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# An Ethnography: Discovering the Hidden Identity of the Banilejos

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

AN ETHNOGRAPHY: DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN IDENTITY OF THE  
BANILEJOS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Yehonatan Elazar-DeMota

2016

To: Dean John Stack  
School of International and Public Affairs

This thesis, written by Yehonatan Elazar-DeMota, and entitled *An Ethnography: Discovering the Hidden Identity of the Banilejos*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Ana Maria Bidegain

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Abe Lavender

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Tudor Parfitt, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 22, 2016

The thesis of Yehonatan Elazar-DeMota is approved.

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Dean John Stack  
School of International and Public Affairs

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Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2016

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Ḥakham Mordekhay Levi-de Lopes. Without his instruction, knowledge, guidance, and most of all patience, the completion of this work would not have been possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I thank the Creator of the Universe for endowing me with the gift of life and instilling within me the love for humanity. I would also like to thank my major professor, Dr. Tudor Parfitt, for motivating me to perform this research and academically document the anthropological history of the Jews in the Dominican Republic, as well as all of the subjects for their eagerness to participate. I would also like to thank my family and friends who supported me throughout this journey with their money, time, and love. Moreover, I am deeply indebted to Elena M. Cruz for her mentorship, who encouraged me to continue my academic pursuits during the most difficult moments of my life. Also, I would like to thank Inês Nogueiro for guiding me in the genetic study. This work was supported and funded by the Yitzhak Navon Professorship in Sephardi-Mizrahi Studies of Florida International University. Finally, I thank the committees of the Jonathan Symons Global Jewish Studies fellowship and the AY FLAS fellowship for their financial support to finish my studies.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY: DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN IDENTITY OF THE  
BANILEJOS

by

Yehonatan Elazar-DeMota

Florida International University, 2016

Miami, Florida

Professor Tudor Parfitt, Major Professor

During June of 2015, an anthropological and sociological study was conducted in the Dominican city of Bani. On the surface, the banilejo people appear to be devout Catholics. However, having had access to their personal lives, it was evident that their peculiar family traditions and folklore hinted at their liminal identities. This study involved interviewing 23 female subjects with questions found in the Spanish and Portuguese inquisitorial manuals. In addition, their mitochondrial DNA sequences were analyzed and demonstrated a high percentage of consanguinity and inbreeding within Bani's population. The genetic analysis of their mitochondrial DNA yielded genetic links with Jewish women from worldwide Jewish communities. Victor Turner's *communitas* theory and Geertz's thick description were used as the methodology. Ultimately, the sociological and anthropological analysis of their way of life evidenced how their ancestors preserved Jewish identity covertly throughout the inquisition timeperiod (1481-1834) and how they continue to perpetuate it in contemporary times through consanguinity, and the power of superstition and taboo.

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## ABBREVIATIONS<sup>1</sup>

### TALMUD

y. for Jerusalem.

b. for Babylonian.

Mishnah

m. for Mishnah

### TRACTATES

Abod. Zar.

B. Bat.

B. Meši'a

B. Qam.

Ber.

Giṭ

Ḥul.

Ketub.

Miqw

Pesaḥ.

Qidd.

Šabb.

Šebu.

Yebam.

### OTHER RABBINIC WORKS

Oraḥ Ḥayyim      OḤ

Yoreh De'ah      YD

Hilekthoth      Hil.

Mishneh Torah      M.T.

Abodah Zarah

Baba Batra

Baba Meši'a

Baba Qamma

Berakthoth

Giṭtin

Ḥullin

Ketubboth

Miqwa'oth

Pesaḥim

Qiddushin

Shabbath

Shebu'oth

Yebamoth

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<sup>1</sup> "Chicago Manual of Style / Society of Biblical Literature Citation Quick Guide." *Benjamin Cardozo School of Law*. Yeshiva University. Web. 21 Feb. 2016.

## TRANSLITERATION GUIDE<sup>2</sup>

Hebrew	English	Arabic
א	'A	ا
ב	B	ب
ג	Gh	غ
ג	G	ج
ד	D	د
ה	H	ه
ו	W	و
ז	Z	ز
ח	Ḥ	ح
ט	Ṭ	ط
י	Y	ي
כ	Kh	خ
כ	K	ك
ל	L	ل
מ	M	م
נ	N	ن
ס	S	س
ע	Ā	ع
פ	P	پ
צ	Ṣ	ص
ק	Q	ق
ר	R	ر
ש	Ṣ	ش
ת	T	ت
ת	TH	ث

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander, Patrick, et al. *The SBL Handbook of style for ancient Near Eastern, Biblical and Christian studies*, Peabody: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999. Print.

## I. WHO ARE THE *BANILEJOS*?<sup>3</sup>

Baní is the capital of the Peravia province of the Dominican Republic. It is known for its production of bananas and coffee. However, it is internationally-known for its variety of mangos, producing a gross of 17 million dollars a year. Baní is a Taíno word, meaning “abundant water.” Some have suggested that it means “children” from Arabic, or yet, “I built,” from Hebrew. The latter etymology is interesting for the purposes of this investigation. The ecclesiastical records demonstrate that Baní was founded primarily by Catholic settlers from the Canary Islands in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first families began to arrive to the region in the early decades of the same century. According to the Haitian-born anthropologist, Dr. Jean G. Bissainthe, there are many reasons to believe that the majority of the Canary Islanders that migrated to the eastern part of Hispaniola were indeed Jews. During an interview with Mrs. Miriam Mejía Herrera, she remembered that her grandfather mentioned that Baní was founded by Sepharadi Jews that came from Spain in order to work in the agriculture industry (Bissainthe 94). In addition to this, there is a myth among the Dominican people that the people of Baní are Jews because of their work ethic, organized and reserved attitudes, and their dedication to business. Moreover, the inhabitants of Baní are often-time labeled as being “racists” because of their tendency to marry among themselves. Since the Spanish Inquisition and the *limpieza de sangre* decrees were still in full force until 1834 and 1870, respectively, it

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<sup>3</sup> See Canary Islands map on page 11.

should be understood that if the settlers were Judaizing Catholics, they had to be *conversos*—living as outward Catholics and Jews at home.

The founding families of Baní are the following: Pimentel, Mejía, Rivera, Herrera, Ortíz, García, Ruíz, Lara, Machado, Melo, Castro, Peynado, Sánchez, Díaz, Peña, Jiménez, Caraballo, Bernal, Lluberes, Soto, Carvajal, Pérez, Olivas, Aybar, Fernández, Pereyra, Rodríguez, Enríquez, Gutiérrez, Rojas, León, González, Araujo, Nieto, and Cabral. In addition to these, the Báez and Guerrero families were part of the establishment of the city of Baní. According to Dr. Valera, Baní's official historian and genealogist, all of the *banilejos* have a Báez ancestor in their lineages. During my third visit to his house, he explained that the Báez family arrived from Andalusia, Spain, to Hispaniola during the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Valera 2015). Father Germán from *Parroquia Santa Cruz* told me that the *banilejos* are clean, hard-working people, and proud of their history. He added that this stems from the fact that they bought the land and settled it.

Out of all of the cities to study in the Dominican Republic, I chose Baní because part of my maternal ancestors settled there from Portugal and Curaçao. My branches left Baní and founded another settlement about 20 km east called Cambita Garabitos in San Cristobal. Thus, in a sense, this investigation was conducted to learn more about my own roots through the *banilejos*. This journey will demonstrate the power of taboo, superstition, and secrecy and deceit, in order to preserve an ancestral heritage at all costs. At the end of the adventure, one will evidence survival of lineages, albeit a people with a loss of consciousness of where they came from, and who they are. This adventure is the

story of how I discovered the hidden identity of the *banilejos* and how they survived the clutches of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions.

## II. THE PROBLEM

The *conversos* are the descendants of Jews who were forcibly converted to Catholicism in Spain (1391 and 1492) and Portugal (1497). *Conversos* were among the first settlers to migrate to the “New World.” According to Catholic records, many *conversos* went to Hispaniola (present-day Dominican Republic/Haiti) during Columbus’ voyages. Migratory records also confirm that many *conversos* from Portugal went to Hispaniola via the Canary Islands in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. A significant number of *conversos* have been able to maintain their identities as Jews secretly through the practice of endogamy and the oral transmission of pre-15<sup>th</sup> century Iberian Jewish customs. This phenomenon is known as “crypto-Judaism.”

Upon visiting Bani, one can observe the lifestyles of the villagers of Spanish and Portuguese ancestry, who are called “racists” by the majority mulatto population. On the surface, this may seem to be true. However, after having gained access to their personal lives, it is evident that their peculiar family traditions and folklore hint at the origin of their hidden identities. To the outsider who lacks the knowledge of 15<sup>th</sup> century Iberian Jewish customs, the *banilejos* seem to be Dominican Catholics. This study will demonstrate that these particular villagers are descendants of *conversos* in the Dominican Republic who settled there in the 18th century. A sociological and anthropological analysis of their way of life will demonstrate how their ancestors preserved the Jewish identity throughout the inquisition time period (1481-1834).

One of the main issues that the contemporary Jewish courts are confronted with in affirming the Jewish identity of people who claim to be the descendants of *conversos* is that they believe that all *conversos* have lost their Jewish identity due to their isolation

from the mainstream Jewish communities. On the other hand, the Sepharadi authorities (14<sup>th</sup> century throughout 18<sup>th</sup> century) established the Jewish identity of any *converso* or their descendants, using the rabbinic principle of the majority. This principle is based on the notion that a portion that is extracted from a heterogeneous majority is reflective of that very same majority. Thus, since the majority of the *conversos* were on the Iberian Peninsula, any individual who left Spain or Portugal during the Inquisition period, in order to reintegrate to the mainstream Jewish communities in the Protestant lands or the Ottoman Empire, was accepted as a Jew, without the need of a formal conversion.

### III. METHODOLOGY

I contacted various churches in Baní in order to obtain access to a total of thirty women to be interviewed. I selected those women based on the following criteria: (a) their families have roots in Baní for more than three generations, (b) marriages between cousins in the family is allowed and prevalent. I will include those individuals who have at least two surnames in their genealogies from the following families: Pimentel, Mejía, Rivera, Herrera, Ortiz, García, Ruiz, Lara, Machado, Melo, Castro, Peynado, Sánchez, Díaz, Peña, Jiménez, Caraballo, Bernal, Lluberes, Soto, Carvajal, Pérez, Olivas, Aybar, Fernández, Pereyra, Rodríguez, Enríquez, Gutiérrez, Rojas, León, González, Araujo, Nieto, and Cabral. This screening will be used since these are the families that originally settled in Baní. The interviews followed a questionnaire that included 12 aspects: genealogy, marriage arrangements, dietary customs, family purity (during menstruation), childbirth and education, death and mourning rites, end of the week customs, religious attitudes toward the Church, superstitions, and ethics. The questions asked were similar to those used by the inquisitors in order to find the Judaizers within the Church. All interviews were recorded. I tabulated the amount of customs that each woman had. Finally, I had their DNA examined. Initially, those women were screened for the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) at the Hypervariable Region (HVR1 & 2) level. For the control test group, I chose a sample of 7 people who are not from Baní, and have a rumored or confirmed tradition of being Sepharadim. This allowed for a genetic comparison between Baní's subjects and the control test group. Those who have Levantine or Middle-Eastern mtDNA, will have their study extended to the full sequence so as to offer some definitive results matching those to Jews of Iberian descent from



around the world. Ultimately, the practice of endogamous marriages will have been proven through the number of "founding mothers" within the sample.

#### IV. JUSTIFICATION OF METHODOLOGY

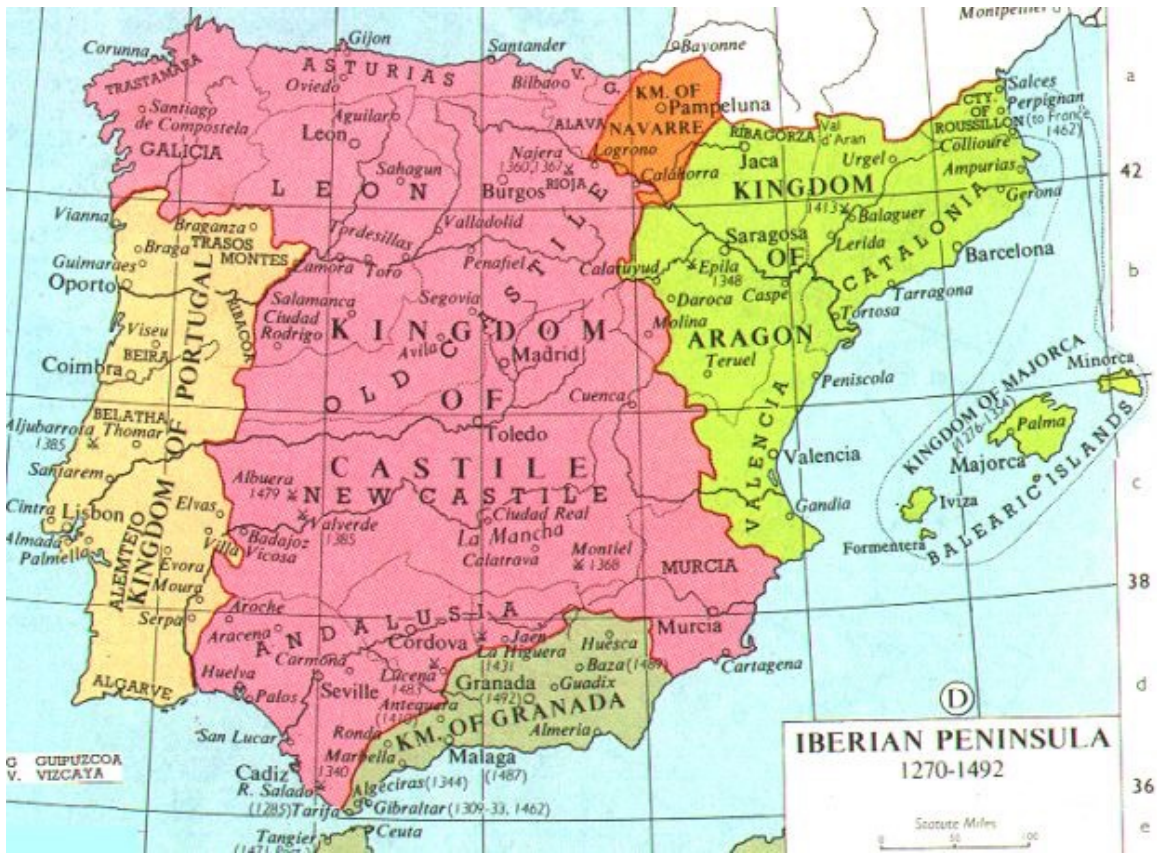
My method of research is based on Victor Turner's theory of "*communitas*."

Since some of the descendants of the *conversos* live within two worlds—Christian and Jewish, an analysis of their liminal customs will demonstrate that they are indeed within this transitory status. Moreover, by applying Clifford Geertz' "thick description," I will be able to uncover their Jewish background. Furthermore, the reason why I will be interviewing only women is because history has proven that they have been responsible in passing down these traditions to their children. In addition, according to Jewish law, the identity is transmitted through the women.

## V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

Whenever people talk about the “Jews of the Dominican Republic,” they immediately talk about those that settled in Sosúa in the 1930s. Few books include the history of the Sepharadim that came from nearby islands. Even fewer books mention the presence of *conversos* in the Dominican Republic. However, almost all historians assume that those *conversos* totally assimilated to the majority Dominican population. This study will shed new light on the actual existence of descendants of *conversos* in Baní and how they were able to preserve their hidden identity throughout the Inquisition. Ultimately, this research is unique because it incorporates genetics, genealogy, sociology, anthropology, and Jewish law. This study has the potential of engaging historians, sociologists, and religious leaders in discussion, in order to change the preconceived ideas about the crypto-Jewish phenomenon around the world. Finally, the contemporary Sepharadi authorities will possess a plausible method for establishing the Jewish descent of those claiming to be descendants of *conversos* from places that have been cut off from the mainstream Jewish communities.

## MAP OF OF 15TH CENTURY IBERIA



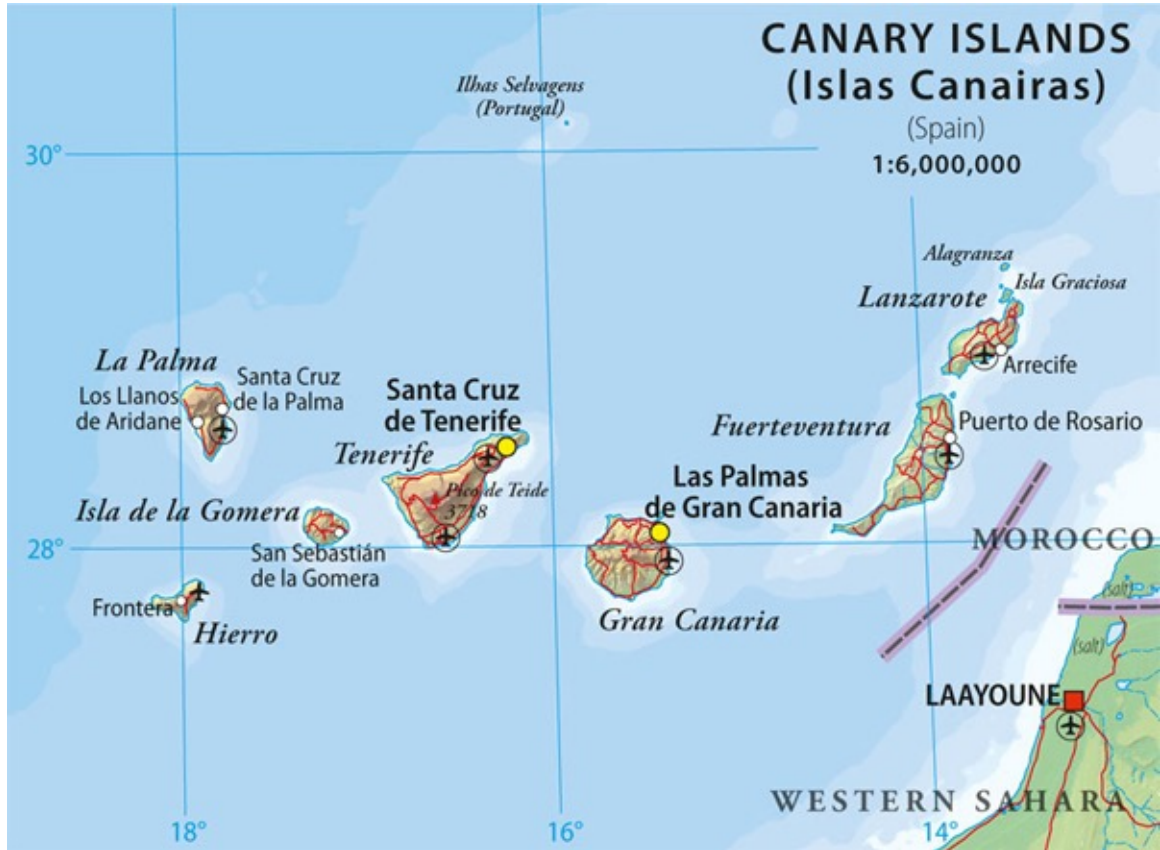
Created for LEARN NC

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/uploads/2007/09/1492spain.jpg>

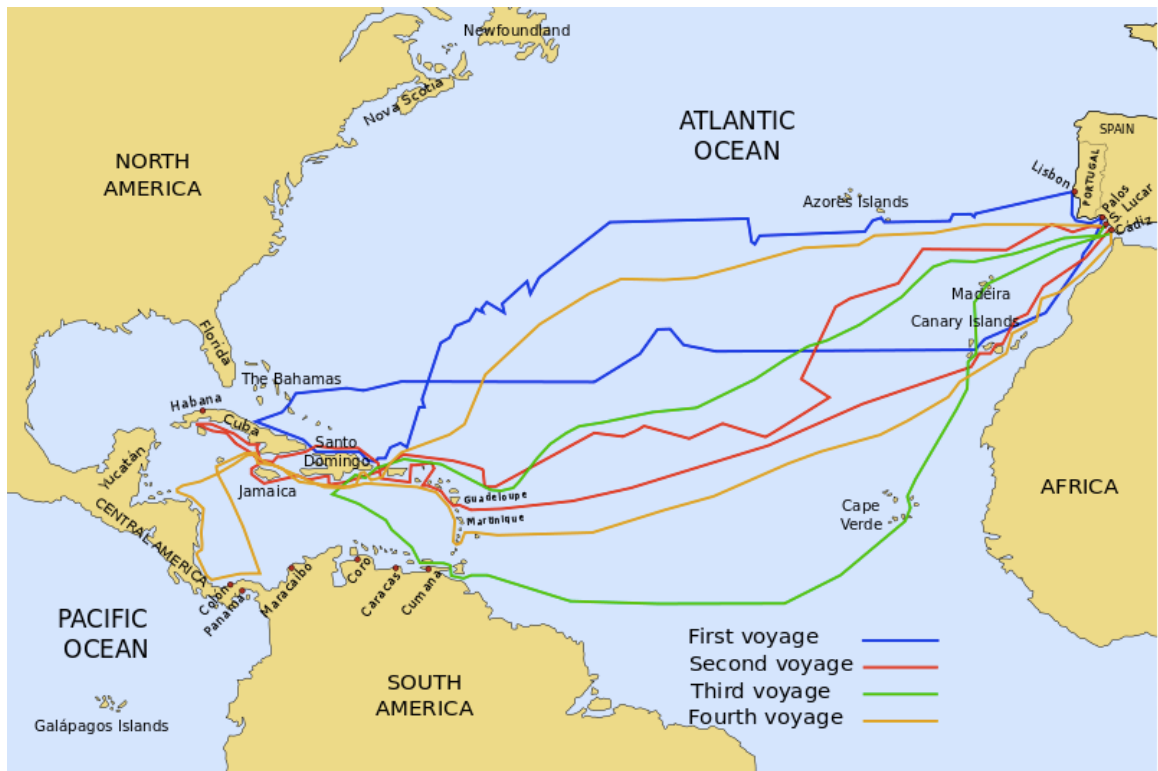
## MAP OF THE CANARY ISLANDS

Created for ROBINSON LIBRARY

<http://www.robinsonlibrary.com/history/spain/spain/provinces/canary.htm>



## MAP OF COLUMBUS' VOYAGES



Created for PHILOSIBERIA

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Viajes\\_de\\_colon\\_en.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Viajes_de_colon_en.svg)

## MAP OF THE CARIBBEAN



Created for the UNITED STATES CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY'S WORLD FACTBOOK.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CaribbeanIslands.png>



# MAP OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



Created for ON THE WORLD MAP

<http://ontheworldmap.com/dominican-republic/large-detailed-tourist-map-of-dominican-republic.jpg>



## VI. THE EXPULSION OF THE SEPHARADIM AND THE INQUISITIONS<sup>4</sup>

Until about two centuries ago, people of Iberian descent were persecuted under the suspicion of being called “Judaizers” by the *Santo Oficio*, throughout a timespan of nearly four hundred years. Many of them thinking to escape terror became subject to piracy at sea, losing all of their possessions, and sometimes even their lives. Whether these people were living in the “New World,” the African continent, Western Europe, or India, their lives were at peril as long as they had a trace of “New Christian” lineage. Though a number of them were indeed sincere converts to Christianity, some of their descendants chose to keep the flame of their ancestral traditions alive. “During the day, they went about as exemplary Catholics, attended Mass, went to confession, and had their children baptized. But on certain nights they met secretly in one another’s homes, reverted to Hebrew names, and read from the Torah” (Kritzler 4). It is these latter ones that received the derogatory label of “*Marranos*.” Their double lifestyle demonstrates Victor Turner’s concepts of *liminality* and *communitas*. In contemporary times, this socio-religious reality is known as the “Crypto-Jewish Phenomenon.”

