

## At Home and Abroad: Forging Sephardic Identities. Before and after the Diasporas of the *Gente da Nação* *Portuguesa*

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**Abstract:** In this paper I shall look at the multifaceted and at times hard to define identity of the Portuguese Jews before and after the Diasporas of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Sephardic Jewry of Portuguese origin, also known as *Gente da Nação Portuguesa* (People of the Portuguese Nation) has oftentimes been neglected or, as often it was the case, overshadowed by and lumped together with its Sephardic brethren.<sup>1</sup> My study will thus concentrate on the Sephardim of Portuguese origin and analyze the different ways the Judeo-Portuguese communities forged their identities, at home and abroad in the Diaspora(s), from the rest of Europe, the Maghreb,<sup>2</sup> the Balkans,<sup>3</sup> and the Ottoman Empire to the New World and Asia.

**Keywords** *Diaspora, Ethnicity, Iberia, Identity, Portugal, Portuguese Jews, Race, Sephardim, Sephardic Jews*

### לא ראינו אינה ראיה

*Lo ra'inu ra'aya*

“We did not see” is not evidence

*Mishnah Two: Eduyot, Chapter Two*

*Mishna Zevahim 12:4.*<sup>4</sup>

#### I. Negotiating Identities

Regardless of their new place of residence and notwithstanding their ethnic differences, the Sephardim always considered themselves as being part of and linked to Iberia, where ethnicity, race, religion, and mores set

<sup>1</sup> Jews from the Iberian Peninsula (present-day Portugal and Spain) and their descendants in the Diaspora (*Galut*, גלות exile) are known as ספרדים Sephardim, whereas Jews from the German-, Baltic-, and Slavic-speaking world, as well as present-day Romania, Moldova, and Hungary are known as אשכנזים Ashkenazim. Italian and southern French Jews, instead, are known as האיטלקים *Italkim* and *Shuadit* (Judeo-Provençal, from the Hebrew *Yehudit* יהודית) respectively, Italkian and Shuadic being their respective adjectives.

<sup>2</sup> From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century much of the Maghreb, east of present-day Algeria, was under Ottoman rule.

<sup>3</sup> The Balkan region was under Ottoman rule between c. 1371-c. 1913.

<sup>4</sup> (Neusner, 1991; Gevirtz, and Goldberger, 1989).

them apart from the rest of the Jewish world. For the *diasporic* Sephardim tracing their roots to the Iberian Peninsula has always been a matter of belonging, a matter of asserting their true Iberian-Jewish identity: “May I repeat, for us the term “Sephardim” is quite clear; we are the descendants of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula;”<sup>5</sup> a (sense of) belonging that was well guarded and to which no one could have access:

In the Sephardi Diaspora, the Judeo-Portuguese and Spanish Nation developed as a sociopolitical entity to which Jews of non-Iberian descent could seldom if ever realistically aspire to belong, even if they married into Sephardi clans.<sup>6</sup>

Ethnicity, race, language(s), philosophical and religious practices and laws are thus all intertwined. Yet, as a whole, this is not a characteristic peculiar to the Sephardim, since these features could be applied to any ethnic, racial, and religious group or minority, past or present. Living in גלות *Galut* (exile) for more than half a millennium has thus enriched the Sephardim at all levels. Obviously, *Galut* and, whenever possible, the return to normative Judaism meant survival and adaptation to their new environment as well as a new/constant repackaging and reinventing of Sephardism:

In northern Europe the deeply alien character of both Jewish and Gentile life required the *ex-conversos* if they were to weather the transition, to attempt a more radical articulation of their collective identity. It was particularly in Amsterdam and its satellite communities in Hamburg, Bordeaux, Bayonne, London and elsewhere in the Atlantic diaspora that a new collective ethos merged.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, as Stephen Shalom has keenly observed, and as most if not all *diasporic* peoples living outside their homeland, the new generations of the Sephardim have to be taught how to cherish their roots, lest their rich history will disappear forever. In other words, Sephardic Jews of the Diaspora have to learn how to reclaim and value their Iberian-Jewish roots:

Wherever we live we are bound together by our Sephardic roots, by our remembering, by our tradition and by our faith. ... We are all Sephardi, whether our roots are traced to Portugal, Morocco, Rhodes, Turkey, Greece, Syria, Iraq, Syria, Iran, Bukhara, or Lebanon. And yet, as our generation has discovered, we are unable to ‘automatically transmit’ our heritage to our children. We have to rediscover and reconquer our roots.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, because of the many Diasporas and the ensuing *Converso*/Crypto-Judaic phenomenon/condition, otherwise known as *Marranism*,<sup>9</sup> “the exile from the Iberian Peninsula could be

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<sup>5</sup> (Lévy, 2005, 17).

<sup>6</sup> (Graizbord, 2008, 46).

<sup>7</sup> (Bodian, 1994, 65).

<sup>8</sup> (Shalom, 1979, 3).

<sup>9</sup> Jews from Portugal and Spain—collectively known as Sephardic Jews or *Sephardim*—who were later forced to convert to Catholicism, were usually referred to as *crístãos-novos* (new-Christians), *Conversos* (those who were forcibly converted to Catholicism), *Marranos* (i.e., pigs), and/or crypto-Jews. The terms *crístão-novo*, *converso*, and/or *marrano* applied to all Sephardic Jews, and their progeny, who either willingly or, as often it was the case, unwillingly were forced to convert to Catholicism. In Hebrew, as well as in Judeo-Portuguese and

considered the salvation of Sephardic culture<sup>10</sup> as a whole. Additionally, and more importantly, almost a century after the 1492 expulsion from Spain and the 1497-1498 forced conversion to Catholicism in Portugal, the *Converso*/Crypto-Jewish new state of mind/being in the Diaspora forged a new sense of identity and belonging, one where race and ethnicity played a key role in defining and self-identifying the “other” living in *Galut*:

[...] after 1580 [...] attitudes now focused on the purported ethnic or racial characteristics of *Judeoconversos*. So too, words like *converso* and new-Christian, which had applied to actual converts during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, had become hereditary labels with predominantly racial or ethnic meanings.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, *Galut* gave the Sephardim the impetus to continue practicing and preserve, as much as they could have, in the case of the **אָנוּסִים** *Anūsīm*, some of their traditions and customs that set them aside from the rest of the Jewish world. Had they been allowed to remain in Portugal and Spain, most likely the **קַפְרָדִים** Sephardim would have ended up assimilating to the local Iberian culture(s).

