

HALAPID

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SPECULATIONS ON NETANYAHU'S THEORIES REGARDING THE CONVERSOS AS REFLECTED IN HIS ORIGINS OF THE INQUISITION IN 15th CENTURY SPAIN

During my presentation at the recent conference in Albuquerque, someone in the audience asked me what I thought personally about this issue. There was no time to answer then. Halapid has given me the opportunity to reply.

Of the several works dealing with the subject of the anousim (Hebrew for "forced ones") that I've read over the past three years, Professor Netanyahu's above work was one of the most impressive. While his views regarding the odyssey of the anousim during the century between the forced conversions of 1391 and the expulsion of 1492 may not agree with ours, his extensive research, abundant documentation and reasonable subjective analysis of his data has contributed significantly, in my opinion, to preparing fertile ground for further, more productive study of the anousim from every viewpoint.

Professor Netanyahu's theory is that after the forced conversion of many of Spain's Jews during the massacre and destruction of most of that country's Jewish communities in 1391, and also after the mass conversions of Jews following the institution of the "Laws of Catalina" (harsh anti-Jewish legislation in the early 1400s), almost all of the forced converts, and especially their descendants, settled comfortably, with the healing passage of time, into their new religion, Christianity. The Inquisition, supposedly instituted to stem a rampant tide of crypto-Judaism among the converses, was actually a cynical, political expedient motivated by King Ferdinand (and supported by Queen Isabella) to diffuse the volatile anti-*converso* mass movement by providing it with a release valve. By doing so, the Catholic Monarchs were able to maintain their popular base of support among the middle and lower classes. These classes constituted the bulk of the anti-*converso* movement and served as leverage against the still-restive nobles who were intimidated for the moment by the monarchy's popular support, and who hesitated to press their claims and privileges against the royal administration.

According to Netanyahu, the majority of the anti-*converso* movement would have preferred expulsion or extermination of the converses, but they settled for inquisition. By conservatively Identifying the Monarchy

with this movement, the Catholic kings attached it to their power base and acquired a significant degree of influence within it. By instituting a legal inquisition, they emasculated the tendencies toward violence and destruction in this movement and maintained, at least formally, the fundamental principle of their government's policy: the unequivocal rule of law. They knew that only thus could they avoid returning to the decades of civil strife that preceded their reign.

What if Netanyahu has something there? Throughout our history Jews have been forced, or even have chosen, to give up their religious and ethnic identity. However, there have been instances where the intractable hate of the dominant society, perhaps exacerbated by attempts to assimilate, would create a backlash that would

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compel the disillusioned and/or desperate survivors to return somehow to their Jewish roots. Such an instance may have occurred in Spain and later in Portugal.

I think it is possible that the unique relationship of Spain's ancient Jewry to the land and the singular part its Jews played in its history, a relationship unparalleled between any other Jewry and its host country in European feudal history, compelled many Jews to

choose Christianity for Spain rather than social ostracism, expulsion or death for Judaism.

In addition to the assault from without, a simultaneous discord from within was taking shape. The conflict between supporters and opponents of Maimonides' interpretation of Judaism through the lens of philosophy was draining further reserves of communal strength. Opponents saw the great scholar's intellectual achievement as an additional major contributing factor in creating a state of religious ambivalence already diluting the Judaism of many among the intellectual elite. This, in turn, adversely affected the commitment to literal interpretation and compulsory observance of Jewish law among the masses. Modern supporters of Maimonides have cited the rabbinically enforced return of the post 1391 remnant of the Spanish Jewish community to rigid orthodoxy as a crucial factor in rendering Judaism

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by Arye Hazary

(cont)

intellectually unattractive and represented by mediocre scholars.

Again according to Netanyahu, most old Christians continued to despise the New Christians despite the eagerness of the latter to adopt the predominant Catholic way of life in Spain. The former saw the latter as Jews in Christian camouflage and denigrated their Catholic fidelity through accusations of crypto-Judaic practice.

As generation succeeded generation, the connection between New Christians and Judaism had become more remote, while Old Christian enmity had become more intense, progressing to widespread attempts at the social ostracism of the converses from Old Christian society as exhibited by the *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) statute. To the degree that this stratagem proved to be inadequate to its goal, the remaining interventions of expulsion then extermination under the auspices of the inquisition, were employed for all they were worth.

During the period of 1391 to 1492, it would seem reasonable, and Netanyahu has stated as much in his book, that the relentless and almost universal rejection by Old Christian society of the New Christians was based on their ethnic descendancy from Jews; and it thus began a trickle of disillusioned and desperate children and grandchildren of conversos to leave Spain in order to return to Judaism in Moslem North Africa and the Middle East, as well as in the tolerant city-states of Italy. While Netanyahu emphasizes that the Jews of Spain knew the conversos from firsthand experience during these years, he describes the relationship between them as one of total antipathy or mutual indifference. Other scholars claim that a more complex relationship existed in which Jews sometimes sympathized with and assisted converses

Those anusim who began their return to the Jewish faith after the Expulsion had rid Spain of all professing Jews, may have learned the ancient foundations of their ancestors' religion by gaining access to the Old Testament (forbidden to the laity by the church at that time), by studying theology at the universities, or by joining the clergy despite the efforts of the *limpieza de sangre* advocates to block the entry of descendants of New Christians to these institutions. Others may have resorted to learning Judaism from the lists of the telltale practices of the Judaizers published by the Inquisition. While these methods may have been revealed by victims during interrogation or torture, it would only render all information thus acquired as suspect, but not necessarily as absolutely false.

Like the secret Jews, descendants of Conversos who may have been sincere Christians were forced to flee the Inquisition to save their lives and property because the Holy Office rarely seemed to differentiate between them. Those who found refuge in the more tolerant, Protestant northern Europe could not do so as Catholics, for practicing Catholicism was poorly tolerated in those regions during the early days of the Protestant Reformation. Conversion to the Protestant denominations, such as the Dutch Reformed Church, was not an option for foreigners because they could then join the Guilds and become powerful economic competitors. Non-sectarians,

deists and atheists were not welcome. Later Spanish and Portuguese émigrés to northern European lands were automatically considered new members of the Jewish congregations founded by earlier Iberian refugees and possibly were presumed to be such by the majority Christian population as well. In such cases, conversion to Judaism was the only alternative to returning to the lands of the Inquisition.