### FORCED CONVERSIONS IN SPAIN

The end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the demise of the Golden Age of the Sepharadim. Yitzchak Baer vividly describes the tragedies that took place all over Spain during this time:

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<sup>4</sup> This chapter is an expanded version of my article Spanish and Portuguese conversas: A model for Sephardic Jewry under the Ashkenazic hegemony. *Journal of Student Research*, 1.1 (2015): 25-35, reproduced here with permission. I gratefully acknowledge the publisher Journal of Student Research for providing me the venue to publish an earlier version of this project."

In 1378, the archdeacon of Ecija, Ferrant Martínez, urged that their twenty-three synagogues should be “razed to the ground, and that they should be confined to their own quarter so as to prevent them from having any intercourse with Christians...He also enjoined the rural population of Andalusia not to allow Jews to live in their midst (Baer 95).

According to Martínez, it was a “Christian duty” to convert all of the synagogues to churches and to settle the Jewish quarters. Riots broke out in the following regions: Andalusia, Castile, Aragon, Cataluña, and Extremadura. There were many martyrs, including the rabbinic family of Rabbi Asher ben Yeḥiel. Baer explains that, “in Madrid most of the Jews were killed or baptized...some of the Jews of Burgos were baptized, and a whole quarter inhabited by *conversos* soon sprang up” (Baer 99). The forced conversions of Jews continued through 1391 and spread to the Balearic Islands. While there were many who fought to death, “so many Jews sought baptism that the supply of holy anointing oil in the church soon gave out” (Baer 101). Some Jews voluntarily converted in order to save their lives, with the hope of sailing to other lands in the near future. To their dismay, laws were established forbidding *conversos* from bearing arms and from sailing to Moslem lands. Baer adds that in Tortosa, Jews were forcibly removed one by one from their homes to the homes of Christians in order to be baptized. Some apostate Jews also forced their wives, mothers, and children to convert (Baer 109). As a result, whole communities were scattered and disintegrated due solely to conversions (Baer 131).

## NEW CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS WITH JEWS

Many enactments by the Church and crown were put in place in order to prevent the “New Christians” from returning to Judaism, albeit creating the phenomenon of crypto-Judaism. In 1393, John I forbade the *conversos*, henceforth, *anusim*,<sup>5</sup> from living and eating together with their Jewish brethren. The King enforced these rules by obligating the Jews to dress differently than Christians (Baer 125). Many of the *anusim* continued to practice Jewish rituals in secret, albeit living as outward Christians. Even though the crown forbade the *anusim* from Judaizing, they had contact with their Jewish brethren throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Baer describes their activity as such:

Not only did actual *anusim* try with all their might to live as Jews, but even the children and the grandchildren of apostates who had forsaken Judaism of their own free will and choice were now inclined to retrace their steps. The *anusim* secretly visited their Jewish brethren in order to join them in celebrating the Jewish festivals, attended the synagogues, listened to sermons, and discussed points of religion. They did no work on the Sabbath, observed the laws of mourning and the dietary laws, and fasted on *Yom Kippur* and even women observed the Fast of Esther. They had Jewish prayer books and engaged their own Hebrew teachers and ritual slaughterers (Baer 273)

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<sup>5</sup> *Anus* is the masculine. sing, *anusá* is the fem. sing, and *anusoth* is the fem.pl.

Haim Beinart explains that the *anusim* were considered part of the Jewish community, despite their conversion:

In those places where there were Jewish communities, the *anusim* were integrated in them in order to fulfill the precepts that required a minimum of persons, such as the prayers that required a *minyan* (quorum of 10 Jewish males), since they were considered Jews and were permitted to participate in the gatherings... Sometimes, relatives or known Jews would attend the [secret] meetings [of the *anusim*], which demonstrates to what extent the *anusim* were considered part of the Jewish community (Beinart 207).

The descendants of the *anusim* continued to practice Jewish rituals for the next 100 years, in opposition to the Church, as Baer states:

As late as 1486, *anusim* of Valencia, like their brethren in Andalusia, were able to find refuge on the estates of the nobility. *Anusim* gathered in groups at the port of Valencia, sailing from there to the countries of the Orient, where they could live freely and openly as Jews (Baer 359).

Apparently, the enactments of the crown proved to be futile against the fervent practitioners of the ancestral faith, and harbored the inevitable crypto-Jewish phenomenon.

## THE SPANISH INQUISITION

Ten years before the Expulsion of 1492, the infamous inquisitor, Torquemada, fervently persecuted the Judaizing New Christians, branding many as heretics, and leading them to the fiery stake as *autos-de-fé* (acts of faith). Upon surveying the

inquisitorial records, there is overwhelming evidence that the women were at the forefront of the Judaizing. The account of Juana Desfar reads as follows:

Juana Desfar came four times, ostensibly of her own free will, to confess to her judges. Nevertheless, in June 1492, the prosecutor-general demanded her arrest on the ground that her confessions were inadequate and deficient, and that, despite her oath, she had continued to practice the Jewish religion. While her first husband, a merchant from Barcelona, and her second husband, a notary from Valencia, were alive, she had conducted herself as a Jewess. She had fasted on *Yom Kippur* and induced others to do so, read to other *anusim* from her prayer book in the Valencian dialect and in the Hebrew language, and so forth (Baer 359).

Haim Beinart states that the “elderly women explained the rites and precepts to the young women of their families” (Beinart 208). Renée Levine Melammed asserts that “the family played a crucial role in many *anusoth*’s lives, and, not surprisingly, particularly in those of the younger ones” (Beinart 63). In the year 1500, an *anusá* by the name of Elvira Rodríguez was investigated by the Inquisition. Melammed states that:

This trial was by far the lengthiest of those under discussion; it lasted seventeen years, yet in the end the defendant prevailed and was released by the court. Although there is no reference to a Judaizing past on the part of Elvira, one wonders how she knew so many Jewish rituals (Melammed 65).

Moreover, she states:

The Inquisition was well aware of their [*anusoth*] active and central role in perpetuating these acts of apostasy and heresy. The inquisitors realized the

unusual importance of the home in crypto-Judaism and understood that the women willy-nilly became the carriers of the tradition that they viewed as inimical...As they themselves explained, although the mother might be burned at the stake, she would leave behind her children to carry on her teachings (Melammed 15).

Consequently, “Ferdinand and Isabella had succeeded in unifying most of Spain politically. Now they sought to complete the task religiously. “In 1478, at their [Ferdinand and Isabella] instigation Rome authorized the establishment of the office of the Spanish Inquisition whose purpose was to root out heresy, especially among the *anusim* throughout the kingdom” (Irvin *et al.* 78). Hence, the Church and the crown worked together to devise a plan that would devastate the Sepharadi community even more—the Alhambra Decree.

#### THE EXPULSION OF THE JEWS<sup>6</sup>

On March 31, 1492, the Catholic kings issued the Alhambra decree, also known as the “Edict of Expulsion.” At that time, Jews were given four months to either convert or abandon the land that they had known for over a thousand years. Those that did not comply with this decree suffered death without trial. Baer explains that the reason for this decree was to purify the Christian faith, in response to the previous failures of the kings to segregate the *anusim* from the Jews in the Kingdom of Granada. Furthermore, he also states:

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<sup>6</sup> See 15th century map of Iberia on page 10.

According to Jewish and Christian sources, the majority of the exiles, numbering between 100,000 and 120,000, migrated to Portugal...thereafter the illegal immigrants fell into the clutches of the Portuguese government officials, who devised all kinds of cruelties to force them to either leave the country or to embrace Christianity (Baer 438).

Melammed relates that once the Jewish community was banished, the *anusim* that stayed behind had no access to certain supplies, such as, books, wine, and food. The most detrimental result was the lack of examples as to how to live as Jews. She further explains that since the Jewish tradition is a “male-dominated” religion, the men were mostly affected, whereas the women continued to dominate in the domestic realm (Melammed 31). Although there “were no more ordained rabbis, teachers, judges, ritual slaughterers, circumcisers, butcher shop owners, and the like, the women did not have to undergo a major change (Melammed 32). Paradoxically, the expulsion provided the crypto-Jewish women the opportunity to become the leaders that they would never have become within the traditional Sepharadi community.

#### FORCED CONVERSIONS IN PORTUGAL

After having been expelled from Spain, the tens of thousands of Jews that left to Portugal would later be faced with forced conversions. King Manuel I wanted to marry the daughter of Isabella, the Queen of Asturias. However, the Church and the Christian people pressured the Portuguese monarch to get rid of the Jews. In December 1496, he decreed that all be expelled from Portugal. Nevertheless, by 1497 he had changed his mind and decreed that all of the Jews of Portugal be converted to Christianity or leave the country without their children (Lowenstein 36). That same year, a week before Easter,

Jewish children were taken from their parents and baptized. Amazingly, their parents held steadfast. It wasn't until they were lured to Lisbon, in hope of seeing their children again, that they would be forcibly converted. To their dismay, they were dragged to the churches for baptism. Many committed suicide, while others were condemned to be burnt as *autos-da-fé*. Just as the Jews that were converted on Spanish soil in 1391, they were called "New Christians." To the consternation of the Church and the Portuguese monarchy, these "New Christians" would later prove to be heretical, due to their Judaizing activities.

## THE PORTUGUESE INQUISITION

The forced conversions in Portugal created an air of "New Christian" heresy within the Church, falling under the judgment of the Holy Office for nearly three centuries. In 1536, Rome sent a letter to Felipe, the Portuguese monarch, in order to expand the Inquisition to his territory. The Portuguese *anusim* had been practicing their Jewish faith clandestinely for over 40 years. They kept the Sabbath at home and went to church on Sunday; they retold the *Hagaddah* during Passover and also appeared to keep the Catholic rituals during Easter Week. As it will be shown later, the Portuguese *anusim* were more serious about their Hebraic identity than their Spanish counterparts. At the beginning of the Portuguese Inquisition, three tribunals were established: one in Lisbon, one in Coimbra, and another in Évora. Moreover, there were also tribunals in Porto, Tomar, and Lamego, but only from 1541 until circa 1547. In addition, the Portuguese Inquisition also had jurisdiction over the religious affairs in Brazil, the Portuguese territories on the African continent, and Goa in India. Interestingly enough, the term "Portuguese" became synonymous with being a Jew. A survey of the Inquisition trials in



the “New World” would suffice to prove this statement. Ultimately, the Church used the Inquisition in Portugal to maintain its political control over the lands of the “New World,” by attempting to eliminate the commercial networks of the Portuguese *anusim*. To their dismay, the “Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation” proved to be more cunning than the inquisitors.

#### TRIBUNALS AND PROCEDURES OF THE HOLY OFFICE

*Tribunals and procedures in Spain.* The reign of terror of *El Santo Oficio* begins in 1481, when Friar Miguel de Morillo and Friar Juan de San Martín arrive to Seville, upon their Highness having received a bull for the Inquisition. “Accompanying them was Dr. Medina, a cleric of San Pedro. The three, working as one, began their inquisition with great diligence...” (Homza 5). Three of the most prominent figures of the city were stripped of their riches and burned at the stake—the wealthy rabbi, Diego de Susán, Manuel Sauli, and Bartolomé de Torralva (Homza 6). Homza asserts that, “the Spanish Inquisition was founded to investigate, punish, and reconcile the *anusim* who continued to practice Judaism, and inquisitors quickly codified the external behaviors they though signified internal conviction” (Homza 13). Within the successive years, various tribunals were established through the kingdoms of Spain:

1482 Zaragoza and Valencia

1484 Barcelona

1485 In Toledo and in Llerena

1488 Majorca

1488 In Valladolid and in Murcia

1489 In Cuenca

1505 In Las Palmas, Canary Islands

1512 In Logroño

1526 In Granada

1574 In Santiago de Compostela

*Judaizing Converts in Castile.* The inquisitors identified the Judaizing “New Christians” through their way of life. The following details how they were selected to be interrogated:

Within the Law of Moses, especially the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, strict, detailed dietary laws are set forth which distinguish between clean and unclean foods, and the proper or kosher method of butchering. For the purpose of the documents here, it is crucial to understand that Jews are prohibited from consuming animals with hooves which are not cloven-footed and do not chew the cud, such as pigs, as well as anything that swarms, crawls on its belly, goes on its paws on all fours, or goes in the water but lacks fins and scales. As for worship, Jews in Spain possessed an annual liturgical cycle that was apportioned into solemn holidays, major holidays, minor or commemorative holidays, and fasts. Jews observed the weekly Sabbath, which begins at sundown on Friday and lasts through Saturday...Ritual bathing, clean clothing, new candles or oil wicks, and the lighting of lights with oral prayers marked the beginning of the Sabbath each Friday. The principal Jewish festival of the year was Passover...The eating of this Paschal lamb was always associated with unleavened bread (Homza14).

Thus, any “New Christian” or descendant thereof that abstained from working on the Sabbath, eating “unclean” foods, and unleavened foods during Passover, were in contempt of the Inquisition. It has been suggested that the term “*marrano*” was given to those “New Christians” that ate pork, either voluntarily or forcibly in order to detract attention from the inquisitors. In fact, the Brazilian *anusim* families still have tables with drawers, which evidence the truth of this experience. When a passerby would come by the home, the family would take out the pork from the drawers and place them on the table to make it appear that they were not Jews.

#### METHODS AND PROCEDURES OF THE INQUISITION

*Water torture of witnesses.* One of the methods used by the Inquisition in extracting the truth from witnesses, was torturing with water. Homza describes one such trial: Maria Gonzalez was asked if what she said against Juan Nuñez, wife of Juan de Teva, is true; she said it is. She affirmed, “They snacked one day and observed two Saturdays, and Juana Nuñez’ mother was there, and they observed the two Saturdays in Juan de Teva’s house, and another in her house, and they fasted one Friday until nightfall, and at night they ate eggs for dinner, and it was a Jewish fast.” Next, “their reverences ordered a jar of water poured into her nose and mouths, which was started, and she said she affirmed everything she had said” (Homza 66). As a result, the tortured person would experience the psychological terror of drowning, and in desperation, would eventually tell the truth.

*Reconciliation of prisoners.* Homza explains how prisoners were reconciled:

Moreover, they decided that if a heretic or apostate has been seized and imprisoned in the inquisitors’ jail on legitimate information, and that heretic says he wishes to be reconciled to the Church and confess all his errors, including the

Jewish ceremonies he performed, and what he knows about others, without covering anything up—and if he says this in such a way that the inquisitors must presume that he truly wishes to return to the Faith—then the inquisitors must receive him to reconciliation, with penalty of perpetual prison, as the law orders (Homza 66).

Many *anusim* were reconciled by the Inquisition and found ways to escape to other lands where they could practice the Jewish tradition openly. For that matter, many of them had multiple aliases in order to escape the scrutiny of the authorities and maneuver business in the West Indies.

*Tribunals and procedures in Canary Islands.* The Inquisition was set up in the Canary Islands in 1505 to seek out crypto Jews and other heretics. The first twenty years of the Holy Office in the Canaries did not condemn a large number of Judaizers. From 1504 until 1510, only 34 cases dealt with Judaizing “New Christians,” of which two were *autos-de-fé*. The Inquisition records of the Canary Islands evidence the existence of secret synagogues. By analyzing the various cases dealing with *anusim* in the Canary Islands, one can infer that the Holy Office identified the Judaizers by the following customs: “Keeping the Sabbath on Saturdays, wearing clean linen on that day, cleaning their houses on Friday, keeping the Jewish fasts and festivals, not eating pork, killing birds in the Jewish fashion” (Wolf 33). They also lit customary candles on Friday in preparation for the Sabbath (xxiii). In addition, they removed the forbidden fats from the meat that they ate (Wolf 70). Evidently, these “New Christians” had a strong bond to the Jewish tradition, and it was the Inquisition’s prerogative to search them out.

Lucien Wolf's compilation of the cases of Jews tried by the Inquisition sheds light on other aspects about their lives. For example, he asserts that in 1520, many Judaizers sought to convert their slaves to Judaism (Wolf xiv). He also states that the *anusim* "married among themselves, imported Jewish husbands and wives from Lisbon and Madeira for their children" (Wolf xxii). Hence, the practice of endogamy was very important for the survival of the Jewish tradition for the following generations. Also, many of them worked as merchants and formed part of the international trade network between the West Indies, Europe, Africa, and the East Indies. Overall, the Canary Islands served as a passage ground for *anusim* between the Iberian Peninsula, London, and the Caribbean<sup>7</sup>.

*Tribunals and procedures in Portugal.* The Inquisition procedures of Portugal were fairly similar to the Spanish Inquisition. However, there were some differences in the customs of the Portuguese *anusim*. Pereira explains how the Judaizers were identified in Portugal:

Those having been baptized and deny that Jesus is the true Messiah, promised to the patriarchs, as predicted by the Prophets; performing Jewish rites and ceremonies, i.e. abstaining from work on the Sabbath, wearing festive clothing on Sabbath, keeping Friday evening, always abstaining from eating pork, hare, rabbit, fish without scales, and other prohibited things in the old law, fasting on the Great Day (*Yom Kippur*), which coincides in September, along with the other days of fasts that the Jews observe, reverencing their Passover, reciting Jewish prayers, bathing the corpses and dressing them with a long linen sheet, burying

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<sup>7</sup> See map of Columbus' voyages on page 12.

them on virgin soil, wailing as the Jews do, and placing pearls, silver, or gold in their mouths, cutting their nails, eating on low tables, sitting behind the door, or performing any other rite seemingly of the law of Moses (Pereira 107).

The Inquisition manuals of Spain make no mention of the placing of pearls, silver, or gold in the mouths of the deceased for burial. Neither do they mention the burial preparations nor the wailing of their deceased. Apparently, the Portuguese *anusim* practice more rituals than their Spanish coreligionists.

*Jurisdiction.* The Holy Office only had jurisdiction of those that been baptized, whether voluntarily or compelled. The authorities used “threats, confiscation of goods, beatings, or death, so that they should be urged that they keep the promises to which they were obliged, when they received the faith of Jesus Christ” (Eymeric 104).

*Acquittal.* After an arduous examination, if no proofs were found against the culprit, he or she was acquitted as follows “In the holy name of God we declare that there has been no legitimate proof against you that make you suspicious of heresy; therefore, etc.” (Eymeric 61).

In 1580, Portugal was annexed to Spain. Thus, Chuchiak affirm that the “*anusim* of Portugal could more easily reside in Spain or its ‘New World’ colonies” (Chuchiak 235).

In the following sections, it will be demonstrated that the majority of the cases of delinquent “New Christians” were from Portugal.

## INQUISITION IN THE AMERICAS

*New Spain.* Upon visiting the Spanish settlements in the “New World,” Bartolomé de la Casas suggested that inquisition tribunals be established in order to weed out all heresy in the newly established territories. Consequently, in 1570 a formal tribunal was established

in New Spain. It lasted until 1820, when Mexico gained its independence. John Chuchiak defines The territory that made up the tribunal of Mexico's geographic district as, "vast indeed, stretching from the unknown lands to the north of Mexico, deep into Central America as far south as Nicaragua, to the east as far as the island of Cuba, and in the west across the Pacific to include the Spanish territory of the Philippines" (Chuchiak 22). Similar to the Holy Office in Spain and Portugal, the ownership of any Hebrew or Jewish texts were not allowed in New Spain. In the "*General Rules and Orders* taken from the new index of prohibited and purged books for the Spanish Catholic kingdoms of King Philip IV," written by Don Antonio Zapata, rule XIII, it states: "The books of the Talmud are prohibited entirely, with all of their glosses, annotations, interpretations, expositions, and their other writings, along with all other nefarious books of the Hebrews, according to the constitution of the Pontiffs..." (Chuchiak 102). Chuchiak also explains that the Mexican Inquisition obligated everyone from 12 years old and older to attend the public reading of the first edict of faith on November 4, 1571 (Chuchiak 107). From that date forward, it was read on "one of the Sundays during Lent each year in all of the cities and towns throughout the district of New Spain" (ibid). Moreover, he affirms that Judaizers could be incarcerated in secret prisons for years (Chuchiak 123). He concludes, that "although in Spain cases brought against suspected Judaizers amounted to more than 29 percent of the total, in New Spain such cases were less than 6.8 percent of the total number of crimes prosecuted from 1571 to 1700" (Chuchiak 235).

Previously, it was stated that the annexation of Portugal to Spain allowed for the *anusim* to reside more easily in Spain and to travel to the "New World" colonies. In an inquisition document that addresses the *auto-da-fé* of 1596, the following people are

named for either being accomplices to the secret practice of the Law of Moses or for guarding the “dead” law of Moses:

Francisco Rodríguez, Gerónimo Rodríguez, Ana Báez, Violante Rodríguez, Léonor Díaz, Isabel Rodríguez, Ana López, Constanza Rodríguez, Clara Enríquez, Justa Méndez, Catalina Enríquez, Sebastián de la Peña, Sebastián Rodríguez, Diego Díaz Nieto, Pedro Rodríguez, Marco Antonio, Domingo Cuello, Jorge Laís, Manuel Rodríguez, Pedro Enríquez, Manuel Francisco del Belmonte, Diego López, Manuel Gómez Navarro, Jorge Álvarez, Duarte Rodríguez, Andrés Rodríguez, Daniel Benítez (Chuchiak 174). It is interesting how many of these were surnamed “Rodríguez.” Perhaps they were related. It is evident that the vast majority of the Judaizing “Christians” tried by the Inquisition were from Portugal. It can be inferred that since their ancestors were forcibly converted *en masse* in 1497, in contrast to those from Spain who were given the choice of conversion or exile, they were more faithful to the Law of Moses, albeit living as pious Christians outwardly for survival.

*Cartagena de las Indias and New Granada.* At first, Cartagena having belonged to the jurisdiction of the Inquisition in Lima, its own tribunal was instituted in 1610, with a broad jurisdiction over the Caribbean<sup>8</sup>. It included, “the Kingdom of Nueva Granada, Tierrafirme, and the island of Hispaniola, and all of the islands of Barlovento, and dependent provinces of the Hearing of Santo Domingo<sup>9</sup>. This implies the archbishop of Santo Domingo, of Santa Fe de Bogotá, and the bishops of Cartagena, Panamá, Puerto

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<sup>8</sup> See map of the Caribbean on page 13.

<sup>9</sup> See map of the Dominican Republic on page 14.



Rico, Popayán, Venezuela, and Santiago de Cuba” (Medina, “La Inquisición” vi).

After reading the cases of those tried for Judaizing, it can be concluded that being “Portuguese” was almost synonymous with being a Jew. In fact, the Holy Office officials of *Cartagena de las Indias* recorded “...and the Portuguese, being all of them Jews...” (Medina, “La Inquisición” 18).

Herein are some cases of those relapsed and punished for Judaizing by the Inquisition of Cartagena de Indias, which demonstrates this fully:

Luis Díaz de Lucena, a Portuguese merchant that lived in Cartagena, was witnessed of observing the Law of Moses while being in Seville. He was held captive and his belongings were confiscated, being part of the first hearing on January 15, 1604; he was admitted to reconciliation, imprisonment for three years, and later exiled to Spain (Medina, “La Inquisición” 14).

That very same year, the Portuguese merchant, Domingo López was accused of being a Judaizer, imprisoned and deprived of his belongings; he had denied being a Jew...while being tortured by the turning of his wrists, he began saying “Ah! Lord God of Israel” (Medina, “La Inquisición” 14).

In 1610, there were to accuse Manuel de Fonseca, a Portuguese doctor, resident of Tolú, accused by his colleague and companion, before the governor Don Jerónimo de Zuazo, which had mentioned that while being in Rome with a wayfaring priest, he had learnt the Psalms of David by memory in the romance language, that the latter taught him; also that he was told by the latter that there was a synagogue of the Jews in Italy when he disembarked, having heard them sing, he entered and knew that they were Jews. (*ibid*)

Diego de Mesa, neighboring *encomendero* in the village of Tolú, was witnessed as having said that the dispensation when the Law of Moses was observed was as good as the dispensation of the Christians, and that men were saved in it [the law] (Medina, “La Inquisición” 50).

