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“The Jews of Yesteryear:”

Ethnography and the Politics of Representation in the Late Ottoman World

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Rachel Smith

2023

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“The Jews of Yesteryear:”

Ethnography and the Politics of Representation in the Late Ottoman World

by

Rachel Smith

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Sarah Stein, Chair

Scholars have long considered how Ottoman Jews have been racialized as ethnographic subjects, but they have barely begun to examine their subjectivities and works as ethnographers themselves. Nor have they incorporated Jews’ contributions to the Ottoman project of ethnography within Ottoman and Middle East Studies. This research explores how Ottoman Sephardic travelers and teachers, rabbis and writers produced, circulated, and marshaled ethnographic and racial knowledge in service of different visions of reform. By reading ethnographic texts, it uncovers how Ottoman Sephardic Jews—who themselves could be doubly racialized as both Jews and as those deemed “Orientals”—adopted and adapted racializing discourses and how they represented themselves and Others. Drawing on Ladino, Hebrew, French, and Ottoman Turkish texts—including travelogues and memoirs, rabbinic responsa and photography, literature and the popular press—it attends to the racialized, gendered, and classed politics of cultural representation that emerge in Ottoman Sephardic ethnography.

This study begins by reading anthropological notions of race and evolution that appeared in the Ottoman Sephardic press to understand what race meant to Ottoman

Sephardic Jews (chapter 1). Sephardic writers translated these ideas about race, civilization, and progress into practices of racialization, enacted within the Ottoman provinces in relation to other imperial subjects, including other Jews (chapter 2). Travel accounts from Ottoman Palestine reveal how Sephardic travelers circulated newly imagined geographies of race in response to global capitalism. Yet Sephardic reformers also applied ethnographic and racial ideas within their own communities in the urban centers of the empire, which surfaces in autoethnographic works on superstition (chapter 3). Such racializing logics and discourses spread in part through the Franco-Jewish *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, which I reframe through the analytic of race (chapter 4). Finally, this study traces the afterlives of Ottoman Sephardic ethnography as it carried into the twentieth century and the global Sephardic diaspora after the collapse of the Ottoman empire (conclusion). This demonstrates how racial discourses were not just social constructs, but created political realities with material consequences for peoples' lives long after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

The dissertation of Rachel Smith is approved.

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2023

*To my parents,
for teaching me how to ask*

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The financial support I received during my doctoral studies made it possible for me to travel to archives, present at conferences, and focus on writing. Thank you to the UCLA Department of History, the UCLA Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies, the American Academy for Jewish Research, the Institute for Turkish Studies, the Mellon Foundation, the Institute for Citizens and Scholars, and the Wexner Foundation. I would not have received this funding—or many other forms of support—without the administrative talents of UCLA staff, including Ann Major, Kate Acquino, and Tessa Villaseñor in the History office and Viv Hollenbeck, Reina Chung, Chelsea White, and David Wu at the Leve Center.

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Vita

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Introduction

“The set of these fanciful ideas and bizarre practices of yesteryear, which are disappearing more and more in the Orient, represent, we have said, the debris of the materials carried by the current of history.”¹

On September 9, 1897, Abraham Danon, a prominent Sephardic scholar and rabbi from Edirne, took the stage at the International Congress of Orientalists in Paris to present his research on the superstitions of Ottoman Jews. According to the Ladino newspaper *El tyempo*, there Danon joined approximately 350 Egyptologists, Semiticists, philologists, historians, geographers, folklorists, and explorers.² In his lecture, Danon outlined a wide range of Ottoman Jewish beliefs and practices that he labeled superstitious, from the belief in demons living in bathtubs and ovens to eating eggs in order to bring peace to squabbling spouses or to facilitate difficult childbirths. In recounting for his audience these “fanciful ideas and bizarre practices,” Danon drew on exoticizing language typical of Orientalist discourse to describe the practices not of an unfamiliar Other, but of his own Ottoman Jewish community. In doing so, he staked out a position as both an insider and someone outside looking in on the world in which he lived, who saw Ottoman Jewish life as somehow both familiar yet bizarre.

Danon accounted for these “fanciful ideas and bizarre practices” by recourse to the past, locating this “debris of materials carried by the current of history” in an earlier age of “yesteryear.” This temporal discourse reflects a nineteenth-century evolutionary view of the world in which, over time, societies followed the same linear trajectory as they moved from savagery to barbarism to civilization. This racialized schema, advanced by European scholars and imperial officials, placed a white Europe at the pinnacle of civilization, with all others

¹ Abraham Danon, “Les Superstitions Des Juifs Ottomans,” in *Actes Du Onzième Congrès International Des Orientalistes*, ed. E. Leroux (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1897), 262. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

² *El Tyempo*, 10/4/1897, 22.

occupying earlier stages of development that it had already passed through. As Danon evinced in his lecture, this teleology led from yesteryear to modernity, from primitive “tribes” to civilized “nations.”³ For Danon, these “fanciful ideas and bizarre practices” represented an earlier and less civilized stage of development of Ottoman Jews that had streamed down through the current of history. This “debris,” stood as the unwanted remains of an earlier time that may be intellectually intriguing and provide insights into the Ottoman Jewish past, but was fundamentally unfit for the modern era.

It was Ottoman Jews’ foray into the modern age that led to the increasing disappearance of such practices, Danon argued, and which compelled him to collect these “relics of the civilization of our ancestors” from the “mouths of our grandparents. It was already time to do it, at the risk of seeing these fossils disappear little by little...”⁴ Perceiving the Ottoman Jewish world on the brink of irreversible change, Danon embarked on a mission of salvage ethnography working to document a culture threatened with extinction. His indefatigable work to document Ottoman Jewry through collections of ballads, proverbs, and superstitions reveals an anxiety around loss as he witnessed the vanishing of what he deemed to be relics and fossils from another age.

Danon was one of a considerable number of Sephardic Jews who joined Ottoman Muslim and Christian intellectuals and writers participating in the ethnographic moment that unfolded in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth. Throughout his life, he worked alongside other Sephardic Jews who drew on cultural and racial discourses in writing ethnographically in Ladino, French, and Hebrew about other Jewish

³ As George W. Stocking Jr. writes, “Civilized men, the highest product of social evolution, were large-brained white men, and only large-brained white men, the highest products of organic evolution, were civilized. The assumption of white superiority was certainly not original with Victorian evolutionists; yet the interrelation of the theories of cultural and organic evolution, with their implicit hierarchy of race, gave it a new rationale” (George W. Jr. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 122); See also Pierre, “Anthropology and the Race of/for Africa.”

⁴ Danon, “Les Superstitions Des Juifs Ottomans,” 1897, 259.

communities across the empire, and at times autoethnographically about their own.⁵ Though scholarship has long considered how Sephardic Jews have been racialized as ethnographic objects of the European and Ashkenazi gaze, it has barely begun to examine their work and subjectivities as ethnographers themselves.⁶ Nor has it incorporated Jews' contributions to the Ottoman project of ethnography within Ottoman and Middle East Studies. Ethnography appears here as narratives of cultural and racial difference that circulate knowledge of an essentialized Other; that is, it is a form of knowledge production. In attending to the history, politics, and ethics of Ottoman Sephardic ethnography, this study explores how teachers and travelers, rabbis and writers produced, circulated, and marshalled ethnographic and racial knowledge in service of different visions of reform. By reading ethnographic texts, it uncovers how Ottoman Sephardic Jews—who themselves could be doubly racialized both as Jews and as those deemed “Orientals”—contended with their consignment to yesteryear by adopting and adapting racializing discourses, situating and representing themselves, and classifying and hierarchizing others.

The Ethnographic Moment

⁵ The genre of “autoethnography” was first formulated to describe narratives penned by subjects of the colonial gaze who represented themselves in ways that reflected the terms of the colonizer. According to Mary Louise Pratt, ethnographic texts were a means by which Europeans represented to themselves their (usually subjugated) others; autoethnographic texts, then, were those that the others constructed in response to, or in dialogue with, those representations (*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2008, 9). Since then, it has expanded to include ethnographic works in which an author researches, analyzes, and interprets their own lived experiences. My use of the term here includes elements of both definitions in looking at how Ottoman Sephardic Jews applied and adapted the conceptual and linguistic vocabulary of ethnology and anthropology to write about their own communities.

⁶ Examples of primary sources include Ludwig August Frankl, *The Jews in the East*, trans. Patrick Beaton (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975); I. J. (Israel Joseph) Benjamin, *Eight years in Asia and Africa from 1846-1855*, trans. Berthold Seemann (Hannover Germany, 1859). For secondary sources, see Ivan Marcus, “Beyond the Sephardic Mystique,” *Orim: A Jewish Journal at Yale* 1, no. 1 (1985): 35–53; Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek Jonathan Penslar, *Orientalism and the Jews* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2005); Ismar Schorsch, “The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” in *Sephardism: Spanish Jewish History and the Modern Literary Imagination*, ed. Yael Halevi-Wise (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); John Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

Ottoman Sephardic writers produced ethnographic texts against the backdrop of expanding empires, shifting notions of race, the rise of anthropology, and Ottoman political reforms that unfolded at both the state and communal levels. During the nineteenth century, racial ideas about savagery and civilization that had circulated for centuries began to acquire a new scientific veneer through the emerging discipline of anthropology. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot succinctly stated, “Anthropology did not create the Savage. Rather, the Savage was the *raison d’être* of anthropology.”⁷ European colonial powers deployed racial ideas, bolstered by the language of science, to justify imperialism as they jockeyed for power on the world stage. These ideas underwrote the sociopolitical framework that structured Europe’s relations with the colonized world, as well as with the Ottoman Empire. As western Europe grew more dominant, it saw the empire as backwards and uncivilized, and increasingly intervened in its affairs. With a growing sense that the empire was falling behind other world powers, in the mid-nineteenth century, Sultan Abdülmecid I (r. 1839-1861) enacted the Tanzimat reforms, a sweeping and ambitious program that sought—often unsuccessfully—to fully restructure the Ottoman political system and the economy, education and social welfare.

In efforts to stave off foreign encroachment and territorial losses, the empire also sought to tighten state control throughout its vast imperial provinces.⁸ They did so in part by borrowing from European colonial logics, discourses, and structures. Scholars have demonstrated how Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals transposed Orientalism within their own imperial domain by equating Europe and Istanbul with progress and the present, while associating the imperial provinces with backwardness, savagery, and the past—what scholars

⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 28.

⁸ During the nineteenth century, the Ottoman state lost Bessarabia and parts of the Caucasus region to Russia in 1812, most of its territories in Greece in 1830, and fought against Russia in the Crimean War from 1853-1856. It ceded Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro as well as Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria in the 1878 Congress of Berlin, and relinquished Egypt to British occupation in 1882. Further territorial losses continued into the twentieth century.

have dubbed “Ottoman Orientalism.”⁹ Ottoman bureaucrats translated these racial ideas into state policy as the Tanzimat reforms expanded under the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909). Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, they carried out their own civilizing mission, working to bring the provinces closer to the imperial gaze; to incorporate them into the empire through reformed administration, schools, and connective technologies such as railroads and telegraph lines; and to settle nomadic groups. In this way, they deployed racial ideas of savagery and civilization as official state discourse to bolster state policy.¹⁰

During this Tanzimat era, the Ottoman state also reorganized the different religious communities in ways that empowered lay leadership at the expense of the clergy, partly in efforts to disenfranchise Christian nationalist movements in the Balkans.¹¹ As a result of this communal restructuring, a coterie of Sephardic lay leaders arose who sought to lead Jewish communities.¹² Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein trace the rise of this new

⁹ Christoph Herzog and Motika, “Orientalism Alla Turca”; Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 768–796; Selim Deringil, “They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (April 2003): 311–342; Palabıyık, “Ottoman Travelers’ Perceptions of Africa in the Late Ottoman Empire (1860-1922)”; Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing About the Orient: A Critical Discourse from the East (1872-1932)*.

¹⁰ Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees*, Studies in Modernity and National Identity (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

¹¹ In response to Christian separatist movements, reforms in the 1840s and 1850s that sought to undermine religious leaders also placed restrictions on rabbinic authority. In 1865, following the Greeks in 1862 and Armenians in 1863, the Jewish community adopted the *Hahamhane Nizamnamesi*, statutes that regulated rabbinical and lay responsibilities and implemented the principle of representative government through elections and communal councils. Subsequent decrees increasingly divested the rabbinic authorities of power until it largely only oversaw personal status matters. As scholars have noted, this shift in communal power is also seen in the decreasing power of *herem*, or rabbinic excommunication. The reform of the rabbinic establishment occurred through the pursuit of a new type of “enlightened” rabbi, one trained in Europe who could interface with the state and would help to further progressive policies. This reconfiguration of social hierarchies within religious communities was deemed a precondition for and measure of progress. See Dina Danon, *Jews of Ottoman Izmir: A Modern History*. (Stanford University Press, 2020), 166; Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi, “The Memoir of Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi,” in *A Jewish Voice from Ottoman Salonica: The Ladino Memoir of Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi*, ed. Aron Rodrigue and Sarah Stein, trans. Isaac Jerusalmi (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012); Devin Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 89-137.

¹² Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue estimate that approximately 250,000 Jews lived in the empire around the turn of the century, but this did not include Jews of foreign nationality (*Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 70). A 1908 report estimated much higher numbers, putting the Ottoman Jewish population at 439,000 (cited in Esther Benbassa, “Le Sionisme dans l’Empire Ottoman à l’aube du 20e siècle,” *Vingtième Siècle* 24 (October–December 1989): 70).

intellectual milieu beginning in the nineteenth century. They identify a generation that was born c. 1820-1850, often raised as observant Jews steeped in traditional rabbinic learning, with some supplementing it with a more European-style education or with independent study as autodidacts.¹³ A second generation, born c. 1850-1870, increasingly studied at the schools of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU), a Franco-Jewish organization established in 1860 that sought to “regenerate” Jewish communities worldwide through political advocacy and French-style schooling. Many Ottoman Sephardic writers lived within the orbit of the AIU, working as teachers or administrators, helping to establish AIU schools, serving on school committees, or having their work supported by the AIU. While many earned their livelihoods through European-style schools, *Alliance* or otherwise, a significant number worked as newspaper editors and publishers, and nearly all published their work in the press.¹⁴ These intellectuals formed a network; they studied with and under one another, and they read, critiqued, and wrote in response to each other. Some used their publications to lambast the traditional rabbinic establishment, at times resulting in their excommunication. Others, like Abraham Danon, pursued careers as “enlightened” rabbis at new, progressive rabbinical seminaries. A number also worked for governments as translators in royal courts and embassies, or as school inspectors.

¹³ Figures from this first generation who appear in my research include Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi (b. Salonica, 1820-1903), Judah Nehama (b. Salonica, 1826-1899), and Abraham ben Israel Rosanes (b. Ruschak, 1838-1879). Figures from this second generation include David Fresco (b. Istanbul, 1853-1933), Abraham Danon (b. Edirne, 1857-1925), Alexander Benghiat (b. Izmir, 1863-1924), Moise Franco (b. Istanbul, 1864-1910), and Elia Karmona (b. Istanbul, 1869-1935). After completing a traditional elementary education, Rosanes studied secular subjects at non-Jewish and Jewish secondary schools. Danon was well-known as an autodidact who supplemented his education at the Gheron yeshiva by teaching himself French, German, Greek, Latin, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and Ethiopic. See Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, “Sephardic Scholarly Worlds: Toward a Novel Geography of Modern Jewish History,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 100, no. 3 (2010): 353-356.

¹⁴ Danon and Rosanes worked at modern, non-AIU Jewish schools. A-Levi started *La epoka* (1875) and *Le Journal Salonique* (1895); David Fresco served as editor of *El nasional* (1873), co-editor of *El telegrafo* (1878), and published the periodicals *El sol* (1879), *El amigo de la familia* (1886), and *El Instruktor* (1888); Benghiat started *El maseret* (1897); Elia Karmona worked at *El tyempo* (1903-1908) and started *El jugeton* (1908-1931); Judah Nehama edited *El lunar*; and Yoná edited *La epoka*.

This group of reformers also held a range of ideological positions. Some identified as *maskilim*, Jewish enlightenment thinkers, and sought to harmonize religious and secular knowledge. They maintained correspondence with other *maskilim* in Europe, translated maskilic works, and started maskilic journals and literary societies.¹⁵ In 1879, Danon established *Dorshe Haskalah* (Seekers of Enlightenment), also known as *Hevrat Shomerei Tushiyyah* (Society of the Friends of Wisdom), and in 1888 founded *Yosef-Da'at*, also known as *El Progreso*, to collect and publish documents related to the history of Jews in the Ottoman Empire. Others embraced Hebraism and were active Zionists.¹⁶ An even smaller minority were active in Ottoman Turkish circles, joined in Ottoman and Turkish politics, and called for Jews to learn Turkish and integrate into Turkish society.

Although they wrote from different political commitments, these figures shared certain commonalities. Hailing primarily from the Ottoman Jewish centers of Salonica, Edirne, Istanbul, and Izmir, these writers were often highly mobile, moving multiple times throughout their lives to attend or work in schools, to avoid state censors, or as a result of war. Almost all had an impressive command of a numerous languages and worked without institutional training or affiliation. They established schools and newspapers that advanced European languages and ideas, and shared a commitment to the production and dissemination of secular knowledge in their communities. It was this new elite who increasingly had Europe as its cultural, economic, and religious point of reference, who challenged the authority of the erstwhile rabbinic establishment, and who were on the forefront of reform within the Ottoman Sephardic world.

Parallel to these more structural changes were demographic shifts across the empire.

¹⁵ Sarah Abrevaya Stein and Julia Phillips Cohen, eds., *Sephardi Lives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 390.

