

JEW, CONVERSOS, AND NATIVE AMERICANS:  
THE IBERIAN EXPERIENCE

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*Sir: I am Jewish, and profess the Law of Moses, and by it I shall live and die. And if I would have to swear, I shall swear by the living God, who made heaven and earth and is the God of Israel.*

Francisco Maldonado de Silva. Martyr, 1627: First Argentine Martyr in the battle against Spanish Oppression.<sup>1</sup>

*The Spaniards in Mexico and Peru used to baptize Indian infants and then immediately dash their brains out: by this mean they secured that these infants went to Heaven.*

Bertrand Russell<sup>2</sup>

Having been born and raised in Buenos Aires and completed my studies in Spain, I came to believe that the fate of Jews, *Conversos* (Christians with even partial Jewish background), and native Americans is closely knitted: they all three were victims of Spanish persecution. As a Jew, the story of the *Converso* is not—it cannot—be closed. Our tradition maintains that something special in their manners and outlook has endured. As a child, when meeting people who bore *converso* names or manners, good bearing and *prudence* did not permit me to insinuate the subject. The situation has changed. Throughout the Americas, in places like Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and Colombia, and throughout the Southwest of the U.S.A., in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona, there are groups of people actively investigating their family roots. Some of them visit Israel. Others try to establish a rapport with the local Jewish communities. We should open our hearts and our ears to them. It is high time for the Jewish communities to enter into a dialogue with the native American communities. There is much that can be learned from each other's experiences. We are both

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<sup>1</sup> There is a novel on his life and ideas, by Marcos Aguinis, *La Gesta del Marrano* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1993). Unless otherwise stipulated, all translations in the following are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 35.

survivors of the same type of horrendous holocaust, ignited by greed, malice, and intolerance. In this sense, one may ascertain that they, too, are brothers from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel (see below, section 6).

The underlying theory of this study is that the Visigothic military ideology (dominating European aristocracy until modern days) was the principal factor in the persecution and extermination of Jewish life in Spain. This ideology has nothing to do with religion—either Jewish or Christian. Rather, it pertains to the dark side of humankind: the manipulation of religion (or other ideologies) for cynical purposes. In the Iberian case, it consisted in the transformation of the *cristiano viejo* (Iberian Christian)—best represented by Don Quixote's faithful companion, Sancho Panzas, a good natured and productive individual, into a *Conquistador*: a superior being encrusted in iron, mercilessly destroying the "other:" first Jews, then *Conversos*, and later native Americans. The victims were not only the persecuted but also the semi-educated and unsophisticated *Conquistadores*. The expulsion of Jews from Spain unfolded into the *Expulsion of Spain from the rest of Europe*. Under the pretext of orthodoxy, the Spanish Crown, in particular with Philip II on, isolated Spain, cutting the cultural and spiritual links from the rest of Europe. Spain is the only nation in Western Europe that did not have a Renaissance. In the last account, what divided the *cristiano viejo* from the Jew was, precisely, what divided the *cristiano viejo* from other Europeans.

Historians on behalf of Spanish inhumanity tell us that the racist persecutions were "necessary" in order to attain national unity. It is a lie, backed up by neither reasoned argument nor palpable evidence. The whole notion of "national unity" was—and to a large measure still is—alien to the Spanish mind. The Spanish language does not even have a word for "Spaniard:" *Español* is a Provençal term.<sup>3</sup> More to the point, other European countries attained national unity *without* pursuing any of the Spanish policies. Finally, whatever measure of unity prevailed in Spain was the result of a strong central government, not of a "national conscience." The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and its brutal effects illustrate our point. Even today, post-Franco Spain continues to be the most divided country in Europe: linguistically, socially, culturally, politically, and religiously. Indeed, many of the regions outside Castile feel more like subjugated territories than parts of "the Spanish Nation."

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<sup>3</sup> See Américo Castro, *La Realidad Histórica de España* (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1982), p. 18.

The main argument of this study is that the same people that persecuted Jews and *Conversos* committed the greatest genocide in human history: the almost total extermination of the native population of Latin America. Whatever "reasons" concocted by historians to "explain" Spanish policies against Jews and *Conversos* cannot possibly apply to Spanish treatment of native Americans. Apologists for Spanish inhumanity argue that many native Americans were devastated by plagues. The argument is essentially racist. It uncritically assumes that the native's immunity system was biologically *inferior* and unable to cope with the white's man *superior* viruses and bacteria. There is no evidence for such a view. It is also specious. Somehow, we are expected to believe that the natives' immunity system failed only when in contact with Spaniards, but it could work fine when confronting non-Iberians, such as the Dutch, the English, or Iberians with a Jewish background, the *Conversos*. Or that these viruses and bacteria failed to do their macabre work in places that were not rich in gold and silver, like Argentina. Strangely, no plagues attacked the native women living with Spaniards, who became the mothers of the enormous *mestizo* population. Finally, we are expected to believe that Spanish viruses and bacteria were sensitive to cost and productivity and therefore inactive with the black slaves imported as substitutes for native American. It is by examining Spanish policies in Spain *and* in the New World as a single phenomenon—rather than as two disconnected events—that the monstrous nature of Spanish persecutions can be gauged. Hence the title of this paper.

A few words about the methodology of this study. Invariably, Western historiography espouses the perspective of the persecutor. The objective of the historian is to simultaneously express the view of the persecutor and discredit the historical memory of the persecuted. Even when expressing empathy for the plight of the victims, the events are examined according to the criteria and perspective of the victor. The cardinal view of this author is that Jewish historiography comes to—and must—express the perspective of the persecuted.<sup>4</sup> As such, the major objective here is to project the events from the perspective of the victims: the Jews, the *Conversos*, and native Americans.

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<sup>4</sup> See my *In the Shadow of History* (New York: SUNY, 1992), pp. 189-193.

1. *The Conceptual Bases of Greed*

Greed is a concept peculiar to Visigothic military ideology that was further implanted in the *cristiano viejo*.<sup>5</sup> It includes two elements: coveting of wealth and contempt for labor. Reflecting the military-aristocratic ideal that might is right, the *cristiano viejo* came to believe that wealth is to be acquired by plundering somebody else's toil. Labor is demeaning: it contradicts the ideal of *honor* (honor) and *honra* (dignity). In this essential point, the *cristiano viejo* differed from the *cristiano nuevo*. The new Christian—exhibiting one of the many contemptible traits that he dragged from his Jewish past—believed in the sanctity of labor. He also espoused the hideous notion that wealth is to be acquired by diligence and industry. These were subversive ideas. They denied the hierarchical structure of society, whereby the inferior owes unconditional obedience to the superior—in our case, represented by the military (and, later on, the ecclesiastical) aristocracy—precisely, because the latter was *superior* and the former was *inferior*.<sup>6</sup> The idea that an individual could climb up above a particular group, as proposed by the *Converso*, stood in flagrant contradiction to the corporational view of humanity, borrowed by Christianity from Roman *corporatio* (corporation). As with the old tribal ideology, the corporational ideal demands that people be viewed as part of a group, never as individuals.<sup>7</sup> The ideal of individuality proposed by the *cristiano nuevo* threatened the very foundation of Spanish society.