Rodrigo Pereira de Castro, Portuguese, resident of Zaragoza, judged because he did not want to remove his hat during a procession of Corpus Cristi...

(Medina, “La Inquisición” 63).

Pedro de Abreu, natural of the villa of Santarem, kingdom of Portugal, said some dishonorable words against the holy cross and images of Christ and his mother, saying that one should not worship them... (Medina, “La Inquisición” 96).

Vicente Gómez Coello, Portuguese, denounced as a Jew in Cuba

(Medina, “La Inquisición” 172).

It is noteworthy that such a simple gesture such as not removing one’s hat during a Christian procession was a sign of Judaizing. Also, these Portuguese *anusim* were educated in some form of Jewish practice in Italy and other Western European lands free of the Inquisition. Such was the case of Daniel Báez: “In the same year [1680]...absolved *ad cautelam* and instructed in the faith...the Hebrew Daniel Báez, Dutch” (Medina, “La Inquisición” 170). Apparently he was Portuguese but educated in the Netherlands, and eventually caught by the Holy Office in South America. Moreover, a simple prayer mentioning the “God of Israel” was sufficient to be labeled as a heretic. In general, any disdain for the Church or its teachings was evidence of Judaizing.

*ANUSIM ON HISPANIOLA*

The first *anusim* to arrive to the “New World” did so during Columbus’ three trips to Hispaniola. Carlos Deive offers a detailed description of the presence of *anusim* in Hispaniola. He states that during Columbus’ first trip to the West Indies, the crew was comprised of 90 men, of which many were indeed *anusim*. He states further that at that moment, there was no legislation prohibiting *anusim* from being part of the crew (Deive 57). Deive states the following in regards to Columbus’ second trip, “about a dozen, or perhaps more *anusim* participated in Columbus’ second trip...the New Christians were Juan de Ocampo or del Campo, Antonio de Castro, Efraín Bienvenido de Calahorra, Álvaro de Ledesma, Iñigo de Rivas, and García de Herrera” (Deive 60). Deive affirms that criminals and incarcerated evildoers were forgiven upon partaking of Columbus’ crew on his third trip. However, “the first explicit mention that vetoes entry to the Indies of the harassed *anusim* by the Inquisition, is found in the provision of June 22, 1497...” (Deive 65). Later in May 1509, the same prohibition is repeated in the instruction to Diego Colón. In fact, at least five *anusim* from Seville arrive in Hispaniola aboard the Santa Maria Magdalena ship with him in 1502 (Deive 98). Deive states that many *anusim* paid their way into the Indies; they used changing of names and the reordering of their surnames to get out of Spain (Deive 68). By the time Bartholomé de las Casas arrives on Hispaniola, there was a large and powerful enough nucleus of *anusim* there in order to compete with the “Old Christians” for the *encomiendas* (Deive 72). For this matter, Fray de las Casas suggested for the inauguration of the Inquisition on Hispaniola, since the *anusim* were reluctant of following the Christian principles (Bissainte 81).

The presence of Portuguese Jewish merchants was prevalent on Hispaniola, especially during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During the month of August, of the year 1596, a witnesses of the Hearing of Santo Domingo wrote to the King expressing:

...that after having examined certain passports, that José Rodríguez, Portuguese, declared that he had neighbors of in the aforementioned city (Santo Domingo) that were leaving for England to the house of Duarte de Rivero, apparently affirming also that Simón Herrera, Ramón Cardoso, and Juan Riveros, Portuguese men, leaving with their plantations to England, and declaring that the witnesses were Jews, and were departing in order to practice the Law (of Moses) in liberty; both were arrested and the other sent to Puerto Rico, inferring that were many Jews living according their Law, not only in Santo Domingo, but in other parts of the West Indies...(Ayala 56).

Kritzler asserts that “in the Treaty of Madrid in 1670, Spain acceded to Europe’s right to settle the ‘New World’ ...and Jews were finally free to be Jews” (Kritzler 10). After the *St. Domingue* slave revolution, many Jewish merchants were at peril for their lives. A French traveler in 1795 on Hispaniola offers the following information about the anti-Jewish sentiments of the time:

Fanaticism is manifest with great fury during these processions; it especially incarnates against the Jews; Santo Domingo has a great number of Jews...The women and children carry manikins that represent the Jews during the processions; they choke them on the corners of the streets, in the plazas, and soldiers fire shots at them. Sometimes this frenzy is inflamed against the homes of

the Jews, left destroyed and pillaged. Last year, three Jews were beheaded and many French refugees were insulted and forced to hide in order to avoid the hatred of this act (Rodríguez 63).

Surprisingly, against all the odds, what began as a nucleus of *anusim* in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, grew into a large international network of Spanish-Portuguese Jews by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, anti-Jewish sentiments grew out of control during the *St. Domingue* revolution, incrementing the psychological terror for the Jews.

## CONCLUSION

*Termination of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions.* The Spanish Inquisition officially ended in 1834, whereas the Portuguese Inquisition officially ended in 1820. The last *auto-da-fé* in Portugal took place on October 27, 1765. An estimated 31,912 were burned at the stake for heresy, 17,659 were burned in effigy and 291,450 made reconciliations in the Spanish Inquisition. In Portugal, about 1,800 were burned, with 40,000 cases tried, while the rest made penance. However, it was not until 1865 that the *limpieza de sangre*<sup>10</sup> statutes were removed from the legal system. Chuchiak describes the end of the Inquisition in Mexico:

On that 10<sup>th</sup> of July, 1820, Captain Llop ordered the opening of the prison cells of the Perpetual Prison: They took out of one of them a man of gigantic stature who said he was the Jew Cristanto Gil Rodríguez nicknamed “The Guatemalan,” a

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<sup>10</sup> Laws that prohibited anyone of Jewish or Moorish ancestry from entering the colonies.

descendant of the Portuguese Jews who had been expelled from the peninsula in the eighteenth century (Chuchiak 131).

It is amazing that so many centuries after the forced conversions in Spain and Portugal, the descendants of the “compelled ones” were still considering themselves Jews. The post-Inquisition period will prove to bring new challenges to the Sepharadi in the Western Hemisphere.

*Post Inquisition Trauma.* Ethnographic works of various scholars have demonstrated the trauma that present-day *anusim* experience. All of the members of a particular Davila-Peña family of *anusim* from Saltillo, Mexico, have identity and confidence issues. Moreover, they have a sense of transmitted violence, in that the older family members slap the mouths of the younger ones to keep quiet about information pertaining to the family. A family of *anusim* from Santiago Rodríguez, Dominican Republic was extremely wary during an interview; the mother asked at least three times what the interview was for, after having been explained its purpose. Moreover, in his 20<sup>th</sup> century ethnographic works, Rabbi Henry Ucko, describes the Dominican Sepharadi as such:

The Sepharadi of Santo Domingo is very different from the *anus* in Europe.

Whereas the latter was baptized with the sole purpose of eradicating any trace of Jewishness in order to acquire previously prohibited positions, the Dominican Sepharadi...proudly calls himself a Hebrew even after his conversion to Catholicism (Ucko 27).

Moreover, Ucko offers insight as to the reasons for such strong assimilations to the general culture after such a long time:

Perhaps the assimilation and estrangement from the sources can be explained due to such a long time of hiding and practicing the Jewish tradition in secret. The fact being that those Jews lived as *anusim* for over a hundred years, without synagogues, rabbis, teachers, communities, nor feasts—motivated large gaps in the struggle to continue Jewish life (Ucko 141).

Rachel Adlers affirms the importance of communal prayers and ritual:

Opportunities for renewal and transformation occur in special events, such as liturgical rituals, which open access to the anti-structure. These events are characterized by *liminality*; that is, they happen away from or the edges of the usual order of social structure...they are bound to other participants by a feeling Victor Turner calls *communitas*, a human bond more fundamental than those of status and role without which other social relationships and obligations could not endure. For Jews who pray, it is *kavanah*, prayerful intention/attention, that opens access to anti-structure, transporting the worshipper to realms of meaning that are fundamental and yet suddenly new and revelatory (Adler 84).

Despite the lack of rabbis and communal structure of the *anusim*, the minister of America's first Jewish congregation said of the crypto-Jewish community of Belmonte:

One of the reasons why the important Greek-speaking Jewry of Alexandria of olden days died out was because they forgot their Hebrew. On the other hand, it is strangely moving to find that a password among the *anusim*, the secret Jews who attempted to escape persecution by the Spanish Inquisition, was the inviolately preserved Hebrew name for the LORD. This one Hebrew word which they held in

common with free Jews led to the final dramatic recognition of this Jewish remnant which had survived five centuries of duress (De Sola Pool 109). Thus, their use of the word “*Adonai*” attested to their survival throughout so many generations of liminal lifestyles—Jews at home, albeit Christians in public.



## VII. HOLY WAR: INQUISITORS VS RABBIS

### THE HEBREW COVENANT

*Berith*. One of the most peculiar Jewish phenomenological ideas to grasp is the Jewish identity. Being “Jewish” transcends nationality, race, and religious belief. Since it transcends nationality, one can be born in any country of the world and be a Jew. Moreover, since peoples from different ethnicities can convert into the Jewish people, race is meaningless. Most important, a Jew that is raised as a Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or any other creed, can return to the faith of the Jewish people. Jews have lived in various regions of the world for over 2500 years, and yet have experienced unity through their covenantal bond. The Hebrew word for covenant is “*berith*,” which denotes an agreement between two contracting parties, and sealing it with blood. Thus, the GOD entered into a *berith* with Abraham by which He entered into a special bond with him and his descendants forevermore (*The Jewish Bible*, Gen. 15:18)<sup>11</sup>. The sign by which this covenant is sealed is through the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:2-7). According to the Jewish tradition, this covenant was renewed with the Children of Israel and the mixed multitude at Sinai. The People exclaimed, “Everything that the ETERNAL ONE has commanded, we will do, then understand” (Exod. 19:8). This mystical union of Israel and the GOD is exemplified in the guarding of the weekly Sabbath. Also, this covenant transcends human time. According to the Hebrew Bible, Moses ratifies the Sinaitic covenant with all generations of the Israelites at his last speech before his death

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<sup>11</sup> The New JPS Jewish Bible Translation is used throughout this chapter, except when stated otherwise.

(Deut. 29:15). Ultimately, the words of the covenant were etched in stone and kept in the “Ark of the Covenant” as a reminder of this event. Hence, the Hebrew Scriptures convey the idea that this *berith* includes all generations of Israelites, irrespective of where one may have been born, and those that join the People of Israel from other nations.

#### THE POST EXILIC JEWISH IDENTITY

The Jewish identity further develops after the Babylonian exile during the time of the Persian rule over the Near East. Ezra, Nehemiah, and their cohorts were faced with a new challenge that posed a threat to the national identity of the Jews. The Torah already stated, “Don’t intermarry with them. Don’t give your daughter to one of their sons to marry, and don’t take one of their daughters to marry your son, because they will turn your child away from following me so that they end up serving other gods” (Deut. 7:3-4). The Men of the Great Assembly took it upon themselves to extend this prohibition from the seven Canaanite nations to exclude women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab

(Neh. 13:23). Whereas the Torah declares a person as part of the Hebrew People through patrilineal descent, the Rabbis declared one to be a Jew through matrilineal descent. This is evidenced in the Talmud where R’Shime’on b. Yoḥai derives from the Torah text [Deut. 7:3-4] that “your son” refers to the one born from an Israelite mother, whereas “your son by a heathen mother is not considered to be yours” (*b.Qidd.68b*). One authority by the name of Ya’aqob, from the village of *Gubiriya* suggested that Israelite identity should follow the patrilineal descent (*y.Qidd. 3:12*). However, the consensus vehemently ruled in opposition to his opinion, in agreement to the principle that the court follows the majority. At this point, it is necessary to define various statuses of Israelites

in the Talmud, namely: *Meshumad*, *Apikorus*, *Min*, *Tinoq Shenishbah leben hagoyim*, and *Anus*.

*Meshumad*. Maimonides codified in his *Yad Heḥazaqah*, the Talmudic law in regards to the statuses of Jews, depending on their behavior and/or belief. He states, “And these are those that do not have a portion to the world to come: the heretics, the Epicureans, those who deny the Torah, those who deny the resurrection, those who deny the coming of a redeemer...” (*M.T. Hil. Teshubah 3:14*). The *meshumad* or apostate is defined as:

Someone who has made a practice of willfully committing a particular sin [to the point where] he is accustomed to committing it and his deeds are public

knowledge... in regard to him, it is as if this precept has been nullified entirely.

Such a person is considered an apostate in regard to that matter. This applies

[only] if he [commits the sin] with the intent of angering the GOD. An example of an apostate in regard to the entire Torah is one who turn to the faith of the gentiles

when they enact [harsh] decrees [against the Jews] and clings to them, saying:

"What value do I have in clinging to Israel while they are debased and pursued.

It's better to cling to those who have the upper hand." Such an individual is an apostate in regard to the entire Torah (*M.T. Hil. Teshubah 3:18*).

The latter case was applied to those Jews on Spanish soil that converted voluntarily in order to climb the social ladder or to escape death. This issue is discussed extensively in the *responsa* literature of the Sepharadi authorities.

*Apikorus*. The Talmudic authorities dealt with Hellenized Jews during their day. These were called the *Apikorosim*, or Epicureans. According to Talmudic law, there are three

types of Israelites that fall under this category: one who denies the existence of prophecy and maintains that there is no knowledge communicated from the GOD to the hearts of men; one who disputes the prophecy of Moses, our teacher; one who maintains that the Creator is not aware of the deeds of men” (*M.T. Hil. Teshubah 3:16*). In contemporary times, rabbinic authorities consider atheistic Jews as *Apikorosim*. During the forced conversions of Spain in 1391, undoubtedly there were some Jews who could be classified as such. They neither desired to be observant Jews, nor hypocritical Christians. However, conversion was the more favorable choice, lest they perish. Thus states Yitzchak Baer, “so many Jews sought baptism that the supply of holy anointing oil in the church soon gave out” (Baer 101).

*Min.* Maimonides lays out the conditions for a *min*, or heretic, in his *Mishneh Torah*. He states that these five are considered *minim*:<sup>12</sup>

One who says there is no GOD nor ruler of the world; one who accepts the concept of a ruler, but maintains that there are two or more; one who accepts that there is one Master [of the world], but maintains that He has a body or form; one who maintains that He was not the sole First Being and Creator of all existence; one who serves a star, constellation, or other entity so that it will serve as an intermediary between him and the ETERNAL LORD (*M.T. Hil. Teshubah 3:15*).

According to this legal decision, it is evident that a Jew would be considered a heretic for adhering to Christian doctrine, namely, the sanctity of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of

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<sup>12</sup> *Minim* is the plural of *min*.

Jesus, the Co-eternity of GOD the Son, the Immaculate Conception and incarnation of GOD in the person of Jesus, and the intermediary and intercessory work of Jesus in Heaven. For that matter, some Jews could not accept converting to Catholicism and preferred to die as martyrs. Baer explains that, “In Madrid most of the Jews were killed or baptized...some of the Jews of Burgos were baptized, and a whole quarter inhabited by *conversos* soon sprang up” (Baer 99). The latter of the two will be the topic of this analysis.

*Tinoq Shenishbah leben hagoyim*. The Talmudic Rabbis dealt with cases of children that were sequestered by non-Israelites. This implies that an Israelite was held captive as a child and redeemed as an adult. The legal ramifications raise many questions. Is this Israelite responsible for upholding the precepts? Is such a person held culpable for violating the prohibitions on the Sabbath? Rab and Shemu’el rule that a sequestered Israelite by any of the nations, and a proselyte are not held culpable for the errors that they commit until they become knowledgeable about their acts (*b. Šabb.68b*).

Maimonides adds:

The children of these errant people and their grandchildren whose parents led them away and who were born among this heresy and raised according to their conception, they are considered as a child captured and raised by them. Such a child may not be eager to follow the path of precepts, for it is as if he was compelled not to. Even if later, he hears that he is Jewish and saw Jews and their

faith, he is still considered as one who was *anus*,<sup>13</sup> for he was raised according to their mistaken path. This applies to those who we mentioned who follow the erroneous path of their ancestors. Therefore it is appropriate to motivate them to repent and draw them to the power of the Torah with words of peace (*M.T. Hil. Mamerim* 3:3).

Maimonides was speaking about the children of those born into heretical sects of Jews that denied the oral tradition.<sup>14</sup> This ruling can be applied appropriately to the descendants of both voluntarily and involuntarily Jewish converts to Catholicism. The latter ones are known as the *anusim* and *bene anusim* in the rabbinic *responsa*.

*Anus*. The most important legal term used in the Talmud that applies to the *conversos* and their descendants is *anus*, i.e. coerced or compelled. The Talmud defines an Israelite that is found in a position where he or she cannot fulfill a precept as *anus*. One can have two precepts to fulfill at one moment, but only have the possibility to fulfill one of the two; this person is *anus*. Those Iberian Jews that were forcibly converted to Catholicism are considered *anusim*, since the socio-political construct did not allow for them to practice the Jewish tradition openly. Also, the lack of knowledge of the legal ramifications of a specific precept also classifies an Israelite as an *anus* (*M.T Hil. Šeb.* 3:7). Moreover, the Rabbis exempt all *anusim* from taking offerings to the Temple for their errors, on the grounds that they were not able to fulfill the precepts (*M.T Hil. Šeg.* 10:10). Finally, the Rabbis exempt all *anusim* from corporal punishments (*b.B.Qam.*31a; *b.Ned.* 27a).

The *anusim* and their descendants will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

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<sup>13</sup> Compelled against observance

<sup>14</sup> Karaites

## CATHOLIC SACRAMENTS

Otto Gisler defines a sacrament as “a visible sign instituted by Jesus Christ, through which invisible grace and sanctification are communicated with us” (Gisler 37). Baptism is the first of seven sacraments of the Roman Apostolic Catholic Church. The others include: Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The sacraments were instituted by the Church, under the assistance of the Holy Spirit in order to increase reverence and respect. Since they are considered to be led by the Holy Spirit, essentially, they cannot be nullified. Many cases throughout the history of the Catholic Church have raised the issue of exceptions to this rule. It will be shown briefly how the sacrament of baptism created dissension among the Church authorities during the forced conversions of 1391 in Spain and 1497 in Portugal.

## BAPTISM IN THE APOSTOLIC WRITINGS

The Apostolic Writings speak of two types of baptisms, namely, the “baptism of John,” and the “baptism of Jesus.” The former was a physical immersion that demonstrated sincere repentance and the messianic expectation. The latter refers to the physical immersion in the “name of Jesus,” for the forgiveness of sins, and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

*The baptism of John.* The Gospel of Matthew states, “At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River so that John would baptize him” (Common English Bible, Mat. 3:13). Robert Webb believes that John was part of the Essene Jewish sect

(Webb 351). He is not alone on this theory. This theory is based on the notion that John’s baptism is related to the daily ablution of the Essenes. It is interesting that Jesus comes to be baptized by John, thereby demonstrating the need for repentance of his sins.

According to the Book of Acts, those Jews who cherished immediate messianic expectations were baptized by John or by his followers as a sign of repentance (Common English Bible, Acts 13:24). After the resurrection of Jesus, a modified form of baptism was implanted by his followers.

*Baptism in the name of Jesus.* In Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus commands his disciples, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Common English Bible, Mat. 28:19). The Apostle Paul contrasts John’s baptism with Jesus’, stating, “John baptized with a baptism by which people showed they were changing their hearts and lives. It was a baptism that told people about the one who was coming after him. This is the one in whom they were to believe. This one is Jesus” (ibid, Acts 19:4). It can be inferred from these passages that John prepared the way for Jesus’ messianic movement to spread throughout Judea and the Jewish diaspora. Moreover, Jesus told his apostles, “John baptized with water, but in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (ibid, Acts 1:5). During the Pentecost, many Jews from various nations were gathered at the Temple in honor of the precept to present their offerings 50 days after the Paschal lamb offering. At that moment, after the apostles began speaking in intelligible languages, in astonishment of the diaspora Jews, Peter proclaimed, “Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (ibid, Acts 2:38). Overall, the Apostolic Writings portray baptism in Jesus’ name as evidenced by the power of the Holy Spirit.



## BAPTISM IN CATHOLIC CANONIC LAW

*Conversion.* The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are yet in full communion with the Catholic Church...” (Catholic Church 1271). Moreover, the 1272st paragraph states:

Incorporated into Christ by baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (character) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing fruits of salvation. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated (Catholic Church 1272).

Baptism as performed by the Catholic Church involves the “immersion of the body or the pouring of water upon the head of the candidate, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (1278). According to these Canonic principles, the sacrament of baptism cannot be revoked or repeated. When the Iberian Jews were forced to convert between 1391 and 1497, respectively in Spain and Portugal, some Church authorities argued that their conversion was not acceptable since it was forced upon them. For example, Isidore of Seville considered conversion under the fear of death to be forced conversion, thereby invalid (Netanyahu 1014). The majority consensus, nevertheless, cited the canonic principles to uphold their inclusion into Christ. As a result, so many “New Christians” were considered heretical by the Catholic Church officials, since they did not abandon the practice Jewish rituals. The outcome was the inevitable Inquisition.

*Christening*. Another important form of inclusion into the Church is that of infant baptism. This ceremony is known as the Christening. Catholic doctrine teaches that children have the need of baptism, being that they are born with a “fallen human nature tainted by original sin.” Hence Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

The practice of infant baptism is an immemorial tradition of the Church. There is explicit testimony to this practice from the second century on, and it is quite possible that , from the beginning of the apostolic preaching, when whole ‘households’ received baptism, infants may have also be baptized (Catholic Church 1252).

“New Christians” throughout the Inquisition time period continued to take their children to be christened by the priests. However, upon arriving home, their parents would wash their children’s heads, as to undue the effects of holy water. To their dismay, the inquisitors considered them to be part of the “Body of Christ,” prohibiting them to disassociate themselves from the Church.

#### THE JEWISH IDENTITY OF THE ANUSIM

To the Church, the forced Jewish converts were coreligionists, albeit insincere in many cases. Whereas the Church authorities responded with the Inquisition, the Sepharadi rabbinic authorities wrote numerous *responsa* in regards to the inalienable connection to the Jewish People of the *anusim* through their birthright. The *responsa* will demonstrate how the Sepharadi sages during the first two centuries of the Inquisition dealt with the identity and reintegration of the *anusim* into the Jewish communities throughout North Africa and the Ottoman Empire.

## 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY RABBIS ON COERCED ONES IN SPAIN (1391 AND 1492)

The most important rabbinic literature on the *anusim* was written in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the authorities that fled from Spain to North Africa in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries: Yişhaq b. Shesheth Barfet, Shime'on b. Şemaḥ Durán, Solomon b. Shime'on Durán, and Abraham ibn Zimra. They based their rulings on the following Talmudic principles:

*Modus Operandi.* In the Babylonian Talmud (*b.Ḥul.12a*) we learn that wherever the facts can be ascertained, we must do so, and wherever one cannot, we follow the majority. Thus, the *shoḥet*<sup>15</sup> is considered valid since the majority of people with the same *modus operandi* are known to be professionals in the ritual slaughtering and their laws.

Therefore, those peoples claiming to be Jews from Spain demonstrate that they follow the same *modus operandi* of the majority of the Jews.

