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Sephardic Customs as a Discourse Topic in the Ladinokomunita Internet Correspondence Circle

Judezmo Language and Culture in the Modern Era

The 1492 Expulsion of the Jews from Castile and Aragon brought most of the Jewish refugees from Iberia to the regions of the Ottoman Empire. The majority of their descendants continued to reside in those regions into modern times. In the empire of the sultans, these Sephardim developed a Jewish language which came to be known by names such as Djudezmo and Djudyó (or “Jewish,” because of its association with the Judaism of its speakers); Ladino (“Latin” or “Romance,” because its Hispanic component derivated from Latin); Franko (reflecting Turkish *frenkçe*, “Western European language,” because its speakers reached the Ottoman Empire from Western Europe); Djudeo-espanyol (“Judeo-Spanish,” because the *maskilim* or “enlightened Jews” of nineteenth-century western and central Europe convinced Ottoman Sephardic intellectuals that their group language was a hybrid Spanish, unique to the Jews); and, again under maskilic influence, simply Spanyol (or “Spanish,” because many Sephardim accepted the maskilic argument that the language they were speaking was Spanish, although in a corrupt form).¹

In the nineteenth century, much of the ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous Ottoman Empire began to be torn asunder, replaced by new nation-

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1 On the names for Judezmo and other Jewish languages, see David M. Bunis, “The Names of Jewish Languages: A Taxonomy,” in Francesco Aspesi, Vermondo Brugnatelli, Anna Linda Callow, and Claudia Rosenzweig, eds., *Il mio cuore è a Oriente: Studi di linguistica storica, filologia e cultura ebraica dedicati a Maria Luisa Mayer Modena* (Milan: Cisalpino, 2008), 415–33; *ibid.*, “Native Designations of Judezmo as a ‘Jewish Language,’” in *Studies in Language, Literature and History Presented to Joseph Chetrit*, ed. Yosef Tobi and Dennis Kurzon (Haifa: University of Haifa; Jerusalem: Carmel, 2011), *41–81.

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states—Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, and others—each with its own budding national language and culture, and a desire to see that language and culture replace all others existing within its borders. In these nation-states, Jews were pressured to adopt the state language as well as the customs and lifestyle practiced by the majority. In those cities still belonging to the Ottoman Empire, such as Istanbul, Izmir and Salonika, young Jews studying in local Western European-style foreign-language schools—such as those of the Alliance Israelite Universelle (fd. Paris, 1860) and Società Dante Alighieri (fd. Rome, 1889)—felt compelled to replace their communal language with a prestigious European tongue such as French or Italian, and to abandon age-old, group-specific ethno-religious customs and *Weltanschauung* in favor of a European cultural cosmopolitanism. As a result, in the nineteenth century, the Judezmo language and the traditional customs and folkways of its speakers came to have serious competitors in many parts of the Levant.

In the twentieth century, the destruction during the Holocaust of major Judezmo speech communities of the Balkans such as Salonika and Sarajevo, and emigration to countries emphasizing linguistic and cultural homogeneity, such as the United States, Israel, and France, resulted in a serious decline in the number of Jews whose mother tongue was Judezmo and who maintained Sephardic customs. Both in the Levant and in countries of immigration, the Sephardim, who formerly had lived in close proximity to one another, now increasingly lived in ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods where they used a language other than Judezmo, such as English, Hebrew, Turkish, or Greek as their principal means of communication with their neighbors. In the twenty-first century, the thousands of Jews for whom Judezmo is still an important family language, and one with which they strongly identify at the personal and group level, have essentially lost the definable geographic space, such as the predominantly Jewish sections of Istanbul or Salonika, or the Montefiore neighborhoods of Jerusalem, in which their language had once served as the primary Jewish communal tongue, and in which their ancestors maintained the group's distinctive customs.

After the Second World War but before the age of the Internet, Sephardim with a desire to communicate with one another in Judezmo had to satisfy that desire through family interactions at home, occasional extended-family gatherings outside the home, meetings in community centers such as the synagogue or home for the aged, correspondence by mail, and Judezmo periodicals, most of them published once in several months. In recent years, however, the opportunities for communication offered by the Internet, combined with the initiative of a few Web-smart Judezmo speakers and a certain post-modernistic sense among grassroots members of the community that the authorities accepted by

academia are not the only ones with something to say on the matter of Judezmo language and folk life, have altered this once-gloomy situation dramatically.

Judezmo Internet Forums as ‘Virtual Sefarad’

In 1999, Rachel Amado Bortnick—born in Izmir in 1938 and a resident of Dallas, Texas since 1988—founded one of the premiere Judezmo Internet forums functioning today: the pioneering Ladinokomunita correspondence circle.² Bortnick formulated the aims and areas of interest of Ladinokomunita as follows:

Ladinokomunita is a correspondence circle written in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish)... Topics of discussion center around Sephardic culture, history, and language, including: reminiscences of Sephardic life in Turkey, the United States, Rhodes, Salonika, or anywhere else in the world; Jewish holidays, customs, superstitions, foods, quaint sayings and proverbs, differences in vocabulary and pronunciation, origins of certain words, etc.; reports on aspects of Ladino history and literature by researchers and knowledgeable members. This is also a forum to announce programs and conferences relating to Ladino (or other aspects of Sephardic culture), as well as books, dictionaries, Ladino language courses, etc. Members may, in fact, discuss any subject of interest, including current affairs, science, literature, etc. The purpose of the Ladinokomunita is to: 1. promote the use of Ladino; 2. spread the use of a standardized method for spelling Ladino with Roman characters, according to the rules established by the journal *Aki Yerushalayim*;³ 3. promote knowledge of Sephardic history and culture.⁴

Ladinokomunita enables people with a knowledge of Judezmo to post messages accessible by members of the site throughout the world. With its founding, Ladinokomunita created a “virtual Sefarad,” or “geographically unbounded Judezmoland” inhabited by some 1,400 individuals of various ages (though many are over sixty), highly dispersed geographically (in Israel, the United States, Turkey, Greece, France, Bulgaria, Spain, and another thirty-five countries), who interact with other friends on the site, occasionally or on a regular basis, in Judezmo.

The circle is characterized by a sense of urgency since the correspondents feel themselves to be the last generations of Judezmo speakers, responsible for salvaging whatever they can of this once-dynamic but now declining culture. Its atmosphere is egalitarian; here, world-renowned authorities on Judezmo language and literature and rank-and-file members of the speech community (and

² Ladinokomunita may be joined by sending a blank e-mail to: Ladinokomunita-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Note: subscribers can expect to receive ten to twenty messages a day!

³ Founded by Moshe Shaul in Jerusalem, 1979.

⁴ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ladinokomunita/>

its admirers) seem pleased to interact with one another in what for both sides is a sacred mission. Through their active and regular participation in Ladinokomunita, the more knowledgeable and articulate “non-professional” Judezmists in the circle have themselves become “authorities” in a kind of parallel field of “popular” Judezmo Studies, and their messages are sometimes cited in professional publications.⁵

Typically, innovative messages to the forum are often followed by replies posted by others. Between ten and twenty messages are posted each day. When participants in the site provide sufficient details, its members have also been known to communicate directly through private electronic mail or even telephone and audio-visual messaging devices, enabling ongoing, and sometimes practically instantaneous, international communication in Judezmo.⁶

The principal nexus of the “community” is the actual use of Judezmo: to be published, messages to the forum must be written in Judezmo, preferably in conformance with the orthographic rules established by Moshe Shaul for the Jerusalem Judezmo periodical *Aki Yerushalayim*⁷ (Here is Jerusalem)—and thus it is not surprising that much of the interaction in the circle focuses directly on issues of language, such as divergences between dialects, the meanings of rare words, suggestions on how to express new scientific or cultural concepts in Judezmo,

5 For example, in David M. Bunis, “Writing More and Less ‘Jewishly’ in Judezmo and Yiddish,” *Journal of Jewish Languages* 1 (2013): 14.

6 For example, in a message posted on January 28, 2011, Benni Aguado of New York reported to readers that “pokos dias atras yo estuve echando lashon por telefon kon Metin Samrano ke mora en Los Angeles” (a few days ago I was chatting by phone with Metin Samrano who lives in Los Angeles).

7 In the present article, Judezmo citations originally appearing in the Latin alphabet preserve the original orthography, in unitalicized type (except for book titles), without indication of stressed vowels. Note the phonemic values of the following special characters used in that orthography in comparison with English or other languages: ch = ch (I.P.A. [tʃ]) as in English *chop*; d = occlusive (hard) d [d] as in *dumb* or fricative th as in *that*, [ð], depending on the speaker’s dialect; dj = j [dʒ] as in *just*; g = occlusive g [g] as in *gone* or fricative gh [ɣ] as in Greek *ghamma*, depending on the dialect; h = ch [χ] as in German *ach*; i = i [i] as in Spanish *mí* or *y [j]* as in Spanish *fiesta*; j = g [ʒ] as in *rouge*; ny = ni [ɲ] as in *onion* or Spanish *año*; sh = sh [ʃ] as in *shop*; u = oo [u] as in *boot* or w [w] as in *want*; y = y [j] as in *yes*; z = z [z] as in *zoo*. The same symbols, in italics, are used here in transcriptions of texts originally in the Hebrew alphabet; but *d* vs. *ḏ* are used to denote occlusive d vs. th (as in *that*), *g* vs. *ḡ* distinguish occlusive g from fricative gh; and a written accent is added to indicate irregular stress when words ending in a vowel, -n, -s or -sh do not have the usual penultimate stress (e. g., *chikés*, “childhood”), and when words with other final consonants do not have final stress (e. g., *séfer*, “book”).

or simply on how keep the language alive.⁸ But of no less interest to members are the traditional lifestyle, culture, and especially habits and customs of Judezmo speakers, particularly in the past when Judezmo speech communities were still “actual,” “physical” realities and not just “virtual.” Michal Held (2010; forthcoming) and Tracy Brink-Danan (2011) have devoted attention to Judezmo speakers as an online speech community, with a particular emphasis on reflections of ethnic identity and semiotics.⁹ The present article focuses on Ladinokomunita as a forum for discourse on the traditional habits and customs of Judezmo speakers,¹⁰ and more particularly, on the diverse functions, or functionality, which that discourse provides for its participants, as extrapolated from their messages.¹¹ Since, in many instances, the actual words of the site participants document previously unattested customs, as well as illustrate contemporaneous “Internet Judezmo,” they are reproduced here at length, in the original language.

8 For example, on March 7, 2009, “Miguel de Meksiko” wrote: “...vengu a dimandar a los miembros de LK [= Ladinokomunita], el sinyifikado de estos biervos en djudeo-espanyol: fried, grilled, steamed, boiled, baked, pickled, roasted, raw, smoked, breaded, canned, grated, mashed, scrambled. Kumidas livyanas ke tengash!” (I’d like to ask the members of L[adino]k[omunita] how you say these words in Judeo-Spanish... Good eating to you!). The discourse on language-related issues as a focus of Ladinokomunita is discussed in greater detail in David M. Bunis, “Talking About Judezmo in the Ladinokomunita Internet Correspondence Circle Today,” *Jewish Languages in Global Contexts*, ed. Joshua Miller and Anita Norich (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2016), 321–60.

9 See Michal Held, “The People Who almost Forgot’: Judeo-Spanish Web-Based Interactions as a Digital Home-Land,” *El Prezente* 4 (2010): 83–101; Marcy Brink-Danan, “The Meaning of Ladinokomunita: The Semiotics of an Online Speech Community,” *Language and Communication* 31 (2011): 107–18; Michal Held, “The Role of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in the Formation of Personal and Group Identity as Reflected in the Digital Internet Homeland of Judeo-Spanish Speakers,” *On the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of the Alliance Israélite Universelle*, ed. Haim Saadoun (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, forthcoming).