The preceding is essential to understand the system of castes (*castas*) upon which Spanish society rested. Américo Castro (1885-1972) was the first scholar to note that Spanish society is structured on the basis of “[c]astes, rather than [c]lasses.”<sup>8</sup> Class is radically different than cast:

The social class bases its rank on what it does; the rank of the caste depends on the mere existence of the person: in the last analysis, all the Hispano-Christians ended up feeling themselves a superior caste by virtue of the fact that they were Christians and not Moors or Jews.<sup>9</sup>

It is a thoroughly racist term. Originally, *castas* applied to the races of animals.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the lowliest *cristiano viejo* felt superior to a *cristiano*

<sup>5</sup> Particularly Castile, incarnating Visigothic ideology to the present, but not necessarily those of Catalonia and Andalusia.

<sup>6</sup> See *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, trans. Edmund L. King (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 607.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 609.

<sup>10</sup> See *La Realidad Histórica de España*, p. 25.

*nuevo* simply because he belonged to a higher cast: a superior race.<sup>11</sup>

Historians struggle to explain the "two Spains" phenomena: one enlightened and progressive, the other reactionary and brutal; one concerned with life and living, the other, obsessed with mortality—what Unamuno (1864-1936) refers to as the "cult of death."<sup>12</sup> In fact, these "Spains" are the effect of two mutually exclusive ideologies, one of the *cristiano nuevo* and the other of the *cristiano viejo*. The slaughtering of Jewish and *conversos* communities throughout Spain, the establishment of the Inquisition, and the Expulsion in 1492 represent the attempt of one Spain to strangulate the other. Invariably, the strategy of the *cristiano viejo* consisted in eliminating, rather than confronting, divergence. In the final account, whereas Jews and *conversos* created the "golden age" of Spanish letters and sciences,<sup>13</sup> *cristianos viejos*—giving full rein to the ideology of greed—created "the age of gold:" a civilization dominated by rapacity. This constituted the sole basis of Spanish policy in the Americas.

## 2. *The Policy of Greed*

The key to unraveling Iberian policy in the Americas is greed. Because work offended Spanish *honra*, the *conquistador* was not interested in developing the territories coming under his domain. The sole purpose for his coming to the New World was to acquire *honra*, that is, wealth *without* labor. Referring to the early founders of Buenos Aires, Américo Castro writes:

The Spanish ancestors of the founders of Buenos Aires came to such a remote country in order to "maintain *honra*."... Given the option of "maintaining *honra*" and cultivating science, the Hispanic-Christians of Christian ancestry chose for the former.<sup>14</sup>

By "maintaining *honra*," the acquisition of wealth *without* labor was meant. Even the most basic forms of labor, such as cultivating the land or drawing water, was repulsive for the *cristiano viejo*. In 1590, the early settlers of Buenos Aires addressed a complaint to Philip II (1527-1598) protesting that since the natives refused to work, they "had to plow and dig with our own hands.... Spanish women, because of their great poverty had to carry the water on their back."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See *The Structure of Spanish History*, pp. 611, 612. Cf., below, ns. 78-79.

<sup>12</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, *Sobre la europeización* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1966), p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> See *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 29-32, and chaps. 4-6.

<sup>14</sup> Américo Castro, *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense* (Madrid: Taurus, 1961), p. 15.

For the Spaniards, America represented, literally, a "golden opportunity:" the possibility of accumulating the maximum amount of precious metals *without* toil. Hence, "the utopian ideology," the search for *el Dorado*, and other similar reveries characterizing the *conquistador's* mind.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the English and Dutch, who worked and developed the land, the *conquistador* did not view the territories as a new home, to settle and advance, but as a place containing fabulous mines to be extracted and transported *away* to the Iberian Peninsula, *as soon as possible*. This attitude prohibited striking roots in the new land. A defining characteristic of the *conquistador* was his casual, temporal connection to the land. As a conqueror—and this is the precise sense in which the term *conquistador* ought to be understood—the right of the Spaniard rested on the facts created on the ground by virtue of his sword. Therefore he felt no responsibility either to the land or to its original inhabitants. Since his sole objective was to vacate the wealth of America and transport it to the Iberian Peninsula, those places that were not rich in precious metals were of no interest to the Crown. Américo Castro had shown that only "in those areas endowed with fabulous riches, with precious metals," did the machinery of the state work. "In the countries without rich metals, or far from their routes, or outside their zone of influence," the government was practically non-existent.<sup>17</sup> A point in case is Argentina, poor in precious metals but fabulously wealthy in land for agriculture and grazing. Significantly, there is no record of even a single Spaniard with title of nobility settling in that country. During the colonial period, there was practically no government. Diego de Góngora (d. 1623), who was appointed the first Governor of Buenos Aires (1618), was a professional smuggler, with no respect for the law:

The Spaniard moved into the region of the Plata in the sixteenth century just as in the tenth and eleventh he had spread down over the south of the Iberian Peninsula, with the object of gaining honor and maintaining seigniorship for himself. Since there were neither Moors nor Jews to do the work in Buenos Aires, and since the Indians quickly fled out into the pampa, what was eventually to become the Argentina we know today remained in a rather wretched condition until about a century ago. Houses in Buenos Aires were straw-covered adobe huts, for this was the only kind of masonry the conquistador knew how to obtain without his wealth and his vassals to carry out his orders.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 57. Cf., Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life 1400-1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1973), p. 407.

<sup>16</sup> See *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense*, pp. 45, 47.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> *The Structure of Spanish History*, p. 632.

Disappointed at not finding rich minerals, Spain neglected the land. According to a report from 1770, the streets of Buenos Aires were impassable during the rain, the wagons "would make such ditches that even horses would get stuck."<sup>19</sup> As late as 1852, the city that will be known as the "Paris of Latin America" was a pest-ridden village. The following remark illustrates the deplorable state of Buenos Aires in those days:

The skeletons of oxen and horses lay about in the mud in the middle of the street; even in front of the doors of some of the houses you could see the putrefied remains of animals.<sup>20</sup>

The apathy of the Spanish Crown is evident in the "linguistic anarchy" prevalent in Argentina. The Spanish of Borges and other distinguished Argentine writers is not the language used by most Argentines. In Argentina, one finds not only the archaic "vos" (in contradistinction to the "tú" of Mexico and Peru, lands rich in precious metals), but in general "the language of Buenos Aires," has been described as "a hodgepodge similar to that of Rome around the year 600."<sup>21</sup>

One need to compare the lamentable state of the countries that had enjoyed the full interest of the Spanish Crown, with Argentina, to realize that Spanish neglect was a blessing in disguise. The enormous economic and intellectual progress made by Argentina was possible, *precisely* because it had been neglected by the Spanish Crown.

The consequences of the Spanish policy on the economic and political history of both Europe and the Americas, will be examined next.

### 3. *The Devil is Always the Other*

The ethical basis of greed is to be found in the Western idea of the "other." The "other" is not *an*-other—someone representing a different human modality and value-system—but an alien bereft of the most basic rights. To the Indo-European mind—and this was exploited by the Visigoths to the tilt—"the dogs which followed the

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Martha B. Etchart, *Documentos de Historia Americana* (Buenos Aires: Cesarini Hnos., 1971), p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> *The Structure of Spanish History*, p. 632.