*A portion extracted from a heterogeneous majority.* In the Babylonian Talmud (*b.Ḥul.95a*) we learn to follow the majority because anything separated from a heterogeneous group is regarded as having been separated from the majority. The case we are dealing here is about ten butcher shops found in a city, where nine of them are of Israelites and one is non-Israelite. If a non-Israelite sells meat to an Israelite, the law is that the Israelite can eat it, since we presume that the meat came from the majority. Therefore, someone leaving the Iberian Peninsula and presents himself/herself before a *Beth Din*<sup>16</sup> can be established as a Jew/ess based upon the notion that the majority of

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<sup>15</sup> Ritual slaughterer

<sup>16</sup> Rabbinic tribunal

those peoples leaving Iberia during the Inquisition are indeed Jews, since they originate from the majority of the group of *anusim*, whose mothers were Jewish.

*Profit loss.* In the Talmud (*b.B.Meṣi'a.5b*) we learn that where there is no profit for the person involved, we assume that he/she does not transgress through lying. This principle is applied to those *anusim* that left their possessions, comfort, and lifestyles in order to return to the Jewish practice openly in another land. We presume that he/she does not lie about being a Jew/ess because of all of the losses at stake.

*A dying person and oaths.* In the Talmud (*b.Šeb.42b*) we learn from a case about a collection of payment to the Temple, that a person is not required to make an oath, since we presume that no one conspires to defraud the Temple. However, this applies to the dying person because there is no profit gain on his/her behalf. During the Inquisition time (1482-1834) it is understood that the Holy Office persecuted the New Christians and their descendants. Therefore, this principle would apply to those *anusim* leaving Iberia to practice the Jewish tradition openly.

Overall, the aforementioned authorities established a legal presumption that the *anusim* were born of Jewish mothers, and that there is no suspicion about their lineage, since they generally did not marry “Old Christians”. They also agreed that the coerced ones were obligated to leave the Catholic lands. Interestingly, many post-15<sup>th</sup> century authorities started to condemn those that continued to stay in Spain.

#### 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY RABBIS ON THE COERCED ONES IN PORTUGAL (1497)

*Qiddushin and gittin of the anusim.* One of the most challenging cases for the Sepharadi authorities to deal with was in regards to the status of the Jewish marriages of those Portuguese *conversas* that left their husbands behind. According to Torah law, a woman

cannot remarry without having received a bill of divorcement from her husband<sup>17</sup> (Deut. 24:1-4). If a woman in such a case happened to remarry or have a child out of wedlock, she would be considered an adulteress and her child would be considered a *mamzer*.<sup>18</sup> During the time of the forced conversions and Inquisition, some couples were separated, due to a difference of opinion. Sometimes, some of these women wanted to leave their husbands to be able to practice the Jewish tradition openly in another land, against the whims of their husbands. The legal ramifications are clear as to her future relationships and descendants. Ribbi Shemuel de Medina, representing the Sepharadi tribunal at Thessaloniki ruled in the following manner in such a cases:

...In a previous (early) agreement, it was written and signed in Salonika, may God be its defense, about the *anusim* in Portugal and wherever they are, to inform to all those who see this writing of ours, that it was agreed upon by all the Sages of this city, the city of Salonika etc...That all woman who are married to any man from the Sons of Israel while they are under the coercive/destructive decree, even when they have *qiddushin* (Jewish marriage) witnessed by other Israelites standing there, who watched the water of destruction over their heads [baptism], that one must not be concerned about (the validity) of those *qiddushin* whatsoever, so that she is allowed to marry any man who wants to marry her, either in the place of the decree, or after being rescued from the sword of the decree. And thus we act in this city (Salonika), that any woman coming from

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<sup>17</sup> *Gittin* in Hebrew.

<sup>18</sup> Bastard and illegitimate child that cannot marry into the Congregation of Israel.

Portugal, we are not concerned about her marital consecration after the decree, and we allow her to marry with any man she wills, for the reason that there are no valid testimonies whatsoever there and, since the witnesses are not valid, there are no *qiddushin* whatsoever. If she remain also in need of Levirate marriage, she has no connection at all and doesn't need a *ḥaliṣáh* document at all, and they are allowed to get married etc.

(Signatures) Ya`aqob ben Ḥabib, Shelomoh Taytazaq, Me'ir `Arama', Yosef Pizo (Fiso), Mosheh 'Arukím, 'Eli`ezer haShime`oní (Lampronti 75).

This ruling was based on the notion that the witnesses were invalid, since they could not keep the precepts correctly. Hence, even though a marriage was performed with Jewish witnesses, their testimony is invalid, thereby invalidating the marriage. Thus, according to this tribunal, those unions were considered as a man with a concubine.

*Legal presumption of anusim.* The Safed-based sage, Yom Tob b. Moshe Şaḥalón ruled, “There is no suspicion that a person that comes to return to Judaism is of a non-Jewish mother, since the *anusim* have legal presumption that they marry among themselves, especially the Portuguese” (Lampronti 107;148). Once again, the lineage of the Portuguese *anusim* are not put into doubt *a priori*, since they did not marry with non-Jews. This was the case since the Portuguese Jews were converted *en masse* in 1497, and were generally sincere adherents to the Jewish tradition in secret. Ultimately, the Sepharadi authorities generally agreed that the Iberian *anusim* were Jews, albeit living an outward Christian lifestyle, while being endangered.

## BERITH VS SACRAMENT

After having analyzed both the Hebrew concept of *berith* and the Catholic sacrament of baptism, it is evident that the Iberian Jews were placed in a difficult situation. The forced conversions of 1391, 1492, and 1497, respectively created identity crises for many Jewish families. On the Sabbath, they held secret Jewish services, while praying at the local church on Sunday. Within one family, some members desired to be genuine Christians, whereas other wanted to be faithful to the tradition of their ancestors. In fact, some of the inquisitors were of Jewish stock, such as the infamous Torquemada. Moreover, the Chief Rabbis of Burgos and Castile became sincere Christians and even attempted to convince other Jews to follow suite. Some Jewish authorities in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire wrote treatises against the Catholic faith, with the hope of convincing the *anusim* to return to the open practice of the Jewish tradition elsewhere. For example, Profiat Durán wrote *Kelimath haGoyim*. In addition, Hakham Hasday Crescas wrote *Biṭṭul `Iqqaré Dath `Iqqaré haNošrim*. Apologetic rabbinic literature continued to appear throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the sole purpose of redeeming the long lost Jewish “souls” to Catholicism. On the other hand, the Inquisitions were in full force, whose goal was to strengthen the Catholic Empire, by weeding out the Church from Judaizing heretics. This war continued until the abolishment of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1821 and the Spanish Inquisition in 1834. Unfortunately, it was not until the year 2000, that the Church pleaded for forgiveness.

Thus the Pope John Paul II said:

We humbly ask for forgiveness for the part that each of us with his or her behaviors has played in such evils thus contributing to disrupting the face of the

church. At the same time, as we confess our sins let us forgive the faults committed by others towards us (CNN News, March 12, 2000).

This war may be over, however, the effects of the forced conversions and the Inquisitions have left many individuals with confused identities. With the promulgation of the 2014 law of return to Spain and Portugal, thousands of Latin Americans today are seeking ways to be recognized as the descendants of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century *anusim*. This fact evidences that this religious war has become internalized in the mind of the individual. Joshua Loth Liebman states, “For if each man is created in the image of GOD, and GOD is one—then it follows that if man allows himself to become a split soul, and inwardly warring personality, he actually denies his Divine image” (Liebman 19). Centuries ago, many Jews became Christians in order to save their lives. Ironically, now many Christians are abandoning their respective churches, seeking to become Jews.



## VIII. MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH BANÍ<sup>19</sup>

On April 28, 2009, I embarked on a mission to the Dominican Republic to establish a Sepharadi education center. Not knowing where I would establish it, I spent 3 months traveling around the country and learning about the idiosyncrasies of the Dominican people. By mid-August, I was settled in Santo Domingo and was teaching science at a private school at the high school and middle school levels. It was sometime in November that I took my Earth Science 9<sup>th</sup> grade class to Baní to study the terrain of the dunes therein. Baní left a strong first impression on me, as I returned two more times within the next year. Every time I returned there, I was drawn to the way the people live, i.e., a simple, yet optimistic lifestyle.

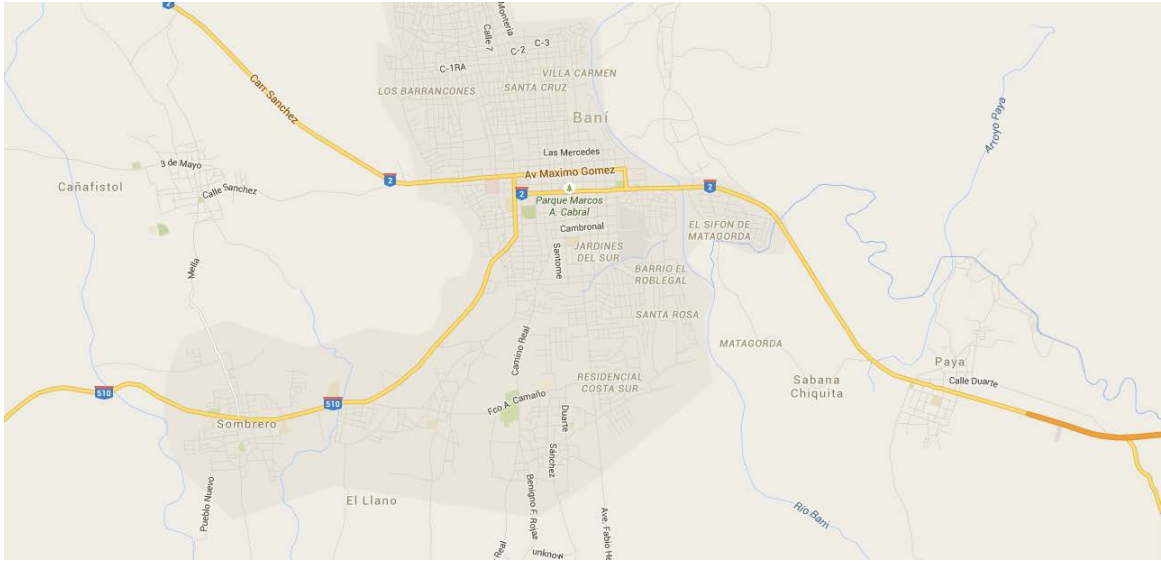
As any typical Spanish colony, Baní's city center has a cathedral—*Nuestra Madre María de Regla*. On the southwest side of the cathedral, there is a governmental building (*Plaza de la Cultura*) which hosts all kinds of cultural events. On the east side, there is a Pala Pizza restaurant, which caters mainly to tourists and passersby. Next to the church, there is a *Claro* telephone establishment. I noticed that businesses rarely turn over in Baní, as the two former were there in 2015 when I returned. Across from the cathedral, there is a park where people sit down to chat, to have a drink, or to engage in romance. Many of the locals attract the birds in front of the church by luring them with corn. As the birds swarm towards the corn, kids run to try to catch them. Meanwhile, a passerby walks in front of the cathedral and makes reference by slightly bending the knee and making the sign of the cross. Simultaneously, a truck drives by with a loud speaker advertising, “*todo*

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<sup>19</sup> See Baní map.

*viejo, compramos todo lo viejo*” (We buy all old things). To add to the mix of sounds, the clothing shop adjacent to the park on the south, has two large 18-inch speakers that stupefy the listeners with the explosive *dembo* rhythm, announcing the daily discounts. Yes, Baní’s city center is a microcosm of its inhabitants: loud, productive, innovative, musical, and religious.

# MAP OF BANÍ



Created by Yehonatan Elazar-DeMota using Google Maps

**IX. WAY OF LIFE OF THE BANILEJOS:  
YESTERDAY AND TODAY**

### *Los primos se exprimen*

It's my first day in Baní. I arrive on the express bus from Santo Domingo and seem disoriented. I have to find somewhere to stay. After checking it at the Caribaní hotel, I ask about the service times at the local churches. The sun is burning hot. Already after the first hour of walking around, my skin becomes two shades darker. I visited two churches, namely, *Parroquia de Santa Cruz* and *Parroquia Nuestra Madre de Regla*. At the former, I speak to Mr. Guerrero Arias (c. 65), who has been in the church service as an assistant to the priest since his first communion (13). When I ask him about cousins marrying each other, he says, "*Los primos se exprimen*," i.e. cousins marry each other. I asked him what families were known for this practice, he said, the Arias and the Zapata. He added that the Zapata family in particular is keen about keeping it in the family, lest they mix with strangers. I waited for Father Germán to arrive. After waiting for two hours, I became restless and left. Next, I went to Baní's cathedral in hope of speaking with the priest and obtaining permission to interview the women of his parish. After obtaining access and entry, I performed three to five interviews per day. The first aspect that strikes me about the *banilejos* is that it is said that they are all cousins of each other, as Dr. Valera affirmed later in an interview (Valera 2015).

Ysabel García Pimentel is a retired educator who is in her seventies. She lives in a humble home with her daughter on the north side of the city. She is about 5 feet and 5 inches tall. Her eyes are caramel colored, contrasted against her long and slick grey hair. She has thin lips and a fine nose. Her skin is like a fine cinnamon color and she has the most angelic smile on her face. I begin to ask her about the marriage customs in her family. She quickly responds by telling me how things were done when she was a child.

“I remember that many a time the couple first lived together and after a time, they would get married. When I asked her about the wedding ceremony, she interjects, “You know that in the past, things were not as modern as they are now, however, it was customary to demonstrate dignity. Afterwards, the wedding ceremony took place. Adolescence was respected as well...before 18 years of age, to be a legal adult, that period was sacred. Very sacred! She uses the word “sacred” numerous of times throughout the interview to convey the idea that a certain issue was of extreme importance or delicate to her family. I proceed to ask her about who she was allowed to marry. She explains that there was no specific prohibition, with the exception of certain types of people: the orphan and someone whose genealogy is unknown. Immediately, the rabbinic concepts *shetuqi* and *asufi* come to mind. The former refers to one whose mother is known, but there is a doubt about who the father is, whereas in the latter case, there is no genealogy at all (*b.Qidd.69a*). Jewish law prohibits marriages involved with either of the two cases in order to avoid *mamzeruth*<sup>20</sup>. When I asked her if there were cousins married with each other in her family, she exclaimed, “yes, indeed!” She added that they would fall in love with each other. Lovers met at parks, parties, or at their homes. “There were also serenading, which is not in use today. This is how we knew if a couple was in love or not” (García Pimentel 2015). When a man often visited his girlfriend’s house, the parents knew that there was some seriousness involved. The parents would observe and analyze and tell the maiden, “So-and-so is not good for you” (*ibid*). Finally, Mrs. García tells me that during the courtship, the lovers had to be accompanied by an elder in the family.

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<sup>20</sup> illegitimate lineages as a result of illicit relations

Obviously, this was to prevent a pregnancy out of wedlock. Interestingly, Jewish law prohibits the seclusion of two people of the opposite sex (*b.Abod. Zar.36b*).

Later that afternoon, around 5pm, I met with Ms. Roa Peña. We had spoken on the phone at least three times before finally agreeing on a time and place of the interview. We agreed on meeting at the park, across from the Cathedral. As I waited at one of the benches under a tree, drops of sweat, due the dry and humid climate, began to drip from my hat. At last! She arrives. She has a caramel complexion that matches the color of her hair. Her eyes are chocolate brown. She is about 5 feet and 5 inches tall. She has a slender figure and carries a particular smirk on her face. She is about 40 years old. She is a lawyer, having graduated from the UASD (Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo), and lives in *Los Llanos*, a small town about 2km south of the center of Baní. The interview with Ms. Roa Peña began with a rough introduction. She was skeptical *a priori*. When I gave her the consent form, I told her that I would translate it to Spanish. She insisted on reading it herself. Initially, she did not want to be recorded, videotaped, nor tested for DNA. I told her that she could not participate. I was ready to withdraw her as a candidate. Then she added that if there were some type of benefit, she would agree to participate, but without identifying her name or taking pictures/video. She presented an interest in acquiring a foreign passport. When I told her about the law of return of the Sepharadim, she knew exactly what I was talking about. She said, "¡Ahora m'estás hablando!" (Now you're talking)! She did not want to admit that she was looking for an exit, but I got it out of her. She then agreed to participate fully, but without video recordings. She wanted proof of participation. Therefore, I took a picture of the consent form and handed it to her. At that moment, I was not sure if I wanted to continue the

interview because of the uncertainty of what she could possibly know about Judaic practices.

I proceed to ask her about the marriage arrangements in her family. She immediately recalls, “I remember that marriages were arranged by conversing and meeting to solve any problem in regards to the match-making. They wanted to make sure that the family knew the genealogy of the future spouse for the child. If there was any conflict, the two families would try to solve any issues beforehand. When the conflict could not be resolved, the match-making was called off” (Roa Peña 2015). She asserts that one must check to make sure that the guy is not a hoodlum. Then I ask about a person with an unknown genealogy—she interrupts while role-playing a conversation with her mother, “No, this was not welcomed. No, but I like him. No, you can’t marry that guy.” She agrees that “this is good because if you know the person’s background, you would spare yourself from many ills (*ibid*). When I asked her if cousins were allowed to marry each other in the family she says “No! I never saw that in my family. When the parents saw us playing too closely with our cousins, they would separate us. They would correct us and discipline us. They understood that family must be respected. This is how my grandmother taught us” (*ibid*). Ms. Roa Peña exclaims that a union between an uncle and a niece is not allowed, and if it happens, it is stopped immediately. After the couple is approved for courtship, the man has to visit the home of the girlfriend, but not too often. She adds, “The courtship is not a time for the couple to be together all of the time. If they wanted to be together, then they had to get married” (*ibid*). This practice is reminiscent of



an ancient Jewish custom of *'erusin*<sup>21</sup>, where a man would make a public declaration before two witnesses and the family of taking a woman as his wife. He would spend up to a year preparing for the *nisu'in*<sup>22</sup>, after which they would be allowed to be alone in matrimony. To this effect, Ms. Roa Peña says, "They were accompanied at all times, but once there was trust, they could go out alone and a time was set for them to return home. However, now it is not like that" (*ibid*)! I understood from her very last statement that this custom is not so prevalent in her family anymore.

The next day, I went to Villa Sombrero to perform two interviews. I had to get a ride on a motorbike to get there. I was amazed at how people who lived in the area were not able to give clear and concise directions. I ended up walking many unknown streets to make it to the homes of the subjects. Villa Sombrero is about 4km south of Baní. It was one of the first towns inhabited by the Canary Islanders that arrived in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The second interview that day was with Mrs. González. When I called her, a girl answered and said, "*Papiiiiii*," (daddy). I said, "This is not your daddy!" Her mother quickly took the phone and asked me where I was. I told her that I would arrive shortly. We had agreed to meet at the *Inmaculada Concepción Church*. I was a bit uncomfortable to interview her at the church setting. I was 15 minutes late to the interview. She told me that she almost left. Mrs. González is a homemaker. I did not ask her, but she seemed to be no more than 30 years old. Her hair is dirty blond. Her eyes are like two light brown marbles. Her lips are full, but her nose is fine. I notice some freckles on her face and

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<sup>21</sup> Betrothal

<sup>22</sup> Consecration of marriage

arms. She is about 5 feet and 7 inches tall. She is wearing shorts and a sleeveless shirt. Her body type is medium built. Before I begin, I sense that Mrs. Gonzalez is nervous. I have to say that she laughed throughout the entire interview.

I proceed to ask her about marriage preparations and customs in her family. She begins explaining that her father was married to another woman and had three children with her. After he separated from her, he married her mother. She agrees that her parents gave her adequate education in regards to marriage. She asserts, “In regards to who I should marry, there were no conditions as to the financial situation; a partner is fine as long as it is worth it. That was their advice...not to marry a hoodlum, even if he was poor, but adequate” (González 2015). In contrast to the majority of women in Baní interviewed, she says that her parents did not have to approve of her marriage partner; she simply made an oral agreement with him and her parents accepted it. She adds that her parents were not involved in any match-making nor any investigation of her spouse. In addition, during her parent’s generation, the lovers had to meet at the homes with a chaperone in the living room. However, Mrs. González asserts that this is not the norm in contemporary Baní. She says, “You meet the person and it is not necessary to marry that person. Nowadays, people do not have special visits at home, rather, they meet in the streets and make an oral agreement. That [the old tradition] is inexistent. Well...that is what I have been able to observe. There are a few of us, men and women that want to be responsible” (*ibid*). Apparently, even though she agrees that times have changed, there is still some notion of respect and responsibility among marriage partners. It can be inferred that this tendency will pose a threat to the endogamous tradition practiced by the previous generations of the *banilejos*.

## **You are what you eat**

*Meat and dairy.* A common axiom posits, “You are what you eat.” In the context of this study, it will be shown that the *banilejos* have particular dietary customs that distinguish them from the majority of the Dominican people. The twenty-three women of the test group generally shared the same customs. The questions asked included the slaughtering of animals, washing of legumes and salads, separation of meat and dairy kitchenware, the treatment of blood in meat, and proper dining etiquette. Typical dishes of the day range from rice and beans, to a meat stew. To my amazement, all of the *banilejo* women of this study have separate pots for meat and dairy dishes. Jewish law stipulates that it is a Torah prohibition to “cook, eat, or benefit [business] from a mixture of meat and dairy” (*M.T. Hil. Ma’akhaloth ‘Assuroth 9:1*). Only one of the subjects had a clear idea about the practical aspect of this custom, when asking why she separated her pots and pans. Mrs. Aguavivas said, “If one cooks dairy in a meat pot, the residue of meat oils will curdle the milk (Aguasvivas 2015). The rest of the women simply said that they did not know the meaning of this custom, but that they were taught to do so by their mothers. When asking Mrs. González about her childhood if any dish involved the mixing of meat and dairy, such as lasagna, she laughed, saying, “No! It was not customary in those times. Today, we see these kinds of varieties. When I was a child, I did not see these things” (González 2015).

*Typical foods.* Mrs. Ysabel García said that they mainly ate chicken at home. Ms. Roa Peña said that the daily stew included “Plantains, potatoes, pumpkin, and either chicken, or goat” (Roa Peña 2015). Mrs. González explained that the daily staple included “rice,

beans, chicken, and eggplant” (González 2015). The ingredients of this menu have sharp similarities with *Maghrebi* and Andalusian cuisine.

*Ritual slaughter*. When asking Ms. Roa Peña about the slaughtering of the animals, she told me that her mother would slice the neck of the chicken with a sharp knife, and that her uncle would slaughter the goat. She added that the chicken was hung by its legs to let the blood fall into a container. The blood was then discarded. Interestingly, Biblical law prohibits the consumption of blood in a number of places (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:12).

However, she never witnessed the slaughtering of the goat because children were not allowed to be in the presence of such an act. Mrs. Aguavivas was the only subject that did see cattle slaughtered by her father. She explained how her father would tie the cow upside down by the hind leg and slice the neck with a knife. She added that the meat was sold to their neighbors in Villa Sombrero. Of particular interest is that the Reina Valera Bible versions use the word, “*degollar*,” whereas the King James Bible uses the word, “kill” for the same verses in Spanish. The term “*degollar*” denotes to decapitate. One can infer that if the *banilejos* had immediate access to bibles, they could have understood through the language that the correct way of slaughtering animals was by cutting the neck. Dr. Valera explained during a third visit to his home, that the town called Matanzas, i.e. slaughtering, received its name due to the practice of “sacrificing” the animals there (Valera 2015). Sacrificing animals specifically refers to a ritual slaughter, as opposed to just killing them. In fact, some of the subjects from the control group mentioned that their mothers would wring the neck of the chicken. Thus, Mrs. Marina Rivera Lara explained that her mother would strike the head of the chicken with a stick. Still, a few of the subjects said that their family would kill the chicken by striking its

backbone. Jewish law stipulates that “It is a positive precept to ritually slaughter domesticated and wild beasts, and fowl by the slicing of the neck, then eating from them” (*M.T. Hil. Sheḥitah* 1:1-5). Moreover, Maimonides explains that a “sharp and smooth” knife is optimal for the ritual slaughter (*M.T. Hil. Sheḥitah* 1:13). Two questions are raised at this point: Did the *banilejos* learn to perform the *sheḥitah* (ritual slaughter) by reading the Reina Valera Bible or through oral transmission in the family? An even more interesting question is how did an entire town manage to perform the Judaizing practice of *sheḥitah* within the context of the Inquisition on a Spanish territory? After interviewing the owners of three butcher shops in Baní, they all explained that the chicken are killed by the slicing of the neck. When asking them why they did it that way, they simply said that it was tradition.