The 'remnant' phenomenon has occurred before in our history. In 721 B.C.E. with the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, 80% of Jacob's descendants were exiled by their Assyrian conquerors into what ultimately became for most of them geographic and cultural oblivion. One source I came across related that after most of the southern kingdom of Judea was exiled by the Babylonians to Mesopotamia about 150 years, some long-exiled Israelites came into contact with these Judeans and were absorbed by them. Today, groups such as Amishav and Kulanu are working with remnants of the 10 Lost tribes in Asia to assist their return to the family of Israel.

A more contemporary example of the remnant phenomenon that I came across in reading Zionist history is that about 90% of the young East European Jews who went to Palestine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries returned to their birthplace. Many were young idealists inspired by the 1917 Russian Revolution. Many were subsequently eliminated by Stalin or the Nazis. The survivors and their descendants were stigmatized by their Jewish origins beginning in the post Lenin soviet era. After the 1967 6 Day War many of these long-disillusioned and desperate Jews began to grope their way back to their alienated and long-suppressed Jewishness. They were persecuted, jailed and refused permission to emigrate to Israel because they began to learn Hebrew and celebrate Jewish holidays in secret. Their inquisitors were the KGB and their Old Christians were the broadly anti-semitic Soviet masses. Today, this renewing Jewry is reconnecting with their heritage in Israel, Russia and elsewhere.

Lastly, look at us, the descendants of the anusim. A remnant of us have endured the obstacles, returned to Judaism and live with the consequences of our decision. Certainly, more of us are returning all the time. But what of the thousands out there who are not, and perhaps will not ever, return?

In conclusion, it seems reasonable that Spain's Jews, with their fortitude eroded both internally by religious discord and ambivalence and the slow suffocation of hope for future salvation, and externally by pogroms and religious harassment aimed at demonstrating the weakness and inferiority of their faith, were left with no other option to attain *convivencia* in the land they called home save the one contoured by the acceptance of Christianity. Out of fear for their lives and property, and out of despair of ever seeing light on any of all the darkening horizons of their faith, increasing numbers of Jews took the only path they saw open to them. Even among Jews who chose exile were, many who ultimately could not make a go of it elsewhere, and who returned to Spain and to the Catholic Church in order to regain the

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homes and property they had left behind.

The general Christian population in Spain, initially delighted with the converso phenomenon of Jews finally joining the true faith in masses, soon realized that rather than curing the cause of their Jew hatred, they had internalized it. While the "cure" could not be reversed, the old standby therapies of physical and social quarantine -expulsion and extermination - could be, and were, reinstituted with terrible effect.

Whether out of principle or practicality or both, disillusioned and desperate anousim began to grope their way back to the covenant that their forebears had forsaken generations before. The dimensions of the return have ranged between trickle and torrent, depending on the conditions prevailing during various periods over the last 500 years, even to this day. The well-spring is seemingly bottomless.

As many, if not most, of the book reviewers have stated, Professor Netanyahu's work constitutes, by virtue of its comprehensive scope and quality, an edifice in the field of crypto-Judaic study that we cannot afford to ignore. If our scholars cannot refute its premises then we must come to terms with them because they are our history. How do we live with the paradox that our ancestors were baptized into Jewish oblivion and yet we exist today? The best answer I know to that question was something that Magda Hinojosa de los Reyes once said, "What does it matter? We are alive. We are here. We are Israel."

It was difficult for me while reading and rereading this book to acknowledge a line between the conversos and the crypto-Jews. The line dissolves into the dark and the fear of our past where conversos and crypto-Jews blend into the *anousim*.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By
Michael F. Atlas-Acuna

Springtime is here and soon we will all be at the annual conference in Denver. As of this writing, the agenda is coming together with only a few last minute adjustments needing to be made. I am looking forward to seeing everyone again and hope that this conference is as educating as the ones in the past. This is also my last article as president of SUS, so I would like to share my thoughts as to what I have learned over the last two years.

First of all, being president of this organization was a privilege because of the great people who are associated with it. It has also been a challenge due to the distance between board members and the rest of the membership. I received many recommendations from the membership that the society should develop a more formal process for having board meetings, but that has been very difficult because of the travel time involved. There have also been concerns about the direction that the Society is going and the lack of respect for those individuals the organization is studying. As president I have learned that because of the distance between board members the organization is being managed in the best possible manner. As I recall, one of the main principles of the Society was to study the phenomenon of Hidden Jews and to accomplish this in a friendly and caring environment. The other principle was to keep the structure of the society simple. Without question, these two principles have been upheld and should continue to be the focus. As for the lack of respect for decedents of Sephardic Jews, I have not encountered this personally, but that does not mean it has not occurred. Often times a researcher or reporter may become excited with the topic and forget to be sensitive to the people involved, this we must guard against, but do it in a professional and caring manner. After all, we are all interested in learning more about this fascinating phenomenon.

These last two years passed very quickly and I do not feel that I accomplished much except to start the ball rolling on planning the Denver conference; nevertheless, I have enjoyed it and have learned a lot about the different people involved with the Society. I want to thank Gloria Trujillo, Dr. Stan Hordes, and Arthur Benveniste for all their support and guidance.

This ends my farewell message, so I will see you all in Denver Colorado for our 7th annual conference.

YOUR DUES HELP PAY FOR THE
VALUABLE WORK OF THE SCJS.

HAVE YOU PAID YOUR 1997 DUES?

