

Abstract

Upon their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, which began in 1391 and culminated in the issuing of the Alhambra Decree in 1492, the Sephardim who migrated to the Ottoman Empire continued and adjusted their cultural and religious traditions in the diaspora. A central element of the Sephardi culture's survival was the continued use of Judeo-Spanish, which descended from dialects of Ibero-Romance to become the heritage language of the Sephardi people in the diaspora. This thesis explores women's usage of Judeo-Spanish in the sixteenth century -- the first full century after the 1492 expulsion -- and their contributions to the language's preservation. The text of Rabbi Meir Benveniste's *Seder Nashim* (1565), as well as the thematic and lyrical content of various Ottoman Sephardi *romance* and *kantiga* ballad traditions, suggest that Sephardi women, who used Judeo-Spanish as their primary form of communication during the sixteenth century, influenced the language's cultural significance and the preservation of certain lexical and grammatical features.

Key words: *Judeo-Spanish, Sephardi Judaism, women, language preservation*

Mother Tongue:

Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Sephardi Women's Contributions to Judeo-Spanish

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Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction.....	5
Chapter II: Sephardi Diasporic Experience and Identity Formation.....	23
Chapter III: Sephardi Women in the Ottoman Empire.....	42
Chapter IV: <i>Seder Nashim</i> : Judeo-Spanish and Religious Practice.....	61
Chapter V: Women's Voices in Judeo-Spanish Balladry.....	72
Chapter VI: Conclusions.....	87
Works Cited.....	94

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and structure of argument

Especially during the past century, the Judeo-Spanish language has been the subject of linguistic investigation by a select but growing number of researchers. The language, which is rooted in Jewish varieties of the Romance language spoken in the Iberian Peninsula before the 1492 expulsion, has been the subject of diverse scholarly works which address an assortment of linguistic concerns. During the late nineteenth century, academic interest in Judeo-Spanish surged, and several books and articles from the period discussed the language's characteristics and origins. Of particular interest were topics such as regional dialects, language features from both Iberian and Ottoman origin, literature, orthography, and oral folk genres (Bunis, 2018, p. 214). Spanish researchers in particular were invested in Judeo-Spanish's potential to reveal new information about peninsular Spanish's history and oral traditions, an interest which especially increased after World War II, when the Sephardi population was targeted in the Holocaust (Bunis, 2018, p. 195). Modern linguists, including those studying Romance, Hispanic, Semitic, Turkish, and Balkan languages, all have a stake in studying the language's features and origins due to its rich history of contact with other languages and the phonological, morphological, and syntactic results of these influences (Bunis, 2018, p. 188). Contemporary approaches to Judeo-Spanish linguistics

vary significantly, ranging from morphosyntactic and phonological analysis to literary documentation and sociolinguistic study. As this thesis enters the scholarly discussion of Judeo-Spanish, it aims to combine many of these different elements into a synthesized and focused examination of Judeo-Spanish's development throughout the sixteenth century. More specifically, I analyze the role that Sephardi women in the Ottoman Empire played in the use of their language during the first century following the Alhambra Decree of 1492, which contained the order for the expulsion or conversion of all Jewish people living in the Iberian Peninsula. I argue that these women were vitally important to Judeo-Spanish's advancement and that their command of the private, domestic sphere, as well as their contributions to preserving the traditions of Sephardi Judaism, facilitated the continued production and early standardization processes of their language.

In this introductory chapter, I present some of the key issues that predated Judeo-Spanish's development in the sixteenth century, including the sociopolitical climate of pre-Inquisition Iberia and the history of the Iberian Jewish experience. I then describe the language known today as Judeo-Spanish, focusing on its differentiation from other medieval Iberian dialects of Romance, as well as the features that it retained from these dialects. Finally, I introduce the historical event of the Expulsion of 1492, providing a geographical and sociological background to the immigration of Sephardim and their language to the Iberian diaspora. Within this thesis, I focus on the Jewish communities that immigrated to the Ottoman Empire. Those who moved to North Africa, especially Morocco, spoke *Haketía*, the western dialect of Judeo-Spanish which differs from the eastern variety studied in this thesis.

In Chapter II, I further locate the Judeo-Spanish language within its historical context, discussing the collective identity beginning to be formed by the Sephardim in the

sixteenth-century diaspora. It was during these first years of relocation, I maintain, that the loosely connected communities of Jewish Iberia began to envision themselves as a distinct social and ethnic group defined by their origins in Iberia and their migration to the Ottoman Empire. This sense of cultural unity was tied to the conservation of Judeo-Spanish, the Sephardi heritage language. Chapter III also sets the stage for my main argument, as within it I detail the role of Sephardi women within their communities. I draw from multiple sources, including collections of Sephardi rabbinical responsa, which include both the witness testimonies and the rabbis' judgments of Judaic legal matters. In analyzing these texts, I describe how Sephardi women were tasked with the responsibility of maintaining the traditions that defined the Iberian Jewish home life. As Sephardi communities adjusted to life in the Ottoman Empire, they preserved their cultural identity through their interactions in the synagogue and the home. While men tended to dominate the synagogue, the home was traditionally under the command of the women, and I discuss women's contributions to the preservation of cultural values and practices, including the Judeo-Spanish language, within this space. This chapter explores questions of Sephardi women's societal roles -- as dictated by rabbis -- as well as their experiences in financial, familial, and communal matters.

In the following two chapters, I develop my central argument by connecting the Sephardi woman's identity to the preservation of Judeo-Spanish. In Chapter IV, I focus on Judeo-Spanish's use in religious practice. The language became an important cultural marker for Jewish life and community. I analyze a sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish women's *siddur* (prayer book) in order to describe the social and religious role that Judeo-Spanish played in the Sephardi home. The prayer book, an element of the corpus of existing sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish works, provides rabbinical teachings that identify the

author's attitude toward Jewish women's religious responsibilities. The language of this prayer book also reflects an informal variety of Judeo-Spanish spoken by women in the home. Women's religious practice, which usually took place in the home rather than the male-dominated synagogue, ensured the continuation of Jewish traditions, including their language.

Next, in Chapter V, I draw upon the themes and lyrics of Judeo-Spanish *romances* and *kantigas*, or traditional ballads, to highlight the significance of women's role in the preservation of Sephardi oral traditions. These songs, often sung by women (though men also played a part in their performance and reception) and featuring female characters, provided another context in which the language continued to be used in the diaspora. This continuing tradition preserved the communicatory and cultural functions of Judeo-Spanish for centuries. Modeled off the *romances* popular throughout Iberia and mirroring similar European and North African ballad traditions, Judeo-Spanish *romances* and their *kantiga* counterparts conveyed the values of Sephardi communities from multiple perspectives. Although these ballads varied in mood and theme, common topics included romantic love, family, and morality. Women's impact on the content and production of Judeo-Spanish songs is explored through the analysis of several ballads from the sixteenth century.

The final chapter discusses these findings and offers conclusions. As previously mentioned, a growing number of scholarly works broach the topic of Judeo-Spanish, usually focusing on its linguistic features (especially morphology, syntax, and phonology) or its development across history. This thesis contributes to that discourse, analyzing and bringing into a dialogue a variety of approaches and sources to create an interdisciplinary consideration of the preservation of Judeo-Spanish in the sixteenth century. Judeo-Spanish is currently facing endangerment, as Sephardi communities, severely diminished in size

since the Holocaust, continue to use the majority languages of their areas of residence and do not often have extensive knowledge of their heritage language. In this context, it is especially important to understand how the language has been successfully preserved until now. This paper will provide not only a preliminary analysis of the Sephardi woman's role in the maintenance of sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish, but also an invitation to consider gender as a prominent factor in the study of linguistic development and conservation, as well as a recognition of the Jewish women without whose contributions this language might have been lost centuries ago.

Judeo-Spanish and Sephardi experience

Judeo-Spanish is the language of the Sephardim, the Jews who originally populated medieval Sepharad, the Hebrew name for the Iberian Peninsula. Sephardi Jews and their language can now be found across the globe, due in large part to the diaspora created by their expulsion from Iberia in 1492. However, the Sephardim originally enjoyed a long period of residence in the peninsula. During the early Middle Ages, Jewish cultures in Spanish and Portuguese kingdoms prospered under Muslim rule. Multi-faith cooperation ensured the proliferation of cultural, artistic, and economic achievements. Although the majority of the Jewish population lived modestly, working as merchants or artisans, wealthy Jewish families could be found in both major cities and non-urban areas, and the population at large thrived economically, socially, and politically (Ray, 2013, p. 24).

However, as Christian kingdoms conquered more territory in Iberia throughout the medieval period, societal tolerance for non-Christian cultures declined. The widening influence of Christian monarchs led to religious persecution of Muslims and Jews on both legal and social levels. In 1391, the peninsula witnessed a surge in anti-Jewish violence as

riots, massacres, and forced conversions prompted a series of migrations away from the peninsula (Ray, 2013, p. 3). Riots occurred in Andalusia and Castile, and the increase in anti-Jewish sentiment spread to Córdoba, Toledo, Valencia, Majorca, and Catalonia (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, p. 18). Iberian Jews seeking a home free from persecution and violence migrated from the peninsula to North Africa, where tens of thousands of Jewish exiles would join them a century later (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, p. 18). Ray (2013) identifies this year as "the first phase of the Sephardi Diaspora" (p. 3). The mass conversions were the beginning of the formation of Iberian *converso* communities, who publicly converted to Christianity but at times practiced Jewish traditions in secret. However, many Spanish and Portuguese Jews who remained in Iberia were able to openly practice Judaism. Despite the numerous governmental policies and public attitudes that put the Iberian Jews at risk, they strategically navigated the legal and social networks necessary to preserve their societies (Ray, 2013, p. 6). Their partially self-sustaining economic and legal system allowed them to resist oppression from outside forces. When the repeated instances of violence and repression did not result in the complete Christianization of the peninsula, King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile provided an ultimatum: by July 31, 1492, all practicing Jews would have to either leave the kingdoms' territories or convert to Christianity. This decree followed other similar expulsions across Christian Europe. Waves of Jewish migration across various kingdoms and empires had been shifting sociopolitical climates across Europe and North Africa during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The 1492 Edict of Expulsion, which displaced tens of thousands of Iberian Jews, marked a new era in the Jewish diaspora (Ray, 2013, p. 1).

Although the Jews had made their homes in Iberia for centuries before 1492, it was only after the mass expulsion that a common identity based on their experiences in Iberia

and the diaspora began to develop. Prior to 1492, Iberian Jewish communities were loosely connected and predominantly regional. Identification with the kingdom or city of residence preceded any notion of a unifying cultural identity (Ray, 2013, pp. 3, 14). While these communities followed similar religious practices, the importance of common religious experience was at times superseded by the needs or desires of specific persons or groups (Ray, 2013, p. 12). Religious law was questioned and adjusted, as the Jewish religion encourages, and people with individual issues often brought their cases to rabbis, a practice that continued into the diaspora. Many of these cases are documented in the responsa collected by dedicated modern researchers, some of which will be further explored in Chapter III. These responsa demonstrate how diaspora communities confronted individual cases of Judaic jurisprudence while navigating issues of ethnicity, displacement, and cultural preservation. The cultural shift in Sephardi communities during their migration from the Iberian Peninsula after 1492 prompted the beginnings of a larger group identity connected by the unifying experience of Jewish life both before and after the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula. As Ray (2013) explains:

[B]y attaching themselves to the already established concept of Sepharad, the Jews of Christian Iberia were thus able to lay claim to a proud cultural legacy within the Jewish world while maintaining a strong association with the Iberian cities and kingdoms in which they lived. (p. 13)

It is this conception of a shared Sephardi experience that connects Sephardi identity with Judeo-Spanish. Prior to the expulsion, Judeo-Spanish had not yet fully distinguished itself as separate from other fifteenth-century Ibero-Romance dialects, and regional differences appeared based on influence from nearby contact languages (Benaim, 2012, pp.

123, 128; Ray, 2013, p. 14). This led to widespread dialect variation, which made the speech of diasporic Sephardi communities:

" . . . highly chaotic at all linguistic levels, with wide variation among speakers".

This process of linguistic leveling would have begun to materialize among the first group of Sephardim born in their new cities (the second generation) and would have generally stabilized among the third generation, no earlier than the middle of the 16th century. (Kirschen, 2018, p. 3)

The strengthening of a sense of collective Sephardi identity promulgated by the diasporic connection between different Iberian Jewish groups was associated with the linguistic processes happening to Judeo-Spanish during the sixteenth century. This emerging Sephardi identity and its relationship with Judeo-Spanish will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Judeo-Spanish language contact and dialectical difference

It is important to note that while I refer to the varieties of Ibero-Romance spoken by Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire with the singular language name 'Judeo-Spanish,' these dialects formed a continuum that had not yet fully standardized itself by the sixteenth century (Kirschen, 2018, p. 3). There was certainly variation among these dialects:

Jews from different parts of the Peninsula spoke differently, before and after 1492.

Whatever the links were between one *judería* and another (and they were presumably considerable in some cases), it is surely the case that the Jews of Cordoba [sic] did not speak in the same way as those of Toledo, or as those of Aguilar de Campó, let alone those of Barcelona or Lisbon. (Penny, 1992, pp. 125-6)

Henceforth, when speaking of 'Judeo-Spanish,' I am grouping together different varieties of Jewish Spanish spoken across the Ottoman Empire -- I use 'Judeo-Spanish' to distinguish these dialects from the western variant, Haketía. This grouping of dialects is necessary since this thesis discusses how Sephardi identity influenced women's use of Judeo-Spanish. Although each dialect differed, the commonality of Iberian Jewish linguistic interaction unites the different regional varieties of Judeo-Spanish. Bunis (2004) notes that early Jewish Ibero-Romance "exhibited phonological, grammatical, lexical, syntactic and stylistic features which distinguished it from the Ibero Romance of non-Jews" (p. 106). Thus, the simplification that I use when speaking of 'Judeo-Spanish' as opposed to 'Judeo-Spanish dialects spoken across the Ottoman Empire' has a basis in linguistic and sociological reality. It resonates with the growing cultural identity that Ottoman Sephardim developed during their first century spent in the diaspora.

Medieval Judeo-Spanish is sometimes conflated with Ladino¹, the scholarly term for the word-for-word translation of Hebrew into Iberian dialects that was used in reprinting the Torah and other religious texts. However, unlike Ladino, spoken Judeo-Spanish was a language with its own syntax and lexicon, containing attributes that were both Hebrew and Romance in nature (Ayoun & Garib, 2003, p. 23). Miller (cited in Benaim, 2012) suggests that the early mixing of the two languages may have occurred based on rabbinic code-switching:

[Miller] believes that language mixing was an acceptable and valued practice because Jews identified with both the secular and Jewish worlds in their linguistic use. Their ability to draw on either Castilian or Hebrew was evident in their legal

¹ While "Judeo-Spanish" and "Ladino" are used interchangeably by the general public to refer to the Sephardi community's spoken heritage language, this thesis uses the scholarly definitions of Ladino and Judeo-Spanish to clarify the distinction between the two modes of communication in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

ordinances . . . [which] represented the Jews' dual loyalties, their commitment both to the religious tradition and to the king . . . (p. 19)

The use of Hebrew alongside Castilian certainly helped to distinguish early Judeo-Spanish dialects from other varieties of Romance. However, it was not until some time after entering the Iberian diaspora that Judeo-Spanish dialects lost their mutual intelligibility with non-Jewish Iberian dialects.

Although during the sixteenth century the language had many different regional dialects, common features among the spoken varieties of Judeo-Spanish can be identified at this stage in the language's development (Benaïm, 2012, p. 129). Judeo-Spanish, for the most part, preserved Iberian Romance's lexicon, although semantic changes and the replacement of Romance words and morphemes with borrowings made it distinct from other peninsular dialects (Benaïm, 2012, p. 164). Many phonological features are rooted in varieties of Romance from across the peninsula (Penny, 1992, p. 125). For example, Judeo-Spanish retained *yeísmo* (often representing the sound in Hebrew script with ם in written texts), which was common to many different dialects of Iberian Romance. Additionally, initial /f/, retained at this time in dialects as far spread as Portugal, León, and Catalonia, is present in some dialects of Judeo-Spanish but has been replaced in modern Spanish by silent *h*: *fijo* → *hijo* (Penny, 1992, p. 131; Benaïm, 2012, pp. 141, 133). According to Penny (1992):

Judeo-Spanish alternation between /f/ and /ø/ cannot have been inherited simply from Old Castilian, but is evidence of the dialect-contact situation from which modern Judeo-Spanish emerges. We might expect the alternation between /f/ and /ø/ to lead, through phonological simplification, to the loss of /f/ [as in modern Spanish], and the persistence of this phoneme in Judeo-Spanish can be regarded as a

further token of the substantial number of non-Castilian speakers who were integral to the early Judeo-Spanish communities outside the Peninsula. (p. 131)

Some differences from other Ibero-Romance dialects indicate that Judeo-Spanish speakers preserved older Latin forms in their speech which were dropped by other dialect speakers, such as the grammatical gender for words like *fin* 'end' (*la fin* in Judeo-Spanish; *el fin* in Castilian) (Benaim, 2012, p. 162; Borovaya, 2017, pp. 40-1). In addition to older preserved forms, phonological innovations also distinguished Judeo-Spanish from non-Jewish varieties of Ibero-Romance. Examples include the emergence of the labio-velar on-glide (*padre* → *pwadre* 'father', *gato* → *gwato* 'cat') and the metathesis of /rd/ to /dr/, as well as palatalization of dorsal stops /k/ and /g/ after stressed /i/ (Bradley, n.d., p. 8; Benaim, 2012, pp. 148, 145). Additionally, word-final vowel + *-is* was often pronounced as vowel + *š* (e.g. *seis* → *seš* 'six'), a distinct characteristic of Jewish Romance that appeared before the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula (Bunis, 2018, p. 198).