10 In preparing the present article, the author sought out customs-related messages posted to Ladinokomunita between the years 2009 and 2012 by searching for words denoting “custom” such as *uzo*, *min(h)ag*, *uzansa*, *kostumbre*, *tradision*. For examples of the use of Hebrew-origin *minag* in modern Judezmo, see David M. Bunis, *A Lexicon of the Hebrew and Aramaic Elements in Modern Judezmo* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993), no. 2525.

11 For a survey of the “social media landscape,” see Anne Gentle, *Conversation and Community: The Social Web for Documentation*, 2nd ed. (Laguna Hills, CA: XML Press, 2012). A theoretical analysis of Internet sites as a social environment supplying social gratifications is provided in Thomas F. Stafford, Marla Roynce Stafford, and Lawrence L. Schkade, “Determining Uses and Gratifications for the Internet,” *Decision Sciences* 35 (2004): 259–88. For a broad overview of social network sites, see Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008): 210–30.

Treatments of the Traditional Habits and Customs of Judezmo Speakers before World War II

Before the dawn of Jewish Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century, the collection and evaluation of customs and popular traditions practiced by everyday Jews throughout the world was primarily in the hands of the communities' rabbis, who often published them in Hebrew tomes which the workaday Jew could not easily understand.¹² From the early nineteenth century—perhaps influenced by the Romantic nationalism which arose in the late eighteenth century,¹³ with its emphasis on the documentation of local ethnic traditions and folklore—rabbis writing for the general public began to include detailed descriptions of the Jewish customs practiced in their regions in popular-oriented anthologies of Jewish law and lore in Jewish vernaculars such as Judezmo and Yiddish.¹⁴ Under similar influence, in the nineteenth century, Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) scholars with a European humanistic orientation began to publish anthologies of Jewish customs and traditions—often accompanied by academic analysis, mostly in European languages not widely known among the Jewish masses—in monographs and scholarly journals.¹⁵ At the same time, Haskalah adherents with a more popular orientation treated Jewish folk customs in the periodical press which began to be established around this time in widely spoken Jewish languages. The Hebrew-letter Judezmo periodical press of the former Ottoman Empire was born in Izmir, 1845, with the appearance of the weekly newspaper *Shaaré Mizrah* or “Gates of the East,” edited by Rafael Uziel.¹⁶

12 For example, Ḥayyim Benveniste (Constantinople, 1603–1673), *Šiyyare kënesset ha-gědola* (vol. 1, Izmir, 1671; vol. 2, Constantinople, 1717).

13 See, for example, Miroslav Hroch, “Introduction: National Romanticism,” in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe*, vol. II: *National Romanticism: The Formation of National Movements*, ed. Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006), 4–6.

14 One such volume, by Judezmo-speaking Rabbi Eli‘ezer ben Šem Ṭov Papo of nineteenth-century Sarajevo, was analyzed by Katja Šmid in *El Séfer Měšec betí, de Eliézer Papo: Ritos y costumbres sabáticas de los sefardíes de Bosnia* (Madrid: CSIC, 2012).

15 For extensive English-language treatments by contemporary rabbis, see Herbert C. Dobrinsky, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1988); Marc D. Angel, *Exploring Sephardic Customs and Traditions* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2000).

16 On *Shaaré Mizrah*, see David M. Bunis, “The Earliest Judezmo Newspapers: Sociolinguistic Reflections,” *Mediterranean Language Review* 6–7 (1993): 5–66; Rachel Saba Wolfe, “Puertas de Lyz [Gates of Light]: The Periodical *Shaaré Mizrah* (Izmir, 1845–1846) as the Proclaiming Voice of the Judeo-Spanish Enlightenment,” *El Prezente* 8–9, Part Two (2015): 421–70.

Chronologically, the Ladinokomunita spotlight on the folkways of Judezmo speakers follows a long-standing interest in the subject in the Hebrew-letter Judezmo periodicals of Constantinople, Salonika, Izmir, and other major Ottoman cities, and in additional periodicals published in satellite communities such as Vienna and Paris.¹⁷ Scattered among their political, commercial, and social news items, the more than 300 Hebrew-letter Judezmo periodicals published between 1845 and World War II included tradition-related articles focusing on the origins of words and expressions customarily used in Judezmo, such as *estar en sus tredje*, “to be persistent” (literally, “to keep to one’s thirteen,” an allusion to Maimonides’ Thirteen Articles of Faith);¹⁸ popular beliefs, such as those referred to among the Sephardim of Istanbul as documented in a perhaps imaginary compendium known as *Simanim del Séfer Rahel* (Signs of the Book of Rachel);¹⁹ and traditional holiday dishes, such as a list of dairy foods eaten by Judezmo speakers during Shavuot [Pentecost], accompanied by the reasons for the custom.²⁰

At the turn of the twentieth century, the important Salonika Judezmo periodical *La Epoka* included articles on the customs and traditions of the city’s Sephardim, and revealed a general preoccupation on the part of its writers with the “*djidió a la vieja*,” the “old-style [Ottoman] Jew.”²¹ These early articles, written by authors who had been indoctrinated in cynical cosmopolitanism by their French-style schoolteachers or other Eurocentric role models, focused mostly on customs which the authors frankly despised and wished to see discontinued.²² But by the eve of World War II, when the highbrows’ scorn for local Jewish customs had all but succeeded in causing them to disappear, the “humor page” of Sunday issues of the Salonika Judezmo periodical *Aksión* (Action) featured arti-

17 For an inventory of the Judezmo press, see Moshe David Gaon, *A Bibliography of the Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) Press* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute / Jewish National Library, 1965) (Hebrew); Elena Romero, *La creación literaria en lengua sefardí* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992), 179–97; Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 23–138.

18 The expression is discussed in *El Enstruktor* (The Instructor) 1 (Constantinople, 1888), 171.

19 Some of the beliefs attributed to this work were noted by Elia R. Karmona in his periodical *El Djugetón* 5 (Constantinople, 1913), 7–8, inspired by a similar article in Alexander (=Gavriel) Benghiatt’s *El Meseret* (Izmir) of the same year. Karmona’s Hebrew-letter Judezmo text is reproduced in David M. Bunis, *Judezmo: An Introduction to the Language of the Ottoman Sephardim* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999), 402 (Hebrew).

20 The foods were mentioned by Alexander Benghiatt in *El Meseret* 23 (1919): 4. The Hebrew-letter Judezmo text is reproduced in Bunis, *Judezmo: An Introduction*, 447.

21 For example, *La Epoka* 31, 1557 (1906), 7.

22 For example, “*Uzos i kostumbres: Melezinas de mujeres i karmaderas*” (Habits and Customs: Women’s Folk Cures and Women Healers) in *La Epoka* 26, 1265 (1900): 4.

cles full of nostalgia for the now endangered communal habits and customs, bearing headings such as “*Uzos i kostumbres*” (Habits and Customs) and “*Rekodros de chikés*” (Childhood Recollections). In these articles, the writers sought to recreate scenes from a way of life which was disappearing before their eyes.²³

The more cosmopolitan readers sometimes ridiculed the “nostalgia writers” for dwelling on the habits and customs of the “distant past.” For instance, in his column “*Por dezbfar*” (To Unburden the Heart) appearing in *Aksión*, gifted journalist “Napolitán” (=Alberto Molho) wrote:

Muchos de mis amigos me se van burlando por la manya ke tengo de estar siempre avlando en estas kolonas de los uzos de shaná-tra-katraka. Ma mil ke se burlen, iné non me van a empiđir a mi de estarme akodrando de las gostozas tradisiones del empesijo de este siékololo. (Many of my friends keep laughing at me for my habit of always writing in this column about our customs of long ago. But, laugh as they may, they will not dissuade me from recalling our savory traditions at the turn of this century.)²⁴

Rather than decrease as a result of the ridicule directed at their authors by community members with little appreciation for the ways of the past, the publications devoted to traditional Sephardic folk life grew in number and seriousness toward the end of the nineteenth century as the popular writers on Sephardic folk traditions in the Judezmo press were joined by maskilic historians and other scholars produced by the community, such as Abraham Danon of Edirne,²⁵ Saul Mézan of Pazardzhik,²⁶ Abraham Galante of Istanbul,²⁷ Michael Molho of Salonika,²⁸ and José M. Estrugo of Izmir,²⁹ as well as scholars from outside the

23 Numerous passages from the Judezmo press of inter-war Salonika, documenting and expressing longings for the habits and customs of the past, are reproduced in David M. Bunis, *Voices from Jewish Salonika* (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim / The National Authority for Ladino; Thessaloniki: Ets Ahaim Foundation, 1999).

24 *Aksión* 10, 2742 (1938): 2.

25 For example, Abraham Danon, “Les superstitions des juifs ottomans,” *Mélusine* (Paris, 1897), 265–81.

26 For example, Saul Mézan, *Les juifs en Bulgarie* (Sofia: Amischpat, 1925), 105–50.

27 For example, Abraham Galante, *Le Juif dans le proverbe, le conte et la chanson orientaux* (Istanbul: Fratelli Haim, 1935). On Galante and his publications, see Albert E. Kalderon, *Abraham Galanté: A Biography* (New York: Sepher-Hermon, 1983).

28 For example, Michael Molho, *Usos y costumbres de los sefardíes de Salónica* (Madrid: CSIC-Instituto Arias Montano, 1950). For a biography and bibliography of Michael Molho, see *Homenaje a don Michael Molho, ofrecido por un núcleo de amigos y simpatizantes* (Buenos Aires: J. Kaufman, 1961).

29 For example, José M. Estrugo, *Los sefardíes* (La Habana: Lex, 1958).

community³⁰ who began to document the folkways of the Judezmo-speaking Sephardim in prestigious scholarly publications in French and other European languages as well as in Hebrew.

Traditional Habits and Customs as a Focus of Ladinokomunita

Following in the spirit of their journalistic and academic predecessors, although not necessarily aware of their publications, the members of Ladinokomunita have made traditional Sephardic habits and customs, beliefs, foods, clothing, and verbal lore (such as spoken and sung literary repertoires, blessings and oaths, and the like) a focal point of the circle's discourse. By doing so, this virtual "global community"—dispersed geographically through forty countries—in fact demonstrates the need often felt today by members of ethnic groups to resist the ethnicity-effacing effects of globalization and band together to distinguish themselves from other groups by fostering their own distinctive linguistic and cultural traditions.³¹ While most Ladinokomunita customs-centered messages attempt to do so by urging the preservation of existing Sephardic customs, there are also rare suggestions for the creation of new ones.

Catalysts for the Discussion of Customs

Customs-related messages on Ladinokomunita generally respond to one of several catalysts. A major one is the approach of a calendar or life cycle celebration, and the childhood memories associated with it. For example, a request from member "Rosina" for reminiscences of Purim customs on the eve of the holiday prompted a detailed message by Eliz Gateno describing customs practiced by her family in Istanbul (see Appendix, Text 1). Such a "call and response" often spurs additional messages on the topic, such as a poem recalling Purim scenes of the past posted by

30 For example, Max Grunwald, "Our Children in the Popular [Judezmo] Proverb," *Hed hamizrah* 3, no. 38 (1945): 7.

31 On globalization versus the fostering of local cultures, and the social and psychological effects of both, see Kevin Archer, M. Martin Bosman, M. Mark Amen, and Ella Schmidt (eds.), *Cultures of Globalization: Coherence, Hybridity, Contestation* (London: Routledge, 2007); Michael Skey, "Why Do Nations Matter? The Struggle for Belonging and Security in an Uncertain World," *British Journal of Sociology* 64 (2013): 81–98.

Matilda Barnatan.³² Other events that have led to discussions of customs and habits include the appearance of a new book on some aspect of Sephardic or Jewish studies, such as a collection of Judezmo commentaries on the weekly Torah portion by Salonika-born “Yehuda Hatsvi of Erets Israel,”³³ or the screening of community-related films, such as those by three Judezmo-speaking women, presented by the Sephardi Federation of West Palm Beach, Florida.³⁴

Ladinokomunita interactions of this kind seem to stem from deep yearnings for family and community life as in times past. The descriptions of traditional ceremonies and other types of ritual behavior posted attempt to recreate, if only for a fleeting moment, the atmosphere in the participants’ childhood homes and neighborhoods when their native cities were still vibrant Sephardic cultural centers in which Judezmo served as the primary language of Jewish communal interaction.