RESPONSE TO THE EDICT OF EXPULSION BY DON ISAAC ABRAVANEL

Our thanks to Ben Nahman who posted this on the Sephardic Home Page of the internet
You can access the edict at <http://home.earthlink.net/~bnahman>

Your Majesties, Abraham Senior and I thank you for this opportunity to make our last statement on the behalf of the Jewish communities that we represent. Counts, dukes, and marquees of the court, cavaliers and ladies.... it is no great honor when a Jew is asked to plead for the safety of his people. But it is a greater disgrace when the King and Queen of Castile and Aragon, indeed of all Spain, have to seek their glory in the expulsion of a harmless people. I find it very difficult to understand how every Jewish man, woman, and child can be a threat to the Catholic faith. Very, very strong charges.

We destroy you?

It is indeed the opposite. Did you not admit in this edict to having confined all Jews to restricted quarters and to having limited our legal and social privileges, not to mention forcing us to wear shameful badges? Did you not tax us oppressively? Did you not terrorize us day and night with your diabolical Inquisition? Let me make this matter perfectly clear to all present: I will not allow the voice of Israel to be stilled on this day.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, King and Queen of Spain, for I, Isaac Abravanel, speak unto you. I and my family are descended directly from King David. True royal bold, the blood of the Messiah, runs in my veins. It is my inheritance, and I proclaim it now in the name of the God of Israel. On behalf of my people, the people of Israel, the chosen of God, I declare them blameless and innocent of all crimes declared in this edict of abomination. The crime, the transgression, is for you, not us, to bear. The unrighteous decree you proclaim today will be your downfall. And this year, which you imagine to be the year of Spain's greatest glory, will become of Spain's greatest shame.

As honor is the reward of individual virtue, so too worldly renown of kings and queens is their proper due for noble deeds. So, too, when unseemly acts are committed by and individual, that person's reputation's suffers. And when kings and queens commit shameful deeds, they do themselves great harm. As it is said, the greater the person who errs, the greater the error.

Errors, if recognized early, can be corrected. The loosened brick that supports the structure can be reinserted into position. So, too, a mistaken edict if caught in time can be undone. But religious zeal has undermined reason, and misguided counsel has perverted sound judgement. The error of the edict will soon become irreversible as the very deed which it proclaims. Yes, my king and queen, hear me well: error, your error, profound and uncorrectable, the likes of which Spain has never seen before. You and you alone are responsible.

As arms measure the might of a nation, so arts and letters measure its finer sensibilities. Yes, you have humbled the Moslem infidel with the force of your army, proving yourselves able in the art of war. But what of your inner state of mind? By what right do your Inquisitors go about the countryside burning books by the thousands in public bonfires? By what authority do churchmen now want to burn the immense Arabic library of this great Moorish palace and destroy its priceless manuscripts? By whose rights? By whose authority? Why, it is by your authority, my king and

queen.

In your hear of hearts, you distrust the power of knowledge, and you respect only power. With us Jews it is different. We Jews cherish knowledge immensely. In our homes and in our prayer houses, learning is a lifelong pursuit. Learning is our lifelong passion; it is at the core of our being; it is the reason, according to our sages, for which we were created. Our fierce love of learning could have counterbalanced your excessive love of might. We could have benefited from the protection offered by your royal arms, and you could have profited the more from our community's advancement and exchange of knowledge. I say to you we could have helped each other.

As we are reminded of our own powerlessness, so your nation will suffer from the forces of disequilibrium that you have set in motion. For centuries to come, your descendants will pay dearly for your mistake of the present. As it is might of arms you most admire, you shall verily become a nation of conquerors - lusting after gold and spoils, living by the sword and ruling with a fist of mail.

Yet you shall become a nation of illiterates; your institutions of learning, fearing the heretical contamination of alien ideas from other lands, and other peoples, will no longer be respected. In the course of time, the once great name of Spain will become a whispered byword among the nations: Spain, the poor ignorant has-been; Spain, the nation which showed so much promise and yet accomplished so little.

And then one day Spain will ask itself: what has become of us? Why are we a laughing - stock among nations? And the Spaniards of that day will look into their past and ask themselves why this came to be. And those who are honest will point to this day and this age as the time when their fall as a nation began. And the cause of their downfall will be shown to be none other than their revered Catholic sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, conquerors of the Moors, expellers of the Jews, founders of the Inquisition, and destroyers of the inquiring Spanish mind.

This edict is a testimony to Christian weakness. It shown that we Jews are capable of winning the centuries - old argument between the two faiths. It explains why there are "false Christians." that is, Christians whose faith has been shaken by the arguments by the Jew who knows better.

It explains why the Christian nation would be as injured as it claims to be. Desiring to silence Jewish opposition, the Christian majority has decided not to argue any further, but rather to eliminate the source of dangerous counter - argument. The opportunity to the Jews is not to be granted after today.

This is the last opportunity on Spanish soil to state our case. In these last few moments of freedom granted to me by the King and Queen, I as the spokesman of Spanish Jewry, will dwell on one point of theological dispute. I will leave you with a parting message although you will not like it.

The message is simple. The historical people of Israel, as it has traditionally constituted itself, is the final judge of Jesus and his claims to be the Messiah. As the Messiah was destined to save Israel, so it must be for Israel to decide when it has been saved. Our answer, the only answer that matters, is that Jesus was a false Messiah. As long as the people of Israel lives, as long as Jesus's own people continue to reject him,

DON ISAAC ABRAVANEL

(cont)

your religion can never be validated as true. You can convert all the peoples and savages of the World, but as long as you have not converted the Jew, you have proved nothing except that you can persuade the uninformed.

We leave you with this comforting knowledge. For although you can dispose of our power, we have the higher truth. Although you can dispose of our persons, you cannot dispose of our sacred souls and the historical truth to which only we bear witness.

Listen, King and Queen of Spain, for on this day you have joined the list of evil-doers against the remnant of the House of Israel. If you seek to destroy us, your wishes will come for naught, for greater and more powerful rulers have tried to finish with us, and all have failed. Indeed, we shall prosper in other lands far from here. For wherever we go, the God of Israel is with us. And as for you King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, God's hand will reach out and punish the arrogance in your heart.

