

# **MICHAEL**

**ON THE HISTORY OF THE  
JEWS IN THE DIASPORA**

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**Editors**

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**COLLECTIVE MEMORIES AND GROUP BOUNDARIES:  
THE JUDEO-SPANISH DIASPORA BETWEEN  
THE LANDS OF CHRISTENDOM AND THE WORLD OF ISLAM**

*1. Introduction: Theory*

This paper is about a religious and social minority group — the Jewish community — in the Ottoman Empire. A more accurate term might be the Judeo-Spanish community; however, since the local autochthonic element was eventually assimilated into the Iberian majority in most of the places mentioned, the general term “Jewish community” is appropriate. This society was created during some two hundred years by immigrants from the Lands of Christendom. The main flow began with the expulsion from Spain, and was accelerated by the activities of the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal. Although the Inquisition had been created to ensure the adherence of the New Christians to their new religion, it was eventually used to exclude them from the Old Christian society and thus became a catalyst for their emigration.

The first immigrants were born as Jews, whereas later generations of immigrants were born in Christianity and learned about their Jewishness as adults, either from their parents or through the attitude of the Christian society around them. The following discussion shows how the passage of time affected the transmission of tradition among these immigrants, each layer in its turn, and how the ensuing changes redefined the boundaries of the group during the three centuries between the expulsion and the eve of modern times. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars were the major events marking the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century in western civilization. They were followed by a major change in the status of the Jews in the Lands of Christendom and the abolition of the Inquisition.

The issue which arises from this historical process is the relationship between memory and the definition of group boundaries, and between memory and the perception of group identity. Both are dependent on the answer to the question "Who is a Jew?"

Erik Erikson's widely accepted theory of identity development and integration explains it as a process in which forces such as the family, society, and reference groups interact over time to shape the individual. The role of the transmission of tradition in defining the group's boundaries is expressed in his definition of the individual's communal identity: "a sense of affinity with a community's sense of being at one with its future as well as its history or mythology."<sup>1</sup> According to Erikson, the identity of the individual begins to develop within the family, where young children emulate the roles that their parents model for them — roles which in turn are derived from the parents' own experiences with larger social groups and from their own childhoods. Throughout the life cycle alternative or additional roles and identities are presented to the individual through a variety of other agents; it is the individual's task to reconcile them, choose among them, and mold his identity. During the lifetimes of its individual members, the process creates the group's identity and defines its boundaries. In essence Erikson's theory reflects Freud's statement that "Mankind never lives entirely in the present. The past, the tradition of the race and of the people, lives on in the ideologies of the super-ego, and yields only slowly to the influences of the present and to new changes."<sup>2</sup> Erikson's theory is developmental and attributes an important role to memory and to the transmission of tradition.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, Henri Tajfel and John Turner proposed a theory which is nondevelopmental. According to them, a positive sense of self is an automatic outcome of group identity. The identity of the individual, and

1 E. Erikson, *Dimensions of a New Identity — The 1973 Jefferson Lectures in the Humanities*, New York 1974, pp. 27-28.

2 S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Standard Edition*, New York 1964, p. 67.

3 See also E. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, New York and London 1980, and especially idem, *The Life Cycle Completed — A Review*, New York and London 1982, pp. 92-94. Compare also with idem, *Young Man Luther — A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, New York 1962.

thus of the group as well, is not a matter of development; it is created simply by the assignment of the individual to the group, or by labeling the group itself from the outside. This theory, unlike Erikson's, has been supported empirically by some famous experiments. Subjects who were arbitrarily assigned to a group invariably developed positive stereotypes about themselves and their group and negative stereotypes about other groups.<sup>4</sup> This theory undermines the role of tradition and memory in creating identities and defining the boundaries of a group.

When leaving the safe ground of socio-psychological theories and moving to the unconstrained field of historical facts, a scholar may find himself surprised by an inability to mold facts into the vessels of a given theory.

## 2. History

### A. The formation of the immigrant community — motives for immigration

When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, many of them headed toward the Ottoman Empire where they could practice Judaism openly and freely. Approximately 120,000 crossed the border and settled in Portugal where, for the time being, they also enjoyed a measure of religious freedom. Since the expellees had a choice between converting to Christianity or leaving Spain without their possessions, their emigration was a clear indication of a common characteristic: an adherence to Judaism.

The first expellees reached Salonika, Istanbul, and other centers of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the summer of 1492. Others arrived later after interim stops in Italy and North Africa. They were followed by fellow Jews who were expelled from Sicily and southern Italy.