Documenting Endangered Customs and Transmitting Them to the Next Generation

A primary function of Ladinokomunita is the documentation of Sephardic traditions, for their own intrinsic cultural value as well as to pass them down to the younger generation. For some participants a first step in that direction is to determine the extent to which Sephardic customs are still being practiced, and where. Elias Barokas of Miami, a frequent contributor to the customs discourse, noted that he had seen some Passover customs practiced in his own home (“Este era el uzo ke vide en mi kaza.” This was the custom I saw in my house); and he included his father, as well as his little sister and himself, as their practitioners.

Site participants overwhelmingly agree that the customs they discuss should be perpetuated, and that their documentation on the site would help enable their transmission to further generations. Barokas emphasized that “It is a duty to continue the customs of our forefathers, even above Jewish law, each person as seen in his/her family.”³⁵ For Eliz Gatenyo, it was a sacred mission to prepare Purim breakfasts for her daughters and grandchildren so they would expe-

³² “Muestro libro i la festividad de Purim” (March 8, 2009).

³³ Avram Behar, “Sovre el libro de Yehuda Hatsvi Semana por Semana” (September 18, 2011).

³⁴ For example, Elias Barokas, “Segunda Tadrada de Enverano” (July 17, 2011).

³⁵ “Es Hova (dover) de kontenuar el uzo de nuestros padres afilu ensima de la Alaha, kada uno i uno asigun lo ke vido en sus famiyas” (February 15, 2013).

rience the same traditions she had seen in her mother's home.³⁶ Eliyahu Matalon of Holon used Ladinokomunita as a release-valve to vent frustration over his attempt to ensure that the younger generations in Israel would maintain Sephardic customs and traditions, given the high percentage of intermarriage between the children and grandchildren of Judezmo speakers and Jews in Israel from other family backgrounds. "In Israel (including in my family)," Matalon wrote (Appendix, Text 2), "we make great efforts to transmit the customs of our Sephardic forefathers to the younger generation. Certainly Ladinokomunita plays an important part in these efforts" (April 16, 2012).

In reaction to an article on the wedding customs of Judezmo speakers posted by Yehuda Hatsvi on another Judezmo-oriented Internet site, *esefarad.com*,³⁷ Nisim Koen of Sofia added some complementary details he believed necessary to complete the treatment (Appendix, Text 3):

The first thing is the bride's ritual bath. In Sofia, we did not have a *mikve* (now there is one, but no one goes). The day before the wedding all the women close to the bride, and she among them, went with great pomp to the city's public bath. There was a lot of singing, dancing, eating and drinking.³⁸

Customs Viewed with a Critical Eye

Although the participants' attitude toward traditional folkways is usually positive, some are skeptical about certain customs, and Ladinokomunita offers a platform to express that skepticism. Nisim Koen, for example, expressed relief over the disappearance of customs he felt to be unworthy of the community. In the message about wedding customs just cited, Koen described how money was customarily collected for the poor brides of Sofia: He wrote:

36 "Ayer demaniana mos arekojimos todos de la famiya i fiestimos Purim en la kaza de mi ijika. Despues del dezayuno metimos un pranso de dulsuryas de Purim. A los ijikos les dimos a un sestiko de mavlacha, yeno de dulsuryas i bahshish (Purimlik, M) de Purim. Yo apareji borekitas de muez, orejas de Aman, i strudel de muez i lokum. Esto todo lo tengo por misyon por ke lo vide en la kaza de mi madre i kero ke mis ijas i mis inyetos veyan la mizma tradisyon" (February 26, 2013).

37 The founders and managers of *esefarad.com* are Liliana and Marcelo Benveniste.

38 Nisim Koen, Sofia, February 15, 2012. For a recent work on Sephardic wedding songs and customs, see Susana Weich-Shahak, *La boda sefardí: música, texto y contexto* (Madrid: Editorial Alpuerto, c2007).

“Without a dowry there is no marriage.” For the poorest brides we had a rabbi, Daniel Zion, may he be worthy of Paradise, who used to send the women of WIZO to collect money for a trousseau and dowry. In order to deceive [the potential grooms], or so as not to embarrass [the brides], they used to promise, for example, 200,000 Bulgarian *lev*, and in the end they put 100,000 on a table for the groom with a mirror behind it, saying that he should take the remaining 100,000 from the mirror. Year after year they did this; good that this is no longer done.³⁹

Customs as an Aid to Establishing Group Identity and Fending off the Loss of Ethnic Specificity

Elaborations of habits and customs are often used on Ladinokomunita to help mark off the Judezmo-speaking “Ottoman Sephardim” as a distinct Jewish sub-culture group. Barokas enumerated Passover customs of a bygone era which he believed were particular to Judezmo speakers, as opposed to those not practiced by the group. For him, group-defining Passover customs included the buying of new shoes before the holiday in order to show one’s readiness to set out for a trek in the desert [just as buying new hats was customary before Rosh haShana, the “head” of the year]; the eldest son’s holding a cloth bundle containing *matza* over his shoulder during the reading of the haggada, and his right to eat the egg placed on the *Seder* plate (*plato de hovod*); the setting aside of a piece of the *matza* constituting the *afikoman*, or last piece of *matza* eaten at the end of the meal, and keeping it in the haggada all year long for use as an amulet and an ingredient in folk-healing ceremonies; the white-washing of the walls of the house, changing the curtains, and putting special holiday carpets on the walls before the holiday; and the complete burning of the piece of roast meat which had been placed on the *Seder* plate in commemoration of the paschal sacrifice.

Barokas also noted that the Sephardim of Turkey customarily did not eat rice during Passover; but because of the severe food shortages of World War II, the local chief rabbi permitted them to do so during the war years, on condition that they ate the rice immediately after it was cooked, and that any rice remaining after the meal be promptly discarded. Barokas added that the Jews of Turkey customarily refrained from working the whole week of Passover. He concluded his inventory of group-defining Passover customs with an ironic proverbial saying alluding to the high costs of the holiday: “Ken no se kome el kapital en Pesah, no sale de hova” (One who does not eat up all his savings on Passover does not fulfill his halakhic obligations).

³⁹ Nisim Koen, Sofia, February 15, 2012.

Site members often use Ladinokomunita to seek corroboration and feedback from fellow participants about customs they think are characteristic of the group, but are not sure that other members know them. For example, Barokas asked if any readers were familiar with a Passover custom no longer used: bringing into the house long plant leaves called *prasinagua*. He proposed an etymology of the word—from Turkish-origin *prasa*, a word for “leeks” which entered Judezmo (and later, Israeli Hebrew) as *prasa*, plus *en agua*, “in water.” Barokas explained that the leaves commemorated the reeds seen by the ancient Israelites when they crossed the Red Sea. The leaves were also meant to draw attention to the imminent arrival of summer, and symbolize the Jews’ hope that their homes would be blessed with sustenance and success, just as the fields were full of long green leaves.

Similarly, Bortnick wondered if any other members knew the custom of adding water to the wine over which the Shabbat sanctification (*kiddush*) was made, after those present responded “*Lehayim*” (To life) to the chanter’s saying “*Savri maranan*” (Gentlemen, what is your opinion?). Bortnick guessed that the custom was unique to the Izmir Sephardim. She added that Mario Saban, president of the Tarbut Sefarad organization and a practitioner of the custom, had explained its symbolism to Ladinokomunita members visiting Barcelona: the wine represented passion and the water, logical thought; thus the custom emphasized the need for a balance between these two forces in life.⁴⁰

Definitive customs bridging religion, cognitive folklore, and popular medicine are occasionally recalled by site members. Barokas offered details on the traditional use of *mumia*, a piece of mummified bone or bit of dried foreskin preserved from a circumcision, administered to someone suffering from fatigue, fright, depression, and so on—preferably on the Torah-reading days of Monday or Thursday or the New Month, sometimes with the knowledge of the “patient” and sometimes without it.⁴¹ Barokas also outlined four types of *prekantes*, or Judezmo magical incantations invoking the Divinity and heroes of the Bible, ut-

40 “En diciendo el kidush de noche de Shabat, kon la kupa de vino en mano, viene a la fraza ‘Savri maranan’ i se responde ‘Lehayim,’ en akel punto en Izmir el uzo era de echar un poko de agua a la kupa de vino. Este uzo no lo vide en dingun lugar mas, asta el anyo pasado, kuando estuvimos en Barseleona kon el grupo de LK, i el Dr. Mario Saban (presidente de Tarbut Sefarad) ke mos giyo por el kartier medieval djudio, en el kidush ke mos disho akel shabat antes del almors, izo la mezma koza. Ma siguro i el es de famiya de Izmirli! Mario mos avia eksplikado la razon de este uzo: el vino reprezenta pasion, emosion, i la agua reprezenta el pensamiento, la lojika. El uno sin el otro no es bueno. En la vida kale tenido un ekilibro entre los dos. Agora kero demandar ken konose este uzo de echar agua al vino kuando se dize ‘Lehayim’?” (October 1, 2011).

41 For an anthropological analysis of the custom, see Raphael Patai, “Indulco and Mumia,” *Journal of American Folklore* 77 (1964): 3–11.

tered to cure ills such as the effects of an “evil eye,” psychological problems, absence of lactation in nursing mothers, and skin disease (Appendix, Text 4).⁴²

Barokas outlined in particular detail the manifold uses of “oil (for much life)” (alzete [de vida muncha]) in this subculture: Judezmo speakers contributed oil to the synagogue for use in lamps following the making of a vow, recovery from illness, a successful birth, or the experience of an apparent miracle. The donors of the oil then carefully observed their own faces reflected in the oil lamps. Barokas remembered his father filling a white plate with oil after his family had finished the meal on the eve of Yom Kippur, looking at himself in it, and requiring his wife and children to follow suit. He then lit a wick in the oil, which burned throughout the holiday. The custom was based on the belief that one who did not see his reflection in the oil would not live long. Barokas and his mother stopped observing the custom after his father died at the age of forty-seven, even though he had seen his image in the oil (Appendix, Text 5). Bortnick affirmed that the custom of donating oil to the synagogue was still practiced in Izmir, and perhaps in Istanbul.⁴³

The Judezmo-Speaking Sephardim versus Jewish ‘Others’

Often, the distinctiveness of the Judezmo-speaking subculture group was established by comparing its customs with those of Jewish “others,” particularly the Ashkenazim. Bortnick disclosed “it was in America that I first learned of Ashkenazic customs.”⁴⁴ She had the impression that, like herself, most Sephardic women there married Ashkenazim; but as the years went by she increasingly in-

⁴² On Judezmo *prekantes* and other incantations, see Melvin M. Firestone, “Sephardic Folk-Curing in Seattle,” *Journal of American Folklore* 75 (1926): 301–10; Steven Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles: A Study of Folklore and Ethnic Identity* (New York: Ayer, 1980); Yaron Ben-Naeh, “A Tried and Tested Spell: Magic Beliefs and Acts among Ottoman Jews,” *Pe’amim* 85 (2000), 89–111 (Hebrew); Isaac Jack Lévy and Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, *Ritual Medical Lore of Sephardic Women: Sweetening the Spirits, Healing the Sick* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2002), 74–94; Tamar Alexander and Eliezer Papo, “On the Power of the Word: Healing Incantations of Bosnian Sephardic Women,” *Menorah* (2010): 57–115. For broad anthropological perspectives, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, c. 1963), 202–28.

⁴³ “El uzo de echar alzeyte al kal para un nes, o dar gracias al Dio, kontunea dainda en Izmir. I me parese en Estambol tambien” (February 13, 2013).