Judeo-Spanish also retained morphosyntactic features from Romance. Examples include use of archaic and poetic *quies* in place of *quieres* ('you want/love') as well as the retention of *vos* with second-person plural verb conjugation and the form *vuestra* (e.g. *vuestra merced*) (Benaim, 2012, pp. 156, 135). Additionally, *mas* is used to mean 'but,' rather than *pero*, which Benaim (2012) suggests might be either an early literary Castilian borrowing or a much later borrowing from Italian in the diaspora (p. 161). Medieval diminutives (*-iko*) frequently appear in sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish texts, evidence that this feature was also retained in spoken Judeo-Spanish after the Sephardim were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula (Benaim, 2012, p. 163).

However, Judeo-Spanish was not identical to non-Jewish Romance dialects, and the language shows influence from contact languages as Jews traveled from the Iberian

Peninsula to the Ottoman Empire. The first language to distinguish Judeo-Spanish from other Iberian dialects was Hebrew, which in addition to contributing to early Iberian Jewish code-switching added various lexical, morphosyntactic, and semantic features to Judeo-Spanish. The influence of Hebrew on Judeo-Spanish speakers' language began while the Sephardim resided in Iberia and continued for centuries afterward. Schwarzwald (cited in Benaim, 2012) proposes two stages through which Hebrew came to affect the Judeo-Spanish lexicon (p. 166). Firstly, words with Jewish religious or cultural meaning were borrowed. These words filled lexical gaps that persisted in gentile Romance. In contrast, the second stage of linguistic interference was not caused by the need for new terms. During this stage, the words that were borrowed did not refer explicitly to Jewish custom or practice. Instead, many of the later Hebrew borrowings referred to taboo or otherwise negative concepts such as death, violence, poverty, and misfortune (Benaim, 2012, p. 167). The use of the Hebrew word over the available Romance term has syntactic and pragmatic implications: the Hebrew word emphasizes the cultural and religious weight of the negativity expressed (Benaim, 2012, p. 167). Hebrew words referring to economic matters were also frequently used in sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish. In general, Benaim (2012) notes, the collection of *responso* that she addresses in her book tended to feature more Hebraisms when the matter at hand was financial (p. 167). In trading situations, where Sephardim conducted business both within and outside their own communities, using Hebrew allowed Sephardim to communicate with non-Iberian Jews about financial matters with ease (Benaim, 2012, p. 173). In most other sixteenth-century texts, Hebrew is mainly limited to terminology connected to Judaism or taboo terms, demonstrating that Hebrew's influence on Judeo-Spanish was a continuing process that affected the language over centuries (Bunis, 2004).

Judeo-Spanish also featured phonological and morphological evidence of Hebrew language contact. Distinctions such as /s/ & /z/ and /b/ & /v/, which did not occur in other dialects of Romance but did in Hebrew, exist in Judeo-Spanish, indicating Hebrew's influence of the language beyond the lexical level (Benaim, 2012, pp. 136, 134). Many of the words that Judeo-Spanish borrowed from Hebrew experienced hispanized phonology, such as *bet din* (H) → *bed din* (J-S) or *Ššabat* (H) → *Sabá, Ššaba* (J-S) (Benaim, 2012, p. 75). Linguistic influence from Hebrew on Judeo-Spanish also occurred at the morphological level in what Benaim (2012) refers to as hybrid morphology, which is a common feature amongst languages in the first stages of language contact (p. 163). For instance, the Judeo-Spanish word *ladronim* is composed of the Castilian word *ladrón* (standard plural *ladrones*, 'robbers') and the Hebrew masculine plural ending *-im* (Benaim, 2012, p. 163). A similar construction is present in periphrastic verbs, which are composed of a Romance auxiliary verb and conjugation but contain a Hebrew meaning-bearing morpheme (Bunis, 2004, p. 117). For example, *ser mekabel* ('to receive') is made up of the Romance auxiliary verb *ser* ('to be') and the Hebrew meaning element *mekabel* ('he receives' or 'he who receives'). Hebrew morphemes in periphrastic verbs could receive either Hebrew or Romance markings for gender or number, depending on the verb in question (Bunis, 2004, p. 117).

Hebrew was not the only language to have a significant influence on the Judeo-Spanish lexicon and grammar. Balkan languages, especially Ottoman Turkish, were the source of many Judeo-Spanish borrowings (Benaim, 2012, p. 183). During the first century of Sephardi settlement in the Ottoman Empire, especially in and around Istanbul, loanwords from Turkish were a natural consequence of contact with Judeo-Spanish. The majority of these borrowings concern financial or judicial matters, but clothing is another common

subject (Benaim, 2012, p. 183). Additionally, interaction between Judeo-Spanish and other nearby Romance languages led to lexical borrowings. Judeo-Spanish loanwords from other Romance dialects include Portuguese *preto* ('black') and Italian-derived *esquiraso* (standard Italian *schirazzo*, 'boat with square scales') (Benaim, 2012, p. 185; Borovaya, 2017, pp. 40-1). Greek, notably, had a significant influence on Ottoman Judeo-Spanish, since some Jewish Ibero-Romance speakers were descended from speakers of Jewish Greek, and the Iberian Jewish exiles also encountered Greek speakers in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century (Bunis, 2004, p. 121). One example is the borrowing of the word *apotropos* (Greek *epitrapos*, 'guardian') (Benaim, 2012, p. 185). Another Greek loanword was the verb *meldar* (Greek *meletaō*, 'to contemplate or study sacred texts'), which in Judeo-Spanish was used to refer to Jewish religious study and reading (Bunis, 2004, p. 121). And whereas many Arabic borrowings made their way to Ottoman Judeo-Spanish via Turkish, some also came from the Jewish Arabic spoken in the Iberian Peninsula during the times of Muslim occupation. These borrowings include names and proper nouns like *Djamila* (Arabic *Jamila*, 'beautiful') and *Saragosi* (Arabic *Zaragoza*, 'Granada'), as well as terms like *al-ḥabáqa* (Arabic *al-ḥábaq*, 'basil'). Judeo-Spanish, contrary to other varieties of Romance dialects, retained the *ḥ* phoneme in Arabic loanwords, since borrowings from Hebrew had already introduced the sound to the language's phonetic inventory (Bunis, 2004, p. 125). While these other languages spoken in the Ottoman Empire had less effect on Judeo-Spanish's structure than Ibero-Romance or Hebrew, they characterize the multicultural experience of Judeo-Spanish speakers as the dialect continuum began to standardize. Sometimes a single feature shows the effect of a great number of contact languages that influenced sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish. For instance, Montoliu and van der Auwera (2004) consider Judeo-Spanish conditionals to be influenced by Greek,

Turkish, and Ibero-Romance (p. 491). In summary, Judeo-Spanish, even by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, combined archaic Romance structure with lexical and grammatical material from a variety of contact languages (Bunis, 2004, p. 106). It is characteristics like these that show Judeo-Spanish's development across time and geographical location.

Sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish dialects, as the above description of language contact throughout the diaspora shows, varied based on geographical location. Haketía, for instance, features a stronger influence from Arabic due to its speakers' residence in North Africa. Eastern Judeo-Spanish, on the other hand, received most of its Arabic loanwords via Turkish (Benaim, 2012, pp. 185-6). But geographical location was not the only factor that could cause differences in dialects. Sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish, like most languages, had dialectal difference linked to socioeconomic class. As Bunis (2004) writes:

Looking closely at some of the writings from the period, one finds hints of a gap which may well have existed between the variety or varieties of language used by a small intellectual elite, including an 'official' chancellery variety of medieval Jewish Ibero-Romance of the kind which most of the surviving formal documents perhaps illustrate, and the popular language of the everyday medieval Iberian Jew. (p. 108)

The differences between these registers was clearly noticed by those who spoke and wrote using them. Rabbi Moše Almosnino distinguished between his Jewish *romance* and the language spoken by the common people, whom he referred to as *el vulgo* (Bunis, 2004 p. 112). This distinction, coupled with already-existing socioeconomic relationships, led to prejudice from the speakers of Almosnino's elite Romance toward the variety spoken by those in the class below them. Rabbi Almosnino himself referred to the common people as "people who are not learned/wise, as is commonly true of most rustic people," and he

recommended that "their opinions on [religious or intellectual] matters not be heeded" (Bunis, 2004, p. 112).

Benaim (2012) argues that Judeo-Spanish's formal variety was "highly respected" and thus was often used in official publications like rabbis' responsa or translations of *siddurim* or parts of the Torah (pp. 18, 3). Code-switching between Romance dialects and Hebrew, both before and after the expulsion, was common, demonstrating the Sephardi tie to both secular and religious ways of life in the pre-Expulsion Iberian Peninsula (Benaim, 2012, p. 19). In its 'vulgar' popular form, Judeo-Spanish was used in conversation, testimony, prayers, and songs. Some lexical differences existed between the sociolects: whereas upper-class Romance's word for violent, angry, or depraved was *airado*, the popular classes might say *kruel*, and where Almosnino's Romance preferred the word *pezadilya* ('little weight') to refer to a phantom, the 'vulgar' dialect used *demonio* (Bunis, 2004, p. 114).

A number of different types of Judeo-Spanish writing will be explored in this thesis. The third chapter presents an analysis of Judeo-Spanish testimonies and legal decisions recorded in the rabbinical responsa of the sixteenth century as part of a discussion of Sephardi women's roles in their communities. Unlike the formal writing style of the legal rulings of Chapter III, the women's prayer-book analyzed in Chapter IV reflects the language's informal spoken variety. In Chapter V, I use transcribed forms of *romance* ballads to argue the importance of women's production of Judeo-Spanish. These different forms highlight the variation of use of Judeo-Spanish in the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire and support my argument for women's central importance in the development of the language.

The Expulsion

The fall of Granada in January 1492 spurred the enactment of the Alhambra Decree by the Spanish kingdoms in the end of March of the same year (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, p. 20). Jewish residents were given until July to sell their property and leave the country or convert (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, p. 20). Abraham Seneor, Royal Superintendent of Finance, and tax collector Isaac Abravanel famously pled with Ferdinand and Isabella on behalf of the Jewish people (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, p. 21). When their petitions were unsuccessful, Seneor elected to convert, while Abravanel chose to be exiled from the peninsula. A Judeo-Spanish proverb highlighting the tax collector's social standing commemorates this event: *Basta mi nombre ke me yamo Abravanel* -- 'My name is Abravanel, and that is enough' (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, p. 21).

Abravanel was followed into exile by tens of thousands of Sephardim. Kamen (1988), on the conservative end of estimators, suggests that perhaps 80,000 Jews left Spain at this time (p. 32). The vast majority of those remaining converted to Christianity, although some later joined the exiled communities as *conversos*. The exiles spread to the south (North Africa) and the west (Italy and the Ottoman Empire). As Ray (2013) explains:

The conventional theme of Hispano-Jewish migration after 1492 is its trajectory from West to East -- from Christian Iberia to the Ottoman Empire, and, in a larger sense, from a medieval setting to something new. This standard description of Sephardi history has the Jews leaving Spain and then arriving en masse in the Ottoman Empire. This narrative reads past the entire sixteenth century as an ellipsis, assuming that the formation of the Sephardi Diaspora represents the relocation of an already formed community, rather than the slow and complex creation of that community over several generations. The truth is actually far more complex, and far

more interesting. (p. 10)

It was during the Sephardi migration and resettlement processes of the sixteenth century that Sephardi identity began to be formed and Judeo-Spanish began to standardize. As aforementioned features of the language itself illustrate, Judeo-Spanish is both a product and a reflection of its speakers' cultural and geographical backgrounds. The following chapters explore various contributions that female speakers of Judeo-Spanish made to the language during the journey across North Africa and Italy and to the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century.

CHAPTER II

SEPHARDI DIASPORIC EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY FORMATION

The diaspora

Upon their migration from the Iberian Peninsula beginning in 1391, the Jews who would come to be known as the Sephardim spread across the surrounding geographical area. Throughout the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as North African regions such as Morocco, these migrants encountered a large variety of previously-established communities with whom they would cohabitate in these regions for centuries. The diaspora was a key element of Sephardi experience and identification. Therefore, it is important to establish how the Sephardim's resettlement contributed to the significance of Sephardi identity and, along with it, Judeo-Spanish. In this chapter, I will specifically discuss the Sephardim who settled in the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century. After describing the migratory journey across North Africa and the Mediterranean, I will outline how Sephardi communities fit into Ottoman social and political organization. This will lead to my discussion of Sephardi identity formation and Judeo-Spanish's role within it.

The Sephardim who would eventually settle in the Ottoman Empire did not immediately arrive there in 1492. Rather, they traveled for years across the Mediterranean and North Africa before forming communities in Ottoman cities and towns. Upon the

enactment of the Alhambra Decree, a number of Iberian Jews relocated to Portugal and Navarre, where Judaism was considered legal until 1497 and 1498, respectively (Kamen, 1988, p. 45). However, when the Inquisition tribunal in Portugal became active in 1541, the remaining Iberian Jews and many of their *converso* neighbors joined the first waves of migrants in their emigration from the peninsula (Borovaya, 2017, p. 36). Many Sephardim leaving the peninsula moved to adjacent North African areas, where political and economic insecurity prevailed and immigrating Jews were often victims of violence (Ray, 2013, p. 42). However, Ray (2013) argues that this violence was the result of economic, rather than anti-Jewish, intentions, given that many instances of such violence were related to robbery (p. 42). Additionally, Iberian Muslims who also migrated to North Africa during the same period were treated equally poorly, suggesting that poor treatment of Jewish immigrants by North Africans did not necessarily have a religious motive. The Sephardim whose families would remain in North Africa for centuries formed the Haketía-speaking portion of the Jewish exiles, but many others continued eastward to Italy, where they again faced hostility, this time from Romaniot Jews (Ray, 2013, p. 45). Italy, like North Africa, was characterized by many internal issues at this period of time, which ranged from invasions to disease outbreak. The latter was frequently blamed on the Sephardim, who were claimed by some to have brought the diseases during their immigration (Ray, 2013, pp. 45-6). Romaniot Jews attempted to prevent a group of Iberian Jewish exiles from entering the country, and the Catholic monarchs tried to enforce the Edict of Expulsion in their territories in Italy (Ray, 2013, pp. 45, 47). Similarly, Benaim (2012) shares a responsum testimony from 1592 in which a man recounts the story of his friend's murder by guards in Ragusa:

. . . que un día de Šabat a las veinte horas me mandaron la dicha señoría de Raguśa que lo llamase, y lo llamí y fue conmigo en una cámara de la señoría y allí le dieron con un mazo en la cabeça y lo mataron y la noche de alħad siguiente lo enterraron vestido allí y si yo supiera que lo llamaban para lo matar no lo llamara . . .

One Sabbath at twenty hours, the said guards of Raguśa asked me to call him and I called him. He went with me to a room in the guards' building [sic], and there they hit him with a stick on his head and they killed him. On the following Saturday night, they buried him in clothes over there. If I knew that they called him in order to kill him, I would not have called him . . . (pp. 414-415)

As these types of incidents show, anti-Jewish sentiment was present in Italy on both social and systemic levels. Most parts of Italy proved to be uncomfortable and dangerous for the exiles -- perhaps even moreso than Spain -- and tens of thousands of Sephardim continued their journey eastward into the Ottoman Empire (Ray, 2013, p. 47).