*Preparation of meat.* Before eating their meat, the *banilejos* have a way of preparing it before cooking. Mrs. García explained how her mother prepared chicken:

Remove the entrails, cut the meat into pieces, wash them very well, open the crop and the gizzard, season the meat with bitter oranges or lemons, garlic, onion...and other natural things were used for seasoning, not like people do now” (García Pimentel 2015).

Some of the subjects explained that their mothers would first wash the meat, salt it, then place it in the sun to dry for a while, after which they would remove the salt then season it just as Mrs. García explained. The *Beth Yoseph* codifies the procedure for washing and salting meat after the ritual slaughter:

It is necessary to wash the meat before salting it...before placing the meat in the container where it is washed, the salt is removed, then it can be washed again. The container is cleansed between washings (*Sh.Ar. YD 69*).

The washing and salting of the meat is not a Biblical precept, rather of rabbinic origin. This demonstrates that these families had an oral transmission of Iberian Jewish practices within their lore.

*Checking of eggs.* It is noteworthy that all of the subjects, including the control test group, said that eggs with blood spots were to be discarded. Thus, Mrs. García Pimentel said, “No! No! We did not eat it...we threw it out,” when asked about finding an egg with blood inside (García 2015). Mrs. González expressed disgust about eating an egg with a blood spot, “No! Yuck!” (González 2015). Ms. Roa Peña simply said that they would not eat it. This practice also demonstrates an oral transmission of rabbinic origin. Thus the *Shulḥan ‘Arukh* states, “If a spot of blood is found within the yoke of the egg, it is prohibited [for consumption]” (*Sh.Ar. YD 66:3*).

*Insects.* All of the subjects explained how they washed the salads, rice, and beans, before cooking them. Mrs. García Pimentel washes her lettuce, cabbage, and tomato very well. Ms. Roa Peña washes the greens very well then dresses them with vinegar before consuming them. Mrs. González washes her lettuce and cabbage with distilled water then adds a drop of chlorine to the water. Before cooking the rice, Mrs. García Pimentel places all of the grains on the table and meticulously searches for darkened grains. Ms. Roa Peña places her grains in water and sifts out the extraneous particles. Mrs. González explained that her mother taught her to wash the rice grains twice in water before cooking them. She added that sometimes they washed the rice more than twice (González 2015).

It is common Jewish practice to follow this same procedure in order to avoid eating insects by mistake. The Torah states, “Ye shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creepeth, neither shall ye make yourselves unclean with them, that ye should be defiled thereby” (Lev. 11:43)<sup>23</sup>. It would be interesting to ask Mrs. González when she washes the rice more than twice, since Moroccan Jews have the custom of washing the rice three times during Passover.

*Seafood.* Biblical law stipulates that only those sea creatures that have fins and scales are apt for consumption (Lev. 11:9-10). The *banilejos* usually eat fish during Holy Week. Mrs. García Pimentel told me that her family would fish often, and that it was no so expensive to buy fish as it is today. Ms. Roa Peña never ate shellfish in her home. Mrs. González did not recall eating fish outside of Holy Week.

*Dining etiquette.* I asked all of the subjects if they were allowed to eat at their neighbor’s home, and they all said that they were not allowed. Thus, Mrs. García Pimentel states:

No way! At noon, we had to be home. They [parents] would say, “At 12 you are not going anywhere. We would receive a beating if we left the house. Lunch and dinner is a sacred hour. Even if we did not have anything to eat, we did not have anything to look for anywhere else. No one had to know that we did not have food (García Pimentel 2015).

Mrs. González says, “I remember that if I was out with a friend and 12pm arrived, I had to be at home already. If not, they called for me” (González 2015). Ms. Roa Peña says, “They told us that it was not comely to eat out...sometimes the food was not prepared the

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<sup>23</sup> The New JPS Jewish Bible Translation is used until the end, except when stated otherwise.

way that we did it” (Roa Peña 2015). The reasoning behind Ms. Roa Peña’s statement echoes the rabbinic concept of *bishul akum*, which refers to the prohibition of eating certain foods prepared by non-Jews. These foods include those prepared at the table of a king: meat, poultry, and fish (*Sh.Ar. YD 113*). She also says that sometimes they [siblings] ate at someone else’s house in secret. As I laughed at her remark, I wondered the beating that they would receive after being found out.

*Food to go.* Since the *banilejos* are careful about where they eat, I wondered how they ate when having to travel. Mrs. García Pimentel said, “We took *arepa* (cornmeal), *moro* (mixed rice and beans) since it was easy to transport” (García Pimentel 2015). Ms. Roa Peña stated “We took our food with us or we ate somewhere” (Roa Peña 2015). Finally, Mrs. González also stated, “If one traveled, one was obligated to eat” (González 2015). One can infer that Mrs. González’s family was not so meticulous about preparing food before traveling, as the older generations.

The way that the *banilejos* prepare and eat their food identifies them as being different from other Dominican peoples from the south. The 17<sup>th</sup> century minister of the Judeo-Portuguese community in Amsterdam stated in a treatise on the Biblical laws, “We are not to make covenants with the nations by not eating their foods. By this means, we learn how to distinguish between the holy and the profane (Morteira 131). The idea is that by maintaining a restricted diet, the Jews will not assimilate. Hence, the people of Baní affirm their Jewish identity by how and what they eat.



## Sacred blood

*Menstruation.* Traditional societies deal with menstrual blood in different ways. Some ascribe power to women during their menstruation, while others look upon them with disdain, thereby separating them from the society (Lev. 15:19). According to anthropologist Mary Douglas, the rites involving menstruating women are useful for the following reasons: “to assert male superiority, to assert separate male and female social spheres, and to attack a rival” (Douglas 171). During those days, traditional Jews separate from their spouses, lest they incur the penalty of spiritual excision (Lev. 18:19, 29). All of the women interviewed expressed that the menstrual period is to be regarded as sacred. Thus, Mrs. García Pimentel said about her mother, “She taught me that it was a sacred thing, having to do with a lot of hygiene” (García Pimentel 2015). Mrs. González said, “It was considered *la vergüenza de la mujer* (woman’s embarrassment) and that I had to take good care of myself, and that it is not something to tell everyone. Nowadays, women let everyone know when they have their period” (González 2015). One can infer from her comment that she does not approve of this change of custom among contemporary women. Ms. Roa Peña stated that during menstruation, the couple could sleep on the same bed, but not have sexual relations until after the period. Some of the women older than 40 years old stated that a menstruant cannot clean nor cook certain types of foods, because it is harmful to them. Mrs. González added that she was taught to not handle everything in the kitchen during her period, but she ignores those instructions. To my surprise, none of the women have knowledge of performing a ritual bath in a natural body of water, as stipulated by Jewish law (m.*Nid.*4:3; m.*Miqw.*8:5). Perhaps this is due to the fact that the rivers that once flowed through Baní have been dried up for many decades.

*Childbirth.* Whenever a *banileja* woman gives birth, she enters a 41-day period called “*riesgo*,” (risk). During this time, she is not allowed to cook, clean, or have sexual relations. The women accustom to eating soups and lots of chocolate. They believe that it helps enhance the quality of breast milk. Probably the most difficult aspect of *riesgo* is not being able to bathe for 40 days. I wondered why they would call this time period “risk” and why 40 days specifically. There is a superstition among the women that if a drop of rain falls on their heads, they will become crazy. One woman attributed many of the problems in the country to the women that do not keep this custom. Ms. Roa Peña stated, “We were amazed to see women going out the next day,” when I asked her if a parturient is allowed to go out of the house (*ibid*). Only Mrs. González, being the youngest subject, did not know the exact number of days for *riesgo*. Interestingly, the Torah states:

And the ETERNAL spoke unto Moses, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: If a woman be delivered, and bear a man-child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of the impurity of her sickness shall she be unclean...And she shall continue in the blood of purification three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification be fulfilled (Lev. 12:1-4).

In ancient Israel, when a woman gave birth to a son, she had to present herself with an offering at the Temple 40 days after. There is no medical reason why the women should abstain from going out of their homes during the 40 days after childbirth. It is noteworthy that the parents would have the children baptized after the *riesgo*. Thus, it can be inferred that their predecessors developed a tradition of not going to church until after 40 days,

similar to the ancient Israelite women who would not visit the Temple until the 40<sup>th</sup> day. However, one should be careful not to consider this practice as an exclusive “Judaizing” custom among the *conversos*.

### *Un con tó*

Many Jews have the custom of greeting someone on his or her birthday, “May you live until 120.” Unfortunately, very few, if any have the merit of living until 120 years of age. When the hour of death arrives, some cultures host jazz parades, such as in New Orleans. Others perform numerous rituals in order to lead the deceased into the next life. Yet, some have periods of mourning after the burial, such as the Catholic Christians and the Jews. The Jewish tradition enlists many death and mourning rituals, including: tearing of one’s clothing upon receiving news of death in the family, preparing the body for burial, accompanying the dead to the cemetery, laws for the priestly lineage, greeting the mourners, the mourners’ meals, and many more legal ramifications (*Sh.Ar. YD 342-403*). Dr. Jorge Casariego, asserts that it is imperative that someone who has lost a loved one should psychologically disengage from the image of the deceased. He believes that this helps avoid pathological mourning, if delayed, becomes chronic and emotionally disturbing ([shiva.com](http://shiva.com)). Jewish law stipulates that one mourn in three stages: 7 days, 30 days, and then 11 months. During the first 7 days, people come to give condolences to the mourners”(*M.T. Hil. ‘Abel 13:2*). It is interesting that after 40 years of experience with

patients, Dr. Casariego concludes that it takes about a year for the completion of the mourning process. This parallels with the Jewish tradition of *naḥalah*<sup>24</sup>.

*Spilling waters.* When someone dies in the family, some *banilejos* immediately spill all the water from open containers into the streets. However, no one in Baní really knows the origin of this tradition. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Lithuanian halakhist, Shabbatai HaKohen (ShaKh), comments on the laws of death in the *Shulḥan ‘Arukh*, “This is to announce to everyone that someone passed, without having to announce it vocally, yet others believe that the Angel of Death puts a drop of blood of death [in the containers]” (*YD* 339:5). This custom was practiced widely in Iberia, albeit not solely by Jews. In fact, even though it is an ancient Jewish custom, it is not legally-binding. Mrs. García Pimentel did not recall seeing this practiced by her family, but did remember hearing people say that the water was spilled so that “death would leave” (García Pimentel 2015). Ms. Roa Peña remembers her mother throwing water at the coffin during the procession to the funeral. However, Mrs. González never saw this in her family. During my third visit to Dr. Valera’s home, his mother interrupted our interview upon hearing of this custom. She affirmed that people would spill the waters upon death. Hence, one can infer that not all *banilejos* tend to spill waters upon the death of the deceased today, but perhaps it was more widespread in earlier generations.

*Preparing the body.* The elderly women of Baní remember how the corpses of the deceased were prepared for burial. The body was washed and the nails were cut. Mrs. García Pimentel said, “The body was placed in a normal way in the coffin. The deceased

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<sup>24</sup> Memorial.

was dressed and then covered with a *mortaja* (burial shroud). I asked her to describe the *mortaja*; she said that it is like a white robe, as a sheet that covers the entire body. She added that if there was no burial shroud prepared beforehand, then the deceased was dressed in white. I understood that the elderly would have their *mortajas* prepared before death. Interestingly, some Jews of the Judeo-Spanish tradition prepare their burial shrouds during a celebration called, “*cortar mortajas*”<sup>25</sup> (Dobrinsky 90). Both Ms. Roa Peña and Mrs. González did not recall having seen this practice in their family, even though they did hear about it. Most likely, it is due to the discontinuation of the custom in contemporary times.

*At the cemetery.* Upon reaching the burial ground, the close family members of the deceased take a handful of dirt and throw it over the coffin. After the pit is closed, various prayers are said. Mrs. García Pimentel stated that they recite, “Our Father, the Rosary, and the Prayer for the Soul of the dead. Of particular interest is that the prayer for the soul of the dead does not include any theological formula that resembles Catholic prayers, such as the mention of the Virgin, Christ, or Purgatory. The prayer goes as follows: “May God in His mercy show him/her love and compassion. May he/she not suffer any shame. May peace attend him/her and may he/she be included in mercy and forgiveness” (Lara 2015). Furthermore, she added that they recite Psalm 91 before the burial. Mrs. González said that her brother lead these prayers for the family. After leaving the burial site, *banilejos* wash their hands with a pitcher of water, outside of the cemetery. Mrs. García Pimentel believes that this is done for hygienic purposes. When asking Ms.

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<sup>25</sup> Cutting shrouds.

Roa Peña about this, she interrupted me, saying, “We wash our hands before going home. It is said that if one does not wash one’s hands, death enters the home. So, we always accustomed to wash our hands. I do not think that most people do this now, but I remember that we always did this” (Roa Peña 2015). Mrs. González also attributed esoteric significance to the washing of the hands upon leaving the cemetery. In the same vein, Yosef Caro, the 15<sup>th</sup> century Sepharadi Sage, codified this custom in the *Shulḥan ‘Arukh* (*Sh.Ar. YD 376:5*).

*Mourning.* When the mourners reach the home of the deceased person, they sit on the floor in one of the rooms. This is referred to *el rincón*<sup>26</sup>. For the next 9 days, extended family and friends come to the house of mourning to bring food, to pray, and to give condolences. Ms. Roa Peña stated, “One wears black and white or purple clothing. If it was a brother that passed away, one mourns from 3 to 6 months. If my mother passes away, the maximum that I will have to mourn for will be 12 months. During this time period, we do not go to parties, we go to church. When the mourning is over, people usually cease going to church” (Roa Peña 2015). We both laughed when she made that last comment about not going to church after the mourning. She also explained that in the previous generation, people would pray the entire *novena*.<sup>27</sup> However, due to the economic difficulty of feeding so many people for so many days, they currently say all of the prayers on the ninth day after the burial. Mrs. González also confirmed one mourns

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<sup>26</sup> Spanish for corner.

<sup>27</sup> Nine days of mourning in Catholicism.

for up to two years for a parent and that they only gather on the ninth day. This is what *banilejos* call “Un con tó.”<sup>28</sup>

Many of the burial and mourning rituals mentioned herein were practiced by Sepharadim in pre-Expulsion Iberia. In fact, the spilling of the waters is not common anymore throughout the Sepharadi diaspora. The use of burial shrouds and the washing of hands is still in common practice today. Also, the custom of praying at the home of the mourners and bringing foods is also widespread among contemporary Jews. On the contrary, one main difference between standard Jewish practice and the *banilejos* is the Catholic custom of nine days of mourning. With all of these similar Jewish customs, mixed with Catholic practice, it is evident that they reflect the religious syncretism that the Iberian *anusim* developed early on in order to survive the terror of the Inquisition. Unfortunately, their syncretism is precisely what the inquisitors labeled as “Judaizing heresy.”

### **Weekend customs and rituals**

Weekend rituals in the *banilejo*'s lifestyle play an important role in their identity as Dominicans. However, due to the secularization on the one hand and Protestant evangelization on the other hand, the contemporary generation tends to do away with many of their grandparents' customs. Throughout the Inquisition, both Old and New Christians made preparations for the weekend, whether they practiced the Sabbath secretly, or went to mass on Sunday. The Talmud states that the Sabbath was the GOD's

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<sup>28</sup> Dominican Spanish for “All in one.”

precious and guarded treasure, which was given to the Israelites as a gift (*b.Šabb.10b*). *Shabbath* is the day that Jews dedicate to building a relationship with their Creator, and reconnecting with the metaphysical after a week of work in the physical world. Ahad Ha'am stated, "More than Jews have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews" (Dmin, Frankel, Wolfson 63; Ha'am). Indeed, this phenomenon has been proven to be true for those that are meticulous about preserving their cultural identity as *banilejos*.

*Cleaning.* The majority of the women interviewed explained that they would clean their homes either on Friday or Saturday every weekend. When asking them why they did this, some said that it was in preparation for "*El Día del Señor*"<sup>29</sup> Thus, Mrs. García Pimental stated, "Friday was the day to clean the house, wash clothes, and Sunday, one used the best clothes to go to church (García Pimental 2015). Moreover, Ms. Roa Peña said, "We used to clean on Friday, but now we do it on Saturday, because it is understood that we have to prepare the house for the Lord. Since we are Catholic Christians, we know that Sunday is a solemn day. We know that Saturday is also solemn, and it is optional. The Church establishes that it is Sunday. The Old Testament says that it is Saturday, but the Church says that we rest on Sunday. We therefore follow the decision of the Church. So we prepare for Sunday" (Roa Peña 2015). In both of these cases, it is interesting that they would clean on Friday as a weekly custom. However, Ms. Roa Peña's comment about the decision of the Church gives insight that there was a modification in her family's *modus operandi*, due to the influence of the Catholic Church. When asking the

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<sup>29</sup> The Lord's Day



Mrs. González the same questions, she simply said that they cleaned the house every week, but not on a particular day.

*Special foods.* It is a Jewish custom to make the best food and drink the best wines on the Sabbath. The Rabbis derived the concept of *oneg Shabbath*<sup>30</sup> from the passage of the Prophet Isaiah, “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight...” (Isa. 58:13). In the same spirit, Mrs. García Pimentel remembered preparing, “Rice with chicken...in general, foods that were not prepared during the week” (*ibid*). Ms. Roa Peña asserted, “Yes! We eat *sancocho*<sup>31</sup> and *arepa*<sup>32</sup> (*ibid*). Mrs. González did not remember any special foods for the weekend.

*Lighting special candles or lamps.* Jews have a custom of lighting special lamps or candles on the eve of the Sabbath in order to enhance the delightfulness (*m.Šabb.2*). I noticed that this custom is not really prevalent among the *banilejas*. In fact, only Mrs. Roa Peña made a comment about lighting special candle on Friday evenings, “My mother always did it on Saturday, but there are people that light it on Friday” (*ibid*). Contrary to standard Jewish practice, she asserted that her mother would light this candle to the Virgin Mary.

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<sup>30</sup> Delight of the Sabbath

<sup>31</sup> Stew

<sup>32</sup> Cornmeal cake

## Holy Week & Easter

One of the most solemn time periods for Dominican Catholics is Holy Week. During this week, they commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Upon interviewing Dominicans from different regions of the country, one can see a pattern in their customs in regards to *Semana Santa*<sup>33</sup>. Being that Baní is in the south, where the concentration of Africans was higher than in the north, the Holy Week customs and superstitions of the *banilejos* reflect a syncretism between West African and Catholic elements.

*Cleaning.* Before the initiation of Holy Week, the women clean their homes, inside and outside. In some families, even the walls are washed and painted. Particularly, some women have the custom of cleaning all of their pots and pans the week before Holy Week. This was the case with Mrs. Aguasvivas and Ms. Y. Pimentel, who stated that their mothers would boil the metal pots in water, then shine them with iron scouring pads. Others stated that they would do the same in preparation for Holy Week and Christmas. In the case of Mrs. Aguasvivas and Ms. Pimentel, why would their mothers specifically clean their pots and pans before Holy Week? Perhaps their maternal ancestors had been doing the same thing in the Canary Islands before migrating to the New World. If they were Jews, it would explain why they would do such a thing. Gitlitz asserts that after the edict of expulsion in 1492, some judaizing *conversos* used the Gregorian calendar as a reference point for the Jewish holidays (380). They knew that Resurrection Sunday generally came after the Passover, and that the Passover generally falls on the full moon

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<sup>33</sup> Holy Week.

of the same month. This way they could calculate the date for the Passover week. Hence, the Catholic Holy Week acquired the status of the Jewish Passover week. The Torah states:

You must eat unleavened bread for seven days. The seventh day is a festival to the ETERNAL. Only unleavened bread should be eaten for seven days. No leavened bread and no yeast should be seen among you in your whole country. You should explain to your child on that day, 'It's because of what the ETERNAL did for me when I came out of Egypt'. (Exo. 13:7-8)

The Rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud recorded in tractate *Pesaḥim* that the metal pots and utensils must be cleansed of the residue of *ḥameš*<sup>34</sup> (*b.Pesaḥ.30a*). The *Shulḥan'Arukh* explains in detail how pots should be purged of all leavening through the use of fire and boiling water, just as some *banileja* women perform with exactitude (*Sh.Ar. OH 451*). The Inquisitors in Castile were aware that Passover was the most important holiday for the judaizing *conversos* (Homza 14). Interestingly, they could have potentially defended themselves before the tribunals, alleging that they were preparing for the Holy Week.

*Foods.* During this week, the overall custom in Baní is that people eat sweets. It seems ironic that they would eat sweets during the Passion of Christ. Ms. Roa Peña said, "My grandmother was very strict with that. She always made sweets and warned us that if we talked or fought during Holy Week, that we would not get the sweets. She said that on Good Friday one had to keep solemnity. One had to perform some type of sacrifice" (Roa

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<sup>34</sup> The mixture of water with 5 grains for over 18 minutes.

Peña 2015). While most Dominicans eat *habichuela con dulce*<sup>35</sup> with pieces of bread in the mix, the *banilejos* generally use cassava<sup>36</sup>. This could either hint to the Amerindian influences on those families or it could reflect their Jewish roots, since Jews avoid eating leavened bread during Passover. On the contrary, Ms. Roa Peña remembered, “In general we ate bread. Cassava was done sometimes. We never ate meat for Good Friday. That’s what I remembered” (*ibid*). She clarified that the bread was *pan sobao*<sup>37</sup>. Contrary to normative Jewish practice during Passover, this bread is sweet and leavened. Mrs. García Pimentel stated that during Holy Week, they ate salted codfish; no meat! Mrs. González did not have such restrictions because her family was not very religious.

*Water immersion ritual.* One of the most peculiar traditions that some *banileja* women practice on the early morning of Good Friday is to perform a ritual bath. The majority of the subjects interviewed had knowledge about this ritual, although less than half actually remembered performing it. Ms. Roa Peña had heard about this tradition, although she stated that it was related to St. John the Baptist’s holiday. Mrs. Rivera and Mrs. Aguasvivas remembered immersing as children. Their mothers told them that they had to walk in a single file without speaking and immerse. They were also told that upon rising from the water, their future husbands would look like the form that appeared in the water. Mrs. García Pimentel said that when girls had their period, they would not perform this ritual. This ritual could have been imported from the Vodou practitioners. During Easter,

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<sup>35</sup> Sweet porridge of beans, sweet potato, and cinnamon.

<sup>36</sup> Cassava is a form of flatbread that is made out of yucca.

<sup>37</sup> Sweet butter bread.

there is a ritual immersion called *Mambo Basin*. One is to wonder why only women performed it? Why early in the morning without speaking? Also, since this day commemorates the death of Christ, many people had the custom of fasting and not bathing on that day. Moreover, the general folklore among elderly Dominicans is that whoever bathes in a body of water during the Holy Week will become a mermaid. It is evident that this superstition was invented in order to prevent people from celebrating during a solemn time period. This could explain why these *banileja* women arose before sunrise and were told to immerse quietly. The reason why they would do this on the morning of Good Friday remains a mystery.