All suffered cruel experiences on the way. Most of them were robbed by greedy seamen, many were sold into slavery, women were raped. Hardly anyone reached a safe haven with his nuclear family intact.<sup>5</sup>

4 P. London & B. Charazn, *Psychology and Jewish Identity Education*, New York 1990; R. Brown, *Social Psychology*, 2nd ed., New York 1985; S. Rosen, *Jewish Identity and Identity Development*, New York 1995.

5 On the settlement of the first expellees in the Ottoman Empire, see S. A. Rozanes, *History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (in Hebrew), vol. 1, Tel Aviv 1930, pp.

In 1497, Portugal began the forced conversion of Jews, but did not give them the option of emigration. Presumably, the 120,000 who had arrived from Spain five years earlier had no intention of converting of their own free will. Some of them managed to escape and reached the Ottoman Empire in a second wave of immigration from the Iberian Peninsula. Those who stayed in Portugal created a community of New Christians under duress, but they were waiting for an opportunity to move to a place where they could practice their Judaism openly. In 1506, after the riots in Lisbon against the New Christians, they were given permission to travel. Many of them took advantage of this chance to leave for places outside the Lands of Christendom, with the main cities of the Ottoman Empire being among the most important destinations, and the flow of immigration from the peninsula surged again.<sup>6</sup> Apparently, therefore, the Iberian emigrants to the Empire during this period were motivated by strong religious feelings more than by anything else.<sup>7</sup>

60-62. On the number of expellees who arrived through 1497, see *ibid.*, p. 62, n. 55. According to Rozanes' estimate, some 7,000-8,000 immigrants entered the Empire during that period. On the influx of Iberian Jews to the Ottoman lands, see Rabbi Yitzhak Abravanel, *Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (in Hebrew). Peasaco 1520, chap. 20; Rabbi Eliyahu Capasali, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* (in Hebrew), M. Benayahu, A. Shemuelovitz, S. Simonsohn (eds.), vol. 1, Jerusalem 1975, p. 218. On the tribulations of their wanderings and the fortunes of their families, see Shlomo Ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehudah* (in Hebrew), A. Shohat (ed.), Jerusalem 1947, pp. 120-125; J. R. Hacker, "Pride and Depression: Polarity of the Spiritual and Social Experience of the Iberian Exiles in the Ottoman Empire" (in Hebrew), in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel Ben Sason*, M. Ben-Sason, R. Bonfil, J. R. Hacker (eds.), Jerusalem 1989, pp. 2-68; *idem*, "The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century: Community and Society" (in Hebrew), in H. Beinart, *Moreseth Sephardi: The Sephardi Legacy*, Jerusalem 1992, pp. 472-473. On the fortunes of the refugees who went to Portugal in 1492 and the rest of Portuguese Jewry in the last years of the fifteenth century and the first years of the sixteenth century, see J. R. Hacker (above, note 5), pp. 543-544; I. Tishbi, *Messianism in the Time of the Expulsion from Spain and Portugal* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1985, pp. 24-30; M. Benayahu, "The Sermons of R. Yosef b. Meir Garson as a Source for the History of the Expulsion from Spain and the Sephardi Diaspora," *Michael*, 7 (1981), pp. 47-48, 132-133, 143, 180; Shlomo Ibn Verga (above, note 5), pp. 120, 125. M. Benayahu (above, note 6), pp. 135, 143-144, 149-150, 192-193; I. Tishbi (above, note 6), pp. 33-52; J. R. Hacker (above, note 5), p. 543; Shlomo Ibn Verga (above, note 5), p. 122.

Another wave of immigration from Portugal arrived in the Ottoman lands between 1536 and 1560. Large numbers of New Christians had been considering the possibility of leading a double life and some even left the Jewish fold altogether, but the establishment of a national Inquisition in Portugal in 1536 convinced many of them that this would be impossible. They emigrated to Christian lands, where they lingered for several years before eventually ending up in the Ottoman Empire.