For the exiles who had experienced antagonism from North African and Italian societies, the Ottoman Empire provided a potential safe haven. There, the Sultan offered the Sephardim hospitality, alerting the governors of his territory that anyone who did not welcome the Jews would face the death penalty. Additionally, the exiles were exempt from landing taxes, helping them to quickly establish new homes and social ties (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, p. 32). Anti-Jewish legislature and violence were still present in these areas, but support from powerful figures contributed to the survival of these new communities. The safety provided to them by their political allies ensured the reproduction of traditional practices and the subsequent development of Sephardi culture.

Religious plurality characterized Ottoman society, especially since religious communities were often given the right to a degree of self-government. In fact, Christensen

(2013) compares the Ottoman environment to the ideal of *Convivencia* that permeated the Iberian Peninsula in the early Middle Ages (p. 143). However, where Iberian societies had failed to maintain a tolerant multicultural environment after the mass conquests by Christian kingdoms, the Ottoman Empire's political and social liberties opened the door to interfaith collaboration and respect, an environment in which Sephardi culture could proliferate. Examples of Sephardi success in the Ottoman Empire include the *yeshivot* opened in Salonica (now Thessaloniki, Greece), which educated many influential rabbis, and the introduction of printing technology to the Ottoman Empire, which brought along with it the distribution of important religious texts such as Joseph Caro's *Shulchan Aruch*, the most widely accepted compilation of Sephardi Jewish law (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, pp. 38-9). Many synagogues, associated with the various cities of origin of the Sephardi exiles, were established across the Ottoman Empire, and Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities coexisted in the same towns. Overall, the Ottoman Empire's legal and social networks permitted the practice of Iberian Jewish religion and customs, a situation which was vital to the Sephardim's realization and valorization of their shared experiences.

After being officially welcomed by the Sultan and permitted a degree of self-government, Sephardi communities had a significant influence on the Ottoman Empire's economic and social dynamics. While men tended to work outside the home, women were involved in domestic labor and, less frequently, the production of textiles. The Sephardim participated in food, leather, and clothing businesses, spanning many types of trade and contributing to the Ottoman economy (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, p. 38). As Ray (2013) states, "[o]f all the potential areas of settlement, the trading centers of the Ottoman Empire offered the best haven for the waves of migrant Jews" (p. 50). The impact of Iberian Jewish immigrants on the Ottoman economy is evident from the woolen fabric production

processes they brought with them from the Peninsula. In many Ottoman cities, Sephardim were heavily involved in the production, manufacturing, and trade of woolen textiles. In fact, the Salonican Sephardi community fulfilled all the woolen manufacturing needs of the Ottoman army during the sixteenth century due to an arrangement with local authorities (Hacker, 2017, p. 100). However, "it did not bode well for the Jews to outlive their usefulness to the empire" -- in other words, Ottoman officials expected to benefit from the trading done by the Sephardim in exchange for their political tolerance, (Ray, 2013, p. 48). Local populations did not always follow the lead of their Sultan in extending official welcome to the newcomers, and other ethnic groups resented any perceived favoritism shown to Jewish exiles because of their economic contributions. The Sephardim at times needed to request legal permission to settle in new cities (Ayoun & Garih, 2003, pp. 23, 26). Despite an overall impression of religious cooperation, for the Sephardim, living in the Ottoman Empire was not by any means free from conflict.

Emerging Sephardi cultural practice and identity formation was particularly evident in cities such as Salonica. By 1519, 56% of Salonica's population was Jewish. Although Romaniot and Bavarian Jews made up a small fraction of these communities, the Jewish population of Salonica was by and large of Iberian origin, making the city "an unprecedented example of an urban settlement where Sephardi Jews represented, until the first half of the twentieth century, the most common demographic group" (Garcia, 2017, p. 29). The Iberian Jewish influence on Salonica's economy, society, and religious practices made the city the nucleus of the Sephardi diaspora (Christensen, 2013, pp. 141-2). Istanbul also became a home to a great number of Sephardi immigrants, who joined the existing Ottoman Jewish population that had been relocated to the city by a *sürgün*. Notably, the Sephardim of Salonica and Istanbul did not tend to view their community demographics

simply in terms of Jews and gentiles. The Sephardim maintained a distinct identity from their Ashkenazi and Romaniot neighbors, who had differing practices, histories, and languages from the Iberian immigrants. Sephardi culture, marked as unique by the use of Judeo-Spanish and the hold on certain sectors of the material economy such as the textile industry, was clearly separate in its customs and practices from other Ottoman Jewish cultures until at least the beginning of the nineteenth century (Christensen, 2013, p. 143). The importance of the Ottoman experience to the new conceptualization of shared Sephardi identity cannot be understated.

Sephardi identity

Prior to 1391, Iberian Jews were already familiar with the significance of living in a diaspora, as they were descended from the tribal groups and kingdoms which had been exiled from the Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722-721 B.C.E. and from the Kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians in 587-586 B.C.E. Jewish societies around the globe have since understood themselves as a diaspora community with an ancestral connection to the Land of Israel. When in the late fifteenth century the Iberian Jews were banished from Sepharad, they associated their persecution with the historical memory of the ancient exiles. The Sephardi expulsion, which created a diaspora within the larger Jewish diaspora, was thus the basis of Sephardi identity formation. The expulsion from Iberia and the consequent resettlement in the diaspora constituted a particular experience from which Sephardim came to be conceived as a separate ethnic group of Jews. United by their experiences within and outside the Iberian Peninsula, these exiles spent the century after their expulsion identifying their commonalities and reconceptualizing their collective identity.

The shared idea of a unifying Sephardi experience grew over the sixteenth century as the result of three factors, claims Ray (2013). The first factor was the experience of expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula and the subsequent migration. Such an impactful and traumatic experience left an imprint on the entire group of Jewish exiles. Another factor was the collective consciousness of the Jewish exile from Israel and Judah, which influenced the Iberian Jews' interpretation of their more recent expulsion from Iberia. Finally, historians who explored the meaning of exile during the sixteenth century emphasized the common experiences and practices of Iberian Jewish exiles, which further contributed to Sephardi identity formation in the diaspora (Ray, 2013, p. 136). By finding common ground amongst one another, interpreting their shared experiences while conscious of Jewish diasporic experience, and constructing a view of exile and diaspora that connected all expelled Iberian Jews, the different congregations and communities of Sephardim came to conceptualize a common identity amongst themselves in the diaspora.

Ray (2008) argues for the consideration of diaspora theory when discussing the Sephardi identity, stating that the diaspora experience was central to this newly forming self-conceptualization. Noting that the Sephardim who were expelled from Iberia met William Safran's six-point definition of a diaspora community, he maintains that:

One of the most salient characteristics of modern diaspora communities is that the phenomenon of exile helps to produce a new and unifying identity that had hitherto not existed among their members prior to emigration from their homeland. Despite the existence of cultural, religious, or racial identities that they shared prior to migration, it is the process of migration, resettlement, and the reconstitution of their "nation" among a network of minority communities that creates a new sociocultural

synthesis. In this sense the creation of the early modern Sephardi society falls squarely within the current discourse of diaspora theory. (Ray, 2008, p. 18)

Wacks (2015) complicates this theory by suggesting the approach of Khachig Tölölyon, who conceptualizes diaspora with the consideration of elements such as "a collective mourning for a trauma that shapes cultural production in diaspora" and "a preservation of elements of the culture of the homeland" (p. 11). This is clearly reflected in the Sephardi case, where the expulsion was the impetus for community formation, and Iberian styles and themes remained common in the cultural production of Ottoman Sephardim. Further, Wacks (2015) argues that analyzing the Sephardi diaspora as a double diaspora, in which the exile from Iberia is conceptualized within the context of the cultural ramifications of the Jewish diasporic experience following the exile from Israel and Judah, provides a helpful lens with which to investigate Sephardi cultural production and identity formation:

Theories of non-Jewish diasporas begin with the premise that diasporic cultures are a product of human actions and mundane material and social conditions, which in turn generate symbolic, religious, or spiritual narratives. A diaspora studies approach to Sephardi history allows us to honor the prophetic discourse of traditional Jewish sources while keeping our understanding of cultural production grounded in historical record. (p. 12)

Thus, a complete interpretation of the Sephardi diaspora is composed of both the sociological implications of exile and the spiritual meaning of Jewish wandering grounded in the Torah. The Jews' expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula was a significant cultural and political phenomenon, as well as a reminder of the persecution and exile central to Jewish history, which affected the way Sephardim conceptualized their identity and experiences.

The understanding of the Sephardi diasporic experience, compounded by the collective memory of the original diaspora from Israel, is vital for the understanding of Sephardi identity. Another central tenant is that of the Sephardi identification as a sub-ethnic group within the larger context of Jewish heritage (Ray, 2008, p. 24). Sephardi communities saw themselves as distinct from the Ashkenazim who lived in their cities, who had previously immigrated from different areas of Europe, and who had their own traditions and language. Ethnic and regional differences were associated with different practices and customs, and Sephardi identity was shaped in great part by this distinction. Similarly, the Iberian Jews viewed Ottoman non-Jewish cultures as separate from their own and retained their own customs and language, at least during the first few centuries of their resettlement (Benaim, 2012, p. 24). The difference in practices and languages between Iberian immigrants and other Ottoman cultural groups led to the conceptualization of Sephardi heritage as an ethnic marker that distinguished descendants of expelled Iberian Jews from other Jewish and non-Jewish cultures alike.

The recognition of underlying commonalities that distinguished the Sephardim from other ethnic groups was a process that took place over many decades after the Alhambra Decree was enacted. The transition of Sephardi social organization from loosely linked associations in the Iberian Peninsula to united communities in the diaspora was, to use the words of Ray (2013), "fraught with complication" (p. 81). Sephardi leaders' ideal format for the new diaspora societies was an independent community with a representative counsel. However, in most sixteenth-century Mediterranean cities, this model was more dream than reality. Sometimes, congregations (*kehallim*) functioned as full communities (*kehillot*), where relationships were loaded with both interpersonal and religious weight, while other times, small communities of a few families and merchants formed instead (Ray, 2013, p.

78). These congregations and communities were normally organized based on the city of origin of the migrants, since in the first decades of the diaspora, Iberian Jews were more likely to identify with their kingdom or city than with Iberia as a whole (Penny, 1992, p. 125). However, as the sixteenth century continued, those previously staunch regional partialities began to make way for the discovery of commonalities amongst Jews with different Iberian backgrounds, leading to a wider social network as well as intramarriage between different groups of Sephardim.

The first connections Sephardim made amongst each other were by chance. Informal encounters between the exiled Jews led to the establishment of social and economic relationships, which laid the groundwork for further community-building (Ray, 2013, p. 82). Many testimonies from sixteenth-century responsa refer to information told to the witnesses by friends in their shops or other public places, indicating the importance of these everyday encounters to Ottoman Sephardi social life (Benaim, 2012, p. 29). In order to establish meaningful social connections with those around them, Sephardim used signifiers of their heritage, such as traditional clothing and the Judeo-Spanish language, to display their culture and identify themselves to each other (Ray, 2013, p. 80). For example, Sephardim dominated the wool trade in Salonica, and their influence on the industry is evident from the increased importation of indigo dyes which were popular in Iberian (especially Castilian) wool dyeing traditions (Christensen, 2013, p. 146). Unlike these dyes, other color schemes typical of Peninsular styles had to be adjusted to the available materials in the Ottoman Empire, and the resulting clothes, rugs, and other items displayed the hybrid nature of their Sephardi creators' culture (Christensen, 2013, p. 146). As the Iberian aesthetics were adjusted to fit the conditions of Ottoman resettlement, the Sephardim's

cultural markers made them recognizable to other Iberian Jewish exiles and helped them establish connections with one another.

Similar to the Iberian textile production styles and aesthetics, the Judeo-Spanish language was another cultural marker that Sephardim shared. Although regional dialects differed, varying forms of Jewish Ibero-Romance were more or less mutually intelligible, aiding in social organization and cultural preservation between different groups of Iberian Jewish immigrants. Just as the woolen textiles produced in Salonica reflected the influences of Iberian and Ottoman aesthetics, Judeo-Spanish was easily identifiable as a form of Iberian Romance but also incorporated elements from Ottoman Greek and Turkish. Thus, it reflected the social circumstances of the Sephardi migrants and aided in cultural identification and unification. Judeo-Spanish's sociolinguistic role will be further discussed later in this chapter.

As personal and professional connections between Sephardim from various Iberian origins continued to grow, the communities of exiles began to trust and support one another on a more general scale. Interpersonal interaction led to wider social organization, which transformed the way Sephardim related to other immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula and ensured the overall survival and protection of their communities (Ray, 2013, p. 83). As these bonds strengthened, the cooperation of newly formed Sephardi communities reduced some of the economic risks the exiles faced. Financial matters were particularly indicative of intergroup cooperation. For example, smaller Sephardi communities sometimes paid their taxes as a group rather than as individual households or residents in order to ensure all members of the community would be supported (Ray, 2013, p. 87). Additionally, the broadening of the Sephardi trading network after the expulsion contributed to and reflected the social reorganization of the Iberian exiles:

The expansion of Sephardi trading networks after 1492 provided an important model of social organization that paralleled that of the local, autonomous Jewish community and was, in many ways, better suited to respond to the needs of such a mobile society. (Ray, 2013, p. 101)

Thus, the Sephardim extended and adjusted their community structures to reflect the needs of life in the Ottoman Empire. Another example of this social reorganization was the key money system implemented in Salonica to address housing competition. This policy prohibited Jewish residents from renting a home occupied by a Jewish tenant without obtaining the permission of the current tenant and paying them a sum of money, a system which ensured that the exiles' need for residence did not lead to excessive competition between potential tenants or exploitation by property owners (Hacker, 2017, p. 101-2). The establishment of this procedure demonstrates the extent to which Iberian Jews cooperated with one another in order to structure their communities in the Ottoman diaspora, especially since the key money system is not typical of Jewish legal practice (Hacker, 2017, p. 101). Identification of shared experiences, intergroup cooperation, and mutual aid facilitated the creation of new relationships on legal, social, and religious levels.

Beginning as a loosely-constructed sense of affiliation, the organization of Sephardi communities in the diaspora continued to grow. During the sixteenth century, the adjustment of the Jewish exiles to a new Mediterranean way of living that was quite different from their previous lifestyle in Iberia prompted the contemplation of ideas like ethnic identity, communal association, and religious status and led to the creation of a more collective Sephardi identity (Ray, 2008, p. 18-9). Congregations of exiles from different cities of origin were, by the end of the sixteenth century, beginning to view their experiences as a collective exile from Iberia from which a shared culture and practice might

develop. This collectivization ensured the survival of Sephardi traditions throughout the resettlement of Iberian Jewish communities after the expulsion. Shared religious values, history, and needs drove Sephardim to unite in face of the political and social circumstances of the Ottoman Empire (Carlebach, 2017, p. 168). Sephardi communities desired to maintain their customs throughout the rapid process of social reorganization that occurred in the diaspora (Davidson, 2010, p. 23). The intention to continue the traditions and institutions that defined their life in Iberia was the impetus for communal organization and cultural preservation efforts (Hacker, 2017, p. 84). Women in particular were essential to the preservation of Sephardi culture by fulfilling their domestic duties, which helped maintain the Iberian Jewish lifestyle their families had grown used to before the expulsion.

Another contributing factor to Sephardi cultural preservation during the sixteenth century was the fact that Sephardim viewed their own traditions as superior to those of other Jewish groups and imposed them on neighboring communities. The responsa of the era, especially those of rabbi and physician Abraham Ibn Yaish, demonstrate that non-Sephardi Jewish communities in some Ottoman cities had begun to adopt the practices of the Sephardim who populated the same areas. Sephardi rabbis' legal decisions took precedence in cities with a high population of Sephardim when questions of traditions that varied between regional groups arose (Davidson, 2010, p. 47). One such issue was the process of betrothal analyzed in many of these responsa, to be discussed in more detail in Chapter III. Additionally, social and political organizations such as charities, public office administration, and social class division followed the Iberian model and retained Judeo-Spanish names in Ottoman cities. An example is the Sephardi *mahamad*, or synagogue council, which participated in the organization and regulation of a particular Iberian community in the diaspora (Hacker, 2017, p. 104). The successful establishment of inter-

and intra-community connections, the navigation of ethnic and national difference, and the administrative actions that ensured the survival of their practices characterized the construction of Sephardi identity during the sixteenth century.

Judeo-Spanish and Sephardi identity

An important element and product of Sephardi culture was the Judeo-Spanish language. A minority language in the context of the Ottoman Empire, Judeo-Spanish's survival depended on its speakers to continue using their heritage language, rather than speaking the Turkish or Greek of other cultural groups residing in the same areas. Judeo-Spanish was the language used to communicate about and participate in Sephardi cultural processes, a fact which made its survival both reliant on and contributive to Sephardi community members' continued practice of their own traditions. As Goodfellow (2005) writes, language and culture are connected in that language transmits cultural knowledge and worldviews to new members of the community (p. 13). In the case of sixteenth-century Sephardim, these receivers of cultural knowledge could be their children -- the first generations born in the diaspora -- or the *conversos* who wished to learn Jewish practices in order to connect with their heritage or pursue conversion back to Judaism. Additionally, language establishes, reproduces, and communicates social or ethnic identity (Goodfellow, 2005, p. 14). By its nature as a marker of characteristics like class, gender, or ethnicity, language connects speakers to conceptualizations of themselves as members of various identity groups (Goodfellow, 2005, p. 15).

