspapers, printed in the common vernacular suddenly made people aware of their fellow readers. According to Anderson, this is the embryonic stage any imagined community had to go through.<sup>71</sup>

Secondly, print-capitalism had the power to give language a fixed form “which in the long run helped to build” an “image of antiquity”. Not only could a printed book be reproduced countless times but through print it also got a “permanent form”<sup>72</sup>. This should make it possible for future generations to read in the past or, in other words, to read the “imagined” past itself.

A third fact that appears to be crucial in relation to print-capitalism is the creation “languages-of-power”. Apparently, some “dialects were ‘closer’” to the printed language and hence

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<sup>67</sup> Idem

<sup>68</sup> At this point we become aware of the fact that Anderson's theories are actually based on the methodological approaches of historical materialism and Marxism.

<sup>69</sup> Idem, p. 37f

<sup>70</sup> Idem, p. 44

<sup>71</sup> Idem

<sup>72</sup> Idem

“dominated” its final form. This, inevitably, leads on to distinct between language of higher status and prestige and languages or dialects that have been “unsuccessful (or only relatively successful) in insisting on their own print-form”<sup>73</sup>.

Of course, “print” as theorised by Benedict Anderson is only a shibboleth. A similar cultural impact was caused, as Anderson maintains, by the invention of the radio in 1895 which “made it possible to bypass print” and also was able to create a “aural representation” of imagined communities, thus, also reaching people that were neither able to read and write<sup>74</sup>. As for the present, we can even conclude that new technologies, such as the internet not only create virtual spaces but, in fact, virtual – “imagined” – web communities.

Now, for all that Anderson asserts that his models can not only be applied to explain nationally imagined communities but virtually any community larger than a primordial village, the question arises if this is also the case for religious communities. Interestingly, Anderson deploys his model also to describe the imaginary forces that bond adherents of a certain religion together. For example, he points out that religious pilgrimages can be valued as constitutive instances which explain how “*otherwise unrelated*” people virtually form a “community of imagination”<sup>75</sup>.

By referring to an example from Islam, namely the *hajj* (the annual pilgrimage to Mecca), Anderson holds that it is almost impossible to understand such mass phenomena without imagining the pilgrims, who themselves come from many different communities (countries, nations), as one single community:

*“The Berber encountering the Malay before the Kabba must, as it were, ask himself: ‘Why is this man doing what I am doing, uttering the same words that I am uttering, even though we can not talk to one another?’ There is only one answer, once one has learnt it: ‘Because we ... are Muslims.’”*<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, Anderson argues that there is “always a double aspect to the choreography of the great religious pilgrimages”. On the one hand a crowd of speakers of different vernacular languages – some of them might even be illiterates – provide a “dense, physical reality of the ceremonial passage”. A “bilingual intelligentsia”, on the other hand, performs “the unifying rites” which give the collective of the ordinary faithful meaning.<sup>77</sup>

And yet, Anderson does make a distinction between “classical communities”, such as religious groups, and “imagined communities” in the sense of “modern nations”. The main

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<sup>73</sup> Idem, p. 45

<sup>74</sup> Idem, p. 54n28

<sup>75</sup> Idem, p. 54

<sup>76</sup> Idem

<sup>77</sup> Idem

distinctive features which are typical for those older or classical communities are how their languages are classified, namely as sacred and unique, as well as “their ideas about admission to membership” (e.g. the possibility of converting to a religion). However, these distinctive differences do not disqualify religions from their imaginative qualities which especially become manifest in their “sacred and language and written script”<sup>78</sup>. Also, we may not forget that many of the first printed books ever published in Europe were, in fact, printed sacred scripts, as for example the Gutenberg Bible or the Luther Bible (the latter one even printed in a vernacular language). This makes Anderson's model of “imagined communities” and “print capitalism” especially interesting for the analysis of the formation of religious communities and religious/cultural identity. Indeed, Benedict Anderson's theories have been very influential. Since the publication of his book they have been widely adopted and further refined. One model based on the theoretical approaches offered in the book “Imagined Communities” is the conception of “Cultural Identity” developed by Stuart Hall which shall be further portrayed in detail.

## 2.2. Imagining Cultural Identity

Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist and sociologist, who has widely discussed notions of culture in connection with race and (black) identity, used Anderson's concept of imagined communities as a point of departure in order to formulate his own theory about cultural identity. Thus, also Hall holds that the nation or, in his term, “national identity” should be defined as an “imagined community”; however, he further maintains that we should interpret the nation as a “*narrative*” or “*discourse*”<sup>79</sup>:

According to Hall, this “*narrative of the nation*” is “told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media, and popular culture”; it is preserved in stories, landscapes, historical events and ritual etc. The “*narrative of the nation*” is also the first out of five elements which Hall defines in order to clarify how the narrative of national culture is actually told. According to Hall's model, the national narrative reveals itself in shared experiences, such as triumphs, sorrows and disasters “which give meaning to the nation”. Only by sharing these narratives people, consequently, become part of an “imagined community” in Anderson's sense.<sup>80</sup>

The second element which characterise the narrative of national culture is the strong “emphasis on *origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness*”. Furthermore, this narrative is highlighting the primordial nature of national identity which has allegedly remained unchanged

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<sup>78</sup> Idem, p. 13

<sup>79</sup> Hall 1992, p. 292ff

<sup>80</sup> Idem

through time and history.<sup>81</sup>

Thirdly, national identity is deploying a strategy called “*the invention of tradition*”<sup>82</sup>. This is a term coined by aforementioned Eric J. Hobsbawm who maintain that

*“‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often recent in origin and sometimes invented. [...] Invented traditions [are] a set of practices, [...] of a ritual or symbolic nature which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviours by repetition which automatically implies continuity with a suitable historical past”.*<sup>83</sup>

A fourth and very important narrative for the formation of national identity “is that of a *foundational myth*” which is a story that “locates the origin of the nation, the people and their national character”. Furthermore, such myths “help disfranchised”<sup>84</sup> or uprooted peoples to “conceive and express their resentment and its contents in intelligible terms”<sup>85</sup>, by providing an “alternative history or counter-narrative”<sup>86</sup>.

Not less important is the fifth element of national identity which is “grounded on the idea of a *pure, original people or ‘folk’*.” However, as Hall adds, “in the realities of national development, it is rarely this primordial folk who persist or exercise power” or, in other words, the original folk was not yet a powerful nation.<sup>87</sup>

To most of these elements outlined by Stuart Hall we will return in the course of the analysis of Sephardic identity which is very much bound to the diasporic history of Sephardic Jews or, in Hall's sense, bound to the narratives that create such a history. Diaspora has also played a major role in the works of Stuart Hall; for example, he has analysed the cultural identity of the Black diaspora of the Caribbean. By doing so he actually evolved his theoretical considerations on that topic which prove to be very helpful for gaining a deeper understanding of the different stages of Sephardic diaspora and identity. But before examining Hall's model of cultural identity and diaspora, we first of all have to declared how term, such as diaspora or homeland are to be understood and in which way they are imagined.

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<sup>81</sup> Idem, p. 294

<sup>82</sup> Idem

<sup>83</sup> Hobsbawm 2010 (1983), p. 1

<sup>84</sup> Hall 1992, p. 294-295

<sup>85</sup> Hobsbawm 2010 (1983), p. 1 in Hall 1992, p. 294-295

<sup>86</sup> Hall 1992, p. 294-295

<sup>87</sup> Hall 1992, p. 295

## 2.3. Theorizing Diaspora

### 2.3.1. Imaginative Geographies

A very helpful conception in order to grasp terms, such as diaspora and homeland in a useful way for our analysis is one that only at first sight seems to derive directly from Anderson's concept of imagined communities. It is this the concept of “imaginative geographies” developed by Edward Said and represented in his famous book “Orientalism”<sup>88</sup>. Said's deliberation mainly relays on the discourse-analytical approaches by Michel Foucault. However, Said's conception can be read complementarity to Anderson's theories: while Anderson is predominantly analysing the imagined structures and “the *Self*”, Said, on the contrary, is more interested in the identity and the imagination of “the *Other*”<sup>89</sup>.

According to Said, geographies and territories are only “fictional” or “imaginative” realities since people tend to set up boundaries upon territories in order to mark what's “ours” (a familiar space) and what's “theirs”, which is, then, unfamiliar. Building upon these considerations, Said concludes that

*“geographic boundaries [are always accompanied by] social, ethnic, and cultural ones [...]. [...] [T]here is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance between what is close to it and what is far away. [...] [T]here is no use of pretending that all we know about space, or rather about history and geography, is more than anything else imaginative.”*<sup>90</sup>

Hence, according to Said's model, not only communities but also geographies and even history are imagined. However, very much in the fashion of Anderson, “imaginative geographies” are not to be understood as a shaky constructs or as something false and untrue. Imaginative, in Said's sense, means something not immediately or instantly experienceable or empirically recordable. This is reason why experience – retrospectively – is only formed by perceptions or imaginations of the reality. However, more important is the fact that only by imagining the past it is hence possible to talk about what has been experienced before or what has never been experienced personally at all (such as history). Furthermore, Said comprehends imaginative geographies as spaces that are contingent on knowledge and power which is why geographic imaginations are also the social media for communicating of power structures (e.g. the power drawing demarcation lines), which again a part of a social/power discourses in Foucault's sense.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Said 1979

<sup>89</sup> Mohnike 2007, p. 21

<sup>90</sup> Said 1979, p. 54-55

<sup>91</sup> Mohnike 2007, p. 19

Except for the discursive (social, ethnic, and cultural) element deriving from Michel Foucault, Derek Gregory names some other “topographies” which Gregory names to be crucial for the full understanding of the power of imaginative geographies. Interestingly, as Gregory holds, Said spares these other aspects imaginative geographies almost entirely, namely the “topographies of desire” but also the ones linked to fantasy and anxiety<sup>92</sup>. What Gregory means is that imaginative geographies may not only be designed by power relations but also by strong and fundamental feelings. However, we should keep in mind that feelings, such as the longing for a homeland all too often accompanied by previous (powerful) rupture. In this sense, also the two closely related terms “diaspora” and “homeland” can be understood as imaginative geographies. They, too, are fed by notions, such as desire and fantasy, but are more over “laden with dark tones of grieve and gloom”, especially in contrast to terms such as “fatherland” or “motherland”<sup>93</sup>. In the next chapter, then, these terms diaspora and homeland shall be further theorised and classified.

### **2.3.2. Diasporas & Homelands**

In the process of finding a theoretical model explaining notions, such as diasporas and homeland, once again, turns out to be very helpful. In fact, Benedict Anderson's model of imagined communities, as well as other studies deriving from the critique of the nation state and nationalism, have given an important, if not revolutionary, impetus to the development of theoretical approaches for the analyses of diaspora, diasporic cultures and diasporic identities. Since nations incline to imagine themselves as “full”, “real” and, thus, as extremely exclusive entities, in turn, minorities and diaspora societies are quite often perceived as a threat to national identity<sup>94</sup>. This is the reason why “diaspora-as-metaphor” has so far appeared in many recent studies about migrating and minority groups and their relation to their new host society<sup>95</sup>. Again we become aware of certain power structures which obviously define diaspora groups; at best such groups will receive the status of a long-term minority but at worst the national regime will seek for their brutal elimination. In any case, according to André Levy and Alex Weingrod, nation states most certainly have a tendency towards the labelling of certain groups as “Others”<sup>96</sup>. However, such explanatory approaches are most frequently employed in order to describe the “new” diasporas which have emerged in the age of globalisation.

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<sup>92</sup> Gregory 1995, p. 456 (cf. also Mohnike 2007, p. 20)

<sup>93</sup> Levy, Weingrod 2005, p. 3

<sup>94</sup> Idem, p. 16-17

<sup>95</sup> Idem, p. 18

<sup>96</sup> Idem, p. 4

Somewhat different from these newly emerged diasporas, are the so called “old” or classical diasporas, a term generally used for Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Romani and other peoples who were forcibly expelled or who left their ancient homelands for other, less portentous reasons. The notion of diaspora, which is in fact a Greek word (*διασπορά*) meaning approximately “scattered seeds”, often correlates with the strong longing for returning to the ancestral homeland<sup>97</sup>. The words used in Hebrew for example, such as *gola* (גולה), *pzura* (פזורה) and *tfutza* (תפוצה), for referring to the Jews living as dispersed minorities in different parts of the world, inherit a similar emotional state and pathos, especially when they are juxtaposed in opposition to a religiosity charged homeland (e.g. Zion)<sup>98</sup>.

Despite these semantic and conceptional distinctions between old and new, classical and modern diasporas there are three widely, though not universally, accepted criteria characterising diaspora which Roger Brubaker identifies as (1) Dispersion, (2) Homeland Orientation and (3) Boundary-Maintenance. Although these criteria turn out to be very helpful when used as operational terms for the identification of diaspora communities, it is not quite easy to define these terms for general purposes.

Brubaker, for example, points out that “Dispersion” can be defined as the settlement of (even compact) populations living “as a minority outside its ethnonational 'homeland'”. However, in its narrowest sense, this can be interpreted as a strictly forced or traumatic scattering (e.g. expulsion, exile) or more broadly defined, it means the crossing of borders within or between entities and territories (e.g. the crossing from one province or national state into another).<sup>99</sup>

The same holds for the the second criterion defining diaspora; generally speaking, homeland orientation, is “the orientation to a real or imagined 'homeland' as an authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty”<sup>100</sup>. Additionally, there are four more criteria in connection to homeland orientation, which William Safran defines as (1) the maintaining of a “collective memory or myth about the homeland”; (2) the regards to “the ancestral homeland as the true, ideal home and as the place to which one would (or should) eventually return”; (3) a collective commitment “to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland and to its safety and prosperity”; and (4) the continuation of relating, directly or indirectly, “to the homeland, in a way that significantly shapes one's identity and solidarity”<sup>101</sup>. However, by referring to Clifford James, Brubaker outlines that Safran's criteria are not fully consistent because they are too much orientated towards a single

<sup>97</sup> Idem, p. 4

<sup>98</sup> cf. Kippenberg, von Stuckrad 2003, p.114ff

<sup>99</sup> Brubaker 2005, p. 5

<sup>100</sup> Idem

<sup>101</sup> Safran 1991, pp. 83-84 in Brubaker 2005, p. 5



source of origin that one allegedly seeks to return to. It omits the de-centred and lateral connections to a certain space which may be as important as the spaces “formed around a teleology of origin/return”. This is why, following Clifford and Burbaker, Safran's model does not prove to be universally valid because, for instance, it does not hold for the many aspects of Jewish diaspora experiences<sup>102</sup>.

Indeed, it is not uncommon for Jews to be connected to more than only one “homeland”. A French Jew of Moroccan descent, for instance, may symbolically identify with a “mystic homeland” loaded with nostalgic memories (Morocco), as well as with a “real homeland” that he ideologically supports and to that he might eventually may return by making *ayliah*<sup>103</sup>. The same holds true for any other Jewish ethnic group who, out of religious or Zionist motives, might feel a much stronger longing for Israel than for the lands where their parents or grandparents originally come from. Also, one might belong to more than one or even shift to another diaspora. A Russian Jew, of example, by returning to the Jewish homeland Israel is automatically becoming part of the world-wide Russian diaspora<sup>104</sup>. Furthermore, it is not unthinkable that two different diaspora groups dispute about the same homeland, as in the case of the Jewish diaspora and Palestinian diaspora<sup>105</sup>.

According to Burbaker, boundary-maintenance is maybe the most agreed upon criterion for diaspora in behalf of scholars dealing with diaspora. Boundaries can either be maintained by a deliberating “resistance to assimilation through self-enforced endogamy or other forms of self-segregation” or they are an unintended result of social exclusion. Boundary-maintenance is what enables a diasporic group to perceive itself (or be perceived) as a “distinctive 'community', held together by a distinctive, active solidarity, as well as by relatively dense social relationships”. These boundaries may even reach beyond state boundaries by creating a direct link between members of a diaspora in different states and unifying them “into a single 'transnational community’”<sup>106</sup>. A good example in this respect are the powerful cultural links among Blacks in England and the Caribbean and African-Americans in the USA who are bound together by their shared myths, dreams and memories about the their “historical homeland” Africa<sup>107</sup>.

Despite the widely agreed importance of boundary-maintenance, Burbaker remarks that for the formation of diaspora societies this criterion actually is only one pole in the field of two conflicting priorities. In fact, the erosion of boundaries, for example, through assimilation is at least as important as their maintenance. Boundary-erosion is a temporally extended and inter-

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<sup>102</sup> Clifford, pp. 305-306 in Brubaker 2005, p. 5-6

<sup>103</sup> Levy, Weingrod 2005, p. 11

<sup>104</sup> Idem, p. 25

<sup>105</sup> Idem, p. 6

<sup>106</sup> Brubaker 2005, p. 6

<sup>107</sup> Levy, Weingrod 2005, p. 17

generational process and, thus, a crucial factor for the maintenance of a diaspora identity over many generations. So, no matter how big the role of boundary-maintenance might be for preserving a cultural identity in the diaspora, the importance of the erosions of such boundaries shall not to be underestimated. This is especially stressed by those who put much emphasis on the fluidity, syncretism, creolization of diaspora societies<sup>108</sup>. Most theoretical approaches that stress the latter mentioned aspects of diaspora usually rely on Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity in relation to diaspora societies.

## 2.4. Cultural Identity and Diaspora

At the beginning of his essay about “Cultural Identity and Diaspora<sup>109</sup>”, in which Stuart Hall theorises the concepts of identity as represented in “film and other forms of visual representation of the Afro-Caribbean (and Asian) 'blacks' of the diasporas of the West”, he holds that there are two principal ways of thinking about diasporic identity. A more traditional model views identity “in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self'” hold by people who have a common ancestry and history. This “oneness” is perceived as “truth” and underlays “all the other, more superficial differences” between people of the same culture. According to this model, it is this true and unifying identity which a “diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express”<sup>110</sup>. This is what anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon once called a “passionate” or “profound research” of one's own roots and what, in Hall's eyes, is carried out by “*re-telling*” the past<sup>111</sup>, or in other words, by means of narratives and discourses<sup>112</sup>. In fact all “enforced diasporas” try to impose “an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation” in order to experience an (imagined) “fullness or plentitude” which is set against the rubric of a broken past<sup>113</sup>.

Despite Hall's acknowledgement that the recollection of a common past and history “has been profoundly formative” by unifying diaspora societies across their differences, this common history does not automatically constitute a common origin<sup>114</sup>. Again, he stresses the fact that diasporic identity is rather constructed through discourses (memories, fantasies, narratives, myths

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<sup>108</sup> cf. Brubaker 2005, p. 5

<sup>109</sup> Hall 1990

<sup>110</sup> Idem, p. 223 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”: <http://www.rlwclarke.net/courses/LITS3304/2009-2010/12BHallCulturalIdentityandDiaspora.pdf>, 20.2.2013)

<sup>111</sup> Idem, p. 223-224

<sup>112</sup> cf. Hall's perception of cultural identity in Chapter 2.2.

<sup>113</sup> Hall 1990, p. 224-225 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>114</sup> Idem, p. 228 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

etc.) about that past<sup>115</sup>.

The second model presented by Hall holds that the “critical points of deep and significant *difference*”, in fact, “constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'”. This is also the model that Hall personally favours; he grasps cultural identities not only as a matter of “being” but also of “becoming”. What we have become is always the result of the different ways of how we are positioned or position ourselves within the narratives of the past. Following the philosophical approaches of Michel Foucault and Edward Said, Hall states that diasporas are always “constructed as different and other” by the knowledge of regimes in which they exist. Moreover, these (e.g. colonial) regimes even have the power to make diaspora societies see and experience *themselves* as “Others”.<sup>116</sup>

However, Halls reminds us, that these “Others” are not monolithically united entities, since a a profound diversity prevails among them (e.g. the huge diversity of Black and Jewish culture). This is why he understands diaspora communities as an interplay of inherent differences and an (imagined) continuity.<sup>117</sup>

By juxtaposing these two models, Hall developed his own model of diasporic identities which, he suggests, we should think of as “‘framed' by two axes of vectors”. The first vector stands for “similarity or continuity” (according to the first model), while the second vector (following the second model) stands for “difference and rupture”. One gives some grounding in the past, whereas the other functions as a reminder of the “profound discontinuity” by which most diasporas are characterised. Hall exemplifies his model by referring to slavery which on the one hand cut Afro-Caribbeans off from their direct access to Africa and their African past and on the other hand “unified” these peoples of different origins across their differences in the American colonies<sup>118</sup>.

The positioning between these two axes of continuity and discontinuity is what Stuart Hall describes as “cultural 'play'” or “play of 'difference' within identity”, in reference to Jacques Derrida's concept of “freeplay”<sup>119</sup>. This “play” is not just a “simple binary opposition” like “past/present” or “them/us”. The complexity of this play rather “exceeds this binary structure of representation” because at “different places, times, in relation to different questions, the boundaries

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<sup>115</sup> Idem, p. 226 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>116</sup> Idem, p. 225 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>117</sup> Idem, p. 227 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>118</sup> Idem, p. 226-227 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>119</sup> In Derrida's post-structuralist sense, the “freeplay” is defined as an infinite “*play* of the structure”, or the play of signs or elements *without* “a fixed origin”; it is always a “play” of the “presence and absence” of a signifying element which is “inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain”. cf. Derrida 2005 (1978), pp. 352, 360

are re-situated”<sup>120</sup>. What Hall means is that the boundaries which construct diasporic identity are constantly *positioned* in new ways and in accordance to the circumstances.

In order to show how this cultural play works, Hall deploys Derrida's notion of “*différance*”, a neologism deriving from French verb *différer* which can either mean “to differ” or “to defer (postpone)”<sup>121</sup>. According to Hall, *différance* “challenges the fixed binaries which stabilise meaning and representation” and, consequently, also identity. In reference to the second meaning of *différance* (postponement), Hall holds that meaning is always deferred (postponed), in the sense that meaning is “never finished or completed”, but keeps on moving in order “to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings”<sup>122</sup>. In direct reference to Derrida, Hall, in his model, “is implicitly and simultaneously comparing Caribbean society to a sign within a wider sign-system”, or in other words, to an element within the “cultural play”. Thus, diasporic identity is comparable to “a signifier located along the chain of signification”. It can also be perceived as a “text which is linked 'intertextually' to other region-texts”<sup>123</sup>. Hall contends that meaning and identity only emerge in the moment when the movement of a sign within that “play” comes to a contingent and arbitrary (thus, not natural nor permanent!) standstill. It is this arbitrary “stop” which Hall also refers to as a “*positioning*” between the two axes of continuity and discontinuity which, then, makes meaning and the formation of identity possible, at least temporally<sup>124</sup>.

Hall maintains that owing to Derrida's approach “it is possible rethink the positioning and repositioning” of diaspora identities by assuming that identity is composed by a number of meaningful “presences”. “Presence” or “*présence*” is this metaphor Hall borrows from Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor, two prominent founders of the *Négritude* movement, in order to analyse the different layers of Caribbean cultural identities. According to Hall, these are composed by “*Présence Africaine*”, “*Présence Européenne*” and “*Présence Américaine*”. All these presences, of course, can never be fully present because they, too, are deferred.<sup>125</sup>

*Présence Africaine*, by drawing upon Edward Said's and Benedict Anderson approaches, can be interpreted as the orientation towards an imaginative homeland, in this case Africa, but to which one “can't literally go home again”. *Présence Africaine* within Afro-Caribbean identities is “what Africa as become in the New World”. The original Africa is lost but nevertheless it has

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<sup>120</sup> Hall 1990, p. 228 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>121</sup> Norris 1982, p. 32 in Hall 1990, p. 229

<sup>122</sup> Hall 1990, p. 229

<sup>123</sup> Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”:

<http://www.rlwclarke.net/courses/LITS3304/2009-2010/12BHallCulturalIdentityandDiaspora.pdf>, 20.2.2013

<sup>124</sup> Hall 1990, p. 229-230 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>125</sup> Idem, p. 230 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

become part of the “Caribbean imaginary” by re-telling Africa “through politics, memory and desire”.<sup>126</sup>

*Présence Européenne* represents the power colonial regimes exerted over African slaves in the Americas. How ambivalent Afro-Caribbeans generally feel about this presence, Hall best reflects by stating, “[f]or many of us, this is a matter not of too little but of too much”. This presence inheres a highly conflicting nature: it is a “dialogue of power and resistance”, as well as a struggle between its refusal or recognition. This why *Présence Européenne* is “always-already fused, syncretised, with other cultural elements” and, consequently, “always-already creolised” which is also the most important feature of the last presence in Hall's model.<sup>127</sup>

*Présence Américaine* is Hall's term for the New World. Is is the “juncture-point where the many cultural tributaries meet” and “where the fateful/fatal encounter” between Africa and the West was staged. The result was a *creole* diaspora society which, according to Hall, is the main feature of all diaspora societies.<sup>128</sup> This, eventually, leads us to Stuart Hall's final definition of diaspora:

*“The diaspora experience [...] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.”*<sup>129</sup>

Thus, considering all the interplaying and sometimes conflicting “presences” within diaspora groups, “hybridity” turns out to be the best term for grasping diasporic identities – thus, in order to grasp this hybridity we, first of all, have to bring all these different presences into focus.

It is important to Hall to stress the fact that the hybridity of diaspora societies is not to be understood as something untrue or corrupt; this is why Stuart Hall concludes his model by making a direct reference to Benedict Anderson, namely that diaspora communities which are, in fact, imagined communities “are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined”<sup>130</sup>.

Notwithstanding the fact that Hall's model is by all means very helpful for the analysis of diasporic identities, one shall not forget that it is still a model and, thus, it also inherently lacks conceptional clarity. Even when applied to the analysis of Black Caribbean diaspora, the universal applicability of his model may be challenged. Although it seems obvious that call Caribbean cultures are indeed hybrid creole culture, Hall's model, in some aspects, seems to be too general. For example, his concept of *Présence Africaine* does not represent the different origins and cultural

<sup>126</sup> Idem, p. 230-236 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>127</sup> Idem, p. 232-233 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>128</sup> Idem, p. 234 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>129</sup> Hall 1990, p. 235

<sup>130</sup> Anderson 1983, p. 15 in Hall 1990, p. 237

influences brought the Americas by African slaves, who, in fact, were members of different ethnic origins and from different West African regions (somewhere ranging between Senegal and Angola – a coastline of more than 7.000 km<sup>131</sup>), speaking different languages and practising different religions. Also, instead of speaking of *Présence Européenne* it might be more helpful to speak of the presences of different European colonial powers in the Caribbean (English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch and even Danish) which, again, brought along different cultures, languages and customs, still recognisable on the different Caribbean islands. Concerning the *Présence Américaine*, Richard L. W. Clarke, a scholar from the University of the West Indies, points out that “Hall fails to make any mention” of a “*Présence Indienne*”, that is the presence of hundreds of thousands of descendants of immigrants from South Asian “whose influence is very marked in countries such as Trinidad and Guyana” where creole culture has emerged that is not formed alone by Europeans and descendants of African slaves<sup>132</sup>.

As we will see, Hall's approaches prove to be highly applicable also for the analysis of Sephardic diasporas. Applying a model originally meant for the analysis of Afro-Caribbean diasporas to the analysis of Sephardic diasporas and Sephardic identity shall not be valued as an attempt to compare apples to oranges. Concerning the common discursive grounds of Afro-Caribbean Blacks and Jews, one only needs to think of the countless references to Zion and other Biblical themes within the Rastafari movement and in Reggae music<sup>133</sup>. Also on an intellectual basis the comparisons of Jewish (respectively biblical) with Afro-Caribbean diaspora experiences has quite a long history. In 1898, of instance, Afro-Caribbean thinker Edward W. Blyden, who is also mentioned in Hall's article about cultural identity and diaspora, published a booklet entitled “The Jewish Question” in which he discussed “an acceptable alternative cause” for Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Americans with the aim of moving back to Africa, “analogous to the call of Zionism for a Jewish homeland”<sup>134</sup>.

## 2.5. Final Hypotheses

From the theoretical approaches exposed above I derive my following hypotheses which will guide my analysis of Sephardic identity:

<sup>131</sup> cf. Figure 3.1. The Atlantic slave trade triangle in Jones, R. Jones, Woods 2004, p. 42

<sup>132</sup> Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”: <http://www.rlwclarke.net/courses/LITS3304/2009-2010/12BHallCulturalIdentityandDiaspora.pdf>, 20.2.2013

<sup>133</sup> cf. Reckord 1998, p. 231ff

<sup>134</sup> Echeruo 2010, p. 556

1. *Sephardic communities have to be understood as “imagined communities”, therefore, as constructed communities, imagined by people who perceive themselves as a group.*
2. *The maintenance of Sephardic identity is very much dependent on the maintenance of a common vernacular language (Judeo-Spanish) which provides a particular and exclusive field of discourse which, in turn, made Sephardic Jews aware of their companionship.*
3. *Sephardic communities are, in fact, diasporic communities because they fulfil all classical criteria for being a diaspora (dispersion, homeland orientation and boundary-maintenance).*
4. *Sephardic diaspora communities created coherent narratives about their own past and origin in order to perceive their sense of being a community in the diaspora.*
5. *Although these narratives usually suggest a pure identity pegged onto a single origin (Sepharad), actual Sephardic diaspora communities are not hallmarked by purity but by hybridity.*

My first hypothesis rest upon the key thesis of Benedict Anderson that every community “larger than a primordial village” is, in fact, imagined by its members. Thus, even though originally drafted as an explanatory model for nations and national states, I hypothesise that Anderson's model perfectly serves my aim to theorize Sephardic communities. In this respect, my first hypothesis also implies the assumption that Sephardic Jews were able to develop a peculiar sense of nationhood or national consciousness.

The second hypothesis derives from Anderson's key hypotheses that actually explains how an “otherwise unrelated” group of people imagines themselves as a community. Following Anderson's concept of “print capitalism” I hypothesise that the use of Judeo-Spanish as a print language was the main promoter that prompted Sephardic Jews to imagine themselves as community.

Building on the main criteria for diaspora formulated by Roger Brubaker, as well as other theorists of diaspora, I hypothesise that Sephardic communities constitute “classical” diaspora communities, not least because Jews in general have been considered to be (and considered themselves) as a diaspora community.

The assumption that Sephardic Jews created narratives of their imagined homeland, as well as about their past in general, constitutes the basis for my fourth hypothesis. Such narratives most evidently manifest themselves in foundational myths of particular Sephardic communities but also in other popular narratives (e.g. concerning family traditions) and are usually featured by two main discourses about the original homeland of Sephardic Jews.

Finally – by following the key assumption in Stuart Hall's essay about cultural identity and diaspora – I hypothesise that Sephardic identity is rather characterised by difference, diversity and heterogeneity – in short, *hybridity* – even though the popular circulating narratives tend to suggest a

pure identity and an unbroken (coherent) affiliation with the past, fixed to a pure origin. Therefore, we can assume that Sephardic identity actually has a share in multiple cultural “presences” which themselves are complex and interdependent fields of discourse.

In order to test the validity and the applicability of my hypotheses, I will commence my analysis by taking a general look at Jewish history and Judaism in which the perception of being one people or one nation linked to a sacred homeland is a very strong *motif* that already existed in the Age of Antiquity. In this regard it is reasonable to dissect the ancient Jewish concepts of exile and homeland, not only for the aim of verifying the theoretical approaches of my hypotheses that have been expounded above but also to have a point of departure of the analysis of Sephardic identity and diaspora.



### 3. Imagining Sephardic Diaspora

#### 3.1. Imagining National Identity of Jews in Antiquity

It would be more than inappropriate to think of Judaism as a monolithic block or a homogeneous entity. In fact, it is, just as any other world religion, very diverse and pluralistic and it would not be any wrong to talk about various “Judaisms” in order to cherish the diversity this religion inheres. Of course, this plurality is not just a product of the age of modernity, when most contemporary Jewish denominations assumed their actual shape. Already in late antiquity Judaism was at least as manifold as it is today, as was the entire environment in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>135</sup>

In the Bronze Age, at the very beginning of Jewish history, Jews, or more accurate, ancient Israelites were just one minor ethnic group among Canaanite clans and other Middle Eastern peoples, in a land that the Bible itself calls “the Land of Canaan”. The authors of the Bible suggest that monotheism was, in fact, the distinctive feature separating the Israelites from the neighbouring peoples. However, this biblical self-assessment is very much challenged by the current stage of research as well as by various archaeological finds that hold that especially in its popular manifestation the Israelite religion was most certainly intermingled with Canaanite polytheism<sup>136</sup>.

The history of the so called “Promised Land” is more than anything else a history of migration and dispersion and exile. Already in the Book of Genesis we read of exile from the Garden of Eden, the peregrinations of Abraham and, of course, the Babylonian Exile. Indeed, exile and return are the guiding themes of biblical texts. The “Return to the Land” has even since been preserved as a messianic vision by many Jewish diaspora communities. Thus, for Jews living in the diaspora it was not unusual at all to compare their own situation to many exiles told in the Bible. Even in its secularised form, the biblical narratives of returning to Israel turned up again in the principles of the Zionist movement and in its endeavour to establish a Jewish homeland.<sup>137</sup>

As has been outlined in the previous chapters, the notions of exile, diaspora and homeland are very much intertwined; moreover, these *motifs* turned out to be extremely formative for the emergence of Jewish nationhood. Not only there is a very strong correlation between nationhood and exile; as Benedict Anderson holds, by quoting John Dalberg-Acton, “exile” should, in fact, be thought of as “the nursery of nationality”<sup>138</sup>.

Indeed, the Bible is full of “national metaphors”<sup>139</sup>. Abraham, the first of the Hebrew

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<sup>135</sup> Synek 2003, p. 735

<sup>136</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xx

<sup>137</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xx, xxviii

<sup>138</sup> Dalberg-Acton 1967, p. 146 in Anderson 1994, p. 315

<sup>139</sup> Pades 2002, p. 9ff

patriarchs, of example, is a biblical character with truly a long migratory history, having been sent to exile at least twice: first when called by God to leave his native city Ur of the Chaldees in order to move out to the “Promised Land”<sup>140</sup> and another time when Abraham has to depart for Egypt due to a great famine plaguing the Land of Canaan<sup>141</sup>.

However, by having a closer look at the word *am* (עַם) which is usually used in the holy script for referring to the Israelites as a nation, it turns out to have a very pluralistic meaning in the Bible. As Shlomo Sand points out, the biblical *am* could either mean people or clan, or it could refer to a throng gathered in the city centre, or even to a fighting force. Finally, it was also used to “indicate the 'holy community', namely, the People of Israel, chosen by God”<sup>142</sup>. Interesting in this connection is the expression *am beney yisrael* (עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) which first appears in Exodus 1:9 and, according to Ilana Pardes, is best translated as “the nation to the children of Israel”. So, this is the first time when the word *am* is used in the sense of folk or nation, though not as a self-imposed term as one might suspect but by none other than the Egyptian Pharaoh. In the Book of Exodus he used this phrase when beginning to perceive the Hebrews in his realms as a potential hazard to his rule<sup>143</sup>.