Undeniably, their business acumen allowed the Sephardim to eventually settle and flourish everywhere in the Diaspora, from Europe, the Maghreb, and the Middle East to the New World, India, Southeast Asia, and the Far East: “[...] Spanish and Portuguese Jews were honest businessmen, were devoted to learning, elegance, and manners, and were useful to the countries that hosted them.”<sup>12</sup>

In the case of the Portuguese Jews and Crypto-Jews, living in Portugal and in the Diaspora, ethnicity and a strong desire to maintain their wealth within the family circle allowed for the creation of a very strong sense of identity where these features overshadowed any religious difference and possible divide, or rather, normative Judaism vis-à-vis Crypto-Judaism or even lack of any religious affiliation:

[...] Luso-Conversos formed a de facto social bloc. They often saw themselves, acted, and were viewed by others as a single economic, political, and social constituency irrespective of religious orientation and despite the common imputation of Jewishness to Conversos. [...] New Christians displayed a strong preference for endogamy in their social relations. These bonds often cut across territorial and religious boundaries. At a time when the extended family was a basic unit of enterprise in the organization of business, endogamy was crucial to the maintenance of Luso-Conversos’ ethnic cohesion as well as the coherence and sheer extent of their mercantile networks.<sup>13</sup>

More than their Spanish coreligionists, Portuguese *Converso* communities in the Diaspora managed to forge a distinct sense of belonging, one that will allow them to survive adversities and to adjust to the political and social situations they eventually encountered: “[...] the notion that Spanish and especially Portuguese

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Judeo-Spanish, instead, the term **אָנוּסִים** *Anūsīm* (“those who faked the conversion because they were forced to do so”) was and is still preferred today.

<sup>10</sup> (Lévy, 2005, 15).

<sup>11</sup> (Graizbord, 2004, 53).

<sup>12</sup> (Pinto, 1762 and Hertzberg, 1968, 181, both quoted in Graizbord, 2008, 50).

<sup>13</sup> (Graizbord, 2008, 45).

*Conversos* formed a distinct *nación* or *nação* is a recurring motif in the history of that group as well as of early modern Iberia and Western Sephardi communities ca. 1415-late 18<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>14</sup>

## II. Diasporic Identities

[...] all *conversos* shared a common fate: the experience of enmeshment in, and rejection by, Iberian society. Thus, underlying the diversity of belief and practice among *conversos* were common psychological issues that played a key role in identity formation.<sup>15</sup>

Until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Sephardic Jews were part of thriving *kehillot* קהילות (communities), in Portuguese known as *judiarias*, and were well-integrated within Christian and Muslim Iberian societies before their expulsions (Spain, 1391; 1492) and forced conversion to Catholicism (Portugal, 1497-1498), with presence in Iberia dating as far back as the 6<sup>th</sup> century before the Common Era.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, for lack of evidence, the year 70 of the Common Era should be considered as the most plausible date for the first massive Jewish migrations from Palestine to the Iberian Peninsula. The destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem in the year 70 of the Common Era is thus the starting point of many *diasporic* movements from Palestine to the rest of the Mediterranean basin area and beyond: first and foremost present-day Greece and Italy, followed by Provence, the Iberian Peninsula, and the rest of Europe.

Yet, regardless of the date of their first settlement, Sephardism is strictly tied to the culture and civilization of the Iberian region/area in which the Sephardic Jews lived, worked, and produced their manual as well as intellectual labor. Sephardic Jewish identity was thus local, regional, and/or national Iberian identity intermingled with the Jewish identity and the collective Sephardic mores of the Sephardim even before the present nations of Portugal and Spain came to be in 1139 and 1492 respectively. In this, Sephardic Jews were and are not unlike other, if not all, Jewish ethnic groups throughout the world, from the *איטלקים* *Italkim* and the *אשכנזים* *Ashkenazim* to the Jews of Ethiopia, Yemen, India, and China.

Yet, what makes Sephardic identity special, particularly Portuguese Jewish identity, is the fact that the many centuries/generations living in the Diasporas—e.g., the rest of Europe, the Maghreb,<sup>17</sup> the Balkans, the former Ottoman Empire (1290-1922), Asia, and the New World—have also contributed to a multi-layered sense of belonging. Issues of assimilation or, better yet, integration to the new environment, as well as to other non-Sephardic Jewish languages and cultures, as in the case of the Sephardic communities in the New World (e.g., Canada, the United States, the Caribbean, Brazil, and Argentina), have also complicated matters. Wherever they went Portuguese Jews thus managed to form, maintain, and keep close ties with other Portuguese Jewish and Crypto-Jewish communities of Portuguese descent. In fact, in the former Ottoman Empire, Sephardim was usually synonymous with Portuguese Jewish or Portuguese New-Christian:

<sup>14</sup> (Graizbord, 2008, 45).

<sup>15</sup> (Bodian, 1994, 49).

<sup>16</sup> For further information, please see: (da Costa, Brewster, and Roth, 1936; Beinhart, 1962; Marcus, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Maghreb, i.e., “west” of Egypt, encompassing Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. In the Iberian Peninsula, instead, Garb: [...] era o território ocidental do Andaluz (Espanha muçulmana), o qual abarcou o território ocupado hoje por Portugal e ainda as cidades de Badajoz e Mérida.” (Coelho, 1989, 1: 47). “[...] it was the Western territory of al-Andalus (Iberian Peninsula under Islamic Rule), which comprised present-day Portugal as well as Badajoz and Mérida, now part of Spain.” [translation provided by the author].

