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"The Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Press in the United States, 1910-1948"

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Multilingual America

*Transnationalism, Ethnicity,
and the Languages
of American Literature*

EDITED BY

Werner Sollors

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The Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Press
in the United States, 1910-1948

Aviva Ben-Ur

Between 1890 and 1924, thirty thousand Jews from the Ottoman Empire (Turkey and the Balkans) poured into the United States. Most of these immigrants (approximately twenty thousand by the early 1920s) settled in New York City.¹ Although among them were Greek- and Arabic-speaking Jews, the majority spoke Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish, the language their ancestors had transmitted after their exile from the Iberian peninsula four hundred years earlier. Ladino, a language whose creation is identified primarily with the Spanish Expulsion, developed in the Ottoman Empire and is based on medieval Castilian, with admixtures of French, Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, Turkish, and other regional languages. Until the early twentieth century, Judeo-Spanish was almost always written in Hebrew, as opposed to Latin, characters.²

One of the most important literary achievements of the Judeo-Spanish people is the Ladino press. Judeo-Spanish scholar Haïm Vidal Sephiha does not exaggerate in declaring that worldwide, the Ladino press, during its first 136 years of existence, was as important to the Jewish community as *responsa* literature had been in previous centuries.³ Sephiha notes that "had it had time to develop, [the Judeo-Spanish press] would probably have produced masterpieces comparable to those of Yiddish literature."⁴ In a similar vein, Professor Edouard Roditi postulates that the Ladino press "might . . . have fathered a whole movement of modern Judeo-Spanish writing similar, though perhaps on a smaller scale, to the Yiddish Renaissance in Eastern Europe and the Americas."⁵ Professor Tracy K. Harris notes that the Judeo-Spanish press was a means through which Sephardim maintained and vitalized their language and literature, and was often the only channel through which they kept abreast of events occurring in the outside world.⁶

The American Judeo-Spanish press, printed in Hebrew letters and founded primarily by immigrants from Salonika,⁷ was originally created to assist new immigrants in their cultural and economic adjustment to the United States. The difficulties common to Jewish immigrants in this country were more numerous in the case of Sephardic newcomers from the Middle East and Balkans because, due to their unfamiliar physiognomy and language, and their ignorance of Yiddish, many of the existing Ashkenazic communal organizations did not recognize them as Jews.⁸

Moreover, many of these Ashkenazic organizations did not suit the cultural, linguistic, and religious needs of the Sephardim. For these reasons, Sephardic Jews found employment particularly difficult to secure, and they struggled to form their own religious, cultural, and political organizations.⁹ One of the most vibrant of these independent endeavors was the Judeo-Spanish press. The Sephardic press, as a record of the multifaceted immigrant experience of Oriental Jewry, is the richest and most encompassing primary source on the struggles this community faced and is an eloquent testimony to the cultural, religious, and political transformation Ladino speakers underwent in their adopted land.¹⁰

The American Ladino press roughly coincides with the era between the Young Turk revolution in 1908 and World War II, a period that Spanish scholar Paloma Díaz-Mas identifies as the second and most prolific of three in the history of the Judeo-Spanish press.¹¹ The first enduring American Ladino newspaper, *La América* (1910-1925), was joined by at least eighteen others of varying lifespans until the complete demise of the American Ladino press in 1948. All known Judeo-Spanish tabloids in the United States, with the exception of *El Mensajero* (The Messenger), which appeared in Los Angeles from 1933 to 1934, and *El Emigrante* (The Emigré), which appeared in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1917, were published in New York.¹² To date, there exists no definitive bibliographical account of all Ladino newspapers published in the United States, and there may indeed have been additional short-lived periodicals or bulletins from other major centers of American Sephardic settlement, including Atlanta, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Montgomery, that have remained undocumented.

Ladino newspapers in the United States varied politically and religiously, and reflected the ideological diversity of their editors and readership. New York witnessed the birth of a number of publications of a socialist bent, notably *El Progreso* (Progress, 1915-1920, later renamed *La Voz del Pueblo*, and still later, *La Época de Nueva York*) and the aforementioned, *El Emigrante*. *La América* tended to be religiously traditional and critical of atheist political movements. *La Vara* (The Staff, 1922-1948), describing itself on its masthead as a "serious-humorous newspaper," devoted itself to social satire. The bulletins of the Sephardic Brotherhood of America—a New York burial, mutual aid, and communal society founded in 1915 by Salonician immigrants—focused on the history and activities of the organization and included some articles on improving the social and educational status of Sephardic immigrant women.¹³ The monthly magazine *El Luzero Sefaradí* (The Sephardic beacon, 1926-1927), described by its editors as a national and apolitical review of science, art, and literature, focused primarily on non-Sephardic themes, with the exception of a number of controversial articles on Sephardic-Ashkenazic tensions in America and the value and beauty of the Judeo-Spanish language. Whatever their orientation, American Ladino newspapers were, almost without exception, dedicated to the social and intellectual betterment of Sephardic immigrants.