### **Religious Attitudes Towards the Church**

Dr. José Faur notes that there were four classes of *anusim*: those who wanted to be Christians and have no contacts with other Jews; those who wished to remain Jews and were willing to pay a high price to do so; those who wanted to have Jewish and Christian identities simultaneously; and those who wanted neither (Faur 113). Those that did not want to remain in contact with other Jews felt that way because they were tired of being persecuted as Jews. Those that kept practicing the Jewish faith did so because they felt that the Jewish People were being punished due to their backsliding from the Law, and hoped for the final redemption. For them, Christianity was a means to escape violence. The third class of *anusim* were sincere Christians that kept Jewish traits. Their education and status allowed them to contribute to the Christian society, while retaining their Jewish characteristics. Among the fourth class of *anusim* were the skeptics—bad Jews before the conversion, and worst as Christians. It was this latter class that was

labeled as *Alboraique*<sup>38</sup> (Faur 122). These very same attitudes are indeed present in contemporary Baní. The following section will include a typological study of the *banilejos* in regards to their religious attitudes.

*Attitude towards the clergy.* Considering that the Dominican people are in general religious Catholics, the attitude towards the clergy is perhaps one of the ways that one can identify potential descendants of *anusim* within the general population. For example, an expression of loathe or disdain for the Pope and the priests has been evidenced in the Inquisition tribunals. Such is the case with Mrs. Baez, who taught her children to not partake of anything Christian. In fact, her children generally identify as atheists, although one of them has affinities with the Jewish tradition. Moreover, Mrs. González's family was also not so religious, albeit not expressing detest to the Church. She stated, "We did not attend. I started to visit the evangelical church from the age of eight. They used to give us motivational speeches and involve us in activities. Later, my mother approached the Catholic Church and I also started visiting about three years ago through her initiative" (González 2015). One can infer that had it not been for the social activities and evangelization, Mrs. González's family would have continued to be secular. On the other hand, Mrs. Roa Peña asserted, "We have an attitude of respect, despite the bad things that have happened in the Church. We have special respect for the leaders, since they love us, even though some of them have intentionally damaged the image of the Church"

(Roa Peña 2015). Also, Mrs. García Pimentel shared the following about her family, "We were raised with a tradition of not missing a mass. We were taught to respect

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<sup>38</sup> Mythical horse that took the Prophet Muhammed to Heaven. It was not clear what kind of horse it was.

the priests and to respect the Pope. The same respect we have for our parents are due to the priests, since they help us. Therefore, I was raised that way and raised my children that way... my mother had the custom of frequenting the Church, but not every day. I attend every day” (García Pimentel 2015). Hence, the religious attitudes towards the clergy varies among the *banilejos*—from apathy and aversion, to acceptance and religious fervor.

*Religious articles.* Even though the Torah prohibits the use of graven images<sup>39</sup>, within the context of the Inquisition, a home devoid of saints or crucifixes would be subject to scrutiny. Thus, Mrs. González recalls only having a statue of the *Virgen Altagracia* in her house. Ms. Roa Peña stated, “Yes, we had a portrait of the Mother [Mary]. My grandmother was very devout. She taught us a lot about the Church and told us that Mary was fundamental to its establishment” (*ibid*). I did not have to ask Mrs. García Pimentel, since I noticed the portrait of Jesus Christ on her living room wall. Apart from Catholic saints, Dr. Valera explained during an interview that some homes have statues of dark-skinned women. He agreed that these statues were hidden in the bedrooms or the closets of the home (Valera 2015). This would explain the African origins of those families and their fear of the Church if found out. What really surprised me was when I met Dr. Pimentel Mejía for lunch. She had investigated my name online and found out that I was a Jew. After explaining that I was the leader of a Jewish community, she felt comfortable telling me about her reciting of the *Shemá*<sup>40</sup>. I was aghast! "Really? You say

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<sup>39</sup> Exodus 20:1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-9;11:13-21; Numbers 15:39-41.

the *Shemá*?", I asked. She belongs to a Neocatechumenal Way movement within the Catholic Church. She expressed that they are criticized by many because of their Judaizing tendencies. This explained a lot. Next, she showed me her *Shemá* plaque. I noticed that she did not have a statue nor an image of the Virgin Mary in her home. Hence, those *banilejas* who are more traditional within the Roman Catholic Church have images and/or statues, but one cannot really know of their veneration of African saints unless one has access to the inner chambers of their homes.

*The place of the Bible.* Most important in determining the class of the *anusim* is the place that the Bible holds in the family. Is the Bible read everyday at home or does it serve as an amulet in the living room? Mrs. García Pimentel said about her mother, "She taught us to say the Rosary and to read the Bible every day" (*ibid*). Mrs. González explained that the Bible was never read at home, neither by her mother nor her grandmother. When I asked Ms. Roa Peña about reading the Bible at home, she was astonished and said, "Look! The Bible was always opened in my house. A devout Catholic evangelized us, and he gave us a Bible. We had it as an altar in the living room, because we understood that it was supposed to be that way before. The Church later took the altar away, but the Bible stayed" (Roa Peña 2015). When asking her about the text that they had the Bible opened to, she said:

Psalms 91. "He that dwells in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." I used to read this Psalm and I used to always read there about having idols. I would question the Church's practice in regards to the text. Then my eyes were opened and I understood that it [Church's saints] was not what the Bible referred to (Roa Peña 2015).



This is indeed interesting, since it is evident that her family was not overtly Catholic, but acquired more Christian traditions due to evangelization. Furthermore, the Church did not like the fact that her family made an altar for the Bible, since such practice lowers its status to that of an amulet.

*The Law of Moses.* During my interviewing of the subjects, I was very careful not to tamper with the field by asking leading questions, nor by assuming anything. I was especially careful about those specific questions that could give away my Jewish identity or shun the subject. Therefore, I made sure to sneak in a question about the Law of Moses within the context of the importance of the Bible. When I asked Mrs. García Pimentel if she had ever heard about the Law of Moses spoken of in her home, she replied, “Of course! Above all things, she taught us to be obedient and humble. She said that we had to be examples of the apostles and of Christ” (García Pimentel 2015). I was also surprised by Ms. Pimentel Mejía’s answer when I asked her about the Law of Moses. She said that her parents taught her to respect the commandments and that they were important. On the surface, this could potentially demonstrate what Dr. Faur states about those *anusim* that saw themselves as the true Christians, being of Jewish background, yet embracing the salvation of Jesus Christ (Faur 119). Ms. Roa Peña said, “They would say that this was the Old Testament and the Christ abolished that Law. Christ respected the Law, but he was God and changed the Law. God left us the liberty to keep whatever day of the week as Sabbath” (Roa Peña 2015). This echoes the typical anti-Judaism polemics that Christian theologians developed. At this point, it was evident to me that Ms. Roa Peña’s family was not originally educated in Catholicism and that they were evangelized at a later date. Finally, when asking Mrs. González if her grandparents spoke about the Law

of Moses, she said, “Those people didn’t talk about those [kinds of things]” (González 2015). In conclusion, the religious attitudes and practices of these women are a clear demonstration of Hobsbawm’s description of tradition:

‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented...the term ‘invented tradition’ is used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period...’Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past

(Hobsbawm 1).

The religious attitudes of the *banilejos* raised some questions:

1. Was there a time period when the Church in Baní was lax with its adherents?
2. Was there a time period when the Church began to systematically evangelize the *banilejos*?
3. Was there a time period when the *banilejos* felt that they had to hide certain practices from the eyes of the Church?

The answers to these questions will help determine the multi-layered religious character of Baní. Thus, the worldview of Dr. Faur’s four classes of *anusim* appears to correlate with the religious attitudes found in Baní.

### *Los cabulosos*

*What is superstition?* The Diagram group asserts that “Superstition in the form of beliefs in external powers which influence our lives will never die. For ten thousands of years, they have been an protection for the arbitrary events that happen to everyone” (Diagram Group 5). During an interview with Mrs. T. Báez, when asking her questions of superstitious nature, she said that her family was not very “*cabuloso*” (T. Báez 2015). I proceeded to ask her what she meant by this term. She explained that it describes people who believe in superstitions. Afterwards, I used this term for the rest of the interviews. To my surprise, all of the subjects knew what I meant by being *cabuloso*. The etymology of this word appears to come from the Hebrew word “*qabbalah*”. Interestingly, Jews ascribe it two different meanings, depending on the circle within Jewish groups—one related to the transmission of the legal codes, and the other referring to Jewish mysticism. Either of these definitions could be applied to the study at hand. The questions that I asked came from the Inquisition manuals from Portugal and the Canary Islands. One must be aware that some *anusim* created superstitions in order to not only transmit Jewish tradition, but also protect the family from being discovered by their Old Christian neighbors.

*Counting the stars.* It is a widespread idea in Baní that one cannot count the stars, lest warts grow on one’s skin. In fact, all of the subjects interviewed expressed general disapproval about counting the stars. All of them agreed that it was bad thing, yet none could explain the origin of such belief. When I asked Ms. Roa Peña if children are allowed to count the stars, she said, “No! I had many warts due to that. I had many on my knees, but with time they disappeared. I believe it because it happened to me. I don’t

doubt it!” (2015). Mrs. García Pimentel stated that children were only allowed to contemplate the stars. However, she also made it clear that her family did not believe in superstition. Mrs. González simply stated that it was bad to count the stars and that she had never counted them in her entire life, due to the fear of having undesired warts. It is amazing that this superstition is so engraved in the minds of the *banilejos*, to the point that some of them can become sick from it. Philip Deutsch is credited with inventing the term “psychosomatic to explain the interaction between the mind and the body in the disease process” (Blonna *et al.* 102). Apparently, Ms. Roa Peña had internalized the evil that results with the counting of the stars. However, what is the origin of this superstition? According to the Israeli anthropologist, Schulamit Halevy, crypto Jews do not count the stars, since their Catholic neighbors could suspect them of being Jewish. Jewish law stipulates that the weekly Sabbath is over upon the appearance of three stars (*b.Šabb.35b*). Thus, those *anusim* who secretly kept the Sabbath during the Inquisition would put their families in danger if their neighbors saw them counting the stars at the end of the day.

*Sweeping the floor.* Another superstition that is prevalent among the *banileja* women is related to how they sweep their floors. It is said that one who sweeps garbage through the front door of one’s house, sweeps the good luck out of the home. Others say that it is bad to sweep through the front door, but have no clue as to why it is so. Mrs. García Pimentel explained how her mother taught her to sweep the floor, “She always taught us to gather everything and then take it out the back. The houses before were different. We would do it this way, then sweep in the front porch. We did not want people to see our dirt in the house.” When asking her if they did it because of superstition, she said, “No! We did not

do it because of that. We say that one does not sweep the porch with the same broom that one sweeps the house” (García Pimentel 2015). After asking Ms. Roa Peña about this custom, she asserted, “Umm...my mother said just that! Yes! Yes! Good luck would leave the house. Sometimes when I cleaned my room, she would say to not throw the water out through the front door, so I would throw it out at the back door” (Roa Peña 2015). According to Mrs. González, this custom is universal among the *banilejos*. Thus she stated, “I remember that my mother and grandmother always swept from the front door towards the back.” I proceeded to ask her why did they do it this way. She replied, “She never explained that to me. That’s what I see that everyone does. You know, everyone here does it that way” (González 2015). The 17th century talmudic scholar Moshe Hagiz, asserted that two hundred years after the Expulsion, Portuguese *anusim* gave their lives up for this matrilineal practice:

I have heard that it was an ancient custom in Spain to take care not to sweep a room from inside out. Rather, they began from the door and swept the dirt inwards out of respect for the *mezuzah*<sup>41</sup>. For this reason, one of the accusations hurled at *anusim* by the inquisitorial priests in Portugal today, so as to incriminate them, is that there is testimony that they sweep the house from the entrance inwards. May God avenge the blood of his servants who sanctify his name at all times and in all places (32b-33a).

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<sup>41</sup> Parchment scroll attached to the door, containing biblical verses Deut. 6:4-9; Deut 11:13-21.

Of interest is that this custom is confirmed in the Portuguese Inquisition records.<sup>42</sup>

Another 18th century literary work explains that Jews sweep towards the inside of their homes, lest they throw their riches away.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, there are some Sephardi scholars that disagree that this custom hints to a specific Jewish tradition, since it is not widespread among the eastern Sepharadim of the Levant. Whether it is specifically a Jewish custom or not, it is interesting that *banilejos* and some Portuguese *anusim* sweep their floors towards the inside, ascribing superstitious connotations to it.

*Hair and nail clippings.* The reverence for witchcraft is very well present in Baní.

Dominicans in general tend to demonize their Haitian neighbors because of their peculiar rituals. Hence, Vodou is viewed as dangerous, eery, and diabolic. The syncretism between West African religions and Roman Catholicism on the island is the basis for some of the superstitions in Baní. Such is the case with how the *banilejos* take great care to dispose their hair clippings and nail parings. Dr. Arbel agrees that, “Spells and incantations have particular power when the witch uses parts of the patient's (or victim's) body. Nail parings and hair are the best” (*pantheon.org*). Many of the older *banileja* women interviewed described how they and their mothers place their hair clippings in a bag and under a rock. A few of them remembered their mothers having all their hair clippings collected in bags in a drawer. Ms. Roa Peña stated, “And the hair, when I was a

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<sup>42</sup> E. Glazer, “Invitation to Intolerance”, *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1956) 353-354. In Spain a woman was reported to have swept her house on Fridays in this manner; see F. Sierro Malmierca, *Judíos, moriscos e inquisición en Ciudad Rodrigo, Diputación de Salamanca* (Salamanca, 1990) 177. Another case is mentioned in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971) 7.

<sup>43</sup> Dom Francisco Manoel de Melo, *Apologos Dialogaes* (Lisbon, 1721) 273, cited in Glazer (1956)

child, after cutting my hair, my mother would place it in a bag” (Roa Peña 2015). Mrs. González explained, “I heard that one does not throw away one’s hair clippings because people can do witchcraft with it.” (González 2015). However, Mrs. García Pimentel simply threw them in the garbage. She added that they were not *cabulosos*, i.e. superstitious. So it seems that guarding one’s hair clippings protects the individual from spells.

Moreover, some *banileja* women are careful to not throw their nail parings on the ground. They are collected and buried. Thus explained Ms. Roa Peña, “Do not leave your nails on the floor; they will hate you after stepping on them” (Roa Peña 2015). I proceeded to ask what she meant by “they will hate you.” She replied, “First of all, my mother says that it is not good manners to throw them out. And if you did and someone stepped on them, they would come to loathe you”. At least half of the subjects expressed that they did not throw away their nail parings for the same reasons. Even though this belief can be attributed to fear of magical contagion from the Vodou practitioners, the Babylonian Rabbis believed, “one who buries his nail trimmings is righteous; one who burns them is saintly; while one who throws them out is wicked – since a pregnant woman may miscarry as a result” (*b.Nid.17a*). Perhaps the *banilejos*’ ancestors brought this belief from across the Atlantic.

### ***Banilejo ethics***

*A true Israelite.* The Talmudic Sages held the belief that the descendants of Abraham could be identified by their morals and ethics. The Talmud explains, “One who shows no

compassion, it is known that he is not of the seed of Abraham” (b.*Beṣah* 32b). Maimonides codified:

We operate under the presumption that all families are of acceptable lineage and it is permitted to marry their descendants as an initial and preferred option.

Nevertheless, if you see two families continuously quarreling with each other, you see one family that is always involved with strife and controversy, or you see a person who frequently quarrels with people at large and is very insolent, we suspect [their lineage]. It is fitting to distance oneself from such people for these are disqualifying characteristics...Similarly, whenever a person is characterized by insolence and cruelty, hating people and not showing kindness to them, we seriously suspect that he is a Gibeonite. For the distinguishing signs of the holy nation of Israel is that they are meek, merciful, and kind (*M.T. Hil. 'Issureh Bi'ah* 19:15-17).

Maimonides explains more fully in *Hilkhoth De'oth* [laws of personal development] what are the character traits of the Jews. He expounds on what is considered proper dress, speech, diet, sexual behavior, and etiquette. Most important, the Talmudic law operates under the presumption that all Jewish families are valid for marriage, but if they are missing the traits of compassion and generosity, they are doubtful of being from the seed of Abraham. In the same vein, the *banilejos* are distinguished for their moral and ethical behavior.

*Temperaments.* The Talmudic Sages explained that one, “Should not be wrathful, easily angered; nor be like the dead, without feeling, rather one should [adopt] an intermediate



course; i.e., one should display anger only when the matter is serious enough to warrant it, in order to prevent the matter from recurring (*M.T. Hil. De'oth 1:4*). During my investigation of the *banilejos*, I asked each subject about the general temperament of their respective families. Mrs. García Pimentel said of her family, “I would say that we 95% are calm...and children were not allowed to fight. If they did, they knew what they would get—a whooping!” (García Pimentel 2015). Ms. Roa Peña said that her family is generally irate, but that children are not allowed to fight with each other—the punishment being a beating. Mrs. González characterized her family as being generally calm, with the exception of her father and brother. She also added that they were not allowed to fight, but that her brother would often time get into fights with other kids.

*Lying.* All of the subjects agreed that lying is considered evil. Moreover, a person who deceives others through lies is called a *tiguere*, i.e. a hoodlum or charlatan. Mrs. García Pimentel described lying as “Disastrous. Not allowed. If it is corrected during childhood, many good things can happen” (García Pimentel 2015). Ms. Roa Peña labeled this kind of person as a *tiguere*. Mrs. González was taught that a liar was “Seen as a bad person...they[parents] would speak about how that person spoke too much and invented stories” (González 2015). Interestingly, one psalmist prays, “Eternal, deliver me from lying lips and a dishonest tongue” (*Psa. 120:2*). Overall, their view of lying as evil could have been learnt either from the Jewish ancestors or from the spiritual lessons from the Church.

*Almsgiving.* One of the traits that characterizes the *banilejos* is their hospitality. In fact, I was offered lunch and even a place to stay by some of the subjects. It seemed to me that

everyone was worried about my well-being and whether I was eating properly. When I asked Mrs. García Pimentel if her family had the customs of setting food apart for the poor, she responded, “Yes, of course my love” (García Pimentel 2015). Ms. Roa Peña explained, “Yes! Not that we did it intentionally, but if they were leftover, we gave it away. They would say to not throw food away and give it to a passerby” (Roa Peña 2015). Mrs. González asserted, “If someone appeared at our home in need, we gave them food” (González 2015). Again, this practice of hospitality and almsgiving could have a Jewish or Christian origin.

*Proper dress code.* One of the first things that one can notice immediately between the *banilejos* and the people from the larger cities like Santo Domingo or Santiago, is the way that they dress. This is due to the instructions of the elders to the youth. All of the subjects had a sense of modesty in dress, both for men and women. One of the practices that caught my attention was to see most of the elderly men with their heads covered all of the time with either a fedora or a cap. As I walked through Baní and its surrounding towns, I even noticed some of the men wearing their hats in their homes. Mrs González explained how her father instructed her, “Well...my father did not like us to dress a certain way. My sister in the U.S. dresses in a provocative manner. My father used to say that I would never dress like her. Thus, I could never dress that way because he was really adamant about my clothing (*ibid*). Ms. Roa Peña said, “My uncle. He did not like his nieces to reveal any skin. There were many issues with this. He told us that we could not go out naked in the street” (*ibid*). Moreover, Mrs. García Pimentel stated that she is particularly scrupulous with her clothing; everything must be clean. She also added that a

woman should not dress in a way to provoke any man. Furthermore, she said that the use of scarves for women and hats for men was more widespread in the earlier decades. Mrs. Aguasvivas explained that neither men nor women in her family wore short sleeved shirts nor short pants. Even though these teachings are part of the *banilejo* culture, they are slowly vanishing, due to the rise of secularism and globalization. These same instructions can be found in the legal codes of the Maimonides and Caro, but as well in the Apostolic Writings. Hence, modesty in dress is not exclusively Jewish, nevertheless, important to the *banilejos*.

*Morning blessings.* Every *banilejo* family knows what it means to “*besar la mano*<sup>44</sup>.”

Upon seeing one’s parents, uncles, aunts, or grandparents in the morning, they say ask for a blessing. If a young person does not voluntarily ask for this blessing, the elder demands, “*besa la mano*,” i.e. kiss the hand. The elder then proceeds with a blessing, “God bless you, God raise you, God protect you, May God prosper you.” Turkish Sepharadim have a similar custom on the eve of *Yom Kippur*<sup>45</sup>. They ask for a blessing from their elders and then kiss their hands. In addition, it is common to see Jews of North African ancestry kiss the hands of their leaders upon receiving a blessing. Perhaps this custom was carried by the Sepharadim throughout the diaspora. However, Catholic Christians also kiss the hand of the Pope. Overall, this custom teaches children to honor their elders and to receive a blessing for it, as the Torah states, “Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be extended...” (Exo. 20:12).

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<sup>44</sup> Literally, kiss the hand.

<sup>45</sup> Day of Atonement.

## X. IT'S IN THE GENES: BANÍ'S MATRIARCHS

According to anthropologist of medicine Susan Kahn, genes are defined as “Jewish in three major ways: population genetics; genetic testing for both disease and Jewish identity; and human ova and sperm donation in the domain of assisted conception. In these different conceptual arenas, “Jewish genes” and Jewish inheritance are determined in markedly different ways” (Kahn 2010). However, according to Jewish law, “Jewish genes” do not make one Jewish. Nevertheless, in 2013, the Israeli government announced that it may consider using genetics to determine whether “prospective immigrants are Jewish or not” (McGonigle 2015).

The following section entails a review which summarizes and critically analyzes the genetic data that was collected from the *banilejas*. Overall, the goal of this review is to determine whether there is a genetic correlation between the Jewish populations of Iberia, Central Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East with the people of Baní. In this regard, it will be necessary to review Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, Amerindian, and Afro-Caribbean population studies for contextualization.

### METHODS

The study of the *Banilejos* entailed interviews of women who have roots in Baní for more than three generations, endogamous marriages in the family, and who descend from at least three of the original settlers families: Pimentel, Mejía, Rivera, Herrera, Ortíz, García, Ruíz, Lara, Machado, Melo, Castro, Peynado, Sánchez, Díaz, Peña, Jiménez, Caraballo, Bernal, Lluberes, Soto, Carvajal, Pérez, Olivas, Aybar, Fernández, Pereyra, Rodríguez, Enríquez, Gutiérrez, Rojas, León, González, Araujo, Nieto, and Cabral. In

addition to these families, eleven subjects were selected that did not meet these conditions in order to serve as the control group. The control group consisted of subjects from the host Dominican Republic population, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central and South America, and Portugal. Next, two vials of their saliva were collected with the DNA collection kit from Family Tree DNA. Finally, their mitochondrial DNA<sup>46</sup> was analyzed at the HVR1<sup>47</sup> and HVR2<sup>48</sup> levels.

#### MITOCHONDRAL HAPLOGROUP DISTRIBUTION OF BANÍ

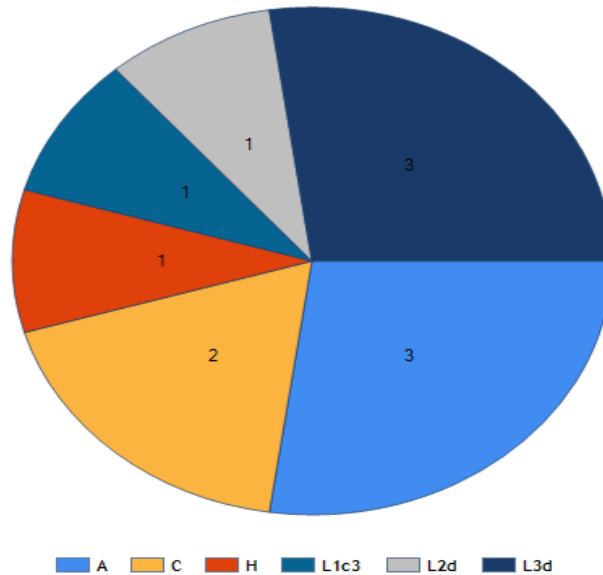
*Control Group.* The mtDNA of a total of 23 women was analyzed from the city of Baní and the satellite towns, including Matanzas, Villa Sombrero, Los Llanos, and Angostura. Four of those subjects, in addition to 7 outside of Baní served as the control group, representing the Dominican Republic host country, Iberian, and Latin American populations. This group yielded 27.3% of haplogroup A (3), 18.1% of haplogroup C (2), 27.3% of haplogroup L3d (3), 9.1% of haplogroup H (1), 9.1% of haplogroup L1c3 (1), 9.1% of haplogroup L2d (1). Figure 1 demonstrates the mtDNA haplogroup distribution of the control group. Thus the control test group demonstrates an admixture of European, Amerindian, and African mtDNA, which correlates for the historical accounts of *mestizo* and *mulatto* populations throughout Latin America (See Appendix 1).