<sup>21</sup> *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense*, p. 102. On the use of *vos*, see *ibid.*, chap. II; on the linguistic anarchy characteristic of Argentines, see *ibid.*, chap. I; on the language used by the general population, see *ibid.*, chap. V; on the mispronunciations peculiar to Argentines, see *ibid.*, chap. VI.

camp had more in common with it than the tribesmen of an alien and unrelated tribe."<sup>22</sup> Linguistically and psychologically, the alien was identified with "the enemy."<sup>23</sup> Since people belonging to oppressive societies and organizations cannot express criticism of the system, feelings of frustration are projected against the "other"—selected segments of society targeted for this purpose.<sup>24</sup> During the Middle Ages, Europe witnessed the emergence of persecuting societies, containing a distinct group—women, lepers, Jews, heretics, etc.—marked for persecution.<sup>25</sup> For the *cristiano viejo* it was axiomatic that morality did not apply to the "other." The theological basis for such a view becomes obvious upon considering that, in the eyes of the Church, "love" does not apply to members of other religions. Christianity was the first religious system (followed by Islam) to introduce the idea of religious enemy (in contradistinction to the political enemy, which is a Jewish concept) whereby all non-Christians are regarded as sub-humans and bereft of rights.<sup>26</sup> According to Christian doctrine, Jews had the legal status of "slaves:" the Synagogue is represented by Hagar, the maid, while the Church is represented by Sarah, the mistress. Since Jews must be regarded as "slaves" the institution of ownership does not apply to them. Consequently, there could not be a moral objection to plunder and despoil them from their property. This doctrine was enunciated with candor and precision by Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274), one of the most brilliant and ethical minds to grace the face of Christendom. Briefly and to the point he wrote: "Since Jews are the slaves of the Church, the Church may take disposition of their property."<sup>27</sup> One may argue that this doctrine could only justify the plundering of the Jew by Church officials but not by the laymen. *Cristianos viejos*, however, had little concern with this type of niceties, more in tune with the narrow mind of the Pharisees than with true Christians.

<sup>22</sup> Sir Henry Sumner Maine, *The Early History of Institutions* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1966), p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> See *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 4-8.

<sup>24</sup> The psychological mechanism of the persecuting mind is implied in the Rabbinic dictum, B. Qid. 70a: "Whenever someone is faulting another, he is faulting with his own blemish."

<sup>25</sup> See R.I. Moore, *The Formation of the Persecuting Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); and *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> See *In the Shadow of History*, p. 198.

<sup>27</sup> *Summa Theologica* II, 2, 10, 10. Cited in *The Structure of Spanish History*, p. 471, n. 10, in the name of Rosa Lida. Since the original could prove a bit unsettling, the English version in ed. Timothy McDermot, *Summa Theologicae* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1989), p. 341, was rendered: "The church has the right to dispose of the Jew's property since he is the subject of the church."



Spanish historians insist that Spanish persecution was neither racist nor antisemitic but simply a matter of national unity, to be accomplished through religion. A distinguished scholar, Dr. Manuel Ballestros Gaibrois, gives an impassioned defense of his country's policies:

Thus, Spain was not "racist" in the dramatic sense that this term has today, neither it was antisemitic—and therefore—, neither discriminatory, but it defended a unifying point of view, as legitimate as any other. But this point of view hurt the expansionist aspirations of the Hebrew race.<sup>28</sup>

It takes a certain level of mental turpitude not to realize that the slaughtering of new Christians, the promulgation of the infamous edicts of *pureza de sangre*, barring Christians with even partial Jewish ancestry from occupying a civil or ecclesiastical office, the hatred and contempt that *cristianos viejos* projected toward their new co-religionists, had nothing to do with "religion," Christian or otherwise. Rather, as noted by Israel Salvador Revah (1917-1973), it was a matter of racism, pure and simple. Referring to the distinction between *cristiano viejo* and *nuevo*, he wrote: "in the midst of the Spanish Catholic Community a distinction was established that must be qualified as racist."<sup>29</sup> Thus, Spain inaugurated a series of racial persecutions to be paralleled only several centuries later by the infamous Nuremberg legislation.<sup>30</sup>

"Christian religion" was an excuse to justify "Spanish rapacity." Reflecting on the carnage of 1391, when most of the ancient *Juderías* were wiped out by the mob in the name of Christianity, Don Pero López de Ayala (1332-1407) wrote: "And all this was a thirst for robbery, it seemed, more than devotion."<sup>31</sup> This strategy became the basis of the official policy of the Spanish Crown. No lesser a political analyst than Machiavelli (1469-1527) concluded that "religion" was but a subterfuge for rapacity. Concerning the policies of King Ferdinand, he observed:

[A]nd always under the pretext of religion, he had recourse to a pious cruelty, driving out the Moors from his kingdom and despoiling them. No more miserable or unusual example may be found.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> In his prologue to Lucía García Pröodian, *Los Judíos en América* (Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1966), p. x.

<sup>29</sup> Israel Salvador Revah, "Les Marranes," in *Revue des Études Juives* 118 (1959-60), pp. 32-33; cf., *ibid.*, pp. 38-39, 50, 55-56.

<sup>30</sup> See *In the Shadow of History*, p. 232, n. 12. Cf., *ibid.*, pp. 233-234, n. 41.

<sup>31</sup> *Crónicas*, (ed. Llaguna), vol. 2, p. 391, cited in *The Structure of Spanish History*, p. 508, n. 83.

<sup>32</sup> *The Prince*, trans. Luigi Ricci (New York: Mentor Books, 1952), p. 120.

The same applies all the more to his policy toward Jews and *Conversos*.

In light of the foregoing, the verdict pronounced by Samuel de Usque (sixteenth century) acquires depth and power: "And Spain, hypocritical, cruel and lupine, ravenous and raging wolves have been devouring my wooly flock within you."<sup>33</sup>

Historians have labored assiduously to explain Spanish treatment of Jews and *conversos* on the basis of religious, political, or economic considerations. One of them, with a firm grasp on the role of the Jewish merchant in the development of the Mediterranean economy,<sup>34</sup> begs us for an "Understanding [of] Spain." In brilliant Gaelic fashion, he reasoned:

[A]ll civilizations move towards their destiny, whether willingly or unwillingly. If the train in which I am sitting moves off, the passenger in a train alongside has the sensation of moving in opposite direction.... Spain was moving towards a political unity, which could not be conceived, in the sixteenth century, as anything other than religious unity. Israel meanwhile was being carried towards the destiny of the *diaspora*.... Even as lucid an observer as Francisco Quevedo saw it possessing diabolical features. The devil is always the Other.<sup>35</sup>

The explanation is an irresponsible justification of every atrocity performed by a civilization on her path towards her "destiny"—including the Nazi (as well as the French participation in) "the final solution." It is also spurious. It will be seen that it was malice—pure and unadulterated—that moved Spain in the direction it went.

The same Spaniards who persecuted Jews and *Conversos* hounded native Americans savagely, although none of the alleged reasons applied. Lucía García de Proodian, a student of Ballestros Gaibrois, justifies the racist legislation prohibiting Christians with even partial Jewish ancestry to immigrate to America, because of the following instruction issued to Columbus:

That it should be attempted to convert the Indians to the [Catholic] faith: to aid this is going Fray Buil with other priests, who could gain assistance from the Indians who know our language. In order that the Indians should love our religion, they should be treated lovingly, and should be given some merchandise and gifts of ours.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Usque, trans. Martin A. Cohen, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977), p. 44.

<sup>34</sup> See Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Silan Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), vol. 2, pp. 820-823.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 825; cf., *ibid.*, pp. 823-826.