Their motive was not necessarily an allegiance to Judaism; the Inquisition persecuted them on racial, as well as religious grounds. Thus, many of them had left the Iberian Peninsula not in order to practice Judaism openly, but to escape the constant harassment of the Inquisition, which was aimed at all New Christians, whether or not they were faithful to their new religion. They came to the world of Islam and started to live as Jews after having lived for decades as Christians, imbued with the culture of Christian Europe and with strong ties to their former cultural, economic and political world. All of them left families and friends behind in the "world of idolatry."<sup>8</sup>

#### B. Iberian Jews and the "Spanish Nation"

The Iberian immigrants went through a very painful process of settlement and adjustment in a new world. The language of the rulers, Turkish, was unknown to them, as were the local languages, Greek and Arabic. Their new home was the meeting ground of Greek, Arabic and Turkish cultures, of which at least one (Turkish) was totally alien to them. The newcomers thought very highly of themselves and their Spanish culture; although they had been evicted from the land, they regarded it as their home and remained tied to the memories and culture of their origin for generations.

The main characteristic of this bond was their sense of identity. As time passed, the Iberian Jews felt increasingly part of their new homeland; but at the same time they retained a strong sense of belonging to the "Spanish Nation," i.e., the Jewish-Spanish Nation. In Turkey and the

8 On the foundation of the Inquisition in Portugal, see S. Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv 1994, pp. 318-327. On the Portuguese immigrants and their mentality, see "The Self-Definition of Iberian Jews in the Ottoman Empire" in *My In the Mediterranean Routes: The Jewish-Spanish Diaspora from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv 1993, pp. 15-23.

Balkans the term "Spanish" meant "Jewish" until the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

Intense legal discussions on the essentially socio-psychological issue — "Who are we?" — surrounded the creation of this sense of identity. These discussions continued at least until the end of the seventeenth century. The Iberian immigrants had to deal with this question because the group, whose composition was unclear, needed to be strengthened. They discussed the problem not only among themselves but also with members of other Jewish communities. And, although the issue was placed on the public agenda immediately after the resettlement, its roots went back to long before the expulsion.

The expulsion destroyed a social fabric which had been formed over a period of a thousand years. Families were broken up and social ties were dissolved by the physical separation, creating a number of urgent problems under Jewish law (*halakha*). One of these problems involved widows who had not borne a male offspring. If a woman's late husband had a brother, Jewish law called for levirate marriage (from the Latin *levir*, "husband's brother"); i.e., the widow and her brother-in-law had to marry so that she could bear a male child to carry on the name of the dead man (in Hebrew, *yibum*), unless she was able to persuade the brother to annul his obligation to marry her (*halizah*). But what if an immigrant widow needed *halizah* from a brother-in-law who had stayed in Iberia and converted to Christianity? Should she wait until he came to release her? Or was he, being a convert, cut off from the Jewish people and considered as dead, which meant that the widow was free to remarry?

Rabbi Ya'aqov Ibn Haviv, speaking for the Iberian rabbis of Salonika, noted the Jewish legal maxim that a Jew remains a Jew even if he has sinned;<sup>10</sup> and in regard to certain legal actions, the *anusim* (coerced converts) did not forfeit their Jewishness through conversion. According

9 On the state of Sephardic culture and language at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, see E. Benbassa & A. Rodrigue, *Juifs de Balkans, espères judéo-ibériques XVIe-XIXe siècles*, Paris 1993, pp. 174-198.

10 On the meaning of this maxim (*Sanhedrin* 44a) and the commentary to it, see J. Katz, 'Although he has sinned — he is Israel', in *idem*, *Halakha and Kabbalah: Studies in the History of Jewish Religion, Its Various Faces and Social Relevance* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1984, pp. 255-269 (first published in *Tarbiz*, 27 (1958), pp. 203-217).

to Ibn Haviv the rationale was simple: "Tomorrow they [the *anusim*] will come here, and how can we oust them now by judging them to be utter apostates?"<sup>11</sup>

His motive was emotional, not legal, and revealed the attitude of the first generations after the expulsion regarding the boundaries of the Jewish community. If he let these women marry, he would have been saying, in effect, that his beloved relatives and friends back in Spain were no longer Jews, and that he was cutting the bonds that connected them. This was something he could not do — even though the decision effectively condemned the widows to a state of *agunah* (the "chained" or limbo status of a woman unable to remarry for lack of a Jewish divorce).

It is noteworthy that Ibn Haviv chose to base his argument on the Talmudic discussion of the Mishnah "He who has a brother causes in any case his brother's wife to need a levirate marriage, and his brother he is in any case aside from he who has a brother born from a slave girl or a heathen."<sup>12</sup> This statement does not deal with apostates and converts; however, the medieval responsa and *halakic* decisions, which were motivated by the same considerations as those of Ibn Haviv, enlarged the meaning of this Mishnah to include in the term "brother" a Jew who converted to another religion.<sup>13</sup> Ibn Haviv was relating to the commentaries of these medieval sages. At the same time, he referred only superficially to another Talmudic discussion which deals with the case of a gentile who converted to Judaism, and then changed his mind and returned to his former religion. What would this man's status be in relation to both marriage in general and levirate marriage?

