

LADINO THEATRE:
TRAGEDY, CULTURAL POLITICS
AND REPRESENTING THE PAST IN THE
SEPHARDIC JEWISH DIASPORA

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I Mara Lockowandt hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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- ABSTRACT -

This thesis considers the role of performances in the modern Sephardic diaspora. Live performances have been an integral part of Sephardic life for centuries: songs and narratives in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) are performed to mark life cycle events, religious holidays, remember the past, and maintain cultural distinctiveness. Despite the decline of Ladino throughout the twentieth century, the language continues to be utilized in singing, storytelling, and dramatic events, often as a means of connecting a community to their diasporic past. In light of the ongoing value of Ladino in performance, the present study undertakes a wide historical examination of Sephardic performances from the nineteenth century to the present day to consider the shifting significance of Ladino and representing the past in constructing ethnic and cultural identities. Two key periods in modern Sephardi history are considered: 1) the emergence and development of modern Sephardi Theatre in the Ottoman Empire; 2) the revitalisation of Sephardi theatre during the late twentieth century in Israel and the United States.

A relational approach is utilized throughout this work, as forwarded in contemporary scholarship on diaspora and performance, to draw connections between different migratory experiences and cross-cultural encounters. Through application of this approach we show how Sephardi Theatre and the use of Ladino developed through specific socio-historical and political circumstances - and especially through relations vis-à-vis the Ashkenazim. Within each period we demonstrate how particular social and political structures and interests impacted theatrical forms as well as the role of language in performance. During the twentieth century, we identify a shift in the performance work of Sephardic artists away from dramatic representations and towards musical or storytelling events intended to increase accessibility and interest in Sephardi culture.

While succeeding in bringing Sephardi traditions to international stages, it is argued that such performances overlook historical and contemporary experiences of marginalisation and conflate variegated Sephardic identities in a manner that risks homogenization and that may impede future linguistic and cultural usability. Nevertheless, this thesis points to the ongoing importance of performance-based events amongst the Sephardim in strengthening connections to their culture and diasporic histories.

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- ABBREVIATIONS -

<i>Alb</i>	<i>La Alborada</i> (Sarajevo)
<i>AmFam</i>	<i>El Amigo de la Familia</i> (Constantinople)
<i>AmPue</i>	<i>El Amigo del Pueblo</i> (Belgrade)
<i>Av</i>	<i>El Avenir</i> (Salonica)
<i>BuEsp</i>	<i>La Buena Esperanza</i> (Izmir)
<i>Bur</i>	<i>El Burlón</i> (Constantinople)
<i>Chak</i>	<i>El Chaketón</i> (Salonica)
<i>EJud</i>	<i>El Eco Judaico</i> (Sofia)
<i>Ep</i>	<i>La Epoca</i> (Salonica)
<i>Flam</i>	<i>La Fambeau</i> (Salonica)
<i>Imp</i>	<i>El Imparcial</i> (Salonica)
<i>Jud</i>	<i>El Jidió</i> (Constantinople)
<i>Jug</i>	<i>El Jugetón</i> (Constantinople)
<i>Lib</i>	<i>El Liberal</i> (Salonica)
<i>Nación</i>	<i>La Nación</i> (Salonica)
<i>Nac</i>	<i>El Nacional</i> (Constantinople)
<i>Nie</i>	<i>Het Nieuws van den Dag</i> (Amsterdam)
<i>Pol</i>	<i>La Política</i> (Vienna)
<i>Pue</i>	<i>El Pueblo</i> (Salonica)
<i>RenJud</i>	<i>La Renacimiento Judía</i> (Salonica)
<i>Sem</i>	<i>La Semana</i> (Plovdiv)
<i>Tiem</i>	<i>El Tiempo</i> (Constantinople)
<i>Vara</i>	<i>La Vara</i> (Cairo)
AAJFT	American Association of Jewish Friends of Turkey
AIU	The Alliance Israélite Universelle
ASF	The American Sephardi Federation
BYCC	Bat Yam Cultural Club
CJH	Center for Jewish History
NAL	La Autoridad Nacional del Ladino (National Authority for Ladino)
WSF	World Sephardi Federation

- NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSCRIPTIONS -

In transcribing Ladino, I use the system adopted by the periodical *Aki Yerushalayim*, which is in essence the phonetic transcription in Latin letters of the former writing in Hebraic letters. Exceptions to this occur when quoting from various sources and are acknowledged within the text. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

In spelling Sephardi proper names I have transcribed them according to general rules, with the exception of those widely used in scholarly work (i.e. *La Amérika* is written here *La América*). For Turkish words, proper names retain their Turkish spelling.

All dates are according to the Gregorian calendar.

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*Arvolés yoran por luyyas
i montanyas por ayres
Ansí yoran los mis ojos
por ti kerido amante.*

*Torno I digo,
ké va a ser de mi?
En tyerras ajenas
yo me vo a murir.*

*Trees cry for rain
And mountains for air
That is how my eyes weep
For you, beloved.*

*I turn and ask
what will become of me?
In a far away lands
I am going to die.*

- Sephardic Folksong -

INTRODUCTION: MODERN SEPHARDI THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

In 2011, Sephardic-Israeli singer Yasmin Levy, returned to London for a musical and theatrical performance at the Barbican Centre. The concert featured Levy's unique performance style, weaving Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) songs with flamenco, tango, and Arabic instruments. She prefaced her pieces with descriptions of their historical and cultural significance for the Sephardim, highlighting how the diaspora experiences across Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa impacted the performance practices of the community.¹ Levy also spoke passionately of her father (Yitzhak Levy), who dedicated his life to recording and preserving the traditional songs, and the similar function of her current work in reviving Sephardic language and culture. Levy has stated in interviews that her 'sacred mission' is to preserve the rich cultural history and language of the Sephardim, which has in turn earned her the title of the 'indisputable Queen of Ladino' (Agbarieh; Meir). Through her performances, Levy demonstrates the aesthetic and ideological importance of representing the past for creating a shared sense of identity amongst Sephardic audiences as well as reviving and legitimating Sephardic narratives in wider national contexts.

¹ Throughout this study the term Sephardim is utilized primarily to discuss the descendants of the group of Jewish exiles who settled within the Balkan region following expulsion from Spain in the fifteenth century. This migrational trajectory of the 'Eastern' Sephardim is distinct from those exiles who settled in North Africa, and the 'Western Sephardim' who settled in Europe and the Americas. As the Eastern Sephardim resettled in Ottoman lands, they established a distinct ethnic-religious identity that incorporated linguistic and cultural features from Spain with those of local practices. Distinct ethnic, cultural and linguistic features also developed in North Africa. For further studies on the development of North African Jewish communities see Haim Hirschberg; Emily Gottreich and Daniel Schroeter; and Michael Laskier. For an excellent study of the theatre practices of North African Jewry see Shmuel Moreh and Philip Sadgrove. Further discussion on defining the term 'Sephardim' is offered in this chapter and for an overview of their historical experiences see Chapter II.

However, Levy's performances also raise questions over the value and effects of depicting a particular interpretation of the past. While Levy's performance style has made her perhaps the most visible and popular Sephardic performer, reception of her work amongst the Ladino-speaking community has been mixed. In interviews, Levy has repeatedly noted the hostile reactions she has received from mixing traditional songs with modern influences: '[t]here are classics that are not to be touched. This angers many people, who accuse me of making Ladino oriental' (Agbarieh; also see Reed; Zeev).² Nevertheless, Levy is defiant of her form of cultural preservation, stating:

I am proud to combine the two cultures of Ladino and flamenco, while mixing in Middle Eastern influences. I am embarking on a 500 years [sic] old musical journey, taking Ladino to Andalusia and mixing it with flamenco, the style that still bears the musical memories of the old Moorish and Jewish-Spanish world with the sound of the Arab world. In a way it is a 'musical reconciliation' of history. (Levy 'About')

Since Levy is one of the world's most popular Sephardic musicians, her performances serve a prominent role in constructing Sephardic cultural identities by focusing on particular histories. However, as her work has been a site of debates amongst members of the Sephardic community, it is paradigmatic of contemporary tensions over traditions, cultural authenticity and representing the past. What histories may be included, or excluded, in 'Oriental' interpretations of the Sephardic diaspora? And, more importantly, what might the impact be of such interpretations on ethnic and national identities? In discussing the work of Levy in relation to contemporary Mediterranean music, Eleni Kallimopoulou asks us to consider whose voices have been empowered to serve as the 'insider' and what the implications of such choices may have for social and political relations (62-63). Performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has

² Oriental in this context may be in reference to Levy's incorporation of Arabic instruments and singing styles.

addressed the politics of performances and heritage and draws our attention to the issues in any performance claiming to draw upon folklore or cultural heritage, as she writes 'choices in repertoire and style are ideologically charged' and implicated in wider concerns of nations, states and cultures (*Destination* 65).

The significance of Levy's performances for this thesis is that the debates generated draw our attention to contemporary Sephardic performances as an ongoing site of contestation. Recent Sephardic performances reflect just part of a broad spectrum of syncretic cultural forms, and responses to them, arising from Sephardic cross-cultural encounters since the Iberic Expulsion. As the stage continues to be readily utilised by Sephardic artists, organizations and communities to construct or maintain ethnic identities, it is a valuable cultural site in which to investigate debates regarding tradition, cultural authenticity and national identity.

* * *

This thesis addresses the development of modern Sephardi Theatre and performances from the late nineteenth century to the present day. More specifically, how representations of the past come to symbolise national and cultural identities. In order to investigate these issues we apply a relational approach as popularised in recent scholarship on diaspora and performance.

A relational approach seeks to forge connections between the studies of cultural life in different historic moments and will be further elaborated upon in this chapter. In order to determine how such an approach may benefit current research on the Sephardim and their performance practices, it is necessary to consider the concept of modern Sephardi Theatre from the nineteenth century in relevant academic literature. The concept and praxis of modern Sephardi Theatre developed from specifically modern factors such as the growth of print capitalism, the economic and political

expansion of Western powers into Ottoman lands, and the wider cultural and educational reforms of the Ottoman Empire.³ According to Sephardic historian Olga Borovaya, it emerged in the late 1870s and continued to exist until World War II in the Ottoman Empire and Sephardic communities as they resettled in various locations during the twentieth century (*Modern Ladino* 196). However, for Borovaya there is 'no such thing' as present-day Sephardi Theatre (see *Modern Ladino*; Personal correspondence). Additional studies attest to this shared perception amongst scholars. Elena Romero has published the most extensively on Sephardic performance practices and her most substantial work, a multi-volume set entitled *El Teatro de Los Sephardies* (1979), offers a catalogue of all recorded Sephardi theatre performances from 1871 to 1938. Romero's groundbreaking work opened Sephardi studies to the important dramatic work of the Sephardim; yet, the geographical and temporal focus inhibits it from drawing connections between different Sephardic diasporic formations throughout the twentieth century.

In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in the history, language, and culture of the Sephardim; however, there is no extensive critical study of their performance practices.⁴ Towards the end of this research project, Borovaya published *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Letters and Theatre in the Late Ottoman Empire* (2012), which is the most extensive study on Ottoman Sephardi Theatre to date and demonstrates current interests in investigating these practices. In forty pages dedicated to

³ The development of modern Sephardi Theatre as coinciding with the growth of print-capitalism amongst the Ottoman Sephardim has strong connections with Benedict Anderson's analysis regarding the rise of the nation-state in *Imagined Communities*.

⁴ Aviva Ben-Ur characterizes the ethnic revivalism of the Sephardim in public and scholarly discourse as arising in the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by the film *Fiddler on the Roof* and Alex Haley's *Roots* as well as growing interest in the effects of the Holocaust on Jewish minorities (*Sephardic* 3). This can be evidenced in the establishment of the Sephardic Studies Programme at Yeshiva University in 1964, the founding of the American Society of Sephardic Studies and its journal *Sephardic Scholar* in 1967, as well as the establishment of the American Sephardi Federation (1973) and the Sephardic House (1978) (*ibid.*). Without denying the historical accuracy in these claims, there appears to be a second wave of interest in Sephardic studies since the quincentennial commemoration events in 1992, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter V. Amongst these scholarly pursuits, there are a few studies which address mid- to late-twentieth century Sephardic literature and cinematic representation, see Diane Matza *Sephardic-American*, 'Sephardic Jews', 'Tradition', 'Sephardic-Jewish'; and Ilan Stavens. For scholarship on Sephardic cinema, or the representation of the Sephardim in cinema, the most comprehensive study is Ella Shohat *Israeli Cinema*; also see Rita de Grandis and Jan Mennell's 'Making *Novia*'; and David Foster's *Mexico City*.

the study of theatre, Borovaya highlights major trends and playwrights as well as addressing the socio-political factors that contributed to their productions prior to World War II. Borovaya expands upon Romero's work in regards to addressing the wider social spheres that contributed to the development of theatre; however, she shares a constricted periodization. There has also been a number of scholarly works which address Sephardi Theatre within historical or geographical pockets of activity. For instance, Tamar Alexander and Susan Weich-Shahak investigate Sephardi Theatre productions of *Esther* in the 1920s and 1930s and Rena Molho has investigated theatre in the early part of the twentieth century in Salonica and Istanbul (Judeo-Spanish Theatre). On performances occurring after the Second World War, there has been very little scholarly attention. Scholars such as Aviva Ben-Ur, Marc Angel and Stephen Stern have investigated a limited number of Sephardic performances in the United States. Within two short yet valuable articles, Ben-Ur's empirical work outlines Sephardi Theatre throughout the twentieth century ('Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Press;' 'Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Theater'). Marc Angel has written one article regarding the productions taking place within the communities in Seattle during the 1920s and 1930s ('The Sephardic'), and Stephen Stern peripherally addresses those in Los Angeles during the 1960s and 1970s.

In addition to current limitations in Sephardi Theatre periodization, current definitions suggest a geographically or socially-narrow characterization. For instance, in *Modern Ladino Culture* Borovaya offers a definition of the practice: '[b]y "Sephardi Theatre," I mean a popular practice of student and other amateur groups to stage Ladino plays and perform them on days off and holidays before a local public, usually with charitable goals' (196). While this definition of the practice enables a conceptualisation of its social significance, the linguistic and temporal aims are too narrow for our current study. Romero's definition is broader as it includes 'works born of the communities [...] produced in Judeo-Spanish and/or by Sephardic authors, and which reflect the realities of the community's world or the historical surroundings in which it lived' (*El Teatro* v1, 32).

The current thesis builds upon this by also considering Sephardi Theatre as a form of *diaspora* theatre: the performance practices reflect the multiple migrations and cross-cultural exchanges experienced by the Sephardim from the Expulsion to the present day. The ongoing usage of Ladino/Judeo-Spanish, evoking an Iberic past, is perhaps the most evident feature of diaspora experiences in performance; however, it is not an exclusive aspect. As will be addressed, Sephardic performances may also be presented in French, Greek, Hebrew, Turkish and English as representative of the diasporian subjects' multiple identities and relations. Considering Sephardi Theatre as a type of diaspora theatre allows us to analyse the cultural practice as it relates to transforming cultural, political and historical conditions.

Since there have been ongoing and often contentious debates about what the term 'Sephardic' and subsequently what 'Sephardi Theatre' connotes, both in regards to language, historic roots and cultural traditions, this study aims to avoid value judgments on the 'genuine' nature of Sephardic performances. In this study, all performances are considered Sephardic and significant for the materialisation of cultural and national identities on stage, as long as the artists themselves believe them as such. As the first English language study dedicated to the performance practices of the Sephardim, this thesis aims to broaden the parameters of debates regarding Sephardi Theatre, applying a relation approach to forge connections between the development of the practice in the late nineteenth century and its modern formations.

In examining over one hundred years of modern Sephardi Theatre, this study offers an expansive view of varied responses to migratory experiences and cross-cultural exchanges. For instance, since the cultural practice arose during a period when the Ottoman Sephardim had more direct contact with colonial forces, the practices borrowed heavily from European (primarily French) conventions, including generic and narrative structures and performance styles. Foreign schools established in the Ottoman Empire from the mid-nineteenth century contributed to a growing number of European-educated

audiences, playwrights and directors.⁵ However, European theatre styles did not entirely replace traditional practices. Sephardic communities produced large quantities of European adaptations and absorbed western models into existing communal structures and social practices. With these transformations came new conceptualisations of authorships, production, reception and thematic formations. In addition, the emergence of modern Sephardi Theatre generated debates regarding the cultural importance of a national theatre for the Sephardim which reflected wider tensions over national and ethnic identities.⁶

The conventions and practices that constituted the development of modern Sephardi Theatre have continued into late twentieth century performances, but the problematics over the aesthetics of cultural representation and the sociopolitical significance of performances have shifted in response to urgent revivalist efforts to secure and legitimate the position of the Sephardim. With the number of Judeo-Spanish speakers continuing to decline and the tendency to amalgamate Sephardic geopolitical experiences from across the Middle East and North Africa, Sephardic performances in the present are faced with new issues of authenticity and accessibility.

Aside from a few aforementioned studies, there is relatively little scholarly work which addresses twentieth century performance practices, particularly those occurring after the Second World War. Such a lacuna may be due to the perceived deficiency of contemporary theatrical performances, both in terms of quantity and professional quality. However, one needs to merely scratch below the surface to discover a significant corpus of material ranging from commercial successes such as *Bustan Sephardi* in Israel, to the decade of performance work by the Ladino Players in New York, and the ongoing success of Sephardic musicians such as Yasmin Levy, Mor Kabasi, Yehoram Gaon, and

⁵ Particularly influential was the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a network of schools across the Balkans and North Africa. Its specific structure and impact on the oriental Sephardim is discussed in Chapter III.

⁶ It is worth noting that a similar trend can be seen within the development of Sephardic music. For example, see Edwin Seroussi on the concept of 'national' Sephardic composers arising during the late nineteenth century as an attempt to preserve traditional Sephardic music from becoming assimilated into Western practices (esp. 66).

Los Desterrados amongst others. Another explanation for the lack of scholarship on contemporary work may be due to the critical emphasis placed upon the detrimental effects of World War II. It is not the intention of this thesis to minimize the effects of the Holocaust on Sephardic communities or to underestimate changes to Sephardic performances on both local and global scales in the late twentieth century. Rather, it is my hope to demonstrate how Sephardic performances from the mid-twentieth century can be considered not in an ahistorical or fragmentary manner, but in relation to previous historical experiences and performance traditions.

A relational approach should not be equated with a conceptualization of Sephardi Theatre as 'continuously' developing, since Sephardic migration to the United States or Israel following World War II drastically redefined the spaces, politics and practices of Sephardic performances. For instance, an increased self-reflexivity towards the application of language in performance and the position of the Sephardim as a 'minority-within-a-minority'⁷ has shifted the focus and perceptions of Ladino in Sephardi Theatre both within the community and larger national landscapes. Whereas the entire Sephardic community in a given Ottoman metropolis was united through Ladino, in the United States the situation transformed as migrants from a range of linguistic backgrounds began interacting in an emerging public sphere.⁸ Therefore, the application of Ladino in recent productions takes on a more symbolic meaning in signaling a sense of belonging, unity and shared history, be it imagined or not.⁹ Although Sephardic performances in America

⁷ The term a 'minority-within-a-minority' is a now commonly adopted phrase to signify the position of the Sephardim within the Jewish community dominated by the presence of the Ashkenazim. The phrase was first introduced by Abraham D. Lavender in 'The Sephardic Revival.' It has since been adopted in a number of other studies regarding the American Sephardim, see Ben-Ur *Sephardic*; and Matza *Sephardic-American*. The term is also widely applied to Sephardim outside of America, for instance see Naomi Gale who uses the term in describing the situation of Sephardim in Australia and Margalit Bejarano in Latin America.

⁸ See for instance Ben-Ur's discussion of linguistic varieties amongst non-Ashkenazim in America (*Sephardic* esp. 20).

⁹ My use of 'imagined' here is intended to invoke the concept of 'imagined communities' theorized by Benedict Anderson. Although community members have various linguistic and historical origins there is an effort to locate and acknowledge a shared sense of culture and history, based in part on a shared experience of displacement. Whereas Anderson's arguments are primarily concerned with the construction and

and Israel have developed within contexts very different from those within the Ottoman Empire, there have been ongoing transnational networks of artistic exchange. For instance, Sephardi Theatre director Leon Behar immigrated from Istanbul to Seattle in the 1920s, bringing with him a repertoire of plays and performance styles that were presented and evolved as the community continued to produce work through the 1970s (Angel, 'The Sephardi Theatre' 157-8). In more recent times Daisy Braverman, director of the Ladino Players, has attended Sephardic performances in Istanbul and Sephardic-Turkish companies have performed for Sephardic communities in Israel (Personal communication; Bahar, Personal interview). Given that Sephardic performances in the late twentieth century are continuing to develop in response to a range of migratory experiences and artistic exchanges, it is an apt time to consider these practices not as neatly segregated from previous geographical or temporal spaces of performance activities, but as developing in relation to past traditions and current sociopolitical circumstances.

Defining the Sephardim

As demonstrated in this Introduction, usage of blanket terms such as 'Sephardim' or 'Sephardic' refers to what is in actuality a range of historical experiences and cultural identities. Application of the terms is not intended to reduce these communities to essentialist characteristics or to simplify current debates regarding the ethnic and cultural identities of these groups. The community on which this dissertation focuses is defined by its connection to the Iberian Peninsula and, in many examples, the Ottoman Empire; yet what emerges from even a brief look at the history and present context of the Sephardim is that there is a multiplicity of language variations, customs, historical experiences, religious practices, cultural norms and practices. On one level, as Harvey Goldberg suggests, the term once referring to long-residing Jews in the Iberian Peninsula is now

reproducibility of solidarity within nation-states, the term has also been accepted amongst scholars addressing transnational communities (see Lemelle; Meerzon).

being utilized as a general comparison to Ashkenazi ('From Sephardi' 168-9; Díaz-Mas 7-8). In addition to these shared geopolitical features, the Sephardim are defined by their religion, in part perhaps because religion was the unifying factor for expulsion, and in more recent times, one of the crucial factors that define this sub-ethnic Jewish group from the Ashkenazim (see DellaPergola). Connection to the language, song and food from the Iberian Peninsula continues to be an important referential point for the Sephardim today, as Jonathan Ray states: '[i]ssues of dispersion, mobility, cultural hybridity, and a continued and complex relationship with their Iberian homeland are as central to the formation of Sephardi identities in the early modern period as they are to any modern community' (11). However, connection to Iberia is no longer the only factor uniting the heterogeneous ethnic group. In an article analyzing the shifting meanings of the term 'Sephardim,' Harvey Goldberg argues that

Delineating the trajectory of a term that subsequently emerged as an inclusive reference to Jews originating from the Iberian peninsula - Sephardim - requires attention not only to the medieval Spanish context but also to the encounter of Sephardim as communities and as a social and religious category, with Jews outside of that region, both in relation to Jews from various parts of Europe (Ashkenazim) and vis-à-vis coreligionists long residing in the Arab East. As in all cases of cultural encounter, such contact yielded mutual exchange and influence concomitant with dynamics that reasserted and re-formed social boundaries and identities. ('From Sephardi' 166-7)

Drawing upon Goldberg's analysis, this study focuses not only on the Sephardim's connection to an Iberian homeland as a contributing factor to establishing a group identity, but also their multiple diasporic experiences and cross-cultural encounters. For instance, both Ottoman and American influences are evident within the work of the Ladino Players, where Moroccan songs, Oriental dancing, eating *borekas*, and life on the Lower East Side are equally important in formulating Sephardic-American identities on

and off stage.¹⁰ It is thus essential to note that whilst discussing enduring differences between the Sephardim and other groups, it was never a homogenous category and can only be understood in particular socio-historical contexts.

I begin by noting one particular cross-cultural encounter which has been informative to the Sephardim and their performance practices: the political, social and cultural exchanges between the Sephardim and Western Jews (Ashkenazim). Even a cursory look at the Sephardic theatrical canon since the nineteenth century reveals traces, both implicit and explicit, of the transformational effects from encounters between these groups. For instance, along with the educational reforms initiated with the French Jews' establishment of Alliance Israélite Universelle (hereafter AIU), over 183 schools (amounting to over 43,700 students) within the Ottoman Empire, including half of the school-aged children in Salonica alone, were introduced to French dramatic texts such as those of Molière and Racine (Benbassa and Rodrigue 83; Mazower, *Salonica* 234). Regular performances of French dramas were met by conflicting communal attitudes concerning tradition, modernity and nationalism. Furthermore, the rise of Zionism asserted its influence on the Ottoman Sephardim in the late nineteenth century fueled by the arrival of European activists. In addition to presenting dramas with a new thematic focus, Zionist productions generated new forms of generic constructions including politically didactic pieces and modern tragedies. The ongoing importance of Sephardic and Ashkenazic relations for theatrical productions can be witnessed, for instance, with Shmuel Rafael's play *Golgotha*, which seeks to challenge Israeli society's prevailing interest in Ashkenazic narratives concerning the Holocaust. Alternatively, the Ladino Players in New York City invite both Ashkenazic and Sephardic performers to stage productions that promote, in part, a shared history of immigration in America. It is the position of this thesis that Sephardi Theatre is not merely reflective, but often constituted

¹⁰ *Boreka* is the Judeo-Spanish word for burek or börek, a savory pastry popular throughout the Ottoman Empire.

by political, social and cultural encounters between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Crucially, neither the Sephardic community nor their performance practices demonstrate an engagement with these encounters through monolithic perspectives. Rather, there was a range of responses from advocating for assimilation and acculturation to actively challenging normative dispositions. Addressing encounters between these groups provides an alternative perspective for analysing the factors which contributed to the development of Sephardic performances.¹¹ Despite this important caveat towards a definition of the Sephardim, it is fruitful to discuss the term through commonly held views and orientations.

The term Sephardim applies most directly to long residing Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. 'Sefardim' derives from the Hebrew word for Spain, *Sepharad*, and comes from the passage '[t]he exiled of Jerusalem who are in Sefarad' (see Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 11; Harris, *Death* 17). Aside from geographical trajectories that have resulted in linguistic and cultural variations, the Sephardim are distinguished from the Ashkenazim within Jewish religion based upon *halakhic* differences, Jewish law. In general, the Ashkenazim followed the practices of French, German and Polish religious leaders in primarily Christian Europe whereas the Sephardim followed sages from Spain and were situated in

¹¹ Undertaking research into Ashkenazic and Sephardic encounters also reflects growing research interests within Jewish historiography. Contemporary research on Israeli society has begun to address relations between Ashkenazic, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, for instance see Chetrit *Intra-Jewish*; Schroeter 'From Sephardi,' 'A Different Road,' and 'Orientalism and the Jews.' A smaller amount of these works addresses Ashkenazic and Sephardic relations pre-creation of the state of Israel, despite the fact that this focus provides vital insights into contemporary politics and ethnic discourses, see Shenhav *Arab Jews*; Shohat 'Sephardim in Israel,' 'Rupture and Return,' Khazzoom *Shifting, The Formation*, and Alcalay *After Jews*. As Shenhav argues, an analysis of Sephardic relations within Israel since only the mid-twentieth century is limiting as it 'depoliticizes the question of the Arab Jews, defines it as an "ethnic" issue (i.e. an intra-Jewish ethnic question), and eliminates the possibility of describing the history of the Arab Jews in its overall - historical and political, let alone colonial - context' (*The Arab* 11). Outside of Israeli studies, a number of scholars have undertaken productive investigations of the Sephardim vis-à-vis the Ashkenazim within geographically specific contexts in the twentieth and twenty-first century, although these are also situated as either preceding or following the Holocaust, see Brink-Danan *Jewish Life*; Gale; Rein; Ben-Ur *Sephardic*; exceptions include Gottreich and Schroeter; and Elkin. Equally, the majority of historical studies that aim to be thematically inclusive of the breath of Sephardic diasporic experiences tend to end with the Holocaust or, at best, trail off in a loose discussion of the Sephardim as they resettle globally and fade into host societies, see Benbassa and Rodrigue; Gerber *Jews from Spain, Sephardic Studies*; with an exception, Zohar. Expanding conceptual links between nineteenth century and present day, recognizes how encounters between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim are a part of larger histories of nationalism and colonialism along with resistance to them.

Arab or Muslim countries around the Mediterranean (Medding, 'Preface' vii-iii).¹² Despite these generalizations, the Sephardim developed as a result of subsuming both Christian and Muslim influences as they migrated (mostly) eastward and south.

Whilst geographical and religious practices are useful in distinguishing the Sephardim from other Jewish groups, such notions are not without complications in present times. Over the past few decades, terms such as 'Sephardim,' 'Mizrahim,'¹³ 'Eastern,' 'Levantine' and 'Arab Jews' have been heavily debated amongst scholars and commentators. For instance, due to Sephardic communities developing in Europe (Western Sephardim) the categorization of 'Eastern' does not accurately reflect all Sephardic identities and heritage (Goldberg and Bram, 'Sephardic/Mizrahi/Arab Jews' 232; Brink-Danan, *Jewish Life* 13; Weiker). However, conceiving of the Sephardim as European is also problematic, especially in light of twentieth century mass migration from Turkey to Israel and the Americas (Brink-Danan, *Jewish Life* 13). Issues of terminology are not only related to territorially-bound experiences, they are also linked to social, political and economic relations within situated contexts. Goldberg makes this point in his discussion of the term Sephardim: '[g]roup labels and the cultural content linked to them cannot be separated from scenes of interaction in which they come up against the ideologies, practices, and identities of other groups, nor be separated from semantic fields that are at once dynamic and a reservoir of historical associations' ('From Sephardi' 184). In other words, 'Sephardic' and 'Oriental' may be more symbolic and objective especially in light of large-scale mobility in the twentieth century (DellaPergola 6).¹⁴

¹² For an excellent overview of Sephardic Judaic practices see Díaz-Mas 9-33.

¹³ Similar to 'Sephardi', the terms and ethnic divisions used to classify Mizrahi Jews are also contentious. While often used to refer to Arab Jews, the Mizrahim are a diverse group and inclusive of Jews with roots in the Middle East, Asia and North Africa (such as Iran, Turkey, India, Georgia and Central Asia) as opposed to the Iberian Peninsula.

¹⁴ DellaPergola argues that for the Sephardim as having little in common with native Oriental communities, 'eastern' is applied more as a symbolic than objective term, not indicating essential characteristics, but an 'absence' of 'westernness' (Ashkenazic traditions and heritage) and thus used to define the Sephardim against progressiveness and modernity (6-7).

Goldberg charts the history of the connotations of the term 'Sephardim' from the Middle Ages to the present day, demonstrating how cultural-religious division between 'Sephardic' and 'Ashkenazic' accelerated in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as a result of tensions arising between Europe and 'the East' (From Sephardi' 170). This division is still visible within Jewish studies, where the Ashkenazim (Jews from Europe or 'the North') are depicted as one distinct race, and all non-Ashkenazim from the 'Orient' or Mediterranean are grouped together as an open homogenous sub-ethnic group. Critics of this perspective argue that a blanket categorization cannot account for the multitude of historical experiences, linguistic features and cultural practices that constitute communities from the Balkans, North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.¹⁵ More importantly perhaps, it has resulted in certain Orientalist characterizations towards the Sephardim where the 'Western' Ashkenazim are associated with progressiveness, rationality and civilization and the 'Eastern' Sephardim with backwardness, traditionalism and primitiveness (DellaPergola 6-7).¹⁶ This research is conducted with an understanding that within each of these communities (Sephardim and Ashkenazim) there is a coalescence of historical and geographical influences, along with the particularities of gender, class and age, which necessarily produces a range of identities.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the theoretical and methodological approaches, it is useful to summarize some key points in relation to this project. In offering a corrective to Sephardi Theatre historiography we draw upon a neglected corpus of Sephardic playtexts and performances from two transformative periods of Sephardic history. The first is the emergence and development of theatre as a new cultural form during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the Ottoman Empire. The second is the last twenty years in Israel and the United States, where performances have taken on a new symbolic and social significance as part of revitalisation efforts. During

¹⁵ For an excellent overview of this literature see Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 18-22.

¹⁶ For further discussion on orientalism see Edward Said's canonical text *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*.

both these periods, the ways in which the past is represented on stage contributes to establishing cultural and national identities. Yet, as a mediated and highly edited version of history, such representations are subject to the ideological concerns and interests of those producing the work in a particular socio-historical context. The contexts of performances are seen as being influenced by both migratory experiences and cross-cultural encounters, particularly between the Ashkenazim. Therefore, this study is particularly concerned with how modern Sephardi Theatre came to be defined and redefined as a cultural force in response to encounters between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim and how such encounters produced particular representations of the past which in turn came to symbolise national and cultural identities.

Theoretical Framework: Investigating a Relational Approach

The purpose of this section is to investigate a relational approach to the study of Sephardic performances. As will become evident, a relational approach has been popularized within Jewish historiography and diaspora studies by scholars seeking to emphasize the syncretism and diversity within Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities. By addressing the cultural practices of the Sephardim, we hope to contribute to this growing body of scholarship.

A relational approach understands something as always in relation to something else rather than essentially constructed. For considering how this applies to cultural or national identities, we may turn to the work of Stuart Hall, who argues that identities are constructed 'through and not despite difference' and that 'it is only through the relation to the Other, to the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term - and thus its "identity" - can be constructed' ('Introduction' 4-5). Relational in this sense is seen as in opposition to essentialist or 'primordial' (Shenhav, *Arab* 78) approaches that consider groups (including ethnic or national) as arising from a fixed origin and progressing in a

natural manner (Brubaker 'The "diaspora";' Smith 'The Ethnic' and 'Zionism'). A relational approach would further avoid 'container' or 'groupness' conceptualizations that consider minority or diaspora groups as stable identities, and instead highlight internal inconsistencies and power hierarchies amongst what are considered collective identities (Beck 23-24; also see Brubaker and Cooper). As Zachary Lockman argues, investigating a 'relational history' accounts for 'a complex matrix of economic, political, social, and cultural interactions,' overcoming depictions of communities as 'self-contained and isolated,' understanding them instead as constituted by 'mutually formative interactions' (*Comrades* 8-9; and 'Railway'). Goldberg advocates a relational approach to Sephardic and Mizrahi histories in order to avoid 'a reification of ethnic definitions and categories' and an 'inability to grasp the content and dynamics of historical imprints that at times surface in unexpected ways' ('Sephardi to Mizrahi' 168).

For the purposes of this study, a relational approach is significant as it acknowledges interconnections between different diasporic formations, geographical spaces and artistic practices. More importantly, it allows us to consider Sephardic diaspora communities not as homogenous, but rather as constituted by a diversity of identities and relations and therein how performances serve to maintain, construct or subvert national and cultural identities and power relations. In tracing how the stage comes to symbolize Sephardic identities through representations of the past, which are informed by evolving socio-political situations, we demonstrate how Sephardic theatrical performances develop through relational processes.

It is important to note some of the challenges and limitations to this study and the application of a relational approach. By focusing on encounters between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim this study risks losing some of the historical details inherent in different diasporic experiences. There is also the concern that by applying this focus the histories of the Sephardim may be further subsumed into Ashkenazi narratives, thereby continuing to deny the community agency and an independent identity. Therefore, it should be

emphasized that this study is conducted not to replace existing narratives concerning the experiences of either of Sephardim or the Ashkenazim, but rather to complicate prevailing paradigms and offer an alternative corpus of materials that may be productively utilized for future research. Every effort has been made to recognize the agency of the respective group in particular socio-historical circumstances.

Jewish Historiography and Sephardic Modernity

As discussed, by applying a relational approach, this study hopes to contribute to a growing field of scholarship which aims to offer a more complex understanding of Jewish historiography and Jewish modernity.¹⁷ Many scholars of Sephardic studies attest, as previously mentioned, to how Jewish historiography often overlooks the distinct experiences of Jews in Middle East communities. 'Jewishness,' Ben-Ur argues, 'has tacitly been assumed to be synonymous with Germanic or Eastern European descent' (2).¹⁸ Sephardic scholars Ester Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue open their survey of Sephardic history by addressing the lack of focus given to the Sephardim in Jewish historiography:

Modern Jewish historiography has been remarkably silent about the Eastern Judeo-Spanish world. Obsessed with the Spanish Golden Age, it has only designed to study the Eastern Sephardim from the perspective of high intellectual history, tracing the problematics of Expulsion and the themes associated with it as they reverberated in the following two centuries [...] The Eastern Sephardim have been exoticized, placed into the 'Middle Eastern' slot [...] or have been romanticized for their preservation of the Iberian past through language and song. (xx)

¹⁷ A relational approach to studying Sephardic and Jewish history is a growing trend as evidenced from a number of scholars since the 1980s including the work of Shohat; Khazoom 'Mizrahim, Mizrahiut;' Chetrit 'Shas;' Ram; Raz-Krakotzkin 'The Zionist,' 'Mizrahim;' Lockman *Comrades*; Kaschl; Shenhav *The Arab*; Alcalay *After Jews*; Campos; Ben-Ur *Sephardic*; Brink-Danan *Jewish Life*; Biale; and Ray.

¹⁸ Sources that omit or offer passing reference to Sephardic and Mizrahi histories in wider studies of Jewish history are numerous. Ben-Ur cites a number of examples of scholarly work that has excluded, or severely limited, engagement with non-Ashkenazic histories particularly in America (*Sephardic* 7-8). What is evident is not only the overwhelming deficiency of the Sephardim within scholarship and media, but the persistence of this trend throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century (ibid. 200; also see Lital Levy *Jewish*; Shenhav *The Arab*).

The history of the Sephardim, and in particular the transformation of their communities in the late nineteenth century, has often been conflated with European Jews and the processes of modernization. In addressing Jewish modernity, this critical emphasis is even more pronounced.¹⁹

In investigating Sephardic and Mizrahi modernity, Lital Levy, Daniel Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit present a thorough and insightful analysis of contemporary literature which this study utilizes and expands upon. Levy provides perhaps the most thorough overview of current scholarship, convincingly demonstrating how scholars of Jewish modernity tend to assume 'Jewishness as an identity embedded exclusively within or in relation to Europe' (*Jewish* 49).²⁰ Within Ottoman Sephardic communities, such a trend in cultural modernity is most noticeable in studies of the AIU, often held up as the most important force of westernization and modernization within the Ottoman Empire (ibid. 68; also see Schroeter and Chetrit 'The Transformation').²¹ Bernard Lewis makes this point in *The Jews of Islam*: '[i]t was not until the last years of the nineteenth century, when the activities of the Alliance Israélite Universelle produced a rising generation of French-educated Turkish Jews, that a new spirit began to work among the [Jewish] communities of the empire, and the first windows to the West were opened' (177). Other scholars argue that Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews only entered modernity after the creation of the State of Israel,

As for the Jewish communities of the Orient and North Africa, with the exception of a small upper class, there seems to have been relatively little

¹⁹ See Lital Levy's overview of the literature which includes reference to notable scholars such as Stein in *Making Jews Modern* which considers Ottoman Jewry as 'European' and thus contributes to an understanding of Sephardic histories of modernity within the geographical and cultural framework of Europe (*Jewish* 76-77), as well as Michael Meyer's *Jewish Identity in Modern World* which aims to present a universal perspective on 'the entire field of Jewish modernity' but makes no reference to non-European Jews (8; ibid. 39-102).

²⁰ Levy offers a comprehensive literature review in her study, addressing how this perspective dominates including studies of the *haskala* (Enlightenment) movement (*Jewish* 50-67).

²¹ For studies that consider the AIU as the most substantial or sole force in Ottoman Sephardic cultural modernity see Rodrigue 'From Millet;' Lewis; Gerber 'The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa.'

interruption of their Jewish mode of existence until they were exposed to their Ashkenazi brethren in the State of Israel' (M. Meyer, 'When Does' 336).²²

Such a perspective of modernity amongst the Sephardim risks depicting the community as 'not agents but passive subjects of modernization, empty receptacles for European culture' (Levy, *Jewish* 68). While this study acknowledges the fact that the AIU and European colonization had a significant impact on Sephardic communities in the Ottoman Empire, it argues that certain assumptions shaping perspectives of Jewish modernity and Sephardic history have neglected to consider alternative sources that may challenge prevailing paradigms to offer a more nuanced and complex image of Sephardic agency in communal transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

What is true regarding Sephardic representation within Jewish historiography and studies of modernity is even more profound in studies of modern Jewish theatre. Outside of specialist studies, Jewish theatre is often synonymous with Yiddish theatre. Evidence of this conceptualization within scholarship can be seen in major critical works, such as Sarah Blacher Cohen's recently edited 'comprehensive' history of Jewish-American experiences on the stage and screen which is prefaced with: '[t]he immediate ancestor of Jewish-American drama is the vibrant but not awesome Yiddish theatre' (1). Predictably, none of the contributors acknowledge the equally vibrant Sephardi Theatre that was developing simultaneously around the country. Research aimed to be more temporally and thematically inclusive often neglects to acknowledge non-Ashkenazi theatre practices. For instance, *Jewish Theatre: A Global View* (2009) offers no entries related to non-Ashkenazic theatre practices, claiming that the terms 'Yiddish' and 'Jewish' are 'practically

²² Also see Levy's analysis of the relevant literature such as *The Jew in the Modern World* (1995) where it states: 'Jews of the Orient have for the most part just begun to enjoy the ambiguous fortunes of modernization with their settlement in the twentieth-century State of Israel' (Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz 4-5); and *The Modern Jewish Experience* (1993) where the author claims that 'for many Sephardic Jews, the modernization process had only recently begun when the traditional community was destroyed by flight to Israel with its resultant dispersal and destruction of the old community, leaving an unanticipated void' (Gerber 'The Jews of North Africa' 43).

interchangeable' (2). Similarly, there are no entries on non-Ashkenazic theatre in the recently edited collection *Jews and Theatre in an Intercultural Context* (2012).²³ While there is admittedly a number of debates circulating amongst practitioners and scholars as to how to define Jewish theatre, the practices of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews are not even part of the conversation.²⁴ Therefore, not only does the lack of research on the Sephardim risk losing an understanding of the rich history and heritage of the community, but it creates a false illusion of a homogenous Jewish history comprised of principally Euro- and Ashkenazi-centric narratives. As part of counter-balancing studies of Jewish modernity, this thesis considers Sephardic performances as they reflect and respond to societal transformations beginning in the late nineteenth century. Such a focus

²³ Further studies of Jewish theatre that demonstrate a conflation of Yiddish and Jewish theatre include a publication by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture in American defining Jewish theatre as having grown 'steadily on roots nourished by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Yiddish theatre,' adding that:

it has acquired, over the last century, an impressive international repertoire. Jewish theatre lacks just one thing: a universally understood definition. It is hard for it to get out of the formidable shadow of its Yiddish antecedents - and there is no reason why it should. [...] Hence, the term "Jewish theatre" has rightly come to denote all drama and production to which Jews, Jewish history, or the Jewish experience are central' (Schiff and Posnick xiii).

Also see Shoef 'The Impossible Birth of Jewish Theatre' which accredits the entire history of Jewish theatre to the Yiddish-speaking actor and director Abraham Goldfaden with an explicit Eurocentric basis: '[o]nly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did a performing Jewish theatre begin to fill an ever-growing social and cultural role within Jewish society, first in Europe and then in the "New World" (67). Further studies that address similar biases include *Jews on Broadway: An Historical Survey*, which dedicates only a note to the Sephardic personality Daniel Belasco (Stewart Lane); in *Nostalgia in Jewish-American Theatre and Film* there is no mention of the Sephardim; in *Beyond the Golden Door* Julius Novick writes: '[m]ost of these plays are about New York Jews of Eastern European extraction; these, of course, are not the only American Jews, but they are the paradigmatic ones, the kind of people both Jews and Gentiles usually think of when they think of "Jews"' (4). There is a good opportunity here for Novick to challenge the Ashkenazic dominance, but instead the survey uses this classification as validation for excluding Sephardic and Mizrahi playwrights and productions from the analysis. In the *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora* Mark Avrum Ehrlich similarly goes as far to claim that Sephardi Theatre did not exist after medieval Spain, and fails to acknowledge Mizrahi theatre entirely: '[t]he Ashkenazic community also developed a theatrical tradition that did not emerge in either of the other Jewish Diasporas (although there is some evidence of isolated plays based on biblical themes being written in Ladino during the Middle Ages)' (211).

²⁴ For instance, I am also aware that Hebrew Theatre is often considered to be paradigmatic of Jewish theatre, as Edna Nahshon states in the Introduction to *Jewish Global Theatre*: '[t]he term "Jewish theatre"' applies to the,

richly heterogeneous array of topics: Yiddish, Israeli, European and American theatres; playtexts written in Hebrew and Yiddish; others, dealing with Jewish topics in non-Jewish languages, works by Jews and Gentiles, some composed for Jews and others for distinctly non-Jewish audiences (at times even to the detriment of Jewish interests); folk theatre; popular theatre and cabaret (1).

It is surprising that a study which aims for the term Jewish theatre to be 'as an inclusive and accommodating tent' does not include any Ladino or Judeo-Arabic productions (2). Such an oversight illustrates the degree to which an Ashkenazic/Yiddish bias penetrates contemporary studies on Jewish theatre.

may offer valuable insight into how cultural trends, political ideologies and social values were circulated and presented, not by Europeans, but by community members, artists and educators who are often neglected characters in discourses of Jewish modernity in the Middle East.

In *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, Ella Shohat demonstrates the implications of collapsing Sephardic and Mizrahi histories with dominant narratives of the Ashkenazim. Such a 'performance of commonalities' she asserts, risks 'silencing any deviance into a more globalized and historicized narrative that would see Jews not simply through their religious commonalities but also in relation to their contextual cultures, institutions, and practices' (214).²⁵ For Shohat, the denial, or reshaping, of certain histories serves both communicative functions (i.e. nationalistic rhetorics) and symbolic functions (i.e. developing power relations and identity construction). The politics of representing the past arise from the particular way in which the narrative is constructed:

alliances and opposition between communities evolve historically, but also their narrativizations differ when seen in the light of the present. And as certain strands within a cultural fabric become taboo, this narrativization involves destroying connections that once existed. The process of constructing a national historical memory also entails destroying a different, prior historical memory at whose expense the nationalist narrative articulates itself. (205)

As Shohat argues, collective identities are based in part upon narratives of the past, and the purpose of articulating particular histories is subject to specific social and political contexts. Cultural practices such as cinema, according to Shohat, may reinforce or challenge hegemonic understandings of history, which in turn contribute to present and future identities and affiliations.

²⁵ For more on the act of forgetting in the construction of national narratives see Huysen; Shenhav *The Arab* 138-9; and Renan).

While certain narratives may destroy and/or exclude histories in light of contemporary encounters between nations or communities, it could also be argued that the active re-engagement with those histories may serve as a way of reasserting marginalized subjectivities into normative understandings of the past. For the purposes of this study, Shohat's work is useful in highlighting how cultural politics contribute to particular representations of the past; however, this thesis expands upon Shohat's critique, addressing not only how history may be manipulated through theatrical representations of the past, but also how such performances can point to tensions in inter- and intra-communal relations, and serve as a tool for reshaping social, cultural and political alliances. One of the core interests in this project is concerned with the representations of the past within theatre productions as evidence of shifting relations between past and future, traditionalism and secularization, homelands and host societies, and transnational actors.

Looking at the case of the Sephardi Theatre in the Ottoman Empire provides a useful model for understanding the greater transformation of other Oriental communities. However, while this study hopes to overcome certain prevailing assumptions and conventions within Jewish historiography and studies of modernity by addressing them through a relational approach, it should be considered as only an initial inquiry into producing a narrative of modern Sephardi Theatre since the nineteenth century.

Diaspora and Performance

As the Sephardim are a diasporic community, this study also aims to contribute to broader discourses on the coalescence of diaspora and performance. In turn, the theories and methodologies offered by both diaspora and performance studies can offer new insight into the practices and relations established through Sephardic cross-cultural encounters. As both diaspora and performance studies offer a range of critical

approaches, the following section discusses the particular application of these disciplines in the present work.

For a study of the Sephardim, diaspora discourse offer possibilities currently underrepresented in academic literature. As Jonathan Ray claims, although the Sephardim display many of the hallmarks of diaspora groups as outlined in current scholarship there has been a failure to address their unique historical experiences (11). Ray argues that the neglect of Sephardic histories within diaspora discourse is rooted on the tendency to view Jewish history as a 'monolithic whole' rather than as a series of 'micro-diasporas' with a veritable range of experiences (12). What Ray proposes is a more nuanced look at Jewish history within diaspora studies in order to expand contemporary assumptions and conventions.

As there are several theorists within diaspora studies with differing perspectives, it is necessary to clarify our use of the term. A literal understanding of diaspora denotes the dispersal of people from their homeland, as evident in the etymology of the term tracing its usage from the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Septuagint* as *dia-* meaning 'through' with the verb *sperein* meaning 'to sow' or 'to scatter' (Braziel and Mannur 1). Diaspora is thus an old concept, although its meanings have drastically changed in recent times (Clifford, 'Diasporas' 310). In broad terms, diaspora discourse addresses encounters between displaced and culturally distinct groups (i.e. ethnic or religious) vis-à-vis others (Faist, *Diaspora* 13). What exactly diasporas entail and who should be allowed to identify under that banner are issues of debate and tension amongst scholars and commentators.

While analysis of the formation and developing of diaspora scholarship has already been productively undertaken (see Mishra), it is useful here to provide a brief overview of the conceptual evolution of the term as is applicable for this study. Thomas Faist provides a concise and useful conceptual division between diaspora scholars concerned with taxonomies and those who address diasporic spaces and socio-cultural conditions ('Diaspora' 21). Scholars such as William Safran, Robin Cohen and Kim

Butler are primarily attentive to the classification of diasporas, each providing definitive list of attributes groups must possess to be evaluated as a diaspora. An understanding of diaspora groups within these studies focuses on the relations between the community, the host country and the countries of origin, each in term depicted as essentially stable entities. For instance, in describing diaspora groups, Safran utilizes terminology such as 'they retain,' 'they believe,' 'they regard,' suggesting that the displaced group responds and relates to each other and nation-states in an indistinguishable manner (83-84). Cohen offers an edited version of Safran's typology in *Global Diaspora*, exploring the various ways groups become diasporic under different ethnically-neutral circumstances such as victimage, labor, trade, imperial and cultural. With this, Cohen offers amendments to Safran's list such as 'dispersal from an original centre is often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event' (23). For Cohen, diaspora experiences are predicated on a type of bonding between co-ethnic subjects even if their relation to a host society changes as dependent on where they have resettled. As Floya Anthias argues, this 'incommensurable *comparative* schema' does not allow for 'understanding the different dimensions *in relation to* one another' (563), nor does it 'reflect on the pitfalls of representing diasporas as class-neutral, gender-neutral and generation-neutral ethnic blocs that uncritically project home and host countries as homogenous territorial entities' (Mishra 48). As the Sephardic diaspora is best understood as a heterogeneous community constituted by a number of cross-cultural encounters, the territorial-based and essentialist schema applied by Safran and Cohen remains inconclusive.

With some exceptions, since the 1990s there has been a move away from the triadic networks (home, host, community) and towards an understanding of diasporas as constructed through difference and a conceptualization of the term that address fields, spaces, and the specific circumstances in diverse contexts. Within this approach, notions of cultural syncretism, hybridity, and diaspora as a condition or space are privileged over categorizations or defining lists for groups. Scholars working on diaspora in this manner

include Stuart Hall, James Clifford, Paul Gilroy and Avtar Brah amongst others. Hall, in 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' values the 'production' rather than 'innate essence' of diasporic identities, arguing how diasporas are 'always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation' (392). Hall suggests that while cultures have histories 'they undergo constant transformation' and are 'subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power' (394). In other words, his conception of diasporian subjects as constantly produced through the interplay of histories and social experiences escapes the essentializing characteristics proposed through other frameworks: '[t]he 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*' (235).

Clifford also forwards an approach to diaspora discourse that foregoes essentialist formulations of diasporic features, critiquing Safran-led studies of defining diaspora through 'strict meanings and authenticity tests' as it leaves little room for 'ambivalence' within diasporas and is limiting in its application of an 'ideal' type (304-5). Instead, Clifford focuses on what diaspora 'defines itself against' (307). He terms the approach 'relational positioning,' which is 'not a process of absolute othering, but rather of entangled tensions' between the host society, or nation-state, and the claims of autochthonous peoples (ibid.). In this sense, diasporas are understood always in relation to something else, although, as Anthias recognizes, 'political allegiances of different agents within diaspora groups is never given' (569). Clifford articulates important steps away from the triadic schema, advocating for a greater consideration of hybridity and non-territorial alliances in addition to issues of gender, class, race and power relations within diasporic formations. Ashkenazic and Sephardic diasporist narratives are briefly discussed as an important case for reclaiming 'alternative cosmopolitanisms and diasporic networks [...] as crucial political visions' and 'recovering non-Western, or not-only-Western, models for cosmopolitan life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling within and against nation-states,

global technologies, and markets' (327-8). Without developing the examination further, Clifford lays the foundations for investigating inter and intra-diasporic tensions and the political motivations for and implications of supporting or resisting dominant diasporic narratives.

Avtah Brah forwards a useful concept of diaspora as 'an interpretive frame referencing the economic, political and cultural modalities of historically specific forms of migrancy' (16). Brah's concept of diaspora space is key to her analysis of the construction and resistance to power within and between dispersed subjects. She defines the term as,

the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. Here, tradition is itself continually invented even as it may be hailed as originating from the mists of time. (208)

Brah is indebted to the earlier work of Hall and Clifford, amongst others, yet her conceptualization of diaspora space foregrounds an examination of the intersections and contentious relations between the native/autochthonous subject as diasporian and the diasporian as native. Both identities are constructed in relation to the other within the site of the encounter. What is equally significant in Brah's account is that the notion of tradition is detached from collective memories of a homeland as in somehow unchanging and 'authentic,' but rather traditions are evoked as strategies for contesting power relations and identities. Brah further articulates this notion of power dynamics:

Of central importance to understanding the concept of diaspora space are the various configurations of power that differentiate empirical diasporas

internally as well as situate them in relation to one another. The concept of diaspora space relies on a multi-axial performative notion of power. This idea of power holds that individuals and collectivities are simultaneously positioned in social relations constituted and performed across multiple dimensions of differentiation; that these categories always operate in articulation. (242)

In regards to this project, Brah's concern with the articulation of power within and between diasporic formations is of key importance. Particular constructions of the past, as well as language and the notion of a common culture, must therefore be understood in relation to socio-political alliances and institutional power dynamics. By examining networks of power within diasporic formations, we can produce a more nuanced understanding of ethnic inequalities within various historical circumstances.

* * *

Over the last decade, there has been an increasing interest in the intersections between performance and diaspora. Performance, understood as 'a process of enacting and scoring signifiers which enable audiences to identify or counter-identify with the ideological discourses informing the performance' (Amkpa 5) may serve as a revealing framework for examining how diaspora communities are defined and redefined through ongoing experiences of migration and cross-cultural exchanges. As Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo state on the intersection of diaspora and performances, it offers 'a distinctive window on the lived experience of crossing cultures and the multiple forms of dislocation, affiliation and belonging that typically characterize this process' ('Diaspora and Performance' 151). The function of diaspora performances varies, from how such practices serve as a ritual to 'overcome the trauma of dislocation and subjugation' (Harrison 4), to how they construct personal or collective identities in relation to local, national and diasporic frameworks (Moynagh 2), or to the ways in which performances

may politically or economically intervene in the affairs of host countries or countries of origin (see Bhatia; Grehan).

One of the central concerns expressed in current studies is to what extent diaspora communities accept or resist cultural invention or hybridization in order to critique or contest conceptions of nationality and history. Recouping alternative histories from normative conceptions of the past is an important potential for diasporic theatre, as Nandi Bhatia argues: '[t]heatre's visual focus, emphasis on collective participation and representation of shared histories, mobility, potential for public disruption, and spatial maneuverability impart yet another layer to the cultural investments of colonial and postcolonial texts in framing, organizing, and presenting alternative stories' (3). Furthermore, some studies point to how representations of diaspora cultures raise questions over the ethics of representation, the relevance to the Sephardim was demonstrated in the opening example of Yasmin Levy. Christopher L. Berchild draws our attention to these issues in Irish diaspora theatre, imploring us to ask if artists and companies have a responsibility to represent traditions and homelands in particular ways (40). Thus diaspora performances are a response to experiences of migration and transnational exchanges and may impact diasporian subjects' identities and relations on both local and global levels.

Following the conceptual developments within diaspora discourse, studies of diaspora and performance studies express a growing interest in applying a relational approach to analyzing the networks and relations which constitute diaspora performances. Christine Matzke and Osita Okagbue apply this approach to work on African diaspora theatre, stating that their aim is to expand relational connections between historical and temporal diasporic experiences by African populations, 'thereby dismissing any residual notion (if any) of the African diaspora as a single imagined community with monolithic cultural expressions' (xvi). Recent developments in diaspora theatre and performance point to an increasing interest in investigating the relational history and temporal

connections between diasporic formations, and also how terms and identities translate, are articulated, and examined through experiences of journeying and settlement.

Theatre as a space, praxis and analytical tool provides a window into the sociopolitical struggles of the Sephardim. In regards to spaces of performance, this study considers the relationships between artists and audiences in the 'theatrical public sphere.' Drawing upon the work of Jürgen Habermas, theatre scholar Christopher Balme outlines the concept of 'theatrical public spheres' as a mode of approaching the relationships between theatrical institutions and the public. For Balme, the theatrical public sphere is the interaction of three dependent categories: space; 'a substantialized concept;' and 'a relational object' ('Playbills' 43-44). As a space, the theatrical public sphere is inclusive of the places of public discourse (i.e. magazines, journals and coffee houses). The 'concept' of the public sphere refers to the abstract entity of 'public' that develops over time, and the relational nature of the public sphere refers to its position in society as dependent upon public participation and therefore may be 'acted on, influenced, and even manipulated' (ibid. 44). This thesis utilizes Balme's concept of the theatrical public sphere in order to consider how both the physical location of performance and the wider debates regarding theatre impacted the production and reception of Sephardi Theatre. In analyzing the performances of the Sephardim it is important to note that the majority of theatrical activity occurred outside of purpose-built theatre venues. Many performances took place in schools, public meeting houses and synagogues. The sites of performance indicate particular symbolic and material conditions that affect not only the aesthetics of the production, but its position within society. As Peter SALLYBRASS and Allon WHITE note, each site of assembly

constitutes a nucleus of material and cultural conditions which regulate what may and may not be said, who may speak, how people may communicate and what importance must be given to what is said. An utterance is

legitimated or disregarded according to its place of production and so, in large, part, the history of political struggle has been the history of the attempts made to control significant sites of assembly and spaces of discourse. (80)

The spaces of Sephardic performances are considered as relational diaspora spaces evoking the concepts forwarded by Stayllbrass, White and Brah. Theatrical spaces in this study are understood as contentious sites wherein audiences, journalist, performers, and foreign officials competed to gain control, and by extension, sought to control ethnic identities and relations.

As a praxis, theatre emphasizes verbal and visual languages through embodiment, which communicates 'a full sensuousness of native speech and gives cultural nuances to second languages through tone, rhythm and gesture, actualizing polyphony in ways that signify multiple sites of language acquisition and practice' (Gilbert and Lo, 'Diaspora' 153). If we accept Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker's argument on Indian diaspora theatre, that 'original' diaspora theatre is only achieved when communities distance themselves from their culture of origin and integrate aspects of the host culture (305),²⁶ then modern Sephardi Theatre is inherently diasporic as it emerged and developed as a result of cross-cultural encounters and is reflective of these national and transnational exchanges. As evident within the case studies, there is a constant tension amongst Sephardic artists in maintaining pre-migration aspects of the culture and integrating in host societies. As discussed, the use of Ladino as the language of performance is one of the clearest ways in which the Sephardim continue to present their cultural and ethnic identity; yet, language is not the only aspect of communication considered in the current study of Sephardic performance praxis. Gestures and movements are also crucial in this analysis, as Ian Burkitt argues, they 'give expression to the conditions of our lives' and can challenge or change prevailing ideologies and social conditions (2). Therefore, the relations of power

²⁶ As Dharwadker asserts: '[w]ithout this detachment from origins, diaspora theatre can only *re*-present the culture of the nation, in expatriate plays about 'home', local productions of plays from home, and full-scale imports' (305).

which govern performances enable certain subjects to gain power while restraining or censoring the agency of others; for example in India where British colonial officials attempted to censor anti-colonial theatre in an effort to maintain the imperial enterprise (Bhatia 32).

Theatre praxis is further utilized in this study to refer to the ways in which narrative structures, gestures, song and performative conventions from traditional forms intersect with contact cultures, such as those between Sephardic, Ottoman and French. In this sense, analysis is focused on hybridized performance practices and subsequently how these practices reflect social relations. As Doreen Massey reminds us, hybridized performances that arise from cross-cultural encounters 'cannot be separated from power' (249-272). Therefore, the ways in which social customs and cultural histories are constructed and transmitted through performance is reflective of relations of power in a given socio-historical context. Gilbert and Lo similarly remark on the politics inherent to performances such as diasporic theatrical productions: 'the terms of cross-cultural engagement are rarely free of power, but rather embedded in asymmetrical relationships dominated by the forces of commerce, imperialism and/or militarism' (*Performance* 10). The particularities of whose voices are empowered and under what historical circumstances certain types of performances take place is of key concern, as illustrated in the example of Yasmin Levy. As an 'evocative political term' (Baubock 317), diasporic performances 'exclude as much as they include' in the process of negotiating and contesting relations (Paerregaard 92), shape the ways in which members of migrant communities relate to each other, and can influence language, religion, political identities, economic ties, and cultural expression. This is exemplified within Sephardic performances, as a range of practices, forms and narrative content (such as folk songs and stories, oppressed histories, and hybrid European-Ottoman productions) were utilized in productions for various political purposes. The relation between form, content and

historical experiences must then be considered in order to determine how performance defines ethnic identities and power relations.

Analyzing Sephardic performances through a diaspora framework may have wider implications for diaspora discourse. For instance, the multiple migratory experiences across the Near and Middle East, North Africa and the Americas have resulted in double or triple diasporas.²⁷ Such experiences, as Ray states, challenge diaspora as an analytic framework, emphasizing that 'diasporas are not permanent structures but transitory moments between dispersion and integration' (24). For the Sephardim, performative acts work at different moments to develop a collective identity, resist assimilation and/or challenge dominant perceptions of history. Investigating how the diasporic experiences and relations are embodied, spatialized, temporalized by the Sephardim offers an alternative approach to understanding how migrant communities contest and negotiated issues of national identity and cultural distinctiveness. This project aims to develop the relational trend in diaspora and performance criticism further by expanding archival interrogation to the Sephardic diaspora through both historical and lateral encounters, inter- and intra-relations across time and spaces.

Traditions, Cultural Authenticity and Representations of the Past

Analysis of Sephardic artistic activities in this study focuses on the significance of representing the past for establishing ethnic and cultural identities. In adopting this perspective we do not mean to undermine the variety of meanings performances have for artists and their audiences. However, within the case studies investigated in this work, both the artists and audiences repeatedly expressed the importance of representing the past for communal identification.

Representations of the past are far from homogenous or unambiguous. Hayden White demonstrates how narratives about history involve more than a marshaling of facts

²⁷ For more on the concept of the Sephardim as a double diaspora see David Wacks 'Double Diaspora.'

and scientific methodologies, but are subjected to a structuring wherein the same event can be endowed with different significance depending upon its characterization in different contexts (7). In this sense, representations of the past share similar conceptual features with 'invented traditions' and 'imagined communities' (Hobsbawm and Ranger; also see Anderson). Developed by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, the concept of 'invented traditions' refers to traditions that are constituted in the present in order to create connections, or rather imply continuity, with the past (ibid.).²⁸ Within this framework, the representation of the traditions and cultural identity do not convey an authentic past, but are enveloped in struggles to establish communities in the present and their connections to the past.

The evocation of 'invented' traditions is utilized within the work of Elke Kaschl, who has investigated the folk dance practices in Israel and Palestine. 'Invention' as Kaschl states, 'does not distinguish between "genuine" and "fake," or "old" and "new" traditions, but sees all practices identified with the nation as brought into being through processes of construction, transformation, interpretation and reinterpretation' (23). In this sense, it is neither my intention to disregard the importance of cultural traditions amongst the Sephardim or to present certain performances as more or less 'authentic.' If, as Hobsbawm and Anderson argue, national histories and identities are selectively represented, then it becomes important to consider how different alliances and relations feed into theatrical work in different historical contexts.

Although we analyze performances from diverse temporal and geographical settings, there are strong connections in all of them between representations of the past and the particular ways in which cultural and national identities are constructed. And, as the case studies demonstrate, representing the past is one of the ways in which various

²⁸ The concept of 'invented traditions' has been adopted in a number of other studies which similarly argue how 'traditional' or 'natural' practices are in fact derived or 'invented' in recent practices. See for instance Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 'Theorizing Heritage'; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bruner; Chatterjee *The Nation*; Handler and Linnekin.

groups maintain, construct or subvert identities and power relations. Similar to White's depiction of historians, those who produce and construct theatrical performances are equally responsible for arranging events, denoting their position, significance and function that goes beyond a representation of objective truth. Rather, such performances demonstrate an engagement with the ideas and forces of history for political or economic ends. Controlling or influencing representations of the past and thus establishing collective memory and national identity, allows 'for the fabrication, rearrangement, elaboration, and omission of details about the past, often pushing aside accuracy and authenticity so as to accommodate broader issues of identity formation, power and authority, and political affiliations' (Zelizer 3; also see Said, 'Invention' 177). 'Invention' and 'representation' become less about a question of truthfulness, and instead a question of power, or, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Edward Bruner state: '[t]he issue is therefore less one of authenticity and more one of authentication: who has the power to represent whom and to determine which representation is authoritative' ('Tourism' 304). My focus in this study is thus on how and under what conditions performances come to represent national and cultural identities.

Israeli theatre scholar Freddie Rokem has addressed similar questions in his work *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*. While White asserts that 'every representation of the past has specifiable ideological implications' (69), Rokem attunes this position towards theatrical representations of the past: 'theatrical performances of and about history reflect complex ideological issues concerning deeply rooted national identities and subjectivities and power structures and can in some cases be seen as a willful resistance to and critique of the established or hegemonic, sometimes even stereotypical, perceptions of the past' (*Performing* 8). As representing the past can take on a number of different narrative and aesthetic possibilities, it is therefore only when the interests and subjectivities of those involved in the representation are made clear that we can determine the significance of the event

(ibid.). Although Rokem's case studies are primarily concerned with the power relations between actors, directors, playwrights and spectators, his critical approach is informative for this study in considering how representations are not merely reflections of the past, but involved in actively engaging with the past for the purposes of unsettling established hegemonic histories or reinforcing them.

Therefore, performing history in the present work is understood not as a form of documentary drama or verbatim theatre: it is not intended to realistically portray the past, but as a creative and often symbolic representation of past events. Representing the past is therefore subjected to an editing process by playwrights, directors and actors where aspects of history may be left out and others exaggerated in order to achieve a particular dramatic effect. Inter and intra-ethnic relations have shaped the ways in which the past is represented and has come to be understood as a result of cross-cultural encounters. If we accept the representation of history as a creative process that involves a structuring of events for the purposes of, in part, reinforcing or challenging power relations and cultural identities, it becomes crucial to engage with the particularities of who is given authority in representing the past, for whom the performances are given, and under what historical circumstances they transpire. In addition, since not all historical events are treated equally in performance, it is important to consider the selection of events, how they are recognized and embodied, and how performances of the past connect and respond to one another.