The American Ladino press enjoyed an extremely wide circulation. Judeo-Spanish newspapers that published their subscription lists reveal a readership as near as Alabama and Seattle and as distant as South America, Cuba, Constantino-

אימנארנו די ארמאס פארה ציין שווארצה

LA VARA **לה בארה**

FRIDAY, February 20, 1948 8708 ת"ר 5708	7 RIVINGTON STREET NEW YORK 5 N. Y. Tel. GRammy 8-4400	PRICE 5 CENTS תשלום 5 סנטימנטים	26 מרץ 5708
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x. The masthead of *La Vara* (The staff), the last Judeo-Spanish newspaper published in the United States. This issue, dated Friday, February 20, 1948 (corresponding with the Hebrew date, the 10th of Adar, 5708), was the last ever printed. Due to the illness of the tabloid's last editor, Albert (Alberto) J. Torres (1892-1970), this issue received very limited circulation and today exists only in hard copy, in the possession of a handful of individuals. The headline reads "Embargo de armas para Sion trokará" (Arms embargo for Zion will be changed). Note that the word "Sion" is misprinted on the masthead. The Hebrew word above the two hands shaking reads "ehad" (one), and the Ladino words on the two globes read "el mundo" (the world).

ple, Western Europe, and the cities of the Balkans. *La América*, which published a list of its agents in 1915, reveals a readership as widespread as Havana, Río de Janeiro, Buenos Aires and Río de Santa Fé (Argentina), Mexico City, Salisbury (Rhodesia, Africa), Vienna, London, Belgrade (Serbia), and Jerusalem.¹⁴ In 1928, *La Vara* boasted 16,500 subscribers, a significant increase from the 9,000 tallied in 1926.¹⁵ Though this figure pales in relative comparison to the Yiddish-language *Forward*, which at its peak in the 1920s had more than a quarter of a million subscribers,¹⁶ it is significant when one considers the social fragmentation, illiteracy, and economic disadvantages that were the lot of many Sephardim both in the Ottoman Empire and the United States. These subscription figures are also placed in perspective when one considers that the Judeo-Spanish speaking population of the world was estimated at 350,000 for the years 1900 and 1925.¹⁷ In comparison, the Yiddish-speaking population of the world in 1900 and 1925 was 7 million and 8,200,000 respectively.¹⁸

In reality, it is somewhat misleading to compare the American Ladino press in its heyday to the American Yiddish press at its peak. The former is better compared to the earlier stages of the Yiddish American press (1870 to about 1905), which Arthur Goren refers to as "a long period of gestation." This period began with the launching of the first Yiddish American newspaper, the *Yidishe Tzeitung* (Jewish Journal), which appeared irregularly until its demise in 1877. All together, nine Judeo-German journals appeared in the 1870s, but only one survived. Goren attributes the failure of the early Yiddish press to the relatively tiny size of the Yiddish-speaking population. In 1870, there were approximately 15,000 Yiddish speakers in New York, a number that ballooned to 35,000 a decade later. Goren also notes that most immigrants were not accustomed to tabloids, having come from provinces where orthodoxy dominated and where secular influences were slight.¹⁹ We have noted earlier that approximately 20,000 Oriental Jews, the majority of whom were Ladino speakers, settled in New York City from 1890 to 1924. Considering that between 1910 and 1924, fourteen known Ladino periodicals appeared, the survival and vitality of the Ladino press in the United States compares favorably, if not remarkably, to its Yiddish counterpart.

Given the social and linguistic isolation of Ladino-speaking immigrants, it is safe to declare that the Judeo-Spanish press was largely an internal conversation. There are examples of Ashkenazim who, seeking a rapprochement with Sephardim, or building upon their knowledge of and interest in modern Spanish, did correspond with the editors of the Ladino press and even subscribed. For example, in 1915 an Ashkenazic Jew named Max Schurman, a researcher for the Bureau of Jewish Education, sent a letter to *El Progreso* indicating that with his modest knowledge of Spanish he was able to read that Ladino newspaper with some effort, and appreciated the editors' "toilsome mission."²⁰ From personal experience, the present writer may add that she is aware of one non-Jewish professor of linguistics, currently teaching at the City University of New York, who subscribed to *La Vara* in the 1940s. These instances, however, are extremely isolated, and generally, the contributors to Ladino newspapers were able to express themselves much more candidly than had these publications appeared in a more widely accessible language. This candid aspect of the Ladino press is generally characteristic of other foreign-language American Jewish tabloids, which were, as Jonathan D. Sarna notes, "often bolder and more critical of America and American Jewish life than English-language ones."²¹

Some officials of the greater Jewish community, however, were indeed aware of the Judeo-Spanish press. *The Jewish Communal Register of New York City* for the years 1917-1918 lists *La América* and *La Voz del Pueblo* in its accounting of Jewish periodicals published in New York City. The list was prepared by Joseph Margoshes of the Yiddish *Der Tog* (The Day) and is based on tabloids that were available at the New York Public Library and the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.²² An article in the same issue, written by Samuel Margoshes of the Bureau of Education, also mentions "La Renasansia" (*sic*) and "El Kierbatch Amerikano" (*sic*). The author apparently had some knowledge of Judeo-Spanish,

given his declaration that "[f]rom the editorials of 'La America' it is rather difficult to decide what policy it pursues, but 'La Bos del Pueblo' is pronouncedly socialist." Commenting on the state of the Ladino press, Margoshes wrote pessimistically,