Woe unto you, authors of iniquity. For generations to come, it will be told and retold how unkind was your faith and how blind was your vision. But more that your acts of hatred and fanaticism, the courage of the people of Israel will be remembered for standing up to the might of imperial Spain, clinging to the religious inheritance of our fathers, resisting your enticements and your untruths. Expel us, drive us from this land that we cherish no less than you do.

But we shall remember you, King and Queen of Spain, as our Holy Books remember those who sought our harm. We Jews shall haunt your accomplishments on the pages of history... and the memories of our sufferings will inflict greater damage upon your name that anything you can ever hope to do to us.

We shall remember you and your vile Edict of Expulsion forever.

**YOU MAY NOT BE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING
CELEBRATIONS THAT WILL TAKE PLACE THIS**

YEAR:

The Mayor of Lisbon, Dr. Joao Soares (the son of former President Mario Soares, has asked Mayor Olmert, of Jerusalem, and received from him a Jerusalem stone, from which a monument to the victims of the Inquisition will be made by a Portuguese sculptor.

The monument will be placed at São Domingos Square, between the S. Domingos Church (where the forced conversions took place) and the National Theatre D.Maria (built in the place of the ancient Palace of Estaos, from where the Jews were taken to the Church and where later the Inquisition headquarters functioned). Many auto-de-fe's took place in this same little square. The monument will be inaugurated on December 5th by President Jorge Sampaio, who has invited President Ezer Weizman of Israel, to co-preside with him.

President Weizman has not answered yet. In the same evening a reception will take place at the D. Maria Theatre. On the eve, the 4th. of December, the synagogue of Belmonte will be inaugurated. The following entities are involved in the celebrations: The President of Portugal, the Prime-Minister, the Jewish Community of Lisbon, the Embassy of Israel, in Lisbon, the Portugal-Israel Friendship Association and the Institute of Jewish Studies, of Lisbon.

IN ISRAEL - A committee has been formed with the participation of the Hebrew University, the Portuguese Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Israel-Portugal Friendship Association, to which I am honored to preside.

IN BRAZIL, The University of São Paulo has prepared a program of commemorations and will also honor Dr. Elias Lipiner, historian of the Jews in Portugal and Brazil, on the occasion of his 80th. birthday.

Sincerely
Inacio Steinhardt
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DATELINE WORLD JEWRY of the World Jewish Congress reports that The Social Democratic Party of Portugal has proposed in Parliament the revocation of the December 5, 1496 legislation by which King Manuel I expelled from the country Jews who did not convert to Christianity.

The Jewish communisies of Portugl and Brazil are commemorating the 500th anniversary of the expulsion, with ceremonies being held in Lisbon, in Belmonte, and in Brazil.

REGISTRATION FOR SCJS CONFERENCE, JULY 20-22, 1997 DENVER COLORADO

Registration: members \$100, non members \$125. Location: Cherry Creek Inn, 600 S. Colorado Blvd. Denver CO, 80222

phone: (303) 757-3341 Room rate: \$ 89 sinble/Double

Mail check to Gloria Trujillo (GTRUJ@aol.com) 2000 Ave. Cesar Chavez, Monterey Park, CA 91754

Name _____

Number or members registering _____ @ \$100 _____

Address _____

Number of non members _____ @ \$125 _____

Phone _____ fax _____

Reserve sales table space : JCC _____ @\$15 at hotel _____ @

\$20

DISCONNECTIONS WHOSE STORY IS IT, ANYWAY?

by Laura Nadworny

"If you don't write your own story, somebody else will and then it won't be yours."

On July 20-22, 1997, the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies (formed to foster research and the networking of information and ideas into the contemporary development of Crypto Jews of Iberian origin--Jews who converted to Christianity 500 years ago to escape the Spanish Inquisition) will hold its annual conference in Denver, Colorado. Over the last few years, issues of cultural imperialism which insinuate themselves into the relationships between the Anglo and Chicano communities in the nation at large, have permeated SCJS, causing tension among the Sephardim (Jews of Mediterranean descent), the Ashkenazi (Jews of Eastern European descent) and those Sephardic members of Inquisitional Crypto Judaic ancestry. Is cultural imperialism a legitimate concern for SCJS? Are the Ashkenazi and Sephardim ripping off the Crypto Judaic story? And, as the author of the novel, *THE MEMORY KEEPER*, which is told in first person by Jesse Abraham, a woman of Ashkenazi descent, and in which there is a convergence of cultures--Native American, Crypto Judaic, Ashkenazi--am I complicit in this rip-off?

What do you think?

I have come to exploit you,
to rip your soul from your heart;
that I have some grand and evil scheme,
that I knew before I entered you held so many answers for me?
That because I have blond hair,
a fair complexion,
because I am Anglo
I am here to steal your spirit?

What if,
just what if I came with no plan
with an open heart
and through knowing you
my spirit has been revived
my self-confidence restored.
I once more dare to be more than a ghost in my own life.

Through knowing you I once again aspire
to be Me.

What do you think?

I was born a Jew. On my mother's side, I am Belgian - German and Polish, and on my father's side, Russian and Hungarian or Czech (depending on where the borders were at the time of his great grandparents births). I used to fantasize

that we were really Romani, Gypsy Jews at least! Of course, if the American rabbinical Right and the Israeli Knesset are to be listened to, I am not a Jew and neither are any of us outside the choke hold of the orthodoxy. Our own now dare to strip us of our collective story.