Sephardi culture, as described in the previous section, survived due to the social ties and growing collective identity of the Sephardim, as well as the intentional imposition of Sephardi practices on nearby Jewish communities. It is evident that, at a time as central to

Sephardi identity construction as the sixteenth century, Judeo-Spanish underwent a rapid, but substantial, process of reformation. Isolation from the Iberian Peninsula created linguistic distance between expelled Jewish Romance speakers and the non-Jewish residents of the Iberian Peninsula, making Ottoman Judeo-Spanish a language that developed distinctly from other Ibero-Romance dialects after 1492. Additionally, the social processes linked to diasporic settlement in the Ottoman Empire made Judeo-Spanish open to substantial change. The multiethnic and multilingual nature of the Ottoman Empire allowed for legal and cultural autonomy for different groups, allowing the Sephardi dialects to be used by exiled Iberian Jews in most aspects of their daily life. The language began to standardize as common practices, including linguistic ones, were established within Sephardi communities (Ray, 2013, p. 137; Borovaya, 2017, p. 41). Penny (1992) explains, "social groups which are characterized by strong social ties between individuals are resistant to linguistic change, while those social groups in which weak ties predominate are much more open to such change" (p. 134). The new social ties created between previously weakly connected groups of Sephardim in the diaspora introduced different Jewish dialects of Ibero-Romance to one another, leading to a form of dialect merging known as koineization (Kirschen, 2018, p. 3). In other words, the century-long shift between disorganized, regionally defined communities and the recognition of a common experience created more interaction between speakers and more contexts for the language to be used, facilitating the merging of the dialects into a single language (*language* here is used in both its linguistic sense, that of mutual intelligibility, and in its political understanding, in which members of a social group use the same language to communicate with one another). Just as Sephardi identity was beginning to be formed in the diaspora from the interaction of communities from various parts of the Iberian Peninsula, Judeo-Spanish started its

transformation from an array of related dialects into a language distinct from other forms of Ibero-Romance.

Judeo-Spanish was used frequently in day-to-day Sephardi Jewish life. Speaking their shared language allowed Sephardim to communicate with one another, share a cultural bond, and reproduce oral history. Throughout the sixteenth century, Judeo-Spanish was the primary language for Sephardi commercial interaction, in addition to its use in transmitting traditional proverbs, songs, and oral folklore, which were frequently preserved by Sephardi women (Ray, 2013, pp. 138, 136). Use of Judeo-Spanish in these contexts indicates the importance of the language -- and women's use of it -- to the Sephardi community. As a poignant example of the meaningful connection between language and identity, Judeo-Spanish itself reflected the history and culture of Sephardi Jews. This new community valued their history in the Iberian Peninsula, as well as their own religious practices and their experiences in the diaspora. Judeo-Spanish's journey from its roots in Iberian Romance to its contact with Hebrew and languages spoken in the diaspora provided historical linguistic evidence of this defining transformation.

In addition to providing a linguistic map of the exodus from the Iberian Peninsula, Judeo-Spanish also reflected the importance of Iberian regional identity to Sephardim in the diaspora. As is previously discussed, even as sixteenth-century Sephardim began to view themselves as an interconnected population, they were still loyal to their geographical origins in the Sepharad. In Salonica, for instance, congregations were named after their members' region of origin, such as Castile, Aragon, or Majorca (Borovaya, 2017, p. 38). The variety of dialects of Judeo-Spanish reflected the different regional identities under the Sephardi umbrella. Salonican rabbi Joseph ibn Lev stated that the language groups in his city were as diverse as the congregations themselves (Borovaya, 2017, p. 38). Judeo-

Spanish was representative of Sephardi identity in that its diversity mirrored the different, though united, experiences in the lives of Sephardim from different parts of Iberia. Regional varieties of Judeo-Spanish demonstrated the various backgrounds of Sephardi community members. The Salonican case shows this connection most obviously, but dialectical variation along the axis of region of origin was evident across the Ottoman Empire.

Although regional identity was correlated with distinct linguistic patterns in sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish, these varying dialects were united by their association with the Jewish background of their speakers. The influence of Hebrew on the language rendered it unintelligible at times to gentile Romance speakers across Europe, although the language was generally understandable to speakers of other Ibero-Romance varieties (Borovaya, 2017, p. 40). From the very beginning, Sephardi Jewish practice affected the usage and characteristics of the language. The need to express important Jewish concepts led to the borrowing of lexical and morphosyntactic elements from Hebrew, linking this element of Sephardi culture with its language. Judeo-Spanish, written in Hebrew script but pronounced in the familiar Iberian dialect, was also used for the instruction of Hebrew to Ottoman *conversos* (Borovaya, 2017, p. 35). In addition, Judeo-Spanish was frequently used for teaching Jewish practices to less-informed Sephardim:

Thus, in the sixteenth century, Ladino served as a language of instruction for Jews of various backgrounds and social classes -- for the unlearned who had never converted to Christianity but whose reading was limited to a few biblical passages and prayers, and for educated *ex-conversos* interested in various Jewish subjects, but not yet fluent in Hebrew. (Borovaya, 2017, p. 46)

Hence, Judeo-Spanish was used for communication of and about religious practice. The language was integral to acquiring the cultural knowledge necessary for identification with Sephardi Judaism.

As a result of the Sephardim's recent arrival to the Ottoman Empire, during the sixteenth century Judeo-Spanish had little juridical status in Ottoman communities. With the exception of Salonica, Sephardim composed a minority of most urban populations, and their language was not used in official documentation or acknowledged by the Ottoman governments. Thus, Judeo-Spanish usage was relegated mainly to unofficial social and religious interaction between Sephardim. This marginalization was exacerbated by the fact that many Judeo-Spanish speakers experienced diglossia. Educated males used Hebrew in official and religious contexts, while uneducated males spoke Ottoman languages, like Greek and Turkish, in their interactions with non-Sephardim (Bunis, 2018, p. 195). Thus, Judeo-Spanish was spoken by males mostly in informal, Sephardi-only contexts. Women, who were predominantly uneducated and had limited interaction with non-Sephardim, likely used Judeo-Spanish much more frequently than other languages, especially at home and with family. Without legal or governmental representation, Judeo-Spanish was a language which was mainly dependent on informal sociocultural processes to survive. These processes included the continued usage of Judeo-Spanish within the private sphere, where female speakers played an important role.

In conclusion, the Sephardim's collective exile from the Iberian Peninsula and subsequent reorganization in the Ottoman Empire were central elements in the formation of their collective identity. Although during the sixteenth century regional partialities were only beginning to give way to communal identification, the tendency of the Iberian Jewish migrants to support community members from other parts of the peninsula and maintain

their distinct customs and traditions was elemental in the formation of diaspora communities and the preservation of Sephardi practices. This process is reflected in the sociolinguistic status of their language, which relied on the increased interaction between speakers of similar dialects to begin to standardize and remain a primary form of communication for the majority of Ottoman Sephardim. Women's role in the continued use of their language will be considered more specifically for the remainder of this thesis, which will discuss their preservation of domestic practices and religious traditions and their effect on the features and contexts of usage of Judeo-Spanish.

CHAPTER III

SEPHARDI WOMEN IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Women's status in sixteenth-century Ottoman Sephardi society

The previous chapter discussed the importance of Sephardi culture and identity formation in the preservation of Judeo-Spanish. In the present chapter, I highlight the significance of Sephardi women's involvement in the preservation of their heritage and language. As is discussed previously, the rabbinic responsa of the sixteenth century show how central issues pertaining to women, such as marriage validity or custody of children, were to the preservation of Sephardi culture. I will further explore cases presented in these responsa as I discuss women's roles in their communities and connect them to cultural and linguistic preservation.

As was common for women of the time, Sephardi women in the sixteenth century lived under the authority of their fathers, husbands, and male community leaders. Patriarchal ideology delineated specific gender roles that limited women's access to education, finances, and the public sphere. This distinction was reflected in the religious roles of the two sexes. For example, men were tasked with learning and studying Torah, seeking divine truth and the holiness that would come with its understanding (Hofmeester, 2011, p. 5). Women, by contrast, practiced predominantly in the home, where daily prayers and blessings could be said as household and familial responsibilities were completed.

They were also responsible for teaching their children about Judaism. Even when women participated in public worship in the synagogue, they tended to occupy spaces separate from those of men, a practice that had begun in Iberia. Synagogues in Toledo and Cordoba had separate upper sections for women, a position which reflected Jewish women's more passive, removed role in public worship, although Christensen (2013) notes that even before the expulsion, some congregations allowed women to occupy men's seats in the synagogue (p. 160). Thus, the role of men was generally that of active, public worship and learning or teaching Torah. Women, on the other hand, worshipped at home or, at times, in separate spaces in the synagogue.

The traditional delineation between private and public lives was complicated by the fact that a man's vigorous study of Torah at times conflicted with the responsibility to provide an income for his family. In these cases, women participated in the industries that corresponded to their role in the domestic sphere. The textile industry, for instance, was a common placement for women who spun, weaved, dyed, and prepared fabrics and clothes (Hofmeester, 2011, p. 17). Other positions women held included food preparation, midwifery, and medical practice (Hofmeester, 2011, p. 19). Rabbis encouraged them to surrender their earnings to their husbands -- though this was frequently ignored -- and women were expected to follow rabbinical laws of modesty (*tsniut*) when working in the public sphere (Hofmeester, 2011, p. 22). However, in the Ottoman Empire, women had been demanding the right to keep their income instead of being obligated to give it to their husbands prior to the Sephardi immigration (Hofmeester, 2011, p. 15). Since the Jewish legal system was subject to the authority of Ottoman law, there was little that conservative Sephardi rabbis could do to prevent this practice within their own communities, especially as interaction between cultures after Sephardi resettlement was inevitable. Unable to

prevent women from appealing to a higher Muslim court if they were not allowed to retain the income they gained from their labor, the Sephardi rabbis had little choice but to accept this practice (Hofmeester, 2011, p. 15).

However, Sephardi responsa from the era show that in other areas of women's lives, the rabbis attempted to prescribe appropriate customs, reflecting their view of women and the female role in the community and religious practice. Testimonies and rulings presented in many responsa are revealing representations of Jewish conduct and ideological consideration in the context of sixteenth-century Ottoman communities:

The considerations of daily life (technology, political shifts, changing relations with non-Jews, the marketplace, the many-faceted engagement with the dominant cultures) that are largely suppressed in exegetical texts are all found here in robust detail, so much that Jewish historians have exploited responsa as fertile sources for the study of Jewish communities. (Wacks, 2015, p. 17)

A significant number of the responsa from the era that have been collected and published by modern researchers deal with topics concerning women's role in religious and familial settings. At the same time that women crossed the boundary from the private to public sphere through their participation in certain sectors of work, they still faced pressure to provide the unpaid domestic labor of caring for their families and homes. Women's modesty and purity were expected and rewarded by Sephardi rabbis. For example, Benaim (2012) shares a responsum in which a couple's marriage validity is evaluated, noting that the wife's performance of domestic duties such as cooking and interacting with her husband's family was scrutinized in order to determine her fulfillment of the role of wife (p. 49). Women's household responsibilities at the time included command of *kashrut*, Shabbat and holiday preparation, maintaining family purity (especially in regard to sexual conduct),

and passing on oral tradition. Ultimately, the observance of these duties qualified this wife as a proper choice, and the rabbi ruled that this couple's marriage was halakhically valid (Benaim, 2012, p. 329). However, it is also true that not performing these roles satisfactorily was punishable. Another responsum relays the story of Sete, a woman who finds herself in an unwanted marriage. According to testimony, Sete once publicly embarrassed Yom Tov, and thus, he requested she be married to him as part of an economic transaction (Benaim, 2012, p. 302). The validity of the marriage is in question in the responsum, which reflects how women's adherence to a deferential gender role was legally enforced. As though punishing her for her transgression of the rules of proper feminine conduct, the rabbi concludes that Sete is legally married to Yom Tov, who now supervises and governs Sete's conduct (Benaim, 2012, p. 303). The rabbis who received and distributed these responsa communicated the message that proper conduct for a Sephardi woman depended on her modesty, subservience, and domesticity.

Family life and the survival of Sephardi society

One of the reasons these responsa focus greatly on matters of marriage and family life is that during the first decades of the diaspora, Sephardim relied on a future generation for the survival of their population and practices:

The exiled Sephardi community was distinguished by . . . the hope for . . . the establishment of a new generation. The traditional role of women within the family - - to bear healthy children, preferably males -- was more sensitive and emotionally charged than ever before. Many exiles lost their children during the course of their wandering. In the written records that survived, we sense the yearning for sons who would perpetuate the family dynasty, which was often brought to an abrupt halt due

to the hardships of the expulsion, and there is a markedly profound concern for the fate of the children, in view of the distressing times. (Lamdan, 2010, p. 70)

The production of male descendants ensured that in future generations, Jewish sons would be able to perpetuate the familial and economic legacies of their parents. It is evident from Sephardi responsa that interpersonal and legal networks supported pregnant wives and mothers, at least in order to ensure the wellbeing of their children. Many rulings refer to Sephardi women as 'instruments' which ensured their infants' health, and the emotional bond between mother and child is recognized by many rabbis in their writings (Lamdan, 2010, pp. 88-9). In an era with a high rate of mortality for both infant and mother during childbirth, care was taken to ensure that women were supported during pregnancy and delivery. Lamdan (2010) refers to a responsum written by Rabbi Yom Tov Zahalon, who was asked to determine whether a woman in childbirth and those surrounding her had taken G-d's name in vain when praying during the painful delivery (pp. 71-2). Ultimately, he rules in favor of rationality over tradition, writing, "How can one object to [their] calling out passionately to God?" (Lamdan, 2010, p. 72). This recognition of the extremity of the circumstances of childbirth shows the rabbi's support for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of both mother and child.

Many responsa demonstrate that husbands and fathers were required to provide for their wives and children, even in the case of divorce. Since women were frequently dependent on their husbands for social and economic standing, prioritizing the wellbeing of a child required that a pregnant woman be given support when she needed it, especially in the form of financial provision. In many cases of divorce, economic aid was provided to nursing mothers as a condition of the divorce, in keeping with Jewish rabbinic law (Lamdan, 2010, p. 78). A testimony in one responsum from Benaim's (2012) collection tells

of a dying man who believes his wife to be pregnant (p. 312). He wishes that an extra 1000 aspers which were not part of the original marriage contract be given to his wife after his death for the support of the family. However, the dispensation of this money is contingent upon whether he leaves a child behind. When his wife turns out not to be pregnant, the rabbi declares that she should not receive the extra financial support (Benaim, 2012, p. 314). The importance of familial responsibilities to this woman's status is noteworthy. Her role as an 'instrument' for reproduction may supersede her need for extra financial support as a dependent and underprivileged member of society. This case exemplifies the fact that men supported the continuance of their family lines, but it also indicates that women's wellbeing was at times dependent on whether or not they fulfilled their role in procreation.

The essentiality of children's wellbeing to Sephardi rabbis is also emphasized in responsa which discuss questions of guardianship. Although women were not automatically or commonly assigned guardianship of their children, many still desired to care for them in the case of the father's death (Benaim, 2012, p. 157). Other family members often believed themselves to be the best guardians for the children, appealing widows' arguments for guardianship even if the father had stated that she should be the child's caretaker (Lamdan, 2010, p. 81). Examples of rabbinical solutions to these situations can be found in responsa by Rabbi David ben Zimra, who frequently decided in favor of other family members, rather than the mother, for the responsibility for a child's care. However, in one case, a widowed mother remarried a respected, Torah-educated man, and Rabbi ben Zimra decided that the child should remain with his mother and stepfather to receive the best upbringing possible (Lamdan, 2010, p. 81). Mothers were also granted guardianship when a male child's adoption by male relatives might cause issues pertaining to inheritance:

Another sage, R. Isaac di Molina of Egypt, did rely on this rule [that orphans should not be left with potential heirs] and rejected a request to remove a six-year-old boy from his mother's custody . . . The rabbi ruled that it is better to leave the boy with his mother than with other relatives, men and women alike, especially since "a minor is not to be entrusted to relatives who are his potential heirs, and this orphan will [better] remain with his mother until he reaches maturity and is well versed in Torah and good deeds." (Lamdan, 2010, p. 82)

However, there were other cases where mothers willingly surrendered custody of their children when they recognized that they faced too many obstacles to care for their offspring. As Rabbi Shemuel de Uzida noted, sometimes "the birth of a child can bring misfortune" to families with little financial resources (Lamdan, 2010, p. 85). In these cases, widowed mothers prioritized their sons' and daughters' wellbeing over their own, allowing their children to be cared for by other relatives. However, at other times, the bond between mother and child was strong, and many women fought to keep their families together.