According to García de Proodian, the presence of Christians with even partial Jewish blood would have interfered with the labor of love and kindness that only *cristianos viejos* could properly perform. Therefore, their presence had to be barred from the New World.<sup>36</sup>

It is instructive to see how this labor of love was carried on. An Italian, Pedro Mártir (1459-1525), author of the first chronicle of the Americas, wrote:

In the midst of such an abundant plenty, there is something that gives me no small anguish. These men, so simple and naked, were used to work little; now many perish as a result of the great exhaustion in the mines, and they are desperate to the point that many kill themselves and do not care to raise children. They tell that the pregnant mothers take medicine to abort, seeing that they would give birth to slaves for the Christians. Although a royal decree had declared that they are free, nonetheless, there are forced to serve more than what would please a free man. The number of these wretched had diminished immensely; many say that once was made a census of one million two hundred thousand, how many there are today, it causes me horror to say. Let us change the subject.<sup>37</sup>

Not a single soul of the native population of Jamaica, Bermuda, St. Thomas, Puerto Rico, Panama, Cuba, etc., survived. Todorov had shown that in the course of only fifty years, the Iberian conquerors managed to reduce the population of native Americans from eighty million to ten million. By the year 1600, the original population of Mexico was reduced from twenty five million to one million. This is the greatest genocide in recorded history, both in absolute and relative terms.<sup>38</sup> None of the "explanations" justifying Spanish persecution of Jews could possibly apply to native Americans. In terms of religion, they were totally submissive and willing fully to accept the teachings of the Church. Nor did they pose a political or economic threat that could possibly compromise Spanish "national unity." On the contrary, they were politically stable and constituted an invaluable economic asset to the Crown (see below, section 5, at end). And yet, even the darkest periods of history witnessed nothing comparing the Spanish atrocities against native Americans.

Consider, in the name of sanity, the common practice of snatching children from their mother's arms and throwing them to be devoured

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<sup>36</sup> *Los Judíos en América*, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Pedro Mártir de Anglería, *Libros de las Décadas del Nuevo Mundo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Bajel, 1944), Dec. III, Lib. VIII, chap. I, p. 273.

<sup>38</sup> Tzevetan Todorov, *La conquete de l'Amérique* (Paris: Editions du Soleil, 1982), pp. 138-139.

alive by dogs, or smashing them against the rocks and throwing them to die in the mountains. The usual way to kill native leaders was in groups of thirteen, in honor of Jesus and the twelve apostles! To prolong their agony, they would burn them in a slow fire. Occasionally, the executioner would insert sticks in their mouth to prevent their screams from disturbing the *siesta* of a captain. Their sexual mores deserve special attention. It was a common practice to tie the hands and feet of the husband *under* the bed, while having sex with the wife *in* bed. When a young native American wife explained to a Spanish captain that she could not have sex with him because she had promised her husband to be faithful, the captain unleashed the dogs and had them devour her alive.<sup>39</sup> Miguel de Monsalve (sixteenth century) reported that it was common for the Spaniards to

take not only the properties of these wretched [native Americans], but also their daughters, taking them by force and rape them; if they do not give consent of their own will, they tie them, and torture them, lash them and punish them with great cruelty.... Their [native American] women if they would find out that someone had had relations with her [native Americans] husband, they burn them, mistreat and torture them, lash them and bring them before their eyes in irons, stripped, exposed, abused, dog-bitten and very hurt.<sup>40</sup>

On June 4, 1559, Fernando de Santillán (sixteenth century) reported how the Spaniards in Chile “unleashed their dogs against some [native Americans], burnt others, in addition to mutilating them, cutting their noses, arms, or breasts, and invented a thousand other ways to tear them into pieces.”<sup>41</sup> It was customary that for reasons of work distribution, a few Spaniards would parcel a native family among themselves. Thus, one would take the wife, another the husband, and a third the children, “in the same manner as if they would have been pigs.”<sup>42</sup> In addition to those dying of sickness, exhaustion, ill treatment, and abuse, we must consider those who simply “were buried alive in the mines.”<sup>43</sup>

So much for acts of loving kindness.

The crimes perpetuated by the Spaniards against Jews and *conversos* came from the same source that contrived the crimes against native Americans: they were crimes against humanity. To “explain” those

<sup>39</sup> See *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Henry Méchoulan, *El Honor de Dios* (Barcelona: Editorial Argos Vergara, 1981), p. 49.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 53.

crimes is to excuse evil and renounce morality. With their convoluted "reasons," modern historians join the persecutors. In a final act of infamy they further stab the victims one more time: their explanations constitute an insult to both human dignity and human intelligence. Theirs is historiography of the persecutor whereby the Devil is always the Other.

#### 4. *The Victims of Greed*

The parallels between the fate of Jews and *conversos* and native Americans go further. In both cases the official pretext for persecution was a bull issued by what historians properly designate "political popes." In the case of the Jews it was a bull issued in 1478 by Sixtus IV (1471-1484)—a pope who, as a good Spaniard from Valencia, was known for his insatiable greed and nepotism. This bull was the basis for the establishment of the Inquisition in 1481. In the case of native Americans, it was Alexander VI (1492-1503)—the scandalous Rodrigo Borgia—who issued the bull *Inter caetera*, on May 3, 1493, awarding the Spanish Crown the exclusive right to bring Christianity to the New World. In both cases, the bulls served as an excuse to simultaneously despoil and demonize the victim under the pretext of "religion." In the case of native Americans, it was debated whether they were indeed humans or beasts. Pope Paul III (1534-1549), the first of the "reform popes," in 1537 issued a decision ascertaining that native Americans do indeed have a "soul." The decision served two purposes. First and foremost, it absolved the Spaniards from reproach. Otherwise, their sexual behavior would have to be condemned as the sin of bestiality—a most serious transgression in the eyes of the Church. Second, it legitimized their oppressive behavior, as it required bringing native Americans into the fold.

Christianity, it has been noted, has produced not only the largest number of saints but also the largest number of fanatics. "Even saints are not always psychologically healthy," observed William Nicholls, "and their ardent devotion can mask severe unconscious problems."<sup>44</sup> This was particularly true of the Spanish priesthood. Under the excuse of "religion" Spanish priests committed some of the most heinous atrocities. Their behavior was captured in a Sephardic proverb, *Pecado de padre* (a priest's sin), to indicate "a heinous and abominable

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<sup>44</sup> "Saints and Fanatics: The Problematic Connection between Religion and Spirituality," in *Judaism* 44 (1996), p. 452.

crime committed with impunity." In the Americas, too, Spanish missionaries justified their sadistic impulses in the name of "religion." On the basis of the inerrant doctrine that "whoever loves you well will make you cry" (*quien bien te quiere te hace llorar*), Christian priests unleashed their brutal force against native Americans. All what the natives need, the spiritual guides maintained, "is bread and whipping." "Without the whip," we are told by one of the more enlightened priest, the natives "are lost like children." Priests had their own jails, with pillories and other instruments of torture, to torment the natives and bring them close to the religion of love. Their abuses were scandalous even by Spanish standards. King Philip II had to issue an order on August 12, 1570, forbidding the priests to tie the natives on pillories, lash them, shave their heads, and inflict other such punishment.<sup>45</sup> A report from June 1756, recounts

how the Father priest orders that the Indians lie on the floor and without being tied except for the respect that they have for him they get twenty five lashes and right away they stand up and go to give thanks to him [the priest] and kiss his hands.<sup>46</sup>