[...] an important way in which eighteenth-century Jews perceived themselves: solidarity and communication occurred within a network that bound the Portuguese Sephardim (mostly former *Conversos*) in several port cities of Western Europe to Portuguese Sephardim living in the Holy Land. These Spanish-Portuguese Jews may or may not have seen themselves as part of a broader “Sephardi” diaspora, but what Hagiz’s treatise (and similar sources) suggests is that it was the Portuguese Jews whom he refers to as a specific ethnic group called Sephardim, whereas others are called Levantines.<sup>18</sup>

An example of this strong sense of belonging and self-determination is the case of the Sephardim who made their home in the former Ottoman Empire (1299-1922). Undeniably aided by the high number of exiled physically present and by an economically savvy administration, Portuguese and Spanish Jews living in Ottoman lands, from the Maghreb to Palestine and beyond, were in fact able to showcase their cultural and financial expertise in such a way that soon they became the dominant Jewish culture and point of reference, thus overshadowing local as well as other *diasporic* Jewish communities who eventually settled in Ottoman lands:

In Palestine, as elsewhere in the empire, the Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin were able, by virtue of their demographic and perhaps their cultural dominance, to transform Ottoman Jewry in their own image and to amalgamate communities that existed prior to their arrival with their own communities into what can be called, by the eighteenth century, a distinctly Ottoman Jewry—though not to be confused with the emergence of Ottomanism as a political ideology in the late nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

As for the Portuguese Jewish communities living in the former Ottoman Empire (1299-1922), particularly the Balkans as well as present-day Palestine, Israel, and Turkey, for more than three hundred years they were able to create closely-knit units held together by a very strong sense of belonging, one that went beyond the mere fact of being Jewish:

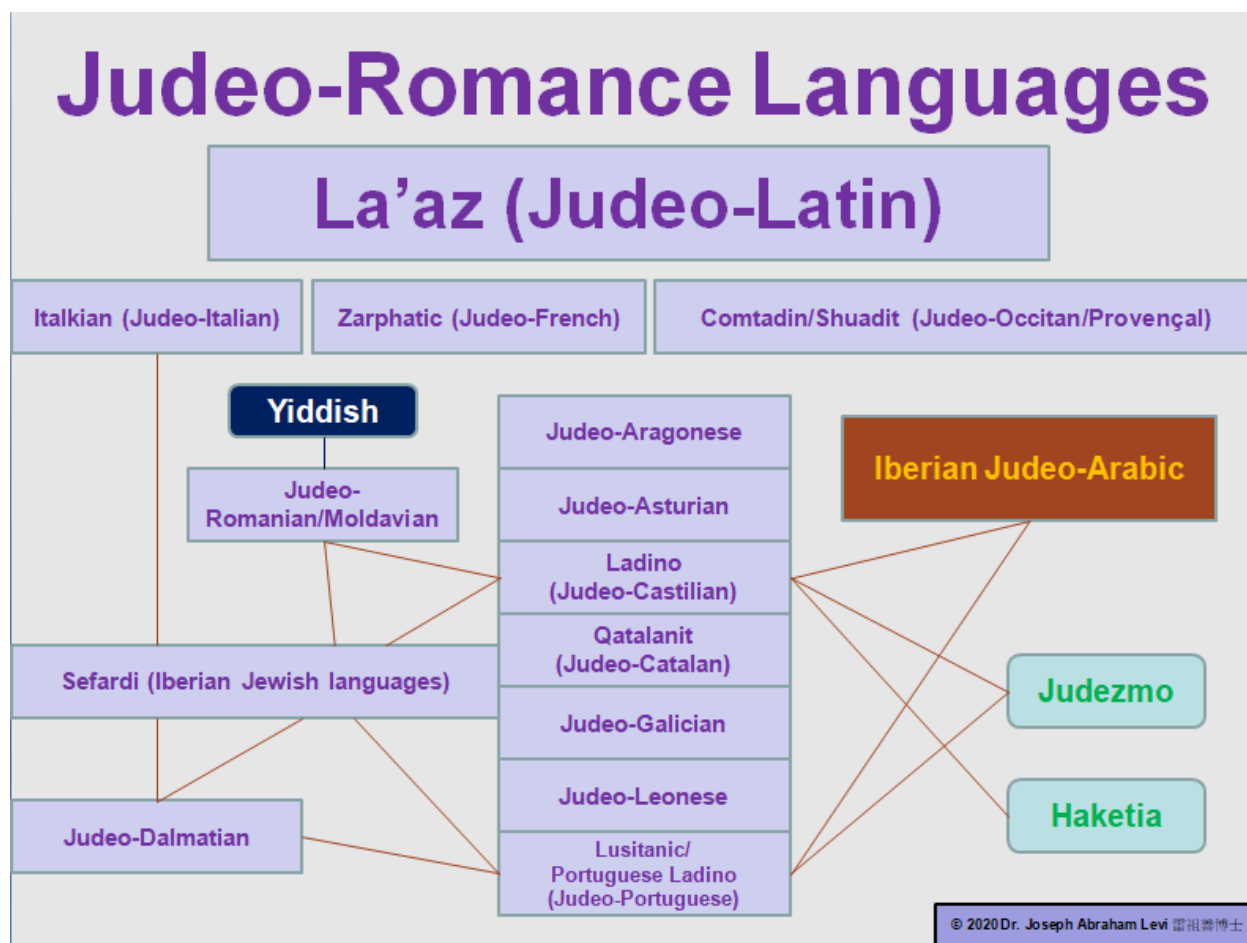
[...] these societies were an important vehicle for establishing networks beyond the commercial ties uniting the Portuguese-Sephardi diaspora, and it was this international philanthropy through which a strong sense of self, of a Portuguese-Sephardi identity, was created and perpetuated.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> (Lehmann, 2008, 86-87).

<sup>19</sup> (Lehmann, 2008, 89).

<sup>20</sup> (Lehmann, 2008, 86).