For one reason or another, the Judeo-Spanish press has failed get a grip on the oriental community. All the four papers combined have a circulation not exceeding 1,500, which is pretty low considering the size of the oriental community in New York City [20,000, according to Margoshes]. The limited circulation of the Ladino press may perhaps be explained by the fact that the oriental community does not form a unit even linguistically, some oriental Jews speaking Arabic, some Greek, and the rest other languages, while not all of them understand Ladino.²³

Margoshes was correct in citing the ethnic heterogeneity of the Oriental Jewish population, but he failed to take into account the fact that the vast majority of these immigrants did indeed speak Judeo-Spanish. In any case, Margoshes's analysis would have been drastically different had he reported after 1922, the year the extremely popular tabloid *La Vara* was launched. As noted above, 9,000 Sephardic Jews subscribed to this newspaper in 1926, and this number ballooned to 16,500 by 1928.

From the point of view of the editors, the Ladino press was anything but a lucrative endeavor. Moise Gadol, for example, editor of *La América*, operated his Lower East Side press at great financial personal loss, particularly given that existing Jewish organizations, Sephardic and Ashkenazic alike, failed to provide financial support for his publication.²⁴ The entire fifteen-year history of *La América* was one of financial struggle. *La América* cost \$3,000 a year to operate, and Gadol received only \$1,500 in contributions yearly. He supplemented his income with the sale of various books at the editorial offices, the profits from his printing services, and the proceeds from his export business. In his words, "[I do] all of this only for the sake of serving my Jewish nation, since, given the numerous languages I know, I could earn my living much better [elsewhere] and earn a profit in America."²⁵ His hyperbolic contention, on the tenth anniversary of the publication of *La América*, that his newspaper had been responsible for drawing Sephardic immigrants to the United States and for effecting a rapprochement between Sephardim and Ashkenazim certainly contains much truth (and much irony, given some of the acerbic comments he directed against his Yiddish-speaking brethren).²⁶

Some aspiring Ladino journalists solicited the Sisterhood of New York's historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue (whose congregation was founded in 1654) for funds to launch Ladino tabloids. In September of 1915, Salonician-born Maurice S. Nessim, struggling to secure funds for his proposed Judeo-Spanish weekly, wrote Sisterhood president Alice Menken of his desire, assuring her that his paper would be "independent of any doctrine" and would "only reflect the social condition of the Sepharadim [*sic*] Jews in America." Perhaps attempting to appeal to Menken's sense of female leadership, Nessim declared, "My mother came last week from abroad, and as we consider her the head of our family, I spoke to her on that score [launching a Ladino newspaper]. When I assured her that the Sepharadim Jews are craving for a real paper, she agreed with me and offered only \$200 for that

purpose. . . ." Nessim requested at least \$300 from Menken but was rebuffed by her apparent denial of the need for such a tabloid (only Nessim's correspondence is available). "I do not agree with you," he responded, "when you say that the Spanish-speaking Jews are not numerous enough in America to have a newspaper of their own."²⁷ One suspects that Menken's decision to withhold funds went beyond issues of population size. Contrary to his earlier promise, the editorials Nessim published in his newspaper, launched in 1915 as *El Progreso*, were highly political and were interpreted by American wartime censors as "communist propaganda." Nessim was eventually forced into French exile in November of 1919.²⁸

The editors of the Ladino press belonged to the cultural and intellectual elite of the Sephardic East. Many had benefited from the education provided by the Alliance Israélite Universelle and other European schools and had enjoyed successful careers in their native lands. Before immigration, Albert J. Levi ([?]-1962), one of the editors of *La Vara*, had graduated from L'École Normale of Salonika and had served as editor of the Ladino daily *El Liberal* (The liberal) of that city. His longtime partner, Salonician-born Moise B. Soulam (1890-1967), had attended both the Alliance and the Turkish college Idadie. Before emigrating, Soulam had launched his own newspaper in Salonika and had also served on the staff of Moise Levy's *El Kirbach* (The whip), a Salonician satirical journal. *La Vara*, the weekly Albert J. Levy founded with Moise B. Soulam as assistant editor, was the longest-running, and perhaps most creative, Ladino newspaper of the United States.

In the early years of Sephardic immigration, when Oriental Jews encountered linguistic barriers and ethnic prejudice at Ellis Island, the American Ladino press served as a channel through which Sephardim could appeal to their brethren for assistance. Sephardic leaders understood that on account of language barriers and idiosyncratic last names, Sephardic immigrants were not recognized as Jews by the Ashkenazic officers of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the very officers who were authorized to intervene on their behalf. In the Ladino lingo of the Lower East Side, the immigration experience at Ellis Island was known as *la izla de las sufrien-sas* (the island of suffering) or *el kastigar* (the scourge).²⁹ Especially memorable is the letter of the twenty-four-year-old Salonician upholstery merchant Itshak Azriel, who found himself detained at Ellis Island, suspected of an unspecified ailment. ". . . I have made so many sacrifices, both financially and temporally, and furthermore, I have spent a good fortune on the voyage," he despaired. Azriel, whose Salonician companions had already been released, begged the editor of *La América* to procure someone to vouch for him: "Now, I implore you with all of my heart to make efforts on my behalf and come to my aid and reclaim me quickly, before it's too late, and I am returned to my country, as they have threatened, and afterwards, who knows what could happen?"³⁰ After two unsuccessful attempts to obtain sponsors to reclaim Azriel, Moise Gadol made an appeal to Washington and secured Azriel's release.³¹ Two weeks later, a letter of Azriel's appeared in *La América* entitled "How I Was Liberated From Ellis Island." It expressed his appreciation for a newspaper that labors "in favor of all of our Sephardic immigrants."³²