Economic limitations

As examples of responsa cases have so far indicated, women's status in Sephardi communities did not permit them to have complete financial independence from their fathers, husbands, or other male relatives. Since women only worked in select industries outside of the home and all were encouraged -- in some cases, required -- to surrender their dowries to their husbands, marriage was as much an economic transaction as an agreement to obey the command to 'be fruitful and multiply.' This is demonstrated in responsa where rabbis rule on women's right to remarry after the death of their husbands. The testimonies of witnesses who observed the deaths of the men were necessary to prove that their wives

were, in fact, widowed. In cases where these testimonies could be corroborated or at least believed, the wife in question was often permitted to remarry, especially when economic necessity would be resolved by remarriage (Benaim, 2012, pp. 351-3, 415). Since Jewish law mandated women to obtain a divorce from their missing husbands if the men were not proven dead -- a law which left women whose husbands had disappeared or moved away in legal limbo -- the testimonial support of their communities allowed them to remarry and obtain the economic and social security marriage provided them.

Issues of remarriage were especially complicated in cases where the wife had a newborn or nursing child fathered by her ex- or late husband. In both Jewish and Muslim traditions, the required period of breastfeeding was 24 months, which allowed the child and mother to bond and ensured the child's health (Lamdan, 2010, p. 75). During this period, women were not permitted to remarry for fear that they might become pregnant, affecting the quality of their breast milk or ceasing its production altogether (Lamdan, 2010, p. 75).

Lamdan (2010) describes the rabbinic response to this issue:

[The] halakhic prohibition [against remarriage during the nursing period] raised many questions, and most of the cases described in the responsa literature came to light when divorcées or widows wished to remarry as soon as possible. The mothers were not always willing [or able] to wait until the end of the 'official' nursing period, nor were the intended grooms always willing to wait until the woman had weaned the infant. "Real life" stories and the answers of halakhic authorities on these matters inform us of the diversity of approaches to such matters, and the desire to not interrupt the flow of life for two years. From a legal point of view, there is almost no dispute over the ban on breastfeeding mothers marrying during the period of nursing. (p. 75)

Some mothers attempted to circumvent the required waiting period by hiring a wet nurse, but this was an unpopular and controversial choice, since many believed that physical or emotional harm would come to a child whose wet nurse changed her mind about nursing it, especially since these women were subject to their husbands, who could force their wives to go back on their word if they so desired (Lamdan, 2010, p. 76). As indicated in previously discussed responsa decisions, the potential wellbeing of the child superseded the mother's need for economic stability. A wet nurse was not considered an adequate substitute for a nursing birth mother. A woman who had to remarry immediately would have to rely on the option of giving up their children to their ex-husbands or other family members. This suited the extended family's desire for the child to be raised by them instead of the mother. Halakhic rulings stated that a divorced woman was not obligated to breastfeed her child if she rescinded custody of it. However, making this choice did not come without criticism: "if [a woman] refused [to breastfeed], even when offered a wage, then she displayed 'Gibeonite' (Gentile) qualities, the opposite of what is expected from a Jewish mother" (Lamdan, 2010, p. 80). A woman's duty to her family, especially her role in child-raising, was assessed by the men who had financial control over her, and it seems that those men's willingness to support their dependents depended on the women's adherence to the role of motherhood. The majority rabbinical opinion about remarriage while nursing is well-summarized by this decision by one rabbi in the case of the mother of a sickly infant who was unable to be weaned:

"If the child has a father, we oblige him to compensate her with money until the child recovers and can be weaned. If he has no father, or his father is a poor man, it is considered a mitzvah for the public to provide for her until she consents to nurse and save a soul, and if she does not, she will be permitted to marry without weaning

him because of the danger entailed. And if she [still] does not agree, we compel her to nurse him, because it is a mitzvah that she has to observe, and his life depends on her and her alone, and she is to be paid a wage [for this]." (Lamdan, 2010, p. 79)

Charity was encouraged by some rabbis so that the mother would be able to provide for her infant, but ultimately, it was considered her responsibility to care for the child.

In addition to cases of remarriage during the breastfeeding period, women's autonomy was also discussed at length in cases of child custody. Specifically, rabbis debated whether mothers had a biological right to their children (and often ruled that they did not). In the case of one sixteenth-century Sephardi woman who wished to return to Salonica to live with her family, taking her nursing daughter with her, three rabbis provided their opinions. Rabbi Shemuel de Medina noted that the child's current city of residence kept her close to her place of birth, her father's family, and the man to whom she was betrothed, and he ruled that after the child was weaned at 24 months, the child would be sent to live with her paternal grandmother if her mother left for Salonica (Lamdan, 2010, p. 83). Rabbi David ben Zimra agreed, arguing that the paternal family could adequately raise the child without the mother's presence, while Rabbi Yosef ben Lev disagreed, stating that "a nursing widow can do as she wishes, and no court has the power to compel her and her child to remain with the husband's family" (Lamdan, 2010, p. 83). A similar case, in which a mother wished to move with her children to the Land of Israel, upheld the majority opinion expressed by de Medina and ben Zimra:

Despite the precept that "all may compel [his or her family] to go up to the land of Israel . . . [this applies to] both men and women," a mother's wish to do so with her children was usually met with fierce opposition from the families. The Radbaz [R. ben Zimra] ruled that a father was entitled to prevent his divorced wife, who was

nursing, from going with her baby to Eretz Israel, even though the journey from Egypt to Palestine did not entail any danger . . . As we have seen in similar cases, the well-being of the newborn and infant is of the utmost importance, but as soon as he no longer needs his mother, there is no reason for him to remain with her. She may go to Eretz Israel, but alone. (Lamdan, 2010, p. 84)

These responsa indicate that although rabbinical opinion varied, the community standard established for women upheld the limited, inferior position that they were afforded in diasporic Sephardi societies.

Women's issues and the establishment of common Sephardi practice

Sephardi responsa of the sixteenth century were instrumental in establishing and maintaining traditional community practices. Those rabbinical decisions that concerned women not only prescribed appropriate female conduct but also emphasized the importance of following Sephardi traditions, rather than those of neighboring Jewish communities. This is particularly evident in responsa that concern the validity of engagement and marriage practices. The traditional Jewish marriage process consists of three stages: *shidukhin*, where a couple becomes engaged by agreeing to the marriage; *kidushin*, a formal ceremony in which the groom presents the bride with a gift of monetary value and thus legally binds the union; and *nisuin*, where the couple stands under the *chupah* and are permitted to begin their married life (Davidson, 2010, p. 24). Ottoman Sephardi responsa often address the significance of *sivlonot*, or gifts given to the bride by the groom during the engagement. Specifically, the question of whether accepting *sivlonot* may be taken as proof of participation in *kidushin*, creating a legally binding union between the couple, is dealt with extensively. The Romaniot Jews of Istanbul traditionally gave *sivlonot* after *kidushin* and

therefore considered the former to be proof of a legal marriage. However, the Sephardim, whose presence was stronger in Salonica and Edirne, gave *sivlonot* before *kidushin*, so acceptance of *sivlonot* did not constitute marriage (Davidson, 2010, p. 24). The terms of engagement during the *shidukhin* process in Castile were binding, so a man could give *sivlonot* to his fiancée without fearing that she would break off the engagement before *kidushin* (Davidson, 2010, p. 28). The Sephardim brought this process with them when they migrated from the Iberian Peninsula, and rabbis of the sixteenth century were tasked with deciding whether this tradition would be upheld in new environments.

Many responsa address questions of marriage validity that arose when marriage between members of different communities occurred the appropriate tradition to follow had to be decided by halakhic authorities. Rabbi Levi Ibn Habib, in particular, asserted that the Sephardi practice of giving *sivlonot* before *kidushin* should be upheld in order to preserve Iberian tradition and identity (Davidson, 2001, p. 28). Citing the practice of Rabbis Yitzhak Aboab and Yitzhak de Leon, two prominent Sephardi rabbis who were part of the pre-exile tradition, Ibn Habib suggested that respect for these men and the custom they upheld was necessary for the exiled Sephardim, "asserting the independence of Sephardi rabbis in legal decision-making and affirming the internal autonomy of the Sephardi rabbinic leadership" (Davidson, 2010, p. 31). Although Ibn Habib acknowledged that in most cases, the exiled Sephardim were obligated to conform to the practices of previously established Ottoman Jewish communities, he classified the matter of *sivlonot* and *kidushin* as a monetary matter, which meant it could be practiced based on the custom of Sephardi culture (Davidson, 2010, p. 33). Cities like Edirne and Salonica, where Sephardim constituted a major part of the population, became places where Sephardim could make their own practices the dominant local custom, ensuring their traditions' continuation in diaspora communities

(Davidson, 2010, p. 34). The rabbinical responsa's decisions regarding marriage validity were crucial in implementing a standard Sephardi cultural practice for betrothal, preserving traditional ideas about gender roles and relationships in the new communities they formed in the Ottoman Empire.

The importance of female community

Disapproving of the fact that Jewish women in the Ottoman Empire had acquired rights to personal and private property, community leaders were able to argue their perspectives on the appropriate degree of independence for Sephardi women through their discussions of the engagement process in their responsa. Responsa concerning the topics of *kidushin* and marriage validity show a variety of perspectives about women's independence in the engagement process. Although responsa like the one previously discussed, where *Sete* is required to marry a man after publicly embarrassing him, paint a bleak picture of women's autonomy, other cases demonstrate that rabbis showed lenience to women who did not wish to marry a man to whom they were engaged. In the case of Donna, a woman distressed about her marriage to Yosef, the author of the responsum rules in her favor:

Since the young girl and her brother are very depressed about the matter, they asked me to write a ruling on whether the marriage was valid in this situation. In order to calm them down, I wrote these lines as briefly as possible, so that there would be no doubt at all in the lack of validity of this marriage for various reasons. (Benaim, 2012, p. 211)

As this rabbi demonstrates, the strict gender roles that subjugated women in Sephardi tradition were not black and white. Women's independence and autonomy were also aided by their interpersonal networks and community connections, especially when facing an

unwanted marriage or other halakhic predicament. Benaim (2012) shares a responsum in which a woman wishes her marriage to be invalidated, since she had accepted *kidushin* without her mother's permission (p. 433). Since she had previously forbidden herself from marrying without the consent of her mother and later expressed her regret -- "sí que me arrepentido" -- the rabbi who authored this responsum ruled that the marriage was invalid (Benaim, 2012, pp. 435-6). Similarly, Davidson (2010) remarks the following regarding another responsum in which *kidushin* was the issue at hand:

The wording of the responsum reflects a patriarchal society in which a man betrothed his daughter to another man and made all prenuptial arrangements and agreements. However, the mothers of the young couple played a limited role in the engagement by presenting gifts to their prospective in-laws. (p. 44)

As the responsum in Benaim's (2012) collection indicates, the mother's involvement in the engagement process could also free a woman from an unwanted marriage. Both responsa demonstrate that the mother's role in her daughter's life and the promises made between them were valued from a halakhic perspective.

In addition to familial bonds, community relationships formed between non-related women also played an important role in rabbinical decisions about marriage and childbirth. According to Lamdan (2010), public involvement in a woman's pregnancy and her child's birth was the norm in both Jewish and non-Jewish cultures of the Ottoman Empire (p. 73). In the case of Sephardi societies, public engagement was valuable from a legal point of view, since community members could testify as to the length of the pregnancy and the time of the child's birth. This corroboration could resolve disputes about a young bride's age or a child's right to an inheritance (Lamdan, 2010, p. 73). In addition, one responsum describes how community corroboration of a birth freed a woman from the levirate bond

requiring her to marry her late husband's brother (Benaim, 2012, p. 420). The woman's testimony of her child's birth, not to be trusted on its own, was validated by others, ensuring that she was not obligated to marry her brother-in-law (Benaim, 2012, p. 422). In another responsum in which a child's birth determined whether a woman could remarry, neighbors and relatives, especially female community members, testified that the child was born during the ninth month of pregnancy, citing as evidence that eight and a half months had passed before the child was born and that it had fingernails, hair, and the instinct to breastfeed (Lamdan, 2010, p. 73). Since the child had died before living for 30 days, the corroboration of its birth was essential to decide if the woman could be freed from the biblical obligation to marry her husband's brother, whom she had been unable to find despite 12 years of searching (Lamdan, 2010, p. 73). Community involvement in pregnancy and childbirth had the potential to support these women's desire to be freed from the levirate command to marry their brothers-in-law, wishes that probably would have not been granted without the contribution of neighbors and relatives.

The importance of female communal involvement was also noted by Rabbi Moshe Trani, who emphasized the importance of female familial bonds for young girls' wellbeing in his ruling on a custody case:

"The precept that a daughter remains with the mother does not imply that the mother is closer to her daughters or loves them more than the father, but for the benefit of the daughters, who will learn good behavior from their mother . . . All the more so if the daughters say that they suffer in the house of their father, who has another wife, and wish to return to their mother. In this case, the father is not entitled to keep them against their will." (Lamdan, 2010, p. 86)

This responsum emphasizes the importance of women's role in educating and raising their daughters. Whether female interpersonal connections were biological or social, it was in the best interests of both young and grown women to be involved in each other's lives, since mothers, neighbors, and relatives could participate in the marriage and child-rearing processes and assure the wellbeing of other women in their communities.

Cultural preservation and Judeo-Spanish

As the responsa of the era show, Ottoman Sephardi women in the sixteenth century were considered responsible for the domestic sphere, especially the maintenance of family purity and the education of their children. These women were widely regarded as essential elements of the production of the next generations of Sephardim, and rabbinical law dictated that they were responsible for creating a pure, holy, and safe home life for their families. Women's matters were central to the establishment and preservation of Sephardi practices. Not only were the important issues of engagement, marriage, and childbirth present in a large number of responsa which disseminated proper legal conduct for Ottoman Jews, but Sephardi women's responsibilities in the home, such as following the laws of *kashrut* and properly raising their children, reproduced and adjusted traditions that their communities had practiced in the Iberian Peninsula.

The importance of women's household practices to the preservation of the Sephardi tradition highlights their involvement in the maintenance of the Judeo-Spanish language. Their responsibility to breastfeed for the first two years of their children's lives meant that overall, Sephardi women participated greatly in their children's early language development, especially in cases where a husband was not present due to widowhood, divorce, or the restriction from remarrying during this period. Additionally, though some

women handed off domestic responsibilities to non-Sephardim, their contributions to the atmosphere and upkeep of the home provided many opportunities for the use of Judeo-Spanish. The language's use by female speakers was amplified by the close relationships formed between Sephardi women, which are evident from the contributions of female neighbors and relatives in corroborating women's testimonies in *responsa* cases. Judeo-Spanish was the language used to communicate amongst women who were involved in each other's private and personal affairs, meaning that women's interactions were essential to the continued use of Judeo-Spanish. As has been previously discussed, the production and early dialect mingling of Judeo-Spanish took place by means of increased communication through newly formed social associations during the first century after the Alhambra Decree. Thus, it is evident that the social networks of Sephardi women, which remained part of the private domain of home and family life, played an important role in this linguistic development.

Furthermore, since the delineation of gender roles between the public and private sphere can lead to language differences between the sexes, it is likely that Sephardi patriarchal class division led to distinct contributions from men and women to Judeo-Spanish's development (Tannen, 1997, p. 87). For instance, it can be theorized that women's language conserved more lexical and grammatical elements from pre-expulsion Jewish Ibero-Romance, since their interaction with the public was limited to certain contexts. By contrast, male speakers, who likely encountered more speakers of Ottoman Turkish or Greek in their work lives or while dealing with the Ottoman governmental and legal apparatuses, may have displayed more borrowing or other influences of language interaction. This theory is supported by the observed differences in speech between Ottoman Sephardi men and women during the nineteenth century, when men with more

access to Western education experienced a shift from the use of Hebrew and Turkish borrowings to the inclusion of grammatical and lexical elements of French and Italian in their speech. By contrast, women without formal education tended to preserve more of these "eastern" linguistic elements, as well as features of Ibero-Romance that had disappeared from modern Spanish and men's Judeo-Spanish but still remained in women's speech (Bunis, 2018, p. 197). Additionally, it can be posited that men's and women's differing religious and societal responsibilities, though not always strictly separated, may have lent itself to the preservation of different sets of lexical and semantic material by speakers of different sexes.