Although we cannot prove the historical authenticity of the above mentioned biblical account, the earliest textual evidence we have outside the Bible that labels Israel as a people, indeed stems from an Egyptian pharaoh. The victory stele of Pharaoh Merneptah, dating from 1207 B.C.E., informs us about the victory over a people named Israel that was conquered – among other peoples – in course of an Egyptian military campaign in Canaan. The key line in its translation reads: “Israel is laid waste, his seed is no more”.<sup>144</sup>

What is interesting in the connection to the latter mentioned inscription, as well as to the biblical account in the Book of Exodus, is the fact that a regime – obviously more powerful than the Israelites – seemed to have played a determining role for the formation of the Israelites as a people or nation; or to put it the other way around, by defining others as weak peoples that the Egyptian regime automatically becomes (imagines itself) as a powerful and triumphant nation. This imaginary process definitely resembles Edward Said's notion of “othering” which is defined as the attribution of “allegedly different qualities of peoples encountered on the periphery – which, in the majority of cases, involved emphasising their perceived weakness –” giving the ruling regime the

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<sup>140</sup> In Genesis 12:2 God assures Abraham: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make you name great”. Biale 2002a, p. xxviii

<sup>141</sup> Idem

<sup>142</sup> Sand 2009, p. 25, 25n5

<sup>143</sup> Pardes 2002, p. 14

<sup>144</sup> Hendel 2002, p. 46

power “to civilise and exploit them”<sup>145</sup>. Although this definition of “othering” was originally intended to describe colonial regimes or other modern power regimes, it turns out to be an interesting model for the re-interpretation of the biblical narrative of slavery in Egypt (cf. Chapter 1 in the Book of Exodus) which some even refer to as a myth since we do not have “actual direct evidence for Israelite slavery in Egypt<sup>146</sup>”. In any case narratives involving unequal balances of power seem to be crucial for the emergence of national consciousness; moreover these narrative are usually linked to a mythological hero and, in fact, especially the Bible is full of mythological key characters<sup>147</sup>.

Renowned mythographers, such as Lord Raglan<sup>148</sup> and Joseph Campbell<sup>149</sup>, unequivocally identify Moses as typical mythological hero. In Moses' biography Lord Raglan, for example, detects no less than twenty characteristic elements which are typical for any legendary account involving a hero<sup>150</sup>. As has been outlined already<sup>151</sup>, myths are also essential for any national narrative. Tamar Alexander-Frizer who deploys Lord Raglan's model in order to analyse traditional Sephardic folk tales mentions that there is one key element in his model which is shared by all twenty two legends Lord Raglan: the “victory over the king”. Of course, this element is also featured in Moses' biography, namely when Pharaoh finally lets the Israelites go. It can also be interpreted as the victory over an oppressive regime and is, thus, a important narrative for consolidation of a Jewish national identity. Again, Ilana Pardes – and similarly to Stuart Hall – points out that such national narratives usually “try to fashion a coherent conception of identity, or origin, to unity at point of clear disjunction”<sup>152</sup>. Mythological founding figures, like that of Moses, whose biography is highly intertwined with the consolidation of Israel as a people, definitely endow such an identity-establishing sense of coherence. Apart from that, Pardes also adverts to significant ruptures and conflicts within Moses' biography. These biographical incoherencies, however, turn out to be no less relevant for the emergence of Jewish national identity. For example, the difficulties involved in Moses' birth and the fact that he actually has two mothers – a Hebrew and an Egyptian one – already reveal the primary questions which arise in this myth and which are especially relevant for the fashioning of Jewish diasporic identity: Who am I? Where are my parents? Where do I come from? Having two sets of parents belonging to two different nations, these questions become

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<sup>145</sup> Jones, R. Jones, Woods 2004, p. 43

<sup>146</sup> Greenberg 2002, p. 197

<sup>147</sup> Idem, p. 187ff

<sup>148</sup> cf. Raglan 2003 (1956), p. 180f

<sup>149</sup> cf. Campbell 2008 (1949) p. 27f

<sup>150</sup> Raglan 2003 (1956), p. 180

<sup>151</sup> cf. Stuart Hall's model of cultural identity in Chapter 2.2.

<sup>152</sup> Pardes 2002, p. 20

especially crucial<sup>153</sup>. In order to resolve this conflict between the two nations, Moses – or more probably the authors and editors of his biography – constructed the concept of Canaan as homeland. The creation of “a sense of home”, Pardes deems, is essential for the “formation of a national belonging”<sup>154</sup>. This sense of home is very much a “topography of desire” in Derek Gregory's sense<sup>155</sup>, an imaginative geography loaded with sentiments. Centuries later this homeland should be imagined in even more specific, one even might say, utopian terms that should go far beyond the metaphors of “a land flowing with milk and honey” (cf. e.g. Ex 3:8,17) or “the land of [the] fathers” (cf. e.g. Gen 31:3, 48:21).

However, there are also other ways of interpreting the Exodus. For example, Karel van der Toorn understands the Exodus as a “charter myth”, as well as an “invented tradition” in Eric Hobsbawm's sense<sup>156</sup>. According to van der Toorn this myth emerged in the tenth century B.C.E. in order to explain and legitimise the political reality of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which had been established by Jeroboam I. The myth's aim was to provide “the young nation with a powerful identity”<sup>157</sup>. Except for Hobsbawm, van der Toorn's insights very much rely on studies the of “Myth, Science and Religion” by Bronisław Malinowski who wrote that a “myth serves principally to establish a social character, or a retrospective moral pattern of behavior”<sup>158</sup>. As we will see later, such charter of foundational myths (e.g. the Exodus) are most often referred to when one's own identity maintenance – in contract or in conflict with other cultures – is at stake.

The emergence of Hellenism in the Eastern Mediterranean created a new cross-cultural space which effected the Jews living outside Coele-Syria<sup>159</sup> and Jews living outside this area alike. Depending on the region, Greek civilisation successfully mingled Phoenician with traditions on the Levantine coast or strong Egyptian elements in Alexandria, as well as with the dominant cultures of Mesopotamia and Anatolia. Rather than a cultural monopoly, Hellenism should be understood a complex cultural amalgamation in the Near East of which the Greek influence was the conspicuous and unifying element<sup>160</sup>.

From the third century B.C.E. onwards, especially the Jews in the Diaspora – first and

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<sup>153</sup> Idem, p. 20-21

<sup>154</sup> Idem, p. 27

<sup>155</sup> cf. Chapter 2.3.1.

<sup>156</sup> van der Toorn 2001, p. 113ff; at this point, let us remember that Stuart Hall, too, mentions almost the same notions (foundational myth and invention of tradition) as two essential criteria in his model of cultural identity (cf. Chapter 2.2.).

<sup>157</sup> van der Toorn 2001 in van Henten, Houtepen 2001, p. 11-12

<sup>158</sup> Malinowsky 2004, p. 120 in van der Toorn 2001, p. 113

<sup>159</sup> The Greek term Coele-Syria (Κοίλη Συρία) was commonly used in the first centuries B.C.E. to refer to the region that also included the biblical Land of Canaan. (cf. Cohen 2006, p. 37ff)

<sup>160</sup> Gruen 2002, p. 79

foremost those in Alexandria – but also many others dwelling in Coele-Syria had been “confirmed Greek speakers and integrated members of communities governed by pagan practices and institutions” for at least one or two generations, as Erich S. Gruen points out. Due to this assimilation or acculturation into Hellenistic civilisation, the Jews of that time remained surprisingly true to their heritage which gives evidences that they had obviously found new ways “of defining and expressing their singularity within that milieu”.<sup>161</sup>

During the era of the Second Temple, the main religious centre of Hellenistic Judaism, Jews in the diaspora soon had outnumbered their co-religionist dwelling in the Holy Land. For the diaspora communities Jerusalem and the Temple had become strong symbols for the Jewish self-perception as a nation. Jerusalem, a city that only few Jews living in the diaspora had seen, had nevertheless become a basis point of reference, replete with a special, one might call imaginative, aura. This is also highlighted and underlined by Gruen who holds that not even the relatively “[s]atisfactory circumstances in the Diaspora” would “diminish the sanctity and centrality of Jerusalem”. Not only many religious texts written in that time underscore the special relation to and with Jerusalem (e.g. 2 Maccabees, the Book of Wisdom, the Testament of Job, the Sibylline Oracles), also the Jewish-Hellenistic author Philo and the Greek geographer Strabo point out the importance of the Holy Land for the Jews. Interestingly, not one author of these texts just mentioned demands the “Return” of the Jews to the Holy Land<sup>162</sup>. However, many diaspora Jews did return in a literal sense by going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Philo of Alexandria, for example, recounts that “myriads came from countless cities for everyday feast, over land and sea, from all points of the compass, to enjoy the Temple as a serene refuge from the hurly-burly of everyday life abroad”<sup>163</sup>. Let us remember that Benedict Anderson firmly stresses the importance of pilgrimage for the consolidation of communal religious identity<sup>164</sup>.

Apart from Jerusalem's role in the popular form of Jewish religiosity during the Hellenistic period, a whole theology about the sanctity of Jerusalem and orbits was developed, with the Second Temple as the centre of Jewish cult and worship. This theological “mapping” of Jerusalem into space of imaginative desire and belonging, is what Hans G. Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad call the “utopisation of space” (“Utopisierung des Raumes”)<sup>165</sup>. By this they mean the “active structuring of time and space” and the simultaneous act of “social and communicative *ascription* of holiness”<sup>166</sup>, which in their sense is a narrative or discursive act. In order to exemplify their notion

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<sup>161</sup> Idem, p. 80

<sup>162</sup> Idem

<sup>163</sup> Philo: Spec. Leg. I 1:69 in Gruen 2002, p. 121

<sup>164</sup> cf. Chapter 2.1.

<sup>165</sup> Kippenberg, von Stuckrad 2003, p.114-126

<sup>166</sup> “die aktive Strukturierung von Zeit und Raum” idem, p. 125

of utopisation, Kippenberg und von Stuckrad make reference to the Temple Scroll which was discovered among the so called Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran in the middle of the twentieth century. The theo-geological deliberations displayed in the Temple Scroll draw upon a model of graduating purity concerning the land around the Temple in Jerusalem, with the Holy of Holies in the very centre of this religious topography – the farther away from the temple, the more disorder and impurity prevails. This model of graduating purity was also deployed in order to describe the graduation of sanctity among men: the Temple priests were considered the purest for being in the closest sphere of the Holy of Holies, followed by the common Jewish people and the non-Jewish people who were excluded whatsoever from the presence of God and therefore ritually impure<sup>167</sup>.

For Kippenberg und von Stuckrad, Judaism is the example *par excellence* in order to illustrate how the power “utopisation” also effects the formation of religious identity and the self-perception of following generations<sup>168</sup>. Although the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. entailed tremendous social and theological changes, rabbinical Judaism drew heavily upon the biblical narratives of “Exile” and “Return” to the homeland. The mystical significance of Jerusalem and the Holy Land even gained in importance by the loss of the central sanctuary, as numerous *mishnah*<sup>169</sup> tractates and *midrashim*<sup>170</sup> bring to proof<sup>171</sup> – of course, in order to detect alterations in Jewish self-images in the first centuries C.E., rabbinical literature has to be read in the light of theses changing times, as well as in the light of the pluralistic environment in which Jews lived during the Hellenistic period.

One example for a rabbinical *midrash* that definitely has to be read in the context of the Hellenistic period is the *Mekhilta*. It represents one of the oldest halakhic *midrashim* on the Book of Exodus which, among other things, tells us about the alleged segregated life style of the ancient Israelites in Egypt<sup>172</sup>. The *Mekhilta* informs us that the ancient Israelites could remain a distinct people because

*“they kept their names; they maintained their language; they resisted violating the biblical sexual prohibitions (by which the midrash means that they did not intermarry); and they did not engage in ‘idle gossip’ (leshon ha-ra, which the midrash understands as collaborating with the gentile government).”*<sup>173</sup>

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“[der] soziale und kommunikative Prozess der *Zuschreibung* von Heiligkeit” idem, p. 115

<sup>167</sup> Idem, p. 116

<sup>168</sup> Idem, p. 116-117

<sup>169</sup> The *mishnah* (משנה) is the first written part of the so called oral Torah (talmudic literature).

<sup>170</sup> A *midrash* (מדרש) is homiletic story told by Rabbis in order to explain passages of the Bible.

<sup>171</sup> Idem, p. 117-118

<sup>172</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xxvii

<sup>173</sup> Idem

And yet, from what we know about the biblical times, these accounts made in the *Mekhilta* can most certainly be valued as the adoption of an unhistorical myth. In fact, as David Biale comments on this, the ancient Israelites did not live so isolated and apart from the rest of the peoples surrounding them; thus he holds that

*“[t]he name Moses itself is almost certainly of Egyptian origin; the Hebrew language borrows its alphabet from the Phoenicians and is closely related to Ugaritic, the language of earlier Canaanite culture [...]; and the Bible is replete with intermarriages, from Joseph's marriage to the Egyptian Asnat to Bathsheba's marriage to Uriah the Hittite (not to speak of Solomon's many foreign wives).”*<sup>174</sup>

So, although the *Mekhilta* obviously does not reflect the historical circumstances under which the ancient Israelite lived, the questions remains, what induced the authors and editors of that *midrash* to portray the Egyptian Jews as “an 'ideal' nation in exile”? Most probably this nostalgic account about a ideal past has more to do with the actual time when the *Mekhilta* was written, thus we can assume that the Jews in the Hellenistic period most certainly used to violate these “prohibitions” because “Jews did adopt Greek names and the Greek language, intermarriage was not unknown, and some Jews did act as agents of or informers to the non-Jewish authorities”<sup>175</sup>. Considering the political and social circumstances after the destruction of the Second Temple, when the Greco-Roman hegemony was not only perceived as a cultural but also a physical threat, it can be understood that an admonitory “ideal of national isolation and purity” – that the *Mekhilta* definitely suggests – was desperately needed. Furthermore, David Biale states that analysis of this *midrash* tellingly reveals how Jews “throughout the ages *believed* themselves to have a common national biography and common culture”<sup>176</sup>. This statement evidently resembles Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, save that Biale prefers the term “believed” instead of imagined. This “belief in the unity”, Biale holds, is all too often stronger than the “historical 'facts'” that could contradict it<sup>177</sup>. By this, Biale argues very much in the fashion of Stuart Hall who, as we have already learned, stresses that fact that national narratives tend to put much “emphasis on *origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness*” in order to create an image of a national identity that has – allegedly – remained unchanged through time and history<sup>178</sup>. Ultimately, Biale does not hesitate at all to compare the Jews, as a people, to (modern) nations:

*“The history of other national groups suggests how complicated the relationship is between the belief in the unity of the nation and historical reality. The Germans and the French, for example, only really became united people with a common language in the nineteenth*

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<sup>174</sup> Idem

<sup>175</sup> Idem

<sup>176</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xxiv

<sup>177</sup> Idem

<sup>178</sup> Hall 1992, p. 294, cf. Chapter 2.2.

*century [...]. Yet the idea of a common French or German identity long preceded the historical reality and, indeed, contributed towards creating this reality. In a similar way, we can speak of a dialectic between, on the one hand the idea of one Jewish people and of a unified Jewish culture, and, on the other, the history of multiple communities and cultures.*"<sup>179</sup>

The letter mentioned circumstance, that, despite the idea of being one nation, we should also think of Jews as a conglomerate of different cultural communities, is in fact very important for the deeper understanding of Judaism as a whole. As Biale firmly emphasises, “the Jewish people were, at once one and diverse”. Further, he maintains that one of the most important unifying factors, namely rabbinical law, definitely was “the product of 'elite' culture”<sup>180</sup>. With this opinion, that national sentiments were actually devised by “a long established cultural elite, possessing a written national literary” is also one of three main criteria that Erich J. Hobsbawm indicates to be essential for the classification of a nation; the other two criteria are: the “historic association with a current state or with a fairly lengthy and recent past” and “the capacity of conquest”, thus, in other words, imperialism<sup>181</sup>. The latter can also be interpreted as the capacity of being conquered, a fate that Jews have by far more frequently experienced between the settlement in the Land of Canaan and the establishment of the modern state of Israel (according to their historical narrative one might add).

In order to explain the diversity within Judaism, we must not only think of it as consisting of a collection of normative halakhic laws and books, shared common beliefs, as well as the imagination of the unity of its people, but also as world religion including countless local customs, also known as *minhagim* (מנהגים, sg. *minhag*) in Hebrew which were unique to every particular community; furthermore they also reflect the historical development of Jewish religion and culture. Moreover, Biale informs us that these customs “varied in their details from place to place, often reflecting the practices of the surrounding non-Jewish folk cultures”<sup>182</sup>. Indeed, he continues, in every period of history the “interaction with the non-Jewish majority had been critical in the formation of Jewish culture”. No matter how remote a Jewish civilisation was, every Jewish community “adapted ideas and practices from their surroundings”<sup>183</sup>. Similarly or maybe even more striking was the adoption the vernaculars of their non-Jewish neighbours. In the course of time they would develop into distinct Jewish languages by enriching their vocabulary with, most notably, Hebrew and Aramaic loanwords; thus, language at once became a sign of acculturation but also of

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<sup>179</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xxiv

<sup>180</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xxv

<sup>181</sup> Hobsbawm 1992 (1990), p. 37-38

<sup>182</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xxv

<sup>183</sup> Idem, p. xxi



cultural segregation. Western Yiddish, for example, had remained relatively conservative with the result that still in the nineteenth century, in some linguistic aspects, it still resembled the German spoken during the Middle Ages<sup>184</sup>. According to Biale, the Middle Ages also seem to have been the time when the notion of “Jewishness’ (an ethnic identity) came increasingly to be identified with “Judaism” (a religious credo)”. The latter most certainly developed in constant conflict but also in dialogue with nascent Christianity and, later, along with the emergence of Islam. There is much evidence, of instance, that Ashkenazic *Hasidim* (חסידים, pious mystics) who in the Middle Ages usually lived separately from Christians but also from other non-hasidic Jews adopted penitential and ascetic practices that were strikingly similar to those of the emerging Franciscan Order<sup>185</sup>.

What we can conclude from the multiple examples discussed above, is that Jewish cultures cannot be studied and, hence, understood without the a basic comprehension of the historical, social and cultural environment in which Jews used to live. The same, of course, is true about the Jewish civilisations in the Age of Modernity, as well as in the present age. Also it has been displayed that the analytical tools by Benedict Anderson, Stewart Hall and other theorists of nations, nationalism and cultural identities, very well serve the task of reconstructing the variety of Jewish cultures. However, we shall not disregard the fact that being Jewish has always meant something different depending on the historical period, as well as on the specific Jewish culture we are talking about. As Biale correctly point out, it was certainly not the same “to be a Jew in biblical Canaan, Hellenistic Alexandria, sixteenth-century Poland, or nineteenth-century Morocco” or today<sup>186</sup>. The boundaries which define a Jew or a distinct Jewish ethnic group have never been immobile or once for all defined – in reference to Jacques Derrida and Stuart Hall, these boundaries are constantly moving elements within the “free” or “cultural play”. Boundaries only become meaningful and constitutive for identity when they are being “positioned” in a certain (cultural) context – in other words, cultural identity always depends on “other” external elements, rather than a individual or inherent essences or origins which are only “imagined” secondarily<sup>187</sup>.

All these imaginary mechanisms play a significant role for the comprehension of Jewish ethnic diversity as a whole, as well as Sephardic identity in particular. Only by having a closer look at the contemporary notion of Sephardic Jewry it soon becomes very clear that it is not that easy at all to define who is a Sephardic Jew and who is not.

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<sup>184</sup> Idem

<sup>185</sup> Idem, p. xx

<sup>186</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xxxi

<sup>187</sup> cf. Chapter 2.4.

### 3.2. Sephardic Jewry within the Ethnic Diversity of Judaism

As for any other major religions, inner diversity is a striking feature also for Judaism. However, many people today think of Jews mostly as Israelis, Americans, maybe Russian or as people of Eastern-European and even German origin<sup>188</sup> and therefore rather associate Yiddish, Klezmer or the long vanished Shtetl culture in Eastern Europe with Judaism, which, nevertheless, all belongs the cultural sphere of Ashkenazic Jewry. The history and culture of Maghrebi, Bukharan, Kurdish or Chinese Jews, by contrast seems to be much less known to a broader (non-Jewish) public. Yet even in Israel, the non-Ashkenazic elements of Israeli culture have been broadly neglected and ignored for a long time, not only in public but also in academic discourses. Moreover, when Jewish ethnic groups others than Ashkenazim finally were described and studied by academics, they were all too often labelled as exotic and only recently the studying and the study of “Eastern” or “Oriental” Jewries has gained a higher academic value<sup>189</sup>. But also in public and political (inner-Jewish) discourses non-Ashkenazic Jews have often played a minor role. For example, testimonies that relate the fate and tragedy of Central European Jewry during the Holocaust usually stand in the centre of commemoration ceremonies in Israel which gives the impression that the victims of the Shoa were mainly if not exclusively Ashkenazic Jews. The extermination of entire Sephardic communities on the Balkans and the threat that North African Jewry was exposed to during World War II are rarely mentioned in such discourses<sup>190</sup>.

These circumstances – the highlighting of the history of “European” Ashkenazim in political discourses and academic research on the one hand and neglecting other Jewish ethnic groups on the other – are strongly reminiscent of the post-modern critics outlined in Edward W. Said's book “Orientalism” in which he describes Eurocentric and hegemonic prejudices against peoples and cultures in the East and their simultaneous romanticisation<sup>191</sup>. Together with other non-Ashkenazic ethnic groups, also Jews of Spanish heritage have been equally marginalized for a long time. But what exactly distinguishes Sephardic from Ashkenazic and other Jewish ethnic groups? In order to find an answer to that question we have to start by determining the term “Sephardic” first.

The terms “Sephardic” derives from the word *Sepharad* (סְפָרַד), a name for a place already mentioned in the Bible (Ob 1:20). Although, generally, an exact localization of places mentioned in the Bible can be quite difficult, today, the Biblical *Sepharad* is believed to be identical with the city

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<sup>188</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 7

<sup>189</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. xxi-xxii

<sup>190</sup> Ben-Amos, Bet-El 2005, p. 184-185

<sup>191</sup> Said 1979, p. 7-9, 97-98, 118

of Sardes, capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor. In the Latin Bible, however, *Sepharad* was translated into “Bosporus”, whereas Jewish commentators of the Middle Ages rather used to identify Spain with that palace mentioned in the Bible, probably because of a vague phonetic similarity of there two terms. Since then the Hebrew word *Sepharad* should remain the name for the county of Spain (or the Iberian Peninsula as a whole) until today. Interestingly, the place *Zarephart* which appears in the same verse of the Bible (originally used for the city of Sarepta in modern Lebanon<sup>192</sup>) was later identified with *Zarphat* (צרפת), France<sup>193</sup>. Michael Brenner holds that although in their collective imagination these places have remain rooted in the Biblical world until today, eventually, Jews began to use these terms for other, newly discovered geographies as soon the first diaspora communities had been established in Europe<sup>194</sup>.

Today, however, the term “Sephardic” turns out as very volatile, often used differently in different contexts by different people. Whereas some exclusively apply the term to Jews whose ancestors lived on the Iberian Peninsula, others use it to designate any Jew of non-Ashkenazi origin, to mention only the two most opposed definitions. The latter is frequently applied to the *Adod HaMizrah* (עדות המזרח), the communities of the East, also known as Mizrahim (מזרחים) or Oriental Jews<sup>195</sup>. These Jews are of African and Asian origin who's history is predominately linked to the Middle East and Muslim lands. Although this is also partly true for Sephardim, the ancestors of Mizrahi Jews, however, have never lived in Europe<sup>196</sup>. For many centuries, if not millennia, the cultural and intellectual centre of Mizrahi Jews was Babylon (Baghdad) in modern day Iraq where also one of the two collections of the Talmud had been written<sup>197</sup>. Yet we may not think of the Mizrahim as a group totally separated from the rest of world Jewry. As we will established in the chapter about the history of Sephardic Jews, the medieval communities of Babylon and Spain stood in unbroken contact with each other. The cultural exchange between these two groups was further facilitated by the fact that, after Muslim armies had conquered a vast territory reaching from the Atlantic in the West as far as South Asia in the East, the Jews of Iberia and Babylon together with other Jewish groups in the Middle East and North Africa actually formed part of one cultural sphere and, at least for a few years, part of the same political entity (Umayyad Caliphate). This is why Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews on a culturally have more in common with each other than with Ashkenazic Jews; the same is true about religious matters. For these similarities, especially in modern

<sup>192</sup> Lightfoot 2007, p. 308

<sup>193</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 13  
Werblowsky 1997, p. 620

<sup>194</sup> Brenner 2010, p. 84

<sup>195</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 12; cf. also Kerem 2007, p. 305, Shabi 2010, p. 15-16; Werblowsky 1997, p. 620

<sup>196</sup> Bokovoy 2000, p. 627; cf. also Shabi 2010, p. 16

<sup>197</sup> Zohar 2005, p. 5

day Israel, Mizrahim are often classified as Sephardic Jews, for the simple reason that both groups are under the supervision of the Sephardic Chief Rabbi<sup>198</sup>. The history of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel (הרבנות הראשית לישראל) goes back to the seventeenth century when the Ottoman sultans demanded a central organ, representing all Jewish subjects of the Sublime Porte. Originally, the Chief Rabbinate was lead exclusively by a Sephardic Chief Rabbi who held, and still holds, the honourable title *Rishon LeZion* (ראשון לציון), the “First to Zion”. During the British Mandate in Palestine the Chief Rabbinate was split and an additional Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi was appointed, due to the constant influx of Jewish immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe<sup>199</sup>. Since the establishment of the state of Israel, however, the Sephardic division of the Chief Rabbinate has often been represented by a Mizrahi Jew, for instance of Iraqi or Moroccan origin<sup>200</sup>. One of the most prominent but also most polarizing Sephardic Chief Rabbis in recent years was Yosef Ovadia, born in Baghdad in 1920. After his career as Chief Rabbi he founded an ultra-orthodox political party, known as *Shas* (ש"ס), which is usually translated as “Sephardi Torah Guardians” (שומרי-תורה ספרדים). Its foundation in 1984 can be valued as a reaction to the Ashkenazi dominance in Israel's public life and politics<sup>201</sup>. Interestingly, this was about the same time when more and more Sepharim in Israel, who indeed were of Hispanic or Lusitanic (Portuguese) heritage, used to add the initials “*Samech Tet*” (ס"ט) after their names, for example in phone books, in order to distinguish themselves from other Jewish groups<sup>202</sup>. “ס"ט” is a very typical abbreviation for Sephardic Jews and has been in use for many centuries, it has different meanings, for example, “*Siman Tov*” (סימן טוב), “a good sign”, or „*Sofo Tov*“ (סופו טוב), “may his end be good” which were commonly used as eulogistic terms to honour a defunct person<sup>203</sup>. According to another popular theory, these terms were used by Jews who were not sure if they would survive persecution on the Iberian Peninsula, in the sense of “good end or may all end well”<sup>204</sup>. However, today “ס"ט” is frequently translated as “*Sephardi Tahor*” (ספרדי טהור), meaning “pure Sephardi”, in order to emphasise one's direct Spanish ancestry. This can be assessed as a reaction to almost interchangeable usage of the terms “Sephardic” and “Mizrahi” Jew, since, as Georg Bossong holds, many Sephardim today do not appreciate being identified with Mizrahi Jews<sup>205</sup>.

Although it is argued – also in academic circles – that the *Adod HaMizrah* constitute a third

<sup>198</sup> Gerber 1997, p. 19-20

<sup>199</sup> Bokovoy 2000, p. 621; cf. also Berenbaum 2007, p. 344

<sup>200</sup> Bossong, 2008, p. 9; cf. also [http://www.rabanut.gov.il/show\\_item.asp?levelId=61624&itemType=0](http://www.rabanut.gov.il/show_item.asp?levelId=61624&itemType=0), 8.10.2012

<sup>201</sup> Alfassi, Skolnik 2007, p. 399

<sup>202</sup> Lévy 2005, p. 24

<sup>203</sup> Maman 2007, p. 237

<sup>204</sup> [http://www.alfassa.com/paper\\_st.pdf](http://www.alfassa.com/paper_st.pdf), 24.2.2013

<sup>205</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 9

group along with Sephardim and Ashkenazim<sup>206</sup>, this does not invalidate the fact that they have much in common with their Sephardic co-religionists. Mizrahim and Sephardim observe the same religious rules and customs, or *minhag*, which is different from the Ashkenazi *minhag*<sup>207</sup>. The development of two different *minhagim* stems from in the application of two different law codices. While Jews Sephardic (and Mizrahi) Jews exclusively follow the *Shulchan Aruch* (שולחן ערוך), a halakhic code authored by Rabbi Joseph Caro, a Jew of Spanish origin, Ashkenazic Jews conform to the halakhic rulings of Rabbi Moses Isserles, a Polish Jew also known as *HaRema* (הרמ"א)<sup>208</sup>. *HaRema's* code is considered to be stricter and less permissive than Joseph Caro's *Shulchan Aruch*. Having two different basic codes of law brought about the establishment of separate norms, customs and characteristics which, according to Zion Zohar, consequently “led to differences in ritual, pronunciation of Hebrew, and the liturgical rite, among many other factors”<sup>209</sup>. Although authored by a Spanish Jew, the *Shulchan Arukh* was also accepted as compulsory source of law by Mizrahi Jews which proves the continuous cultural influence of Sephardic Jewry on the communities of the East. This is also reflected in the liturgy and rites of Oriental Jews in North Africa, the Middle East and even Central Asia whose prayer books more and more conformed to the Sephardic rite over the centuries<sup>210</sup>. But together with the *minhag* also the term “Sephardi” had been adopted by many Mizrahi communities. Concerning this matter, the recent history of the Jewish community of Vienna may serve as a good example in order to demonstrate the rather broad and inclusive usage of the term “Sephardic” today.

If someone refers to the Sephardic Jews of Vienna today he or she usually does not mean the historic Sephardic community which will be extensively discussed later, but to Jews coming from Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan) and the Caucasus region (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Dagestan) who established their communities in Vienna in the 1970ies and 1980ies<sup>211</sup>. This was at the time of the Cold War when Austria became an important transit country for Jews who wanted to leave the Soviet Union to settle down in other countries, Israel and the United States being the most favoured destinations. A number of Jewish families from the USSR who originally wanted to start a new life elsewhere decided to stay in Vienna for various reasons. Furthermore, later these were joined by a number of families who had already left Austria but decided to come back to Vienna after having

<sup>206</sup> Gerber 1997, p. 19-20

<sup>207</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 10, 12

<sup>208</sup> רבי משה בן ישראל איסרליש is an acronym of his name הרמ"א

<sup>209</sup> Zohar 2005, p. 8

<sup>210</sup> Goldschmidt, Langer 2007, p. 136

<sup>211</sup> Labudovic, Ida: Sephardim in Wien: Die unbekannten Juden. In Die Presse (online) 7.7.2009

([http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/integration/493309/Sephardim-in-Wien\\_Die-unbekannten-Juden](http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/integration/493309/Sephardim-in-Wien_Die-unbekannten-Juden), 23.10.2012)

faced various difficulties in Israel<sup>212</sup>. Today, the Bukharan Jews together with the Georgian Jews have their own community centre which they proudly refer to as the Sephardic Centre (*Sephardisches Zentrum*)<sup>213</sup>. The Bukharan, Georgian and Caucasian Jews of Vienna naturally claim themselves as Sephardim even though their ancestors do not come from the Iberian peninsula. Their Sephardic identity is not defined by their land of origin but by the Sephardic *minhag* they follow. The history of Bukharan Jewry also reveals that this rather remote Central Asian community which actually belonged to the Judeo-Persian cultural sphere has not lost contact with the rest of the Jewish world throughout its existence. Due to inner crisis and the decline of the community a Rabbi called Joseph Maman from Safed but originally of Moroccan descent, decided to revitalize Jewish life in Central Asia. Owing to his spiritual leadership he did not only save the Bukharan Jewish community from their decline but he also introduced the Sephardic rite and customs<sup>214</sup>.

Taking into consideration all the different angles and positions concerning the definition of Sephardic Jewry, the seemingly simple question, “Who is a real Sephardi?”, requires a rather complex answer because one always has to bear in mind the complexity of Jewish history as a whole, as well as different claims of different people concerning the topic. Thus, we can conclude that it always depends on who you ask and in which context since the term Sephardic implies religious meaning (concerning the *minhag*) and cultural meaning (Iberian *heritage*). In fact, this is exactly what Stuart Hall meant by the re-situation of boundaries that bring about different meanings in different contexts<sup>215</sup>. Meaning can only be fixed when it is bound to another signifying element – for some this is a religious tradition while for others it is certain origin. Also, many name language as a crucial criteria for being Sephardic. Mordechai Arbell, for example, a former Israeli diplomat of Sephardic (Bulgarian) origin who has researched many Sephardic communities worldwide stated his sentiment about Mizrahi Jews being identified as Sephardic as follows:

*“Sometimes they [Mizrahi Jews] tell me: 'I'm a Sepharadi Jew'...somebody from Irak [for instance]. Ah very well, I say. I start speaking with him Ladino [=Judeo-Spanish]. Aha, you don't know this! (laughing) [...] [Sephardic Jew are] from Spain and Portugal. [...] Sepharad in the Bible is the Iberian Peninsula. It's also in the Bible. [...] [It's] the origin!”*<sup>216</sup>

For Mordechai Arbell the central criteria for being Sephardic are the language, that he describes as Ladino, and the common origin on the Iberian peninsula seem to be the central criteria

<sup>212</sup> Galibov 2001, p. 13-14

<sup>213</sup> <http://www.bucharische-gemeinde.at/index.php?show=religion>, 24.10.2012

<sup>214</sup> Galibov 2001, p. 19-21, cf. also Tobi, Yosef 2002, p. 938

<sup>215</sup> cf. Chapter 2.4.

<sup>216</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbell (12.4.2011)

for Sephardic identity. However, there are other opinions like that of Paul Wexler, a linguistic from Tel Aviv University, who does not see any problem extending the term “Sephardic” to Arabophone Jews in North Africa because “many of the latter have antecedents on the Iberian Peninsula”, and according to his own theory “Sephardic Jewry was originally conceived on a trilingual Romance-Arabic-Berber basis in North Africa, prior to the Muslim invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 711”<sup>217</sup>. Others researchers, like Tracy Harris, seemingly adopt language as single criterion for defining Sephardic Jews. According to Harris, the fact that (Eastern Sephardic) Jews of Spanish heritage spoke or still speak a variety of Spanish is an important component of their identity and self-image and the reason why many of them do not only consider themselves as Jews, but as Sephardic Jews<sup>218</sup>. Within such a methodological (i.e. linguistic) framework the term “Sephardic” necessarily equates with “Judeo-Spanish speaking”, leaving out of account other notions of being Sephardic, for example, the conformation to the Sephardic *minhag*.

Indeed, language does play an important role in the formation of self-image and identity. In order to display the strong correlations of the two, we will have a closer look at the vernacular of Jews of Iberian heritage. The focus on Judeo-Spanish allows us to test Benedict Anderson's assumption, namely that a common vernacular language provides the basis on which communities are imagining themselves. Thus – for methodological reasons – in the following chapters the term “Sephardic” will most commonly refer to *Judezmo* or Judeo-Spanish speaking Jews; however, I have to re-emphasise that from a general/descriptive point of view, other (self-)definitions should not be dismissed, by keeping to the motto: who ever claims to be a Sephardic Jew is a Sephardic Jew.

### 3.3. The Role of Language within Sephardic Culture

As has been outlined before, language – especially, though not exclusively, in its printed form<sup>219</sup> – can be an important medium for the establishment and the consolidation of identity. Although the Sephardim managed to preserve their language for many generations up to the twentieth century, Judeo-Spanish, just as Sephardic communities as a whole, has undergone drastic changes during the recent centuries. The future of the language remains unclear and some scholar, as for example Ora R. Schwarzwald, even predict its gradual decline which could lead to a total disappearance of the languages within a few decades or even years:

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<sup>217</sup> Wexler 2005, p. 37

<sup>218</sup> Harris 1994, p. 21

<sup>219</sup> cf. Chapter 2.1.