One of the most vibrant features of the Ladino press was the quasi-fictional advice columns by Moise B. Soulam under the noms de plume, "Tía Satula" (Aunt

Satula), "Bula Satula," "Ham Avraham," and "Ham Moshón."³³ Soulam began to contribute his column within a week of his arrival in New York, and it proved to be one of the longest-running features of the American Ladino press, spanning from 1913 until 1934. The columns, which ultimately evolved into "Postemas de Mujer" (Pet peeves of a woman) and "Postemas de Ham Moshón" (Pet peeves of Rabbi Moshón), opened with a recounting of an outrageous anecdote of inappropriate social behavior and ended with a satirical commentary directed at Sephardic female and male immigrants of New York. They are revealing of the extreme self-consciousness Sephardim felt as immigrants with a distinct language and "Oriental" mores, and represent an attempt to Americanize Sephardic readers through social satire. Though the stated purpose of the columns was "to proffer good morals to the people, and to counsel women [and men] to take the right path in this blessed city," Soulam's contributions were also meant to offer consolation in times of trouble. The installments dealing with the Great Depression, for example, are among the most poignant and are filled with uplifting Ladino adages such as "Ay días klaros i días eskuros, i todo ay ke tomarlo kon pasensia" (There are clear days and cloudy days, and everything must be endured with patience).

The American Ladino press is also a rich source for Sephardic community activism. The bulletins of the Sephardic Brotherhood of America, for example, offer information on female participation in organizations such as the Brotherhood's Committee of Education, which in 1922, under the direction of Fanny Angel, Rebecca Nahoum Amateau, and other Sisterhood volunteers, organized a series of lectures of "general interest." From an article in *La Vara* in 1924, we learn that one of these lectures, given by Angel, was on "love and sex," and that Angel was to be commended as "the first of our Sephardic women to speak with courage in public."³⁴

Judeo-Spanish newspapers are also an excellent source for documenting the history of the Ladino theater of the Lower East Side and other Sephardic-American communities. Theater groups served an important function by providing social activities for both performers and audience members, and were a means through which Sephardim expressed political and social activism, since many shows donated their proceeds to local Sephardic clubs, to both local and overseas charities, and to the victims of the two world wars. From the first few years of its inception, the Ladino press faithfully printed announcements of upcoming performances and offered critical reviews, describing drama plots, naming individual actors, and commenting on the quality of performances.³⁵

The Judeo-Spanish press records many fascinating interactions between Ashkenazic and Sephardic immigrants, many of them betraying intraethnic tensions. In 1915, a Russian-born Jewish girl wrote to the editor of *La Voz del Pueblo* of an amorous encounter with a Sephardic youth. Clara met Jack at a ball organized by the Judeo-Spanish newspaper, but she was not certain of his religious affiliation. "At first glance," she wrote, "I thought him Italian. The way he spoke, his countenance and his gestures were like those of the Italians. But later, when we began seeing each other, he swore to me that he is a Spanish-speaking Jew." Though the two were in love, Clara's parents objected to the union because they did not believe

that Jack was indeed Jewish. Addressing the editor, Clara wrote, "Now, I beg you to tell me through your esteemed newspaper if it is possible, that a Jew who doesn't speak Jewish, and doesn't look Jewish, can nevertheless have a Jewish soul." The editor was annoyed that this Ashkenazic girl "is still not up to par with her knowledge on Judeo-Spaniards in America." "... Yes, 'Clara,' " the editor replied, "the boy speaking Spanish, having Italian gestures, who can read our newspaper, is Jewish. . . . No, we don't see any inconvenience in the intermarriage of Sephardim with Ashkenazim. There are many examples of Sephardim living with Ashkenazim in the greatest harmony."³⁶

The transformation of the ethnic identity of Ladino-speaking Jews manifests itself distinctively throughout the Ladino press. Having constituted more than 90 percent of all Jews in the former Ottoman Empire, Sephardic Jews encountered a new reality on American soil, where they were now a tiny minority in a sea of Ashkenazic Jews. Their struggle to redefine themselves in relation to their Eastern and Central European coreligionists proved to be a major preoccupation. To distinguish Middle Eastern and Balkan Sephardim from old Sephardim, descendants of Iberian Jews who had immigrated to America via Western Europe, South America, and the Caribbean, Ladino-speaking Jews became known as "Oriental Jews." The communal organization founded for them in 1912, in fact, was known as the Federation of Oriental Jews of America, and *La América*, on its masthead, described itself as an "Oriental Spanish-Jewish" tabloid until as late as 1915. Once Sephardi immigrants realized the connotations of the word "Oriental," a semantic battle ensued. The term was deemed objectionable not only because it also referred to peoples known today as "Asians" but also because of its negative connotations of backwardness and economic and cultural disadvantage. Contributors to the Ladino press protested that the only acceptable nomenclature was "Sephardim" and pointed out that Ladino was a Western language, not an Oriental tongue. Furthermore, they argued, the word "Sephardic" conjured up images of the most glorious epoch in Spanish Jewish history, when medieval Spanish Jews flourished culturally and literarily under Islamic rule.³⁷