### III. Al-Andalus and the Sephardim

For centuries, Muslims, Mozarabs, and Jews coexisted in al-Andaluz under Islamic rule. The Christians prayed discretely in their churches and convents, maintaining and upholding their clergy, language, and customs; the Muslims prayed and taught in the mosques; the Jews prayed and gave guidance in their synagogues. [...] Once it came under Christian rule, the Islamic religion persisted up through the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in Lisbon's Moorish quarters and in town throughout Portugal's central and southern regions.<sup>21</sup>

In the Muslim world, as well as elsewhere, Islamic Iberia (711-1492) was known as *الأندلس* *al-Andalus*, (711-1492), *الأنْدَلُوس* *al-Andalūs*, and/or *إسبانيّا* *Isbāniyāh*. There is much controversy over the origin of the Arabic word *Andalus*, given that not all scholars are happy with the idea that the word came from *وَنْدَلُوسِيَّة* *Wandalusiyyah*, a Berber corruption of the expression “Land of the Vandals,” the latter being one of the Germanic tribes that in 409 invaded and eventually settled in the Iberian Peninsula.

In Modern Standard Arabic the word for Vandals is *أَوُوْ نَدَان* *al-Wandalu*. As for its synonym, *إسبانيّا* *Isbāniyāh*, it is a clear calque from the Latin *Hispania*, in itself a calque from the Phoenician quadrilateral root HSPM (*Hispania*), which meant “land of rabbits.”

<sup>21</sup> (Borges Coelho, 1994, 93).

The expressions listed above are the terms used to denote the Iberian Peninsula during the Muslim occupation (711-1492) as well as present-day Spain; whereas *بُرْتُغَالٌ* *Burtuqāl* and *פּוּרְטוּגַל* *Pürtügāl* were used and are used today in Arabic and Hebrew to denote Portugal and the city of Porto,<sup>22</sup> since Portugal became an independent nation in 1139, though only in 1249 were the Portuguese able to “reconquer” the southernmost region of the newly-unified country, known as the Algarve (“the West”), until then still in Muslim hands: “The cities of al-Andalusian Gharb were probably little different from Muslim Lisbon at the time of its conquest in 1147. There also, the three religions coexisted openly.”<sup>23</sup>

*Al-Andalus* is where the coming together of Islam, Sephardic Judaism, and Christianity<sup>24</sup> produced a unique body of cultural and scientific works unequaled in human history. Though oftentimes idealized, this peaceful, and (almost always) tolerant, cooperation among the *أهل الكتاب* *Ahl al-Kitāb*, People of the Book, (711-11<sup>th</sup> century),<sup>25</sup> was able to foster a flourishing of the Arts and Sciences (e.g., agriculture, architecture, arithmetic, arts, chemistry, cosmography, geography, mathematics, medicine, music, philosophy, and all other sciences), thus opening the doors to the Portuguese Age of Exploration, 1415-1543. From now on, Africa, Asia, South East Asia and surrounding areas in Oceania, as well as the Americas were within easy reach of the Portuguese:

In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Portuguese met and took on Islam in Morocco, on Africa’s west and east coasts, in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, in India and the Malay archipelagos. In this meeting/confrontation, they put to use the Muslims’ centuries of experience with navigation in the Indian Ocean.<sup>26</sup>

Though officially begun in 1415 with the siege of Ceuta, in present-day Morocco, the Portuguese Age of Exploration was preceded by centuries of timid explorations of the Atlantic sea (north and south). Between 1307-1312, King Dinis (1279-1325), promoted the organization of the Portuguese Navy and in 1317 he appointed the Genoese Emmanuele di Pezagna,<sup>27</sup> known in Portugal as Manoel (de) Peçanha, as Admiral of Portugal. During the reign of King Afonso IV (1325-1357), the Portuguese undertook their first expedition to the Canary Islands (1335-1341). King Fernando (1367-1383), instead, founded the Grower of Ships Company in Lisbon and Porto. In 1413, a Prior of the Knights Hospitaller advised King João I (1385-1433), to capture Ceuta. Two years later, in 1415, King João I and his sons, Prince Duarte (1391-1438) and Prince Henrique

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<sup>22</sup> From the Latin *Portus Cale*, or rather, Port of Cale. The first name of the future, independent nation of Portugal was *Condado de Portu Cale*, i.e., County of Porto Cale (formed in 1093; independent in 1139; recognized as a sovereign nation in 1143).

<sup>23</sup> (Borges Coelho, 1994, 93).

<sup>24</sup> This period is known as *convivência/convivencia* (Portuguese/Spanish for living together).

<sup>25</sup> *أهل الكتاب* *Ahl al-Kitabi*, “People of the Book,” which include Jews and Christians, are those who believe in a sacred book, or rather, the Bible, the Torah, (*التَّوْرَى* *al-Tawrah*), the New Testament (*الْإِنْجِيل* *al-Injīl*), and the Psalms (*الزَّبُور* *al-Zabūr*). However, the category *Ahl Al-kitabi* also includes Zoroastrians, Sabaeans, Mineans, and any other group of people with whom Islam had contact during its territorial expansion outside the Arabian Peninsula, who believe(d) in only one god and who base(d) their religion on a holy book, as in the case of the Hindus. The ancient Sabeian and Minean pre-Islamic religions, though containing a few polytheistic elements, were not condemned by Islam. The kingdoms of Sheba, (930-115), and Mina (1200-650), the former in the South, the latter in the Southeast of the Arabian Peninsula, were civilizations that were deeply involved with the spice trade routes between Asia/the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

<sup>26</sup> (Borges Coelho, 1994, 93).

<sup>27</sup> Also spelled Passagna or Pessagno, corresponding to the Italianized form Passano. For more information, please see: (Peragallo, 1882).

(1394-1460),<sup>28</sup> eventually seized the North African city of Ceuta, thus officially starting the Portuguese Era of Discoveries (1415-1543) and Expansion which would eventually end on December 20, 1999, with the transfer of sovereignty of Macau to the People's Republic of China:

Ceuta had become wealthy because it was the outlet for caravan routes that delivered sub-Saharan gold, melegueta malagueta pepper, and slaves to the Mediterranean coast. These were the slaves sold to Arab, Genoan, and Catalan merchants, who exchanged them from grain but also for Asian spices brought in from the Levant.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, there are documents attesting to Portuguese presence in the Northern Sea as early as the last decades of the twelfth century, oftentimes with the precious help of the Genoese and Catalans who, in their turn, were also heirs of, thus they were benefitting from, the Jewish—mainly Sephardic, *Shuadic*, and *Italkian*—and Islamic cultures of the Mediterranean basin area:

Lisbon merchantmen had long been sailing the rough Atlantic waters north to Flanders and the Baltic ports with cargoes of olive oil, salt, and oranges. To the south, Portuguese fishermen had traced the African shore for hundreds of miles.<sup>30</sup>

As People of the Book, the status and role of the Iberian Jews (Sephardim) living under Muslim rule proved to be instrumental for the transmission of scientific knowledge and advancement in technology to Portugal and the rest of the then in-the-making world.