In particular, this study addresses the ways in which tragic events and experiences of suffering and loss are embodied through performance. As mentioned, Sephardi Theatre frequently addresses experiences of suffering and violence that have punctuated the history of the community. The idea that tragic events are formative of group identities and cultural memories is prevalent in several studies of minority and ethnic communities such as the Sikh communities (Tatla 283-4), Finnish populations (Münz), Armenians (Hovannisian), and Palestinians (Salhi and Netton). Therefore, the arguments presented

in this work may serve to illuminate such representations of tragedy in further studies. If, as Rokem argues, '[c]ollective identities, whether they are cultural/ethnic, national, or even transnational, grow from a sense of the past' (*Performing 3*), a tragic sense of history is an even more potent narrativization for establishing or challenging hegemonic historiographies. In this manner, particular attention must be given to the application of generic conventions and narrative structures in representing the past as not 'natural' or 'self-evident,' but as indicative of historical, social, political and cultural influences.

Methodology

As presented, the focus of this research project is on how modern Sephardi Theatre developed from experiences of migrancy and cross-cultural exchanges, and how representations of these experiences came to materialize on stages to maintain, establish or subvert national identities and relations. What remains to consider further are the methods and material utilized in this study.

This study draws upon theoretical and methodological contributions from Jewish historiography, diaspora discourse, and performance studies. The purpose of integrating the practices of several disciplines is to attempt to overcome certain assumptions and biases that exist within each field. In considering the asymmetrical power relations present in experiences of migrancy and transnational exchange, and the structures and processes which construct or maintain such relations, this thesis also draws upon theoretical contributions from post-colonialism and critiques of modernity.

Additionally, we employ methods from Cultural Materialism to consider the material, historical and cultural contexts under which performances are produced and consumed. Ric Knowles has been instrumental in advancing a cultural materialist approach within theatre studies. In *Reading the Material Theatre* he argues that such an approach would consider 'theatrical performances as cultural productions which serve specific cultural and theatrical communities at particular historical moments as sites for

the negotiation, transmission, and transformation of cultural values, the products of their own place and time that are nevertheless productive of social and historical reification or change' (10). By applying a similar approach, this study addresses not only playtexts and performance events, but the broad range of cultural practices related to the performances such as government and non-governmental cultural policies, funding patterns and sponsorships along with institutions and companies. In brief, this thesis aims to situate the performance practices of the Sephardim in their social contexts.

In analyzing how theatrical representations give way to new geographies of identity and belonging, this study reflects broader thematic concerns of diaspora discourse: how diasporic communities fuse with and oppose local societies, cultures and constructs of nationhood. In particular, this study draws upon the work of Shohat and Dharwadker. Shohat's work often revolves around Ashkenazic and Sephardic/Mizrahi relations and advocates a wider gamut of inquiry into the variegated links between horizontal and vertical histories, geographies and discourses to assess antagonisms and intersections between the past and present. The work of Dharwadker on post-colonial Indian drama has been particularly useful in providing a model by which to examine theatre practices and their relation to global and local power structures. Primarily, his work recognizes the heterogeneous responses to cross-cultural encounters through performance, as practitioners 'have both embraced and rejected the colonial inheritance in terms of form, language, ideology, and conventions of representation' (11). The result is a 'spectrum of syncretistic cultural forms' that offer 'conflicting claims of tradition and modernity' and questions 'received views of the past and the ways of knowing it' (*ibid.*). Such a conceptualization of the function of theatre within post-colonial or diaspora settings is crucial for this study, which aims to go beyond consideration of Sephardic diaspora as solely promoting a sense of belonging, or as only a political instrument, but rather within a spectrum of these perspectives. Dharwadker's work also demonstrates a synthesis of interpretations drawing on live performance as much as playtexts to investigate the

transformation of authorship, production, reception and thematic forms in post-independence India. Drawing upon Dharwadker's 'unconventional fusion' (3), this study similarly applies these methods of analysis for charting the transformational effects of the ongoing processes of modernization on Sephardi Theatre practices.

Within theatre studies and performance historiography, the work of notable scholars such as Balme and Jacky Bratton have been influential in demonstrating the relationship between performance events, texts, and the public sphere. Theatrical performances are understood beyond the demarcations of theatre spaces and as part of cultural and political processes. Bratton's use of 'intertheatricality' places emphasis on studying theatre performances as they are produced and performed in relation to other institutions and cultural practices. Following in the approaches of these studies, this work looks to playbills, programmes and literary works as well as considering spectators' understanding of both past performances and histories to present alternative readings of performances and their relationality to political and cultural activities.

In addressing each of these varied points, the project illuminates the ways in which performances address power relations, questions of domination, resistance and empowerment as well as identity constructions. The starting hypothesis is that representations of the past are never culturally authentic or organically occurring, but always constructed as a result of political and social encounters.

Materials

Theatrical works investigated include primarily Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) language productions that have transpired in three of the major historical and contemporary sites of Sephardic communities: the Ottoman Empire; the United States; and Israel. Although, as stated, my definition of Sephardi Theatre extends beyond Ladino-language productions, we have elected to primarily address these in my analysis as it allows for a consistent language variable within all three geographical and historical locations. One

advantage of this is that the diaspora community's connection to language and performance can be more easily charted, and, as the language is intimately connected to its historic origins in the Iberian Peninsula, it reflects the community's changing connections and perceptions of diasporic experiences. It is my hope that future scholars may build upon this study to address additional Sephardic performances in a wider range of languages.

Plays investigated from the Ottoman Empire include a range of works produced in Ladino by companies affiliated with the AIU and Zionist organizations, primarily two versions of *Ester* by Racine and *Dreyfus* by Jacques Loria. Although several plays were performed and developed through Sephardic encounters with non-Sephardic Jews in the Ottoman Empire, a few paradigmatic texts have been selected to demonstrate the rhetorical and ideological discourses at play. Playtexts used in this study from the Ottoman Empire were all published by the Sephardim as either separate monographs or as serialized entries within the press; all the materials can only be accessed in specialized archives as no contemporary publications have taken place. For *Dreyfus*, an additional unpublished translation by Olga Borovaya was consulted. For productions conducted by the Ladino Players, manuscripts of their works were generously provided by the company as there are no publications available. For investigating contemporary work in Israel, *Golgotha* by Shmuel Refael, *Bustan Sefardi* by Yitzhak Navon, the works of Sara Benviste Benry and majority of the work of Matilda Koen-Sarano have been published in Ladino and/or Hebrew, although their circulation is limited.

Published and unpublished playtexts are utilized as the primary entry point into the theatrical work of Sephardic artists; however, they represent only a selection of performances from within the theatre repertoire of the Sephardim. Archived materials in Ladino are not easily accessible; out of the 684 distinct titles of productions that Romero identifies, only 83 texts of Judeo-Spanish plays are known to exist (*La Creación* 268). As many performances took place on an amateur level, it is likely that many texts were never

published. Therefore, texts considered in this thesis represent only a limited number of the Sephardi Theatre repertoire performed in the Ottoman Empire. As Susan Bennett states, in 'The Making of Theatre History' the 'archive only preserves a minute sample of past's traces and fragments' (66). In establishing a theory and methodology for performance analysis, Eli Rozik further emphasizes the 'deficiency' of playtexts in analysis since it 'lacks the non-verbal indicators that determine the nature of each speech act' and thus the specific components of specific performances (273). However, considering a playtext is not without merit and may offer insight into three primary areas: 1) 'to understand the mechanisms of generating meaning through the partial notation through language;' 2) to enable speculation into the playwright's intentions on 'poetic, aesthetic and rhetoric levels;' and 3) to conjecture the 'possible effects' of the 'fictional world on a synchronic audience within its socio-cultural context' (ibid. 96). Rozik's assessment of playtexts is even more pertinent for the study of the Sephardic theatrical repertoire as plays were often meant to be read, either prior to attending a performance or as a piece *sui generis* (Borovaya, *Modern Ladino* 207). For instance, the playwrights of *Han Benjamin* and *The Playful Doctor* preceded the publication of the playtext with a preface that outlines the moral lessons and intentions of the drama, which Borovaya argues is demonstrative of the twofold purposes of plays to be read as well as performed (ibid.).

While the Sephardic playtexts are an invaluable source into the intentions and performance mechanisms utilized within the Jewish communities, a number of other sources are utilized to gain a more complex understanding of the relationship of performance in its socio-historical context. One of the most significant sources from the Ottoman Empire is the Ladino press. As 'portable archives,' periodicals serve a particularly important function in analyzing aspects of Sephardic history often neglected by scholars (Stein, 'Creating' 11). One challenge to utilizing periodicals is that the political biases and communal concerns are often a reflection of the primarily Western-educated editors and not necessary indicative of greater communal attitudes. As Sarah Abrevaya

Stein notes, the press includes as much as it excludes, and thus whilst one of the richest sources for accounting to communal life, it must also be considered in relation to additional sources and understood as just a part of the diverse historical influences in circulation (ibid.). As Ladino language resources are one of the most under-researched areas in Jewish studies as knowledge of the language makes access to texts and periodicals challenging, engaging with Ladino periodicals and playtexts is an additional attempt to open Sephardic histories and cultural practices to a wider range of scholars and students.

Particularly for the later two case studies, we have included a number of other materials in the analysis including playbills, photographs, interviews and archival video footage. For the Ladino Players, video materials have been considered for *Forsyth Street*, *Orchard Street Blues*, *Aviya de Ser* and *Panorama Sephardi*. For the Israel productions, we have consulted the recording of *Golgotha*, *Bustan Sefardi*, Koen-Sarano's *Sefaradis de Dor en Dor* and *Tres Ermanikas* along with the Bat Yam Cultural Club productions of *A Fuersa del Palo* and *Amor i Mentiras*. These recordings have formed a fundamental part of my analysis, serving as important tools for investigating casting, design, music and use of language.

In order to gather data for the later case studies a number of interviews from contemporary theatre-makers in Israel and the United States were conducted. These interviews took place in America during January 2009 and in Israel during November 2010. Although these interviews do not form the core of my research, they have been useful in providing insights into productions that were not available through archival sources.

Overview of the Chapters

This study is divided into two main parts. Following a discussion of the history and present situation of the Sephardim (Chapter II), the first part of this thesis (Chapters III-IV) investigates Sephardi Theatre in the Ottoman context as developing out of cultural

and political encounters. Part II (Chapters V-VI) addresses Sephardi Theatre in the United States and Israel in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as a response to ethnic revitalization interests and relations with the Ashkenazim. Within each of these periods we have selected case studies that attest to major trends within the development of Sephardi Theatre. For the Ottoman period, Borovaya notes how it is possible to distinguish the development of theatre into two periods: theatre as school (1873-1908) and theatre as propaganda (1908-early 1920s) (*Modern Ladino* 199); the former representative of relations between the Sephardim and Europe, particularly the French, and the latter considers the influence of Zionists in transforming the socio-political significance of Sephardi Theatre. Therefore, this thesis considers the impact of these encounters within Part I, although we do not keep strict adherence to the dates proposed by Borovaya. Focus on the development of Sephardic practices in America and Israel in Part II is due to the enduring strength of these communities, which has enabled the evolution of diverse performance practices;²⁹ however, by focusing on performances in these geographical areas it is not my intention to underplay the value of cinematic, musical or theatrical projects happening in diverse locations such as Australia, Mexico, Turkey, England and Argentina. In fact, it is my hope that the present research may be expanded and deepened by further studies in an effort to create a more varied understanding of global Sephardic performance practices. It is important to note that this study is not an attempt to create an entire theatre historiography of the Sephardim as the breath of such a work would exceed the limitations of the project. Instead, I hope to contribute to the limited body of literature available on Sephardi Theatre by investigating how the community defined itself in relation to the past through performance in specific cultural and historical periods. A more detailed overview of the chapters follows.

²⁹ According to statistics on world Jewish populations, North America and Israel have the largest number of Sephardim in the early twenty-first century (DellaPergola 12).

Chapter II: The History and Present Context of the Sephardim provides an overview of the history of the Sephardim and their performance practices from Medieval Spain until the present day. A summary of the development of Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) is also included.

The primary concern of *Chapter III: Alla Franka!: Investigating the French Impact on Sephardi Theatre* is the relationship between developing theatrical forms and the Western modernizing institutions of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which expounded a type of Jewish orientalism through their rhetoric and ideological discourse. The tensions arising between progressive, French-aligned members of the community and traditional conservatists will be explored through the dramatic works revolving around translations of Molière and Racine. Examining how Western power was articulated in and by representation, this chapter addresses the extent to which the contact experience was adopted or resisted by local communities during this period.

Forming a dialectical relationship within Part I, *Chapter IV: Sephardi Zionist Theatre and the Emergence of Modern Tragedies*, reflects on the developing Zionist ideology which was in political, social, and economic opposition to the French influence in the Ottoman Sephardi communities. Focusing on dramatizations of the Dreyfus Affair as a key example, this chapter argues that modern tragedies produced by Zionists in the Sephardi communities were politically-motivated performances designed, in part, to counter the Western assimilationists.

Part II addresses Sephardi theatre in the United States and Israel after the Holocaust as primarily affected by encounters with the Ashkenazim. Using the Quincentennial Commemorative events that recognized the simultaneous expulsion from Spain, the 'discovery' of America, and settlement in the Ottoman Empire as a starting point for critique, this chapter addresses recent theatrical productions in the United States in *Chapter V: The Ladino Players: Performances in the American Sephardic Revitalization Movement*. This chapter draws upon archival work and interviews with the

Ladino Players, America's last theatre troupe to perform in Ladino. Comprised of both Sephardi and Ashkenazi members, the Ladino Players present objective and symbolic models of co-existence and tolerance. This chapter questions the degree to which representations of the past that prioritize 'harmonious' relations legitimate or challenge normative understandings of Jewish and American history.

The final case study, *Chapter VI: Performing Sephardi History on the Israeli Stage*, investigates Sephardi theatre in Israel from the 1990s to the present day in relation to dominant Ashkenazi historiographies and politics as well as the language and cultural revitalization movement. Offering a broader scope of current performance troupes and individuals than the American context, this chapter undertakes a critical survey of several productions including *Golgotha* by Shmuel Refael, *Bustan Sefardi* by Yitzhak Navon, the works of Sara Benviste Benry and the works of Matilda Koen-Sarano. As a majority of these productions demonstrate an interest in representing the past, discussion revolves around how and to what effect theatre performing history fails or succeeds in offering counter-histories and discourses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is useful to reflect upon the main points presented in this introduction. Primarily, we have noted, there is little recognition of the Sephardim within hegemonic Ashkenazic and Eurocentric discourses. Sephardi Theatre is consequentially relegated to a limited number of specialist studies. Although there is little scholarly work dedicated to the cultural practices of the Sephardim, there is a corpus of materials attesting to their developing performance practices. By transcending the historical boundaries in present scholarship and focusing on the agency of the Sephardim in artistic developments, this study aims to contribute to studies in Jewish historiography and Sephardic modernity. In addition, as outlined, Sephardi Theatre has been transformed through ongoing encounters with the Ashkenazim. While several studies attest to the relation between

these two communities before or after the Second World War, there are few accounts that apply a relational approach that attest to connections and evolutions between these two periods. It has been argued that such an approach is recommended for a deepening understanding of imperialism, nationalism and cultural revitalization as experienced by the Sephardim.

Furthermore, Sephardi Theatre is seen to be a heightened mediation of these encounters and constituted by them. In particular, as the possible effects of representing the past (especially through a tragic frame) may include constructing collective memory and communal solidarity for cultural or political agendas, this generic convention is seen as a particularly informative category for exploring the evolution of power relations within Sephardic diasporic communities. Thus our study is concerned with addressing the cultural, social and political factors that inform Sephardic performances.

THE SEPHARDIC CONTEXT: HISTORY AND PRESENT SITUATION

In order to understand the significance of Sephardic Theatre from the late nineteenth century, it is essential to understand the history of the diaspora. The purpose of this present chapter is to present an historical overview of the Sephardim and their language with particular attention given to literature and the dramatic arts.

The History of the Sephardic Diaspora

Origins in Medieval Spain

There are varying myths of origin regarding the Jews' initial arrival and settlement in the Iberian Peninsula. One tradition claims Jews accompanied the Babylonian monarch, Nebuchadnezzar, traveling there in the sixth century B.C.E., another that the Sephardim arrived after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., and another that the Jews arrived in the Peninsula with the Roman exile in 70 C.E. (Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews* 12). The Peninsula came under Arab rule in 711 when the Umayyad Dynasty invaded Visigoth Spain, making Spain a province of the Muslim Empire until 929 (Benbassa and Rodrigue xxvi). This period of Muslim rule has perhaps been the most romanticized experience of Jews in Arab lands, as A. Haim remarks:

The Jewish community in Spain (Sefarad) was one of the most unique and important in the Middle Ages, and occupies an outstanding place in the history of the Jews. In Spain there developed during centuries a Jewish

culture that attained the highest pinnacles of creativity and was the most remarkable in the world at the time. (qtd. in Harris, *Death* 30)

When Caliph Abd al-Rahman III took power in 929, the Muslim territories were united and what is commonly referred to as the 'Golden Age of Spanish Jewry' began.

From the tenth till the twelfth centuries, Jews in the Iberian Peninsula achieved literary and intellectual prestige through the work of poets, military leaders, grammarians, courtiers, rabbinic leaders and influential figures such as Moses Maimonides, Dûnash ben Labrât and Judah Ha-levi (Stillman, *The Jews* 54).¹ In addition to influencing the poetic arts, Jews were present in the development and performance of live theatre during the era of Muslim rule. Shmuel Moreh identifies the earliest record of a performance in Islamic societies to be from 655 by a Jewish 'magician and player' (*Live* 585). This performance took place during the reign of the third Caliph Uthman where a Jew named Batruni was invited to perform 'magic, mime with phantasmagoria and buffoonery in the courtyard of the mosque in Kufa,' Iraq (ibid 586). Jewish presence in the live theatre of Muslim Spain included the role of performers as well as the source of themes and characters such as a performance from 1147: '[t]hey related that when he hobbled about, slightly advancing, then retreating, staff in hand, and sack on shoulder, he was the most skillful person at performing the *Play of the Jew*' (ibid 588). To mimic the Jew the Arab actor took to 'walking in a certain manner and holding a staff with a sack upon his shoulder,' similar, Moreh points out, to the physique of the stock-Jewish character in shadow plays (ibid 589).

Crisis in the Iberian Peninsula

By the mid eleventh century Christian armies began acquiring territory in Spain. Initially, relationships between Jews and Christians were amicable as Jews were useful for their

¹ The history of the Jews in the Iberian Peninsula has been well documented in other sources. See for instance Roth; Jayyusi and Marín, particularly Scheindlin's contribution; Sachar; and Baer.

knowledge of trade and commerce. Live theatre under Christian Spain involved a more religious turn from the previous Arab theatre with the rising popularity of The Corpus Christi plays. These religious dramas were the evolution of plays from Christmas and Easter typically performed inside churches. However, the development of the Corpus Christi plays in the fifteenth century included a shift to traveling performances which were constructed and performed upon carts with a bare platform stage between them in which the action took place (Shergold 415). In a documented account of the performances from the fifteenth century, Moors and Jews were made to perform dances in the festivities (ibid. 416).

Attitudes towards the Jews deteriorated during the fourteenth century when Jews were blamed for the Black Death across Europe, resulting in thousands of Jews being murdered or forced to convert (Shaw 5). Those who converted were known as 'New Christians' and they often remained in close contact with the Jewish community and family members who had not converted. Some of these *conversos* returned to Jewish practice as crypto-Jews immediately following their conversion and continued to be persecuted by the Inquisition (Díaz-Mas 6).² Growing suspicion amongst the old Christians resulted in the new laws passing in 1449 prohibiting the New Christians from holding ecclesiastical or municipal office (Benbassa and Rodrigue xxxiv). Following the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabel in 1469 the Inquisition was created to root out New Christians suspected of Judaizing heresy (ibid xxxvi).

On January 14, 1492 the Catholic monarchs defeated the Muslim's last stronghold in Granada. With their victory, the monarchs signed the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews in Granada on 31 March 1492 forcing approximately 150,000 Jews to leave the territory (Benbassa and Rodrigue xxv; Shaw 14). After the expulsion from Spain the Jewish exiles settled across Europe, the Americas, and the Mediterranean (Díaz-Mas 36; Harris, *Death*

² For more details on the history of conversos and their contributions to Iberian arts and culture see Roth; and Ingram, particularly the essay by Wertheimer.

17). Half of the exiles went to Portugal, where they faced further prosecution and forced conversions in 1497 (Harris *ibid*). Another group would eventually settled in Nieuw Amsterdam (New York), considered to be the first Jewish community to be established in the United States (Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 14).

Those who fled to Western Europe became known as the Western Sephardim, and often took on the high culture and language of the Western European country in which they settled (Harris, *Death* 18). Many Marranos³ settled in Holland and Belgium where they contributed to the economic and cultural life in cities such as Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht and especially Antwerp and Amsterdam. Sephardic cultural life prospered during this period, with playwrights such as Miguel de Barrios, Mendes Moses ben Mordecai Zacuto, Joseph Penso de la Vega, and Antonio Enríquez Gómez (nicknamed the Jewish Calderón) contributing to a Jewish drama renaissance (Besso; also see C. Stern). According to Haydee Litovsky, the Sephardic playwrights in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries composed their dramas in Hebrew or Spanish, built theatres in the style of Spanish and Portuguese traditions, and generally wrote on themes that reflected a conflicted sense of loyalty between the Iberian Peninsula and their new homeland (3-5). Over time Western Sephardim assimilated more readily into European nation-states in comparison to their Eastern counterparts (Benbassa and Rodrigue xix).

A number of exiles settled in North Africa. Michael Laskier notes how the Sephardim who settled there (primarily Morocco), remained distinct from the indigenous Jewish populations by maintaining their own customs and manners and speaking Ladino (15). However, over time a number of Sephardim intermingled with the Judeo-Arabic speaking population (the largest Maghribi Jewish population) and eventually assimilated their vernacular (16).

³ Marranos refers to crypto-Jewish converts. Within the Low Countries, many Sephardim continued to practice Judaism following their forced conversion in Spain (Díaz-Mas 37).

The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire

The majority of the exiles from Spain found their way to the Ottoman Empire where Sultan Bayezid II, eager for economic gain, welcomed them with varying incentives (Díaz-Mas 38). Although the exact number of migrants is debatable, an estimated 125,000 exiles entered the Ottoman territories in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and became known as the Eastern or Oriental Sephardim (Harris, *Death* 18; also see Ben-Ur, *Sephardic*; Rodrigue, 'The Sephardim'). It was within the Ottoman Empire that the exiles were best able to sustain their Spanish cultural traditions whilst developing socially and linguistically. The Sephardi exiles arrived in two waves of emigration to the Ottoman Empire. The first came after 1492 and the other following the forced conversions in Portugal in 1497. Migration to the Ottoman Empire was a gradual process for many Sephardim, emerging as a preferred location for settlement following further expulsion from other European countries (Benbassa and Rodrigue 8; A. Levy, *The Sephardim* 4). Ottoman Sephardim came to represent one of the highest concentrations of Jews, as Avigdor Levy remarks, the Ottoman communities 'emerged as the foremost Jewish centers in the world, rivaled, perhaps, only by those of Poland and Lithuania' (*The Sephardim* 12). By the early seventeenth century, over 68% of the population in Salonica was Jewish, making it one of the most important centers in the world for Jewish life (Benbassa and Rodrigue 9).

In the Ottoman Empire the Sephardim encountered two other major Jewish groups, the Romaniotes, who trace their origins to Byzantine times, and the Ashkenazi who had settled in the territories in the fifteenth century (Shaw 1; Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 15). The Sephardim separated themselves from the other Jewish communities in the Empire and did not adopt the *halakhic* ruling (religious law) or the *minhag* (customs) of the autochthonous communities (Benbassa and Rodrigue 13). Instead, the Sephardim worked to impose their customs upon the local communities and by the seventeenth

century the Romaniot community successfully went through a process of 'Judeo-Hispanicization' and assimilated into the Sephardi community (ibid 14).

During the fifteenth and sixteenth century the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman Sephardim experienced a golden age brought about by increasing territorial expansion. The Sephardim are often depicted as contributing to this period of economic and cultural prosperity due to their positions within Ottoman administration and the economy and their considerable transnational contacts with Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean (A. Levy, *Jews* xix; and 'Introduction' 26-28; Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 15). Throughout this period, Muslim rulers held the Jews in a privileged place above other non-Muslim groups including Christians. For instance, unlike the Christians, Jews were allowed to build places of worship (Shaw 29). The Sephardim were granted a large amount of self-governance and thus able to advance education and culture within their designated communities and preserve religious practices, the Spanish language, and use of the Hebrew alphabet (Díaz-Mas 39). The Ottoman government, similar to that of Arab Spain, did not separate religious and state law and a hierarchical system existed within the society which protected non-Muslim groups while also dictating a number of different regulations such as paying a poll tax, wearing certain clothing, being unable to carry a weapon or to ride 'noble' animals (Benbassa and Rodrigue 3).

Due to military and territorial expansion, Ottoman political and economic success faced new challenges by the end of the sixteenth century. New and powerful enemies could be found in Austria, Poland, Russia, Spain and Iran, placing increasing burdens on Ottoman resources (A. Levy, *The Sephardim* 72-73). Through imperialist expansion and exploitation, European countries became new and important centers for trade and began penetrating Ottoman markets. Ottoman Sephardic communities mirrored the situation of Ottoman economic, political and cultural life, although they 'suffered greater deterioration than that of other segments of society' (ibid 74). In the seventeenth century the Jewish community experienced internal disorder due to the

Sabbetai Tzevi affair, which compromised the Jews within the Ottoman system and contributed to growing conservatism by enabling rabbinic authorities to gain more control over communal affairs (ibid 87; Benbassa and Rodrigue 57).⁴

During the eighteenth century, the Jewish communities continued to serve as important centers for commerce and scholarship. Several notable publications emerged in this period, including an encyclopedia of rabbinic knowledge, the *Me'am Lo'ez*, along with several Sephardic poems (Díaz-Mas 45).⁵ Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Ottoman disintegration accelerated due to military defeat from Russia and the resulting economic and political difficulty. Jewish communities suffered growing discrimination as internal conflicts took place between the government and separatists (A. Levy, *The Sephardim* 93-94). In addition, the Sephardim became associated with conservative attitudes and were overlooked by Ottoman officials seeking to modernize certain sectors of society at the turn of the nineteenth century (ibid 95).

Theatre Traditions in the Ottoman Empire

The theatrical performances the Sephardim encountered in the Ottoman Empire were developments from centuries of influences from various civilizations from both Asia and Europe (Metin, *A History* 10-11). Live theatre was often performed for special occasions and festivals and included dramatic performances such as dancing, music, poetic recitations, jugglers, street parades and the widely popular *Karagöz* shadow-theatre (ibid 18). İlhan Başgöz discusses the synthesis of Jewish and Ottoman cultural life, noting that by 1539 'Jewish musicians, dancers, fire workers, and magicians, as well as performers of marionette, shadow-play theatre *Karagöz*, and street comedy were reported as participating in every public festival in Edirne and Istanbul' (549; also see And, *A History; Rôzen*). Jews often performed for Turkish audiences, including the Sultan and the royal

⁴ Shabbetai Levy was a false messiah who gained significant notoriety in the later part of the seventeenth century. For an extensive study of the affair see Scholem.

⁵ For an excellent overview of the development of rabbinic literature see Lehmann.

harem (Başgöz 350; also see And, *A History*, Appendix 1). These performances included farces and political satires, as Baron de Tott reports on Jewish performers imitating the Grand Vizir at the end of the eighteenth century, '[e]very moment Companies of Greeks and Jews are seen mimicking the different Offices of the Empire, and executing their functions, in such a manner as to turn them to Ridicule' (175). In addition to public performances, Jews also participated in comedic performances in private residences (Başgöz 556; And, *A History* 25).

Another form of popular entertainment with which the Ottoman Sephardim were involved was the shadow-puppet theatre, *Karagöz*, named after the primary character. Metin And notes how the performances were most likely established as a form of political satire, but they were primarily comedies rooted in slapstick, verbal humor horse play, and mimicry (*A History* 34-52). An often quoted remark about Jewish participation in *Karagöz* performances is from a French traveler, Jean de Thévenot, who visited Istanbul in 1655/65 and reported, '[n]ow they are commonly Jews that show Puppet-Shows, and I never saw any but them play' (ibid 35). Another traveller's account from 1809 also describes the performers as Jews: '[a]n evening or two before our departure from Ionia we went to see a puppet play...conducted by a Jew who visits this place during the Ramadan' (Hobhouse qtd. in Başgöz 296). According to Thévenot, the puppet-shows take place in private houses except during Ramadan when they go from coffee house to coffee house, singing 'several pretty songs in the Turkish and Persian languages, but on most nasty subjects, being full of foul obscenities; and nevertheless the Turks take great delight in seeing them' (ibid 295) Amongst the topics presented, it is possible that by the nineteenth century Molière plots such as *L'Avare*, *Tartuffe*, and *Les Fourberies de Scapin* were adapted for *Karagöz* performances (Thalasso qtd. in And, *A History* 48). The significance of this for our study is that Jewish communities may have contact with these plays before the arrival of the AIU; however, these links remain tenuous in our current study and provide, at best, an avenue for future research.

The Nineteenth Century

Within the Ottoman Empire, the nineteenth century brought about widespread changes. The Tanzimat Era (1839-76) best encapsulates this transformation as the reforms represent a period when the government became more interested in positioning itself as an equal to Western powers, adopting new legislation in order to modernize the governmental system of the empire, secularizing education, the emancipation of women, encouraging national pride, increasing the development of Turkish arts and culture, and transformations of the public health system (Hanioglu, *A Brief* 70-74; also see Landau 'Atatürk'). The Ottoman state became more secular as the reform leaders sought to acquire 'the international respectability required for membership in the European concert' (Hanioglu 74).

The nineteenth century also brought a number of hardships to the Ottoman Sephardim such as cholera epidemics (1832-1913), earthquakes (1837 and 1856), and multiple accusations of ritual murder, the most notable being perhaps the Damascus Affair in 1840 (Díaz-Mas 48). According to Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, the Damascus Affair served as a trigger for Western Jewry to engage more intensely with their Jewish brethren in the East (72). Growing separatist movements were carried out under the auspices of European intervention, who increasingly sought to seize control of Ottoman provinces and economic markets (see Abitol; A. Levy, *The Sephardim* 102). A growing sense of nationalism penetrated Ottoman territories during this period, resulting in the independence of Serbia in 1830, Greece in 1832, the uniting of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859 (paving the way for Romanian independence in 1878), Montenegro in 1878, Bulgaria autonomy in 1878 and independence in 1908 and Albania in 1912.

European migration to the Ottoman Empire increased during the nineteenth century, their arrival fuelled by steam boats, railroads, a thirst for the exotic and economic opportunities. In 1838 the Ottoman government signed the Anglo-Turkish Commercial Treaty, granting British tradesmen equal rights to native tradesmen in regards to

purchasing goods within the Empire. Within a decade of the agreement, European trade increased by fifteen fold (Zeynep 31). In Salonica alone the increase in Europeans rose from around 100 residents in 1768 to nearly 10,000 by the end of the nineteenth century (Mazower, *Salonica* 224). More significantly, the commercial and intellectual connections the local communities maintained with European states grew throughout the Empire as a result of advancing communication and transportation.

An increased Western presence greatly affected the education and government of the Ottoman Empire. A number of foreign schools were established during this period including an Italian school, Dante Alighieri, established in 1901 in major Ottoman cities (Bunis, 'Modernization' 230). In addition, English and Scottish protestant missions established schools which provided welfare and educational serves along with the aim of converting Ottoman Sephardim (Díaz-Mas 48; also see H. Cohen). French Jewry in particular became highly motivated to intercede, leading to the establishment of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) in 1860. Throughout the rest of the century, more schools continued to open across the Balkan region and in Northern Africa. The AIU schools, in addition to general education as well as Hebrew and French language courses, served as a centre for youth clubs, libraries, and apprenticeship training programmes (Benbassa and Rodrigue 34). French language and culture was adapted and domesticated by the Sephardim so that by speaking French with their local accent 'became yet another marker of Sephardi distinctiveness' (ibid 89).

The growing European trade was quickly followed by a transformation of the cities themselves through the introduction of European-inspired buildings, public spaces and industries. Describing one such space, the Grande Rue in Constantinople, one witness describes the scene as,

...bright and cheerful...It is the 'West End' of the European colony, the quarter where are to found [sic] the concerns and elegancies of life...It is

lined on both sides with English and French hotels, cafes of the better sort, brilliantly lighted shops, theatres, foreign consulates, clubs, and the residences of various ambassadors. (de Amicis qtd. in Zeynep 133)

As demonstrated in de Amicis' account, European restaurants, performance halls, architectural and spatial design became signs of the shifting public spheres. Mazower notes that in Salonica by the 1900s 'the carpets were often "European", and the furniture frequently included high marble-topped tables, sideboards, large clocks, mirrors and other signs of *alafranga* taste' (*Salonica* 236).

Alla Franka, the Ladino for *alafranga* or *Alla Franca*, is closely linked to the idea of progress in the late Ottoman Empire and denotes the attitude and practices associated with a particular kind of Westernized individual. As Şükrü Hanioglu notes, the meaning of the phrase had negative connotations until the mid-nineteenth century when shifts in the 'intellectual climate' afforded the expression with the idea of superiority and 'the natural marker of progress' (*A Brief* 100). Hanioglu's description of *Alla Franca* demonstrates the cultural capital related to the acquisition of French fashion and language amongst the Ottoman elites. Despite the increasing cultural capital of French products and language, the notion of *Alla Franca* was not met without ridicule within both Ottoman and Sephardic communities. Satirizing the new found European style, Salonican historian Joseph Nehama writes of the Ottoman Francophile: '[h]e affects a knowing exoticism, getting himself up with exquisite care, he strains laboriously to set himself above the vulgar herd, to appear at all costs chic, smart, the last word in fashion' (qtd. in Mazower, *Salonica* 236). Brummett offers additional insight into the procurement of all things French in her investigation of satirical cartoons published in the Turkish-language press where Ottoman couples are depicted as asses (donkeys) due to their consumption of European-style entertainment and fashion (Fig 1.).

Figure 1: The Alafraanga Couple.⁶



The AIU helped create a new generation of Sephardim able to engage with the language and culture of France. French newspapers, organizations, institutions, and cultural events became a prominent feature in Sephardi communities in the later half of the nineteenth century. Knowledge of French and appreciation of French fashion, architecture, design and theatre became a symbol of education and cultural capital. Tamar Alexander suggests that the superiority of French culture within Sephardic communities was not merely aesthetic but stemmed from their desire to imitate a dominant cultural mode as a form of security. 'Knowledge of French culture,' she asserts, 'is part of a strategy of acculturation, helping the Jews maneuver through European society' (*En Este* 50). To behave like a French Westernized individual was seen as being modern, civilized, and gave one crucial economic advantages within the Empire and abroad. However, many community members disapproved of the foreign presence infringing on education and daily life. Tensions surrounding a desire for acculturation and the growing wariness over the presence of Europeans are constantly reflected in the growing theatrical output of the Sephardim during this period of transformation.

⁶ Brummett, 203.

Theatre in the Nineteenth Century

Amongst the changing architecture of the Ottoman cities grew a distinctly new form of theatrical experience. Beginning in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Western-style performances took place within foreign embassies in the Ottoman Empire where theatre troupes would perform for both the ambassadors and Turkish elite (Halman 29; And, *A History* 65). In the nineteenth century Sultan Mahmud II had the first theatre built within the palace and entertained nobility and foreign ambassadors with a mixture of Turkish and Western theatre. During his reign he would build two additional theatres where European troupes performed (Halman 30). European operas and performances took up a prominent place within the Sultan's palaces and demonstrated the openness to Europe now reflected throughout the Empire.

The Sultan's political and economic modernization plans were intricately linked to the construction of court palaces where foreign and native officials were entertained and bore witness to Ottoman power, wealth, and progress. The theatres constructed for the Sultan were modeled after European designs. For example, one of the first palace theatres was the Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre, built in 1858 for Sultan Abdülmecit by Nigogos Balian, the theatre was inspired by Italian theatres of the period, modestly sized with ornate fixtures and design (Tuğlacı 345). The Yıldız Palace Theatre was the second court palace theatre, completed in 1889 it featured ceilings decorated with gilded patterns and gold stars. In addition to displaying the Sultan's power, the theatre was a site of Ottoman progress, for instance, the Yıldız Palace Theatre was the first theatre lit by electric light in the Empire and it showed short films by wetting the curtain with brushes and pulling it taut to display the film (Tuğlacı 639). Brummet further points out how theatres became a symbol of the modern era, as demonstrated with a photograph in the Turkish gazette *Resimli Kitab* from 1909 featuring the Skoplije City Theatre as testimony to modernity and culture (207-210; also see Krueger). The construction of theatres and

the production of both Turkish and Western theatrical events were depicted as integral parts of the modernization movement.

Theatre became more legitimate as playhouses became a more prominent feature in the changing urban landscape and through the patronage of the Sultan. As And notes, the earliest mention of public theaters in Istanbul appeared in 1839 detailing two amphitheatres in operation, suggesting that the nineteenth century saw a shift in theatre from diplomatic circles to more public spaces (*A History* 66). The first of these playhouses was the Fransız Tiyatrosu (The French Theatre), a 500-seater, large proscenium arch construction fashioned after Italian theatre design containing a gallery with six-tiers of twenty six boxes to accommodate eight people each (*ibid* 66). Built in the fashionable district of Pera, the playhouse was funded by embassies and the Turkish government and often presented work by foreign companies (*ibid*; Shaw 129). A range of foreign plays and operas were performed, including pieces by Molière (And, *A History* 66; Halman 30; Shaw 129).

Descriptions of Sephardi theatres, set designs, and audience arrangements suggest that the community was similarly adopting Western performance trends. While theatre was carving out a legitimate position within the Empire due to its growing popularity with the Sultan and the increase of buildings in public spaces, within the Sephardic communities the stage became an important and often controversial site of modernization. As the majority of Sephardi theatre was performed in Ladino,⁷ it operated beneath the tight censorship applied to Turkish theatre in the late nineteenth century. For example, since Sultan Abdülhamid had a large nose, performances of *Cyrano de Bergerac* were banned (Halman 33); however, a Ladino translation slipped beneath the censors and was performed in Salonica in 1907 (*Ave* 8 Jan., 16).⁸ Similar to their

⁷ There is also a substantial body of dramatic work produced by Sephardic playwrights in Arabic. For an excellent overview of these plays and context see Moreh 'Nineteenth-Century,' Moreh and Sadgrove's *Jewish Contributions to Arabic Theatre*, and Sadgrove's *Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century*.

⁸ After 1908 and the restoration of the constitution, censorship laws were loosened (Faroqhi 261)

Ottoman counterparts, light comedies, especially those of Molière flourished within both theatrical circuits. In addition to Molière's comedies, melodramas from French dramatist such as Georges Ohnet, Xavier de Montepin, Octave Feuillet, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and Emile Zola emerged on both Turkish and Sephardic stages.

Modern Sephardi Theatre signified a major shift from previous theatrical activities primarily as it became 'theatre of the author' characterized by the popularizing of text-based performances (Romero, *La Creación* 267). Three popular areas of society where this modern theatre was produced and developed include: at annual festivals such as Purim and Hanukkah; within schools; and within charitable organizations, clubs and political associations (ibid 293). Popular themes included: Biblical representations such as Joseph and his brothers, David and Goliath or Queen Ester; Sephardi life, with topics such as marriage, commerce, and other aspects of daily life including Sephardi history, memories of expulsion and the Inquisition; and translated and adapted works, primarily from Western theatre canons. Popular playwrights within this latter category include French writings from Molière, Emile Zola, Marcel Pagnol, and Edmond Rostand (ibid 283-292). While productions within each of these categories were ongoing throughout the designated period, the particularities of narratives and styles corresponded and reflected greater societal trends.

The Sephardic American Experience

The end of the nineteenth century is marked by growing politicization of Ottoman Sephardic communities. Due to the economic and political hardship in the Ottoman and later Turkish Republic, the Sephardim began migrating out of the former Ottoman territories.

Many Ottoman Sephardim migrated to America where they established the largest and most important Ladino-speaking community outside of former Ottoman territories (Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 16). Of the Sephardic American experience, Aviva Ben-Ur

notes that the 'denial of Jewishness was a defining experience' (ibid 2). Ben-Ur argues that such historical marginalization arose and was propagated in part by the quantitative weight of the community, which has most likely never risen above four percent of the Jewish population since colonial times (ibid 3). Outnumbered by their Ashkenazi brethren, Sephardi and Mizrahi immigrants have been repeatedly left out of scholarly and communal debates, both in the past and present: '[w]hat began at the turn of the twentieth century as denial of shared ethnicity and religion (whereby Ashkenazim failed to recognize Sephardim as fellow Jews) continues today in textbooks, articles, documentaries, films, and popular awareness (ibid 2).⁹ In analyzing the ways in which contemporary performances access the past, it is significant to note the ways in which the non-Ashkenazi community intersected with the mainstream history of American Jews.

Non-Ashkenazi Jews arrived in America in what is commonly referred to as two waves: the Western Sephardim who arrived in 1654; and the Eastern Sephardim, Romaniotes and Mizrahi Jews predominantly from the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ The population of the Western Sephardim in America never rose above three thousand, while tens of thousands of Mizrahim and Eastern Sephardim immigrated and settled primarily in New York City throughout the twentieth-century (Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 82). Immigration to America by non-Ashkenazi groups increased during the nineteenth-century as the Ottoman Empire declined and nationalistic factions led to internal wars and territorial disintegration. As Joseph Papo notes, 3,413 Sephardi immigrants arrived from the Ottoman Empire between 1885 and 1908 after which the number rose significantly due to worsening conditions in the 'old country' (270). Most of these Sephardim settled in New York City, although some went to other American cities such as Seattle, Rochester, New Jersey, Indianapolis, Gary, Montgomery, and Atlanta, while others went to South

⁹ Ben-Ur discusses a number of efforts that have been made throughout the twentieth century to overcome this lacuna (*Sephardic* 13-15).

¹⁰ Romaniote Jews trace their origins to the Byzantine Empire and are also referred to as Greek-speaking Jews.

America (Papo 270; V. Sauna). The Rabbi and Sephardic historian Marc Angel notes that in only four years, between 1920 and 1924, an additional 10,000 Sephardim arrived in America, with 80-90% settling in New York City in the Lower East Side (*La America* 13).

One of the more noteworthy features of the geographically and historically disparate groups of migrants was that there was no unifying language. Unlike the Ashkenazi populations, who were united through the Yiddish language, the Sephardim spoke a combination of several languages and dialects developed in the diaspora. As Papo, the Sephardic Jews were 'divided into Judeo-Spanish-, Arabic-, and Greek-speaking groups. They had to learn English in order to speak to each other' (271; Ben-Ur *Sephardic* 6, 32). In addition, relations between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews were often contentious, as the Ashkenazi refused to recognize the 'exotic Orientals' as 'real' Jews: 'people who spoke something like Spanish instead of Yiddish and ate grape leaves instead of gefilte fish were simply not Jews!' (qtd. in Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 1-2).

To combat inter- and intra-community hostility, Moïse Gadol established the first Ladino periodical, *La América*, in 1910. Gadol's publication included vocabulary lists so that readers could be educated on common usage, grammar, and terminology. The periodical provided a means of uniting the community, it was 'the life-blood of the immigrant community, providing its members with much-needed information, serving as a means of intercommunication, extending leadership, and formulating communal goals' (Papo 287).

The merging and uniting of non-Ashkenazic organizations was a communal strategy throughout the twentieth century. In the early decades of the twentieth century, many immigrant groups formed societies based on particular places of origin.¹¹ Working to unite the disparate non-Ashkenazim Jews, the sisterhood of the Shearith Israel [Remnant of Israel], the first synagogue in America, took steps in bringing communities together through religious education for children, English classes, family and legal

¹¹ See Angel *La America* for an overview of these activities (27).

counseling, a nursery, as well as providing a kindergarten and a medical clinic for all Sephardic immigrants (Papo 275). Similar unifying efforts were taken up by the Sephardic Jewish Community, founded in 1920, with an amalgamation of thirteen Ladino speaking societies, aiming to centralize religious, Jewish education and to become the voice of the Sephardic community as equally legitimate to their Ashkenazim brethren (ibid 292-3). The Great Depression greatly affected these unifying efforts, with societies forced to close due to lack of financial support (ibid 294). The re-emergence of interest in uniting the non-Ashkenazim came in 1942 with the establishment of the Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America. The Sephardi World Federation established its American branch in 1951 using the Central Sephardic Jewish Community as a core for communication. In 1972 the non-Ashkenazi communities formally banded together with the creation of the American Sephardi Federation, which advocated a standardizing of the Sephardi language and unification of cultural traditions (Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 105).

Sephardi Theatre in America

In addition to formal efforts to unify the community, a number of cultural and theatrical activities actively worked to create cohesion and retain diasporic languages and traditions. American-bound immigrants brought with them a large repertoire of dramatic works, including original Ladino texts as well as adapted and translated European works. Amateur dramatic performances within Sephardic communities took place throughout the twentieth century and served as an important aspect of diasporic communal life. It should be noted that while focus is given here to performances which took place in Ladino, there were also Sephardic playwrights writing in English as part of the broader American theatre landscape. Works of Sephardic authors such as Mordecai Manual Noah (1785-1851) and Annie Nathan Meyer (1867-1951), while compelling material addressing Sephardic/Jewish cultural identity in America, are not addressed formally here

as their work was not specifically written for the Sephardic communities in America.¹² The more community-based Sephardic performances combined 'social idealism with lively entertainment' and were often events for charity produced in the Lower East Side for audiences up to 2,000 (Ben-Ur, 'Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Theatre' 785).

While no comprehensive study of early American Sephardi Theatre has yet been published, Aviva Ben-Ur has published two short articles which address certain aspects of this social phenomenon and it is worth including an overview of the productions covered in her research. As Ben-Ur notes, La Sosietá Hesed VeEmet de Kastoralis [Charity and Truth Society of Kastoria] is thought to have presented the earliest play in New York in 1911 entitled *Ahashverosh i Ester* [*Ahasuerus and Esther*] and by 1915 the organization's fourth drama, *Ataliahu*, was performed to an audience of over 800 (Ben-Ur, 'Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Theatre' 786). Other dramatic societies included the Sephardi Young Men Sephardim Association, who staged *Romero and Juliet* in 1916 translated by Alberto Halfon, former actor from Sofia (Bulgaria) and member of the Sephardic Brotherhood (ibid.). The Association for Sephardic Actors produced biblical and original works such as *The Family at War* (1916) by Eli Mushabak, based on the ideas of Karl Marx (ibid.). *Amor i Dezespero* [*Love and Desperation*] was a five act tragedy staged in 1922 through sponsorship of La Sociedad de Karidad de Ozer Dalim [Charity Society of Aid to the Poor]. The performance was followed by a ball that drew a thousand audience members, including R. Haim Nahoum, former chief rabbi of the Ottoman Empire (ibid 786).

Although there were female playwrights in the Ottoman Empire, women undertook a much more active role in the creation of dramatic performances in America, a trend which continues in even greater proportions with the work of the Ladino Players. One of the most noteworthy female playwrights and actresses was Esther Cohen. Writing in the 1930s in Brooklyn, *La Vara* commented on her dramatic work, claiming that 'if

¹² For more detailed analysis on these early American Sephardi playwrights see Schuldiner and Kleinfeldand; and Matza 'Tradition' and *Sephardic-American*.

there exists any dramatic talent in our colony, we may assert that Mrs. Cohen is of first rank' (qtd. in Ben-Ur, 'Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Theatre' 786). Her plays include *El Sapatero* [*The Shoemaker*] and *Baron Lenzer of Germany*, based upon issues of assimilation in Germany.

Figure 2: Scenes from *My Fair Mujer*, Georgia (1961).¹⁸



In addition to the theatrical scene in New York, the Sephardim staged plays in communities in Georgia, Seattle and Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the only accessible records at this time relates to work following the Second World War, a gap that will hopefully be overcome with future research projects. In Atlanta, Georgia, the Sisterhood of Congregation or VeShalom staged productions between 1958 and 1973 based on Broadway musicals, with the lyrics and dialogue adapted to add a 'Sephardic flavor' (Maslia). Shows included *My Fair Mujer* based on *My Fair Lady* (1960), *Midsummer's Nightmare* (1961), *South Side Story* (1963), and *What Makes Manny Run?*² based on *The Music Man* and *Funny Girl* (ibid.) (Fig. 2).

Rabbi Marc D. Angel and Stephen Stern have conducted the most extensive research on Sephardi Theatre outside New York City. In 'The Sephardic Theatre of Seattle,' Angel focuses primarily on the work of Leon Behar, an immigrant from Istanbul

¹⁸ Maslia, 175.

who brought with him theatrical experiences from the Ottoman Empire (157).¹⁴ Behar was a significant figure in the Seattle Sephardic Theatre scene, and is credited with producing a range of performances from dramatizations of Jewish history to melodramatic romances. According to Angel, Behar arrived in Seattle in 1920 and began producing plays in order to raise funds for the Sephardic synagogue and local organizations including a representation of *Dreyfus* (1922) to benefit the Talmud Torah (ibid. 158). This production demonstrates the journeying of theatrical texts within the Sephardic diaspora. Behar went on to stage productions which similarly echo work from the Ottoman Empire, such as a version of *Joseph Sold by His Brothers* in July 1922 and *The Massacre of the Jews of Russia* (1928), sponsored by the Sisterhood of the Bikur Holim, resembles *Los Pogromes de Kichinev* [*The Pogroms of Kichinev*] staged in Salonica in 1927, further discussed in Chapter IV. Productions were staged for the Seattle community up until the mid 1950s where, under the direction of Professor David Romey, local youth would write and perform in the dramatic pieces (ibid 157).

During the 1970s, the Sephardic community in Los Angeles staged a number of amateur productions as part of local and community events. Stern's study entitled *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles* arises from his doctorate fieldwork conducted in the Sephardic community during 1974 and chronicles a number of cultural events taking place in the 1960s and 1970s which aimed to 'keep alive' the cultural traditions of the Sephardim (ibid 120-121). Furthermore, the Los Angeles community staged theatrical productions that reflected Jewish biblical events and, more recently, panoramic visions of Sephardic identity and culture. Such productions include a version of *My Fair Lady* (1970), *Esther* (1974), and original pieces such as 'But Why Israel?' (1973) about why a family may travel to Israel for a holiday, and 'What's a Shavu?' (1974)

¹⁴ Angel quotes from an article in *El Jugueton* praising Behar and his company, although there is no date or reference given. I have not yet been able to locate the source.

addressing the holiday of Shavuot and its significance (ibid. 315).¹⁵ In 1973, another notable theatrical event transpired, the Sisterhood organization presented a piece entitled *Love Makes the World Go Around* at a Pacific Southwest Branch of the National Women's League luncheon (ibid 319). The production was written specifically for a non-Sephardic audience with the intention of celebrating and educating the Ashkenazim in the audience on Sephardic histories (ibid 321). However, despite the intention to broaden awareness and appreciation of Sephardi heritage, Stern notes how 'an appeal was made to the exoticness of the Sephardic cultural expression' (ibid.).

Sephardi Theatre in America reflects the ongoing struggle amongst linguistically and geographically disparate groups wrestling with anxieties over assimilation, acculturation and traditionalism that affected immigrant communities throughout the twentieth century. Briefly reflecting on the history of theatre within this community in America calls attention to certain cultural and political concerns absent from earlier performance histories in the Ottoman Empire; namely, a struggle for validity and acknowledgment between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim branches of American Jewish life.

Judeo-Spanish, Judezmo, Ladino: The Language of the Sephardim

The Sephardim are just one of the sixteen or more Jewish groups to develop a distinct vernacular. The most widespread of the Jewish vernaculars was Yiddish, although there is also Judeo-French, Judeo-Persian, Aramaic, Judeo-Greek, Judeo-Arabic, and Judeo-Latin (Goldsmith 27). The Sephardim are unique in that although there were smaller numbers of native speakers in comparison to Yiddish, they nevertheless maintained and developed literature and drama in their own language. The language of the Sephardim has been given many names throughout the centuries. C. Crantford identified 81 distinct names

¹⁵ Stern includes the playtexts for four productions in his study. Analysis of these materials in relation to the work of the Ladino Players provides interesting parallels, but is not able to be addressed in this present study.

referring to the language including: romanse, lengua valugar, Spaniolit, Jargon, Espanyol, Muestro Espanyol, Djidio, Ladino, and Judezmo (qtd. in Harris, *Death* 20). In fact, tensions over what to call the language persists within academia and amongst lay people, as George Zucker remarks, '[n]ot even native speakers agree on what to call what, in the academic world, is generally [sic] known as Judeo-Spanish; there are those who refer to it as "Ladino," "Judezmo," "Spanyolit," "El Kasteyano Muestro," and even simply "Espaniol" (4). Generally, the language of the Sephardim has two major components: medieval Spanish grammar and vocabulary; and Hebrew Aramaic lexicon. Further linguistic attributes were acquired through encounters in different speech communities across the Mediterranean.

One of the largest debates concerning the language of the Sephardim relates to the appropriate terms and usage to distinguish the written and spoken versions of the language.¹⁶ In its vernacular development, Ladino often refers to the language used to translate, word for word, religious texts from Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish to the spoken language (Harris, *Death* 22). According to Benbassa and Rodrigue, the language for oral communication developed through 'a dialectical relationship with the surrounding cultures' (62) and it thereby reflects the languages the Sephardim encountered in their surrounding cultures including Turkish, Portuguese, Aramaic, Italian, French, Greek, and Arabic. The manner of these accessions led to phonetic, morphological, and lexical peculiarities, resulting in a number of dialects throughout the Balkan region (Harris, *Death* 19).

'Judeo-Spanish' is used today to refer to the language by the popular press such as *La Luz de Israel* in Tel Aviv and the journal *Aki Yerushalayim* in Jerusalem (Harris, *Death* 24). However, 'Ladino' has gained a wider currency to designate both the written and spoken language within academic scholarship and amongst lay people (Bunis, 'Judezmo Language' 387; Harris, *Death* 21). Throughout this study, Ladino is used in

¹⁶ For a more extensive overview of these debates see Bunis *Judezmo*; and Harris *Death*.

reference to vernacular texts as it is a term most often used by native speakers and in a number of contemporary scholarly works.¹⁷

The Present Situation of the Sephardim

There have been substantial geographical, demographic and linguistic shifts amongst the Sephardim in the past fifty years. While many Sephardim were displaced during the twentieth century, their population continues to grow, rising from roughly four percent of the total Jewish population in 1948 (1.3 million) to 26 percent (3.4 million) by 2000 (Medding, 'Preface' viii-ix). The majority of the Sephardim now reside in Israel (nearly 2.3 million), signifying 47 percent of the total Jewish population and two thirds of the global total of Sephardim (ibid ix; DellaPergola 15).¹⁸ Outside of Israel, the other third of Sephardic Jews reside in Western Europe and the Americas with those continuing to live 'in the East' constituting only 1-2 percent (DellaPergola 15).

Over the last few decades there has been an increased interest in reviving and preserving the language and distinct aspects of Sephardic culture. While there are varying figures as to the number of speakers, it is most likely no more than 60,000 worldwide, to which none are monolingual speakers and few are under sixty years old (Harris, 'The State' 51). However, efforts to revive Ladino and preserve Sephardic culture and traditions should not be underestimated. One important development transpired in 1997, when the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) established *La Autoridad Nacional del Ladino* (National Authority for Ladino) to promote the study and teaching of the language and heritage. At the present time, the NAL organizes regular lectures, films, concerts and classes for both the Sephardim and non-Sephardim in Israel.¹⁹ Issues related to Sephardic language and heritage entered the world stage most prominently in 2002, when the

¹⁷ Olga Borovaya and Sarah Abrevaya Stein also advocate the usage of 'Ladino' in their respective studies of modern Sephardic culture (Borovaya, *Modern Ladino* 15; Stein, *Making Jews Modern* xiii).

¹⁸ Other areas of significant Sephardic demographics include 18 percent of Jewish populations in the Americas (604,000), although this can be further broken down into 9 percent in the United States, 40 percent in Mexico and Venezuela. In Europe the Sephardim are roughly 13 percent (449,000) and less than two percent in Asia-Africa (50,000) (Medding, 'Preface' ix).

¹⁹ For an excellent overview of the history and current work of the NAL see Navon 'The Israeli.'

United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared that Ladino was an intangible relic of world heritage and appropriate measures need to be taken to preserve and develop the language (Paris Conference, *Langue et Culture Judéo-Espagnoles* June 17-18). As a result of local and global efforts, today a number of courses in Ladino are offered primarily in Israel and United States at both universities and community centres and there is a growing presence of Sephardic histories within academic curricula.²⁰ There are a number of institutions working to promote Sephardic culture and traditions, primarily in the United States, Israel and Turkey including: the Ben Zvi Institute, Sefarad, Misgav Yerushalayim; the Council of the Sephardi and Oriental Communities of Jerusalem, MORIT - Foundation for the Heritage of Turkish Jewry, Instituto Arias Montano, the American Sephardi Federation with Sephardi House, and the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture to name but a few. A number of individuals and private organizations are trying to preserve and promote Sephardic traditions through publications, such as: *El Amanecer*, a Ladino supplement in the Turkish periodical *Şalon*; *Los Muestras*, an online publication from Brussels; *Erensia Sefardi*, a quarterly journal edited by Albert de Vidas in the United States; and the Ma'ale Adumim Institute for Ladino located in a West Bank settlement, which has catalogued a number of Ladino books and publishes material related to Ladino literature and history.

For Ladino speaking Sephardim, online communities are becoming some of the most important centers for exchange, maintenance, revitalization and standardization of Ladino (Brink-Danan, 'The Meaning' 108; also see Benor 'Jewish Language;' Bortnick 'The Internet'). Current online publications and forums include *Bletin eSefarad*, *CIDiCsef*, a digital Ladino library project at Stanford University, radio programmes in Israel on *Radio Kol Israel* and Matilde Gini Barnatan's weekly broadcasts, *Emisión Sefarad* from Spain. The online forum, *Ladinokomunita*, is one of the largest and most

²⁰ For an detailed overview of current revival activities see Harris 'The State.'

important virtual communities, with members posting daily messages in Ladino on topics ranging from cuisine, poetry, personal matters, and news reports.

In addition to online and education efforts, there has been a number of informal and culturally-driven activities utilizing performance in revitalization efforts, as will be discussed further in Chapters V and VI. Sephardic music and cinema are also developing as important avenues for the representation of Sephardic language and culture. In 1990, a Sephardic Film Festival began in New York City and in 1997 another in Los Angeles, designed to promote Sephardic heritage. A number of Sephardic music festivals have emerged in diverse locations including Israel, Spain, Canada, the United States and Sephardic artists are regularly appearing on international stages. Much of the Sephardic music activity is being carried out by non-Sephardim and consciously incorporate guitars and orchestral instruments to make for 'easy listening with exotic overtones' (Cohen, 'No Son Komo' 157-8). Recent developments in Sephardic music raise new challenges for the survival of Ladino and Sephardic culture, as Judith Cohen remarks, 'perhaps the more immediate and also challenging issues are those related to questions of representation and appropriation, or, briefly put: who are the harvesters, and whether anyone is in charge of the orchard' (ibid 162).

Conclusion

The history of the Sephardim and their performance practices cover a range of overlapping spheres of influence. What becomes clear from their origins in the Iberian Peninsula to the present is that there is not one Sephardi diaspora, but several. While Sephardi revival movements today are standardizing grammar, vocabularies and even cuisine, history demonstrates that Sephardi communities have survived in many guises and have been influenced by diverse experiences. The theatre produced therein reflects this myriad of cross-cultural encounters; the tensions arising from such experiences and

developments in modern Sephardi Theatre are best understood in relation to these experiences.

ALLA FRANKA!:
INVESTIGATING THE FRENCH IMPACT ON
SEPHARDI THEATRE

These Sephardim have not only their own language but...their own historic experiences, traditions and habits completely typical to themselves...To transplant European values here would be very possibly complicated, misunderstood and disappointing.

-Ha-Menora, Bulletin of the B'nai B'rith, District XI (1911)

Introduction

The Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) was central to transforming the educational system of Ottoman Jewry in the second half of the nineteenth century and, in turn, furthering the processes of westernization and embourgeoisement. Following French Jews' emancipation seventy years earlier, the AIU was established in Paris in 1860 to 'regenerate' Eastern Jewish communities, to integrate them into bourgeois society and dissolve traditional forms of communal governance. The 'civilizing mission' of the AIU echoed French colonialist ideology at the time, as one AIU circular stated, the mission was 'to cast a ray of the civilization of the Occident into the communities degenerated by centuries of oppression and ignorance' (qtd. in Rodrigue, *French Jews* 71). The AIU proved to be the most successful foreign school amongst the Ottoman Sephardim; by the First World War, it served as the 'central and most significant conduit which channeled European ideas and practices to the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa' (ibid xiii).

It is well established within Sephardic studies that the AIU had tremendous significance for the Ottoman Jewish communities. In fact, as Lital Levy remarks, within

studies of cultural modernity the AIU is often depicted as the principal (if not sole) architecture of modernization and westernization in the Ottoman context (*Jewish* 68; also see Schroeter and Chetrit, 'The Transformation' 101). Bernard Lewis forwards this notion in *The Jews of Islam*: '[i]t was not until the last years of the nineteenth century, when the activities of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* produced a rising generation of French-educated Turkish Jews, that a new spirit began to work among the communities of the empire, and the first windows to the West were opened' (177). A similar argument appears in the work of Aron Rodrigue, one the leading scholars on the activities of the AIU within the Ottoman Empire, as he remarks that 'The main impetus for cultural change for Turkish Jews would come from...western Jewry' (From *Millet* 247).

The extent to which the AIU was responsible for introducing and advancing modernization within Ottoman Sephardic communities has greater implications for the study of modernity within the region. In addressing the modern period within Oriental Jewish communities, Daniel Schoreter and Joseph Chetrit argue that even studies which understand modernity as an uneven process 'assume the inevitability of modernization based on a Western model, which presumably would lead to a secular, literate, and emancipated Jewish community' ('The Transformation' 100). Within this model, 'tradition' and 'modernity' are juxtaposed, represented as dichotomous forces in an inverse relationship where the growth of modernization leads to the decline of tradition (ibid. 101). The AIU is exemplary of this model as the above examples attest to its prevalence in narratives of modernity within Ottoman Jewish communities.¹ Within this model, as Levy argues, 'the Middle Eastern Jewish experience of modernity is entirely indebted to European patronage, be it through the activities of the AIU or through European colonization' (*Jewish* 70-71).

¹ See for instance Jane Gerber: '[c]hange did not come to Sephardic Jews in the context of an emancipation debate, nor was the achievement of equality with the dominant Muslim majority ever a realistic goal. It was European Jews, concerned and chagrined by the abject condition of their co-religionists, who introduced change in the traditional Near Eastern Jewish community. With the establishment of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1860, a vast network of Western-style schools reached Jews in the remote corners of Islam' ('The Jews of the Middle East' 43).

If we transfer this prevailing narrative of Europe as the sole progenitor of the Ottoman Sephardic experience of modernity to the development of modern Sephardi Theatre, we may expect to see a similar overriding credit given to European influence and patronage. While there is very little scholarship on Sephardi Theatre during this period of modernization, the work of Aron Rodrigue and Olga Borovaya resonates with this model. 'Having no counterparts in previous epochs,' Borovaya argues, cultural products such as theatre 'emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century as a result of westernization and secularization' (*Modern Ladino* 3). Modern Sephardi Theatre is depicted here as entirely indebted to European presence in the region and in particular, the work of the AIU: '[s]ince Ottoman Jews had not been exposed to modern theatre, Sephardi westernizers, who in the early 1870s decided to expand their educational project by means of a theatre, were faced with the necessity to create a cultural practice hitherto unknown in their community' and further on, 'Sephardi Theatre, like the AIU schools, fulfilled a civilizing mission and was called to serve as a medium of instruction' (ibid 198, 200). Such an understanding regarding the development of Sephardi Theatre led to Borovaya's periodization of 1870-1908 as 'theatre of school' given that the practices were produced entirely under the auspices of the AIU and in conjunction with its 'civilizing mission' (ibid 200). While Borovaya does note how European practices were adapted within local contexts, there is a general understanding of 'modern' Sephardi Theatre as synonymous with 'Western' practices and in opposition to 'traditional' theatre pre-dating European encounters. Along similar lines, Rodrigue associates the creation of modern Sephardi Theatre with Western cross-cultural encounters:

The opening up to Europe of Turkish Jewry led to new avenues, to new contacts with western culture. The rise of a secular Judeo-Spanish literature, the rise of the novel and drama in this medium, the efflorescence of the Judeo-Spanish press that also acted as a major transmitter of western news

and ideas and worked in close collaboration with the Alliance schools, all were some of the results of westernization (From *Millet* 252).

Again, there appears a conflating of 'westernization' with 'modernization' within Ottoman Sephardic society, and the presumption that theatre within the late nineteenth century can only be the result of European influence.

If, as Levy, Schroeter and Chetrit advocate, new models are needed in order to address modernity within Ottoman Sephardic communities, investigating the ways in which modern Sephardi Theatre developed in relation to Western influences might provide insight over the extent to which Sephardic modernity is indebted to outside influences as well as the critical role of Sephardic agency during this period. As the following chapter reveals, modern Sephardi Theatre did not necessarily conform to Western models. While it was informed by enlightenment notions of progress that relied heavily on Western European models, it fused them with a strong degree of Ottoman and Jewish elements. Capturing Sephardic agency through theatrical developments allows for many of the misperceptions and overlooked aspects of this period to come to light. A relational approach considers the theatrical developments arising from 'entangled tensions' (Clifford, 'Diasporas' 307) between Western and Ottoman communities as opposed to an absolute transference of European traditions to Ottoman Sephardic stages.²

By following the conceptual lead of a number of recent studies that aim to address the complex processes of modernization within Ottoman Jewish communities as a 'dynamic interplay between foreign influences and indigenous modernity' (Schroeter, 'From Sephardi' 147), we consider the production and reception of Western influences in

² This is in reference to Clifford's analysis that 'relational positioning' is 'not a process of absolute othering, but rather of entangled tension' ('Diasporas' 307).

modern Sephardi Theatre.³ To begin, this chapter presents an overview of the AIU and in particular, the institution's relationship to developing theatrical practices. Focus is on how theatre was not simply adopted by the Sephardim but was a site of debate amongst community members. The second half of this chapter will investigate productions of the two most widely produced French dramatists: Jean Baptiste Molière and Jean Racine. The works of these playwrights were well-circulated in the Ottoman Empire through translations not only in Ladino, but in Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Serbio-Croat and Greek, and performances took place from the Sultan's palace theatres to local community centres (Schmidt 30). Investigating the production and reception of these works allows for a wide gamut of inquiry into the relationship between Sephardi Theatre and Western practices.

While there were a number of productions of Molière's works, Ottoman Sephardim primarily produced only one of Racine's plays: the story of Esther. The story of Queen Esther is a traditional Jewish narrative based upon the history of a Jewish Queen who brings about the salvation of her people in Ancient Persia. This case study is particularly useful as it signifies a production dramatizing a traditional story but through a French-theatrical framework. The ways in which the past is represented through multiple productions of Racine's *Esther* demonstrate how cultural and national identities shifted in responses to changing attitudes towards European integration. In addressing how Sephardi Theatre developed through the interplay of internal and external social forces, this chapter demonstrates how theatrical practice is not entirely indebted to European models but emerged through relational processes between the Ottoman Sephardim and Western Jews.