Rabbi Yohanan stated that "We call him Israel who has converted, and his *gidushin* is valid";<sup>14</sup> in other words, a Jewess who accepted *gidushin* from him would need a divorce in order to free herself to marry somebody else. The Talmudic sages had not been confronted with the circumstances of the forced conversion of Jews, and that is why they could discuss only the case of a gentile who converted to Judaism and regretted it, which was

11 Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi, *Responsas* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1959, 47:123.

12 *Yevamot* 22a.

13 See also Katz (above, note 10).

14 *Yevamot* 57b.

a realistic situation from their point of view. Why didn't Ibn Ḥaviv discuss this Talmudic statement in full?

The medieval sage's elaboration on this statement did not reflect Ibn Ḥaviv's state of mind. The idea of the wish to maintain an emotional bond with the converts did not emerge in the commentaries regarding this particular statement. This made it less relevant to Ibn Ḥaviv, who was tormented and torn between the social needs of the community of immigrants and refugees and their, as well as his, emotional needs.

Rabbi Mosheh Capsali, who was not of Iberian origin but the leader of the Romanians, the Greek-speaking local Jews of Istanbul,<sup>15</sup> believed that the 'agunot' should be freed from their chains. Aside from the legal considerations, Capsali declared, anyone who forced a woman into a state of 'agunat' caused her to reconsider returning to Judaism. Such a scholar, he said, despised the *anusim* and should be viewed as one who intentionally and maliciously drove these women to sin.<sup>16</sup> He paid very little attention to the question of the *anusim* who remained in Spain or Portugal, but considered only those who returned to the world of Judaism.

Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi, who became the rabbi of the Romanian community in Istanbul after Capsali, agreed with his predecessor. Since his "brothers" were not *anusim*, he had no problem in declaring that they were not Jews. He claimed that there was a difference between brotherhood in the sense of blood relation and brotherhood in the religious-legal sense;

15 Capsali presided as Chief Rabbi from the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans until his death, circa 1498-1500. See M. Rozen, *Introduction to the History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul (1453-1560) (in preparation)*, ref. 147.

16 Rabbi Ze'ev ben Matayah, *Responsa, Benyamim Ze'ev* (in Hebrew), Venice 1539, 78:141b. Interestingly, Ze'ev ben Matayah, a Romanian rabbi in Arta, came across Capsali's responsum after the latter's death and gave a contradictory opinion. He wondered how anyone could see the New Christians as non-Jews, since they married only among themselves and kept the Sabbath and the other commandments as far as possible (74:140a, 75:141b-42b). Later, however, Matayah forbade the sons of fathers who had stayed in the Lands of Idolatry to mention the names of their deceased fathers when they were called to read the Torah or when they signed their names. Thus, he expressed the same emotional detachment as Mizrahi and Capsali (204:300a). See also Rabbi David He-Kohen mi-Corfu, *Responsa* (in Hebrew), Istanbul 1537, 24:170a-80b; 9:87b-98b; 28:188a-94a.

the latter was forfeited, he said, once a person converted. Thus, he exempted the widows from levirate marriage.<sup>17</sup>

The meaning of Ibn Ḥaviv's decision was of great importance. For him, the boundaries of the Jewish people encompassed not only those who managed to escape from "the place of subversion" (*meqom ha-hafek/hah*), but also those who, for one reason or another, were compelled to stay. He believed that those who stayed behind were uneasy about their way of life and were looking for a way to change it. According to Ibn Ḥaviv, a Jew was anyone born to a Jewish mother, even those who lived as Christians in Spain or Portugal. Through his decision (which was inconceivable for a non-Spanish rabbi), he included the New Christians in the Nation, along with the immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula.