*“[Judeo-Spanish] is not a native language to children anymore. The youngest native speakers are over 50 years old today; with their death, [Judeo-Spanish] will cease to exist as a native language”<sup>220</sup>.*

In this respect, Trancy K. Harris already speaks bluntly of the “Death of a Language”, although, as she correctly remarks, Joshua Fishman's terms of “language shift” and “language maintenance” are much more appropriate describe this phenomenon, that is to say the replacement of a habitual language or making a total shift to a new language instead of maintaining it<sup>221</sup>. Lukas D. Tsitsipis further elaborates these two term as follows:

*“[...] linguistic codes are in a constant process of change [...]. [L]anguage shift presupposes stressful socio-historical conditions [which lead to] the replacement of one or more languages in a community's repertoire by a language which is socially more powerful. Efforts made by inside agents as well as outside institutions and authorities to preserve a language or a dialect consisting the particular community's local vernacular are called language maintenance.”<sup>222</sup>*

Tsitsipis' definition immediately calls to mind Roger Brubaker's model describing the ambivalence between “boundary-maintenance” and “boundary-erosion” of diaspora communities<sup>223</sup> but also Benedict Anderson's definition of “languages-of-power”, by which he means the hegemonic power the certain (print) languages exert over other weaker vernaculars<sup>224</sup>. Indeed, the relations between language and culture are very close, so much that Joshua Fishman even claims that the two terms virtually “stand for each other in the minds”, not only of insiders but also of outsiders of a (language) community<sup>225</sup>; further, he contends that

*“[m]ost cultures, and minorities or threatened cultures in particular, have very definite views of the relationship between languages and cultures in general and, most specifically, about the relationship between their own language and their own culture”<sup>226</sup>.*

These “very definite views” that members of a community have about their language and culture very well explain why speakers of Judeo-Spanish do not want to extend the term “Sephardic Jew” to Mizrahi Jews who do not speak Judeo-Spanish or why the formerly mentioned abbreviation “ט"ס” is increasingly perceived as “pure Sephardi”. Especially when the maintenance of a (language) community is at stake such reactions are more than comprehensible.

However, this complexity of language and culture does not make it necessarily easy to

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<sup>220</sup> Schwarzwald 2000, p. 575

<sup>221</sup> Fishman 1972, pp. 76-134 (cf. Harris 1994, p. 251)

<sup>222</sup> cf. also Tsitsipis, p. 191

<sup>223</sup> cf. Chapter 2.3.2.

<sup>224</sup> cf. Chapter 2.1.

<sup>225</sup> Fischman 1991, p. 22

<sup>226</sup> Fischman 1991, p. 15



discern the key reasons for the disappearing of language or the shift to another one. In the case of Judeo-Spanish there certainly cannot be named only one single reason why Sephardic Jews cease to speak and pass on their language to the next generations; instead Tracy Harris mentions no less than 24 reasons that reflect on the present status of Judeo-Spanish. The most notable reasons are: the rise of nationalism in the Balkans and Turkey in the nineteenth century; the processes of secularisation and modernisation which took place within Sephardic communities at that time; the education Sephardic children in non-religious institutions and the replacement of (less prestigious) Judeo-Spanish, for instance, by French as culture language; the immigration of a large number of Sephardim to other countries and the adoption of the local languages there; the emergence of Zionism and the ideological pressure to speak Hebrew in Israel; and, of course, the Holocaust and the extermination of entire native-speaking communities (e.g. in Greece and Macedonia)<sup>227</sup>. Although many of these factors, which have been responsible for the gradual reduction of native speakers, already had their roots in the nineteenth century<sup>228</sup>; however, the mortal blow which led to a sudden extermination of entire speaker communities was definitely the Holocaust.

What appears to be important to be outlined in this context is, once more, the complexity between language and culture and, consequently, cultural identity of Sephardic Jews. Taking into account Fishman's argument that language and culture virtually “stand for each other”, Judeo-Spanish, or more precisely, the manifold oral traditions (folk tales, songs, prayers etc.), as well as the countless religious and secular texts (e.g. *haggadot*, novels, newspapers) which have been produced in Judeo-Spanish can certainly be regarded as the main carriers of Sephardic culture and identity (in the very sense of what Benedict Anderson calls “print capitalism” in its earlier stage). So, one becomes clearly aware of the veracity of the proverb 'When a language dies a culture dies'<sup>229</sup>.

In this regard it is not nearly a surprise that the national body promoting Sephardic culture in Israel is called *Autoridad Nacional del Ladino*<sup>230</sup> *i su Kultura* (National Authority of Ladino and its Culture)<sup>231</sup>. So, even the official name of the cultural representative body of Sephardic Jews in Israel adverts the close relation between language and culture, a fact, once again confirmed when having a closer look at the official objectives of the National Authority:

1. “*Propagate the knowledge and awareness of the Judeo-Spanish culture*”

<sup>227</sup> Harris 1994, pp. 121-229; cf. also Schwarwald 2000, pp. 574-575

<sup>228</sup> cf. Chapter 5.2.

<sup>229</sup> cf. Harrison 2002

<sup>230</sup> Ladino is just another (rather contemporary) designation for the vernacular of Sephardic Jews as will be discussed shortly.

<sup>231</sup> <http://www.ladino-authority.com/>, 25.2.2012

2. *“Helping founding and enriching active Judeo-Spanish cultural institutions”*
3. *“Promoting, encouraging and helping the gathering, documentation and cataloging [sic] Judeo-Spanish literature”*
4. *“Publishing books by contemporary authors who write about Judeo-Spanish topics, either in their original language or Hebrew”*
5. *“Organizing and promoting activities that can disseminate information about Sephardic communities exterminated in the Holocaust”*<sup>232</sup>

These objectives virtually prove the equation of language and culture. This notion of the close relation between the two is also firmly emphasised by Mordechai Arbëll. Regarding the question about the connection between Sephardic identity and language he answered:

*“Why [do you think] we have here [an] organisation? The governmental [Authority] of Ladino and its Culture – it's not [only] the language. It is...it's all the culture around...because the theatre plays [written in Ladino] are not religious. They were [just] theatre plays! (smiling) ...the novels written in Ladino: they are not religious. And the Rabbis were [just] Rabbis but not [the only representatives of our culture].”*<sup>233</sup> [trans. by MS<sup>234</sup>, original cf. footnote]

Thus, according to Mordechai Arbëll – a (native<sup>235</sup>) speaker of Judeo-Spanish – observing the Sephardic *minhag* does obviously not seem to be the main criterion (as for the Bukharan Jews of Vienna for example) for being a Sephardic Jew – it is the Judeo-Spanish language and its literature that form the basis for Sephardic culture and identity.

However, what is interesting in this respect is that Mordechai Arbëll uses various names for the languages of Sephardic Jews, of example “*Ladino*” (the same name that also appears in the official name of the National Authority). In other occasion he refers to the language as “*Djudio*”, “*Judezmo*”, “*Judeo-Espanyol*” (the term that he actually prefers) or simply as “*Español*” or “Spanish”.

<sup>232</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autoridad\\_Nacional\\_del\\_Ladino](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autoridad_Nacional_del_Ladino), 25.2.2013; cf. also [http://www.ladino-authority.com/Ladino%20ver/sovre\\_Full%20-%20Ladino.htm](http://www.ladino-authority.com/Ladino%20ver/sovre_Full%20-%20Ladino.htm), 25.2.2013

<sup>233</sup> “¿Porqué [crees que] tenemos aquí [una] organización? La [Autoridad] Gubernamental de Ladino y su Cultura - no es [solo] el idioma. Es la...toda la cultura alrededor es...porque las piezas de teatro [escritas en Ladino] no fueron religiosas. ¿Fueron [simples] piezas de teatro! (riendo) ...los romances escritos en Ladino: no [son] religiosas [sic]. Y los rabinos fueron [solo] rabinos pero no fueron [los únicos representantes de nuestra cultura].” Interview with Mordechai Arbëll (18.4.2012)

<sup>234</sup> MS=Martin Stechauner

<sup>235</sup> Mordechai Arbëll himself refers to Judeo-Spanish as „family's language“, instead of native language. It is important to note that Judeo-Spanish was not the only or the first language he grew up with. His first language was actually Bulgarian which he also used to communicate with his parents. His parents, however, who both had learned Judeo-Spanish from their parents, used German in order to communicate among themselves, since it had been their language of (higher) education. Mordechai Arbëll, in turn, was sent to the American school in Sofia which made English his first language of education. Judeo-Spanish he usually uses for communicating with his grandparents (cf. Interview with Mordechai Arbëll [12.4.2011]).

### 3.3.1. How to call the Language of the Sephardic Jews?

The use of different names for virtually the same language is the rule rather than the exception in the case of Judeo-Spanish. Both, native speakers, as well as outsiders (who have to refer to other languages somehow), frequently use different names for the same language which, according to Joshua Fishman, indicates the absence of a higher status function of the language in question<sup>236</sup>. This, of course, appears to be quite paradox at first sight, when we think of Judeo-Spanish as important and unifying ingredient of Sephardic identity, especially in the context of a dispersed diaspora.

In the Levant and South Eastern Europe, for instances, Jews used to call their language *Judezmo* (also spelled *Djudezmo*, originally meaning “Judaism”) or *Judio* or *Jidio* (other spellings: “*Djidio*” and *Djudio*; literally meaning “Jewish”). The term *Judio* and *Jidio* were frequently used by Sephardic Jews in Bosnia which indicates that some Sephardic communities preferred certain names over others in order to designate their own language. Native speakers of other communities also used names such as *(E)spanyol*, *(E)spanyolit*<sup>237</sup> (literally, “Spanish”), as well as *Muestro Espanyol* (“our Spanish”, in opposition Castilian Spanish) and as *Jargon/Zhargon*. The latter mentioned are rather pejorative terms predominantly used by the Sephardic “elite” who considered the language to be a corrupt form of (Castilian) Spanish because it was full of foreign loanwords.<sup>238</sup>

Today, other popular names for the language of Sephardic Jews of Eastern Mediterranean origin are *Ladino* and *Judeo-Espanyol* (Judeo-Spanish). Although *Ladino* is a term that has been used by Sephardic Jews for many centuries, its context of meaning, as we shall see, has changed in the last hundred years. The other popular name, *Judeo-Espanyol*, is often referred to as “relatively neutral, self-explanatory, academic term”, usually “preferred by Romance scholar”<sup>239</sup>. However, David Bunis adjudges the term *Judeo-Espanyol* rather to be “pseudo-scientific” since it was invented by philologists and linguists eighteenth or nineteenth century; yet later the term was adopted by many Sephardic Jews too<sup>240</sup>. Bunis, being a distinguish philologist of “Juedo-Spanish” himself prefers to call the language of (Eastern) Sephardic Jews as *Judezmo* since this is a term that “originated among native speakers” and was not “imposed by outside sources”<sup>241</sup>. Modrechai Arbell, however, is one of those Sephardic Jews who keeps stuck to this “imposed” name:

*“I would call it Judeo-Espanyol. This is more the real name... Some used to call it Judezmo.*

<sup>236</sup> Fishman 1985, p. 9-10

<sup>237</sup> A combination of the word *Espanyol* or *Spanyol* and the Hebrew suffix “-it”, as in *Sfaradit* (ספרדית)

<sup>238</sup> Harris 1994, p. 20-29

<sup>239</sup> Idem, p. 24

<sup>240</sup> Bunis 2008, p. 427

<sup>241</sup> Harris 1994, p. 21

*But I think...Judeo-Espanyol is the most exact expression. But if people call it Ladino, let them call it Ladino...I don't care.*"<sup>242</sup>

Mordechai Arbell's attitude towards Judeo-Spanish maybe shows best that the usage of different names for the same language is something quite normal in the case of Judeo-Spanish.

Also the Western Mediterranean, or more precisely in North Africa (Northern Morocco, parts of Algeria), used to be the home of Spanish speaking Jews after the expulsion from Spain and Portugal. These Sephardim used to call their language *Haketia*. The name most probably derives from the Arabic root "*ḥakā*" (حكى) which means "to tell"<sup>243</sup>, to chat"<sup>244</sup>; thus *Haketia* can be translated as "clever" or "witty saying"<sup>245</sup>. Apart from this, Paloma Díaz-Mas and David Bunis offer an additional etymology, suggesting that *Haketia* could also derives from the name *Haquito*, the diminutive of Hebrew/Biblical name *Yitzhak* (יצחק), actually meaning "little Isaac"<sup>246</sup>. Nowadays *Haketia* is also sometimes referred to as *Ladino Occidental*<sup>247</sup> (Western Ladino), analogous to Eastern Ladino which was and, in some cases, still is spoken in the Eastern Mediterranean. Studying and distinguishing the characteristics of *Haketia* today turns out to be quite difficult because there are hardly any written sources available and only very few native speakers are left<sup>248</sup>. Nevertheless, it is evident that *Haketia*, due to the geographical proximity, maintained closer contact with peninsular Spanish and was, moreover, strongly influenced by Arabic and to some extent also by British English (Gibraltar)<sup>249</sup>.

While the language of Western Sephardic Jews, especially today, is almost exclusively known under the name *Haketia*, the situation concerning the designation of the language Sephardic Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean was much more complex. As has been mentioned above, there are multiple names for virtually the same language which, again, is divided into several dialects. However, there is much evidence that especially one of several possible terms was more frequently in use than others within a certain period. Having a closer look at the various names we also gain deeper insights into the different notions of being Sephardic at different times.

Right after the expulsion in the sixteenth century, for example, many Sephardim who settled

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<sup>242</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbell (18.4.2012)

<sup>243</sup> "avlar", "konversar" in Judeo-Spanish. cf. Bentolila 2005 (<http://de.scribd.com/doc/86544645/CursoDeLadino-com-ar-La-Haketia-El-Djudeo-Espanyol-de-Africa-Del-Norte-en-Ladino>, 15.1.2013)

<sup>244</sup> Bunis 2011, p. 24

<sup>245</sup> Bunis 1978, p. 96

Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 75

<sup>246</sup> Idem; Idem

<sup>247</sup> Bentolila 2005 (<http://de.scribd.com/doc/86544645/CursoDeLadino-com-ar-La-Haketia-El-Djudeo-Espanyol-de-Africa-Del-Norte-en-Ladino>, 15.1.2013)

<sup>248</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 86

<sup>249</sup> Zucker 2001, p. 10

down in the Ottoman Empire were, in fact, very conscious about Spanish heritage, which is the reason why they simply called their language *Espanyol* (“Spanish”) or *Franko*, due to their “Frankish” (Western European) provenance<sup>250</sup>. Consequently, within many Sephardic communities in the diaspora the terms “Spanish” and “Jewish” became almost interchangeable synonyms, or in other words, for most Sephardic Jews – far away from their land of origin – it was clear, if not logical, that a Spanish speaking person had to be Jewish too. There are many humorous stories and anecdotes approving this close identification: for example, when a Levantine Sephardi met a Spanish priest speaking Spanish the former exclaimed: “A Jewish priest!”<sup>251</sup>.

By the eighteenth century Eastern Sephardim more frequently began to refer to their language as *Judezmo*<sup>252</sup>. The original meaning of this term might have been only “Judaism”, as, for example, used in a text written in 1552. However, one of the earliest primary texts, which bears the testimony that *Judezmo* was used to denote the everyday languages of Eastern Sephardim is a translation of Molière's theatre play *Le mariage forcé* by Shelomoh ben Astrugo which was published in Vienna in 1890<sup>253</sup>. Also in the nineteenth century the term *Jidio* for the language of Sephardic Jews became popular in certain communities, especially in Sarajevo, as has been mentioned before<sup>254</sup>. Both terms, *Jidio* and *Judezmo*, reveal how Sephardic Jews actually felt about their own language: for most speakers it was, first of all, a Jewish language. This is a tendency not only observed among Sephardic communities but also among other Jewish groups – for example, also Ashkenazim call their language “Jewish”, Yiddish, being the most popular designation for Judeo-German<sup>255</sup>.

Another possibility to define Judeo-Spanish is to describe it as a Jewish language, belonging to a set of languages (together with Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Persian etc.) whose, to use Herbert H. Paper's words, “unity is not genetic but is rather to be found in an overriding cultural or civilizational framework”<sup>256</sup>. Tracy K. Harris<sup>257</sup> points out two characteristics that all Jewish languages have in common, namely “1) a merged Hebrew-Aramaic component, and 2) an orthographic system composed by some variety of Hebrew characters”. This is also the case for Judeo-Spanish which was traditionally and sometimes still is written in a modified Hebrew script. This goes back to the Middle Ages when Jews and Arabs used their Semitic alphabets for writing

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<sup>250</sup> Bunis 2011, p. 23

<sup>251</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 74-75

<sup>252</sup> Bunis 2011, p. 23-24

<sup>253</sup> Bunis 1978, p. 97

<sup>254</sup> Idem, p. 96-97

<sup>255</sup> Bunis 2011, p. 23-24

Uziel, Baruh In Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 77

<sup>256</sup> Paper 1978, p. vii

<sup>257</sup> Harris 2005, p. 102 (also see Birnbaum 1944, p. 64; Bunis 1975, p. 9)

Romance (Christian) language. Medieval Spanish written in Arabic or Hebrew script is usually called *aljamiado*<sup>258</sup>. David Bunis states that already during Middle Ages Iberian Jews used several alphabetic styles for writing texts<sup>259</sup>. Through the course of time, special characters (diacritical marks) have been developed in order to enable the transcription of Hispanic sounds absent from Hebrew<sup>260</sup>. Together with their own cursive script for manuscript writing, which later became known as *solitreo* or *soletreo*<sup>261</sup>, Sephardic Jews developed an elaborated book hand (stylized Medieval handwriting script) which Solomon Asher Birnbaum, an Austrian born linguist, designates as “Sephardic Mashait”. Its typeface which had been designed for printing should become known under the name Rashi script (*letras de Rashi*), named after the famous Rabbi of Troyes<sup>262</sup> because it was used for printing his commentary on the Bible and the Talmud, as in the first printed book ever published in Hebrew in 1475<sup>263</sup>. For some Sephardic prints also Hebrew square characters (*ktav meruba*, כתב מרובע) were used, especially for newspaper headlines and book titles and for religious texts with masoretic vowels<sup>264</sup>.

In mayor Sephardic centres the Rashi script was used to print books and newspapers until the 1920ies (Turkey) or even until World War II (Salonika)<sup>265</sup>. In the course of the modernisation of the societies where Sephardic Jews where living and through the acquaintance of knowledge of other language like French, Italian, Modern Turkish und Spanish, other writing and printing systems were adopted. in most cases it was the Latin script (as e.g. in modern Turkey where Atatürk in 1928 abolished the Persian-Arabic alphabet and introduced the Latin alphabet instead), in some cases also the Cyrillic alphabet (Bulgaria and Serbia) or the Greek writing system was adopted<sup>266</sup>. Today many speakers of Judeo-Spanish do not know how to read the Rashi script any more and the few texts produced in this language are published in Latin letters (with an attempt towards phonetic transcription)<sup>267</sup>.

The difficulties in reading and comprehending the language of the ancestors, finally, bring us about the explanation of another popular name for the language of Sephardic Jews. Today, especially in Israel, Judeo-Spanish is best known under the name *Ladino*. Although this term is very

<sup>258</sup> The word derives from the Arabic *ağamīya* (عجمية), for foreign or barbarian language, as the Christian language was called (cf. Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 98)

<sup>259</sup> Bunis 2011, p. 24

<sup>260</sup> E.g. for the Hebrew letter *gimel* (ג) with a diacritic representing the sounds /ch/ (as *macho* in Spanish), /dj/ (as in *djudezmo*) and /j/ (as *jour* in French) (cf. Bunis 2011, p. 24)

<sup>261</sup> Idem, p. 25

<sup>262</sup> Rashi (רש"י) is abbreviation of the name **R**abbi **S**helomo **I**saac (1040-1105) (see Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 99)

<sup>263</sup> Birnbaum 2007, p. 720, cf. also Harris 2005, p. 101

<sup>264</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 99

<sup>265</sup> Harris 2005, p. 101

<sup>266</sup> Bunis 1992, pp. 400-401

<sup>267</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, pp. 95, 99-100

popular among Jews and non-Jews alike, *Ladino* has not always been used for the everyday speech of Sephardic Jews. The term *Ladino* derives from the Spanish word *latino* (Latin) which in the Middle Ages was used for referring to any Moorish (Muslim) or Jewish Spaniard who was also fluent in Romance, the Christian tongue of that time. Within the Jewish context *Ladino* became a term for what Paloma Díaz-Mas calls a “*calque hagiolanguage*”, that is to say, a language which was only used to translate religious texts word-by-word into a vernacular language. Making use of such a claque language is not only a Jewish nor a sole Sephardic phenomenon. For example, Persian scholars used an Islamo-Persian calque for translating the Quran word-by-word into their own language; furthermore, translations of the Hebrew Bible also exist in other Jewish vernaculars, e.g. Judeo-German, Judeo-Italian and Judeo-Greek<sup>268</sup>. In Judeo-Spanish there is even a verb for producing such word-by-word translations of religious texts: *enladinar*, literally meaning to translate something into (Vulgar) Latin/Romance<sup>269</sup>. David Bunis explains that this technique – translating Hebrew texts into the vernacular – has been popular within Jewish communities for many centuries. About Sephardic communities in particular he writes:

*“Most Sephardim did not understand Hebrew, and the rabbis considered it desirable that people understand their prayers, so the custom developed of reading certain texts [...] in both Hebrew and Ladino translation. [...] [Thus] Sephardic boys learned to enladinar or translate portions of the Torah into literal Ladino as part of their religious studies.”*<sup>270</sup>

The hypothesis that *Ladino* was, in fact, a claque language has so far been proven right and is commonly accepted by most academics dealing with the language of Sephardic Jews; some scholars (e.g. Jacob M. Hassán, Moshe Lazar and Isaac Jerusalmi) even claim that the term *Ladino* should not be limited to the translation of religious texts alone but, instead, should be extended to any translation from a “Christian” language into Judeo-Spanish<sup>271</sup>.

Analogous to *Ladino*, *Judezmo* is the term favoured by many scholars to refer to the spoken language of Eastern Sephardic Jews. David Bunis argues that term *Ladino* should only be used for the written language of religious texts, whereas the spoken language should be called *Judezmo*, for being the term that most native speakers usually use to refer to their everyday speech<sup>272</sup>. However, there are also opposing opinions suggesting that *Judezmo* is neither a proper term nor a proper language. This, for instance, is the position of David N. Barocas. Although he does not deny that *Judezmo* indeed is the term preferred by many if not most Eastern Sephardic Jews to designate their speech, Barocas abstains from defining it as a real language. Instead, he argues that the vernacular

<sup>268</sup> Idem p. 75-76

<sup>269</sup> Šmid 2002, p. 114-115

<sup>270</sup> Bunis 2011, p. 25

<sup>271</sup> Šmid 2002, p. 116

<sup>272</sup> Bunis 1978, p. 93-98

of Sephardim should rather be regarded as a dialect, or more specifically, as a conglomerate of different languages. For Barocas the “Sephardic dialect” lacks in possessing a proper grammar and a coherent vocabulary which has caused Sephardim to borrow a large number of words from several other languages, as for example Turkish or French. Moreover Barocas does not think that *Judezmo* is an appropriate term for this “dialect”, simply because the word *Judezmo* is a corrupt version of the Spanish word *judaísmo*, meaning Judaism (which denotes a religion but not a language). Thus, notwithstanding the fact that Sephardic Jews have used the term *Judezmo* for many generations in order to refer to their own speech, from Barocas' point of view, this is just a proof for the bad education of most Sephardim which consequently led to the misapplication of that term<sup>273</sup>.

### 3.3.2. Judeo-Spanish: A Language or a Dialect?

The definition of Judeo-Spanish as a dialect is a rather pejorative and subjective term to describe this language but is in fact an idea that was taken up by many Sephardic Jews themselves (taking into account that David N. Barocas too is of Sephardic heritage). Many well educated Sephardim belonging to the “elite”, especially those who had received a Western education (e.g. in schools of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*<sup>274</sup>), used the *Jargon*, not believing that Judeo-Spanish was a real language. After having had contact with other languages of “greater prestige” many Sephardim were ashamed to use their own mother tongue, also because they were aware of the great extent of foreign loan words in their speech<sup>275</sup>.

These obviously polemic disputes about Judeo-Spanish, being rather a dialect and not a proper language, somehow resemble the classical controversies about “religion” and “magic”. According to Kippenberg and von Stuckrad, magic can be interpreted as the “Other”, that is to say, all those people and communities which do not belong to one's one<sup>276</sup>. Therefore, the term magic, in opposition to religion, is usually accompanied by rather derogatory connotations, in the very sense of Edward Said's notion of “othering”. The same mechanisms seem to be at work concerning the tension between “languages-of-power” (cf. Benedict Anderson) on the one hand, and corrupt dialects or *Jargons* on the other. This tension especially comes into effect in David N. Barocas's

<sup>273</sup> Baracas 1976, pp. 122-133 In Bachler 2003, pp. 27-28

<sup>274</sup> *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (A.I.U.) was founded in France in 1860 and was heavily influenced by the ideas of the *Haskalah* (Jewish enlightenment) and Jewish self-determination. The A.I.U. opened many schools, above all, in North Africa and the Middle East with the aim of offering Jewish children a modern, European (French) style of education. The language of education was almost exclusively French. cf. Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 83-89

<sup>275</sup> Harris 1994, p. 23

<sup>276</sup> cf. Kippenberg, von Stuckrad 2003, p.155ff



notion of Judeo-Spanish when he brings the vernacular of Sephardic Jews in opposition to languages, such as Turkish or French. This arbitrariness between language and dialect maybe best summed up with a humorous quip which was popularized by Max Weinreich, a pioneer in the field of Yiddish philology: “A language is a dialect with an army and navy”<sup>277</sup>. In other words, respectively from a socio-linguist point of view “the notions of language and dialect are fundamentally social and not linguistic constructs”<sup>278</sup>.

Aldina Quintana Rodríguez, an distinguished researcher of Judeo-Spanish dialects, points out that for a linguist analysis the definition if Judeo-Spanish is either a dialect or a language is almost irreverent, since both are linguistic systems without any natural or substantial difference between them<sup>279</sup>. From a historical point of view, Judeo-Spanish represents an ancient dialect of Castilian Spanish (*castellano*), in the same way as the latter represents an dialect of Latin. Thus, Aldina Quintana Rodríguez, whose considerations mainly rest upon the definitions of Eugenio Coseriu, defines Judeo-Spanish as a secondary dialect (*dialecto secundario*) of Castilian Spanish. While other secondary dialects of Castilian Spanish such as Andalusian, Canarian or Latin American Spanish make use of a standardized form of Spanish (*lengua funcional*) as an unifying element; however, this is not the case of Judeo-Spanish. The reason therefore is, first of all, the expulsion from Spain which, in succession, cut Sephardic Jews off from the Iberian speech communities. Despite or precisely because of this tragic event, Judeo-Spanish was able develop independently from Castilian Spanish over the last centuries<sup>280</sup>. The occasional emigration of Spaniards of Jewish descent who (re-)converted to the religion of their forefathers and left Spain after the expulsion to settle in one of the newly found Sephardic communities in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century often was the only contact with the ancestral homeland. These rather infrequent contacts prompted some diaspora communities to abandon Spanish entirely. Instead the language of their new environment or of the autochthonous Jewish communities they had joined was adopted (e.g. in Syria and Egypt where Jews adopted Arabic; only a handful Spanish terms should continue to be used in certain card games, for numbers and in a religious context)<sup>281</sup>.

In most parts of the Ottoman Empire, however, quite the opposite was the case. There the descendants of Iberian Jewish refugees continued to speak Spanish for many generations. Moreover, the new arrivals from Spain and Portugal exerted an enormous cultural influence on the old-established Romaniote (Byzantine) Greek-speaking Jews and the Jewish-Italian and the Ashkenazi communities residing in the Ottoman Empire. This “gradual process Judeo-

<sup>277</sup> Original in Yiddish: “א שפראך איז א דיאלעקט מיט אן ארמיי און פלאט” Weinreich, 1945, p. 13

<sup>278</sup> Romain, 2001, p. 1

<sup>279</sup> Quintana Rodríguez 2006, p. xxii ; cf. also Coseriu 1988a, pp. 18-19

<sup>280</sup> Idem; cf. also Coseriu 1988b, p. 79

<sup>281</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 74

Hispanization” was so tremendous, that the other communities gradually adopted the liturgy, the culture and the language of the Sephardim<sup>282</sup>. Only very few Romaniote communities were able to preserve their language and customs (e.g. on the island of Corfu which lay outside the Ottoman Empire). Still, the common family name *Ashkenazi* among Sephardim from Istanbul and Izmir (Smyrna) apparently indicates the “Sephardization” of a primal Ashkenazi family<sup>283</sup>. However, these cultural encounters with a new host society and other Jewish communities also left their marks on the language of Sephardic Jews. This is the reason why one not only has to bear in mind the genealogical relation to Old Castilian and other (Ibero-)Romance languages<sup>284</sup> but also to totally different languages<sup>285</sup>, not only Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, but also Balkanic languages (so called balkanisms)<sup>286</sup>, Greek<sup>287</sup>, Turkish<sup>288</sup>, French<sup>289</sup> and even Italian and German (e.g. in the case of Vienna<sup>290</sup>), depending on the time and the environment where Sephardic Jews lived. Here, we become aware that Stuart Hall's principle of *hybridity* not only becomes manifest in diasporic culture but in the languages and dialects of diasporic societies<sup>291</sup>. The presence of other (more powerful) languages is consequently reflected in the vernacular of a diaspora society.

Except for these external influences, it was first and foremost the distant relation to Spain that led to the development of several dialects of Judeo-Spanish. Furthermore, the numerous Sephardic communities in the Ottoman were geographically separated from each other, sometimes many hundred kilometres; however, they stood in constant contact and continuous communication with each other. Travelling rabbis, businessmen and craftsmen and the circulation of books and newspapers printed in Judeo-Spanish gave rise to a type of *koiné*, a languages community, whose members could understand each other without greater difficulties, despite dialectal differences and varied characteristics in spellings and vocabulary.<sup>292</sup>

Aldina Quintanan Rodríguez argues that there was not just one *koiné* but, in fact, two main dialects which predominantly based on the local speeches of the two major centres of Sephardic Jewry in the Ottoman Empire: Salonika and Istanbul. Cities like Belgrade (Serbia) and Ruse (Bulgaria) and the interior of the Balkans, for example, were stronger influenced by the Salonikan dialect. This dialect also exerted influence on the communities up the River Danube (Budapest and

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<sup>282</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 14

<sup>283</sup> Idem, p. 39

<sup>284</sup> This is definitely the reason why so scholars of Romance philology have engage in the study of Judeo-Spanish.

<sup>285</sup> Quintana Rodríguez 2006, p. xxii

<sup>286</sup> Idem, p. 262ff

<sup>287</sup> Idem, p. 260ff

<sup>288</sup> Idem, p. 267ff

<sup>289</sup> Idem, p. 273ff

<sup>290</sup> von Schmädel 2007, p. 196-197

<sup>291</sup> cf. Chapter 2.4.

<sup>292</sup> Idem, p. 73

Vienna)<sup>293</sup>. David Bunis calls these the North-West dialects. At the same time, the dialect of Istanbul influenced the speech of Sephardic Jews in Adrianopolis (Edirne) and Eastern Bulgaria, thus, in an area where David Bunis locates the South-East dialects. Of course, one cannot draw an exact line between the numerous Judeo-Spanish dialects (e.g. in Bulgaria); instead, we should think of two broad dialect continua with overlapping dialectal areas<sup>294</sup>.

### 3.3.3. What was the Language of Jews in Pre-Expulsion Spain?

Although the development of Judeo-Spanish outside the Iberian Peninsula can be reconstructed quite accurately, thanks to the thriving Sephardic literature, the opposite is the case for the language spoken by medieval Jewry before the expulsion. This lack of knowledge, which first and foremost is due to a lack of sufficient and adequate primary texts, has led to many divergencies among scholars whether the Jews of medieval Spain spoke a language different from their Christian neighbours or not. Paloma Díaz-Mas, for instance, argues that the language before the expulsion cannot have been too different from the language of their Christian neighbours, except for some dialectal variations used exclusively by Jews in a religious context: e.g. *El Dio* (for God) instead of *Dios* in Castilian Spanish or the Arabic word *الأحد* (*alhad*, for the first day of the week or Sunday) instead of *domingo* (“day of the Lord”). The reason for the usage of different in this context most probably was that both, *Dios* and *domingo* were too closely associated with Christendom. Another example for such a dialectal phenomenon is the Judeo-Spanish verb *meldar*, originally meaning “to read a religious text” but which would be later used for “to read” in general, including secular texts<sup>295</sup>. Interestingly, alterations of the verb *meldar*, which derives from the Greek word *meleto* (μελετώ, “to study”<sup>296</sup>), can also be found in other Judeo-Romance languages, as in Judeo-Italian (*meltare* or *meldar*) and in Judeo-French (*melder*, *miauder*, *mader*). The pervasive usage of this verb prompted George Jochnowitz to assume that there must have been “a continuous history of Judeo-Romance going back to the Roman Empire”<sup>297</sup>. According to David Bunis, however, the same word rather gives evidence that the first Jews settlers who came to Spain with the Roman conquerors more likely spoke a variety of Greek. Furthermore, Bunis argues that the language of medieval Sephardim must have been different from the Christian speech of that time (a variety of Romance), since Jewish texts from medieval Spain – written in Romance – are featured

<sup>293</sup> Quintana Rodríguez 2006, pp. 302-311

<sup>294</sup> Bunis 1993, p. 16

<sup>295</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, pp. 72-73

<sup>296</sup> *meletan* (μελεταν) is already used in the Septuaginta (Ps 119:148) and can be translated as “meditate”

<sup>297</sup> Jochnowitz 1978, p. 71-72

by several Hebrew-Aramaic and Judeo-Greek as well as Arabic elements; apart from these non-Romance elements, Bunis assumes that even some words of Hispanic origin were probably used differently by Jews in medieval Spain<sup>298</sup>.

The numerous Arabic elements within the medieval Judeo-Romance caused Paul Wexler to assume that Sephardic Jews are originally descendent from North African Jews and must therefore have spoken Arabic, or maybe even Berber, in the first place. Even if Iberian Jews had been speakers of a Romance language before the Muslim conquest, he argues, they must have become speakers of Arabic in the Muslim-dominated parts of then Iberian Peninsula as soon as these were under Muslim domain. Only when the Christians began to reconquest the peninsula from the North, Wexler argues, “Romance once again became the dominant language of the Iberian Jews”. Further, he quotes the famous Andalusian poet and philosophers Shlomo ibn Gabirol (1020 – 1057) as well as Maimonides (1135 – 1204), in order to prove his theory: while ibn Gabirol informs us that about half his contemporary co-religionists in Spain were speaking Arabic (“half [the Jews] speak Romance, the other Arabic”), Maimonides regarded to Romance as “*‘ajamiyyat al-andalūs*” which can be translated as “the foreign language of Andalus”<sup>299</sup>. However, Bunis holds that an exact reconstruction of the vernacular spoken by medieval Sepharadim in Spain turns out to be virtually impossible, simply because we do not have any texts on hand which could shed light on the popular spoken language of medieval Sepharadim<sup>300</sup>.

Although all these theories concerning the native language of Sephardic Jews in medieval Spain – whether they spoke a Romance language similar or different from Christians or rather Arabic like their Muslim neighbours – build on some evidence to support these claims, Bunis' latter mentioned remark, that we actually lack any text that would serve as a reliable source for reconstructing the everyday speech of medieval Sephardim, shall be further expounded. The reason why these texts written by Sephardic Jews which have been preserved from the Middle Ages up to now do not served as reliable sources is very simple: these texts were written by an intellectual, and more importantly, literate elite. In this regard, once more, I have to employ Erich Hobsbawm who wrote:

*“We are informed about the ideas of the section of the literate who wrote as well as read – or at least of some of them – but it is clearly illegitimate to extrapolate from the elite to the masses, the literate to the illiterate, even though the two worlds are not entirely separable [...]”*<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Bunis 1992, pp. 402-404

<sup>299</sup> Wexler, 2005, pp. 34-35

<sup>300</sup> Bunis 1992, pp. 402-403

<sup>301</sup> Hobsbawm 1990, p. 48

Hobsbawm firmly reminds us that whatever we read, we always have to read it context, also keeping in mind the author's social back ground<sup>302</sup>. Surviving medieval text, such as the Romance poetry written by Yehuda Halevy (1070 – 1145)<sup>303</sup> or the “rhymed *Porverbios morels* of Sentob de Carrión composed for King Pedro de Cruel (1350 – 1369)<sup>304</sup>” simply do not serve as representative sources in order to draw conclusions about the common vernacular of medieval Sephardim, also because we can assume that the overwhelming majority of the medieval population on the Iberian Peninsula was illiterate and that the ability to read and write was more than anything else a huge privilege. Thus, having analysed several medieval texts written by Sephardic Jews, David Bunis arrives at a conclusion that very much endorses Hobsbawm's considerations:

*“The surviving medieval Sephardi literary texts exhibit Hispanic elements which, in form and meaning, tend to resemble the literary Spanish employed by Christian writers of the same period rather than contemporaneous popular spoken Spanish; this seems to imply a knowledge of Christian literary Spanish and its convention among the medieval Sephardi literati.”*<sup>305</sup>

What has been said about the work of Jewish authors, of course, also holds true for Christian literati of the Middle Ages – their works, too, have to be valued as products of an intellectual elite. The statements by Shlomo ibn Gabirol and Maimonides which Paul Wexler names as authoritative testimonies also have to be rated as such, since both of them belonged to the (predominantly Arabic speaking) Jewish intelligentsia in medieval Spain.