Alliance Israélite Universelle: Educational Reforms and Theatrical Influences

Widespread sentiment in France during the nineteenth century placed 'optimistic faith in the "incomparable power" of the school' turning the spread of modern education into the

³ See Schroeter (From Sephardi' 147) for an overview of a number of recent studies that are offering corrective approaches to modernization within Asian, African and Mediterranean Jewish communities.

solution for all contemporary problems (Fortna 30). Educational, and subsequently economic, poverty was viewed by the Western powers as one of the primary setbacks to the Sephardim entering the world stage with their European counterparts (Rodrigue, *French Jews* 45). Before the arrival of the foreign education systems, the Ottoman Sephardim maintained a basic system of education. Drawing upon a report from the AIU, Yitzchak Kerem states that the 'masses received barely six years of rote didactic instruction in the overcrowded *hedarim* and *hevrot*, barely sufficing them to read the prayerbook and the Bible, learn about the Jewish holidays, and attain the rudiments of simple mathematics' ('The Europeanization' 58). During the nineteenth century Sephardic communities had growing access to a range of foreign schools, such as the German Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden (Aid Association of German Jews). Established in 1901, Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden shared a similar goal to the AIU in fighting global anti-semitism and advancing less developed Jewish communities (Bar-Chen, 'Two Communities' 112). Although the Sephardim encountered foreign education through a number of avenues, the AIU was perhaps one of the most important due to its more widespread influence. By 1913, there were 183 schools teaching 43,700 girls and boys (Benbassa and Rodrigue 83). In Salonica, 4,000 children, amounting to over half of the school-aged children had attended AIU schools by 1912 (Mazower, *Salonica* 234).

The AIU aimed to 'regenerate' the Ottoman Sephardic communities through three main goals: 1) to bring civilization to communities where oppression and ignorance was seen to prevail; 2) to educate the youth in order to enable communities to obtain more secure jobs; 3) and to destroy 'outdated prejudices and superstitions' (Jacques Bigar qtd. Rodrigue, *French Jews* 71-2). In addition, the AIU viewed itself as a spiritual leader, striving to bring moral education, community values, and 'how to reconcile the needs of the modern world with the respect of ancient traditions' (ibid 71-72). AIU schools were only established at the invitation of community members. A director would be sent from Paris who administered the school and taught certain subjects. Additionally, schools

gained support from adjunct teachers sent from Paris and community members, who contributed to educating and monitoring classes as well as providing financial aid. A local school committee was responsible for recruiting members and oversaw the finances of the institution. This allowed many schools to operate free of charge, however, few students from poorer families were able to attend (see Molho 'Education'). AIU schools gave religious instruction (including Hebrew and Jewish history), French, Turkish, maths and writing. In addition, AIU activities promoted vocational schools for the study of crafts especially for poorer students (ibid.). As part of its 'civilizing mission' the AIU worked to eradicate Ladino and any student caught speaking it within the institution would be sent home, some teachers even went so far as to fine students if they did not speak French (Rodrigue, 'The Ottoman Diaspora' 880). The strict adherence to language within the schools becomes particularly significant when considering the range of languages in which cultural activities outside the classroom were presented.

Critical engagement with the cultural products of the AIU and their reception indicate how the 'civilizing' work extended beyond the walls of the classrooms. Before the Young Turk Revolution, Sephardic theatrical activities took place primarily under the auspices of the AIU. Theatrical events, although performed by members of AIU schools, were open to the entire community and thereby provide a unique access point for examining how the educational institution chose to display itself for the community. AIU productions were performed in schools as well as public places, such as synagogues or theatres and were often produced in conjunction with charity organizations, such as the Jones Israelita de Balat in Constantinople and Ozer Dalim, a welfare services organization in Izmir. For the AIU teachers and alumni, theatre was a forum wherein diverse audiences would come to be entertained and educated about Western performance and politics. Furthermore, as previously stated, the use of Turkish, Hebrew, Ladino and French languages within AIU-sponsored productions illustrates their interest in appealing to a wide cross-section of the community.

Dramatic performances came to be a popular way of engaging students with French cultural texts and history. Recalling an AIU educational experience from Morocco, Charles Bensimhon writes, '[a]fter having stuttered the fables of La Fontaine at the primary school, vibrated with Corneille, laughed [sic] with Molière, and cried with Racine in the *cours complémentaires*, we are finally ready to enter the normal school with enthusiasm; and there we are exposed to deep philosophy, complex mathematics, and literary finesse' (qtd. in Laskier, 'The Alliance' 337). Although the account is from an AIU school in Morocco, it demonstrates that French dramatic texts, particularly Molière, Corneille and Racine, were part of the AIU educational experience. As the popularity of French dramatists such as Molière and Racine increased, the AIU ceased to be the soul producer of these texts and they became a regular part of community life.

The theatrical event, not merely the content of the performance, took on a great importance for the 'education' of the Ottoman Sephardim. Illustrating this is an announcement for an international theatre festival, sponsored by the AIU at the Sporting Club in Izmir to benefit the Talmud Tora, reminding patrons 'not eat fruit or other things in the salon of the theatre' (*BuEsp*, 28 Mar 1907, 1).⁴ In the same announcement which reminds audiences not to eat fruit in the theatre, the editors implore Jewish members of the community not to give the 'the smallest pretext for outsiders to talk about us' (ibid.).⁵ Such a statement implies not only that there would be non-Sephardic audience members, but that the Jewish community was particularly concerned in presenting themselves as respectable and civilized. Instilling rules for attending theatre events as part of the modernization process was a phenomenon not unique to the Ottoman Sephardim. Lata Singh, in critiquing colonial theatre from India, depicts the stage as a site of hegemonic contest where a European/colonial culture may be able to assert cultural superiority by claiming a 'high' status and simultaneously 'relegating indigenous cultural forms to a "low'

⁴ Original Text: no comer frutos y otras cosas en la sala del teatro.

⁵ Original Text: no cale dar el mínimo pretexto por que los ajenos hablen de nosotros.

status' (2). Educating the Sephardim on morals and good behaviors went beyond presenting morally upright dramatic performances, but the entire theatre-going experience was an opportunity to promote the supremacy of French culture and values. The way in which community members behaved in public theatrical events was in part indicative of their degree of education and cultural capital. A similar process of Western education occurred in India where the middle class audiences in India strived to give theatres a 'respectable' image, transforming theatrical spaces from sites of indigenous traditions to those of high culture, 'suitable for the consumption of the "educated" and "respectable"' (Singh 5). Susan Seizer argues that stylistically Parsi theatre adapted conventions from British touring companies in India such as printed tickets, stage machinery, styles of advertisements, and hand bills as well as production conventions like the proscenium arch, scene settings and painted backdrops (80). In a similar manner, not only the content, but the theatre space and experience became an important physicalization of modernization processes.

Rather than completely adopting French theatrical traditions, AIU-sponsored theatrical activities became a site of debate within Ottoman Jewish communities regarding modernization and Westernization. Opposition to Western education, and subsequently Western drama, developed primarily out of cultural divide between rabbinical leadership and the activities of the AIU. Although some rabbinical leaders eventually came to embrace the efforts of the AIU as a necessary tool for overcoming widespread poverty within the community, the efforts of the AIU were initially met with hostility. Education was one of the major areas of social life that challenged the rabbinical leadership. Traditionally, education took place through religious primary schools known as *meldars*, which served as the primary means of employment for those community members with rabbinic training (see Lehmann). These tensions within the community preceded the establishment of the AIU. In Salonica, Western-style schools were established by a small group of dedicated progressive community members in 1856, sixteen years before the

first AIU school opened in this Ottoman city (Kerem, 'The Europeanization' 61). Dr. Moise Allatini was one of the most important figures within the community to bring foreign language schools to the Sephardim and, along with Saadi Betsalel Halevi Ashkenazi and Rabbi Juda Nehama, he reformed the education system. However, Allatini's efforts were met with much objection from the Rabbi and certain community members, who 'objected to his establishing a school because they saw instruction in foreign languages as a dejudaising force' (ibid 63). The antagonisms forming between the progressive intellectuals, such as Allatini, against those who felt the Western presence 'dejudaised' the community, would be reflected in various theatrical endeavours for the next several decades.

Resistance by the religious leadership to the intruding Western forms of education was reflected in the community's theatrical activities. A series of contributions to the periodical *El Nación* reflect the attitudes of various community members towards theatre and education in local schools. On 3 November 1873, the same year that the first AIU school was established in Salonica, a letter from an anonymous patron under the name 'A passionate patriot'⁶ stated that the school productions, such as *La Vendida de Yosef* [The Selling of Joseph], are making a mockery of the children who perform in them and new comedies about Jewish history should be sought in order to not ruin the tender hearts of the youth (578-9). Despite the author's advocacy for religious/historical theatre productions, he/she claims that even a girl being instructed by wise teachers will only become well-versed in the principles of Judaism but not believe in them herself (ibid.). In other words, these comedies were contributing to an education of young women which will enable them to understand Judaism but will not instill within them a sense of pride or belief.

Ishac Yeosúa, Secretary of Buró of Public Instruction also spoke out against theatre as a mode of education for the youth, arguing theatre is entertainment, to be

⁶ Original Text: Un pasionoso por la amor nacional.

conducted for the pleasure of audiences, not for progress in schools. In his letter to the editors of *El Avenir*, Yeosúa challenges the teachers who believe that the monologue and comedy are important to the advancement of the community, presenting his rationale that a performance at the end of a year of work is a fine idea, but need not to be undertaken three or four times a year as it detracts from the actual progress of the students (*Ave* 29 Apr., 1903, 4). Within these arguments put forward in the press, it is both the quantity of theatre as well as the content which challenges or enhances modernisation efforts.

The debate continues in Izmir, where a visiting audience member, having witnessed a performance at the local school, described the scene as a harem and a place for spiritually empty children.⁷ Describing the event, the author quotes one of the teachers, who addressed the audience that theatre '[i]t appears to me that it is a great sin [...] I feel it is worse and more sinful of these children than dancing with Turks [...] and of those who go to the tannery' (*Nación* 18 Feb., 1874, 883-4).⁸ An article published a few days later carries the same sentiments with '[e]veryone that believes in the law of Moses (!) should not go to this theatre' (*Pol* 27 Apr., 1875, 33).⁹

In combating accusations against theatrical activities, a number of community members praised the theatre as a suitable site to educate the youth. One such letter challenged the notion that theatre was a detriment to the community, and claimed that even plays such as Molière's *El Casamiento Forzado* are addressing societal issues and are capable of saying much more than a school-based education (*Nación* 25 Feb., 1874, 903).

⁷ Sultan Abdülhamit's theatre at the Yıldız Palace was also linked to scandals and the idea of resembling a harem due to the richly decorated red and gold velvet (And, *A History* 75; Dodd 101).

⁸ Original Text: me parece que es grande pecado...siendo es mas negro y mas pecado de estas muchachas que bailan con turcos...y de aquellas que se van al palamut.

I have not been able to find a direct translation of palamut, but a reference is made to it in a Ladino account of Izmir Jews by Selim Amado which defines it as: 'tannin para la industria del kuero' [tannin for the industry of leather-making] (n.p.). Tannin being the gallic acid produced during the process of leather-making. Leather industries are referred to as 'dirty' work along with state executions (Goffman 87) and were often undertaken by Jewish workers in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century as the work was deemed unclear for Muslims.

⁹ Original Text: todo el que se cree en la Ley de Mose (!!!!), no puede ir a este teatro.

Objections to theatrical events amongst the Sephardim are a reflection of greater trends within orthodox Turkish society, as And describes, illiteracy, censorship and 'deep rooted prejudice against all things theatrical' negatively impacted the development of Turkish theatre (And, *A History* 71).

A week later, another letter reviews the production of *La Vendida de Yosef* challenging the original argument that the performance is corrupting the youth by stating the performances of the young girls proves that the theatrical arts are not only for entertainment, but for the community to embrace morals, education, and civilization itself (*Nación* 2 Mar., 1874, 914-5).

In order, perhaps, to combat the attitudes that modern Sephardi Theatre was corrupting the youth and 'dejudiazing' the community, in 1901 *El Avenir* published a lengthy serialized article recounting the long history of theatre within Jewish communities. This performance genealogy is significant for many reasons as it demonstrates one way in which the Ottoman Sephardi community responded to European theatre traditions in the name of progress. The article, entitled *Justice to the Jew: The Story of What He Has Done For The World* was an edited Ladino translation of Madison Clinton Peters' book first published in New York City in 1899. Over the course of three weeks the article was edited and reprinted focusing on the major Jewish contributors to Western drama. As we have yet to encounter mention of Peters' Ladino translation in other sources on Sephardic history, an overview of the productions discussed is included in Appendix A. What is significant about the translation and publication of this lengthy account of Jewish dramatic history is the editor's interest in linking present conditions within theatrical debates regarding the value of theatre with its long and diverse past. Peters sets the tone of the article by stating that although the rabbis have declared the theatre to be immoral and against Jewish law, theatre has, on the contrary, been an important part of Jewish civilization since their ancestors lived in Spain. The connection to Spain and life before exile points to the notion that theatre is part of life in the diaspora and should be an aspect of pride, not decay amongst the Sephardim. Not all the Jews mentioned in the review were Sephardic, but their contributions are all significant in pointing to the value of theatre amongst Jews and demonstrate a circulation of materials and historical knowledge about a wide range of playwrights and productions.

Language became one of the most contested areas of theatrical and community debate. Although AIU productions transpired in Ladino, a number of pieces were presented in French, resulting in a growing division within the community over those who had the education and cultural capital to attend and those who did not. As one article states, after the main show the performers will 'give another comedy in French that will lighten the hearts of all who understand it' (*Nación* 9 Apr., 1873, 72-4).¹⁰ The significance of this announcement is that it demonstrates how participation in theatrical events, as actors and audience members, secured and strengthened the AIU's presence within the community by signaling a 'worldliness' associated with the knowledge of a foreign language and culture. Language also holds particular symbolic weight, as theatre scholars Philip Auslander notes, 'questions of who or what is speaking through the body and in what language, of what discourses are inscribed on/in the body, are clearly questions of power relations' (9)

The encroachment of Western culture and language to the detriment of local practices was not isolated to the Sephardic community, but representative of the shifts taking place within the Ottoman Empire. As Brummett argues, knowledge of European languages became associated with that of progress, as well as that of 'being left behind, with a sense of urgency' provoking both displeasure and patriotic sentiments towards the native language (194). Although Brummett is referring to attitudes amongst Turkish-language speakers, a similar sense of urgency and a rise in patriotism can be seen amongst the Sephardic communities. Language was the symbol of the community's history and cultural heritage, and therefore the topic of impassioned debate that often arose from the display and representation of language on the stage. As one article expressed: '[e]verywhere, theatre is one of the most popular entertainments and, at the same time, a means of efficient national education. Nowhere in the world today can one imagine a city

¹⁰ Original Text: Más después dieron otra una comedia en lingua francesa que hizo alegrar corazones de todos los que se entendían.

or a large audience without a theatre in its language' (*Pue* 19 Mar., 1923, 2). In translating *Han Binyamin*, Hassid claims that part of his motivation was to provide a comedy for the community in their own language (Preface). Hassid demonstrates the growing awareness amongst the Sephardim about creating and developing a Ladino corpus of texts and signifies the interest in establishing a unique Sephardi subjectivity on the stage, not merely representing popular pieces from the Western canon. There is a dual desire to be seen as 'in touch' with Europe as well as developing a distinctly Sephardic theatrical canon. One of the earliest mentions of a theatrical performance in the Ladino press refers to a production of the dramatization of the Biblical story Joseph. Regarding this production, *El Nacional* noted how,

Until now, everyone has run to the theatres and comedies, but being in foreign languages and histories not known for their ideas, for the most part people were not happy. Now we see with pleasure that many of our co-religious, committing themselves to this profit from goodness and developing the idea, they are thinking and sacrificing their interests to give similar examples and in our Israeli nation.¹¹ (13 Feb., 1874, 903)

Emphasis here is given to the fact that the production will take place in Ladino and address an aspect of Jewish history. Performing in the common vernacular of the community implies this production will also be more accessible to those members of the community who have not been educated in foreign languages. Hence, the production of Ladino theatre marked a significant step in constructing a unique Sephardic theatrical identity, which was nevertheless influenced by Western cultural products. Furthermore, although the performance took place in Ladino, an article in *El Tiempo* suggests that the audience will be comprised of non-Jews that know Spanish and others who want to see

¹¹ Original Text: Hasta agora muchas veces coren todos los señores a los teatros y comedías, ma siendo en linguas estranjerias y las historias no conocidas por sus ideas, la más parte de los señores no les era tanto gusto. Agora veemos con plaçer que muchos de nuestros coreliçionarios, celando de este profito de buendad y deçvelopamiento de idea, están penando y sacrificando de sus propios intereses a_fin de dar el exempio semejante y en nuestra naçion israelita.

progress within the communities (14 Feb., 1874, 2). The diverse audience suggests that even though the story resonates within the Jewish community, the theatre is a mirror for the modernisation process and an important symbol for the international community.

Issues of language are not only reflected through live performance but also openly addressed through dramatic didactic texts. A short dialogue published in the press (*Ave* 1 Mar., 1899) illustrates certain attitudes regarding the teaching of Hebrew and the French language. Preceding the dialogue is a description of the piece as being written by an illustrious Israeli composer and author (without stating the name), and that the piece is entertaining and educational to the last degree. In addition to discussing education, the dialogue suggests that Hebrew is a holy language and the most appropriate language for the Jewish community, not only in connecting to a heritage and religious tradition, but for the betterment of society. As the characters discuss:

MB: I know many Jews that are bad spouses and their wives suffer.

AB: These Jews must be those that 'do not know the Hebrew language is necessary!'

MB: They laugh - but believe me, that this is the absolute truth, the Hebrew language is the language of good-sense and understanding, and to be a good husband it is necessary to be a wise man who knows much, in my early youth I read our holy scriptures with the help of my good mother [...]¹²

The dialogue is not just concerned with the acquisition of Hebrew, but serves as a warning to the Jewish community over conforming to French language and culture. Within ten years, the characters go on to state, the community will deteriorate unless the holy language takes a more prominent place in education and daily life. What is

¹² Original Text:

MB: Yo konosko muchos Judios ke son muy negros maridos y azen sufrir a sus mujeres.

AB: Estos Judios deve ser ke 'no konosen la lengua Hebrea komo es menester!'

MB: Vos dezesh esto en riyindo, ma kreaedme ke esto es la pura verdad, la lengua Hebrea es la lengua del buen-senso y del entendimiento, y por ser buen marido es menester ser hombre entendido y de mucho saver en mi prima mansevez yo melde muestras santas eskritoras con el ayudo de mi buena madre [...]

significant in this dialogue is not only the subject matter being presented regarding the teaching of Hebrew within the community, but precisely that the argument took place as a didactic dialogue in the press. Theatrical forms of expression provided a form of presenting and discussing topical issues.¹³

Tensions over the education of French and Hebrew also extended to the Turkish language and the question of loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. Whilst Stillman argues that due to the presence of the AIU, the Sephardim never entertained the notion of Turkish or Arabic as an official language ('Middle Eastern' 164) a strong sense of Ottoman-ness persisted within the community. As demonstrated in an editorial in *El Avenir* from 1899, claiming that youth abandoning the fez in order to wear a hat was a 'very delicate issue' in that it disrupts the relationship between the Sephardim and their 'Muslim compatriots' whom the community should respect without sacrificing any of their own beliefs (24 May 1899). Here the author is affirming that whilst the community needs to respect the customs and languages of their Muslim countrymen, they must not abandon their own traditions. Rodrigue has noted that the Sephardim remained 'politically loyal' but culturally disassociated from Turkish language and customs ('Eastern' 84). Despite showing interest and loyalty to both French and Turkish languages, the Sephardim maintained connection to their diasporic language throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a distinguishing marker of their history, culture and religion.

As demonstrated in the previous examples, debates regarding theatre at the turn of the twentieth century were embedded in wider concerns regarding the processes of modernization. Attitudes towards theatre as a cultural force varied from those who considered it a moral and righteous activity for the community's youth, to those who felt it was responsible for corrupting and 'dejudaizing' the community. What follows is a more

¹³ A number of theatre advertisements signify the performance of a dialogue without specifying the title or the subject matter. Although it is possible dialogues such as this would have been performed, there is no evidence to suggest that this piece was ever presented and it could have been intended to be read individually or out loud, which was the custom amongst the Sephardim (see Stein, *Making* esp. 66).

targeted investigation of how the works of Molière and Racine were produced and received by the Ottoman Sephardim.

Translating and Adapting Molière in Ottoman Sephardic Theatre

Molière was the single most popular French playwright on the Ottoman stage and investigating the production and reception of his work amongst the Ottoman Sephardim is a key to understanding local responses to cross-cultural encounters. At least six of Molière's plays were performed by the Ottoman Sephardim: *El Hacino Imaginario* [*The Imaginary Invalid*], *El Médico Malgrado él* [*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*],¹⁴ *Han Binyamin* [*The Miser*], *Historia de H. Binyamín*, *El Casamiento Forzado* [*The Forced Marriage*], *El Médico Jugetón* [*The Flying Doctor*], and *Los embrollos de Escapen* [*The Impostors of Scapin*]. As indicated in the overview of Molière productions in Ottoman Sephardic communities (see Appendix B), there is a diverse range of languages, organizations and complementary events which surrounded the presentation of plays. See-sawing between performances with Zionist groups and at AIU functions indicates how the popularity of Molière was not limited to French language groups or those adhering to the ideologies put forward by the AIU network, but rather performances were part of a complex interaction between various political and social groups. Performing Molière's texts alongside patriotic or Jewish historical pieces as well as in celebration of Jewish holidays indicates how attitudes regarding the French dramatist were integrated into the fabric of Jewish life in the Ottoman Empire. Two of six texts appear as translations, two as adaptations and two are not indicated; however, as discussed shortly, even though *El Hacino Imaginario* is considered a translation, it is highly adapted from the original.

Only three of these plays are known to have survived in print and they will be explored in the following section: *Historia de H. Binyamín* by David Joseph Hassid, *El Hacino Imaginario* by S. Ben-Ataf and *El Médico Jugetón*, translated anonymously.

¹⁴ Renditions of this text also appear under the names: *El médico a palos*, *El doctor malgrado él*, *El médico contra su voluntad*, *El médico malgrado de él*, and *El médico por Zorla*.

These plays were published between 1873 to 1904 and thus reflect the development of attitudes towards French culture and performance within Ottoman Sephardic communities during the modernization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁵ *El Médico Jugetón* is the earliest surviving translation of a Molière play in Ladino from the Ottoman Empire, published in the Constantinople periodical *El Tiempo* in 1873. *H. Binyamín*, based on Molière's farce *The Miser*, was one of the most popular plays adapted and performed within the Ottoman Sephardic communities. Productions are known to have taken place in Constantinople in 1882 and Salonica in 1884 and 1904. In 1903 *El Hacino Imaginario*¹⁶ was translated by S. Ben-Ataf and published in Sofia (Bulgaria) and a report from 1906 indicates that a performance took place in Izmir at the sporting club of the AIU school (*BuEsp* 22 Jun., 1906, 1). The comedy in all three performances arises out of the societal expectations, gender roles and intergenerational tensions. There is also a repetition of character types as all three texts contain an elderly man who is stubborn about the marriage and financial issues of his offspring, and each address issues of inheritance and attitudes towards medicine. In the end, all three texts show how the less traditional and liberal youth are victorious.

There are some important variations to Molière's original that the translator David Joseph Hassid applied to his 1884 rendition of *H. Binyamín*.¹⁷ What strikes a reader first are the alterations to the dramatis personae. As evident from the title, the main character of Harpagon has become Han Binyamin. Romero suggests this change arises from the local specifics of this production: a man called Han Šemtob Binyamin was a folk figure

¹⁵ İnci Enginün argues that the appearance of doctors and tradesmen in Ottoman novels was a sign of the transformations taking place in society. In addition, modernisation of the state affected novels and plays as they critiqued customs such as marriage (228-229). While Molière's comedies can be read as demonstrating an interest in European culture, they signify a much more meaningful change to the religious and traditional Sephardi repertoire which preceded them.

¹⁶ Renditions of this text also appear under the names: *El Enferno imaginario*, *El Haćino Imaginario* and *Malato imaginario*.

¹⁷ Versions of this French translation exist in Ladino under the titles *Descarso*, *El escarso*, *El escasso*, *Han Binyamín* and *Historia de H. Binyamín*. Details regarding the other texts are as follows: the 1882 rendition of this text was written by an anonymous translator and entitled *El Escasso*, and the 1904 version was adapted by Joseph Nehama in Salonica.

amongst the Sephardim in Salonica and his name became synonymous with 'stingy' [*avaro*] (*El Teatro* vI 166). However, representations of this play under the title *Escarso* and *L'Avare* appeared in Salonica as well, suggesting there may have been several approaches to the adaptation and synthesis of French and Ottoman Jewish connotations. In addition to the principal miser, the names of the other characters have also been altered: Cléante and Elise, the children of the miser, are changed to Alberto and Leonora; Mariane, the love interest of Harpagon becomes Matilda in the Ladino translation and Élise's love interest Valère becomes Enrico. Similar alterations to character names appear in both *El Hacino Imaginario* and *El Médico Jugetón*. In *El Médico Jugetón*¹⁸ the hero of the piece, Sganarelle, this master Gorgibus and his beautiful daughter Lucile have been adapted as Selomo, Frederico and Laurita respectively. However, in *El Hacino Imaginario* the names of the characters have remained relatively unchanged, Argán goes to Argan and Angélique to Angelic. Reflecting the modification of character names, *El Hacino Imaginario* was the only text, out of these three, to be published as a translation from the French whereas *El Médico Jugetón* was announced as a Ladino version and the *Historia de H. Binyamin* (1884) as 'translated and modified' by David Joseph Hassid and adapted again by Joseph Nehama in 1904. With examples demonstrating both a strict translation and more localised adaptations, the range of versions signifies the varied ways in which the Sephardic dramatists choose to represent these French comedies.

Thematically *H. Binyamin* and *El Médico Jugetón* share a patriarchal figure crippled by their desires for wealth, social status, and perfect health. Similar to the character of Han Binyamin, Frederico in *El Médico Jugetón* wants to marry his daughter Laurita off to a gentleman, despite her interest in marrying the charming Carlo. In both stories, the young lovers conspire against an elderly father who appears more concerned

¹⁸ A transcription of this text is published in E. Romero *El Teatro* v. II 883-898 and references to the text come from this transcription.

with his own societal position and livelihood than that of his children. Carlo hatches a plan with his servant Selomo to convince Laurita's father she is sick and must be moved to the country, where he plans on marrying her in secret. Carlo's servant, Selomo is paid to dress as the doctor and succeeds in out-witting Frederico and allowing the lovers to get married. *El Hacino Imaginario* carries many similar themes to both *El Médico Jugetón* and *H. Binyamín*. The play was translated by S. Ben-Ataf and was first published in Sofia in 1903 and subsequently performed in Izmir in 1906 by AIU alumni and students at the community's sporting club. Adhering closely to Molière's plot, it is the story of Argan, a miserly hypochondriac, who wishes to marry his daughter Angelic off to a medical student from Paris. However, Cleant is in love with Angelic and disguises himself as a music teacher to woo her under her father's nose. To stop Argan from sending her to a convent if she does not marry the Parisian, and from giving all her inheritance to her stepmother, the family servant Tuanet helps stage the death of Argan to test the loyalty of Angelic and the stepmother. When Angelic proves her devotion to her father despite his traditionalist mentality, he awakes to give her his inheritance and allows her to marry Cleant provided he becomes a doctor. In the final moments, Argan is convinced by the others that he should become a doctor so he can treat himself.

In *H. Binyamín*, the setting for the story has been altered in line with the localization of the characters' names. Hassid has moved the setting from Paris to Salonica and the city is mentioned several times in the text as a replacement for both the original mention of 'Paris' in Molière's version and the original references to 'le ville.' Such constant reference to Salonica localizes the setting and therefore the comedy. Furthermore, any moral lessons may be directly applicable to the local context. Following the plot of the original text, the Ladino version centres on the story of a miser, Han Binyamin and his children. His daughter and son, Leonora and Alberto, try to out-wit their penny-pinching father and marry whom they choose. Leonora has secretly been engaged to Enrico who has disguised himself in Han Binyamin's house as a servant.

Alberto is in love with a girl from a lower economic and social position, Matilde. Leonora and Alberto stage a robbery which gives them the upper-hand in the household and forces their father to let them marry whom they choose in exchange for the return of his money. In addition to being a satirical farce, the play was written as a comedy of manners and criticizes greed and parsimonious behaviour. Issues of economic divisions between the rich and poor may have made a particular impact on Ottoman Sephardic communities, where poverty was a present reality for the Sephardim as nearly 6,000 of 13,000 Jewish families in Salonica relied on humanitarian donations in 1911 (Benbassa and Rodrigue 82).

With *El Médico Jugetón*, the text has similarly undergone 'Sephardization,' to use Romero's term (*El Teatro* v1 337). Minor changes include such alterations as '10 pistols' to '10 ducets' (Act I, Scene II). One of the most striking textual adaptations is the inclusion of haRamban in the list of great thinkers Carlo tells the servant Selomo to recite to Frederico to ensure his costume as a doctor is believable (Act I, Scene II). Selomo follows his advice: 'HaRamban and Galien said, with their reason that they have, that a person doesn't feel well when they are sick'¹⁹ whereas the French refers to Hippocrates and Galen (Scene IV). Within the second scene of the French text a French proverb, 'after death comes the doctor'²⁰ becomes 'doctors' mistakes are covered with earth' (Scene II).²¹ In addition, common Ladino phrases such as 'mata-sanos' (literally kill-health) are utilized (Scene II). As these textual variations suggest, Hassid was interested in creating a Sephardi colouring of the classical French work. The main story has remained unaltered, but the names, places, and illusions upon which the characters draw succeeded in reimagining the text within the Ottoman diaspora.

¹⁹ Original Text: HaRamba.m y Galién dijeron, con sus razones que tuvieron, que una persona no está buena cuando está haćina.

²⁰ Original Text: apres la mort le medicin.

²¹ Original Text: yero de medico la tierra lo corija.

It is not only proverbs and sayings which have been altered to conform to the Ottoman Sephardim's sensibilities. In *El Médico Jugetón*, Selomo in disguise as a doctor asks Esterina, Federico's servant, to bring urine from the infirm Laurita so he can investigate her illness. Whereas in Molière's versions the urine is brought and Selomo drinks it, asking for more, in the Ladino version Selomo merely examines the urine and then asks for blood (Scene IV). Selomo goes to investigate the patient himself without having sampled blood or urine. Without additional evidence regarding this particular alteration to the text it is difficult to know with any certainty the motivation behind this adaptation of the scene; yet Romero suggests that this alteration was made to appeal to the more delicate sensibilities of the audience (*El Teatro* vI 337-338). While the appearance and consumption of urine on stage may have been considered too crude for the Ottoman Sephardim, as Romero suggests, it also may have been too close to home.

Whilst conducting fieldwork amongst the Sephardim in the 20th century, Issac Jack Lévy and Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt revealed many ritual healing and medical superstitions that have persisted amongst communities for hundreds of years, including the medicinal uses and superstitions surrounding the disposal of, consumption and application of urine. 'Urine' they state, 'was used as both a liquid of purification and of pollution' (132) indicating its popularity as a traditional ingredient in Sephardic medicinal practices even in the nineteenth century. The removal of urine from the exploits of Selomo may be due to the fact that the anonymous author did not wish audiences to associate his actions with that of traditional medical practices and instead to focus on the humor in the double-identity of Selomo. In Molière's text, the urine scene reads as a comical escapade, with Sgnarabelle convincing Gorgibus that drinking urine is a highly regarded method of determining one's illness. For the Sephardim, this may not have achieved a similar reaction amongst audiences familiar with the traditional practice of using urine as a way of curing or eradicating illness. The issue of urine arises in another Ladino play, *Ocho días antes de Pesah* [Eight Days till Passover] published in 1909. Here

urine is presented on stage for the purpose of drawing attention to the backwardness of this medical practice. In this story, a mother refuses to call a doctor to tend to her sick son and instead fashions a medicine made of urine (S.B. 967).

Rena Molho has argued that this play was intended to explore the themes of modernity on the Ottoman Sephardic stage and that the grotesque display of traditional medical practices was used to demonstrate to audiences how 'religious diligence cannot protect them from the dangers of ignorance' (Judeo-Spanish' 143). Perhaps in 1873 the theme of urine on stage was beyond the sensibilities of audiences, or the realities of urine amongst the Sephardim took away from the original comedy of the scene. However, by 1909 the theme of urine and modernity were dramatized in *Ocho días antes de Pessah* as a way of critiquing the traditional practice. It is possible that drinking urine was removed from *El Médico Jugetón* precisely because that was a practice deemed 'unmodern' by the playwright who so clearly was attempting to increase the cultural capital of the Sephardim by translating Molière's text.

El Hacino Imaginado also exhibits alterations in terms of content and plot as a way of perhaps modernizing or moralizing the original text. Molière's text offers a critique of the absurdities of the medical profession while the Ladino version, in contrast, focuses on the young lovers and almost completely disregards the medical profession commentary in favour of presenting a romantic inter-generational comedy. Therefore, despite being considered a 'translation' from Molière, this text has adapted the ending to reflect a more pressing issue for the Ottoman Sephardim: inter-generational attitudes towards marriage. Both examples of alterations to the plot and storytelling in *El Hacino Imaginado* and *El Médico Jugetón* suggest that the translators were interested in ensuring only particular aspects of the narrative were told to their local audiences. In addition, each of the texts reflects a desire on the part of the translator or adaptor to appeal to local customs. Lastly, these texts represent the ways in which theatre was utilized to address the

theme of modernization and change within the Ottoman Empire and present audiences with a model way of behaving morally and respectably in their changing society.

A Theatre of Morals

In the preface to *Historia de H. Binyamin*, Hassid indicates the text's importance as a moral piece of theatre. 'It is already known' he remarks 'that the reason that the theatre has such a great importance in Europe, for the civilized countries, is on account it is considered the 'first school to teach morals'²² (Hassid 3). Hassid appears to be claiming the value of the translation is reflected in the piece due to the fact it contains a moral lesson and the performance event itself is able to teach a lesson in line with the ideals of westernization. In addition to the theatre being the first school of moral education, Hassid lists three reasons for the publication of this text in his preface: 1) to give the righteous societies who are always doing charitable theatrical representations, a piece in Ladino to profit the poor of the city; 2) to introduce a previously unknown comedy for the pleasure of the audiences; 3) to recommend to certain honorable families and societies something to pass the time that is entertaining and so full of morals at the same time (Preface). While Hassid is drawing connections between a theatre of morals for the Sephardim and those transpiring in Europe, there is a resounding sense of it contributing to a distinctly Ottoman Jewish identity and moral values.

On a similar note to Hassid's preface is the advertisement for *El Médico Jugetón* from *El Tiempo* in 1873. The announcement concerns the publication and not a performance of the text, however, the editors express their wish that readers will present the play in their houses and that a performance will take place over the winter (31 Aug., 4). Most significant is the assertion that, '[w]hile for a moral part [the play] serves as an example for those who pretend to be wise and good friends, while they are actually

²² Original Text: Ya es sabido y conosido que la razón que el teatro tiene una tan gran importancia en Evropa, así que los países civilizados, es a_cavsa de lo_que es considerado como la 'prima escola de enbežamiento moral.

ignorant and ill-mannered' (ibid.).²³ The announcement signifies that this translation of Molière's text is to serve as a moral play for performances in theatres or homes within Ottoman Sephardic communities. The moral lesson is perhaps most evident in the final scene. In the final line of Molière's version, Gorgibus (Federico in Ladino) tells the flying doctor, Sganarelle, 'I forgive you; and, on seeing such a good son-in-law, think myself happily deceived by Sganarelle. Now, let us all go to the wedding, and drink the health of the company' (Scene XV). However, in the Ladino adaptation, Federico exclaims,

What has been has been, the act has already passed, with this I forgive you. God provides us a good and happy life, but this was lost on Selomo, who could not see. It doesn't matter this time what he did to me; it has already passed. But may god protect him if he ever if I ever meet him again [...] you will all see how I destroy him.²⁴

Such a final moment in Ben Ataf's version appears much more moralizing and as a warning to those who consider overstepping boundaries. Whilst Molière's character considers himself 'happily deceived,' Federico admits that he will let the matter pass but will not tolerate such recklessness in the future. As Federico's lines are significantly adapted, perhaps it is indicative of the moral objective of the piece as being concerned with forgiveness and justice.

Cloaking productions as moral and progressive is reflective of greater trends within modern Sephardic Theatre. One such example comes from a performance of Molière's *El medico contra su voluntad* [*A Doctor in Spite of Himself*], where a reviewer states that the entire audience, 'admired the intelligence and courage of the children' and that this clearly proves that 'they are making serious progress in their studies' (*Tiem* 8

²³ Original Text: Mientras que por parte moral sirve por ejemplo a alguna gente que se muestran sabos y amigos, mientras que no son que ignorantes y ensabanados.

²⁴ Original Text: Lo_que fue fue; el hecho ya pasó, con esto vos perdono. El dio que vos haga vivir de una vida buena y venturosa; ma a este pedrido de Šelomó más non quero ver. No importa esta vez qué tuvo que hacer con mí; que vaya ansí. Ma el dio que lo / guadre si otra vez le atrasara el [...] verés cómo lo estruigo.

Sep., 1890, 542-3).²⁵ It was not only the works of Molière which were translated and advertised as moral works. Additional plays addressing moral and social issues include works such as *Los efectos de el alcoholismo* [The effects of alcohol] from 1914 in Salonica (*Lib* 14 Apr., 1914, 1). Discussing the play *Rinu* by A. Galante, an article claimed: *Rinu* is written in a basic language; the reader will be able to pull from it a lot of moral²⁶ (*Vara* 23 Mar., 1906, 4). An additional example is evident in the review of *La espiación* from Salonica in 1912, which claims the production 'is moving and moral to the final moral moment'²⁷ (*Ave* 1 Apr., 1912, 1). Another reviewer of a production in 1898 claims the performance taught audiences that wealth does not equal happiness, and the comedy of circumstance is 'filled with morals'²⁸ (*Ave* 6 Apr., 1898, 5-6). Having a moral lesson to teach audiences was an important advertising mechanism for productions. Regarding a production of *Joseph and his brothers*, performed in Ladino with French music, *El Nacional* proclaims that this new national theatre will 'banish to the depths of the earth the ignorance that reigns amongst some of our co-religionists by making them see that theatre is not only something for entertainment but where one learns morality, education and civilization' (6 Feb., 1874, 914-5).²⁹

Theatre is also a site of moral debate. A series of letters and articles published in 1916 regarding the AIU-sponsored productions of Tolstoy's *Resurrección* [*Resurrection*], which took place on the pages of *El Liberal*, points to some of these issues. A dramatic arts section of the Socialist Federation in Salonica staged the play at the Eden Theatre, and the press praised the production in highlighting how theatre is no longer just about pleasure and happiness, but is about presenting various points of view on social issues

²⁵ Original Text: admiro la inteligencia y el coraje de los niños y de las niñas que dieron con esto una prueba clara que ellos hacen serios progresos en sus estudios.

²⁶ Original Text: *Rinu* es escrito en un lenguaje muy fácil; el lector podrá tirar de él mucho moral.

²⁷ Original Text: es esmóviente y moral al último grado.

²⁸ Original Text: yena de moral.

²⁹ Original Text: Es en esta manera que vas a venir a hacer desaparecer al fondo de la tierra la ignorancia que enreina en algunos de nuestros coreligionarios en haciéndoles ver que el teatro no es una cosa sólo por divertimineto si-no que de él se embeza moral, educación y civilización...

(*Lib* 14 Apr., 1916, 2).³⁰ However, the third performance of the show was interrupted and prohibited by police responding to an outlast against the performance from the nationalist periodical *Avante* [*Forward*]. The editors argued the drama was 'immoral' due to the fact the youth were playing unsavory characters such as prisoners (*Lib* 30 Apr., 1916, 2). Another journal, *El Progreso* also classified the production as immoral, but based this assessment on the Christian themes presented and embodied through the work (*Lib* 14 May, 1916, 2). Theatre is depicted here as a real danger to the youth of the community who may become corrupted through mimesis. Combating the views put forward in *El Progreso*, *El Liberal* argues that Tolstoy was demonstrating social injustice through the drama, which make the play 'far from being immoral'³¹ (*Lib* 30 Apr., 1916, 2). Furthermore, the editors argue that *El Progreso* is associating Christianity with immorality whereas the Socialist Federation is respectful of all ideas and works in a spirit against evil and injustice (*Lib* 14 May, 1916, 2). Such a development on the stage and in the press demonstrates how the idea of morals and theatre were common issues raised with the staging of foreign texts. The arguments put forward in *Avante* and *El Progreso* demonstrate how the 'morals' were something that could be damaged by a number of things, including the embodiment of criminals or Christians on stage. This debate is significant as it suggests that the 'moral' quality of modern Sephardi Theatre was not only associated with the Enlightenment ideals propagated by the AIU, but with how to behave in the world, religiously and ethically. As especially articulated in the arguments in *El Progreso*, being moral is also about maintaining a Jewish identity. Therefore, moral education is detached from a purely secular notion associated with westernization and is rather about an interplay of 'tradition' and 'modernity' expressed through dramatic representations.

³⁰ Original Text: De más en más el teatro ganó una grande importancia al punto de visa social y el empleo en Salonica de este potente mezo de educación populara non puede que caváramos plaçer y alegría.

³¹ Original Text: amor, piadad y justicia son lonçe de ser imoralas.

In discussing the teaching of morals through theatrical activities, Borovaya notes how the theatre produced before 1908 was 'meant to be a venue of moral education and enlightenment, a school open to everybody,' clearly connecting the AIU's moralizing mission with that of the associated theatre practices (*Modern Ladino* 200). As discussed previously, the ideology of the AIU was closely associated with the idea of bringing intellectual as well as moral education to Ottoman Jewry, as in fact the two were seen as inseparable components of enlightenment education.³² However, the issue of moral education is more complex than simply the diffusion of ideas from Europe. Primarily, emphasis on a moral agenda within education spheres was part of a growing global trend to integrate moral content into state curriculums. France, Russia, Japan, Germany, China and the United States were all undergoing educational reforms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, indicating how aiming to integrate a moral agenda into educational projects was a common approach within international models.³³ Within Ottoman Islamic schools, in contrast to the perceived models of the AIU, moral approaches to education were seen as a 'corrective measure' to counter the 'negative effects of the Western penetration' (Fortna 206). By inserting (Islamic) morals back into the classroom the schools would be able to recoup the losses brought about by 'Frankish habits' (ibid 207). The significance of this global trend is that the synchronic commonalities between the Ottoman context and that of Europe suggest that the educational trends amongst the Sephardim were in line with their western counterparts. Furthermore, as discussed, moral secular education was not foreign to Ottoman Sephardic communities when the AIU began establishing schools, there was in fact a well-established communal learning tradition known as *musar*, which disseminated ideas related to the science, religion and cultural topics (Lehmann 51-75). This suggests that moral education included both vernacular rabbinic literature as well as the ideals presented through the work of the AIU.

³² See Rodrigue's chapter 'The Moralizing Agenda' in *Images* for a series of statements by AIU teachers on the vital importance of moral education in the Ottoman Empire.

³³ See Fortna 26-35 for an overview of these activities.

Representations of 'morals' through theatre thus reflect the interplay between these two traditions rather than the singular dissemination of ideas from Europe.

Issues arising out of adaptations of Molière and the notion of moral education within the greater Sephardi Theatre landscape resonate with the interplay of Western theatrical frameworks in other colonial or semi-colonial contexts. In discussing Parsi theatre's treatment of Shakespearian texts, Javed Malick notes that exposure to the work came through British education institutions in the colony, but that great liberty was taken by the artists in the Parsi theatre in adapting the Bard's materials in a process that he refers to as 'nativising' (157). Part of this drive to localize Shakespeare was to 'meet the demands and the logic of a commercial vernacular stage' which represents a 'hybrid [...] text in which the European influences and native popular traditions of dramaturgy and performance were interwoven' (ibid 159). For the Sephardim, maintaining their local vernacular, cultural expressions, and the semiotics of Salonica through character and place names, signifies a type of translation of Molière which refuses to part with the capital of the dramatist's name and comical plot, but which simultaneously strives to achieve something of greater worth and value to the local community. Modern Sephardi Theatre achieved a type of syncretic aesthetic between the desired acculturation and modeling of French models of performance with local characters and linguistic particularities. Within the Ottoman Sephardi communities, theatre came to function as a new cultural force, a reflection of the community's openness and ability to engage with modernisation as well as an adherence to local colouring. However, these texts represent both a resistance and a desire to present Western texts and modes of performance. Such resistance would come by way of the use of language and the nature in which theatre addressed Sephardic or Jewish history and identity. What productions of Molière's text signify is a community developing a cultural dualism, or bifurcation. Carter Findley (174-210) and Niyazi Berkes (109) address cultural dualism in the Ottoman Empire as the tensions arising out of secular and religious identities. While not addressing religious

practice per se, Molière's text demonstrates the development of a splitting of Sephardic alliances between the desire of Western acculturation and maintaining a distinct ethnic identity.

Assimilation to Nationalism: Staging Racine's *Esther*

The Society for the Friends of Instruction is revealing the biggest secret about playing for Purim the tragedy of Ester by Racine, with the choruses that accompany the piece. This will be the biggest event of the season. But, pardon...indiscretion! Do not trust the reporters.

- *El Avenir* 16 February, 1909

M. Cobo's announcement in *El Avenir* is an intriguing unveiling of the dramatic performance set for 7 March, 1909. The announcement is most likely an act of self-promotion as a certain Mercado Cobo is credited with writing the music for the Ladino production of *Ester*.³⁴ Whilst taking into consideration the underlying impetus for such a publication, it represents the initial announcement of Cobo's adaptation of Racine's text, which would become one of the most popular variations circulated within the Ottoman Sephardim communities. As theatrical productions of the Esther story were regular features amongst the Sephardim, the aspect of particular interest in this performance, for Cobo, is the inclusion of the tragic chorus and the fact it is Racine's version of the story. As an important cultural export, productions of Racine's text offer additional opportunities to explore the extent to which Sephardi Theatre developed in relation to French theatrical traditions.

Prior to Cobo's aforementioned production, a translation of Racine's text of *Esther* appeared in 1882, published in Constantinople. Although some of Racine's

³⁴ There are various spellings of Esther productions from the Ottoman Empire. The 1882 translation of Racine's *Esther* maintains the same spelling, although Cobo's version appears as *Ester*. I have kept these spellings variations throughout this section and use 'Esther' to refer to the traditional Jewish character.

abstract metaphors have been simplified and the prologue has been removed, the translation appears very true to the original text. Published with the playtext is a preface, written by the anonymous translator, which positions this translation as a momentous achievement for the Sephardi Theatre repertoire and the increased emotional efficacy of this story on audiences (4). Emphasizing the international fame of Racine's play, its success in the 'biggest theaters' and translation into several European languages, the author notes that the most important aspect of the work is the advantage afforded in *seeing* a theatrical representation as opposed to merely reading the well-known story. Theatre is thus regarded as a particularly powerful way of engaging with the tragic story. The author seems to put forward an argument that the true efficacy of a tragic text arises from two aspects: that the work itself is recognizable as one of the most important items in the community's canon; and the specific audience will see (for the first time) Racine's version of the Esther story. For the author, the second factor will ultimately result in the audience undergoing a deeper emotional response; it is not the staging of an Esther story that is of particular value for this translator, but the staging of Racine's rendition of the story wherein the efficacy lies.

While it is unclear as to whether a previous western-style production of Esther took place prior to the 1882 translation of Racine's play, what is certain is that as late as the 1870s Ottoman Sephardic communities were performing the Esther story as part of Purim celebrations in a mode significantly different to the style afforded by Racine's tragedy. Traditional performances involved masks, singing, and a promenade style of performing:

[...] these groups with masks on their faces would visit diverse houses where they played certain pieces of the repertory, some disguised as Ahasveros, some as Haman, another as Mordehai, another as Esther, and well understood, Haman gets his punishment.

[...]

One of the particularities for the night of Purim was to leave the doors open - in order to indicate that the house was Jewish. In seeing a house with open doors, groups of players enter and exit, each one waiting on the stairs for their turn. The players were rewarded with *purimlik*. (Camhy qtd. in Romero, *El Teatro* v1 597)³⁵

As performances such as the one described above were taking place in the nineteenth century, it suggests that Racine's *Esther* was one of the initial versions of the traditional Jewish story to be presented within a western-style. According to the translator's preface, Racine's *Esther* not only presented a new mode of storytelling but challenged the efficacy of traditional Sephardic performances.

Not only the mode of performance, but the aspect of tragedy, which is inherent in Racine's version, became an issue of debate amongst members of the community. Expressing discontent with the way in which the story of Purim was being presented, an article in the Ladino periodical *El Amigo del Pueblo* from 1889 states that '[p]eople today have no desire to laugh at Purim'³⁶ and asks, '[b]ut why do they [the Sephardim] abandon the joy and happiness of this memorable festival?' (24 Feb. qtd. in Romero, *El Teatro* v1 598).³⁷ To offer a solution, the author suggests that '[i]t will be well deserving to look for some agreeable molds to be able to celebrate in a modern manner these celebrated days' (ibid.).³⁸ It is suggested that performances such as Racine's tragedy of *Esther* may be part of the repertoire which has removed the 'joy and happiness' from the festival. What appears definite is that the story of Esther was not previously performed as a tragedy prior to the translation of Racine's text and the 'modern' performance of Purim that is

³⁵ Original Text: Dunque, despues dela Seouda estos grupos con mascaras en las caras visitaban diversas casas onde jugavan ciertos pedazos del repertorio, quien travestido en Ahasveros, quien en Haman, otro en Mordehai, otro en Esther, y bien entendido, Haman recivia su pena. [...] Una de las particularidades de la noche de Purim era de dejar las puertas aviertas - por indicar que la casa era judia. En viendo una casa con puertas aviertas, grupos de jugadores entran y salian, cada uno esperando en las escaleras su turno. Los jugadores eran recompensados con *purimlik*.

³⁶ Original Text: La gente no tienen hoy gana de reir ni en Purim.

³⁷ Original Text: Ma ¿por esto se debe abandonar el gozo y la alegría de esta memorable fiesta?

³⁸ Original Text: Seria bien mereciento de buscar unos moldes agradables para poder celebrar en una manera moderna estos celebres dias...

advocated for in the Ladino press may have been answered in 1909 with Mercado Cobo's adaptation of Racine's *Esther*.

A day following the performance of *Ester*³⁹ in 1909, M. Cobo sent a letter to the editors of *El Avenir* to report on the success of the show taking place at the theatre in Serres, Greece. Drawing attention to the success he sees in his own work, Cobo writes:

This day will be marked in the history of our community: never has a Jewish festival achieved better, never has a theatre been so compact [...] This is due, perhaps, to the attraction of Purim; the fact that today was presented the famous piece *Esther* by Racine, accompanied by the choruses which form the most beautiful part, the most attractive of the festival, it is not, we believe for our part, beyond the success of this event. (*Ave* 19 Mar., 1909, 4)⁴⁰

Cobo's account of the performance credits the popularity of the event to the 'famous piece *Esther* by Racine,' suggesting that this was a text widely circulated in print or orally within the community. This is further suggested by a later comment by Cobo in the same article which states, 'of the piece itself we don't need to discuss anything because everyone knows it' (*ibid.*).⁴¹ Cobo's emphasis on the wide circulation of Racine's piece indicates that he is not just referring to the common knowledge of the Esther story, but rather the actual playtext. Due in part perhaps to the translation and circulation of Racine's *Esther* twenty seven years earlier as well as the increasing knowledge of French amongst the Sephardim, the western-style approach to the Esther story was well known within the community. In addition, as previously indicated, Cobo placed particular emphasis on the chorus, a Racinian addition to the traditional story that Cobo adapted.

³⁹ Cobo's version of Racine's text is spelt *Ester* while the original French is *Esther*.

⁴⁰ Original Text: Este día marcará en la historia he muestra comunitá: nunca fiesta judía reuśó mejor, nunca un teatro estado más enbutido [...] Este es debido, puede ser, a la atracción de Purim; ma el fato de respresentar aquel día la famośa pieza *Esther* de Racin, acompañado de los cores que forman la partida la más hermośa, la más seduiśante de esta fiesta, no es, creemos por nuestra parte, eñtrajero al suceso de esta fiesta.

⁴¹ Original Text: De la pieza ella miśma no hablaremos nada porque todos la conocen.

In an analysis of *Ester*, Romero compares published fragments of Cobo's text with that of Racine. The following section summarizes and builds upon her work to further understand the effect of adaptations to the chorus on audiences in the late Ottoman Empire. *Yemé quédem* is the earliest surviving extract of Cobo's text so whilst it was not printed until 1923, it is an indication of what may have been presented in 1909 and demonstrates how his work was still in circulation fifteen years after the premiere. As the extract demonstrates (see Appendix C), Cobo's adaptation bears a strong resemblance to Racine's original. However, while the first stanza in Racine's text focuses on the demise of Zion, Cobo has shifted the focus to be on the individual suffering in exile. The singer is not only mourning Zion but is actively evoking being parted from a homeland. Furthermore, Cobo's text has more religious connotations, for as opposed to wishing to see the 'ramparts' and 'towers' of Zion, the speaker longs for the ceremonial incense and temples ('incense' and 'holy houses'). Similar sentiments are therefore conveyed in both versions of *Esther* in that each chorus is mourning Zion and longing to return to a homeland; although Cobo utilizes language that is more colloquial.

An additional fragment of Cobo's text demonstrates a more radical reconfiguring of the French for the final chorus piece in the play. Published in Salonica in 1932 in the periodical *La Nación* is Cobo's *Marçh Triumfal de Ester* [The Triumphant March of Ester] (Fig. 3). As mentioned, Cobo's rendition of *Ester* was presented several times in the late Ottoman Empire and following this publication a performance took place in Salonica during 1935 with Mizrahi, a Zionist organization.¹² The Ladino transcription of this text appears in Appendix D.

All together brothers and sisters,
We raise our voice and sing
To one who raised heavens and earth,

¹² Romero indicates that the same organization presented a performance of *Ester* in 1934 but no author is mentioned. It is possible that this production also utilized Cobo's text (*El Teatro* v. I 606).

raised our banner
And saved us from the hands
Of evil ones.

Refrain

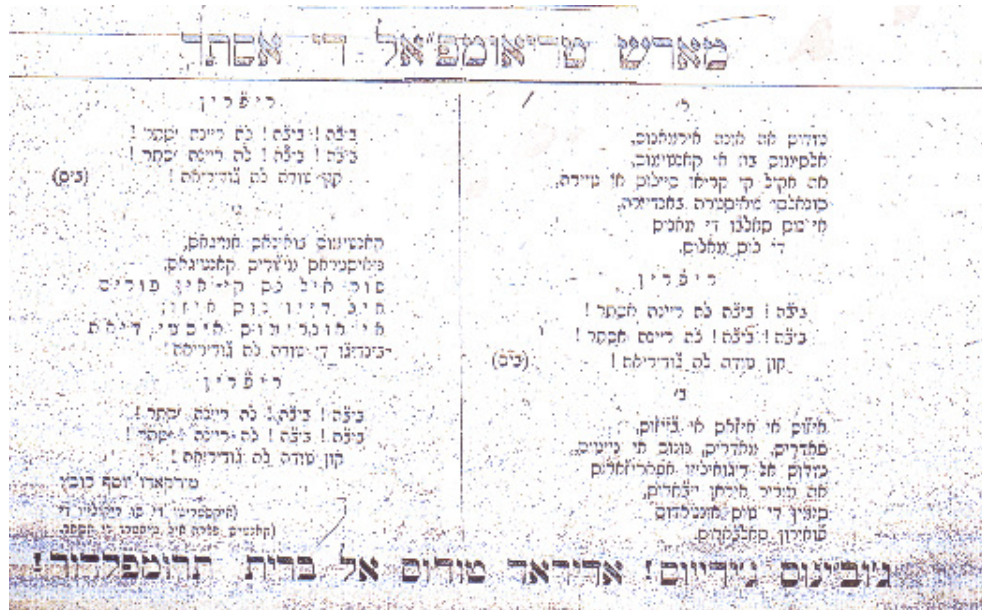
Long live, long live Queen Ester!
Long live, long live Queen Ester!
With all of Jewry!

[...]

We sing, good friends
Our best songs
For the month of Purim
God made us
And we honour this day
Blessed be all of Jewry!

The above extract is much more celebratory than Racine's version with regard to both the figure of Esther and the Jews' salvation. In addition, the Ladino version is more rooted in Jewish traditions and festivals, as indicated by the reference to Purim and the celebrations that take place annually. Overall, Cobo's text resonates with many of the same sentiments of Racine's original, yet the scene is much shorter and once again in a more colloquial language. The idea of Zion regaining its former glory as a cause of celebration dominates the sentiments of Racine's text, while Cobo's is focused on the figure of Esther and the implications of this momentous day on Jewish history and remembrance. Cobo's adaptation is designed for knowledgeable audiences who recognize the story in its relation to Purim.

Figure 3: *Marčh Triumfal de Ester*.⁴³



An additional point should be addressed regarding Cobo's text of *Esther*. As indicated in the review of the production, the 1909 performance included the character of Zeresh, wife of the traditional villain, Haman, who 'is not quite the Zeresh in popular Jewish traditions' (*Ave 19 Mar.*, 1909, 4).⁴⁴ This remark demonstrates how the production of *Esther* within modern Sephardi Theatre diverged from traditional representations of the narrative. Not only were the characters more reflective of the French text, but the performances themselves were evaluated in relation to French actors. As demonstrated in a report on the performance of Šelomó Yosef Cohén as Mordechai: '[i]f he had been born in Europe [...] I can't tell you that he would be Muret-Sully, but he certainly would become a celebrity with the years' (*ibid.*).⁴⁵ Alluding to the famous French actor, Mounet-Sully in reference to this production further connects the theatrical circuits of the Ottoman Sephardim with the nineteenth-century French stage and emphasizes a certain supremacy of French acting to that of the Sephardim.⁴⁶

⁴³ *Nación Mar*, 1932, 5.

⁴⁴ Original Text: la Žereš de Racín no es del todo la Žeres de las tradiciones populares del judaísmo.

⁴⁵ Original Text: Si él nacia en Evropa [...] no vos digo que el seria Mune-Sully, ma por seguro él sería una celebrítá con los años.

⁴⁶ Mounet-Sully was a famous actor in the Comedie-Francaise. He was invited as part of the French Archaeological School of Athens to perform a French version of *Oedipus Rex* in 1899 in Constantinople. Audiences were so impressed by his performance, physicality and portrayal of the Greek King that they

One final point should be addressed in relation to Cobo's personal history and his rendition of Racine's *Esther*. Cobo worked as a teacher in a Jewish school run by the Alcheih brothers where lessons were primarily given in French (Alexander, *En Este* 29).⁴⁷ Although following certain French models of education, the Alcheih brother's school was a private institution known to have a friendly attitude towards Zionism (Molho *In Memoriam*) and it is likely that Cobo was involved in both French education as well as Zionist activities. Further supporting this notion is the evidence that Cobo sang for events with the Maccabi Circle in Salonica, a pro-Zionist organization which engaged in sporting events as well as theatrical performances, many of which were designed to raise money for local charities. Several of the theatrical performances were translations of French plays including *El casamiento forzado* (1910), *El médico por zorlá* (1913), and *El doctor malgrado él* (1914). In addition to French works, the organization presented still pictures of Jewish history and performed national songs.⁴⁸ As earlier discussions noted, the developing French-Jewish public sphere supported activities which not only assimilated and regenerated Ottoman Sephardim, but which maintained a Jewish specificity. Cobo's dual role within French and Zionist circles indicates a certain conflating of values and how his rendition of *Esther* developed in relation to various interests and alliances. Cobo's appreciation for both French and Jewish values would be passed on to his student,

pulled his coach from the theater back to his hotel (Constantinidis 21). Mounet-Sully is just one example of Ottoman Sephardi knowledge of international performers and their abilities. An article published much earlier, in 1894 in *El Telegraph*, demonstrates how a knowledge of French performance traditions were known within Ottoman communities. This article titled "The Acts of Miss Abot [sic]" describes the work of this performer as well as including pictures which demonstrate her performances. The article describes Miss Abbott as a beautiful girl working in Paris as the 'electric girl' for her ability to generate electricity (*Te* 15 Nov., 1894, 442). The article refers to Annie May Abbott, a performer who was more commonly known as 'The Little Georgia Magnet' or the 'Georgia Electric Girl,' and who became famous in the late 1880s and early 1890s for her magnetic ability. What is particularly interesting about the article is that the date of publication was the state of Ms. Abbott's career, indicating how the Ladino Press was well informed of theatrical activities in the Americas and Europe.

⁴⁷ This school also appears under the name 'Alchech' in an interview with Mairy Angel where she recalls that it was a private elementary school for boys established in the nineteenth century. It is also referred to as Francoallemande or l'Ecole Franco-Allemande as students were taught French and German (Molho *In Memoriam*).

⁴⁸ See reviews from performances: *Ave* 6 Mar., 1912, 2; *Ave* 25 Dec., 1913, 1; and *Ave* 28 Dec., 1913, 1.

Shlomo Reuben [Reuben] Mordehai, who would go on to reconstruct Racine's *Esther* to adhere to his Zionist political aims.

Reuben's *Esther* is the most radical adaptation of Racine's text. Two versions of Reuben's text appeared in Salonica in 1932, one is a version of the text published in Ladino in Latin letters and the other is a small booklet in Ladino Rashi script⁴⁹ entitled *Los Cantes de Ester* [*The Songs of Ester*], which contains full versions of the songs and mere descriptions of the scenes within the play.⁵⁰ According to Tamar Alexander's analysis of the two texts, the full-text was most likely used for the actors and creative team, while the booklet of songs was distributed to audience members at the performance as the front matter of the booklet contains a list of the cast and creative team and the programme for the evening's events (*En Este* 35). It is reasonable to assume that Reuben was aware of Cobo's version of *Esther* and had seen performances of the play as a student at the Alcheih school. In addition, Aharon Hayim worked as a choreographer on both Reuben's 1932 production and on the revival of Cobo's 1935 version of *Ester*, further suggesting that the two practitioners were aware of each other's work (ibid. 30). Hayim and Reuben were both active members in Salonica's Bnei Mizrahi Club, where Reuben ran cultural activities in addition to publishing articles with *La Boz Sionista* [The Zionist voice] (ibid. 28-29; Benbassa and Rodrigue 141).

Reuben's version of *Esther* is significant on several levels, primarily as it reflects further developments of French-Jewish relations within the Ottoman Empire. The initial striking aspect of this adaptation is that the production is classified as an 'original musical,' removing the authority of the French dramatist and the play's association with a French literary canon, as announced in *El Nación*: '[t]his play is an innovation in the Judeo-Spanish theatre and the original music is composed by the self-taught Isac Zion' (19 Feb.,

⁴⁹ Rashi script is a semi-cursive typeface for the Hebrew alphabet, often used for Ottoman Sephardic publications and periodicals.

⁵⁰ Full transcriptions of these versions are published in Tamar and Weich-Shahak.

1932, 3).⁵¹ The same article mentions the dance numbers in the production as also being choreographed by Hayim Aharón, a member of La Juventud Mizrahista [The Young Mizrahi] and director of gymnastics at a local school. By emphasizing the 'innovative' nature of this new production as well as promoting the piece as containing original music by a member of the community, Racine's name becomes much less valuable for this particular production. Such a deliberate avoidance of Racine's name does not similarly equate to a complete neglect of the structure of the French play. As Alexander asserts, '[t]he framework of Racine's play is retained, but its contents have been altered' (*En Este* 51). Structurally, the play follows more or less the linear narrative put forward by Racine, but Reuben's version is significantly shorter. He has removed characters, substantial chorus lines and concentrated the scenes so that the focus is entirely on the character of Esther. In addition, Reuben's version linguistically demonstrates moments of remarkable similarity to Racine's text (ibid 41-45).

Reuben's political impetus for staging *Esther* is further acknowledged in his work with the Beitar branch of the Bnei ha-Mizrahi.⁵² Established in the early 1920s, Beitar operated under the slogan 'The Land of Israel for the People of Israel, according to the Torah of Israel' and advocated mass emigration to Palestine. Beitar had joined with the Bnei Mizrahi religious youth organization in 1925 to form an organization steeped in religious tradition and militant-nationalism, unique to Salonican Jewry (Alexander, *En Este* 31; Benbassa and Rodrigue 141). It was within this organization that Reuben presented his version of *Esther*. In discussing the activities of Beitar, Reuben writes,

My national concept combines fortification of our connection to the traditions of our forefathers with preparation for national militant activism...the Jewish holidays are a good opportunity to perform for the 'Beitar' parents and for the general Jewish public. In addition to athletic

⁵¹ Original Text: Esta obra es una innovación en el teatro judeo-español y la música originala por el simpático otodidacta Ísac Sión.

⁵² Beitar, also spelt Betar, was a revisionist Zionist youth movement.

exercises such as pyramids and torch exhibits, the 'Beitar' youth performed original Jewish and Hebrew plays, among which was the play 'Esther' written by the author of this article, performed on many occasions by Zionist organizations and even translated into Greek. (qtd. in Alexander, *En Este* 31-32)

For Reuben, the performance of *Ester* was an important part of building a strong religious and nationalistic community. Through representing the past as a struggle against assimilation, it confronts the present audience with a narrative of Jewish preservation against forces threatening to dissolve or destroy a distinct ethnic/religious community. As there is no association within this production to the authorship of Racine, the symbolic capital of the French dramatist has been replaced with the ideological-political undercurrents of the Biblical story. When comparing the circumstances of this production to the 1882 translation of Racine and Cobo's adaptation, the significance of Racine's name are seriously reduced in Reuben's piece. In advertisements about Reuben's production, Racine is no longer a desirous selling point of the performance; rather emphasis is on the display of fitness, the principles of Z.H.R. and Jewish heritage.

In addition to Reuben stripping his production of Racine's name, he has also infused the tragedy with elements of melodrama and folk theatre. Alexander argues that his production was more of a 'melodramatic flavour' due to the structure (sharp climaxes), content (a rags to riches narrative) and the 'melodramatic utterances such as "Ahaa" and "Avoy"' combined with the heroine's deep sighs and fainting (*En Este* 47). Unlike Cobo's version of Racine's text, Haman in Reuben's play is devoid of the tragic character traits present in Racine's version. Reuben's character appears more like the stereotyped villains in carnivalesque performances. Whilst Racine develops all of his characters more, Reuben has focused on Ester. As Alexander argues, Reuben's version resembles a folk drama expressing the 'Hebrew nationalistic ideological trends' in Salonica in the 1930s (*En Este* 23).

Dramatic representations of Esther are often connected to notions of the Jewish identity in the diaspora. Purim plays narrate the story of Jews living in foreign contexts, and are thus considered to breathe 'the spirit of the Diaspora' (Masliansky 59). In staging *Esther*, Cobo and Reuben draw connections between aspects in Jewish history and the present tensions faced by the Ottoman Sephardim in retaining their distinct ethnic and cultural identities while being intimately entangled in Western economic and social forces. Cobo and Reuben's productions of *Esther* signify how French theatrical forms impacted on the development of modern Sephardi Theatre; however, while the productions maintain the overall dramaturgical framework of Racine's play, they are cut through by a distinct Ottoman Jewish identity by the application of Ladino, its resonance with traditional folk Purim performances, and its representation through local communal organizations. What emerge are hybrid Ottoman-French productions.