⁴⁴ “Yo es en la Amerika ke me topi por primera ves kon uzos Ashkenazis. Es aki ke sinti ke en Shavuot se kome solo kozas de leche. Ya se ke muestras madres azian sutlaches, i fongos, i bu-rekitas para el dezayuno, ma me parese ke la noche de Shavuot era de karne” (May 14, 2013).

corporated in her family celebrations Sephardic customs remembered from her youth, such as the Rosh haShana *yeirasones* or *yēhi ratson* (May it be Thy will) blessings recited over symbolic produce.⁴⁵

Paying tribute to deceased Ladinokomunita member “Rosina,” who had frequently contributed descriptions of Sephardic customs, Eliz Gatenyo commented on the Rosh haShana customs she still practiced (Appendix, Text 6). Gatenyo also noted that, visiting Israel during Hannuka, she was surprised to learn that, following the Ashkenazi custom, Israelis sang “*Ma’oz tsur*” rather than “*Mizmor shir Hannukat ha-bayit le-David*” after the candle-lighting.⁴⁶ Barokas was pained to see Sephardic customs replaced by Ashkenazic ones, especially when the latter seemed to run counter to the very spirit of the Sephardic tradition, such as when sweets (*dulses*) were served in houses of mourning, whereas Sephardim served them only on joyous occasions (Appendix, Text 7).⁴⁷ Furthermore, “en mozos” (among us), noted Barokas, only one Shabbat light was kindled in each family, using a wick floating in oil (“may it be for life”); “the two [or more] candles or candelabras, an Ashkenazic tradition, is not our custom.”⁴⁸

Ladinokomunita members used customs as a parameter to distinguish themselves from non-Ashkenazi Jewish “others” as well—even from two groups whose ancestors had also resided in medieval Iberia. One group is the so-called “Western Sephardim” or “Spanish-Portuguese” Jews, descendants of the conversos of Spain and Portugal who secretly remained loyal to Judaism despite their ostensible conversion to Catholicism, and who returned to the open practice of Judaism mostly in cities of Western Europe such as Amsterdam, Ferrara, London, and Bordeaux. As Bortnick noted, the Hispano-Jewish table hymn “Bendigamos al

45 “Aki en la Amerika lo mas de los sefaradim estamos kazados kon Ashkenazim... Ma, en pasando los anyos, yo esto mirando a azer mas i mas de los ermozos uzos i simbolizmo ke tenemos en Roshashana. Oganyo ... vamos azer los Yehiratzones al uzo de Izmir” (September 13, 2012).

46 “Unos kuantos anyos antes aviya echo un viaje a Israel. Era tiempo de Hanuka. Ke alegriya era para mi de ver las hanukiyas grandes asendidas en las kalejas i en los bulvares. Una noche ke estavamos envidados ande unos amigos israelyanos, asendimos todos enjuntos la hanukiya i ampesimos a kantar. Despues ke dishimos ‘Al niseha ve al yeshuoteha ve al nifleoteha’ ampesaron a kantar ‘Maoz Tsur.’ Yo me aviya enkantado... Kuando eskapo la kantika, les demandi la razon i me disheron ke esto es el uzo suyos. I eyos, no saviyan ke mozotros kantavamos ‘Mizmor shir hanukat abayit leDavid’” (January 13, 2012).

47 On Sephardic mourning customs, see Shmuel Refael Vivante, in collaboration with Moshe Elisha Bachar, *Beit Hachaim – Final Resting Place: Laws and Customs of Mourning Among the Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) Speaking Communities* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2012) (Hebrew and Judezmo).

48 “En mozos solo se uza una kandela de shabat para toda la famiya. Se asendiya kon azete, de vida muncha, i kon la mecha... entenyida en la azete. Las dos kandelas, asigun la tradisyon ashkenazi,... no es nuestro uzo” (February 13, 2013).

Altísimo” is traditionally sung by Western Sephardim but not Judezmo speakers.⁴⁹ Charles Barouh Abraham of Gatineau remarked that when he prayed in Spanish-Portuguese synagogues, he sometimes used their characteristic pronunciation of Hebrew [characterized by *b* for *vet*, *ng* for ‘*ayin*, and *s* for *shin*];⁵⁰ but “when I read the Scroll of Esther before the ark of a congregation,” he wrote, “I insist on doing it according to the Sephardic pronunciation of the old Ottoman Empire” [today having *v* for *vet*, zero for syllable-initial ‘*ayin*, and *sh* for *shin*].⁵¹

The second Iberian Jewish “other” consists of descendants of Sephardim who settled in North Africa, primarily Northern Morocco, where they developed habits and customs distinct from those of Ottoman Judezmo speakers, and spoke varieties of “Judeo-Spanish” which have become known as *Ḥaketía*. Those varieties share some Ibero-Romance features with the Judezmo of Ottoman Sephardim, but they incorporate a rich North African Judeo-Arabic component instead of borrowings from Turkish and Balkan languages, and they have an Arabicized pronunciation of elements of Hebrew-Aramaic origin closer to that of North African Judeo-Arabic speakers.

In 2009, *Haketia* began to receive attention in *Ladinokomunita*, first by contributors not belonging to the Judezmo speech community, later by Ottoman Sephardim, and finally by *Ḥaketía* speakers themselves. On the site, the Judezmo speakers have always made a point of distinguishing between their own in-group language and *Ḥaketía*, and between the customs of Ottoman versus North African Sephardim. For example, in response to contributor Judith [Cohen] of Toronto’s explanation of *endecha* (*dirge*) as “una lamenta kantada tradicionalmente por las mujeres” (a lament sung traditionally by women), “Rosina,” with the concurrence of Yehuda Hatsvi, insisted: “Ma no en LADINO!!!!!!!!!!!! ... sera en *Ḥaketia* i no en MUESTRA lingua” (But not in LADINO!!!!!!!!!!!!... it must be in *Ḥaketía* but not in OUR language) (April 26, 2009).

Since 2009, *Ladinokomunita* has opened its doors widely to *Ḥaketía* messages, but they are always designated as such, and never as posts in “our language.” Barokas expressed resentment when a New York *Jewish Daily Forward* writer put the Balkan and Moroccan Sephardim in one category simply because they, like

49 “El ‘Bendigamos al Altísimo’... es el Birkat Amazon de los Sefaradim oksidentales” (November 12, 2011).

50 Cf. Herman Salomon, “Hebrew Pronunciation among Western Sephardim,” *American Sephardi* 1 (1967): 20–25.

51 “Kuando meldo la megilat Ester delante el ehal de un kal, uzo ensistir en fazerlo asigun la pronunsiasyon sefardiya del antiguo Emperyo Otomano” (June 19, 2009). On that realization of Hebrew, see Cynthia M. Crews, “The Vulgar Pronunciation of Hebrew in the Judeo-Spanish of Salonica,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 13 (1962): 83–95.

Ashkenazim, do not eat rice during Passover; he pointed out that, unlike the Ashkenazim, the Balkan Sephardim do eat peas and certain beans during the holiday.⁵²

In reply to messages posted to Ladinokomunita regarding the blessing customarily used to congratulate someone returning to his seat in the synagogue after having been called up to the Torah, Edmond Cohen of Paris noted that in his local congregation of Jews from Turkey and Salonika, one did not say “*hazak ubaruh (tiye)*,” as is common in synagogues in Israel, but simply “*hazak baruh*.” He also observed that long-time members of his congregation had always worn their prayer shawl (*talit*) folded narrowly around the neck, but Jews from North Africa who had recently joined the congregation wore it unfolded, covering the shoulders; and in recent times, veteran members of his congregation had begun to accept that custom too.⁵³ In a follow-up to that message, Abraham stressed the importance of maintaining traditions handed down from one’s ancestors; but on the other hand he instructed that, when joining a new congregation having stricter customs, one should adopt them, as in the case of the wearing of a *talit* opened fully, as in North African congregations.⁵⁴

52 “Asigun el uzo de los djudios de los Balkanes, de los ashkenazim i de los sefaradis marokanos, no komemos arroz en Pesah. Komo un mes atras un famozo djornalista de la Gazeta ‘Forward’ de los Estados Unidos mos yamo ‘egzotikos’ por esta kavza. Este renomado mehoram mos echo a todos djuntos en el mismo bogo por pekado de ignoransya... Los de los payises del Balkan no tienen uzo de komer avas (fijones) o granos sekos de ningun tipo por modo de ke puede aver kayido hames arientro, ama es uzo de komer fasulya, biselias i avas freskas ke se lavan antes de kozerlas. Los sefaradis de la Sirya tienen el minhag de komer arroz i ful el primer diya de la fiesta. Muchos de estos se kazaron kon turkos o turkas i kontinuaron kon el uzo. En mi payis los edirnilis no komian arroz en Pesah por del todo. Lo mas ke komemos en la fiesta es birmuelos de matza, patatas i guevos haminados sin karar. Hallal ke vos seyga” (April 1, 2012).

53 “Lo le eskrivyo nuestro amigo Yehuda [Hatsvi] sobre la dicha ‘Hazak ubaruh tiye’ me izo akodarme ke en mi kal, Berith Shalom en Paris, ke era el kal de los Turkos i Selaniklis, no era el uzo de dizir ‘Hazak ubaruh tiye,’ no era mismo el uzo de dizir ‘Hazak ubaruh,’ se diziya, no se deke, ‘Hazak baruh.’ Syempre oyi mi padre dizir ‘Hazak baruh!’ a uno ke veniya de suvir a la teva para la perasha. De la misma manera, vide ke en mi kal Berith Shalom, la djente se metiya el taleth djusto al deredor del garon, i no sobre los ombros. Kuando me fui despues en el kal Buffault, vide ke la djente venida de Afrika del Norte yevava el taleth sobre los ombros, i a poko a poko los turkos izyeron eyos tambyen ansina, i agora yo yevo el taleth sobre los ombros, lo ke no aziya antes. Troki de uzo” (June 19, 2009).

54 “Denguno no puede kontradizir las uzansas ke te ambezates de tu kerido senyor padre, de bendicha memorya, por el ikar de: ‘Minag avoteinu be-yadeinu, la kostumbre de nuestros padres esta en muestras manos.’ Yani, no trokamos de eya. Portanto, en el kavzo ke mos deskriyites tenemos de tener en tino otr’un ikar ke kere ke kuando se muda a otr’una komunidad se quadran las humrot (estrikuras/estrinjensyas) de su lugar i se adoptan las humrot del nuevo lugar. La kostumbre de la sinagoga de Rue Buffault es de yevar el taled en toda su lar-

After noting several well-known customs connected with the special holiday plate (see Appendix, Text 8) practiced among Jews in Morocco and Egypt during the Passover *Seder* (or reading of the haggada and festive meal celebrated during the first night[s] of the holiday),⁵⁵ Barokas emphasized that “Los sefaradis otomanos no tenemos este uzo” (We Ottoman Sephardim do not have this custom). Bortnick noted that, unlike the Moroccan Sephardim, those of the Balkans did not celebrate the Mimouna the day after Passover; however, at the close of the holiday, Judezmo speakers from Izmir gathered to eat the first meal of leavened food together, calling the celebration *la haméra* [perhaps from *hamés* (< Hb. *ḥameš* ‘leaven’) + *-era* (< Sp. noun-forming *-era*)?].⁵⁶

Coping with Diversity within the Ethnic Group: Variation within the Customs of Judezmo Speakers

As noted, Ladinokomunita members from all geographic regions which once had formed a part of the Ottoman Empire (and daughter communities elsewhere) express the sense of belonging to a single Jewish subculture group defined primarily by their “Ladino” language and shared customs. But, as already alluded to in messages by various members cited above, this does not mean that the language or customs-inventory of all members of this geographically widely dispersed group are identical in every respect. In fact, as already indicated in messages cited above, members are quick to point out the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the Sephardim of their own city or region, sometimes expressing the conviction that their own Judezmo dialect and customs are the best. Several members commented on regional divergences in customs-related terminology: “Rahel de ISRAEL” noted that the vigil against harmful forces held on the

gura, una humra, i dunke fue djusto de adoptar esta humra del minag a-makom asigun la uzansa del nuevo lugar, todo komo lo fizites” (June 19, 2009).