Spanish rapacity was not the exclusive patrimony of the laity. Priests used their position to increase their *honra* by further despoiling the natives. They also were known for their promiscuity. Their behavior became so outrageous that the Church was forced to investigate the matter.<sup>47</sup>

Slander is the method used by persecuting societies to justify their treatment of the "other." In Spain there circulated a whole series of libels—ranging all the way from the ritual murder of children to treason and the poisoning of rivers and wells. They were designed to dehumanize the Jew and justify anti-Jewish atrocities. "There isn't an evil so atrocious or a cruelty so vile," wrote Isaac Cardoso (1604-1681), "that they have not imputed it to them."<sup>48</sup> These accusations are psychological projections, whereby the persecutor projects onto the victim precisely those impulses that he must suppress. As Cardoso showed, each calumny was designed to conceal a particular virtue peculiar to the Jew that made the old Spaniard feel inadequate.<sup>49</sup> Native Americans, too, were slandered with the same purpose: to rend them infra-human and justify Spanish atrocities against them.

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<sup>45</sup> See *El honor de Dios*, p. 43.

<sup>46</sup> *Documentos de Historia Americana*, p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> See *El honor de Dios*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>48</sup> *Las Excelencias de los Hebreos* (Amsterdam, 1679), p. 408.

<sup>49</sup> See *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 209-210.

Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1478-1557), although recognizing the greed of the Spaniards nonetheless favored that they should take the gold from the natives, "since is better that it should be in the hands of men and not [in the hands] of beasts."<sup>50</sup> The natives "are filthy, liars, and cowards." They are so evil that they "commit suicide just to impoverish the Spaniards with their death." They deserved to be exterminated as a divine punishment for their many vices. These were the standard view of Spaniards, and not only those of Oviedo.<sup>51</sup>

The accusations represent psychological rather than moral concern. Consider the charge that the natives were guilty of idolatry. The worship of images is an issue that had divided Christianity throughout the ages. It emerged again, in the fifteenth century as a result of the ingression of *conversos* in the Church. By the sixteenth century it was voiced by enlightened Christians, moved by the new spirit of humanism and reform, and not only by Jews and *conversos*. The principal point was that there are no objective grounds by which "the worship of idols" can be distinguished from "the adoration of images." (Thus, whatever theological argument could justify the worship or adoration of images in the Christian Church could justify the worship or adoration of images among native Americans).<sup>52</sup> Only when analyzed on psychological grounds, as a typical case of repression and projection, does the charge of "idolatry" make sense: by projecting the guilt onto the victim, the persecutor absolves himself of sin.

The same applies to the accusation that natives practiced human sacrifices. The accusation is based on fact. Pedro Mártir reported with horror the practice of human sacrifice.<sup>53</sup> But Spaniards, as Sephardim had pointed out, were guilty of the same crime. What is the incineration of old and young, men and women, but *Autos de Fé*—"acts of faith"—but human sacrifices on behalf of Christianity? And what about the incessant slaughtering of native Americans? Wasn't this perhaps a form of psychological substitute and thus a veritable form of human sacrifices? Is there any other way to classify the killing of native American leaders in groups of thirteen, in honor of Jesus

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Alberto M. Salas, *Tres cronistas de Indias* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959), p. 119.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> On the worship of images in Christianity, see Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images* (London, 1940). On the input of the *conversos* in this debate, see *In the Shadow of History*, p. 40. For the *converso* charge against *cristianos viejos* of the crime of idolatry, see *Los Judíos en América*, p. 148.

<sup>53</sup> See *Tres cronistas de Indias*, p. 48.

and the twelve apostles? In fact, King Charles V (1500-1558) regarded his brutal persecution of Moors in Valencia (1525-1526) "as a sacrificial thank-offering for his miraculous preservation."<sup>54</sup> The same psychological mechanism underlies the Spanish condemnation of natives' sexual mores. It is worth noting that the early Spanish chronicles saw nothing offensive in the sexual life of the natives. On the contrary, their life style and mores were described in paradisiacal terms. It is only *after* they committed sexual crimes against the natives that the Spaniards accuse them of sexually offensive crimes. Knowing the *cristiano viejo's* obsession with *honra* and his contempt for work, it is not difficult to discern the same psychological pattern in the accusation that the natives were lazy and unproductive. The same applies to other accusations, such as the natives' personal hygiene, their honesty, etc.

Nicholls had shown a link between the instinctual renunciation demanded by Christianity and antisemitism. Since the anger could not be directed against the religious authority, it is projected in paranoid hostility against members of other religion.<sup>55</sup> The same psychological mechanism effected Spanish behavior in the Americas.

### 5. *Imperial Economy*

There is a further parallel worth considering. Traditionally, Visigothic economy depends on the exploitation of a minority: first Jews, then *Conversos* (and Moors), and finally native Americans. Without these elements, Spain would have collapsed.<sup>56</sup> During the period of the *Reconquista* (middle eleventh century-end of fifteenth century),

<sup>54</sup> "Charles V," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th edition, vol. 5, p. 269.

<sup>55</sup> See William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A history of hate* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), pp. 249-259.

<sup>56</sup> Moorish conquest and subsequent domination of the Iberian Peninsula was possible because Visigothic Spain lacked an effective economic structure. As Américo Castro had shown, even after the *Reconquista* the working class in Spain were the Moors (they were the ones who actually cultivated the land, a people "who would not let a single space of land go to waste"), and the merchants were the Jews. The policy of the Spanish central government was to exploit its productive minorities. In modern times, when there no longer were Jews, Moors, or native Americans to be exploited, Spanish policy had been to exploit the Catalonian population. This had been the most productive (and hence the least antisemitic segment of Spain). Their love and capacity for industry and labor had been captured in a Sephardic proverb, "*Los Catalanes—de las piedras sacan panes*" ("The Catalonians can extract bread from stones"). Hence the tension characterizing the relations between the central government of Spain and Catalonians (and other productive minorities).



Spanish economy depended on the services provided by the Jews, as tax-farmers, businessmen, artisans, scientists, and diplomats. The very day that the *Reconquista* finished, with the fall of Granada (January 2, 1492), the Catholic Monarchs announced the Expulsion of Jews. It was signed on March 31. By August 3, every professing Jew had to leave Spain. Henceforth, Spanish economy would depend on two segments of the population, *Conversos* and Moors. (At this stage, the celebrated "religious unity" that according to historians had moved the Catholic Monarchs to expel the Jews was not yet affected by the presence of Moors.) Shortly thereafter, with the full realization of the economic significance of America, Spain developed what must be described as an "imperial economy." It is a dimension of Visigothic greed. Hard cash, in the mind of the *cristiano viejo*, parallels the sword. As such, it is the basis of all rights. Hard currency enables its possessor to acquire wealth with *honra*, that is, without labor. (Hence, the conceptual root of modern capitalism, see below.) The system was organized along the lines of metallic economies, with one fundamental difference. Since the new territories awarded Spain unlimited access to precious metals and the minting of money, there no longer was a need for financial planning and management. Accordingly, there was another aspect to this policy: *Conversos* (for business and financial organization) and Moors (for basic labor, agriculture, and industry) were now expendable. Charles V's savage persecution of Moors (1525-1526) and *Conversos* underlines the structural relationship between the imperial economy and the racist policies. On the September 15, 1522, he issued the infamous order prohibiting Christians with even partial Jewish or Moorish ancestry from entering America. It was reissued a few years later, on the September 3, 1539.<sup>57</sup> These orders signaled that Spain was now sure that it could implement its imperial economy. Just as the sword had rendered the *cristiano viejo* invincible in the battle field, precious metals will render him invincible in the field of political economy and financial administration.