According to a tradition dating to medieval times, Iberian Jews traced their origins to the royal house of David and were descended from a long line of "kings and princes." Even after the Spanish expulsion, Sephardic Jews continued to perceive themselves as the chosen of the Jewish people. Their widespread poverty and the failure of many Ashkenazim to recognize them as Jews shook the self-confidence of immigrant Sephardim. The disdain among many Sephardim for the Judeo-Spanish language as "jargon" and "uncultured," inculcated by the Alliance Israélite Universelle of Ottoman lands, was accentuated in the United States. As Sephardic intellectual leaders became exposed to studies in modern Spanish, moreover, the idea of Ladino as a corrupted tongue began to gain currency. In a 1916 article on modern Spanish proverbs, Dardanelles-born Maír José Benardete, who was to become a renowned scholar and professor of Hispanic and Sephardic studies, asked rhetorically, "Is it [Ladino] really a language?"³⁸ Both Moise Gadol and Ben-Tsion Behar, a contributor to *La América*, lamented the use of Ladino because it bore with it memories of the anti-Jewish persecutions in Spain.³⁹

These language battles can be compared to parallel conflicts among Ashkenazi Jews, whose journalists also fought over the propriety of the use of Yiddish as the means of communication among American Jews. Many of these intellectual leaders deemed Judeo-German "the jargon of the uneducated masses," and some even sought to substitute "a heavily Germanized Yiddish style and vocabulary."⁴⁰ Others, mostly radicals, adopted a more pragmatic approach, viewing Yiddish as "a transitory phenomenon" to be exploited for purposes of political unification until the Americanizing of the Jewish labor force was accomplished.⁴¹ Particularly intense debates between Zionists, who advocated Hebrew as the key to national redemption, and Yiddishists, who regarded Hebraicists and the culture they sought to cultivate as elitist, heat up the pages of the Yiddish press in the 1890s and early 1900s.⁴² While these internal debates bear some striking parallels to the linguistic controversy bubbling in Sephardic circles, the conflicts of Ladino speakers bear a distinctive flavor and conjure up elements of a unique experience, one that encompassed Inquisitorial oppression, legendary ethnic nobility, and the secularizing forces of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.

The editors of the American Ladino press were remarkable personages; extraordinarily energetic and creative, and filled with a zeal for effecting the betterment of their community. Yet for all their idealism, these editors were not without imperfections. As Joseph M. Papo notes, one major factor in the demise of the Sephardic press was intragroup fighting between various competing periodicals, melees that sometimes even resulted in lawsuits.⁴³ Still, it was another factor that played a central role in the eclipse of the press. Professor Jane Gerber observes that the Ladino press was ultimately the "victim of its own success," acculturation being the primary reason for the demise of the last Judeo-Spanish newspaper in 1948.⁴⁴

JUDEO-SPANISH NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES

The following list represents all known Judeo-Spanish periodicals published in the United States and provides, where available, the names of their editors, cities of publication and publication lifespans. My information is based on the research of previous scholars and, where this research is inaccurate or incomplete, my own research and first-hand knowledge. I have omitted from this essay detailed bibliographical information on the American Ladino press, including archival holdings and biographical details of editors, as such information extends beyond the framework of this volume. I should stress that this bibliography, while it represents the most inclusive list of American Ladino periodicals to date, is by no means definitive, and at the time of this writing, I am still waiting for a number of institutes and libraries to confirm their holdings and to send me issues and publications I have not yet examined.

The existence and lifespans of many American Ladino newspapers remain nebulous. Much work must be accomplished in order to establish dates, archival holdings, and previously overlooked titles definitively. Only then can scholars begin a comprehensive assessment of the multidimensional contribution of the Ladino press. As this brief survey has

intended to demonstrate, the Judeo-Spanish press is a rich, and largely unexplored, source for the history of Ladino-speaking Jews in the United States.