Interestingly, Tracy Harris, in reference to Denah Lida, arrives at a similar conclusion as David Bunis, namely that not much can be said about the language or distinct dialect of Sephardic Jews in the Middle Ages, but for quite different reasons. She holds that more study has to be done in this area in order to gain more information about the medieval Judeo-Spanish. According to her, one big problem is that most medieval Judeo-Spanish texts are only studies examined from their linguistic point of view, not taking into account that especially after 1391<sup>306</sup> most Jews were very cautious in the open cultivation of their Jewish culture and ethnicity. Another decisive fact, Harris indicates, is that most copies of Biblical and liturgical works and translations were systematically destroyed by the Inquisition and those taken into exile were often damaged or destroyed afterwards by fires, overuse or negligence<sup>307</sup>. However neither Harris nor Lida seem to be conscious of the fact that even if we were in the possession of more literary and liturgical works from that time, these works would hardly serve to allow a conclusion to be drawn about the everyday speech of medieval

<sup>302</sup> There are also other factors that could be taken into account, such as gender, ideological orientations etc.

<sup>303</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 29

<sup>304</sup> Bunis 1992, pp. 402

<sup>305</sup> Idem, p. 403

<sup>306</sup> In that year severe Anti-Jewish pogroms broke out in several Spanish cities. (cf. Chapter 4.3.)

<sup>307</sup> Harris 1994, p. 109 (cf. also Lida 1978, p. 83)

Iberian Jews.

As yet, many details about the moving history of Sephardic Jews before and after their expulsion from Spain have been exposed. Both, the heydays of the so called Golden Age, as well as the traumatic experiences of having been a persecuted and, finally, dispelled as minority from the Iberian Peninsula, are all relevant for Sephardic self-consciousness and identity, as we will see. As will be seen, a general overview of the history of Sephardic Jews inside and outside the Iberian Peninsula already serves to reconstruct how Sephardic communities in the diaspora in general and the (historic) Sephardic community of Vienna in particular have imagined themselves, as well as their left-behind homeland *Sepharad*.

### 3.4. *Sepharad* & Sephardic Diaspora – One, Two, Three or Four Diasporas?

Before dealing with the history of Sephardic Jews in detail we have to take a closer look at the different perceptions that not only Sephardic Jews but also scholars of Sephardic history have had of *Sepharad*, the ancient homeland. As had been explained before, the term *Sepharad* itself has changed its meaning over the millennia, from referring to a seaport in the Asia Minor in biblical times, to designating the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages and, ultimately, to name the modern country of Spain. So, although today the term *Sepharad* stands exclusively for Spain, the term “Sephardic Jewry” usually refers to Jewish communities in North-Western Europe (e.g. Amsterdam, London, Hamburg), in Southern Eastern Europe (the Balkans), in North Africa (Morocco), in the Middle East (e.g. part of the old-established Jewish community of Jerusalem) and even in the Americas (e.g. the Caribbean and North Western South America)<sup>308</sup>. Despite the epochal changes, caused by the uprooting of the Iberian Jewry in the late fifteenth century, “*Sepharad*” should remain an important point of reference for the identity and the heritage of Sephardic Jew. However, some semantic changes of the term have occurred since the time Jews who remained true to their faith had left the peninsula. By presenting an example from 1775 Salonika, Davis Bunis expounds that after the expulsion from Spain and Portugal the term *Sepharad* could also refer to other loci than the Iberian Peninsula:

*“Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire occasionally referred to their language as lašón de Sefarað 'language of Sefarad' without necessarily identifying Sefarað with 'Spain', since the term had come to denote any region inhabited by Sephardim, such as the Ottoman*

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<sup>308</sup> The first Jewish settlements in the New World were, in fact, established by Dutch Jews of Portuguese descent. (cf. Arbell 2002, Gonsalves de Mello 1996, Chapter 4.4.)

This example makes us aware of how the meaning of the term *Sepharad* began to change, according to the new circumstances in the Sephardic Diaspora when this term also became used for the new lands inhabited by Sephardic Jews after the *gerush sepharad* (גירוש ספרד), which is the Hebrew term for the expulsion from Spain. Being aware of the great consequences that the *gerush* meant for the history of Sephardic Jews, Max Weinreich proposed to think about Sephardic History in two stages: the history of Jews in *Sepharad I*, which refers to a period from the earliest Jewish settlements on the Peninsula up to the end of the fifteenth century, and in *Sepharad II*, referring to the history of the diaspora communities which were established outside the Peninsula after the expulsion (in the Ottoman Empire, North Africa etc.). Here, Weinreich employs a terminology he has already used for describing the history of Ashkenazic Jews, by dividing it in *Ashkenaz I* for the time when most Yiddish-speaking Jews resided in German-speaking lands (e.g. the Rhineland), and *Ashkenaz II* for describing the period of Ashkenazic Jews after many of them had moved to parts in North Eastern Europe, predominantly inhabited by Slavic peoples.<sup>310</sup>

Based Weinreich's model, another term had been created since, in order to refer to the Sephardic communities now living outside *Sepharad I* and *Sepahrad II*, a result of the dispersions, re-settlements and migrations of Sephardic Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth century, for example to the USA or Israel. Thus, this secondary dispersion is commonly referred to as *Sepharad III*<sup>311</sup>.

The creation of new *Sepharads* or Sephardic homelands has not yet ceased. For example, Michal Held has researched the contemporary online-usage of Judeo-Spanish on internet platforms, such as “Ladinokomunita”<sup>312</sup> and the “Ladino Cultural Forum” (פורום תרבות הלאדינו)<sup>313</sup>, which are used by Sephardic Jews in order to discuss topics, such as Judeo-Spanish language, Sephardic culture and cuisine, history and genealogy, experiences related to Sephardic traditions and past communities etc. According to Held these two internet communities “may be regarded as a metaphoric place, in which an identity is constructed in the absence of an offline Sephardi community”<sup>314</sup>. In this respect, she suggests that we should think of these online forums as a new “Digital Home-Land” for Sephardic Jews living dispersed around the world (especially those living outside Israel). Held describes this “Digital Home-Land” as

<sup>309</sup> Bunis 2008, p. 421

<sup>310</sup> Weinreich 1973, p. 100 in Wexler 1996, p. 100

<sup>311</sup> Šmid 2002, p. 114n1

<sup>312</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ladinokomunita/>, 27.2.2013

<sup>313</sup> <http://www.tapuz.co.il/forums2008/forumpage.aspx?forumid=420>, 27.2.2013

<sup>314</sup> Held 2010, p. 83

*“a virtual territory in which long-lost offline communities [...] are reconstructed online. Their reconstruction involves a process of creating a milieu de mémoire when most aspects of the trauma of losing the lieu de mémoire have already faded away. It is only natural for endangered ethnic languages, such as JS [Judeo-Spanish], to play an important role in the formation and practice of the DH-L [Digital Home-Land] when the offline homeland they are associated with disappears.”*<sup>315</sup>

Held's definition of a “Digital Home-Land” rest upon the research and the theoretical approaches of Andre Pinard and Sean Jacobs<sup>316</sup> who, instead of “Digital Home-Land”, use the term “Virtual Diaspora” to which they regard as a space constructed by (real) diaspora communities, in reaction to the their “symbolic marginalism” and in order to express their cultural and ethnic orientation or heritage. Hence, it has to be understood “as a metaphor for a terrain in which, due to experimental and historical dynamics, social agents *position* [my emphasis] themselves appositionally as well as oppositionally to the status quo or a dominant ideology”<sup>317</sup>. These two models of virtual diaspora spaces strikingly highlight the powerful dynamics which are at work – e.g. caused by the trauma of losing a previous, real, homeland; the marginalisations besides the mainstream society – when people seek to position themselves on a new terrain. This very much resembles Edward Said's notion of “imaginative geography”<sup>318</sup> which depends, above all, on knowledge (e.g. of one's one “imagined” history) and power (e.g. a hostile or exclusive out-side force). Also in connection to Stuart Hall's notion of cultural and diasporic identity the models of Michal Held, Andre Pinard and Sean Jacobs are very much appropriate<sup>319</sup>. Since the virtual space of the “Digital Home-Land” is a new product of dispersed people – living in different parts of the world (*Sepharad III*) but who, nevertheless, have a strong sense of community – we could also refer to this homeland, in the tradition of Max Weinreich, as *Sepharad IV*.

Although the former homelands (*Sepharad I, II and III*) are definitely places that the Sephardic Jews of today cannot “in any final or literal sense return<sup>320</sup>” to, Michal Held still sees a possibility that the virtual community of the “Digital Home-Land” could, under some circumstances, return “offline” again, for example when the members of the online community meet in real life; in fact, such meetings have already taken place, when, for example, members of the platform Ladinokominita from all over the world met in Israel<sup>321</sup>. However, such gatherings cannot be valued as a full recovery of past. What remains are the memories about the past, retold in

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<sup>315</sup>Idem, p. 91

<sup>316</sup> There theoretical approach relies on a study carried out about Hip-Hop music in cyberspace.

<sup>317</sup> Held 2010, p. 83; cf. also Jacobs, Pinard 2006, p. 83

<sup>318</sup> cf. Chapter 2.3.1.

<sup>319</sup> According to Stuart Hall cultural identities the produce of a certain position within the narratives of the past (cf. Chapter 2.4.)

<sup>320</sup> Hall 1990, p. 231

<sup>321</sup> Held 2010, p. 98-99



multiple narratives in order to preserve it. These narratives and discourses, by once more referring to Stuart Hall, are the actual constitutive elements of cultural and diasporic identity<sup>322</sup>. This, of course, equally holds for the previous stages of Sephardic diasporas (*Sepharad I, II and III*<sup>323</sup>). The multiple Sephardic folk tales, songs, in short, narratives are full of allusion to the Jewish Golden Age on the Iberian Peninsula but also of the trauma left behind by the expulsion and the inquisition or memories about the flourishing communities of Spanish and Portuguese exiles, in places such as the Ottoman Empire or the Netherlands or even the New World. By having a closer look at the history of Sephardic Jews we will encounter various narratives that give evidence about how differently Sephardic Jews used to imagine themselves throughout the ages.

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<sup>322</sup> cf. Hall 1990, p. 225

<sup>323</sup> Of course we have to be aware that by juxtaposing various stages of Sephardic history (I, II, III etc.) we also tend to impose an “imaginary coherence” of Sephardic history which is just the same mechanism which “lies at the centre” of cultural identities (coherence gives meaning). However, for the following analysis I will continue to use the terminology coined by Max Weinreich because it still serves the aim of deconstructing Sephardic history as a whole.



## 4. Imagining Sephardic History

### 4.1. Origins, Myths and First Persecutions

Little is known about the advent of Jewish life on the Iberian Peninsula. According to the current state of scientific knowledge, Jewish history on the Iberian Peninsula began with the arrival of Jewish settlers and merchants together with the Romans in the first and second century C.E.; those settlers primarily established themselves on the Spanish Levante (Mediterranean coast) and on the Balearic Islands. This was about the same time after the temple in Jerusalem – the cultural and religious centre of the Jews – had been destroyed in 70 C.E.<sup>324</sup>. However, we do not know for sure if these Jewish settlers directly came from Palestine because, as has been discussed before, a Jews diaspora had most certainly existed before the destruction of the Second Temple.

The earliest documented archaeological finds that gives evidence of a Jewish presence on the Iberian Peninsular is a gravestone discovered in Adra (in modern day Andalusia), dating back to the third century C.E. Another gravestone found in Tortosa (Valencia) dates from the fourth century which also seems to be the time when the first synagogues was built on Spanish soil, as an preserved inscription from a synagogue in Elche (Catalonia) clearly proves<sup>325</sup>. Under Roman dominion, Jews enjoyed considerable communal autonomy and even gained the status a *religio licita* (a legal religion) in accordance to Roman law<sup>326</sup>. This freedom, as we will see later, should be strongly challenged with the dissemination of Christianity within the Roman Empire in the upcoming centuries.

Disregarding the archaeological finds, there are also hypotheses that Jews might have had settled earlier on the Iberian Peninsular<sup>327</sup>. For sure, the Jews were not the first Semitic people that settled down on the Iberian Peninsula in the Age of Antiquity. Starting from 1100 B.C.E. Phoenician colonists established several seaports on the Mediterranean shore of the peninsula, such as the cities of Cádiz and Cartagena<sup>328</sup>. If also Hebrew settlers arrived on Iberian Peninsula together with the Phonecians remains an open question, since there are no archaeological evidence that could prove the presence of Jewish settlers before the third century C.E.<sup>329</sup>, as has been mentioned above.

As a matter of fact, there are many legendary accounts claiming that the first Jewish settlers

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<sup>324</sup> Taking into account that important Jewish settlements outside Palestine had existed already before the destruction of the Second Temple.

<sup>325</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 1-2

<sup>326</sup> Biale 2002, p. 303

<sup>327</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 1-2

<sup>328</sup> Cartagena derives form the Phonician word Qart hadash (קרת חדש), meaning new city (similar to Carthage).

<sup>329</sup> Bossong 2008, pp. 14-15

arrived right after the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C.E., while others even claim that Jewish presence goes back to the era of King Salomon. Although it is not totally unlikely that Hebrew traders indeed arrived together with the Phoenicians as early as the tenth century B.C.E., Paloma Díaz-Mas holds that these accounts are merely legends which most certainly arose in the tenth century C.E., thus, two millennia later when Jews enjoyed greater tolerance under Muslim rule<sup>330</sup>. Such foundational myths and a collective memory about a land of origin – as has already been outlined by Stewart Hall<sup>331</sup>, as well as by Rogers Brubaker<sup>332</sup> – are two of the most important narrative elements for the formation of cultural or national identities because they provide an “alternative history or counter-narrative<sup>333</sup>” which is all too often provides more coherence than the actual historical facts and evidences we have. So, it is not all surprising that Sephardic Jews created several myths in the Middle Ages, obviously with the aim of establishing a direct connection between the former (imagined) homeland, the Holy Land with Jerusalem in its centre, and their new or actual homeland *Sepharad*. Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue similarly argue as they hold that

*“Sepharic identity had its roots in this past, in a collective historical experience, and in a fate of shared suffering resulting from the wrenching from a land that the Iberian Jews considered their own – in accordance with a myth that their presence dated back to the destruction of the first Temple (568 BCE)”.*<sup>334</sup>

This myth, just mentioned by Benbassa and Rodrigue, refers to the legendary account that the entire tribe of Juda and, depending on the source, also the tribe of Benjamin escaped to seaport of either Ashkelon or Ashdod after Nebuchadnezzar's armies had destroyed the First Temple of Jerusalem. In order to be spared from the hardship of the Babylonian Exile they decided to leave their homeland and sailed across the Mediterranean Sea until they reached its most Western point where “no Jew had ever been before”. There the refugees went ashore and decided to stay on that land that should become identified with the biblical *Sepharad*<sup>335</sup>.

Indeed, this legend can be interpreted as a “counter-narrative” in Stuart Hall's sense. It stands in direct opposition to the narrative of the Babylonian Exile which, according Shlomo Sand, many scholars of Jewish history consider to be the crucial event for the formation of “historical-religious Judaism” which, as a matter of fact, is fundamentally based on “the experience of exile”<sup>336</sup>. The existence of an alternative narrative – e.g. the tribe of Juda landing in *Sepharad* – alongside a

<sup>330</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 1-2

<sup>331</sup> cf. Chapter 2.2.

<sup>332</sup> cf. Chapter 2.3.2.

<sup>333</sup> Hall 1992, p. 295

<sup>334</sup> Idem

<sup>335</sup> Leroy 1987, p. 13-14

<sup>336</sup> Sand 2009, p. 69

much more powerful and authoritative one – namely the Babylonian Exile – is by no means exceptional, especially within a Jewish context. According to David Biale, such narratives or “beliefs” that suggest a common history and origin, regardless of their historical veracity, are “an integral part of Jewish culture because their very existence made them as true as the historical ‘facts’ that seem to contradict them”<sup>337</sup>. This, of course, would explain the century-long persistence of such (pseudo-)historical narrative.

As stated above, Paloma Díaz-Mas suggests that these myths about the origin of Iberian Jews most certainly emerged in the tenth century B.C.E. when the Jews in Moorish Spain “were enjoying a period of splendor”. Furthermore, Béatrice Lerony informs us about another legend circulating in the Christian part of the peninsula in the thirteenth century. When the Christian kings tried to impose higher taxes on their Jewish subject, corresponding to the thirty pieces of silver that Judas Iscariot allegedly received for having betrayed Jesus, the Iberian Jews used to answer in response that, other than their fellow brethren at the time of Herod the Great, they could not be found guilty because their forbears had already used to reside in Spain long before Christ was crucified, busy gathering gold and other precious metals for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem<sup>338</sup>. Here we become aware of the power which – according to Stewart Hall, Edward Said and Michel Foucault – certain regimes have to make diaspora societies see and experience themselves as “Others”<sup>339</sup>: while the discriminatory Christian establishment labelled its Jewish subjects as “Others”, Sephardic Jews concurrently experienced themselves as “Others” from their non-Sephardic co-religionists. It is interesting to note that such stories and legends became especially popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth century<sup>340</sup>, thus, at a time when Jews on the Iberian Peninsular were more and more frequently persecuted and finally expelled, respectively, at a time when they had already been banished from Spain and Portugal. In this regard, Georg Bossong informs us about a recently discovered manuscript dating from the time shortly after the expulsion which proves that even Christians were quite convinced about the Jews' millennia-long presence on the peninsula:

*“Es war eine ganz besondere, ganz neue Sache, alle Juden aus all ihren Ländereien hinauszuerwerfen, 300 000 Menschen in nur drei Monaten, nachdem sie mehr als 2100 Jahre in Spanien gelebt und den Königen viele gute Dienste erwiesen haben”.*<sup>341</sup>

The Catholic Monarchs, however, were not the first ones who decided to expel all Jews from their territories. Already one thousand years before the Great Expulsion of 1492, in the fourth century

<sup>337</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xxiv

<sup>338</sup> Leroy 1987, p. 14

<sup>339</sup> cf. Chapter 2.4.

<sup>340</sup> Idem, p. 13

<sup>341</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 55-56

when Spain was still part of the Roman Empire and Christian at the time, measures were taken for the first time in order to segregate Jews from their Christian neighbours. On the Synod of Elvira (modern day Granada) mixed marriages were prohibited, as was the common celebration of feasts and Jewish blessings of Christian fields and harvest<sup>342</sup>. When the Visigoths came into power in Iberia in the late fifth century the situation of the Jews eased to some extent. The Visigoths adopted Arianism as their state religion, an early sect of Christianity that refused Jesus Christ's equality with God who, as they believed, was merely godlike. This tolerance faded when the Visigoth King Reccared I (559 – 601) converted to Catholicism in 587 which made Jews the only religious minority in a former multi-confessional state. During the Councils of Toledo new policies in dealing with Jews were settled: in 589, during the Third Council of Toledo, marriages between Jews and Christians were prohibited; furthermore Jews were disqualified from public offices and were forbidden to purchase slaves. Especially the latter mentioned ban brought along terrible economic consequences for most Jewish households and farmers on the peninsula. Nevertheless, these measure were not always fully implemented, until the coronation of Sisebut (r. 612 – 621) who enacted a law that forbade Jews even to posses any slaves. Sisebut may also be called the father of the Spanish Anti-Judaism since he was the first to publish a decree that forced Jews to chose between conversion to Christianity or to leave his realm instead. From now on this should be the first measure of choice in order to deal with “the Jewish problem” in Spain<sup>343</sup>. Under Sisebut's reign also the *converso* (convert) problem arose for the first time<sup>344</sup>, that is the apprehension that Jews who had been dragged to the baptismal font could (secretly) return to their old faith.

Although the Anti-Jewish measures imposed by the Visigoth were harsh they would not persist for long. Already by the end of the seventh century, further East, a new political and religious power emerged that should end the hardship of the Jews under Visigoth rule. In 711 the Muslim army of the Umayyad Caliphate crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and the conquest of the Visigoth kingdom began. Only a few years later almost the entire peninsula, except its Northern fringe, was under Muslim rule. At the time of the invasion the Visigoth empire was already very weak, yet Jews are said to have played a considerable role in the course of this conquest – legend has it that wherever they could Jews left the gates open for their Muslim liberators<sup>345</sup>.

As had been seen and yet remains to be seen, throughout their history on the Iberian Peninsula, Jews were all too often at the mercy of the Christian and Muslim rulers in their day. This,

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<sup>342</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 2

<sup>343</sup> Bossong 2008, pp. 17-18

<sup>344</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 2

<sup>345</sup> Idem p. 20

of course, has not been forgotten and, in fact, has ever since played an important role in the collective memory of Sephardic Jews. Nevertheless, Sephardic narratives are also filled with stories of glory and splendour about the Spanish past, about a time most famously known as the Golden Age.

## 4.2. The Golden Age

When the Iberian Jews came under Muslim rule their situation improved drastically owing to mainly to two conditions. According to Raymond P. Scheindlin, for the first time until the Hellenistic era the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula found themselves “in one political, economic, and cultural system, a single Islamic empire stretching from the Indus River in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west”. Furthermore the new rulers put an end to the persecutions, harassments and humiliations Jews had suffered under the Christian regime of the Visigoths<sup>346</sup>.

Jews, as well as Christians, were regarded by Muslims as *ahl al-kitāb* (أهل الكتاب), “people of the book”. This recognition awarded them a special protected status within the realms of Islam, also known as *dār al-Islām* (دار الإسلام), “the House of Islam”. In the Pact of Umar<sup>347</sup> Christians and Jews were guaranteed a special protected status; from that time they were also referred as *ahl ad-dīmmah* (أهل الذمة), people of the *dīmmah* (treaty of protection). In return of a special tax and “on condition that they behaved in a manner appropriate to a subject population” they were not only tolerated by the Muslim regime but also guaranteed their lives and property. However, *dhimmīs* also had to deal with several restrictions imposed to them, which included the construction of new churches or synagogues and the repair of old ones, the prohibition of holding public processions and proselytism; neither they were permitted to strike a Muslim, carry arms or ride a horse, build homes taller than those of Muslims, adopt Arabic names or to study the Quran; moreover they were also obliged to wear a distinguishing clothing. However in many cases those restrictions were only loosely applied.<sup>348</sup>

Although the context as well as the balance of power are very different here, these boundaries established by the means of Islamic law very much resemble the boundaries maintained by halakhic law (cf. halakhic *midrashim*, such as the *Mekhilta*)<sup>349</sup>. The intended target that such restrictions and laws as well as idealised and moralising narratives usually pursue is the creation of

<sup>346</sup> Scheindlin 2002, pp. 317-318

<sup>347</sup> Named after Umar or Omar, the second Caliph proceeding Mohammed.

<sup>348</sup> Scheindlin 2002, pp. 318-319

<sup>349</sup> The boundaries established by Islamic law are usually meant to define a majority, whereas the Rabbinical laws are concerned with defining a minority within a majority.

an imagined, or in Max Weber's sense, utopian ideal type (*Idealtypus*)<sup>350</sup>. While Weber argues that ideal types are, in fact, unified analytical constructs, one could also argue that they are constructed by “other” types (in Foucault's and Said's sense). By creating the subordinate *dhimmī*, Islamic scholars not only defined non-Islamic subjects but also themselves by simultaneously imposing a discourse of “power, knowledge and truth”<sup>351</sup>. However, in reality ideal types remain relatively shallow; they are nothing more than by-products of rather volatile power discourses. In reality, the enforcement of *dhimmī* laws depended very much on the actual regime-in-power's attitude towards its minorities which could reach from overall tolerance to severe persecution, the latter actually involving the non-application of the *dhimmī* laws (which would also affect Sephardic Jews at some stages of their history under Muslim rule). The actual “ideal” distinguishing the heydays of the so called Golde Age was rather a “hybrid” stile of culture, to use Stuart Hall's term, broadly lacking of clearly defined boundaries between ethnic and religious groups.

During the Caliphate of Córdoba (929 – 1031 C.E.) a unique amalgamation of Jewish and Arab culture took place which, according to Georg Bossong, led to a consolidation of a new – namely “Sephardic” – identity of the Jews in Iberia. The Jews, as well as the Muslims of *al-Andalus* (الأندلس), the Arabic name for the Iberian Peninsula, sought to emancipate themselves from their former intellectual and political (the latter in the case of the Muslims) role model Baghdad which brought about the formation of a new “Spanish” self-esteem<sup>352</sup>. Despite the above mentioned restrictions that Jews were subjected to under Muslim rule (the *dhimmī* laws) they “resembled their [Muslim] neighbours in their names, dress, and language as well as in most other feature of their culture”<sup>353</sup>. Moreover, within the Arabic society some Jews were able to make prestigious careers. For example, Hasdai ibn Shaprut (915 – 970 C.E.), also know under his Spanish name *Saporta*, became the personal physician of the ruling Caliph and he was also one of the most respected diplomats of his time<sup>354</sup>. He managed to induce the appointment of Moshe ben Hanoch, an important Talmudist from Babylon (Baghdad), to the office of the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community of Córdoba. Moshe ben Hanoch (920 – 970) in turn is considered the founder of

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<sup>350</sup> „[Der Idealtypus] wird gewonnen durch einseitige Steigerung eines oder einiger Gesichtspunkte und durch Zusammenschluß einer Fülle von diffus und diskret, hier mehr, dort weniger, stellenweise gar nicht, vorhandenen Einzelercheinungen, die sich jenen einseitig herausgehobenen Gesichtspunkten fügen, zu einem in sich einheitlichen Gedankenbilde. In seiner begrifflichen Reinheit ist dieses Gedankenbild nirgends in der Wirklichkeit empirisch vorfindbar; es ist eine Utopie [...]“ Weber 1988 (1922), p. 191

<sup>351</sup> cf. Foucault 1991; cf. Hall 2001

<sup>352</sup> Bossong 2008, pp. 21-22

<sup>353</sup> Scheindlin 2002, pp. 317

<sup>354</sup> Hasdai ibn Shaprut is famous for having established the correspondence with the Khazar king Joseph, the ruler of a Turkic people settling in the Pontic-Caspian steppe that entirely or partially had converted to Judaism. cf. Bossong 2008, p. 22



Talmudic studies in the West which led to a great competition with the Gaonic school of Babylon<sup>355</sup>. This was about the time when Jews on the Iberian Peninsula, as well as in other Muslim dominated areas, began to adopt the Arabic language which, in turn, had an enormous impact on the way how Jews would develop and used their own intellectual vernacular, the Hebrew language<sup>356</sup>.

Formerly mentioned Hasdai also patronised Dunsh ben Labrat (920 – 990) who literally revolutionised Hebrew poetry by resembling the Arabic metre. Dunash was well aware of the relationship between Hebrew and Arabic and introduced a metre building on interspersing long and short vowels, a method already in use in Arabic poetry. This innovation brought along a revival of Hebrew by combining the Biblical language with Arabic metaphors and rhythmicity. Solomon ibn Gabirol (1020 – 1057), maybe the most important Jewish poet of medieval Spain, introduced another element of Arabic language art, that is rhymed prose (free verses held together by an end rhyme), a literary form inspired by the Quran. Like most Jewish intellectuals of his time Ibn Gabirol wrote his poetry in Hebrew but his discursive prose in Arabic. His philosophical works were highly influenced by Neo-Platonism and later translated into Hebrew and Latin. His magnum opus “Fountain of Life”, *Meqor Hayyim* (מקור חיים) in Hebrew or *Fons Vitæ* in Latin, should exert huge influence on medieval scholasticism, as well as on the platonic philosophers in the twelfth and thirteenth century who praised “Avicenna” (Ibn Gabirol's Latin pseudonym) for being the most venerable Christian philosopher of their times, not being aware that he was actually a Jew.<sup>357</sup>

Their “multi cultural proficiency” and the ability to most publish in both Hebrew but also in Arabic, the dominant cultural, political and intellectual language of their time, is what Zion Zohar names as one of the most distinguished features of Sephardic<sup>358</sup> Jews in the Middle Ages. Ashkenazic Jews in Christian dominated Europe lived through much less tolerant regimes which limited the sphere of interest of most Ashkenazic rabbis to the study of the Bible and the Talmud. Sephardic Jews, by contrast, also engaged in producing more secular literature, such as poetry and philosophical works, predominantly written in Arabic<sup>359</sup>. However, as we will see shortly, when the tolerant attitude of Muslim rulers towards Jews faded away religious topics also began to play a more dominant role among many Sephardic intellectuals.

After the demise of the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba in 1031 the vast Muslim realm was divided into smaller rivaling kingdoms, the so called *Taifa* (طائفة) principalities, ruled by Muslims

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<sup>355</sup> Bossong 2008, pp. 21-22

<sup>356</sup> Idem, p. 327

<sup>357</sup> Idem, pp. 23-25

<sup>358</sup> Under the term “Sephardic” Zion Zohar also includes Mizrahi Jewry, thus he uses it to refer to Jews who lived in Muslim dominated lands (in opposition to “Ashkenazic Jewry”).

<sup>359</sup> Zohar 2005, p. 6-7

of Arab, Berber and *Muladi* (mixed Iberian) descent. Even in those new small kingdoms influential Jews like Samuel ibn Naghrela (993 – 1056), also known as *Shmuel HaNagid* (שמואל הנגיד), “Samuel the Leader”, could fill a similarly important position as Hasdai ibn Shaprut. He became the vizier and military leader of the ruling Berber king in the Taifa of Granada. Its capital was home of a sizeable Jewish community which is the reason why Muslim called this city *Granata al-Yahud* (غرناطة اليهود), “Granada of the Jews”. HaNagid's eldest son, Joseph ibn Naghrela, was not as diplomatically skilled as his father. After he had got entangled in a conspiracy to murder, his own reputation, as well as that of Jews in general sank drastically and provoked extreme violence. In 1066 the Jewish community of Granada fell victim to maybe the bloodiest massacre in the Iberian Peninsula since the reign of the Visigoths. According to Georg Bossong 1500 Jewish families were exterminated in this event, including Joseph ibn Naghrela himself whose dead body was publicly dragged through the city. This pogrom can be seen as the beginning of the end of the Gold Age of the Jews in Al-Andalus which was eventually sealed by the invasions of the Almoravides (1090) and the Almohads (1147).<sup>360</sup>

When the Berber dynasty of the Almoravides or *al-Murabitun* (المرابطون) shattered the Taifa kingdoms they ordered many Jewish settlements to be liquidated, a refugee movement of Jews towards the Christian North of the peninsula began where the new and highly proficient immigrants were even welcomed with open arms by the Christian kings who favoured their excellent skills in medicine. This should also be the fate of Moshe ibn Ezra (1055 – 1135) and Judah Halevi (1070 – 1145), both important poets and philosophers, who had become lifelong friends in the Taifa of Granada but later sought refuge in the North due to the Anti-Jewish climate under the Almoravid regime. Especially the works of Yehuda Halevi belong to the most influential pieces of Hebrew literature. His œuvre was composed in three languages: besides Arabic (prose and philosophical works), also in Hebrew (secular and religious poetry) and in Romance (Old Spanish) what makes him maybe the first Spanish poet mentioned by name<sup>361</sup>. His wandering life, rootlessness and the longing for a homeland can be recognised in his literary work and is probably best reflected in his *Zionides* (odes to Zion). In 1140 his longing for Zion finally induced him to depart for a journey in order to reach the Eretz Israel. If he actually found his way into the Holy Land is unknown; his traces get lost in Egypt where he was received “like a king” by the local Jewish community.<sup>362</sup>

Yehuda Halevi is often referred to as “early<sup>363</sup>” or “medieval<sup>364</sup>” Zionist by the modern

<sup>360</sup> Bossong 2008, pp. 26-27 (cf. also Beinart 1992a, p. 23; Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 3)

<sup>361</sup> As had been discussed before his outstanding poetry composed in the Romance language unfortunately does not serve to reconstruct the spoken vernacular of the Jews of his time.

<sup>362</sup> Idem, pp. 28-31

<sup>363</sup> Schwartz 1996, p. 24

<sup>364</sup> Alexander 2012, p. 59

Zionists of today. Interestingly, both, Yehuda Halevi's longing for Zion as well as the early Zionist's motivation to establish a old/new homeland for the Jews apparently arose in a time of crisis outside pressure (e.g. hostilities, displacements, Anti-Semitism). According to Stuart Hall, such experiences of “experience of dispersal and fragmentation” necessarily evoked “an imaginary coherence” and the orientation towards a new imagined homeland<sup>365</sup>. Yehuda Halevi was by far not the only Jewish intellectual of his time who decided to leave Spain due to a crisis evoked by Anti-Jewish forces. The precarious situation of the Iberian Jews in Muslim Spain further escalated with the invasion of another extremist Muslim-Berber dynasty from North Africa, the Almohads or *al-Muwahḥhidun* (الموحدون). Under their rule other religions than Islam were outlawed which forced Christians and Jews alike to chose either between conversion, immigration or martyrdom. In order to save their lives many Jews headed for the Christian kingdoms in the North, including many intellectuals, taking with them Judeo-Arabic culture which should continue to prosper in Christian territories. Others, like family of the famous philosopher Moses ben Maimon (1135 – 1204), also known as *Rambam* (רמב"ם<sup>366</sup>) or Maimonides, fled in the opposite direction to North Africa. From Morocco he and his family went further eastwards and finally settled down in Egypt where Maimonides became a distinguished physician and philosopher.<sup>367</sup>

While many in times of crisis resorted to the Aristotelian works of Maimonides, others were seeking a spiritual refuge in Jewish mystics, known as the *Kabblah* (קבלה). The most famous kabbalistic work, the *Zohar* (הזוהר) meaning “The Splendour” or “The Radiance”, was most probably written by Moshe ben Shem Tov de León (1250 – 1305). According to Georg Bossong the *Kabballah* was written in the context of inner crisis and exile which is the reason why this mystic approach can be valued as a sort of “immaterial homeland”, especially intended for Jews of a more traditional background who rejected the radical works of Mainmonides and other Aristotelian philosophers<sup>368</sup>. The Kabbalah could be further interpreted as a work that was written with the intention to reconnect Jews to their own roots and to draw definite boundaries between the Jewish and the non-Jewish environment. The end of the Golden Age was also a time of identity crisis invoked by transboundary interactions and overall acculturation and eventual hostilities that reminded the Jews of their “otherness”. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the *Zohar* not only condemns the sinful behaviour of the rich and sophisticated Jewish aristocracy (e.g. influential court Jews) but also (sexual and romantic) relationships between Jews and non-Jews which were

<sup>365</sup> Hall 1990, p. 224-225 (cf. also Richard L. W. Clarke's notes of Hall's article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”)

<sup>366</sup> The Hebrew acronym רמב"ם stands for **R**abbi **M**osheh **B**en **M**aimon (רבי משה בן מיימון)

<sup>367</sup> Bossong 2008, pp. 32-33

Scheindlin 2002, pp. 323

<sup>368</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 39-45

considered to be deeply immoral<sup>369</sup>. However, interculturality continued to be the main feature of Iberian culture, even after the bigger part of the peninsula had been recaptured by Christian forces which might also be the reason why the *Kabbalah* remained remarkably popular among Sephardic Jews.