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<sup>46</sup> Human DNA that is transmitted from a mother to her children.

<sup>47</sup> Hypervariable region 1. A genetic test that indicates a common female ancestor along the maternal line about 1,300 years ago.

<sup>48</sup> Hypervariable region 2. A genetic test that indicates a common female ancestor along the maternal line about 700 years ago.

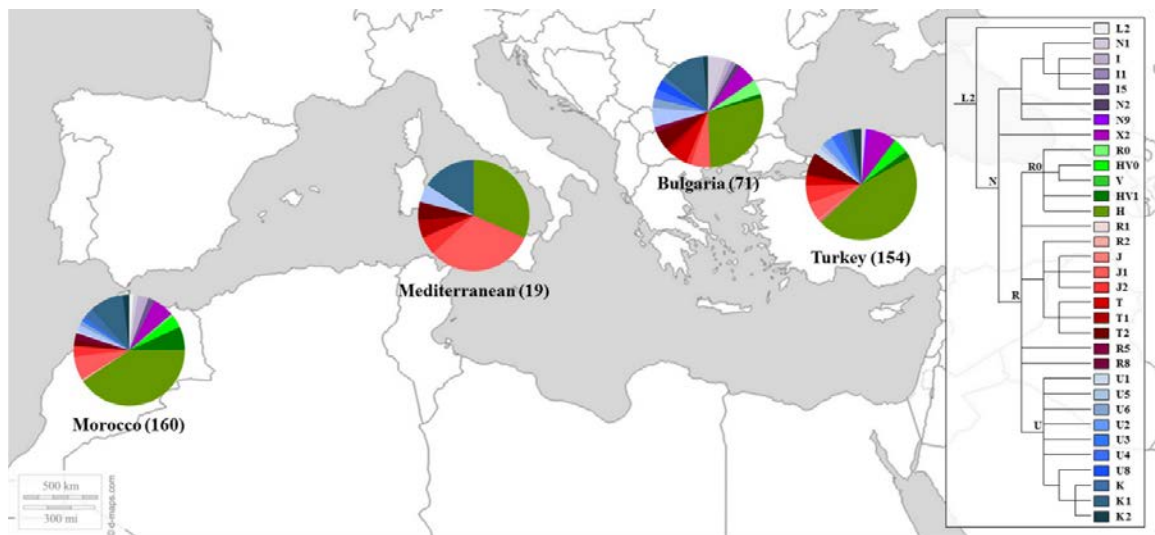


*Haplogroup H in Bani.* The mtDNA results of the study group demonstrated that 2 women out of a total of 19 (10.5 %) are related at the HVR2 level. This implies that they descend from the same maternal grandmother in recent generations. Interestingly, the dietary and childbirth customs that they were taught by their mothers and grandmothers are the same. For the purposes of this study, this matriarch is called Matriarch H.

Matriarch H most likely originated in Europe, as the majority of European populations have a 40%-50% frequency of this haplogroup (Metspalu M, Kivisild T, Metspalu E. et al. 2004).

*Haplogroup H in Sepharadi Populations.* Genetic studies of Sepharadi populations in Portugal (Nogueiro et al. 2014), Morocco, the Levant, and the Mediterranean region

reveal that these communities have high proportions of mtDNA haplogroup H. It is remarkable that the Turkish Sepharadi samples have a large imprint of the haplogroup H (Picornell et al 2006; Behar et al 2008). Figure 2 shows the proportion of mtDNA haplogroup H taken from the 2008 study.



<http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fgene.2015.00010>

*Comparative study of Sepharadi Populations and Baní.* The Family Tree DNA database shows that the two subjects of the present study match with 3 Sepharadi Algerians, 9 Sepharadi Bulgarians, 5 Sepharadi Libyans, 26 Sepharadi Moroccans, 4 Sepharadi Tunisians, 19 Sepharadi Turks, and 1 Sepharadi Greek. Considering that the 2 subjects that descend from Matriarch H have evident Jewish customs that were transmitted along the maternal line, it could be concluded that Matriarch H converted to Catholicism between 1391 and 1497 and came to Hispaniola in the 18<sup>th</sup> century via the Canary Islands.

*Haplogroup A in Baní.* The mtDNA results of the study demonstrated that 3 women (15.8%) who do not have a common maternal ancestor within 5 generations of their genealogy, are related at the HVR2 level and belong to the haplogroup A. It is interesting that the three subjects explained that their mothers kill their chickens by wringing their necks. Moreover, the Family Tree DNA database only shows 1 exact match in the



Dominican Republic that does not belong to this study. For the purposes of this study, this common genetic ancestor will be called Matriarch A. Matriarch A most likely originated in East Asia and either traveled westward toward Europe or journeyed across the Bering Strait, as a founder of the Ameri-Indian peoples (Fagundes, Nelson J.R. *et al* 2008).

*Haplogroup A in Caribbean Populations.* The four major Ameri-Indian mtDNA haplogroups are A, B, C, and D. During a study of 27 bone samples of the extinct Taíno population of Hispaniola, the research team discovered that only two (C and D) of the major mtDNA lineages were present in the sample: 18 individuals (75%) belonged to the C haplogroup, and 6 (25%) to the D haplogroup (Lalueza-Fox *et al* 2001). This suggests that if Matriarch A was indeed part of the Ameri-Indian peoples, she was not Taíno. Therefore, there are three possible scenarios: either she migrated from South America or Puerto Rico, before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or she belonged to the enslaved Catawba Native Americans of South Carolina that were brought to Santo Domingo in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, there is a possibility that she belonged to the seven Beothuks in Newfoundland that were captured by the Portuguese in 1507, and were brought to France. Hence, this third scenario would account for an Ameri-Indian lineage found in Catalonia and Southeastern France.

*Haplogroup A in Ashkenazi Populations.* The “supplementary figures” document of Costa’s team indicates that they discovered 1.1% Asian (non-West) mtDNA haplogroups among the Ashkenazim that they sampled (Costa, Martha D. *et al* 2013). This research concluded:

The "M/A" Asian group is found in 0.5% of Czech/Austrian/Hungarian Jews, and 1% of West European Jews as a whole, but 2% among French Jews, actually higher than the 1.4% reported among Russian/Belarusian Jews, and the 1.2% in Polish Jews. However, Romanian/Moldovan Jews also have 2% of these "M/A" elements (*ibid*).

The map shows that Catalonia region in northeastern Spain has a tiny proportion of East Asian mtDNA haplogroups. Yom Tov Assis records that, "In the 13th and 14th centuries there were three prominent centers of Torah study in the Crown of Aragon: Barcelona, Gerona, and Perpignan" (Assis 331). Moreover, he states that students came from all parts of Europe to study in the rabbinic academies in the northeastern region of Spain. It is possible that a small number of Ashkenazi Jewish women, belonging to haplogroup A, arrived with their husbands during the Golden Age, prior to the 1391 massacres and forced conversions in Spain. Thus, it is possible that Matriarch A converted to Catholicism sometime before the Expulsion of 1492, and one of her daughters eventually migrated to Baní in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

*Haplogroup L Lineages in Baní.* Genetic studies in Africa demonstrate that the L3d haplogroup is distributed throughout all of Africa, but in higher percentages among the Egyptians, Berbers (Sheet1 - PLOS Pathogens), Fulani, Chadians (Behar., *et al* 2008), Ethiopians, Mozambique (Kivisild, T. *et al* 2004), Akan People (Liane Fendt *et al* 2011). The haplogroup L1c is highly concentrated in West and Central Africa, specifically among the Mbenga Pygmy, Ba-Kola, Ba-Benzélé, Biaka, Tikar, Baka people of Gabon, Cameroon, Bakoya, and Ba-Bongo (Batini, Chiara *et al* 2006; Quintana-Murci *et al* 2008; Sarah A. Tishkoff *et al* 2007). The L2d haplogroup is very frequent in West Africa

and also found in Sudan and Mozambique (Antonio Torroni et al 2001). Considering that the Spanish and Portuguese carried African slaves to the Caribbean, it is highly indicative that these 4 lineages of the study are representative of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The HVR1 and HVR2 of the rest of the mtDNA's in Baní come from the macro L haplogroups. There were four signature lineages, namely, L2a, L3e, L3e2b and L3f. For the purposes of this study, the matriarchs were named, Matriarch C, Matriarch D, Matriarch E, and Matriarch F respectively. Two women within the study yielded exact HVR2 matches within each respective group, with the exception of 1 unrelated subject from the L2a haplogroup. Apart from this, the L3e haplogroup yielded 2 non-related sub-haplogroups, L3e1 and L3e2. Finally, the rest of the L mtDNA haplogroups were, L0a2 and, L1b, with only one subject per group.

*Haplogroup L lineages in the Canary Islands.* The maternal aboriginal genetic study of La Palma, Canary Islands resulted with 6%-7% sub-Saharan African ancestry (Fregel, Rosa *et al* 2009). However, it should be noted that this does not necessarily imply that slaves carried their respective African ancestral mtDNA to the archipelago. In fact, both in Northwest Africa and the Iberian Peninsula the sub-Saharan mtDNA haplogroups represent about 4% and 11%, respectively (Semino et al. 1989; Pereira et al 2005). The Eurasian L0-L3a haplogroups are concentrated in Iberia and the Near East. They are scattered through southern European, especially Portugal. It is difficult to assign a specific location to L2a types in Eurasia. Interestingly, the L3f sequence is found mainly in the Near East and southern Europe. Therefore, Matriarch C (L2a) most likely originated in West or Northwest Africa, whereas Matriarch D (L3e), Matriarch E (L3e2b), and Matriarch F (L3f) originated in East Africa.

*Haplogroup L lineages Among Mizrahi Jews.* According to Behar's 2008 study, the African ancestral mtDNA haplogroups are found in small proportions within the Mizrahi Jewish populations of North Africa. Libyan Mizrahi Jews yielded 3.6%. Tunisian Mizrahi Jews yielded 2.2%. Moroccan Mizrahi Jews yielded 1.34% (Behar *et al* 2008). There is a possibility that some of these Jewish maternal lineages settled on the Iberian Peninsula and the Canary Islands sometime before 1492 and reaching Baní during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. If that were to be the case, it would also be possible that Matriarchs C, D, E, and F are representative of this scenario. Otherwise, these signature lineages would suggest that they came to Hispaniola between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries by way of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

*Haplogroup J in Baní.* The mtDNA results of the study group demonstrated that 1 subject out of a total of 19 (5.3 %) belongs to the J mtDNA haplogroup. Upon analyzing the genealogy up to the 6<sup>th</sup> generation, one can see a high level of endogamous relationships. Of important interest, the subject demonstrated an adverse attitude towards Catholicism. For the purposes of this study, this matriarch is called Matriarch J. The FamilytreeDNA database shows that this subject has no other matches in the Caribbean Basin.

*Haplogroup J in Iberia.* Matriarch J most likely colonized the Iberian Peninsula from the Near East in the late Paleolithic & Mesolithic eras, as it is found in nearly 12% in the Near East and 11% in native Europeans (Sykes 2001).

*Haplogroup J in Mizhari populations.* Over 59% of Azerbaijani Jews belong to the mtDNA haplogroup J. Some Iraqi, Georgian and Persian Jews also belong to the same haplogroup (Behar *et al.*, 2008). According to Behar's study in 2008, one of the Jewish diaspora founding lineages belongs to the mtDNA haplogroup J (*ibid*).

*Comparative study of Sepharadi Populations and Baní.* The Family Tree DNA database shows that the mtDNA haplogroup J subject of the present study matches with 15 Mizrahi Iraqis, 2 Sepharadi Moroccans, 1 Sepharadi Turk, and 1 Mizrahi Yemenite. This data suggests that the subject from Baní most likely descends from an Iraqi Jewish lineage that migrated to the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages, via the Maghreb. Considering the strong evidences of Judaic practices in the family, it can be inferred that Matriarch J converted to Catholicism in Spain or Portugal, then went to Hispaniola in the 18<sup>th</sup> century via the Canary Islands.

#### FINAL REMARKS

In conclusion, the demographic processes in regards to the genetic pool of the *banilejos'* maternal ancestors studied thus far, demonstrate a complex model of consanguinity<sup>49</sup>. When compared to the control group, the results of this study demonstrate that Baní's target population is genetically distinct and more homogeneous. Thus, this study (19 total) demonstrates that 69% of the women sampled, belong to either Matriarch A, C, D, E, F, or H, corresponding to the haplogroups: A, L2a, L3e, L3e2b, L3f, and H, respectively. Hence, it can be concluded that a majority of Baní's population was founded through endogamous marriages, i.e. marriages with relatives along the maternal line. Interestingly, this percentage correlates to the genetic data of inbreeding within the Arab populations of North Africa, the Middle East, and the Ashkenazi Jewish population (Ben Halim 2012; Behar et al 2010). This confirms the oral tradition among the *banilejos* that cousins marry each other. Furthermore, the haplogroups that stood out were J, H,

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<sup>49</sup> Marriages between individuals who share at least one common ancestor.

L1b, and L3e2b, indicating a remarkable signature of Near and Middle Eastern ancestry joined with some degree of North African and European admixture. The haplogroup pattern among the *banilejos* demonstrates that the most important Jewish putative founding lineages are J and H, found in other Jewish (especially Iraq and Azerbaijan) and Middle Eastern populations, like Druzes, Palestinian and Bedouins. Finally, these data confirm that the *banilejos*, due to their marriage practices, have kept not only the cultural memory of their Jewish origin through centuries, but also a significant amount of their ancestral genetic signature.

## XI. FORGOTTEN JEWISH CONSCIOUSNESS

With so many apparent Jewish customs practiced by the *banilejos*, one would expect that some families had the tradition of being Jewish or perhaps having heard about the Inquisition. To my surprise, none of the subjects interviewed had ever heard anyone in their respective families say that they were Jews. The majority of them remember their Spanish ancestors. Also, only two of the subjects knew about the Inquisition: Ms. Roa Peña and Mrs. Arias. Ms. Roa Peña explained that she had knowledge of the Inquisition because she had studied about it in law school. Thus she replied:

Yes! Yes! I know a lot about it because I studied law in the university. They used to tell us there was the Orthodox Church and the Roman Apostolic Church, and due to a problem, they separated. However, they were united during the Holy Inquisition. I do not know what happened during that time and that people were persecuted for being witches. They were burnt alive. There is a museum about this and I know that there was abuse by the Church during that time. (Roa Peña 2015)

Mrs. Arias, a retired school teacher, said that the Inquisition was for bad people, but that she did not know anything else about it. When I asked Mrs. Roa Peña if she had heard about her family being Jewish, she asserted, “Thank God, no! We were always Christians. We are happy. We know that Jesus and Mary were Jews, but not all of the Jews were bad. There were economic interests” (*ibid*). It is evident from Mrs. Roa Peña’s statement that her anti-Jewish sentiments were acquired through her Christian education. To my surprise, she was the only subject who expressed herself this way. I proceeded to

ask her if she had ever met any Jewish person. She denied it! At that point, I took off my hat and showed her my *kippah*<sup>50</sup>. After revealing that I was a Jew and that I was interested in the oral traditions of the *banilejos*, she changed her demeanor and said that she did not mean to offend me. I exhorted her to visit Israel and to visit some synagogues so that she could see that Jews are not evil people. Next, she told me that she suspected that one of her uncles from the Ruiz family could have potentially have been from Jewish descent, since he never engaged in any religious activity and demonstrated hatred toward the Church. After interviewing over 20 women, who amazingly practice so many Jewish traditions in their daily lives, I wondered what had happened to their ancestral faith, and where did they acquire their traditions.

So many years of hiding and living double lives created much turmoil and identity crises for their progeny. Many contemporary descendants of *anusim* have no idea of the Jewish background of the family, since it was dangerous to even make mention of the word “Jew.” An elderly man of the García-Ruiz family from Baní was asked if his family identified themselves as Jews—he replied with a stern face, “That is not a proper question.” In light of this, Liebman states, “much our mental and physical illness—a whole host of fears, anxieties, and hatreds—spring from the seeds of false conscience that man has somehow contrived to sow during his life” (24). In addition, he states, “outraged by tyrannical repression, our unconventional or unacceptable impulses outwit us by disguising themselves in new forms. They become our worst inner enemies, assaulting our nerves, laying siege to our peace of mind, tormenting us with a sense of failure,

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<sup>50</sup> A religious skull cap.



making us feel depressed and inferior, driving us from excess to excess against our will” (27). Thus, many of the somatic and psycho-somatic diseases that the descendants of the *anusim* experience is due to generational repression. Hence, the Inquisition may have ceased circa 200 years ago, but its effects are still prevalent in Latin America.

Presently, globalization through the use of the internet, has played a large role in the emergence of the so-called “crypto-Jews” in Latin America. The majority begin searching for their ancestors through genealogical websites and are confronted with the fact that perhaps their surnames appear in synagogue or Inquisition records. In addition, they made find a list of customs that are shared with descendants of *anusim* around the world and assume new identities. At this point, they begin to feel “Jewish.” With much passion and fervor about their new-found identity, some of them approach the local synagogue to begin re-educating themselves as Jews. Unfortunately, they are confronted with a nonchalant attitude from the rabbi or repudiated by the congregation. Ironically, the majority, if not all, are told that they must convert to the faith for which their ancestors were killed. Herein lies the most disastrous effect of the Inquisition; the descendants of *anusim* do not find inner peace, as their identities are fragmented, being neither Christians, nor Jews.

## XII. EPILOGUE

Can one truly say that the customs of the *banilejos* are due to their Iberian Jewish ancestors, or is there another story to the one told here? During an intense analysis of Baní's genealogies, I found an interesting fact that could help answer some of the questions raised throughout the course of this investigation. Baní had a Jewish mayor in the early 19th century. His name was Haim Vidaal Naar, a citizen of Curaçao, son of Patrich Vidaal and Annette Naar. He married Antonia Martínez Pimentel in Baní. The Jewish Vidal family is originally from Catalunã, Spain. Before the expulsion of 1492, the Vidals were settled in Valencia, Spain and the Balearic Islands. It was the Valencia branch that went to Amsterdam, where the name was modified to Vidaal. During the 17th century, one Vidaal family went to Curaçao, being active members at the Mikveh Israel, Spanish and Portuguese Jews' synagogue. Then in the last 18th century, Patrich Vidaal migrated with his family to Hispaniola, then under French rule. His son Haim Vidaal held various positions: Lieutenant Colonel in the army of General Pedro Santana [Founding father of the Dominican Republic], mayor of the city of Baní, and an honorable judge. It is possible that the Judaizing *banilejos* began to openly practice their Jewish traditions during this time period, since they had one of their own that could defend their rights. Dr. Valera confirmed this discovery and agreed that my inference is very possible since Haim Vidaal also had political ties with the President Pedro Santana.

Another family from the Jewish community of Curaçao that became established in Baní was the Capriles family. Moisés Elías Capriles married Rosa Montero. They fathered Moisés Capriles Montero, who later married Elisa Zoquier Aguasvisas, daughter of Emilio Zoquier de Lara and María del Pilar Aguasvivas. The De Lara family was also

a Jewish family that migrated from Jamaica and Amsterdam throughout the 18th century to Baní. These genealogical connections demonstrate that there were Jews with strong political and religious ties in Baní. This raises more questions. Did the presence of these Jewish families in Baní strengthen the Jewish faith and practice of Baní's original settlers?

Can one say that the *banilejos* are indeed *halakhic* <sup>51</sup>Jews? These are questions that should be answered by a competent Jewish court. With all of the evidences herein, the Jewish authorities should be able to determine the Jewish status of the *banilejos*. A future study could link the *banilejos*' maternal lineages with Iberian Jewish mothers that were forced to convert to Catholicism. Until then, one can only infer that a majority of the contemporary *banilejos* are descendants of *anusim* who for the most part, empathize with the Catholic Church. The strongest evidence that substantiates a Jewish past in Baní lies in the plethora of rabbinic practices, which are not recorded in the Bible. Also, this study demonstrates that the women of Baní transmitted their customs and traditions through the use of superstition and taboo. Moreover, consanguineous marriages helped preserve family structure and provided social, economic, and cultural benefits for the *banilejos*. All in all, the combination of genealogy, sociology, anthropology, and genetic analysis in this investigation has demonstrated that it could be a viable method in the uncovering of the hidden, and recovery of a forgotten memory.

Overall, this investigation can suggest multiple conclusions: (1) the *banilejos* are descendants of Iberian Jews that were forcibly converted in Portugal then migrated to

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<sup>51</sup> According to Jewish law.

Hispaniola between the 17th and 18th centuries, (2) the *banilejos* are a make-up of Iberian Jews, Amerindians, and ex-African slaves, (3) the contemporary *banilejos* are indeed Jews, according to rabbinic law. To a historian, the history, genealogies, and sociology of the *banilejos* presented herein, reveal that the *banilejos* are indeed of Iberian and Mediterranean origin. To the anthropologist, the genetic study would suggest that a majority of the original settlers of Baní could have been Judaizing Christians, some of which Judaized their Native American and African spouses in the 18th century, then adhered to strict endogamy in order to preserve their peculiar identity in a new land. To the ethnographer, this story could demonstrate religious and cultural syncretism between Judaism, Catholicism, and Haitian Voodoo. Finally, to a rabbinic court, this investigation provides overwhelming evidence that the majority of the contemporary people of Baní are *halakhic* Jews, and should be treated as such. Indeed, the chairman of the High Rabbinic Court in Israel, Rabbi Nissim Karelitz, established a precedent in the modern era with the *chuetas*<sup>52</sup> of Majorca in a 2011 ruling. Thus he stated, “Since it has become clear that it is accepted among them [the *Chuetas*] that throughout the generations most of them married among themselves, then all those who are related to the former generations are Jews, from our brethren the children of Israel, the nation of G-d” (Arutz Sheva News, July 11, 2011). Therefore, according to this ruling, contemporary rabbinic courts could establish the Jewish identity of the *banilejos* and of other Latin American societies with similar characteristics, centuries after their ancestors were torn away from

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<sup>52</sup>Derrogatory term used by Old Christians to refer to the *anusim* in Majorca.

the Jewish People against their will. Hence, this is how I discovered the hidden identity of the *banilejos*.