Although Racine's playtext may have originally entered the Sephardic repertoire through AIU schools, by the 1930s productions stripped away the cultural capital of the original translation, redefining the play as a propaganda piece for political Zionism. In so doing, Reuben returns to more traditional depictions of the characters and emphasizes the 'Jewish' rather than the 'French' nature of the piece. As previously discussed, Reuben was a militant Zionist and conceived of *Esther* as an important element of his political activities: immigration to Palestine. Combining the performance of *Esther* with gymnastic events and activities with the militant Zionist organization demonstrates how Reuben intended the story to be read alongside images and patriotic songs proclaiming Sephardic (or Jewish) victory over the pressures of assimilation and acculturation. Such political underpinnings are in direct conflict with the impetus of the original (1882) translation of *Esther* from the French, which advocated a greater awareness of French culture and the power of Racine's *Esther* to emotionally affect audiences. Reuben's adaptation recalls Sanjay Seth's discussion of 'vernacular modernity' in his study of colonial relations in India. As he argues, anti-colonial nationalism put forward the desire to be 'modern but

different' by adopting dominant culture characteristics in national terms: '[i]t was not enough to imitate the colonizer: if the project was simply to become a mirror image of the original, there could be no rationale for the nationalist project' (176-177). *Esther* provided a particularly useful counter-model for Reuben's purposes as it allowed him to draw upon the cultural capital of Racine but adapt the production to suit Ottoman Jewish traditions, language and local politics. Representing the past, in this case a traditional Jewish story, transforms from furthering the 'civilizing mission' of the AIU to challenging the encroachment of French influences and advancing the Zionist agenda.

Reuben's adaptation of *Esther* is not the only example of hybrid Ottoman-French traditions in modern Sephardi Theatre. In her study of theatre at the turn of the twentieth century, Rena Molho discusses the 1929 production of *Musiú Jac El Parisiano Quere Esposar* [*Mister Jac the Parisian Wants to Marry*],⁵³ a one-act satire about the enduring effect of encounters with Europe upon Sephardic identities (Judeo-Spanish). The play addresses cultural dualism through satire in the character of Jac, who, whilst benefiting from a Western education has not abandoned traditional attitudes towards marriage and demands a dowry to marry a modest girl in Constantinople. The play shifts issues of modernity from religious practices to more social issues, demonstrating how even those with western education are not necessarily more moral, socially established, or progressive. As these productions capture, a new national and cultural identity was emerging amongst Ottoman Sephardim based upon their encounters with western education and theatre.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which diverse dramatists within Sephardi communities have articulated and responded to cross-cultural encounters with Western

⁵³ The play was published in *El Jugeton* in Istanbul in 1929 and appears in Elena Romero's anthology (vol.II 1087-1096).

Jews. Fuelled by the presence of Western educational networks, French dramaturgical frameworks and texts gained wide-spread popularity amongst the Sephardim. However, as demonstrated in the examples of Molière and Racine, there was not a perfect 'marrying' of Western frameworks with local traditions. Tensions related to cultural dualism, and the simultaneous exposure to modern and traditional ideologies, created a theatrical landscape consistently reflecting the heterogeneous attitudes of the local communities. As Benbassa argues, modernization efforts had to work with existing traditions rather than supplanting them in order to advance Sephardic communities in the late Ottoman Empire ('The Process' 96). A process of Sephardization reveals a varying degree of resistance to Western powers with a move from adoption to adaptation. However, as demonstrated with Reuben's *Esther*, there was not a clear abandonment of French traditions even in the light of militant Zionism. Such hybridity emphasizes how the experience of cross-cultural encounters in the late Ottoman Empire was a highly-nuanced and contentious terrain which gave rise to the most prolific period of Sephardi Theatre.

As revealed through analysis of these plays, modern Sephardi Theatre cannot be considered as entirely indebted to Western influences and the work of the AIU. Rather, developing theatre practices demonstrate a deliberate integration of 'modern' and 'traditional' forces. The notion of progress in regards to theatrical activities involved upholding the Ladino language and a distinct Ottoman Jewish identity as well as embracing secular plays and foreign dramaturgical traditions. Modern Sephardi Theatre developed through a relational process between these forces and can be seen as a contributing factor to the process of transformation of Ottoman Sephardic society and part of late-nineteenth-century narratives of modernity.

SEPHARDI ZIONIST THEATRE AND THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN TRAGEDIES

The most passionate of modern dramas is certainly the history of Captain Dreyfus.
-*El Avenir* 14 January, 1903

Introduction

In furthering our inquiry into the effects of cross-cultural encounters on Ottoman Sephardic communities and their theatre practices at the turn of the twentieth century, this chapter addresses theatrical responses to the cultural and political influence of European Zionists. While the processes by which Zionism entered and gained popularity amongst Ottoman Jews varied, it is undeniable that the ideological movement brought significant changes to the Sephardim, and greater world Jewry. Within Ottoman Sephardic communities, exposure to and reception of European Zionism collided with a number of other ideological movements. Primarily, during and after the Young Turk Revolution many Sephardim sought to align themselves with the emerging Ottoman body politic and the ideals of Ottomanism (Shaw *History*; Campos, *Ottoman Brothers* 197).¹ Research into the political and cultural struggles amongst the Zionists in the Ottoman Empire often foreground the dialectical relationship between them and the AIU supporters (see Molho, 'The Zionist'; Benbassa and Rodrigue). As Benbassa and Rodrigue assert in *Sephardi Jewry*, Jewish nationalism was a 'facet of Westernization'

¹ It is important to note that Zionists were not the only political organization operating in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. For instance, there were sharp intra-communal divides amongst those who supported the Young Turks, the Worker's Federation and the Zionist campaign (Ramsaur 66). Many Ottoman Sephardim contributed to the Committee of Union and Progress. Established in 1878, the Committee would have significance influence in the Ottoman Empire after the 1908 revolution (Hanioglu, *Jews* 519). Furthermore, as Molho notes, in addition to the AIU, Zionist groups conflicted with the socialist movement within the Ottoman Empire ('Zionist Movement' 173).

manifesting through various means throughout the Ottoman lands during the second half of the nineteenth century that generated a 'war' between Zionist supporters and the AIU which carried on into the twentieth century (116-124).

As argued previously, Sephardi Theatre was not only a mode of cultural production, but a site wherein power relations could be displayed or subverted. One place where power struggles can be clearly observed is between the network of AIU schools with their corresponding organizations and the emerging Zionist movement in the late nineteenth century. Zionist societies were able to build upon the growing theatre culture advanced by the AIU, creating a new form of theatrical productions that allowed them to critique and diminish the authority of the semi-colonial institution, but was at the same time dependent upon it. In addition to the French Jews and the work of the AIU, encounters with Zionist ideology made a significant impact on Ottoman Jewry and modern Sephardi Theatre. The significance of this encounter can be demonstrated in part through Olga Borovaya's periodization of 1908 till the early 1920s as 'theatre for propaganda' due to the significant role the Zionist organizations had in producing theatre during those years (*Modern Ladino* 199). Before 1908, Zionist publications and organizations operated under strict censorship laws, but when restrictions were eased following the Young Turk revolution, European Zionists were able to openly visit Ottoman Jewish communities and local Zionist activities became more prevalent (Rodrigue, *French Jews* 126; Molho, 'The Zionist' 169). Nonetheless, there were a number of productions taking place prior to 1908 wherein we can identify the aims of Zionism beginning to take hold. This chapter begins by addressing Zionist-influenced productions pre-1908 and their ongoing contributions to modern Sephardi Theatre throughout the early twentieth century. Through examining these productions, this chapter highlights the ways that cultural and national identities which materialized on Ottoman Sephardi stages through Zionist-productions can be examined through a relational approach. In other words, this chapter demonstrates how the performances

were shaped through the particular socio-historical circumstances that positioned the Zionists in opposition to the AIU.

One particularly noteworthy aspect of the emerging Zionist theatrical repertoire was an interest in representing the past.² Such plays include dramatizations of the Medieval Spanish Jew, Don Abravanel, the Macabees, the Inquisition and the life of the *conversos*, and dramatizing recent events in France, Germany and Russia. In part, the popularity of representing international events demonstrates an important development in the dramaturgical focus of Sephardi Theatre. In addition, these plays demonstrate the perceived importance and interest Zionists had for representing the past in order to further their political aspirations. As Freddie Rokem reminds us, 'theatrical performances of and about history reflect complex ideological issues concerning deeply rooted national identities and subjectivities and power structures and can in some cases be seen as a willful resistance to and critique of the established or hegemonic, sometimes even stereotypical, perceptions of the past' (*Performing* 8). Part of what this chapter aims to address is why and to what effect representing the past, particularly the recent past, had for Zionist organizations and Ottoman Jewry. Therefore, this chapter considers how encounters with Zionists along with increasing contact with European Jewry, influenced modern Sephardi Theatre and the extent to which dramatizing the past contributed to new affiliations, alliances and national identities.

Although Zionism was intensifying throughout the mid-nineteenth century, the Dreyfus Affair in 1894 served as a moment of crystallization for nationalists to rally against advocates of European assimilation. Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish Captain in the French military and, during a period marked by increased anti-semitism, he was accused

² The parameters of the 'Zionist theatrical repertoire' and 'Ottoman Zionist theatre' are varied and my usage of these terms is not intended to reduce the scope of texts and productions to those who conform to narrowly-defined political objectives. In fact, Ottoman Zionist organizations often staged translations of French texts, such as a staging of Molière's *Doctor Despite Himself* by the Zionist Society Kadima in Salonica (*Pue* 15 May 1915, 2). Rather, my terminology is intended to signify productions produced by Zionist organizations or written by Zionist playwrights as oppose to productions sponsored by the AIU or socialist organizations.

of espionage and sharing military secrets with the Germans. While many historians attest to the critical role the affair played in political Zionism,³ scholars have overlooked the explicitly performative way in which the historical event played out in the Ladino press and on the stage. Reportage within the Zionist Ladino press demonstrates a dramaturgical framing of the international scandal, and more precisely, a view of the event as implicitly tragic. A dramatic framing for contemporary 'tragic' events extended to include similar contemporary situations of racism and violence across Europe and Asia such as the pogroms in Russia and discrimination against Jews in Germany. While the Zionists publicly challenged the curriculum and orientation of AIU schools and periodicals, a perhaps more subtle method of subversion took place on the Sephardi stage. Dramatic representations of the Dreyfus Affair in the Ottoman Empire blur living memory with fictional artifice and signify a new mode of production upon the Sephardi stage in response to cultural and political tensions at the turn of the twentieth century. In part, Sephardic Zionist playwrights drew upon the Dreyfus Affair as a way of resisting both Jewish assimilation into French culture and the hegemony of French theatrical forms.

Nevertheless, the Zionist playwrights were subject to a specific social context in which French education had proved to be economically and socially desirable.⁴ Furthermore, many Zionist playwrights (and editors of Zionist periodicals) had been educated in AIU or foreign schools.⁵ While France was frequently lambasted in the Zionist press and on stage, Sephardic nationalistic organizations continued to produce and perform translations of French and European works. In fact, several European plays such as *Ghetto* by the Dutch dramatist Herman Heijermans and *Israel* by the French playwright Henry Bernstein ironically utilize foreign works to oppose assimilation into

³ See Wein 232-237; Kuzar 5-6; Bensimon 142-143; M. Stanislawski 11-14, 69-73.

⁴ Rodrigue notes the work of the AIU in Ottoman Jewish communities with the economic interests of the Sephardim 'lay certainly in the overall Western presence, and increased trade with Europe led to considerable upward social mobility in major Jewish centers such as Salonica, Istanbul and Izmir' ('The Ottoman Diaspora' 875; also see *Images*).

⁵ For instance, Jac Loria, author of *Dreyfus* was a teacher for the AIU. Borovaya offers useful biographical details for major playwrights and journalists in *Modern Ladino*, noting for instance how the Zionist-periodical editor David Florentine was educated at the first AIU school in Salonica (98).

European nations. In this sense, Zionist theatre amongst the Ottoman Sephardim cannot be considered as an imported form of theatrical traditions, but as developing in relation to the particular theatrical public spheres of the late nineteenth century.

The case of Alfred Dreyfus serves as our primary case study as it was one of the most discussed international events and inspired several theatrical adaptations within Ottoman Zionist circles. An overview of the affair and the wealth of cultural products circulated in relation to the events will be followed by an analysis of Jac Loria's playtext, *Dreyfus*. In order to gain a greater understanding of how these performances were situated within the community, the latter part of this chapter provides an overview of subsequent Zionist-produced productions that reveal a similar interest in dramatizing contemporary accounts of violence or racism. This chapter concludes by considering the value of representing the recent past through a predominantly tragic framework for the Ottoman Zionist and its significance in the development of modern Sephardi Theatre.

Overview of the Dreyfus Affair

The historical events of the Dreyfus Affair include a series of investigations, cover-ups, suicides, felonies, and demonstrations by firmly opposed parties which French studies historian Leslie Dreffer has referred to as a 'national hysteria' (3). Events were set in motion in 1894 with the discovery of a letter later to be known as the *bordereau* by a French spy, Marie Bastian, which revealed that a member of the French army had been trading military secrets with the Germans. Captain Alfred Dreyfus became the prime suspect of the act due in part to his position as a *stagiaire*, an officer in training who may have had access to some of the materials discussed in the *bordereau*, in addition to the perceived similarities between Dreyfus' handwriting and that of the letter. However, Dreyfus was also a Jew at a moment in French history when anti-semitism was a growing force amongst French citizens. The late 1880s and early 1890s saw a tremendous rise of anti-semitic literature as part of a reaction against the perceived association between Jews

and the Germany, evident most notably in the influential publication of *La France Juive* by Edouard Drumont, which professed how Jews were the cause of every disaster and defeat of France (Johnson 6). Under the orchestration of graphologist Major Marquis Mercier Du Paty, Dreyfus was brought before an inspection team where he was asked to write a letter which resembled in content the message dictated in the bordereau. Upon assessing the similarity of the handwriting, Du Paty accused Dreyfus of authoring the treasonous letter and arrested him. Dreyfus was unanimously convicted of treason on 22 December 1894 and humiliated through a public ceremony stripping him of his army rank on 5 January. Subsequently, he was sentenced to penal servitude on Devil's Island off the coast of Guiana.

Even with Dreyfus out of the country suspicion began to build amongst French military officials over the lack of substantial evidence convicting Dreyfus. In 1896 the case was further complicated by the discovery of another document known as the *petit-bleu*. Major Georges Picquart came into possession of the document, taken from the German military attaché in Paris, Colonel von Schwartzkoppen. The letter was addressed to Major Walsin Esterhazy, a French officer and upon comparing the handwriting of this document to that of the bordereau, Picquart came to believe that Dreyfus and Esterhazy were accomplices (Derfler 2). However, once Picquart compared the *bordereau* to the *petit-bleu* he determined that they were both the handwriting of Esterhazy. When he began raising concerns to the chief-of-staff he was silenced and relocated to North Africa. While Picquart's actions would eventually lead to him being dismissed from French politics, he became a symbol of justice for the Ottoman Sephardim, often presented alongside Dreyfus and Zola as three champions of truth and justice.

Concurrently, Dreyfus' brother Mathieu learned of Esterhazy's guilt and requested the case to be reopened and Esterhazy tried. In January 1897 Esterhazy was tried and found innocent, creating a public outcry from both sides of the debate. Emile Zola's now famous letter to the President of the Republic (*J'accuse*) condemned the verdict and

members of the General Staff. Following the publication of *J'accuse*, Zola was tried and found guilty of libel and Picquart was removed from the army. In 1898, Picquart, as a private citizen, sent the recently appointed Minister of War a letter reiterating Dreyfus' innocence and accusing the minister of relying on forged documents. Lieutenant-Colonel Henry, who had been forging documents to prove Dreyfus was the traitor since 1896, was arrested by Cavaignac and committed suicide in prison. Meanwhile, Esterhazy fled to England and confessed to writing the bordereau. These events set in motion further actions by the anti-Dreyfusards and Dreyfusards regarding the re-opening of the case.

On August 7 1899, the Dreyfusards succeeded in having the case re-opened, but Dreyfus was convicted of treason on 11 September. A month later the chamber voted against reopening the case but, in granting amnesty to all those involved, Dreyfus was allowed to return from Devil's Island. It wasn't until 1906 that the original 1899 verdict would be reversed with Dreyfus being declared innocent and reinstated into the army while Esterhazy was found guilty of treason.

Dreyfus Narratives in the Ladino Press and Cultural Products

Renditions of the history of Dreyfus were widely circulated throughout the Ottoman Empire through daily articles, poems, playtexts, dialogues, his autobiography and a romance novel. The relationship between representations of the Dreyfus Affair in the press and additional cultural products demonstrate the interplay between these sources in constructing a particular image of Dreyfus and his position as an assimilated Jew in Europe.

The Press

In 1897, *El Avenir* was founded by the militant Zionist, David Florentin, who immediately began reporting on the Affair in weekly publications.⁶ Borovaya notes that

⁶ *El Avenir* was the official publication of Kadima, a political youth club. The paper was founded in 1897 by Moshe Aaron Mallah and David Florentin and continued to appear until 1916 first as a weekly and then,

the emergence of *El Avenir* created a 'commercial and ideological rival' for Francophile journals such as *La Epoka* and *Le Journal de Salonique* (*Modern Ladino* 107).⁷ In fact, tensions between the Francophile and Zionist press began with the Dreyfus Affair, as Joseph Nehama remarks: the 'Dreyfus Affair awoke in Salonicans a passion for reading and led to a rapid development of the local press. Before 1895, aside from the official Turkish periodical, there was only one weekly. After the first debates around the famous Affair had started, periodicals began to mushroom' (185). *El Avenir* is a unique source of developing political and social movements within Salonica as it was one of the few Zionist-oriented Ladino periodicals operating before the Young Turk revolution and was not subject to the same imperial censorship as other Ottoman sources.⁸

El Avenir was unquestioning towards Dreyfus' innocence, constructing him as a martyr in modern times: '[f]inally! Perhaps the hour of deliverance is coming. [...] we will be able to feel the proper words and we will know the just suffering that this martyr stands for, having been born a Jew and having wanted to enter a career that he was not entirely allowed' (Ave 4 May, 1898, 3).⁹ Significant in this extract is the classification of Dreyfus as a 'martyr,' a term that was repeatedly used within the press. This vocabulary choice suggests that Dreyfus was beginning to be characterized within a religious, or even mythical, tradition. In discussing the creation of myth within communities, Jean-Luc Nancy states that it occurs when speech 'takes on a whole series of values that amplify, fill, and ennoble this speech, giving it the dimensions of a narrative of origin and an

after 1908, as a daily. In 1909 it began receiving funding from the Zionist Organization (Borovaya, *Modern Ladino* 100). Florentin was active in Zionist political activities and journalism serving as editor for several periodicals including *La Tribuna Libera*, *La Aksyon Zyonista*, *La Renasensya Djudia*, *La Boz del Pueblo*, *La Vara*, *El Punchon* and *L'Oriental* and as vice president of the Makabi Club and headed the Education Committee of Salonica (ibid.).

⁷ For more on the development of the Ladino press (and its connection to wider cultural and social trends) see Kerem 'The Europeanization' and 'The Influence,' Borovaya *Modern Ladino*, and 'The Serialized Novel,' S. Stein *Making Jews* and 'Creating.'

⁸ Borovaya has argued that while the Ottoman authorities had 'no special provisions for minorities,' the Sephardi press was censored by rabbinic authorities. However, the dwindling power of the rabbinate meant that the rabbis could not close periodicals licensed by the state and Ottoman authorities rarely interfered with Sephardi publications unless asked to by the rabbis (*Modern Ladino* 60).

⁹ Original Text: Enfin! Pares que la ora de_la delivransa ya se esta serkando. [...] poedrimos sentir sus propyas palabras y sabremos y gusto las sufriensas que este marteryo somporto por aver nasido Judio y kizado entrar en una kariera que no poedia enteramente.

explanation of destinies' (48). The classification of Dreyfus as a martyr transforms the historical event into a narrative associated with the histories and destinies of the Jewish people.

While the martyr terminology and the binary degree to which justice and evil is constructed in the press resonate with a mytho-religious lexicology, the representations of the historical events were also presented within a dramaturgical framework. As published in *El Avenir*, the Dreyfus Affair is a modern day tragedy of assimilation:

The truth, the great tragic story of Dreyfus [...] is not of a ordinary individual [...] This story comes to all French Jews, and Dreyfus is no more than the chosen victim of fate to suffer for them all. The French Jews were the first to legally, over one hundred years ago, receive equal rights with conservative Christians, to better profit from those social and political rights, they believed they must abandon everything that was an effort and characteristic of their race, these Jews were dedicated to this. In less than a century within Italy and France they sacrificed this Jewish sentiment, and also the recollection of the glorious history of their martyred forefathers [*padres-martirios*] that were so holy and glorious, because they wanted to be French and nothing else. But they have forgotten the existence of an indestructible and marvelous force [...] against this secret force and for this tragic story they suffer and must overcome. This is the tragic story of Alfred Dreyfus. (11 May, 1898, 9)¹⁰

As presented here, the historical events of the affair are discussed as tragic, with Dreyfus at the centre of a plot involving the tragic downfall of the Jews who have forgotten their past and assimilated into French society. In this tragic vision of the affair, Jews are

¹⁰ Original Text: La vera, la grande kolpa trájika de Dreyfus [...] no es de natura individual [...] Esta kolpa revini a todos los Judios Franzes, y Dreyfus no es mas que la viktima eskojeda de la suerte para que sufra por todos ellos. Los Judios Franzes fueron los primeros que legalmente antes sien anyos resivieron todas las igualdades con sus konsevkadenes krestyanos por mejor profitar de estos derechos sosiales y politikos, ellos kreaeron dever abandonar todo aquello que les dava empenio y karakter de su rasa, estos Judios fueron hasta la abnegasion de ellos mismos. En menos de en siglo sakrifiksiaron ellos sovre Italano dela Franses sea esta el sentimiento Judaiko, y mizmo esta el rekodramiento de_la gloryoza historia de sus padres-martirios echaron lo mas santo y gloryozo porke kezieron devener y ser solamente Franzes y nada mas. Ma estos se olvidaron que egziste una fuersa indestruavle y maravilozza [...] kontra esta fuersa sekreta y por esta kolpa trájika ellos sufren y deven suvir. Esta es la kolpa trájika de Alfred Dreyfus.

depicted in opposition to the French, and more broadly, European assimilation.¹¹ *El Avenir* is also linking the false accusations of Dreyfus to anti-semitic sentiments within the French military through reference to his career. Such a position challenges the work being conducted by the AIU as discussed in the previous chapter, which strove to civilize Sephardic Jews for careers in European posts.

Francophile periodicals had a somewhat different presentation of the Affair. Sam Levy, editor of *La Epoka* [The Era], *Le Journal de Salonique*, and *Le Rayon* [The Ray] continued in his unwavering support of France throughout the affair. Through one article in 1898 entitled 'The Honorable Captain Dreyfus,' he informed readers that the 'international and even the French press' are in support of Dreyfus, calling him 'Captain' as opposed to 'traitor' (9 Mar. 1898, 1 qtd. in Borovaya, *Modern Ladino* 118). As Borovaya remarks, the reality of the situation in France was misrepresented in Levy's account in favor of depicting the situation in a more favorable light (ibid.). There is evidence of a contrast developing here between the tragic framework with which the Zionist press represented the affair and that of the AIU-sponsored periodicals. Contrasting constructions of the Dreyfus Affair within Zionist and Francophile periodicals was part of larger ideological debates between these two movements in the Ottoman Empire. Levy and other proponents of French universalism repeatedly utilized the press to attack Zionist ideology. For instance, Levy's journal *El Luzero* published a serialized article 'I am an Anti-Zionist' in which each issue included criticism and ridicules of the Zionist movement (29 July-12 Aug. 1905 qtd. in Borovaya, *Modern Ladino* 111). Similarly, an article in the Francophile journal *El Amigo del Pueblo* entitled 'Anti-Semitism in France' takes on a very optimistic note in the light of rising tensions in

¹¹ The affair was equally significant in influencing European Zionism; Theodore Herzl and Max Nordau were both motivated to advance political Zionist ideology following their reportage on the Dreyfus Affair. One avenue which they both sought in order to expose incidents of anti-semitism to world Jewry was through dramatic works. Nordau would also publish an article in Graecia about the Salonican Jews in 1914. The article entitled 'Les Israélites de Salonique' discusses the Sephardim's reservation about the Greek presence in the city and argued that it was possible for both groups to live in harmony. Nordau's article was reprinted in the Salonican newspaper *Macedonia* 11 January, 1914 (Najari qtd. in Molho, 'The Zionist' 178).

France, with the editor asserting that 'I do not feel that there is any movement against our nation' (1 May 1894, 4). The Dreyfus Affair thus marks an important point of confrontation within the Ottoman Sephardic community where both Zionist and assimilationists rallied around in order to advance their own political aims.

Novels

In addition to the weekly articles related to Dreyfus in the press, his autobiography, *Five Years of My Life*, was translated into Ladino and published in 1901. *El Avenir* advertised the book with much interest on 22 May 1901,

'Five Years of my Life' is of course the most passionate story that has been written, accounting in a very admirable manner some painful details of the sad affair that we all know [...] It could become the greatest work of modern literature in the sense that it can show what is capable with the willingness of a powerful, clean conscience and the spirit of solidarity. (221)¹²

Particularly of interest within this advertisement for the autobiography is the reference to Dreyfus' work as a monumental achievement in modern literature. For the editors of *El Avenir*, the triumph of his book is the overarching message, promoting a moral and ethical lifestyle and dedication to family and one's co-religionists. The historical story of Dreyfus is promoted as a model of Jewish solidarity and triumph, thus resonating as a modern day story of Esther, through its demonstration of achievement over adversity.¹³

During the same year, Elie S. Arditti published *Dreyfus or A Romance of an Innocent*. In the introduction, Arditti notes how his current project is much more delicate as it is the truth and therefore of interest to the entire population: '[i]n effect, who is not

¹² Original Text: "Cinco anyos de mi vida" es por seguro la mas pasyonante estorya que si tiene eskrito; ella konta de una manera veramente admirable algunos deloryozos detalyos del triste echo ke todos konosemos; es el grito de dolor que sale foryozo del korason del dezgrasyado Alfred Dreyfus enterado bivo en la izla del Diablo; es poaede ser el kapo-lavoro de la literatora moderna, en este senso que ella mostra lo que poaeden la fuersa de velontad de una konsensya limpya y el espreto de solidaredad.

¹³ For more on Dreyfus's autobiography see Eva Belén Rodríguez Ramírez's transcription and analysis *Cinco Años de Mi Vida*.

passionately excited about the Dreyfus Affair? Who does not shed a few tears of compassion for the poor martyr, unjustly imprisoned on Devil's Island?' (3).¹⁴ With the case of Arditti, the lines between history and fantasy continue to be interwoven, as he claims to be narrating the 'truth' of the Affair through collaborating with an eye witness to the 'terrible drama' (9). Both publications from 1901 highlight the ways in which the community was constructing the Affair within popular discourse and the importance given to first-person accounts of the historical event and resonate with the press in sharing a sense of the incident as a modern-day tragedy.

Poetry

One of the most frequent cultural products in circulation regarding Dreyfus were poems printed in the Ladino press. The repeated publication of poems indicates that Dreyfus was a popular topic for creative expression. Similar themes of martyrdom are noticeable in these works along with Biblical images and association of the affair within the greater context of anti-semitism. For instance, in a poem entitled 'Dreyfus and his Defendants' published in 1898: '[i]f Dreyfus would believe in Saint Paul / He wouldn't be on Devil's Island today / But like him are the children of Israel / He was sacrificed' (*Ave* 25 May, 1898, 7).¹⁵ Another poem, written by a professor in Bulgaria,¹⁶ evokes language that similarly connects the situation of Dreyfus to the history of Jewish suffering: '[i]n stenching prisons I will be in pain / In foreign and savage lands / In iron chains I will suffer there / As you will see, fight my sad friend' (*Ave* 17 Aug., 1898, 7).¹⁷ Both of these poems demonstrate how even before the publication of any Dreyfus plays, the story was being

¹⁴ El efeto kiene no si entereso vivamente al pasionant echo Dreyfus? Kien no viertio algunas lagrimas de kompasion por el povero marterio enserado injusta mente al izla del diablo?

¹⁵ Original Text: Si Dreyfus kreaeva en Santo Paulo / Nun era oy en la isla del diablo / Ma komo el era de ijos de Ishral / Fue sakrifikado [...]

¹⁶ Bulgaria was a hotbed for Zionist activities after 1878 when the country became a self-governing state, with centers in Salonica and Istanbul only developing in the final decade of the nineteenth century (Benbassa and Rodrigue 118). It is therefore not a coincidence that the first dramatization of Dreyfus and poems were in circulation in Bulgaria before appearing in other Ottoman cities.

¹⁷ Original Text: En preziones leshanás yo penare / En tier ajen a y salvaje / En kadenas de fyero ay yo sufrire / En que veas, luchae mi triste emaje

utilized within the community (in the Zionist press) as not only an important political event, but also one that resonated within Jewish religious and folklore traditions.

Within both the press and the dramatic text we see the fusion of history with a religious consciousness in the figure of Dreyfus. It is significant to include both the press and the theatre as cultural products advancing this notion of Dreyfus as a martyr and symbolic figure of the community, for both sources contribute to the way in which the community imagined itself and its relation to others. Benedict Anderson discusses the importance of print-capitalism in contributing to the imagined solidarity of a community through the shared act of reading and for the Ottoman Sephardim; print culture played a central role in the development of the community, not only through shared readership, but also in the transmission of knowledge (33-36). The representation of Dreyfus, framed within a particular manner repeatedly perpetuated the imagined linkage between his historical character and his symbolic significance. Evoking biblical themes within the cultural products was utilized by the Zionists to 'reinforce the Zionist historiosophic view of Jewish history, which tried to build a bridge of continuity between the ancient past and the Utopia that was projected onto the immediate present as a need to act, to build, and to transform the marginal Jew into a Jewish protagonist' (Rokem, 'Hebrew Theatre' 70-71). Through the repeated representations of Dreyfus he became established as a canonical figure within the Sephardi repertoire advancing the linkage between the past and future significance of the affair. The dramaturgical framing of the Dreyfus Affair within the press would be reflected in the construction of the theatrical performances.

Dramatic Dialogues

Dreyfus as a martyr or defender of the Jews is illustrated in a dramatic dialogue printed in *El Avenir* in 1898. The piece is entitled 'The Best Servant of the Jews' and involves two characters who are in a salon; the stage directions at the start dictate that they are naturally going to talk about 'the event' (*Ave* 28 Dec., 1898, 4). Reference here to the Dreyfus

Affair as 'the event' illustrates the popularity and shared understanding of the significance of the Dreyfus Affair in Ottoman Sephardic social life. Within the dialogue two characters proceed to discuss whether a person, Dromon (דֵרֹמֹן), is anti-semitic. One character suggests that Dromon is the defender of the Jews, and with little prompting continues to elaborate on the state of Judaism in France. Following the French Revolution, the character claims, Jews had the same rights as a French subject and married infidels, ate pork and other *treif* (non-Kosher) food, and abandoned their religion. However, the character declares that Dromon renounced his co-religionists and because of this was jaded by the work of the AIU. This aspect of the dialogue is particularly significant as it emphasizes that the AIU is a force that will weaken Jewish cultural and religious identities. The dialogue concludes with the second character being won over by the arguments, reaching the conclusion that Dromon is a Jewish hero. In order to clarify any misunderstanding, a footnote for this dialogue reads that Dromon is Dreyfus, thus ensuring that no reader misses the important connection between the dialogue and the reality of anti-semitism in France and with the AIU.

'The Best Servant of the Jews' demonstrates how the Zionist press connected French attitudes towards Jews with modernizing institutions in the Ottoman Empire. While the Dreyfus Affair was a moment of crystallization for the Ottoman Zionist as a symbol of the failures of European assimilation, it was also a way in which the political movement could critique the work of the AIU within local communities. Concurrent to these political strategies was a flowering of cultural products depicting Dreyfus as a sympathetic 'defender' of Judaism against a sea of rising animosity. Repeated references to Dreyfus as a martyr and as the heroic protagonist in a tragedy create a particular narrative that operates in direct relation to the theatrical playtexts.

Dramatic Representations

When the first performance of *Dreyfus* took place in 1899, the outcome of the affair had yet to be resolved as Dreyfus was still awaiting reversal of his sentence and Esterhazy was not yet held accountable for treason. Therefore, this initial production was dramatizing an event that was simultaneously being reported in the news, and thereby marks a departure from previous representations of the past which were depicting more temporally distant events. *Dreyfus* productions integrated historical facts in fictional performances in a manner which Rokem calls 'ontological hybridity' (191). In *Performing History*, Rokem differentiates between the ontological spheres of performance, wherein '[p]erformances about a specific historical past contain an added ontological dimension compared to the so-called fictional performances, also integrating historical "facts" into the fictional world' (ibid.). Implied within Rokem's argument is a type of distance between the historical past and the present performance which is diminished within the space of performance. However, within *Dreyfus*, the temporal distance is significantly less. Representations of the *Dreyfus* Affair maintain a dialectical relationship with the press, each relying on the other for constructing mythical and dramatic interpretations of recent historical happenings. The relationship between representations of the recent past and the growing political activities of the Zionist movement raises questions regarding the purpose and effect Sephardic dramatist sought to achieve through these performances throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Before examining in detail Loria's playtext of *Dreyfus*, it is useful to consider the scope of *Dreyfus* theatrical productions in circulation during this period.

From 1899 till 1923, several productions of the *Dreyfus* Affair were performed with a variety of titles including: *Dreyfus*, *Alfred Dreyfus*, *Capitán Drayfus*, *El Capitán Dreyfus*, *El Martirio de la Isla del Diablo* (*The Martyr of Devil's Island*), *El Hecho*

Dreyfus (The Dreyfus Affair), and *El Triunfo de Justicia (The Triumph of Justice)*.¹⁸

The earliest known production of this topic is from Bulgaria in 1899, seven years before Dreyfus returned from Devil's Island and his charges for treason were dropped. Information regarding this initial performance is sparse, although there is evidence which suggests the same production was performed prior to 1926 by the theatre group Rafael Farin in Shumen, Bulgaria (Romero, *El Teatro* vI 511). In her index of Sephardi plays, Elena Romero identifies three distinct dramatic versions of the Dreyfus Affair by Aharón Menahem, Yosef Papo, and Jacques (Jac) Loria (*El Teatro* vI 501).¹⁹ Loria's version is the only manuscript currently available for analysis.

Jac Loria's *Dreyfus*

Loria's version, appearing under the title *Alfred Dreyfus, Capitán Drayfus*, and *El Capitán Dreyfus*, was published around the end of 1902 or early 1903 in Sofia, Bulgaria. As indicated in the press, the first performance took place in Bulgaria, and after 1909 the play was staged in other Ottoman cities such as Constantinople, Salonica, Izmir and Costan (Appendix E). A report on the publication of the playtext appears in *El Avenir* from 1903,

The most passionate of the modern dramas is about the history of Captain Dreyfus. At this time there are many books about this moving drama, but in Judeo-Spanish there has been very little. Today we have the pleasure to announce to our readers that Senor Jac Loria, author of *Los misterios de Pera* and other romances, brings a drama in Judeo-Spanish where the details are accounted in great detail and with great mastery over the entire conspiracy that the enemies of Dreyfus were conducting against him. (*Ave*, 14 Jan., 1903, 11)²⁰

¹⁸ See Appendix E for a complete list of these productions.

¹⁹ Romero notes how M. Molho has argued that a version of the Dreyfus Affair was written by Henry Bernstein, although this has not been able to be confirmed (*El Teatro* vI 515).

²⁰ Original Text: El más pasionante de los dramas modernos es por seguro la historia del capitán Dreyfus. Fin agora tienen salido muchos libros sobre este ésmoviente drama, ma en judeo-español non habén salido que muy pocos. Hoy tenemos el plaçer de anunciar a nuestros lectores que Se. Jac Loria, autor de *Los*

By providing a drama in Ladino, Loria is providing access to the historical event to members of the community who have perhaps not been educated in foreign language schools.

As Borovaya notes, Loria's personal life was also filled with accusations of espionage, double identity, and public denunciations (*Modern Ladino* 275). In addition to serving as a teacher of an AIU school in Tatar Basary, later becoming the director, Loria also wrote novels and plays in Ladino, Turkish, and French. Some of his most popular publications included *The Mysteries of Pera* (1897), *The Imperial Treasure of the Topkapi Serail* (1909), and *The Bloody Matzah*. Sources regarding the public smearing of Loria's name are mixed, some claiming he secretly joined the Zionist movement and was therefore dismissed from his post with the AIU, while a report from the journalist Sam Levy states that Loria was unjustly accused of misconduct including writing novels set in exotic locations and serving as a spy (ibid.). Insulted by the false accusations, Loria tried to resign from the AIU but instead was moved to the school in Salonica, where he was eventually fired in 1908. He wrote letters to *Le Journal de Salonique* claiming he had been falsely accused and blaming the journal's editors for causing the misunderstanding (ibid.). Loria's production of *Dreyfus* was written and performed before Levy wrote in the press about the false accusations; however, based on the close proximity of the accusations and public outcry, Loria was already engaged in Zionist activities although still working for the AIU school when writing the play.

An examination of Loria's *Dreyfus* reveals the relationship of fact and artifice within the text and performance in representing recent history. Loria's version of the Dreyfus Affair follows the historical events chronologically for five years: from the accusations of the French Ministry of War in 1894, his imprisonment on Devil's Island,

misterios de Pera y otros romanzos, viene de poner un drama en lingua judeo española ande son contados detalladamente i kon gran maestría todos los complotos ke los enemigos de Dreyfus hicieron por depederlo.

and the telegram he received in 1899 informing him that the French government would reconsider his case. The drama centers on the actions and prejudices of Major Farbes, whose character appears as a combination of historical figures responsible for the decisions at the Ministry of War, most closely resembling Major Henry and Colonel Fabre. As mentioned, one of Dreyfus's superiors, Fabre, had a history of disapproving the Jewish Captain's service in the French military, filing a report in 1893 which accused Dreyfus of being 'an incomplete officer [...] Very intelligent and gifted, but pretentious and not fulfilling - from the point of view of character, integrity, and manner of service' (qtd. Burns 20). In addition, Fabre is noted as having taken part in the investigation and accusations against Dreyfus, being the first to suggest that the handwriting of Alfred Dreyfus could be compared to that of the *bordereau* (ibid., 24). Recalling the events of the affair, Major Henry also played a major role in the accusations of Dreyfus during the course of the affair and fabricating false evidence. He was in charge of the counterespionage unit in the Statistical Section of the French War Office, which first received the *bordereau* in 1894 (Derfler 1). Henry gave testimony at Dreyfus' 1894 trial, assuring the judge that he was not able to provide the name of his informant but that he could swear on record that Dreyfus was the traitor (Burns 137; Derfler 89). As mentioned earlier, when it looked as though there was not sufficient proof to condemn Dreyfus, Major Henry took it upon himself to fabricate false evidence which would lead to Dreyfus being identified as the traitor. He was also one of the officers who disagreed with the cases' initial handwriting expert, and called upon Alphonse Bertillon, a known anti-semitic and head of the criminal records office to reevaluate the previous verdict. Bertillon claimed to apply scientific accuracy to obtain "indisputable proof" of Dreyfus's guilt (Derfler 78). Loria's character of Major Fabres is represented as a combination of these two figures; for instance, he is characterized in the playtext as first accusing Dreyfus, orchestrating the handwriting investigation and later committing suicide. By combining the figures of Colonel Fabre and Major Henry, Loria superseded historical accuracy to

create a character that comes across as an evil mastermind without remorse. Loria's Fabres is depicted as a ring-master, plotting and manipulating the series of events to ultimately convict and sentence Dreyfus as a traitor.

Loria himself notes the discrepancy between the historical figures and his dramatic character in the opening of his playtext as he writes, '[t]he author felt obliged to change some names,' he states, 'but the readers will be able to guess the real ones' (2). Out of a cast of twelve characters, seven are given historically accurate names,²¹ although Major Fabres is a combination of Fabre and Henry and the Minister is a combination of General Mercier and General Billot based upon the years they were respectively in office and the action in the play. According to Loria's opening statement, readers and audiences would have been familiar with both the characters and major plot points of the historical event and therefore he expected audiences to understand in part the discrepancies between fact and artifice. The choices in the narrative construction attest to how Loria engaged in a subjective ordering of facts and characterization.

Dramatic Themes and Theatrical Styles

Two major themes can be identified within Loria's dramatization of the Dreyfus Affair: anti-semitism and moral redemption. Loria includes powerful anti-semitic remarks presented only sparsely in the press. As the character Fabres proclaims, '[w]ho is more capable of betraying his motherland than a Jew?' and in justifying his decision to blame Dreyfus for his acts of treason, '[w]ho deserves to be dishonored, arrested, condemned, hated by God and people, despised by the entire humanity? Dreyfus, Dreyfus, Dreyfus!!!' (Act I, Scene VI). In addition to dramatizing racism, Loria reveals Fabres' plot to be soaked in moral injustice:

²¹ Cast of characters includes: Captain Dreyfus, Major Fabres, Major Esterhazy, Colonel Picquart, Colonel Rishardon, Cretinion, Chief of Police, Minister, General Mons, Lawyer Demange, Lucie Dreyfus and Bellboy.

Before Major Fabres' head falls off, let hundreds or thousands of other heads fall off! [...] In order to keep it away from me, I must show it a criminal [sic], even if he is innocent, and say, "Here is the criminal. This is the culprit! This is the scoundrel who betrayed his motherland! Seize him! Kill him! Bury him!..." (Act I, Scene VI)

Fabres' depiction within the theatrical narrative leaves little room for ambiguity.

Although Loria's *Dreyfus* draws upon actual events, the style of performance as indicated through stage directions and dialogue is more evocative of commedia dell'arte, shadow puppet traditions and melodrama. The significance of these performance styles points to developments in the mode of presentation of modern Sephardi Theatre, ongoing influences from international theatre circuits, and the ways in which local playwrights continued to respond to the forces of modernization within the Empire. There are a few indicators in Loria's text that the actors were not expected to portray the action in a naturalistic manner, or perhaps, that there would be a combination of performance styles on stage. For example, Esterhazy appears as a simple-minded buffoon, described in the stage directions as having 'the eyes of a bandit, a happy face, and his tone is not serious' (Act I, Scene 2).

More significant to understanding the intended performance style is Loria's description of Rishardon and Cretinion (surely a pun on Cretin), two handwriting experts called upon by Major Fabres to examine the intercepted letter and ensure Dreyfus' guilt. As a pair they resemble the historical figure of Bertillon in their determination to solve the case through scientific accuracy. Rishardon and Cretinion work as a comic duo within the text and Loria's stage directions emphasize the 'unnatural' manner in which the pair should appear, as Rishardon is described: '[h]is gold-rim glasses are falling off every minute, and he adjusts them with the gestures of an automaton. He moves as if made of cardboard. He turns his body as if it were made of one piece and always remembers to straighten his back, like a soldier' (Act II, Scene 2). Characterizing Rishardon as appearing

to be made of 'cardboard' and whose movements resemble that of a robot, evokes the performance of shadow puppets such as Karagöz and Hacivat. Another traditional Turkish style of performance was *Orta Oyunu*, which shares many similarities with the shadow play but is conducted with live actors. Metin And notes characteristics of *Orta Oyunu* includes the use of identical scenes with different characters, imitation (of language and gestures), exaggeration, slapstick and horse play, rhythm, and verbal humor (*A History* 42-43). While there is some debate over the origin of this form of theatre, it was certainly being practised in the late nineteenth century and may have influenced Loria's vision for these characters (ibid 34-52). While the relation between Loria's text and popular entertainment are tenuous, the stage directions in *Dreyfus* suggest that there may have been an integration of Ottoman dramatic styles with Ladino playtexts at the turn of the twentieth century.

A short extract from Cretinion and Rishardon's dialogue further reveals the absurd characters' farcical banter:

- Cretinion: This handwriting is exactly the same as that of the Jewish Capitan.
- Rishardon: (*Laughing with contempt, balancing on his foot that he keeps behind him*) Ah! And you can prove it?
- Cretinion: Of course! I have at my disposal sixty-nine letters written by the culprit!
- Rishardon: I have seventy!
- Cretinion: My science never fails!
- Rishardon: Mine never errs!
- Cretinion: I maintain that the *bordereau* is written by Dreyfus!
- Rishardon: I claim the same! (Act II, Scene III)

Cretinion and Rishardon's exchange: 'My science never fails/Mine never errs,' is repeated throughout Acts Two and Three, resulting in a humorous exaggeration of the means by

which Dreyfus was accused of treason. The mode of performance is intensified in other statements of scientific implausibility, as in Rishardon's statement, '[i]f someone tells me that a Jew has stolen the moon and swallowed Mount Levan, I will immediately believe it. Jews are capable of everything!' (Act II, Scene III). Loria has taken the tragic representation of the affair within the press and transformed it, in part, into a comical performance, where the humor works to stress and critique the French bureaucracy. Loria has reduced the officers at the Ministry of War into a collection of simpletons and xenophobic officers. Ridiculing the image of French power works to destabilize the western hegemonic force within the Ottoman Sephardic communities through theatrical representation.

In addition to the comedic performances, Loria's *Dreyfus* also resonates with contemporaneous melodramas. While a few studies on the Ottoman Sephardim note the representation of melodramas within the theatrical repertoire, there is little analysis as to the specific ways in which the Sephardim wrote and performed melodrama, or, more importantly, its greater implication to Sephardic history.²² Performing melodramas indicates, in part, a greater awareness amongst the Sephardim of not only international playtexts, but developing performance styles.²³ More importantly, it demonstrates an additional theatrical response to modernity. Ben Singer has written an insightful study on melodrama, demonstrating the interconnections between the rise of melodrama and modernity at the turn of the twentieth century in America. The significance of Singer's

²² Operas, comedies or dramas may have more of a melodramatic style, at least in terms of their plot and structure; for instance, as discussed in the previous chapter, Alexander notes how Reuben's rendition of *Esther* featured melodramatic characteristics (*En Este* 47). Similar to *Esther*, there are a number of productions classified as 'musical operas' by the Ladino Press that may have had melodramatic features, such as *La Expulsión de los judíos de España* (*Jud.* 10 Sept., 1920, 3); the 'biblical opera' *Yosef vendido por sus hermanos* (*Jud* 8 Oct., 1920, 4); the 'historical opera' *La Reina Ester* (*Jud* 21 Oct., 1920, 3); another 'historical opera' *Los dos talmudistas* or *Los Bregantes* (*Jud* 15 Oct., 1920, 4); and the celebrated Venetian opera *Lo que una Mujer Puede Hac'er* (*Jud* 15 Oct., 1920, 4). A further example is *El Corier de Lyon*, which is described as a drama in the Ladino press, but nevertheless was loosely based on the French melodrama *Le Courier de Lyon* (*AmPue* 5 Mar., 1987, 455-6).

²³ Borovaya demonstrates the development of the Ladino romantic novel and adventure stories in the late nineteenth century as part of a growing reader culture which may have contributed to a taste for melodrama on the Sephardi stage. While travel writing was popular, Borovaya notes how 'Ladino fiction never discussed current issues but instead intended to attract readers by its escapist nature' (*Modern Ladino* 154).

work for our study of Sephardi Theatre is that it demonstrates how the modern period gave rise to melodrama worldwide, indicating that the Sephardim were not lagging behind European or American counterparts in terms of theatrical developments, or simply adopting western practices, but were in fact responding in similar ways to the cultural anxieties and ideological fluctuations that characterized the processes of modernity.

For the purposes of our understanding of melodrama as it may apply to the work of the Sephardim, the works of William S. Dye and Ben Singer have been useful in applying the 'cluster concept' of melodrama, as in 'a term whose meaning varies from case to case in relation to different configurations of a range of basic features of constitutive factors' (Singer 44). Drawing upon Dye's twelve aspects of melodrama, Singer narrows the list to five including: pathos, overwrought emotion, moral polarization, nonclassical narrative structure and sensationalism (44-48). While there is evidence of each of these features in Loria's text, focus here is on moral polarization within the text and the resulting sensation such representations had for Sephardic audiences. By focusing on this aspect of the production it is not intended to underestimate the importance of the other melodramatic features of the text, but rather call attention to the features of the production that may have had the most significant impact on constructing a collective Sephardic identity as well as establishing and subverting power relations and cultural identities.

Loria draws sharp lines between good and evil and addresses the anxiety which rocked French society through a lens of absolute moral clarity. It is evident that Loria sought to establish the moral injustice of Dreyfus as an 'undeserving victim' throughout the play. One such example a monologue Dreyfus delivers while imprisoned on Devil's Island,

How long will this horrible martyrdom of an innocent man last?

(Raising his voice in pain.)

Isn't there any more justice in this world? And if human justice is blind and erroneous, where is your justice, powerful and merciful God? Why do you allow such unfairness? Why do you allow that an innocent man suffer instead of the guilty one? (Act V, Scene I)

Loria's text thus further elaborates the sentiments in the poems discussed previously as Dreyfus is depicted as an upstanding religious figure. Similarly to reports from the press, Loria is establishing Dreyfus within a religious tradition by reference to his imprisonment as 'martyrdom' and the moral transparency of the character. In some ways, Dreyfus's conversation positions him as a type of modern day Job, who is being treated morally unjustly for reasons he cannot comprehend. By allowing audiences to identify with Dreyfus as a Jewish everyman, Loria's production emphasizes the potential injustice that may befall any Jew should they assimilate into European societies. Dreyfus' plight is emphasized through overwrought emotions, expressed in both speech and physical gestures. Descriptive gestural directions feature throughout the playtext, such as 'hitting his forehead' (Act I, Scene VI), 'rubbing his hands with joy' (Act II, Scene I), 'suddenly steps forward as if to strike an enemy' (Act IV, Scene II), 'falls to his knees crying' (Act IV, Scene IV) and several near faints, indicate the importance of physical actions to convey the emotions and drama of the text.

As stated, the social anxieties and moral clarity evident throughout the piece are evidence of melodrama as a production of modernity. As Singer argues, '[m]elodrama conveyed the stark insecurities of a modern life in which people found themselves "helpless and unfriended" in a postsacred, postfeudal, "disenchanted" world of moral ambiguity and material vulnerability' (132). Although Singer is primarily addressing historical European manifestations of melodrama, anxieties over modernization and the secularization of Ottoman communities cannot be disassociated from the numerous productions of the Dreyfus Affair in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Overwhelming popularity and interest in the Dreyfus Affair amongst the Sephardim point

to the fact that the situation in France was the source of great anxiety for the diasporic population. Singer also notes the importance of religious rhetoric within this theatrical development, 'melodrama allegorized the modern situation' by portraying 'the individual's powerlessness within the harsh and unpredictable material life of modern capitalism' while at the same time serving 'a quasi-religious ameliorative function in reassuring audiences that a higher cosmic moral force still looked down on the world and governed it with an ultimately just hand' (134). Loria's text attests to this 'quasi-religious' function through Dreyfus' ongoing evocation of a 'higher cosmic moral force' such as in his prayer: 'm]erciful God, who accepted the sacrifice, let the smallest of your creations thank you for what you did for me, for making it possible for the truth to come out and the true culprit to be discovered!' (Act V, Scene III). In Loria's text, there is no ambiguity of the moral dichotomy of the characters, and in the end, the virtuous victim is redeemed and evil is eradicated.

Within the socio-political context surrounding the production of *Dreyfus*, the choice to apply melodramatic principles, especially moral polarization, presents a particular ethical and political attitude that would not have been possible through alternative dramaturgical frameworks. In some ways, Loria's *Dreyfus* can be read as a 'protest melodrama,' in James Smith terms (74). This type of melodrama is designed to 'pinpoint a contemporary evil' by setting up 'a blameless hero as the victim of the system, and then subject him to such inhuman persecution that the audience explodes with indignation and demands the immediate repeal of laws which perpetrate such cruelties' (ibid.). Perhaps Loria was not merely suggesting that a 'higher cosmic moral force' would alleviate acts of violence and racism, but rather that a 'contemporary evil' must be overcome through the creation of a system in which Jews could not be threatened by such forces. Loria's depiction of the French military echo the fluctuating attitudes towards France within the Zionist Ladino press. As captured in an article from *El Avenir*, France is shifting from a position of cultural supremacy to that representative of injustice and

racism: 'France, the France of the great republic, and of the declaration of the rights of man, a peace that gave the first example of the emancipation (liberty) of the Jews, that same France today walks in the front of the anti-semitic movement' (Ave 14 Sep., 1898, 6). In analyzing the effects of the Dreyfus Affair, Derfler notes, 'for a century before the Dreyfus Affair, French Jews had been among the most successfully assimilated Jews in Western Europe' (9). Zionists' struggles for power against the AIU and assimilationists made France a particularly important subject for debate. Through both the Zionist Ladino press and Loria's playtexts, the Dreyfus Affair is utilized by the Ottoman Zionist to critique assimilation and in particular, the cultural supremacy of France.

Before concluding our discussion on the melodramatic aspects of Loria's *Dreyfus*, it is worth elaborating on the final image of the play: the apotheosis as a *tableau vivant*. Once Dreyfus has uttered his final lines of the play 'let's go to freedom!' and he leaves the prison, the curtain falls and rises again to reveal a 'living picture' (Act V, Scene IV). The scene includes Dreyfus in the center of a semicircle including all his family and supporters, such as his wife and children, his lawyer Demange, Picquart, and Emile Zola. Despite the fact that Zola does not appear in the dramatic text, Dreyfus has his arm around his shoulders in this final image. While no physical description of Zola is provided in the playtext, the scene implies that audiences would have been able to recognize the historical figure despite his absence in Loria's play. In addition, the use of a tableau to offer an optimistic ending is a common feature in European melodramas. Equally significant, the final scene of Loria's *Dreyfus* is evocative of a Dutch production from Amsterdam, *Dreyfus of de Banneling van Het Duivelseiland*, and points to the possibility of an important, and previously unacknowledged, circulation of dramatic texts.

Investigating the Influence of Dutch Theatrical Texts in Jac Loria's Dreyfus

A Dutch production of a melodrama entitled *Dreyfus of de Banneling van Het Duivelseiland* [*Dreyfus or the Exile from Devil's Island*] took place in Amsterdam around

1897/98. A review of this production appears in the Ladino press in 1898, where the title is rendered *El Martrio dela Isla del Diablo* [*The Martyr from Devil's Island*]. The same title was given to a performance in 1927 at the Marx Nordau society in Salonica where the production is described as being a tragedy in five acts. No author for either production is given, but Romero suggests that it was most likely a version by Papo based on the number of acts, characters and the fact that the Nordau society performed a Papo version previously (*RenJud* 8 Apr., 1927, 4; *Pue* 22 Apr., 1927, 4; Romero *El Teatro* vI 513). The review describes the production as being a huge success in Amsterdam having been performed over 130 times and with productions occurring in Germany (*Tiem* 22 Sep., 1898, 7). Reference to a Dutch production attest to a certain circulation of contemporary theatrical histories within the Ottoman Sephardic communities.²¹ Interest in the production may be due in part to the overwhelming interest the subject matter gained amongst foreign audiences. In addition, the review indicates that there was knowledge of a melodrama about Dreyfus a few years before the publication of Loria's version.

As no previous study on Sephardi Theatre has acknowledged the potential influence of a Dutch production on the Ottoman stage, it is worth elaborating here on the text and staging of the two representations. According to the review in *El Tiempo*, the last scene of the Dutch play takes place on Devil's Island, where Dreyfus is seen heavily guarded and is committed to dying with honor. Similar to Loria's dramatization, the European production concluded the performance with a *tableau*, featuring a cast of characters that appears to surpass those featured within the dramatic narrative. As described in the article, the curtain rises to reveal a 'magical' scene wherein fifteen girls in white form a statue representing France. Golden letters reading 'The Revision' descend from the ceiling as Dreyfus, Picquart and Zola enter onto the stage where they are met by 'indescribable enthusiasm' from the audience. Each of the three figures are rehabilitated

²¹ For a much earlier example of the circulation of Dutch dramatic texts in the Ottoman Empire, see references to J. Schirmann 'Evidence of the Performance of a Hebrew Play in Algeria' in Moreh 'The Nineteenth-Century'.

with Zola receiving a crown of laurels and proclaimed the savior of France. 'At this moment,' the article states 'the public starts to applaud frequently and suddenly has a need to shout, the formidable cries: "long live truth! long live justice!" (22 Sep., 1898, 7).²⁵ Madame Dreyfus and the couple's children are also present in the final image, where she is described as wearing all white and clutching her husband. At the site of the reunion of the couple the audience 'erupted in applause and from that a formidable voice rose above and cried: "Long live Zola! Long live General Piquart! Long live General Alfred Dreyfus, the martyr from Devil's Island!" (ibid.).²⁶

It has been difficult to locate additional sources to corroborate this review in the Ladino press; however, reviews exist in both the Dutch and other international periodicals from 1897 and 1898. In Amsterdam, a local newspaper *Het Nieuws van den Dag* [*The News of the Day*] reviewed a play, *Dreyfus, or the Exile from Devil's Island*²⁷ by Anton van Sprinkhuysen²⁸ (23 Dec. 1897, 10). Several additional reviews appeared in 1899 which attest to the popularity and impact of performing dramatizations of the Dreyfus Affair in the Netherlands. One review went as far as to claim audiences were so passionate about the drama that the performance transformed the Dutch into Italians (*Nie* 16 Jun., 1899, 3). Based upon the extracts included in the review, Sprinkhuysen's texts shares in part plot points with Ottoman dramatizations of the historical event. Sprinkhuysen's texts concludes with Dreyfus boarding a boat to sail back to France for his new court martial, whereas Loria's piece ends with Dreyfus still in prison but with the news that he will now be able to return to France for his court martial. While

²⁵ Original Text: En este momento, el pobleko empesando delas lujas asta el parter empesan a aplaudeser frenetekamiento y soveto tomado de un emperyozo menester de gritad, el echa los gritos formedavles de: viva la verdad! viva la justesya!

²⁶ Original Text: la asestensya empesa de mas en mas sus aplaaozos y una bos formedavle si levanta gritando: biva zola! biva el general pikar! biva el general alfred dreyfsu, el martyro dela isla del diablo!

²⁷ Original Text: Dreyfus of de Banneling van het Duivelseiland.

²⁸ Anton van Sprinkhuysen was an actor, translator and playwright (of mainly Jewish texts) including *De Dertig Zilverlingen* [*Thirty Pieces of Silver*], *De Dode* [*The Dead*], *Kaat Mossel*, *De Kleine Man* [*The Little Man*], *Mijnheer Florissen, de mislukte kandidaat voor de tweede kamer* [*Mister Florissen, the unsuccessful candidate for the second chamber*], *Om 't goud van Transvaal* [*To this gold from the Transvaal*], *Oranje-klanten* [*Orange Customer*], *Wapens neer* [*Arms Down*], and *X-stralen* [*X-rays*] (Honig 874).

Sprinkhuysen was forced to conclude his 'historical' text here as Dreyfus had yet to be pardoned or reinstated in the army, Loria's text appeared three years later and therefore could have drawn upon more recent events. While there may have been artistic reasons for ending the narrative with Dreyfus's departure from Devil's Island, it does raise questions concerning the circulation of information regarding Sprinkhuysen's production within the Ottoman Empire.

There is only one scene described in detail within the review from *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, which was a final scene added by Sprinkhuysen when Dreyfus was to be returned to France for a new court marital. According to the review, Sprinkhuysen had published an earlier version of the play with the scene taking place on Devil's Island between Dreyfus and his guard, Daniel. Within the scene Dreyfus receives a letter from his wife Lucie, which is reprinted in the article:

Dearest Alfred! Keep brave, redemption is coming close. I'm still not in a position to tell you anything special, the investigation with the court of appeals is still carrying on. The end of our trials is close. Pier and John our beloved children are waiting for you impatiently. LUCIE.²⁹

Recalling Loria's playtext, towards the end of the play Dreyfus receives a letter from Lucie which carries a similar sentiment,

I want to let you know that all of us are fine and strong, hoping for your near salvation, day and night doing everything possible and impossible to attain a retrial. The children are very good and every day ask when papa is going to return from his long trip. (Act V, Scene III)

²⁹ All Dutch translations have been provided by Pepijn van Houwelingen. Original Text [Dutch]: Derbare Alfred! Houd moed, de weder verlossing nadert. het is me nog altijd niet vergund je bijzonderheden te melden. het onderzoek bij het hof van cassatie duurt nog altijd voort...het einde onzer beproeving is nabij. pierre en jeanne onze dierbare kinderen verwachten je met ougeduld.

The plot device of Dreyfus receiving a letter whilst in prison has been similarly undertaken in both texts, and, furthermore, there is similar information exchanged.

Returning to the apotheosis which concludes Loria's text, according to the article in *El Tiempo*, Sprinkhuysen's text also ends with a forward-looking display in which Dreyfus is welcomed back to France. From the Dutch review, it is not clear as to whether the production ended in a *tableau*, although the reviewer states that it is a 'happy-ending tragedy'³⁰ and audiences are eager for another installment (*Nie* 16 Jun., 1899, 3). Discrepancies between the Dutch and Ladino reports could be due to the fact that the Sephardic press may have been reporting on a performance occurring later in the run of Spinkhuysen's play.³¹ In Loria's text, the moving image captures a future utopian conclusion to the Dreyfus Affair and shares with the Dutch production a sense of justice and admiration for the characters of Dreyfus, Zola and Picquart.

While there are only a few references to melodramas being performed on Ottoman Sephardic stages, it is suggested that despite this lack of visible nomenclature, the narrative plot and style may have been more widespread as suggested through Loria's *Dreyfus*. As Dye argues, each age has its own type of melodrama, brought about by both comic and tragic traditions and the term itself may be called 'popular tragedy' despite the lack of tragedy resulting from the action of the play (7-8). Although a direct connection cannot be made between Loria's knowledge of Sprinkhuysen's work and his own rendition of the historical event, it is evident that a certain mode of production was undertaken in the performing of history through both dramatic texts. As other Dutch plays were translated and staged in the Ottoman Empire during a similar period, it is not

³⁰ Original Text: een blij-eindend [sic] treurspel.

³¹ A popular newspaper from New Zealand, *The Auckland Star*, also reported on the Dutch melodrama in 1898 and stated that the performance of *Dreyfus, the Martyr of Devil's Island* was presented in Amsterdam and included eight tableaux, 'the last of which prefigures in a dream of the martyr his restoration to his military honours' (8 Mar., 1898, 5). Eight tableaux correspond to the eight scenes described in the Dutch press and suggest that the melodrama did in fact conclude with tableaux. The New Zealand source also notes how the piece has two principle villains, one of them as Esterhazy (ibid.) and suggests that the production shared two villains with Loria's Dreyfus (Esterhazy and Farbes).

impossible that Loria had access to information regarding Sprinkhysen's text, although any direct connection at this point is circumspect.

Receptions to Dramatizations of the Dreyfus Affair

To investigate further how Zionist productions such as *Dreyfus* resonated with local audiences it is useful now to shift to an analysis of responses to the dramatic representations. As philosopher and theatre scholar Paul Kottman argues, only by examining participants in the 'here-and-now' (120) of performance can the politics of the scene be fully determined and therefore crucial in determining the extent to which the production was perceived to challenge or maintain French cultural dominance. Many reviews point to the historical importance of this piece for the Sephardic community, as both a piece of modern theatre and one which captures national sentiments. For example, as referenced at the opening of this chapter, in 1903 *El Avenir* the editors remark: the 'most passionate of modern dramas is certainly the history of Captain Dreyfus' (14 Jan., 3).³² Similar attitudes were expressed regarding a 1910 performance as a 'historically and moving drama of the highest quality' (*Imp* 29 Sep., 1),³³ wherein the audience frantically applauded after each act: 'the enthusiastic ovations were provided without scarcity by the numerous audience members' (*Imp* 20 Oct. 1910, p.1).³⁴ The same review also makes note of the diverse and esteemed audience in attendance by assuring readers that the 'enthusiastic' audience was comprised of 'the best society and where the beautiful sex was broadly represented' (*ibid.*).³⁵ An additional announcement from 1927 states that it is the 'most tragic of dramas' and is 'full of action that will for certain incite passion for all audiences' (*RenJud* 8 Apr., 4).³⁶

³² Original Text: El más pasionante de los dramas modernos es por seguro la historia del capitán Dreyfus...

³³ Original Text: drama histórico y esmioviente al último grado.

³⁴ Original Text: las ovaciones entuásstas le fueron prodigados sin escarcidad por la muy númeroša asistencia.

³⁵ Original Text: la mejor soçetá y onde el hermošo sexo era anchamente representado.

³⁶ Original Text: drama lleno de acción que por seguro pasionará todos los asistentes; más trágico de drames.

A select number of the reviewers reporting on dramatic representations of the Dreyfus Affair elaborate on scenes or performances which were particularly impactful on audiences. A reviewer called S notes two scenes he/she found particularly moving: when Dreyfus is visited by his wife Lucie in prison; and when Colonel Picquart is alone in his office and decides to act in Dreyfus's interest although it may cost him his life (*Pue* 26 Apr., 1927, 4). In recalling Dreyfus' encounter with Lucie, S describes how she removed the sword from Dreyfus' hand, embraced him, and encouraged him to have faith and trust (*fiu'cia*) in the Lord. According to the reviewer, at this moment there was a chorus of tears from the audience (*ibid.*).³⁷ The second scene described by S revolves around Picquart. Determined to seek justice by all means, Picquart exclaims, 'I must do my duty of conscience even if doing so risks my life' (*ibid.*).³⁸ Such sentiments are similarly expressed in Loria's text where Picquart proclaims '[m]y future will be ruined, my life threatened? So what? What does it matter? I have to fulfill my duty! (Act IV, Scene 2)..

While the audience shed tears over Lucie's unwavering support for her husband, the crowd was similarly moved (although no tears are mentioned) by Picquart's dedication to the pursuit of justice. The display of tears is an expression of pathos and identification with the character of Dreyfus. Both scenes described by the reviewer dramatize decisions where individual choices come to represent something greater. The reviewer concludes the article by drawing out the social and political objectives of such a performance, stating 'we need to formulate our equal desire in representations that take place frequently to develop in the Jewish population the love for the theatre and at the same time the

³⁷ Historically, there is no record of such a scene taking place but, as Derfler mentions in her account of Dreyfus's degradation, the 'generals would have preferred that he [Dreyfus] commit suicide, and Dreyfus considered the prospect' (123). However, she does not offer evidence of Lucie as a key agent in abandoning his plans for self-destruction. Ruth Harris demonstrates in her work on the affair that Dreyfus was feared to be contemplating suicide, as evidenced from Forzinetti, a fellow soldier, who wrote to the Minister of War that, he 'always protests his innocence and shrieks that he will become mad before it is recognized. [...] It is feared that he will commit a desperate act, despite all the precautions taken, or that madness will ensure' (qtd. in Harris 18). Although Lucie was not allowed to visit Dreyfus on Devil's Island, it is possible that the scene described in the review refers to Dreyfus's imprisonment before his public degradation, which would correlate to the suicidal fears expressed above.

³⁸ Original Text: Yo debo hacer mi deber de conciencia al resico mismo de mi vida.

national sentiment' (*Pue* 26 Apr. 1927, 4).³⁹ While arguing that an appreciation for theatre should be instilled amongst the Ottoman Sephardim, the reviewer also explicitly links the representation of Dreyfus to the development of a national consciousness. The Lucie and Picquart scenes present a national ethics, a way in which citizens should behave in the light of contemporary violence and racism.