This chapter has characterized Sephardi women's roles as community members whose religious and cultural responsibilities contributed to the continuation of Iberian Jewish traditions and customs after settling in the Ottoman Empire. Traditional Sephardi gender roles emphasized women's presence in the private, domestic sphere, where they were expected to raise their children into a pure and holy family. These responsibilities proved essential to the widespread implementation of Sephardi practices in diaspora communities. For instance, the rabbinical debate over *sivlonot* and *kidushin* allowed Sephardi religious authorities to impose their traditions on neighboring Jewish communities who intramarried with Iberian migrants, widening the influence of their culture. The dominant belief that women were best suited to the domestic sector and not the public sphere is evident from many of the rabbinical opinions discussed in this chapter. Of course, Ottoman Sephardi women often resisted these restrictions, notably in terms of working in certain industries outside the home and keeping their own income. However, they still lived in a patriarchal society where, if widowed or divorced, they often needed aid from family, charity, or remarriage to care for their children. Although the roles of men and women in

sixteenth-century Sephardi communities were not as clear-cut as rabbis may have wished them to be, women still faced certain restrictions from sectors of Sephardi society that men were able to access. Their language, which was likely different in certain ways from male speakers', was used in social interaction, passed down to their children during the early language development period, and contributed to the early language standardization processes occurring in the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century.

CHAPTER IV

SEDER NASHIM: JUDEO-SPANISH AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Sephardi women's literacy

Most Ottoman Sephardi women of the sixteenth century were not formally educated and were therefore unable to read or write (Schwarzwald, 2017, p. 6). In comparison, the literacy rate among Ashkenazi Jewish women was higher during the same period. A number of publications in Yiddish targeted female audiences, implying that Ashkenazi women were able to use the Hebrew alphabet to read Yiddish and perhaps had limited knowledge of Hebrew (Schwarzwald, 2017, p. 10). Women's education was not considered a priority by the majority of prominent Sephardi rabbis of the time. However, one rabbi by the name of Meir Benveniste sought to increase his female community members' literacy and knowledge of Jewish traditions. Following a request from members of his congregation, he published *Seder Nashim*, a prayer book for Sephardi women, in 1565 (Schwarzwald, 2017, p. 1; Schwarzwald, 2010, pp. 49-50). The volume, which features Judeo-Spanish translations of prayers and blessings relevant to a typical sixteenth-century Jewish woman's daily life, demonstrates the link between Judeo-Spanish and traditional religious practice for Sephardi women. In this chapter, I discuss and analyze *Seder Nashim*, arguing that Benveniste used Judeo-Spanish to communicate religious expectations to Sephardi women.

Seder Nashim is the only existing Judeo-Spanish prayer book for women published during the sixteenth century (Schwarzwald, 2010, p. 38). This makes it a unique and pertinent text for analyzing the relationship between Judeo-Spanish and Sephardi women. Despite *Seder Nashim's* singularity, the general practice of translating religious texts from Hebrew to vernacular languages was regular practice in both Sephardi and non-Sephardi Jewish communities, since Hebrew was not spoken by most women and a sizeable number of men (Schwarzwald, 2010, p. 47; 2012, pp. 3-4). Judeo-Spanish, with roots in Iberian Latin-based dialects but written in Hebrew script, served not only as a language of instruction for the readers of these translated texts but also as a stepping stone to the understanding of Hebrew. By first learning how the Hebrew alphabet functioned within the context of the known vernacular, readers could learn the basics of Hebrew pronunciation without having to simultaneously acquire the lexicon and grammar of the unfamiliar language. Understanding that his intended readers were illiterate and lacked formal education in secular or religious matters, Benveniste included a copy of the Hebrew alphabet in the *siddur*, demonstrating that he wished for his female audience to first be instructed in how to read the alphabet and then to be able to read and understand the prayers on their own (Schwarzwald, 2017, p. 2). Schwarzwald (2017) notes that Benveniste "understands that learning orthography and language together is more than studying script on its own" (p. 4). Hence, the text is translated into Judeo-Spanish so that female readers needed only to master the pronunciation of the Hebrew alphabet in order to understand the prayers written in their native language. Even *Shema Israel*, a prayer often taught to children in Hebrew as soon as they are able to speak, is translated in this text into Judeo-Spanish: "oye Yiśra'el YY² nueso Dio YY uno" (Schwarzwald, 2010, p. 46). Clearly,

² Hebrew ך, the abbreviation used for the sacred name of G-d.

Benveniste was more interested in his readers' ability to understand and practice Jewish traditions, especially prayers and blessings, rather than the acquisition of Hebrew, the sacred language. This prioritization was in line with the majority rabbinical opinion that Jewish worship may be done in any language.

In his introduction to the *siddur*, Benveniste addresses concerns about female literacy he has heard from male community members and encourages them instead to educate their wives and daughters:

[Benveniste] states that men think it might take women a long time to learn to read the prayers and that they are afraid that praying will prevent women from taking care of their families; therefore they refrain from teaching them the prayers and blessings. Since women have fewer religious duties and are not required to say as many prayers as men, [he] has adjusted the Siddur to meet their requirements according to Halakha . . . The editor-translator also argues that it is the responsibility of the father and the husband to educate the women in his household (as discussed by Maimonides). (Schwarzwald, 2010, p. 41)

The introduction also states that men generally believed teaching women to read was either fruitless, as women were assumed to have lower intelligence, or a waste of time that women could otherwise be using to complete domestic duties (Schwarzwald, 2017, p. 3-4). Thus, they did not consider women's education or religious knowledge to be a priority. Because their husbands and fathers have not taught them, Benveniste writes, many women believe that they are exempt from reciting prayers and blessings altogether (Schwarzwald, 2017, p. 3). In writing *Seder Nashim*, he hopes to inform them of their religious duty and give them the tools to teach themselves and their children proper observance of these obligations.

Seder Nashim's audience

The various contents of the *siddur* expand upon the work's title, which indicates that its intended audience is Sephardi women. *Seder Nashim* includes material related to Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, other holidays, and everyday matters. The responsibility for the holidays, including Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, was traditionally ascribed to Jewish women because of their involvement in the food and household preparation processes, which comprise the majority of the obligations for celebrating those holidays. In addition to warnings and instructions for keeping Shabbat and *kashrut*, the introduction to the book contains general directions about how to say the blessings and perform commandments. For example, *Seder Nashim* instructs women

. . . regarding the way in which mitzvot (commandments) should be performed after waking in the morning, the Passover Haggadah and the blessings to be said after eating a meal (*Birkat Hamazon*), other blessings, Eruv [Tavshilin] (preparations for cooking for Shabbat on a Holiday), *Mezuzot*, separating part of the dough when making bread as *Hafrashat Halah*, women's purification laws, keeping Kosher, and additional warnings for women. (Schwarzwald, 2010, p. 40)

Special guidelines are also included for women without husbands or fathers, such as the explanation of how to fulfill the Purim gift-giving obligation (Schwarzwald, 2010, p. 48). These women had an important role in preserving Sephardi traditions and teaching them to their children. The questions of agency and independence brought about by the inclusion of these practices for exclusively female settings will be explored later in this chapter. The blessings and prayers included in the prayer book also suit its audience's involvement in the domestic sphere. Special blessings, such as those to be said over food and drink, as well as the one said when a woman gives birth, were important to female community members

who participated in food participation and aided their friends during pregnancy and childbirth. The directives in Judeo-Spanish are both relevant and accessible to women in the household. Overall, the various instructions throughout the *siddur* emphasize the importance of communicating, in her own language, the expectations and commandments relegated to a Sephardi woman.

Additionally, the grammatical gender used in the blessings which differ for men and women indicate Benveniste's intention to accurately educate Sephardi women. The blessing recited as part of morning prayers, written in Judeo-Spanish as "Bendicho tu YY nueso Dio rey del mundo que no me hizo goya" (Blessed are You, A(donay), our God, King of the Universe, who did not make me a gentile), uses the feminine form *goya*, indicating that the intended reader was female (Benveniste, 1565, p. 70; Schwarzwald, 2010, p. 42). Benveniste includes a special instruction along with this blessing, stating that if the reader was not born Jewish, she should not recite it (Benveniste, 1565, p. 70). This detail targets readers from *converso* families, who made up a significant portion of Ottoman Sephardi communities and were especially in need of instruction about Jewish practices (Schwarzwald, 2010, p. 42). Another example of the explicit acknowledgement of female readers can be found in the instructions for conducting the Passover Seder, which read, "y beberá cada una su bazo o lo mas del" (and each one should drink her cup or most of it), again using the feminine form, *una*, to refer to the reader (Benveniste, 1565, p. 127; Schwarzwald, 2010, p. 42).

Finally, instructions about observing the commandments of challah, ritual purity, and Shabbat candle-lighting all aim to enlighten women about the reason for their obligations by explaining them in terms of the transgression committed by Eve in the Garden of Eden. These three commandments, the author states, were given to all Jewish

women because of Eve's original sin (Benveniste, 1565, p. 239). In practicing these commandments properly, women fulfill their duty to remember and avoid repeating the original woman's wrongdoing. Blessing and setting aside the challah compensates for Eve's tasting of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge as well as inviting Adam, made of the "challah of the world," to take part in this offense, while the observance of *tevilah* (ritual immersion) prevents a woman from implicating both her and her husband in a transgression as Eve did. Finally, lighting candles on Shabbat counteracts Eve's extinguishment of Adam's "life candle" when she shared the fruit with him (Benveniste, 1565, p. 239; Schwarzwald, 2014, pp. 127-8). By considering all women responsible for atoning for Eve's sin, Benveniste demonstrates the importance which he ascribes to women's religious practice. This prayer book was written for Sephardi women, a population that Benveniste viewed as needing religious guidance, and this fact is reflected by both the language and content of the volume.

Significance of Judeo-Spanish in *Seder Nashim*

The fact that Benveniste considered women's observance to be so important that he published *Seder Nashim* to instruct them sheds light on the connection between the book's purpose and its language. Benveniste's decision to write the book in Judeo-Spanish instead of Hebrew is noteworthy because it demonstrates that in his mind, the most effective way to communicate his instructions was in the vernacular rather than the ritual language. He considered his readers' understanding of the meaning of their religious observance to be as important as the observance itself. Schwarzwald (2014) likens *Seder Nashim* to a "[*Shulchan Aruch*] for women" because of its detailed instructions about religious observance, which constitute approximately one third of the book and provide various

explanations for why women are obligated to perform their religious duties (p. 122). For example, Benveniste (1565) notes that the blessings included in his "Orden de las Berachot" are necessary for the sanctification of women's everyday matters, explicitly stating that women were equally as responsible as men for avoiding taking the world's gifts for granted (p. 215). Additionally, he acknowledges that the observance of Jewish rituals could be performed in Judeo-Spanish in his note on the obligation to listen to the Purim Megillah: "I eskuchara la *Megila* noche i dia en *Leshon Hakodesh* aun ke no lo entienda o en Ladino si la *Megila* estubiere eskrita en akelya lengua i en akelya letra alo menos" (Benveniste, 1565, p. 121). He understands that most women could not understand the Megillah in its original Hebrew and offers the option of listening to it in Judeo-Spanish instead, if there is a translated text available. These two options, both presented as viable alternatives, emphasize the rabbi's encouragement of women to both participate in and understand their religious duties.

The author's intent to ensure his audience's complete comprehension of their religious observance is further supported by his use of an informal variety of Judeo-Spanish which mimicked the spoken language rather than a more grammatically strict written style (Schwarzwald, 2012, p. 11). This type of language was typical of sixteenth-century texts intended for the common reader, which tended to incorporate unique features from Hebrew-Aramaic, Ibero-Arabic, and Ibero-Romance origins (Bunis, 2018, p. 192). Benveniste's text demonstrates the discrepancy between the sixteenth-century spoken vernacular and the more formal, standardized written form of Judeo-Spanish. For example, the clause "mantilyas suzyas de kriaturas o mojudos" would formally be written "mantilyas suzyas o mojudas de kriaturas," and the instruction to avoid unclothed children during prayer recitation, which includes the phrase "se le vino aestar deskubierta alguna kriatura

enfrente," demonstrates constructions not common in formal written Ibero-Romance or Hebrew syntactic structures (Schwarzwald, 2012, p. 11). This indicates that the book was written in the more informal style with which Ottoman Sephardi women would have been familiar, aiding in their understanding of their duties and the reasons for performing them (Schwarzwald, 2012, p. 12). Had the book been written in a more literary or formal style, his audience, who had little to no exposure to this form of language due to illiteracy, lack of education, and their restriction to the domestic sphere, would probably not have understood the prayer book's instructions to the degree that the informal language variety afforded.

In addition to supporting women's understanding of their religious obligations, the usage of Judeo-Spanish in *Seder Nashim* reflected its intended purpose as a book to be used in the private sphere. Schwarzwald (2010) states that the prayer book was designed to be used exclusively at home, noting that there are only two references to rabbis within it and that the instructions indicate that the reader should be praying between or during the performance of her normal household duties:

All the instructions assume that the person praying (i.e. the woman) is at home where children might disturb her. Thus, for instance, when standing for the Amidah prayer, the woman should distance herself from small children who might get dirty.
(p. 44)

In fact, Benveniste does not exempt women from the time-bound commandment of daily prayers, a detail which reflects his intent to increase women's religious practice within the home and their maintenance of Sephardi cultural traditions. During the sixteenth century, as the newly settled communities experienced dramatic social changes in both intra- and intercommunity settings, Benveniste sought to inform women of their duty to continue fulfilling the commandments given to them in the Torah, *Shulchan Aruch*, and other

religious sources. Not only did performing female-specific religious rituals such as lighting Shabbat candles or separating challah have important spiritual worth, but it also had significant implications for the unique role Sephardi women played in continuing traditional practices within the private sphere. Following the laws of *kashrut* and challah when making food, blessing the act of childbirth, and bringing in the holiday of Shabbat, during which work is not permitted and time spent with family and community members is encouraged, were ways in which women could participate in religious observance while remaining within the home. The use of Judeo-Spanish, the language of the Sephardi home, further links religious observance with the preservation of cultural traditions and values. By recognizing that Judeo-Spanish was very often women's only linguistic resource and writing the book in this language, rather than requiring his readers to learn Hebrew, Benveniste effectively communicates religious and cultural expectations and supported the continued use of that language for the fulfillment of women's spiritual obligations.

Furthermore, reading the book in Judeo-Spanish meant that women could learn and teach each other about religious practice without relying on learning another language from male relatives, who were the only ones who could access formal education at the time:

As far as he [Benveniste] is concerned, women can perform a great number of religious duties themselves, without being instructed by men, for instance, leading a Passover Seder for women, putting a *mezuzah* on the doorpost or making a *ma'ake* (railing/fence) around the roof. (Schwarzwald, 2017, p. 5)

According to Schwarzwald (2017), the detailed instructions written in the vernacular language allowed women to "function autonomously in nearly all facets of religious Jewish life" (p. 12). *Seder Nashim* also permits women to teach each other and their children about religious duties, further supporting the use of Judeo-Spanish in female-centric settings.

Using the prayer book, women could read the instructions and blessings for themselves as well as communicating them to others. Thus, Judeo-Spanish could be used to facilitate women's learning and participation in Sephardi traditions. For example, the instructions for conducting a female-only Passover Seder, referenced earlier as an example of the explicit grammatical acknowledgement of the book's female audience, indicate that the instructions are intended for female-only rather than mixed-sex settings (Schwarzwald, 2012, p. 15).

Despite Benveniste's efforts, the dominant conservative attitude toward women's education and religious practice prevailed, and Ottoman Sephardi women did not make regular use of women's prayer books, which were infrequently produced and disseminated (Schwarzwald, 2017, p. 13). As indicated in Benveniste's introduction, men preferred for women to fulfill their domestic duties and provide the home with a second income rather than spend time in daily prayer. Additionally, women's ability to learn was considered limited, and men's religious knowledge was deemed more valuable (Schwarzwald, 2017, p. 10). Thus, *Seder Nashim's* effect on women's religious knowledge and literacy likely did not extend to many communities beyond Benveniste's own congregation in Salonica. In other cities and congregations, Sephardi women remained largely uninformed of their religious obligations. However, the siddur's inability to change the dominant view of women in Sephardi communities does not negate its usefulness as an example of the ways in which Sephardi women used Judeo-Spanish in their religious practice. In fact, the lack of Sephardi women's siddurs published in either Hebrew or Judeo-Spanish during this time period suggests that women's religious activity was limited to the informal variety of Judeo-Spanish reflected in Benveniste's siddur. Sephardi women largely remained illiterate until the late nineteenth century and were thus unexposed to certain formal and literary varieties

of Judeo-Spanish, making their language distinct from that of men who were exposed to a greater number of styles of the dialect (Bunis, 2018, pp. 191-2).