The Jewish-Iberian and the Christian-Iberian concept of the Jewish Nation paralleled one another. The Spanish Jews in the Ottoman Empire regarded the New Christians in the Iberian Peninsula and in other Christian lands as their brothers in every way, and so did their Christian neighbors. In their eyes a New Christian remained a Jew even though he meticulously followed all the practices of the Christian religion. This viewpoint persisted for generations after the expulsion. Strictly guarding the Spanish family's *purezza de sangue* (purity of blood) was the most important way of preserving its good name (*honra*); Spaniards took care not to marry New Christians and kept long pedigrees to prove the purity of their blood.<sup>18</sup>

The concept of a Jewish Iberian entity was created both by its members and by the values and culture of the society from which it emerged. The enormous pressures on the New Christians helped give them a deep sense of solidarity and common destiny. They were actively involved in helping each other. Those who succeeded in reaching the shores of Italy went to great lengths to rescue those who stayed behind on the peninsula and Jews who settled in the Ottoman Empire did their best to help those who remained in Christian lands. The most famous activity of this kind was probably that of Don Yosef Nasi and his aunt Doña Gracia, whose

17 Mizrahi (above, note 11), 47:123-27.

18 Y. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Life and Work of Isaac Orshio de Castro* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1982, pp. 151-153.

network of agents helped New Christians escape from the Iberian Peninsula to safety in the Ottoman Empire between the 1540s and 1560s.<sup>19</sup> When they emigrated from Iberia, many New Christians who had been born into Christianity did not feel compelled to move somewhere outside the "Lands of Idolatry." They accepted their double identity, or settled for a Christian ruler's promise that their religious past would not be investigated. Although Jewish law held that a Jew should choose death rather than give up the practice of Judaism, these people realized that the world had not come to an end and that life went on as usual despite their transgression. This made it necessary to redefine the boundaries of the Jewish-Iberian entity.

Such redefinition was not easy. The *halakic* decision upholding levirate marriage even when the widow's brother-in-law remained in the Iberian Peninsula was ratified again in the middle of the sixteenth century, but only with great misgivings. The difference between the decision of Rabbi Ibn Haviv at the beginning of the century and the reality of the situation five decades later is obvious in the writings of the *halakic* authorities in the latter period. In 1555 Rabbi Shemuel de Medina of Salonika dealt with the case of *anusim* who had left the peninsula but had not moved to a Jewish locality; instead, they had settled in the Low Countries, where they believed the hand of the Inquisition would not reach them.

He wrote: "The *anusim* of our time have regret in their hearts, and their eyes and hearts are in quest of an opening for returning to God whose forgiveness is great." In the same responsum, however, he admitted that not all of the New Christians should be measured by the same standards. He was reluctant to consider them all as part of the Jewish Nation, and declared that:

19 On the Nasi family and their activities, see the bibliography in M. Rozen (above, note 15), ref. .... On the commitment to mutual help among the *anusim* and its transmission over generations, see the episode described by J. Schwarz in *The Anusim in Portugal* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv 1932, p. 125, which is very telling. He described an early twentieth century group still living in Northern Portugal, Christian in almost every way, secretly keeping some remnants of Jewish tradition and being labeled as "Judeus" by the surrounding society. He asked them why they were called "Judeus". The answer: "It comes from the verb 'ad-judar'; it is because we always have to help each other. ...."

Those *anusim* reached by the sword of coerced conversion (*shemad*) who stayed many years among the same Gentiles who decreed the conversion, and did not save their souls from the *shemad* by escaping to another country in which they would be able to worship God with no fear: it is worthwhile to inquire thoroughly into their cases. If there are among them some who could have escaped and saved their souls from the *shemad*, but instead converted unwillingly and in time unloaded from themselves the heavenly yoke, then they have cut the chains of the Torah and from their own free will they follow the laws of the Gentiles, transgressing all the commandments of the Torah and even persecuting the Jews.<sup>20</sup>

These people, wrote Rabbi Shemuel de Medina, had no share in the Nation of Israel. Furthermore, the Jewishness of those who preferred to settle in the Low Countries instead of the Ottoman Empire was dubious because "they are more apostates and Gentiles in the Low Countries than in Portugal."

The fact that Rabbi Shemuel de Medina was born in Salonika in 1506, and hence a second-generation immigrant living in the Ottoman Empire, should be taken into account when assessing the weakening of the emotional bond to New Christians that his ruling displayed. The memory of the common experience, the coercion, the humiliation, the horror, was still a personal one for the New Christians, while for Medina it was a historical experience, part of his historical memory. For him it was something that had happened to his grandfathers, but it was *still happening* to the people of whom he wrote, and, of course, each of them reacted in their own way.<sup>21</sup> The newcomers who arrived in the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the sixteenth century displayed the same kinship with their brothers in the Iberian Peninsula and elsewhere as did the immigrants of the generation of the expulsion.