An earlier review of a theatrical representation of the affair from 1923 similarly evokes the importance of national education and a collective diasporic identity. The review states, it 'is an excellent idea from the [Max] Nordau society to give from time to time theatrical representations in Judeo-Spanish in order to ensure healthy entertainment for the masses and that at the same time contribute to their national education' (*Pue* 19 Mar., 1923, 2).⁴⁰ The value of Ottoman Zionist theatre in instilling a sense of social cohesion was repeated in several additional productions, such as a staging of the story of Saul in 1909 where a review stated that the production 'stirs the national sentiments that live in each Jewish heart truly tied to their traditions' (*Nación* 19 Mar., 1909, 16).⁴¹ The implication of these statements is that modern Sephardi Theatre, especially in the Ladino language, is an important aspect in contributing to a progressive Jewish community. While the theatre of the AIU discussed previously appears to have been, in part, produced in order to demonstrate to non-Sephardic foreigners a modern and educated diaspora community, Zionist theatre emerges as primarily targeted at local, Jewish audiences.

³⁹ Original Text: non tenemos que a formular el deſeſo que ſemejantes repreſentaciones tengan lugar mſs frecuentemente. a_la de deſvelopar en la poblaciſn judia el amor por el teatro y inculcarles en miſmo tiempo el ſentimiento nacional.

⁴⁰ Original Text: Excelente la idea de_la [Max] Nordau de dar de tiempo en tiempo repreſentaciones teatrales en judeo-eſpaſol por procurar un divertimiento ſano a_las masas y en miſmo tiempo contribuir a ſus educaciſn nacionala.

⁴¹ *Los cativados de Israel* took place in Seres by Los Amigos de la Instrucciſn [The Friends of Instruction] under the patronage of the Club des Intim to benefit the community ſchool in Seres (*Imp* 31 Mar., 1909, 1). Original Text: irſn remeanea los ſentimientos nacionales que vivrſn en cada corazſn de jidiſo verdadamente atado a ſus tradiciones.

Although there is melodramatic and physical comedy present in Loria's *Dreyfus*, reviewers' reactions to later productions reveal an interest in 'natural' or 'realistic' representations of the drama. As one reviewer signed 'Spectator' notes,

In short, a mention must be made to the person who fills the role of Colonel Richardon. It is without doubt that he must come first before his companions for the naturalness and expertise with which he played: he spoke easily without cadence in his diction, with simple gestures, similar to a person who would move in the same circumstances, without any exaggeration in the play. Such role-playing deserves the biggest congratulations, leaving the spectator the impression of encountering another reality. (*Pue* 9 Apr., 1923, 2)¹²

Despite the non-naturalistic stage directions in Loria's text, reviews of various representations of *Dreyfus* throughout the 1920s commend actors and actresses for their natural approach to acting. One review provides us with further details as to what is deemed to be an exceptional performances, noting how Colonel Picquart was an 'important force' due to the natural way he approached the speech and attitude in the circumstances, and the performance of Madame *Dreyfus* was less powerful due to her 'monotone cadence' which did not appear natural (*Pue* 9 Apr., 1923, 2). As no particular scene is emphasized the review suggests that it was not the situation or the character but rather the realistic embodiment of the historical roles and a more naturalistic style of acting which resulted in a more engaging theatrical experience.

Furthering this point, the reviewer articulates the precise way in which the tragic effect can be achieved in representations of *Dreyfus*,

¹² Original Text: En tanto, una mención aparte debe ser hecha por el que hinchó el rolo de colonel Richardón. Es afuera de dudvo que él debe venir primo entre sus compañeros por el naturel y la maestria con las cualas él jugó: habla fáçile sin dición cadenzada, gèstos símpliçes, semejantes a los que haría seguramente la persona jugada en las mismas circunstancias, ninguna exageración en el jugo. El que jugó este rolo merece las mas vivas felicitaciones, siendo él dejaba en el spectator lo más de impresión de toparse delante la realidad.

In general if one is able to remark, about everything from Dreyfus and from Colonel Henry, in an effort to dramatize the believable voice, it is possible, that the tragic effect comes from trembling of the speech and to say 'my chiiiiildren,' for example, and not from painting the unfortunate situation. Many times - the actors and the organizations are unable to render this story - the audience will laugh at the most poignant moment, which proves that the tragic effect is not always obtained in the inflection of the voice or in the verses. This happened many times, particularly in the degradation of Dreyfus. This scene, that ought to rouse the audience from indignation, revolt, and pity, was not able to deter the auditorium from an immense laugh [...] Other laughs come undone in the moment when Dreyfus is in prison, shattered and lost [...] (*Pue* 9 Apr., 1923, 2).⁴³

For this reviewer, the tragic effect is not caused through situations, as Dye and Singer suggest as an important aspect of melodramatic texts. Rather, the article implies that it is a natural evocation of the actual event which causes a moving experience for the spectators. An important assumption made is that the performance should evoke a tragic effect on audiences. In a sense, although comical dialogue exists in the script (clearly evidenced in Loria's text) the tone of the performance should not belittle the memory of the tragic event. In a way, this reviewer is offering up an ethics of representing the past by suggesting that performances need to represent events in a manner that does justice to the 'truth' of the tragic events.

The tendency to evaluate naturalism in acting as in some ways superior to traditional or non-natural forms was most likely influenced by the rising popularity of natural acting forms in the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century. Deniz Taşkan

⁴³ Original Text: En general se remarcaba, y sobre todo onde Dreyfus y onde el colonel Henry, un esfuerzo de dramatizar la voz en la creyenza, puede ser, que el efeto trágico proviene del temblamiento de la habla y deéir 'mis crrrriaturas', por enjemplo, y no del pintamiento de una situacion dolorioša. Muchas veécs - los actores y los organizadores ya dubieron rendirsén cuento de esto - la asistencia se metía a reír en el momento el más puañante, lo_que proba que el efeto trágico no se obtiene siempre en unflando la voz o en recitando el rolo como pesuquim. Esto aconteció muchas veécs y particularmente en la degradación de Dreyfus. Esta čena, que debía solevantar la asistencia de indignación, de revolta y de apiadamiento, non hizo que menear la sala de una imensa riša [...] Otras rišas dešbrocharon en el momento onde en la prišión Dreyfus, aребantado y piedrido [...].

briefly describes the interest in actor training taken up in Istanbul in the early twentieth century with the establishment of the *Darülbeyazıt-ı Osmani* (The Ottoman House of Beauty). This centre was set up in 1914 under the initiative of Cemil Paşa, the mayor of Istanbul, and offered musical and dramatic training originally under the instruction of André Antoine, a French actor and director specializing in naturalism (5). Antoine was the director of the Odeon Theatre in Paris and he is believed to have traveled to Istanbul on two previous occasions before taking up residence in the new acting school and was the subject of much interest to the local press where his articles on naturalism were widely published (And, *A History* 90). Although Antoine's position was interrupted by the First World War, the widespread interest in his work with the acting school signifies the growing awareness in naturalistic acting forms as part of encounters with western styles of performance within Turkey. As evidence by reviews from the 1920s, naturalism within the Sephardic community was seen as a superior form of acting, especially in representations of the past.

Zionist Theatre: Staging Violence, Racism and Jewish Nationalism

In the following section we look at a wider cross-section of Zionist-produced theatre at the turn of the twentieth century in order to gain further insight into the themes, styles and implications of this development in modern Sephardi Theatre. Ottoman Zionist theatre was responding not only to encounters with European Zionists, but also shifting international and local concerns. Paul Dumont refers to this period as being a 'climate of insecurity' as ethnic, ideological and financial concerns gave way to an 'epidemic' of uprisings and terrorist activities with the Ottoman territories (51). In Ottoman territories, 'bands of robbers' were 'plundering and committing acts of bloodshed' including acts against Jews (Mazower, *Salonica* 259). As nationalist politics developed in the late Ottoman period, violence 'was no longer a means to a livelihood' but an 'instrument of nationalist politics' (ibid 263-4; also see Shaw 204; Ramsaur 9-10). For instance, the

Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878) resulted in the slaughtering of Muslim and Turkish peasants as the Russian army moved across Bulgaria (Shaw 183) and Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria gained autonomy as a result of the invasion, their independence inspired Armenian nationalists who, not having gained the ear of Europe, turned to violence in order to have their demands for autonomy recognized. Violence continued to ravage the countryside as Serbian and Bulgarian terrorists raided, kidnapped, and destroyed property in uprisings against the Sultan in Macedonia. Amongst such activities was the bombing of the Ottoman Bank of Salonica and the French steamer Guadalquivir (Shaw 210; Mazower, *Salonica* 265-7). Jews, for the most, were not regular targets of violence, with Salonica being an exception. Following the Greek conquest of the city in 1912, 'frictions and conflicts' between Greeks and Jews occurred as a result of anti-semitism (Benbassa and Rodrigue 161; also see Molho, 'Zionist Movement' 256). It was within this purview of events that Ottoman Sephardim took to dramatizing contemporary history such as the Dreyfus Affair, the Russian pogroms and anti-semitism in Germany.

As previously discussed, a number of Zionist-produced productions during the early twentieth century demonstrate the ongoing interest in dramatizing accounts of violence, primarily in foreign locations. While several translations of French works were 'Sephardized' by the local communities as discussed in the previous chapter, Ottoman Zionist theatre tended to retain a foreign setting for productions and instead emphasized the interconnectedness (or lack thereof) to world Jewry. Two of the main inspirations for productions came from events transpiring in Germany and Russia. A number of these plays along with their themes and implications are discussed below.

Doctor Kohn and *El Muevo Gueto* [The New Ghetto] were based upon German plays by Zionist leaders Max Nordau and Theodore Herzl respectively. Each play depicts a Jewish man in Europe who suffers and eventually dies as a result of anti-semitic acts in their community. *Doctor Kohn* by Max Nordau was considered a 'civil tragedy of the present' and was performed in Salonica in 1909 and 1929 as well as in Sofia (Romero, *El*

Teatro vI 240).⁴⁴ In the text, Doctor Kohn is a professor of mathematics and he is refused a higher position within the academy because of his religion. Kohn is also in love with a Christian girl, who is in fact the daughter of an assimilated Jew, Moser. When Kohn asks for her hand in marriage, her family remains cold to the idea; however, Moser eventually takes a stand and believes the two should be allowed to wed. Moser's son challenges Kohn to a duel to protect his sister's honour, and Kohn is killed in the exchange as he chooses to fire his gun in the air and not at his opponent. Through the exchange Moser comes to the realization that his position within society and his family is tenuous at best and he was perhaps never accepted by his peers and loved ones. As Hans-Peter Söder states in his analysis of Nordau's work in Germany, Moser 'seems to stand for the fate of Jews in the diaspora' (42).

For reviewers in Salonica, the piece was a moral tale of anti-semitism in Europe. The 1909 premiere took place at the Eden Theatre in Salonica and was performed by the Leguoro-Farina company. In a review from *El Avenir*, Doctor Kohn is described as a 'Jew beloved by all' who 'valiantly defends the name of the Jew and dies a victim of antisemitism' (23 Feb., 1909, 3).⁴⁵ This particular production failed to move audiences, perhaps due to a poor translation from German or the inability for local audiences to connect with the characters and situation (see *Flam* 20 May 1929, 2).⁴⁶ In 1929 the Zionist agenda was more prominent, with the production being described as 'diffusing and exploiting the ideas of the Zionist theatre' (*Flam* 9 May 1929, 2).⁴⁷ The main thesis of the production, according to the review, was embodied in a line from the production: '[t]he

⁴⁴ The 1929 show in Salonica took place at the theatre with Haut Patronage from the Zionist Federation of Greece and the dramatic players of the Max Nordau society at the Pantheon theatre (*Flam* 10 Apr., 1929, 3 and 3 May 1929, 3). In 1930 it was performed in Sofia by the HaŠomer haSa'ir for Tu-bishvat at the Vladimir Trendafilov National Theatre (*Jud* 27 Nov., 1929, 4). Romero describes how reference to the production was discovered on a scrap of newsprint, most likely from the periodical *HaMišpat*, which was published in Sofia 1911-1913 and 1917-1920 (*El Teatro* vII 870).

⁴⁵ Original Text: El doctor Cohn es un jidió muy amado de todos [,,,] defiende valorosamente el nombre de jidió y muere víctima del anti-semitismo.

⁴⁶ A similar issue appeared in relation to a staging of *The Dybbuk*, where a reviewer noted how audiences were not able to connect with the piece which was addressing Ashkenazi themes (see *Pue* 26 Apr., 1933, 2).

⁴⁷ Original Text [French]: diffuser et vulgariser les idées sioniste par le theatre.

Jew must become himself again. That is his only remedy' (ibid.)⁴⁸. Within Nordau's text, Kohn speaks this line in a dialogue between himself and Moser, where he is convincing Moser that the Jews will always remain a separate people and thus they should live and die nobly as Jews (Act II, Scene 7). An additional line from the production appears in the review which further illustrates the moral of the narrative: '[w]e will try to obtain a country, and we must recall our forgotten tongue' (*Flam* 9 May 1929, 2).⁴⁹ Söder argues that *Doctor Kohn* does not espouse a particularly Zionist viewpoint but instead positions anti-semitism on an individual level where it can be overcome by honour and dignity (42).⁵⁰ However, as the lines selected by the press suggest, for the Ottoman Sephardim there was an important collectivity in the play regarding taking action on a communal as well as an individual level.

Many of the plays within the Ottoman Zionist repertoire directly or indirectly aimed to address the anxieties of modern life, particularly in regards to tensions over anti-semitism, European assimilation, and life in the diaspora. As an announcement of Theodore Herzl's play *El Muevo Gueto* states, the production is a 'very sad tabló of the modern Jewish life in exile' (*Lib* 15 Feb., 1915, 1).⁵¹ Similarly motivated by the Dreyfus Affair, Herzl's story follows an idealistic lawyer, Jacob Samuel, who becomes a victim of anti-semitism within a German company and dies in a duel. Jacques Kornberg, in his critical account of Herzl's life, states that Jacob is an archetype of the assimilated Jew and the racism experienced by Jews in the play is depicted as 'a product of the Jewish historical experience' (138). Announcements and reviews about *El Muevo Gueto* contextualize the production as an essential form of national education. As one

⁴⁸ Original Text [French]: Le duif doit redevenir lui même; c'est le seul remède.

⁴⁹ Original Text [French]: Kohn: Nous chercherons à nous faire une patrie; et quant à la langue, nous n'avons qu'à nous rappeler notre idiome oublié.

⁵⁰ Such themes were evident in Mary Safford's English translation of Nordau's play where the title was adapted to *A Question of Honour* (1907).

⁵¹ This play was performed in Salonica in 1915 and 1930 in Ladino. Also see *El Liberal* 19 Feb., 1915, 1; 26 Feb., 1915, 1; 17 Mar., 1915, 2; 28 Mar., 1915, 1). Original Text: es un tabló muy triste de la vida jidía moderna en el galut. The term galut originally referred to Jewish captivity in Babylon and exile. Distinguishing galut and diaspora continued in the third and second century BCE to describe the situation of living outside Israel-Palestine (Baumann 315-8).

announcement from *El Liberal* suggests, '[i]n Salonica we are going to see the premier representation of a real national play [...which] will be marked in the annals of Judeo-Spanish literature and come to be known to the audience as what is the Jewish question' (17 Mar., 1915, 2).⁵² Similar sentiments are expressed in a review from 1930, which claims that one of the actors, Mois Najari, gave a speech at the performance declaring how the performance 'contributes a lot to the work of the national education of the masses' (*Pue* 15 Jul., 1930, 3).⁵³ For the Ottoman Sephardim, representing the recent past in productions such as *Dreyfus*, *Doctor Kohn*, and *El Muevo Gueto*, were seen as important ways of educating the community regarding European anti-semitism.⁵⁴

A number of plays were also based on the experience of Jews in Russia and equally focus on accounts of anti-semitism and violence. *Los Pogromes de Kičhinev* [*The Pogroms of Kishinev*] by Zionist playwright, Sabetay Y. Djaén,⁵⁵ was performed several times beginning in 1920 in Alexandria and subsequently in Salonica in 1927, 1930 and

⁵² The 'Jewish Question' is a term which Alex Bein dates to the 1840s as a result of contemporary problems involving the 'toleration', 'civil improvement', 'equal rights', and 'emancipation' of the Jews and the 'Jewish cause' (19). He notes how public discussion increased around the term in the 1880s as a result of escalating anti-semitism (20) and it was utilized as part of the title of Theodore Herzl's *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question* in 1895. In 1901, Herzl declared in London at '[t]he solution of the Jewish question is that the Jews should be recognized as a people and that they should find a legally recognized home to which Jews in those parts of the world in which they are oppressed would naturally migrate' (qtd. Bein 301). Original Text: Vamos a ver en Salonico la prima representación de una obra veramente nacionala... La representación de hogano del Tomjé Yetomim marcará en los anales de la literatura judeo-española y hará conocer a la asistencia lo que es la cuestión judía...

⁵³ Original Text: contribúe muy mucho al laboro de educació nacionala de las masas.

⁵⁴ The European Zionist movement also saw cultural products as important tools for Jewish emancipation. Cultural activities were seen as a beneficial way of propagating the ideas, as Herzl stated, 'dreams, songs, and fantasies floating in the air must be harnessed for practical politics' (qtd. Berkowitz 37). Martin Buber, another early Zionist pioneer, advocated the development of Jewish art and culture as the most essential aspect of the political movement, 'the most magnificent cultural document' he stated, in regards to Zionist culture, 'will be our art' (ibid., 90-91.). Through artistic endeavors, Buber imagined the national spirit would be spread as part of these cultural transmissions, even suggesting the publication of an 'A-B-C Book' of songs to be circulated with other Zionist propaganda (ibid., 83). As exemplified in Herzl's and Max Nordau's plays, these cultural products were to serve a didactic purpose not dissimilar to the attitudes embedded in the theatrical work of the AIU.

⁵⁵ Djaén was one of the most well-known Ladino playwrights, having also authored a dramatization of *Devorah*, *Itah* and *La Hija del Sol*. For a short case study on *Devorah* see Borovaya, *Modern Ladino* 225-238. Borovaya does not include Djaén's as *La Hija del Sol* in her analysis, yet this play is particularly interesting as it is one of the few non-naturalistic texts from the Ottoman Sephardi repertoire. It features a virtuous poet who is searching for the daughter of the sun, a character who is a witch disguised as a young woman. The poet meets several allegorical characters throughout his quest, ending with his encounter with The Truth [La Verdad].

1932. The 1927 performance was given by the Max Nordau Society⁵⁶ for the holiday of Sukot in the Pantheon Theatre. A review states that the actor 'Mois Angel presented to us a true type of young, idealistic Jew, from a burning nationalism boiling for love of his oppressed brothers and always revolting against the rampant assimilators' (*Pue* 23 Oct., 1927, 2),⁵⁷ thereby further situating the Zionists in the production against the assimilationist policies of the AIU and its supporters. Djaén's piece similarly draws a recent event from the past in order to fulfill his artistic and political aims. Reviews of the production draw clear links between the Kishinev pogrom from 1903: '[b]efore our eyes will unfold the life of Jews in Tzarist Russia twenty years ago: the families painfully beaten by previous pogroms that took place a little here and there before the great pogrom of Kichinev' (*RenJud* 2 Nov., 1927, 3).⁵⁸ Comparable to the Dreyfus Affair, the Kishinev pogrom appears to have been utilized for dramatic representation in order to emphasize the problems of assimilation. In 1905, *El Avenir* describes the situation in Russia as tragic and desperate as the Jews suffer from numerous anti-semitic accusations (11 July, 10) and nearly every issue of *El Luzero* refers to Russian refugees of the massacre as 'victims of persecution' (Borovaya, *Modern Ladino* 124). The playtexts produced in the 1910s and 1920s reflect a more optimistic and heroic colouring to the acts of racism and violence in Russia, much in the same way that Loria's *Dreyfus* presents a happy-ending to a tragic event.

⁵⁶ The Nordau society was the result of a merger between three Zionist associations: Pirhei Zion [Flowers of Zion], Atikva [Hope] and Ahvat Ahim [Brotherly Love]. The Nordau society merged with Bnei Zion to form Mevasseret Zion [Messenger of Zion] which would have brought the groups membership to over 300 by 1916 (Molho, 'The Zionist Movement' 178-179).

⁵⁷ Original Text: Moisés Ángel nos presentó el verdadero tipo del joven idealista jidió, del ardiente nacionalista bullendo de amor por sus hermanos oprimidos y siempre en revolta contra los asimiladores rampantes, contra sus padres mismo muchas veces, como es el caso en la circunstancia.

⁵⁸ In a substantial study of the 1903 pogrom, Edward Judge argues that the wealthy Jews of Russia had succeeded in assimilating into the Russian government and economy throughout the nineteenth century (10); when economic prosperity began to dwindle, and nationalism rose, the Jews became the scapegoats for dissatisfaction (11). In Kishniev, Judge remarks, the 'ingredients for violence conflict were present' and exploded in 1903 with a massacre (29). The incident in Kishniev led to an increased interest in the fate of Russian Jews amongst the Ottoman Sephardim.

Original Text: Delante nuestros ojos hicieron derular la vida de los jidiós en la Rusia tzarista antes 20 años: las famias doloriosamente harbadas por pogromes pasados que tenían lugar un poco aquí un poco ahí antes del grande pogrom de Kičhinev.

While no complete script of Djaén's play survives, several extracts were printed in the Ladino press and are very useful in examining how subsequent Zionist productions dramatized historic events. As translations of this play have not appeared previously in English, a transcription and translation is included in Appendix F. The didactic nature of the dialogue suggests that the production was intended to educate audiences on the ideals of Zionism through foregrounding simplistic renditions of social attitudes. It is interesting to note as well that the role of Šelomó was played by the same actor, David Anĝel, who had performed Dreyfus a few months previously. For audiences familiar with the two productions, the role of Šelomó would have been haunted by that of Dreyfus and the theme of anti-semitism and violence would be reinforced despite the drastically different endings. Productions of *Los Pogromes de Kičhinev* in the 1920s and 1930s demonstrate an interesting case of representing the past as not only were the performances given within a few decades of the actual event, but many of the victims of the pogroms had immigrated to the Ottoman cities and may have been amongst the audiences.

Another play entitled *El Triunfo de Justicia* [*The Triumph of Justice*]³⁹ published in Salonica in 1921, also responds to the situation of Jews in Russia, this time with the pogrom of 1917. The temporal distance between the dramatic representation and the actual historical event is therefore much closer than with *Los Pogromes de Kičhinev*. The play was written by Mois Najari, an actor previously mentioned for performing in *El Muevo Ghetto*. *El Triunfo* bears an uncanny resemblance to Dreyfus' historical circumstances as the narrative involves a sergeant in the Russian army, Ivanof, who delivers secret documents to German agents. Aided by Nikolaief, the two accuse a Jewish Sergeant, Jacof, of the crime. Najari's text divulges from the Dreyfus story when Ivanof kidnaps Jacof's wife in order to blackmail Jacof into confessing; however, Ivanof ends up

³⁹ *El Triunfo de la Justicia* was first performed in 1917 by the Max Nordau society in Salonica. It was presented again in 1923 by the Sociedad Bene Sion de Xanzi and in 1930 with actors from the Zionist youth organization Kadima (*Pue* 15 Jan., 1930, 4). The 1932 production was produced by the Asocacion de Jovenes Judios de Kastoria [The Association of Young Jews from Kastoria] (*Pue* 15 Jan., 1932, 3).

giving the war council evidence of Nikolaief's guilt and Jacof is acquitted. From Najari's preface to the play, he calls the piece a 'national drama' and that it 'clearly demonstrates the tortures and obstacles that Russian Jews bear' when superiors believe the slander of anti-semites as if they were real facts (Preface 1 qtd. in Romero, *El Teatro* vI 441)⁶⁰. For Najari, the play demonstrates how even if the brave Jewish character is abused, the ideas of independence persists in them to live and walk as equals with others (ibid.). The piece works as a palimpsest of contemporary tragedies as it evokes both the Dreyfus Affair and the recent Russian pogrom and functions, according to Romero, as a rallying piece for community members, encouraging them to join the Zionist cause (ibid.). Many of the reviews of Najari's piece point to the national sentiments embedded in the work and its function as a piece of national education. Describing a performance at the Baron Hirsch school in Salonica, a review states that Ivanof is a Jewish martyr, and that the performance left audiences in tears (*Pue* 11 Feb., 1930, 3). It is 'a subject similar to dramas of purely national interest' the reviewer states, 'which are represented as frequently as possible in the popular Jewish neighborhoods in order to procure healthy distractions to the residents and at the same time win over the masses to the Zionist idea' (ibid.).⁶¹ As demonstrated in several productions dramatizing contemporary Russian events, Ottoman Zionist considered representation of the past as an important part of national education efforts and as a way of challenging perceptions of Jewish emancipation as advocated by the AIU.

Furthermore, a tragic conceptualization of the events is the most pervasive narrative form for these productions. As further demonstrated in a review of *El Triunfo de Justicia* where 'the true tragedy of Jews in exile' will be depicted (*Pue*. 15 Jan., 1932,

⁶⁰ Original Text: ubraje nacional; Es un dram que amostra claramente las torturas y los entrompiezos que somportan los jidiós de Rusía.

⁶¹ Original Text: Es a suhetar que semejantes dramas de interés puramente nacional sean representados los más frecuentemente posible en los foburgos populares jidiós por procurar distracciones sanas a los moradores y ganar en miésimo tiempo las masas a la idea šionista.

2).⁶² The reviewer further remarks, '[m]y emotion for the drama was so great that no one could stop me from shedding tears to see the suffering of the Jewish people' (ibid.).⁶³ Once again the term 'tragedy' emerges as a way of describing a situation not unlike the Dreyfus Affair, where a Jewish 'martyr' suffers due to his ethnic identity. However, more explicitly than with representations of Dreyfus, Najari has offered a solution to this 'tragedy' through the establishment of a Jewish state. Referring to a scene from the production, that is very similar to one from Dreyfus, wherein the wife of Jacof visits him in prison, an article quotes her declaration, '[f]or no others to fall victim to the anti-semites we must all unite and to believe in a Jewish independent state in our old Eretz Israel' (Rebeca, Act II, Scene 4 qtd. in *Pue* 15 Feb., 1933, 3).⁶⁴ Thus in Najari's text, Israel emerged as a solution and presented through drama as a means of reaching the masses in order to convert them to political Zionism.

A number of other productions explicitly address 'the Jewish question.' *Los Judíos* was written by Y. Chirikov as a response to the Russian massacres in Kichinev and performed in 1906 in Bulgaria. While *Los Pogroms de Kichinev* and *El Triunfo de Justicia* were authored by local playwrights, *Los Judíos* was a translation. Describing the play, a reviewer from *La Semana* writes that it is the first time the Jewish public in Filibe has the opportunity to see where 'painted in its true reality the three currents of Judaism today, the situation of the Jews amongst the nations and the different solutions of the Jewish question' (12 Apr., 1906, 24).⁶⁵ As another reviewer writes, the play demonstrates how the Jews will never be able to agree amongst themselves on an 'answer' to the Jewish question (*Sem* 20 Apr., 1906, 27-28).

⁶² Original Text: la verdadera tragedia del jidió en el galut.

⁶³ Original Text: Mi emoción del drama fue talmente grande que non manqué de verter lágrimas al ver la sufrienza del pueblo jidió.

⁶⁴ Original Text: Por non cayer más víctimas de los antisemitas debemos de aunarnos todos y crear un estado jidió independiente en nuestra vieja Ereš Israel.

⁶⁵ Original Text: pintados en su verdadera realitá los 3 corientes de hoy en el judaísmo, la situación de los jidiós entre las naciones y los diferentes medios por la solución de la cuestión judía.

A 1910 production of *Gueto*, from Dutch playwright Heijerman's *Ghetto*, is also referenced in relation to its value in addressing the Jewish question. The play was adapted into French by Jac Lemer and Jac Surman, and later into Ladino. An article in the periodical *Nación* includes the preview note for the Ladino version of the text, contextualizing anti-Semitism in history, claiming the play 'offers a solution to this terrible social problem: that the Jews leave the ghetto' (18 Mar., 1910, 8-9).⁶⁶ Re-imagined in the Ottoman Empire, the play confronts tensions related to inter-generational and inter-racial romances amongst the Jewish middle classes. In the final scene we see Rafael deciding to leave his family to be with his Christian love, Rosa, and to seek a more promising future elsewhere,

...the voice of truth must be heard now [...], do not stop the way of moral emancipation for the cities and their advanced version of brotherhood amongst all men, of all the servants without concern for race or religion. It is the voice of truth that I feel inside my conscience, and this sweet voice is like a divine harmony that calls me to this just and right path. (Scene Six)⁶⁷

In this dramatic text, the 'just and right way' is associated with abandoning current social values and charting unknown territory. Without explicitly advocating emigration to Palestine, Rafael demonstrates the corruption and unhappiness seeped in their current situation, proposing a future of nationalism and democratization of power.

The responsibility for enacting change is also directed towards the local audience in performances of Henry Bernstein's *Israel*. Written in 1908, *Israel* is a three-act piece

⁶⁶ Original Text: *Gueto* ofre una solución a este terrible problema social: que los jidiós salgan del gueto.

⁶⁷ Original Text: [...] la voz de_la verdad que se debe escuchar [...] dejad que las ideas justas hagan sus camino; no interumpices, no impidas el camino de_la emancipacion moral de los pueblos y su adelantamiento verso la hermandad de todos los hombres, de todos los criados sin apartadijo de raza ni de religion. Es la voz de_la verdad que yo siento dientro de mi concencia; y esta voz dulce como una armonia divina me grita que yo esto en el camino justo y derecho. (Heyermans *Gueto*; Romero, *El Teatro* vII 1014-5).

translated from French by Saul Nahmias.⁶⁸ Although Bernstein based his play on an anti-semitic incident in France from the 1880s, Ottoman Sephardic reviews of the production place stronger emphasis on the piece as a modern and moral piece of theatre. It was championed as upholding high moral values, destroying anti-semitic arguments and was profoundly moving to the spectator due to passionate and unexpected scenes (*Ave* 24 Mar., 1911, 3; *Imp* 10 Apr., 1911, 2). *El Avenir* mentions the first performance taking place in 1911 to benefit a Salonican charity, Tomje Yetomim, and was produced through the help of the Zola Dramatic Society at the Union Park Theatre (*Imp* 14 Mar., 1911, 2; *Imp* 10 Apr., 1911, 2). The play achieved success in Salonica, with reviews praising it as an 'incomparable success, without equal' and the acting as full of 'tact and realism' (*Imp* 17 Apr., 1911, 2).⁶⁹ In addition to translating the piece, Saul Nahmias played a title role described as 'a true artist of talent [...] he truthfully personified the banker without a small defect in the voice, without the smallest hesitation, and his gestures, his vigorous tone repeatedly drew enthusiastic applause from the audience' (*Imp* 21 Apr., 1911, 2).⁷⁰ Nahmias reclaimed his role in 1914 at the Eden Theatre in Salonica, where again his performance was noted by the reviewers who stated that

He has the heart that revolts, [and] is indignant when the name of his nation is stained, crushed; he is not able to see the work, the work that represents their eyes, the darkness, the reaction, the return to barbarism. He demands always the right to life because he wants to live, because he wants to progress,

⁶⁸ Michèle Fingher suggests that *Israel* was also adapted into a melodramatic Yiddish in 1911 by Joseph Latteiner under the title *Dos Yudishe Hertz* [*The Jewish Heart*]. The plot is described by Ilana Bialik and although she does not mention a link to Bernstein's text the basic plots are very similar. In Zachary Baker's annotated bibliography of Yiddish Plays he notes that Bernstein's text *Israel* was supposedly adapted as *Der Id: drama in fier akte* [*The Jew: Drama in Four Acts*] by William Edlin and Leon Kuperman and produced in New York in 1911 (26).

⁶⁹ Original Text: Suceso incomparable, sin igual; tacto y realismo

⁷⁰ Original Text: un verdadero artista de talento...él personificó realmente el banquero sin un chico defeto en la voz, sin la mínima hešitaci3n, y sus gestos, su tono vigoroso arancaron muchas većes aplausos entušiasmados a la asistencia.

to always go forward to bring improvements to society. (*Lib* 14 Apr., 1914, 2)⁷¹

In addition to praising Nahmias' performance, this review blurs the actions of the character with those of the actor. By obscuring the actions, Nahmias both represents and is a Jew fighting against discrimination and advocating progress. He is, in many ways, presented as a model citizen and thus demonstrates an ethical and moral way of behaving in a modern society. In relation to a production of *Israel*, Nahmias is called 'one of our teachers of modern theatre' (*Imp* 10 Apr., 1911, p. 2).⁷² A direct address to the audience is utilized in many of these productions, signifying a particular interaction between audience and performers where the actors represent both their convictions and those of their fictional characters.

Narrating a Tragic History

The repetition of violence and racism within several of these productions representing the recent past indicates that this subject matter was very important for the Ottoman Sephardic community at the turn of the twentieth century. Whereas much of the AIU-influenced theatre was targeted at improving individuals' behaviour (i.e. not to eat in the theatre, respect one's parents etc.), the Zionist theatre aimed to transform the community as a collective through educating audiences on international events that affect Jews globally. The theatre could be understood as operating in relation to the Ladino press, serving as lens in which the community could engage with international events. However, these representations were constructed by playwrights and, in fact, historical accuracy was not their primary motivation, as openly demonstrated in Loria's *Dreyfus*. Despite the

⁷¹ Original Text: El tiene un corazón que se revolta, se amporta cuando el nombre de su nación es manchado, machucado; él non puede veer el clericalismo, los clericales que representan a sus ojos la escuridad, la reacción, el retorno a la barbaría. El demanda siempre el derito a la vida porque él quiere vivir, porque el quiere progresar, ir siempre adelante por traer amejoreamientos en la soçetá.

⁷² Original Text: Digamos que esta representacion no asemeja a las otras, siendo esta vez el oditorio terna a asistir a un espectáculo de grande valor debido al talento de uno de nuestros coreligionarios reconocido como uno de los maestros del teatro moderno.

inaccuracy of the historical retellings, reviews of the plays suggest that audiences tended to understand characters not as entirely belonging 'somewhere else,' as in characters from epics, folklore or even biblical narratives. Rather, as Freddie Rokem remarks, '[s]uch plays present characters who, even if they belong to the past, possess a reality or a veracity which does not exclusively confine them to the fictionality of the stage' (*Performing* 11). The effect of this may have been that audiences were invited to collectively participate and debate topical issues, as John Casson notes, dramatizing news stories allows audiences to 'explore a social, shared problem, to understand the interplay of roles and events' (115).

Although the subject matter of the plays was crucial for the Zionist project in the Ottoman Empire, the mode of presentation and the characterization of violence and history accounts for the ideological implications of the form. As theatre theorist and historian Hans-Thies Lehmann states 'theatre is not political because of its subject matter, but because of the implicit substance and critical value of its mode of representation' (178). The mode of representation is understood here as the manner in which the past is dramatized, and the Ottoman Zionist theatre appears to be primarily a tragic emplotment of historical events. The use of tragic emplotment evokes Hayden White's description of 'a story of a particular kind' and the affect gained from attempting to apply standard interpretations to certain types of situations (12). But, as White argues '[w]e grant that it is one thing to represent "what happened" and "why it happened as it did," and quite another to provide a verbal model, in the form of a narrative, by which to explain the *process of development* leading from one situation to some other situation by appeal to general laws of causation' (ibid.). As a type of account, a tragic narrative of history is based on certain presuppositions, and equally significantly, calls upon audiences to respond in particular ways.

The theatre scholar Nicholas Ridout has written on the ability of theatrical performances to activate spectators through the unique collaboration between actors and

spectators in the space of performance. In representations of suffering, Ridout states that 'theatre can awaken in its audience a feeling of ethical responsibility to the people suffering in the images' (58). One effect of a tragic narration may be that spectators of Zionist theatre are 'called upon to recognize that there is a relationship between what is shown in the theatre and their own experience of the world' and most importantly, the possibility to act upon these images (ibid 59). Furthermore, the construction of tragic heroes and heroines within these narratives may also resonate with particular political agendas. In discussing the reconstruction of history within African and Caribbean theatre, Osita Okgabue suggests that dramatists 'engage in a selective presentation of history creating heroes and villains which correspond with their own political agendas' for the purposes of overcoming the deleterious effects of colonialism (*Culture* 62). Within these performances, the role of the spectator is presented as a subject capable of participating in the 'collective will to resist and survive oppression throughout their history' (ibid 63). It is vital to recognize the repetition of tragic frameworks for representing the past within Ottoman Zionist theatre is not coincidental, but arguably connected to the aims of the movement in engaging audiences and inciting them to unite and act against those forces threatening the integrity of the Jewish community.

For determining the potential effects of Ottoman Zionist theatre it is essential to consider these productions in relation to the particular socio-political context. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Zionism was just one of many political movements popular amongst the Ottoman Sephardim. The Ladino periodical *La Tribuna Libera* goes as far as to call the situation at the turn of the century 'bordering on fratricide' as nationalism, assimilation, and Zionism encompass the entire community (qtd. in Campos, 'Between' 461). The community in the Ottoman Empire was not experiencing the same degree of anti-semitic activity as was taking place in Europe, yet the community was engulfed in internal battles amongst rival political movements. Several scholars of Sephardi history have noted the particular type of Zionism developing amongst Ottoman Jewry, and even

within 'Ottoman Zionism' there was a diversity of political orientations.⁷³ In general, Ottoman Zionism did not share the separatist political aims of European Zionism; instead Ottoman Sephardim demonstrated strong influences from cultural Hebraism, which advocated the incorporation of a Jewish culture and identity into modernizing efforts. Additionally, Ottoman Zionism often overlapped Zionism and Ottomanism, especially in the years preceding the Young Turk revolution after which Zionism came to overcome Ottomanism (ibid.).

What begins to emerge from even this cursory look at the development of the Zionist movement within the Ottoman Empire is that it becomes increasingly difficult to talk about the political aims of Ottoman Zionism, and therefore Ottoman Zionist theatre, in definitive terms given the ongoing shifts and alliances forming amongst large sectors of the Jewish population. As demonstrated by the productions in this chapter, there was a significant corpus of Zionist playtexts which only occasionally advocated immigration to Palestine, and did not appear to directly provoke separation from the Ottoman nation. Instead, there appears to be a stronger interest in demonstrating the dangers of assimilation and emphasizing the importance of retaining a strong Jewish language and cultural identity as a diaspora community.

Recalling our opening discussion of the Zionist position in relation to the AIU and supporters, while Ottoman Zionists may have had conflicting views over the political aims of the movement and its validity within the Ottoman Empire, they were united against assimilationists. As discussed throughout this chapter, the Dreyfus Affair was considered a 'tragedy of assimilation' by the Ladino Press, echoed within Loria's dramatic interpretation of the historical event. Furthermore, accounts of anti-semitism and violence in Germany and Russia were similarly reduced to the problems of European assimilation. Whereas Ottoman Zionist theatre tended to represent foreign events, the Zionist

⁷³ For more on Ottoman Zionism see Esther Benbassa and Rodrigue; Rodrigue *French Jews*; Stein *Making Jews*; and Shenhav.

campaign within the Ottoman Jewish communities worked in part to demonstrate how organizations such as the AIU were 'de-Judaizing' the community's youth (Benbassa and Rodrigue 179). While both the AIU and Zionists were 'imported' movements, the Ottoman Zionists gained a stronger hold over Ottoman Jewish communities by more successfully furthering a collective Jewish collective. In this manner, the Ottoman Zionist theatre was a site where cultural and national identities were redefined in opposition to those advanced by the AIU and its supporters.

Conclusion

Investigating how Sephardi Theatre shifted from promoting French culture and politics to interrogating European assimilation through Zionist theatre productions, this chapter has demonstrated how cultural practice developed in relation to shifting socio-political situations and relations between Western Jews and Ottoman Sephardim. Sephardi Zionist Theatre legitimized itself as 'truthfully' representing the life of the Jew in diaspora as well as being 'authentic' and 'original' drama that reflected the desires and values of the Ottoman Sephardim. Paradoxically, Sephardi Zionist Theatre continued to advocate the community to be 'in touch' with Europe through translating European texts while simultaneously demonstrating the dangers of assimilation and the necessity of strengthening a Jewish, and at times distinctly Sephardic, community. Thus, Sephardi Zionist Theatre can be characterized through the relationality cultural practices asserted themselves against the (dwindling) French practices. It was by providing performances that presented alternative readings of contemporary history and reworking or delegitimizing French dramatic texts that the Sephardi Zionist Theatre appropriated their practices as authentic Ottoman Sephardic Theatre.

- PART II -

In the winter of 1942, Nazi forces dismantled the Jewish cemetery in Salonica. A hundred thousand tombstones were uprooted; the skeletal remains which littered the area were picked through by German soldiers looking for gold, jewelry and other valuables (Fleming 119). The physical destruction of the Jewish cemetery marked the end of one of the few remaining Jewish architectural structures in the cityscape, a final testament to over four hundred years of the Sephardic presence in the metropolis.¹ Surveying the abandoned Jewish ghetto, the Italian Consul General remarked, '[t]he Jewish community of Salonica, which was founded before the discovery of America and which included around 60,000 members, exists no more [...] The liquidation of the Jewish community was carried out with the greatest atrocity, horrors, and crimes, such as never has been seen before in the history of all times and of all people' (qtd. in Fleming 125). The evocative image of uprooting and scattering casts its shadow over Sephardic experiences throughout the mid and late twentieth century as a defining moment in the history of the community, much like the exile from Spain nearly five hundred years previously. 'If the first date represents the great exile from Spain,' Steve Bowman argues, 'the second signifies the second exile of Sephardic Jews, only this time to their death' (7). As Benbassa and Rodrigue state: '[m]ost of the Judeo-Spanish Diaspora was obliterated or displaced during the Second World War and the years that followed it. The centuries-old Judeo-

¹ Throughout 1943, up to 10,000 Sephardim were deported from the city each week to Nazi concentration camps; the approximately 60,000 Jewish residents had vanished by the summer. Sources vary on the exact number of deportees, Daniel Capri states that the number of Sephardim in 1941 was 56,000 with the total number of deported at 48,533 (261). Molho claims that out of the 45,000 deported from Salonika, 2,000 were from neighboring areas (*In Memorium* 110). Fleming puts the number at around 50,000 deported in total from Salonika and 67,630 from all of Greece (113, 190).

Spanish presence in the Balkans disappeared forever' (159).² The effects of the Second World War on the Sephardim were catastrophic. The demolition of the Jewish cemetery represents another tragedy that profoundly impacts the Sephardic consciousness in the twentieth century. For Bowman, the Second World War was a defining moment in establishing the 'parameters' of the Sephardim's migration experiences, and thus, marks a stark divide in the diasporic theatre practices of the Ottoman Empire discussed in the previous two chapters, and that of the practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (7).

² For an excellent overview of Holocaust experiences by non-Ashkenazim see Gaon and Serels, and Refael *Un Grito*.

THE LADINO PLAYERS: PERFORMANCES IN THE AMERICAN SEPHARDIC REVITALIZATION MOVEMENT

Introduction

Encounters with the American Ashkenazim, from early immigrant experiences to the present day, have contributed to defining and redefining the identities of the American Sephardim. According to Aviva Ben-Ur, such encounters in the early twentieth century were contentious and marked by a 'denial of shared ethnicity and religion (whereby Ashkenazim failed to recognize Sephardim as fellow Jews)' (*Sephardic* 1-2). In more recent times, marginalization of the Sephardim continues in textbooks, articles, documentaries, films and popular awareness as the Ashkenazim tend to define the Jewish American experience (ibid 2). Ben-Ur has termed this phenomenon 'corporate exclusion' since the marginalisation does not result from 'genuine ignorance' but rather 'the failure to consider them [the Sephardim] a legitimate part of American Jewish history and community' (ibid 189). The 1990s mark an important juncture in this narrative as the quincennial ceremonies in 1992, commemorating 500 years since the Spanish expulsion, created a wave of renewed interest by both Ashkenazim and non-Ashkenazim in the history and culture of the Sephardic Jews. As discussed in Chapter II, relations within America led to several efforts throughout the twentieth century to strengthen and legitimate Sephardic identities in relation to the Ashkenazim.

Language and culture revitalization¹ efforts are common amongst displaced peoples or those affected by colonial histories, wherein policies and activities conducted on either governmental or community levels seek to promote a group's heritage for the purposes of protecting, preserving or reviving intangible cultural traditions.² As it might be expected, diaspora communities subjected to assimilation, acculturation and new forms of national identity that work to 'de-diasporise'³ them are also prone to moments of cultural resurgence. A turn towards the theatrical during revival movements is not untypical, as Jeff Titon notes: 'cultural revitalization movements among various ethnic groups in the last hundred years or so have led to self-conscious efforts to preserve their heritage of folk music and dance' (169). Similarly, Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer remark that cultural activities are 'easier, more fun, more tangible, and less threatening' than formal educational efforts such as language learning and 'are more obvious outward manifestations of "the culture" that transcend language skills' and 'provide a more convenient "badge of ethnicity"' (68). While a few notable studies⁴ have championed or challenged the ways in which performance features in diasporic revitalization movements, there has been very little scholarly attention on the institutional or communal efforts undertaken by the Sephardim. Such a paucity of attention risks depreciating the various measures taken by national and international organizations since the 1980s to resurrect the Ladino language and Sephardic culture.

Founded in 1994, the Ladino Players represent the last American theatre company performing almost entirely in Ladino and are a unique cultural entity within the

¹ Nancy Dorian discusses the dichotomy between language revival and revitalization movements, with the former referring to situations where there are no longer native speakers and the latter to situations where native speakers are still able to contribute to matters such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary ('Purism vs. Compromise' 481).

² For an informed analysis of the concept of cultural revivals see Andrew F. C. Wallace 'Revitalization Movements' and Neil V. Rosenberg edited collection *Transforming Tradition*. For revivals within postcolonial and diasporic contexts some good examples include Ferdinand de Jong *Reclaiming Heritage*, Michael Lambek *The Weight of the Past*, Elke *Kaschl Dance and Authenticity in Israel and Palestine* and Ralph Linton and A. Irving Hallowell 'Nativistic Movements'.

³ 'De-diasporization' is a term used by Safran to describe the processes by which many Jews and Armenians are merging their identities with their host societies ('Deconstructing' 15-16).

⁴ See for instance Conteh-Morgan and Thomas; Harrison and Edwards; Feldman; and Um.

American Sephardim's 1990s revitalization movement. This chapter examines the role of the Ladino Players in the ethnic revival movement and how particular aspects of the Sephardic diasporic past materialized on stage in order to symbolize new cultural and national identities at the turn of the twenty-first century. Representing the past was a crucial aspect of the Ladino Player's repertoire and is thus seen as fundamental to their political and cultural efforts. Such representations are one way for the community to engage publicly in a revival movement by signaling to pre-assimilated or pre-immigrated subjectivities. A number of different debates point to the impact of representing the past as part of revitalization campaigns. Freddie Rokem notes the ways performing the history of the Holocaust in the Jewish diaspora may be a 'redemptive activity' to work through traumatic experiences (*Performing* 59). In writing on performances in the Korean diaspora, Hae-Kyung Um points to how recollecting the past can serve as remembrance to the hardships of migration histories and celebrate a thriving culture in their new home ('Community' 54). Within postcolonial situations in particular, performing history can serve as a form of canonical counter-discourse to rewrite colonial narratives, such as in Africa and the Caribbean (Conteh-Morgan) and amongst the Black Peruvians, where performances showcased a past that preceded the colonial era nostalgia (Feldman 49).⁵

Though recalling the past in such contexts may work to destabilize American hegemonic norms and language, and even more explicitly, American Ashkenazic biases, there is also the possibility that such practices risk freezing an idolized vision of cultural heritage. Postcolonial scholar Frantz Fanon has signified the potential dangers in creating (or reviving) a national culture where the intellectual or artist 'instead of setting out to find this substance [of an authentic culture], will let himself be hypnotized by these mummified fragments which because they are static are in fact symbols of negation and

⁵ Canonical counter-discourse is a term coined by Helen Tiffin in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. It refers to a strategy in which a post-colonial agent 'takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes' (97).

outworn contrivances' (*Wretched* 180). Fanon uses the image of an intellectual clutching hold of outer garments, which are 'merely the reflection of a hidden life' to criticize the act of simplifying histories into a 'stock of particularisms' (ibid.). Beninese philosopher and politician, Paulin Houtondji, also offers criticism to reductive or homogenizing revivals of groups and cultures that collapse ethnic, gender and class identities into undifferentiated and universalizing sameness and calls for a 'rereading of so-called traditional cultures to discover their dynamism, their imbalances' and their 'internal tensions' (107-8; Conteh-Morgan 35). While both Fanon and Houtondji draw upon African postcolonial contexts, the issues pertaining to historical power disparities are also present within most diaspora situations, wherein such critical perspectives warrant application.

The *Ladino Players* serve as a particularly fruitful example for evaluating the politics of representing the past in the process of regeneration as their dramaturgical focus is almost exclusively on staging diasporic histories. A number of their early pieces depict the immigrant's initial experience in America, while their later work focuses on Ottoman heritage. Performing the past demonstrates certain normative dispositions, and highlights the ideological and rhetorical value of history within the Sephardic revitalization movement as a means of supporting legitimacy in the present. Furthermore, these productions are most productively considered in regards to Sephardic and Ashkenazic relations in America as these encounters have heavily contributed to the position of the Sephardim in the past and present Jewish American landscape. In this manner, the current chapter furthers a relational approach in considering the materialization of Sephardic identities on American stages in the late twentieth century, but not considering such practices as developing in a linear manner to previous identities and performance practices; neither the Sephardim nor Sephardi Theatre has 'continuously' developed since Ottoman times. Rather, the ways in which the Sephardic cultural and national identities are performed on American stages can be productively examined by the structures and interests which constitute Sephardi-Ashkenazi relations. One of the primary concerns in

addressing these productions is the extent to which representations of the past challenge Ashkenazi-hegemonic norms or, in fact, contribute to further exoticizing and marginalizing the Sephardim. As the troupe was ideologically and rhetorically embedded in the 1990s revival movement, it is valuable to investigate the activities and negotiations that took place during this period.

Quincentennial Commemorations and the Sephardi Cultural Revival

Professor William Safran refers to diaspora revival movements as rooted in 'trigger events' where the (nearly) assimilated group feel at risk; for the Sephardim, such a moment could be constituted in the quincentennial ceremonies of 1992, marking both Columbus' voyage to the Americas and the Sephardic expulsion from Spain ('Deconstructing' 16). Judith Roumani, Head Editor of *Sephardic Horizons* remarked in 1992, 'all things Sephardic came to the fore in the Jewish world' and as 'Spain had discovered America, American Jews [...] discovered Spanish Jewry' ('The Engineering' n.p.). Focus within the quincentennial rhetoric is on the history of co-existence and harmonious relations, rather than histories of colonialism or imperialism, as demonstrated in Naim Güleriyüz lecture on Sepharad '92 activities: 'Jewish history is full of sad events which are marked by commemorations and memorial services. But now there was a major event to celebrate [...] both the 500th anniversary of the welcoming of the Sephardic Jews to the Ottoman Empire and the five centuries of continuous and peaceful life in Turkey' (25). Güleriyüz's positioning is echoed within the rhetoric of the Quincentennial Foundation⁶ whose commemoration 'not only celebrates the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the Sephardic Jews on Turkish soil in 1492, but also the remarkable spirit of tolerance and acceptance which has characterized the entire Jewish experience in Turkey' (qtd. in Brink-Danan, *Jewish* 35). The Quincentennial Foundation went as far as adopting the slogan 'An

⁶ The foundation was established in 1989 by a group of 113 Turkish citizens including Jews and Muslims. The cultural program planned for the events surrounding 1992 included activities in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Turkey (Brink-Danan, *Jewish Life* 26-27).

Example to Mankind' for the events (*Sephardic Studies* xvii). Brink-Danan argues that focusing exclusively on tolerance and co-existence resulted in a 'lack of engagement with more trouble-some (i.e., intolerant) episodes in Ottoman and Turkish history, questions of second-class citizenship, and changing relations among the Jews of Turkey, as well as with other minority histories in the region' (*Jewish* 40). Similarly, historian Jonathan Schorsch states that the flurry of materials surrounding 1992 had less to do with addressing Sephardic identity politics or recapitulating persecutions and trauma than it did with focusing on discourses of multiculturalism,⁷ 'family, community, tradition, and modernity itself' (ibid 87). Any sense of a tragic past is replaced by rhetoric of harmonious experiences.

In addition to commending cordial diasporic relations, the quincentennial commemorations advanced a notion of solidarity and unity amongst diverse non-Ashkenazic populations. As Roumani notes, 1992 was a year in which '[i]t seemed that a light went on simultaneously in many scholars' minds and links were being identified between non-Ashkenazi Jews from diverse origins' ('About Sephardic Horizons'). Reference to 'links' between Ashkenazic and non-Ashkenazic histories begin to allude to the conflating of Jewish historical narratives that was pronounced throughout the quincentennial commemorations and the 1990s. Such sentiments are captured within scholarly and popular narratives such as Benjamin Harshaw's 1993 work. Harshaw states, 'Jewish history is a staggered history: what happened to one Jewish group earlier happened to another later' (15). Similar attitudes are evident within the work of Lucette Valensi and Nathan Wachtel: '[f]rom Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean countries, Jewish memories echo one another' and 'Ashkenazic and Sephardic [memories], converge to form, with nuances and variations, a single collective memory' (345, 348).

⁷ I use the term multiculturalism as favored primarily within British, Australian and Canadian texts synonymously with cultural pluralism as reflected most predominantly within American scholarship.

While the Quincentennial Foundation and several other Sephardic organizations appeared to advocate for the merging of non-Ashkenazic diasporic histories, the creation of a monolithic Sephardic experience is not without problematic political implications. Ella Shohat critiques such universalizing of Jewish history as it 'hijacks' and 'subordinates' Judeo-Islamic history into that of an Ashkenazi-European experience that supports a more Eurocentric Zionist historiography by lamenting 'yet another tragic episode in a homogenous, static Jewish history of relentless persecution' ('Rethinking' 27). Similarly, Ammiel Alcalay notes how conflating Ashkenazic and Sephardic histories is ahistorical and works to eliminate a sense of need and even possibility of a culture interrogating its own difference (*After Jews* 21). Alcalay critiques the lack of self-reflexivity amongst the quincentennial activists, referring to the affair as a 'missed opportunity' to assess the deeper implications of Muslims and Jews 'obscured to the point of oblivion' in a Eurocentric history which 'successfully managed to ethnically cleanse any references to semites - Jews or Muslims - that might indicate them to be both possessors of an autonomous history and inextricable partners in the creation of "European" civilization' (ibid. 16). As the quincentennial activities focused on the history of Jews from the Ottoman Empire as a homogenizing historical narrative embodying tolerance and co-existence, it fails to recognize the multitude of Jewish communities that were in existence throughout North Africa and the Middle East before 1492 (Shohat, 'Rethinking' 27). The representation of a homogenous 'imaginary Sefarad'⁸ invoked in numerous publications, films, conferences and events points to the central focus of the quincentennial commemorations: such a representation conflates within that point of origin a multitude of historical experiences beneath the cipher 'Sephardic.'

⁸ Jonathan Schorsch utilizes the term 'imaginary Sefarad' as a development of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' to describe the imagined homeland and sense of collective identity which, despite the original terminology referring to decedents from Spain and Portugal, has been 'muddled' with other non-Ashkenazim from the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East. He openly announces that Sephardic, for him, refers to those descending from Spain and Portugal but has elected to 'cast' his 'net even more broadly' and includes Jews from Iraq, Iran and India in his analysis (85).

The actual activities of the quinquennial celebrations included a series of events at national, state and local levels. The American Sephardi Federation (ASF), established in 1978, undertook the organization of several activities including a series of National Conventions and the organization of the Sephardi Odyssey, a cruise designed to transport participants to major Sephardi sites in North Africa and the Balkans (Pejša n.p.). One of the over-arching initiatives of the commemoration events was Sepharad '92, a series of events and an international committee launched through the collaboration of the Spanish government and several other Sephardic organizations such as the ASF, the American Association of Jewish Friends of Turkey (AAJFT) and the World Sephardi Federation (WSF). As part of the pre-quinquennial activities, in 1989 the former president of Israeli, Yitzhak Navon, established the International Jewish Committee for Sepharad '92, chaired by the ASF Executive Vice-President Hal M. Lewis. Also leading up to the commemoration event, a Sephardic Film Festival began in New York City in 1990, furthering increasing public awareness of the culture and history of the Sephardim.

Activities for increasing unity and strength amongst Sephardic organizations, and promoting the histories of the Sephardim, were not exhausted by quinquennial activities, but have had profound effects on the organization and urban projects throughout the 1990s till present times. For instance, in 1994 the Lower East Side Tenement Museums began a 'Komunidad' project to include non-Ashkenazic histories into their tour offerings (Ben-Ur 'Where Diasporas;' *Sephardic*), opening up the Confino family programme in 1997. In 2002, the merging of two of America's largest Sephardic organizations took place: the ASF and the Sephardic House.⁹ The aim of the merger was described as an endeavor to create 'one stronger organization that would work to ensure that the history and legacy of the great Sephardic communities be remembered and celebrated' ('History of Sephardic House' n.p.). Thus strategies for the revival movement

⁹ Writing in the early 1980s, Marc Angel claims that Sephardic House was the most 'important and successful current cultural effort', offering a wide range of classes on both Sephardic and Jewish topics and publishing materials related to Sephardic history and culture (*La America* 180).

included the erasing of ethnic differences between non-Ashkenazim, bridging the gap between Sephardic and Ashkenazic historical experiences, and promoting an image of tolerant Jewish-Turkish relations.¹⁰

Amongst this myriad of institutional advances and cultural activities, the Ladino Players were founded under the auspices of seeking 'to celebrate and revive' their heritage through performance (Ben-Ur, 'Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Theatre' 787). Two of the company's leaders, Daisy Sadaka Braverman and David Altabé, were active in the revitalization movement along with the theatrical activities of the Ladino Players. Their performance work conducted throughout the 1990s was ideologically and rhetorically embedded in the quincennial commemorations. The climate of regenerating interest in Sephardic culture and language heavily impacted both the aesthetic and dramaturgical work of the company as well as its position within the wider New York Jewish landscape. Against a background of growing concern over the plight of Sephardic language and culture within revival efforts, the dramatic performances of the Ladino Players reveals the community's relationship with the past, and the role of performance in the future of Sephardic language and culture. As demonstrated, the quincennial events respond to the ongoing history of segregation and amalgamation outlined in Chapter II. What follows is a more thorough look at the emergence of the Ladino Players and how theatrical performances came to symbolize and reflect cultural identities and power relations.

The Emergence of the Ladino Players

Described as a 'butterfly in the storm' (Armada n.p.), the Ladino Players emerged in order to celebrate the language and culture of the Sephardim and offer an alternative Jewish history to the dominant Ashkenazi perceptions of the past. In addition to

¹⁰ Part of these activities included the launching of the Sephardic Film Festival in 1990 by the Sephardic House (now the American Sephardi Federation). The goal of the festival was 'to illuminate the scope of the Sephardic experience; to raise the consciousness of the American Jewish, and non-Jewish, community to a better understanding of Sephardic Jewry; and to present, through the medium of film, the history, literature, poetry, music, dance, customs and traditions of the Sephardic world' ('About the Festival' n.p.)

materializing during the revitalization efforts of the 1990s, there was also a growing interest in multiculturalism within the American society and theatre.¹¹ American scholarly and popular narratives celebrated ethnic diversity as, according to S.E. Wilmer, 'a strategy of resistance and progressive change' surfacing through a focus on 'the positive aspects of difference rather than focusing on the negative history of discrimination' (173). Embracing the favorable rhetoric of difference, the Ladino Players sought to create both a space for Sephardic solidarity and a place wherein the non-Sephardic public could learn and appreciate their unique historical experiences. For this effect, their focus was often on parallels between Sephardic experiences and other immigrant communities; they painted history with broad strokes, focusing almost exclusively on the positive aspects and rich cultural heritage of the diaspora.

While performances are conducted in Ladino, with occasional English phrases or narration, the company is a mixture of Ashkenazic and non-Ashkenazic performers from diverse backgrounds, including Egypt, Turkey, Cuba and Bolivia. Support for the company's work has come from several organizations including the AAJFT, Congregation Shearith Israel, the ASF, the Sephardic House and the Center for Jewish History (CJH). Between 1994 and 2003 they produced eleven plays and, although there is still a

¹¹ Multiculturalism has arguably been a catchword for the 1990s, captured by Holland Cotter's observations: '[m]ulticulturalism...will define the 1990s in the history books as surely as Pop defined the 1960s' (qtd. in S.E. Wilmer 174). For an excellent overview of cultural pluralism and multicultural theatre see Maufort. Glenda Frank, in writing about cultural pluralism in the American theatre, argues that the 1990s bore witness to a shift in the representation of Jews on stage. Up until the 1980s, Frank argues, protagonists of Jewish playwrights were either Melting Pot Everymen or depicted as part of a Glorious Mosaic, both forms which worked to homogenize and ameliorate the differences of a multifarious society (245). For Frank, productions such as *Falsettos* (1992) by William Finn and James Lapine, Tony Kushner's *Angels in American* (1993), and Neil Simon's *Broadway Bound* (1987) gained success by 'yoking ethnic themes to "hot" issues' for consumption by mass audiences' (ibid.). A number of other plays in the 1990s attempted to address the deeper complexities of the immigrant's experience in American by dramatizing twentieth century history. Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass* (1997) is one example of such a production as it looks back onto historical ethnic issues within America during the 1930s as a way of reflecting upon contemporary politics concerning issues of ethnicity and violence since the Second World War. Frank demonstrates how products such as Wendy Wasserstein's *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992-1994) and *Herb Gardner's Conversations with my Father* (1992) demonstrate the individual's struggle for identity at the end of the century and how the 'path to success' is presented 'through 'Melting Pot otherness' (247). Evidence of this trend in England can also be seen through such productions as Ronald Harwood's *Taking Sides* (1995) and *The Handyman* (1996), Bernard Kops' *Dreams of Anne Frank* (1997), Richard Norton-Taylor's *Nuremberg: The War Crimes Trial* (1997), Diane Samuels' *Kindertransport* and Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto* (1989).

semblance of a group, it is unclear if they will mount another production due to the passing of one of the most active members in 2010 and the natural aging of the other members (Braverman, personal communication). Performances were always conducted outside of traditional theatres, at the Shearith Israel synagogue or at community centres such as the CJH and the Sephardic Home for the Aged.

The following sections investigate three phases of work undertaken by the Ladino Players: the early years wherein the voice of playwright and activist Professor David Fintz Altabé (1929-2008) dominated the cultural products; the middle phase, which saw a move away from original works to translated international pieces; and the later years under the direction of Daisy Braverman, where the production of 'reviews' and composite pieces were the foremost genre of the repertoire. By addressing the changing ways in which the company represents the past we can observe the ways in which history is embodied and comes to symbolize cultural identities and Ashkenazic-Sephardic relations.

Coexistence in the Sephardi-American Immigrant Plays

As previously discussed, one of the primary orientations of the quincentennial commemorations was an interest in presenting the Sephardim through a discourse of coexistence with Muslims.¹² Part of the purpose for this focus was to reorientate populist notions of Jewish relations in the Middle East, and to remind both Americans and Turkish peoples of positive aspects of their past relations. Reflecting this rhetoric, notions of coexistence weigh heavily in the work of the Ladino Players, both in terms of their dramaturgical choices as well as the structural composition of the company, being inclusive of Ashkenazic, non-Ashkenazic and those 'who are interested in the Ladino language and who are fairly fluent in Ladino and/or Spanish' (Programme, *Aviya de Ser*;

¹² Güleriyüz lists a number of events planned by The Quincentennial Foundation that emphasize coexistence and the conflating of historical experiences between the Sephardim and Turkish citizens: conference themes such as 'Contribution of Turkish Jews to Culture and Turkey and Jews: 500 Years of Shared History'; concerts on Turkish music by Turkish-Jewish composers; Ladino music festivals on 'songs from Spain'; painting competitions; synagogue restorations; documentaries; a photo exhibit 'to focus attention on Turkish Jew's rich cultural heritage'; a high school curriculum course about 'the exciting experience' of the Jews in Turkey; and Jewish heritage tours to Turkey (26-27).

Programme, *Panorama Sephardi*). While a number of works by the Ladino Players address issues of coexistence, two of the earlier productions that dramatize American immigrant narratives serve as productive examples for investigating the ways in which representing diasporic histories challenge hegemonic perspectives regarding the Sephardic experience in America. Both set in the 1920s, *Orchard Street Blues* and *Forsyth Street* present particular images of past immigrant relations between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim in New York City. Altabé, whose own family emigrated from Turkey, wrote both pieces and was an active contributor to the Ladino Players until 1997. Altabé was responsible for directing *Ester A-Malká* by Turkish-Israeli playwright Nessim Danón in 1995, writing *Merekias de Orchard Street: Orchard Street Blues, Forsyth Street*, and *Prezentando de una Megilah para Maestros Dias* [*Presenting an Esther Story for Our Times*].

It is useful to briefly address the wider publications and political activities of Altabé as such an examination reveals his motivations and interests in creating and producing work with the Ladino Players. In addition to playwriting, Altabé was a professor of Spanish and published and translated Ladino poetry and folktales. His creative work appears in *Chapter and Verse: Poems, Temas y Dialogos*, and *Una Kozecha de Rimas i Konsejas: A Harvest of Rhymes and Folk-Tales*. One of Altabé's most widely published poems is entitled 'Homage to our Turkish Brethren' (published in English, Ladino and Turkish), which echoes the language of tolerance and coexistence dominant within the quincentennial events,

[...]

The benevolence granted by your forefathers did not end in 1492,
For five hundred years we have lived side by side, Turk and Jew;
We have shared your destiny, we have eaten your food;
Our Spanish is enriched by your words, our music by your tunes.

And so on this five hundredth anniversary of 1492,
We wish to express to you our gratitude.
The One God, whom we both revere, brought us together.
May the harmony we have known last forever! (Altabé, Atay, and Katz 193-4).

Altabé's poem demonstrates his alignment with the popular notions in circulation regarding Sephardic histories in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic. In addition to his interest in Turkish-Jewish relations, Altabé wrote about the contemporary position of Ladino amongst American Sephardim, claiming that the language still 'fills a void that can not be breached by Hebrew or English [...] Hebrew is, of course, the eternal and universal language of the Jews, [but] it does not convey what is distinctly Sephardic' (Judeo-Spanish' n.p.). Altabé's recognition of Ladino as 'distinctly Sephardic' and its inherent value in daily or religious life is similarly reflected in his dramatic work. Through his professional and personal work, Altabé demonstrated an overwhelming interest in bringing Ladino and Sephardi cultural history to wider audiences. Both his plays for the Ladino Players are both set in a 1920s Lower East Side neighborhood, a traditionally Jewish/Sephardic neighborhood during the years of mass immigration, and although they reflect typical narratives of American immigrants, they are particular to Sephardic experiences. In this manner, they are both attempts to rewrite prevailing American immigrant histories, although each presents a slightly alternative perspective to the realities of immigrant life.