Seder Nashim's purpose as a Sephardi women's prayer book sheds light on the importance of Judeo-Spanish to Sephardi women's comprehension and practice of religious obligations. The effort of Sephardim to preserve their traditions after their expulsion from Spain was carried out in part by women's practice of female-specific rituals and their education of their children in religious and societal values. The prayer book informs women about their religious obligations and how and why to perform them in the context of their domestic lives, as well as providing instruction about the many rituals that could be performed independently or in solely female group settings. The informal variety of Judeo-Spanish used throughout the *siddur* makes the content more accessible to women who were predominantly illiterate and not fluent in Hebrew. Further, the book explicitly establishes the connection between the language and Sephardi women's religious duties when Benveniste suggests listening to the Purim Megillah in Judeo-Spanish as an alternative to listening to the Hebrew version his readers would not understand. Benveniste evidently recognized the centrality of Judeo-Spanish to women's domestic and religious duties and made a deliberate effort to communicate his instructions to his female audience through the use of their own language.

CHAPTER V

WOMEN'S VOICES IN JUDEO-SPANISH BALLADRY

Characterizing Judeo-Spanish ballads

Having established that women contributed significantly to Judeo-Spanish's usage (and, therefore, its development and preservation) through religious practice, I now turn to the subject of these same speakers' use of the language through the Judeo-Spanish ballads they sung amongst each other. In this chapter, I first provide background information on Judeo-Spanish balladry, including its origins and characteristics. I then define the relationship between these songs and Sephardi women. Often sung by women and frequently featuring female characters, these ballads communicated expectations about purity and domesticity in female spaces and aided women in discussing and defining their experiences. This more general argument is supported by close readings of select ballads, which encapsulate how the medium facilitated women's use of Judeo-Spanish and enabled multilateral communication, even about sensitive or difficult matters.

A limitation of this examination which should be noted is that there is little documented evidence of these ballads from the diaspora in the sixteenth century. Because balladry is a predominantly oral tradition -- especially during the medieval period, during which literacy was lower and there was less interest in creating permanent copies of songs - - ballads were not often recorded in writing. Those that were may not have necessarily

survived four hundred years to be documented and analyzed by contemporary scholars (Shelemay, 1995, p. 28). The information that is available is based on surviving transcriptions of the songs' lyrics as well as modern versions of similar ballads. It is therefore nearly impossible to speculate what the melodies were during the sixteenth century and whether they are the same as the melodies used for similar ballads today (Etzion & Weich-Shahak, 1988, p. 5). The discussion in this chapter will not focus on the songs' tunes but rather their text and thematic content, which are easier to identify based on the documentation of medieval peninsular ballads and modern Sephardi ballads. Conclusions about certain elements of the ballads, such as content and themes, can be approximated from the existing evidence. Armistead & Silverman (1987), for instance, state that the sixteenth-century Ottoman Sephardi ballad tradition was "somewhat different and significantly richer in narrative themes than its modern counterpart" (p. 634). Overall, however, many themes are similar to those of the peninsular tradition during the same time or those used in Sephardi ballads today. A notable exception is in the explicitly Jewish content of some of the songs, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Thus, while necessary to recognize, the limitation of detailed evidence about these ballads will not have an overbearing effect on my analysis of them.

Sephardi song traditions were brought from the Iberian Peninsula after the expulsion and continued to develop after resettlement in the diaspora. In the words of Shelemay (1995), "song is carried in the memory, [which is] not an incidental factor in the powerful survival of song traditions among Sephardi Jews" (p. 28). Existing documentation of orally inherited Sephardi ballads shows significant correlation with Iberian documentation of similar music from the medieval era (Shelemay, 1995, p. 29). These songs, including *romances* (narrative songs brought from Iberia) and *kantigas* (lyrical songs created after the

Expulsion which were often adapted to popular tunes of the Ottoman Empire and other areas of the diaspora), comprised an important part of Sephardi cultural identity (Alon, 2017, p. 1). Though this chapter primarily analyzes *romances*, it will also include supporting discussion about *kantigas*.

Origins of Judeo-Spanish balladry

As the distinction between *romances* and *kantigas* demonstrates, there is a blending of influences and traditions in the Judeo-Spanish song repertoire. *Romances* were rooted in their singers' Iberian background and were carried to the Ottoman Empire after the Expulsion, thus becoming influenced by the social and cultural adjustments that Sephardim experienced in the Iberian diaspora. *Kantigas* are another example of this cultural exchange in that they were sung in Judeo-Spanish but frequently used melodies that were already popular in the Ottoman Empire, where they were created. The multiple origins of these ballads are representative of the history and heritage of the Sephardim, which were kept alive not only through the songs' content but also through their tune. Thus, the singers, often women, contributed through ballads sung in their community's language to the preservation and discussion of Sephardi cultural and historical experiences.

Regarding the similarities between Sephardi and medieval Spanish Christian ballads, Shelemay (1995) writes:

While in many lands of relocation, Sephardi Jews both perpetuated old songs, including the ballads, and also incorporated new elements into them. This was a process that occurred over time, at different rates of speed in different Sephardi communities, depending upon their accommodation to and acceptance within the new country as well as a variety of other social and economic factors. (p. 30)

The Iberian origins of these new ballads are clear from their poetic content. Etzion and Weich-Shahak (1988) provide an illuminating examination of a number of examples of modern ballads whose texts are related to the lyrics of medieval Spanish *romances*. However, there are some differences between the two genres. For instance, Spanish balladry tended toward heroic themes and sentimental tones, while Sephardi ballads often focused on prominent personal relationships that included familial, romantic, or courtly ties (Etzion & Weich-Shahak, 1988, p. 3).

Although the ballads' roots in Iberian *romance* style are noteworthy, their Ottoman-influenced elements are not to be ignored. For instance, one Judeo-Spanish ballad was originally thought to be of Iberian heritage until Armistead & Silverman (1983) discovered it was a Judeo-Spanish rendering of a popular Greek ballad (p. 40-1). Other ballads, as well as additional parts of Sephardi folklore, are cited to emphasize the importance that nearby musical traditions had on works that had been previously considered wholly Iberian (Armistead & Silverman, 1983). For example, many other *romances* have narratives and themes which appear related to the Greek *tragóidia* ballad tradition (Armistead & Silverman, 1987, p. 638). Other influences also included various existing Sephardi religious and cultural song traditions. In other words, there was borrowing from both within and outside of Sephardi culture (Shelemay, 1995, p. 32). The ballads of the sixteenth century thus provide a snapshot of the blending of cultural influences that Sephardim encountered in the century after the diaspora.

The multiplicity of stimuli from which sixteenth-century Sephardi balladry drew inspiration can be perceived in the various narrative themes in the *romance* genre. Some, such as *Rape of Dinah* and *David Mourns Absalom*, reflect biblical events that were also referenced in Christian Spanish ballads, while others, like *The Death of Alexander* and

Virgil, draw from classical antiquity and are derived from other medieval renditions of these classical stories (Armistead & Silverman, 1987, p. 636). *David Mourns Absalom* is a particularly interesting case in that the Christian ballad tradition associated it with the mourning of the defeated Christian kings throughout Iberia during the wars of the Middle Ages, whereas the Jewish version is sung on Tisha B'Av, the Jewish day of mourning for the destruction of the First and Second Temples (Etzion & Weich-Shahak, 1988, p. 16). Other, more "novelesque" themes include the husband's return, adultery, rape, incest, seductive or seduced women, deceptions and tricks, death, and positive and negative representations of romantic love (Armistead & Silverman, 1987, p. 636). These varying subject matters show multiple functions of the Sephardi *romance*: it allowed singers to reference historical events that were important to Sephardi culture and history, communicate expectations of purity and safety to female community members, and present difficult subjects such as rape and incest.

Female Sephardi singers

Catarella (1990) defines the *romances*, especially those that concerned biblical subject matter, as "a women's genre *par excellence*," noting that women were both frequent singers of the ballads and central characters in their narratives (p. 332). *Romances* were sung by women in many contexts and served multiple purposes that aligned with their domestic duties, such as to provide entertainment to guests, pass time during domestic tasks, and lull their children to sleep (Shelemay, 1955, p. 31). Describing a parallel Sephardi balladry tradition that took place in Northern Africa, where Haketía was spoken, Paloma Elbaz (2015) writes that the four major responsibilities for which women were responsible in the private sphere (kashrut, Shabbat and holiday preparation, purity of the

self and the family, and the preservation of oral traditions) were interconnected because women sang *romances* while cooking, cleaning, and caring for their children (p. 179). In regard to balladry's connection to holiday preparation, she notes that "the cooking, preparing and singing were equally as important as the actual act of sitting around the table to celebrate the Seder or [going] to listen to the shofar at the end of Yom Kippur" (Paloma Elbaz, 2015, p. 181). Despite traditional rabbinical opinion that men should not hear women's singing, ballad traditions were transmitted and performed by both male and female community members. Even today, Sephardi community members in Morocco cite female relatives and neighbors as the source of their knowledge of *romances* and *kantigas* (Paloma Elbaz, 2015, p. 182). This interrelation extends to the practices of Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire. Wedding songs, which were traditionally sung in single-sex settings during the bride's preparation as well as led by women during the public ceremony, are a demonstrative example of the effectiveness of this medium in preserving oral history and cultural practices. Women's responsibility to ensure cultural and linguistic preservation through singing *romances* was connected to their role as caretakers of the domestic sphere and communicators of oral tradition. Female transmission of these songs, both through intergenerational means by singing to their daughters and through the extension of this private practice into the public sphere at events and celebrations, was an important aspect of the ballads' preservation (Alon, 2017, p. 1-2). The repetitive nature of the songs' melodies, rhyme schemes, and lyrics allowed the characters and plots of the *romances*, which often reflected women's issues, to "permeate the collective unconscious" when reproduced in mixed-sex settings (Paloma Elbaz, 2015, p. 101).

Sephardi ballads' reflection of women's issues

Women's perspectives and concerns are evident from the content of various types of ballads. In regard to *romances* which retold biblical stories, Salama (2009) argues that these ballads allowed religious tradition to enter the private sphere and spread new perspectives about Biblical characters and stories that involved women, representing the roles they played in Jewish religious history. The popular *romance* "El robo de Dina" (The Rape of Dinah) is an example of such domestication. Ontañón de Lope (1961) provides the text of a sixteenth-century Spanish version of the ballad, which likely mirrors the Sephardi version during the same time period in theme if not in exact lyrics:

A caça salía Dina / la hija de[1] gran Jacob,
 por ver a los de Salén / quán bien hazen su lavor.
 hazen villas y castillos / *qu'es* cosa de admiración.
 Encontrárala Siquén / el hijo del rrey Emor,
 y de *aquella* sola vista / de su amor preso *quedó*.
 -- ¡O, bendita seas, Dina / y bendita tu nación,
 y benditos tus hermanos / también tu padre Jacob,
 y bendito Dios del cielo / *que* tan bella te crió!
 ¡O, si te pluguiese, Dina / de tener conmigo amor!
 Y Dina, muy vergonsosa / nada no le rrespondió.
 Tomárala por la mano / a vn castillo la llevó.
 más de fuerça *que* de grado / su virginidad gozó,
 y Dina muy *querellosa* / del castillo se salió.
 Quexávase a sus hermanos / mucho más a Zabulón:
 -- Si no me vengáis, hermanos / muerte mala muera yo.

Ellos en aquesto estando / el rrey Emor *que* llegó

a pedilla en casamiento / para su hijo el mayor.

Ninguno se la otorgava / si no fuera Zabulón.

Zabulón se la otorgava / y avn con la tal condición,

que vayan a hazer las bodas / a casa del rrey Emor.

Todos estando a la mesa / Zabulón se levantó:

-- ¡Aquí, aquí, los mis hermanos / muera esta mala nación! (p. 187)

This *romance* describes Dinah's encounter with Shechem, the son of King Hamor during which he tries to convince her to have sexual intercourse and, when she does not respond, proceeds to rape her. The ballad voices women's fear of sexual assault and the guilt brought on by a strict code of purity that they were expected to maintain. The villain Shechem is first portrayed as romantic and upstanding, as demonstrated by the sequence of verses in which he expresses that Dinah, her family and tribe, and G-d Himself are "benditos" (blessed) for having created and raised such a beautiful woman. However, his evil nature is revealed when he takes her virginity "más de fuerça *que* de grado" (more by force than voluntarily) in the king's castle. The ballad ends with Zebulon and Dinah's other brothers setting out to take revenge on her attacker, an action which Dinah cannot undertake herself and which validates the protection of women's purity as necessary for the honor of her entire community. The retelling of Dinah's story combines religious and gendered elements in a notable storytelling form, exposing listeners to a multifaceted representation of Sephardi culture and women's role within it.

The Sephardi ballad tradition also included many songs that told stories of the issues that women faced both in the medieval period, both while living in the Iberian Peninsula and after their expulsion. These ballads allow a contemporary reader to explore Sephardi

gender relations and power dynamics during this period (Shelemay, 1995, pp. 30-1). For instance, in the lyrical dialogues which characterized *kantigas*, women appear as speakers who react to various issues and events in their communities and in wider society (Weich-Shahak, 1996, p. 56). This focus on gendered experiences is also reflected in *romances*. These ballads were, of course, created within the context of women's subordination and a strict normative role according to which they were expected to act. The female protagonists in the songs suggest proper behavior for women, though the extent to which this norm is encouraged varies by ballad. Themes of domesticity and sexual purity are approached from multiple perspectives, using a familiar and memorable form of storytelling to open a dialogue about women's roles and responsibilities.

One predominant subject matter reflected in *romance* balladry is domesticity, a fact that reflects the gender of many of the singers and the prominence of the private sphere to Sephardi culture. Since the family is central to Jewish life and women had the primary responsibility for ensuring the family's moral and ritual purity, it is unsurprising that household practices were common topics of the Sephardi ballads = (Paloma Elbaz, 2015, p. 178). The Iberian *romance* "Vos labraré yo un pendón" (I will weave you a banner), which existed in the sixteenth century, describes a father and daughter's reunion when he finds a cloth she has embroidered (Armistead & Silverman, 1966, pp. 137-8). In other words, the female character's commitment to her domestic duties keeps the family unit intact, a relationship that indicates the importance of women's household responsibilities to the essential structure of Sephardi families. The centrality of textile production, which brought economic success to Salonican Sephardim, to this ballad's themes of social and familial reconstruction emphasizes the roles of the domestic sphere and women's involvement in it to Iberian Jewish cultural tradition.

The valorization of certain forms of women's domestic labor is apparent in various other Sephardi songs. Alon (2017) notes that the motifs of embroidery and textiles are clear in many other ballads, including the *kantigas* "Mother I Have Never Seen" and "Miserable Young Girl" and the *romances* "The Fair Young Woman" and "The Knight and the Captive Lady" (p. 9). In the latter ballad, the heroic tales of the Middle Ages are approached from the perspective of a knight's wife, whose domestic labor reflects her internal desires and experiences:

While this *romansa* depicts a world of knights and kings, and tells about a knight who comes back from war, at the same time, the song does not focus on the adventures of the knight, or his heroic battles, but on the woman left behind, her emotions and daily routine. As such, "women's work" in this case becomes a metaphor. The woman who washes her clothes with her tears and gathers them with her sighs cleans not only her clothes, but also her soul. (Alon, 2017, pp. 9-10)

This song brings the female protagonist's private world to the forefront, showing the essential work she did to care for and support her family.

Sexual purity was another common theme in Sephardi ballads. The above example of "El robo de Dina" serves as an example of how Judeo-Spanish musical forms broached difficult or taboo topics like adultery, rape, and incest. Of the similar Moroccan tradition, Paloma Elbaz (2015) writes that older women taught their children about their role in preserving a morally and ritually pure community, using the private sphere and *Haketía* to facilitate this instruction (p. 183). Though the Ottoman Sephardim used a different variety of Judeo-Spanish, the same dynamic can be seen in their ballad traditions. Since married Jewish women were perceived as ritually impure during monthly menstruation and were forbidden from having sexual relations during that time, they were considered responsible

for ensuring that they and their husbands did not transgress halakhic purity laws. Another element of family purity for which women were held accountable was their husbands' sexual satisfaction, which if not fulfilled could lead men to seek extramarital affairs (Paloma Elbaz, 2015, p. 181). Although both partners in a marriage were tasked with the purity of the union, the social and economic pressures which women faced in the sixteenth century meant that preserving a healthy marriage was especially important to them. The ramifications women's responsibility for marital purity were explored through ballads that told stories of adultery. "La mujer de Arnaldos" (Arnaldos's Wife) is a fitting example of a *romance* whose content reflects a female heroine and a female villain. The lyrics tell of a queen who is envious of her daughter, the titular wife of Arnaldos, and accuses her of adultery. Upon hearing this rumor, Arnaldos nearly kills his wife, who is ultimately spared by the revelation that she has not betrayed their marriage (Armistead & Silverman, 1966, p. 139). In this ballad, women are featured as both villainous and innocent, and two messages are communicated. The first is a warning to not betray the monogamous marriage contract. Additionally, a standard of morality and solidarity is established by showing the failure of the jealous woman to turn against another woman in her own self-interest.