#### 4.3. Jews in Christian Spain

The *Reconquista*, the recapturing of the Iberian Peninsula by Christian forces, had almost entirely been accomplished by the mid-thirteenth century. Only a small fringe of it in the very South, the Emirate of Granada (est. in 1238) ruled by the Nasrids or *Banū Naṣr* (بنو نصر), remained under Muslim rule until its final fall in 1492. While most of the Muslim population that came under Christian rule was outlawed and their properties confiscated, Jews were still tolerated and allowed to stay in the Christian realms.<sup>370</sup>

Already from the beginning of the twelfth century, the cultural centre of the Sephardic Jews had gradually shifted from Muslim dominated South to the Christian part in the North of the Peninsula; this also brought along a shift of language use and literature for Sephardic scholarship. Hitherto Iberian Jews had written a large part of their works in Arabic but from now on Hebrew would become more important as an intellectual language; for instance, many important Judeo-Arabic works were translated into Hebrew. The reason for this shift was that Arabic speaking Jewry of former Al-Andalus now came into closer contact with Jewish communities in Northern Spain, Provence and Italy whose native tongue was another than Arabic what made it somewhat difficult from them to have access to that kind literature. One of the first works entirely written in Hebrew by a Sephardic Jew were the Bible commentaries by Abraham ibn Ezra (1092 – 1167) which were primarily intended for the Jews in Christian Europe. Another example is the *Mishneh Torah* (משנה תורה) authored by Maimonides who may have wanted to make this book more accessible for the Jews residing in Provence.<sup>371</sup>

According to Raymond P. Scheindling, the language shift from Arabic to Hebrew also reflects the significant change in the linguistic situation of the Iberian Jews after the Reconquista. While Jews under Muslim rule naturally had excess to and made use of the intellectual language of their Muslim neighbours, the excess to Christian scholarship, in change, was much more difficult. First of all, knowing solely one of the Christian vernacular languages, in the case of Northern Spain

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<sup>369</sup> Idem, p. 44

<sup>370</sup> Idem, p. 33

<sup>371</sup> Scheindlin 2002, p. 329

these were several medieval Romance languages and dialects, was not sufficient for studying or producing text in Latin. Secondly, in the Middle Ages scholarship was an almost exclusive domain of the Christian clergy. This made it quite difficult for Jews to have access to high Christian culture, even if they were familiar with Latin; at least this was the case in most parts of Christian Europe. In Castile, however, the multiple language and translation skills of the new Jewish immigrants were not overlooked. King Alfonso X also known as *El Sabio* (r. 1252 – 1284), “The Wise”, was a great supporter of the development of the Castilian language. He patronised many Jews who translated scientific works but also Jewish and Islamic religious writings into the dominant vernacular, mainly with the aim to make these works accessible for the Church or, to be exact, the Christian intelligentsia<sup>372</sup>. Another prominent patron of the twelfth century who emphatically supported the translations of Arabic works into Romance (early Castilian) and at a second stage into Latin was Raimundo de Salvestat, the archbishop of Toledo. As Paloma Díaz-Mas outlines, Jews collaborated sustainably to the “cultural and scientific enrichment of Castile” and as well as the rest of Europe. Thus, we can conclude that “the consolidation of the Castilian language as vehicle of artistic and technical expression<sup>373</sup>” was especially if not only possible due to the multilingual skills of non-Christian (also including number of Iberian Muslim) scribes. Concerning this matter, the power of what Benedict Anderson calls “print-capitalism” becomes conspicuously manifest (which is, as we remember, the adoption of a vernacular language in favour of an exclusive print language). I mention this particularly in relation to the emergence of a (Christian) Spanish nationalism that soon would have serious consequences for the Jewish subjects of Christian Spain.

The kings of Portugal, Castile, Navarre and Aragon benefited sustainably from the Jewish and remaining Muslim intelligentsia with their realms. However, this rather peaceful coexistence of three religions – known as *convivencia*<sup>374</sup> – was not completely free of interests. For example, in exchange for their services to the ruling Christian establishment (including special taxes, as well as their intellectual contributions) Jews were granted the protection of the Christian rulers, especially in Castile where the rights but also the duties of the Jewish subjects were retained in *Las Siete Partidas*, the “Seven-Part-Code”, that was co-authored by King Alfonso X. On the one hand this

<sup>372</sup> Scheindlin 2002, p. 378

<sup>373</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 4; cf. also Bossong 1982, p. 1ff; Idem 2008-2009, p. 17ff

<sup>374</sup> The term “*convivencia*” is often mentioned in one breath with the “Golden Age”, also for referring to the Muslim dominated society in *Al-Andalus*. However, as has been previously discussed before, the granted tolerance towards non-Muslim subjects on behalf of the Muslim rulers rather depended on the rulers' general attitude towards religious minorities within their realms and there have also been periods when Jews and Christians suffered severely under the Muslim regimes in power (cf. e.g. the Almohads or the Almoravids). Hence, we can assume that the picture of an all over tolerant medieval (no matter if Christian or Muslim) Spain is of quite recent date (cf. Lewis 2004 [1984], p. 13f), which is why we should think of terms like “the Golden Age” and “*convivencia*” as retrospectively imagined constructs, rather than general historical realities.

legal code guaranteed the Jews the free exercise of their faith as well as their own jurisdiction. Also their observance of the Sabbath should not be disturbed; they were allowed to build synagogues, even though in limited to a certain size and number. On the other hand Jews were explicitly prohibited from proselytising among Christians; neither were they allowed to administer any office that would give them any power over a Christian. Whenever a Jew wanted to convert to Christianity he was not to be disparaged, whereas a Christian who converted to Judaism was to be put to death immediately<sup>375</sup>. These measures shall remind us that the situation of the Sephardim under Christian rules was precarious to say the least. In this respect Haim Beinart reminds us that the positive attitudes of King Alfonso X towards his Jewish subjects should not be overestimated. Beinart points out that Alfonso already showed overall less tolerance towards the Jews in his kingdom than his father Fernando III *El Santo* (r. 1217 – 1252), “The Saint”, had done. King Fernando, for example, had refused to impose harsh laws against the practice of Jews lending money to Christians for interests which had been strongly criticised by Pope Gregory IX (r. 1127 – 1241)<sup>376</sup>. Alfonso, by contrast, was in fact considering the restriction of such practices. Furthermore, in 1258 he approved a law of dress regulations in Valladolid that should ban Jews, especially those of higher status, to dress like Christians.<sup>377</sup>

Throughout the thirteenth century the Jews also enjoyed much freedom in the neighbouring territories ruled by the Crown of Aragon<sup>378</sup>, to a great displeasure of the Church. Thus, the pope also tried to convince Jaime I de Aragón *El Conquistador*<sup>379</sup> (r. 1213 – 1276) of his duty to impose stricter laws against the Jews. Jaime finally yielded to the demands on behalf of the Church by giving more scope to the Dominican Order in his realm<sup>380</sup>. This was a rather pragmatic act; on the one hand he was placating the leaders of the Church but on the other he was still holding a protecting hand over his Jews<sup>381</sup>. In 1262, due to the growing pressure on the part of the Dominicans, the king allowed them to arrange a public disputation in order to prove that the Talmud contained evidence that the Christian faith was true. This disputation should become known as the Disputation of Barcelona (*Disputa de Barcelona*), named after its place of venue. On the Christian

<sup>375</sup> Bossong 2008, pp. 34-35

<sup>376</sup> Even King Fernando's efforts could be valued as political opportunism rather than a selfless commitment to protect the Jews of his realm from any harm. In fact he might have been more concerned about his own sovereignty vis-à-vis the Catholic Church.

<sup>377</sup> Beinart 1992 (1), p. 28-29

<sup>378</sup> Consisting of the Kingdom of Aragon and the County of Barcelona (Catalonia)

<sup>379</sup> Jaume I d'Aragó el Conqueridor (in Catalan), Chaime I d'Aragón o Conqueridor (in Aragonese)

<sup>380</sup> Beinart 1992 (1), p. 29

<sup>381</sup> However, we can assume that this “protecting hand” did strongly act upon certain (economic) interest. As Yom Tov Assis reminds us that “the royal treasury” usually was “in desperate need for money”. Thus, the attitude of the king towards his Jewish subjects usually “depended on the Jews's contribution to the royal treasury or rather on his [the king's] evaluation of this contribution”. (Assis 1997, p. 1)

side Fray Pablo Christiani (*Pau Cristià* in Catalan), a former Jew who had converted to Christianity was appointed to challenge the Jews. Those ones chose Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides<sup>382</sup>) as defender of their faith to whom the king himself assured free speech during the disputation which lasted four days long. Two documents give account about the course of events, one written in Latin, the other one in Hebrew by Nachmanides; the two coincide in certain accounts but differ in others, concerning the success of the disputation in particular. All the same, the king seemed to have been very impressed by Nachmanides' defence and presented him a considerable sum of money. When Moses ben Nachman went public with his version of events the Dominican friars accused him of blasphemy. As the pressure on him grew steadily Nachmanides finally decided to leave Barcelona in 1262 to settle down in the Holy Land<sup>383</sup>. Similar to the case of Yehuda Halevi, the constant pressure upon Jews in Aragon seemed to have nurtured Nachmanides' recollection and actual return to the imaginative homeland of the Jews.

The Disputation of Barcelona was the first and relatively weak climax of gradual rise of anti-Judaism in Christian. The growing pressure upon Jews should soon culminate in the installation of the Spanish Inquisition and, finally, the expulsion of the Jews two centuries later. But until this final measure was taken other remarkable tragedies were to take place which induced more and more Jews to be baptised which, yet not all against their will. Often the decision to convert to Christianity was made voluntarily and as an act of firm belief, as in the case of Abner of Burgos (1270 – 1347) who converted after having had a vision about the truth of the Christian faith. He would later become known by producing many inflammatory pamphlets against his ancestral faith still in Hebrew but under his Christian name Alfonso of Valladolid.<sup>384</sup>

As the Christian kings still were holding their protecting hands over “their” Jews the anti-Jewish sentiments among the common people grew and were even stirred up by Christian clerks. One of the most prominent voices was the Archbishop of Seville Ferrando Martínez whose hate sermons against the Jews would evoke the maybe fiercest anti-Jewish pogroms Spain has seen hitherto. Beginning from Seville on 4 June 1391, when the entire Jewish quarter was lit and many of its dwellers murdered, the riots rapidly spread across Castile and Aragon like a wildfire. Hundreds of Jews were killed in cities such as Valencia, Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona, Girona, Lleida. The year 1391, indeed, had plunged Iberian Jewry into a deep crisis. Since Jews were not ready to die a martyr's death even more Jews found their way to the baptismal fonts, out of more pragmatic reasons though which began to cause much distrust among the “old” Christian

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<sup>382</sup> Also known as Ramban (רמב"ן) in Hebrew and *Bonastruc ça Porta* in Catalan

<sup>383</sup> Assis 1992, pp. 100-102

<sup>384</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 33

population<sup>385</sup>. Many of converts rose to high positions within the Church and became fierce defenders for their new faith, the most prominent being Pablo Santa María (formerly: Shlomo Halevi, 1350 – 1435) and Gerónimo de Santa Fe (formerly: Jehoshua Lorki, died 1419). The latter had been proselytised by Vicente Ferrer (1357 – 1419). Together with the antipope Benedict XIII the three decided to organise a disputation which took place in the city of Tortosa in 1413 and which is known as the biggest disputation of its kind throughout the Middle Ages. It should last for two months and included no less than sixty nine sessions with the result that even more Jews decided to be baptised<sup>386</sup>.

The conversion of evermore Jews to Christianity gradually gave rise to a new problem that for the upcoming centuries should create a deep rift within the Spanish society which from now on should be divided into “old” and “new” Christians. The latter ones were under permanent general suspicion for being latent Judaisers, still attached to the faith of their forefathers. Thus, what has been a matter of faith should soon develop into a matter of race<sup>387</sup>. In 1449 the *estatutos de limpieza de sangre* (the statutes of purity of blood) were issued in the cities of Toledo and Ciudad Real which banned New Christians from occupying public offices and from testifying at court; until the end of the nineteenth century the amount of “impure blood” running through one's veins should decide on matters such as military or academic careers<sup>388</sup>. This hitherto unprecedented practice, using the matter of race as an excluding criteria has often been compared to the Nuremberg Laws which were imposed by the Nazis five hundred years later<sup>389</sup>. In fact, here Foucault's notion of knowledge and power takes on a new dimension which yet had to be institutionalised.

As the “*converso* problem” started to become virulent especially Catholic clergymen urged for a rapid and sustainable “solution”. In the eyes of the Church the *conversos*, these new Christians, were even worse than the Jews themselves because at the end of the day they were still considered as Christians and as Christians for violating the Holy Catholic faith they had to be brought to justice. In this respect, according to the Church, the Jews remained the biggest threat for the New Christians and their inclination to judaise<sup>390</sup>. The conversos were also called *marranos* (swines) or *tornadizos* (turncoats) which were expressions of resentment and contempt on behalf of the old Christians<sup>391</sup>. However, the *Reyes Católicos* (the Catholic Monarchs), Isabela I de Castilla (1451 – 1504) and Fernando II de Aragón (1452 – 1516), who got married in 1476 and hence

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<sup>385</sup>Idem, p. 47-48

<sup>386</sup> Idem, 49-50

<sup>387</sup> Idem, p. 50

<sup>388</sup> Idem, p. 50, 66

<sup>389</sup> Idem, p. 50

<sup>390</sup> Idem, p.54

<sup>391</sup> Kaplan Y. 2012, p. 138



unified their kingdoms, hesitated to deal with the *converso* problem for a long time since both of them depended strongly on the capital provided by their Court Jews (above all Abraham Senior and Isaak Abravanel<sup>392</sup>). Soon they could not longer ignore the “problem” and asked the pope for permission to install a special agency in order to attend to the matter. The pope approved their request and in 1478 the Holy Spanish Inquisition was finally installed and by 1490 no less than 13.000 New Christians would have been convicted of judaising, many of them burned at the stake. Already several year before, in 1483 the officiating Archbishops of Seville and Córdoba took measures in order to expel all Jews from Andalusia because, as they thought, the “*converso* problem” would not be solved until all Jews, who were all considered as potential seducers, would have been banished<sup>393</sup>. Therefore the expulsion of Andalusia can be regarded to as “experimental expulsion<sup>394</sup>” for being just a rehearsal of what was yet to come.

The end of the fifteenth century was also marked by several blood libels, the most prominent being the one of the Holy Child of La Guardia (*El Santo Niño de La Guardia*). In a inquisitional trial two *conversos* and one Jew were found guilty for having allegedly kidnapped and crucified a child for the purpose of practising conspiratorial magic involving the child's heart and a host. A child, of course, was never missed but in the end principal defendants together with five additional alleged partners in crime were burnt at the stake in 1491. Once again, the public anti-Jewish sentiments were at the verge of rage and the Catholic Monarchs were compelled to find a fast and final solution in the *converso* and Jewish question. At the urging of Tomás de Torquemada, the Grand Inquisitor-in-office and father confessor of Queen Isabella, the Catholic Monarchs signed the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews from Spain on March 31 1492.<sup>395</sup>

Here the long history of the Jews of Spain ends abruptly, though not surprisingly. On May 1 of that year King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile, the Catholic Monarchs, finally published their nationwide edict:

*“[...] we order all Jews and Jewesses of any age, who live, dwell and are found in our kingdoms and domains, whether born here or elsewhere, and present here for any reason, must leave our kingdoms and domains until the end of the next month of July this year [...]. They should not dare to return and live where they previously lived, not for passage or in any other form, under a penalty, that if they fail to do so and to obey the order, and if they are found living in our kingdoms and domains, or come here in any way, they should be put to death, their property being confiscated by our Court and Royal Treasury.”*<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Bossong 2008, p.54

<sup>393</sup> Idem, p. 51

<sup>394</sup> Beinart 1992b, p. 19f

<sup>395</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 52-53

<sup>396</sup> Taken from the Edict of Expulsion (Castillian version), translated by Beinart in Beinart 1992b, p. 30

Although we do not know exactly how many Jews left Spain<sup>397</sup> in the aftermath of the Edict (also known as Alhambra Decree), we do know for sure that most of the refugees crossed into neighbouring Portugal. There the Jews would be expelled only a few years later in 1497 which should actually culminate in a forced mass conversion rather than an organised deportation<sup>398</sup>. In 1498 the Jews of the Kingdom of Navarra, which hosted the last Jewish communities left on the peninsula, took the same measures as the neighbouring nations and expelled all the Jewish subjects from its territory which finally marked the end of (public) Jewish life on the Iberian Peninsula<sup>399</sup>.

The expulsion of the Jews from Spanish and Portuguese land, as has been mentioned before, did not resolve the “*converso* problem” which should remain virulent until the nineteenth century and yet in the twentieth century, in the course of the Spanish civil war, Spain was imagined to be divided into to “two Spains” (*las dos Españas*)<sup>400</sup>. As we will see later, the systematic persecution of alleged judaising individuals by the inquisition, which should remain in office until 1821 in Portugal and 1834 in Spain<sup>401</sup>, should also have a lasting effect on Sephardic identity.

Those exiles who did not flee to Portugal 1492 directly took refuge in North Africa (e.g. Morocco), France (e.g. Bayonne, Biarritz, Bordeaux) Italy (e.g. Venice, Rome, Leghorn, Ferrara) or the Ottoman Empire, the latter being the only realm actively encouraging the Jews to settle down within its territories. Others, especially the Jews and *coversos* in Portugal, escaped to Northern Europe (e.g. Amsterdam, London, Hamburg) or even to the territories in the New World in order to escape the long arm of the Spanish and the Portuguese Inquisition which, however, also should start operating in the colonies after some time. Also the Sephardic Jews who had formally found refuge in the Netherlands headed further West to the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean and the Northern South America where they established the first Jewish, that is to say, Sephardic communities in the New World<sup>402</sup>.

This worldwide dispersion was the beginning of what is usually called the Sephardic diaspora, or, by using the expression of Max Weinreich, the emergence of “Sepahrad II”. First and foremost, the new communities in Ottoman Empire and the Netherlands should remain the main cultural centres of the Sephardic Jewry for the following centuries – these were also the places where the identity of Sephardic Jew got its new shape(s).

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<sup>397</sup> The numbers vary between 150.000 and 300.000 individuals. Cf. Bossong 2008, p. 65; Beinart 1992b, p. 36f

<sup>398</sup> Beinart 1992b, p. 37, 40

<sup>399</sup> Kaplan, Y. 2012, p. 139

<sup>400</sup> Bossong 2008, pp. 67

<sup>401</sup> Idem, p. 64-65

<sup>402</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 35-38

#### 4.4. Imagining Sephardic Diasporas

Many Jews who left the Iberian Peninsula, though not all of them, moved eastwards to the Ottoman Empire where they were gladly received by Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481 – 1512)<sup>403</sup>. About King Ferdinand II of Aragon who had issued the Alhambra Decree that forced the Jews of Spain to choose either between conversion, emigration or death Bayezid is alleged to have said: “How can you consider intelligent a man who impoverishes his own reign to enrich mine?”<sup>404</sup>. In the Ottoman Empire the Jewish refugees were able to establish new communities, usually in cities or in areas that were closely controlled by the Sublime Porte<sup>405</sup>. However, the new Jewish settlements within the Empire were not established randomly but were strictly controlled by a policy of population transfer, called *sürgün* in Turkish. This policy did not only affect Jewish subjects but also other minorities, as well as Muslims, which had first of all economic reasons<sup>406</sup>. Soon there was a Spanish speaking congregation in almost every major city of the Ottoman Empire, so for example in Constantinople, Izmir (Bursa), Sarajevo, Belgrade, Monastir, Sofia, Filipopolis (Plovdiv), Jerusalem, Safed, to name only a few of them, but also in other territories that were strongly influenced by the Ottoman Empire, such as Budapest, Rhodes, Cairo and Vienna<sup>407</sup>.

Of course, the Jewish refugees from the Iberian Peninsula were not the first to establish Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire which already had been home to Romaniote (Byzantine) Greek-speaking Jews for many centuries, as well as to some smaller Jewish-Italian and Ashkenazic<sup>408</sup> and Karaite<sup>409</sup> communities. The Spanish exiles, who soon outnumbered these old established Jews, exerted an huge cultural influence on these autochthonous communities, of example on an linguistic level, as had been discussed in the chapter about the Judeo-Spanish language. Consequently, the arrival of the Spanish immigrants led to serious conflicts with Romaniote community in the first place. According to Benbassa and Rodrigue these “communal conflicts” were most predominantly characterised by differences in the interpretation of the religious law (*halakha*)<sup>410</sup>. Here, it becomes clear that the already mentioned cultural hegemony and religious authority of Sephardic Jews<sup>411</sup> was not always absorbed voluntarily by other Jewish-ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the dispersed Sephardic Jews keenly endeavoured to “recreate a 'paradise

<sup>403</sup> Bossong 2008, pp. 92-93

<sup>404</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 38

<sup>405</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 2

<sup>406</sup> Idem p. 5

<sup>407</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 39

<sup>408</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 39

<sup>409</sup> The Karites were “Jews who did not recognize the authority of the Oral Law” compulsory for Rabbinical Judaism. Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 5

<sup>410</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 11

<sup>411</sup> cf. Chapter 3.2.

lost”, which means they were imposing and perpetuating of their Iberian, first and foremost Spanish heritage. According to Benbassa and Rodrigue, these efforts gradually brought about the merging of the two notions of being Jewish and being Hispanic<sup>412</sup>. This phenomenon we have already encountered before in the chapter about Judeo-Spanish since Sephardic Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean gradually began to refer to their vernacular as *Judezmo* or *Jidio*; Jew became a synonym for Spaniard in the context of Diaspora – a similar phenomenon we shall encounter also in the Western Sephardic Diaspora where the two term “Jew” and “Portuguese” would even merge into a new national construct, as we will be discussed later.

Not only did the Sephardic Jew of the Ottoman Empire maintain the Hispanic identity, they even made efforts in order to adhered to their “regional” identity, they is to say that Sephardim very distinguished between their Spanish or Portuguese, as in the case of the Sephardic community of Monastir (modern day Bitola in Macedonia) reveals. There in the sixteenth century the consolidation in two “*landsmanschaftn*” generated an inner-Sephardic ethnic conflict between Sephardim of Spanish and Portuguese descent<sup>413</sup>.

Similar accounts we have of the Sephardic communities in Italy. In Venice, for example, also became the home of two different Sephardic congregations: the *Scuola Spagnola* (sic!) was the one frequented by Portuguese, manly *ex-converso* Jews (in Venice know as *ponentini*<sup>414</sup>, “Westerners”) who had turned their back on Portugal in order to be able to re-convert to Judaism; the *Scuola Levantina* was the second Sephardic congregation that had been founded by Sephardic merchants from the Ottoman Empire. Both synagogues are located in the tiny *Ghetto Vecchio* of Venice. Other than in the case of Monastir, their immediate vicinity caused the members of both congregations to cooperate with each other at a social and organizatorial level. According to Miriam Bodian the congregational approximation of the two Sephardic communities in Venice should be valued as an indicator that the ethnic divisions between Sephardic Jews gradually blurred, although, she emphasises, they never fully disappeared<sup>415</sup>. However, there seem to be more features that led to a more unified identity of Sephardic Jews.

Italy was also the place where one of the first Judeo-Spanish Bibles was printed in 1553. Its authors of the Ferrara Bible, the *ex-conversos* Abraham Usque (Duarte Pinel) and Yom Tob Attias (Jerónimo de Vargas), actually decided to publish two sample of the Bible<sup>416</sup>. One was intended for the use of Christians, while the other version clearly appealed to *concersos* returning to Judaism

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<sup>412</sup> Idem, p. 13

<sup>413</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 16-17

<sup>414</sup> cf. the nautic expressions *Ponente* (Western wind) in opposition to *Levante* (Eastern wind)

<sup>415</sup> Bodian 1997, p. 149-150

<sup>416</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 103

(which is the reason why also this version was printed a Latin typeface)<sup>417</sup>. The first Judeo-Spanish Bible had been printed a few year earlier in 1547 in Istanbul, published by Eliezer Soncino. It not only included the Ladino transliteration but also the original text in Hebrew and an additional neo-Greek transliteration (also in Hebrew characters)<sup>418</sup>. The the most important religious work ever published in Judeo-Spanish is, without any doubt, the *Me'am Lo'ez* (מעם לועז)<sup>419</sup>, a colossal biblical commentary initiated by Yaakov Culi (a.k.a. Kuli, Chuli, Khulli, Houli; 1690 – 1732). After his death Culi's œuvre was carried on by all together eleven co-authors in a stretch of 170 years and has not yet been accomplished. However the work turned out to be enormously popular which is the reason why it could be found in virtually any literate household. Especially after the rise and fall of Shabbetai Tzvi (1626 – 1676), a false messiahs whose charismatic sermons destabilized the entire Jewry of Europe and the Sephardic communities in particular<sup>420</sup>, the *Me'am Lo'ez* was intended as a handy tool to make Sephardic Jews once again familiar with their own religious traditions, first and foremost with the biblical texts. The commentary was printed not in *Ladino* (the liturgical calque language) but in *Judezmo*, the popular vernacular, at a time when most of Sephardic Jews did not have any or only little knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic<sup>421</sup>. The formative impact of religious literature on the Sephardic communities, especially in the Ottoman Empire, shall not be underestimated. According to Benbassa and Rodrigue it was “aiming for a wide, public audience” which is why religious Judeo-Spanish literature should be valued as

*“a response to real and perceived needs to strengthen the faith and resolve of the masses who were coping with increased economic and social problems which were making considerable inroads into traditional instruction in the post-Sabbatean period.”*

Judeo-Spanish as a language of print did not only have the power to compensate the trauma caused by Sabbateanism, just another crisis challenging Sephardic-Jewish self-image, but should be considered as the decisive catalyser for the formation of identity Eastern Sephardic Jewry. Once again Benedict Anderson's concept of “print-capitalism”, which implies that (national) communities are created by the adoption of a vernacular as print language instead of an unintelligible and exclusive one (e.g. Hebrew or Aramaic) , may serve as the paradigm of choice in order to explain the formation of not only national but also of religious identity. A collective identity can only emerge by creating a discourse in a language intelligible to all, so that the “ordinary man” will have

<sup>417</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 60-61

<sup>418</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 103

<sup>419</sup> מעם לועז is an expression taken from Ps 114, meaning “from a people of strange language” (other than Hebrew). In the Bible this foreign language was referred as Egyptian; in the Sephardic context this term was to be associated with *Judezmo*. cf. Bossong 2008, p. 99

<sup>420</sup> cf. Bossong 2008, p.94 – 98

<sup>421</sup> Idem, p. 98-102

a share in the collective and constitutive narratives (e.g. biblical and talmudic texts).

The nurturing role that religious literature played in the formation of Sephardic identity in the Eastern Mediterranean diaspora and even beyond coincided with the emergence of a technology that should have a lasting impact on the formation of Sephardic identity in general. The Judeo-Spanish printing press – a medium that was enthusiastically received by Sephardim throughout South Eastern Europe and in the Middle East – most certainly was the most important promoter to consolidate a Sephardic group identity<sup>422</sup>. Except for religious literature also secular media would benefit massively from the emergence of print. For example, between the last decades of the nineteenth century until the inter-war period in the twentieth century there were almost four hundred Judeo-Spanish periodicals published throughout South Eastern Europe and the Middle East<sup>423</sup>.

Nevertheless, we shall not forget that also other (oral) literary forms, such as poetry (with the most popular metre known as *coplas* which were heavily influenced by medieval Spanish verses<sup>424</sup>), alongside with other traditional oral genres, such as proverbs, popular stories, ballad and songs (*canticas*)<sup>425</sup> should make a huge contribution to the formation and maintenance of Sephardic identity in the diaspora.

As we see, Judeo-Spanish, indeed, created a peculiar field of discourse, featuring many different – oral, as well as written/printed – narratives. Since the orientation towards an imagined or real homeland is one of the most important criteria for diaspora communities, it is not surprising at all that narratives about *Sepharad* (I) were among the most popular and relevant ones. Interestingly, the ancient homeland tended to be portrayed in two different, almost contradicting ways: on the one hand it was very much positively connoted and even glorified; on the other hand, Spain was remembered as a terrifying and traumatising place.

#### 4.4.1. The Glory of Spain

The role that Spain as well as Portugal played and still play in the narratives of Sephardic Jews that further consolidate Sephardic consciousness or identity are not always definite but rather ambivalent. They oscillate between the glorification and the condemnation of Spain as will

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<sup>422</sup> As a matter of fact, the Sephardic *minhag*, as well as the Sephardic/Oriental *nusach* (נוסח, style of prayer service), could only spread out by publishing and distributing books (i.e. halakhic literature, *Sidurim*, *Machzorim*) throughout the Sephardic world.

<sup>423</sup> Stein 2004, p. 56 (cf. also Gaon 1965)

<sup>424</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 105f

<sup>425</sup> For more details about Sephardic literary genres cf. Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 102-150

hereinafter be assessed in detail.

As has been outlined before<sup>426</sup>, Jews living in medieval Spain imagined themselves to be the descendant of the tribe of Juda that were mysteriously saved from deportation to Babylon by sailing westwards until they encountered what should become known as *Sepharad*. This story, as has been discussed before, most probably served for legitimising the Jewish presence in Spain before the Christian rulers. Similar mechanism seem to be at work when Sephardic Jews in the diaspora (*Sepharad II*) talk about their homeland (*Sepharad I*). According to Miriam Bodia, the typical medieval Sephardic Jew most popularly imagined by Sephardim in the diaspora is usually the figure of the Spanish-Jewish courtier who could be (maybe all at once) a physician, advisor, tax collector, diplomat or astronomer to the king, and defender of Jewish interests at court, thus, “a figure without parallels in other Jewries<sup>427</sup>”. The emphasis of an alleged aristocratic standing which quite often goes hand in hand with the glorification of the ancestral homeland also led Benbassa and Rodrigue to conclude that the past of Sephardic Jews after the expulsion has in fact been strongly mystified and sometimes idealized<sup>428</sup>.

Indeed, many oral and written accounts of Sephardic Jews about Spain are very emotional and sometimes even accompanied by what could be described as a mysterious aura. For example, when Mordechai Abrell recounts his first trip to Barcelona he did not only talk about a feeling of being “at home” but also about something that can be described as a *déjà vu*:

*In Spain, I enjoy it because I feel at home. [...] I was in Barcelona. I went to the Old City. [Suddenly, I had the feeling that] I was here [before] ... I was here! Yes, here, this street. I was here! [Later] I gave a lecture only to Sepharadi Jews. This was in Ladino. And said: I had this feeling. Some of you have had this feeling [too when visiting Spain]?? Yes, yes, yes, yes [they answered]!!<sup>429</sup>*

There are similarly emotionally charged accounts of Sephardic Jews who at the turn of the twentieth century travelled from the Ottoman Empire to the “land of their ancestors” in order to discover the common features between the Sephardim and the Spaniards who hitherto had lived separated for almost half a millennium<sup>430</sup>. One of those travellers was José M. Estrugo, an Ottoman Jew originally from Izmir (Smyrna), who emigrated to the United States in 1920 and even fought in the Spanish Civil War<sup>431</sup>. In his travelogue entitled *El Retorno a Sefarad* which was published in 1933 he describes his overwhelming feelings when first setting foot in Spain in 1922:

*“For the first time in my life I felt truly at home, like a native. Here I was not, I could not be*

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<sup>426</sup> cf. Chapter 4.1.

<sup>427</sup> Bodian 1997, p. 85

<sup>428</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 12

<sup>429</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbell (12.4.2011)

<sup>430</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 171

<sup>431</sup> Ben-Ur 2009, p. 10; cf. also [http://www.mediterraneosur.es/arte/res\\_estrugo\\_sefarad.html](http://www.mediterraneosur.es/arte/res_estrugo_sefarad.html), 7.2.2012

*an intruder! For the first time I felt completely at home, much more so than in the Jewish quarter where I had been born! I am not ashamed to confess that I bent down, in an outburst of indescribable emotion, and kissed the ground on which I was standing.”* [original in Spanish, trans. by George K. Zucker]<sup>432</sup>

Another Sephardic Jew from the Ottoman Empire, Maurice Jacques Bensasson, originally from Bursa, also travelled to Spain in the quest of his roots, a two decades earlier in 1900<sup>433</sup>. He was not less emotionally moved as Estugo when he arrived in the “homeland of his blood bothers” (*patria de mis hermanos de raza*)<sup>434</sup>. In his book *Los Israelitas Españoles* he informs us about patriotic Spanish sentiments which broke out when he was leaving the Spanish capital during his tour through the homeland:

*“I was proud to think that I was as Spanish as those who comprised the life of Madrid. ... My Spanish blood seemed to feel the influence of that milieu, the pleasant temperature of the environment, the refreshing homeland air, the happy noise of all those beings through whom ran the same blood. ... Madrid, Spain, Spaniards, I love you, I adore you because I am Spanish.”* [original in Spanish, trans. by George K. Zucker]<sup>435</sup>

Bensasson's narration is reminiscent of the notion of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) which, too, is inverted in an affirmative way by imagining Sephardic Jews to be as Spanish as the Spaniards themselves since they are adherents of the same race and bound together by blood. This resembles the manner in which Dutch-Portuguese Jews in the diaspora used to redefine the term *limpieza de sangre*.

Bensasson's book also contains a collection of letters he had exchanged with Dr. Ángel Pulido Fernández (1852 – 1932), a Spanish physician and politician (senator) who sought to re-establish the contact between Spain and the Sephardic Jews in the Balkans, Anatolia and North Africa<sup>436</sup>. On a journey down the River Danube Pulido once met a Sephardic couple which as the first time he heard spoken *Judezmo*. This surprising encounter had impressed him so much that he dedicated his life to run a campaign in order to rehabilitate Sephardic Jews into Spanish culture and society. He published two books summarising his travel experiences. The first one, *Los Israelitas Españoles y el Idioma Castellano* (1904), became a huge success inside and outside Spain which also helped him to become known among Sephardic intellectuals and community leaders in North Africa and the Levant. Pulido accounts that many Sephardic Jews he had met still had very emotional feelings about their ancient homeland<sup>437</sup>. About Enrique Bejarano, leader of the Sephardic

<sup>432</sup> Estugo 1933, pp. 35-37 in Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 171

<sup>433</sup> Bensasson 1905, p. 7, 13

<sup>434</sup> Idem, p. 8

<sup>435</sup> Bensasson 1905, p. 215 in Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 171

<sup>436</sup> Meyuhas Ginio, p. 193ff

<sup>437</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 154



community's school in Bucharest and who as also the first Sephardic Jew Pulido ever met, he wrote:

*"[Bejaranos's] broad knowledge attracted me...; and more than that I was impressed by the outburst of love for Spain the he expressed with a great deal of emotion and in very delicate and tender phrases, as if it were a matter of religious and secular belief."* [original in Spanish trans. by George K. Zucker]<sup>438</sup>

With many of the Sephardim Pulido had met during his journeys he stayed in close contact over many years. The correspondence he kept with them were published in his second book *Espanoles sin Patria y La Raza Sefaradī*<sup>439</sup> which contains various letters that account how well Pulido's campaign was received by some Sephardic intellectuals. For example, Moritz Levy, a student of philosophy in Vienna, was one of the Sephardim who obviously was very moved by Pulido's first book<sup>440</sup>:

*"It is impossible for me to express the impressions which – as a Jew – my heart feels on reading your book, as well as your articles filled with love and friendship for our Jewish people. A nervous movement takes hold of my body, my thoughts whirl and I seek in vain to calm myself."* [original in Spanish, trans. by George K. Zucker]

Moritz Levy's emotional reaction towards Pulido's campaign, as well as the efforts made by José M. Estrugo, Maurice Jacques Bensasson and Mordechai Arbell who traveled to Spain in order to get in touch with their cultural roots indicate that Sephardic Jews since their expulsion must have had their own particular ways to keep their memory of the ancient homeland alive. According to Tamar Alexander-Frizer, one way to preserve the memory of a glorious ancient past was the production of popular literature. The Judeo-Spanish novels that were circulating throughout Sephardic communities in Europe and the Middle East were full of accounts about the "former opulence of the Spanish Jewry during the golden age". Even though many of the details told in these stories, including its main characters and plots, may "belong to the realm of fiction" the aim of the authors was very clear; the feeling of "longing for the glorious past when Jews enjoyed wealth and political power" before the expulsion was usually at their forefront<sup>441</sup>. As example Alexander-Frizer mentions a typical *motif* featured by many Sephardic novel: there are the numerous popular stories which end with the marriage between a Jew and a Christian princess, an event that would have hardly ever taken place in real life<sup>442</sup>. The subtext of this *motif* rather meant to suggest that Jews were so much respected or so cunning that even Christian kings would have give away their daughters to them.