¹⁶ Menahim Farhi, for example, was a dedicated Hebraist who translated Abraham Rosanes's travelogue—analyzed in chapter two—from Ladino into Hebrew to be printed in the maskilic journal, *Ha-Magid*.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a time of intense regional migration and urbanization as people moved from small towns to cities, facilitated by the newly built railroads that spanned across the empire and beyond. Out-migration also rose steeply at this time—as it did from the Mediterranean basin in general—peaking at the turn of the century as steamship travel became more available and more affordable. While the majority of émigrés were men, girls and women in the empire saw new opportunities with the beginning of formal education for girls. Women soon became teachers in these schools and entered the workforce in increasing numbers. Greater schooling for women, but also in general, meant greater literacy rates and the 1850s marked a boom in literary production in the empire with the rise of a reading public large enough to sustain it.¹⁷ Everyone, but especially women, were reading more and these decades saw a sharp increase in the publication of books and pamphlets, journals and particularly newspapers, which were seen as a tool of mass education. The rise of a new information economy in the empire facilitated the spread of new ideas, including those about race and ethnography, civilization and progress that were at the forefront of Ottoman political and intellectual discourse.

Although this new coterie of Jewish lay leaders had different visions of reform, they agreed that their communities required transformation to be fit for the modern era. They—like many other Ottomans—felt that as Ottomans they were lagging behind Europe—but within the empire itself, they also felt that they had fallen behind the other religious communities, particularly the Armenians and Greek Orthodox. While their relationship with the Ottoman government had once thrived, they bemoaned its decline into a state of benign neglect by the nineteenth century. They felt the need to heighten their status, both in the empire and vis-à-vis Ashkenazi Jews and Europeans in general as those deemed “Orientals.”

¹⁷ Johann Strauss, “Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th Centuries)?,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 6, no. 1 (2003): 39–76.

It was this preoccupation with civilization, progress, and being modern that drove the ethnographic impulse among this new wave of Ottoman Sephardic reformers.

In some ways, their efforts to reform their communities echoed the *mission civilisatrice* that the French state carried not only in its expanding empire, but also domestically as it worked to remake the diverse regional populations into a modern nation through new cultural, social, economic, and linguistic prescriptions.¹⁸ During the mid-nineteenth century, most Ottoman Jews were poor, lived in crowded neighborhoods primarily in urban centers, and attended religious schools. Unable to speak Ottoman Turkish, few could attend imperial schools or secure government positions. Ottoman Sephardic reformist writings often reflected a fundamental premise that their communities were somehow broken and in need of “regeneration.” These new Sephardic leaders sought to bring them out of poverty, to raise them up to the status attained by the other religious communities of the empire, and to make them civilized and therefore decidedly modern. They also tended to uphold a second premise, that the way to improve Ottoman Sephardic Jews was by teaching them to meet white European, and particularly French, cultural standards.

In an 1879 article published in the Ladino periodical *La epoka*, “The Physical and Intellectual Differences Between Orientals and Occidentals,” one writer bemoaned that the “races of the Orient” live “in the same state in which the Occident was many years ago.”¹⁹ He admonished readers:

If Orientals knew how to achieve greater activity, energy, and perseverance in their acts, if they knew the value of industrial work, of instruction, if they thought more of the future, if they were not indifferent, less superstitious, and if they knew how to commit themselves with resoluteness among themselves in all things like the European nations, they could, without a doubt, surpass Westerners in their level of civilization and in all kinds of knowledge.²⁰

¹⁸ For reforms in the Ottoman Sephardic world, see Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004); Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Danon, *Jews of Ottoman Izmir*.

¹⁹ “The Physical and Intellectual Differences Between Orientals and Occidentals,” *La epoka*, 8/4/1879, 2.

²⁰ “The Physical and Intellectual Differences Between Orientals and Occidentals,” *La epoka*, 8/4/1879, 3.

Views such as this distinguished between active and productive, educated and civilized, rational and resolute modern citizens from those deemed passive and unproductive, uncivilized and premodern, who jeopardized the well-being of Ottoman Sephardic Jewry. Such boundaries were newly emergent, tenuous, and needed to be constantly reasserted, in part to justify and bolster the authority of a new lay elite.

This civilizing project was grounded in nationalist, classed, gendered, and racial discourses.²¹ Within the Ottoman Sephardic context, the process of becoming a model citizen reflected the surge of Ottomanism and a newfound sense of patriotism in the wake of the Tanzimat reforms, even as Ottoman Sephardic Jews became increasingly economically and culturally oriented towards France. These orientations towards both the Sublime Porte and Paris blended in everyday life, where instantiations of language, education, religious expression, ideas about the cultivation of “character,” and values of productivity and patriotism determined what it meant to be a good Ottoman Jew.²² Nationalist notions were further tied to classed and gendered prescriptions. Julia Phillips Cohen, Sarah Abrevaya Stein, and Dina Danon have all emphasized the civilizing impulse as a gendered, bourgeois project wrapped up in notions of respectability and belonging, propriety and productivity.²³ These notions played out in discussions of parenting, language use, hygiene and the body, financial responsibility, interior design, leisure activities, even sensory experiences of smell and taste.²⁴ At the same time, the bourgeois nature of the civilizing project manifested in

²¹ Scholars have demonstrated how domestic disciplining projects and civilizing missions abroad were based in the exclusionary logics and structures of nation-states that sought to distinguish who was truly French or European. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). Although both Foucault and Stoler discuss this as endemic to the state, this discussion also shows how these coercive logics gain power even without the same governmental mechanisms or state power to enforce them.

²² Julia Phillips Cohen has shown how the failure to conform could lead to social policing on the part of communal elites (Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*).

²³ Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*; Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*; Danon, *Jews of Ottoman Izmir*.

²⁴ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 47; Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*, 148–49.

initiatives to police the Jewish poor and remove beggars and refugees from public view, as well as in the turn towards European-inspired education, particularly the schools of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, with its commitment to socioeconomic mobility and bourgeois identity formation.²⁵ Discourses of class and gender entwined in the construction of women as the arbiters of embourgeoisement in their roles as custodians of morality and civility, attentive caregivers and guardians of children and husbands, and keepers of pristine domestic spaces.²⁶

While historians have long considered aspects of class and gender in the Ottoman Sephardic civilizing project, the role of race still remains largely unexplored. Critical race scholars have demonstrated how race articulates with other forms of hierarchy, including class and gender, and this context is no exception. Race was not only fundamental to grand concepts like civilization and modernity, but also to the details of everyday life. As one example, the Ladino press cautioned that to maintain a pale complexion, “the most beautiful women protect the color of their face when outdoors,” and that readers should soak their hands to remove calluses to distinguish them from those working in heavy labor.²⁷ Bodily prescriptions that instructed women to keep their bodies light-colored and unmarked by labor underscore the discursive imbrications of gender, class, and race. As explored in this study, race was not an incidental part of this civilizing project; for Ottoman Sephardic reformers, the ideal, modern subject was coded by class, gender, and race. A focus on race demonstrates

²⁵ Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*; Danon, *Jews of Ottoman Izmir*. This is also clear in the memoirs penned by Ottoman Sephardic writers who condemned the *meldar* as steeped in poverty, ignorance, and superstition.

²⁶ Women were socialized into propriety, economic thrift, and meticulous home management as concerns were voiced about mixed-sex dancing, best practices for raising children, and appropriate dress and hairstyles. See Danon, *Jews of Ottoman Izmir*, 117–22; Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*.

²⁷ *El amigo de la familia* cited in Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*, 127–128.

how these were not discrete social categories, but were articulated through overlapping and interlocking discourses, which comes to the fore in the ethnographic texts they produced.²⁸

The Rise of Ottoman Ethnography

Beginning in the 1860s, ethnographic accounts began to appear in the Ottoman Empire. In the wake of the Tanzimat reforms, Ottoman state officials and intellectuals produced ethnographic reports, travelogues, novels, and photographs that documented the lives of provincial subjects, especially populations long racialized as inviolably different, including Arabs, Kurds, and Bedouin.²⁹ While the earliest examples were produced by



Mehmed Emin, *Musavver Ta'rif-i Ümem* (Illustrated Description of Nations), 1890.

²⁸ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 127.

²⁹ Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing About the Orient*.

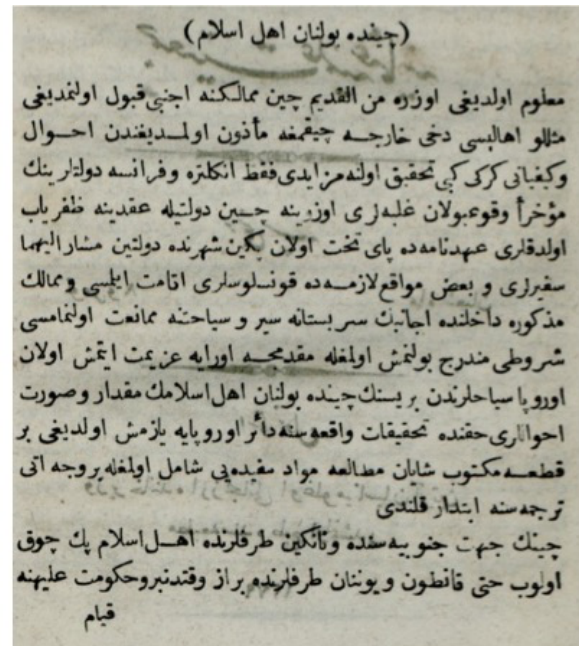
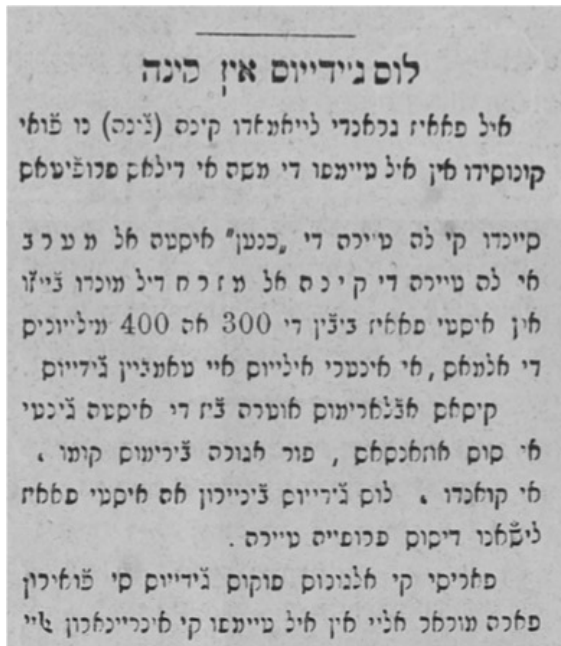
Ottoman state officials, ethnography also emerged as a more popular genre.³⁰ Descriptions of different cultures from around the world began to appear across the empire, as seen in this 1890 Ottoman text, *An Illustrated Description of Nations*. They were frequently accompanied by visual representations, including here of *Australialılar*, indigenous peoples of Australia, that are highly racialized and what many today would consider to be racist imagery. Such accounts, often translated and reprinted from French and English works, encouraged Ottoman readers to identify with writers and travelers from Europe in an era when, as Timothy Mitchell notes, through ethnographic texts, “ordinary people were learning to live as tourists or anthropologists.”³¹

Within the Ottoman press, editors saw ethnographic literature as both entertaining and educational, instructing readers about the strange and curious customs of people abroad. With the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II and his growing rhetoric of pan-Islamism, Muslims in the empire took a more active interest in Muslim populations worldwide, from the Caucuses to North Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, and China.³² This was also true for Jewish readers. Below we can see similar ethnographic accounts about Muslims in the Ottoman press and Jews in China in the Ladino press, which reflects a shared interest in those who are remote but also “like us.” Editors in the Ladino press proclaimed it their educative mission to inform readers about Jewish communities near and far, and they sent correspondents to the far reaches of the empire and abroad to cover developments and dispatch reports. They also translated ethnographic accounts from other writers and languages or combined articles from different publications to create accounts of Jewish communities in China, Japan, Ethiopia,

³⁰ Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, “Travel, Civilization And The East: Ottoman Travellers.” Dissertation from Middle East Technical University, 2016.

³¹ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 28. See also Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*.

³² Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, “Travel, Civilization And The East: Ottoman Travellers.” Dissertation from Middle East Technical University, 2016.



Left: *La epoka*, “The Jews of China” (Los Djudios en Kina), January, 1876.
 Right: *Mecmua-i Fünun*, “Muslims in China” (Cin'de Bulunan Ehl-i İslam), January, 1863.

and other faraway places.³³ Ethnography became a key genre to explore the state of Jews in the nineteenth century, and conversely, investigations into Jewish life furthered the genre of ethnography. In a feature on the Jews in the mountains of Afghanistan, one writer exclaimed:

The Jews! Where do we not find them? An Englishman said: In the north of the earth where glaciers form, where blankets of snow rise up into mountains...in that place there are Jews. Within Africa, in the middle of some place completely dry...where there is the highest degree of heat, there are Jews. In Europe, in the very middle of the civilization, in that place of education and industry, there are Jews. In Tartar lands, in Bukhara, in China, in the most backwards lands, there are Jews.³⁴

By reading ethnographic reports, readers followed intrepid travelers through the mountains and deserts, through perceived spaces of civilization and savagery in learning about Jewish populations the world over. Living in different climates and landscapes, some even saw Jews as a key to understanding the racial diversity of the world.³⁵

³³ Olga Borovaia, “Jews of Three Colors: The Path to Modernity in the Ladino Press at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 110–30; Olga Borovaya, “Shmuel Saadi Halevy/Sam Lévy Between Ladino and French: Reconstructing a Writer’s Social Identity,” in *Modern Jewish Literatures: Intersections and Boundaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 99.

³⁴ “Afghans or Israelites?” *La epoka*, 10/28/1878, 3.

³⁵ This role of Jews as a key population in accounting for racial difference is discussed in chapter one. See also Mitchell Bryan Hart, *Jews & Race: Writings on Identity and Difference, 1880-1940* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2011); Maurice Fishberg, *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment* (London, New York: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd., 1911).

Ethnographic reports by Ottoman Sephardic Jews tended to follow a template, whether in the popular press, scholarly treatises, or reports of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. We can see these conventions, which drew on conventions of French military reportage, in a series of articles published in *La epoka* as the editor Saadi a-Levi “visited different places to inform our readers of everything that is happening in the Jewish world of the Orient.”³⁶ Rather than report on news there, each article provided a profile of a different Ottoman Jewish community in Skopje, Belgrade, Varna, Burgas, Yambol, Sofia, Philippoli (present-day Plovdiv), Edirne, Dedeağaç (present-day Alexandroupoli), Gümülcine (present-day Komotini) and Sérres. These articles often began with demographic information that listed the number of Jewish families, followed by their socioeconomic status or the professions practiced, and the key educational, religious, and communal institutions there. a-Levi introduced readers to the Jews of Dedeağaç, for example, writing: “Here there are some thirty families of Jews, ten of whom are very wealthy, and ten of whom are very poor. They have a synagogue and one school where they only teach the Holy Language. The synagogue and the school are wanting.”³⁷ During an age of growing racial awareness, knowledge of different populations also required evaluating their character. Jews in Gümülcine, according to a-Levi, were “hospitable, pleasant, amiable, and offer all that could be asked of them without refusing anything,” while he critiqued those in Dedeağaç, who “spend their whole day counting money,” unwilling to use it to support the school or synagogue.³⁸ At a time of increasingly pervasive racial discourses, such characterizations were essentialized markers of whole communities rather than individuals.

In 1900, *La epoka* and *Journal de Salonique*, both published by the a-Levi family, started an “exclusive collaboration” with Alexander Benghiat, the former editor of the Izmir-

³⁶ “A Trip,” *La epoka* 10/1/1897, 2.

³⁷ *La epoka*, 8/13/1897, 4-5.

³⁸ *La epoka*, 8/13/1897, 4.

based newspaper, *El meseret*, who had “traveled in the interior and announced the idea to lengthen the number of pages of *La epoka* and to designate a section to each province where there are many Jews living.”³⁹ They explained that, “he will send us notes about the Jews of Asia Minor that we will publish just as we previously published stories about the Jews of Romania and Bulgaria, the colonies of Palestine, etc. that were so appreciated by readers.”⁴⁰ Informing readers about Ottoman Jews, these accounts contributed to the production of knowledge about these communities during a time when explorers, anthropologists, and colonial officials, driven by imperial and racializing logics and dynamics, sought to definitively map out, classify, and hierarchize the many populations of the world.

Arguments and Contributions: Race, Ethnography, Empire

This research charts new directions for situating Sephardic Jews in relation to race, ethnography, and empire. First, I argue, simply but fundamentally, that race mattered. Jews in the Ottoman Empire thought about race and with it. This revises the dominant view in Jewish Studies that emphasizes race as salient for Ottoman Jews only once they emigrated out of the empire, particularly to the Americas, parts of central Africa, and Palestine. Attending to race within the Ottoman Empire demonstrates how it was not only in their new contexts as émigrés that race mattered. They had already engaged with questions of race for decades prior to the waves of emigration that brought Ottoman Jews beyond the empire. This study, then, provides important context for this scholarship on the Ottoman Sephardic diaspora. It was in part by engaging with such discussions and debates that Ottoman Sephardic Jews

³⁹ *La epoka*, 1/12/1900, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

worked to position themselves in a global racial hierarchy that spanned across the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to their new homes in new racial contexts.⁴¹

Following the work of critical race scholars, I define race as the assertion and assignment of “strategic essentialisms” to create hierarchies of people for differential treatment and domination.⁴² As a structural relationship of power, a range of concepts—such as genealogy and environment, biology and skin color, theology and religion, culture and language—have been mobilized and worked in tandem to produce racialized discourses and subjects.⁴³ Rather than race, much of the scholarship on Jewish difference and Otherness, particularly in the Mediterranean, has invoked a lens of Orientalism.⁴⁴ Since the publication of Edward Said’s monumental work *Orientalism* in 1978, Orientalism has been the reigning paradigm in Middle East and Ottoman Studies. Yet scholars have noted how Orientalism functions as one type of racism, so race both encompasses Orientalism and extends beyond it.⁴⁵ It is not incidental that Said included racial theorists such as Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau and Ernest Renan within the intellectual genealogy of orientalism.⁴⁶ Despite this,

⁴¹ Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020); Max Daniel, “The Sephardi Century: A Relational History of a Los Angeles Community, 1893-1992.” (Los Angeles, Calif, University of California, Los Angeles, 2022).