A striking example of the difference between the attitudes of the second generation and the new immigrants toward their brethren in Christian lands is found in the boycott of Ancona in the Papal State. Starting in 1547, a group of New Christians from Portugal had been allowed to

20 Rabbi Shemuel de Medina, *Responsa, Orah Hayim* (in Hebrew), L'vov 1861, 10:5b-7a.

21 See also Rabbi Yosef Ibn Lev, *Responsa* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1959, vol. 1, 268b-87.

practice their Jewish religion freely in Ancona. But in 1555, when Paul IV ascended to the papacy, he changed the Holy See's policy toward Jews in general and the Portuguese Jews in Ancona in particular. Because they had lived as Christians in Portugal and then practiced Judaism openly in the Papal State, they were arrested, tortured and tried as apostates. Thirty-eight of them returned to Christianity and were sentenced to work as oarsmen on galleys, one committed suicide, and twenty-four were burned at the stake in the public square of Ancona.

The Nasi family, which was well-established in Istanbul by then, made great but futile efforts to rescue some of the prisoners by claiming that they were Ottoman subjects. After the execution was carried out, the Nasi family organized a boycott of the port of Ancona. It was intended to divert the Adriatic trade to neighboring Pesaro, in the Duchy of Urbino, where some of the Portuguese Jews had found a haven. However, not all the Jews favored the boycott. Many Jewish merchants gave priority to their business interests rather than demonstrate Jewish solidarity, while others complained that the boycott put the Jews of Ancona in danger.

The internal dispute in the Jewish community revolved around two axes: the struggle of the Nasi family for the leadership of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire (or at least those of Istanbul) and identification with the Jewish Iberian entity. The question was whether the show of solidarity was worth endangering the Jews of Italy and the economic interests of the Ottoman Jews. The Romanians in Istanbul were not concerned with the issue; they did not trade with Italy and they did not have relatives in Italy, so they did not mind signing the boycott pact. On the other hand, the Portuguese Jews in Istanbul, having recently escaped from Christian lands, were eager to sign because it avenged the blood of their brothers and their business associates.

Among the long-established Spanish congregations in Istanbul, too, there was no unanimity. The strongest opposition to the boycott was expressed by the Jews of Italian origin who were concerned about their brethren in Italy. And, although Rabbi Yehoshu'a Zonzin, an Italian who presided over a Spanish congregation, may have been expressing the viewpoint of non-Iberian Jews toward their Iberian brethren who had chosen to stay in the Lands of Idolatry instead of settling in the Ottoman haven, his congregation had decided that:

There is no place to say that it is a commandment to ratify this covenant in order to avenge the spilt blood of our brethren. These Jews used to live according to the laws of the Gentiles in Portugal, and came to live under the wings of the Holy Presence (*shekkhinah*) according to the laws of Moses and Judith. They should not have made their residence in the lands of the Gentiles, even though they were given all sorts of promises, since it is a well-known fact to every person of reason that the Gentiles would take revenge on them because they had denied their faith. They brought the damage upon themselves, and lost their lives with their own hands....and for that reason they have sinned themselves, and there is no reason to mourn them or to avenge their blood.<sup>22</sup>

The split among the Jews over the boycott reflected not only differences in economic interests, but also the changes in the Iberian Jews' conception of the Judeo-Spanish entity that had occurred during the sixty-four years since the expulsion. On the one hand, the descendants of the expulsion generation were going through a process of emotional detachment from their brothers in Christian lands. They believed that those who had stayed behind obviously did not fear for their souls or their religion. But among the newcomers, on the other hand, the emotional attachment was still strong and vibrant. To them, whoever was from the seed of Jews—whether living under the yoke of the Inquisition or in the lands of Islam, whether practicing Judaism openly or not—was still part of the Jewish Iberian Nation.<sup>23</sup>

Let us move on in time. Emigration from the Iberian Peninsula continued well into the seventeenth century. The emigrants of that period usually preferred the newly founded communities of New Christians in the Low Countries or Southern France, which turned into Jewish communities at their own pace. Many settled in Livorno (Leghorn) where one's religious past was not a matter of investigation. Some arrived in the lands of Islam and settled in the Jewish community whose identity had been molded during the 150 years that had passed since the expulsion.