#### IV Sephardic Contributions to Iberia

Barely a hundred years after the Prophet's death, the Muslims had made it their task to master the then-known sciences. Founding institutes of advanced study (*Bait-ul-Hikmas*), they acquired an absolute ascendancy in the sciences that lasted for the next 350 years.<sup>31</sup>

On the Iberian Peninsula, the Islamic House of Knowledge, *بَيْتُ الْحِكْمَةِ Bait al-Hikma*, was also known as *الْمَدْرَسُ الْمُشْتَرَكُ al-Madrasah al-Mushatarak*, or rather, the Common Teaching Establishment, a unique place in the then-Muslim world, where Sephardic Jews, Christians, and Muslims assembled to talk about different topics, religious as well as secular, among the latter Philosophy and Science. Yet, Science was the key to all sciences

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<sup>28</sup> King João I had nine children with his wife, Queen Filipa de Lencastre, (1359-1415), and two children with his mistress, Inês Pires. A poet and a writer, Prince Duarte succeed his father as King Duarte I; whereas Prince Henrique, Duke of Viseu, also known as Prince Henry the Navigator, dedicated his entire life and fortune investigating the nautical sciences that allowed the Portuguese to eventually circumnavigate the African continent and reach the much sought-after spices of India and the rest of the Orient. At his death in 1460 the Portuguese had reached as far south as present-day Sierra Leone in West Africa.

<sup>29</sup> (Kronld, 2007, 115).

<sup>30</sup> (Kronld, 2007, 115).

<sup>31</sup> (Salam, 1987, 180).



and through which Humankind could reach all levels of Knowledge: “Dois são os deleites que a ciência necessariamente produz. Um deles é o que vem atrás do desejo de saber; como consequência sua.”<sup>32</sup>

Given the usefulness of the *المُشْتَرَكِ المَدَارِسِ al-Madāris al-Mushatarak*, (Common Teaching Establishments), these centers in fact:

[...] continued to function even after a number of Andalusian cities had been reconquered by Castile and Portugal. Their educational and scientific approach, which was truly unique among institutions of their kind, is described in various Arabic reference works on the history of the Peninsula.<sup>33</sup>

Jewish (mainly Sephardic) contribution to Islamic science is particularly visible during its early stages, or rather, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries of the Hegira. The presence and active participation of Jewish scholars in this transfer of knowledge is first noticeable in the Muslim East and then in the Muslim West, the latter covering the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula, or rather *al-Andalus*, home of the Sephardim:

The intellectual dependency of Muslim Iberia on the Levant made inevitable the reception of such advances in the west and the peculiar social configuration of *al-Andalus* facilitated their transmission to the Jewish and Christian worlds.<sup>34</sup>

In *Al-Andalus* Sephardic Jews, Christians, and Muslims also met at the *الْقُدْسِ al-Quds*, sanctuary, (pl. *الْأَقْدَاسِ al-aqdās*), where “each member of each faith” carried out “the duties that his own faith required of him.”<sup>35</sup> As mentioned earlier, in *Al-Andalus* the cultural exchange and coexistence among Christians, Muslims, and Sephardic Jews, oftentimes idealized as a perfect and peaceful time of coexistence, was perhaps the vehicle through which many aspects of the three religions were included, either subconsciously or overtly, into the social and respective religious canons which, in itself was already a collective reflection of a multilayered and multicultural society:

[...] it was in this pluralistic society that the Sephardim not only shared their knowledge with the other two groups but also embraced many local traditions and incorporated them into their own traditions ....<sup>36</sup>

For over two centuries then, namely between the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Sephardic Jews and Muslims in present-day Portugal and Spain “had an allegiance to centers or to issues outside” the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, Iberian Jews “consulted the rabbis and learned men of Iraq in matters of faith. Moreover, they were connected through marriage with their coreligionists in North Africa, Sicily, Egypt, and even India.”<sup>37</sup>

## V. Sephardic Identities

<sup>32</sup> (Borges Coelho, 1989, 1: 122). This quote, translated into Portuguese by the author, is from the famous Islamic theologian al-Ghazālī (1058-1111). “The gift of science to Humankind is twofold: one of them is knowledge, followed by science itself, a logic consequence of the first.” [Translation provided by the author].

<sup>33</sup> (Tazi, 1994, 62).

<sup>34</sup> (Reilly, 1993, 123).

<sup>35</sup> (Tazi, 1994, 62).

<sup>36</sup> (Lévy, 2005, 15).

<sup>37</sup> (Grabar, 1992, 7).

When a Portuguese Jew is faced with [...] Talmudists wishing to break his spirit and abolish his independence of thought, he will develop and flourish into a very high civilization.<sup>38</sup>

Sephardic identity (Portuguese and Spanish) is thus part of a larger phenomenon whereby all aspects of the(ir) history, culture, and society contribute to the makeup of what it meant/means being Sephardic, in the golden age of the Sephardim, in the Diaspora, as well as today.