Performed in 1996, *Orchard Street Blues* tells the story of a group of immigrants in 1922 as they try to find love and employment in New York City. The narrative involves several romantic plots. The first concerns the widow Jamila who begins to have feelings for the delivery man, Sami, but is eventually convinced by the Rabbi to marry a wealthy factory-owner named David. Sami is central in the second romantic plot; he is in love with Suzi but her family finds their relationship unacceptable and wish for her to marry David. Suzi's parents arrange a meeting between her and David, but she tells him her true love is

Sami. Upon hearing this, David agrees to meet with Jamila instead and promotes Sami in his factory. The play ends with two unions, that of Jamila and David along with that of Sami and Suzi. One Ashkenazi character is present in the play, Rivka. She is Jamila's neighbor and is presented as a friendly and moral conscience for the widow, offering her advice on work and relationships. Structurally the play is divided in two acts and includes a number of popular Sephardi songs which are sung by the characters in between scenes, including: *Durme, Durme, ijiko* [*Sleep, Sleep, little child*], *Arvoles yoran por luvia* [*Trees cry for rain*], *La vida do por el raki* [*Life is for raki*], and *Venimos a ver* [*We come to see*]. The overall effect is of an early immigrant community where the Ladino language and traditions are important symbols of the community's identity and reflect their historical experiences.

Use of Ladino is a very important part of the performance, not only as the practical choice of delivery, but thematically as a unifying force and carrier of tradition for the Sephardic community. In the 1996 performance, Braverman opens the evening by providing an English introduction, explaining the setting and the situation with Jamila and Sami. While the dominant language of the production is Ladino, Braverman's preface worked in part to ensure that any non-Sephardic members of the audience would understand the general context. Throughout the performance, a combination of Ladino and English is used with occasional Yiddish phrases. Except for a few instances where the play makes light of the misunderstanding between Jamila and Rivka, the two characters seem to be able to understand, at least modestly, one another. As demonstrated in Act I, Scene 2:

Rivka: [...] I'll watch **da kindele** [*the child*] for you.

Jamila: **No. Por sedaka, no. Yo no desho a mi ijiko en manos de dengunos.**

[*No. For goodness, no. I don't leave my child with anyone*]

- Rivka: Oh, you're so old fashioned. Oy! To bring up a **kindele** [*child*] all by yourself. **Oy vé!** [*Oh my gosh!*]
- Jamila: **Tu saves. So bivda. Este mazal presto tuve.**
[*You know. You're a widow. You'll be lucky soon.*]
- Rivka: You telling me vat is like to be a widow? I bin a widow five years now. **S'is schwer tzu zein an almona.** [*It is difficult to be a widow*]

The mutual understanding of dialogue is echoed in the delivery of the lines, as the actresses speak in an unstilted manner with each other, seamlessly transitioning between accents and languages.

Although all the characters, aside from Rivka, are Ladino speaking Sephardim, they occasionally converse in English. In fact, Suzi admits that she only speaks Spanish 'a little' (Act I, Scene 4). As a result, her character often responds to Ladino in English, demonstrating what Joshua Fishman refers to as 'intergenerational dislocation,' when children fail to acquire the linguistic skills of their parents (*Language* 395; Dorian 21). The situation in the play reflects the reality of Sephardic immigrant life, as Marc Angel states, 'internal conflict' divided those 'factions in the community that urged radical Americanization [...and] those who argued vigorously for the preservation of the Judeo-Spanish language and culture and for strict adherence to the old traditions' (*La America* 49). This was inclusive of tensions amongst immigrant children responding to the traditions and language of their parents along with a desire to acclimatize to American society. For the Ladino Players, it is representative of not only the historical experience of assimilation but the contemporary situation in the 1990s where American Sephardim are working to revive cultures and traditions that have not been formally passed on. Altabé's linguistic choices play a practical role in the staging of the piece as it allows non-Ladino speaking audience members to follow parts of the narrative. In the context of the story itself, mutual understanding of English, Ladino and even Yiddish suggest that many

immigrants were knowledgeable and capable of communicating with community members, be they Sephardic or Ashkenazic. Such a decision downplays racism and intra-communal tensions in favor of a linguistically knowledgeable and welcoming community.

In regards to relations between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Altabé creates a cordial exchange that does not fail to recognize the inherent possibilities of miscommunication. An example of such an exchange takes place in Act I, Scene 5,

Jamila: [...] I never go to the **kehla** [*community centre*], **ma** [*but*] today is the **meldado** [*reading*] for my husband.

Rivaka: What are friends for. But tell me, what's a '**meldado**'?

Jamila: **Ya saves** [*You know*]. One year after he die, we say **ashkavah** [*Sephardic memorial prayer*].

Rivka: **Ashkavah**? Oh, a **bruch** [*Yiddish for prayer*]. When are you going to learn English? You mean a **yahrtzeit** [*Yiddish for memorial prayer*].

Disagreements over the appropriate word for prayers for the departed are played out with humour. In the same scene, Rivka questions Sami over the strange form of Hebrew he was speaking in the synagogue: '[y]ou **davine** [*pray*] very good, but I didn't understand not one word'. He informs her that the prayers are the same, but the Sephardim pronunciation is more 'pure,' inciting a round of laughs from the audience, clearly familiar with such arguments and classifications. In the 1996 performance, Vicki Grubman in the role of Rivka delivered the above lines in a light-hearted manner, teasing the young widow over her need to familiarize herself with the English and with Sami's classification over Ladino as more authentic. Therefore, while tensions between the two Jewish groups are acknowledged through the production, all the characters display respect and interest in the affairs of the other, emphasizing homogenous immigrant experiences over intra-communal anxieties.

In addition to relationships between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, the other major themes expressed in this work are tensions between traditional and modern lifestyles. These frictions are expressed primarily through the younger characters. For instance, in an exchange between Rivka and Jamila, Rivka tries to encourage her to '[b]e more American' by changing her name: '[w]hy you don't call yourself, Jenny' she states, '[l]ike me, I'm calling myself Becky, now' (Act I, Scene 1). Jamila is much less willing than her Ashkenazi counterpart to take on a new Americanized identity, instead she asserts, 'Jamila I was born, Jamila I will end' (ibid.).¹³ Within the 1920s, acculturation was characterized not just in relation to American norms, but also towards the dominant presence of the Ashkenazim. For instance, Moïse Gadol, editor of *La América*, advocated that 'the Sephardim could best fulfill their destiny by integrating themselves as much as possible into the Ashkenazic society' while not losing their own particularities (qtd. in Angel, *La America* 52). For Gadol, such integration would not result in destruction: rather he saw transformation of the Sephardic community and their customs as essential for survival in America (ibid. 51-52).

Figure 4: Sami, Jamila and Rivka in *Orchard Street Blues*.¹⁴



¹³ Original Text: Jamila nasi, Jamia me vo kedar.

¹⁴ *Orchard Street Blues*, 1996. VHS.

Clashes between traditional lifestyles and modernity are further expressed through the romantic plots. As Sami argues, marrying for money and not love is a reality of the past, and it should not dictate the life of the new immigrants. When Sami suggests speaking to Suzi's Father, she is reluctant to encourage such modern behavior,

Suzi: Sami, you'd be wasting your time. You're lucky if he doesn't throw you out on your ear.

Sami: What about you? You're nineteen years old already. Can't you talk up.

Suzi: You know it isn't done that way. I would never get married without my parent's blessing.

Sami: Oh - don't give me that. This is America. We're not living in Turkey.

(Act I, Scene 3)

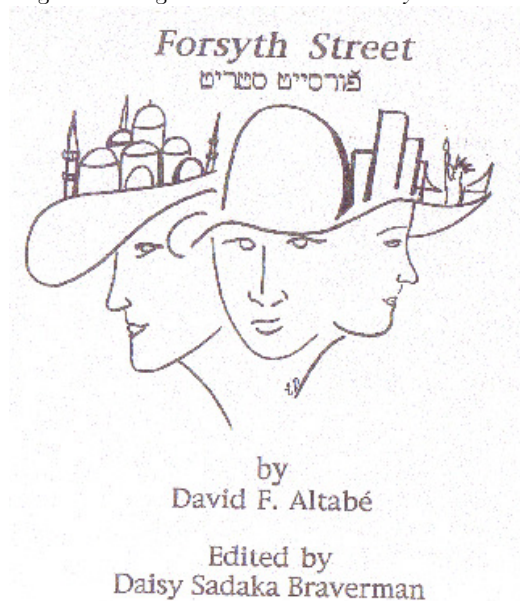
Although Suzi appears to be following in the traditions of her family before immigration, she is still reluctant to accept all of her parents' decisions. When she is encouraged to marry the elderly widow David, Suzi is adamant that he is not suitable for her claiming that he is old enough to be her father and probably already has children (Act I, Scene 4). Suzi is not as clearly impressed as her parents in David's successful career. Throughout the performance, the tensions regarding traditional and modern lifestyles are resolved as Suzi is allowed to marry the recently-promoted Sami and Jamila is happy to become David's young wife. Therefore, although the conflicts arise, they are easily and peacefully resolved by the match-making Rabbi.

Ongoing references to antagonisms between the 'old country' and the new immigrant lifestyle in America illustrate, in part, the ways in which the theatre performs diasporic histories. For all the characters, their homeland is Turkey, although they never express a desire to return, but are interested in their former country's affairs. In just one scene David, Mordu and Sarah briefly share their families' origins and interest in news

from their former homeland (Act I, Scene 4). Referring to Turkey, albeit briefly, the text demonstrates the characters' transnational identities, intimately intertwined with previous occurrences of settlement while simultaneously embedded in the realities of the new diaspora experience.

Geographically set a mere two blocks from the characters in *Orchard Street Blues*, and during the same year, *Forsyth Street* portrays a snapshot of the American Sephardic experience focusing on recurring themes such as the clash of old and new traditions, dual-identification with the homeland and the new country, as well as the limitations of employment opportunities and poor living conditions. Themes of immigration and diasporic identities are captured in the programme image, designed by Esther Cazés Daiell, featuring several characters from the same root with an Ottoman/Turkish past and an American future (Fig. 5).

Figure 5: Programme Cover for *Forsyth Street*.¹⁵



Forsyth Street is a one act play in six scenes focusing on the Turkish immigrants Jacques and Judít, both Sephardic youths from Istanbul. Although Jacques studied at an AIU school and had nearly finished his studies to become an engineer, he is now selling bonbons in a theatre in New York until he can improve his English. When the play

¹⁵ Programme: *Forsyth Street*.

opens, Judit has just arrived in the city and is staying with her Uncle Nesim and his wife, Regina. She has been given permission to marry Jacques, her betrothed for over three years. Judit quickly learns that life in America is not as full of opportunities as she thought, and the Sephardim experience difficulties due to language acquisition, an inability to join unions, and difficulties in continuing education whilst working. Upon reuniting with Jacques, she becomes disillusioned even over their engagement as she feels he has abandoned his ambition and future prospects. Jacques has also been dating the colorful Safira, who is shocked to learn that Jacques is prepared to leave her for a girl from the 'old country.' Judit attempts to secure a job as a saleswoman in a local clothing shop, although in Istanbul she was responsible for translating documents from French, Italian and German into Turkish for a bank. The shopkeeper, Mordechai Leví, who now goes by the name Murray, expresses camaraderie with Judit as a fellow Sephardim. During her first task in the shop, Judit must sell a dress to Safira in a dialogue ripe with dramatic irony. Although Judit expresses concern over her engagement up until the final scene, she is eventually won over by Jacques, who has by now fulfilled part of his ambition by securing a job as an electrician in a factory and pledged to be faithful to Judit.

There are several aspects of the production which work to make the performance distinctly Sephardic. Several traditional Ladino songs are sung by characters, which succeed in creating a particular mood and capturing the Sephardic culture more than driving the plot forward. Altabé also includes actions such as preparing Turkish coffee and *borekas* to signify to the audience the cultural identity of the characters. Similar to *Orchard Street Blues*, direct discussion of life in Turkey only occurs once with Judit informing Regina that 'the situation is very bad. One war after another'¹⁶ and that the people are dying of hunger (Scene 2). Regina notes how the situation is the same in Salonica, where soldiers fill the streets, and the two women speak about how life in Paris is much different and full of culture and beauty but assert that although the situation in

¹⁶ Original Text: La situación está muy negra. Una gerra después de otra.

America is not as good as France, 'at least we live in peace and we aren't going hungry.'¹⁷

In both *Orchard Street Blues* and *Forsyth Street*, the characters are interested and attentive to news from Turkey, but are clearly driven to settle and succeed in America.

Whereas language is an important part of both the spoken language and themes in *Orchard Street Blues*, in Altabé's second play, there is much more focus on the application and importance of retaining Ladino. The characters speak exclusively in Ladino except for a very few English phrases, and there are no Ashkenazi or other ethnicities present in the narrative. Thus, the image of the past that materializes in this production contrasts the linguistic-hybrids and affable Sephardic-Ashkenazic relations established in *Orchard Street Blues*. Within the playtexts, the characters appear to challenge assimilationist tendencies by not conforming to hegemonic languages such as English or Yiddish. Subsequently, the performance itself refuses to conform to the present non-Ladino speaking American audiences. One possible effect is that the performance language creates exclusivity, an intimacy that can only be shared by those with an awareness of Sephardic histories and language. The further effects of this in regards to code-switching are discussed shortly. Together, both *Orchard Street Blues* and *Forsyth Street* point to the tensions and desires to preserve Ladino in America, which has remained an 'important cultural issue' for the Sephardim throughout the twentieth century (*La America* 49).¹⁸

In addition to linguistically diverging from *Orchard Street Blues*, Altabé's second play presents stronger divisions amongst Sephardic characters. For instance, although Jacques and Safira both speak Ladino (as well as French and German), Jacques states that

¹⁷ Original Text: ma bivimos en paz i no mos manka de komer.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that the question of acquiring Hebrew as a unifying Jewish language is not raised in either production. Angel asserts that a common argument amongst Sephardic and Ashkenazic immigrants was the adoption of Hebrew as an equalizing and neutral language (*La America* 50). In Angel's study of language debates amongst the American Sephardim, Hebrew was occasionally heralded as the ideal language for uniting Sephardic and Ashkenazic immigrants (ibid 50-51). The possibility of acquiring or advocating Hebrew is not raised in performances by the Ladino Players.

they don't speak 'the same language' (Scene 4).¹⁹ The argument presented is that despite a shared language, as Safira has not grown up in the same town, read the same books, attended the same schools, and had the same thoughts, they are not as connected as he is with Judít. Alliances run deeper than spoken word, and are more associated with the experiences and cultural identity from particular cities of origin. Although not addressed specifically, Altabé is alluding to some of the divisions within the Sephardic community itself as groups tended to converge with immigrants from similar cities of origin.

Although the play concludes on an optimistic note as Jacques and Judít are able to wed, the ending is much more open than the neatly concluded sequence of events in *Orchard Street Blues*. Whereas Jacques and Judít prepare to embark on their future together, Jacques' former betrothed, Safira, is left alone and without a romantic or financial future. Jacques' new position in a factory allows him the means to marry Judít in line with her cousin Nesim's wishes. However, Nesim continues to operate a hot dog stand in Brooklyn, demonstrating that not all immigrants achieved economic success in America. Whereas *Orchard Street Blues* evokes a melodramatic ending with the series of weddings and turn-of-fortunes, *Forsyth Street* has a more bittersweet conclusion.

One additional point of significance is that *Forsyth Street* is in fact autobiographical. Following a performance in 1997, Altabé addressed the audience, explaining his personal connection to the story,

[t]his is the story of my family. My father was Jacques [...]. He struggled when he came to this country, he came with a lot of talents but America was not entirely the land of opportunity it promised itself to so many other people. [...] In a way I have fulfilled his dream by becoming a professor of Spanish.
(Performance)

¹⁹ Original Text: Judít i yo avlamos la meisma lingua.

As a tribute to his parent's experience in America, *Forsyth Street Blues* performs Altabé's personal history. The non-fictional elements of this text distinguish it from previous Ladino Players' productions. Classified as autobiographical, the production establishes a particular ontological and epistemological relationship between the actual event and its narrated presentation, or, to use Richard Bauman's terms, the 'narrated event' and the 'narrative event' (*Story, Performance* 98). Altabé's linguistic choices and auto-biographical positioning enables the performance to acquire a level of prestige and recognition. Primarily, Altabé's fluent use of Ladino establishes him and the Ladino Players as bearers of symbolic capital amongst their audiences. Pierre Bourdieu discusses the relationship of language and power as symbolic profit as 'within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market), and which is capable of procuring a certain material or symbolic profit' (*Language* 66). Within the cultural field, symbolic profit is as important as capital resources within the economic field, and the extent of symbolic capital the speaker possesses is in direct relation to their position within the community (also see Bourdieu *Distinction*). When audiences and speakers share in linguistic and cultural capital, the use of Ladino in performance becomes an ideologically powerful means of communication.

Although both *Orchard Street Blues* and *Forsyth Street* perform Sephardic immigrant experiences, the ways in which discourses of coexistence are embodied leave audiences with somewhat contradictory images. Through the representation of Sephardic and Ashkenazic characters, *Orchard Street Blues* presents the two communities as peaceful neighbors, respectful of the others religious and linguistic traditions. Miscommunication adds humour to the scenes although it demonstrates underlying anxieties regarding conforming to American or Ashkenazic linguistic frameworks. Altabé's overall representation consists of a homogenous Sephardic community that is able to inter-marry and communicate with ease as all members appear to share a similar familiarity with Ladino and English. While there are occasional signs of apprehension

between the two Jewish communities, relations with the Ashkenazic community are presented as cordial and beneficial, conjuring up an image of cultural diversity that allows for the cooperation between different social and ethnic groups. This is further emphasized in the final scene, where Rivka has joined the Sephardic family in celebrating the engagements, and together they lead the audience in singing *Venimos a ver*, a traditional Moroccan Sephardic wedding song. The fictionalized vision of the past can be read as a model for current peaceful coexistence. While *Orchard Street* resists collapsing Sephardic immigrant experiences into dominant narratives, claiming to represent an authoritative view of the past that does not account for inter-communal tensions risks not fully 'de-Ashkenazing' Sephardic history. The production bypasses historically unequal power relations and instead presents two linguistic and culturally different communities that nevertheless share a legitimacy and authority within American immigrant experiences. In this manner, the production does not try to reevaluate historical Ashkenazic-Sephardic relations but present them as equals. Shohat demonstrates how this may still be problematic if it continues to risk 'assimilating' non-Ashkenazic histories into hegemonic norms (Shohat, 'Reflections' 27).²⁰ Linking the quincentennial rhetoric with contemporary politics, Shohat points to how conflating historical narratives may have implications for future orientations of Sephardic history and identity.

In contrast, *Foyrsth Street* claims to be rooted on more 'authentic' immigrant histories and presents an immigrant community devoid of contact with the Ashkenazim and conscious of intra-communal differences. None of the characters speak in Yiddish, nor are audiences made to believe they know it; however, it is depicted as a necessary language to acquire for economic development (i.e. Judit must learn Yiddish or she will be fired). In addition, English is much less prominent throughout the play, resulting in an

²⁰ Ferdinand de Jong and Michael Rowland also advocate the need to release 'hidden voices' as crucial for resisting the imposition of foreign models (17; also see Schmidt and Patterson for a study of how 'historical research can be used to recuperate the histories of people that have been erased, marginalized, or misrepresented' xii).

image of the Sephardic community that is isolated both linguistically and culturally from their surroundings. Acquiring linguistic skills is depicted as necessary for economic advancement but not for the sake of becoming American. Coexistence is therefore linked to financial security and meeting material desires within the host country, not to the potential of a beneficial cultural synthesis.

Language Ideologies in *Prezentando de una Megilah para Myestros Diyas*

Whereas the utilization of Ladino within Ottoman Sephardic performances correlated to the dominant speech community, within 1990s New York it demonstrates a politics of language that aims to resist normative language dispositions. The application of Ladino in these performances intersects with the wider interests of this thesis in representing the past in two ways. Primarily, its evocation is explicitly linked with the diaspora itself, as Sephardic historian Mair Jose Benardete argues, language was 'the most precious possession [...the Jews of Spain] took with them in their exile' (9-10). As Ladino has eroded as a primary language amongst the Sephardim, the act of speaking it in performance envelops the performance in historical associations and could be seen as a demonstration of the ongoing strength of the community. In other words, performing in Ladino *is* representing the past. Additionally, performing in Ladino corresponds to various visions of the past and present society. For instance, in *Orchard Street Blues* and *Forsyth Street*, the language could arguably have been used to authenticate the atmosphere of the American immigrants; however, in the Ladino Players later productions which are set in the present and are narrating the past, the use of Ladino signifies a shift from recreating a historic moment to a communicative mode for narrating the past. By addressing both what is said through performance and how it is said signifies the ways the Ladino Players work to challenge linguistic norms through theatrical events.

For the Ladino Players, the widespread use of Ladino points to a representation of language that does not necessarily correspond to the linguistic reality of the Sephardic

community. Therefore, the language takes on a symbolic value as a distinguishing marker of ethnic identity. As John Edwards observes, the context necessitates a differentiation of language use 'as a tool for communication' and 'as an emblem of groupness, as a symbol, a rallying-point' (17). Since the language is linked to particular diasporic histories, its symbolic use in performance extends beyond a unifying communal force in the present, but as a bearer of histories: '[f]or any speech community in which the language of use is also the ancestral language, the intangible symbolic relevance is tied up with the instrumental function' (ibid 17). Jacob Landau also addresses the language use in diasporas, terming the relationship 'defensive lingualism' as it 'considers language not merely as a means of communication, but also as the genius of nationhood' ('Diaspora' 9). This relationship is heightened in situations when minorities feel threatened (Fishman, 'The Truth' 83). The application of Ladino represents not merely a language shift, but also a reconceptualization of what it means to be Sephardic in America in the 1990s. The materialization of language not only defines contemporary cultural identities, but also the community's relation with external forces. A deeper look into how language within the *Ladino Players* performances operates in relation to dominant ideologies will determine the extent to which the symbolic representation of Ladino resists or contributes to existing power relations.

Issues related to language use on stage are typical in work on postcolonial or diaspora communities. Gilbert and Tompkins propose that within post-colonial plays the 'strategic use of languages' may work to 'reinvest colonised peoples and their characteristic systems of communication with a sense of power and an active place on the stage' (*Post-Colonial* 168). Thereby the choice alone of an expressive language is 'a political act that determines not only the linguistic medium of a play but, in many cases, its (implied) audience as well' (ibid.). The implications for the *Ladino Players* may be a reinvestment in the use and prestige of Ladino both on and off stage. For the *Ladino Players*, language is an important marker of ethnic identity. However, this is also problematic in the sense

that the Ladino Players evoke the language of the Eastern Sephardic linguistic variations from Turkey and Greece and not the wider experiences of heterogeneous Sephardic communities. Similar to the unifying activities around the quincentennial commemorations, Ladino symbolically dominates and thus universalizes non-Ashkenazic experiences under the banner of Ottoman/Turkish-Sephardim: the language used in production is not reflective of the variety of Ladino-linguistic varieties amongst the Sephardim.²¹ While the use of Ladino distinguishes the community from dominant Ashkenazic historiography, it simultaneously problematizes non-Ashkenazic experiences by universalizing linguistic and cultural histories.

The productions in the Ladino Players' middle phase of work demonstrate a more direct interest in addressing issues of culture and language for modern day Sephardim. *Prezentando de una Megilah para Maestros Diyas* [A Presentation of the Megilah Story for Our Times],²² thereby demonstrates a shift in Altabé's work from recreating historical experiences to representing an image of the community in the present as they engage with their religious and cultural identities. The relevance of the production 'for our times' is significant in that the play is positioned as a modernization of the Purim story and, more importantly perhaps, as a Ladino production it is also a modernization of the language and its relationship with the community. In addition to altering the geographical and temporal focus of the performance, *Prezentando una Megilah* was, at the time, the Ladino Players most ambitious production. Written in Latin characters for a cast of twelve, the play is divided into three acts that follow an amateur theatre company's telling of the Megilah story in preparation for the festival of Purim; therefore, it resonates with Jewish themes that would be easily identifiable to a broader, non-Ashkenazic audience. In a playful metatheatrical mode, the performance oscillates

²¹ For more on dominant ideology with language see Johnson: '[d]ominant ideology guides conceptions of reality through repetition of preferred, privileged practices treated as though they were 'natural.' This control of meaning relegates other cultural systems to the margins by making their meaning systems seem wrong, deviant, unimportant, primitive, or even invisible (*Speaking* 62).

²² Megilah is the scroll which contains the Purim story.

between a present day social hall (which bears much reflection to the actual location of the performance) and the historical/fictionalized world of Ancient Persia. One of the notable differences between Altabé's other playtexts, is that *Prezentando una Megilah* does not attempt to recreate or represent the past, but rather to present a modern multiethnic community dealing with various historical and religious legacies, including both Ashkenazim and Sephardim. The work consciously acknowledges the varying backgrounds of the performers and audiences, and depicts characters that have come together with a shared goal of presenting a relevant rendition of the Esther story for contemporary audiences. This production thus marks an important shift in the repertoire of the company, away from performing history to performing an, albeit rather idealized, image of the present.

Utilizing Ladino as a unifying language becomes one of the more noteworthy aspects of this production, which aims to demonstrate how both Ashkenazim and Sephardim can use the language in the present as opposed to conforming to Yiddish, Hebrew, or even English. More explicit in this text than *Orchard Street Blues*, Ladino is utilized in an ethnically-joined company, establishing the importance given to creating a shared sign system amongst community members and the necessity of such a system in ensuring the survival of the cultural traditions. However, also present in the application of Ladino is the evidence of a struggle to celebrate cultural traditions while asserting the modern relevance and necessity to propagate the language. The ongoing struggle between assimilation and survival of the composite diasporic identities, results in a performance of a syncretic²³ culture, borrowing from both traditional/indigenous religious text and the new society.

Issues related to the use and choices of language are immediately raised in the opening scene of *Prezentando una Megilah*. The actor/character of the Rabbi begins the

²³ Use of syncretic here draws upon Christopher Balme's excellent study of the term in postcolonial performances amongst the Maori in New Zealand (*Decolonizing*).

play by addressing the gathered crowd of congregants (in Ladino), imploring them to help him with a new project. He states that not everyone can understand Hebrew when the Megilah story is presented during Purim and some congregants miss out on key moments of the story. Therefore, he suggests that the members of the social club (those present, and by extension, the audience) should present a play of the Purim story that will mark a departure from the typical festival atmosphere by focusing on the more serious aspects of the narrative. To further convince the other club members, he emphasizes that the 'script' is already written in the Megilah, implying the promptness with which they can begin rehearsing (Act 1, Scene 1). The choice of language, story, and performance are thus interwoven in this meta-theatrical opening sequence. Although the play has thus far been spoken in Ladino, when the Rabbi insists that the club members present the play in Ladino there is disbelief and disagreement amongst the on-stage listeners. However, the Rabbi qualifies his decision by stating that they must use the language before it is forgotten: 'you all must use the language before you forget it entirely' (ibid.).²⁴ When questioned about this decision he responds that enough people are familiar with the Megilah story and have studied Spanish in school so they will understand. There is an implied shared understanding of the story, a part of cultural traditions, and an acceptance (or even embracing) of audience members knowing 'enough.'

Whereas Altabé's other works perform history through his openly personal, subjective view of history, *Prezentando de una Megilah* strives to give, at least the illusion of, debate regarding how the past should be 'displayed' for contemporary audiences. Various moments occur throughout the narrative wherein the actors/characters discuss vocabulary and narrative choices in their dramatization, illustrating not only that one *should* be (re)evaluating representations of the past and traditions in the present, but one *must*. Immediately following the opening discussion of language are moments when the relevance and attitudes of characters on the subject are questioned, revised, and reversed.

²⁴ Original Text: vozotros tambien devesh uzar la lengua antes de ke se vos olvide por entero.

One such moment occurs when the character playing the King uses the word 'kulo' [ass]. A club member responds that *kulo* is not in the Megilah, to which the president of the club declares that if the Rabbi does not say anything then they can use it in the performance (ibid.). This instance is particularly noteworthy as a double-rewriting by the actors/characters and an active transformation of the historical story that is consciously acknowledged. Michael Lambek discusses the importance of debating changes to traditions as an important aspect of Sakalava culture in Madagascar, as it allows certain practices to adapt to a changing world while not becoming alienated or destroyed: '[c]hange is acceptable as long as it is engaged upon consciously and is properly authorized' (234). In this manner, the playtext recognizes the inherent transformation of history in the present yet seeks to legitimize such actions as a necessary, and respectful, way of Sephardic cultural continuity. An additional example of how the historical text is openly debated in the present occurs in Scene Four where the King utters to his wife, Vashti: 'I would feel so destroyed without you,'²⁵ to which a club member responds, '[a]lthough that doesn't appear in the Megilah, I like it' (Act 1, Scene 4).²⁶ While the alteration of the King's lines and intentions may be to add a layer of romantic appeal to the characters, the two reasons given within the playtext for adapting the traditional story are to add humor and to modernize the text's chauvinistic characteristics. The decision to keep this line in the performance shifts the meaning and colouring of the traditional story. Through publicly editing the traditional text the actors/characters continuously redefine the narrative and characters, and thus consciously recognize temporal and spatial connections between the past and present.

Prezentando una Megilah situates the re-articulation of the traditional text between both Ashkenazi and Sephardi performers and audience members, dissolving mono-ethnic ownership of the language and cultural traditions and encouraging all those

²⁵ Original Text: I yo me siento tan asolado sin ti.

²⁶ Original Text: Aunken no aprese en la Megilah, me esté gustando.

present during the theatrical event to join in the propagation of the tradition. A specific example of audience empowerment occurs when the actors invite the audience onto the stage to join in traditional dancing in the Persian court: '[w]hy don't we demand that all the women that are going to see the play come on stage to present themselves to the King. Then we will have what they call "audience participation"' (Act 1, Scene 4). Audiences are hence invited not only to cross the loosely constructed "fourth" wall and join the actors/characters on stage, but also to enter into a geographically removed and distant past. The act of border-crossing is opened to the community, if even partially, as they are invited to embody and connect to a previous moment of the diaspora. However, the act of 'participation' is boundary-leveling, as it allows for even those who do not identify as Sephardim to partake in the performance activities.

Code-switching in *Ladino Reveries*

Regarding the issues of language use in a diaspora, code-switching may be a particularly powerful communication tool and a symbolic carrier of the past and ideological markers in performance. Code-switching is defined by John Gumperz as the 'juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems' (59) and differs from diglossia, which refers to a 'highly codified' rendering of the same language (Ferguson, 'Diglossia' 336), or bilingualism (Fishman 'Bilingualism'). For Gumperz, the use of conversational code-switching is a much more complex form of communication in social contexts as the incentive is 'stylistic and metaphorical rather than grammatical' (72). Within the context of diaspora performances, code-switching is a bearer of history and offers a metalinguistic commentary on socio-cultural and symbolic values.²⁷ Code-switching in Ladino is itself a political act as it draws attention to speaking in a diasporic language, and thus offers a critique on the language's

²⁷ For approaches to code-switching as a carrier of social meaning see Fishman 'Who Speaks;' Gumperz; Myers-Scotton; and and Hua. For alternative theories see Auer and Gafaranga who position the act of code-switching as more meaningful than the language itself.

existence and endurance. Two years following the performance of *Prezentando de una Megilah*, the Ladino Players staged *Ladino Reveries* which concerns itself with the politics of language, in particular through the symbolic power of code-switching.²⁸ An investigation of code-switching as a potential site of resistance and strategy for uniting cultural groups serves not only to deepen understanding of the Sephardic diaspora, but to aid understanding of mutually-applicable scenarios wherein multiple language groups compete for access to power.

Code-switching was nearly a ubiquitous feature within productions by the Ladino Players and therefore significant in analyzing linguistic-dramaturgical choices. Within *Ladino Reveries*, the application of code-switching is particularly apparent as a conscious dramaturgical choice when adapting Hank Halio's popular text. In 1998, the Ladino Players presented *Ladino Reveries*²⁹ based on Halio's text and adapted by Vicki Grubman. Published in 1996, *Ladino Reveries* is an anthology of anecdotes, dialogues, and stories from Halio's columns on Sephardic language and culture, first appearing in 1986 in a newsletter from the *Sephardic Home News* (Halio 15). In the preface to the 1996 compilation, the editors note how such a work contributes to the important Sephardic cultural 'Renaissance' and serves as an important step in '[p]reserving the remnants of a vanishing culture' which they hope will stimulate 'further interest and studies in our Sephardic culture and the Judeo-Spanish language' (ibid. 5-6). The context

²⁸ Following the original work of Altabé the Ladino Players produced two shows in 1999 and 2000 which moved away from performing Sephardic histories or religious traditions and presented instead international translations and original work in Ladino. In 1999, the company staged two performances of *El Eskaso* from Molière's *The Miser*. In December 2000, the company presented a night of one-act plays entitled *La Tavla de Dulces* [*Tray of Sweets*], which featured a 'series of humorous sketches in Ladino about family life' including a new piece from the Jewish community of Montevideo (Uruguay), a translation of a Sholem Aleichem play from Yiddish, and a 1950s Israeli radio play. Both productions took place at Congregation Shearith Israel ('Kol Jeshurum June 11-18' 5; 'Kol Jeshurum June 18-25' 4; 'Past Events at the Sephardic House' 3). *El Eskaso* was translated and directed by Daisy Braverman. These productions present an interesting alternative on the repertoire of the Ladino Players and will hopefully receive appropriate attention in future research on Sephardi Theatre in America.

²⁹ I am grateful to Irwin Berkman for the photocopy of his script which includes the textual edits and stage directions added in during rehearsals for the production. Several adjustments to this text have been made, including the crossing-out of lines and scenes. As I have not yet confirmed if these scenes were ever performed, I have elected to focus on the scenes which appear to be the ones which made the final cut. In quoting from the text I have included the edits that were added later in the rehearsal process in order to better reflect the spoken words during the performance.

and impetus of the publication was thus in line with the quincennial revival movements. As both the Sephardic Home for the Aged and Shearith Israel were involved in the publication and support for the theatrical production, it suggests that there was an ongoing interest in the piece as a work that both preserves and stimulates interest in Sephardic language and traditions (see Cañas 282). The popularity of the publication amongst particular cultural spheres in New York City also suggests that when the Ladino Players staged their adaptation in 1998 the stories carried a degree of cultural capital.

Much of the dramatic text is taken directly from Halio's book; however, just some of the stories are utilized and they are presented in a non-sequential manner, with occasional photographic slides and Sephardic songs. Although Halio's anthology contains a number of stories from his family, the wider community, and folktales, the scenes dramatized in the play revolve around the Halio family exclusively. The audience experience Halio's mother, Betty, as she struggles to learn English and gain citizenship, interactions with neighbors and relatives, outings in the park, family storytelling sessions and concludes with a conversation between Halio and his mother. Although the performance unfolds in an episodic manner, it plays out in a linear fashion and explores Sephardic families through two generations. Grubman's adaptation captures a similar tone to the original anthology, with the protagonist Hank Halio serving as a narrator and commenting on dramatic extracts in a style that contextualizes the language, characters, and social situations. Linguistically, the play has been adapted to include a combination of English and Ladino within all the scenes, occasionally operating in tandem through code-switching and at other times the two languages are utilized for different functions. Whereas the book utilized English for commentary and Ladino for dramatizing scenes, the theatrical performance included a greater degree of code-switching within the dramatic episodes. English is maintained as the dominant language and the one in which factual information and commentary is conducted. Ladino appears as a secondary

language, but in which the jokes emerge, stories unfold, and the sense of 'history' is most prominently embedded.

As an essential aspect of the jokes and traditional stories, the application of Ladino is essential for the humor of the piece, as many jokes revolve around mispronunciation of words, and miscommunication. In a dramatized conversation between Sultana (nickname for Hank's mother), her sister Zimbul and Aroniko (a young Hank) the two women are doing the laundry and Sultana wants to purchase new sheets and pillowcases but she cannot think of the English word. Upon hearing the word 'sheet' she doesn't believe that is the real English word, and accuses her son of trying to set her up for a joke with the shopkeeper. Aroniko assures her that it just sounds similar to another English word, but she is unconvinced, and the two women decide they will take him to the shop to inquire about the purchase and will see how the shopkeeper responds. This scene draws upon language for its comedic effect and a number of other scenes similarly use 'Ladinoenglish words.' Some examples include: la Constitusha/the Constitution; sanaweech/sandwich; I don't estay long; Ande es este pahk?/Where is this park?; beeznez/business; and no hay damage on the skirts/the skirts are not damaged. There is also a profusion of Sephardic proverbs and expressions throughout the play such as 'el ombre en la plaza, la mujer en la kaza' [man makes a living and the wife works at home] (Scene 5) and 'las muelas ke te caigan' which is translated within the dialogue as 'your teeth should fall out' (Scene 6). The choice of language within the text illustrates the layering of cultural identities present within American Sephardic communities as they moved between various linguistic registers.

In the final scene of the play, code-switching is utilized to indicate a generational divide. Grubman's adaptation of this scene incorporates a great deal of English, spoken by the protagonist Hank, which does not appear in the original version of the narrative. As shown in this extract, although Hank's responses to his mother are almost entirely in English both characters seem to be communicating fluently:

Halio's Original Text

Grubman's Adaptation

Me: Kalme te. Phyllis y los chikos estan buenos. Yo no tengo abashada. Y no esto ronko. Es la konckSION de el telefon ke esta negro. Yo esto bueno.

Y: Phyllis and the kids are fine. **Los chikos se estan aziendo guerkitos.** They're becoming little devils.

M: **Ya te akodrates ke tienes madre? Porke no me yamates ayer?**

Y: Take it easy. How could I forget you, Ma? I couldn't call yesterday because I was very busy.

M: **Yo esto aki sola y seka, yo no se ke te esta pasando a ti, Si estas komiendo bueno, si estas hazino.**

Y: Yes, yes. I'm eating ok. I'm not sick.

M: **Estas avlando komo tienes yelor. La boz esta ronka.**

Y: No, Ma, listen...I don't have a...

M: **Te fuites al doktor? Mira no te la deshes la yelor ke se aga mas mala. Si no te miras, te se engrenya y nunca se sale del puerpo.**

Y: Ma, listen. My voice is not hoarse. I don't have a cold. **Es la koneksion de el telefon ke es negra. Yo esto bueno.**

Mom: No mires de enganyarme. Yo so tu madre y yo te konosko mejor ke te konoses a ti. Dime, komo esta el *beeznez*? Komo te estas pasandon kon el *Union*, y kon tu haver? No tienes trouble kon eyos? Tienes *orders*? Tu haver esta vendiendo? Estas kortando la ropa? Komo de lavoro estan aziendo los kontraktos? Estan saliendo las fustas sin *demidj*?

M: **No mires de enganyarme. Yo so tu madre y yo te konnosko mejor ke te knonses a ti.**

Y: Please, Ma. I'm not trying to fool you.

M: **Dime, komo esta el *beeznez*?**

Y: The business is fine.

M: **Komo te estas pasando kon el *Union*, y kon tu haver? No tienes trouble kon eyos?**

Y: No, no trouble with the Union.

M: **Tienes orders? Tu haver, esta vendiendo?**

Y: Yes, yes. My partner is selling. We're getting plenty of orders

Me: Ma, kreye me, yo esto bueno. Mi mujer esta buena, y los chikos se estan aziendo guerkitos. Mira, ma, no puedo avlar mas, tengo otra yamanda.

M: **Estas kortando la ropa? Estan saliendo las fustas sin demidj?**

Y: **No hay damage on the skirts. Mira, Ma, no puedo avlar mas, tengo otra yamada. I have another call.**

Thematically, the scene deals with loss and the growing distance between generations. Narrating the scene, Hank introduces the action by confessing how he longs for his parents and their presence as he embarks on raising his own family, '[t]oo bad that our hindsight is 20/20 and our foresight zero' (Scene 7). The weight of these words applies not only to his reflections on how he once gave his parents such a hard time, but also how he too quickly grew tired of contact: '[a]fter I was married and moved out of the house, I used to call Mom about once a week. Mom hoped I would call every day. After a while it really got to be a chore. [...] After a few minutes, I couldn't wait to say goodbye' (ibid.). There seems to be fluent communication between the characters despite the fact that Hank's mother only speaks in occasional words and phrases in English. Although Hank appears comfortable and fluent in both languages, the use of English is associated with business and his contemporary lifestyle. The way in which language is embodied in this scene symbolizes shifting identities of the Sephardim where fluency in Ladino is not necessarily the sole defining ethnic marker.

The scene leaves audiences confronting the reality of loss rather than the more activist agenda embedded in Halio's original work. Whereas this scene originally comes near the middle of Halio's anthology, Grubman has selected this scene to conclude the performance. Halio's own epilogue in *Ladino Reveries*, entitled 'El Tiempo Mos Esta Pasando/Time is Passing Us By,' recounts his experience of maintaining Ladino in the modern world and the difficulties in resisting its disappearance. He leaves his readers with the hope that the stories in the anthology will encourage others to share and pass on the

memories and culture of the Sephardim with the hope that the rich heritage will not be forgotten by future generations, '[t]he object is to remind you of our glorious recent past, to bring back loving memories of our parents and grandparents who spoke Ladino' (16). Grubman's final scene is colored by deeper feelings of loss, without the activating message of Halio's conclusion. As the mother and son hang up, the audience is left wondering what will be come of the language, the culture, and the connection between one's Sephardic past and future generations.

Linguistic choices mirror the thematic context by demonstrating a rupture in the language with which the generations are able, or elect, to communicate. As the original text did not include English within the exchange, Grubman's choices throughout mark a deliberate effort to raise awareness of code-switching as a part of indicating the character's multiple identities (see Myers-Scotton, 'The Negotiation' 126).³⁰ And in fact, language choices were the most noteworthy aspect of the production in relation to affecting audiences, as expressed in one member's commentary: 'the sound of that peculiar mix of fifteenth century Spanish and English, sprinkled with Turkish and Greek words - something we might call "Ladinoenglish" - did not fail to move all those in attendance' (Cañas 282). The Ladinoenglish Dionisio Cañas refers to is in fact a continuous use of code-switching more than a mixture of English and Ladino. Linguistic choices appear as an important dramaturgical choice in affecting audiences who were part of a similar speech community capable of recognizing the symbolic value of code-switching

In addition to signaling alternative linguistic registers, the application of code-switching points to a certain language politics. Monica Heller describes the politics of language through code-switching as 'the ways in which language practices are bound up in the creation, exercise, maintenance or change of relations of power' ('Code-Switching' 159). As argued, code-switching gains relevance when 'linked to other instances of

³⁰ For instance, Myers-Sutton points out, including more than one linguistic system is a strategy for 'implicating multiple identities in oneself' and an attempt to establish the importance of more than one language in an exchange ('The Negotiation' 126).

language use' and it 'must draw on resources which are somewhere separate, either in the lives of individuals or in their distribution in a network of individuals who are otherwise linked' (ibid. 167). In other words, code-switching gains political saliency when linked to two separate linguistic networks, such as that of unequal relations between English and Ladino. Framing linguistic exchanges through code-switching signals power relations in two ways as argued by Heller:

First, it is part of the processes of social action and interaction, part of the ways in which people do things, get things, and influence others, and so on. Second, language itself thereby becomes a resource which can be more or less valuable, according to the extent that the mastery of ways of using language is tied to the ability to gain access to, and exercise, power. (ibid 159)

For Heller, code-switching does more than create humorous scenarios, but is a way of communicating underlying power relations and forming, or disbanding alliances based upon who has access to the linguistic resources.

As mentioned previously, one effect of utilizing Ladino in performance is to combat the hegemony of standard English. In fact, performances are particularly powerful ways to 'override' language use in the real community (Woolard, 'Codeswitching' 70). Susan Gal also argues how code-switching between minority and hegemonic language is a way of resisting or challenging language ideologies. Code-switching, she notes, is 'how speakers respond symbolically to relations of domination between groups within the state, and how they understand their historic position and identity within a world capitalist system structured around dependency and unequal development' ('The Political' 247). She goes on to argue that some 'switching strategies' are 'best understood as symbolic responses to a systemic context much wider and historically deeper than the local community and its current role expectations' (ibid 248). In this manner, the Ladino Players could be seen as symbolically challenging the status quo by positioning themselves

outside the dominant systems of language and history propagated by prevailing Ashkenazi experiences. Ladino operates 'not only as conversational tools that maintain or change ethnic group boundaries and personal relationships' as Gal argues, 'but also as symbolic creations concerned with the construction of "self" and "other" within a broader political economic and historical context' (ibid 247). The differentiation between 'self' and 'other' exceeds the actors and includes the audiences which share linguistic and cultural capital, in other words, Sephardic audiences who identify themselves as such. Both English language and Ashkenazic experiences are de-centered, inscribing the performances as resisting domination, unsettling power relations, and reclaiming diasporic language and histories.

Whereas Grubman's adaptation leaves audiences with a potentially distressing image of Sephardic linguistic and cultural decay, the actual performative act models the capability for Sephardic heritage to be preserved in the present. As Jill Bishop asserts: '[f]or Judeo-Spanish speakers, the story is rarely an end in itself, but rather a means to an end; like the language, Judeo-Spanish stories are a vehicle for transporting people back in time and bringing the memory of previous storytellers to the present moment' ('More Than' 264). The real epilogue is the potential efficacy of the performative act on the audiences, an invitation for them to resist foreboding loss and disappearance through their newly recognized sense of symbolic and cultural capital.

Language Impact on Audience Reception

In addressing the extent to which language can serve as a powerful force against dominant linguistic networks and a means of empowering the actors and audiences, it is useful to look more closely at the demographics of audiences and the Ladino Players' choices in performance venues. As can be gathered from the linguistic choices present in the aforementioned productions, consistent and untranslated use of Ladino in performances presents a range of opportunities and challenges for the public. As Susan Bennett

reminds us in her useful investigation of theatre audiences, 'each particular variety of playing space provides the audience with specific expectations and interpretive possibilities' based upon their perception of a code system that includes both exterior and interior signs of the performance (*Theatre* 127). For audiences at performances by the Ladino Players, the code systems in place are of particular interest as none of the venues were exclusive or traditional theatre spaces. Sites used for performances included the Shearith Israel synagogue, the Center for Jewish History, and the Sephardic Home for the Aged. The selection of performance spaces raises important issues regarding the intertextuality of the performance to their position as programmable and displayed features in museums and religious centres.

To begin, language is an important marker of not only resisting dominant linguistic networks, but for creating (or dissolving) social alliances. As Myers-Scotton argues, language, and particularly code-switching is an 'on-going negotiation between speaker and addressee' and can be used to 'decrease social distance' for those who share in the ethnic language, or, for others, 'the use of the speaker's ethnic language is a strategy to increase the social distance' ('Making' 96, 104). Monica Heller refers to the strategy as 'boundary-leveling and boundary-maintaining' that 'contributes to the definition of roles and role relationships at a number of levels, to the extent that interlocutors bear multiple role relationships to each other' ('Introduction' 1). As the use of Ladino does not reflect the standard linguistic practices of the shared speech community (the audience and the performers), it is a marked choice for performance, as it calls attention to itself '*because community members tacitly know there is an unmarked choice which is being by-passed*' (Myers-Scotton, 'Making' 103). Therefore, the use of Ladino is a marker within the performance, it carries a social significance for both speakers and non-speakers, representing a particular identity or ethnic boundary, even for those who do not share in the linguistic capital of that community. Of course, the concept of boundary-maintaining would only have limited effects on audience members who do not share an understanding

of the language, or those who do not consider it as a necessary ethnic marker for their cultural identity. While the performers have made clear dramaturgical choices in preserving the language in performance as an important, if not the most important, signifier of identity, the shifting value of Ladino amongst the wider community points to the fact that the value of Ladino is constantly being negotiated and contested through performance.

Ladino in performance does not necessarily suggest that the performances were designed to create barriers for non-speakers; however, it may have encouraged a distancing effect with audiences now positioned to gaze upon the performance as an ethnographic or anthropological performative event. David Foster, in analyzing the usage of Ladino in Mexican films, notes how even if audiences are able to understand most of the dialogue, due to preexisting knowledge of Spanish, 'the alien quality of the phonology of Ladino' still bestows 'a distancing effect that provides the texture of the linguistic - and, along with it, the cultural and religious - difference' (24). When Ladino is 'untranslatable,' through the exclusion of subtitles in films or code-switching in live events, it may challenge national attempts to create a 'fissureless image' of society (ibid.). Judith Cohen forwards a more critical opinion of the use of Ladino in vernacular and liturgical settings, arguing that the language is 'a signifier of many things to many people' including Sephardim and non-Sephardim, representing for some, 'a specific aspect of a language complex,' 'a symbol of their own family's history,' or 'a symbol of exoticism, folklorised history, mythologised folklore, and/or vague spirituality' ('E Com Razões' 166). Thus, the use of Ladino is never neutral in performance.

An overview of the venues selected for performance offers an alternative access point into understanding audiences and the subsequent impact of the Ladino Player's performances on addressing marginalized Sephardic histories and language. One of the initial venues in which the company performed, and received ongoing support from, was the Sephardic Home for the Aged (since renamed the Sephardic Nursing and

Rehabilitation Center). The Home has long served a dual role amongst New York Sephardim in providing a shared space for Sephardic elders, and using their knowledge of customs and traditions in educating the public. For instance, musical groups and individuals such as *Alhambra* and Robin Greenstein have interviewed and recorded native singers from the Home to include in their own performance repertoires and scholarly pursuits (*American Folklore Society* 3; J. Cohen, 'Back to the Future' 509). Despite the Home's position as a site of 'authentic' knowledge of Sephardic customs and language, Brigitte Sion notes that in 1999 the current composition of the Home was half Sephardic and half Ashkenazic Jews, with a limited range of Sephardic activities such as bingo in English and Spanish, occasional lectures, belly dancing classes, and *borekas* served on special occasions (54). A more recent article from 2009 puts the figure of Ladino-speaking residents as 25 out of 270, suggesting that the name is more symbolic than reflective of the demographic distribution (Strauss n.p.). Despite these demographic shifts, the Home still positions itself through title and activities as a social venue for engaging in Sephardic culture. Esther Cazés Daiell, a Sephardic Jew from Egypt, has been the art therapist in residence at the Home for over two decades, and also served as the President of the Ladino Players.³¹ Connections between the company and the Sephardic Home indicated that the Ladino Players were interested in the support and performance opportunities afforded by the Sephardic Home. Archival videos of *Forsyth Street* and *Orchard Street Blues* indicates a small but receptive audience of elderly Sephardim. The Ladino Players' choice of performing at this site for their early productions indicates their interest in performing to audiences who would have known the language and been personally connected to the narratives of migration and integration.

Another popular venue and sponsor of the work of the Ladino Players is Congregation Shearith Israel, the historic Spanish and Portuguese Orthodox synagogue in

³¹ Furthermore, in the recording of the 1996 production of *Orchard Street Blues*, Altabé acknowledges Esther as being responsible for organizing the production to be presented at the Home.

New York. Historically, the synagogue has been a symbol of unity and strength for the non-Ashkenazim of New York. Even more than a place wherein non-Ashkenazic religious customs could be maintained, it was a beacon of American Jewish co-existence from its very origins (see Angel, *Remnant*). The congregation has always included Ashkenazic congregants, and as early as 1999 membership comprised half Sephardim and half Ashkenazim members. Rabbi Marc Angel noted at the time that, '[w]e are not an ethnic congregation' and thus the fact that the congregation refers to itself as the 'Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue' is more historical than reflective of its current composition (qtd. in Sion 38; also see Angel, *Remnant* 54). Theatrical performances by the Ladino Players are one of the few events offered in recent years that appeal to specifically Sephardic traditions.³² Demonstrating the relational processes between the theatrical performances and ongoing revitalization efforts, Daisy Braverman also held Ladino language classes at Shearith Israel in addition to theatrical workshops. An announcement in the Sephardic House newsletter suggests that both classes were held on the same night, and those interested in 'performing, singing and to assist in the production' were invited to join the theatre classes for free ('Past Events at Sephardic House 2001'; also see 'Past Events at Sephardic House 2003' 2). Interconnections between the religious, social and learning activities and the performances are profound, exemplified perhaps through the work of Rabbi Ira Rohde, who assisted in organizing both the language and theatre classes as well as participating in the performances of the Ladino Players. The dual function of learning and participating in Ladino events, both formal language learning and performative activities, speaks to the company's interweaving of theatre with ethnic revitalization interests. Through rehearsals and performances, Shearith Israel was an important supporter and promoter of the work of the Ladino Players, suggesting that the

³² Current events and courses are focused primarily on Jewish issues related to law, language and Biblical interpretation. Special events focused more of Sephardic topics include music concerts, book readings ('Shearith Israel Calendar of Events'). In 2000, when the Ladino Players presented *The Tray of Sweets*, Congregation Shearith Israel had also organized events around Sephardic film, music, and cooking classes ('Past Events at Sephardic House 2000').

company was not only interested in encouraging public engagement with Sephardic language and stories, but also with positioning themselves as an authentic representation of Sephardic identity, intimately bound up with the community's history in America. Intertextual associations between the site of performance and the content demonstrate the pervasive interest in co-existence and unity between Ashkenazim and Sephardim. The historic function of the synagogue as a place wherein diverse non-Ashkenazim gathered in the New World, has been replaced by a Jewish centre of tolerance between Ashkenazim and Sephardim congregants. Through the work of the mixed-company at this particular site, histories of racism or marginalization are replaced by positive ideals of past relationships and contemporary equality.

The final venue to be discussed is the Center for Jewish History (CJH) in New York City, and, as a site of education and exposure to the Jewish past, an alternative venue and framing for the performance work of the Ladino Players. As a heritage site, the CJH marks a fundamental difference between the synagogue and elderly home and as the most recent, and apparently successful, site of performances by the Ladino Players, it is essential to understand the production and reception of their work in this space and its relationship to the company's underlying work in reshaping historiographical paradigms.

Legitimacy and Exoticism with Performances at Heritage Sites

The CJH was an important sponsor of the later work of the Ladino Players and therefore represents an important site in which to consider how the company redefined itself in relation to Jewish American histories. In the Center's recent publication 'A Decade of Distinction' (2011), it proclaims its position and focus as 'one of the foremost Jewish research and cultural institutions in the world' whose collection spans literary and material works comprising 'the largest repository of the modern Jewish experience outside of Israel' (8). At the Center, the history of the Jewish people is illuminated through scholarship and cultural programming, exhibitions and symposia, lectures and

performances' (ibid.). Including the work of the Ladino Players as part of the cultural programming at the CJH would have been in line with their newfound interest in opening support for non-Ashkenazic institutions and interests. It was not until 1998 when the CJH merged with the American Sephardic Federation³³ that it sought fit to include a Sephardic organization as one of its member institutions (Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 125). During their 2002 season, *Aviya de Ser* was presented alongside performances on Sephardic and Ashkenazic topics; however, the production was considered unique: '[t]he audience journeyed to a different part of the Jewish world with *Aviya de Ser* [...] An Evening of Sephardic Storytelling and Song' (*Theater* 7).³⁴ Performances by the Ladino Players were thus positioned as something 'different' to the regular repertoire of events at the CJH. Performances at the CJH point to two particularly relevant issues, the audience's relation to the presented materials due to language barriers and the subsequent effects, and the influence of space on the efficacy of the production in achieving various aims. Unlike performances taking place at the Sephardic Home for the Aged or Congregation Shearith Israel, where the specific Sephardic nature of the establishment might suggest audiences with particular linguistic or cultural connections, performances at the CJH were open to interested members of the public curious to learn or engage with alternative Jewish histories and customs.

Performances at heritage sites raise a number of concerns related to issues of history and authenticity. These issues are heightened by the ways in which displays are constructed and spectators' relationships to the exhibited work. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has written persuasively about the political economy of heritage sites in relation to performance, including performances produced in collaboration with 'authentic'

³³ The ASF, as discussed, shared an interest with the CJH in promoting Jewish history. As stipulated on the ASF website, their mission is 'To promote and preserve the spiritual, historical, cultural and social traditions of all Sephardic communities as an integral part of Jewish heritage' (About the American Sephardi Federation', n.p.).

³⁴ Other performances included the Israeli company Netela Theatre's production of *Bavel*, Ghetto Cabaret, a drama with music based on documents, diaries and chronicles of the Vilna Ghetto, the Jewish Repertory Theatre's productions of *Two by Two*, based on the story of Noah, and *Vagabond Stars*, a revue about immigration of Eastern European Jews to the United States in the early 1900s.

companies and individuals. She notes how heritage sites wield a particular agency or 'agencies of display' over the types of materials and performances selected for public engagement and how 'display not only shows and speaks' but also 'does' (*Destination* 6). In other words, the objects in heritage sites are not 'found' but rather 'become' through 'processes of detachment and contextualization' that fragment and exhibit the objects anew in contexts capable of endowing them with relationships and positions that may not have been otherwise achievable (ibid. 3). Thus, participation of the Ladino Players at a heritage site such as the CJH offers the potentially invaluable opportunity to re-situate Sephardic histories and traditions firmly within the canon of Jewish history, even if such actions require a degree of fragmentation and detachment. As Laurajane Smith remarks, the effects are influenced by the 'links people understand themselves to have with the heritage sites or spaces they encounter' (74). There is thus a relational approach to performances of authenticity, between those who share in the cultural and linguistic heritage on display as well as those who are part of the wider audience, who have come with their own expectations of value and 'authentic' representations.

Performing at heritage sites may work to increase the legitimacy of Sephardic traditions within American and Jewish history and thus resist normative ideas and values. The notion of gaining legitimacy through heritage sites is also undertaken in the work of Smith, where heritage serves as 'an important political and cultural tool in defining and legitimizing the identity, experiences and social/cultural standing of a range of subnational groups as well as those of the authorizing discourse' with the potential in 'challenging received identity and cultural/social values' (52). Heritage, for L. Smith is both a 'gaze or way of seeing' as well as a physical site that allows marginalized communities, for instance, a physical place in which to display and construct their experiences (75). For diaspora groups, heritage sites may serve as particular powerful ways of anchoring disparate historical experiences both symbolically and physically. In addition to constructing a legitimacy, heritage sites may afford a usability or relevance through the representation of

heritage, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblet puts forward: '[h]aving a past, a history, a "folklore" of your own, and institutions to bolster these claims, is fundamental to the politics of culture: the possession of a national folklore, particularly as legitimated by a national museum and troupe, is cited as a mark of being civilized' (*Destination* 65). It is not merely the representation of the past, of a history, that is of importance, but the recognition of such a past through heritage displays, that offers the Ladino Players an alternative visibility and legitimacy.

The site of the Ladino Player's productions not only points to the ways in which their traditions are displayed and encountered by Sephardic and non-Sephardic audiences, but also reflects the underlying interest in promoting ideas of tolerance and co-existence. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblet argues in regards to the cultural production of heritage, 'messages other than heritage - are likely to be encoded in the interface' such as 'messages of reconciliation, of multiculturalism or biculturalism, or of development' (*Destination* 157). In this manner, heritage sites also serve as a way for the Ladino Players to forward the rhetoric of co-existence and tolerance embedded in their dramatic work. For seeking ways in which their work can be more, although not completely, encountered by larger and more diverse participants, heritage sites may serve, as Sion has argued, 'the likeliest places to keep the Sephardic flame kindled' (39).

While certain benefits may arise from the Ladino Players aligning themselves with the CJH, focus needs to be given to the particularities of these representations and their implications. A transformation takes place within the later work of the Ladino Players, emphasizing a shift in local and specific histories, albeit highly mediated, to more distant representations of the past with dramatizations of culture from Spain and the Ottoman Empire in *Aviya de Ser* and *Panorama Sephardi*. Rather than presenting a complete narrative, these productions represent fragmented images of the past through song, folktales and dramatic sketches. Kirshenblatt-Gimblet notes that choices in the repertoire are 'ideologically charged' (*Destination* 72-73) and, as Ferdinand De Jong and Michael

Rowlands similarly note, heritage sites are 'inseparable from the powerful modern moods of nostalgia and longing for authenticity as well as escalating desires for roots and origins' (13). The suggestion here is that the reshaping of the past through performances at heritage sites emphasize a nostalgia and longing that risks neglecting certain histories and experiences in an effort to present 'good things' that 'lend credence to a sense of cultural and communal pride in identity' (L. Smith 58). Such a position is further articulated by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, where, by its 'very nature' spectacle in heritage sites 'displaces analysis and tends to suppress profound issues of conflict and marginalization' (*Destination* 72-73). Whilst the cultural identity and legitimacy of the Sephardim may be strengthened through their alliance with the CJH, which may in turn provide a useful partner in constructing new historiographies of Jewish history, the site requires a particular 'way of seeing' that affects the ways in which the performances are symbolically positioned to reinforce a particular identity (L. Smith 53).

Issues of diasporic history and cultural identity are further complicated in the final two productions by the Ladino Players, which demonstrate a greater interest in presenting a historical ideality through a reductive mode of encounter. It thus becomes important to look at not only what is being said in and through performance, but also those histories which have been actively removed through performances subscribing to a notion of cultural preservation. Moving away from performing American experiences, *Aviya de Ser* and *Panorama Sephardi* aim to present an authentic image of pre-immigration Sephardic traditions. As only these two productions perform a pre-American diasporic experience, they serve as important illustrations regarding how representations of a more distant past may point to existing power relations and alternative ways in which normative depictions of history could be rewritten. These productions share in the rhetoric of the quincentennial commemoration activities in that they focus on Turkish-Jewish and Spanish cultural exchanges, as opposed to political or religious relations, and the achievements of the diaspora community's cultural outputs over any other field such as

material, philosophical, or political. For instance, during the opening narration of *Aviya de Ser* in 2003, the performance is stated as being a representation of religious culture and traditions and 'who we are as a people' (Performance) as seen through the lens of music, storytelling and dramatic episodes. Enrique Levy, as the narrator, is clothed in a traditional white tunic with a fez and addresses the audience from behind a podium and large storybook. In this manner, the performance demonstrates an interest in presenting an authentic image of traditions and culture through a selected presentation of songs and stories that, due to the structure and nature of the production, invite more of a gazing upon than participation with the performative acts.

Aviya de Ser and *Panorama Sephardi* were arguably two of the more popular productions by the Ladino Players. *Panorama Sephardi* was produced as the sequel to the *Aviya de Ser* due to widespread interest and popularity (*Panorama*, Performance). *Aviya de Ser* was performed at the CJH in 2002 and Shearith Israel in 2003. A recording of the production in 2002 includes a cast of seven, four men and three women, and a variety of instruments: the violin, accordion and tambourine. Presented in an episodic manner, actors dressed in nonspecific Oriental costumes present traditional Ladino songs and dramatizations of Djoha stories along with those of Bahor and Djamilla, a popular fictional couple from Salonica whose dramatic dialogues were captured in *El Mesajero* (The Messenger) and the Sunday edition of *Aksyón* (Action) in the 1930s and 40s.³⁵ Stated in the programme, stories of Djoha were taken from Matilda Koen-Sarano's compilations *Konsejas i konsejikas del mundo djudeo-espanyol* and *Djohá ke dize?*, and the dialogues of Bahor and Djamilla are adopted from David Bunis' compellation, *Voices from Jewish Salonica*. *Panorama Sephardi*, also includes a combination of songs, folktales of Djoha and scenes of Djamilla and Bahor; however, the production goes further in proclaiming it will be 'a true panorama' as the night will also feature Spanish Flamenco and new choreography set to Middle Eastern tunes (*Panorama*, Performance). With a

³⁵ See Bunis *Jewish Voices* for a thorough account of the development of the series in the Ladino Press.

much larger cast than *Aviya de Ser*,³⁶ the program is more ambitious and offers a greater variety of performances with the inclusion of dance, as well as a greater number of songs and dramatic sketches.

Both performances diverge structurally and thematically from the dramatic narratives produced in all of the other Ladino Player's productions. One of the most significant ways in which these productions differ from previous work is through the use of metanarration. Bauman defines metanarration as 'those devices that index or comment on the narrative itself (such as message, generic form and function, and discourse) or on the components or conduct of the storytelling event (including participants, organization, and action)' (98). A similar technique could be said to have been applied in *Ladino Reveries*; however, within *Ladino Reveries* the narration is spoken by the character Hank Halio who is narrating his own life experiences and memories, whereas in the final two Ladino Players' productions the narration is conducted by the actors, not as part of a character. The actors take on the role of story-tellers, relating the traditions and histories of the community through an entertaining yet educational mode that incorporates dance, song, and dramatic action. Helen Gilbert, in discussing story-telling in post-colonial drama, remarks that the dramatic technique can be a 'strategy for revisioning history' and a way to 'interrogate received discourses and received models for staging them' as it challenges typically western naturalistic conventions of performance, foregrounding 'the role of the interlocutor and the specific context of language utterance to create meanings that are changeable and unfixed' (*Post-colonial Drama* 126-7). Each actor directly engages the audience, and 'historicises the action, calling for intellectual response rather than merely an aesthetic appreciation' (ibid. 127). More than previous productions, the continuous interaction between the actors and audience works to frame the pieces as educational in addition to entertaining. The fact that the production is set within the CJH

³⁶ Cast Members listed in the program include: Irwin Berkman, Daisy Sadaka Braverman, Joshua Davidowitz, Joe Elias, Sheerra Geffen, Vicki Grubman, Enrique Levy, Rabbi Ira Rohde, Roberto Salama, Perla Shifer, Roselle Silverstein, Cecilia Torzs.

further suggests the intention of the performances in engaging intellectually with audiences.

The relationship between languages and the story-telling is even more pronounced than in earlier productions. All of the commentary is conducted in English, while all of the songs and dramatic episodes are entirely in Ladino. Instead of adopting Ladino and modernizing it, as in *Prezentando* and to a lesser extent in *Ladino Reveries*, English retains the image of being a modern and educating language, whereas Ladino is restricted to communicating songs and folk traditions. For example, before a scene of *Paraliykas de Amor* [Little Words of Love] in *Aviya de Ser*, the English-speaking story-teller provides a brief commentary: '[f]rom the 9th century' he explains, Djoha 'means religious leader and teacher in Turkish, he appears in hundreds of stories throughout the Sephardic world' (Performance). If as Woolard suggests, that 'placement of the languages is neither random nor unimportant' and must be considered within the framework of the performance or speech event (37), then the ideological implications behind such dramaturgical choices is, in part, that certain cultural histories and traditions must, or can only, be transmitted through language. As story-tellers, the performers are refusing to translate these stories, even if it means that a narrower speech community will fully understand the specific content of the given performances.

Although the dramaturgical structure of the piece is fundamental to its social aspirations, it is useful to address the various thematic and genre orientations. Humour plays a much larger part of this production than earlier works mainly through the stories surrounding Djoha. Djoha is a traditional Sephardic character first appearing in Arabic stories from the ninth century (Alexander, 'Introduction' 5). According to Israeli folklorist Tamar Alexander, Djoha stories are particularly significant in expressing ethnic identity and Sephardic mores: '[t]hey are Sephardic stories because they express a "group self" and an ethnic identity, along with a particular physical and geographical environment, worldview, and way of life' (ibid 8, 10). Djoha stories play a unique role in the oral

literature of the Sephardic diaspora as they were a traditional feature of communal and family life and express a particular texture of Sephardic histories absent in more text-based archival sources. The Ladino Players performed a number of Djoha stories, five in *Aviya de Ser* and twelve in *Panorama Sephardi*.³⁷ The Djoha stories performed in these two productions cover a broad range of themes³⁸ but the majority of them are comical episodes about daily life and occasional episodes related to religious activities. For the company, these stories evidently contained an important aspect in relation to their cultural identities and captured a particular image of their diasporic history that they wished to foreground in their performances. All of the stories are told in Ladino, although some include English introductions that set the scene but do not reveal the punchline. In this manner, non-Ladino speakers would be able to follow the main narrative of the story, even if the significance of the final joke is lost. Most of the ensemble in *Aviya de Ser* serves as a Djoha storyteller during the performance. Although each embodies their own style, there is a similar interest in engaging the audience and bringing out the humor of the piece. For instance, Trudy Balch uses a giant wooden spoon to add to the comedic effect in a story about Djoha making a soup, Esther Cazés Daiell emphasizes the key words of the story, throwing them at the audience in a manner that reflects how Djoha throws them at characters in the story, and Daisy Sadaka Braverman prefaces her narration with an English commentary. The company has a demographic approach to electing storytellers based upon the diversity of those performing Djoha stories. This choice suggests that the value was not given to one who would be perhaps the most talented at the particular art of storytelling, but the importance

³⁷ In *Aviya de Ser* the Djoha stories included: *Palavrikas de amor*; *Djoha i los sien dukados*; *Ojo por ojo*; *La fuersa de Djoha*; *El tindjere de su vizino*; and *Supa de yave*. In *Panorama Sephardi* the stories included: *Djoha y los ladrones*; *Djoha y el ultimo treno*; *Djoha y la luna vieja*; *Djoha y el anijo pedrido*; *Djoha vende guevos*; *Djoha y su mujer prenyad*; *Djoya y el ijiko djenial*; *Djoha y la mediá ermana*; *Quantos anyos tyene Djoha*; *Djoha y los aznos*; *Djoha lava el gato*; *Djoha y el lonso*; *Djoha si kyere el dio*; and *Djoha y el sermon*.