22. Rabbi Yehoshu'a Zonzin, *Responsa, Nahalah li-Yehoshu'a, Responsa* (in Hebrew), Venice 1622, 39-45a.

23. Rozen (above, note 8).



One of them was Rafael Mordekhai Malki. His place of birth is unknown, but we do know that he was of New Christian origin, that he spent part of his life in Amsterdam, and that he practiced medicine in Livorno. In 1677 he settled in Jerusalem, where he joined the famous *Beit Ya'akov* House of Study and became a law-abiding Jew who meticulously followed all the commandments of the Torah. However, in a long exegesis on the Torah, he revealed that he was torn between his Christian background and his decision to become part of the Oriental Jewish community (which considered itself the elite of Jewishness). His doubts were expressed in deistic ideas and strong internal conflicts. He dealt at length with the status of the *anusim* and his view was identical to that of Rabbi Ya'akov Ibn Haviv almost 180 years before him. He considered the *anusim* to be part of the Nation of Israel, declaring the eternal validity of the maxim "A Jew, although he has sinned, remains a Jew." Moreover, because he felt obligated to respond to members of his community who probably disputed the Jewishness of those who had lingered for so many generations in lands in which they could at best express their Jewishness in hiding, if not solely in their minds, he invented a messianic role for the *anusim*. In his vision of the war of Gog and Magog, Spain is depicted as Gog. The *anusim* in the Spanish army turn against their king to help the King-Messiah and slay the soldiers of Spain, measure for measure for what had been done to them and to the Jewish people.<sup>24</sup>

The emotional link with the *anusim* expressed in Malki's words vividly portrays the role of an individual's personal memory in defining group boundaries. How could Malki, who had strived at immense personal cost to be considered "a real Jew," relate to people whom he still remembered, people who were just like what he had been some twenty-five years ago, as something other than brothers?

The last example is Rabbi Hayim Yosef David Azulai, known by his initials, *Hida*, a famous rabbi and emissary of the Jerusalem community in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Azulai, himself a descendent of a

24 See M. Rozen, *Jewish Identity and Society in the Seventeenth Century. Reflections on the Life and Work of Rafael Mordekhai Malki*, Tübingen 1992, pp. 93-102; M. Rozen & E. Witzlun, 'The Dark Mirror of the Soul: Dreams of a Jewish Physician in Jerusalem at the End of the Seventeenth Century', *REJ*, 131 (1992), pp. 5-42.

family whose presence in Palestine can be traced back to its immigration in the sixteenth century, was an emissary to the Portuguese communities of western Europe. His assessment of their Jewishness is very interesting. Since his task was to raise as much money as possible for the poor community of Jerusalem, he could not be too particular and could not criticize too severely. His observations of the Jews of Bordeaux, made in 1774, reveal that he was shocked because the children in the Talmud Torah studied only the Torah, not Rashi or the Rambam, whose interpretations were not accepted. The leaders of the community expressed opinions close to heresy, he wrote, but the nadir was his visit to Avraham Gradis, the famous Jewish shipowner and banker.

Señor Avraham Gradis, highly esteemed in the French court, a very rich millionaire, does great favors to the Gentiles and the royalty and satisfies all their needs since he became very famous. He is one of the greatest apostates and heretics who do not believe in the oral law and eat forbidden foods in public. And a certain priest came to tell that a Gentile had died and while dying confessed that he had stolen 20,000 libras from Gradis, and Avraham said that it should be given to their churches (*barnot*) and their poor. And his name is great in everything despicable.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, this same Gradis used all his influence to help Azulai press the leaders of the Bordeaux community to give him more money.

Azulai went on to Paris and Amsterdam, where he was received with great honor. However, he could not hide his views concerning the behavior and mores of those communities either. He chose a very interesting way to express his opinion. He recounted a story about Rabbi Hizkiya da Silva, the son-in-law of Rafael Mordekhai Malki, which had been told to him by Rabbi David Mi-Yaldola. Da Silva had gone to Amsterdam to collect money for Jerusalem in 1694, some eighty years before Azulai. He had made a great impression on the Jews of Amsterdam, since he was young, very handsome, already a famous scholar, and well-known for his wisdom. The Amsterdam community asked him to stay on as their rabbi at a

25 Rabbi Hayim Yosef David Azulai, *Ma'agal Tov, He-Shalem* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1934, pp. 115-116, 157.