Perhaps Spanish writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) best defined this phenomenon as *intrahistoria*, (intra-history),<sup>39</sup> or rather, the *modus vivendi et operandi* of a specific group of people throughout the centuries, as it is imbued with the many facets of every-day life, from childbirth to death. In other words, as Isaac Lévy summarized it, *intrahistoria* is:

[...] the intimacy of the people, with their beliefs, their customs, their superstitions, their dress style, their culinary traditions, their folk dances, their folktales, and much more, for this is the nature and spirit of the social group. These are the folkways that are transmitted to us from generation to generation. It is the chronicle of the attitude, the flavor of loyalty, as well as the thinking and the daily mannerisms of the folk.<sup>40</sup>

For many centuries then, before and especially after the Sephardic Diasporas, Portuguese and Spanish Jews and Crypto-Jews have thus cherished their particular way of being Jewish and Iberian, the latter term encompassing the entire Iberian mosaic of languages, dialects, and mores. As Marc Angel affirmed, there are indeed many different Sephardic cultures, each one independent of one another, though for historical reasons some may have borrowed from and/or influenced their fellow Sephardic neighbor(s):

Because Sephardi communities in different lands developed under differing cultural and historical conditions, it would be more proper to speak of Sephardi cultures than to one monolithic Sephardi culture.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, a quick glance at the literature available on Sephardic history, cultures, and societies, exhibits a robust collection of information and studies on the Sephardim of Spain and their descendants, whereas little or no attention at all is paid to the Portuguese Jews and their *diasporic* descendants throughout the world. This is unfortunate since during a little over four centuries, namely from c. 1400 to c. 1820, the *Gente da Nação Portuguesa* (People of the Portuguese Nation), have contributed more than their Iberian coreligionists to the advancement of science and technology, as well as to development of world economy.

Indeed, in the Caribbean and most parts of South America, along the coasts of West and East Africa, in India, Southeast Asia, and the Far East Portuguese Jews and New-Christians were essential in creating and maintaining trade links vital for the advancement of western societies in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Lúcio de Sousa has brilliantly observed, Sephardic Jews of the Diaspora were instrumental for establishing trade links in key areas of the world, particularly the Indian Ocean basin, Southeast Asia, and the Far East:

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<sup>38</sup> (Lazare, 1890), quoted in (Jissof, 2009, 68).

<sup>39</sup> (Unamuno, 1968).

<sup>40</sup> (Lévy, 2005, 14).

<sup>41</sup> (Angel, 1973, 79).

[...] the descendants of the Sephardic Jews in China and elsewhere represented an important economic contribution to the development of trade [...], as well as in establishing European economic interests in the Far East and beyond. As for the Macau-Philippines connection, it was actually created and controlled by the Sephardic Diaspora.<sup>42</sup>

## VI. Luso-Sephardic Voices

It was not until my sons were born that I gave much thought to what it meant to be Jewish.<sup>43</sup>

As for present-day voices of Luso-Sephardism, hailing from Portugal as well as from the Diaspora, worth mentioning are a few individuals who have made it a point of affirming the Portuguese component of Sephardic Studies.

Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausebaum is a direct descendant of *diasporic* Portuguese crypto-Jews. Rufina, a Property Consultant at Firzt Realty in Johannesburg, returned to traditional Judaism and created a website, *Saudades*,<sup>44</sup> dedicated to Sephardism, with a particular emphasis on the Sephardim originally from Portugal and now dispersed throughout the world. Even before her return to Judaism, Rufina was adamant about educating people on the important role of the Sephardim, particularly the Portuguese Jews, in the Portuguese Age of Discoveries and Expansion (1415-1543). Without their knowledge of science and technology, not to mention the important financial role of the Portuguese Jews and Crypto-Jews in the key economies of the time, the Portuguese would never have had the opportunity of holding an empire that embraced the major trade routes in the Americas (e.g., the Caribbean and Brazil), West and East Africa, India, Japan, and Southeast Asia. In fact, for more than three centuries the word Portuguese, for the good as well as for the bad, was synonymous with Jewish or New-Christian, almost always following along the trade commercial routes trodden by the Portuguese:

[...] Portuguese New Christians were now seen as a dangerous group in their own right. In time, the appellation “Portuguese” acquired the same cross-generational meaning that the term *converso* had attained at the turn of the sixteenth century: by the 1600s ... the word “Portuguese” identified New Christians who were descended from Portuguese immigrants. ... the designation “Portuguese” connoted a particularly grave religious menace as much as it connoted a purely racial one.<sup>45</sup>

Founded in the late decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with support from the Alberto Nahman Benveniste’s family, the *Cátedra de Estudos Sefarditas Alberto Benveniste, Universidade de Lisboa*, (The Alberto Benveniste

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<sup>42</sup> (Sousa, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> (Eve, 1996, 45).

<sup>44</sup> “SAUDADES-SEFARAD is an international, non-governmental organization put in place to assist Anūsīm communities of Portugal & Spain in returning to normative Sephardic Judaism as well as other community projects to help strengthen and improve knowledge of our Sephardi traditions.” <<http://www.saudades.org/>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

<sup>45</sup> (Graizbord, 2004, 53).

Center for Sephardic Studies at the University of Lisbon),<sup>46</sup> is a research and teaching center exclusively dedicated to the advancement of Portuguese Jewry. Led by an impeccable team of Portuguese and international researchers its journal and various publications cover the entire spectrum of the Sephardic world with a particular emphasis on the Portuguese Jews and Crypto-Jews. On January 1, 2002, the Benveniste family also founded in Paris the *Centre Alberto Benveniste d'études sépharades et d'histoire socioculturelle des Juifs* (Alberto Benveniste Centre for Sephardic Studies and Jewish Social and Cultural History) within the Religious Studies Department at the École Pratique des Hautes Études.<sup>47</sup>

The Lisbon-based *Museum of Portuguese Jewish History/Museu de História Judaica Portuguesa* is by far the best place, physical as well as virtual, to find information on and be acquainted with everything related to Portuguese Jewish History. Its aim is:

[...] to be a vital component in the cultural life of Lisbon. The MPJH invites a broad audience to explore Portuguese Jewish identity through online exhibitions, live tours, resources, books and videos. The Museum displays special exhibitions online, and will aim to become the largest consolidated resource for Jewish Portuguese artifacts and information in the world. MPJH has developed extensive institutional experience in preservation, conservation and collections management, supporting the fulfillment of its mission to present and preserve the material culture of Portuguese Jews.<sup>48</sup>

Despite its name, *Ladina* “is a Portuguese based registered non-profit society dedicated to rescuing the memory of Portuguese Jewish Marranos.”<sup>49</sup> To most people, particularly in the United States, the word Ladino brings to mind the language spoken by the Sephardim in present-day Spain and, as of 1492, elsewhere in the Diaspora, namely: Judeo-Spanish. It is indeed a pity that, despite the available scholarship on Ladino: Judeo-Portuguese, most people, including scholars, only know about, teach, and/or research Judeo-Spanish Ladino. *Ladina* is thus a welcoming addition to the few available resources on the Portuguese Jews and Crypto-Jews, including their language, thus giving present-day Portuguese Jews and their descendants a sense of belonging and great pride.