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<sup>438</sup> Pulido Fernández 1905, p. 3 in Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 153

<sup>439</sup> Pulido Fernández 1905

<sup>440</sup> Pulido Fernández 1905, p. 121 in Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 170

<sup>441</sup> Alexander-Frizer 2008, p. 88

<sup>442</sup> As an example, see "The Wealthy Señor Miguel" retold and analyzed by Tamar Alexander-Frizer. (cf. Alexander-Frizer 2008, p. 88ff)

Another literary genres which Tamar Alexander classifies as the “magic Sepharic fairy tail”, also served its authors to create a connection to the Spanish homeland, for example by mentioning the names of geographical locations on the Iberian Peninsula as well as typical names of people of kings and other historical figures<sup>443</sup>. But not only Sephardic literature genres, even one's own family story or tradition could create a direct personal link to the land of origin<sup>444</sup>. These family narratives are usually linked to a town or a certain region within Spain or Portugal. Mordechai Arbell is no exception in this respect. He distinguishes between the twofold origin of his family:

*“The Arouetys [the family on the mother's side] are [from] Aragon. [On the father's side the family name] it's not Arbella. It's Varsano. I changed it to Arbella. Varsano, they are Catalonians [sic, Catalans]. And we know, we have the family history from Spain till today.”*<sup>445</sup>

In other cases the family names themselves gives a clue of a Sephardic family's origin, as do the names *de Avila* (from the city of Ávila) or *Saragosti* (deriving from the city of Saragossa)<sup>446</sup>.

As has been outlined already, also Sephardic congregations could give some indication of the origin of its members. Many synagogues that were established in the Ottoman Empire after the *gerush* bore the name of certain Iberian towns or regions, such as *Toledo*, *Cordova*, *Catalonia* or *Portugal*. In other words, Jews who claimed to be from a certain area or city tended to segregate in order to form a particular community which should ensure the protection of “the specific ethnic-regional character” of its members, as well the preservation of their typical traditions and customs<sup>447</sup>. Today, the names and the history of these congregations could be even used for the reconstruction of one's own family history. Mordechai Arbella, of example, is convinced that his mother's family originally came from Aragon since his mother's family name was also very common among Jews in Monastir (Bitola)<sup>448</sup>:

*“I think that the name Arouety...I found it. I found it in Aragon, in the city of Tarazona. Maybe there was the same name, I don't know. But, in Macedonia there is a town that was called by the Turks Monastir. [...] [T]oday it's call[ed] Bitulia [sic, Bitola]. And it were there two synagogues. One is called Portugal and one is called Aragon. So, Tarazona - Aragon, the Arouetys [are] from Aragon.”*

Of course the search of genealogical traces is complicated by the absence of revealing documents. From a scientific point of view, Jewish names are indeed very helpful when it comes to the reconstruction of the migration waves and language shifts (for example from Arabic to Romance

<sup>443</sup> Idem, p. 94, 90ff

<sup>444</sup> Idem, p. 93 (cf. also Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 12)

<sup>445</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbella (12.4.2011)

<sup>446</sup> Alexander-Frizer 2008, p. 74

<sup>447</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 16

<sup>448</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbella (12.4.2011)

in medieval Spain), however, according to Paul Wexler, family names should not be used as a truthful index for the search of a geographical origin because these all too often evoke far-fetched assumptions<sup>449</sup>. Nevertheless, as had been stressed at the very beginning of this analysis, the quest for origin, or to be precise, the narrative about origin is almost compelling for the formation of identity. Another example in this regard the Sephardic family name Toledano. As Alexander-Frizer holds, the Toledano family claims that the name actually means “no Toledo”. Members of this family still relate the story that when their ancestors were banished from the city of Toledo, “they swore never to return, in effect saying “no” to Toledo”<sup>450</sup>. Although the veracity of this story is very hard to prove it has to be valued as a very meaningful narrative for the Toledano family after all. This narrative is not merely a story about a family's origin but it also reflects the tragic uprooting of Sepharic Jews, thus neither shall the members of the Toledan family commemorate their origin (Spain and most probably Toledo) nor must they forget the expulsion from their homeland. Here the other important notion about the homeland *Sepharad* (I) becomes manifest. As we shall see, the traumata caused by persecutions, forced conversions and, finally, the expulsion, too, are constitutive narratives for the formation of Sephardic identity which, in turn, indicates that many Sephardic Jews have very ambivalent feelings about their ancient homeland.

#### 4.4.2. The Trauma of Expulsion

The pride of their ancestry and the search for historical connections to Spain are not the only features defining Sephardic identity in connection to Spain. This ambivalence may even become manifest in one single person: the same person glorifying Spain in one occasion may express his or her bitter resentments to the land of the forefathers in another. An example in this respect is Moritz Levy, the previously mentioned Sephardic philosophy student from Vienna who carried on correspondence with Ángel Pulido Fernández:

*“To my mind come recollections of the history of our ancestors in Spain. Glory, wealth, science and progress, decadence, poverty and exile. To my eyes come the horrible images of the courts of the inquisition. ... “But what did our ancestors do to be so persecuted?” “Is it possible that there was no human heart to intervene on their behalf?” [original in Spanish trans. by George K. Zucker]*<sup>451</sup>

Although he does not abstain from mentioning Spain's glorious past, he also strongly

<sup>449</sup> Wexler 1996, p.128-129

<sup>450</sup> Alexander-Frizer 2008, p. 74

<sup>451</sup> Pulido Fernández 1905, p. 122 in Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 174

emphasises the great misery of his forefathers. This aspect of Spain is also highlighted by other correspondents mentioned in Pulido's book *“Españoles sin Patria y La Raza Sefaradí”*. At one point Pulido had to admit that his campaign – bringing Spain and Sephardic Jews closer together – was not always enthusiastically adopted by Sephardic Jews. Some, in fact, explicitly uttered their refusal to establish any contact with the lost homeland:

*“A distinguished [Sephardi] from a city in Hungary, asked by an illustrious Budapest attorney to establish correspondence with us, resists doing so. From his letter it seems that they (the Israelites) can be proud of their ancestors, of whom they speak gladly; that there is interest in Spain, but no thoughts of going where their ancestors were treated horribly. They are not interested in seeing modern Spanish books and journals.”* [original in Spanish trans. by George K. Zucker]<sup>452</sup>

Again, the glory of Spain is juxtaposed in opposition to what Tamar Alexander-Frizer phrases as “memory of suffering” and which is very conspicuous within many Sephardic narratives. She further emphasizes the fact that personal narratives or private family traditions are not the only carriers of the bitter memory and point out that also “collective historical legends” draw upon “the traumatic aspects of the expulsion”<sup>453</sup>.

As a matter of fact, the literary genres adopted by Sephardic Jews in the nineteenth century strongly reflect on the ambivalent feelings towards Spain. Paloma Díaz-Mas names several novels and theatre plays that almost exclusively deal with themes such as the persecution of *marrano* or the unscrupulous methods of the Inquisition. Popular novels representing that “typical view” of Sephardic Jews towards inquisitorial Spain hold titles such as *La judia salvada del convento* (The Jewish woman saved from the convent), *Don Miguel San Salvador* (about a convert<sup>454</sup>), *La Hermosa Rahel* (a story about *marranos* of Portuguese origin); among theatre plays there were *Don Yosef de Castilla*, *Don Abravanel i Formosa o Desteramiento de los djudios de Espanya* (Abravenel and Formosa or exile of the Jews from Spain) and *Los marranos*<sup>455</sup>. The latter novel is about a convert by the name of Miguel who “was supposed to incline toward dark fanaticism and embrace Christianity” in order to save himself from persecution. In fact, he became an inquisitor himself persecuting Elena, a Jewish woman who turns out to be his own mother. Similar plots frequently reappear in many Judeo-Spanish novels throughout the nineteenth century<sup>456</sup>. These stories are usually featured by basic themes like denunciation, persecution, separation from one's family,

<sup>452</sup> Pulido Fernández 1905, p. 186 in Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 172

<sup>453</sup> Idem, p. 76

<sup>454</sup> Alternative title: *Don Miguel San Salvador o un korason entre dos amores. Kuento istoriko akontesido en Espania en la epoka de la ekspulsion de los djudios* (see <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/becites/ladino/63062107s.html>, 9.2.2013)

<sup>455</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 174-175

<sup>456</sup> Díaz-Mas 1992, p. 175

education in a Christian convent, torture and *Auto-da-fé* tribunals<sup>457</sup> and sometimes even a miraculous rescue and an escape to safe havens in cities such as London or Amsterdam. Usually these stories were adoptions from French, Hebrew or German novels translated into Judeo-Spanish<sup>458</sup>. One of these stories was especially popular among the Sephardim of Vienna who claimed that the founder of their community was, in fact, a *marrano* of Spanish origin by the name of Baron Diego d'Aguilar, also known as Moses Lopes Pereira. His legendary biography is also related in the first official chronicle of the Sephardic community of Vienna. In the preface of this chronicle, which had been published in 1888 the “memory of suffering” was laid great stress upon:

*“Namentlich waren es Spanien und Portugal, diese sogenannten rein katholischen Lande, die am verfolgungssüchtigsten gegen das Judenthum [sic], und zahllose Leben fielen diesen gehässigen Fanatikern zum Opfer, machten so viele glückliche und friedlich lebende Familien elend und zu Bettlern.”*<sup>459</sup> [original in Spanish trans. by MS]

The legend of Diego d'Aguilar not only exemplifies how Sephardic Jews in the diaspora used to imagine their Spanish homeland and the *marranos'* fate on the peninsula in the centuries following the expulsion; on the basis of the narrative outlined in the legend we may also draw many inferences about the actual conditions and the history of Sephardic Jewry in Vienna in the nineteenth century. This was the same time when nationalism was about to become a popular ideology across Europe and it is not surprising that also Sephardic Jews would evolve their own particular variety of diasporic nationalism. Interestingly, the Austro-Hungarian capital played a very special role in the emergences and propagation of Sephardic nationalism in the course of the nineteenth century. Hence, the legendary account of Diego also has to be discussed exactly in this ideological and social context which is why a short history of Sephardic notions about nationhood will be expounded. As we will see, Sephardic nationalism is closely intertwined with the diaspora experience of Sephardic Jews.

#### 4.5. Imagining Sephardic Nationhood

As mentioned above, the nineteenth century was also the time when Eastern Sephardic Jews in the first instance developed a peculiar sense of Sephardic nationhood, or as Benbassa and Rodrigue call it, “Sephardism<sup>460</sup>”. It was this an ideology especially popular among Sephardic Jews

<sup>457</sup> An *Auto-da-fé* (port.: act of faith) was a public inquisitorial show trial against heretics (incl. Judaizers). The most severe punishment to be imposed was death by burning. (cf. Pérez 2006, p. 154ff)

<sup>458</sup> Studenmund-Halévy 2010a (<http://www.davidkultur.at/ausgabe.php?ausg=84&artikel=108>, 9.2.2013)

<sup>459</sup> Papo, Zemlinsky 1888, p. 1

<sup>460</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 143ff

on the Balkans (above all in Zagreb and Sarajevo) but also Vienna played a special role in the emergence of Sephardism since many young Sephardim from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina spent their university years in the Austro-Hungarian capital. Vienna was also the place where the first Sephardic academic association (*Sosyedad Akademika de Djudios Espanyoles: Esperanza*<sup>461</sup>) for the support of Sephardism was founded. Sephardism was originally meant as a culturalist trend, thus, putting strong emphasis on the language and culture of Sephardic Jews<sup>462</sup>, but soon it changed into an ideological movement, similar to the emancipatory ambitions of Central Eastern Jewry. Sephardism can be valued as a counter movement to (Ashkenazi dominated) Zionism<sup>463</sup> which is why Benbassa and Rodrigue refer to it as a “Diaspora-type” kind of Zionism or nationalism. Its supporters hoped that Sephardic culture would continue to “flourish in both the Diaspora and Palestine” even after the establishment of a new Jewish homeland<sup>464</sup>. Again, this identity discourse about Sephardic nationhood was a predominant intellectual enterprise, which is not surprising since, following Erich Hobsbawm, nationalist aspirations are usually invented by an intellectual elite. Thus, it is also not surprising that organisations such as *Esperanza* made use of the Sephardic press, if not of their own printed media in order to distribute their ideology<sup>465</sup>. Evidently, the emergence of nationalist aspirations and print were strongly associated with each other.

However, the Balkans and Vienna were not the first places where a sense of Sephardic nationhood had emerged. The Sephardic Jews of the Western diaspora, those who had established themselves in Northern Europe and the New World, already had their own kind of national consciousness, long before something similar would evolve among their Eastern co-religionists. The reasons therefore were similar (e.g. the interaction with Ashkenazic Jews would also play a significant role in the formation of a Sephardic nationhood), though not the same since the cultural and historical context of Western Sephardic Jews was distinct from the one in the Eastern Mediterranean. For example, one important difference was that “print-capitalism” and matters of language did not play the same decisive role in the West as they did in the East. While Eastern Sephardic Jews in the seventeenth century adopted their own vernacular as literary language, Sephardim of the Western diaspora, in Amsterdam for instance, gradually ceased to produce literature in Spanish or Portuguese<sup>466</sup>. Nevertheless, the Sephardic Jews in North Western Europe

<sup>461</sup> For more details about *Esperanza* (“Hope”) see Ayala, von Schmädel 2010

<sup>462</sup> Ayala, von Schmädel 2010, p. 85

<sup>463</sup> In the course of the nineteenth century the Sephardim of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia were soon outnumbered by Ashkenazic immigrant who had moved there when these parts of the Balkans were incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

<sup>464</sup> Benbassa, Rodrigue 2000, p. 147

<sup>465</sup> cf. Ayala, von Schmädel 2010

<sup>466</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 98-99

(e.g. Amsterdam, London, Hamburg) as well as in the New World, who predominantly were descendent from former *conversos* of Portuguese origin, began to evolve into a endogamous “nation”, called *nação* in Portuguese. One reason for the adoption of this term may result from the fact that in the seventeenth century the Dutch authorities generally used the term *Portugeesche natie* (Portuguese Nation) in order to refer to the new *converso* immigrants on their territories. At this time it was not uncommon at all to identify foreign residents with their ethnic-religious origin<sup>467</sup>. The Austrian Emperor Joseph II (r. 1765 – 1790) for example, too, used the term nation (*jüdische Nation*) in order to refer to his Jewish subjects who, in turn, frequently called themselves “Israelite Nation” (*israelitische Nation*)<sup>468</sup>.

Nation, in terms of how the political authorities used it, directly derives from the meaning of the Latin word *natio* which in Roman antiquity and in the Middle Ages referred “to a local community of foreigners (never one's own community)”<sup>469</sup>; it can therefore be compared with the Biblical word *goy* (גוי) for nation or people which later became a synonym for gentile. Although the Portuguese term *os da nação* (those of the Nation) seems to derive from a designation used by the Dutch authorities it was already a common term used even before the time of the expulsion. In Spain, during the sixteenth century, terms like *gente del lineage* (people of the lineage), *esta gente* (those people), *esta generación* (this generation), *esta raza* (this race), as well as *los de la nación* (those of the nation) were frequently used by old Christian to refer to Crypto-Jews (*conversos*) who before had rather been know as *judaizantes* (Judaisers) or *marranos*. This shift of terminology indicates a certain emphasis on “the conversos' purported ethnic or racial traits”<sup>470</sup>. As Miriam Bodian points out, one reason why *conversos* in Portugal being persecuted the Inquisition and its racial fanaticism accounted for by the *estatutos de limpieza de sangre* (the purity of blood statues)<sup>471</sup> adopted “nation” as self-imposed term was the effort of redefining this term in a positive way by inscribing it “Iberian values concerning ethnicity and virtue”<sup>472</sup>. When *conversos* converted back to Judaism and found themselves on “free soil”, for example in the Netherlands, “they suddenly became what they had never been before, a well-defined group”. From now on the term “nation” should “define the population of *conversos* and ex-*conversos*” but at the same time is was used to refer to the expanding diaspora as a whole<sup>473</sup>.

However, the term *nação* still implied a certain racial component which became manifest

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<sup>467</sup> Bodian 1997, p. 6f

<sup>468</sup> Grunwald 1926, p. 29

<sup>469</sup> Bodian 1997, p. 6

<sup>470</sup> Idem, p. 11

<sup>471</sup> Idem

<sup>472</sup> Idem, p. 14-15

<sup>473</sup> Idem, p. 18

when more and more Ashkenazic Jews began to immigrate to the Netherlands. Due to the different *natureza* (nature, character) of these new arrivals<sup>474</sup>, the Dutch-Portuguese Jews did not consider their co-religionists as members of “the Nation” which is why the Portuguese Nation rather kept to itself, trying to avoid to their Ashkenazi neighbours with whom they did not want to intermingle<sup>475</sup>. Levantine Sephardim, in turn, were very well associated with “the Nation” on behalf the Portuguese/Dutch Jews<sup>476</sup>. There are accounts of the first Jewish settlement in the Americas which was established in the city of Recife when the Dutch West India Company conquered some parts of today's North Eastern Brazil, known by the Portuguese as *Capitania de Pernambuco* (Captaincy of Pernambuco). Recife, Pernambuco's capital, was under Dutch rule between 1630 and 1654<sup>477</sup>. Many of the Dutch settlers actually were Sephardic Jews of Portuguese origin which is the reason why the city became home of the first synagogue ever erected in the Americas, known as *Kahal Zur Israel* (קהל צור ישראל)<sup>478</sup>. The small number of Ashkenazic Jews who arrived together with the more numerous Sephardic settlers from Holland, naturally, did not form part of “the Nation” whereas the very few Levantine Sephardim who also arrived in Dutch Brazil were very well considered to be *gente da nação* (people of the Nation)<sup>479</sup>.

Although “being part of the Nation” is an attribution primarily common among Jews of Dutch-Portuguese descent, Mordechai Arbell emphasizes the importance of national consciousness among Sephardic Jew in general, regardless of whether they are of Portuguese or Spanish origin. He was born in Bulgaria into an Eastern Sephardic family that immigrated to Israel in 1941. As has been mentioned before, for many years Mordechai Arbell served as an Israeli diplomat in several Caribbean states<sup>480</sup> where he established contact with the local Jewish communities. Researching the history of the Caribbean and South American Sephardim he arrived at the following conclusion:

*“We [all Sephardic Jews] are a nation. Afterwards a religion. Those who were Catholic...they converted...are of the Jewish Nation. This is something the Ashkenasis don't have. [...] The Jewish Nation. When someone meets another one, not sure if he's Jewish or not [he asks]... “Are you part of the Nation?” [and if the other one answers] “Yes, I'm part of the Nation” [that] means [he's] part of the Jewish Nation.”* [original in Spanish, trans. by MS]<sup>481</sup>

<sup>474</sup> Idem, p. 153-154

<sup>475</sup> Idem, p. 4, 133

<sup>476</sup> Idem, p. 146

<sup>477</sup> Gonsalves de Mello 1996, p. 199ff

<sup>478</sup> Idem, p. 230-231; Topel 2005, p. 188

<sup>479</sup> Gonsalves de Mello 1996, p. 245-246

<sup>480</sup> Mordechai Arbell served as Israeli ambassador in Panama and Haiti (extraterritorial) and he was also Israeli consul in Colombia and Turkey.

<sup>481</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbell (18.4.2012)

Original version in Spanish: “[Los sefaradíes] Somos nación. Religión después. Estos los que son judíos católicos...se convirtieron...son da la nación judía. Este es algo que no es ashkenazí. [...] La Nación Judía. Cuando



In Mordechai Arbell's personality many different aspects of Jewish identity merge: first of all, he considers himself as Israeli but also as part of the "Jewish Nation" by which he actually means the community of Sephardic Jews. Furthermore, also his Bulgarian heritage and his Zionist ideology are integral parts of his personal identity. On a personal level, this reflects once more what Stuart Hall describes as the *hybridity* which diaspora societies generally inhere and which makes it totally impossible to trace one's identity back to only one single origin. However, what is interesting is that Mordechai Arbell personally adopted the term "Nation" as used by Western Sephardic Jews<sup>482</sup> but, as we will see shortly, such comparisons are not as far-fetched as one might think. There are accounts, also of Eastern Sephardic Jews who used to stress their pure-blooded connections to the ancestral homeland. All this, of course, cannot be understood without the historical framework and bearing in mind how terms such as "nation" or "purity of blood" have been reinterpreted in the diaspora. In order to grasp diasporic identity one also has to grasp the discourses constructing it. Especially in connection with oral accounts (e.g. the interview with Mordechai Arbell) Lynn Abrams reminds us that discourses are usually "subjective versions of the past" which arose when the teller of a narrative attempts to draw his own life story "upon discourses from a wider culture"<sup>483</sup>. The aim is always the same: the creation of coherence which rests upon "the principals of causality and continuity"<sup>484</sup>. These two principals may easily applied to the mechanisms that construct cultural identity which, too, is aspiring after continuity, as Stuart Hall has outlined already. When having a closer look at the (subjective) discourses of the past it soon becomes clear that it is by no means easy to create a coherent narrative about a person's own past and history which proves to be full of ruptures and discontinuities. As we have seen before, the same is true about discourses that have been drafted in order to form a sense of community, such as foundational myths. The legend of Diego d'Aguilar is the perfect example for such a myth, not only because it is featured by popular discourses about the homeland but also because it vividly reflects the *hybridity* that is so characteristic for diaspora communities.

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uno encuentra a otro, no sabe si es judío o no [pues pregunta]..."¿Ud. es de la Nación?" [y si el otro responde] "Sí, soy de la Nación." Es decir [el es] de la Nación Judía."

<sup>482</sup> Mordechai Arbell does not like the distinction many academics use to make between "Eastern" and "Western" Sephardim – he personally thinks that there is only one Sephardic identity. Cf. Interview with Mordechai Arbell (12.4.2011)

<sup>483</sup> Abrams 2010, p. 63

<sup>484</sup> Idem, p. 42



## 5. Imagining the Sephardic Community of Vienna

### 5.1. Baron Diego d'Aguilar – A Legendary Figure between Myth and Reality

The legend of Baron Diego d'Aguilar (Diego de Aguilar) – also known by his Jewish name Moses Lopes Pereira (Mosche Lopez Pereyra) – is a perfect example of the consolidation of history and fiction. Although there is no doubt that a man by the name Diego d'Aguilar truly lived in Vienna during the first half of the eighteenth century and that this man even bore the aristocratic title of a Baron (*Freiherr*), many of his biographical data apparently underwent some significant changes that finally turned him into a rather mysterious figure that the Sephardic Community of Vienna claims to be its founder.

The most popular version of this legend was published in Vienna by Adolf von Zemlinsky (1845 – 1900) and Michael Papo (1843 – 1918) in 1888 on the occasion of 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sephardic community of Vienna:

It is the year 1725 when Diego d'Aguilar is an inquisitor in Madrid. One day he sentences a young lady to death for being a clandestine Judaiser. Shortly before the defendant is supposed to be burned at the stake, an older woman seeks to be received in audience by the inquisitor. The woman, whose name is Sarah, accounts that she is the mother of the young convicted girl, thus, she has come to beseech the inquisitor to stop the trial against the young lady. When the inquisitor is not willing to give in to her demands, the old lady finally reveals to him that she herself was, in fact, the mother of both, the young girl and the inquisitor. At first, the inquisitor does not believe her but when the old woman calls the inquisitor by his original given name “Moshe”, all of a sudden he realises that she is telling nothing but the truth. Thus, he recalls that he was actually born as a Jew but separated from his family at a very young age. Having come to his senses, he immediately rushes off in order to save his sister from death but when he returns he has to inform his mother that only a few hours ago her daughter, his sister, has already died in agony under torture. Both are devastated. As a direct consequence of the event, Diego d'Aguilar decides to flee Spain together with his mother. Before leaving, Diego d'Aguilar remembers that he still holds a present<sup>485</sup> from the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa who found accommodation in his palace while visiting Spain together with her father Charles VI several years ago. Summarily, Diego d'Aguilar and his mother decide to seek refuge in Vienna, however, according to the legend his mother Sarah dies during the journey never reaching the Austrian capital. When reaching his destination, Diego d'Aguilar goes to

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<sup>485</sup> A necklace according to one version of the legend, a children's glove to another.

see Maria Theresa begging her to let him and several other refugees from Spain stay in her realm. Of course, the empress immediately recalls their former Spanish host, kindly offering him to stay at her service in Vienna. Gladly accepting her offer, Diego d'Aguilar becomes an influential court Jew and the leaseholder of the imperial tobacco monopoly. Soon, Diego d'Aguilar becomes a wealthy man which even puts him in the position to lend his patroness a substantially huge amount of money in order to fund the rebuilding of the *Schönbrunn* castle. For the services he rendered to the Empress he is also bestowed with the title of a Baron. Using his great influence at the court, Baron Diego d'Aguilar becomes a patron of the Jews in Vienna as well as in the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire. For example, for not having a synagogue, he offers a room in his own house to the first Sephardic immigrants from the Ottoman Empire in Vienna in order to provide for them a place of worship. Furthermore, he donates two sets of *remonim* (רִמּוֹנִים, torah crowns) with an engraving of his name to the Sephardic congregations of Vienna and Temeswar (Timișoara in modern Romania), the latter also being blessed by his patronage. One day, when Diego d'Aguilar learns about a secret plan that all Jews shall be expelled from the Austrian territories, he and one of his friends seek to confound this scheme by sending a letter to the Sultan in Istanbul. Promptly, the Sultan sends back a letter personally addressed to Maria Theresa in which he is trying to convince the empress to renounce her plans of expelling the Jews from her realms. Maria Theresa willingly accedes to the Sultan's petition, refraining from her plans to expel the Jews from Austria. However, Diego d'Aguilar, the actual hero of this story, suddenly decides to flee from the Vienna because he suspects the Empress to know about his eager intervention. Also, legend has it that the Spanish Inquisition has finally gained knowledge of Diego d'Aguilar's residency in Austria and, moreover, of his return to Judaism wherefore his immediate extradition is demanded in order to put him to trial for apostasy. On his flight, Diego d'Aguilar hardly leaves any traces and nobody knows for sure about his final destination; some say he might have gone to Amsterdam, while others believe he may have found refuge in the Ottoman Empire. In remembrance and reverence for his generosity and advocacy the Sephardim of Vienna and Temeswar consider him the founder of their communities. Every *rosh hashana* a *kaddish* is prayed in his remembrance<sup>486</sup>. Manfred Papo, the son of Michael Papo – the author of the Judeo-Spanish version of the text – informs us that this tradition was maintained until 1938, the year the Nazis came to power in Austria<sup>487</sup>.

As has been mentioned above we have evidence that Diego d'Aguilar indeed arrived in Vienna during the first half of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, as Michael Halévy points out,

<sup>486</sup> Papo, Zemlinsky 1888, p. 2-6 (cf. also Studenmund-Halévy 2010a)

<sup>487</sup> Papo 1967, p. 329

we do not know for sure when the legend about the alleged founder of the Sephardic community of Vienna arose which always end with a sudden and mysterious disappearance of the hero<sup>488</sup>.

Most of the legend's circulating versions are based a two-part article (*Geschichte Diego de Aguilar's*) by Ludwig August Frankl which was published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* in 1856<sup>489</sup>. At the beginning of his article Frankl informs his readership that he himself learned about the legend from Hakham Ruben Barukh (died in Vienna in 1875), the venerable leader of the Sephardic community of Vienna at that time<sup>490</sup>. About thirty years later in 1886 Aaron ben Shem Tov Semo, the son Shem Tov Semo (1827 – 1881) who was one of Vienna's the most famous publishers and editors of Judeo-Spanish newspapers, published his version of Diego d'Aguilars legend which, according to its author, is based on an earlier Hebrew version<sup>491</sup>; however, he does not mention an exact source and it remains open to question if the Hebrew original of Diego d'Aguilar's legend really exists<sup>492</sup>. In 1888, finally, the version of Adolf von Zemlinsky (Shem Tov Semo's son-in-law) and Michael Papo was published in the above mentioned bilingual edition in which Diego d'Aguilar is explicitly mentioned as the founder of the Sephardic community of Vienna:

*“Wollen wir mündlichen Traditionen Glauben schenken, so würden sich gar mancherlei Bindemittel finden, worunter namentlich eine traditionelle Fabel über das Entstehen dieser Gemeinde spricht, welche wir hier in Kürze wiederzugeben uns verpflichtet halten, da eben die Hauptperson dieser Fabel identisch ist mit der des Gründers unserer Gemeinde.”*<sup>493</sup>

Here, we see that the authors initially declare that their version of Diego d'Aguilar's legend is actually based on a popular fable; by this, they seem to admit that their account might not resemble the true historical facts which does not seem to disqualify the legend to be adopted as the official story of foundation of the Sephardic community of Vienna. Already Ludwig August Frankl, the author of the first known printed version, was not quite sure about the veracity of the story, even though his informant was no other than the Rabbi of the Sephardic community of Vienna:

*“Es ist offenbar, daß uns hier Dichtung und Wahrheit innig ineinanderverschlungen entgegentreten, daß aber selbst der Dichtung wirkliche Thatsachen, nur poetisch ausgeschmückt, zu Grunde liegen mögen.”*<sup>494</sup>

<sup>488</sup> Studenmund-Halévy 2010a

<sup>489</sup> Frankl 1856a; 1856b

<sup>490</sup> Ruben Barukh was the highly respected leader of the Sephardic community of Vienna around 1845. (cf. Kohlbauer-Fritz 2010, p. 152)

<sup>491</sup> The legend was published in the magazine *Luzero de la Pasiensia* in Severin (Romania) under the title *El establecimiento de la onorada Comuna Spagnola en Viena, trezladada del ebraico conteniendo la beografia del Baron Diaga [sic] de Aguilar*. Interestingly, it was not printed in Rashi but is Latin script. (cf. Studenmund-Halévy 2010a)

<sup>492</sup> Studenmund-Halévy 2010a

<sup>493</sup> Papo, Zemlinsky 1888, p. 2

<sup>494</sup> *“Es ist offenbar, daß uns hier Dichtung und Wahrheit innig ineinanderverschlungen entgegentreten, daß aber selbst der Dichtung wirkliche Thatsachen, nur poetisch ausgeschmückt, zu Grunde liegen mögen.”* (cf. Frankl 1856b, p. 658)

Indeed, the legend of Diego d'Aguilar is not to be judged as a mere invention by its authors or their informants; actually, it is based on several historical facts. However, while Zemlinsky and Papo did not make any effort in order to prove its historical authenticity, Frankl, on the other side, also provided a range of historical data that draw a more authentic picture of Diego d'Aguilar's life. For example, Frankl found out that Diego d'Aguilar's decision to leave Vienna had economical rather than other reasons because his contract for holding the Austrian tobacco monopoly ended in 1748. By then, his business had already been strongly weakened by foreign ambassadors who had repeatedly tried to bypass his monopoly<sup>495</sup>. So, Zemlinsky's and Papo's assumptions that Diego d'Aguilar withdrew from Vienna because he was afraid of Maria Theresa's vengeance or because the Spanish government had ordered his extradition in order to hand him over to the inquisition seem to be no more than fictional literary elements.

Moreover, Frankl ascertained that Diego d'Aguilar had not merely disappeared as the legend suggest but, in fact, he left Vienna in order to return to his house in London (which also indicates that d'Aguilar must have lived in England before he settled down in Vienna)<sup>496</sup>. Even Ruben Barukh, the Rabbi from who Frankl had learned about the story in the first place, mentioned that Diego d'Aguilar had reached Vienna via England<sup>497</sup> and not directly from Spain as the version of Papo and Zemlinsky suggests.

Frankl's original assumption that Diego d'Aguilar had gone to England after having left Vienna was ultimately confirmed by a letter from his friend Josef von Wertheimer, an Austrian Jewish philanthropist, who Frankl had asked to peruse some investigations concerning the traces Diego d'Aguilar must have left in London. In his letter von Wertheimer quotes a short extract from a book about the biography of Diego d'Aguilar's son Ephraim Lópes Pereira d'Aguilar, also including some information about his father:

*“Baron Diego de Aguilar war in Lissabon geboren, das er ungefähr 1722 seiner Religion wegen verließ. Er kam nach England und ging im Jahre 1736 nach Wien, wo er Pächter der Tabakmonopols wurde. Er war ein Liebling der Kaiserin Maria Theresia. Im Jahre 1756 kehrte er nach England zurück mit seiner Familie, die aus zwölf Kindern, Söhnen und Töchtern, bestand. Er starb im Jahre 1759 unermesslich reich.”*<sup>498</sup>

In another letter Ludwig August Frankl received from his friend, Josef von Wertheimer almost revokes the information that he had communicated before by stating<sup>499</sup>:

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<sup>495</sup> Frankl 1856b, p. 659

<sup>496</sup> Frankl 1856b, p. 659

<sup>497</sup> Frankl 1856a, p. 632

<sup>498</sup> Frankl 1856b, p. 661

<sup>499</sup> Idem

*“Es existiert kein Abkömmling von Baron Diego de Aguilar. Seine Grabschrift ist verlöscht, und es würde nicht unerhebliche Kosten verursachen, sie zu entziffern. Andere Nachforschungen waren vergeblich.”*

It is easily imaginable that this was a letter previously written by Josef von Wertheimer which delayed and arrived after the first mentioned one. At any rate, Ludwig August Frank does not further clarify this contradiction. However, interesting is the fact that Diego d'Aguilar obviously was not of Spanish but of Portuguese origin.

While Frankl cannot provide any solid evidence of Diego d'Aguilar's death in London, a genealogical record, today preserved in the library of the Society of Genealogists in London, actually proves that the “Bemaventurado [blessed] MOSEH LOPES PEREIRA BARON DE AGUILAR [...] S.A.G.D.E.G.” was interred on the burial ground of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews (Row 17. No. 41) in Mile End which is located in the Borough of Tower Hamlets in the London East End<sup>500</sup>. Furthermore, a pedigree of the d'Aguilar family in the same record gives evidence that “Moses Lopes Pereira Baron Diego de Aguilar came to London from Vienna” in the year 1756. It also informs us that his last will dates 5 August 1759, that he was born in 1700 and that he finally passed away in the month of August in 1759 and was laid to rest on 17 Av 5519 (10 August 1759) at Mile End<sup>501</sup>. Moreover, the above mentioned initials “S.A.G.D.E.G.” on his tomb give evidence of his Portuguese origin, since this is an acronym written on many graves of Portuguese Jews, standing for *Sua Alma Goza da Eterna Gloria* (his/her soul attains eternal glory)<sup>502</sup>. At this point it is also worth mentioning that the author's of Diego d'Aguilar's legendary account also misrepresent the facts about the fate his parents. While the legend recounts that Diego d'Aguilar's arrived in Vienna without his family, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek informs us that both, his mother (Sarah Peryrea) and his father<sup>503</sup> (Abraham Lopez di Pereyra), were buried in Vienna on the Jewish cemetery in Roßau (*Seegasse*), together with two of his children and his brother in law<sup>504</sup>.