1. *La Ágila* (The eagle). 1910. New York. Editor: Moise S. Gadol.
2. *La América* (America). 1910-1925. New York. Editor: Moise S. Gadol.
3. *La Ágila* (The eagle). 1912. New York. Editor: Alfred Mizrahi. Coeditor: Behor Hana.
4. *La Renasensia* (Renaissance). 1912. New York. Editor unknown.
5. *El Progreso / La Boz del Pueblo / La Época de New York* (Progress / The voice of the people / The epoch of New York). 1915-1920. New York. Editors: Maurice S. Nessim; Alfred Mizrahi.
6. *El Emigrante* (The emigré). 1917. New Brunswick, N.J. Editor: Albert J. Covo.
7. *El Kirbach Amerikano* (The American whip). 1917. New York. Editor: Albert J. Levi.
8. *La Renasensia* (Renaissance). 1917-1922. New York. Editors: Shimon (Simon) S. Nessim; Robert Fresco. Organ of the Agudat Zionit Maccabee.
9. *El Amigo* (The friend). 1918[?]. New York. Editor: Albert J. Covo.
10. *El Proletario* (The proletarian). 1918. New York. Editor unknown. Organ of the Sephardi Branch of the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen's Circle; an affiliate of the American Socialist Party).
11. *El Ermanado* (The brotherhood). 1920[?]-1938[?]. New York. Numerous editors. Organ of the Sephardic Brotherhood of America.
12. *La Luz* (The light). 1921-1922. New York. Editor: Shimon (Simon) S. Nessim. Asst. Editor: Maurice Benrubi.
13. *La Vara* (The staff). 1922-1948. New York. Editors: Albert J. Levi; Albert J. Torres. Asst. Editor: Moise B. Soulam.
14. *El Amigo* (The friend). 1923[?]-1932[?]. New York. Editor unknown. Publisher: New York committee for the Insane Asylum of Salonika.
15. *El Luzero Sefaradí* (The Sephardic beacon). 1926-1927. New York. Editors: Albert J. Levi; Moise B. Soulam.
16. *The Sephardic Bulletin*. 1928-1930. New York. Editors: Robert Franco; Victor Tarry.
17. *El Sol*. 1930[?]. New York.
18. *El Mesajero* (The messenger). 1934-1935. Los Angeles. Editor: Dr. Robert Benveniste. Publisher: Sociedad Paz i Progreso (Peace and Progress Society).
19. *The Sephardi*. 1940[?]/1943-1959[?]. New York, N.Y. Editor: Joseph M. Papo.

NOTES

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dation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture for providing me with the masthead of *La Vara*. All translations and transliterations from the Ladino and translations from the French are mine.

1. This is a conservative figure, based on Marc D. Angel, *La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982, p. 6. In 1923, *La Vara* estimated the Ladino-speaking population of New York and the United States at 35,000 and 50,000, respectively. See Albert J. Levi, "El Menester de Un Jurnal Kotidiano Se Aze Fuertemente Sentir," *La Vara*, 12/14/23, p. 2, and "Por La Prima Vez en la Istoria de los Sefaradim de América: Grandioza Kompania de Publisidad Sefaradit" (editorial announcement), *ibid.*, p.4. In 1934, the American Sephardic population was estimated at 75,000. See "A Los Lektors de 'La Vara': Nuestra Seksi6n en Ingl6z," *La Vara*, 8/10/34, p. 8.
2. See Tracy K. Harris, *Death of a Language: The History of Judeo-Spanish*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994, p. 56. According to Harris, the use of Latin letters increased only in the twentieth century, particularly in the field of journalism. Harris notes that the first Ladino newspaper printed in Latin letters was the Rumanian tabloid *Luzero de la Pasensia*, which appeared from 1886 to 1889. Throughout this essay, for reasons of simplicity, I refer to the language of the Sephardim as Ladino or Judeo-Spanish. For a discussion of the controversy regarding nomenclature, see Harris, pp. 20-29.
3. Haïm Vidal Sephiha, *L'Agonie des Judéo-Espagnols*, Paris: Editions Entente, 1977, p. 106. Sephiha's arithmetic eludes me; he refers to "ces cent trent-six dernière années," indicating that his survey of the Ladino press ends in 1978. According to him, the first Ladino newspaper, *La Buena Esperansa*, originated in Smyrna in 1842, and by 1973, only two Ladino newspapers remained worldwide, one published in Tel Aviv and one in Constantinople. The Tel Aviv Ladino newspaper Sephiha was probably referring to is *La Luz de Israel* (published in Latin letters), which folded in 1990. Sephiha has documented 344 titles, exceeding Moshe David Gaon's accounting of 296. See Gaon, *Haltonut BeLadino: Bibliografia (A bibliography of the Judeo-Spanish [Ladino] press)*, Tel Aviv: Monoline Press, 1965. The Judeo-Spanish press appeared on five continents—Europe, North America, South America, Africa, and Asia—and in the following countries: England, Austria, Bulgaria, Egypt, the United States, France, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Turkey, and Yugoslavia. It also appeared in the British crown colony of Gibraltar and on the island of Curaçao. See Sephiha, *L'Agonie des Judéo-Espagnols*, pp. 100-101.
4. Sephiha, *L'Agonie des Judéo-Espagnols*, p. 106. "Elle [la presse] constitue en outre une littérature en gestation, qui si elle avait eu le temps de se développer aurait probablement donné des chefs-d'oeuvre comparables à ceux de la littérature yiddish. . ."
5. Edouard Roditi, "The Slow Agony of Judeo-Spanish Literature," *World Literature Today* 60 (Spring 1986): 244-246, at p. 245.
6. Harris, *Death of a Language*, p. 130.
7. The founders of the two longest-lived Ladino periodicals in America, Moïse S. Gadol (*La América*) and Albert J. Levi (*La Vara*), were of Bulgarian and Salonican origin, respectively. Gadol is also thought to have launched *La Ágila* in 1910; Levi also launched *El Kirbach Amerikano* and *El Luzero Sefaradit*. Behor Hana, former editor of *La Boz de Izmir*, who was coeditor with Alfred Mizrahi of the short-lived *La Ágila* (1912), was probably from Izmir. I have not yet identified the patrimony of Alfred Mizrahi, who was also editor of *La Époka de Nu York*. Albert J. Torres (publisher of *La Époka de Nu York*, cofounder and business manager of *La Luz*, editor of *La Vara*, and business manager of *El Luzero*