³⁸ In *Aviya de Ser* the Djoha stories are spaced throughout the piece; whereas in *Panorama Sephardi* the stories about Djoha are grouped together into jokes, stories about donkeys, stories about other animals and stories about God and Djoha.

of performing itself, and the value of having both Sephardic and non-Sephardic members of the company engage in the act of storytelling.

In addition to Djoha stories, both productions dramatize a number of episodes from the popular Salonica characters Bohor and Djamila.³⁹ Throughout a series of dialogues published in *El Judezmo*, Moshé Cazés captured the tensions and aspirations of the Sephardic community through satire and humour.⁴⁰ Aside from a few minor alterations, these sketches are identical to the text in Bunis' compilation. In performances, the dramatic sketches involving Bohor and Djamila differ greatly from the Djoha storytelling. In both *Aviya de Ser* and *Panorama Sephardi*, the same set of the actors is cast as the historically-fictional couple (Rabbi Ira Rohde and Vicki Grubman). The consistency across the productions leads to a less-fragmented depiction of the dramatic sketches as opposed to the Djoha stories; with Bohor and Djamila an audience is allowed the opportunity to enter more fully into a particular dramatic narrative. In performing these scenes, the actors are less interactive with the audience and the lighting during the productions isolates their existence in a particular part of the stage, creating but a small window of light into the world of the Sephardim in Salonica. Although the actors are also adorned in traditional garments, there is more consistency in their costumes and more evocation of a particular reality, unlike the Aladdin-esque garments worn by company members telling the Djoha stories. With Bohor and Djamila there appears more of an attempt to create a realistic illusion of the past through more accurate props and costumes.

While there is comedy and absurdness in the dialogues between Bohor and Djamila, there is also a greater sense of anxiety than expressed in the Djoha stories. One example of this comes almost at the end of *Aviya de Ser* in an episode entitled '*Purim es*

³⁹ In *Aviya de Ser* the following stories were performed: *Kada shabat mejorado*, *El mundo se meneá*, *Purim es haver de pesah*. In *Panorama Sephardi*: *Ande kedo la kandelika* and *Kuando kanta la gayina*.

⁴⁰ Cazés wrote two satirical series: *Tío Ezra i su Mujer Bemuta* [*Uncle Ezra and his wife Bemuta*] and *Tío Bohor i su Mujer Djamila* [*Uncle Bohor and his wife Djamila*]. The Ladino Players have used scenes from both collection but presented them as through the characters of Bohor and Djamila.

haver des Pésah [Purim is the partner of Passover]. In this scene, Djamila's happiness for the impending Jewish holiday of Purim is diminished by news of the suffering of Jews in Eretz Israel (Performance). Djamila's reluctance to celebrate Purim stems from her unease over the situation in Palestine. However, Bohor reminds her that Purim is a time to remember that even in the darkest hours of Jewish history, the 'dice of destiny' turn in their favor (Performance).⁴¹ Bohor's monologue resonates with the contemporary staging of Sephardic traditions amidst a revival movement as it alludes to the strength and endurance of the diaspora community through tragic and debilitating past experiences. Viewed in the light of the Holocaust and further cycles of diasporic experiences, the scene is evocative of the anxieties within Ottoman Sephardic communities as well as those of the present day.

Musical accompaniment is another dominant feature within these productions and play an important role in presenting a linguistic and cultural link to the past as well as encouraging audience participation. Although there is usually only one primary singer for each traditional Ladino song, often times the entire company joins in for the chorus. The final songs in both productions appear to be particularly selected to encourage audiences to join in the singing. In *Aviya de Ser* the production concludes with a Ladino version⁴² of Hatikvah, the Israeli national anthem. Braverman begins the song in a slow, melodic voice, lit in isolation with a spotlight. The lights expand and the whole cast joins her, accompanied by live music. As indicated in the recording, the audience stood and some members joined in the singing, aided by the published lyrics in the programme. Although it is a distinctly Jewish song, electing to sing in Ladino and not Hebrew cast the piece with a Sephardic flavour. A similar technique is applied in *Panorama Sephardi*, where the final song *Avram Avinu* [*Abraham, Our Father*] evokes Jewish themes but is a traditional Sephardic folk song. Within ethnic revitalization movements, singing can be a non-

⁴¹ Original Text: los dados de el destino se aboltan en mwestra favor.

⁴² The programme for *Aviya de Ser* notes that the version is ca. 1920s and 1930s. The lyrics differ from the Hebrew although there is a similar sentiment.

threatening and effective way of encouraging cultural practices. Bishop notes the importance of singing as part of public performances in the Ladino revitalization movement, claiming it is

effective in increasing interest in Judeo-Spanish for those Sephardim who, whether due to lack of time, feelings of intimidation or lack of motivation, would not take a language class. For many Sephardim who don't speak Judeo-Spanish, it is only through singing that Judeo-Spanish words form on their lips, and they want to strengthen that connection to the language. ('More Than' 159)

Singing, like story-telling, is a performative technique that encourages interaction amongst a particular speech community and resists a collapse or neglect of cultural and linguistic traditions (Fig. 6). Even more than story-telling, singing is an expression of Sephardicness that is more easily transmittable and adopted by linguistically-inferior generations, it has become today 'self-conscious and iconized ways of symbolizing Sephardicness' (ibid. 222).

As discussed, discourses on coexistence and language weigh heavily on the performances of the Ladino Players and often work to challenge and transform power relations. However, echoing the rhetoric of the quincentennial commemorations, the crisis for preservation that permeates their work represents images of the past that may encourage the propagation of binaries that deny the Sephardim an active historicity. '[I]f ethnic identities are indeed negotiated and constructed through the interplay of self-knowledge and communal understandings,' as Peter Hulme reminds us on the economics of representation, 'it is important to recognize that the process does not [...] occur under historical circumstances of the participant's own choosing' (15). In highlighting various economic and social pressures that may affect ethnic performances, Hulme urges us to pay attention to historical specificities of negotiated interactions and to consider the political ideology of traditions that influence particular representations. For instance, the representation of Sephardic culture is present in the productions through such features as

the generic classifications of 'Middle Eastern dance' and costume. As opposed to the earlier productions by David Altabé, these final two performances emphasize what could be considered an 'aesthetic experience of alterity' as they work to distance audiences from image, captured within the title itself *Aviya de Ser/Once Upon a Time* (Laouyene 217). Neither of the dance sequences within *Panorama Sephardi* (contemporary Middle Eastern choreography and Spanish Flamenco) are specifically Sephardic but rather work to establish the community's identity as distinctly foreign, although this foreignness is nonspecific to diasporic experiences.

Figure 6: Storytelling and Singing in *Aviya de Ser*.⁴³



In addition to the dances, the costumes worn in both productions appear to be general Middle Eastern articles. Almost all the performers wear headpieces, from scarves for the women and variations of the fez for the men. Other garments include *salvars* (baggy trousers), *uceteks* (three-skirted cloaks) and sleeveless vests. As the pieces were all donations, there is a loose consistency across the company, succeeding in the creation of a foreign and temporally distant aesthetic without the specifics of a region or historical

⁴³ *Aviya de Ser*. 2002. DVD.

moment. Representation of Sephardic identity risks reduction to a homogenous 'otherness' that holds modest parallels to Orientalist notions of the East as exotic foreigners, folk and traditional (see Said *Orientalism*). In some ways, the productions position the Sephardim in contrast to the West (specifically Western Jews) by way of the images and costumes utilized. While the productions were in part constructed and performed by Ladino-speaking Sephardim, the performance evoke a particular Western bias towards the East, with what Mary Pratt refers to as 'autoethnography' where 'colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms' (9). 'If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others,' Pratt writes, 'autoethnographic texts are texts the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations' (ibid.). The diasporic performances of the Sephardim in America resonate with Pratt's conceptions of colonial encounters in that it shares a 'dialectical relationship between "foreign" codes of representation and "indigenous" experiences' (Huggan 271).

The ways in which the Ladino Players are presented within the heritage site and choose to represent themselves through costumes and scenery, point to a certain autoethnographic exoticism. Graham Huggan discusses exoticism, not as 'an inherent *quality* to be found "in" certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places' but rather, 'a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* - one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery' (13). James Clifford may refer to such work as 'ethnographical salvage,' as in the attempt to rescue 'authentic' cultures from contingency and loss. However, for Clifford, 'authenticity is something produced not salvaged' and, like Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, this process involves the detachment and removal of objects from their historical context (*Predicament* 250, 228). Huggan notes how exoticism 'effectively hides the power relations' by 'allowing the dominant culture to

attribute value to the margins while continuing to define them in its own self-privileging terms' (24). The predominantly aesthetic value ascribed through performances may reroute 'subversive implications' into 'safe assertions of a fetishised cultural difference' (ibid.). Overall, positioning the performances within the CJH may work against the company's objective in resisting Ashkenazic hegemonies. Nevertheless, as Huggan notes, even with authenticity being recognized as a representation of otherness, it can be 'used for self-empowering purposes' by articulating the specific lives and histories of the participants while still engaging in the global and local communities in which they are enmeshed (175).

Orientalist perceptions demonstrated within dramaturgical choices of music, scenery and costumes at the CJH not only characterize the Sephardim as exotic others, but also risk 'freezing' linguistic and cultural practices. Dean MacCannell refers to such processes as 'reconstructed ethnicity' (168), as an 'end point in dialogue, a final freezing of ethnic imaginary which is artificial and deterministic, even, or especially, when it is based on a drive for authenticity' (ibid.). Dramatic performances that seek to present an authentic image of a community's diasporic identity may instead function as a 'symbolic expression with a purpose or an exchange value in a larger system' (ibid.). The idea of reconstructed ethnicity distinguishes certain cultural practices as not revitalization activities, but rather 'freezing' (or mummifying in Fanon's terms), propagating a Sephardic imaginary that does not allow for future transformation and development but wherein culture and language exist only as relics of the past. The image of authenticity that appears in the performances repositions the past at the heart of the contemporary Sephardic identity in a way that might, as John Frow argues, 'deny their active historicity - their usability for the present' (134). Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin refer to this phenomenon as one of the 'paradoxes of the ideology of tradition' in that 'attempts at cultural preservation inevitably alter, reconstruct, or invent the traditions that they are intended to fix' (qtd. in Frow 77). In the work of the Ladino Players, the presentation of

Sephardic history through the music, costumes and folktales corresponds to a particular image of the past that paradoxically contributes to an ethnic revitalization but simultaneously reduces and homogenizes historical experiences.

In regards to ethnic revitalization efforts, the transformation through reduction of the diasporic past may be too quick a solution for transferring linguistic or cultural sensibilities. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer note that performances that utilize folktales and songs may be merely a 'quick solution' to revitalizing the language and culture as such activities present the 'culture as alienable, something that one puts on or takes off at will, like a shirt or blanket' (69). The danger in singing and dancing [and performing] within cultural revitalization movements, they argue, is related to the 'the failure to see the connection between language use and transmission' (ibid.). Whilst the Ladino Players may achieve authority and prestige through authentic language and culture presentations within their productions, without an active network of transmitting the language so that future generations will have the skills to utilize and develop it, the success of revitalization activities will be severely limited.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the rhetoric of the quincentennial commemorations dialogued with that of the theatre company in advocating the strength of coexistence between the Sephardim, their host communities and the Ashkenazim. Such presentation of pluralism may lead, as Paulin Hountondji remarks, 'to freezing these cultures in the pretext of preserving their authenticity' which would result in an actual 'rejection of history' (*The Struggle* 134). A stronger way for challenging Western/American cultural hegemonies would consist of 'recognizing the complexity, diversity, tensions, contradictions, internal dynamics of each culture, and in seeing in that a source of richness and creativity, rather than of evil' (*The Struggle* 134; also see *African* 156-9). Electing to represent the communities through harmonious relations and as equals, both within the Ashkenazic and Turkish contexts, overlooks certain historical problems in favour of an image of respect and comparability. Within postcolonial

experiences, de Jong and Rowlands remind us of the value of returning to cultural heritage through activities such as performance; however, they assert 'a return to the past is always partial and incomplete' (17) and activities in 'restoring the past' are 'insufficient without an accompanying decolonization' (ibid.). De Jong and Rowlands are wary of practices that do not properly account for past power relations and historical effects on cultural identity and authority. Brink-Danan relates the trope of tolerance and co-existence as problematic for a future Sephardic identity in challenging power relations: '[m]ythologizing tolerance without room for critique erases a history of changing power dynamics as well as future opportunities for such' (*Jewish Life* 61). The work of the Ladino Players is legitimized and valued within the limited context of heritage sites, but the particularities of the past that are presented limit the scope of affecting actual change in the education of Sephardic language and histories in the future, and may even risk reducing the image of the Sephardim to a simplified exotic other.

Critical evaluation of the dramaturgical features within the repertoire of the Ladino Players should not overlook the value of such performance practices in signifying the development of new agendas that could have positive implications to the engaged community. Operating as a form of touristic-ethnicity could bring certain benefits to revitalization activities, as Chris Ryan, Janet Chang and Tzung-Cheg Huan suggest, a tourist's gaze 'bestows economic value upon performance, and it provides reasons for learning traditional skills. The performer engages upon acts of creativity and rediscovery' (201). Through learning and remembering Ladino as well as engaging performers or audiences with dramatic productions, the revitalization of Ladino has the potential of succeeding not despite but because of the fact it is able to appeal to new audiences. However, representations of the past through the selected display overseen by the Ladino Players and their sponsoring venues 'characteristically create new perspectives' (Rosenberg 'Starvation' 196). Neil Rosenberg, in describing music revivals terms the agents as 'revisionist historians' rather than revivalists as they 'attempt to establish standards of

authenticity' (ibid.). Rokem suggests that such theatrical tensions create an intensity where the actor becomes a hyper-historian (101) and works by validating 'the authenticity of the events that are depicted on the stage as historical events' (*Performing* 102). What is crucial for Rokem remains so in the performances of the Ladino Players as well, revolving around who is given the authority of the hyper-historian: how is that role embodied, and what might be implied by such a performance. Such questions which are foundational for Rokem's thinking about the theatre performing history become even more applicable when considering the power relations and history of the Sephardim in America.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the performances of the Ladino Players within the Sephardic ethnic revitalization movement in America. Rather than merely shifting historical focus from the centre (Ashkenazi history and practices) to the margins (Sephardi practices), this chapter has undertaken a relational approach in order to expand current scholarship of Jewish American communities and their performance practices.

The establishment of the Ladino Players correlates to the growing interest (by both Ashkenazim and non-Ashkenazim) in Sephardic culture and history during the 1990s, illustrated most explicitly through the quincentennial commemoration ceremonies and ongoing activities. In order to overcome ongoing marginalisation within Jewish American history, the Ladino Players staged several productions to celebrate, revive and legitimize Sephardic culture and language. As in previous case studies, representations of the past materialized on stage in order to contribute to establishing a collective cultural identity. Sharing in the rhetoric of the quincentennial, the Ladino Players' early work emphasized a history of tolerance and peaceful co-existence in Ashkenazi-Sephardi, and later Turkish-Sephardi, relations. While succeeding in placing Sephardic histories and culture in public spaces such as the CJH, performances by the Ladino Players have been characterized by the organizers, as well as through the company's own artistic choices, as

in some ways tokenistic or even exotically foreign as opposed to fully integrated into larger narratives of Jewish history. Furthermore, in performing the histories and cultural traditions of non-Ashkenazic communities, the representation of diverse historical experiences tends to become reduced to more simplistic terms and frames of reference. The risk in these representations is that the language and traditions may be 'frozen' in a way that impedes their contemporary usability.

If we accept Marianna Sauna's argument that the 'Sephardim must learn to cooperate with already existing Ashkenazi institutions if they want their culture to be better known' (qtd. in *Sion* 59), then the Ladino Players serve as a model for the future of Sephardic culture in America by collaborating with Ashkenazi artists and inclusive Jewish organizations. In addition, the representation of harmonious inter-Jewish relations as depicted in both the composition of the Ladino Players company and the content of performances may serve as a model of tolerance for American ethnic tensions. Such a model resonates with the rhetoric of the quincentennial commemorations but equally with the socio-political situation in America during the 1990s when ethnic and racial conflicts were intensifying.⁴⁴ The ideological and rhetorical positions of tolerance and co-existence which appear as the *modus operandi* of the company, offers their work as a space and model for both historical and contemporary politics of unity and acceptance. However, aesthetic choices especially in the later productions maintain distinct East/West binaries and continue to propagate an image of the Sephardim as traditional, folk and as a natural 'other' to the Ashkenazim. In this manner, the company confronts contemporary 'corporate exclusion,' by actively working to reinsert Sephardic histories into Jewish American narratives, but their performance activities appear to advocate the inclusion of Sephardic narratives based upon their inherent value as an alternative cultural group,

⁴⁴ Issues of race were sweeping the United States in the 1990s, including: the Rodney King beating and subsequent riots in Los Angeles; the OJ Simpson murder trial; Proposition 187 in California; and the James Byrd Jr. murder. For more on racial issues in the United States during the 1990s see Steven A. Tuch and Jack K. Martin; and Jacqueline Foertsch and Colin Harrison.

rather than addressing the historical and contemporary relations of power that have maintained unequal representations within Jewish American narratives.

PERFORMING SEPHARDI HISTORY ON THE ISRAELI STAGE

So far from regarding our immigrants from Oriental countries as a bridge toward our integration with the Arab-speaking world, our object should be to infuse them with an Occidental spirit, rather than to allow them to drag us into an unnatural Orientalism.

- Abba Eban, Foreign Minister

Jews, thank God, have nothing in common with the East. We must put an end to any trace of the Oriental spirit in the [native] Jews of Palestine.

- Vladimir Jabotinsky

Introduction

Since the 1970s there has been a growing social movement to revitalize Sephardic and Mizrahi music, literature, language and theatre in Israel. While there has been a number of commentators and scholars addressing cinema and literature, theatrical productions have been given much less critical attention.¹ One reason for this may be that contemporary Sephardi Theatre productions are seen to be primarily focused on reaching Ladino-speaking audiences and operating outside mainstream or commercial spaces. Two important points can be made in regards to this perspective. Primarily, although Sephardi Theatre productions are mainly taking place in community-based contexts, there are nevertheless a few commercial productions, such as *Bustan Sefardi* and *Golgotha*, which have had significant runs in Israeli theatres and toured

¹ See for instance Shohat's *Israeli Cinema*; Alcalay's edited volume *Keys to the Garden*; Gover's *Zionism*; Hochberg *In spite of partition*; Levie 'Blow-Ups in the Borderzones'; and Domb's *The Arab in Hebrew Prose*. For scholarship on Sephardi and Mizrahi theatre productions see the work of Dan Urian: 'Mizrahi and Ashkenazi'; Shulamith Lev-Aladgem: 'Ethnicity, Class, and Gender,' 'Remembering Forbidden Memories'; and the work of Shem-Tov: 'Community Theatre of Mizrahi-Jews.' Evidence of renewed interest in publishing and translating literary and dramatic work into Ladino can be demonstrated through the growing Sephardic publication catalogue at the Maale Adumim Institute.

internationally. Secondly, despite the relatively small number of Sephardi theatrical productions, they are in fact a crucial aspect of the Sephardic activists and local artists' agendas in building and maintaining a distinct Sephardic identity. For instance, leading Sephardi activist Matilda Koen-Sarano readily uses theatre, in the form of both live and radio performances, to complement her educational and political activities and the Bat Yam Cultural Club continues to perform annual productions in Ladino to maintain connection to the language and cultural traditions. Given the ongoing developments of Sephardi Theatre in Israel, it is an apt time to consider these performances and, in particular, the extent to which they contribute to defining or redefining contemporary Sephardic cultural and national identities. As many of these theatrical productions have grown out of revitalization efforts on local and national scales, an investigation of them may also shed new light into the dynamics and complexities concerning the cultural politics of Israeli society.

Encounters between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim in Israel have been instrumental in defining contemporary cultural and national identities, and they play a central role in the cultural and political orientations of contemporary Sephardic Theatre. As Peter Medding remarks, for Sephardic Jews in Israel 'self-identity and sense of distinctiveness is now largely defined by their interactions with Ashkenazic Jewry [...]. As a result, their self-identity has not only been affected by the need to take account of the Ashkenazi "other" but has also developed and has been promoted in direct opposition to it' ('Preface' x). In this sense, Sephardic identities are depicted not as deriving from an essential core, but developing in relation to the socio-historical circumstances and, in particular, constituted by symbols that define the community as in some way 'different' to the Ashkenazim. Similar to the Ashkenazi biases present in American Jewry, Israeli society is also primarily characterized by the values and preferences associated with the Ashkenazim; however, in Israel the situation is intensified as the Sephardim also compete in an economic and political marketplace dominated by the Ashkenazim. The

predisposition towards Ashkenazi-centred policies has led to various accounts of resentment and aggression amongst the non-Ashkenazim, manifesting in the form of social and cultural movements and the rise of political parties determined to unite the marginalized collective in a sociopolitical struggle against prevailing Ashkenazic ideologies (ibid.). Due to protests and social changes (such as the events at Wadi Al-Salib, the rise of the (Sephardic) Black Panthers, and the population increase of Sephardim in the twentieth century), discriminatory attitudes in Israel towards the Sephardim and Mizrahim have become more moderate since the 1960s; however, shifts have been slow in terms of occupational and educational reform (DellaPergola 39; Urian, 'Mizrahi and Ashkenazi' 25).²

Since the 1980s, there has been a growing interest amongst scholars investigating Israeli history and society in critically addressing intra-Jewish and Arab-Jewish relations. Elke Kaschl provides an insightful overview of this scholarly development, noting how academics (known as the New Sociologists) generally applied a 'colonialist paradigm' to examine issues of power, domination, and inequality through a relational approach (Kaschl 5; also see Ram 'The Colonization'). In regards to intra-Jewish relations, Kaschl notes how these scholars positioned 'a dominant Ashkenazi elite against subordinate groups feeling excluded from the Zionist narrative' and 'set out to expose and trace inter-connections across the ethnic, religious and national dividing lines which official Zionist discourse had established as seemingly unbridgeable' (6).³

Part of this scholarship indicates an interest in recovering or signaling to the literary works of marginalized writers and critically addressing the representation of the Sephardim and Mizrahim in Israeli cultural products. One example is the work of Lital

² In contemporary discourse, the terms Sephardi and Mizrahi are often used interchangeably. I have attempted to acknowledge distinctions between the groups in this chapter as consistent within the thesis, but at times replicate this slippage when citing sources. For an overview of the Wadi Al-Salib riots and the Black Panthers see G.N. Giladi *Discord in Zion* (253-268); and Chetrit *Intra-Jewish*. For more on Sephardi population statistics see Giladi 5; and DellaPergola.

³ See for instance the work of Shohat: *Israeli Cinema*; 'The Narrative'; 'Taboo Memoires'; 'Sephardim in Israel'; and the work of Shenhav: *Arab Jews*; 'Modernity'; and Chetrit: 'Mizrahi Politics,' *Intra-Jewish*.

Levy, who has written several articles on the literature and history of the Arab Jews. In 'Reorienting Hebrew Literary History' she argues for a more inclusive approach to the study of Hebrew literature that accounts for the histories and relations between the Ashkenazim, Sephardim and Arab Jews, investigating the impact of cultural influences on literature.⁴ In *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture*, Ammiel Alcalay examines literature written in several languages to address the complex relations between Arabs and Jews and their relation to time and spaces, namely the Levant. Ella Shohat, as previously discussed, offers one of the most comprehensive studies of Sephardic and Mizrahi representation in Israeli Cinema (*Israeli Cinema; Taboo Memories*).⁵ Part of Shohat's analysis includes an investigation of 'bourka films,' popular in the 1960s and 70s these films were primarily produced by Ashkenazic filmmakers and drew upon ethnic stereotypes of the Sephardim. Although, as Shohat argues, the Sephardim did not have agency in the depiction of their culture and histories, the popular genre worked to legitimize the representation of Oriental Jews in the national cinema, recognize the economic power of the Sephardim as cultural consumers, and thus ensure that certain concessions were made in order to appeal to Sephardic viewers (*Israeli Cinema* 137).

Theatre has also been an important site wherein identities and power relations are established, maintained or subverted. One of the most notable scholars on non-Ashkenazic theatre in Israel, Dan Urian, states that 'Israeli theatre offers an accommodating research area for the study of Ashkenazi-Mizrahi relations. Political and social problems have been presented and "solved" on the theatrical stage [and...] theatre in particular, has offered an uncompromising disclosure of the confrontations, such as the ethnic conflicts, disagreements and contradictions, and presented them as insoluble' (Mizrahi and Ashkenazi' 19). Part of what Urian discusses is the Ashkenazi-centric focus

⁴ For additional studies on Sephardi and Mizrahi literature in Israel see the work of Nancy E. Berg including '*Sifrut*,' *Exile*, and *More and More*.

⁵ For additional discussions on representations of Sephardi and Mizrahi in film see: Urian 'Mizrahi and Ashkenazi' (23-24) who discusses the representation of Mizrahi Jews in Israeli Cinema as a combination of Oriental stereotypes; and Naaman 'Orientalism.'

of Israeli theatre: '[t]he theatre repertoire [...] (and particularly 'original theatre'), is mainly directed at the problems that occupy the minds of the secular-Ashkenazi group' and that Israeli theatre 'constitutes a powerful, self-reproducing cultural system, which reinforces the prevailing norms amongst those who finance it as well as participate in its deliberations. Whoever does not belong to this group is perceived as the "Other," and is presented as such on stage' (ibid 19-20). Similar sentiments are articulated in the work of community theatre director and scholar Shulamith Lev-Aladgem, who notes that the '*Mizrahim* have generally suffered from underrepresentation, and their images, especially in literature, cinema and theatre, have been generally negative and inferior, rigorously following the orientalist discourse of the *Ashkenazi* state' (Ethnicity' 182).

According to this paradigm, Israeli theatre replicates societal biases and stereotypes and does not afford the Sephardim or Mizrahim equal agency in the representation of their distinct cultural and linguistic traditions. A recent anecdote further illustrates how certain biases and values continue to play out in mainstream Israeli theatre. During Habima's (the Israeli National Theatre) production of *The Merchant of Venice*, presented in London at the Globe Theatre as part of World Shakespeare Festival to complement the 2012 Olympics Games, the lead role of Shylock was played by Sephardic actor Ilan Ronan. In the British newspaper, *The Independent*, Ronan remarked that his performance represented the first time that a Sephardic Jew was given the iconic role due to prevailing prejudice against Jews from Middle Eastern origins (Tonkin n.p.). People criticized the casting: 'the official reason was that he's a comedian. The unofficial reason is that he's a Sephardi' (ibid.). A study concerning the casting and representation of the Sephardim in Israeli Theatre is a subject worthy of its own investigation; however, the following chapter is chiefly concerned with theatre produced by Sephardic artists and that has been classified, in some respects, as distinctly Sephardic. By focusing on plays produced by the Sephardim, we do not mean to disregard any of the realities of artistic discrimination or marginalization in mainstream theatre, as these social

and political circumstances and attitudes have been instrumental in the development of contemporary Sephardi Theatre. Rather, this chapter furthers our relational approach by considering the circumstances which have engendered particular social and political positions and the ways in which theatrical performances maintain or challenge those positions.

One aspect of the aforementioned studies on intra-Jewish relations is an interest in critically examining the representation of history within governmental policies, textbooks, literature and popular entertainment. In particular, while memories of the past resonate strongly within contemporary Sephardi Theatre, one event weighs more heavily than others: the Holocaust. If, as Freddie Rokem argues, 'stories and memories from the Holocaust [...] have been central for the creation of a collective Israeli identity' (*Performing* 27), then the ways in which the Sephardim narrate and relate these events may hold significance in situating the community within Israeli national narratives. Rokem further remarks that performances 'dealing directly or indirectly with the Holocaust must therefore be seen as an integral aspect of the more comprehensive "work of mourning" and "working-through" which is an important element in the Israeli ideological texture, occupying Israeli society and culture in innumerable ways' (ibid.). It would then follow that Sephardic representations of the Holocaust can be considered important sites in confronting these historical narratives, relations to the past, and power dynamics within Israel. In this respect, the current chapter investigates in part how representations of the Holocaust materialize on stage and contribute to the construction of Sephardic cultural identities.

Following in the conceptual lead of Alcalay, who advocates scholarly efforts in examining 'how cultures produce *themselves* within the conditions in which they happen to exist and evolve' (*After Jews* 33), this chapter investigates how Sephardic artists in Israel utilize the stage to construct cultural and political identities. The overall focus is on how Sephardi Theatre in Israel works to challenge the normative disposition of Israeli society

by eschewing Ashkenazi-centered frames of reference. By representing the past, Sephardi artists offer a revisionist theatre that rewrites history from the margins of society, demonstrating how cultural identities extend beyond national borders and are constituted by diasporic experiences and relations. In narrating the past, Sephardi Theatre presents a contemporary Sephardi-Israeli identity that is complex, ambivalent and not confined by Ashkenazic-Eurocentric frameworks. By investigating how the Sephardim represent their cultural and national identities, this chapter is concerned with the extent to which these identities are internally generated or imposed, if the products homogenize communities or account for particularisms, and the potential implications of these performances on revitalization efforts.

In order to understand the dynamics and significance of contemporary Sephardi Theatre in Israel, it is crucial to examine the internal tensions between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim along with the political and cultural movements in recent times which have responded to histories of subordination. The following chapter begins by addressing the history and present context of intra-Jewish relations in Israel and its connection to recent efforts in revitalizing Sephardic language and culture through live performances. Following this is an investigation of various responses by artists to revitalization efforts on both local and commercial scales.

Historical and Social Context

On a global level, less than 30% of the total Jewish population were Jews from African-Asian origin in 2000; however, in Israel the percentage is much higher, with nearly 47% of the total population (about 2.3 million), including both those born within and outside of Israel, being Jews from Asian and African origins (DellaPergola 14-15). Although Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews account for nearly half of the total Jewish population, a statistic that continues to increase, there are stark differences in occupations, income and social status between Jews from European and American origins and those from Asian

and African origins. In Sergio DellaPergola's analysis of the Sephardim in Israel, he demonstrates how in the present times the negative occupational gaps have not been closed: the Sephardim and Mizrahim continue to be underrepresented in high-status positions. Similarly, educational gaps are slowly closing but are in need of more critical attention, and income distribution remains unequal at the top and bottom of income levels (18-30). In the studies mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, these statistics are often read through a colonialist lens, critiquing the economic and social position of non-Ashkenazim as constituted by orientalist and racist values upheld by the Ashkenazi elite.

Although now openly condemned for its racist perceptions, Kalman Katznelson's *The Ashkenazic Revolution* captures the prevailing attitudes within Israel towards the Sephardim in the 1960s:

Ashkenazi rule over the Afro-Asiatic Jewish people and over the other non-Ashkenazi peoples continues even in the State of Israel. [...] We have undertaken tremendous efforts to destroy the gap [between Ashkenazim and non-Ashkenazim]. But the results are meager. After eighty years of educational and social work we are at the point where we have not even begun to struggle with the environmental and hereditary factors that form the basis of this failure. There is no possibility of closing the gap completely. Even those Ashkenazim who believe in closing the gap speak of an extended process lasting hundreds of years. However, the Sephardo-Oriental movement for equality refuses to wait. It asks us to close the gap with the speed that environmental improvement projects - such as the draining of lake Hula, or the construction of big buildings - are undertaken. If we sincerely would like to close the gap within the space of one or two generations, there is only one way: we must descend, deteriorate most surprisingly. We must cease reading serious books, abbreviate our studies, and drastically reduce the number of Ashkenazi children going into secondary school and then on to the universities. Perhaps we should also begin to play the game of *sheshbesh* [backgammon] or other Oriental games of similar kind and type. This is the only realistic way for us to achieve equality quickly with the Sephardo-Oriental. If we refuse to follow this path, then we must tell the Sephardo-

Orientalists the truth. We must tell them that only a few of them, primarily those of the Ladino Jews, have the chance of reaching our cultural level, and that the gap between us and the great mass of Sephardo-Orientalists will be fixed firmly until the end of days' (Hebrew translated and qtd. in Alcalay, *After Jews* 31-32).

As presented in this extract, one of the core issues is in regards to the integration and acculturation of the Sephardim in Israeli society. Henry Toledano refers to the various integration processes as 'simply the Ashkenazization of the Sephardim,' which resulted in marginalization, deculturation and the transformation of the communities (335-7).

While Katznelson is an extreme example, the work is illustrative of certain attitudes regarding Ashkenazic and Sephardic relations even in more recent times.⁶ Ella

⁶ There are a number of examples which indicate the prevailing biases towards the Sephardim and Mizrahim in popular discourse. Tom Segev in *1949: The First Israelis* describes the theories propagated by Israeli academics to justify the 'primitive' mentality of the Arab-Jewish immigrants and the need for their 're-education':

Some time after the number of immigrants from the Arab countries began to exceed that from Europe, the quarterly *Megamot* approached five prominent scholars of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Ernst Simon, Natan Rotenstreich, Meshulam Groll, Yosef Ben-David (Gross) and Karl Frankenstein, all of Central or East European origin, and asked them to consider this new problem. They approached it with appropriate academic rigor, their articles bearing such titles as 'Absolute Criteria' and 'The Dignity of Man.' Karl Frankenstein's article ended with the sentence: "We must recognize the primitive mentality of many of the immigrants from the backward countries." The others were of the same opinion. Frankenstein proposed that in order to understand the mentality of the immigrants it should be compared, amongst others, to the primitive expression of children, the retarded, or the mentally disturbed. Yosef Gross was of the opinion that the new immigrants from the Arab countries were suffering from "mental regression" and "a faculty development of the ego." His colleagues discussed "the nature of primitiveness" at great length. As a whole these articles project an Ashkenazi consensus, which was partly paternalistic and benevolent as well as being supercilious and contemptuous (qtd. in Alcalay, *After Arabs* 223; Segev 157-8).

A number of other studies have critiqued these theories as echoed in Israeli politics. Former Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion is perhaps one of the most cited individuals for his views of the Sephardim and Mizrahim. For instance, he referred to Moroccan Jews as 'savages' and the Orientalists as lacking 'the most elementary knowledge' and 'without a trace of Jewish or human education' (qtd. in Shohat, *Israeli Cinema* 116). He continues: '[w]e do not want Israelis to become Arabs. We are duty bound to fight against the spirit of the Levant, which corrupts individuals and societies, and preserve the authentic Jewish values as they crystallized in the Diaspora' (ibid.; also see Smooha, *Israel* 88; Massad 57). Golda Meir, another Israeli prime minister, shared similar attitudes as exhibited in her remarks on the Sephardim as a primitive 'Other': '[s]hall we be able to elevate these immigrants to a suitable level of civilization?' (qtd. in Shohat *Israeli Cinema* 117). G.N. Giladi provides perhaps one of the most comprehensive accounts of relations between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim in *Discord in Zion* Israel, tracing confrontation between the two groups from before and during early settlement in Palestine. Jonathan Massad in 'Zionism's Internal Other' also includes an excellent overview of political and social commentary regarding the Sephardim and Mizrahim.

Shohat elaborates on the construction of the Sephardim within popular discourse, both within Israel and abroad,

According to the mythic discourse, European Zionism 'saved' Sephardi Jews from the harsh rule of the Arab 'captors.' It took them out of 'primitive conditions' of poverty and superstition and ushered them gently into a modern Western society characterized by 'humane values,' values with which they were but vaguely and erratically familiar due to the 'Levantine environments' from which they came. Within Israel, of course, they have suffered the problem of 'the gap'; not simply that between their standard of living and that of European Jews, but also that due to their 'incomplete integration' into Israeli liberalism and prosperity, handicapped as they have been by their Oriental, illiterate, despotic, sexist, and generally pre-modern formation in their lands of origin, as well as by their propensity for generating large families. The political establishment, the welfare institutions, and the educational system, according to this discourse, have done all in their power to 'reduce the gap' by initiating the Oriental Jews into the ways of 'civilized, modern society.' At the same time, intermarriage is proceeding apace and the Sephardim have won new appreciation for their 'traditional cultural values,' for their folkloric music, rich cuisine, and warm hospitality. A serious problem persists, however. Due to their inadequate education and 'lack of experience with democracy,' the Jews of Asia and Africa tend to be extremely conservative, even reactionary, and religiously fanatic, in contrast to the liberal, secular, and educated European Jews. Anti-Socialist, they form the base of support for the right-wing parties. Given their 'cruel experience in Arab lands,' furthermore, they tend to be 'Arab-haters,' and in this sense they have been an 'obstacle to peace,' preventing the efforts of the 'Peace Camp' to make a 'reasonable settlement' with Arabs. (*Israeli Cinema* 115-6)

Shohat shows how discriminatory processes extended across Israeli society and penetrated the ways in which images of the Oriental Jews are circulated and interpreted. While Shohat is primarily concerned with cinema, theatrical productions can similarly

benefit from analysis within particular socio-historical contexts as mediated forms of intra-Jewish relations.

Open criticism of the Ashkenazi hegemony in Israel has become more widespread over the last few decades and even referred to as a new form of exile. One of the first Sephardi MPs, Shmuel Rakanti, criticised integration within Israeli society in 1954: '[i]ts real meaning is the eradication of Sephardi culture and traditions and the imposition of Ashkenazi culture [...] I am disgusted by the humility and spiritual and social nihilism. It enrages me. We must reject these corrupting opinions and criticise those who humiliate us while imposing upon us generals and patrons' (qtd. in Giladi 197). Writing on the discrimination of Mizrahi Jews particularly from Iraq, Nancy Berg describes how the Zionist state created a new kind of exile:

There are two sides of the “double exile”: intensification and negation. In the first case, the writer as double exile is doubled not only from the homeland but also from its language and culture, from an established audience, and from the literary markets and partnerships. In the second sense, the double exile functions as a double negative and cancels out. Those exiled (metaphorically) or marginalized in their own homeland are often demarginalized by the second exile. This is, of course, the fulfillment of the Zionist vision. (*Exile* 13-14)

Berg is speaking in particular about the experiences of Iraqi Jews in Israel, however the experience of living as a 'double exile' is repeated in experiences of the Sephardim in Israel. As Sephardic-Israeli scholar Gabriel ben Simhon notes: 'we live in cultural exile. They have changed our culture without telling us' (qtd. in Gideon 200).

Beginning in the 1970s, the Sephardim began to more actively challenge Ashkenazic cultural biases, power hierarchies and discriminatory policies. One area which has been the focus of considerable activist efforts is the preservation, education and revitalization of Ladino.

Language Policy in Israel and the Ladino Revitalization Movement

Fundamental to the Zionist vision was a uniting of disparate ethnic groups through a common language: Hebrew. The privileging of Hebrew and discrimination against other languages led to the decline of Ladino amongst Israeli Sephardim and, importantly, a perceived inferiority of the language (see Bishop 'More Than' and 'From Shame'). As a result of various ethnic groups emigrating into Palestine, in 1948 there was not a dominant language in the region. Hebrew language schools existed in Palestine in the nineteenth century but it was not until the 1950s that the language became privileged above all other ethnic languages such as Ladino or Yiddish as the national language of the state. The pressure to speak Hebrew and conform to a new national identity threatened minority identities both culturally and linguistically (Eliezer 5). As Harshaw illustrates,

It was a revival not only of the Hebrew *language* but also of Hebrew *culture* and a Hebrew *society*. Moreover, the process was circular: the revival of Hebrew culture and of an ideological society brought about the revival of the language; and, reciprocally, the revival of the language enabled the growth of the culture and the new society. (92)

The revival of Hebrew culture described by Harshaw is part of a greater ideological movement which aimed to homogenize the new state's various ethnic groups.

For the Sephardim, the Zionist policies of integration resulted in a heightened level of embarrassment within the community in openly engaging with their heritage. Ladino, as a clear indicator of origins, ceased to be spoken by immigrants and was not taught to subsequent generations in order to acclimatize better to Israeli state identity and politics. The issue of language and education has been a key concern for scholar Gideon Giladi, an Israeli-born Sephardim. He writes passionately from his own experiences of growing up in Israel:

[t]he tragedy of the Sephardim is that they no longer know the language of their grandparents, or about the Jewish poets and writers from Iraq, Syria and Egypt. They can neither read nor write the language of their fathers, and are unaware that most of the Jewish heritage, or that most of the works of Maimonides and Saadya Gaon, were written in Arabic. They have been pressurised into believing that they, along with the Arabs, are backward and uncivilized in comparison to the Ashkenazim. (189)

The Israeli radio, Kol Israel, played a major role in adjusting the immigrants to their new national context and later, as an important avenue for language revitalization efforts. Kol Israel was established in 1948 to serve as an educational tool for teaching immigrants Hebrew and connecting them to social life (Penslar 184). Hebrew was the primary language of the Israeli radio, with 15-20% of the programming dedicated to minority language broadcasts in the 1950s (ibid 186). According to Bishop, the emergence of Ladino radio programs in 1948 was a stepping stone for the language revitalization movement in the late twentieth century ('More Than' 87). This shift in language ideology is captured by Moshe Shaul, who began his career in 1954 with the Ladino radio program and is currently one of Israel's foremost revitalization activists. Shaul is an important figure in advancing the standardization of Ladino, remarking how the work of Kol Israel was a 'Judeo-Spanish Academy' as it was the only group at the time which was working professionally to establish linguistic standards through laborious work and collaboration (Shaul, *Kreasion* 67; Bishop, 'More Than' 92). In 1977, Shaul led *Projekto Folklore* designed to gather and record the folkloric stories and songs of the Sephardim. By the mid 1980s Shaul and his supporters had gathered 4,000 songs accessible to the public and researchers on cassette. Currently, Shaul edits the Ladino print publication, *Aki Yerushalayim*. Begun in 1979, *Aki Yerushalayim* publishes articles, reviews, and community announcements. The orthographic system used in *Aki Yerushalayim* is now the standard Latin-based system used throughout the world for Ladino publications.

Language revitalization efforts have led to the development of several projects to revitalize and promote the Ladino language and Sephardic culture. Such organizations and publications include: the *Association Vidas Largas*, established in 1974; *Los Muestras*, a magazine in Belgium established in 1990; the *Instituto Arias Montano* in Spain which currently publishes *Sefarad*; the European Sephardi Institute; and the Sefarad Association, which organizes activities related to the revitalization of Ladino such as seminars, conferences, storytelling, and high school language courses. In 1996, at the same time that the Knesset established the Yiddish Preservation Programme it took the first steps in officially fostering and preserving the Sephardi heritage. *La Autoridad Nacional del Ladino* (NAL hereafter) was established with former Israeli president Yitzhak Navon as its leader and regularly sponsors educational events, concerts, performances and language classes.⁷ Sephardic communities and organizations have been organizing their own events and language programs to promote their culture and dictate their own means of representation within society.

In addition to language courses, events, and publications, the Ladino language revitalization movement in Israel has also drawn heavily upon storytelling, theatrical and musical performances. The results of Bishop's fieldwork in the late 1990s demonstrates how performance-based events were regularly used by activists to engage, educate and promote the public on Sephardi language and culture ('More Than'). While classroom-based language learning programmes utilize performance as a means of engaging students with the myths, music, and stories of the Sephardim, a large part of language revitalization programmes revolves around performance-based public events such as storytelling, singing and theatrical performances. As will be discussed in this chapter, while the motivation of performance events may arise from common drives rooted in the revitalization movement, the ways in which artists construct language, culture and history

⁷ Unfortunately, with the establishment of the NAL the Israeli Ministry of Education ceased funding the Ladino high school courses, resulting in the majority of NAL funding now being utilized to maintain the programmes that already existed.

on stage, and their effect on audiences, differs greatly. What follows is an investigation into how Sephardi playwrights, directors and artists are constructing representations of the Sephardim in contemporary public spheres, and what effect such performances may have for relating to previous diasporic histories and offering a place for such traditions in the future.

Matilda Koen-Sarano and the Sephardic Revitalization Movement

Matilda Koen-Sarano is one of Israel's leading Ladino activists and she has been awarded special recognition for her efforts in preserving and contributing to the revitalization movement. Born in Milan to a Sephardic, Ladino-speaking family, Koen-Sarano immigrated to Israel in 1960 and currently lives in Jerusalem where she plays an active role in teaching, publishing, and organizing events around the learning and appreciation of Ladino. She has taught language courses at Ben-Gurion University in the Negev and a course for Ladino teachers in Jerusalem. In addition, she regularly contributes to Kol Israel with endeavours including programs on Ladino folk tales. As one of Israel's most prolific Ladino writers, she has published several books on the topic of folktales, legends, Sephardi songs, grammar and language books including a dictionary, a Sephardi cookbook, as well as a number of poems and theatrical pieces.

Koen-Sarano's most popular publication is perhaps *Vini Kantaremos*, a collection of Ladino songs which she collected and edited. The songbook is intended to facilitate group singing and is occasionally utilized in Koen-Sarano's monthly event, *Vini Kantaremos* in Jerusalem. This event draws an average of 100-150 participants, including elderly Sephardim and interested members of the public. Koen-Sarano's artistic work reflects her involvement in the Ladino language revitalization movement and signifies the unique role afforded to live performances in legitimizing, educating, and celebrating Sephardi culture. While participants in *Vini Kantaremos* are encouraged to connect with their Sephardic identities during the performance event, Koen-Sarano often

contextualizes the songs, offering anecdotes and historical information to further link the performances to a Sephardic past. Koen-Sarano is also involved in the creation and promotion of new Ladino songs and Sephardi music appreciation. Since 2003 she has also worked as a consultant for Festivaladino, a song competition resembling Eurovision where artists perform live songs in a style that organizers claim resembles Sephardic traditions. The festival is representative of the important efforts made by Koen-Sarano and other activists in, as former Israeli president Yitzhak Navon claims, ensuring that Ladino is 'not just a fond memory of the past, but a new creation which runs in the veins' ('The 5th Festivaladino' n.p.). Koen-Sarano is thus equally involved in the preservation of Ladino for nostalgic purposes, as well as the promotion and establishment of fresh artistic practices that may work to solidify a place for Ladino in the present and future.

Koen-Sarano has also written a number of theatrical works and has been involved in their staging and publication. These productions are often semi-autobiographical, reflecting her family's experiences in Milan and Turkey, surviving the Holocaust, along with immigrating and integrating into Israeli society. Her best known theatrical work is the musical comedy *Sepharadis de Dor en Dor* [Sephardim from Generation to Generation], which was first broadcast on Kol Israel in fifteen minute segments from 1999-2000. A staged version of the play had been performed in Mexico with Colejio Sefaradi children in 1998. In the introduction to the published playtext, Moshe Shaul describes this piece as an important addition to revitalization efforts: '[t]his is also a work that is able to contribute considerably to the conservation efforts and the promotion of Judeo-Spanish and its culture' ('Entroducción' 22).⁸ Here Shaul is explicitly linking the theatrical work of Koen-Sarano to the greater Ladino revitalization movement ongoing in Israel. As the plays are written in Ladino with no Hebrew or English translation, Koen-Sarano appears

⁸ Original Text: Esta es también una obra que podrá contribuir considerablemente al esfuerzo para la conservación i promoción del judeo-espanyol i su kultura [...].

more interested in contributing to the revitalization movement than circulating her work based upon their artistic merits.

The plot of *Sepharadís de Dor en Dor* centres on the experiences of a family across several generations from 1907-1994 as they travel through several countries, including Israel, Turkey, and Italy. The story begins with Lior and his grandmother Suzanne in present-day Israel as she narrates the history of their family beginning with her grandparents' life in Izmir during 1907. Suzanne's narrative draws heavily upon Koen-Sarano's own family history, reflecting upon life in Rhodes, in foreign language schools, and in 1930s Milan with the rise of fascism and the threat of German invasion. Semi-autobiographical flashbacks throughout the play dramatize life in the diaspora, periodically returning to life in the present day. Charting the Sephardi diaspora through her own experiences, Suzanne tells of her immigration to Israel in the 1960s and meeting her husband. The grandmother ends her narration of the past with her marriage and the familial celebration of the family as the couple begins a new chapter of their lives in Israel. Lior pressures his grandmother to continue with the narrating of his own parents' experiences, but Suzanne insists that this is a story he will have to continue with his own children. The emphasis throughout is on Sephardic diaspora experiences, not as only an aspect of the past, but as an ongoing narrative that continues to transform through each generation. Storytelling and narrating the past are central aspects of the dramatic text, and Lior is instructed at the end to continue in these traditions of remembering and sharing the past to future generations. Koen-Sarano's interest in presenting the piece not only on the radio but also for school children, suggests that the piece was intended to resonate across generations and perhaps initiate inter-generational dialogue regarding the history and language of the Sephardim.

In addition to evoking Sephardic history through the narrative content, the production also draws heavily upon traditional Sephardi songs. For the Kol Israel production, the piece was set to music by Hayim Tsur which was played during several

interludes between the scenes. While Tsur produces some original music, there was also a number of well-known musical pieces such as *Morenika*, *Arboles*, and *Durme durme*. *Arboles* is a particularly evocative song of trauma and loss experienced during the Holocaust. In an interview, Sephardic musical director Yossi Davara states that *Arboles* is a sad love song about dying in a foreign land, sung by families as they were transported from Thessaloniki to Auschwitz (Personal Interview). The usage of 'Arboles' in the production draws connections between Koen-Sarano's auto-biographical experiences to greater histories and traditions within the Sephardic diaspora.

A similar usage of music and storytelling to represent the past is evident in Koen-Sarano's play *Tres Ermanikas* (Three Sisters). Originally written in 2000 and adapted for the theatre in 2004, *Tres Ermanikas* includes a multi-generational cast who dramatize the history of a family. The play is set in 1980s Tel Aviv and opens with a young woman, Dalia, inquiring about the history of the family for a school project. In each of the three acts, Dalia's grandmother (Djoya) and her sisters, Rebeka and Roza, recount their memories of growing up in Izmir and the various successes and difficulties they experienced throughout their lives. Each sister's experience is recounted through flashbacks where audiences see their younger selves. The basic structure of the play allows Koen-Sarano to dramatize important moments of the sisters' past which corresponds to significant historical events in Sephardi communities. In Roza's story, she describes how when her husband was unable to provide for her and the children, she was able to take matters into her own hands to save the family. In Act II, Rebeka describes meeting her husband, Djako, and their travels to Milan and America, but how they were often separated and grew apart and how she longed to return to Izmir and be with her family. The final sister, Djoya, narrates her experiences during World War II. The core of Djoya's story revolves around an encounter she had with two German soldiers on a train, wherein she managed to avoid having her papers checked and was therefore able to flee the country safely (Act III). Djoya's experience is particularly meaningful in the

dramatic narrative as the other sisters were previously unaware of the event. Memories of the Holocaust are thus resurrected through Djoya's storytelling in the form of a metatheatrical critique regarding the importance of recalling the past in order to inform the present. In the final scene of the play, Dalia faces her own reservations about her past and future. Whilst she had previously expressed reservations over a recent marriage proposal, in the end she decides that the future would be better experienced with a family and resolves to marry immediately. The final song of the piece is the traditional Ladino piece, *A la una yo nasi*, a song which emphasizes the shortness of life and love.

The title of this piece is not without significance. *Tres Ermanikas* shares its name with a popular Ladino folksong *Tres Ermanikas eran*, which is sung by the sisters at the end of the prologue. As the play appears to be named after this song, it is clear that it held significance for Koen-Sarano in her writing of the piece. Koen-Sarano has changed the lyrics slightly as indicated in the opening lines shown below:

Koen-Sarano's version of <i>Tres Hermanikas</i>	Traditional Version of <i>Tres Hermanikas Eran</i>
There were three sisters, White, beautiful and full of love,	There were three sisters, White roses and branches of flower
There were three sisters, Now they are grandmothers. ⁹	There were three sisters, Three sisters there were. ¹⁰

Koen-Sarano has adapted this popular Sephardic romance in order to express the particularities of the sisters in her production. While the original romance continues by

⁹ Original Text:
Tres ermanikas eran
Blankas, ermozas i yenas d' amor,
Tres ermanikas eran,
Agora nonas son

¹⁰ Original Text:
Tres hermanicas eran,
Blancas de roz, Ay, ramas de flor
Tres hermanicas eran,
Tres hermanicas son.

way of focusing on the specifics of the youngest daughter, Koen-Sarano's version emphasizes the passing of time and familial bonds between sisters. There is a recognizable structure and repetition of 'tres ermanikas' which may enable listeners familiar with the folksong to recognize its traditional value in the Sephardic canon, but nonetheless Koen-Sarano and Tsur have adapted the piece to make it resonate with the present: it is not narrating the story of a woman waiting for the return of her sailor, but the rich and full lives the sisters have led.

Two important aspects of Koen-Sarano's theatrical productions that resonate with her socio-political activities are the ubiquitous use of Ladino and the emphasis within the productions on the importance of recalling and communicating Sephardic diasporic histories as distinguishing aspects of contemporary cultural identities. The past is recalled through both the narration of the characters and regular flashbacks to previous diasporic experiences as well as through the regular use of traditional Sephardic folksongs. Whilst the plays address tragic or unsettling aspects of the Sephardic past, they seem to emphasize the importance of intergenerational dialogue and the 'passing down' of histories, traditions and language over directly critiquing contemporary policies or openly advocating revitalization efforts. In part, Koen-Sarano's work contributes to the construction of alternative histories within Israeli society and historiography as her plays narrate the experiences of the marginalized Sephardim. As Partha Chatterjee notes on history as a source of nationhood in Bengal: '[i]t is, of course, a primary sign of the nationalist consciousness that it will not find its own voice in histories written by foreign rulers and that it will set out to write for itself the account of its own past' (230-2). What is useful in Chatterjee's analysis in relation to the work of Koen-Sarano is the notion of history-writing as an important strategy for subverting dominant narratives of nationhood and contributing to the formation of a collective consciousness, in this case of course for the Sephardic community.

When considering Koen-Sarano's pieces as extensions of her revitalization efforts, there are certain limitations in the pieces' potential to impact Sephardi and non-Sephardi audiences. One implication of performing solely in Ladino is that it may limit the extent to which her pieces connect and inspire new audiences or non-Ladino speaking Sephardim. Isaac Benabu, director of the radio version of *Sephardis de Dor en Dor*, corroborated this idea, remarking how it was a struggle to find actors who knew Ladino to a level where they could perform the piece (personal communication). In a sense, Koen-Sarano's dramatic works may only have a limited future in terms of their restagability. The lessons to be gained from the performances, including the necessity of intergenerational communication, may be lost to a younger generation who are disadvantaged through lower language comprehension or reduced access to recordings of the radio productions. Although Koen-Sarano's theatrical work only has the potential to reach limited audiences, it may nonetheless be useful for encouraging Ladino-speaking Sephardim to become engaged (or re-engaged) with the language, histories and songs of the past, with the potential of increasing interests amongst their peers and families. While Koen-Sarano broadcasts her productions and produces events designed to bring disparate Ladino-speaking audiences together, the Bat Yam Cultural Club (BYCC) serves as an alternative example of how Sephardi Theatre continues to operate in Israel.

Theatre Performances at the Bat Yam Cultural Club

Bat Yam is a neighborhood south of Tel Aviv where a significant number of Turkish and Balkanic immigrants have settled over the twentieth century. The BYCC is comprised of a group of Turkish immigrants who have been producing Ladino-language productions since 1991 for the local community and wider public. Their first production in 1991 was entitled *La Novya de Las Syete Fustanellas* [*The Bride with Seven Dresses*] by Avram Alberto Anach, and evokes the Sephardi tradition of gift giving for weddings in a theatrical vaudeville style (Mitchell n.p.). Most of the club participants are between fifty

and sixty years old, with the introduction of twenty year olds set to happen in their 2012 production (Bahar, personal interview). Performances typically take place once a year and include a cast of around twelve with several additional community members assisting with aspects of production, including costumes, set, marketing and ticket sales. While most shows take place at the BYCC, the company has also performed at the Suzanna Dellal Center in Tel Aviv. On average, the productions draw up to 2,000 audience members over a run, with an average age of between forty and eighty. Although performances are community-based, they have attracted the attention of leading Israeli language activists such as Matilda Koen-Sarano and Yitzchak Navon, who support the group as the last Ladino-language theatre company in Israel.

What becomes evident through interviews with members of the BYCC, is the social rather than artistic significance of the productions. As one of the actresses, Violet Bahar, explains: '[i]t is good to be together, for me, we want to be together all the time and [...] with this theatre we are together and we are very happy to be together' (Interview). Rather than working to a production deadline, performances are staged after months of preparation and rehearsing. As most of the actors and actresses are undertaking theatrical work as a social activity, rehearsals only take place once or twice a week. During this time actors work on blocking and learning their lines, but also connect to fellow Ladino-speakers and practice the language. In discussing their most recent production, V. Bahar explains how the director Leon Sason worked hard in building confidence with the cast members and patiently working with them on their lines (personal interview). V. Bahar admits that her Ladino is not fluent, and she often had to memorize sections before rehearsals, nevertheless, she was committed to the project as it keeps her close to fellow Sephardim and her familial histories. In addition to rehearsals, V. Bahar describes how each week the community comes together for singing, dancing, or playing cards, especially canasta: each Sunday, she says 'we like to play cards. We do everything - we must we must!' (personal interview). Continuing to engage in community

events is very important to V. Bahar and the rest of the Turkish community; V. Bahar's insistence on 'we must' emphasizes how social events such as rehearsals and performances are an important part of maintaining a strong Sephardic community. Evidence of the community-building aspect of the theatrical productions can be seen in video footage of the production *Fuorsa del Palo* from March 2010.¹¹ The opening sequence includes a significant amount of backstage footage, which captures a communal feel amongst the actors and production team as they assist one another with applying make-up, getting into costume and practicing their lines. Including a good deal of backstage footage before the theatrical production suggests that those activities were equally valuable to the performers and part of the overall significance of the event.

Figure 7: Flyer and Production Image from *A Fuersa del Palo*.¹²



¹¹ This footage appears designed for personal usage and not for commercial distribution.

¹² 'Teatro en el Moadon,' and *A Fuersa del Palo*. 2010. DVD.

Musical accompaniment is also an important part of the productions at the BYCC. Sephardi songs are performed in order to draw audience members into the performance and encourage their vocal participation. V. Bahar describes how older members of the audience often sing and dance along to the familiar tunes, suggesting that the focus of the production is not only on entertaining audiences, but also on creating an environment wherein the Sephardim can congregate and strengthen their connection to musical traditions and Ladino. For audience members with varying degrees of linguistic ability, songs are an important part of the performance event in that they offer a non-threatening and fun opportunity for participation.

While the BYCC produces a number of translated works from Hebrew or French, they have also performed a few original Ladino plays by playwrights such as Sara Benveniste Benrey and Anah. Benrey has written a number of pieces including *Cecilia la Cantadara* [*Cecilia the Singer*], *Todo Bueno kon Marido Viejo* [*Everything's Good with an Old Husband*] and *Sigundo Kazamiento* [*Second Marriage*]. All of Benrey's works were written in Ladino, and currently have only been produced in conjunction with the BYCC. In addition to dramatic works, Benrey has written a number of poems and short sketches, which were transcribed by her son, Yossi Benrey, and self-published in the collection *Espertando el Djudeo Espanyol* [*Reviving Judeo-Spanish*]. The title itself evokes the revitalizationist motivation behind Benrey's writing and publications.

Sharing certain similarities with Koen-Sarano, Benrey only became active in writing literary works later in her life, as she became aware of the unsettling realities of Sephardic linguistic and cultural decline. In an interview, Yossi Benrey informed me of his mother's journey towards writing Ladino literature and drama. Growing up in Izmir, she learned French, English, Turkish, Greek and Ladino, obtaining a degree to teach French in Paris before immigrating to Israel in 1969; however, she did not take up a career in teaching and instead dedicated herself to learning Hebrew and integrating into Israeli society. It was not until the death of her husband that she returned to Ladino as a

source of literary inspiration. Y. Benrey explains her early inspiration came from the success of Yitzchak Navon's *Bustan Sephardi*,

she was inspired very much [by the play] and she began very slowly you know, each item in the news happened she began to write poems. But she had arthritis so she couldn't even write anymore, her hand was not able to hold the pen. So I bought her a computer and although it was very difficult for her to use, but she managed to do it. But with most of her songs, poems and pieces of theatre she was writing it and I was typing it up. ('Interview')

What began as poems and short sketches turned into a significant corpus of plays, poetry, and dramatic sketches. Benrey's late blooming signifies the importance of loss and nostalgia in her work. Although not all of her pieces deal with these issues directly, it is important to understand her work from the context of looking back. In addition, all of her pieces are inspired by historical events - both international, national, and personal, which create an image of the narrative of a Sephardi immigrant. As Benrey's daughter, Dolly, describes, 'she wrote from her experience in life' for instance, 'when my father passed away she married another man, these adventures she put in the theatre. Also, she wanted me to marry [...] she put it all in the theatre' (Benrey, personal interview).

Many of Benrey's plays are comedies dealing with domestic and family situations set in a present-day Sephardic community. In *Sigundo Kazamiento* the narrator opens the production by announcing that the piece for the evening features the 'famous matchmaker from Bat-Yam,'¹³ highlighting how her productions were written and performed for the local community (Act I, Scene 1). Dramatic situations within Benrey's plays often revolve around marriages and matchmaking and include a number of traditional Ladino songs that directly relate to the title or the themes of the particular production. For instance, *Todo Bueno Kon Marido Viego* and *La Ija del Altezahé* both feature traditional songs of

¹³ Original Text: famozo kazamentero de Bat-Yam

the same title. Similar to Koen-Sarano's incorporation of traditional music, Benrey's pieces were written to evoke collective memories and customs and include audience members in the event through the incorporation of familiar songs. The stories are lighthearted, humorous and full of familiar musical interludes, suggesting that the event generated around the performance was as significant for the community as the specific content of the piece.

What is particularly interesting is that all of Benrey's dramatic works are domestic comedies, whereas her poetry directly addresses modern day political tensions such as war, ethnic conflict and Palestinian-Israeli relations. For instance: the poem 'Yitshak Rabin: 1922-1995' was written one day after the assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister; 'La Pas en Washington' ['The Peace in Washington] about longing for peace; 'Un Akordo de Pas Kon Arafat' [The Peace Accord of Arafat]; and 'George Boush I Husseyin Saddam.' As Benrey was evidently conflicted by the political and social tensions in Israel, it is curious that the subject matter of her dramatic work remains light-hearted and domestic. Dolly offers an explanation, suggesting that her mother wrote comedies for live performances as theatre is a space within the communal life in Bat Yam for audiences to come together for light entertainment and socialization (Benrey, personal interview). Sarah Benrey's genre choices reflect the wider interest of the BYCC in utilizing theatre as primarily a site for revitalizing communal solidarity and strengthening connections to the past, rather than actively engaging with wider socio-political issues.

As with the dramatic work of Koen-Sarano, the theatrical productions of the BYCC utilize Ladino and traditional Sephardic songs as important indicators of a distinct Sephardic identity. V. Bahar indicates that despite the use of Ladino in theatre productions, the language is declining from everyday use amongst the younger generation as Turkish has in some ways replaced Ladino as an important and useful language to connect her children to their diasporic heritage: 'we want the children to not forget

Turkish, the Spanish,¹⁴ but it is very difficult, they will forget [...]. I speak with my children Turkish and not Ladino because I don't know Ladino, I should learn it' (personal interview). Although younger actors are being incorporated into the productions, V. Bahar does not express confidence in the prospects of Ladino-language productions continuing within the community:

they don't know Spanish the kids - it is very difficult. Only my grandchildren come to see me [in the theatre, within] five minutes, and they [are] Safta - Safta! [she gestures 'lets go'] Grandmother! My son as well, he doesn't know Spanish and she [my daughter] doesn't know Spanish, they can't [understand]. (Interview')

As neither all the actors nor audience members are fluent in Ladino, the theatrical representations portray a highly mediated version of the current Sephardic community. An awareness of the fragility of the Ladino and its usability for the community is heightened in the very productions that aim to assert its strength and value for the community.

As Ladino is no longer a daily language amongst the Sephardim, theatrical and musical performances are thus one of the few remaining spaces where audiences can encounter the language in a live setting and they provide a rare opportunity for language maintenance and, importantly, in symbolically representing something that is distinctly Sephardic. For V. Bahar, engagement with these activities is driven by her desire to 'not forget' the language or lose connection with her fellow Sephardim: 'we are very tired by the end of the day and to go and perform is very difficult, but we love it. We love it and we want to speak Spanish in the club. We don't want to forget this language' (personal interview). For V. Bahar, working on the productions keeps her connected to a Sephardi community in Israel and helps maintain links to her family's history. Yossi and Dolly

¹⁴ Spanish refers to Ladino in this context.

Benrey share a similar attitude towards performances and language maintenance. They admit that their mother's interest in Ladino and theatrical productions did not rub off on them until they were much older, and in recent times they have turned to the dramatic work as it helps them stay connected to their linguistic and cultural heritage:

Last week, you know we have eight couples of Turkish friends and each Friday evening we chat, play cards, and of course we speak Turkish. So last week I took the book [of Benrey's publications], you know not every day you read it, and I found the sketch 'La Ija' [The Daughter]. I read the sketch and they loved it! (personal interview)

Yossi Benrey's experiences with other Sephardic families reflect the storytelling traditions amongst the community. Although the plays were intended for performance Benrey's dramatic pieces find contemporary usability in small social gatherings and contribute to forming a shared identity amongst Turkish Sephardim.

V. Bahar's husband, Shlomo, who has also volunteered for the theatrical productions by handling internal and external contacts and promotions, explains how the dynamics of the audience have shifted over the years and how the BYCC has responded. He notes that when the company first started in the 1990s, there were audiences members from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece, but over the past few years the numbers have declined. Nevertheless, he is hopeful for the future:

unfortunately every year we have less and less because the people left us, just died [laughs]. But now we have a new generation, this year we are making a new theatre production with some boys and girls who are young. They like to play with us so we are playing (personal interview)

In an effort to include younger actors the next BYCC production is reaching out to the community to incorporate the voices of the youth. S. Bahar explains how members of the

cast have helped devise their latest production by sharing stories of life in Turkey which were then transcribed and made into a script by Anach for a performance set for 2012. He adds that this production will be performed roughly five percent in Hebrew, which will not alter the overarching goals of the production, but will rather better reflect the changing dynamics of the community. His hope is that by making the production relevant to younger actors and audiences the theatrical traditions will remain alive ('Interview').