⁴² Robin D. G Kelley, “What Is Racial Capitalism and Why Does It Matter?” (Scholars for Social Justice, University of Washington, November 7, 2017); Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

⁴³ Geraldine Heng has demonstrated that “differences selected for essentialism would vary in the longue durée—perhaps battening on bodies, physiognomy, and somatic attributes as skin color in one location; perhaps on social practices, religion, and culture in another; and with perhaps a multiplicity of interlocking discourses elsewhere” (Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 3). Biology and physiology emerged in the late eighteenth century as a central organizing principle for race, so much so that it is often seen as the definitive form of race.

⁴⁴ Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek Jonathan Penslar, *Orientalism and the Jews* (Waltham, Mass.; Hanover: Brandeis University Press ; University Press of New England, 2005); Daniel J. Schroeter, “Orientalism and the Jews of the Mediterranean,” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 4, no. 2 (1994): 183–96; Aziza Khazzoom, “The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel,” *American Sociological Review* 68, no. 4 (2003); Harvey E. Goldberg, “The Oriental and the Orientalist: The Meeting of Mordecai Hacoheh and Nahum Slouschz,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 57–145 : (2003); Julia Phillips Cohen, “Oriental by Design: Ottoman Jews, Imperial Style, and the Performance of Heritage,” *American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (2014).

⁴⁵ The European view of peoples in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa as backward, degenerate, and uncivilized reveals an understanding of Orientalism as a form of differentiation based in hierarchy and tied to domination, that is, a form of racialization (Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 99).

⁴⁶ Said, 99.

the focus on Orientalism has, in part, excluded attention to race. As the first study of Jews and race in the Ottoman Empire, this work contributes to Ottoman and Middle East historiography as well as scholarship looking at race globally.⁴⁷ Scholarship on race in the Middle East and Ottoman Empire is still in its infancy, and it tends to focus on histories of racialized enslavement or official Ottoman discourse. This study models one approach to looking at how Ottoman imperial subjects engaged with racial discourses and practices in their daily lives.

Attending to race enables us to position the dynamics of Orientalism within a more global frame, both historically and analytically. Eschewing the language of race obscures the extent to which the Ottoman Empire was, by the second half of the nineteenth century, in the throes of a global racial hierarchy. As scholars have noted, the grand ideas that pervaded Europe and the Ottoman Empire— notions of culture and civilization, history and modernity, degeneration and regeneration, progress and development— were profoundly racialized in the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ A major criterion for civilization at the time was race, which served as the reference point for ethnographic texts that sought to discern, describe, and assess levels of civilization.⁴⁹ Cultural forms, be they “fanciful ideas and bizarre practices of yesteryear,”

⁴⁷ For scholarship on the Middle East and Ottoman Empire, see Eve Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Eve Troutt Powell, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012); Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960*, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2011); Bruce S. Hall, “Reading Race in Africa and the Middle East,” *Antropologia (Milano)* 7, no. 1 N.S. (2020): 33–44; Mostafa Minawi, *Losing Istanbul: Arab-Ottoman Imperialists and the End of Empire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2023).

⁴⁸ See, for example, Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, “Ottoman Travelers’ Perceptions of Africa in the Late Ottoman Empire (1860-1922)” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 46 (2012): 187–212; Zeynep Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing About the Orient: A Critical Discourse from the East (1872-1932)* (Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2020).

⁴⁹ As Laura Ann Stoler writes, “Race became the organizing grammar of an imperial order in which modernity, the civilizing mission, and the ‘measure of man’ were framed. And with it, ‘culture’ was harnessed to do more specific political work:” to differentiate, create hierarchies of privilege and profit, establish regimes of labor, and scaffold colonial rule (*Race and the Education of Desire*, 27). Scholars of critical race studies argue that this is still the case today. They have argued that notions of cultural difference have long been racialized. They explain that the shift in anthropology away from race and racial determinism after the Second World War to a focus on culture with Franz Boas was only a shift in terms, and not in theory; culture used non-biological terms to explain all the same phenomena that race had, and, they contend, our ideas about “culture” and “ethnicity”

religious beliefs, food, dress, or health and hygiene were thought to correspond directly with civilizational stages. So we cannot understand nineteenth-century ethnography without attending to race, and as its corollary, we cannot fully grasp nineteenth-century notions of race without reading ethnographically. This becomes apparent in images produced in the Ladino press, such as this illustration that appeared in 1883 in *El amigo de la familia*, a Ladino newspaper published in Istanbul. It presented readers with a *mélange* of “races of men” from around the world all condensed into one image, marked as Others by long robes and fur coats, various head coverings and jewelry, a parasol and spear, a horse and dogs. Through clothing and adornment, props and animals, images like this presented readers with racialized depictions of cultures from around the world.

On an analytical level, in thinking with race, I build on the scholarship on Orientalism to open up different tools, analytic connections, and insights that extend far beyond “the Orient.” Eschewing the language of race enables the reproduction of a certain vision of the past by destigmatizing the realities of various practices, acts, and institutions as well as the systems of inequality that they



“Races of Men” (Rasas de ombres), *El amigo de la familia* 108, June 28, 1883 [23 Sivan 5643], 109.

today still have an underlying racial logic. See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Adieu, Culture: A New Duty Arises,” in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 97–116; Pierre, “Anthropology and the Race of/for Africa”; Lee D. Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); M. Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre, “Anthropology of White Supremacy.”

produced.⁵⁰ A racial lens further reveals key connections, for instance, between different forms of racism, including Orientalism, Ottoman Orientalism, and anti-Black racism—which are linked by “the ascension of *whiteness* to supremacy as a category of identity” and the emergence of whiteness as an organizing logic of western modernity—among both European and Ottoman Orientalists.⁵¹ This places greater emphasis on multidirectional racialization in terms of Blackness but also whiteness, which is often absent in accounts of Orientalism. It also reveals how race articulates with class and capital, as explored in chapter two, and hone in on connections between race and gender, a focus of chapter three. In doing so, race also brings out more global connections; when we talk only of Orientalism, we risk provincializing the Ottoman Empire by segregating these dynamics from broader, more globalized dynamics of race.

By applying race as an explicit analytic, we can see how racializing discourses carry across religions, time periods, and geographical contexts. Recent studies of Jewish life in the Ottoman empire have tended to focus on a single city or region. While these have produced important insights, we also lose something in the process. By tracing how ideas about race, civilization, and ethnography circulated across the empire and beyond, I take an approach that moves transregionally, from the streets of Istanbul to the synagogues of Izmir, from theaters in Salonica to classrooms in Edirne. But this study also extends further afield to France, Ethiopia, Palestine/Israel, and the Americas. This offers a more expansive and integrated geography for both modern Jewish history and the Ottoman Empire more broadly and reveals how global racializing discourses travel and transform as people adopt and adapt them to meet their own local circumstances and needs.

⁵⁰ Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 4.

⁵¹ Heng, 45; Anne Bonds and Joshua Inwood, “Beyond White Privilege: Geographies of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism,” *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 6 (2016): 715–33.

Jewish historiography that does consider race tends to focus on antisemitism and the Holocaust, Zionism, or encounters in the Americas.⁵² Yet this largely fails to consider Sephardic experiences, the Ottoman Empire, and the long arc of racialization within and between Jewish communities in the larger landscape of everyday life. Even within Sephardic Studies, the dominant view is that race is salient for Ottoman Jews only once they emigrated out of the empire. This research rewrites this history by showing how Sephardic reformers engaged in practices of racialization, for what reasons, and to what ends.⁵³ As the first study to put Sephardic and Ottoman historiography in conversation with Critical Race Studies, this research engages with the burgeoning scholarship on race both within the region and more globally to charts new directions in these fields.

This research articulates new perspectives and methodological approaches not only by applying race as an explicit analytic, but by examining knowledge production among Ottoman Sephardic Jews. The production of knowledge remains underexplored in Sephardic

⁵² John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Mitchell Bryan Hart, *Jews & Race: Writings on Identity and Difference, 1880-1940* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2011); Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Sander Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers: Essays on Bodies, Histories, and Identities* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Boum and Stein; Yehuda Sharim, "The Struggle for Sephardic-Mizrahi Autonomy: Racial Identities in Palestine-Israel, 1918-1948" (Los Angeles, University of California, Los Angeles, 2013); Bryan K. Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel's Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle, 1948-1966*, 2015; Ella Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements: Selected Writings of Ella Shohat* (London: Pluto Press, 2017); Orit Bashkin, *Impossible Exodus: Iraqi Jews in Israel*, 2017. One key exception to this is Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (Rutgers University Press, 2010). For work on the Americas, see Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: University Press, 2006); Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); Helen Kiyong Kim, *JewAsian: Race, Religion, and Identity for America's Newest Jews*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); Aviva Ben-Ur, *Jewish Autonomy in a Slave Society: Suriname in the Atlantic World, 1651-1825* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

⁵³ While race provides the organizing grammar, racialization refers to historically-specific practices of differentiation and domination. As Hazel Carby writes, "I use the word racialization to capture the practices and processes involved in the calculations and impositions of difference, all of which have their own logic but are not eternally fixed" (Hazel V. Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso, 2019), 65). A focus on racialization emphasizes the constructed and fluid nature of race, how it functions as an inherently relational and "contested and active process" (Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, American Crossroads (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 6). The term *racialization* was originally coined in the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant. See *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015).

and Mizrahi history in contrast to European Jewish history and Islamic history, which have both long foregrounded intellectual movements. In exploring how Ottoman Sephardic Jews produced racialized knowledge about themselves and others in the empire, this study also nuances discussions of imperial knowledge production and scholarly debates in Ottoman and Middle East Studies about Orientalism, which still focus on Muslim intellectuals and bureaucrats.⁵⁴ Part of what we see by adding Ottoman Jews into the conversation is how state-sponsored imperial logics unfolded beyond the purview of the state, enacted by non-state actors not as a part of state domestic or foreign policies, but as part of a push for reform within in political, cultural, social, and religious life.

In producing ethnographic knowledge, Ottoman Sephardic writers merged older forms of text and knowing with ideas about race and anthropology that were circulating internationally at the time, what Natalia Molina has referred to as racial scripts. In *How Race is Made in America*, Molina introduces the idea of racial scripts as attitudes, cultural representations, or practices that circulate and resurface in relation to different racialized groups and at different points in the long arc of history. Sephardic writers resituated these racial ideas, translating them linguistically and culturally into a Ladino that resonated with their readers. Rather than see these ethnographic dealing with race and anthropology as bad copies of a supposedly uniform and coherent western European model of modernity, I am more interested in exploring how reformers sought to render new forms of knowledge intelligible through the grid of Ottoman Sephardic social and cultural values and practices, and through reformulation or critique.⁵⁵ Sephardic journalists not only read texts about race

⁵⁴ Christoph Herzog and Raoul Motika, "Orientalism Alla Turca: Late 19th/Early 20th Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim 'Outback,'" *Die Welt Des Islams* 40, no. 2 (2000): 139–95; Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–96; Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 311–42.

⁵⁵ Here I am building on the approach of Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford University Press, 2007), 5.

and anthropology alongside other texts, but also through other texts.⁵⁶ As Marwa Elshakry has pointed out in *Reading Darwin in Arabic*, reading consists of a variety of practices including interpretation, explanation, appropriation, omission, and others.⁵⁷ Ottoman Sephardic Jews had their own didactic and literary styles, their own linguistic and cultural vocabularies. Rather than reading these texts against those they translated and rewrote, I trace what Elshakry has referred to as a “web of meaning,” that is, how these texts formed “part of an extended system of meaning, references, and significations.”⁵⁸

A focus on Sephardic ethnographic knowledge production additionally highlights divergences from previous scholarship on Jewish ethnography, which has largely considered the Ashkenazi experience.⁵⁹ In Eastern Europe, an ethnographic movement began on the cusp of the twentieth century and continued in various forms for decades. There, Jewish ethnographic collecting was much broader in scope and was spearheaded by those with university training and affiliation. It was part of a populist movement that romanticized both the peasant and the Pale of Settlement; their ethnographic work reflected their commitment to mass politics and diaspora nationalism and they embraced it as the foundation for a Jewish cultural renaissance. In contrast, Ottoman Sephardic ethnography was a much smaller movement that began earlier in the mid-nineteenth century. It unfolded in both intellectual and more popular fora, led by those without university training or affiliation who published primarily in the press. Although both engaged in salvage ethnography, seeking to document

⁵⁶ Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*, 2013, 5.

⁵⁷ Elshakry, 5.

⁵⁸ Elshakry, 6.

⁵⁹ Gabriella Safran and Steven Zipperstein, eds., *The Worlds of S. An-Sky: A Russian Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2006); Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: The Dybbuk's Creator, S. An-Sky* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); James Benjamin Loeffler, *The Most Musical Nation: Jews and Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* (Harvard University Press, 2011); Keith Ian Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation: Noah Prylucki and the Folkists in Poland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Cecile Esther Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture: Scholarship for the Yiddish Nation* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jeffrey Veidlinger, ed., *Going to the People* (Indiana University Press, 2016).

beliefs and practices before they disappeared, those in the Ottoman Empire championed their disappearance as a measure of progress, even as they lamented their loss. This research explores how their works were motivated by other factors, took alternative forms, and achieved different results. In doing so, it contributes to the thin but rich scholarship that expands how we think about Jewish ethnography.⁶⁰

This study of Sephardic ethnography moves beyond the scholarship that looks at Sephardic Jews from an Ashkenazi or European perspective to ask how they themselves observed, perceived, and wrote ethnographically. In her recent book, *Europe Knows Nothing About the Orient*, Zeynep Çelik explores responses to European orientalist discourse from Ottoman and Turkish intellectuals, which provides a key point of comparison with the Sephardic Ottoman writers in this study.⁶¹ She demonstrates how these writers took a wide array of stances in upholding, furthering, undermining, and challenging European orientalist discourses, and she urges scholars to study responses to Orientalism by other Ottoman imperial communities. I argue that Ottoman Sephardic engagement with race reflected their own experiences as both Jews and those deemed “Orientals” in an increasingly racialized world. Through these texts, Ottoman Sephardic writers worked to position themselves racially in ways that reflected both their assumed racial superiority over indigenous groups around the world, while also revealing their own racial anxieties about where they fell themselves within an emergent and expanding global racial hierarchy. Sephardic reformers turned to race as a way of understanding shifting power dynamics globally and as a solution

⁶⁰ Examples of Jewish ethnography beyond Europe and the Russian Empire include Norman A. Stillman and Yedida K. Stillman, “Samuel Romanelli and His Massa Ba’rab,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985): 343–54; Aron Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2003); Goldberg, “The Oriental and the Orientalist”; Colette Zytznicki, “The ‘Oriental Jews’ of the Maghreb: Reinventing the North African Jewish Past in the Colonial Era,” in *Colonialism and the Jews*, ed. Ethan Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud Mandel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017); Alan Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen: The Travels of a European Orientalist and His Native Guide* (Stanford University Press, 2018).

⁶¹ Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing About the Orient: A Critical Discourse from the East (1872-1932)*.

to the problem of progress. I am curious here about how these anxieties and aspirations played into the development of a new mode of scientific thinking among Ottoman Sephardic Jews in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth.

In addition to these contributions to the fields of Sephardic and Jewish, Ottoman and Middle East history, this study further contributes to the field of Colonial Studies by demonstrating how Ottoman Sephardic Jews adopted and adapted colonial discourses to suit their own circumstances and ends. Their works were suffused with a temporal self-consciousness that constructed difference temporally between their past, premodern selves and their future, modern selves. In colonial contexts, discursive boundaries delimited the colonial European from the native Other who threatened contamination, but in Ottoman Sephardic reformist literature, the boundary is temporal, lying between their conceptions of modernity and their own “fanciful ideas and bizarre practices of yesteryear.” In this way, they applied colonial discourse to their past selves, who were, in their view, a native Other to be reformed. By confining their own native Otherness to the past, they could move beyond their former uncivilized state, through the stream of history and into modernity.

They further adapted other colonial discourses, such as that underlying the military policy of divide and rule. Within the French military, this policy led to the creation of racial categories, associations, and evaluations that juxtaposed local Muslim populations as more backwards, fanatical, and violent than other groups, such as Catholics in Mount Lebanon or the Kabyles in Algeria, who French colonial authorities deemed more capable of civilization and thus potential intermediaries.⁶² This discourse appears throughout French military and

⁶² In Algeria, colonial ethnographers justified the military strategy of divide and rule by the Kabyles as more civilized sedentary tribes in the mountains with the Arabs as less civilized nomadic peoples of the plains. In doing so, they marked the Kabyles as potential intermediaries and auxiliaries to French colonization. See Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995). At times this discursive move served as legitimation for imperial intervention, as with the French interceding in the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire on behalf of the local Catholic population, whom they deemed better able to accede to European level of civilization than their Muslim neighbors. See Andrew

colonial ethnographic reports, as well as in an 1842 ethnographic report about Algerian Jews produced by two French Jews, Jacques Isaac Altaras and Joseph Cohen, on behalf of the French Ministry of War.⁶³ Altaras and Cohen identified Algerian Jews as having “an admirable aptitude to assimilate the principles of civilization, an intelligence that is excited by the persecution and difficulties of living under the Arabs, and sympathy for the nation that liberates them and calls them to take their part of the good deed of civil equality.”⁶⁴ As a result, they argued, Jews in Algeria could serve as “a powerful instrument for the pacification of Algeria.”⁶⁵ This military report presaged the ethnographic writing both of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and the reformers who were its students, teachers, and administrators. At times, their writings invoked this racializing colonial trope of Jews as backwards but more civilized than their neighbors, more capable of progress, and more easily assimilable. This research demonstrates how logics, discourses, and structures of imperialism spread outside of state-sponsored colonial expeditions and military conquests, carried out by teachers and travelers, scholars and rabbis.⁶⁶ Within their writings, they applied the same imperial mechanisms of racialization within the Jewish world to bolster insiders and repudiate outsiders. This discussion thus contributes to a more expansive understanding of how people, and especially Jews, have served as agents of imperialism in various ways, including within their own communities.