Sefaradit), Maurice S. Nessim (*El Progreso*), Albert J. Kovo (*El Emigrante*; the 1918[?] *El Amigo*), Shimon S. Nessim (*La Renasensia*; *La Luz*), and Moïse B. Soulam (*La Vara*; *El Lazero Sefaradit*) were all from Salonika. I have not yet identified the patrimony of Maurice Benrubi (cofounder and assistant editor of *La Luz*) and Robert Fresko (*La Renasensia*), though I suspect that they too were born in Salonika. Many of the editors of and contributors to the annual reviews of the Sephardic Brotherhood of America, including Ralph Hasson, were of Salonican origin. I have no information on the editors of the *Sephardic Bulletin*. The committee for the Insane Asylum of Salonika in New York, which published the later *El Amigo*, was most likely made up of Salonican Jews. The existence of New York's *El Sol* and its editor is unconfirmed. Avram Galante is the only scholar who mentions this tabloid, and he dates it to 1930. See his *Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*, vol. 9, Istanbul: Editions Isis, 1985 (first published 1926), p. 225, and "La Presse Judéo-Espagnole Mondiale," *Hemenora* 8-10 (July/August/September 1935): 186-199. Dr. Robert Benveniste, editor of *El MESAJERO*, was probably from Rhodes, given that the bulletin's sponsoring organization, *Sosiedad Paz i Progreso* of Los Angeles, was founded by Jews of that island. *The Sephardi* counted among its editors Palestinian-born Joseph M. Papo, a Ladino-speaking Sephardi, and John J. Karpeles, whose ethnic origins are unknown to me at this time.

8. Ashkenazim are Yiddish-speaking Jews, in this case, of Eastern European origin. During the Middle Ages, the biblical place-name, "Ashkenaz" came to be identified with Germany, and "Sefarad" with Spain; hence, "Ashkenazic" and "Sephardic."

9. For histories of the immigrant experience of Ladino speakers in the United States, see Angel, *La America*, and Joseph M. Papo, *Sephardim in Twentieth Century America: In Search of Unity*, San Jose and Berkeley, Calif.: Pelé Yoetz Books and Judah L. Magnes Museum, 1987 (henceforth, *SITCA*). See also Diane Matza, "Sephardic Jews Transmitting Culture Across Three Generations," *American Jewish History* 79 (Spring 1990): 336-354, and Jack Glazier, "Stigma, Identity and Sephardic-Ashkenazic Relations in Indianapolis," in *Persistence and Flexibility: Anthropological Perspectives on the American Jewish Experience*, ed. Walter P. Zenner, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, pp. 43-62.

10. See my "Nuestra Colonia: A Report on the Sephardic Community of the Lower East Side as Conveyed Through the Judeo-Spanish Press, 1910-1925" (unpublished manuscript researched and prepared under the direction of Dr. Jane S. Gerber for the Komunidad Project of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum), May 1995.

11. Paloma Díaz-Mas, *Los Sefardíes: Historia, Lengua y Cultura*, Barcelona: Riopiedras Ediciones, 1986, pp. 167-68. The first and last periods are 1845-1908 and 1945 to the present.

12. For information on the Ladino-speaking Jews of Los Angeles, see Daniel J. Elazar, "Sephardim in North America," *The Other Jews: The Sephardim Today*, New York: Basic Books, 1989, pp. 162-183, at p. 175; Papo, *SITCA*, pp. 294-299; and Stephen Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles*, New York: Arno Press, 1980. In 1910, the Sephardic population of New Brunswick swelled to such a degree that Oriental Sephardim made up nearly one-third of that city's Jewish population of 2,500. For several years, New Brunswick represented the largest Sephardic community outside New York City. See Papo, *SITCA*, p. 270.

13. See my "Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Press," in *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore, N.Y.: Routledge, 1998, pp. 781-785.

14. "Lista de Nuestros Agentes," *La América*, 11/12/15, p. 5. Even with this geographic

diversity, Gadol claimed only just under one thousand subscribers. See "La Kestión de los Dokumentos Turkos," *ibid.*, p. 2.

15. Harry Linfield, *The Communal Organization of the Jews in the United States*, 1927, New York: American Jewish Committee, 1930, p. 175. The figures are tabulated from "Claimed Circulation." In 1927, the claimed circulation of *La Vara* was sixteen thousand, indicating that, if these figures are accurate, this tabloid increased its readership by seven thousand in the span of one year. Linfield does not list subscription figures for *El Luzero Sefaradí*; see p. 174.

16. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Judah Reinharz, "The American Experience," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 354-417, at p. 383. In 1916, the year during which Judeo-German journalism in the United States reached its acme, the American Yiddish daily press enjoyed a readership of two million. This figure is not surprising, considering that between 1880 and 1914, more than two million Eastern European Jews immigrated to the United States. See Arthur A. Goren, "The Jewish Press," in *The Ethnic Press in the United States: A Historical Analysis and Handbook*, ed. Sally Miller, New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, pp. 203-228, at p. 212.