At any rate, Ludwig August Frankl was right on the assumption that Diego d'Aguilar did not just mysteriously disappear after having left Vienna but, in fact, moved back to London where he

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<sup>500</sup> Genealogical Record in Colyer- Fergusson Collection, archived in the Society of Genealogists Library, London, UK, see Appendix (Fig. 1)

<sup>501</sup> Genealogical Record in Colyer- Fergusson Collection in the Society of Genealogists Library, London, UK, see Appendix (Fig. 2)

<sup>502</sup> [http://www.benedictusdespinoza.nl/lit/Shoshannah\\_Brombacher\\_description\\_painting\\_Ethica.pdf](http://www.benedictusdespinoza.nl/lit/Shoshannah_Brombacher_description_painting_Ethica.pdf), 19.3.2013 (cf. also Arbell 2001, p. 304)

<sup>503</sup> The death of Diego d'Aguilar's father (who allegedly had died in Spain) is only mentioned in Michael Papo's version the legend but not in Adolf von Zemlinsky's which, indicates that Papo's Judeo-Spanish version is not a word-by-word translation of Zemlinsky (cf. also Chapter 5.3.)

<sup>504</sup> Heimann-Jelinek 1991, p. 28; cf. also Wachstein 1917, p. 216f, 278ff, 311ff; Studemund-Halévy 2010c (<http://www.davidkultur.at/ausgabe.php?ausg=84&artikel=108>, 29.3.2013)

came from before settling down in Vienna. Through Josef von Wertheimer's letter and the genealogical data from London we also learn that Diego d'Aguilar's roots did not lie in Spain, as the legendary accounts suggest, but in Portugal. Owing to his committed investigations, Ludwig August Frankl could even provide more evidence, proving Diego d'Aguilar's Portuguese provenance. By consulting the k. k. Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as several other archives in Vienna, Frankl did not only find out that Diego d'Aguilar was entrusted with the creation of the tobacco monopoly by the order of Emperor Charles VI in 1725 (thus, not by Maria Theresa) but that already d'Aguilar's father had been a successful businessman who was responsible for the establishment of the tobacco trade business in Portugal<sup>505</sup>. The precise motive for Diego d'Aguilar's departure from Portugal and his immigration to England remains unclear. Historically confirmed is the fact that he already bore a Portuguese title of nobility when leaving Lisbon and that he was conferred with the title of a Baron (*Don Diego Freiherr von Aguilar*) in Vienna on March 26 in 1726. A draft of his patent of nobility is still preserved in the Austrian State Archives (*Österreichisches Staatsarchiv*)<sup>506</sup>. However, this also means that when Diego d'Aguilar was awarded his barony in Vienna Maria Theresa (1717 – 1780) was only eight years old which makes a previous encounter in Portugal (or Spain as the legend suggests) not impossible but very much unlikely.

At the end of his article, Ludwig August Frankl mentions a number of testimonies by Rabbis who were contemporaries of Diego d'Aguilar. Salomon Salem, the Chief Rabbi of the Portuguese-Jewish congregation of Amsterdam, for example, described Diego d'Aguilar as a crown of Jewry (*Krone des Judenthums*) for having an open house for every foreign rabbis visiting Vienna. Elias Katzenellenbogen, who was also among those were received by Diego d'Aguilar, describes his generous host as *ger* (גר), thus, as a convert or proselyte of Jewish origin who was only able to converse in Spanish or Dutch (which suggests another – Dutch – connection<sup>507</sup>). Furthermore, Katzenellenbogen informs us that Diego d'Aguilar did not exclusively favour Sephardic Jews but also Ashkenazic Jews in need of support.<sup>508</sup>

## 5.2. A Legendary Hero

A remarkable fact about the legend of Diego d'Aguilar is that quite a few alterations have

<sup>505</sup> Frankl 1856b, p. 657

<sup>506</sup> Milchram 2010, p. 80f

<sup>507</sup> According to Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, Diego d'Aguilar did not arrive to Vienna via London but Amsterdam (cf. Heimann-Jelinek 1991, p. 27). Hence, it is not

<sup>508</sup> “Diego de Aguilar [machte] keinen Unterschied, ob die spanischer, deutscher oder polnischer Abkunft waren; sie fanden bei ihm eine gleich gute Aufnahme”. Frankl 1856b, p. 660 (cf. also Studenmund-Halévy 2010a)



been made to his biography although, as Michael Studemund-Halévy emphatically outlines, many facts about his life (e.g. about his Portuguese origin; London as his final destination) were already known in the nineteenth century<sup>509</sup>. Exactly here lied the paradox because although Ludwig August Frankl's version obviously seemed to have influenced most other subsequent accounts about Diego d'Aguilar, the efforts made by Frankl in order to draw a more realistic picture of the legendary figure were widely ignored. Thus, it is impressive how a story comprising so many unhistorical details could gain such an official character by turning Diego d'Aguilar into the founder of the Sephardic community of Vienna. However, this appears to be much less surprising when we perceive as his legend as a “foundational myth” in Stuart Hall's sense<sup>510</sup> or, in terms of Tamar Alexander-Frizer, as a “historical legend”. Alexander-Frizer defines five basic literary genres or narratives, typical for the Sephardic folk tale<sup>511</sup> according to which Diego d'Aguilar's story is not only to be classified as a legend but as a historical legend which constitutes a crucial sub-genre of the Sephardic folk tales in general. One important feature of the narrative genre of the historical legend is that

*“[i]t may portray encounters between personalities who could never have met in actuality or connect events and places without any basis or reality. Among members of the group, the legend is more powerful than history, and historical facts cannot change the belief in the legend.”*<sup>512</sup>

Alexander-Frizer's statement very much resembles another one by David Biale which has been mentioned before already, namely that the very existence of historical narratives already makes them “as true as the historical 'facts' that seem to contradict them”<sup>513</sup>. This, for example, is the reason why even the disapproval of Diego d'Aguilar's dubious encounter with Maria Theresa in Spain would not eradicate the authority of this historical legend. The unbroken authority that this historical legend inheres is maybe best expressed by Mordechai Arbell who, for his part, is very familiar with the story of Diego d'Aguilar: “It's a legend. But this legend is very true”<sup>514</sup>.

Florian Krobb who has analysed another German version of Diego d'Aguilar's legend (*Die Famile y Aguillar*<sup>515</sup>) eventually mentions another aspect from which he can look at the legendary

<sup>509</sup> „die Fakten [waren] auch im 19. Jahrhundert bekannt“ Studenmund-Halévy 2010a

<sup>510</sup> cf. Chapter 2.2.

<sup>511</sup> (1) the legend, (2) the ethnic tale, (3) the fairy tale, (4) the novella and (5) the humorous tale (cf. Alexander-Frizer 2008)

<sup>512</sup> Alexander-Frizer 2008, p. 223

<sup>513</sup> Biale 2002a, p. xxiv (cf. also Chapter 4.1.)

<sup>514</sup> Interview with Mordechai Arbell (12.4.2011)

<sup>515</sup> *Die Familie y Aguillar. Eine Erzählung vom jüdischen Heldenmut zur Zeit der spanischen Inquisition* is a novel written by Markus (Meir) Lehmann (1831 – 1890) who also served as the Rabbi of Mainz. It was published in 1873 and basically differs from the other versions previously mentioned: the plot is set almost entirely in Spain; the novel predominantly discusses the possibility of *conversos* to re-convert to Judaism; Vienna only is mentioned at the very

figure of Diego d'Aguilar. Krobb identifies d'Aguilar with a “mediocre” or “middling” hero (*mittlerer Held*), a term created by George Lukács when analysing the epic novels of Walter Scott<sup>516</sup>. A “mediocre hero” is not only involved in greater historical events (*historische Großereignisse*) but also is also living a fairly “normal” life<sup>517</sup>, thus, creating a link between the common man and the ruling elite<sup>518</sup>. According to George Lukács, in the story of “mediocre heroes” the problems or the crises of the popular life (e.g. the [Sephardic] Jews in the Habsburg Empire struggling with their systematic discrimination) are always depicted within a broader historical crisis (e.g. the expulsion of Spain). Lukács holds that the authors of such stories want to make its readers “sympathizers and understanding participants of this crisis” in order to make them “understand exactly for what reason the crisis has arisen”. Thus, the hero on the one hand “appears in order to fulfil his historic mission in the [historical] crisis” and on the other hand “to solve just [the current social] problems”<sup>519</sup>. As we see, the legendary figure of Diego d'Aguilar perfectly fits into the model of George Lukács. Not only is Diego d'Aguilar's legendary biography linked to the crises and traumata caused by the expulsion, the persecution by the inquisition and the clandestine lives of *conversos* on the Iberian Peninsular, but also to the potential threat that Austrian Jewry might also be expelled. Indeed, (the historical) Diego d'Aguilar seemed to have intervened when Maria Theresa – who was notoriously known for her Anti-Jewish attitudes<sup>520</sup> – was planing to expel all Jews from Moravia (1742) and Bohemia (1744)<sup>521</sup>; however, this was several years before Diego d'Aguilar moved back to London (1756).

Apart from the bridging function that “mediocre heroes” inhere in order to link the crises of the past to the crises of the present (creating coherence due to rupture<sup>522</sup>), George Lukács highlights another feature, especially important for the role of historic or epic heroes:

*“The epic hero is, strictly speaking, never an individual. It is traditionally thought that one of the essential characteristics of the epic is the fact that its theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community.”*<sup>523</sup>

As we see, also Lukács is very much aware of the fact that myths are an essential ingredient for the formation of a community as well as of cultural and national identity. Building upon these

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end. (cf. Krobb 2002, p. 25; Studenmund-Halévy 2010a)

<sup>516</sup> Walter Scott (1771 – 1831) was a popular author of historical novels. His role for the creation a popular image of Scotland and Scottish traditions has also been analysed by Hugh Trevor-Roper in Hobsbawm's and Ranger's book “The Invention of Tradition”. cf. Trevor-Roper 1983, p. 15ff

<sup>517</sup> Krobb 2002, p. 42

<sup>518</sup> Idem, p. 84-85

<sup>519</sup> Lukács 1983, p. 38

<sup>520</sup> cf. Schubert 2008, p. 56

<sup>521</sup> Breuer, Graetz 1996, p.149f

<sup>522</sup> cf. Chapter 2.4.

<sup>523</sup> Lukács 1971, p. 66

insights, Florian Krobb suggests that Diego d'Aguilar's legendary accounts should be classified as collective autobiography (*Kollektivautobiographie*), since the story – even though it is fictional – becomes relevant for the construction and imagination of the history (*Geschichtsbild*) of an entire group. Further, Krobb holds that collective autobiographies are at the same time, as he calls it, wishful autobiographies (*Wunschautobiographien*) by which he means the projection of contemporary sentiments (*gegenwärtige Befindlichkeiten*) into the past<sup>524</sup>. From this insight he arrives at the following conclusion:

*“Das Postulat historischer Erzählens schlechthin, daß es so hätte gewesen sein können oder sollen, verdankt sich dem Wunschdenken, daß Geschichte überhaupt erschließbar, vermittelbar und sinnvoll erfaßbar ist. Ohne diesen Optimismus würde sich die Aktivität der Geschichtsdarstellung prinzipiell ad absurdum führen”.*<sup>525</sup>

Just as Stuart Hall, Krobb also puts much emphasis on the desire of giving one's own history or past a meaning and coherence<sup>526</sup>. Furthermore, Krobb is convinced that the emergence of collective autobiographies, such as the one of Diego d'Aguilar, was crucial for the formation of a Jewish national consciousness in the nineteenth century<sup>527</sup>. Having said this, Krobb's model of *Wunschautobiographie* even more convincingly resembles Stuart Hall's concept national identity:

*“National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation' with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images are constructed about it.”*<sup>528</sup>

Again, we have to keep in mind that attributions such as true or false are absolutely irrelevant for the formation of an identity<sup>529</sup>, so we may not conclude that historical legends are *per se* mere inventions, which, for example, is definitely not true for the legend of Diego d'Aguilar as has been noted in various occasions. Hence, even though many details of a historical hero are rather imagined than actual proven facts, Lord Reglan reminds us

*“that imagination is not the faculty of making something out of nothing, but that of using, in a more or less different form, material already present in the mind. We must conclude, then, that those who composed the traditional stories [...] applied, in a more or less modified form, [other] stories which they had heard in a different but not dissimilar connection. We fail to explain the origin of these stories unless we trace the materials from which they were composed.”*<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> Krobb 2002, p. 15-16

<sup>525</sup> Krobb 2002, p. 16

<sup>526</sup> cf. Chapter 2.4.

<sup>527</sup> Krobb 2002, p. 34ff

<sup>528</sup> Hall 1992, p. 293

<sup>529</sup> cf. Anderson 2006 (1983), pp. 6 “[...]Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”; Chapter. 2.1.

<sup>530</sup> Reglan 2003 (1956), p. 208

There is no doubt that the creators of Diego d'Aguilar's legend were heavily influenced by popular *marrano* novels. As has been mentioned before<sup>531</sup>, such novels – especially those which included dramatic narratives such as an inquisitor unwittingly torturing one of his own female relatives (cf. *Los marranos*) – were extremely popular among Sephardic Jews throughout the nineteenth century. These novels, in turn, are based upon historical events on the Iberian Peninsula. Already before the expulsion it was not uncommon that confessional fractures ran through the same family: while some family members converted to Christianity, others remained true to their old faith<sup>532</sup>. We may conclude that such incidents, then, became part of the collective cultural memory of Jews after the expulsion. The same holds true for the *conversos* who – by being persecuted on behalf of the inquisition – gradually turned into mysterious and heroic figures<sup>533</sup> that later became the protagonists of thrilling novels and even historical legends, such as the one about Diego d'Aguilar. So, although most historical legends are, in fact, based on historical events, Tamar Alexander-Frizer outlines that the historical legend itself (or rather its authors) chooses the facts and the manner of its presentation in accordance with a certain goal<sup>534</sup>. This goal, following Stuart Hall, is the creation of an “alternative history or counter-narrative” which is absolutely necessary for the construction of a cultural and national identity<sup>535</sup>.

Returning to Florian Krobb's concept of collective and wishful autobiographies, another factor, concerning this model, seem to be worth in order be discussed in detail, which is the projection of contemporary sentiments into the past. As we will see, this also holds true for the legend of Diego d'Aguilar. By having a closer look at the biographies of Adolf von Zemlinsky and Michael Papo but also at their social and historical environment we learn a lot about their version of Diego d'Aguilar's legend, for example, why the two authors decided to publish this particular version the legend and not another.

### 5.3. Authorship and Social Environment

As already mentioned before, maybe the most famous version of Diego d'Aguilar's legend is included in a chronicle (*Festschrift*) that was published in 1888, commemorating the 150-year existence of the Sephardic community in Vienna, officially known as *Türkisch-israelitische*

<sup>531</sup> cf. Chapter 4.4.2.

<sup>532</sup> Bossong 2008, p. 48

<sup>533</sup> cf. Krobb 2002, p. 25

<sup>534</sup> Alexander-Frizer 2008, p. 223

<sup>535</sup> cf. Chapter 2.2.

*Gemeinde zu Wien* in German. It is a bilingual edition which was written in both, German (printed in a black-letter typeface) and Judeo-Spanish (printed mainly in Rashi script). Both covers of the chronicle mention Adolf von Zemlinsky (1845 – 1900) as the community's “*Sekretär*” (secretary), while Michael Papo (1843 – 1918) is mentioned as “*Functionär*” of the Turkish-Israelite community of Vienna. Furthermore, Adolf von Zemlinsky is mentioned as the author of the chronicle (“*Verfasst von Adolf v. Zemlinsky [...]*”), while Michael Papo only seemed to have translated Zemlinsky's text from German into Judeo-Spanish (“*Ueversetzt ins Jüdisch-spanische von Michael Papo [...]*”)<sup>536</sup>. However, the two versions differ from each other in style and length as well as in some other details, which is the reason why Papo's text should be considered as a very loose translation or even as an independent text<sup>537</sup>. Nevertheless, the plots of both versions in the pamphlet closely resemble each other. It was published under the title “*Istorya de la komunidad israelit espanyola en Vyena. Del tyempo de su fundasyon asta oy segun datos istorikos*”<sup>538</sup> in Judezmo and “*Geschichte der türkisch-israelitischen Gemeinde zu Wien. Von ihrer Geschichte bis heute nach historischen Daten*” in German and is to be considered the first official chronicle of the Sephardic community of Vienna, or at least the earliest still preserved. Although both authors claim to have used historical sources (“*historische Daten*”, “*datos istorikos* [דאטוס איסטוריקוס]”<sup>539</sup>) for their work, neither Alexander von Zemlinsky nor Michael Papo mention their sources or informants.

Adolf von Zemlinsky (also Aldolf Zemlinszky or Adolfo [von] Zemlinsky) was the son-in-law of Shem Tov Semo (born in Sarajevo, 1827 – 1881<sup>540</sup>) who, in turn, was one of the most active promoters of the Judeo-Spanish press in Vienna. Together with his sons Haim, Shabatay and Aron and, of course, his son-in-law, he made Vienna one of the most important places of the publication of Judeo-Spanish printed media<sup>541</sup>. The Semo-Zemlinsky family even had its own small publishing company and many members of family were committed authors and translators. Shem Tov Semo, for instance, translated various novels originally written in German by Adolf von Zemlinsky into Judeo-Spanish<sup>542</sup>. *El Correo de Vyena* – Vienna's most important Judeo-Spanish newspaper which included several supplements such as *El Dragoman*, *Guerta de Istorya* and *Ilustra Guerta de*

<sup>536</sup> see Appendix (Fig. 3 and 4)

<sup>537</sup> cf. Studemund-Halévy 2009 (<http://www.davidkultur.at/ausgabe.php?ausg=83&artikel=85>, 6.3.2013)

<sup>538</sup> , איסטוריא די לה קומונידאד ישראלית איפאניולה אין ביינה. דיל טיימפו די סו פונדאסיון אסטא אוי סיון דאטוס איסטוריקוס , see Appendix (Fig. 4)

<sup>539</sup> see Appendix (Fig. 3 and 4)

<sup>540</sup> Studemund-Halévy 2009 (<http://www.davidkultur.at/ausgabe.php?ausg=83&artikel=85>, 6.3.2013)

<sup>541</sup> Studemund-Halévy 2010a, pp. 61-62

<sup>542</sup> Idem, pp. 68-69

*Istorya* – was also published by Shem Tov Semo and his sons<sup>543</sup>. These newspapers and magazines were not only eagerly read in Vienna, they were also extremely popular among the Sephardic Jews on the Balkans<sup>544</sup>. Semo's mission was to create a synthesis of Sephardic traditions and modern pedagogy in which he was heavily inspired by the Rabbis Yehuda Bibas from Corfu (1780 – 1825) and Yehuda Alkalay from Sarajevo (1798 – 1878), both crucial figures for the advent of modern Jewish nationalism<sup>545</sup>.

Adolf von Zemlinsky was born into a Catholic family but later he decided to convert to Judaism in order to be able to marry Shem Tov Semo's daughter Clara. His father-in-law did not seem to be bothered by the fact that Adolf von Zemlinsky was actually a convert; he rather seemed to be pleased by the ambition of his son-in-law to learn Judeo-Spanish which is why Zemlinsky soon became one of Semo's closest associates in the family business. Also within the Sephardic community of Vienna Adolf von Zemlinsky gained much respect and was even appointed as its secretary in 1872<sup>546</sup>. Clara and Adolf von Zemlinsky's daughter – named after her mother Clara Zemlinsky – was the mother of Mathilde Zemlinsky who would later marry the Austrian composer Arnold Schönberg. Clara's son, Alexander Zemlinsky, would also become a famous composer<sup>547</sup>.

Similar to Shem Tov Semo, Michael Papo's roots also lie in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Sarajevo) which had become part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878. From 1888 to 1918 Papo served as the Rabbi of the Sephardic community of Vienna. He was also an active supporter of the cultural and academic association *Esperanza*<sup>548</sup>. As had been mentioned before<sup>549</sup>, *Esperanza* was exerting a huge influence on the Sephardic communities on the Balkans (first and foremost in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania and Bulgaria). This association should also have played a significant role on the World Zionist Congress in Vienna in 1913.<sup>550</sup>

The Papo family was heavily affected by the terror of the Nazi regime. Michael Papo's wife (née Grünbaum<sup>551</sup>) was deported to Theresienstadt where she died in 1942. In the same year their daughter was killed in the Maly Trostinec death camp in Belarus. The only family member who

<sup>543</sup> Studemund-Halévy 2009

<sup>544</sup> e.g. many of Semo's texts were also published in Saloniki which was definitely the most important publishing place of Judeo-Spanish newspapers.

<sup>545</sup> Studemund-Halévy 2009 (<http://www.davidkultur.at/ausgabe.php?ausg=83&artikel=85>, 6.3.2013); cf. also Alkalay 2003, p. 94

<sup>546</sup> Heimann-Jelinek 2010, p. 146

<sup>547</sup> Kohlbauer-Fritz 2010, p. 162

<sup>548</sup> Heimann-Jelinek 2010, p. 164

<sup>549</sup> cf. Chapter 4.4.

<sup>550</sup> Kohlbauer-Fritz 2010, p. 174

<sup>551</sup> Heimann-Jelinek 2010, p. 164

survived the Holocaust was Manfred Papo who had also served as a Rabbi in Salzburg and St. Pölten<sup>552</sup>. For his lifelong commitment to the Sephardic community of Vienna, which had not ceased to keep contact with Ottoman Empire, he was decorated with a medal on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan in 1905<sup>553</sup>. Shortly before his death in 1918 he was even rewarded with the title *Haham Bashi* which is the Turkish term for a Chief Rabbi<sup>554</sup>.

When Michael Papo served as Rabbi in Vienna it was already clear that Judeo-Spanish had entered in a state of decomposition and that German was to become the dominant vernacular within the Sephardic community of Vienna. This circumstance might explain Michael Papo's engagement within the *Esperanza* association which sought to strengthen Sephardic culture as well as use Judeo-Spanish as a spoken language. However, the efforts made by *Esperanza* could not suspend this ongoing process of decay.

Michael Papo did his best in order to counteract these developments. In 1884 he published a German-Judezmo dictionary (*traductor de lenguas*) under the title *Trajoman*. Although it was primarily intended for Sephardic merchants from the Ottoman Empire who wanted to sell their goods in German speaking lands<sup>555</sup>, it can be valued as an effort to strengthen the relations between the Sephardic Jews of Vienna with their co-religionists in South Eastern Europe.

Interesting to note in this context is that Benedict Anderson appraises the production of word lists and simple lexicons as an important precursor for the emergence of modern nationalism. In the case of Michael Papo this assumption is by no means unjustified since, as we already know, he was the supporter of an organisation (*Esperanza*) that propagated a Sephardic version of Jewish nationalism (Sephardism). According to Benedict Anderson, “[b]ilingual dictionaries made visible an approaching egalitarianism among languages”<sup>556</sup>. By this he means the provision of a common status of two different languages (e.g. German-Spanish/Spanish-German), or in other words, the juxtaposition of a language of one nation in opposition to a language of another one. Only by having a closer look at the title of Michael Papo's *traductor de lenguas* we also acquire some information about the personal attitude toward his mother tongue:

“*El trajuman o libro de konverzasyon en eshpanyol i aleman (nemtsesko) por provecho de muchos sinyores del Oryente ke viajan a la Nemtsia rekojido de los mejores libros de konverzasyon ke ay en ditas linguas por el minor Menahem b. Michael Papo*”<sup>557</sup>

<sup>552</sup> Heimann-Jelinek 2010 p. 166; Papo, 1967, p. 327

<sup>553</sup> Heimann-Jelinek 2010, p. 164

<sup>554</sup> Papo 1967, p. 342

<sup>555</sup> Studemund-Halévy 2010a, p. 78; cf. also Hernández Socas, Sinner, Taberes Palencia 2010

<sup>556</sup> Anderson 2006 (1983), p. 71

<sup>557</sup> Studemund-Halévy 2009 (<http://www.davidkultur.at/ausgabe.php?ausg=82&artikel=54>, 10.3.2013)

Here, Michael Papo clearly puts Spanish (*Eshpanyol*<sup>558</sup>) at one level with German (*Aleman/Nemtsesko*<sup>559</sup>). By doing so Papo implies at once that his mother tongue is not just a mere dialect of corrupt language but, in fact, a cultivated language that one can use for conversation and merchandise (just as German).

Of course, Michael Papo's *Trajoman* was not the only Sephardic dictionary or text book ever published. However it is interesting to note that out of twenty one Sephardic grammar books and dictionaries (also including books for teaching Hebrew to children) that had been published between 1821 and 1930, seven – or one out of three – were published in Vienna (also including the first one ever published: *Hinuh leNaar. Maestro de kriatura en sortes de alef bet kon algunas kuantas brahot menesterozas. Viyena 1821*)<sup>560</sup>. However, Anderson's assumption that dictionaries and lexicons etc. play a sort of the vanguard role when it comes to the advent of nationalism also has another reason which, too, is very compelling within the Viennese context. According to Anderson, the invention of the dictionary stood at the beginning of a broader development, namely the scientific comparative study of languages and philology which, of course, was first of all an elitist endeavour<sup>561</sup>. So, it is hardly surprising that at the turn of the twentieth century Vienna had evolved into one of the first centres of the academic research of Judeo-Spanish.

The variety of different dialects promoted several Romance philologists and even Rabbis, who were interested in the language of Sephardic Jews, to engage in the research of Judeo-Spanish. Most of these intellectuals came from Germany (Kurt Levy, Max Leopold Wagner) and Austria (Julius Subak, Kalmi Baruch) but also from North America (Leo Wiener, Max A. Luria)<sup>562</sup>. In Austria the *Kaiserliche Akademie* entitled Julius Subak to collect recording in Judeo-Spanish for the newly inaugurated *Phonogramarchiv*<sup>563</sup>. Subak's recordings from 1908 together with the material collected by Max A. Luria in 1926 was recently publish by the *Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften*. These records and transcripts to the oldest recorded testimonies of Sephardic Jews from the Balkans<sup>564</sup>. Furthermore, several dissertations and essays about linguistic aspects (phonology, grammar) and the history of Sephardic Jews were published, most of them in Vienna or by scholars having studied or lived in Vienna<sup>565</sup>. Although Vienna definitely was an important point

<sup>558</sup> The fact that Papo used the terms *Eshpanyol* in his dictionary and *Espanyol* (אספנייול) in the chronicle (see Appendix , Fig. 4) instead of other common terms such as *Judezmo*, *Jidio* in order to refer to his mother tongue may lead us to the assumption that he did not make much difference between Judeo-Spanish and modern Spanish.

<sup>559</sup> *Nemtsesko* (deriving from the Serbo-Croatian word *njemački* for German) seems to have been the more popular term for the German language among Jews living on the Balkans; in turn, the (modern-Spanish) term *Aleman* for German did not seem to have been a self-explanatory term for many Jews when standing alone.

<sup>560</sup> El Amaneser 2 December 2009, p. 13 (<http://de.scribd.com/doc/44590449/El-Amaneser-Numero-58>, 10.3.2013)

<sup>561</sup> Anderson 2006 (1983), p. 70-71

<sup>562</sup> Quintana Rodríguez 2006, p. 3

<sup>563</sup> Studemund-Halévy 2010a, p. 70

<sup>564</sup> Leibl (ed.) 2009

<sup>565</sup> Grünwald, Moritz: Zur romanischen Dialektologie. Über den jüdisch-spanischen Dialekt als Beitrag zur Aufhellung



of departure for many scholars studying Judeo-Spanish and Sephardic culture on the Balkans, it is an interesting fact that almost nothing was published about the variety of Judeo-Spanish spoken in Vienna. The only researcher who very aptly named some examples of the “Viennese dialect” of Judeo-Spanish is the Russian born American linguist Leo Wiener in his article about “Songs of the Spanish Jews in the Balkan Peninsula”<sup>566</sup>.

Although – following Benedict Anderson – the activities of “professional intellectuals were central to the shaping of nineteenth-century European nationalisms”<sup>567</sup>, which also becomes evident from the fact that Vienna became a centre of Sephardism (Sephardic nationalism), we have to remain realistic about the actual condition of Judeo-Spanish and its role as (living) vernacular language. Rafael Mazliach, a Sephardic banker and commerce agent from Vienna, explicitly underlines the precarious status of Judeo-Spanish, not only in Vienna but all over the Balkans at the turn of the twentieth century. In a letter to Ángel Pulido Fernández he wrote:

*“Sir, I can respond to you with deep sorrow that the Youth in Vienna as well as in the Balkan states is alienating itself from the mother tongue; the languages of their countries of residence, here German, there Serbian, are ousting the Spanish language! while the Elderly still hold on to their mother tongue.”*<sup>568</sup> [trans. by MS, original see footnote]

With regard to this regretful account it is thinkable that Adolf von Zemlinsky and Michael Papo decided to publish their chronicle – including the legend of Diego d'Aguilar – in a bilingual edition because it is highly probable that the young generation of Sephardic Jews in Vienna had difficulties to understand and read the languages of their parents and grandparents. However, the loss of Judeo-Spanish as the dominant vernacular among the Sephardic Jews of Vienna (and the Balkans) did not occur over night. In the case of Vienna the language shift to German was primarily caused by social and demographical changes that, consequently, led to a gradual process of acculturation and assimilation right after the first Sephardic Jews had settled down in the city in the

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der Aussprache im Altspanischen. Belovar ca. 1893

Grünwald, Moritz: Sitten und Bräuche der Juden im Orient. Vienna 1894

Levy, Moritz: Die Sephardim in Bosnien. Sarajevo 1911

Baruch, Kalmi: Der Lautstand des Judenspanischen in Bosnien. Vienna 1923

Altarac, Isaac: Die Spracheigentümlichkeiten des Judenspanischen Bibelübersetzung. Vienna 1932

Schleicher, Mordche Schlome: Geschichte der spaniolischen Juden (Sephardim) in Wien. Vienna 1932

(cf. 28n In Studemund-Halévy 2010a, p. 70)

<sup>566</sup> Wiener 1903, p. 206; according to Quintana Rodríguez there is no evidence for the existence of a distinct Viennese dialect of *Judezmo*. However, we can assume the spoken vernacular of the Sephardic Jews of Vienna very much resembled the speech of Sephardic Jews in Bosnia and Serbia, since these were the regions where most of the Sephardic families living in Vienna originally came from (Quintana Rodríguez 2006, pp.40-14n30).

<sup>567</sup> Anderson 2006 (1983), p. 71

<sup>568</sup> „Señor, yo puedo con mucha tristesa constatar, que la Juventud de Vienna y de los estados balcaniquos se esta alejando de la lengua maternal; las lenguas de los estados de sus domicilios, aquí el aleman, ayí el serbo, estan mayorgando el español! mientras que los Viejos detienen con amor la lengua maternal.” Letter by Rafael Mazliach in Pulido Fernández 1905p. 308

in eighteenth century. After the Treaty of Belgrade (1739)<sup>569</sup> had been signed between the House of Habsburg and the Sublime Porte, Ottoman citizens – including the Ottoman Jews – suddenly had the opportunity to trade and to move freely within Austria and in its crown lands. In conjunction with other privileges granted to the Ottoman Jews residing in Austria, this led to the paradox situation that the (foreign) Sephardic Jews enjoyed a better legal status than the (domestic) Jewish subjects of the Habsburg Empire. For example, Ottoman Jews were even allowed to live within the city walls of Vienna whereas most of their Ashkenazic co-religionists were not permitted to reside in the city<sup>570</sup> until the Edict of Tolerance (*Toleranzpatent*) was issued by Joseph II in 1782<sup>571</sup>. Furthermore, a decree from 1796 on behalf of the Habsburgian government made it possible for Turkish Jews residing in Vienna to apply for the Austrian citizenship and indeed many opted for the naturalisation. However, the Viennese Sephardim had not ceased to remain loyal to the Ottoman Empire on a ceremonial and a commercial level. For example, throughout the nineteenth century until the demise of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 the Sultan was honoured annually by holding a special ceremony on his birthday in the Sephardic synagogue in Vienna. Reciprocally, the Ottoman Sultan still considered the Jews of Turkish origin living in Vienna as his protégés<sup>572</sup> from which we may assume that many Sephardic Jews in Austria actually held a dual citizenship. This is also the reason why some Austrian (Ashkenazic) Jews sought to obtain Ottoman documents of residence in order to enjoy the same rights as Turkish Jews residing in Vienna, especially at the time when Austrian Jews were not allowed to settle down in the city<sup>573</sup>. In fact, the *türkisch-israelitische Gemeinde zu Wien* was never “pure” Sephardic since several Ashkenazic Jews also formed part of the community. Still, in the nineteenth century the Turkish-Israelite community was accommodating new Ashkenazic members who were seeking to acquire the Ottoman citizenship<sup>574</sup>.

All these were reasons mentioned above were responsible for the gradual cultural convergence of the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim living in Vienna. This process was further accelerated in the second half of the nineteenth century when the Sephardim became a minuscule Jewish minority in Vienna due to the constant influx of more and more Ashkenazic immigrants from other parts of the Habsburg Empire which also resulted in a significant increase of mixed marriages between Ashkenazim and Sephardim<sup>575</sup>. Simultaneously, the Sephardic Jews of Vienna

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<sup>569</sup> Seroussi 1922, p. 148

<sup>570</sup> Schleicher 1932, pp. 67-68

<sup>571</sup> <http://www.wien.gv.at/kultur/juedischeswien/geschichte/neuzeit.html>, 14.2.2013

<sup>572</sup> Seroussi 1992, p. 148-149

<sup>573</sup> Seroussi 1922, p. 152n7

<sup>574</sup> Several orthodox immigrants from Galicia who did not want to serve in the Austrian army became members of the Turkish-Israelite community in order to receive the Ottoman citizenship and to be spared from the compulsory military service. (Schleicher 1932, pp. 71-73)

<sup>575</sup> Schleicher 1932, pp. 70-71

also began to assimilate into the non Jewish society. In 1887, the same year of the inauguration of the new Sephardic synagogue in Vienna and one year before the publication of Adolf von Zemlinsky's and Michel Papo's chronicle, a letter to the editor of the periodical *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* was published that very well described the ongoing process of acculturation the Sephardic community of Vienna had gone through:

*“[...] Bis vor 30 oder 40 Jahren trugen die Mitglieder der türkischen Gemeinde, Männer und Frauen, die malerische orientalische Tracht und sprachen zumeist Spaniolisch, jetzt kleiden sie sich ausschließlich deutsch, respective französisch, d. h. modern und sprechen deutsch. Sie haben eine Schule mit deutscher Unterrichtssprache, und zahlreiche Kinder besuchen die allgemeinen Volks-, Bürger- und Mittelschulen. So viel jedoch bekannt ist, widmen sich nur selten Knaben oder Jünglinge der Wissenschaft im Allgemeinen der jüdischen insbesondere. Ihr Ritus in der Synagoge ist der spanische. Sie haben in letzter Zeit jedoch einen deutschen Kantor, Namens Bauer, und einen Chor.”*<sup>576</sup>

This commentary vividly described the drastic social changes within the Sephardic community of Vienna which occurred only within a few decades; apparently, a new – in Stuart Hall's terms – *hybrid* style of culture had emerged, less “Turkish” and more “Viennese”. Consequently, this process was associated with the loss of the Judeo-Spanish language and an alienation from (traditional) Sephardic culture. This was also the time when the children of some long-established Sephardic families in Vienna decided to withdraw their subscription from the Turkish-Israelite Community of Vienna<sup>577</sup>.