"....Inside my head, the room became a huge and broken mirror: broken pieces were glued back together side by side and overlapping one another invoking a world distorted by its mirror shards. Faces torn from 8x10 glossies, pasted under real plastic black glasses, above fake beards and beneath wide-brimmed fedoras were masked in bold dripping black acrylic brush strokes. There were rows and rows of Hasidim: black-suited, black-hatted, black-bearded, disjointed. Only the front row of payos-framed faces was large enough to be distinguishable. My mind's eye jumped from face to face to face to face. Diego de Cristo, Michael Coyote, Father Gabriel Velarde, Rebeca Sanchez, Lita Padilla and me. Everyone a Jew. Everyone fragmented."*

The roots of *THE MEMORY KEEPER* can be traced back to a part-time job I had in college at a store which bought unusual jewelry and pottery from caravan traders. I arrived at work one day to discover in one of the display cases something that had not been there the day before--a crucifix, a crucifix of silver and wood. It was ancient and it was beautiful and knowing too well that I could never take it home and show it to anyone, I bought it anyway. Eight or nine years ago, remembering only then that I owned it and that it was supposed to be Spanish or Latin American, I took it with me to Taos, hoping that someone in the New Mexican art community could tell me something of its history. That Christian crucifix became an integral part of Jesse Abraham's journey to identity.

"....My reflection was staring back at me from our jagged-edged mirror. I was wearing the crucifix; my fingers were tracing the cross within a cross, the inlaid pieces of wood worn and oiled by centuries of praying fingers; I was remembering sitting on a bench in the garden of the de Cristo *masia*; Diego was opening up my fingers; he was placing on my palm a crucifix, the de Cristo family crucifix--he was setting it there, Christ-figure down; he was closing my fingers around it. I grimaced as my fingers now wrapped themselves too tightly around the Christ-figure at my neck, strangling him as if to draw blood. I watched my hands rip the crucifix from its chain; I heard myself hissing "Nazi, damn Nazi" as I walked out the door that had been left ajar."*

The Jewish migration from Europe to America in the late 1800's-early 1900's to escape pogroms, anti-Semitism and

* All excerpts are from *THE MEMORY KEEPER* ©1997
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po box 1415—cooper sation—new york, ny 10276
eccltceghd@waonline.com

poverty is the story of a people leaving their story behind. Multiculturalism was not on the minds of the peasants who traveled in steerage across the Atlantic. Their journey was about survival. Families did surely bring their Judaism with them, but what was most important was becoming "American," fitting in, becoming part of the melting pot. They settled in the ghettos of New York, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta. They were not thinking about handing down story--they were too poor, they were working too hard. Their commitment was to provide their children with a future, not a past.

Only generations later, when their grandchildren were exposed to the grandchildren of slavery (African Americans who came without choice) who understood that to learn the stories and revive the memory was to empower, and to the grandchildren of Native Americans who were renewing their ties to their own story, only then did the grandchildren of the shtetl look around for their story. I am one of those grandchildren.

"....All those times I had visited with Grandfather YellowRose, I had never been inside his [pueblo] home. My eyes surveyed the room, an uninvited guest in a forbidden inner sanctum, an inappropriate time to snoop. I welcomed the distraction.

"The slanted whitewashed walls, the walked-on-again-and-again rugs, the simple cot-like bed, the fetishes. It was all so different from my own grandparents' heavy mahogany framed bed, their intricately hand-crocheted throws, the too-large-for-the-room dressing table, the oval-framed photograph of Grandma and Grandpa on their wedding day--she bustled in satin and lace, he spatted and bow-tied. Only the bottle on the table next to Gloucester YellowRose's cot suggested they were more alike than they were different: After Grandma died, a bottle of schnapps was always in service and stationed at Grandpa's end table...."*

During my early trips to the Southwest, I submerged myself in the Native American community as much as I was permitted. I had no idea at the time that these lessons, too, would find their way into a novel--the novel form was not then part of my creative vocabulary. From the Pueblos, I learned the value of the handed-down story. From them, I learned that I had none. And later, it was the Crypto Sephardim of Northern New Mexico--people who had lost their freedom to connect with their story, their roots, their Jewishness--who taught me the power of taking ownership of one's handed-down story. I had been so disaffected, so disconnected.

"....I remained in the cellar for I don't know how long. I did not want to leave. There in that underground synagogue,...I had been accepted. I had become a member of a community, of a something--a something with a past, a present, a future. Tomorrow and the next day, out on the street and in their shops, they would act again as strangers: the Garcias, the Serranos, maybe even the S<nchezes. Walls would once again be raised. I would once again be isolated. I wanted to pull over to the side of the road. I wanted to be found. I wanted to take root. Every step I had taken as an artist, as a woman, had been a search for my own discarded story, a quest to take ownership of whom I

was--Lillith struggling to return to Adam, on her own terms.

"What would I have done had I lived in the time of Torquemada? How different would my life be today if my shtetl ancestors had sent their story down to me...? I grabbed for the wall, afraid I would fall. I was sitting on a bench. They were Jews. They were all Jews and still, I did not belong...."*

That it is within other cultures that Jesse Abraham, my protagonist, must search to learn the value of her own cultural history was a path which required great vigilance. As a writer of fiction, I have license to "create" life! But for me (in this book, anyway, because I was ever sensitive that I was treading through cultures that were not my own), whatever I conjured had to have roots in reality. The question I always asked was could this particular event have happened--not necessarily did it happen, but could it. The answers to this question were found in the research I did and the more scholarly research and personal accounts to which I had access.

Never having had my own cultural secrets, I found myself in awe of those who did. The keeping of someone else's secret would not be a problem for me, I was sure of it. To pilot my way through this area most susceptible to accusations of cultural imperialism, I prefaced all discussions with "cultural sources" with the caveat that I be informed whether or not I could repeat the information being shared, either verbatim or in my own words. I assured my sources that I was not offended being told particular information could not be revealed to me.

What no one ever anticipates is that there is always something that is public information to one member of a group and deeply secret to another. The pathway through researching a culture, a religion, a race, is filled with the treachery of one's sources of information: members of different generations, who have lived different lives place different values on the same piece of their cultural history. One generation of Taos Pueblo was silent about some information but open about others; a member of a younger generation was appalled that I even knew such things, let alone whether or not I would use the information. My experiences in the Sephardic communities were much the same.