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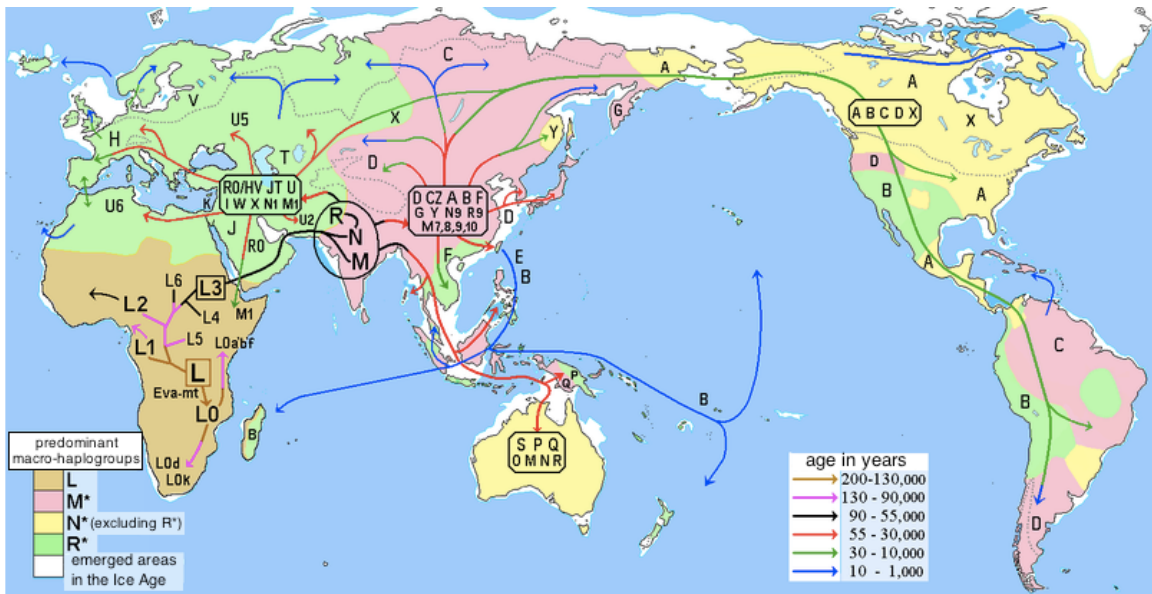
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**Appendix 1 – Human Migrations and Mitochondrial Haplogroups Map**



## mtDNA Migrations Map



Created by Maulucioni for MIGRACIONES HUMANAS EN HAPLOGRUPOS

MITOCONDRIALES. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Human\\_migrations\\_and](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Human_migrations_and)

[\\_mitochondrial\\_haplogroups.PNG](#)

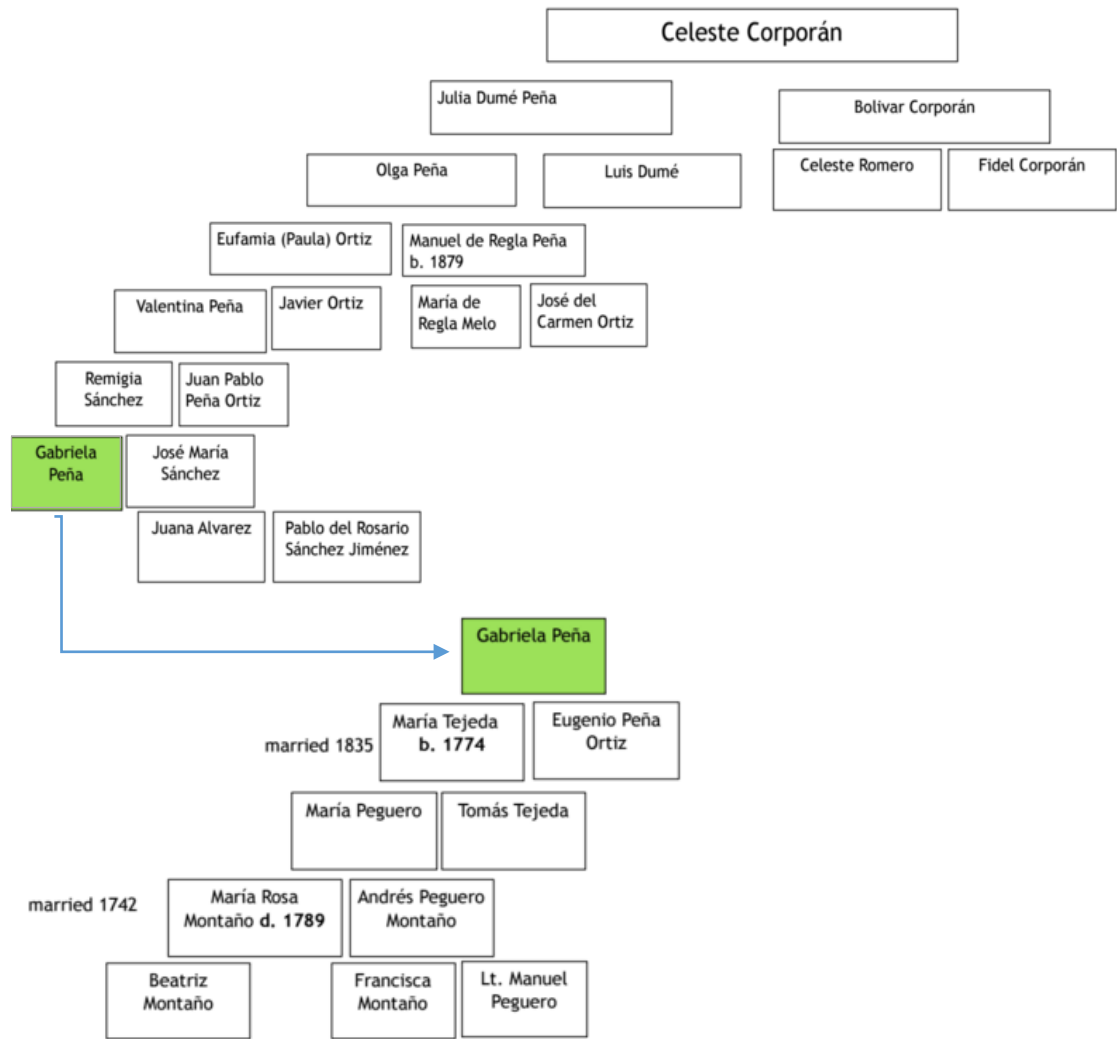
## **Appendix 2 – Genealogies of Baní’s Founding Families**

The following genealogies belong to the subjects that were interviewed.

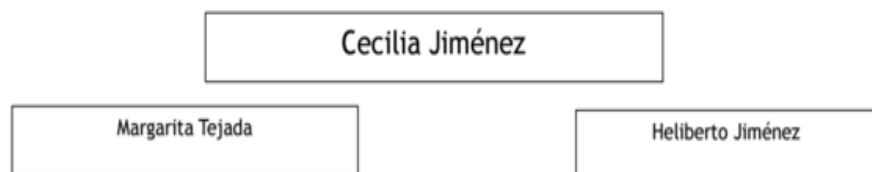
## Genealogy of Teany Báez



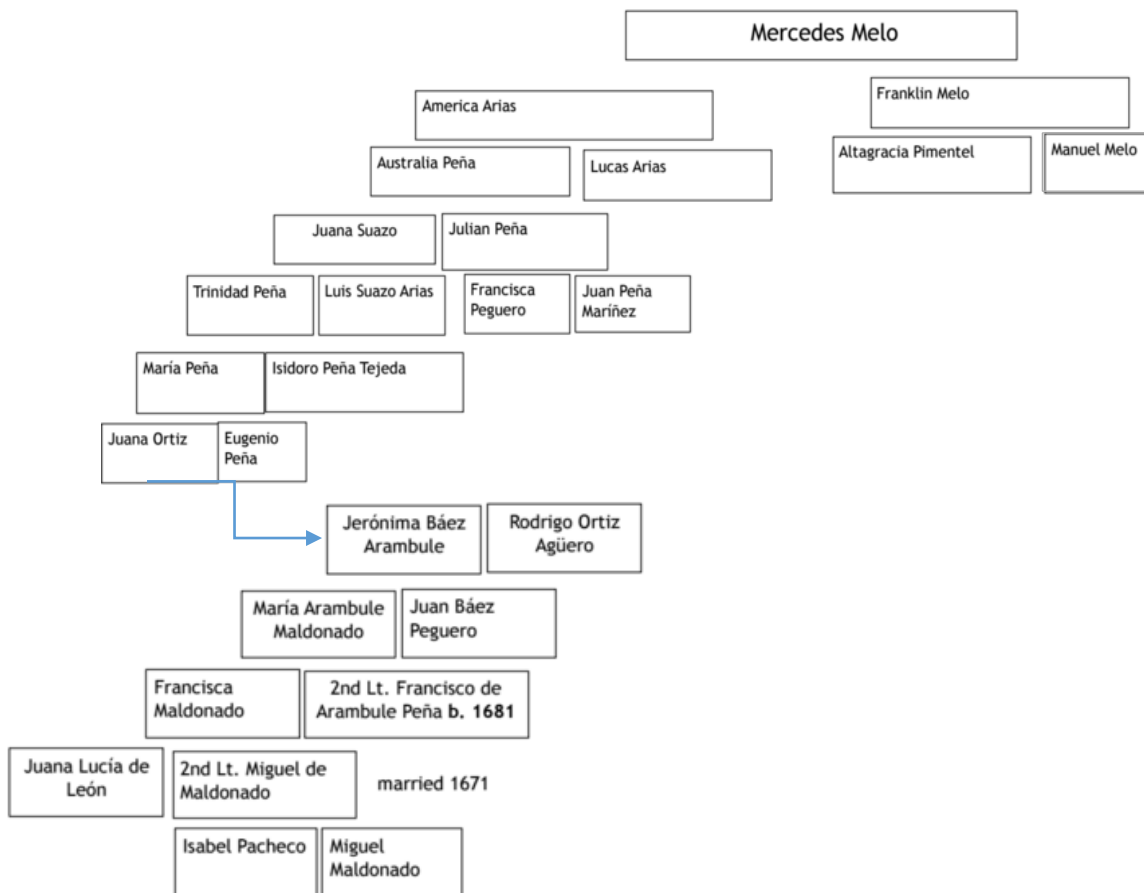
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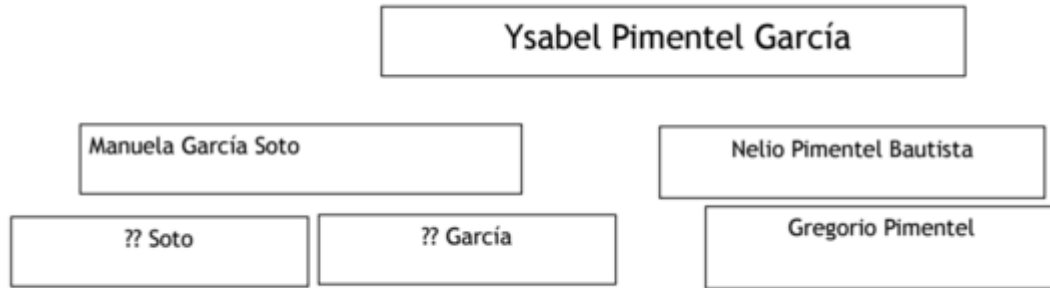
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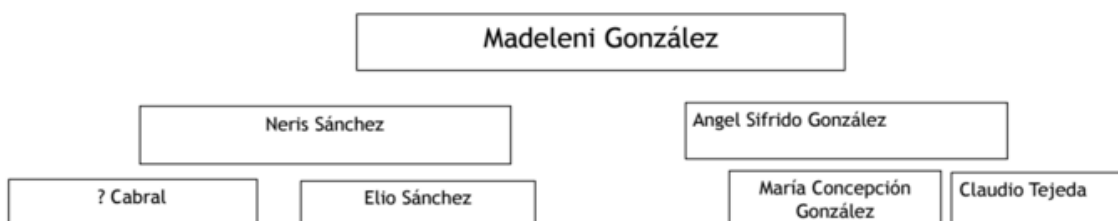
Genealogy of Mercedes Melo



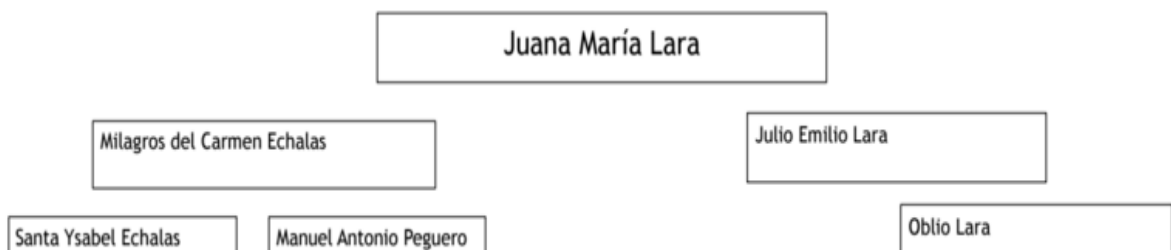
Genealogy of Ysabel Pimentel García



Genealogy of Madeleni González



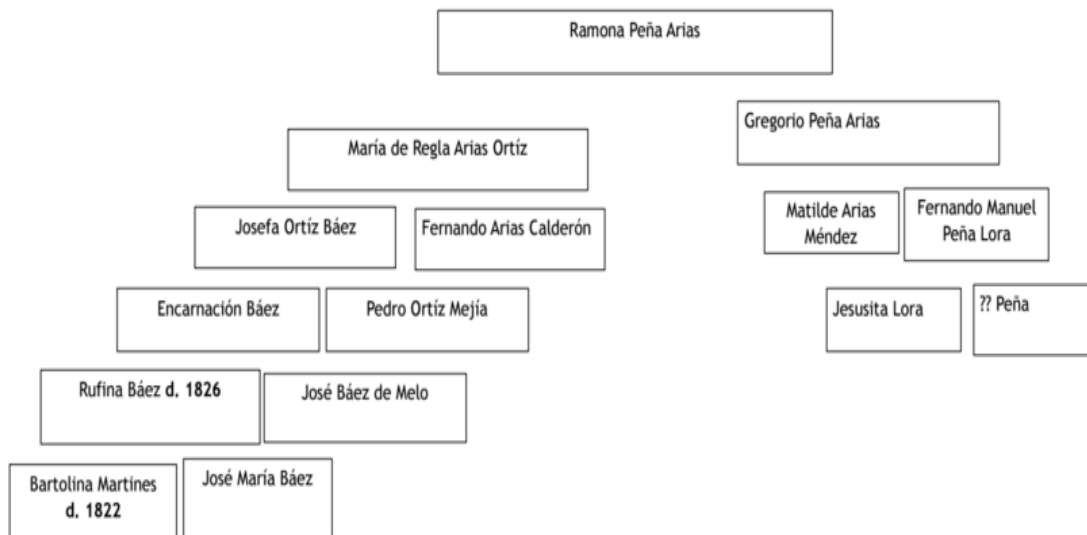
## Genealogy of Juana María Lara



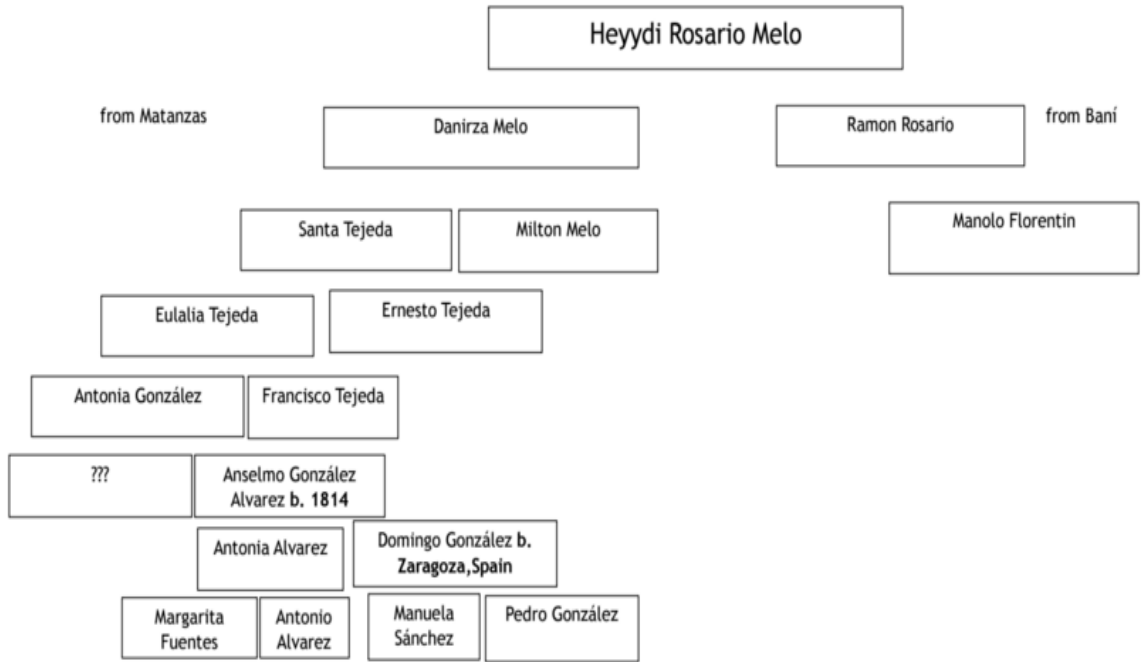




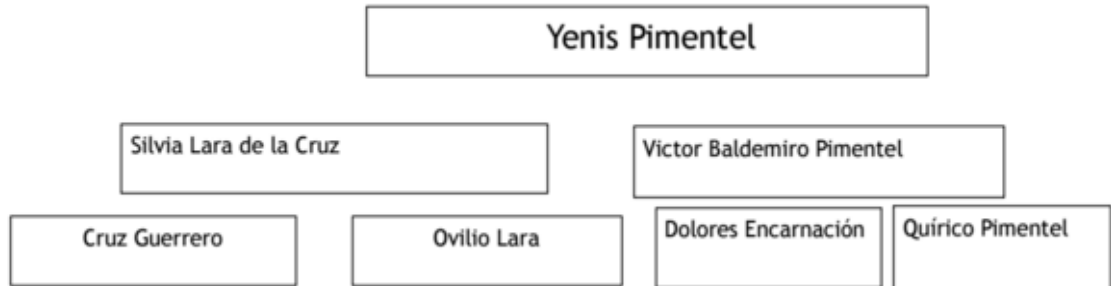
# Genealogy of Ramona Peña Arias



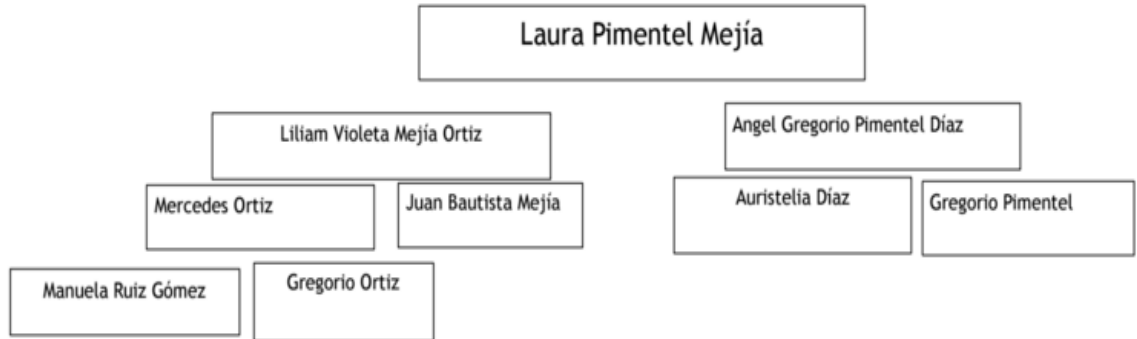
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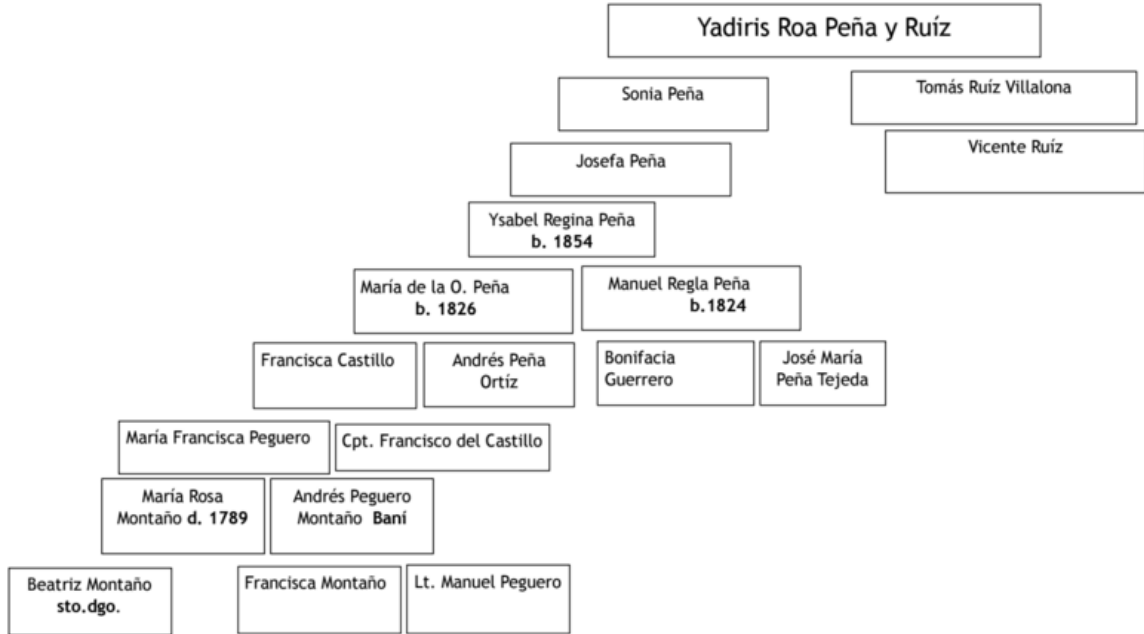
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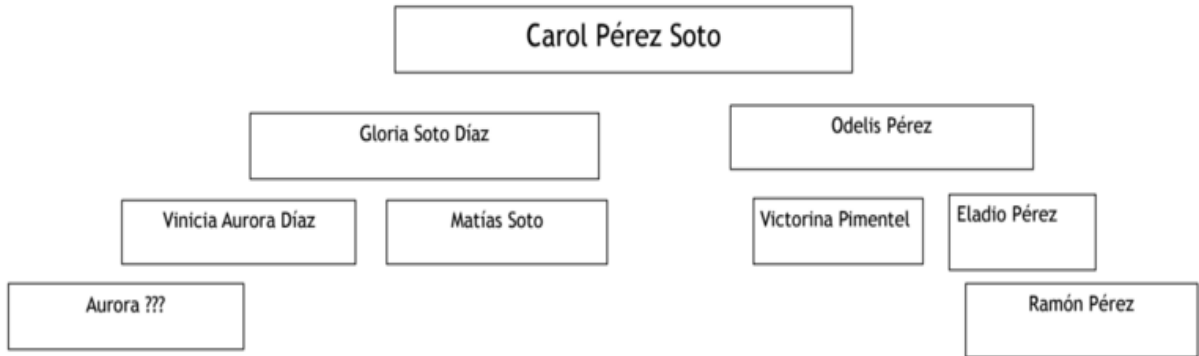
## Genealogy of Laura Pimentel Mejía



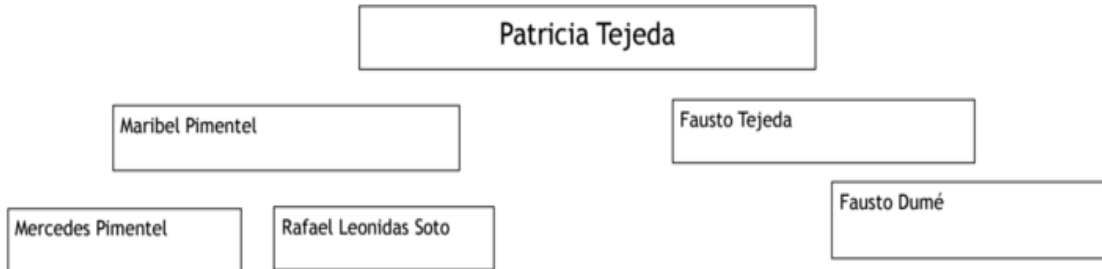
## Genealogy of Yadiris Roa Peña y Ruíz



# Genealogy of Carol Pérez Soto



## Genealogy of Patricia Tejada





# Genealogy of Altagracia Rojas Lara