Delatolla and Joanne Yao, “Racializing Religion: Constructing Colonial Identities in the Syrian Provinces in the Nineteenth Century,” *International Studies Review* 21, no. 4 (2019): 640–61.

⁶³ This “Rapport sur l’état moral et politique des israélites de l’Algérie et des moyens de l’améliorer” is discussed in Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*.

⁶⁴ Isaac Altaras and Joseph Cohen, “Rapport Sur l’état Moral et Politique Des Israélites de l’Algérie et Des Moyens de l’améliorer,” in *Les Juifs d’Algérie et La France (1830-1855)*, ed. Simon Schwarzfuchs (Jerusalem: Institut Ben-Zvi, 1981), 67.

⁶⁵ Altaras and Cohen, 189.

⁶⁶ This reflects Patrick Wolfe’s argument that a white supremacist colonial order may still be a frame of reference even in non-settler colonial societies. Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London ; Verso, 2016). See also Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús and Jemima Pierre, “Anthropology of White Supremacy,” *American Anthropologist* 122, no. 1 (2020): 65–75.

Ethnography provides a new perspective to understand the shifting political, religious, intellectual, cultural, and racial terrains of both Sephardic life as well as the Ottoman Empire more broadly. At a time when ethnography loomed large in the imperial world, these reformers parlayed their status as communal insiders into writings on the “fanciful ideas and bizarre practices of yesteryear” that they produced as knowledge for both Ottoman Sephardic and European audiences. Writing their anxieties and aspirations, they sought to theorize, educate, and entertain, to satirize and to salvage. They simultaneously praised and lamented change, while they struggled to document ways of life lost with the massive social, cultural, religious, and political changes that swept the Ottoman Empire; with increasing waves of emigration; and the devastations of war.

It was within this context that ethnographic narratives became a critical tool to articulate different visions of regeneration. Ottoman writers—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—produced and circulated racialized representations of Others, identifying and ascribing to them notions of savagery and civilization against and through which they created their own sense of self. I argue that Sephardic reformers adopted and adapted racializing discourses in ways that reflected their uncertain place as both Jews and “Orientals” within an emergent and expanding global racial hierarchy.⁶⁷ Driven by social anxiety about being discursively produced as uncivilized and unsuitable for the modern world, Ottoman Jewish elites enacted a disciplining project that sought to ensure the well-being of their communities. A focus on ethnographic production situates these reformers within the larger imperial context, and enables us to better see how imperial racializing discourses and dynamics unfolded within and between Jewish communities and their neighbors and merged with more local, Ottoman, and Jewish forms of thinking and writing. In attending to the racialized,

⁶⁷ On the concept of a global racial hierarchy, see Tara Zahra, “Travel Agents on Trial: Policing Mobility in East Central Europe, 1889-1989,” *Past & Present* 223, no. 223 (2014): 161–93.

gendered, and classed politics of cultural representation that emerge in their ethnographic works, this study examines how and why Jews in the nineteenth century engaged in new processes of knowledge creation—scientific, ethnographic, racial, and otherwise—and what these processes reveal about how they came to see themselves, others, and the changing world around them.

Sources and Structure

In historicizing ethnography, this study brings together historiographic methods, anthropological theory, and Critical Race Studies. The source base includes Ladino, Hebrew, French, and Ottoman Turkish texts, ranging from ethnographic treatises and photographs, to travel literature and memoirs, literature and the press, and reports and meeting minutes of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. Anthropology provides theoretical framing in thinking through the complex intercommunal encounters and interpersonal worlds that emerge in these accounts. Applying insights from Critical Race Studies reveals the contours of racialization that shape these accounts. This work breaks new ground in part by applying tools and insights from Critical Race Studies to Ottoman history and historiography to rethink Jewish life in the Ottoman Empire and our understanding of the empire more broadly.

This aggregate methodology fits a world in which texts were more stylistically fluid and disciplinary boundaries less entrenched. By using Ladino, French, or Hebrew, writers indexed different ideologies and moved between terse reportage and magical realism, scientific observation and personal reflection, literary references and internal monologues as they played with linguistic and genre conventions, veered off into narrative digressions, and told stories within stories. Just as writers engaged and combined discourses in unique ways, genre was also more fluid. Sources traversed mediums; they originated as letters, were published serially in the press, and later collected into travelogues and other books. Within

these writings, ethnography emerges as history as memoir as anecdote as travelogue.⁶⁸ Rather than circumscribe ethnography as a genre, I underscore its polyphony and emergence within various kinds of expression.

The ethnographic sources that form the base of this study span from 1860 with the founding of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* through the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Many Ottoman Sephardic writers producing ethnographic texts were connected to the AIU as students, teachers, alumni of its many schools, or writers backed by the AIU. The endpoint of the revolution marks a fundamental shift within Ottoman society that triggered the increasing violence, displacement, and mass emigration of Sephardic Jews from the empire during the first decade of the twentieth century, leading up to the First World War, which led to the collapse of the Empire, heralding the disintegration of the Ottoman Sephardic heartland.⁶⁹ Following the devastations of this period, the tone of ethnographic writing from the former empire and its diaspora shifted to one of nostalgia and elegy, mourning the disappearance of a lost world.

Moreover, the First World War marked a shift in the practice of ethnography. The postwar period saw the advent of “modern,” “scientific” ethnography set in motion by Bronisław Malinowski.⁷⁰ By foregrounding the period prior to the First World War, this research contributes to scholarship that explores the beginnings of ethnography largely beyond its academic bases. A narrow focus on institutionalized ethnography negates travelers, women, teachers and administrators, journalists, and independent scholars who

⁶⁸ George Trumbull IV notes how ethnography stands “capable of containing biography, narrative, and context within one analytical frame” (*An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 53.

⁶⁹ This includes, most notably, the Italo-Ottoman War in 1911, the transfer of Salonica into Greek control in 1912, the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, and the First World War from 1914-1918.

⁷⁰ Though many still hold Malinowski up as the turning point in the development of modern ethnography, for an incisive critique, see Mary Louise Pratt, “Fieldwork in Common Places,” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986).

were largely excluded from the realm of formal scholarship.⁷¹ The use of the term “ethnography” to characterize their accounts is situated at the juncture in which scholars have deconstructed the notions of objectivity and scientific rigor used to characterize academic ethnographies, while reappraising and validating the efficaciousness of non-academic sources. Previously disparaged by some scholars as amateurish, they have emerged as a legitimate and productive source base for examining the history of ethnography. Unfolding largely beyond the academic context, and engaging especially with the popularization of ethnographic writing, this study highlights those realms of methodological innovation that resulted, not despite, but because of, their dissociation from institutional settings.

This intellectual genealogy is rehearsed through microhistorical vignettes that trace various strands of Ottoman Sephardic ethnography. This structure, pioneered by George Stocking, rests on his observation that “there are in these microcosms, in their selection and framing, and written sometimes as much between the lines as directly upon them, hints or suggestions of the outlines of larger macrocosmic pictures.”⁷² He illustrates how, within a small space, vignettes identify moments, exemplars, and events that reveal larger discursive patterns, tendencies, and strategies of broader historical and historiographic significance.⁷³ These vignettes not only narrate the larger tenets that these Ottoman Sephardic writers believed indisputable, truths about race, civilization, and progress, but they also showcase the fine details of these ethnographic accounts, deeply wrought as evidence of these truths, that elevate detail to a historiographic principle.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Danon is largely an exception here. Further, the distinction sometimes drawn between “applied ethnography” and “academic” ethnography ignores the extent to which the latter was harnessed to imperialism and colonialism.

⁷² George W. Jr. Stocking, *Delimiting Anthropology: Occasional Inquiries and Reflections* (Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 261. For another successful example of this structure, see Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*.

⁷³ This also draws on Heng’s notion of moments of racialization in *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*.

⁷⁴ As Edward Said writes, “What interests me most as a scholar is not the gross political verity but the detail, as indeed what interests us in someone like Lane or Flaubert or Renan is not the (to him) indisputable truth that Occidentals are superior to Orientals, but the profoundly worked over and modulated evidence of his detailed

These vignettes unfold across four chapters. The first explores anthropological theory and notions of race and evolution that appeared in the Ottoman Sephardic press. It approaches race descriptively in seeking to understand what race meant to Ottoman Sephardic Jews at this time. Newspaper editors and writers considered scientific knowledge to be necessary to progress, and they published expositions on science and anthropology and weighed in on debates about evolution, biological and environmental determinism, monogenesis and polygenesis, and physiognomy. By tracing these debates, I argue that journalists introduced Ottoman Sephardic readers to indigenous groups in Africa, India, and Australia against whom they judged themselves racially superior, and by using the language and methods of science they gave these judgements authority and objectivity. In translating these debates, reformers worked to render new forms of scientific knowledge intelligible through the grid of Ottoman Sephardic language, values, practices, and texts. In effect, they rendered biblical and rabbinic texts as a framework for new scientific knowledge, positioning science as fitting with older knowledge traditions rather than an epistemological rupture. By demonstrating how Judaism not only tolerated science but complemented it, they presented an image of Judaism not as an archaic and authoritarian religious relic but as compatible with science, the ultimate language and arbiter of the modern world, at a time when Christian clerics in Europe remained mired in scientific controversy.

Sephardic writers translated these global ideas about race, civilization, and progress into practices of racialization enacted within the Ottoman provinces in relation to other imperial subjects, including other Jews. In chapter two, I examine ethnographic travel literature from Ottoman Palestine: Abraham Rosanes's, *Masaot he-ḥakham ha-Abir (Travels of Rabbi Abraham ben Israel Rosanes)*, published in Hebrew from 1866-1867, and Jacob

work within the very wide space opened up by that truth. One need only remember that Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* is a classic of historical and anthropological observation because of its style, its enormously intelligent and brilliant details, not because of its simple reflection of racial superiority, to understand what I am saying here" (*Orientalism*, 15).

Shaul's Ladino *Impresiones de Viaže en Palastina (Impressions of Travel in Palestine)*, published from 1896-1897, alongside other contemporary writers. These accounts reveal how Sephardic travelers circulated newly imagined geographies of race in response to how global capitalism was changing both ideas about land and the land of the empire itself. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the growing debts of the Ottoman state pulled it closer into the global economy under the mounting control of its European creditors. Opening the empire to foreign investment and land ownership led to the laying of railway tracks and paving of roads, the expansion of harbors and construction of telegraph lines to facilitate the movement of goods and boost the economy. Written thirty years apart, these travel accounts racialized spaces and their inhabitants as productive or useless, civilized or savage in ways that reflected this changing physical and economic landscape. By drawing on the insights of scholarship on racial capitalism, I revise dominant approaches to political economy in Ottoman Studies, which continues to rely on World Systems Theory and fails to account for how racial hierarchies position people within the international economic order.

Sephardic reformers not only project racial notions onto those in the imperial provinces, but they also applied them to their own communities in the urban centers of the empire. The third chapter examines autoethnographic popular and scholarly writings on superstition. In the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century, spiritism was on the rise with audiences packing into theaters and living rooms to witness séances, even as Sephardic reformers consigned old spirits to the realm of superstition. Editorials in the French and Ladino presses railed against superstitious practices, from beliefs in demons and spirits to carrying amulets and healing rituals. I explore this tension between the campaign against superstition and the concurrent embrace of spiritism by tracing how reformers divided the supernaturally licit from the illicit by constructing and instrumentalizing superstition as a category of knowledge. I argue that Ottoman Sephardic reformers wrote in ways that

racialized certain forms of knowledge as superstitious, consigning them—and those who held them—to the premodern past. They particularly decried women, the elderly, and traditional rabbis as clinging to these “fanciful ideas and bizarre practices of yesteryear.” Situating Ottoman Sephardic discourses about superstition within relations of race, gender, and class illustrates how these writers translated specific notions about social identity into claims of intellectual authority and knowledge. By analyzing ethnographic discourses around superstition in both the popular press and in scholarly treatises, I argue that the campaign against superstition served as a disciplining project in both senses, intellectual and social, one that delineated which kinds of knowledge, and therefore which kinds of people, were suitable for the modern world. In this way, reformers created a regime of truth delimiting knowledge production, but also that sought to enact forms of social control.

Such racializing discourses spread across the Ottoman Empire in part through the Franco-Jewish *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, which established schools across the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Iran. The fourth chapter reframes the extensive literature on the Alliance by applying race as an explicit analytic in focusing on one ethnographic expedition to the Beta Israel in Ethiopia undertaken in 1867-1868 by Joseph Halévy. Doing so reveals how the AIU produced racialized knowledge about the communities in which it worked, how the Jews at its helm performed whiteness, and how race has structured its extensive archives that have proved foundational to the field of Jewish history. This discussion highlights connections between the ethnographic knowledge and racial discourses examined in the first three chapters and those circulated by the AIU, demonstrating how it shaped the many communities in which it worked across the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Iran.

In the conclusion, I trace the afterlives of Ottoman Sephardic ethnography as it carried into the twentieth century and the global Sephardic diaspora after the fall of the Ottoman empire. I consider the persistence of ethnographic typologies in former Ottoman

lands through a family photo album from Rhodes assembled in the 1930s. I attend to the ongoing consequences of racializing discourses that labeled Ottoman Jews as superstitious by looking at émigrés arrival in the nascent state of Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, where this perception shaped state policy around medical treatment and healthcare. Finally, I turn to a series of autoethnographic YouTube videos produced by émigrés in Los Angeles in the 1980s, which in some ways, reflect the opposite project as that of reformers in the empire. Having largely obtained whiteness in America, they seek to recover their cultural traditions, their “fanciful and bizarre practices of yesteryear.” These afterlives point to the ethical implications of these ethnographic works both in their historical moment and as they continued to unfold in the twentieth century. Though this research is primarily focused on racial discursive constructions, which Geraldine Heng has called “extralegal and informal rehearsals of power,” it demonstrates how racial discourses produced by and about Ottoman Sephardic Jews were not merely social constructs, but created political realities long after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁵ Such examples beg the question of how the politics of representation shape the perceptions, life trajectories, and political intelligibility of Ottoman Jews when they are mediated and known through ethnography.⁷⁶

In exploring the history, politics, and ethics of knowledge production and representation, this study brings to the fore questions of power and how Sephardic Jews perceived and positioned themselves and others in the racialized world. They did so, in part, by inscribing racial difference through notions of time and space, physiognomy, culture and religion—all markers of difference that European colonial powers used to categorize, hierarchize, and rule populations deemed less civilized. This ethnographic turn reflects how reformers perceived their encounter with modernity as fraught, in part because it was shaped

⁷⁵ Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 30.

⁷⁶ Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 69.

by racial notions, anxieties, and aspirations as they tried to fight their way out of their relegation to yesteryear. Their visions of reform entailed social practices that would yield an enlightened, productive, and civilized population that could join in the progress of the modern era.

This study illustrates how racialized and colonial ways of thinking and writing have shaped the creation of knowledge about Ottoman Sephardic communities. The advent of the study of Sephardic Jews in the nineteenth century was set in motion by writers such as these reformers who lived in a world ignited by nationalism, imperialism, and racism. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds us, “The intense and joint solidification of political and intellectual borders in Europe during the nineteenth century should remind us that the sciences of humankind as we now know them are products of the very world that they try to explain.”⁷⁷ The sources that these Ottoman Sephardic reformers created and the archives that they comprise today are deeply shaped by these forces, as is the knowledge that scholars working in the current moment produce based on these sources. This is just one legacy of their work that confronts us today, alongside continuing questions of racialization and racism within and across Jewish communities, debates over Jewishness and Blackness, as well as the intersection of Jewishness and whiteness today. Tracing continuities with racial discourses into the present highlights ongoing legacies of past racial inequalities that continue to shape our world. In exploring these historical roots, this study is neither definitive nor exhaustive, but attempts to open up new ways of thinking and writing the racial experiences of Jews in the late Ottoman Empire and beyond.

⁷⁷ Trouillot, *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*, 4.

Chapter 1: Debating Race and Anthropology in the Ottoman Sephardic Press

In 1887, the Istanbul-based Ladino periodical *El instruktor* reported that “a caravan of twenty Ashantis (people living in Ghana) comprised of twelve men and eight women and young girls arrived recently to the *Jardin zoologique d’acclimation* in Paris.”¹ This, it explained to readers, was not the first time that the zoological garden had displayed “the most diverse peoples from the ends of the earth, indigenous (savages) who until now have only been known by the accounts of travelers. The inhabitants of Nubia, Eskimos from the pole (the edge of the earth), people from Tierra del Fuego, and many other savage men often come before the Parisian public.”

Increasingly in the nineteenth century, paying a small entrance fee to see displays of foreign people became a popular leisure activity in cities like Paris, London, and Chicago.² As a new form of cheap mass entertainment, the public flocked to see Sámi, Krenak, Inuit, Anishinabe, Bakhoje, Zulus, San, Arabs, Pacific Islanders, Indigenous Australians, Indians, Japanese, Ndebele, Chinese, and “Aztecs.”³ At theaters and museums, sporting venues, international fairs, and zoological gardens, audiences swelled to see groups dressed in “authentic” clothing, living in reconstructed “native villages,” and made to sing, dance, and perform ceremonies.⁴ They were often peoples imported from the colonies to be *tableaux*

¹ *El instruktor* 1 no. 11-12, Tammuz 5648 [September 1887], 96

² Among the extensive literature on what scholars have termed “human zoos” in Europe, see Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World’s Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); James Smalls, “‘Race’ As Spectacle in Late-Nineteenth-Century French Art and Popular Culture,” *French Historical Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003): 351–82, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-26-2-351>; Sadiya Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Pascal Blanchard, *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: University Press, 2008); Pascal Blanchard et al., *Zoos humains et expositions coloniales: 150 ans d’inventions de l’Autre*, 2e éd., Poche/Sciences humaines et sociales (Paris: La Découverte, 2011); Catherine Hodeir, “Human Exhibitions at World’s Fairs: Between Scientific Categorization and Exoticism? The French Colonial Presence at Midway Plaisance, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,” in *The Invention of Race*, ed. Nicolas Bancel, Dominic Thomas, and Thomas David, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2014), 222–32; Carole Reynaud-Paligot, “Construction and Circulation of the Notion of ‘Race’ in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations*, ed. Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David, and Dominic Richard David Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2014), 87–99.

³ Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 2; Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: University Press, 1996).

⁴ Çelik, *Displaying the Orient*, 18; Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 8.

vivantes, transformed into professional “savages” and ethnological specimen, who embodied the colonial enterprise and made it concrete for those at home.

For the hundreds of thousands of visitors pouring in, these human zoos—as scholars have dubbed them—claimed to demonstrate different human societies’ unique nature, emphasizing their strange and curious practices, and fixing them in place and time. Mixing entertainment with education, these spectacles were arenas for the production of knowledge, exhibiting people as living examples of human and racial types, both for professionals and families on outing.⁵ Ethnologists and anthropologists, phrenologists and physicians brought their calipers, tape measures, and photographic equipment to the garden to take advantage of the presence of “living specimens” to develop and test their racial theories.⁶ Displayed peoples became both the objects and means of ethnological empirical observation and investigation, of taxonomy and classification localized on the body.⁷

As individual and collective representations of their race, their presence incorporated them into contemporary hierarchical discourse of civilizational progress.⁸ Such displays situated groups within earlier stages of development as the “primitive” precursors to modern man. The production of racial difference worked to reaffirm the colonizing society’s imperial notions of technical, scientific, moral, and racial superiority by promoting fundamentally racist evolutionary hierarchies of the peoples of the world.⁹

⁵ Blanchard et al., *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales*.

⁶ For more on the “living subject,” see chapter four.

⁷ Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 187; Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford University Press, 2007), 30.

⁸ El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory*, 30.

⁹ Çelik, *Displaying the Orient*, 18; Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 4. Yet, as Qureshi demonstrates, “the associations between displayed peoples, imperialism, and ethnic difference are neither inherent nor self-evident; rather, they must be both created and maintained” (4).

This was true not only for visitors, but also those who followed such exhibitions in the press. Spectacles were accompanied by printed promotional pamphlets that described the displayed peoples' physical form and cultural practices, often based on travel accounts, and these pamphlets in turn were reproduced in the popular press internationally.¹⁰ "The Ashantis are one of the most beautiful varieties of the negro (Black) race," *El instruktor* informed its readers. "They resemble the Abyssinians (*kushim*)."¹¹ This comparison reproduced European colonial racial hierarchies created by missionaries who deemed lighter-skinned peoples of northern Ethiopia to be Abyssinians who had descended from Semites and practiced a more pure form of Christianity, in contrast to their southern Oromo neighbors, whom they regarded



Fig. 1. — Achanti du Jardin d'Acclimation, avec ses armes.
(D'après une photographie.)



Fig. 2. — Guerrier Achanti du Jardin d'Acclimation,
sans armes. (D'après une photographie.)

"Les Achantis" from the *Jardin d'Acclimation* printed in *La Nature*,
September 17, 1887, 249.

¹⁰ Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 93, 188.

¹¹ *El instruktor* 1 no. 11-12, Tammuz 5648 [September 1887], 96. This attributed sense of beauty may reflect the fact that, by the 1880s, Jewish communities in Europe and the Ottoman Empire had long engaged in debates over whether there were Jews in Ethiopia. These debates are the focus of chapter four of this dissertation. See chapter four, footnote 61 for an explication of the term *kushim*.

as racially African and more barbaric.¹² As such, the Ashantis “have reached a certain level of civilization,” *El instruktur* stated. “They are very brave and despise death.” Yet this was tempered by their “cruelty,” “passion for blood,” and “idolatrous practices.”¹³ In copying these materials directly, journalists reproduced their tendency to create, emphasize, and hyperbolize racial difference for economic gain.¹⁴ Rather than an accurate guide to understanding peoples on display, these texts reflect how showmen marketed their exhibitions, which saw enormous commercial success.

In reporting on different human societies, such pamphlets also echoed military ethnographic reports in conveying population numbers, the geography of their home countries, natural resources found there, and the state of commerce and industry. In its profile of the Ashanti, *El instruktur* described for readers the oversized insects and venomous snakes of Ghana, the rich vegetation that covered the coast, the brilliant colors of woven fabrics, and the gold extracted from mines and the sands of the rivers. As they read such descriptions in their living rooms, cafes, and streets across the Ottoman Empire, Sephardic readers took in racial ideas about people around the world.

But they were not the only ones in the empire. Readers of Ottoman Turkish periodicals like *Maarif* also scrutinized groups from New Zealand to the Ivory Coast to the American Southwest. Although “it is rumored that the Maori tribe have been eating people,” *Maarif* declared, “compared to the degree of civilization before, they are increasingly entering into the circle of civilization (*daire-i medeniyet*).”¹⁵ And they too reported on groups brought to the Parisian *Jardin zoologique d’acclimation*: “Recently, the Pai Pi Bri tribe,

¹² See chapter 4, footnotes 8-9; Brian J. Yates, *The Other Abyssinians: The Northern Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1913* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020); “Where or What Is ‘Abyssinia’? –An Investigation,” *Ethiopianorama*, accessed August 4, 2021, http://ethiopianorama.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Where-or-What-is-Abyssinia-an-investigation.pdf2_.pdf.

¹³ *El instruktur* 1 no. 11-12, Tammuz 5648 [September 1887], 96.

¹⁴ Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 97.

¹⁵ *Maarif* 110, 18 Safer 1311 [August 21, 1893], 95.

who were displayed in the *Jardin d'acclimation* in the Boulogne Forest in the region of Paris, was presented in the Paris newspapers and in the daily science newspapers of our city.”¹⁶ It explained how, “Sixty people of this group consisting of men, women, and children were made to live in huts that they themselves constructed within the garden.” It further provided bodily descriptions of their skin, “the color of copper,” their “hair curly like wool, wide foreheads, and bright white teeth.”¹⁷ The overlap in reportage points to the tendency of periodicals in the Ottoman Empire to translate from the French and English press in providing ethnographic accounts deemed to be informative and useful for its readers.¹⁸

In the nineteenth century, as empire and scientific knowledge expanded in step and Europeans encountered groups the world over, debates about race and anthropology erupted. What were the differences between human groups and how were they measured? What accounted for differences—both physical and cultural—between human societies? How many races existed? Did they share one common ancestor or did they represent separate species? And where might Jews fit into all this? In a world in which states jockeyed for political and economic superiority based on assumed racial hierarchies, the stakes in these debates were high. These debates unfolded not only in scholarly circles, however, but they also circulated at the more popular level. As newspaper editors increasingly considered scientific knowledge as a marker of progress and civilization, Sephardic journalists translated for a wider reading public the new sciences of anthropology and physiognomy, notions of savagery and civilization, the existence of racial types and hierarchies, debates on biological

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *Maarif* 110, 18 Safer 1311 [August 21, 1893], 95.

¹⁸ *El instruktor*'s coverage of the Ashantis appears to be rewritten from the popular French science periodical, *La Nature* (“Les Achantis au Jardin d’Acclimatation de Paris,” *La Nature*, September 17, 1887, 249-250). On the concept of translation in the Ottoman Sephardic press, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 126; Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theatre in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Olga Borovaia, “Translation and Westernization: ‘Gulliver’s Travels’ in Ladino,” *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 2 (2001): 149–68.

and environmental determinism, and prescriptions around the human body. In analyzing discussions and debates around these ideas in periodicals in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, I read *El telegrafo*, *La epoka*, *La buena esperansa*, *El sol*, *El lunar*, *El amigo de la familia*, and *El instrutor* to make a few entwined arguments.

First, I argue that Ottoman Sephardic Jews began to distinguish themselves from colonized groups around the world through racialized ideas of geography, colorism, and indigeneity onto which they projected notions of savagery and civilization. By picking up preexisting racial scripts articulated under the aegis of colonialism, it was indigenous groups in Africa, India, and Australia against whom they judged themselves racially superior.¹⁹ By deploying the language and methods of science—racial typologies, anthropometry, physiognomy, and others—they gave these judgements a sense of authority and objectivity.

Science thus began to matter to Ottoman Sephardic Jews in part because of its rise as an intellectual trend and in part because it served to bolster political agendas, but also because it enabled them to articulate claims to modernity. Racialized as Orientals, they were considered and depicted as backwards and uncivilized; racialized as Jews, they were represented as fossils, practicing an archaic form of religion fundamentally incompatible with a Christian modernity. Yet by demonstrating how Judaism not only tolerated science but complemented it, they presented a very different image of themselves. While Christian clerics remained mired in scientific controversy, intellectuals and progressive rabbis in the empire declared Judaism's compatibility with science, the ultimate language and arbiter of the modern world, surpassing Christianity in its embrace of modernity.

Finally, I argue that in their texts on science, anthropology, and race, writers both engaged pre-existing racial scripts that circulated internationally, such as this story on the

¹⁹ On the concept of racial scripts, see Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, American Crossroads (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

Ashantis lifted from the pages of the French scientific periodical *La nature*, but they also recontextualized them within earlier Jewish textual and knowledge traditions. This involved linguistic and cultural translation as journalists worked to *enladinar* texts, to translate them into a Ladino that would be intelligible to readers and would resonate with them. This is perhaps best exemplified in the use of Ladino terms *atrazado*, meaning advanced, and *adelantado*, meaning backwards. While these terms preexisted the rise of racial and anthropological ideas in the nineteenth century, through semantic shift they came to function as terms that racialized different groups as primitive and savage or civilized and modern. Yet these ideas were also translated into previous knowledge traditions, joining together science and biblical and rabbinic texts that framed scientific knowledge not as rupture but as continuity, not as unprecedented but as an extension of the familiar.

Ultimately, this chapter seeks to understand what race meant to Ottoman Sephardic Jews at this time. In contrast to the remaining chapters, which largely apply race as an analytic, this chapter approaches race descriptively as an explanatory tool. How did it work to explain human difference, and why did race hold such explanatory power in this particular moment?²⁰ This was a time when a new global discourse on science was emerging, one that acquired status as a fundamentally empirical and objective form of knowledge and that became the primary arbiter of political issues relating to “nature.”²¹ The sciences, which worked in service of empire and depended on it, provided frameworks for making an increasingly globalized world, in part by creating human hierarchies.²² The material practices of scientific research relied on global practices of gathering specimen—including humans—

²⁰ Or, as Sujit Sivasundaram succinctly put it, “What are the conditions under which knowledge moves?” (“Focus: Global Histories of Science,” *Isis* 101, no. 1 (2010): 96).

²¹ Sander L. Gilman and Nancy Leys Stepan, “Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism,” in *The “Racial” Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*, ed. Sandra Harding, Race, Gender, and Science (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 186.

²² Sadiya Qureshi, “Science, Empire and Globalization in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Routledge Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Science*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2017), 18–29.

from colonial territories and bringing them back to the metropole, dead or alive, where, like the Ashantis, they were displayed in gardens, museums, private homes, and theaters.²³

New scientific ideas spread rapidly as a result of new print technologies, including the introduction of recently developed printing machines and the mechanization of paper manufacturing.²⁴ In tandem, an increase in schooling at this time led to rising international literacy rates and the explosion of a global print culture. The advent of the telegraph, railroads, and steamships further accelerated the dissemination of ideas across vast distances. The rise of a new information economy at this time thus advanced the spread of ideas—including those about race and anthropology—as part of the larger circulation of scientific knowledge in the nineteenth century, including into the Ottoman Empire and within it.

The spread of scientific knowledge in the empire rose dramatically in the nineteenth century.²⁵ Ottoman intellectuals increasingly saw the world as a subject to be studied scientifically and systematically to regenerate the empire and reverse its decline.²⁶ Its territorial losses and the ebbing of Ottoman military strength led to a renewed focus on science (*ilm*), and state officials and intellectuals came to see Europe's military and technological superiority as one of the most significant causes of Ottoman defeats. Beginning in 1815, the Ottoman state absorbed science as part of its new bureaucratic practices of statecraft; it established Western-style schools and imperial academies that taught students sciences, medicine, engineering, geography, and translation to educate new armies and bureaucratic elite.²⁷ It brought in instructors, technicians, and military officers as teachers

²³ Qureshi, 19.

²⁴ Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*, 6–7.

²⁵ M. Alper Yalçinkaya, *Learned Patriots: Debating Science, State, and Society in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). See also the many scientific periodicals discussed in Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*.

²⁶ Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, “Travel, Civilization And The East: Ottoman Travellers” (Middle East Technical University, n.d.), 97.

²⁷ Marwa Elshakry, “When Science Became Western: Historiographical Reflections,” *Isis* 101, no. 1 (2010): 101; M. Alper Yalçinkaya, *Learned Patriots: Debating Science, State, and Society in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

from France, Italy, and England and sent Ottoman students to study abroad in European capitals. Science was seen as Western science, useful knowledge directed to the needs of the state.²⁸ But increasingly in the nineteenth century, scientific knowledge was considered a prerequisite for modern progress, and scientific journals and books proliferated among a wider public. In this way, Sephardic journalists were participating in a broader moment of science popularization across the empire and beyond.

This was facilitated through the expansion of the Ladino press at this time. While early Ladino publications were primarily addressed to religious men, the 1860s and 1870s saw a boom in newspaper publishing that circulated secular material to a more popular readership, including women and children.²⁹ The rise in the press bore the imprint of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU), which inspired a new generation of journalists and whose work was often supported by the AIU.³⁰ This milieu of newspaper editors and journalists formed a small and somewhat insular circle. They read and published in one another's papers; they engaged in debate and fierce polemics. The advent of European-style education led to higher literacy rates, and the Ottoman Sephardic world saw the rise of a new reading public that cut across class, gender, age, religious observance, educational background, and profession.³¹ As a vehicle of mass education, newspapers played a significant role in the mission to make Ottoman Sephardic Jews educated, cultured, productive, and self-consciously modern.³² Daily newspapers not only covered current events, but also often published instructional supplements that sought to entertain and to

²⁸ Notably, science also circulated in the empire through missionizing efforts and the translation of scientific articles and treatises (Elshakry, 102). For an example of this in the Ottoman Sephardic world, see *El manadero o la puente de la sensya*, a missionary publication in Ladino that included scientific content.

²⁹ Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*; Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture*. Both discuss precursors, starting with the publication of Shaarei Mizrah, the first, if short-lived, Ladino newspaper published in Izmir in 1842.

³⁰ Stein, 66; Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture*, 74.

³¹ Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*, 61.

³² Statistics on circulation, literacy, and readership are notoriously difficult to come by. While estimates of circulation remain low, scholars note that newspapers were often shared and read aloud, which was a popular practice within Ottoman Jewish communities.

inform readers of the latest developments and fashions in food and clothing, in child-rearing and leisure activities, as well as the human and natural sciences, including science, anthropology, and race.³³

To understand how Sephardic journalists translated scientific ideas about race and anthropology, this chapter is loosely organized by chronology, beginning with how Ladino publications first introduced readers to the idea of science in the 1860s and 1870s. It then turns to how they presented readers with an evolutionary view of the world, one that accounted for racial differences, which were shaped by climate and culture. Such ideas, which circulated in the late 1870s and 1880s underpinned debates on whether different races represented different species, or were all one species—and where Jews fit into various racial schemas. Beginning in the 1890s, these writers translated debates in which Jews themselves mobilized ideas of race in service of political movements, including integrationism and Zionism. As the nineteenth century progressed and notions of biological determinism became increasingly prominent, the press began to spread ideas of physiognomy and the human body, which played an ever-greater role within anthropological reports at both the professional and popular level—including that of the Ashantis. By tracing this timeline, we can see both how it follows shifting currents within European anthropology and race science, and moments when it diverges, demonstrating how Ottoman Sephardic writers adopted and adapted notions that were circulating globally to reflect their own local circumstances and visions of reform.

Introducing Science

Before explicating scientific concepts such as anthropology and race, Sephardic journalists first sought to introduce readers to the very idea of science. In the first 1864 issue of *El lunar*, a Ladino periodical out of Salonica, Judah Nehama presented his readers with the

³³ Stein, 123.

concept of science, which “includes all kinds of knowledge and study on all kinds of topics; furthermore, all the forms of knowledge that were arranged and belong to a certain type and over time each one became its own area of particular study.”³⁴ These types included “the metaphysical and moral sciences” (theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, economics); “the historical sciences” (history, chronology, geography); “the mathematical sciences” (mathematics, meteorology); “the physical and natural sciences” (physics, chemistry, medicine); and “the occult or false sciences” (alchemy).³⁵ It was within the science of geography that readers could find “ethnography,” or “the science that deals with the customs of nations.”³⁶

Over a decade later, science remained a largely unknown concept among Ottoman Sephardic readers. As a result, in 1879 *La epoka* announced that before publishing articles on science, “We want to say a few words to our readers about what we mean by the word *science*.”³⁷ It began: “Science, in our view, is the story of all there is in the world, of all that we see on earth, in the skies, and outside of ourselves. Science is the story of man and of animals, of the earth and the heavens, of the sun and the moon, of the rain and snow, of the cold and heat, of trees and plants—in short, of all that we can see, touch, smell, hear, and make. With this, science is a great book full of little stories that are more beautiful than the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights*.”³⁸ This broad definition encompassed nature and all that humans perceived with their senses, a form of knowledge so great it surpassed even the most iconic book of stories. Yet scientific knowledge also served a higher purpose as a prerequisite for civilization and progress. Science, it stated, “is what we want to make known to our compatriots in sharing with them the few fruits that we can pick from the tree of

³⁴ “Science,” *El lunar* 1 (1864), 1.

³⁵ “Science,” *El lunar* 2 (1864), 4-5.

³⁶ “Science,” *El lunar* 2 (1864), 4.