When Jesse Abraham tells her story, is she being culturally imperialistic? Or, if my heroine's story is about her relationships with others (similar and different from herself), isn't she telling her own story? And, how does one walk the fine line between not telling someone else's story and telling one's own, when others' stories have molded whom we have become. Because THE MEMORY KEEPER has its roots in my own life, when writing scenes based on my personal experience, I gave myself permission to write it honestly--as it happened. These scenes belong to me; these scenes are part of my story.

"....I, too, was conversant with the passionate effort needed to sustain two contradictory parts within one's self--that blurred identity which Gabriel spoke of with such clarity. The labels I was branded with at birth had different

definitions for me than for those who had done the branding. The expectations of what others judged me to be by my outer appearance fought daily against my daring to be whom I knew myself to be...."*

That there have been too many incidents over too many years when I entered a gathering of Jews only to be assumed not to be one of them--to be an outsider, may be in part the root of my sensitivity to the loss of story. I am, as a result, quite interested in the journey of others especially when it provides me with insights into my own, but it would be foolhardy of me to aspire to take ownership of someone else's story. It would serve only to corrupt my soul. Working on this novel has taught me that I am the sum of my own experiences and the experiences of those who have come before me. Where there are blank spaces in the story handed-down to me, my journey is to fill them in. Others may have, do have, life experiences that attract me, intrigue me, even challenge me, but their story is not my story. I can, however, learn from them.

"...Weeks turned into months. I walked among them making no sound, leaving no footprints, wearing no shoes. It was a time for long walks in the woods alone; meals prepared and eaten alone. Living among them as a ghost, never did it occur to me to be distressed that they did not invite me in. I had been afraid they would. They showered me with no feint praise; there was no pretense that I was one of them, no unspoken expectations. With their gifts of space and time, the Taisga'a breathed life back into me; their respectful separateness nourishing me, enabling me to find my own way back...."*

Nor am I so naive as to suggest that there are no individuals giddy with the opportunities of exploitation. I do not believe, however, that it is the Anglo taking ownership of the Chicano story at work between the Ashkenazi and the Crypto- Sephardim. "...There is the sense of shared experience. There is a sense in each generation that its destiny has been, in part, determined by past destinies....There is a sense that in the end all of it is linked together by a thousand invisible links....There is a sense of recognition...."***

What brings us to the same place is the need to know that there are others out there like ourselves. What binds all Jews together is our collective memory--*Zakhor*.

"...I dared reach for Gabriel's hand. He grabbed hold of mine as if he had been waiting for it; as if he knew it would be there for him; as if once before we had supported one another. I could not identify what it was that drew us to each other, what it was that connected us. It wasn't the same thing that joined me to Michael. Not at all. That was love. This was deeper. No. It wasn't deeper. Maybe older? Primordial? But we had just met and he had never resided inside my head. It was as if somehow we were related to one another; as if we had begun our journeys together aeons ago--maybe in some biblical place or time. I didn't think it was sexual. It could be. It was that profound. No, it couldn't be.

He was a priest...."*

As is true for most writers and artists, my work will necessarily reflect the experiences of my everyday life. That there seemed to be so few contemporary female baby-boomer novelists exploring their own "Jewishness" through their work was surely a significant impetus to my writing Jesse's story. Could it be that my generation is sufficiently disconnected that collectively we do not recognize this "missing story" as an influence on our writings, on our lives? That search for a connection back to a long-ago Jewish identity is central to THE MEMORY KEEPER.

"...I need to know who I am, I thought to myself. I wanted it to come from her, from Dora [great-aunt, immigrant from the shtetl]. I don't see anything like me outside myself like Michael [relocated Pueblo] does. I wanted her to show me, to mirror me back at myself. I wanted to discover I was connected; that I was a repeat of someone else--someone who had come before me. I wanted to find out that I was like her...."*

And finally, as those familiar with a study presented at the 1995 SCJS Tucson Conference are aware, there is research indicating a genetic link among all Jews--Sephardi and Ashkenazi. Scientists even hypothesize about patterns of migration, suggesting that the ancestors of the Ashkenazi are the Sephardim traveled west out of the Middle East up through Iberia and then east into Eastern Europe. So, how does this impact cultural imperialism and the story I am telling? I am neither scientist nor researcher. I am Laura Nadworny, a daughter of Abraham. And although it is true that the patriarch Abraham did not have a daughter, it may also prove true that I, too, am Sephardi. Or, maybe not.

"...In some ways, Jesse," Gabriel explained, "you are just like us, trying to hold on to a memory you don't remember. You look around hoping to find yourself reflected back and your reflection doesn't exist." It was spooky the way Gabriel could sometimes read my mind. "But, in other ways, we're not at all alike, you and I. You have never become a chameleon to your surroundings."

"He was holding my hand, staring into space. "Most of us are carriers of someone else's memories. We busy our lives fulfilling someone else's dreams. You, my dear Jesse, you are the immigrant. You have your own dreams. You are making your own memories."*

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THE MEMORY KEEPER, book-on-tape, is available through eclectic eghead/pob 1415/cooper station/ new york, ny 10276; eccltceghd@waonline.com and will be for sale at the Denver Conference. Also on display at the Denver Conference will be an artist's book, limited edition, of THE MEMORY KEEPER.

** Yosef Yerushalmi, Judaic scholar and author.

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SYMPOSIUM ON THE LIFE OF LUIS DE SANTANGEL

Today I write to you with reason to celebrate. it is my great pleasure to announce to you that on August 23, 24, 25 and 26, 1998, an international symposium on the life and times of Luis de Santangel and the contributions and heritage of the Spanish Jews will take place on the campus of Dominican University (we are near Chicago). We now have the official co-sponsorship of the Cervantes Institute of Chicago and of Dominican University.