55 The celebration takes place on the first night of the holiday in Israel, and on the first two nights outside Israel.

56 “No tenemos Mimuna entre los sefaradim de los Balkanes o Turkia. MAAA en Izmir ay el uzo de ‘la Hamera,’ ke es el pranso para empesar a komer hametz. Es solo un pranso (komida), i oy en dia, muchos se arekojen en un restoran para la hamera” (March 30, 2013). “Yehuda [Hatsvi] avia echo el paralelismo entre este uzo i el ‘kal hamira,’ la seremonia de kemar migas de hames antes de Pesah... Ma... ay diferencia en pronunsasion entre los dos biervos. En ‘kal hamira,’ el aksento esta en la kava a (hamirA), en ‘la hamera,’ el aksento esta ensima la e (hamEra)” (April 26, 2011).

night before a circumcision was called *shemirá* in Izmir and *viola* in Salonika.⁵⁷ Yehuda Hatsvi remarked that the Shabbat before Shavuot was humorously called “Shabat de dereh-eres” (Shabbat of good manners) in Salonika because, according to the midrash, “*derekh erets* (Heb. good manners/desired behavior) preceded the Torah.”⁵⁸ Bortnick noted that in Izmir it was customary to raise a glass of raki (arrack) to a bride and groom and say “May all say to him Mashallah [cf. Tk. *mašallah* ‘What wonders God has willed! No evil eye!’ < Ar. *maša’Allah*]; may they pass it well, Inshallah [cf. Tk. *iñšallah* ‘God willing!’ < Ar. *iñša’Allah*].”⁵⁹ She also mentioned that in Izmir—and apparently only there—the custom was to give three pinches of sugar to someone who suffered a serious fright that might have psychological or physical repercussions.⁶⁰

Barokas remembered that elderly Jews from Turkey used snuff in the synagogues on Shabbat, causing them to sneeze;⁶¹ “Rosina” countered that in the thirty-one years she had lived in Istanbul she never saw this custom—but she acknowledged that it might have been practiced in cities of the interior such as Izmir or Çanakale.⁶² Rather than letting divergences in language and custom become a source of divisiveness among Judezmo speakers, however, “Cobert

57 “La nochada antes del día de la Brit se yamava en Izmir ‘la Shemira.’ Es en ebreo ‘guadradijo.’ Guadraron la kreatura de los guerkos, de los ‘mijores de mozotros’ ke sus fuersas, antes ke el chiko entre al djudezmo, eran muy fuertes. En Salenik esta nochada se yamava ‘vijola’” (January 18, 2004). For a collection of Judezmo texts read on this night, see Elena Romero (comp.), *El libro del buen retajar: textos judeoespañoles de circuncisión* (Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1998).

58 “Muestros padres sefaradim, kon un típiko aire de umor, uzavan a yamar al Shabat ke ANTES de Shavuot ‘El Shabat de dereh-eres’ (porke el dereh erets presede a la Tora)” (May 14, 2013). Cf. Midrash Rabbah Leviticus 9:3.

59 “En Izmir era uzo de ogurar todo bueno al novyo i la novya, en alevantando el vazo de raki, kon el refran: ‘Todos ke le digan Mashallah, bueno ke pasen Inshallah.’ (‘Para pasar bueno’ era lo ke se ogurava a los nuevos kazados)” (March 6, 2013).

60 “...uzo de Izmir: Kuando uno pasava algun espanto (miedo) grande o supitanyo, le davan trez prezikas (pizcas, pinches) de asukar a la boka para kitarle el mal ke le puedia azer el espanto a su salud mental i fizikal” (February 11, 2012).

61 “Yo me akodro de kuando ero chiko, mi Sinyor padre me yevava Shabad al Kal i los aedados triakis kitavan unos kutikos chikos i tomavan presikas de ‘rape’ lo yamavan i las metiyan a la nariz/burnu i poko dispues sarnudavan mucho. A mi esto me venia muy komik i me parese ke era una onor de dar esto a otra persona. Algunos lo goliyan entre dos dedos i otros de ensima de la mano al estilo franko. Este uzo solo lo vide ke lo teniyan los muestros i se ke aparveniyan de la aristokrasiya espanyola i franseza. Solo lo vide en los muy aedados ke vinieron de la Turkia” (August 24, 2011).

62 “En los anyos ke yo bivi en Turkiya (31 anyos) yo no vide esto entre los ayedados de Istanbul, ni de mi famiya ni del entorno. Puedeser ke los de las sivdades mas aryento komo Izmir, Çanakale, etc....” (August 24, 2011).

Rohen” suggested that they should accept them with humor: “Each family has its own language.”⁶³

Establishing the Sources of Customs

Considering the central role played by distinctive customs in the self-definition of the “Ladino-speaking Sephardim,” it is not surprising that Ladinokomunita members occasionally stop to ponder the sources of those customs, both at the personal and group level. Barokas noted that he had learned to practice certain Passover customs directly from his parents and other relatives. However, he became acquainted with other customs from a book—a widespread phenomenon in Judaism, where literacy is so prevalent and collections of customs are widely distributed.⁶⁴ “Nissim E.” of New York noted that a particular custom he witnessed in the Turkish Sephardic synagogue of Mexico was included among those listed by Rabbi Nessim Behar (1913–1990) of Istanbul and Bat Yam in his *El gid para el pratikante* (Istanbul, 1967).⁶⁵ Conversely, once customs were documented in writing, they could be revived or adopted by Sephardim who had ceased to practice them or had never known them.

Intrigued by the possibility that present-day Sephardim might be maintaining habits once practiced by their medieval Iberian ancestors, members questioned whether a custom described in research publications as having characterized the Jews and crypto-Jews of Spain—that of sweeping one’s house from the entrance in, rather than from the inside toward the doorway⁶⁶—was known in

63 “Mejor es reyir de muestras diferensas. Ay una lengua por kada famiya. Tienes razon i tengo razon. Yo no [digo] ‘biervo’ ma ‘palavra,’ i tu bedahem no lo konosias, mizmo si viene del ivrit Bet Hahayim. La limpieza lingustika iberika sera de dezir ‘simitero.’ Kada uno deskoje en respekto de las tradisiones de SU famiya. Nunka dishe ‘paraluvia,’ porke mi famiya selanekliya dezia ‘chadir’” (May 28, 2012).

64 On printed collections of customs practiced in Jewish communities, see the articles by Feuchtwanger-Sarig, Baumgarten and Kanarfogel in the present volume.

65 “[En] el Gid [para el pratikante, Istanbul 1967]... los minagim ke eskribe aya, son asigun los jidios de la Turkiya... El Rabino [Nessim] Behar eskrivio en la parte sigunda, pajina 381: ‘1. El dia del meldado uzan los avelim de asender lampara o kandela en memoria del defondo. En ora ke asyende dize estos byervos: “Yo asyendo en memorya de mi sinyor(a) padre o madre, ke repoze su alma en gan-Eden.” Este uzo de asender lampara lo vide kuando yo era chiko en Meksiko en el Kal Yeuda Alevi de los Turkinos. Aviya un plato grande kon azete i venian los yehidim ke tenian meldado i asendian mechas en memoria de un familiar. Ama agora ke esto en Mueva York i la Keila es de Jidios siriyanos eyos no tienen este uzo” (February 17, 2013).

66 See, for example, David M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2002), 321.

the community today.⁶⁷ None of the correspondents was familiar with it. The often-iconoclastic Barokas dismissed the suggestion that the custom reflected the crypto-Jewish woman's respect for the *mezuzah* on the doorpost (since crypto-Jews could have no *mezuzah* there), and he suggested that the custom was a "superstition" perhaps borrowed from the Jews' medieval neighbors.⁶⁸

However, Barokas himself admitted "losing sleep" trying to determine if the "special signal" reportedly used by medieval crypto-Jews to identify one another in public places was still being used.⁶⁹ He thought it might be the salute, consisting of bringing one's hand to the forehead and moving it three times, that he saw used—by Sephardim only—in synagogues and elsewhere.⁷⁰ Isaac Azose explained that it was called a *temená*; and Bortnick suggested that, since the word derived from Turkish *temenna* (from Arabic *tamanna*), the custom was probably of Ottoman origin.⁷¹

67 For example, "Kero demandar si en las kazas sefaradis muestras (del viejo Imperio Otomano) tenemos el uso de barrir (o barrer, como dicen algunos) de la puerta para aliento, i de no barrir enverso la puerta. Yo no me akodro si tenemos este uzo o no. Demando porke siempre se mensiona esto como una de las tradiciones entre los kripto-djudios" (Rachel Amado Bortnick, August 14, 2011).

68 "Algunos interpretan ke este es un uzo sefaradi en pensando ke en la puerta estava la mezuzah ke era konsiderada por las mujeres como 'la Tora de kaza.' En realidad esto no es un uzo djudio sino una superstision de ke echar el polvo a la kaleja se va el mazal de la kaza. Puede ser ke algunos djudios kopiaron este uzo de los vizinos. Por otro lado si el uzo era por respeto a la mezuzah, devo demandar en ke kaza de kripto-djudios aviya mezuzah. Esto era un signo ke los identifikava inmediatamente ante los inkisidores" (August 14, 2011).

69 For the use in the street of a piece of white linen and a sword as a secret invitation to crypto-Jewish synagogue services, see Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 513.

70 "Estuve meldando en un livro de la Enkezision i por los 'kristianos nuevos' ke egzistia una sinyal ke se davan a konoser unos a otros los anusim. El esfuenyo se me fuyo de pensar kuala podia ser esta sinyal ke se davan a konoser unos a otros sin ke los kristianos se dieran de cuenta... En mi chizek rekordo ke los sefaradis tenian, o tienen, una manera singulara de saludo kuando se topavan i era ke alevantavan la mano fina la frente i la movian tres vezes, kon la palma de la mano en señalando a la frente; este era un uzo de ombres i mujeres, ma nunca vide ke otras personas izieran este modo de saludo kuando se topavan en las kayes, en vijitas o a la entrada del Kaal. Para mi esta era una signal solo de sefaradis por modo ke los ashkenazis no tenian este modo de saludo. Mi demanda es si este es un uzo entre los musulmanos de la Turkia o solo entre los sefaradis? Puede ser ke era esta una sinyal ke tiene dalguna signifikansya?" (February 25, 2011).

71 "El biervo 'temenna'... Izak Azose... me lo ekspliko... komo 'saludo oriental, en yevando la mano a la frente.' I Izak me eskrivyo: 'Yo me akodro ke, en anyos pasados (mas de sinkuenta), en la ke'ila, en dias ke se kitava el sefer torah, kuando yamavan alguno por 'aliyah' al sefer torah, kaji todos levantavan la mano komo 'temenna' i dezian 'behavod' (kon onor).' I yo le eskri vi ke i en Izmir se saludavan ansina los ombres mas aedados. No kreygo ke esto es 'sinyal djudio,'

Residing in the Ottoman Empire for centuries following the expulsion, it would have been natural for Sephardim to adopt customs practiced there by non-Jewish neighbors such as the *temenna*; and that possibility was discussed in several further messages. Bortnick observed that both Jews and Turks relished roasted and salted seeds after meals, when relaxing outdoors, and—among Jews—on Shabbat and holidays; but she pointed out that the Turks only ate pumpkin seeds, while the Jews also ate watermelon seeds, and in general, their eating of seeds exceeded that of the Turks.⁷²

With characteristic irony, Barokas poked fun at what he called the *kasherizar* (making kosher) of certain practices that he believed originated in Islam, such as the adoption as good luck amulets of the “Hand of Fatima” (Turk. *Fatma'nun eli*), judaized under the name *la mano de Miriam Anevia* (Hand of Miriam the Prophetess)—or among some other Judezmo speakers, *la mano de Moshe Rabenu* (Hand of Moses Our Master),⁷³ and the blue-eyed *nazarlik* (Turk. *nazarlık*) or *ojo mavi* (Appendix, Text 9), widely used to ward off evil. Barokas also noted the similarity in the gesture used by Jews and Muslims of drawing one's palms down one's face at the end of certain prayers, such as the kindling of Shabbat candles by Jewish women, and at the opening of the Torah ark in the synagogue, as at the end of the Muslim *namaz* (prayer).⁷⁴

porke el biervo, i el uzo, es turko. Por el biervo le demandi a Selim mi ermano si lo konosia. I me disho ke si, i ke mezmo avia la dicha: ‘No ago temenna a dingunos,’ en el sensio de ‘No kero kedar endevdado a dingunos.’ Kijo dizir ke esta manera de saludo es una manera de saludo para onorar” (February 26, 2011). The Ottoman *temenna* consisted of bowing and bringing the right hand to touch the heart, lips, then forehead (cf. Douglas S. Brookes, *The Concubine, the Princess, and the Teacher* [Austin: University of Texas, 2008], 300); the three touches are perhaps the source of the three hand motions in the Sephardic *temená* described by Elias Barokas.