Unlike Koen-Sarano's plays, the BYCC participants are part of a communal organization designed to develop and perform work for local audiences. Whilst they share an interest in maintaining the language amongst the community members, the theatre functions more to evoke nostalgia and contribute to maintaining a collective communal consciousness. Shifts in the repertoire of the company indicate that their relationship to Turkey and Israel has transformed over the last decade as the theatre productions begin to reflect the realities of language acquisition and integration. Although Shlomo and Violet Bahar are actively working to revitalize Ladino through theatrical productions, they are drawing upon additional factors, such as teaching their children Turkish, to construct and maintain a distinct Sephardic identity. Despite the decline of Ladino in the daily life of the community, theatre remains one of the few public sites where the language, song and histories of the community are represented. In writing about Mizrahi community theatre, Shulamith Lev-Aladgem argues that it is through drama that minority a community can 'reconsider its systems of values, symbols and beliefs, and negotiate with different regimes of power both within and beyond it' ('Ethnicity' 181).¹⁵ Theatre in this context, operates as a representational system to express 'life-experiences, thoughts, and memories which are mostly missing from the dominant cultural discourse, and they re-design their cultural and self history [sic] and identity' (Lev-

¹⁵ Bimat Kedem (The Eastern Stage) is perhaps the most notable Mizrahi theatre company established to address intra-Jewish tensions in Israel. Similar to the BYCC, Bimat Kedem uses theatre to offer an alternative to Ashkenazi-centered cultural products; yet the company's work is more politically charged. Since the 1980s, a number of Mizrahi playwrights are becoming more prominent on Israeli stages, such as Sami Michael, Yizhak Ben-Ner and community artists such as Oshrat Mizrahi-Shapira and Yusef Swed (see Urian 'Mizrahi and Ashkenazi').

Aladgem qtd. in Shem-Tov 44). While the future of Ladino language productions in Bat Yam is uncertain, the contemporary performances of the BYCC, along with those of Koen-Sarano, are valuable in continuing to countering the dominant Ashkenazi biases in language, history and culture.

Performing the Holocaust in *Golgotha*

Shmuel Refael's *Golgotha* narrates the story of an elderly man living in Tel Aviv as he wrestles with living in Israel and his memories of the Holocaust. From early advertisements the performance was characterized as connected to the historical experiences of the Sephardim in Israel as indicated in a 2005 article from *The Jerusalem Post*, 'Greek Tragedy: The forgotten history of Israel's Ladino-speaking Jews is remembered on stage' (Halkin). Although the article is a review of Refael's production, journalist Talya Halkin uses the performance as a springboard for a discussion about the history of Greek Jews in Tel Aviv's southern neighborhood, Florentin and the Rehov Levinsky market. Halkin describes the gentrification of the area as the shops full of Greek olives, spices, and the sounds of Ladino have been replaced by sleek apartments and young professionals. What is significant about Halkin's reportage of the neighborhood in Florentin is the implicit link between Refael's production of *Golgotha* and the realities of cultural extinction amongst the Sephardic community in Israel. For Halkin, what gives *Golgotha* value is its reflection and critique of the situation concerning Sephardim in Israel. In particular, productions such as *Golgotha* are depicted as embodying a certain resistance to the destructive forces of history and play an important role in reinserting a Sephardic identity on the Israeli stage. Dramatic representations become a means of combating the modern 'tragedy' of the Sephardim by demonstrating and legitimizing their presence in society and thereby supporting the growing number of Sephardi culture and language activists in Israel and abroad.

Golgotha is one of a few Sephardi Holocaust plays and it actively seeks to challenge Ashkenazi biases towards the representation of Holocaust experiences in Israel.¹⁶ As briefly discussed at the start of this chapter, the Holocaust is a focal point within Israel society, 'a filter for the collective Israeli consciousness' as Rokem states, 'through which most of the major events of present-day Israeli life are experienced and interpreted' (*Performing* 28-29; also see Abramson, *Drama* 153). In Israel, Holocaust remembrance has contributed to tensions between the Ashkenazim, Sephardim and Mizrahim.¹⁷ As Hanna Yabonika states in addressing the issue of Oriental Jews and the Holocaust, when 'the Holocaust became a key element in Israeli national identity, opposition developed to the form and content of its remembrance in Israeli society and the implications for Oriental Jews as secondary victims' (110).¹⁸ Sephardic academic Yitzhak Kerem, addresses this point as it relates to the compensation the Sephardim received following their experiences in the Holocaust during an interview at the Jewish Festival LimmudLA: 'I can ascertain today that the majority of the Sephardim who survived the Holocaust did not receive reparations and they've already died. They were

¹⁶ While *Golgotha* is one of the few contemporary Holocaust theatre productions written by a Sephardi, there have been a number of cinematic works similarly addressing the omission of Sephardi and Mizrahi histories in Holocaust narratives such as *Free Men*, *Empty Boxcars*, *Farewell my Island*, and *Desperate Hours*. In general, there appears to be a far greater amount of cinematic attempts to address the lacuna of non-Ashkenazic narratives of the Holocaust; although many of these continue to be products of European and American directors and production houses.

¹⁷ There is a great deal of scholarship on Israeli Holocaust drama, see for instance Schumacher; the work of Sklott including 'Stage Nazis,' 'The Drama,' Kaynar 'The Liturgical,' and Abramson.

¹⁸ These tensions were crystallized in at 1995 Holocaust Remembrance Day at Kedma in Tel Aviv. The school's principal Sami Shalom Chetrit created a program that aimed to draw universal lessons from the Holocaust in similar conditions and circumstances, including Armenians, Native Americans, African slaves and Gypsies. The event became a controversial issue with community members. One woman responded: 'You Moroccans have already stolen everything from us, but this is it! Don't dare touch our holocaust. You will not steal our holocaust with you belly-dancing' (Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish* 218), and another enraged respondent stated:

The liquidation of the Jewish people and the fact that it happened mostly to Ashkenazim seems to be a snag in the Sephardic Jews' theory of victimization. Shitrit [Chetrit] is intelligent enough not to deny the Holocaust, instead he proves to his pupils that similar events occurred elsewhere in history, so the Ashkenazim do not have a monopoly on annihilation and shouldn't make such a fuss over it (qtd. in Yabonika 113).

Despite the disapproval of the ceremony by members of the community, Chetrit's alternative Holocaust Remembrance Day has produced a series of similar ceremonies in Israel that strive to give a permanent voice to those who have been considered 'secondary victims' in popular Holocaust narratives, the Sephardim playing a large role in these activities and the rewriting of Ashkenazi biases towards the Holocaust (ibid 114).

totally delegitimized by the Jewish world' ('American' n.p.). For Refael, the lack of acknowledgment afforded to the Sephardim within Israeli Holocaust narratives was a major factor in his motivation for writing and producing *Golgotha*.¹⁹

The title of the piece refers to the Greek term for suffering and torture or an impossible event and evokes the 'incomprehensibility' associated with narrating Holocaust narratives. Refael began writing what would become the script on a research trip to Spain in 2001 where he was investigating the experiences of Sephardic Jews in the Holocaust. Furthermore, Refael is connected to Holocaust experiences as his father is a Greek-Holocaust survivor and he has published several books and articles regarding the Holocaust experiences of the Sephardic Jews.²⁰ Despite Refael's academic work on the Holocaust, he explains that the material and testimonials he gathered in Spain were so emotionally charged they could only be expressed through drama (personal interview). In addition to the numerous Ladino-speaking survivors that informed the piece, *Golgotha* draws upon his father's experiences. Refael's father was an important informant and collaborator for the production, often attending rehearsals and recording the accordion music used in the production (personal interview). For Refael's father, bringing the stories of Holocaust survivors into the present consciousness of audiences was of key importance, as lead actor Victor Attar recalls: 'he was saying it is important for me to tell the story, to tell it again. This is the problem [...] never forget what happened to us' (personal interview). The motivations for Refael and his father in legitimizing and sharing the histories of the Sephardic Jews were clearly articulated in the materials surrounding the show, such as the theatre programme:

¹⁹ Similar motivations have fuelled Jewish authors writing on the Holocaust. For instance, in the introduction to *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Germany: An Anthology*, Leslie Morris and Karen Remmler discuss the novel *Soharas Reise*, a story of an Algerian Jewish Sohara and a German Jewish Holocaust survivor: '[t]he Holocaust serves as a marker of hegemonic domination of the Ashkenazim over the Sephardim, another way in which the Sephardim are cast as hybrid and subaltern (semi-Arab); the Holocaust is the domain of the shared memory of the Ashkenazim, a memory of space and geography that underscores Sohara's exclusion as an Algerian Jew' (16).

²⁰ See for instance *Un Grito en el Silencio* and 'The Geography.'

This play cries out against injustices experienced by Sephardim whose stories are still missing from traditional holocaust narratives. Holocaust commemorative efforts have been slow to fully recognize the plight of Ladino-speaking Jews who survived that hell. Alberto, our hero, is just one of them. The hero's thoughts actually represent those used in the campaign for recognition being conducted by the Ladino-speaking public and Holocaust survivors against the Israeli establishment and its remembrance and commemoration authorities, in Israel and abroad. *Golgotha* is a shuddering voyage into the past of Alberto, a descendant of the glorious Sephardi community of Thessalonica Jews that was led to the slaughter. (*Golgotha*, programme)

Evident in the programme is a clear connection between the political and social activism in Israel amongst the Sephardim. Refael utilized the real histories of Sephardic Holocaust survivors to represent the past in a manner designed to construct and assert a contemporary Sephardic identity in Israel.

Refael's socio-political motivations and extensive research were directed into the one-hour monodrama produced through the collaborative efforts of Refael, text adaptor Haim Idissis, director Geula Jeffet-Attar and her husband, actor Victor Attar. According to Refael and Jeffet-Attar, the original text was formulated more as a short novel than a drama and initially ran as a two hour, one-man show (Refael personal interview; Attar personal interview). Jeffet-Attar worked with Refael to consolidate his ideas and focus on one aspect of the story: the guilt which the Greek-Holocaust survivor felt towards his life and his family. From this starting point rehearsals and exercises exposed the main drive of the piece as centering on the significance for Alberto of lighting the torch at Yad Vashem in recognition of the Sephardim who suffered in the Holocaust. It took approximately a year of workshops at Bar Ilan University with Refael, Jeffet-Attar, Attar and Idissis to turn the short novel into an hour monodrama. Funding and support came through a number of Jewish organizations, including the Bar-Ilan University's Ladino Language Center where Refael currently works as a Ladino language and culture professor.

The plot of *Golgotha* revolves around the story of a man named Alberto Salavado, a Sephardic Jew from Thessalonica who lost his wife and daughters in the Aushwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in the winter of 1943. As a Zondercommando at the camp, an oven worker, Alberto witnessed and contributed to the cremation of his wife, Rozika. The play takes place in present-day Tel Aviv where Alberto has been asked to participate in a candle-lighting ceremony at Yad-Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum. He interprets this honour as being one of the first steps the government has made in acknowledging the Sephardic presence in the Holocaust as up until recently there were no pictures of Sephardi Holocaust victims or survivors in the museum. As Alberto waits to go to the ceremony he remembers his experiences in the past, represented on stage through a combination of audio and visual effects. Such effects place Alberto in the centre of a demoniacal recreation of the horrors of the camp and the death of his family. Over the course of the play, Alberto learns that his friend Daniel who was to attend the ceremony with him has died, leaving Alberto in charge of lighting the torch and carrying on the memory of all those who were lost in the Holocaust on his own. He cries out in pain and speaks to a picture of his wife, his own memories and expectations immobilizing him. During the final moments of the play a knock is heard on the door, Alberto's escort to the ceremony, yet he remains still and silent on his chair.

Figure 8: Victor Attar in Rehearsals for *Golgotha*.²¹



²¹ Images from Shmuel Refael's personal collection.

Aside from narrating the story of a Greek-Jewish Holocaust survivor, the performance illustrates various prejudices and anxieties experienced by the Sephardim. For instance, in describing his first encounter with this Polish friend, affectionately referred to as Danielico, Alberto exclaims:

The very first moment he saw me there in the Commando, he didn't believe I was a Jew. With my own ears I heard him say to his friend 'Iz der a yid?' which means 'Are we really Jews?' I understood him.

Then I answered in the Spanish of Cervantes - 'Si señor Somos Jidios' [Yes Sir we are Jews] and he asked 'What - Do they also bring Sephardic Jews to the ovens?' I told him 'No - we Sepharadim came here as volunteers'. Ho - did he laugh! That got me so mad that I beat the hell out of him - Me! Albert...That's how we became such good friends. Yeah, yea, even though he was Polish. (Scene 1)²²

Although Alberto becomes friends with Daniel, the performance evokes certain stereotypes over Sephardic experiences in the Holocaust. Alberto also expresses his attitude towards the recognition of the Sephardim at Yad Vashem: '[m]e, Albert,²³ whose life has been 60 years of patience. Only patience and more patience until they finally let one of us light a torch at the ceremony at Yad-Vashem. Patience she tells me! What? A normal man wouldn't go crazy!' (Scene 1). While there are connections between Alberto's situation in present day Tel Aviv and the experiences of the Sephardim in Israel, the primary conflict within the narrative concerns Alberto's difficulties in wrestling with his own past and the atrocities that he finds himself implicated in, primarily the burning of his wife and children.

The omission of the Sephardim's stories from Yad-Vashem (and Israeli Holocaust narratives) is emphasized in the staging and design of the production. Set entirely in

²² Citations from the playtext are taken from Howard Ryppe's translation, which was used in the English-language productions in New York City and Washington D.C.

²³ I have maintained the slippage of the spelling of the character's name throughout the playtext.

Alberto's sparsely decorated apartment, he recounts his experiences to the audience through direct address. A few select props evoke Alberto's diasporic history, such as his penchant for uzo, and his prayer beads. Although Alberto speaks about social and business encounters, he appears disconnected and isolated from society. His only friend is Daniel, and thus Daniel's death further emphasizes Alberto's disconnection and isolation from social life. In regards to the first person address in Holocaust drama, Freddie Rokem notes that the 'transmission of painful knowledge and experience to a listener' is 'a strategy which through rhetorical means actively includes the spectators in the process of communication' ('On the Fantastic' 41). Throughout the production Alberto addresses the audience directly as witnesses to his memories and present suffering. Alberto could thus be considered as a 'hyper-historian,' in Rokem's terms, as he is given the task of educating 'witnesses' to the theatrical event on the realities of the Sephardic past as well as their position in contemporary Israeli society (*Performing* 101). In this manner the production challenges contemporary ideological positions within Israel in terms of the value of Sephardi history, serving as both a 'willful resistance to and critique of the established or hegemonic, sometimes even stereotypical, perceptions of the past' (ibid. 8).

Although the play is primarily delivered to the audience in a naturalistic style, the performance also incorporates aspects of the fantastical when Alberto is recalling the past. The fantastical is another popular genre within Israeli Holocaust theatre designed to 'address and confront the issues of the incomprehensibility and the incommunicability of the Holocaust' (ibid. 43). According to Rokem, the aims of the fantastical in Holocaust drama are to show that even events that appear 'too fantastic to be true' have in fact occurred and that 'paradoxically, some kind of aesthetization of the narrative is necessary in order to tell what has really happened' (ibid.). Although the audience directly experiences Alberto's current circumstances, the past is conveyed primarily through a combination of verbal, visual and auditory fragments. For instance, when recalling his

encounter with Daniel and memories of his wife and children, soft accordion music plays and photo-montages are projected. However, light music and images transform to nightmarish sounds as Alberto is continuously haunted by his memories of the past. Shifting between the first-person narrative and the fantastical suggests how the experiences of the Holocaust permeate multiple aspects of Alberto's life. Furthermore, the depiction of Alberto is fragmented; he is never entirely in one place, time or speaking in one consistent language. Alberto is presented as having a diachronic relationship to history, constantly moving between the past and present.

When asked what the most difficult aspect of performing Alberto was, Victor Attar remarks on the challenge of performing the 'real life tragedy' of the situation and the piece's interrogation of those actual experiences (personal interview). As he explains,

this man, this creature, this human being lost his family, his wife. Not only that but he was one of the guys that threw them away and it was terrible to think of it...I don't know what is more important - the art or the tragedy. I don't know where the border is, because there's art like Chekhov, Ibsen, but this - I mean wow! (personal interview)

Attar describes how tragic aesthetics and tragic events are not always easily distinguishable, but he argues that the fact that this production is rooted in real tragedies gives the production a certain weight and authenticity that the works of other playwrights do not necessarily have. The 'tragedy' of *Golgotha* does not refer to a set of dramaturgical conventions of a particular genre, but rather the historical 'truth' that is represented on stage.

In Israel, Refael speaks of the difficulties he had in presenting this piece to commercial theatres, arguing that its failure to be accepted into main stage houses was based on biases against Sephardi Holocaust material, budgetary limitations, and its perceived lack of potential commercial success (personal interview). Despite these

setbacks, Refael and his team premiered the play on January 13, 2004 at the Mintz Auditorium at Bar Ilan University. Under the direction of Jeffet-Attar, the set was a basic room with minimal props. Visual effects were designed by Dana Levy and served an important part of creating the nightmarish memories of the Holocaust. Jeffet-Attar explains how part of her artistic vision was for the images and memories of the Holocaust to be part of his life so their projection covered the whole stage (personal interview). Therefore, video images enveloped the stage during moments when Alberto was recalling his experiences, creating a sensation of him drowning in the harrowing sounds and images from the past. The creative team produced both an English and Hebrew version of the performance for touring in Israel and abroad. Each production included occasional words and phrases in Ladino, along with Sephardi music. In Israel performances took place in several theatres including the Tzavta Theatre in Tel Aviv, and abroad: in 2005, at the La MaMa theatre in New York City; Washington D.C.; and in 2006 at the Ladinofestival in Switzerland, where it was presented alongside a diverse programme celebrating Sephardi culture including performances by Yasmin Levy (Programme, Ladinofestival n.p.). Presenting *Golgotha* both within and outside of Israel has generated a number of different reactions which are useful in examining the significance of this event in contributing to Sephardic identities and challenging normative frameworks on a wider scale.

Audience and critical responses to *Golgotha* have been mixed, but the majority emphasizes the production's importance in discussing a forgotten aspect of Sephardi history and, to a lesser extent, the educational value of the performance. An announcement in *The Jerusalem Post* draws connections between Alberto's character and the socio-historical context: 'he [Alberto] can only explain the fact that he survived while 96% of the Jews of Saloniki were slaughtered by believing it was in order that someone be left to tell their tale' (Radoszkowicz). The value of the production is placed on the importance in learning about the tragedy of the Holocaust from the forgotten perspective

of the Sephardim. A review from *Lettre Sephardii*, further emphasizes the ability for theatre to interrogate contemporary attitudes towards the Holocaust, posing the question: '[h]ow can you transmit the memory of the Holocaust to younger generations beyond oral and written testimonies of survivors?', and offering the opinion that theatre is the answer to combating the situation of the Sephardim and reviving the community (Nussenblatt and Carasso 10). The reviewers claim that the piece is one of the rare successful attempts of an artistic piece to address the 'terrible catastrophe' of the Holocaust, valuing the production as capable of teaching the wider Jewish community about the history of Greek Jewry (ibid.)

There were also a number of reviews of the production in Ladino-publications and letters sent to Refael from Sephardic audience members which demonstrate a more emotional and personal connection to the materials. One reviewer writing for the *Bulliten* expressed his hopes in the company filming the production so that it might be used in schools as an educational tool in order that younger generations do not forget the terrible events that occurred to their parents (Bar-Yehuda). This highlights how the representation of Sephardic history in *Golgotha* extends beyond entertainment to rather serve as a lesson concerning the realities of the Holocaust and can be used as a crucial educational tool. A number of audience responses to the show reflect similar reactions, echoing that the production was 'moving,' leaving one with 'deep impressions,' and referring to the greater educational and social aspirations with comments such as: 'I was impressed by your writing and your social Ladino agenda. I think this subject is really important and to spread the word' and '[o]ne wishes that the cry rising from the play *Golgotha* will add to our collective story and the tragic story of the Jews of Thessaloniki, and will stop the process of forgetting the Ladino Sephardic Jews' (*Golgotha* Box).²⁴ In addition to signifying the shared social and political agenda between the production and audiences,

²⁴ All letters can be accessed through the Bar Ilan Ladino Language Centre archive, *Golgotha* box. I have elected to keep the reviews anonymous and they are not currently numbered within the archive collection. Hebrew translations have been generously provided by Oron Cohen.

many commentators expressed deep emotional connections to the conditions of the production:

It is beyond my understanding as to how you, as an Israeli *sabra* could get so deeply into the emotions and memories of the past. [...] You, the *sabra*, a son of a Holocaust survivor, have internalized the pain suppressed by the old generation. A pain that they tried to suppress because they wanted their kids to grow up normal and happy (*Golgotha* Box).

The personal letters archived by the Bar Ilan Ladino Language Centre attest to the personal as well as political connections of *Golgotha*. As Jeffet-Attar and Attar remark, the production was the most successful when presented to audiences already connected to the materials, such as those who attended the performances at Bar Ilan.

According to Jeffet-Attar and Attar, and further indicated by reviews from the New York City production, the American audiences were less sympathetic to the production and the embodiment of Ladino and Sephardic histories on stage. This can be demonstrated in the *New York Times* review of the production which goes as far to call the production 'boring' and that 'there is nothing even a veteran actor can do to turn this heartfelt effort at memorializing the Greek-born Sephardic victims and survivors of the Holocaust into anything but a tedious guilt trip' (Hoban n.p.). Another review offers a more blunt critique, suggesting that the play does offer enough emotional intensity or historical information to make a strong impact on audiences on the difference between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Holocaust experiences:

I am absolutely certain that there are those who benefit from this play in a way that I cannot ever comprehend, including Holocaust survivors, survivor's families, and members of the Sephardic community; many such people seemed to be in the audience the night that I was there. I respect the ongoing mission of works of art helping to ease the pain by sharing the experience, and passing on information with the hopes that the events will not be repeated.

I think it is dangerous when works about the Holocaust feel overly familiar or repetitive, because the essence of the message then slowly degrades. If a play, or any piece of art, about atrocity seems easy to deal with, then the opposite mission of the piece is accomplished. At the moment when horror no longer horrifies, the danger of disassociation becomes readily apparent. Unfortunately, my experience of *Golgotha* was more in this vein, and I found myself neither fully involved nor profoundly moved by this piece [...] the play doesn't really provide much more information as to what made their experience unique. The themes, the words, and the experiences related, all seem intensely reminiscent of other Holocaust literature. (Marks n.p.)

For these reviews, the aesthetics of the production and the construction of the piece detracted from its potential to impact audiences or to offer an alternative position to Holocaust narratives. These reviews indicate that American audiences, especially those less familiar or invested in revitalizing Sephardic histories found the production artistically bland and politically insignificant.

While the reviews regarding the New York production were more critical of the production than those in Israel, there were nonetheless a few reviewers who drew connections between the piece and the wider socio-political mission:

"Golgotha" is indeed unique in one respect - the ethnic background of its hero. This time around the victim is not only of the Ashkenazi Jews, whose history has been well-documented, but a Sephardic Jew of Greece. He comes from a population with a different culture and a culture and a different language (Ladino, with its mixture of Spanish and Hebrew). While the Ashkenazi Jews' wholesale destruction that has been well-memorialized, and appropriately so, the story of the Sephardic Jews and their fate has been sadly neglected. And now, at last, in "Golgotha," Sephardic Jews receive their proper due (Backalenick n.p.).

Here the reviewer finds the merit of the piece to be embedded in the significance of the drama in representing Sephardic language and culture in a manner that challenges Ashkenazi biases. In general, while many of the reviewers in New York noted the

significance of the piece as it related to the historical and contemporary circumstances of the Sephardim, there was more critique than that expressed in the Israeli productions.

Golgotha aimed to legitimize the histories and presence of the Sephardim in Israel, representing the tragic past through a narrative rooted in testimonials and personal experiences. The use of language in the production is more evocative of the realities of the Sephardim in Israel: Hebrew with occasional phrases in Ladino, and therefore an alternative representation of the contemporary Sephardic cultural identity than expressed in the work of Koen-Sarano and the BYCC. Furthermore, Refael's piece has a stronger socio-political mission: aiming to shift the focus of Holocaust narratives and educate audiences on alternative, subordinated histories. Despite the greater critical attention the production received in America, through translating the piece into English and performing for diverse audiences, Refael's production nevertheless marks an important step in educating, legitimizing, and celebrating Sephardi language and culture. Potential lessons gained from *Golgotha* may continue to impact audiences, as Jeffet-Attar explains the piece may continue to be shown at festivals in Israel related to Holocaust Remembrance Day (personal interview).

Music and Commercial Sephardi Performances

The largest commercial success of a Sephardi theatrical production has perhaps been *Bustan Sephardi* [Sephardic Orchard] written by Yitzchak Navon. *Bustan Sefardi* was inspired by Navon's upbringing in a Sephardi neighborhood in Jerusalem, Ohel Moshe. The story is narrated by Moses, who has returned to his former neighborhood to reveal to the audience his memories of times gone by. Stories from the neighborhood revolve around the daily life of the neighborhood in the 1930s and incorporate a number of Ladino songs, dances, Sephardic traditions and superstitions. Similar to *Golgotha* the primary language of the production is Hebrew with the occasional usage of Ladino in the dialogue and songs.

Both *Bustan Sephardi* and Navon's early musical *Sephardi Romance* (1968), which starred the well-known Israeli singer Yehoram Gaon, helped in bringing Sephardi music and stories to the wider public. As Edwin Seroussi notes of *Sephardi Romance*: it was a 'landmark in the establishment of the Judeo-Spanish folk song as a distinctive genre of Israeli popular music' (88). The music for *Bustan Sefardi* was selected and adapted from Isacc Levy's collection and was first produced under the direction of Joseph Milo in 1970 and was presented 384 times as well as being aired on Israeli national television. Rivka Rav, a popular Israeli performer, starred in the production, further assisting in the popularity of the piece. In 1998, the performance was revived at the Habima Theatre and was performed hundreds of times. As discussed, in addition to writing these musicals Navon is a former Israeli president and an active member in the Sephardic revitalization movement, serving as president of the NAL and contributing to several ongoing cultural activities to promote Sephardic language and traditions. In part, these musicals were designed to increase public attention to the Sephardim and their traditions and thus extend Navon's sociopolitical aims in to the wider Israeli theatre public sphere.

In many ways, the performance succeeded in widening awareness and interest in Ladino; however, the use of traditional songs is also problematic. Ethnomusicologist Judith Cohen explains the tensions related to Isacc Levy's recordings, adapted for *Bustan Sefardi*:

On the one hand, his anthologies provide a wealth, indeed the main published corpus of the mid-tenth century, of Judeo-Spanish songs of all genres, and his broadcasts, performances, and commissioned arrangements brought the repertoire to a wide public and gave it the impetus that led to its present popularity. [...] The fact that the transcriptions in his anthologies clearly modify the original melodies (pitches, rhythms) and provide no information except, after volume 1, the names of the cities or provenance, makes the inaccessibility of the recordings all the more problematic, and the

modifications become standard practice for the first generation of performers, most of whom based their repertoires on Levy's work. ('Sound Reviews' 531)

Although the performances have contributed to the increased popularity of Ladino and Sephardi songs, Levy's own research and the ways in which performers have adapted the music for performance raises concerns over the authenticity of the cultural identities presented. Cohen goes on to critique the music popularized in *Bustan Sefardi* as it focuses on lyrical rather than life-cycle songs and ballads and, perhaps more importantly:

modified the Middle Eastern microtonal *maqam* system so that piano and Western orchestral instruments could be used for accompaniment, often adding harmony to a monophone tradition. The overall result was a sort of easy listening, a Sephardi fiddler-on-the-roof product very different from the Greek and Turkish recordings from the early part of the century. [...] Naturally, one could argue that they created a new performance practice, but the fact remains that much has been lost in the process (ibid.)

Cohen draws attention here to some of the crucial issues facing contemporary Sephardi performances (both theatrical and musical): the interplay of maintaining traditional language and performance styles, whilst creating innovative performances in order to increase accessibility and/or commercial success. As international interest in Sephardi performances is becoming increasingly focused on musical traditions, these concerns are further heightened when examining the usage of Ladino and Sephardi traditions in musical revitalization efforts.

In considering various Sephardi performance endeavours since the 1970s, what emerges is evidence of a growing interest in song and music to supplement, if not completely replace, dramatic cultural products. Throughout many of these productions, song remains one of the most important means by which theatre-makers engage with diverse audiences. As mentioned previously, Bishop suggests that singing plays a

fundamental role in Ladino language revitalization efforts in Israel: '[f]or many Sephardim who don't speak Judeo-Spanish' she notes, 'it is only through singing that Judeo-Spanish words form on their lips, and they want to strengthen that connection to the language' (*More Than* 160). As discussed previously in regards to the Ladino Players in New York City, the use of music and song in revitalization movements is not unique to the Sephardim. Similar cases have transpired in revitalization and retention programmes such as the cultural and linguistic revival movement in Hawaii in the late 1960s. According to Sam L. No'eau Warner, the interest in song and dance played an important role in a renaissance of Hawaiian language and culture (135). As demonstrated in several of these productions, the inclusion of popular songs worked to arouse memories within audiences and serve as means of strengthening ones' cultural and linguistic identity. Similarly, the cultural revival of Rapa Nui (Easter Islanders) utilized primarily music and dance to facilitate the dissemination of the culture to global audiences who do not possess linguistic, political or historical bonds to the traditions (Bendrup 262). However, the dissemination of culture may lead to either an interest in 'laying claim to accuracy of traditional representation' or to creating 'entirely new musical combinations' (ibid 266). A similar trend can be seen in the musical performances of the Sephardim, as musicians continue to engage with tradition and innovation in varying degrees.

The utilization of music for revitalization efforts is transpiring on both local and international stages to different ends. For Yossi Davara, musical director of the Ladino/Hebrew Israeli group *Voice of the People*, the company is more than a singing club, it also is a place for members to connect and build meaningful social relations (personal interview). The group includes Sephardic and non-Sephardic members and works to establish a mutual appreciation for Sephardi songs. Even non-Sephardi members of the group have taken to the traditional Ladino songs and participate in the performances. These steps are a beginning to introduce new audiences to the music.

On a more global scale, Sephardi and non-Sephardi performers are gaining recognition through modernizing the traditional songs and styles of Ladino music. As mentioned in relation to *Sephardi Romance*, Turkish/Macedonian singer Yehoram Gaon is one of the most successful Israeli singers and has contributed to the popularization of Sephardi music. Israeli ethnomusicologist, Pal-Yarden argues that Gaon served to integrate Ladino into Israeli society in the 1960s: '[w]hen he made a Ladino album, it made it possible for Ladino to be seen as part of what is Israel' (qtd. Bishop 'More Than' 183).²⁵ As mentioned at the start of this thesis, there are a number of Sephardi artists gaining international recognition including the female singers such as Yasmin Levy, Mor Karbasi, Sarah Aroeste, Nuriya and Françoise Atlan, who draw upon Sephardic music and lyrical traditions. Many of these artists connect their musical work with greater socio-political aspirations to keep Ladino alive. Similar to the work of Levy already discussed, these musicians often incorporate a range of musical traditions in their repertoires. For instance, Karbasi combines flamenco and fado as well as music traditions from Morocco, Persia and Spain in her Sephardic-inspired repertoire, with the aim of 'reviving' Ladino (Karbasi web), and Aroeste sings in an 'exotic pan-Mediterranean language' and works 'tirelessly to keep Ladino music alive' through fusing it with contemporary sounds from rock, funk jazz and blues (Aroeste 'About'). Goldberg and Bram critique the homogenization of historical and cultural identities, arguing that it 'demonstrates not only that individuals can move between and seek to change categories, but also that historical developments may shift the center of gravity of such categories, even while an illusion that they are "given" is maintained' ('Sephardi/Mizrahi/Arab-Jews' 245). In other words, the image and sound cultivated by these artists may suggest relations, traditions, and identities

²⁵ Gaon has also starred in *Kazablan*, a 1960-70s theatrical and cinematic sensation and, according to Dan Urian, helped bridge the gap between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi audiences: 'Gaon, a Mizrahi, but not Moroccan [like the character in the play], softened the threatening elements of the image, moderated the degree of ethnic division and also distanced it from the Arab "semblance"' (Mizrahi and Ashkenazi' 26). Urian and Gaon's classification of Gaon as Mizrahi highlights the degree to which ethnic distinctions between Sephardi and Mizrahi are at times conflated in academic and popular discourse.

are 'natural' as opposed to externally constructed to satisfy the demands of a global market.

Although Sephardic musical performances have brought international attention to Sephardic language, traditions and artists, such events are not without social and political implications. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer note that singing and dancing are often utilized within language revitalization and retention programmes, such as with Native American organizations. Although such activities may be successful in keeping certain traditions alive, there are growing concerns over the authenticity or knowledge of the singers as appropriate subjects for transmitting the traditions, as they may not be able to pronounce words correctly or appreciate the social and spiritual contexts of the pieces (68). One aspect of these changes suggested by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer is that 'cultures do not really die, but change' (73). By blending language, music and performance traditions from Spain, Turkey, Israel, Persia and Morocco contemporary singers are redefining what it means to be Sephardi, but by encouraging a more 'pan-Sephardic' identity these associations risk losing geographical or historical specificities. Nonetheless, Ladino continues to be utilized in musical performances and symbolically represents a distinct Sephardic identity, which may lead to a situation where cultural activities flourish but the language declines, as Peter Ellis and Semas Mac a'Ghobhainn remark in regards to the Cornish language revival: 'a language cannot be saved by singing a few songs' (14). Nevertheless, such cultural activities may succeed in emphasizing a distinct 'Sephardicness' that is culturally, historically, and traditionally different, especially when considered in relation to the Ashkenazim. The use of Ladino in song, as well as the limited number of theatrical productions, serves as a symbol of 'otherness' that may work to raise the profile of the Sephardim and draw attention to the community's social and political concerns.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed an under-researched area within Sephardic and Jewish studies: contemporary Sephardi Theatre in Israel. While a number of current studies address how non-Ashkenazim are challenging hegemonic norms and practices, this chapter has demonstrated how a relational approach to analyzing Sephardi Theatre offers an alternative reading to the ways in which both community-based and commercial productions are contributing to social and political efforts to legitimate the distinct cultural identities of the Sephardim. As discussed, Sephardic productions over the last two decades have responded directly or indirectly to the socio-historical situation of the Sephardim in Israel during the twentieth-century and the Sephardi/Ladino revitalization movement. While the various productions discussed differ in their level of cultural and political activism, each demonstrates a certain desire to transform the Sephardim in Israel into a single community, connected through shared linguistic roots and histories as well as political and social identities, and work to legitimize the representation of Sephardic histories in national discourse. As demonstrated, this has often meant representing 'Sephardicness' on stage in a manner that can be read as embodying an identity different to Ashkenazi norms by speaking in Ladino, performing traditional Sephardic songs, and narrating distinct Sephardic histories. Medding notes that amongst the Sephardim in Israel, there is a desire to 'act in unison for common goals and purposes' which has resulted 'paradoxically' in a 'quest for unity [that] seems to require opposition to or conflict with Ashkenazim' ('Preface' xii). In the performances discussed, Sephardi Theatre reflects this wider trend discussed by Medding. There is still, of course, a variety of approaches Sephardic artists are undertaking. While performances such as those of Koen-Sarano and the BYCC are more focused on community-building efforts and providing a space to strengthen the Sephardim's connection to memories and histories, other productions such as *Golgotha* attempt to utilize theatre to politically engage audiences over the representation of the Sephardim within society. The variety of

approaches taken by Sephardic activists and community members demonstrate the range of responses amongst the Sephardim to their diasporic histories and present situation. Yet in each instance, theatre emerges as a site wherein the Sephardim have challenged (albeit mildly at times) Zionist historiography as a homogenous vision of the national past.

While a number of theatre companies and artists continue to produce Sephardi Theatre in Israel, it appears as though Ladino-language productions are fading as the primary mode of representation for Sephardic culture and identity. Instead, Sephardic identities are drawing more heavily upon the various communities' experiences in Israel, incorporating more Hebrew language and experiences from life in Israel within contemporary productions. Although Ladino is being utilized less in commercial productions, aside from occasional words and phrases, it is finding a growing international audience within musical performances. Music may have the potential to carry Ladino on into the twenty-first century as the number of fluent speakers continues to decline. Aaron Cohen, from the NAL, suggests that for audiences: 'you'll see that [Judeo-Spanish] isn't dying at all, because when you hear Ladino in music and song, no one would believe that it's dying, and you'll enjoy hearing it' (qtd. Bishop, 'More Than' 160). While it would be generous to suggest that songs will be able to keep the language alive in the same manner that language classes, or generational exchange might, Cohen's attitude does call into consideration the powerful role music may have for the future. These performances, however, offer less of a critical perspective of the historical and contemporary situation of the Sephardic experience, focusing instead on the folk, traditions, and even Eastern exoticism of the Sephardim.

It is important to note that this chapter has not been able to address the entire canon of Sephardic productions that have been occurring in Israel in the present times. Especially as Ladino declines as a theatrical language, there are Sephardic playwrights

turning to Hebrew-language productions such as A.B. Yehoshua²⁶ as well as playwrights such as Yehoshua Sobol who utilize theatrical representations to critique intra-Jewish tensions (Abramson 49). Instead of covering the work of these playwrights, this chapter has attempted to provide an overview of the spectrum of performances taking place in Israel. It has been important throughout this chapter to address not only those artists who have achieved international and/or commercial, success, but also those who are operating on local levels as they have received very little, if any, scholarly attention outside of specialist studies. These performances are valuable in providing insight into how Sephardic artists have taken to depicting themselves and their relationship to the past, present and future.

²⁶ For more on the work of A.B. Yehoshua and, in particular, how his work addresses Sephardic/Ashkenazic relations in Israel, see Arnold J. Band 'Sabbatian Echoes in A.B. Yehoshua's *Mar Mani*.'

CONCLUSION

In this thesis we have addressed the development and practice of Sephardi Theatre from several historical and geographical angles. The subjects considered throughout this thesis demonstrate a diverse engagement with theatre and performance as a desirable, if not urgent, means of responding to social and political pressures brought about by cross-cultural exchanges.

This thesis applies a relational approach to the study of Sephardi Theatre in order to understand how these communities and performance practices can be productively considered by examining political, social and cultural interactions, especially in relation to the Ashkenazim. In applying this approach, this thesis considered three primary points: investigating the impact of relations between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim on Sephardi Theatre developments; expanding current scholarship on Sephardi Theatre to include post-Holocaust performances and developments; and considering the extent to which particular socio-historical contexts influence how Sephardic artists represent the past, which in turn contributes to establishing or subverting Sephardic identities and relations.

In regards to the first point, it is evident that the Sephardim have been highly influenced by a range of cross-cultural encounters, not the least through relations with Western Jews/Ashkenazim. Part I of this thesis investigated how exchanges with French and Zionist Jews contributed to the spaces, styles and generic focus of Ottoman Sephardic performances. Although influential, European practices were adapted to suit the specific circumstances of the Ottoman Sephardim along with aspects of traditional Sephardic or Turkish theatre practices. Evidence of these aspects were discussed through such

examples as Jac Loria's connotation of shadow puppets or the *Orta Oyunu* style in the stage directions for *Dreyfus*, and Shlomo Reuben's transformation of Racine's *Esther* into a melodramatic and folkloric musical event that differed in its performance style and ideological focus from the original French tragedy. This thesis demonstrates how Sephardi Theatre is not entirely indebted to European patronage. Rather, we have offered an alternative analysis which suggests that Sephardic practices were a hybrid of forms and styles often drawing upon European traditions but embedded in local contexts and reflective of the social and political aspirations of the Sephardic artists. In this manner, this thesis presents an alternative reading of Sephardic modernity by demonstrating the degree of agency local Sephardim had in the construction of their cultural and ethnic subjectivities.

Addressing the second point discussed above, Part II of this thesis has demonstrated the diversity of Sephardi musical and theatrical performances that continue to take place in America and Israel in the late twentieth century. In the cases investigated, Sephardi Theatre has developed out of responses to cultural and linguistic revitalization efforts in order to strengthen the community and exert its legitimacy in greater national histories. Relations of power have provided a prism by which we can consider how cultural and ethnic identities have materialized on stage. In America, these relations are highly affected by the Sephardim's position as a 'minority-within-a-minority.' Ben-Ur's conceptualization of corporate exclusion was applied in considering how American Ashkenazi organizations and institutions continue to classify the work of the Ladino Players as an 'exotic exception' rather than integrated into greater national narratives (*Sephardic* 190). In an effort to be acknowledged and legitimated in traditional Ashkenazi spaces such as the CJH, the majority of the work by the Ladino Players conforms to this image of the community as, to use Loolwa Khazzoom's terms, 'different, unusual, mysterious, fascinating, and exotic' (qtd. in Ben-Ur, *Sephardic* 190). As demonstrated, relations within Israel between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim have influenced not only

social and religious but also economic and political activities. Since the Sephardim comprise a much larger section of the Jewish population in Israel (nearly 50%), they have been in a stronger position to produce work targeted solely at local communities, as demonstrated in the dramatic work of Matilda Koen-Sarano and Sarah Benviste Benrey. Additional commercial productions such as *Golgotha* and *Bustan Sefardi* have attempted to legitimize Sephardic histories and cultural traditions in national narratives. *Golgotha*, in particular, critiqued the prevailing representations of the Holocaust within Israel and is one of the strongest examples of how theatre is being utilized to advocate for a greater acknowledgment of the Sephardim not because they are different, exceptional or unusual, but precisely because the power imbalances in Israel have resulted in a normative position that continues to overlook their particular histories.

As demonstrated, while the enduring efforts of Sephardic artists signify the continuing strength and presence of Sephardic traditions in popular discourse, contemporary performances indicate certain limitations. One of the limitations is presenting 'difference' in a way that homogenizes Sephardic histories and cultural specificities. Through the efforts of the revitalization movement, there has been an increased interest in uniting the heterogeneous narratives of the Sephardim and 'softening' the representation of traumatic or discriminatory experiences. As suggested, this risks continuing to mark the Sephardim as 'folk,' 'traditional,' 'exotic' and may fail to re-evaluate historical Sephardic/Ashkenazic relations by merely assimilating Sephardic histories and culture into a hegemonic Ashkenazi framework.

In regards to the third objective of this thesis, the study has sought to demonstrate the role of representing the past in the construction of cultural and ethnic identities amongst diaspora communities. The past has been evoked throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century by Sephardic artists as a way of representing the community's unique historical experiences and language. Recalling Freddie Rokem, representations of the past may work to 'counteract the destructive forces of history' and legitimize such histories in

the present (*Performing* 3). Representations of the past continue to carry important ideological significance. As demonstrated in the Zionist theatre productions, dramatizing the Dreyfus Affair and European accounts of anti-semitism was an important strategy in delegitimizing French culture and assimilationist policies. Even in recent times, the past has been dramatized in order to maintain a distinct cultural identity, or to challenge normative perspectives of the past, such as in Israel where *Golgotha* blends Holocaust survivors' testimonies and fiction in a performance designed to challenge dominant Ashkenazi-biases towards Holocaust narratives in academia and popular discourse.

One way in which Sephardic activists and community members have sought to challenge hegemonic norms and bring Sephardic language and culture to wider audiences has been through musical performances. As demonstrated in the adaptation of songs in *Bustan Sefaradi* and contemporary Sephardic singers, what is considered Sephardic is expanding in ways that suggest a potentially dangerous homogenization of experiences and language. The application of Ladino in many musical and theatrical performances indicates its ongoing importance as one of the clearest signs of 'Sephardiness' in the twenty-first century. However, as expressed in this thesis, the symbolic use of Ladino by both Sephardic and a growing number of non-Sephardic performers raises new questions of representation and authenticity. Nevertheless, music is providing an attractive and powerful means of instilling the Sephardim with a sense of pride as well as engaging new audiences in a manner that may enable a certain Sephardic identity to continue into the future.

In part, this study has argued for a re-evaluation of Jewish history and modernity by accounting for the often marginalized experiences of the Sephardim. Furthermore, it has demonstrated the importance of accounting for intra-diasporic relations and tensions by showing the diversity of theatrical responses to historical experiences by Sephardi artists. As Goldberg and Bram remark, while it is generally understood that the Sephardim/Mizrahim are not a monolithic entity, the term continues to be used

inadequately and risks obscuring a wider range of identities and the means of investigating 'the often intricate relations between these identities' ('Sephardic/Mizrahi/Arab-Jews' 229). What this study has tried to address is precisely this lacuna in research into Jewish history and the history of the Sephardim by investigating the various and often conflating ways in which Sephardic artists have taken control of representing their own subjectivities. In so doing, this thesis has alluded to the difficulties of discussing the Sephardim as a homogenous group with a definable collective identity and thus the necessity of considering the Sephardim in relation to the specific circumstances under which cultural and national identities are produced and received.

As we have seen from the case studies, a relational approach to diaspora, which does not consider diaspora groups as homogenous entities with unchanging historical roots, has been essential in understanding how the community continues to transform through different cross-cultural encounters. In part, this has been demonstrated through examples of how the Sephardim represent the past in performance. These performances, from depictions of Jewish history, international events, and of Sephardic migration experiences, show how analyzing representations of the past can tell one much about the politics of the 'here and now' of the performance. Recalling our earlier discussions on diasporas, James Clifford emphasizes that diasporas involve a process of 'relational positioning' and may be characterized through what they define themselves against (307), and with the case of the Sephardim this has often involved defining themselves against the Ashkenazim. Even in the present times, this thesis has demonstrated how the Sephardim continue to express a distinct cultural and ethnic identity in relation to the Ashkenazim although these processes have varied greatly in terms of their social and political positioning. Overall, a relational approach has emphasized how constructions of the Sephardim are not unchanging, but how through performing the past Sephardic identities and relations continue to transform within different socio-historical experiences.

While these case studies have been exemplary in illustrating the diverse ways in which Sephardi artists have responded to ongoing social and political global developments, they are not an exclusive look at contemporary practices. Further studies may look towards the blending of theatre and musical performances in groups such as the Canadian ensemble Gerineldo, theatrical work in Latin America and Australia, or the rapidly growing corpus of Sephardi/Mizrahi cinematic productions.

I would like to conclude with a reflection of a performance I attended in London in 2009, which addresses some of the themes and issues discussed throughout this thesis and points to an alternative example of how Ladino and Sephardic histories may continue to be utilized within performance.

* * *

Chi Chi Bunichi premiered in 2007 as a devised ensemble piece led by the Israeli-Sephardic director Daphna Attias in collaboration with Ayse Tashkirana, Yaniv Fridel, and later, performers Robert Cook and Konstantinos Thomaidis. Attias was inspired for the piece by two recordings of her grandmother (Savta Lunchikca) and great grandfather singing *cantigas* in Ladino, including the recitation of the Bosnia Sephardic nursery rhyme from which the performance is titled. The ensemble worked from these recordings, blending them with contemporary musical compositions, movement sequences, and autobiographical narratives from the performers for an experimental theatrical performance exploring diasporic journeys, memories, lost communities, and forming new relationships. The performance is a series of songs, stories and dance sequences expressed in French, Hebrew, English and Ladino that weave together themes, stories, memories and identities for both a sensual and intellectual experience.

Attias explains, in a 2009 interview, that she did not grow up hearing any Ladino or the songs that her grandmother sings in the recordings. For this, Attias expresses a

sense of regret, loss and disappointment; yet there is an enduring connection to the music, language and histories which she and the company embody and perform through their connection to the emotional narratives of the recordings.

The internal logic of the cantigas is reflected in the performance. Having developed through complex processes of layering, remembering, forgetting and travelling, cantigas may have one verse on one subject and the next on something else. In this manner, a cantiga expresses the transformation of Sephardic communities from generation to generation and across borders. The fragmented and layered structure of cantigas is mirrored in the performance. For instance, one segment of the performance progresses from an account of a Turkish wedding in London, to a recording of Lunchikca singing a song about a girl sitting in a tower waiting for her sailor to come back from the sea, to a personal account of names and border crossing in Cyprus, to the story of Lunchikca awaiting the return of her husband from war. There is an echoing of experiences as life-cycle events are performed in non-chronological order between different times and spaces.

Audience participation and the creation of a communal event were crucial in the devising and production of the piece. In fact, Attias explains that the goal of the piece was less about creating a performance and more about creating a 'shared experience' (personal interview). These efforts were put into place from the very beginning as audiences were invited into the space, to sit huddled together on wooden benches, with a cup of hot peppermint tea and *halva*. Performers quickly learned audience members' names and personally acknowledged them, inviting them into the performance space towards the end of the piece. Attias explains that the company worked to recreate the functionality of cantigas in their original context, as features of informal family events, celebrations such as weddings, or in the privacy of familial homes.

The ending of the performance is particularly interesting, as audience members are invited into the space, directing each other and the performers with the final line:

'[c]an I die in your arms?' Attias admits that the company had not anticipated the reactions they would receive from these final moments of the performance. She explains how there was an emotional connection between the audience and the performers, people began conversations and shared intimate experiences. Audiences were invited to continue 'dying' in each others arms as the performance faded away; the performers slowly packed up their belongings and moved somewhere else.

Figure 9: An Intimate Performance of *Chi Chi Bunichi* at the Notting Hill Arts Club, London 2009.¹



While the recorded cantigas hold personal and emotional connections for Attias, they have been adopted and embodied by the entire company. The performance features a combination of old recordings with new production, old and new cantigas, live and reordered music and a mixture of sounds that evoke memories as well as new experiences. In fact, the combination of 'old' and 'new' was critical for the performance, as Attias states:

there is no other way I could have learned that information unless it was reordered and yet there is no way I could have made it mine unless I used a live, contemporary element with it, otherwise it stays dead, reordered in the past and I wanted to bring it now, into me, into the things that interest us as artists. (personal interview)

¹ Bruce n.p.

Thus the performance is not intended to authentically reproduce traditional Ladino folk songs, but actively juxtaposes the traditional with the modern in order to engage and connect to contemporary audiences. Two new cantigas were written for the performance as a way of furthering the connection between old forms and traditions with contemporary styles.

Chi Chi Bunichi demonstrates how Sephardic traditions and language continue to resonate with contemporary artists and audiences as rich and varied access points in evoking the histories of the Sephardim. This performance offers an alternative example of the use of language and music in theatrical performances as Attias and her company have incorporated the songs into dramatic narratives and movement sequences that evoke the diaspora experiences in ways that extend beyond an image of 'tradition,' 'folk,' 'Eastern' or even 'other.' There is an original and striking juxtaposition of the past, present and future which offers glimpses of historical, and personal experiences as well as opportunities for the themes and memories to continue to engage and challenge audiences conceptualizations of what it means for a language and a repertoire to die, and importantly, what it may mean for it to carry on through new forms of artistic expressions.

In speaking about *Chi Chi Bunichi*, Attias remarks that it is 'one story even though it's a million stories' (personal interview). This statement resonated with me in relation to the various histories of the Sephardim and their diverse theatre practices. There is not one journey of Sephardi Theatre, but several. It is my hope that this study will encourage researchers to listen and experience the variegated ways in which Sephardic language, culture, music and traditions continue to inform and inspire contemporary performance practices.

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- APPENDIX A -

'Justice to the Jew'

The article, entitled 'Justice to the Jew: The Story of What He Has Done For The World' was first published by Madison Clinton Peters in New York City in 1899. The edited Ladino translation appeared in *El Avenir* in 1901.

Following the format of Peters, the series begins by stating how theatres of the Greeks were filled with immoral scenes such as idolatry, which is one reason why the Rabbis have been against the Jewish communities attending theatres. However, the article goes on to state that 150 years before Christianity, the first Jewish dramatists Ezekielos (Ezekiel) composed a play entitled *La Salida de Aefito* [The Exodus from Egypt] which became famous. The article goes on to discuss the first Jewish productions as Purim plays dates back to the ninth century, and the first original drama in Spanish literature was *Celestina*, composed by a Jew, Marrano Rodrigo de Costa. The article goes on to discuss the work of Antonio Jose de Silva, a Portuguese Jew writing near the end of the seventeenth century. *Los Aprezados de la Esperansa* [The Prisoners of Hope] published in 1763 was the first drama in Hebrew written by Joseph Pensa de la Vega. The article goes on to describe a production of *Samson and Delilah* in the nineteenth century and early German language productions which have been subsequently translated into English, Italian, Danish and Hungarian. Peters rendition of this passage is slightly different, claiming the title of the play was *Samson and the Philistines* and it was the work of German Jewish dramatist Benedict David Arnstein whose works *Deborah* and *Sonnenwendhoff* were translated into several languages.

Moving into the nineteenth century, attention is given to the writer Adolphe Philippe D'Emery, born in Paris in 1811. He is attributed to have written, often in collaboration, several comedies, vaudeville pieces, dramas, melodramas, and reviews and in collaboration with Jules Verne, *Viaje al Deredor del Mundo el 80 Dias* [Around the World in 80 Days]. Moving on to Jews from the

West, as the article describes them, a renowned Jewish English dramatists, Henry James Byron work is described. According to this report, he was the first actor in the Globe Theatre in London, October 1869 in a 'proper' piece entitled *No Tanto Loko Segun Parese* [Not Such a Fool as he Looks].

In discussing popular American playwrights, the article mentions Mordecai M. Noah from Philadelphia and Samuel B H Judah born in New York in 1799 wrote a melodrama, *La Rosa de Aragon* which was a great success. Peters gives a more detailed production history for both dramatist which has been cut from the Judeo-Spanish translation. While the details of their productions seem of less importance, the editors have sought to include that there were playwrights from several places in America and the success of their work. In addition to the success of Judah's piece, the article mentions in rapid succession Jonas B. Phillip's *El Ojo Mala* [The Evil Eye] from 1839, H.B. Sommer's *Noaestra Botika* [Our Show] and *Ayudo Si Tiene Menester* [Help Wanted] all performed to great success at the Bowery Theatre in New York City. The final installment of the series concerning the success of Jewish dramatists is primarily focused on European works and players. Citing the most famous French actress, the article mentions Rachel [referring to Elizabeth Rachel Felix], born in 1820 and the only other Jewish actress that has had universal fame (according to the editors), Sarah Bernhardt born in 1844. A more detailed description is given, to whom the article considers to be one of the greatest actors of our time, Adolph Ritter von Sonnenthal from Vienna. The final section of the overview of Jewish dramatists ends with a recap of the famous playwrights and actors in America who are Jewish and a note that the principal directors are also Jewish.

- APPENDIX B -

A List of Molière's productions from the Ladino Press

- *El Casamiento Forzado* was performed in Judeo-Spanish without mention of a translator alongside a Turkish-language play *Zavalli Çocuk* [Poor Children] by Namik Kemal in 1886 (*Tel* 29 Dec., 1886, 2).
- In 1873, *Le Médecin volant* by Molière was published in Ladino (*Tiem* 19 Aug., 1873, 4).
- *Los embrollos de Escapen* was presented as a translation by Se. Moriz M. Levi in Sarajevo in 1901 (*Alb* 1 Mar., 1901, 44; *Alb* 15 Mar., 1901, 52).
- In 1910, *L'Avare/El escarso* was presented in Turkish at the Eden Theatre to profit the schools in Salonica organized by the committee of Union and Progress (*Imp* 22 Mar., 1910, 1).
- *Le Mariage Forcé/El casamiento forzado* was presented by the gymnastic society of Makabi to benefit the organization (*Imp* 6 Dec., 1910, 1; *Imp* 12 Dec., 1910, 1; *Imp* 29 Dec., 1910, 1).
- In 1913, *El médico por zorlá* was presented in Salonica for Hanukkah at the Eden Theatre by the Makabi society (*Ar* 25 Dec., 1913, 1).
- In 1920, *L'Avare* was presented at the White Tower theatre by the Theodore Herzl Society (*Pue* 25 Nov., 1920, 2).
- *Le Médecin malgré lui* was presented for Pesah by the Scout-Makabi of the Theodore Herzl society in addition to a comedy adapted from Molière's *El médico por zorlá* (*Pue* 17 Apr., 1922, 4; *Pue* 18 Apr., 1922, 2).
- In 1928 an untitled comedy by Molière is performed in Salonica for Purim by Kadima (*Pue* 6 Feb., 1928, 4).
- *El Médico Malgrado él/El doctor malgrado él* was performed over a dozen times with a variety of organizations demonstrating a range of interest in the play:
 - In 1890 it was presented in French at an Alliance school to raise money for victims of the fire in Balat (*Tiem* 8 Sep., 1890, 542-3);
 - By a Zionist troupe in Yambol (Bulgaria) to profit the club in 1901 (*EJud* 1 Mar., 1901, 19);

- Again with the Alliance in 1902 but this time accompanied by the March of Hamidie²⁴⁹ and monologues about family life (*Ave* 2 May, 1902, 1);
- With *El médico por zorlá* in Monastir (*Av* 23 Mar., 1909, 4).
- With the Makabi organization in honour of Hanukkah at the Eden Theatre in 1913 also accompanied by a tableau of captives from Jerusalem (*Jud* 31 Dec., 1913, 1);
- In 1916 for the Alliance along with Hebrew monologues and dialogues and patriotic Greek and Jewish poetry;
- As an adaptation for Pesach in 1922 by the Scout-Makabi organization presented along with gymnastic exercises (*Pub* 18 Apr., 1922, 2);
- By a Zionist group at the school of Baron Hirsch (*Pue* 15 May, 1928, 4);
- As part of an event organized by the Union of Amateur Jewish Actors in Salonica for Pesah (*Pue* 22 Mar., 1931, 4);
- In association with the Jewish holiday of Tub-Bishvat in conjunction with the patriotic piece *El Triunfo de la Justicia* (*Pue* 15 Jan., 1932, 3).

²⁴⁹ The official march of Sultan Abdülhamid II.

- APPENDIX C -

Ladino and French Extracts from Adaptations of Racine's *Esther*

Yemé quédem (Días de antaño) by Mercado Cobo was published in *Ben Israel* (Salonica, 1923, p.10-11). A transcription of this piece appears in Romero *El Teatro*, vI p. 603.

Yemé quédem

(Recodros de días de avante)

Ladino Transcription

Por tus recodros, ¡Oh Yeruśaláyim!
mi alma llora muy desolada;
llora y esclama, patria amada.
Mi corazón en ti stá decolgado
Como una sclava, solo, abandonado,
Sión, Sión, triste es mi estado.

Refrain

¡Oh, río de Yardén,
montañas de Karmel,
jaras del Lebanón,
montes de Šomrón!
¿Cuándo ya ver [sic] nacer
los días del goel?

¿Qué se hićeron, Sión, tus ĝigantes,
rees, profetas y tus amantes,
quetóret, caśa santa, prínĉipe y condes?
¡Sión, Sión, tierra de baraganes!
Triste y amargo es para tus hijos
tu repudio, ¡oh luz de los ĝentiyos!

Refrain

Yemé quédem

(Remembrance of days to come)

English Translation

For your remembrance, Oh Jerusalem!
My desolate soul cries;
Cries and exclaims, beloved fatherland
My heart is bound with you there
Like a slave, alone, abandoned,
Zion, Zion, sad is my state.

Refrain

Oh, river of Jordan,
Mountains of Carmel,
Thickets of Lebanon,
Mount Somron!
When will be seen the birth
Of the days of redemption?

What happened Zion, your great
Kings, prophets and your lovers,
incense, Holy houses, prince and counts?
Zion, Zion, land of heroes
It is sad and bitter for your children
Your condemnation, oh light of the people!

Refrain

- APPENDIX D -

The Triumphant March of Ester by Mercado Cobo

The Marčh triunfal de Ester [The Triumphant March of Ester] by Mercado Cobo was published in La Nación, 15 March 1932.

Ladino Transcription

Todos a una, hermanos,
alcemos yoŕ y cantemos
a aquel que crió cielos y tierra,
sonalzó nuestra bandera,
y nos salvó de manos
de los malos.

Refrén

¡Viva, viva la reina ester!
¡Viva, viva la reina ester!
con toda la judería! (bis)

Hijos y hijas y viejos,
padres, madres, nons y nietos
todos al deguello aparejados
a morir eran llevados,
semen de tus untados
fueron salvados.

Refrén

Cantemos, buenas amigas
nuestras mejores cantigas
por el nes que en purim
el Dio nos hizo
y honremos este dia
bendicho de toda la juderia

Refrén

English Translation

All together brothers and sisters,
we raise our voice and sing
to one who raised heavens and earth,
raised our banner
and saved us from the hands
of evil ones.

Refrain

Long live, long live Queen Esther!
Long live, long live Queen Esther!
With all of Jewry!

Sons and daughters and old people,
Fathers, mothers, grandparents and
grandchildren
all ready to be put to slaughter
they were taken to die,
his anointed seeds
were saved.

Refrain

We sing, good friends
our best songs
for the month of Purim
God made us
and we honour this day
blessed be all of Jewry!

Refrain

- APPENDIX E -

Productions that took place in Ottoman Sephardic communities based upon the Dreyfus Affair

See Elena Romero's 'Tema de Dreyfus' chapter in *El Teatro de los Sefardies Orientales* v.II, 509-520 for additional analysis on these productions.

- May and June 1901, *Dreyfus* by Aharon Menahem was performed in Sofia (*EJud* 10 May, 1901, 108; *EJud* 17 May 1901, 108).
- A version of Jac Loria's *Dreyfus* in January 1903 in Ismir (*BuEsp* 29 Jan., 1903, 4; *BuEsp* 30 Apr., 1903, 4).
- In 1904 an historical drama *Dreyfus* was performed in the theatre of the Israeli Society a Yosef Marco Baruj in Ploviv (Bulgaria) (*Av* 14 Dec., 1904, 8).
- March 1909 to accompany the Purim celebration in Constantinople at the Israeli Youth Club [Club de la Juventud Israelita] in the Casino Kel Burnu with a second performance by the Amateur Troupe from the Israeli Youth Club [Tropa de Amadores de Club de la Juventud Israelita] from Balat at the Variety Theatre [Teatro Variete] in Pera (*Jug* 3 Mar., 1909, 150; *Bur* 4 Mar., 1909, 9).
- April 1909, due to popular demand, *Dreyfus* is performed again in Constantinople by the Amateur Troupe from the Israeli Youth Club (*Jug* 8 Apr., 1909, 192).
- *Dreyfus* was presented in Sofia to benefit the Hésed veEmet (*EJud* 23 May, 1901, 100).
- In September and October 1910 productions of *El Hecho Dreyfus* were performed in Salonica to benefit the Israeli Library, performed by the Zola Dramatic Society under the patronage of the Grand Circle Israelite [Gran Cercle Israelite] at the Park Union Theatre [Teatro del Parc Union] (*Imp* 23 Sep., 1910, 1; *Imp* 29 Sep., 1910, 1; *Imp* 3 Oct., 1910, 1).

- In March 1912, Jacques Loria wrote an additional play entitled *La Sangre de la Masa* (*The Blood of the Matzah*) which deals with similar anti-Semitic accusations against Jews as *Dreyfus* (*Tiem* 29 Mar., 1912, 796).
- In October 1920, a version of *El Hecho Dreyfus* in Yiddish was performed in Constantinople by the Jewish National Troupe
- March and April 1923, productions of *El Hecho Dreyfus* by the Dramatic Section of the Max Nordau Zionist Society to celebrate Pesach at the Pantheon Theatre [Theatre Panteón] (*Pue* 5 Apr., 1923, 2).
- April 1927 a performance in Salonica of *El Martirio de la Isla del Diablo* was performed by the dramatic section of the Max Nordau Zionist Society at the Pantheon Theatre. It is likely that this was a version by Joseph Papo (*RenJud* 8 Apr., 1927, 4; *Pue* 27 Apr., 1927, 4).
- March 1929 in Constantinople at the Theater Francés in Pera (*Jug* 22 Mar 1929, 4).

- APPENDIX F -

Los Pogromes de Kičhinev

Sabetay Y. Djaén's *Los Pogromes de Kičhinev* published in *El Pueblo* 26, 29 April and 1 May 1932. Transcriptions appear in Romero vol. 1, 1979:384-386.

[Part II] 29 April, 1932
Ladino Transcription

[Part II] 29 April, 1932
English Translation

Gobernador: ¡Oh, qué bueno que está aquí! Y diéjen que los jidiós non saben recibir invitados. Vos calumnían, Se. Šelomó.

Gobernador: Oh, it's good you are here! And they say that the Jews don't know how to receive invitations. You are all slanderous, Señor Šelomó.

Dolin: Non siempre, excelencia. Yo non hablo de Se. Šelomó, que se esfuerza de fuyir del seno de los jidiós y dejar la sucía marca judía; ¿ma los otros?, ¿el resto de la raza? Otorgad, excelencia que ellos non valen nada; ellos se detienen arespartados del resto de la humanidad. Sus usos son bárbaros: tienen la circuncisión. ¿Conocés vos un uso más bárbaro?; estos usos se ven en los salvajes del Sudán. ¿Sabés también que los jidiós son adoradores del fuego?

Dolin: Not always, your excellency. I don't speak for Señor Šelomó, that his efforts to escape from the bosom of the Jews and leave the dirty Jewish race, but the others? The rest of the race? Admittedly, excellency they are worthless; they are separated from the rest of humanity. Their ways are barbarous: they have circumcision. Do you know something more barbarous? These ways are seen in the savages from Sudan. Did you also know that they are fire worshippers?

Šelomó: ¡Oh..!

Šelomó: Oh..!

Gobernador: ¿Es posible?

Governor: Is it possible?

Dolin: ¡Tened!, vo lo aseguro. Mañana la raza entera celebra la fiesta del fuego: en cada casa cada noche se acienden unas luces y toda la secta recitan y bailan al torno de estas luces. Esta fiesta se repite mientras ocho días y la llaman Hanuká.

Dolin: Indeed! I am sure. Tomorrow the entire race celebrates the festival of fire: in each house each night they turn on lights and the whole sect recites and dances around the lights. They repeat this festival for eight days and they call it Hanukkah.

[Part III] 1 May, 1932

[Part III] 1 May, 1932

Dolin: ¿Y el crimen de la sangre? Non puedés negar que los jidiós emplean sangre cristiana para la mašá.

Dolin: And the crime of blood? No one can deny that the Jews use Christian blood for Matzah.

Šelomó: ¡Ah, non!, yo protesto. Non es verdad.

Šelomó: Oh no! I protest. That is not true.

Dolin: ¡Ah!, veo con plačer que aínda non vos dešvestiteš del vestido jidió.

Dolin: Ah! I also pleasantly see that you all aren't wearing the Jewish dress.

Šelomó: Vos aseguro que vos yeráš. El crimen de la sangre es una leyenda, una pura calumnía.

Dolin: Puede_ser que no lo pratiquéš vos este uso barbaro; ma ¿puedes asegurar que no existe entre vosotros una secta de viejos jidiós que practican el crimen de_la sangre? ¿Puedés asegurarlo?

Šelomó: ¡Mi Dio!, non puede ser.

Dolin: Viteš, yo estó informado mejor que vos, Se. Šelomó; es como el šionišmo...

Gobernador: ¿El šionišmo? ¿Qué coša es esto?

Dolin: Es la mueva doctrina que quiere restorar el pueblo jidió en Palestina.

Gobernador: La Palestina es bien lonjana...

Šelomó: De mi parte non la quiero. Los que quieran que vayan y que tomen sus Palestina; yo me topo bueno aquí y quedo aquí.

Šelomó: I assure you are confused. The crime of the blood is a legend, pure slander.

Dolin: It is possible that you don't practice this barbarism, but, are you sure that it doesn't exist amongst you a sect of old Jews that practice the crime of the blood? Are you sure about it?

Šelomó: My God! It can't be.

Dolin: You see, I am better informed than you, Senior Šelomó; it is like Zionism...

Governor: Zionism? What is that?

Dolin: It's a new doctrine that wants to restore the Jewish people to Palestine.

Governor: Palestine is a good distance...

Šelomó: For my part I don't want it. Those that want to go and take their Palestine; I find it good here and I'll stay here.