With great optimism inspired by such sturdy backing, finally I feel secure enough to invite you and the members of your Society to participate in our symposium. Plans for this symposium include: lectures and panel discussions on campus here; videoconferencing between Dominican University and Spain; an exhibition of photographs, art, artefacts and original documents of the Spain of Santangel's time; a presentation of Sephardic music and a Sephardic supper; a screening of a documentary film on Sephardic life. Among our topics for lecture and discussion will be: the Jews of Spain., past, present, future; the importance of the Santangel family in the kingdom of Aragon; Luis de Santangel and Columbus; the life of Santangel; the Jews and converses in the Court of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella and in the Discovery of the New World; the heritage of the Sephardim. Our vision for this symposium is a true celebration of the contributions of Santangel and the Jewish people to the history and culture of Spain and of the idea of reconciliation spoken about by King Juan Carlos and the other participants in the ceremony in the Synagogue of Madrid on March 31, 1992. The year 1998 will be the 500th anniversary of the death of Santangel; this seems to be an opportune moment to hold the symposium, which we have wanted to organize in the U.S. since we co-directed the excavations of Santangel's tomb in Valencia in 1993-1994.

What we need most of all to carry out a successful event is the help and presence of dedicated and interested experts. Although there remains an enormous amount of work to do, I know that we can do this. May we continue corresponding with you? I know that you and the members of the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies would be of inestimable value to our symposium. May we invite you and Society members to be involved in our symposium? I would be most grateful if you would forward the news of our symposium to your members. On May 28th my husband Charles and I leave for a 2-month journey through Spain to complete more research. When we return, I shall contact you again. In the meantime, may I wish you every success on your conference in Denver in July; it sounds quite fascinating.

Sincerely yours,

Kathleen E. LeMieux

Director, Language Laboratory

Dominican University

THE ALBUQUERQUE CRYPTO-JEWISH CONVENTION 1966 : Scholarship, Stories, and The Arts

by Judith Fein

Going to Crypto-Jewish conventions is a bit like watching a huge jigsaw puzzle being assembled. Each time the members convene, there are new pieces of information that help to complete the picture of the life, trials, tribulations, migrations, assimilations and persistence of Sephardic Jews from the time of the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal. To keep the puzzle assemblage lively at the recent convention in Albuquerque, there were scholarly presentations, personal stories of ancestral discovery, artists and entertainment.

Micaela Amato, an art historian from Pennsylvania State University, illustrated the schizoid nature of contemporary Spanish identity as expressed by Spanish conceptual artists. To Amato, their quasi-obsession with elusive and illusive reality mirrors the secret lives of Jews (Marranos) and Muslims (Moriscos) who were forced to convert to Christianity, and who kept up their own clandestine religious practices. So pervasive was their presence and influence in Spain, that Amato feels it is virtually impossible to claim purity of Spanish blood. What, she wonders, does being "Spanish" mean today?

Arye Hazary gave a critical review of Ben Zion Netanyahu's controversial book, *Origins of the Spanish Inquisition* (Random House). Netanyahu, a respected historian, concludes that most converted Jews ("New Christians") abandoned their ancestral religion and willfully assimilated. Only later, after the Inquisition pursued them for secret Judaizing, of which they were not guilty, and after the Catholics rejected them, did they return to the secret practice of Judaism. When pressed to give his personal opinion of the book, Hazary suggested that the book cannot be ignored or reviled as it is by many Crypto-Jewish enthusiasts; because Netanyahu is a serious historian, his work either must be refuted or seriously considered.

Abraham Lavender, who is descended from French Huguenots (Protestants), made a strong case for the presence of Crypto-Jews in France and their conversion to Protestantism, which was closer to Judaism than Catholicism. Lavender told a compelling story of members of the staunch Protestant elite of present-day Charleston, South Carolina, tentatively delving into their secret Jewish past.

The keynote speaker, Everado Trevino-Garza, who spoke in Spanish, traced his emerging knowledge of his Sephardic ancestral roots in Tamaulipas, Mexico. With grace and humility, Trevino-Garza, a Catholic, told of family customs like not mixing meat and milk, having public weddings and private "chupa" (canopy) ceremonies, and dressing up for the Sabbath. His research has led him to conclude that Northeastern Mexico has been mostly colonized by Portuguese "New Christians" of Sephardic origin. He pointed out the persistence of bigotry and prejudice today, mostly due to the stigma of Theocide by Jews. To Trevino-Garza and his family, the knowledge of their Jewish origins is a treasure--but they don't know with whom they can safely share it.

The musical entertainment highlight of the conference was master oudist John Bilezikjian, who showed us his jewel of an instrument, which had been abandoned and abused and came to him in thirty broken parts. He re-assembled and rebuilt it, and it danced under his masterful fingers,

accompanying the Ladino songs of mezzo soprano Bonita Nahoum Jaros, who is of Sephardic ancestry from Salonika. She introduced each song with tales of her family and traditions, and even had the scholars sing along with her in Ladino.

One of the folk melodies is called "Una Matika de Ruda" and it tells of a mother's dubious advice to her daughter: a bad husband is better than a good lover! As she ad-libbed, Nahoum mentioned a tidbit that Ashkenazi Jews in the audience found delightful: in Ladino, instead of saying "Mazel Tov" to wish good luck, people say 'Mazel Bueno.'

Jose Antonio Esquibel, a Santa Fe genealogist, presented the fruit of years of his labor--the reconstruction of the genealogical history of Juan de Oñate, who settled New Mexico. Oñate descends from three different converso families--although there is no way to prove that he knew of his secret Jewish roots. Equally provocative, Esquibel reported that secondary sources preliminarily seem to indicate that Coronado's wife was also a Crypto-Jewish scion. Like other speakers, Esquibel traced his own roots, and his led to the Oñate family; his research has clearly propelled him on a personal voyage as well as a historical one.

Stanley Hordes, one of the deans of Crypto Judaic studies, presented tantalizing information about the Rael family, and reported that New Mexican baptismal records for 1756 listed the family name as Israel--a clear indication of their religious origin. Hordes gave a vivid account of his recent research trip to Spain, where he met with other Rael's who had no knowledge of their secret past, but were most interested.