72 “No es solo en Salonik ke komer pipitas era un pasatiempo djudio. En Izmir, sovre todo en Shabat, i tambien las nochadas de enverano kuando mos asentavamos en el balkon, kon las ventanas aviertas, o en los eskalones de la entrada a la kaza, no podiamos estar sin pipitikas. A vezes eran las pipitas de kalavasa, ma tambien muestras madres sekavan i tostavan pipitikas de karpuz, ke eran mas chikas, i dainda mas ‘de pasar la ora.’ Porke era mas muncha lavor romper la kashka kon los dientes, para komer la simiente chika ke avia alyentro (i entre mientes, era delisiozo tomar savor de la sal ke estava apegada a la kashka.) I los turkos tambien komian pepitas (çekirdek) ma solo de kalavasa, no de karpuz, i no tanto komo los djudios” (January 10, 2012).

73 Bunis, *Lexicon*, no. 2708.

74 “Despues de asender las kandelas las mujeres avriyan las manos kon las palmas para ariva i orasyonavan en demandando al Dio por la famiya i por todos (en ebreo esto se yama tefila Halev – orasyon del korason) i kuando eskapavan pasavan las dos manos por las karas, ma no se tapavan los ojos. Mi madre, ke tenga ganeden bueno, eskapava siempre la orasion kon ‘Shabad alegre a moz i a todo Israel.’ De la mesma manera aziyan al kal kuando se avre el ehal hakodesh las mujeres i los ombres aedados, en lo ke avriyan el aron estaban kon las manos aviertas i en lo ke se

For Bortnick, it was of no less interest to note a custom *not* traditionally celebrated by the Ottoman Sephardim or by their Turkish Muslim neighbors: birthdays. Bortnick first began to celebrate hers when she attended an American school in Izmir; before that, it was simply noted that she was born three days before Rosh haShana, and on that day her mother gave her an extra kiss. The only birthday celebrated in honor of Rachel's brother, Selim, was his thirteenth birthday—his *bar mitzva* or *kumplimiento de minyan*. Rather, as among their Muslim neighbors, the Jews commemorated the anniversaries of the demise of close relatives, observed yearly in the form of a *midrash* or *meldado* (sacred study session with prayers and refreshments) (Appendix, Text 10).

Site Participants as Interpreters of Customs

Not satisfied to document and reminisce about customs, members of Ladinokomunita—often female members—also conjecture about their significance. “Ester de Tel Aviv” suggested that the custom of carrying a bundle of *matza* on a pole over one's shoulder during the Passover *Seder* symbolized the forty-year sojourn of the Children of Israel in the desert after the exodus from Egypt.⁷⁵

Bortnick explained the components of the traditional ceremony performed at Jewish weddings in Izmir, during which a large, sweet bread ring (*kezada*) made by relatives and friends was broken over the heads of the bride and groom: its little birds symbolized the bride and groom united in a new nest; the eggs in the nest were the future children; the castle which her own *kezada* included had denoted peace and security; and the gifts of jewels and gold, displayed on the same tray as the *kezada*, symbolized hopes for wealth. The bride's mother or another female family elder broke the bread and said: “I divide this *kezada* so that *you* will remain well married, with children, wealth, and a husband, into old age.” The first piece was eaten by the bride, who then gave pieces

veyian los sefarim apuntavan kon las palmas a los sefarim i la pasavan por las karas (daiinda muchos lo azen). Lo mismo se pasava al guadrar el sefer ke se meldo. Es egsaktamente igual ke komo lo azen los musulmanos kuando eskapan el namaz” (February 13, 2013).

75 “En el mediyo del seder pesah... tomavan una tovaja blanka kon masa ariyento, la atavan komo un bogito, i kada uno de los partisipantes metiyan este bogito a sus pala, i lo deteniyan un poko. Este bogito pasava de una persona a la otra, fin ke lo yevavan todos a sus palas i espalda... Puede ser, ke alguno puede eksplikar las raises del uzo? Simbolikamente se puede entender, ke estamos akodrandomos del kamino de bney Israel en el dzierto 40 aniyos, ma esta es solo una spekulasion miya” (April 14, 2011). “Rosina” confirmed Ester's conjecture: ‘Es justo ... el bogo ke salimos de Mis-trayim ... Este bogito kon maza aryento era lo ke guadravamos para Afikomin. En mi chikes era komo un onor ke las kreyaturas deteniemos este bogito en la espalda’” (April 14, 2011).

to her as-yet unmarried friends for the same good luck. “Why break it over their heads?” asked Bortnick. “Because that’s the tradition. Why do some throw candied almonds at the heads of the newly-weds when they leave the synagogue? Why do some throw roses...? I think the *kezada* custom of Izmir is the most beautiful of all” (Appendix, Text 11).

Traditional Customs and Present-Day Ideological Agendas

In some instances, Ladinokomunita members focused attention on traditional customs and habits not only to document them or transmit them to the younger generation, but also to connect them to a pet social or philosophical agenda. For example, the issue of homosexuality, and the question of its acceptance within Judaism, was raised in site messages touching on customs: “Alex en Las Kalifornyas” noted that in California there were synagogues for Jewish gays, and that their wedding ceremonies were beautiful.⁷⁶

A brand of Sephardic feminism emerged in a message by Barokas, who noted how several recent autobiographical films in Judezmo paid homage to “the Jewish woman and [particularly]... the Sephardic Jewish woman, and the important role she plays in the continuity of our culture.”⁷⁷ One of the films, *Trees Cry for Rain*,⁷⁸ produced by forum manager Rachel Bortnick, recreated scenes from the life of this female “immigrant from Izmir, her memories of childhood in Turkey, the customs and traditions [of the Sephardim in Turkey].”⁷⁹ Another film by a woman, *A Look at the Sephardic World*,⁸⁰ by ninety-one-year-old Daisy Newell, described “the life of Sephardic immigrants who came to New York from Salonika” in 1916,⁸¹ and how “the Salonikan manners and customs were transferred to the New World.”⁸² The third film, Flory Jagoda’s *The Key from Spain*,⁸³ included reminiscences of the film-maker’s influential grandmoth-

76 “Si... i aki en Las Kalifornias ay sinagogas (kales? snogas??) para djudios ‘gay,’ los kazamyentos son muncho fermozos” (April 9, 2011).

77 “[A] la mujer djudia i... la mujer sefaradí i al importante rolo ke tiene en la kontenuidad de muestra kultura” (July 17, 2011).

78 “Arvoles yoran por luvias.”

79 “Una imigrante de Izmir, de sus rekordos de la chikez en Turkia, los uzos i kostumbres...”

80 “Ojadas al mundo sefaradí.”

81 “La vida de los emigrantes sefaradis ke vinieron de Selanik a Mueva York.”

82 “Komo se tresladaron uzos i maneras selaniklis al Muevo Mundo.”

83 “La yave de Espanya.”

er. It must be noted that, as the female-initiated Ladinokomunita site amply illustrates, the contribution of women Judezmo speakers to the contemporary “Judezmo renaissance” is not limited to film-making, but is evident in every one of its components. This is a striking development since the times of the Hebrew-letter Judezmo press, in which Sephardic women hardly played a role.

The Preservation of Customs as a Triumph over Nazism

For Prof. Haïm-Vidal Sephiha of France, a native Judezmo speaker who survived the Holocaust and is today one of the leading specialists in the field of Judezmo language and literature, the persistent efforts of the Ladinokomunita members to document and maintain Sephardic traditions are part of the Jewish triumph over the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jewish people and its civilization. In response to participants who posted birthday greetings to him on the server, Sephiha in turn expressed the desire “that we continue to reconquer what belongs to us: our language, our customs and traditions, in a word: our culture, which the Nazis could not choke, or murder, and which, after the Shoah, deserves to be rescued, as we are doing on Ladinokomunita, and in our Vidas Largas organization, since 1973.”⁸⁴

A Platform for the Dissemination of an Invented Custom

While most of the discourse on Ladinokomunita revolves around customs of the past and their maintenance during the present, “Rosina de Florida” related how she herself had initiated what she hoped would become a Sephardic custom to be adopted by future generations (Appendix, Text 12).⁸⁵ Upon the marriage of her

84 “Ke kontinuemos esta rekonkista de lo nuestro, muestra lingua, nuestros uzos i kostumbres, en una palabra, muestra kultura, ke los nazis no pudieron ni atabafar, ni matar, ama ke despues de la Shoa merese ser resgatada komo lo azemos en Ladinokomunita i en nuestros Ate-liers de VIDAS LARGAS dezde 1973” (January 22, 2011). Sephiha founded Vidas Largas as a social/cultural organization the principal goal of which is to preserve Judezmo language and culture. Their website is <http://vidaslargas.blogg.org/>

85 On the phenomenon, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

grandson, Rosina sent his new wife a piece of embroidery she had made, telling her it was a gift from her Sephardic grandmother from Turkey, and “Sephardic custom” required that the grandmother give her new granddaughter the first gift toward her “dowry” (after the fact). “How would she know there’s no such custom?” Rosina asked fellow Ladinokomunita members. “And if the girl passes the gift onto the next generation—such a custom really will start.”

Concluding Remarks

With the birth of the Internet and popular Jewish-language forums such as Ladinokomunita, academicians specializing in Jewish customs and everyday practitioners of those customs—or at least individuals who still remember those customs being practiced—finally meet as equals. The sites afford them the opportunity to document and discuss Jewish customs in the Jewish languages once spoken by all sectors of the communities in which those customs were once widely maintained. Scholars of Jewish custom and tradition would do well to monitor the exchanges taking place in these forums, for they are a dynamic and valuable source of data and insights into the popular traditions of the Jewish people—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Appendix

Text 1. Kualo mos akodramos de el Purim de muestra tchikes? (Eliz Gatenyo, Istanbul, March 7, 2009)

‘Purim Purim Lanu, / Pesah en la mano, / Ya vino enverano, / Para yir al kampo.’
Keridos amigos,

Estos versos son la primera koza ke me vienen al tino, kuando viene Purim, kada anyo. Rosina mos demando kualo mos akodramos de el Purim de muestra tchikes? Ampesi a pensar. Ize un viaje al pasado. Uuuuu, salyo tantos rekuerdos, tantas fotos i tantos filmes de el arshivo de el meoyo.

En mi tchikes, Purim era una alegríya. Seya para los tchikos o seya para los grandes. La primera koza ke mos dava haber ke ya esta viniendo purim, era los folares ke mi mama aparejava un viernes antes de Purim. Estos folares se komiyan al Shabat, a la torna de el kal, en el dezayuno. Mis paryentes lo yamavan “Shabat de Folares.” Estos folares eran unos sestikos de masa de borekas kon un guevo haminado aryentro. Para los ijikos se aziya sestikos i para las ijikas se aziya pantuflikas.