³⁷ “On Science,” *La epoka* 8/18/1879, 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

science, the few flowers that we can gather in the field of civilization from among the European nations who have left us far behind.”³⁹ By introducing scientific knowledge to its readers, Sephardic journalists sought to help Jews to progress to the heights reached by European nations.

To give readers an example of scientific knowledge and its purpose, *La epoka* explicated the concept of geography. “When we move to a new house,” it began, “the first thing we do is to learn who we are living among, who our neighbors are.” Invoking a collective “we” served as a persuasive rhetorical device for readers to identify with the editorial voice. “Why do we want to know all this?” it asked its readers. It answered: “First because of our interest in knowing people, to talk with them and help one another...But it is also because of curiosity. In moving to this house, we ask the names of those who live there, their occupations, etc. It is curiosity that impels us to ask, and it is thanks to curiosity that man learns every day.”⁴⁰ Yet the article proceeded to explain that this curiosity extended beyond one’s neighbors and city: “How interesting and helpful it is to know all peoples, their religion, their trades. And to learn all of this, we must study geography. Therefore geography is a science that teaches us without us needing to leave our country. Staying at home, we can learn who people are who live like us on this earth, where they are found, the languages they speak, the god they worship, the government they have, the trade they do, the wealth they take from the earth on which they live.”⁴¹ Journalists helped readers to conceptualize geography as a science of the world based on their experiences at home, translating the unfamiliar in the language of the familiar. At a time when scientific knowledge and especially geography was deemed fundamental to military and bureaucratic operations, the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 4.

concept of geography was also seen as important as the more popular level and spread through books, curricula, and newspapers such as this one.⁴²

Another Ladino scientific and literary periodical, *El sol*, similarly encouraged readers to develop a sense of geography. The previous year, in 1878, it introduced an article on “Geology,” stating: “Before we enter into this subject, we must give our dear readers some knowledge about the earth on which we live and about the study of its peoples.”⁴³ The Earth, it proclaimed, holds “over 1.1 billion different people, and they speak different languages. If all the languages that exist in the world were calculated, it would be more than thousands.”⁴⁴ This linguistic diversity reflected divergent historical pathways:

Each and every people has its history from the time it began to consider itself a people, and all these histories are not true. The history of one people tells some things that make false the history of another people, and in this way, each one is contrary to another. The cause of this opposition is that each people thinks that the Creator chose only them and that all other peoples will perish, or at least they believe them to be inferior. And so they tell some accounts that were passed on to them and that go against those of other peoples. The cause of this belief or concern is 1. Little knowledge 2. Egoism.⁴⁵

It chastised those who remained ignorant of geography, writing that, “There are many people who think that the land of their birth or homeland is the entire world, and that all the people in the world are their coreligionist brothers, and that the entire world was created only for them. This means that they do not know that the place where they live is but a very small place given the magnitude of the earth, and that their brother coreligionists are but one drop of the sea that is all the people on earth.”⁴⁶ *El sol* pushed readers to move beyond ignorance and egoism, to lean into curiosity and to embrace scientific knowledge like geography, which

⁴² On the rise of interest in geography in the Ottoman Empire, see Palabıyık, “Travel, Civilization And The East,” 100–101. He traces how it was integrated first into the military in the 1830s, before it became more popularized in the 1840s through the publication of scientific books and treatises and its incorporation into secondary and high school curricula. He states that from 1840–1876, after medicine and mathematics, geography was the third field in which Ottomans published the most (101).

⁴³ “Geology,” *El sol* 8 (1878), 116.

⁴⁴ “Geology,” *El sol* 8 (1878), 116.

⁴⁵ “Geology,” *El sol* 8 (1878), 116.

⁴⁶ “Geology,” *El sol* 8 (1878), 116.

would enable them to imagine a much wider world full of those who were unlike themselves, who spoke other languages, lived in other homes, and had other histories.

Yet ethnography also had more utilitarian ends. In “Ethnography: China,” *El sol* commended “all the scholars of Europe, whose spirits do not rest, looking to know all, who succeeded in knowing the nature of this place and the state of the people who live there.”⁴⁷ This proved advantageous, as it explained: “Oftentimes, or almost always, a great benefit is achieved by studying the history of each people in the world who lived before us and who still live today. Their privileges and laws can teach us as much when they are good as when they are bad. If they are good, the natural benefit is that we imitate them. And the contrary, when they are bad, we distinguish it from the justice that we have...” It then provided conventional ethnographic details, including reporting on demographics, topography, and racial characteristics of the Chinese, who “are of the Mongol race. The color of their face is like silk, their hair is black and their faces are round like an egg.”⁴⁸ Ethnography, or “the science that deals with the customs of nations” as defined by *El lunar*, was an antidote to ignorance and egoism and part of the drive, in part compelled by curiosity and in part by practicality, to learn about other peoples on earth.⁴⁹

An Evolutionary View of the World

Learning about various peoples—and what accounted for their differences—led journals like *El sol* to explicate an evolutionary theory of the world. “The earth on which we find ourselves has endured many large and profound changes,” it explained in its article on geology.⁵⁰ “There was a time when our globe was entirely aflame like a planet that is seen in

⁴⁷ “Ethnography: China,” *El sol* 13 15 Tamuz 5638 [July 16, 1878], 186.

⁴⁸ “Ethnography: China,” *El sol* 13, 187.

⁴⁹ “Science,” *El lunar* 2 (1864), 4.

⁵⁰ “Geology,” *El sol* 8, 116-117; 10, 133-137; 11, 160-162. On various speculations on the age of the earth over time, see Dennis R. Dean, “The Age of the Earth Controversy: Beginnings to Hutton,” *Annals of Science* 38, no. 4 (1981): 435-56.

the space of the sky. Little by little, over the course of many thousands of years, the globe began to diminish and take another form. There was also a time when the earth was almost entirely covered with water and many years passed and it then took another form and very slowly it came to the state of in which it is today, which without a doubt will change...”⁵¹

The various stages of the earth, including when it was covered in both fire and ice, were part of a larger understanding of planetary changes: “In the space of the heavens or of the universe, there are many planets, many worlds that sunk and others that were born over the course of many thousands of years.”⁵² *El sol* proceeded to cite as evidence *Bereishit Rabbah*, a Talmudic-era commentary on the biblical book of Genesis: “And how wise are the words of the scholars of *midrash* (Genesis), who say about the verse ‘And God saw all that He had made, etc.’ From this it results that He created (the Creator) worlds and destroyed them until he made them much better.”⁵³ This references Genesis 1:31: “And God saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good.” To explicate this verse, *Bereishit Rabbah* explains that, “Rabbi Abbahu said: This teaches us that God created worlds and destroyed them, saying ‘This one pleases me; those did not please me. Rabbi Pinhas said, Rabbi Abbahu derives this from the verse, ‘And God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good,’ as if to say, ‘This one pleases me, those others did not please me.’” Here *El sol* put rabbinic texts in conversation with the physical sciences, which, it explained, demonstrated how the earth, engulfed by flames or ice, could not sustain life, but that God created the world anew and “much better” with an atmosphere that enabled life.

It was changes in climate over thousands of years that ultimately made it favorable to different life forms, *El sol* explained. This, in turn, offered “proof that on this globe many changes occurred because we see that the animals that exist now are not the animals that were

⁵¹ “Geology,” *El sol* 11, 160.

⁵² “Geology,” *El sol* 11, 160.

⁵³ “Geology,” *El sol* 11, 160, quoting *Bereishit Rabbah* 3:7.

found under the layers of the earth.”⁵⁴ As examples, it presented readers with the idea of fossilized remains of extinct animals like dinosaurs and mammoths found in museums in London and St. Petersburg, demonstrating that not only did the earth change, but so too did nature and the forms of animals it made possible.⁵⁵ The Ladino press commonly printed images of prehistoric animals,



“Antediluvian wild animals: *Dinnetheria*, *Palaeotheria*”
in *El amigo de la familia* 3 (123), 229.

including here the species *dinnetheria* and *palaeotheria*, for readers to visualize these primeval animals, lost to a prehistoric world.

This evolutionary nature was as true for the earth and animals as it was for humans. Reports in the press highlighted the new science of archaeology, which “discovered under the earth signs of people who lived before the flood...like swords, lances, knives, etc. and chemical evidence testifies that they are thousands of years old.”⁵⁶ As a result of such evidence, scholars concluded that, “History shows us that up until today, the centuries of the world move forward every day, making progress (*adelantandosen*). Every century that lies behind us is lower in its level of civilization.”⁵⁷ *El sol* explained: “Nature has taught the human species, as a child who is born with a faithful instructor learns. In the first days of creation, humans were like children who were still not complete, and without a doubt, long ago they were very backwards (*atrazado*). According to the nature of the entire world, so it

⁵⁴ “Geology,” *El sol* 10, 135.

⁵⁵ “Geology,” *El sol* 10, 134.

⁵⁶ “Geology,” *El sol* 10, 135.

⁵⁷ “Geology,” *El sol* 8 (1878), 116.

was too with humans.”⁵⁸ Here we see an evolutionary theory of society at work, in which all peoples progress over time from backwards, *atrazado*, to more civilized, *adelantado*, from tribes to nations. The terms *adelantado* and *atrazado* encapsulate in Ladino this evolutionary theory in linking the idea of being *adelantado*, or advanced in one’s ideas and principles with being ahead of their time, more progressed, more evolved—and being *atrazado*, or more backwards in one’s ideas and principles, with being behind, in the past, less evolved. These terms encompass the spatial and temporal, but also the intellectual and moral.

This was a time when Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) swept through the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁹ Just like their Jewish counterparts, Muslim and Christian Arab thinkers saw in evolution the solution to the predicament of progress. As a scientific theory, it enshrined in science the potential for all groups to evolve and to enter into the circle of civilization (*daire-i medeniyet*) and up the racial hierarchy.⁶⁰ Ottoman intellectuals like Ahmed Mithat and Abdullah Cevdet adopted Darwinist theories that were published and circulated in the empire beginning in the 1870s, and began to apply them to as much to earth as to human societies.⁶¹ However, as Marwa Elshakry points out, the term “social Darwinism” implies a divide between applying Darwin to understand “nature” versus “society,” a divide that would have made little sense in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶²

The Ladino press tended to rewrite content from European sources, and certainly these articles are an example of that, which highlights how texts like these were part of larger global discourses on science and evolution. But what they also reveal is how Sephardic journalists found ways to *enladinar* this material, to translate it linguistically and culturally

⁵⁸ “Geology,” *El sol* 8 (1878), 116.

⁵⁹ Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*.

⁶⁰ *Maarif* 110, 18 Safer 1311 [August 21, 1893], 95.

⁶¹ Palabiyik, “Travel, Civilization And The East,” 399.

⁶² Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*, 5.

into Ladino, into a Ladino that Sephardic readers could understand and that would resonate with them. The terms *aztrazado* and *adelantado* give us a way into thinking about Sephardic and Ladino-based ideas of progress, civilization, and race, ways that seized preexisting terms and redefined them as they translated global ideas into a different textual matrix, one that read geology and the physical sciences through rabbinic commentary, offering religious texts as prooftexts for a new concept of science.

Accounting for Racial Difference

Various stages of human civilization could thus be explained in part through an evolutionary understanding of human society, an understanding that underlay ideas about climate and culture, language and religion, and biology and physiognomy—all of which were mobilized in the nineteenth century to explain racial difference. In the early nineteenth century, climate and environment were seen as particularly influential. As *El sol* explained, “We would like to draw your attention to some things that demonstrate how the nature of each person and each group of people changes, as much in civilization as in intelligence, based on the changes in nature.”⁶³ It was the environment, it claimed, that accounted for human difference. It explained: “Scholars of nature already see clearly that nature exerts a great impact on the manner of living of each people and their knowledge, and we can almost say that nature is the basis of the stages through which each people passes in every time and every generation.” A stadial view of the world, one shaped by climate, corresponded with evolutionary theory and the notion of various stages of progress for humans, both as humans developed biologically as a species and as they developed culturally as civilizations.

While all peoples were capable of progress, *El sol* asserted that some peoples had progressed faster than others based on the climate in different parts of the world. “In places

⁶³ “Geology,” *El sol* 10 (1878), 135.

with a temperate climate where nature spreads its blessings by the handful — clear skies, fruitful earth, rivers, aromatic trees — there, the inhabitants have tasted of the fruits of civilization for thousands of years,” it claimed.⁶⁴ This was as true for Egyptians living on the banks of the Nile and Jews in Mesopotamia as for Greeks and Romans, as well as those in India who lived among “rich, beautiful fields, fruit gardens, fountains and trees.” Each of these groups produced the highest level of science, borne out in imaginative works, complex theologies, and rich literary traditions. But, “On the contrary, in places where nature is dry and withered, where the earth is sun-drenched and desolate, the inhabitants are also savages.”⁶⁵ This was the case for people in Asia, Australia, and “The blacks (negroes) who live on the equator and have black faces from the hot rays of the sun, so much so that this color becomes their nature. They do not know what civilization is at all. The ground beneath them is dry, growing thorns and thistles.” Explaining human difference by recourse to environment rather than biological determinism meant that the possibility of progress was open for all groups, always, including for Ottoman Sephardic Jews themselves.

By the nineteenth century, the notion of environmental determinism of race already had a centuries-long genealogy. The idea that different climates produced different physiognomies and moral characters was rooted in Greek and Roman antiquity, carried through the medieval period, and into Enlightenment discourse.⁶⁶ By the nineteenth

⁶⁴ “Geology,” *El sol* 10 (1878), 135.

⁶⁵ “Geology,” *El sol* 10 (1878), 135.

⁶⁶ In his work *Air, Waters, and Places* (4th c. BCE), Hippocrates asserted, for example, that people in Europe were ungovernable but courageous because of the cold climate, while those in Asia were peaceful but timid as a result of the hot climate. Environmental determinism also appears in works by Aristotle, Pliny, Benjamin of Tudela, Montesquieu, George Buffon, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, and Hegel. In Benjamin of Tudela’s travelogue, Africans living in balmy environments were marked by dark skin but also cowardice and moral laxity. Montesquieu attributed to regional climate a wide range of characteristics, from physiology to national character, to social practices and moral standards. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 155; David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993); Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); David N. Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins*, Medicine, Science, and Religion in Historical Context (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 203.



Left: "Eskimos cut ice blocks to build their houses" in *El amigo de la familia* 105, April 2, 1883 [24 Adar 5643], 84.

Right: "Eskimos" in *El amigo de la familia* 106, April 9, 1883 [2 Sivan 5643], 91.

century, however, environmental determinism began to shape the policies of new and expanding nation-states, both at home and abroad. The notion that climate could change groups of people was evoked in debates on degeneration and regeneration and the place of minorities, and particularly Jews, as citizens within newly emerging nation-states.⁶⁷ Yet it also played into discursive strategies used to bolster imperialism and the notion that human societies living in warmer climates were less developed; more violent, sensual, and instinctive; and in need of imperial guidance. Colonial regimes depicted them as being closer to nature, embedded in and inseparable from their environment, whereas modern European cultures displayed a distance from nature and domination over it.⁶⁸ As a corollary, if

⁶⁷ John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 6.

⁶⁸ Derek Gregory, "Power, Knowledge and Geography," *Geographische Zeitschrift* 86, no. 2 (1998): 86-88.

temperate nature was conceptualized as “normal” nature, then the violence, desires, and uninhibitedness of intemperate and tropical nature remained a safe distance from Europe.⁶⁹

In addition to invoking environmental factors to account for racial difference, articles also turned to the notion of culture. In 1878, *El sol* published an article introducing readers to the discipline of “Anthropology, or the science of the human.”⁷⁰ It accounted for differences between races by declaring that, “The difference that is found between them, in height and color, the form of their bodies and shapes of different body parts is only because of the climate and their customs, how they live their lives, what they eat, and the ability to provide for their needs.”⁷¹ Ethnographic reports further inscribed racial difference through cultural notions of savagery and primitivity. In 1888, under the heading of “Various Scientific Stories,” the Ladino periodical *El instructor*, ran an article titled “Primitive Man Today.” It began: “There are still currently on our planet some primitive (natural, savage) humans, who live as though science did not exist, ignorant of everything, indifferent to all, incapable of higher thought...They are human beings but are almost in an animal (brute) state.”⁷² The Ladino press commonly glossed in parentheses words that readers may not know, here introducing into the linguistic and conceptual vocabulary notions of savagery and primitivity.

Among other groups deemed primitive, it described “dwarves” in Ethiopia, Native Americans dwelling in mountain caverns, and Vedda living in tree tops in Sri Lanka, concluding that, “Not all human races are certainly susceptible to progress.”⁷³ It quoted from a report by Christian missionaries in Ethiopia, where

These savages have all the physical signs of great inferiority. They know nothing about how to light a fire or grow produce from the land...they are fortunate if they succeed in catching a rat, a lizard, or a snake. They are naked in the forests, incapable of building a hut. They generally look for shelter among

⁶⁹ Patricia Lorcín observes how this manifested in anxieties surrounding the corrupting influence of the climate on French colonial officials and settlers in Algeria. See Lorcín, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 125.

⁷⁰ “Anthropology: the Human,” *El sol* 5, 68-71; 6, 85-87; 7, 104-106; 8, 113-116; 10, 137-139; 11, 157-160.

⁷¹ *El sol* 5, 71.

⁷² *El instructor* 2, 29.

⁷³ *El instructor* 2, 29.

the trees. They feel almost no shame and have only very light family ties. After breastfeeding, the mother does not delay in abandoning her children.⁷⁴

Similar to the opening description of the Ashantis, this article signified primitivity through intelligence; productivity; food, clothing, and housing; and familial life. It emphasized the lack of family ties through the claim of child abandonment by mothers. This, *El instrutor* asserted, was also true for other groups, citing the killing of elderly relatives in Polynesia and infanticide among “tribes of the Native Americans, in Australia, India, and in Africa (where it is still a practice among the Hottentots).”⁷⁵ This also echoed reports in *La epoka* of cannibalism or “anthrophagists (maneaters), or people who eat human flesh, who are still found in many places on earth, primarily in the interior of Africa, in ‘North’ and ‘South’ America and in India.”⁷⁶ By describing and sensationalizing cultural practices, true or not, ethnographic reports racialized groups as savage, primitive, and “absolutely uncivilizable.”