For almost forty years the *Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture* “has been dedicated to preserving and promoting the complex and centuries-old culture of the Sephardic communities of Turkey, Greece, the Balkans, Europe and the U.S.”<sup>50</sup> Though Portuguese Jewry is obviously contemplated in the greater scheme, there appears to be much concentration on the Spanish component of Sephardism. Additionally, the *Foundation* also aims at protecting and promoting Ladino which it calls “the Sephardic language.” Unfortunately, though, there is no mention of Portuguese Ladino.

Founded in August 1990 by the late Rabbi Joshua Stampfer (1922-2019), of Portland, Oregon, and Dr. Stanley M. Hordes (1949- )—Adjunct Research Professor at the Latin American and Iberian Institute at the University of New Mexico—the *Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies* is committed to “fostering research and networking of information and ideas into the contemporary development of crypto Jews of Iberian origins.

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<sup>46</sup> *Cátedra de Estudos Sefarditas Alberto Benveniste da Universidade de Lisboa*. <<http://www.catedra-alberto-benveniste.org/index.asp>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

<sup>47</sup> *Centre Alberto Benveniste d'études sépharades et d'histoire socioculturelle des Juifs*. <<http://www.centrealbertobenveniste.org/>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

<sup>48</sup> *Museum of Portuguese Jewish History/Museu de História Judaica Portuguesa*. <<http://mpjh.org/Welcome.html>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

<sup>49</sup> *Ladina*. <<http://ladina.blogspot.com/>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

<sup>50</sup> *Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Cultures*. <<http://www.sephardicstudies.org/>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

Additionally, it provides a venue for the descendants of crypto-Jews, scholars, and other interested parties to network and discuss pertinent issues<sup>51</sup> Iberian Jews and Crypto-Jews are studied and researched alongside with *Italkian* Jews and Crypto-Jews. Their journal, *Journal of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian Crypto Jews* (JOSPIC-J), is in fact a great example of a sincere interest in promoting and encouraging scholarly investigation in these still not-very-often trodden research paths, particularly the Portuguese and Italian components of the abovementioned Jewish and crypto-Jewish triad.

Founded in March 2011, the *Rede de Judiarias/Centro de Estudos Judaicos Adriano Vasco Rodrigues*,<sup>52</sup> (Network of Jewish Quarters/The Adriano Vasco Rodrigues Center for Judaic Studies), is an association devoted to the enhancement and promotion of pre-expulsion/forced conversion to Catholicism Judaic sites in northern and central Portugal once thriving centers of Sephardic life, namely: Belmonte, Castelo de Vide, Freixo de Espada à Cinta, Guarda, Lamego, Penamacor, Tomar, Torres Vedras, and Trancoso. The purpose is to bring back to life the splendor of these Sephardic communities and restore the lost Portuguese-Jewish identity through activities that highlight the cultural and scientific contributions of the Portuguese Jews to Portuguese and world history.

In March 2012, at the first *Conferência Internacional sobre a Herança Judaica nos Açores*, International Conference on Jewish Heritage in the Azores, Ponta Delgada, São Miguel, Azores, the late Maria de Fátima Silva de Sequeira Dias (1958-2013)—professor in the Department of Management and Economics and renowned scholar of the history of the Jews in the Azores at the University of the Azores—presented an impeccably well-documented foldable guide map to the major Jewish sites on seven of the nine islands of the Archipelago, *Herança Judaica nos Açores*, (Jewish Heritage in the Azores).<sup>53</sup>

In the United States since 1995, journalist and freelancer Nuno Guerreiro Josué (1969-) is a proud descendant of Portuguese new-Christians persecuted by the Lisbon and Évora Inquisition Tribunals. His blog *Rua da Judiaria*<sup>54</sup> (Jewish Quarter) is a wonderful collection of articles, written in Portuguese, on a variety of topics on Portuguese-Jewish and Crypto-Jewish history, culture, and society.

In pre-1498 and post-1801 Portugal,<sup>55</sup> as well as elsewhere in the Sephardic Diaspora, Portuguese Jews and Crypto-Jews were able to maintain their Sephardic identity, despite the many adversities they had to endure. Either as openly Jewish or as crypto-Jews, the Sephardim of Portuguese stock fought tightly to preserve their distinctiveness. The same holds true today:

In Portugal the perceived “Jewishness” of *converso* society was not so unequivocally a product of the imagination. Here the “Men of the Nation”

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<sup>51</sup> *The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies*. <<http://cryptojews.com/>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

<sup>52</sup> “A Rede de Judiarias de Portugal - Rotas de Sefarad é uma associação com carácter público mas de direito privado e que tem por fim uma actuação conjunta, na defesa do património urbanístico, arquitectónico, ambiental, histórico e cultural, relacionado com a herança judaica.” “The *Network of Jewish Quarters – Sephardic Routes* is a public association funded privately which aims at protecting the urban, architectural, environmental, historical, and cultural heritage related to the [Portuguese] Jewish past.” [translation provided by the author]. *Rede de Judiarias/Centro de Estudos Judaicos Adriano Vasco Rodrigues*. <<http://www.redejudiariasportugal.com/>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

<sup>53</sup> Luciano Barcelos. “Açores querem recuperar herança deixada pelos judeus. RPT Açores: <<http://www.rtp.pt/acoeres/index.php?article=25714&layout=10&rss=0&t=Acores-querem-recuperar-heranca-deixada-pelos-judeus-video.rtp&tm=10&visual=3>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

<sup>54</sup> *Rua da Judiaria*. <<http://ruadajudiaria.com/>>. [information retrieved: July 8, 2020].