In addition to positive characterizations of heroines who follow the laws of ritual purity, portrayals of woman as villains who cross the lines of appropriate sexual conduct are present in Sephardi *romances*. In "El villano vil" (The Lowly Peasant), whose antecedents can be found in texts from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Iberia, a shepherd rejects a beautiful woman's brazen proposals (Armistead & Silverman, 1966, p. 140). This song can be interpreted as a warning to Sephardi women not to take on the role of initiator in romantic matters, which would constitute adopting the responsibilities of men and defying their position as less privileged members of their societies. Similarly, "Landarico"

(also called "Andarleto") depicts a queen who mistakes her husband for her lover and is consequently sentenced to beheading for her infidelity (Armistead & Silverman, 1966, p. 146). The grim consequence of her betrayal echoes the seriousness of the standard of purity that women were expected to uphold. "Landarico" warns female listeners against violating the marriage contract and stresses the seriousness of the issue by describing how adulterous women could be subject to severe punishment, including death. Thus, a punished villain is as effective a protagonist as a praised heroine for the purpose of communicating societal expectations of sexual purity in the *romance* form.

In addition to disseminating societal expectations of women's responsibilities, Sephardi ballads constituted a form of communication about areas of sexual conduct that might have been harder to address in everyday conversation. For example, in the *romance* "Silvana," the titular character is approached by her father, who requests that she replace her mother as her father's lover. After requesting to go to the bathhouse before coming to the king's room, she pleads help from G-d and her mother. Her mother answers and offers to trade places with Silvana to spare her from having to comply with her father's request (Alon, 2017, p. 11). This *romance* opens a space for dialogue about incest and also reveals the important power of women's cooperation:

The mother's solution in 'Silvana' demonstrates the balance of power in the patriarchal society: the daughter cannot refuse her father's request and the mother cannot leave him or stand up to him. Their power is not equal to the king's, and so Silvana must go to his room. But what they are able to do is use their cunning and sophistication to trick him while ostensibly following his orders. Silvana's mother answers her daughter's call with an encouraging message: she can talk about her problem and solve it. As mentioned before, women in this patriarchal society

operated in a limited sphere, but as seen here, they have the ability to create their own sphere, a world of conversations and emotional support. (Alon, 2017, p. 12)

The ballad challenges the dynamic which makes women the primary responsible party for sexual purity by revealing how the innocent Silvana is preyed upon by her father. Rather than being portrayed as a temptress like the woman in "El villano vil," she is depicted as a victim in need of aid. Additionally, the ballad demonstrates how women could collaborate to resolve problems they were facing, as Silvana and her mother colluded to protect her from her predatory father. By using the *romance* form, singers and audiences were able to approach otherwise uncomfortable or inappropriate subject matters in a way that was easily understood and remembered. "Silvana," a narrative of the troubles of a royal family, functions similarly to the biblical "El robo de Dina" by addressing topics of women's mistreatment, but it also contains an example of women's ability to guide and support each other through difficult situations.

Finally, the ballad "Una ramica de ruda" (A Branch of Rue) explores the topic of women's preferences for romantic partners. When confronted by her mother about who gave her a branch of rue, a young girl responds that it is from a lover. Her mother answers with chastisement, and the daughter argues that a young lover is better than a husband (Armistead & Silverman, 1966, pp. 147-8). Pedrosa (2006) provides a version of the lyrics from the eighteenth century, which reflects similar themes to its sixteenth-century counterpart (p. 192-3). This version has been selected for analysis due to its being written in Judeo-Spanish, since earlier written versions of the ballad are primarily Romance ballads from the Iberian Peninsula and reflect different dialects.

-- Una mantika de ruda 'i una mantika de flor,

['iza mí'a, ¿kén te la dyó?] 'iza mí'a, ¿kén te la dyó?

-- Me la dyó 'un manseviko, ke de mí se namoró.
 -- 'Iza mí'a, la mi kerida, no te 'eces ala perdisyón.
 Más vale 'un mal marido, ke mezor ke mu'evo amor.
 -- El mal marido, mi madre, 'el gu'elpe 'i la maldi syón [sic]
 'i el mansevo de amores, la mansana 'i 'el bu'en limón.
 Madre mí'a, la mi kerida, no yorés, ni vos aharvés.
 Lo ke izites 'en gu'estro tyenpo, lo venites vos a ver.
 'Ora 'es de 'el kabayero, 'ora 'es de andar de akí,
 Ken vos krese bruha, vos akorta 'el vesti[r].
 -- 'Iza mí'a, la mi kerida, torna 'en tesúbah kompli[da].
 ¿Asta kuándo vas pedrida 'entre *setenta* 'umo[t]? (Pedrosa, 2006, p. 193)

By switching speakers between both parties of the mother-daughter debate, this *romance* provides multiple perspectives on the issue of women's appropriate sexual conduct. The mother worries that her daughter has committed a sin by being romantically involved before marriage, advising her to do *teshuva*, or repentance, for her errors. Her advice and admonition, expressed in Hebrew terms in the ballad, communicates Jewish expectations of purity to listeners of the *romance*. The daughter's breaking of the religious expectation for ritual purity and her mother's disapproval transmit Sephardi cultural norms. However, the daughter has as much input as her mother in the ballad, explaining that marriage is a curse and that her lover is like "la mansana 'i 'el bu'en limón," an apple and a good lemon. What distinguishes "Una ramica de ruda" from the other ballads that discuss sexual purity referenced here is that the 'sinful' woman is given the ability to speak about her perception of her love. Though the ballad ends with the mother's advice to repent, indicating the finality and superiority of her point of view, the fact that the daughter expresses her

romantic desire questions the validity of the normative view of sexual purity expressed by her mother. The *romance* allows different female perspectives to coexist, connected through a familial bond, and, by being sung and heard by women, provides space for opinions that do not perfectly align with the patriarchal society's expectations.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined the Judeo-Spanish ballad tradition and posited that these songs, which draw from both Peninsular and Ottoman traditions in their form and content, exemplify the various influences in Judeo-Spanish song and oral history and provide varying opinions on issues that frequently concerned Sephardi women. The *romances* and *kantigas* in this chapter demonstrate the functionality of an easily memorized and frequently reproduced form of discourse, the traditional ballad, in communicating and questioning social norms and women's issues. For instance, the value of one form of domestic labor is emphasized and demonstrated to be essential to the structure of the Sephardi family unit in "Vos labraré un pendón," while the expectation of women's sexual purity and proper Jewish conduct is both expressed and argued against in "Una ramica de ruda." The production of these songs in both single-sex and mixed-sex spaces disseminated the messages and themes of these ballads throughout Sephardi communities. Singers could use the storytelling or dialogue forms of the songs to present varying viewpoints on complex or taboo issues. Thus, women's participation in Judeo-Spanish balladry dissemination sustained oral tradition and brought light to women's matters, playing an important role in the association of Judeo-Spanish with Sephardi culture and preserving the language within diaspora communities.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of central arguments

In this thesis, I synthesized primary and secondary sources in order to describe women's participation in Sephardi society and Judeo-Spanish language use, as well as the many processes that characterized Judeo-Spanish linguistic shift and relative standardization throughout the sixteenth century. The women's prayer book and various Sephardi ballads that I analyzed demonstrate the importance of women's use of Judeo-Spanish as well as the larger cultural implications of their linguistic production. By contextualizing women's use of Judeo-Spanish within the framework of their assigned gender role in Ottoman Sephardi society and noting the historical and sociological elements that impacted the language's change and survival over this period of time, my analysis makes connections between these elements that reveal a new way of looking at women's contributions to language preservation and standardization, especially in regard to sixteenth-century Judeo-Spanish.

The mass expulsion of the Iberian Jews from their homeland led to the production of their culture and language in diaspora communities in the Ottoman Empire. Sephardi women, both as the people primarily involved in the physical reproduction of community

members and in their experiences under the expectations of an assigned subordinate gender role, were responsible for preserving certain important cultural traditions. These included the preparation of kosher food, the keeping of Shabbat and important Jewish holidays, and the transmission of oral tradition and societal values to their children and other community members. While of course gender roles only have so much effect on people's actual behavior, and sixteenth-century Sephardi women notably participated in the public sphere through their work in the textile industry and their participation in community events like weddings, the era's published responsa indicate that economic and social limitations had an impact on women's autonomy in the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, issues of family purity -- specifically, the maintenance of the *sivlonot* and *kidushin* process unique to the Castilian tradition -- were central both to women's practice of domestic duties and of rabbinical dissemination of Sephardi cultural traditions to larger sectors of Ottoman societies. These observations suggest that women experienced a unique cultural and societal situation that may have affected their specific use of Judeo-Spanish. Namely, more recent research on gendered linguistic differences suggests that Sephardi women may have been central in the preservation of more conservative elements of Judeo-Spanish due to their monolingualism and limitation from accessing the public sphere of Ottoman Jewish society. Their requirement to breastfeed their children two years, which was rarely waived in rabbinical responsa, increased the transmission of women's forms of Judeo-Spanish to their children. However, there is a notable lack of evidence of the actual linguistic production of either sex beyond the few remaining written documents from the period, so these conclusions remain conjecture.

Due to the lack of evidence of spoken Judeo-Spanish in the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire, I analyzed the prayer book *Seder Nashim* as well as various traditional

ballads to assess women's use of Judeo-Spanish during this period. As the only existing Sephardi women's prayer book published during the sixteenth century, a text which remained unamended and was not republished until Schwarzwald's twenty-first-century transcription and analysis, *Seder Nashim* is a unique example of a rabbi's acknowledgment of women's lack of education and effort to teach them about their religious obligations in their own language. However, Benveniste's book did not have a large counter-hegemonic effect on Sephardi women's education in the Ottoman Empire, and women's language likely remained limited to the informal, non-standardized and unregulated variety of Judeo-Spanish exemplified in the text of the *siddur*, language which reflected the various dialectical characteristics of different speakers during the language's koineization process. Additionally, the *romances* and *kantigas* analyzed in this thesis, though not an exclusively female phenomenon, can provide insight as to women's use of this communicative form to present or learn about female Sephardi experiences. A notable limitation of this particular analysis is the aforementioned lack of documentation from the sixteenth century due to the primarily oral culture of Ottoman Sephardi Judaism during this time. Thus, the conclusions drawn from the analysis of medieval peninsular and modern Sephardi ballads are more of an approximation of the features and effects of the sixteenth-century Sephardi song tradition. However, the primarily oral transmission of Sephardi language and culture during this time suggests the important role that female-sung *romances* and *kantigas* played in disseminating linguistic and cultural information. Overall, although the limitation of evidence of specific features of spoken Judeo-Spanish in the sixteenth century Ottoman Empire makes the arguments presented in this work more theoretical than would be ideal, the conclusions drawn from the available information indicate that women played an important and unique role in the development, usage, and transmission of Judeo-Spanish.

Implications

Recognizing women's role in the early development of Judeo-Spanish is especially important given that various factors have caused the language to become increasingly endangered over the last 400 years. The low juridical status the language experienced in the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire did not improve much over time. Notably, when the Ottoman governments opened schools for both sexes in the middle of the nineteenth century, the language's use decreased considerably because children were replacing Judeo-Spanish with local Turkish, Greek, or Slavic languages (Bunis, 2018, p. 189). Additionally, during the same time, the Alliance Israélite Universelle and other organizations established educational institutions which focused on educating children in French and Italian, and the prestige and perceived cultural value of Judeo-Spanish lessened considerably as a result (Bunis, 2018, p. 189). French imperialism sought to 'civilize' Sephardi communities by encouraging them to abandon their cultural practices, including the use of their language (Seloni & Safarti, 2013, p. 14). Participating in the Ottoman education system necessitated learning the majority language, and many parents encouraged their children to use it over their heritage language, hoping it would help them improve their socioeconomic conditions (Seloni & Safarti, 2013, p. 23). In particular, women's role in using the language in the home was hindered by mass education, which not only taught them new languages but also greatly increased literacy rates and women's participation in the economy (Seloni & Safarti, 2013, p. 14). Sephardi women's shift away from Judeo-Spanish and toward the majority languages of their regions began to see pronounced effects in the mid-nineteenth century and only intensified as legal barriers limiting their access to the public sphere were eliminated (Kirschen, 2018, p. 7). Judeo-Spanish's prestige lessened, and the number of fluent speakers decreased with each generation.

Although representatives of Jewish interests in Ottoman governments were required to know how to speak and write Judeo-Spanish in the twentieth century, the Sephardim themselves began to speak the language less as they culturally assimilated into Ottoman society (Bunis, 2018, p. 196). The political landscape of newly formed nation-states and World War I led to bilingualism and the eventual replacement of Judeo-Spanish with the local majority language in Sephardi communities (Bunis, 2018, pp. 196-7). As local majority and state languages began to be the norm for intracommunal interaction throughout the nation-states formed from the Ottoman Empire, Judeo-Spanish's marginalization to the private sphere increased as the language's use became limited to interactions between close friends and family (Bunis, 2018, p. 198). During the early twentieth century, Turkish-only policies in the Turkish public sphere put Sephardi speakers under pressure to use the majority language in place of their heritage one (Seloni & Safarti, 2013, p. 16). Further, within the ideology of the nationalist swing that occurred during the mid-twentieth century, speaking unaccented Turkish was a way to prove loyalty to the Turkish state (Seloni & Safarti, 2013, p. 17). Sephardim thus were pressured to abandon Judeo-Spanish entirely in favor of becoming monolingual in Turkish, so parents did not encourage their children to speak Judeo-Spanish at home. The lack of intragenerational transmission within the family was a major contributor to the endangerment of the language (Seloni & Safarti, 2013, p. 8). The death of tens of thousands of Sephardim in the Holocaust made the language's survival even more precarious (Kirschen, 2018, p. 4).

Today, Judeo-Spanish is spoken primarily by older heritage speakers or by younger Sephardim who use the language in online Judeo-Spanish communities. Bunis (2018) estimates that several thousand individuals, mostly living in Israel, former Ottoman territory, the United States, and France, speak Judeo-Spanish at present, most of them over

60 years old (p. 190). Nearly all of these speakers identify a language other than Judeo-Spanish as their primary language (Kirschen, 2018, p. 4). However, despite the lack of intergenerational transmission, the attention of linguists and scholars of Sephardi culture and religion has brought the project of preserving Judeo-Spanish to the public eye. Sixteenth-century Sephardi women's instrumentality in preserving their language's use in the home lends insight to the current effort to keep Judeo-Spanish alive and documented. While contemporary strategies of language revitalization typically focus on official planification and status improvement, women's continuation of Sephardi cultural practices and oral traditions after the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula demonstrate that community-driven cultural preservation can have a profound impact on a language's usage and development. Current approaches to supporting the continued use of Judeo-Spanish should therefore take care to address the cultural significance of the language and how to improve its standing within the Sephardi community as well as more traditional methods of status planning in a larger, more official context. Large-scale language policy may affect the decisions that families and communities make about language use, but ultimately, their choices are not dictated by dominant ideologies (Seloni & Safarti, 2013, p. 8). Thus, an approach to Judeo-Spanish preservation that addresses both the official and the cultural attitudes toward language use is essential to ensuring the language's best chance at survival.

Further research into women's use of Judeo-Spanish is necessary for a number of reasons. First, linguistic research itself, regardless of the specific focus thereof, can be used to renew interest in an endangered language. The attention of the academic community can lead to the allocation of resources to preservation efforts, such as the creation of grammars and other documentation as well as the drafting of policies that support the protection of the language and plans for its continued use in the education system or on official

documentation. Bunis (2018) suggests that cultural vitality and linguistic creativity can be maintained through the continued publication of fiction and non-fiction works, recordings of the language, and governmental and grassroots encouragement of public performance significant to Sephardi culture and in Judeo-Spanish (p. 190). Furthermore, a more extensive examination of the success of Judeo-Spanish speakers, especially women, in keeping their language alive can help inform decisions about how best to approach the preservation of the language today. Specifically, I consider more investigation into the gendered differences of Judeo-Spanish over time, as well as women's own perceptions about the value of their language, to be central to a complete understanding of Sephardi women's relationship with Judeo-Spanish, one that goes beyond the scope of this project. The more insight gained into the language and its development until today, the more informed our efforts to understand and preserve this unique and culturally significant language will be.

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