In doing so, they often compared human groups to different kinds of animals. *El instrutor* cited the expertise of scientists “who visited these places and asserted that these human beings are hardly a few degrees more advanced than orangutangs.”⁷⁷ Moreover, it took the perspective of missionaries who “have worked for many years in vain to inculcate in these races the first beginnings of an education. All their efforts were useless.”⁷⁸ While missionaries claimed that it was easy to educate “some domesticated animals (like cats, dogs, etc.),” it was much harder “to conquer the savagery of these miserable creatures, whose stupidity is sometimes so great that if they strive to understand, they fall asleep and if one insists on making them understand, they become sick. Thus it is more difficult to make a savage into a civilized man than it is a monkey into a man.”⁷⁹ In a similar piece on people in

⁷⁴ *El instrutor* 2, 29.

⁷⁵ *El instrutor* 2, 29. The association of savagery and infanticide was a common trope already in eighteenth-century travel writing. See Steve Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

⁷⁶ *La epoka*, 2/14/1878, 4.

⁷⁷ *El instrutor* 2, 29.

⁷⁸ *El instrutor* 2, 29.

⁷⁹ *El instrutor* 2, 29.

the Congo, *El telegrafo* reported that “Currently, Protestant missionaries are converting to Christianity masses of these tribes.”⁸⁰ This it considered to be a good thing, because “The negroes (blacks) of the Congo are much less intelligent than the other races of Africa. They do not have intelligence, but rather simply instinct like animals. In effect, their customs and traditions are close to animals’ way of life.”⁸¹ Such language further reinforced the equation of savagery and warm climates, an environment in which humans and animals could be virtually indistinguishable.

Despite their own tangles with missionaries in the Ottoman Empire, Sephardic writers praised missionaries’ “marvelous efforts, the considerable sacrifices, and the expenditures that are made and will be made each day by Protestant propaganda societies.”⁸² It balked at supporting their efforts at converting other monotheists, “But when they are trying to make savage and barbarian tribes believe in God, spreading civilization and Christian charity among them, we see their duty in elevating and enlightening them.”⁸³ It was the ongoing efforts of Protestant missionaries that led to their evolutionary progress, *El telegrafo* declared. “The inhabitants of these islands were savages a few years ago,” it explained. Yet their physiognomy remained the same: “Some of the inhabitants are the color of copper and some are yellow, their eyes black, their hair black and thick.”⁸⁴ These physical details were bolstered by cultural descriptions: “They went almost naked, and they committed many acts of cruelty to the elderly and women. They believe in spirits and make forms out of stone and worship them.”⁸⁵ Ottoman Sephardic writers created and represented to readers the idea of

⁸⁰ *El telegrafo*, April 5, 1894, 146.

⁸¹ *El telegrafo*, April 5, 1894, 146.

⁸² “Micronesia,” *El amigo de la familia* 3 (112), 137. For interactions with missionaries in the Ottoman Empire, see Cengiz Sisman, “Failed Proselytizers or Modernizers? Protestant Missionaries Among the Jews and Sabbateans/Dönmes in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 51, no. 6 (2015): 932–49.

⁸³ “Micronesia,” *El amigo de la familia* 3 (112), 137.

⁸⁴ “Micronesia,” *El amigo de la familia* 3 (112), 137.

⁸⁵ “Micronesia,” *El amigo de la familia* 3 (112), 137. For similar ethnographic accounts on the Vedda of Sri Lanka, see “A People who Never Laugh,” *El telegrafo*, April 19, 1894, 171–172; and on the Chinese, see “Ethnography: China,” *El sol* 13, 186–187.

“savage” Others as uncivilized, ignorant, and superstitious, in need of the guiding hand of missionaries and colonial intervention.

Through such articles, Ottoman Sephardic journalists picked up preexisting racial scripts that were circulating internationally at the time and were largely produced through the expanding colonial occupation of lands and peoples around the world. In accounting for racial difference through both climate and culture, they distinguished between those who were still deemed primitive and “absolutely uncivilizable,” located largely across the colonized world, and those who were more “susceptible to progress,” like themselves. They further emphasized this difference by encouraging readers to identify with anthropologists as they scrutinized those they considered to be the savage races of the world.

Counting Races

The creation of a worldwide racial hierarchy was one of the most significant and globalized efforts to order human life in the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ Yet the criteria used to create these classifications shifted over the course of the modern period. The eighteenth century saw the birth of modern ethnology with the belief in qualitative differences between the races.⁸⁷ Beginning in the 1840s, however, approaches to understanding and classifying human groups began to proliferate.⁸⁸ Some scholars sought to redefine the criteria used to categorize and rank people. While notions of climate and culture predominated early on in the nineteenth century, European scholars, scientists, and physicians began to develop techniques to quantify human difference through the new discipline of anthropology.

⁸⁶ Qureshi, “Science, Empire and Globalization in the Nineteenth Century.”

⁸⁷ These taxonomies were derivative of earlier Enlightenment notions of the “ordering of mankind” and eighteenth-century works on the role of place, climate, language, and race in human classification by writers such as Hobbes, Montesquieu, Hume, Kant, and Fichte. See El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory*, 34.

⁸⁸ Sadiya Qureshi emphasizes that the rise of scientific racism in the mid-nineteenth century did not completely displace other approaches to race based on social, cultural, or linguistic considerations, but there was a proliferation rather than a homogenization of approaches (Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 214–17).

Increasingly, anthropologists embraced a biological determinism that used body measurements to quantify human difference and saw them as the key to understanding both human history and its future.⁸⁹

In 1878, *El sol* introduced readers to this new discipline in a series entitled “Anthropology: The Human.” It consisted of forty numbered sections that explicated topics ranging from the brain and consciousness, to the chemical elements that make up the body, to the logic of dreams.⁹⁰ It opened by stating:

1. The human is the chosen one of all creations. The brilliance of their form, the beautiful completion of the build of the body, and the curiosity and capacity of their works elevate them to the highest degree of all those created on this earth. As the great prophet among prophets said, he was created in the image of God (*because in the image of God he created man*)⁹¹ and as the great poet David said, he lacks little less than God (*and you have made him little less than divinities*).⁹²

The text began its discussion of anthropology with quotes from Genesis and Psalms that assess the human body and mental capacities through comparison with divinity. In doing so, it resituates biblical verses as part of modern, scientific discourse, framing anthropology not as an epistemological rupture, but as continuity with biblical tradition.⁹³

After providing a detailed examination of the human body and how the different limbs and organs function, it set out a racial schema in which “There are five human families, or

⁸⁹ This drive to map out all human races of the world, to mark them as inferior or superior, to classify and rank them, unfolded in the nineteenth century within the context of nation-state formation within the domestic sphere and imperialism abroad. Within the nation-state, this reflected concerns about degeneration and criminality, overlaid onto European imperial and racial ideas of the inferiority of colonized races. See Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002).

⁹⁰ *El sol* 5, 68-71; 6, 85-87; 7, 104-106; 8, 113-116; 10, 137-139; 11, 157-160. A complete listing of the sections includes: the brain and consciousness; the head, throat, legs, chest, and arms; the five human races; childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age, and death; the chemical elements that make up the body; the four temperaments; the senses, eyes, ears, tongue, skin, and how they work together; sleep and waking hours; the internal logic of dreams; mesmerism.

⁹¹ This refers to Moses, believed to have written down the Bible, and here references Genesis 1:27: “And God created humanity in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.”

⁹² Psalm 8:6: “You have made him little (less) than divinities, and have crowned him with glory and honor.”

⁹³ In her study of Darwin in the Arab world, Marwa Elshakry notes a similar practice in terms of scholars constructing lineages for evolutionary theory by tracing aspects of the theory to older and more familiar schools of thought. See Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*, 8.

racas (*rasas*).”⁹⁴ For each race, it listed what it considered to be defining characteristics, including geographic location, cultural practices, physiognomic information, intellectual aptitude, and professional profiles. The first in this racial schema was “White: they live in Europe, in western Asia, and now they are found scattered over almost all of America, whose different customs reflect the lands and cities in which they live.”⁹⁵ It then praised their professional success, noting that, “They have complete knowledge of agriculture, industry, and business, and now almost all parts of the world are full of them.” Here it appears to link their work aptitude with their settlement around the world, due perhaps both to colonialism and the spread of global commerce. Finally, it remarked that, “Their skulls are round and have an elliptical shape, meaning that it is round like an egg. The angle or sides of the skull are almost 80 degrees.” This refers to the measurement of the circumference of the skull; the larger the measurement, the larger the brain case was thought to be, and the more intelligent a race was considered. As *El sol* explained to readers in a footnote, “When the head of an animal is rounder and larger, it has greater consciousness.”

Second in the racial schema was “The Black family or race: found in all parts of Africa south of the Atlas Mountains.”⁹⁶ For Sub-Saharan Africans, “The size and build of their bodies is not slim like those of white people. The shape of their faces is very close to those of monkeys.” This, the article explained, was evidenced by anthropometry in that “The angle of their faces is only sixty degrees.” Additionally, “Their bodies are large, strong, and very black. There is little industry or business among them and they live under the control of their feelings or instincts.” Similar to the ethnographic accounts discussed above in “Primitive Man Today,” this text reproduced the popular racist trope equating “savages” with animals,

⁹⁴ “Anthropology: The Human,” *El sol* 5, 71.

⁹⁵ “Anthropology: The Human,” *El sol* 5, 71.

⁹⁶ “Anthropology: The Human,” *El sol* 5, 71.

and particularly Black people with monkeys, less evolved and living based on instinct rather than knowledge or reason.

Next in the racial schema came “The family or race of brown peoples” who “live in India and the surrounding areas.”⁹⁷ Their physiognomic profile noted that, “The build of their bodies is ordinary and more like black people. Their hair is straight and black. Their skull is rounder, their faces are large like the curve of an egg. Their noses are straight and their feet are small.” It concluded: “They have little intelligence, but their great virtue is that they only eat vegetables and not meat.” As the only comment on diet in the article, vegetarianism signaled a notable departure from known dietary habits, but the reasons for its equation with great virtue at this time remain unclear.

The fourth race in this schema is “The family or race of colored people” who “live in some parts of America.”⁹⁸ Here it refers to Native Americans, whose “color is like copper. Their hair is long and black, their chin small, the skull round, the forehead wide, the bones of their jaw protrude a bit.” It similarly compared them to animals in that “Their nose is like that of an eagle. They have a strong sense of smell and are savages in their habits.”

Finally, there was “The family or race of Turks or Mongols” who “live in the east of Asia and the island of Japan.”⁹⁹ Notably, the text denoted Turks using the Ladino term “*El Vedre*,” meaning “The Green One.” While this association between Turks and the color green has often been seen as reflecting the importance of green in Islam, the article interestingly projects the color onto their skin itself, writing that “The size of their bodies is average and their color is green.” Here we see slippage between metaphorical and physical coloring. Further, “Their hair is straight and black, their heads large, their faces wide, and the point of their nose is high. Their eyes are small, narrow, and deep.” It concludes that, “Some have

⁹⁷ “Anthropology: The Human,” *El sol* 5, 71.

⁹⁸ “Anthropology: The Human,” *El sol* 5, 71.

⁹⁹ “Anthropology: The Human,” *El sol* 5, 71.

sense and knowledge and have become experts and officials, but they have not reached the level of white people.” It thus situated all five races within a global racial hierarchy, one in which the Black Africans represented the lowest rung of humanity; through races deemed brown, including Native Americans and Indians; up to Turks and Asians, marked as green; and culminating in the white race. Yet, for a racial schema published in a Jewish periodical in Ladino, any mention of Jews remained conspicuously absent.

While anthropology provided one means of investigating the number of different races, another lay in the emerging science of language. Scholars in the nineteenth century saw language as fundamentally a question of race. As the newspaper *El tyempo* declared in 1892, “The science of linguistics has been transformed into a solid and fertile terrain over a long path that guides scholars towards some great and magnificent discoveries,” discoveries that were fundamentally about race.¹⁰⁰ It explained to readers that, “The scholars who occupy themselves with linguistics (the science of languages) have for a long time and even still continue to ask themselves this question, which remains without a definitive solution.” This question was about where languages derived from, which in turn became a question about the origins of human races. “From which trunk did all of the many innumerable languages extend like great branches over the face of the earth?” it asked. “Was there in primitive creation one mother language that gave birth to all of these languages like Eve, who was the mother of mankind?”¹⁰¹ It asserted that, “It is true that there was a first language, as there was a first human family in creation, and all believe that this primitive and original language was full of terms that were short but expressive.” This reflects racialized theories of philology by scholars such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Alexander von Humboldt, and Ernest Renan, who believed that there was a link between the structure of a language and the spirit it represented.

¹⁰⁰ “The Origins and Development of the French Language,” *El tyempo* 2/18/1892, 328.

¹⁰¹ “The Origins and Development of the French Language,” *El tyempo* 2/18/1892, 328.

They contended that languages reflected a people's intellectual capabilities and the distinctive traits and psychological character.¹⁰² For Renan writing later in the nineteenth century, an age of progress and evolution, "this primitive and original language" matched an image of the ancient Israelites—and Jews as their modern descendants—as stagnant, impervious to the forces of history, and uncompromising in their religion.¹⁰³

Not only did languages reflect racial characteristics attributed to their speakers, but tracing linguistic histories enabled the reconstruction of racial genealogies. *El tyempo* declared that, "In the same way as individuals and families, languages also have their genealogies, their ancestors."¹⁰⁴ It recounted the history of the Israelites' "primitive and original language" and how "One day, this crude language expended itself and this event, whose story is found in the bible, took place after the flood when people thought of building the tower, which is called for this reason the Tower of Babel, being that God mixed up language there." It was following the flood that Noah's descendants formed groups that spoke different languages, a division often considered the first source of linguistic and national diversity.¹⁰⁵ Noah's sons were therefore seen as spreading different national languages. As *El tyempo* explained:

This clearly proves that primitive language, transmitted from Noah and his sons to his descendants after the flood transformed after some time, and that each family, dispersed here and there so that humanity gradually increased, preserved in its particular language a piece of this scattered language. It is very probable that the descendants of Shem, the eldest son of Noah, the grandfather of the Semitic race, conserved with the most fidelity the rest of the primitive language...¹⁰⁶

In providing this biblical genealogy, it reiterated for readers that, "It is already known that the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, were dispersed on the face of the earth and so the descendants of Shem became the ancestors of the Semitic race, those of Ham

¹⁰² Maurice Olender, *The languages of Paradise: race, religion, and philology in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 4–5.

¹⁰³ Olender, 54–56.

¹⁰⁴ "The Origins and Development of the French Language," *El tyempo* 2/18/1892, 328.

¹⁰⁵ Tuska Benes, *In Babel's Shadow: Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Detroit, Mich: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 12.

¹⁰⁶ "The Origins and Development of the French Language," *El tyempo* 2/18/1892, 328.

of the African race, and those of Japheth of the European race.”¹⁰⁷ This reflects a long historical theory of the sons of Noah dating from the medieval and early modern periods that linked Shem with Asia, Ham with Africa, and Japheth with Europe, geographic associations that became deeply racialized, seen in the so-called Hamitic curse used to justify enslavement and racism towards Black Africans.¹⁰⁸ Within such a schema, there were three primary races rooted in different geographies, reflected in different languages, who traced their lineage back to Noah’s sons.¹⁰⁹

Nineteenth-century scholars never reached a consensus on a definition of race, but although it remained polysemic, it was became a key concept within both scientific and then popular discourse.¹¹⁰ We can see some of the ambiguity of the term in the debates over how many races existed in the world as the criteria used to classify them both drew on longer histories of racialization, as seen in philology and biblical interpretation rooted in medieval

¹⁰⁷ This biblical genealogy derives from Genesis 5:32: “And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.” Maurice Olender writes that Herder and A. L. von Schläzer (1735—1809) were the first to apply the term Semitic to a group of languages (Olender, *The languages of Paradise*, 11).

¹⁰⁸ Benjamin Braude traces this development from the years 1400-1800 in “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 103–42. On the Hamitic curse and how it has been mobilized in racialized ways across time and religions, see David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Sylvester A. Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Robin Law, “The ‘Hamitic Hypothesis’ in Indigenous West African Historical Thought,” *History in Africa* 36 (2009): 293–314; Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*, African Studies (Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 2013); John O. Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell, *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam*, (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2002). Sylvia Wynter explains how mobile classificatory categories inherited from earlier periods, became useable in later racialized contexts. See Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex M. Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 5–52.

¹⁰⁹ Scholars have explored how Arab Jews historically embraced a Semitic identity. See Lital Levy, “Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Mashriq,” *Jew Q Rev The Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 4 (2008): 452–69; Jonathan Marc Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race, and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter*, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Mostafa Hussein, “The Integration of Arabo-Islamic Culture into the Emergent Hebrew Culture of Late Ottoman Palestine,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 109, no. 3 (2019): 464–70; Yuval Evri, *ha-Shivah le-Andalus: mahloket ‘al tarbut ye-zehut Yehudit-Sefaradit ben ‘Arviyut le-‘Ivriyut* [Heb.], Mehkar ve-‘iyun (Yerushalayim: Hotsa’at sefarim ‘a. sh. Y.L. Magnes, ha-Universitah ha-‘Ivrit, 2020); Orit Bashkin, “On Noble and Inherited Virtues: Discussions of the Semitic Race in the Levant and Egypt, 1876–1918,” *Humanities (Basel)* 10, no. 3 (2021): 88–108.

¹¹⁰ Olender, *The languages of Paradise*, 57.

and early modern hermeneutics, as well as newer methods such as anthropometric skull measurements. And as the methods shifted, so too did the number of races one counted; while some favored five, others went as high as seven or as low as three.¹¹¹ But debates over the number of races in the world, and what those races might be, evoked a greater issue of classification, which was whether all races represented different human species or whether they belonged to the same species.