Imperial economy, or the (miss-)management of enormous monetary wealth, became the cornerstone of Philip II's administration. He had been properly described as "a merciless bigot," known for his promiscuity. He ruled Spain from 1556 to 1598. Unlike his father, he never succeeded to be crowned emperor. To compensate, he devoted his life to implementing his father's policy. It was the biggest economic fiasco in the annals of history. In addition of physical and

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<sup>57</sup> *Los Judíos en América*, p. 20.

cultural genocide to millions and millions of innocent women and children, old and young, this policy was responsible for squandering the largest amount of gold and silver known to man. It reduced Spain to spiritual and economic desolation. It also proved conclusively Spain's utter incompetence and its parasitic structure. Left "on its own," Spanish policy produced the biggest squandering of money known in human history.

Jews had been a major factor in the industry, commerce, and banking of the country. Their expulsion in 1492 and the subsequent persecution of *cristianos nuevos* produced an economic vacuum that needed urgently to be filled. Since all forms of industry and commerce deeply offended the *honra* (Spanish does not even have a word for "tailor"), the vacuum was filled by importing even the most basic goods. Foreign artisans, merchants and bankers, were now replacing the Jew. Bereft of its own industrial and financial organizations, goods were being imported at exorbitant prices. The new Spanish administrators were not only inexperienced but also corrupt. In a short time, the entire economy was controlled by foreign interest, Genoese bankers in particular. Spanish wealth was drained out. The imperial economy of Spain consisted in paying for all its need with coins made with precious metals extracted from the New World. The very survival of Spain depended on the gold and silver extracted from America with forced labor. Without these metals Spain would have collapsed: it could not have paid even for its most basic necessities. Soon, Spain discovered what every novice businessman knows, that payment of debts in hard cash is not a simple matter. Pirates and bandits made the transportation of cash and precious metals a very costly task, fraught with danger and uncertainty.<sup>58</sup> One by one, Spanish investments in Europe crumble. On the January 1, 1556, King Philip II was forced to declare bankruptcy. A series of economic crises followed, including a general recession after 1595. The Spanish Crown declared bankruptcy in 1557, 1560, 1575, 1596, 1607, and 1627.<sup>59</sup> The last bankruptcy took place during the reign of Philip IV (1605-1665). Since by then there were neither Jew nor *Converso* to plunder, public funds were plundered.<sup>60</sup> There was a last ditch effort to revamp the economy, made by the *Conde-Duque* de Olivares (1587-

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<sup>58</sup> On the problems connected with the transference and payment of hard currency, see *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1, pp. 476-508.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 505-517; vol. 2, pp. 897, 960-966.

<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 506-517; 897-900.

1645), who served as prime minister from 1621 to 1643. With this purpose in mind, he sought the help of Portuguese *Conversos*. He was censured for these efforts. The antisemitic historian Braudel echoed the racist slurs of a work attributed to Quevedo (1580-1645),<sup>61</sup> accusing the *Conde-Duque* de Olivares for counting in his entourage bankers who "under a disguise" concealed their "circumcision." The people of Israel, in Braudel view, are one "possessing diabolical features." Thus he concurred with Spanish antisemites, who insisted that Christians with partial Jewish ancestry should be barred from financial activities.<sup>62</sup> The *Conde-Duque* de Olivares was the author of *El Nicandro*, a work addressed to the king, in which he chastised "*los grandes*" (the grandees), that is, the *cristiano viejo* establishment, for their disastrous policies.<sup>63</sup> He was henceforth dismissed by the king. Taking advantage of the situation, his enemies denounced him to the Inquisition. There is no doubt that were it not for the fact that he soon died, this august figure would have ended in the Inquisition's cell.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the economic downfall of Spain was finally sealed. The *cristiano viejo* would rather be ruined than helped by someone with (even partial) Jewish ancestry.<sup>65</sup>

Eventually, all the wealth of Spain ended up in the purses of foreign nations. "Spain," we are told, became "a mere channel" for silver from its colonies, as Portugal was for gold.<sup>66</sup> As it were, Spain was just a secondary detail in the passing of the treasures from America to Europe:

[T]he new continent had acted of its own accord and given old Europe its fabulous metals as a gift, or as if Europe had won them at a lottery or free of charge through the inhuman exploitation of the Indians and Black slaves.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, in a supreme act of justice—that of the Hebrew Bible—the wealth that it had been plundered from Jews, *Conversos*, and native Americans, was in turn plundered from the Spaniards by foreign merchants and bankers, as well as by pirates and bandits. It is an ironic fact of history that the precious metals that they took away

<sup>61</sup> On Quevedo, see *In the Shadow of History*, p. 57.

<sup>62</sup> *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 2, p. 825.

<sup>63</sup> On the nature and character of the "*grãndes*" and other members of the nobility, see *ibid.*, pp. 709-718.

<sup>64</sup> For a general view of his life and accomplishments, see Gregorio Marañón, *El Conde-Duque de Olivares* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1962).

<sup>65</sup> See *El Honor de Dios*, pp. 142-148.

<sup>66</sup> *Capitalism and Material Life 1400-1800*, p. 345.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

from America ended in the vaults of Venice, Genoa, Milan, Antwerp, and other European capitals—not in Toledo, Seville, and Madrid.

In addition to fiscal chaos, market instability, and inflation, there were many lasting consequences to the “imperial economy”—too numerous and complex to be adequately treated here. For the sake of illustration, it would suffice to note that originally, gold and silver functioned as *currency*, performing a *dynamic* role, without which no business transaction could be possible. As a result of Spain’s colossal mismanagement, the great banking firms of Europe were able to hoard huge amounts of silver and gold bullion. These fortunes could no longer circulate and be used in ordinary transactions. Henceforth, they became *capital*, performing an essentially *static* role, regulating the growth of world economies. Thus, the rise of modern capitalism with all its economic, social, and political implications.