generous salary. After thinking about it for several days, he rejected the offer. He explained to the *sefiores dos ma'amad* that it was impossible for him to be their rabbi, because he would have to tell one of them to get rid of the two gentle women with whom he lived, and similar things to another, and to all the others, since it would be his duty to purify their community; the result would be that they would throw him out anyway. According to the story, he told them that they wanted him as their rabbi because "You want me not in the name of God, but to make a name for yourselves." The *sefiores dos ma'amad* agreed with him and he headed back to Jerusalem. Azulai praised da Silva, who had rejected illusory honor, and hoped that his predecessor's virtuousness would protect him as well.<sup>26</sup>

The Jews of Bordeaux and Amsterdam had already passed from the stage of becoming "Judaized" to the stage of leading an open Jewish life. They identified in many ways with their co-religionists in Jerusalem, but they were still very different. More than 200 years of Christianity stood between them and the Jews of Jerusalem — 200 years of coercion, of being labeled as different in their own society. Hizkiya da Silva, only a second-generation returnee to Judaism, already knew that he could not be a rabbi in Amsterdam. *Hida* badly needed the money Gradis, Oliviera and Fonseca could give him and he took it, even though he must have found it odious to do so. Yet the memories of the initial experience, the catastrophe of the expulsion, the coercion of baptism, the kidnapping of children from their parents and the fires of the *auto da fe* were strong enough to maintain a sense of solidarity and enable the Jews of Jerusalem to turn to their brothers of western Europe for help.

Still, one should bear in mind that the relations between these two parts of the Spanish-Jewish Diaspora had a certain practical basis. The Jews of Bordeaux and Amsterdam viewed their donations as expiation for their sinful way of life, while the emissaries and the members of the Jerusalem community saw themselves as those who, by their suffering in the Holy Land, bore the burden of these sins and atoned for them. This quid pro quo relationship suited the conceptual world of the western European merchant communities.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

### 3. Conclusion

Barukh Spinoza, one of the most famous members of the Judeo-Spanish diaspora, declared that it was not the perseverance of the Jews that had preserved them as a nation, but the hatred of the Gentiles.<sup>27</sup> While his statement is a crystallization of the Turner-Tajfel theory, his own personal history proves that this theory alone cannot explain the formation of identity and the creation of group boundaries; Erikson's developmental theory is also essential to the explanation.

The Jewish community of Amsterdam excommunicated Spinoza because he failed to conform to their concept of orthodox Judaism. In Spain or Portugal, no matter how heretical his views might have been, he would still have been considered part of the Jewish Nation. For the New Christians in Iberia, heresy was not an important factor in defining their place inside or outside their group, since its boundaries were defined by the attitude of the Old Christians. But outside the Iberian Peninsula, the historical memories of the New Christians burdened the young Jewish community of Amsterdam, which looked up to and emulated the Iberian Jewish communities in the world of Islam.

The self-definition of these Jewish communities had developed in a similar way to that of the Amsterdam community. Their initial identity derived from the labels imposed by the society that persecuted and eventually expelled them. The personal and communal memories of the former New Christians affected the identity of Jews in the lands of Islam in the same way that it did Spinoza's excommunicators.

The passage of time played an important role in redefining the identity of the Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire. There is a qualitative difference between memories of personal experiences and those transmitted from parents or grandparents. Over the years, from generation to generation, the Jews in the Empire gradually lost their feeling of identification with those who had remained in Spain and Portugal.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the question of whether a Jew who had sinned was still a Jew was no longer discussed in the Ottoman Empire;

<sup>27</sup> *Theologic-Political Treatise*, 3:55-56 in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, (trans. R. H. Hewes), vol. 2, (New York 1951; see discussion in Y. Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, vol. 1, Princeton 1989, pp. 181-184.

it was no longer relevant, since migration from the "world of idolatry" to the Empire had ceased. Those who chose to leave Iberia preferred to settle in western Europe and they came with all the baggage of two centuries of life in disguise and a new kind of Judaism that was alien to their brothers in the Empire. Still, the distant memories of their common past were enough to maintain loose boundaries for the diverse communities in the Judeo-Spanish diaspora.

Thus, a combination of two factors created the identity and sense of belonging for the members of this diaspora: the attitude of others and the process of change. The changes involved not only those whose identity was being molded, but also those who influenced this identity from outside the group. While the historical memories of the Jews of Istanbul, Salonika and Jerusalem were being transformed and the New Christians in the Iberian Peninsula were undergoing constant changes in their recollections of their past and their traditions, Christian society itself had been changing its attitudes toward the Jews. Where these ever-changing perceptions meet on the axis of time, they reflect different images of group identity, group boundaries, and the view from outside the group.