<sup>55</sup> In 1801 Portuguese Jews and Crypto-Jews of the Diaspora were invited back to Portugal to stimulate economy. In 1821 the Inquisition was finally abolished in Portugal.

tended to cling tenaciously to Jewish identity, and actual Judaizing among them was not unusual.<sup>56</sup>

I would like to conclude this study with the following note: a scholarly article on the Sephardic Diaspora throughout the world (1492-1820) that I authored in 2013<sup>57</sup> was instrumental for the implementation of the "Law of Return for Portuguese Jews."

Indeed, on January 29, 2015, the Portuguese Government approved changes to the law that gave Portuguese citizenship to descendants of Portuguese Jews expelled in 1497 and who escaped Portugal because they were later forced to remain in Portugal (1497-1498) and convert to Catholicism.

Portugal's law naturalizing descendants of Portuguese Jews was passed by the Portuguese Parliament on July 29, 2013, as a result of the April 11, 2013, speech presented by José Ribeiro e Castro (1953- ), then member of the European Parliament for the Social Democratic Party-People's Party (CDS-PP).

During his address to the Portuguese Parliament, Mr. Ribeiro e Castro mentioned my work and read three excerpts from my scholarly article where the many contributions of the Portuguese Jews to world history were analyzed. To-date, fifty-one thousand descendants of Portuguese Jews asked for and obtained Portuguese citizenship,<sup>58</sup> thus closing the loop in their centuries-old quest for belonging and identity.

As of late, though, some members of the Portuguese Parliament are considering restricting this law in order to avoid abuse, or rather, using this decree in order to gain access to a European passport and the consequent freedom to live anywhere in the European Union.<sup>59</sup>

Understandably, this is problem; yet, the *diasporic* descendants of the Portuguese Jews who were forced to leave their homeland have a right to reclaim their identity so that they can eventually start leveraging their age-old survival skills in גלות *Galut* (exile) in order to carve for themselves a new place within a society that now is, or should be, accepting them with open arms.

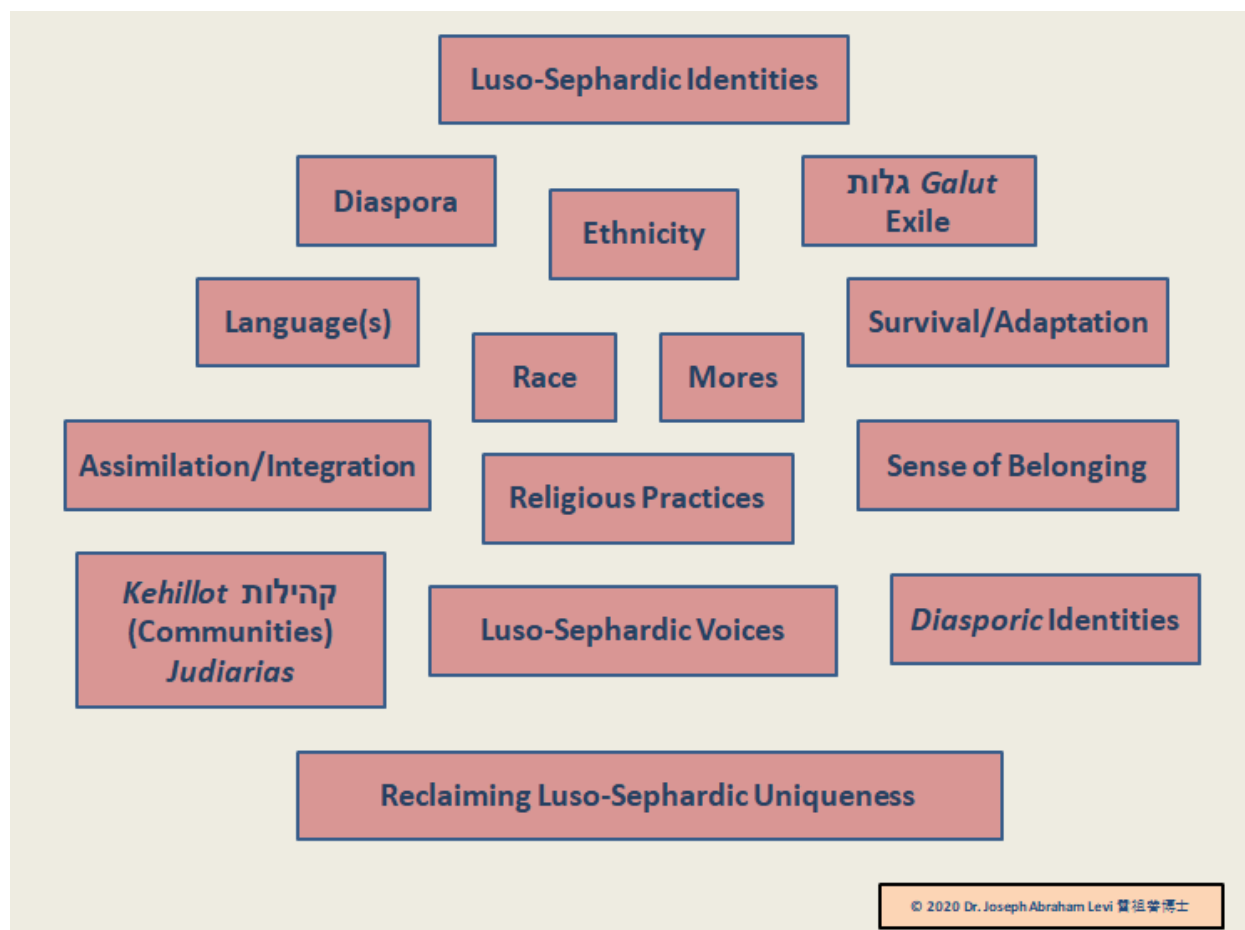
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<sup>56</sup> (Bodian, 1994, 58).

<sup>57</sup> (Levi, 2003d).

<sup>58</sup> (Lira, 2020).

<sup>59</sup> "PSD aperta condições para nacionalidade a descendentes de judeus sefarditas." July 7, 2020. <<https://www.mundoportugues.pt/psd-aperta-condicoes-para-nacionalidade-a-descendentes-de-judeus-sefarditas/>>.



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