Jews, *Conversos*, and native Americans were the victims of the same diabolical forces. Their destruction was justified, among others, with theological reasons. The following forms part of an argument explaining how in their destruction the natives are serving the white race so that their existence acquires meaning. The natives may now die happily, knowing that their destruction serves a higher purpose: the sustenance of the superior race (without labor!—we may add). The argument acquires unfailing logic when assuming the hierarchical view of humanity peculiar to Christianity and its corresponding Spanish *castas*. It reads as follows:

The white race and the Indian race are like two sisters that their father wanted to marry off. The first one is very beautiful and intelligent; her marriage presents no difficulties, since she does not lack suitors. But the other is very ugly, lazy, stupid, and dumb. In order to get married she would need a valuable dowry, a rich trousseau, and also something else. The dowry of the ugly daughter are the precious metals in the American soil.<sup>68</sup>

#### 6. *The Spanish Exception to the Conquistador*

The Spanish exception to the *Conquistador* mentality were the Jew and the *Converso*. What divided these men was not religion but attitude. A determining factor in the Jewish attitude towards native Americans is the Jewish view of the “other.” In Hebrew tradition, the “other” is not a “deformed” or “abnormal” being but only a different expres-

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in *El Honor de Dios*, p. 39.

sion of the same "image of God," common to the children of Adam, the father of *all* humanity. The Hebrew term *kamokha*, "as yourself," connotes a horizontal perspective. The biblical commandment to "love the other as yourself (*kamokha*)" (Lev. 19:18) is grounded on the absolute parallel *I-you*. It excludes a vertical perception of the "other," with all the monstrous consequences that the narcissistic interpretation of this commandment had in Christian tradition.<sup>69</sup> The effect of this perspective is evident in the first encounter between Jews and a native Americans. When Jews first met native Americans, they viewed them not as inferior beings but as members of the Ten Lost Tribes. Although historically incorrect, their view expressed the basic semantic orientation peculiar to Hebrew humanistic tradition: those who are different are not "deformed freaks of nature" but brothers of an ancient Jewish tribe.<sup>70</sup>

Apologists for Spanish inhumanity point to the few voices raised in indignation against the atrocities committed by the Spaniards. The most prominent among them was that of Bartolomé de las Casas (1474-1566), the great champion of native American rights. But these apologists conveniently omit the fact that he was not a *cristiano viejo*. Bartolomé de las Casas was indeed a *Converso*. For defending the rights of native Americans he was branded "the enemy of Spain."<sup>71</sup> A libel campaign intended to discredit him went into effect. The governor of Nicaragua declared that he

is a very quick-tempered and prejudicial, and most of the sermons that he preaches come after some argument or passion that he manifests from the pulpit, very far from Evangelical doctrine, and [resulting] in scandal and hostility of the audience.<sup>72</sup>

When Las Casas ordered the members of the order of the Hieronymites to free the natives, they simply refused to obey him. When he denounced them for actively participating with the official authorities in the extermination of the entire population of Lucayas, the life of Las Casas was in danger.<sup>73</sup> The Hieronymites—those

<sup>69</sup> See *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 6-7, and p. 220, n. 19. Semantically, the Hebrew *re'akha*, usually translated "friend," actually means "Other."

<sup>70</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> See Américo Castro, "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas o Casaus," in *Cervantes y los casticismos españoles* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1974), pp. 73-74; and the monograph by Marcel Bataillon and André Saint-Lu *Las Casas et la Défense des Indiens* (Paris: Julliard, 1971).

<sup>72</sup> Cited in *Tres Cronistas de Indias*, p. 184.

<sup>73</sup> See Fray Antonio de Remesal, *Historia general de las Indias Occidentales* (Guatemala, 1932), vol. 1, p. 177.

saintly hermits for whom Philip II had built *El Escorial*—<sup>74</sup> joined efforts with the *Conquistadores* to have Las Casas expelled. They succeeded. Las Casas had to flee America and return to Spain. In 1550, Philip II assigned his position to another bishop.<sup>75</sup> Antonio de Guevara, the brilliant writer who used his literary skills to bring to light the plight of native Americans, also came from a *converso* background.<sup>76</sup> The same was the case with Montesinos (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), the first clergyman to denounce Spanish atrocities in the New World, and Juan de Silva (seventeenth century).

Jews and *Conversos* were the only people from the Iberian peninsula who came to the New World for the purpose of developing the land, not to exploit it, take the money and run back home. These people no longer could regard Spain and Portugal as their motherland. They were now looking for a new land where to strike roots and build a home. As Rabbi Saul Levy Mortera (ca. 1596-1660) wrote:

You should know that the cause is that in Spain and Portugal there is such a cruel and unjust beast, tyrannical and without pity, that had transformed that which we call motherland into a stepmother, and accordingly foreign lands are a benevolent mother, and that [beast] is that which we call Inquisition, an inhuman and rigid iron, and unjust judgment, and she is the cause of all these errors which you have seen and heard, since she is continuously robbing some, and inuring and killing others, taking properties, life, honor, and nature, and making them search for new worlds, where they could live and have liberty.<sup>77</sup>

There is another difference between the attitude of the *Conquistador* and that of the Jew and *Converso*. Américo Castro had shown that the *cristiano viejo* “lacked the tradition and habit of work, of being socially productive.”<sup>78</sup> The reason that Spain refused to participate in the intellectual and scientific progress taking place in the rest of Europe was because in Spain almost all the philosophical and scientific works had been produced by Jews and *Conversos*. Since the *cristianos viejos* viewed the other in purely racist terms, they “regarded intellectual activities as proper to Jews alone.”<sup>79</sup> To engage in *their* type of activi-

<sup>74</sup> Now we understand why.

<sup>75</sup> The best overview of Las Casas' views and activities, from which many of the references of this work proceed, is *Tres Cronistas de Indias*, pp. 161-301.

<sup>76</sup> On his family background, see Stephen Gilman, “The Sequel to *El Villano del Danubio*,” in *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, 51 (1965), pp. 177-185. On his life and accomplishment, see Agustín Redondo, *Antonio de Guevara et l'Espagne de son temps, 1480-1545* (Geneva: Druz, 1978).

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>78</sup> *De la edad conflictiva*, p.91.

<sup>79</sup> *La Realidad Histórica de España*, p. xxiv.

ties was an affront to their own racial status. Therefore, they could not participate in any scientific or productive enterprise, for "the terror of being taken for a Jew. This and this alone was the reason for the cultural backwardness of the Spaniards."<sup>80</sup>

The new Christians and Jews arriving at the New World did not come to accumulate the maximum amount of precious metals and run back to the Iberian peninsula, leaving the land empty and barren. Rather, like the British and the Dutch, their main objective was to *develop* the land and make it their permanent home. And this they did. They were the first ones to introduced sugar cane into the New World, in the North of Brazil and the Antilles—still the staple good in the economy of the region.<sup>81</sup> They established and ran sugar mills. They cultivated tobacco, indigo, lemons, and oranges. A sample of the commercial activities of the Jews, and their contributions to the general welfare of the country, are the Dutch communities in the Antilles, where they were permitted to settle freely. The Jews of Curaçao introduced the cultivation of the cantaloupe, watermelon, eggplant, and okra. They contributed to the development of trade and transportation in the Americas and between the Americas and Europe. They participated in the Civil Guard. They were active in marine insurance and navigation. There were many Jewish captains who owned their own boats. Some of these boats bore obvious Jewish names, such as "Rebecca," "Rachel," "Sarah," "Ribca," "King David," "Rey David," "Reyna Esther," and my favorite: "Ester Linda." Jews and Christians lived together in the same street and occasionally in the same building and rented their houses to one another.<sup>82</sup>

The bigoted policies of Philip II were intended to prevent such people from settling in the Americas. The purpose was to go on exploiting the people and the land. The persecutions intensified. Law IX, promulgated during the reign of Philip III (1578-1665), issued the following order to the American colonies:

That they should try to clean the land of Foreigners and people who are suspect in matters of Faith.

A decree issued on the October 17, 1602, reads:

<sup>80</sup> *De la edad conflictiva*, p. 118.

<sup>81</sup> See *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense*, p. 48, n. 1.

<sup>82</sup> For a detailed description of their economic, political, and cultural histories, see the superb work of Isaac S. and Suzanne A. Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1970), 2 vols.