17. Arthur Ruppín, *Soziologie der Juden*, vol. 2, Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1931, p. 131. As Sephiha has noted, Ruppín's figures are misleading, given that the quality of Judeo-Spanish knowledge has steadily declined; see Sephiha, *L'Agonie des Judéo-Espagnols*, p. 95.

18. Ruppín notes that these figures represent 60.6 percent and 54.7 percent of world Jewry, as opposed to Ladino-speaking Sephardim, representing 3 percent and 2.3 percent in 1900 and 1925. In 1991, Joshua A. Fishman estimated the world Yiddish-speaking population at more than three million, and the Yiddish-speaking population of the United States at a million and a quarter. See Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991, p. 194. In 1994, Harris estimated the world Ladino-speaking population at sixty thousand but did not provide an estimate for the United States. See Harris, *Death of a Language* pp. 19, 255.

19. Goren, "The Jewish Press," p. 211.

20. "Tribuna Libera," *La Boz del Pueblo*, 11/26/15, p. 3. Given the flawlessness of the Ladino, this letter was probably translated from the English.

21. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The History of the Jewish Press in North America," in *The North American Jewish Press*, The 1994 Alexander Brin Forum, Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University, 1995, pp. 2-7, at p. 5.

22. *The Jewish Communal Register of New York City*, 1917-1918, New York: Lipshitz Press, 1918, p. 619.

23. Samuel Margoshes, "The Jewish Press in New York City," in *ibid.*, pp. 596-616, at pp. 610-611.

24. Papo, *SITCA*, pp. 68-70.

25. "La Kestión de los Dokumentos Turkos," *La América*, 11/12/15, p. 2.

26. *Ibid.*, and Papo, *SITCA*, p. 79. See also Albert J. Amateau, "The Sephardic Immigrant from Bulgaria: A Personal Profile of Moise Gadol," *American Jewish Archives* 42, 1 (1990): 57-70.

27. Letter from Maurice S. Nessim to Alice Menken. Archives of Congregation Shearith Israel's Sisterhood.

28. Papo, *SITCA*, p. 82. Interestingly, a few months after the tabloid was launched, Menken, writing on behalf of the Sisterhood, sent a letter of congratulations to *La Boz del*

Pueblo, wishing those involved success in their "admirable work." Regrettably, with the exception of "admirable work," Nessim only paraphrases the letter in the January 7, 1916, issue of his paper. See "La Sisterhood Apresia La Boz del Pueblo," p. 1. (Nessim's summary of the letter is, of course, in Ladino.)

29. "Rosh A-Shaná 5676" (no author given), *La América*, 9/8/15, p. 2.

30. "Letra de Ellis Island," *La América*, 6/11/15, p. 8.

31. "Itshak Azriel Delivrado de Ellis Island," *La América*, 6/18/15, p. 1.

32. "Komo Fui Delivrado de Ellis Island," *La América*, 6/25/15, p. 6.

33. Ham, the Ladino pronunciation of the Hebrew word "haham," or wise man, denotes "rabbi."

34. "Aktividades de la Kolonia: Enteresante Konferensia," *La Vara*, 11/21/24, p. 7.

35. See my "Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Theater," in *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore, N.Y.: Routledge, 1998, pp. 781-785. An account of the American Judeo-Spanish theater, parallel to the work of Elena Romero, remains a desideratum. See Elena Romero, *Repertorio de Noticias Sobre el Mundo Teatral de los Sefardíes Orientales*, Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1983. For a brief overview of the Sephardic theater in Seattle, see Marc D. Angel, "The Sephardic Theater of Seattle," *American Jewish Archives* 25, 2 (November 1973): 156-161.

36. "Tribuna Libera: Lo Ke Nuestros Lektres Pensan: Porke No?" *La Boz del Pueblo*, 5/26/16, p. 6.

37. See, for example, Ben-Sion Behar, "Sefaradim, Ma No Orientales," *La América*, 10/29/15, p. 2.

38. "Tribuna Libera: Lo Ke Nuestros Lektres Pensan" (letter from Meyer [Maír José] Benardete), *La Boz del Pueblo*, 4/28/16, p. 6.

39. "Por La Lingua" (no author given), *La América*, 12/9/10, p. 1, and Ben-Sion Behar, "Sefaradim, Ma No Orientales."

40. Goren, "The Jewish Press," p. 212. On language wars, see also David Wolf Silverman, "The Jewish Press: A Quadrilingual Phenomenon," in *The Religious Press in America*, ed. Martin E. Marty et al., New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963, pp. 125-172, pp. 125-126, 135-136 and 144-145.

41. Goren, "The Jewish Press," p. 214.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Papo, *SITCA*, pp. 89-90 and "Pasado, Prezente i Futuro de la Prensa Sefaradit en América" (signed "Reporter"), *El Progreso*, 5/26/16, p. 5. See also "El Progreso No Pudo Progresar" (no author given), *La América*, 12/17/15, p. 3.

44. Jane Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*, New York: Free Press, 1992, p. 270.