Despues de Shabat, mi mama se iva a Balikpapan. En Kalyoncukulluk se topava un helvaci, ke vendiya fila para baklava. Esta fila era muy espesyal. Muy muy fina i muy delikada. Este helvaci teniya las filas las mas renomadas de mi tiempo. Despues se merkava muezes kon kilos i kilos. Se merkava lokumes de almagita. En kaza, mi nono, ke biviya kon mozotros, teniya el dover de alimpyar las muezes ke no ayga kashkaras i pasarlas por la makina, para ayudar a mi mama.

Mi mama aziya kuantos modos de dulsuryas ke nunca me olvido la sabor. Baklavas de muez, Aman Tashen, Strudel de muez i lokum, masapan, orejas de Aman, biskotchikos. De todo esto se aziya unos kuantos tifsines. Aparte de esto se merkava mavlatchas de Madam Belifante. Despues se aparejava tchinis i tchinis para los vizinos i para las tiyas, parientes etc. En nuestro apartamento eramos 11 famiyas, las 10 judias i la 1 italyana. Diya de purim yo i mi ermanika yevavamos los tchinis ande los vizinos (sin arovar de aryentro...) i los vizinos mos davan los suyos. I en vezes aviya vizinos ke mos davan mavlatchas para mi i mi ermanika. Mi padre i mi madre yevavan ande las tiyas i a unas kuantas famiyas ke no tenian posibilidad de merkar o azer dulsuryas.

Teniyamos un portalero (kapici) ke ya konosiya todas muestras fiestas i todas muestras uzansas. La mujer de Rifat el kapici se yamava Zekiye. Zekiye tomava una tavla grande, metiya ensima un tapon brodado i metiya ensima bonbones, masapan, mavlatchas, baklavas etc. I demanianika de Purim, sonava las puertas de todos los vizinos. Mos augurava Purim alegre i mos ofriya bonbones, i mozotros le metiyamos un bahshish a la tavla.

Se organizava balos para las kriyaturas. Mi mama mos aparejava fostanes, seya de zinganas, seya de reynas o espaniolas. Estos fostanes se kuziyan en kaza, por ke akel tiempo no aviya vistimientas prontas komo agora. Yo me akodro ke me alegrava muncho ke mos ivamos a yir al balo, por ke teniyamos la permisyon de fardarnos. Mos metiyamos ruj a los mushos, i kalem a los ojos i pudra a la kara. Ahhh, ke alegriya ke era.

I agora me meto ruj a los mushos, i kalem a los ojos i pudra a la kara, ma no me alegre komo me alegrava akeyos diyas. Acaba de ke...?

Purim alegre.

Text 2. Salvaguardar muestras kostumbres (Eliyahu Matalon, Holon, April 16, 2012)

Karos amigos de Ladinokomunita,

Ya ay kaje 10 anyos ke meldo los mensajes de LK, i entre otros, apresio mucho los eskritos de Yehuda Hatsvi. En su mensaje de alkavo sobre "Un kavritiko," mos avlo Yehuda sobre la difikultad de prezervar, aki en Israel, muestra kultura se-

faradi, por kavzo de los kazamientos mikstos kon judyos venidos de varyas partes del mundo.

En noche de Pesah me se alegra el korason asentarme arreskovdado djuntos kon Seniora mi mujer, en la kavesera de la meza, rodeado kon toda mi famiya, asta mis bisnietos. Kuatro jeneraciones. Komo puedo difinir a mis bisnietos? Tienen un poko de kada trivo del pueblo. Una partida de sefaradi, otra de ashkenazi, i tambien otras partidas de aki i de ayi. En Israel (i en mi famiya tambien), azemos muchos esforsos para transmeter las kostumbres de muestros padres sefaradis a la nueva jenerasion. Syerto, ke Ladinokomunita tambien tiene una parte importante en estos esforsos.

Text 3. Las bodas (Nisim Koen, Sofia, February 15, 2012)

Shalom Sr Yehuda Hatsvi,

Kon grande plazer meldi tu artikolo por las bodas. No eskrevites por dos kozas. La primera es el banyo de noviya. En Sofia no teniamos mikve (agora ya ay, ma no ay ken ke vayga). El dia antes de la boda todas las serkanas de la novya i kon eya enjuntos ivan kon muncho “saltanat”(?) al banyo de la sivdat. Avia munchos kantes, bayles, komer i beber. Lo segundo es el kontado/dota: sin kontado no ay kedushim. Para las mas proves teniamos un rav, Daniel Zion, en gan eden ke este, ke enbiava las mujeres de Vizo ke arekojgan ashugar i kontado. Para enganyar, or por no arebashar, aprometiyen por egzemplo 200000 i davan 100000 i metian un espejo los otros sien ke los tome del espejo.

Anyos, anyos – bueno ke ya paso esto.

Text 4. Prekantes (Elias Barokas, Miami, September 3, 2012)

La tema de la mumya es muy interesante... Kuando una persona estava agotada, kansa, desrepozada, abatida, charpeada, entikiada, espantada, ets., era uzo de darle mumya tapada. La mumya era de dos maneras, una de gueso de momia o de gueso topado en el disierto o del pedasiko ke se kortava del berit mila (serkunsisyon) de una kriatura, ke aviya sido sekado. La famiya o los amigos del hazino/a entonses le davan esta kura enmesklada kon asukar o dulce sin ke la persona sepa lo ke le estan dando. Por esto se yama mumya tapada, ke kere dizir ke es en sekreto ke se lo davan. Ansina ke en esto, no esto de akordo kon lo ke eskrivio Moshe Shaul de ke aviya un efekto sikolojiko, por modo ke la persona no saviya kualo le estavan dando a komer. La mumya kaliya ser dada denprano en la manyana, preferablemente en lunes o djueves, ke son diyas ke

se melda el sefer Tora, o en la noche del diya de reshodesh (empesijo del mes), kuando la luna esta en kresiendo, nunca kuando esta menguando. Los hahames defendiyan de azer este modo de kurasyon por modo ke areyeva komer koza muerta de benadam.

Ay kuarto modos de prekantes: 1. Prekante de ayin ara (ojo malo). 2. Prekante de chefalo. Ke es prekante para hazinuras del meoyo. 3. Prekante de pelo. Para las mujeres ke se les sekava la leche de los pechos. 4. Prekante de kulevreta. Prekante para la sierpe o kulevra ke es una hazinura del kuero...

Uno de los prekantes diziya la aprekantadera: “Kon el nombre del Dio, Avraham, Yishak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aron, David i Shelomo, Yo meto la mano, komo la Sinyora de Myriam a-nevia (profetesa) Ke sanava i milizinava, i todo el mal eya kitava i a la fondina de la mar eya lo echava. Ansina yo kito todo el mal de fulana, ija de sitrana. Amen.

Text 5. Alzete de vida muncha (Elias Barokas, Miami, February 13, 2013)

I esto tambien lo vide: kuando echavan alzete de vida muncha al kal kuando era por un neder (promesa) ke aziyan, nunkua por un meldado. Kuando aviyan hazinos, o una ke eskapo de parir, o tuvo un nes (mirakolo) era uzo de ir a echar alzete a la lampa del kal i se miravan la refleksyon de la kara en este alzete. Esto lo vide azerlo de mi padre, de bendicha memoria en arba (erev) de Kipur en mi kaza. Despues de la komida, mi padre inchia un cheni (plato) enteramente blanco enriva de la mesa, i el enprimero se mirava, despues mi madre, despues me kargava a mi i me diziya ‘Mirate al asete’ i mas despues a mi ermanika (el Dio ke le mande la refua kumplida). En seguito mi padre diziya la beraha de la kandela de Kipur (ke teniya ke turar por todo el Kipur) i moz ivamos al Kol Nidre. Este uzo era bazado en la kreensya de ke akel ke no vido su reflexyon en este diya es siman negro ke no va bivir (has veshalom). Yo esto nunca lo ize mas, por modo ke kuando teniya 8 anyos, me akodro ke mi padre se miro tres veses i meneo la kavesa i akel anyo mos desho la buena vida kon 47 anyos. Mi madre no kontinuo tampoko este uzo.

Aviya tambien la kreyensya de ke el [ke] no veyia su solombre en sheminit haseret era siman negro.

Text 6. Asigun me ambezi de mi madre, i eya se ambezo de su madre (Eliz Gatenyo, Istanbul, September 15, 2012)

Si biviyá muestra kerida Rosina, mos iva demandar lo ke gizimos i mos iva kontar lo ke gizo eya... Vos va kontar lo ke apareji por Rosh Ashana i ansina la vamos a nombrar todos enjuntos. Mozotros mos aparejamos al uzo sefaradi de Estambul asigun me ambezi de mi madre, i eya se ambezo de su madre siguro. I ansina espero ke va kontinuar kon mis ijas i inyetos.

Kuando ya ampesan a vinir los miembros de la famiya, los adulsamos. Kere dizir ke ofremos dulce de bimbríyo o de mansana en una kase. La metemos en-medyo de una tavla (si posivle de plata). Metemos kucharikas i kupas yenas de agua al entorno. Kada uno toma una kuchara de dulce i en metyendola a la boka, dize una bendisyon, komo: “Anyada dulce,” “Sanos i rezyos,” “Novya ke la veyas a tu ija,” “Parida ke te veyá,” etc., etc.

Emprimero vos dizere ke en la meza ke aparejamos kon mantel blanko, no metemos salero. Metemos una kase de asukar. Azemos el amotsi en untando el pan a la asukar al lugar de la sal, para ke el anyo nuevo seya dulce.

Despues del kidush i el amotsi azemos las berahot Yehi ratson i ampesamos a komer. Kada koza ke komemos tiene una sinyifikasyon i un simbolizmo. Metemos: Datiles i dizimos: Sheyitemu oyveha... ke se eskapen nuestros enemigos... Dulce de mansana: Shana tova umetuka... ke tengamos anyada buena i dulce... Koftes de prasa o prasifuchi: Sheyikaretu oyveha... ke se agan migajas nuestros enemigos... Borek de pazi: Sheyistaleku oyveha... ke se alevanten de en medyo los enemigos... Filikas de kalavasa kolorada: Shetikra roa gezer dine-nu... ke el orden de muestra pena seya arazgado... Pishkado (deve de ser trayido a la meza kon la kavesa): Sheniye le rosh ve lo le zonav... ke seyamos siempre la kavesa i no la kola... Agranada: Sheyirbu zahiyotenu karimon... ke pujemos komo los granos de la granada...

I despues de esta seremoniya ermoza, trayemos las komidas prensipales a la meza a sigun keremos. Este anyo estamos ande mi ijika la chika. Mi kosuegra ke tiene manikas de oro aparejo el seder de Rosh Ashana este anyo. Gizo fasulya, bogos de berencena kon karne, i arroz. Yo ize tarama i dulce de kalavasa kolorada...

Text 7. Me vino muy ahuerte (Elias Barokas, Miami, February 17, 2013)

Aze unas semanas atras tuve de irme a dar las kondolansas a unos amigos sefaradis ke estaban asentados en siete (shiva). Me vino muy ahuerte ke lo empri-

mero ke emprezentaron hue dulserias. En mozotros no es uzo de dar dulces en avelu (dolio) ni en meldados (yortza, azkara, nahala, ets.). Kuando aviyan meldados en las kazas o en el kal se aparejava una meza kon burekas de patata i kezo, bulemas de espinaka, azetunas, guevos haminados, kezos, raki i karpus (sandia). Este uzo, ke los ashkenazim no tienen, no es por dizir el Kadish i la ashkava (orasyon por la alma del niftar), sino ke kada beraha (bendisyon) ke se dize en lo ke se va a gostar, es para la alma del ke se hue i asuva mas al ganedem. Si se da kave, kale ke seiga manko de asukuar. Por esto en otras okazyones ande se beve el kave, uzamos dizir “Kave de alegrias.” En la despedida del meldado kada uno saludava a la famiya en diziendo “El (o eya) ke tenga ganedem bueno i vozotros ke bivash anyos munchos i buenos para rekodrarlos.”