Exactly this was the environmental setting in which the legend of Diego d'Aguilar had emerged. Obviously, intellectuals like Michael Papo and Adolf von Zemlinsky adopted and modified this legend in order to create coherent (hi)story and to remind the the Viennese Sephardim of their own roots. In this respect, the remembrance of the Balkan and Ottoman heritage, to which the contact had not broken off yet, was not enough. For Papo and Zemlinsky it was much more important to draw a direct link to ancient homeland (*Sephard I*) in order to be able to preserve the Sephardic character of the community; apart from the “Spanish” elements they were also keen to emphasise the “Viennese/Austrian” and some “Turkish/Ottoman” aspects which all together become manifest in the main character of the founding legend. Several facts of Diego d'Aguilar's biography – e.g. his Iberian origin and his influence at the court of Habsburg – appeared to be perfect in order to be converted into suggestive narratives with the aim of creating a direct link between the ancient *Sepharad* and the new “Sepharad of the Danube”<sup>578</sup>. However, the fact that the

<sup>576</sup> Philippson (ed.) 1887, p. 633; cf. also Seroussi 1992, pp. 149-150

<sup>577</sup> e.g. members of the wealthy Russo family (cf. Kohlbauer-Fritz 2010, p. 108).

<sup>578</sup> “Sepharad of the Danube” (*Sefarad an der Donau, La Sefarad del Danubio*) is a term frequently used by Michael Studemund-Halévy for referring to the Sephardic community of Vienna. (cf. Studemund-Halévy 2009; Studemund-Halévy 2010a). It is hard to categorize Vienna yet as *Sepharad II* or already as *Sepharad III* in Max Weinreich sense. However, these categories shall only remind us of the fluidity of term *Sepharad* in general.

hero in question was of Portuguese origin, obviously, did not make him “Spanish”, or in other words, “Sephardic” enough. Thus, his biography had to be consequently altered and dramatized in order to turn it into a real Sephardic folk story, including a setting in the Spanish capital Madrid, as well as the inquisition. All these are elements that have obviously been borrowed from popular Sephardic novels of the nineteenth century. Apart from a direct link to Spain, also a link to the new host society had been created: not only should the Sephardim of Vienna feel themselves as proud Sephardic but as *Viennese* Sephardim. Hence, the legendary account of Diego d'Aguilar had to be featured by authoritative Austrian figures such as Maria Theresa and Charles VI<sup>579</sup>. Last but not least, another link to the Sephardic colonies on the Balkans and in Anatolia had to be accommodated by featuring no less a figure than the Ottoman Sultan<sup>580</sup>. Nevertheless, as has been expounded before, many of those allegedly historical links are not all *per se* fictional. Several elements about Diego d'Aguilar's biography are not only well feasible but they even seem to reflect historical facts (e.g. his *converso* background, his confirmed presence in Vienna; his patronage of local Jewish communities). The legendary heroic figure of Diego d'Aguilar, however, is first and foremost an imagined character. Of course, the imaginative elements within his legendary biography do not make his figure less authentic or even corrupt but they fulfil a certain aim, namely to bring into focus the different elements, or in Stuart Hall's terms, “presences” which constitute the diasporic/cultural identity of Sephardic Jews in Vienna<sup>581</sup>. Thus, by drawing upon the (imagined) diasporic experience of one Spanish (*converso*) Jew and by highlighting his vivid interactions with the Austrian and Ottoman authorities the recipients of that legend should be reminded, first of all, of their Spanish but also about their Austrian and Ottoman heritage. Moreover, all these heritages were featured by a certain aristocratic aura which, as has been outlined before, is quite typical narrative (e.g. the Sephardic nobleman) employed by many Sephardic diaspora societies<sup>582</sup>.

Thus, in regard to Diego d'Aguilar's legend we can identify – at least – three constitutive presences: a Spanish or “Sephardic” presence (representing the strong retrospective dependence to the imagined homeland, i.e. *Sepharad* *l*), an Austrian presence (for having gradually integrated/assimilated into the Viennese society) and an Ottoman presence (representing the historical and political ties with the Ottoman empire); furthermore, we could also add the existence of a Balkan presence, since many community members continued to maintain close contacts with

<sup>579</sup> In Ludwig August Frankl's version of the legend (as told by Ruben Barukh) even Prince Eugene of Savoy makes a short cameo appearance (cf. Frankl 1856a, p. 632).

<sup>580</sup> Neither Papo or Zemlinsky mention the name of the ruling Ottoman Sultan who supposedly intervened when Maria Theresa made plans for expelling the Jews from Austria. Ludwig August Frankl, in turn, mentions “Sultan Selim”; however, a Sultan by that name was not in power in the lifetime of Diego d'Aguilar (cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_sultans\\_of\\_the\\_Ottoman\\_Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sultans_of_the_Ottoman_Empire), 24.3.2013)

<sup>581</sup> cf. Chapter 2.4.

<sup>582</sup> cf. Chapter 4.4.1.

their regions of origin (represented in the legend by Diego d'Aguilar's close relation with the Sephardic community of Temeswar). By applying Stuart Hall's conceptional model of diaspora and cultural identity, we immediately become aware of the *hybrid* nature of the Sephardic community of Vienna. Of course, these manifold “presences” do not constitute pure origins but should rather be understood as discourses about (imagined) origins – following Benedict Anderson, we may not forget that an origin of a whole group (and maybe even of individuals) can only be imagined. In other words, only the knowledge and the discourse about one's own origin allows individuals to imagine themselves as groups of people belonging together, thus, as a community or even as a nation. At this Michael Papo and Adolf von Zemlinsky are no exception, so, it is hardly surprising that they begin their chronicle with a broader discourse about the Jewish past:

*“[...] der Bestand eines Volksstammes [ist] in den Blättern der Weltgeschichte verzeichnet, der Bestand eines mächtigen großen Volksstammes, dessen Geschichte gar eng verflochten sind [sic], mit dem anderer Volksstämme und alle diese Folianten widmen immer und immer wieder ein Blatt der Geschichte dieses Volkes, das in Folge maßloser an ihm verübter Grausamkeiten und Unterdrückungen jeglicher Art, eine Zeit lang der Befürchtung Raum gab, auch diese Nation würde vergehen, verderben. Diese Befürchtung erfüllt sich jedoch nicht.”*<sup>583</sup>

Here, the two authors strongly emphasise the resolute national nature of their own *Volksstamm*<sup>584</sup> by simultaneously juxtaposing it in opposition to other, more powerful tribes or nations that repeatedly used to oppress and maltreat the Jewish people. This experience – being an oppressed and discriminated against “Other”, respectively, the discourse about such an experience – definitely seemed to have been the main reason for Jews to imagine themselves not only as a community but as a national entity (in opposition to their oppressors who, in turn, are dependent on the recognition of their oppressed subjects in order to perceive themselves as a community too<sup>585</sup>).

In order to maintain the boundaries of a national identity, the creation and the distribution of a foundational myth seemed to be inevitably necessary. Also associations such as *Esperanza* sought after ways in order to maintain the national character of Sephardic Jews. So it is not surprising at all that Michael Papo, the co-author of one of the most popular versions of the legend about Diego d'Aguilar, was also one of the most prominent supporting members of *Esperanza*. However, in 1923 – only a few years after Michael Papo had passed away – an article in *El Mundo Sefaradi* (*Esperanza*'s own club magazine) was published which already drew a much less enthusiastic picture of the future of the Sephardic community of Vienna. Both, the decay of Sephardic print

<sup>583</sup> Papo, Zemlinsky 1888, p. 1

<sup>584</sup> It is important to note that Zemlinsky and Papo do not use *Volksstamm* (translated as *tribu* in Papo's version) for referring to Sephardic Jews alone but Jews in general.

<sup>585</sup> According to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel exactly this dynamic – which became known as Master–slave dialectic – is responsible for the formation of self-consciousness, or in other words, identity (cf. Hegel 1979, pp. 145ff)

culture, as well as of Judeo-Spanish as a spoken language, were clearly considered to be the many reasons for the erosion of the national identity of Sephardic Jews in Vienna:

*“Vienna once [was] an important Sephardic centre. Here, many Judeo-Spanish newspapers were published, as well as many other different works in that language, especially many religious books for the Sephardic rite were published and edited in Vienna. [...] But over the time the good old Jewish tradition was lost [...] The contact between Judaism and the Sephardic way of life in the East is crumbling day by day. [...]. The young Sephardic generation is uprooted. At best they know a little how to read Hebrew, Judeo-Spanish they do not speak at all, as “Spaniards” they do not participate in the Jewish national life, thus, they are urged to give an answer to the question: what nation are you part of?”*<sup>586</sup> [trans. by MS, original see footnote]

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<sup>586</sup> „Vyenah [era] un importante sentro sefardi. Aki aparesian gazetas judeoespanyoles, se publikavan diferentes ovras en este idioma, i espesyalmente redaktavan en Vyenah i imprimian los libros relijyozos para el rito sefardi. [...] Ma, la buena tradisyon judia se fue kon el tyempo perdyendo [...]. El kontakto de este judaizmo kon la vida sefardi en el oryente se rompia de dia en dia [...] La jenerasyon jovena sefardi es una dezraizada. En ebreo save, en el major falo, apenas meldar, el judeo-espanyol no avla del todo, komo ‘espanyoles’ no partesipan en la vida nasyonal-judia, i se topa en apreto de dar repuesta a la demanda: de ke nasyon sos.“ El Mundo Sefardi Vol. 1 No. 1 1923, pp. 39-41 in Studemund-Halévy 2010a, p. 79

## 6. Conclusion

As has been expounded at the beginning of this analysis, cultural identities are rather complex and multi-layered constructs which is why multiple approaches are required in order to be able to reconstruct the mechanisms which are responsible for the formation of cultural identity. Of course, it has to be kept in mind that most of the approaches I have selected, had originally been evolved in order to analyse more “secular” political and social phenomena, just as nationalism. This is why some of considerations and conceptions might have appeared somewhat unconventional at first sight when being applied to the analysis of religious/ethnic communities. However, since I perceive the Studies of Religion as a predominantly interdisciplinary subject, it is not only desirable but, in fact, absolutely necessary to employ and test out the common state-of-the-art approaches of other neighbouring disciplines, not least because religious phenomena can hardly be understood separately or independently from social, political, psychological or philosophical points of views. In this respect, the theoretical approaches of Benedict Anderson, Stuart Hall, as well as those of other prominent theorists included in my thesis, definitely provide a very solid ground for the analysis and evaluation of cultural – including religious – identities. Thus, in references to my hypotheses about the cultural identity of Sephardic Jews discussed in the second chapter of my thesis I arrive at the following conclusions:

There is no other way to grasp Sephardic communities as “imagined communities” in the sense that Benedict Anderson expounds this term in his eponymous book. This assumption eventually proves to be right when we acknowledge that the most important criterion for being real/actual communities, namely face-to-face contact among all community members in question, is definitely not met among the multitude of (dispersed) Sephardic communities. Moreover, the fact that Anderson's theory was primarily evolved for the analysis of nations and nation states makes his analytical models, as well as those of other prominent theorists of nationalism, even more attractive. As has been shown in my analysis, Sephardic Jews actually did and still do (e.g. Mordechai Arbell) perceive themselves as a nation (*nación* or *nação*), a circumstance which even culminated in the evolution on a peculiar Sephardic variety of nationalism by the end of the nineteenth century, somehow similar to other forms of modern nationalism, first and foremost Zionism.

Having said that, my first hypothesis is further verified by the fact that an ultimate definition of what “Sephardic” actually means eventually does not exist. As has been discussed in detail, the terms “Sephardic”, as well as “*Sepharad*” turn out to be extremely eclectic. The actual places associated with the *Sepharad* have changed over the course of time and it was only in late Antiquity

that this term became identified with Spain or the Iberian Peninsula and although the modern Hebrew term today designates the modern country of Spain, for many Sephardic Jews it has remained a rather volatile term over the centuries, which was even expanded to the diaspora communities outside the peninsula, as soon as the Iberian Jews had been forced to leave their homeland. Furthermore, the term “Sephardic Jew or Jewry” today does not necessarily have to designate Jews whose ancestors actually lived in the Iberian Peninsula or who still speak Judeo-Spanish. Since the term Sephardic is also frequently used in order to refer to Oriental Jewish communities who conform to the Sephardic *minhag*, it can also designate Jews of Iraqi, Central Asian descent or even any non-Ashkenazic Jew. On that score we can conclude that in order to perceive themselves as a community, Sephardic Jews necessarily had and still have to “imagine” themselves as a group of people, by fixing the meaning of the term Sephardic either to the a common origin, common religious customs and laws or a common vernacular language, just to name a few current examples. Whatever definition we choose, there will always be individuals who will drop out of a particular definitional framework. For example, while today's Bucharan Jews in Vienna naturally define themselves as Sephardic Jews, others, like Mordechai Arbell, exclusively use the term Sephardic for referring to Jews of Spanish or Portuguese heritage who eventually speak Judeo-Spanish.

Thus, to be able to proceed with the analysis of Sephardic identity I, too, was forced to define the scope of the very term “Sephardic”. Since, according to my second hypothesis, the use and the maintenance of a vernacular language has been fundamental for the formation of a Sephardic identity, the term “Sephardic” – at least for the analytical purposes in my thesis (i.e. I am the last who would dare to deny a Bucharan or Iraqi Jew the right to call him or herself Sephardic) – had finally been limited to Jews of Iberian heritage who actually speak or spoke Judeo-Spanish or *Judezmo*.

Indeed, the adoption of Judeo-Spanish, thus, a generally intelligible vernacular as print language, created a particular and exclusive field of discourse which, in turn, made Sephardic Jews aware of their companionship. As a matter of fact, this sense of companionship goes hand in hand with the emergence of a common readership, for example, of newspapers written in *Judezmo*. The strong ties between the cultural identity of Sephardic Jews and their language strikingly come into focus when we draw upon the discourses about the fate of Judeo-Spanish as a living, spoken language. For example, the shift from Judeo-Spanish to German especially among the younger generation of Sephardic Jews in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century was vehemently regretted by a number of Sephardic intellectuals. Yet apparently, the emergence of intellectual



associations such as the Viennese *Esperanza*, which sought ways of maintaining a national Sephardic consciousness also by preserving and purifying the language of Sephardic Jews, could do very little in order to arrest this process.

In any case, the maintenance of one's community defining boundaries, which includes the preservation of language and customs but also the distinction from "Others" (e.g. Ashkenazim, gentiles), is one of the main criteria which actually define a diaspora.

The fact that Sephardic communities, in fact, perceive themselves as diaspora communities has repeatedly been demonstrated in the course of my thesis. Apart from boundary-maintenance, also dispersion and the orientation toward an imagined homeland play a constituting role in the formation of Sephardic identity. As has been pointed out, already the Bible is full of narratives that constitute a strong homeland orientation in connection with the biblical *topoi* of exile and exodus.

However, by having a closer look at biblical terms such as *am* (עם) we also become aware of the volatility of such identity-establishing terms, a phenomenon just mentioned in relation to the terms "*Sepharad*" and "Sephardic". The meaning of the term *am* was only fixed – i.e. designating Israel as a people – within the context of the Exodus and in reference to a power regime (Egypt) which was associated with a discourse about the "Self" and the "Other". This circumstance shall only remind us of the fact that a identity-finding process is never self-contained but dependent on other agents as well. Furthermore, the Book of Exodus can clearly be identified with a foundational myth with Moses being the mythological hero at the centre stage. The aim of such myths is obviously clear, namely to create a coherent narrative – most likely about a single agent – for establishing a group identity. What pertains to protagonists of these myths is also true be demised to its authorship. Group identity should not necessarily to be valued as a collective effort or struggle. In fact, group identity – respectively, the corresponding narratives constituting such a identity – is usually drafted by a small group of people belonging to a literate social elite. This is why we can conclude that communal identity, first of all, is the product of single visionaries who, in turn, draw upon their own social realities when producing their identity-constituting narratives. This has effectively been demonstrated by using the example of Michael Papo and Alexander von Zemlinsky, the authors of one of the most prominent circulating versions of the founding legend of the Sephardic community of Vienna.

The obvious existence of coherent narratives about the past and an origin, consequently, verifies also my fourth derived hypothesis. In fact, such narratives are well-documented since the very beginning of Sephardic history on the Iberian Peninsula, where Jews had evolved legendary

narratives that should prove their biblical origins and their connection on the one hand, and their millennia-long existence on the peninsula on the other.

Similar narratives about an imagined homeland come into focus after the Jews of Spain and Portugal had been expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. In the diaspora, actually twofold discourse about the homeland left behind would emerge: one about the “glory of Spain”, as well as another one about “the trauma of expulsion”. Once again, both discourses were evidently featured by “Other” (Muslim and Christian) actors.

However, these narratives about a glorified/doomed homeland were not simply invented or made up without a reason but actually based on real historical events and served a certain purpose. Thus, by interweaving these narratives with fictional elements, they actually became meaningful enough for consolidating a communal identity not just despite but because of the diaspora experience by creating a link to a imagined homeland that one most probably was not able to return to in a literal sense but at least virtually by the means of illustrative stories about the lost homeland. Numerous novels in Judeo-Spanish which were published throughout the nineteenth century serve as good examples for how Sephardic Jews used to ponder on the land of their ancestors. The plots of many of these novels were often schemed about a *converso* protagonist living in (post-expulsion) Spain and who, in the course of the story line, finally learns about his Jewish heritage. It seems quite obvious that these stories were written and distributed with the aim of making the Sephardic Jews of the diaspora aware of their own Jewish-Spanish heritage, especially at a time when more and more Sephardic Jews gradually disconnected from the traditional Sephardic way of life which also included the shift to vernacular languages other than Judeo-Spanish, as has been stated before.

The foundational myth of the Sephardic community of Vienna is the perfect example for making these drastic social changes visible that most Sephardic communities had gone through in the course of the nineteenth century. Quite naturally, in order to create a coherent and, more importantly, meaningful story line historical facts had creatively been interwoven with fictional elements. However, apart from the narrative elements highlighting the Spanish heritage of the Sephardic Jews of Vienna, the legend about Diego d'Aguilar – the legendary founder of that community – is also featured by secondary plots in order to create a direct connection between the protagonist and the other two significant topographies especially meaningful for the Sephardic community of Vienna, namely the Habsburg, as well as the Ottoman Empire. In order to explain this complex interplay between various origins – or “presences” – Stuart Hall's model of diasporic identity best illustrates that we should think of Sephardic identities as *hybrid* (i.e. complex, multi-layered, syncretic, creole) identities rather than pure and one-dimensional identities linked to only one origin.

With this conclusion, ultimately, also my last hypothesis, namely that Sephardic diaspora communities are actually not hallmarked by purity but by *hybridity*, is equally verified. Precisely for that reason, particular Sephardic communities always have to be studied within their particular cultural, social and historical context. This is why, for example, the different notions and nuances of Viennese Sephardic identity cannot be understood without keeping the different (Spanish, Portuguese, Balkan, Ottoman, Habsburg, and nowadays even Central Asian, Caucasian, Russian and Soviet) “presences” in mind which all have a share in this imagined collective identity to a greater or lesser extent.

Last but not least, I claim that the concept of *hybridity* is generally valid for every kind, not only diaspora-type of culture. Although the unique Sephardic civilisations of the Mediterranean, of Northern Europe, the New World and, of course, Vienna, have already ceased to exist, *hybrid* Sephardic identity, still, continues to exist within other *hybrid* societies, first and foremost in the State of Israel, where the vast majority of Jews of Sephardic heritage has found a new home. In this sense, I conclude with the words of Abraham B. Yehoshua, a renowned Israeli novelist and essayist of Sephardic origin, who opines that even Israeli identity forms part of a larger matrix of Mediterranean identity. According to Yehoshua, Sephardic Jews form an integral and, most importantly, unifying part within this *hybrid* cultural matrix which, in turn, is why they are called upon to fulfil not only a cultural but also a political mission:

*“Mediterranean-style pluralism, rooted in a real and not an artificial unity, is not to be found in many other regions of the world. Surely, we may therefore speak of a Mediterranean identity, one of whose unifying components is the Sephardic Jew, who carries in his soul the vanished Other, the Christian and the Muslim. This is his role, his mission. Not merely Ladino love songs or folkloric foods or Sephardic melodies and modes of prayer in the synagogue, but a political and cultural mission. A mission of peace and tolerance, addressed first and foremost to the Arabs of the Mediterranean – a mission with which Israelis who are not Sephardic are also likely to identify.”*<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> Yehoshua 2010, p.155



## 7. Sources

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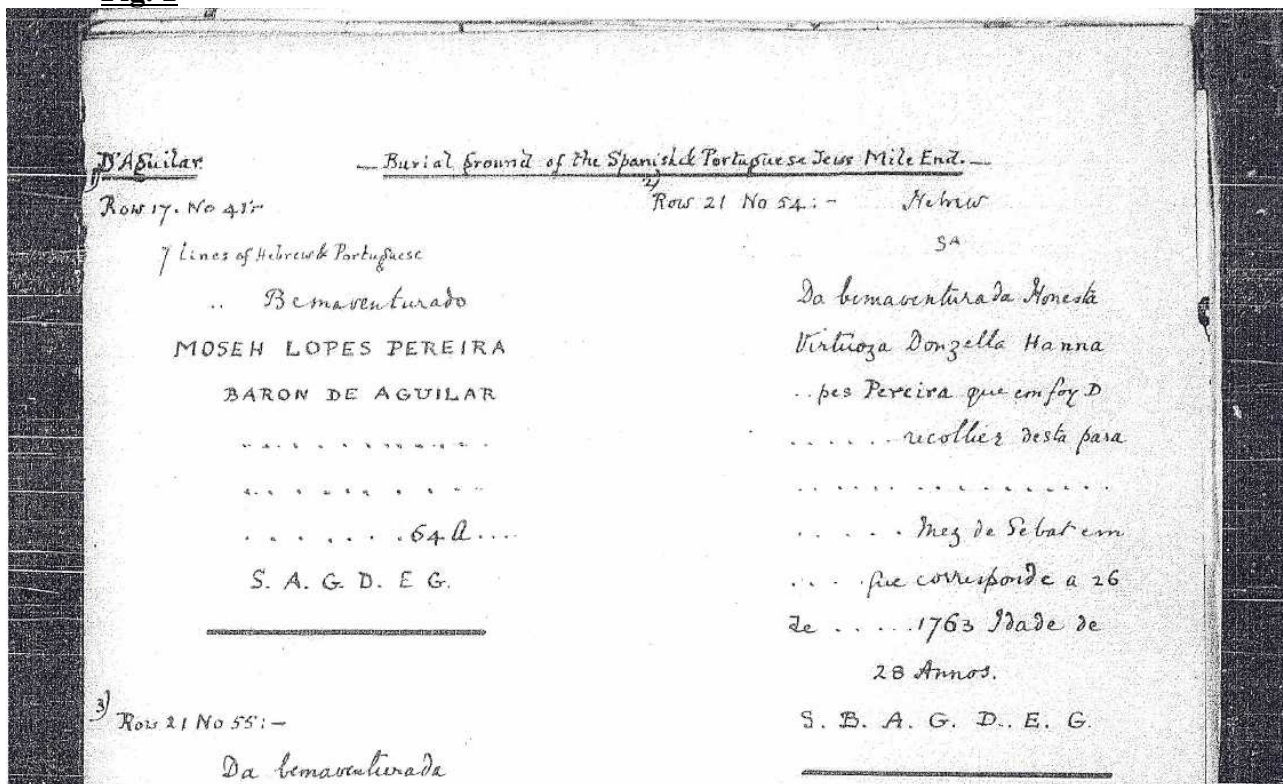
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 Interview with Mordechai Arbelle (12.4.2011, transcript available on request)  
 Interview with Mordechai Arbelle (18.4.2012, transcript available on request)



## 8. Appendix

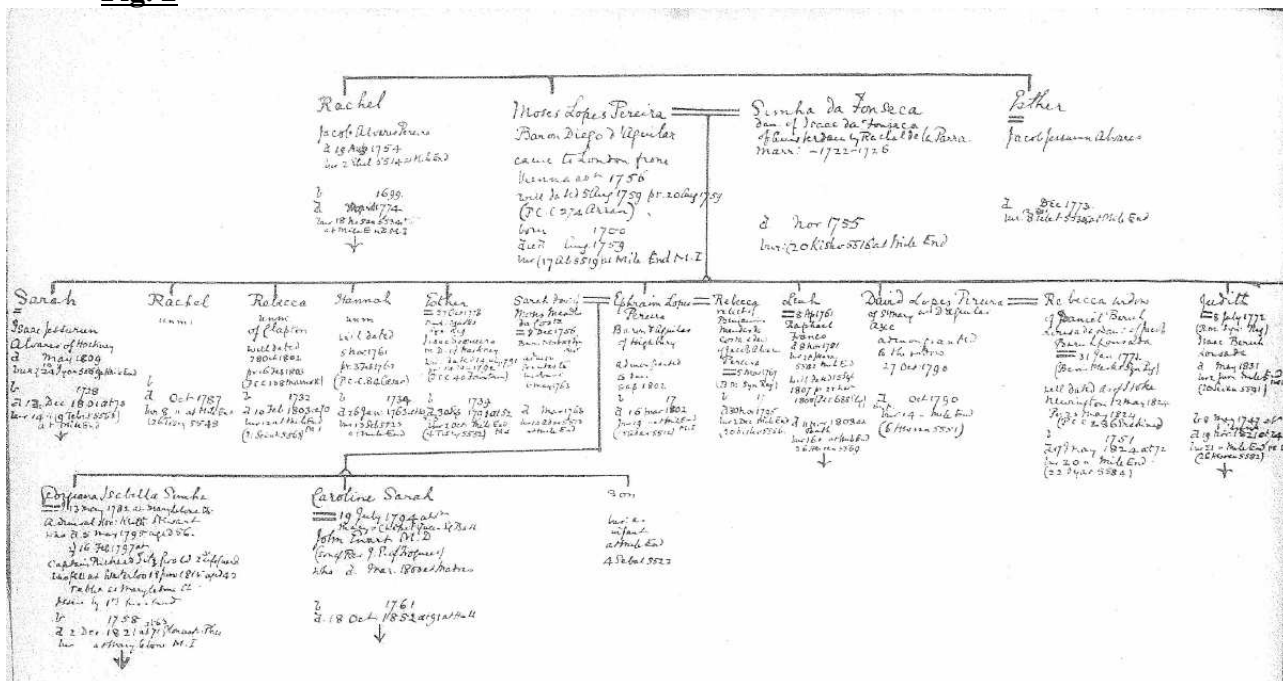
**Fig. 1**



## Transcript of Diego d'Aguilar's tombstone inscription

(selected from the Genealogical Record in the Colyer- Fergusson Collection, archived in the Society of Genealogists Library, London, UK)

**Fig. 2**



## Pedigree of the d'Aguilar Family

(selected from the Genealogical Record in the Colyer- Fergusson Collection, archived in the Society of Genealogists Library, London, UK)



Fig. 3



Cover sheet of Papo, Zemlinsky 1888 (German version)



Fig. 4



Cover sheet of *Papo, Zemlinsky 1888* (Judeo-Spanish version)



## Acknowledgement

There are many persons to whom I want to express my deepest gratitude. This thesis would not have been possible without the insight and knowledge I gained during my one year study programme at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Therefore I want to thank my wonderful teachers first and foremost David Bunis, Michal Held and Aldina Quintana Rodríguez, for instructing and for encouraging me to proceed with the studies of Sephardic Jewry. I am especially indebted to Michal Held who not only gave me invaluable feedback on my first paper about Sephardic identity but who also established the contact with Mordechai Arbell. In this regard, I also want to thank Mordechai Arbell, especially for his time and for sharing his interesting stories about *el mundo sefaradi*.

Furthermore I would like to thank the association Studium in Israel e.V., as well as my parents and my godmother Eva for having supported me – also financially – during my study year in Israel which, in fact, had been crucial for my decision to write my thesis about Sephardic identity.

My special thanks, of course, go to my supervisor Wolfram Reiss who encouraged me, not only to write about a topic with reference to the Sephardic community of Vienna but also to study in Israel in the first place. His support includes uncountable letters of reference which were also necessarily at various stages for organising my field research in England and Israel.

At this point, I also want to thank the extremely helpful staff of the Library of the Society of Genealogists and of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain for making available all the genealogical material I required for my research.

Another special 'thank you' goes to Michael Studemund-Halévy who not only provided me with plenty of valuable material about the Sephardic community of Vienna but who also invited me to participate in his conference *Sefarad an der Donau* as an external participant.

Last but not least, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my wonderful friends (Sarah, Thomas, Julia, Eva, Sana, Lea, Keren, Omri, Moran, Eli and Rob a.k.a. Breaty Bear) but also to my patient flat mates (Babsi and Peter).



## **Abstract**

This thesis presents a study on the constitution and consolidation of Sephardic identity in relation to a diaspora experience. Principally concentrating on Sephardic group identity, this study also includes several aspects of identity of certain individuals since two are interdependent to some degree. For this reason the study not only rests upon the analysis of the secondary and primary sources about the history and the language of Sephardic Jews, but also upon two qualitative ethnographic interviews which were conducted in the course of two research stays in Israel in April 2011 and April 2012. Furthermore, the study is featured by some selected genealogical material that was collected during another research stay England in Spring 2012. The analysis of diasporic Sephardic identity as outlined in the thesis is based on the interpretation of the gathered material in the course of the field research, as well as the evaluation of other primary and secondary sources concerning the history and language of Sephardic Jews. Additionally, the analysis builds on various examples taken from ancient Jewish history, as well as from the history of Sephardic Jews in Vienna. The guiding question of research is centred around the role that diaspora plays in the identity-finding process of Sephardic Jews.

In order to find an answer to this question a discourse-analytical approach is the methodological means of choice because it provides the best methods and perspectives in order to deal with identity issues. The main theories applied in the thesis derive from Benedict Anderson's model of "imagined communities", as well as from Stuart Hall's conceptions about "cultural identity and diaspora". While the first model has originally evolved for theorising the emergence of modern nation state and nationalism, the second one basically describes the constitution of Black identity in the Caribbean. However, as the results of the present study show, both models, as well as the other deployed approaches, perfectly serve the aim of analysing Sephardic communities. Thus, Sephardic communities have to be understood as "imagined communities" in which narrative motifs, such as diaspora, exile and exodus, play a crucial and identity-constituting role. For this reason, Sephardic communities have to be perceived, first and foremost, as diasporic communities because they fulfil all criteria for being a classical diaspora. In turn, the narratives about this diaspora experience, including the Iberian past, as well as the maintenance of Judeo-Spanish, the vernacular language of Sephardic Jews, represent the main criteria for the consolidation of Sephardic identity. Furthermore, Sephardic communities are not to be thought of as monolithic and pure entities but as hybrid (i.e. complex, multi-layered, syncretic, creole) communities, since hybridity is a characteristic feature all diaspora communities have in common.

### **Zusammenfassung (Abstract in German)**

Die vorliegende Arbeit befasst sich mit einer Studie über die Konstituierung und Konsolidierung sephardischer Identität in Bezug auf Diaspora. Obwohl vorrangig sephardische Gruppenidentität im Zentrum des Interesses dieser Studie steht, werden auch einzelne Aspekte sephardischer Individualidentität berücksichtigt, da – so die These – beide in enger Verbindung zueinander stehen. Aus diesem Grund werden im Laufe der Analyse nicht nur historische und sprachwissenschaftliche Daten ausgewertet und interpretiert, sondern auch Daten, die im Rahmen zweier qualitativer ethnographischer Interviews im April 2011 und April 2012 in Israel erhoben wurden. Zusätzlich kommt auch genealogisches Material zum Tragen, dass während eines weiteren Forschungsaufenthaltes im Frühjahr 2012 in England beschafft wurde. Sephardische Diasporaidentität wird zum einen auf Grundlage des gesammelten Materials und zum anderen durch die Auswertung anderer Primär- und Sekundärquellen einer genauen Analyse unterzogen. Darüber hinaus baut die Analyse auf einer Reihe von historischen Beispielen aus der antiken jüdischen Religionsgeschichte und der jüngeren Geschichte der sephardischen Gemeinde in Wien auf. Hierbei steht die Forschungsfrage im Vordergrund, inwieweit Diaspora eine Rolle beim Identitätsfindungsprozess sephardischer Juden spielt.

Um Antworten auf diese Frage zu finden wird ein diskursanalytischer Ansatz verfolgt, da ein solcher am besten analytische Methoden und Perspektiven für Fragen, die sich mit Identität auseinander setzen, bereithält. Die daraus resultierenden Hypothesen basieren vorwiegend auf den theoretischen Ansätzen Benedict Andersons („imagined communities“) und jenen von Stuart Hall und seinem Konzept von „cultural identity and diaspora“. Während Andersons Modell ursprünglich für die Konzeptionierung moderner Nationen und Nationalismen gedacht war, beschreibt Halls Modell vorrangig das Zustandekommen schwarzer karibischer Identität. Nichtsdestotrotz bieten sich beide Modelle als ideale Ausgangspositionen für die Analyse sephardischer Gemeinschaften an. In der Tat müssen sephardische Gemeinschaften als „imagined communities“ verstanden werden, in welchen Narrative wie Diaspora, Exil oder Exodus eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Identitätsbildung spielen. Aus diesem Grund müssen sephardische Gemeinschaften auch als Diasporagemeinschaften verstanden werden, da sie alle Kriterien einer klassischen Diaspore erfüllen. Narrative über die imaginierte Diaspora (z.B. über Spanien), ebenso wie der Erhalt der judenspanischen Sprache stellen somit die Hauptkriterien für die Herausbildung von sephardischer Identität dar. Sephardische Gemeinschaften wiederum dürfen nicht als in sich geschlossene Konstrukte verstanden werden, sondern als hybride (d.h. komplexe, mannigfaltige, synkretistische, kreolische) Gemeinschaften. In der Tat ist Hybridität das eigentliche Hauptmerkmal von Diasporagemeinschaften im Allgemeinen.

# Curriculum Vitae

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## Education/Academical Activities

- 09/1998 – 06/2003 **Bundesoberstufenrealgymnasium, St. Pölten, Austria**  
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- 08/2000 – 05/2001 **Colegio La Salle Margarita, Colón, Panama**  
*Student exchange programme*
- 07/2003 **Vienna International Model United Nations (VIMUN)**  
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- 03/2005 – 04/2013 **University of Vienna**  
*Religious Studies*
- 09/2009 **Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR), Messina, Italy**  
*Participant*
- 08/2010 – 06/2011 **Hebrew University Jerusalem**  
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- 06/2011 **National Authority of Ladino (Israel) & Hebrew University Jerusalem**  
*Fellowship for outstanding students of Sephardic Studies*
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- 07/2011 **Summer School of Jewish Studies, Hohenems, Austria**  
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## Work Experience

- 08/2001 – 06/2006 **AFS – International Programs Austria**  
*Student exchange organisation: voluntary coordinator*
- 06/2006 – 07/2010 **Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe Austria**  
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- 08/2007 – 08/2008 **Verein Gedenkdienst & Asociación Filantrópica Israelita (AFI), Buenos Aires, Argentina**  
*Holocaust memorial service: care assistant, office employee*

09/2008 – 11/2008	<b>Verlorene Nachbarschaft – Vecinos Perdidos, Buenos Aires, Argentina</b> <i>Holocaust memorial congress: communications, research assistant</i>
10/2011 – 03/2012	<b>University of Vienna</b> <i>Department of Religious Studies: research assistant</i>
Since 10/2011	<b>Mattersburger Kreis für Entwicklungspolitik an den österreichischen Universitäten</b> <i>Research platform, publishing house: head of despatch section</i>
Since 11/2011	<b>VertretungsNetz – Sachwalterschaft, Patientenanwaltschaft, Bewohnervertretung (VSP)</b> <i>Freelancer: care assistant</i>
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### ***Languages***

German	<i>Native language</i>
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English	<i>Fluent</i>
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Portuguese	<i>Proficient</i>

### ***Publications***

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## Statement of Confirmation

I declare that this thesis entitled: “Imagining Sephardic Diaspora” is my own original work, and hereby certify that unless stated, all work contained within this thesis is my own independent research and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree at any institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

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Martin Stechauner

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Date