Tomas Atencio, of UNM, talked about the "manito" culture of New Mexico, which refers to mestizos of Indian and Hispanic blood. In poetic fashion, he traced his personal odyssey from being the son of a Presbyterian minister to the present, where he has a "feeling" of Jewishness, notions about his links to Sephardic origins, and has decided to start studying Hebrew. He creatively weaves the strands of his life together to walk a sacred path that is Hispanic, Indian and Jewish.

Dr. Isabelle Sandoval, a diminutive doctor of education from Colorado with a huge heart, accompanied lunch with a reading of her poems in English and Spanish. Her poetry sings like songs that are dedicated to the Sephardic heritage she has uncovered, and the songs unfold against the backdrop of life in the southwest. Sandoval talked about the "key" that the Sephardim brought with them from Spain; it was lost, and now it has been found. Sandoval herself is lusciously, deliciously, outspokenly out of the Crypto-Jewish closet. She writes with an intense consciousness of being both Sephardic and a woman--öl have no more secrets,ö she said. The tone of her poetry is conversational and confessional. It weaves her personal story into the story of her heritage; it goes back to the medinas of Toledo, to her grandmothers and greatgrandmothers. Finally, the words take flight and actually become a song. As she sang, there was silence in the room and all that could be heard was the truth of her heart.

In her poem, "Contemporary Inquisition," she pleads guilty to Judaism, and she formulates the voices of all the players in this modern drama--the Chicanos and rabbis, the

Spanish, her family, other Jews. "Will someone help me dismantle my human doubts?" she asks.

After poetry, anthropology. Rabbi Seth Kunin, from the University of Nottingham in England, explained his structuralist approach, which tries to understand patterns of thought and perception within a specific community, like the Jews. He tries to identify how Jews look at the world, and if that perception has changed in Diaspora. If so, he looks at the contexts which have shaped it. In this way, he is studying the Crypto Jews, trying to understand how they interacted with their environment.

The concluding hours of the conference were moving, personal accounts by articulate speakers like Yehoshuah ben Avraham, Dennis Duran and Prospero Chavez. All have undertaken the brave, poetic, difficult, lonely voyages from Hispanic Catholicism to Judaism and their joy, anger, amazement, awe and open-heartedness left all observers with respect for the complexity of that path.

THE SEPHARDIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER PRESENTS

The First Annual Los Angeles Sephardic Film festival

LAEMMLE'S MUSIC HALL THEATRE

9036 Wilshire Blvd. Beverly Hills

Tuesday, June 3 *COMMEMORATING THE 30th
ANNIVERSARY OF THE REUNIFICATION OF
JERUSALEM*

6:30 *Island of Roses*, The Jews of Rhodes in L.A. by
Gregori Viens, USA

7:30 *Woman*, an new film by Moshe Mizrahi, Israel. Set
in 19th Century Jerusalem, a story of faith, love and passion.

9:45 *Opening Night Reception*, Café Rodeo, 360 Rodeo
Dr B.H.

Monday, June 9 - *COMMEMORATING THE 500TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE FORCED CONVERSION OF
THE JEWS OF PORTUGAL*

7:00 *O Judeo*, by Jom Tob Azulay, Portugal. True story of
the poet, Antonio da Silva, burned at the stake in 1739 for
Judaizing

8:30 *Braids*, by Yitzhak Halutzi, Israel. Moving story of a
Jewish girl imprisoned in Iraq in the turbulent 1940's

Wednesday, June 18 -

6:30 *Next Year in Havana*, by Lori Beraha, USA. A
touching documentary of the dwindling Jewish community
on Cuba

7:00 *Rhodes Forever*, by Diane Perelsztein, Belgium.
Jews fro Rhodes recall their island community and the tragic
deportation to Auschwitz

NASAWI

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SEPHARDIC ARTISTS, WRITERS AND INTELLECTUALS

NASAWI-the National Association of Sephardic Artists, Writers and Intellectuals-has just elected teacher-poet Gilla Nissan as its President, while fine artist Morris Zagha, who recently exhibited at the Marjorie and Herman Platt Gallery (at L.A.'s University of Judaism), has been elected Vice President. NASAWI represents and promotes a wide range of Sephardic, Middle Eastern and Crypto-Jewish creative professionals, including writers, musicians and professors. It will publish its first quarterly newsletter, Summer 1997, in June. The publication of NASAWI's national magazine, meanwhile-IVRI, People Without Boundaries-has been pushed forward to September 1, 1997, as the editors and advisory board appeal to the local and national community for additional funding.

Says IVRI-NASAWI founder Jordan Elgrably, "While it would be wonderful for all American Jews to have a national cultural center devoted to the exploration of Sephardic, Middle Eastern and Crypto-Judaism, currently nothing like this exists. As a national magazine, IVRI proposes instead to be a 'virtual' cultural center, a nexus available to everyone at an affordable price. Getting the magazine off the ground is by far cheaper than buying and refurbishing a building in any one city. We've been gathering a lot of momentum, however, so landing a publisher or major patron for this timely project can't be far off."

IVRI-NASAWI originated and is coproducing the Skirball Cultural Center's main summer event, the SEPHARDIC ARTS FESTIVAL, to take place on Sunday, July 27 at the Skirball (in Los Angeles) from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Save the date and bring the entire family for a day of music and dance, activities for children, storytelling, Sephardic food and more. Entertainment includes Judy Frankel, Adam and Laila Del Monte and a Special Guest. The festival is cosponsored by the Sephardic Educational Center, the Center for Jewish Culture and Creativity, and the Israel Consulate's Department for Cultural Affairs. For more information or to volunteer, call IVRI-NASAWI at (213) 650-3157, or the Skirball Cultural Center, (310) 440-4500.

8:15 *Routes of Exile, A Moroccan Odyssey*, by Eugene Rostow, USA. A colorful portrait of this North African community from ancient times to the present.

\$40.00 Festival Package - Includes tickets to all films and opening night reception

\$28.00 Opening Night - Film pass plus opening night reception

\$26.00 Festival Pass - Tickets to all Festival films

\$10.00 General Admission - Subject to availability

For tickets and information call the SEC at (213) 653-7365
limited seating MC/Visa accepted.