Las alegriyas (ke tengamos munchas i buenas sin mankura de ninguno), estan markadas por las dulserias, desde una simple vijita ke se uza a adulsar. Kuando nase una kriatura, el padre dava konfites a los otros ijos, para los berids (berit mila o birkamila), ansina komo en las fadas se davan dulce blanko de almendras i almendras konfitadas (konfitikos). A la salida del kal en un kumplimiyam (Bar mitsva), se davan bombonyeras kon konfites de almendras blankas konfitadas. En los despozorios no puediya mankar los dulces, komo en Izmir ke el novio kale ke yeve a kaza de la novia los mogados i almendras. En los despozorios (bodas), se dava sutlash echo de pipitada i arroz, afilu el gato de la boda es blanko.

Mi madre me konto ke kuando aviya una entrevista para emprezentar un djovenito a una manseva, viniyan a la kaza de la muchacha, si a la ija no le plaziya davan kave, ama si le plazyo i lo va a tomar por novio davan dulce, ke era signal de ke el “echiko” va a riushir.

Kada moed tiene sus dulserias, en Shevo (Shavuot) son de leche, en Hanuka son de kozas friyidas, i mas i mas. Esto eskribiendo esto por kavza ke en los sefaradis la diferensya entre alegrias i dolios esta en los dulces. Lukumikos para todos!

Text 8. Los sefaradis otomanos no tenemos este uzo (Elias Barokas, Miami, April 13, 2011)

El uzo de los djudios de la norte de Afrika de pasar el plato del seder o keara de Pesah ensima de las kavesas de kada uno ke estan en la fiesta es por modo de proteksion. Asigun siertos rabinos i mekubalim, la noche de Pesah es una nochada de proteksion para los bene Israel por modo ke eskaparon los behorim de la muerte sino tambien por modo ke ay una konstelasion en los sielos en favor de los ke salirian de la servidumbre de Ayifto. Por modo de esta proteksion es ke pasan el plato

por ensima de las kavesas. Los djudios ejipsianos tienen el uzo de uzar kalsados espesiales o sandalas la noche de Pesah i uzan un baston en demandando: “De ande vienes? / De Mitzrayim / I ande te vas / A Yerushalayim.”

Los sefaradis otomanos no tenemos este uzo. Los sefaradis teniyan la kostumbre de merkar kalsados nuevos para Pesah, en asignifikando ke estamos prestos a salir al dizierto. (En Rosh Hashana se merkavan chapeos nuevos). En Pesah el ijo bohor o el mas chiko era el ke tomava ensima del ombro el bogo de la matza durante la meldadura de la Hagada i si era el behor a el le apertensiya el guevo del plato del seder. Este era el uzo ke vide en mi kaza. Mi padre, ke en ganeden este, teniya el uzo de guarar un pedaso de la matza del afikomin ariento del livro de Pesah durante todo el anyo, despues meldi ke era un uzo de guarar esta maza i algunos guaravan tambien del haroset para endulkos i otras kuraciones ke aziyan al tiempo. Me akodro ke antes de Pesah era uzo de enkalar las kazas i de trokar las perdes (kortinas) i meter tapetes de moed enriva de las kamas. Una de las kostumbres de Pesah de los sefaradis, ke se pedrio, era el de trayer a kaza en el ochavo diya la “prasinagua,” ke eran yervas de ojas largas en sinyalando ke ya pasimos la mar kolorada (Yam Suf), la entrada del enverano i dezeyando ke la kaza este yena de parnasa i aslah komo las yervas de los kampos. Le yamavan prasinagua por modo ke eran largas i komo la forma de las ojas de prasa. Yo i mi ermanika eramos okupados de yenar la kaza de estas yervas. Dalguno se akodra de este uzo? En muchas kazas sefaradis no era uzo de komer kodrero las dos noches de Pesah por modo ke es ovligasion de kemar lo ke kedo (el kusur) despues de pasar la media noche. En mi kaza mi padre kemava el korban ke se metia en el plato del seder. Los sefaradim de Turkiya no uzamos de komer arroz en Pesah por modo ke pudo kayer hames ariento, ama mi tiyo me konto ke en la gerra el haham bashi permitio de komer arroz en seguida de gizarlo, kon la kondision de ke el kusur fuera kitado de la kaza presto. En mi chikez los djudios no lavoravan la semana entera de Pesah i aviya una dicha de: “Ken no se kome el kapital en Pesah, no sale de hova.”

Pesah alegre a todos.

Text 9. Kasherizar uzos ke no son djudios (Elias Barokas, Miami, February 25, 2011)

Me sonreyi kuando lo meldi, por modo de ke los rabinos tiene este uzo de bushkar djustifikaciones a las superstisiones... Ansina komo era el uzo de aser la “viola,” meter livro de la Ley o de tefilim debasho del kavesal de la kriyatura (algunos mohalim uzavan de meter i el kuchiyo) por defender de Lilit, “Agrat bar

mahalat, Nahama, Agrat, Mahalat Shibeta, i de mazikim, malahei habaala, ruhim tumea,” shedim i toda la demonolojia ke tomimos de Babel i ke estan en el Talmud i en los midrashim; u de meter una kamea kon los nombres de los angelos Senoi, Sensenoi i Samagelof. Este uzo es atado a la kreensya de Lilit, ke fue la primera mujer de Adam harishon i djuro de tomar a las kriaturas kuando nasiyan en venganza ke Adam kijo dominarla i eya se fuyo...

Esto de kasherizar uzos ke no son djudios kuando ya entraron en el folklore i en la alma del pueblo tiene su ejemplo en el uzo de la “Hamsa” (mano), ke viene del Islam ande es la “mano de Fatima,” la isha de Muhamed. Komo los rabinos vieron ke esto no lo podiyan kitar de la alma del pueblo la yamaron “mano de Miriam Hanevia,” mehoram! I en despues asignalaron ke komo son 5 dedos (hamesh) es la letra hei, ke es una del shem hamevorah. Ya se izo kasher!!!! Agora todos a dizir Hamesh i alevantar la mano! Aide todos a enkolgar hamsas en las puertas, en los otomobiles, en los garones i en los echos. Paras para los merkaderees. Ansina las butikas de objetos djudios tienen echos i moneda. Igualmente la moda del nazarlik de los turkos entro kon este ojo mavi en el folklor de los sefaradis i ya saves ke no ay novia ke no se meta un ojiko en debasho del fostan de boda. Barminam!

Text 10. ‘Birthdays’ (Rachel Amado Bortnick, Dallas, January 16, 2011)

Muestra amiga... Raquel... mos eskrivyo un mensaje... demandando si famiyas sefaradis selebravan “birthdays” (kumpleanyos) porke en su famiya no se selebrava... En kurto la repuesta es NO, no se selebrava. Ni ke teniamos el biervo “kumpleanyo”! Diziamos aniversario, ke es un termino jeneral, ma por fiestar—NADA! Es kuando mos izimos mas “modernos” ke empesimos kon esto...

Yo lo fiesti primera ves a la edad de 14–15 anyos en Izmir porke en la eskola amerikana ande estudiava se avia echo moda de tener un “birthday party.” Asta akel anyo, solo me dizian ke yo nasi tres dias antes de Rosh[sha]na, i mi mama me dava un bezo demazia akel dia.

Ni una ves no fiestimos el aniversario ni de mi mama, ni de mi papa, ni de dinguños (mezmo Selim mi ermano no me akodro ke tuvo alguna selebrasion de kumpleanyo aparte de su bar mizva, o “kumplimiento de minyan” asigun diziamos). A la kontra, el uzo era solo de komemorar el anyo de la muerte, kon el “midrash” (meldado) en kaza, ke era kon muncha djente i komida. I lo kuriozo es ke i los musulmanos tienen el mizmo uzo. I ande eyos tienen el “mevlut” para el anyo del muerto, mientras ke el fiestar dia de nasimiento (doğum günü) es

koza mueva, de 50 anyos para aki. Siguro la jenerasion mueva Sefaradi, ande es ke seyga, agora estan fiestando “kumpleanyos,” o “birthdays.”

Text 11. La kezada (Rachel Amado Bortnick, Dallas, February 18, 2013)

Este uzo partikolar a Izmir [de romper una kezada ensima la kavesa de los novyos] es una ekspresion de amor ke da forma a una skulptura dulce (de masapan) echa kon el talento i la kerensya i alegria de algunos de la famiya i amigos, i la seremonia es okazion para ke todos los prezentes les oguren todo lo bueno a los nuevos kazados... Los pasharikos (palombikas) simbolizan el novyo i la novya ke se estan aunando en un nuevo nido, los guevos en el nido es el avenir kon kriyaturas i alegria. La kezada mia tenia tambien un kastilyo, ke kreygo simbolizava repozo i seguridad. I, komo ya dishe, las djoyas i el oro ke me avian regalado estavan en la mizma tavla, para simbolizar rikeza.

En partiendo la kezada ensima la kavesa de los novyos, la madre (o ken sera, una grande de la famiya) dize: “Yo te parto esta kezada, para ke turez bien kazada, kon ijos, kon bienes, i marido fin a la vejez.” El primer pedaso toma la novya, i eya da pedasos a las amigas ke son dainda sin kazar para ke tengan mazal alto kon la mizma alegria. Deke se rompe por enriva la kavesa? Porke ansi es la tradision. Deke se echa konfites a la kavesa de los novyos al salir de la keila? Deke los otros echan arozes en las kavesas de los novyos...? Me parese ke la tradision de la kezada de Izmir es mucho mas ermoza de todos.

Text 12. Un uzo o tradisyon ke lo enjenyi yo (Rosina de Florida, July 8, 2011)

Oy kero partajar kon vozotros un uzo o tradisyon ke lo enjenyi yo. No savemos komo tradisyon i uzos ampesan... ma meldando lo miyo pudeser ke se azera una tradisyon...

Mi inyeto el grande Aaron, ke estudya i bive en Washington..., bive enjuntos kon una amiga de la universitad ke se konosyeron el primer anyo de klasa 5 anyos antes. Dos mezes antes se fueron a viyajar a Paris i ayi mi inyeto le propozo de kazarsen. Por seguro ke no es espozoryo... komo lo saviyamos en nuestros paises anyos antes... No es komo se envitava a los kosuegros para dar hatima de boda... No es komo el novyo veniya ande la novya kon el plato de kristal kon bombones aryento (yo lo tengo dayinda de 56 anyos antes)... No es komo antes ke se avlava ke kadar de ashugar va trayer la novya etc...

La novya de mi inyeto Aaron se yama Emma. Konosimos a la famiya de Emma kuando el anyo pasado los 2 se gratuaron en Washington i en la kaza de un paryente de Emma tuvimos una reunion onde mos konosimos los genitores i las nonas i tiyas. Los genitores de Emma tiyenen una meskla de religiones i dengunos no pratikan. La madre una parte judiya, el padre desediente de avuelos/nonos judios. Ansi ke ni son kristiyanos ni judios. Enfin esto no es mas importante en el dor de agora...

Komo savesh yo no puedo estar sin tener un lavoro de mano. Siempre tengo en kada kamareta un lavoro ke me aspera, seya de trikotar o brodar... i yay unos kuantos anyos ke brodi manteles i los guadri. Yo no uzo mas mis manteles de l'ashugar miyo ke son muy grandes (esto se uzava akel tiyempo) ke eran para 24+ personas. Los ke brodi i brodo son mas chikos para 4 o 6 personas.

Kuando oyi ke Aaron i Emma se espozaron pensi ke es la okazyon de mandarlos 2 manteles. En el paketo meti una letra para Emma i le dishe "Komo es uzo de los sefaradim el primer pedaso para l'ashugar es dado de las nonas..."

Este uzo i tradisyon lo enjenyi yo... De onde lo va saver ke no egziste? Pueder ke si estos manteles kedaran en buena kondisyon lo piedra pasar a sus ijas/ijos dizyendo "Esto fue regalo de la nona sefaradi venida de Turkiya ke es tradisyon sefaradi de dar el primer regalo para l'ashugar." I Emma me remersio i lo apresio. Ke pensaj por el uzo i tradisyon mueva?

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