We order that the Viceroys, Audiencias, and governors, and charge the Archbishops and Bishops, that they should communicate with each other, assist and try to clean the land from that people, and make them to be expelled from the Indias, and ship them [out to Spain] in the first opportunity at their own expense, and be extremely diligent to inform us.<sup>83</sup>

Because of its more liberal policies, particularly under the Dutch, many Jews and *Conversos* had settled in Brazil. With the fall of the Dutch government in 1654, they scattered all over the Americas, from New Amsterdam in the North, to Buenos Aires in the South. Some formed separate communities, a few of which survive to our days. Others, like those who settled in Argentina, became the founders of the most distinguished families of the country.<sup>84</sup> Like their brothers in North America, these men fought on the side of the people for freedom. This was particularly true in Latin America, where Iberian inhumanity and exploitation reached its worst. There is a curious notice—a last ditch efforts on the part of Spanish authorities to arrest the Argentine revolution began at the May 25, 1810. It was published in the *Gazeta de Buenos Aires*, on June 9, 1810. In it the Spanish authorities acknowledged their greed, oppressive rules, and indifference, promising reform. Part of it reads as follows:

Spanish Americans [!]: From this moment on, you see yourself elevated to the dignity of free men: you no longer are the same as before bent under a very harsh yoke as you were, distant from the center of power, looked at with indifference, abused by the greed, and destroyed by ignorance.<sup>85</sup>

Spanish credibility was nil. The plea was ignored. The Argentine people continued with their revolution. Soon it spread to the rest of Latin America. The battle for independence began with the great Argentine hero, Don José de San Martín (1778-1850). Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) carried it to other parts of the Continent. Jews and members of distinguished *Converso* families fought on the side of the people. Bolívar was particularly helped by the Jewish community. After his defeat in Otrabanda, he took refuge in the house of a Jew. The following is a letter of the great liberator, thanking Mordechai

<sup>83</sup> *Documentos de Historia Americana*, p. 70.

<sup>84</sup> See Mario Javier Saban, *Judíos Conversos: Los Antepasados Judíos de las familias tradicionales Argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Distal, 1990). For some interesting details in the lives of these early settlers, see Matilde Gini de Barnatán, "Los Criptos Judíos del Río de la Plata en el siglo XVI," in Abraham Haim, ed., *Society and Community* (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1991), pp. 103-118.

<sup>85</sup> *Documentos de Historia Americana*, p. 87.



Ricardo (1771-1842) for his assistance in those dire moments. It reads as follows:

Kingston, November 7, 1815

My Esteemed and Old Friend:

Through different channels I have had the satisfaction of addressing several letters to you which, I understand, you have not received, such having, doubtless, been lost with my other letters which have, perhaps, been intercepted by my Spanish friends.

At present, I repeat the thanks that I have given previously for the kindness with which you have treated my unfortunate sisters, and for the memory that you have (made) [kept] of me even when fate did not favor me [until now]. Incontrovertible proof of the generosity of your sentiments and the nobility that characterizes you.

Friend, I shall receive with great pleasure your communications that flatter me so much, and I hope that you will honor me with an answer to this letter.

I beg of you give my regards to Madam your wife and that she accept the sentiment of pure friendship and the consideration with which I am

Your most devoted, certain servant  
who kisses your hands,  
Simon Bolivar<sup>86</sup>

The Latin America Revolution constituted a repudiation of Spanish racism and a fulfillment of Jewish and *Converso* humanism. Spanish bigotry lingered among obscuranist groups. It was swiftly repudiated by one of the great leaders to grace the continent: Don Pedro Santana (1801-1864). Even after one hundred and fifty years, one only can ponder in amazement the spirit of liberty and compassion kindled within this remarkable man. He had been at the head of the military forces that wrested the Dominican territory from the claws of the Spaniards in 1844 and was the first President of the Dominican Republic (1844-1848). He was reelected several times (1853-1856, 1859-1862). In 1846, a petition was addressed to him requesting that measures be taken against four or five Jews who were buying gold and other produce at higher prices, interfering with the cartel organized by local merchants. The petition was signed by distinguished members of the political establishment. President Santana confronted this outrage. The points contained in his reply are in fact both a manifesto against Spanish racist policies and a defense of Jewish and *Converso* humanism. To begin with, the President noted, the true authors of the petition were not the signatories. They were only a front

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<sup>86</sup> Published in *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, vol. 1, p. 298.

for the greedy monopolists who were “exploiting the wretched peasants whom they sacrifice.” These unscrupulous merchants did not want Jewish tradesmen to pay a fair market price to the natives. Instead of trying to expel the Jews, they should emulate their industry and productivity. Here there are some excerpts of his response:

It is not the Jews who increase the price of gold ounces, but the lack of proportion between import and export. The cure for this difficulty consists in combating laziness and increasing agriculture. The prosperity of other countries is rooted in their love of work; accordingly, when some diligent and industrious foreigner comes to our land and produces in one day what natives do not produce in one month, because they don't want to move, instead of persecuting them, as the hidden authors of the petition to the Government are doing, the Government, as well as all good Dominicans who are interested in the country's welfare, ought to protect and encourage [them] in order that our own [people] should follow their example and learn that wealth is the result of work and economy.

The use of religious prejudice to rob innocent people of their basic rights is an affront to religion:

[To] persecute a peaceful man and prevent him from buying tobacco under the pretext of religion, is an outrageous abuse of Christian doctrine.

Jews are genuine patriots. They are an asset to the nation and deserve praise and admiration. In fact, they were the first to contribute to the freedom of the country. It would be a travesty of justice if people like them would be denied the basic rights that the Constitution guarantees to all.

The conduct of these Dominicans would have been different if instead of harking to shouts of passion they would have hearkened to the voice of justice and gratitude. These four Jews that they are persecuting there, and others residing here, were the first ones to impart of their funds to subsidize the expenses of war [against Spain], in the very moment in which some Dominicans not only would not do it, or would lend [of their money], but they would discourage with their bad example the good patriots who had expressed their resolution to defend the freedom of the Republic. If a soldier had many time a cracker to sustain himself in the borders, he should thank those very people whom selfishness and interest, alien to the common well, want to throw out with ignominy from a country whose political Constitution insures foreigners protection of their person and property.

Jews are also an asset to society. Far from being a threat to other religions, they are a benefit even to religious institutions not their own. Jews seek freedom from religious subjection and the right to practice their own religion without outside interference. That is why

not only that they do not impose their religion on others or try to gain proselytes but they respect other religions and help with their alms.

The Jews neither preach their commandments nor conquer anybody in order that they join their religion, because nobody could make himself Jewish if does not belong to the race of Israel, so that in this aspect they present no problem to the nations in which they reside. In this capital [Santo Domingo]...there are more Jews than in any other spot in the Island, and far from having experienced the least difficulty, they go to Church, they assist in all our ceremonies, and they even contribute with their alms to the maintenance of the cult.<sup>87</sup>

To Jews and *Conversos* these words sound with special resonance: they are a fulfillment of their long struggle for freedom. It is as if President Santana, z"l, stretched out a consoling hand: redeeming with grace and compassion the tears of those who endured so much pain and ignominy for their vision of freedom.

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<sup>87</sup> Enrique Ucko, *La Fusión de los Sefardíes con los Dominicanos* (Ciudad de Trujillo: Imprenta 'La Opinión,' 1944), pp. 18-20.