Were all races a single species or different species?

Already in the eighteenth century, natural philosophers, political theorists and theologians, travelers and medical practitioners offered conflicting interpretations of the biblical stories of creation, Adam and Eve, and Noah's sons in support of monogenesis—the idea that different races were all one species—or polygenesis, the belief in multiple human species. By the nineteenth century, although they invoked the science of comparative anatomy, anthropology, natural history, and climatology, underlying these scientific debates were political preoccupations.¹¹² In a world in which anthropologists and government officials, scientists and slaveholders claimed polygenesis to justify colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade and to bolster claims of political and economic superiority, the stakes in these debates were high.

Ottoman Sephardic journalists weighed in on these debates. In its series on “Anthropology,” *El sol* declared: “The human is singular and gifted as a species, and there is no fundamental or radical difference between them. It is wrong what some scholars think, that humans were created as many different species, black and white and many others.”¹¹³ Rather

¹¹¹ Sadiya Qureshi gives by way of example Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who counted five (Caucasian, Malayan, Mongolian, American, and Ethiopian); Immanuel Kant, who defined four; and Georges Cuvier, who listed three (Caucasian, Mongolian, and Negro). See Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 200.

¹¹² Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors*, 79.

¹¹³ “Anthropology: The Human,” *El sol* 5, 70-71.

than attributing biological difference to the existence of different human species, it chalked it up both to climate and to culture. But ultimately, its main evidence of monogenesis—that all humans were one species—was that: “And greater than any of these reasons, our holy law testifies to this, that male and female were created.”¹¹⁴ Invoking the Biblical creation story—specifically Genesis chapter 1, verse 27—it held up Adam and Eve as the progenitors of humanity to refute the nineteenth-century racial doctrine of polygenesis, that different races stemmed from different progenitors and so were different species.¹¹⁵

The idea that all humans descended from the biblical Adam and Eve had been a long-held doctrine in Jewish, Islamic, and Christian thought.¹¹⁶ As believers, their sense of place in the divine order of things and of their identity as humans created in the image of God were underpinned by a notion of human origins that assumed the divine truth of the book of Genesis and their literal descent from Adam and Eve. But as methods for creating racial taxonomies proliferated and particularly with the rise of race science in the nineteenth century, some scholars moved away from an earlier monogenist, ethnological, and environmentalist tradition. These polygenists proposed that the differences between races were just too great to constitute a single human species, and that they warranted splitting people into different species with unequal, innate, and immutable physical, mental, and moral capacities. One prominent advocate of polygenesis was Paul Broca, a physical anthropologist and the president of the *Société d'anthropologie de Paris*.¹¹⁷ Many polygenists held that even

¹¹⁴ “Anthropology: The Human,” *El sol* 5, 71.

¹¹⁵ Genesis 1:27: “And God created humanity in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.”

¹¹⁶ Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors*, 5; Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 198–200.

¹¹⁷ Paul Broca and racial debates at the *Société d'anthropologie de Paris* will resurface once again in chapter four in relation to the work of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and the Beta Israel. Polygenists like Broca created an arsenal of scholarship to make their case, including works on national character, biological heredity, geographic location, human acclimatization, and phrenology. See Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors*, 173.

if there had been a single act of divine creation, the variations between humans had become so great as to require their classification into different species.¹¹⁸

Yet even as some scholars began to move away from an earlier ethnological and environmentalist tradition, Jewish writers would continue to uphold it throughout the nineteenth century.¹¹⁹ In April 1878, *El sol* printed a front-page feature also entitled “Anthropology,” in which it championed monogenesis, marshalling both evolutionary theory and environmental determinism in support. It began: “The great scholars of nature of our time occupy themselves with human history to know the first origin of the days of creation, and scholars of anthropology—or the science that deals with humans—have given different ideas of where in the world humans were created and emerged for the first time and how they behaved during the first years of the world.”¹²⁰ Again, it reiterated an evolutionary view of the world, claiming that, “The many signs that lie in the surface of the earth from ancient ruins show us that many changes occurred in the earth from the time that we came into existence, or better, from the time we were created until today.” The evolutionary nature of the world thus applied not only to the planet, but also to humanity: “For this reason, there are some scholars who believe that many changes have also occurred among humans themselves, be it in their bodies, their sizes, forms, colors, or nature, and there are some who also think that humans also constitute different animals.”

Yet it quickly negated this last idea based on physiognomic differences that it accounted for not by polygenesis, but by environmental determinism:

But, contrary to this last idea, scholars of a science called physiognomy have demonstrated that based on the build of the human body, the brain, the soles of the hands and feet, it is clear that from the beginning of creation, humans were created as speaking animals, masters of consciousness unlike other animals, and the difference that we see in human races, such as Black people, Turks, colored people is

¹¹⁸ Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 200.

¹¹⁹ Black intellectuals in the United States also drew on Christian monogenism as a form of self-defense. However, as was the case for Jews and other monogenists, theological arguments based on scripture appeared less scientific and therefore less legitimate when measured by scientific standards. See Gilman and Stepan, “Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism.”

¹²⁰ “Anthropology,” *El sol* 8, 113.

for no reason other than climate that causes changes in their bodies, such as Black people who live in very hot places where the sun always burns with its scorching rays.¹²¹

El sol joined the environmentalist chorus of those who argued that it was climate that continuously acted on bodies over several generations as a key force in evolution, creating physiognomic differences between humans, and not biological determinism. In doing so, it marshalled environmentalism to uphold and sustain the traditional Jewish belief in the common descent of all humanity. The article concluded unequivocally that despite these racial differences, “all are children of one father, of one race (*rasa*).”¹²² Rooted in both scientific and religious frames of reference, here it invoked both the new “science called physiognomy” as well as biblical lineage of all races as “children of one father,” in proffering what it deemed to be indisputable evidence in support of monogenesis.

Yet the assertion of all humans being “children of one father, of one race” contradicted *El sol*’s earlier racial schema, in which it mapped out the five races of the world. This points to the ambiguous and largely undefined nature of race in the nineteenth-century as scholars debated and negotiated, conceptualized and reconceptualized what race might mean and how it worked in ways that furthered their own political agendas.¹²³ And Ottoman Sephardic writers were no different. By advocating for monogenesis, they aligned themselves with other advocates of monogenesis who worked to uphold the orthodox biblical interpretation, and yet, it may also reflect a sense of anxiety over where they might fall within a new racial classification that separated human societies into different species.

On Jews and Race

¹²¹ “Anthropology,” *El sol* 8, 113-114.

¹²² “Anthropology,” *El sol* 8, 113-114.

¹²³ This was as true for monogenists as it was for polygenists, who also invoked monogenesis in ways that served a white supremacist politic. See Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors*.

Throughout such explications on race in the Ladino press, discussions of Jews remained few and far between. Yet for those investigating racial differences in France, England, and Germany, Jews posed a particularly interesting racial example and played an important role in debates on race. Given their dispersion in countries and climates around the world, scholars claimed that through them they could investigate the many racial questions about connections between environment and race, racial purity and mixing, how to account for group traits, and others.¹²⁴ By the mid-nineteenth century, anthropologists considered Jews a race; however, their specific racial classification could differ from one scientist to the next.¹²⁵ It was common belief that Jews were predisposed to certain ways of thinking and acting based on their “racial nature,” and scholars pontificated on the unique characteristics that set them apart from other groups, and what accounted for these traits, be it hereditary or historical, cultural or environmental.¹²⁶ Some focused on physiognomy while others turned to historical factors: dispersion, repressive legislation, professional restrictions, anti-Jewish violence. Others posited that perhaps external and internal forces worked together in that traits developed by historical pressures became hereditary over multiple generations.¹²⁷ Many Jews considered themselves to be a distinct race, rooted in common origins and in shared physical and mental characteristics, both negative and positive. Some European Jewish thinkers used the language of race to articulate understandings of the Jewish past and visions for the Jewish future—ideas that made their way into the Ottoman Sephardic press.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Hart, *Jews & Race*, xiii.

¹²⁵ Efron, *Defenders of the Race*, 3.

¹²⁶ John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 8.

¹²⁷ Hart, *Jews & Race*, xv.

¹²⁸ There is a small but rich literature on how Jews themselves have historically internalized, engaged with, and projected ideas of race science. See Gilman and Stepan, “Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism”; Efron, *Defenders of the Race*; Hart, *Jews & Race*. Gilman and Stepan explore how Jews were not the only minoritized groups to do this, but also Native Americans and Black Americans produced racial studies in which they accepted the concept of race, but used it to parry negative images and assessments of their groups.

In 1864, *El lunar* ran an article on “The Cosmopolitanism of the Jewish Race.”¹²⁹ It announced the publication of a new book by Doctor Jean-Christian M. F. J. Boudin, a French physician and anthropologist, who concluded that “only the Jewish race is capable of living, reproducing, and spreading throughout all regions of the world.”¹³⁰ In 1860, Boudin had presented his statistical research on the ability of different races to adapt to diverse climates at a meeting of the *Société d’anthropologie de Paris*.¹³¹ He proclaimed his startling conclusion that Jews outstripped all other races in their ability to acclimate in all corners of the globe, asserting that, “Not only do they not lose any of their racial specificity, but even do so in conditions that are far more healthy than the indigenous races themselves.”¹³² *El lunar* proceeded to offer evidence of this conclusion, quoting at length from Boudin’s work. The key to their unique racial abilities, Boudin asserted, was cosmopolitanism, which he considered a defining feature of the Jewish race.¹³³ “There is only one race in the world that up until now has resolved the problem of ubiquity,” he wrote. “Only one race has demonstrated itself to be truly cosmopolitan, meaning that it can inhabit and live in any place on earth, and this race is the Jewish race.”¹³⁴ As evidence, Boudin noted their wide geographic spread “in Europe from Gibraltar to Norway; in Africa from Algiers to the Cape of Good Hope; in Asia from Cochin to the Caucasuses, and from Jaffa to Peking; in America from

¹²⁹ “The Cosmopolitanism of the Jewish Race,” *El lunar* 1 (1864), 6-14. It is likely rewritten from “Le cosmopolitisme de la race Juive par le docteur Boudin,” *La Vérité Israélite* 3 (1861), 228-233, which initially appeared as “Der Kosmopolitismus der jüdischen Race,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 9 (1860), 401-406.

¹³⁰ “The Cosmopolitanism of the Jewish Race,” *El lunar* 1 (1864), 6. Jean-Christian M. F. J. Boudin (1806-1867) served as the chief medical officer with the French army in the Alps and Italy. He pioneered the publication of army medical statistics, and he published widely on the health of various human groups, and on cross-breeding.

¹³¹ Boudin, “Du non-cosmopolitisme des races humaines,” *Mémoires de la Société d’Anthropologie de Paris*, 1 (1860-1863): 93-123.

¹³² “The Cosmopolitanism of the Jewish Race,” *El lunar* 1 (1864), 6-7.

¹³³ Cathy S. Gelbin and Sander L. Gilman trace the rise of the term cosmopolitanism to Enlightenment thought, and they note how cosmopolitanism was seen a key to understanding Jews' racial identity. See *Cosmopolitanisms and the Jews* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

¹³⁴ “The Cosmopolitanism of the Jewish Race,” *El lunar* 1 (1864), 7.

Montevideo to Quebec.” Moreover, he offered statistical analysis of birth and death rates, age comparisons with those living around them, and age of marriage in different locales.¹³⁵

This led Boudin to draw a number of conclusions about Jews as a race in relation to environment and acclimatization. “The ease of acclimating to new climates changes according to race,” he contended. “And this change is seen in the differences that correspond to the proportion of those who become ill and those who die of each race.”¹³⁶ This was as true for Europeans, who “accept the climate much better in cold countries than in hot countries,” as for “the Black race,” which “appears unable to acclimate in either northern Africa or southern Europe, where they can only sustain themselves through gradual and continuous changes.”¹³⁷ Yet Boudin observed that in the United States, “The Black race is diminishing and they are unstable there,” while “it appears to acclimate in the southern provinces of the United States,” where a plantation economy had long depended on the transatlantic slave trade. Yet it was only “The Jewish race [that] acclimates to any climate and spreads in all countries.”¹³⁸ This, Boudin claimed, reflected their religious mission: “The moral and religious importance of this result, based on the most certain observations and uncontested statistics, is easy to understand. Is it not clear proof of the mission that the Eternal One entrusted to the Jewish people with the goal of penetrating to the ends of the earth, through the intermediary of Israel, the great truths of the unity of God and the unity of mankind?”¹³⁹ For Boudin, Jews’ adaptability testified to their being chosen for the divine mission of spreading the truth of God’s oneness and the unity of humanity, a theory of a divine mission that had already begun to spread among European Jews themselves in the nineteenth century.

¹³⁵ This reflected the larger trend towards statistical analysis within the social sciences arising at the time. See Mitchell Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

¹³⁶ “The Cosmopolitanism of the Jewish Race,” *El lunar* 1 (1864), 13.

¹³⁷ “The Cosmopolitanism of the Jewish Race,” *El lunar* 1 (1864), 13.

¹³⁸ “The Cosmopolitanism of the Jewish Race,” *El lunar* 1 (1864), 14.

¹³⁹ “The Cosmopolitanism of the Jewish Race,” *El lunar* 1 (1864), 7.

Calling upon divine mission as a way to explain Jewish racial difference continued to appeal to Jewish readers. In 1890, the Ladino newspaper *La buena esperanza* reprinted an article from the Belgian *Zuntagsblatt* about the French Enlightenment scholar Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal and his assessment of the Jewish race.¹⁴⁰ Raynal maintained that, “The Jewish race was bestowed with a superior ability to resist evils and obstacles more than other peoples. That is how we explain the extraordinary fact that the Jews have been able to sustain themselves despite the great persecutions and the terrible calamities that they have suffered over many centuries.”¹⁴¹ He wondered whether “their rare life force” was because of “a divine force, a supernatural power transmitted in the inheritance of all generations of this people,” or if it was on account of biblical hygiene laws or “the family life and spirit of order.”¹⁴² Whatever the reason, Raynal asserted that Jews “have distinguished themselves in the sciences, in industry, in philosophy, and in commerce,” and as a result, “The Jewish race occupies the first tier among the white races both from a moral and material perspective.” In the great spirit of the Enlightenment, he added that, “We say this with conviction in front of everyone, and we feel a true joy in rendering this justice to our brothers, brothers in the great human family, in extending to them our hand with sincere affection and in paying them the tribute of respect and honor that they have the right to claim of us.” Jews, according to Raynal, thus belonged among the white races of the world because, “according to general opinion, they are the strongest and most courageous of all races.” Furthermore, it was Jews who had brought the world both religion and morality, and who had taught Christians to act in service of justice and equality.

¹⁴⁰ “The Jewish Race, *La buena esperanza*, April 22, 1890, 2. For more on Raynal and his Enlightenment theories of race, see Nicholas Hudson, “From ‘Nation to ‘Race’: The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 3 (1996): 247–64; William Max Nelson, “Making Men: Enlightenment Ideas of Racial Engineering,” *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (2010): 1364–94; Ann Thomson, “Colonialism, Race and Slavery in Raynal’s *Histoire Des Deux Indes*,” *Global Intellectual History (Abingdon, England)* 2, no. 3 (2017): 251–67.

¹⁴¹ “The Jewish Race,” *La buena esperanza*, April 22, 1890, 2.

¹⁴² “The Jewish Race,” *La buena esperanza*, April 22, 1890, 2.

It is notable that the Ladino press in the 1890s printed eighteenth-century Enlightenment texts on Jewish racial superiority at a time when antisemitism was on the rise within France and in Europe press more broadly. By the close of the century, antisemitism in Europe had acquired a scientific veneer as older physical, mental, and moral attributes assigned to Jews morphed into modern scientific notions about innate and immutable Jewish degeneracy, borne out by the sciences of anthropology, physiognomy, and pathology.¹⁴³ The Dreyfus Affair provoked the crisis of French universalism and an Enlightenment vision of society like Raynal's came under attack by right-wing forces who championed a new nationalism that had no place in French society for Jews, the historical and archetypal foreigner.¹⁴⁴ Most French Jews reacted to this increasingly biological antisemitism by doubling down on their commitment to Republicanism and circulating treatises by well-known French thinkers in support of Jewish integration into French society, even if they, like Raynal, had lived a century earlier.

It was in this context that the French Jewish scholar Salomon Reinach questioned the very existence of a Jewish race in a conference that he organized at the Society of Jewish Studies in Paris, which was covered in the Ladino press.¹⁴⁵ Writing in 1903 during the years of the ongoing Dreyfus Affair, Reinach proclaimed unequivocally that, "There is no Jewish race."¹⁴⁶ As *El tyempo* explained, "He declared the theory of races to be unfounded, an error that was committed by linguistics," referring here to the science of language developing in

¹⁴³ Efron, *Defenders of the Race*, 6.

¹⁴⁴ Aron Rodrigue, "Totems, Taboos, and Jews: Salomon Reinach and the Politics of Scholarship in Fin-de-Siècle France," *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004): 6-7.

¹⁴⁵ Salomon Reinach (1858-1932) was an educator, archaeologist, philologist, historian, and museum director born in Paris and educated at the *École normale supérieure*. He was a member of the prestigious *Institut de France* and was a leader of the Franco-Jewish establishment. He served as the co-founder of the Jewish Colonization Association and vice-president of the *consistoire* and of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, and was active in the *Société des études Juives*. For more on Reinach, see Rodrigue, "Totems, Taboos, and Jews: Salomon Reinach and the Politics of Scholarship in Fin-de-Siècle France."

¹⁴⁶ This essay began as a public lecture delivered in 1903. It was later published as "*La prétendue race Juive*" in *Cultes, mythes et religions*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1905-23), 3:461, 471. An excerpt of Reinach's essay is translated in Hart, *Jews & Race*, 191-202.

the nineteenth century that traced the rise of different races through philology.¹⁴⁷ Racial theory was only invented by Germans, Reinach alleged, in order to fuel military aggression of Germany against France in 1871 and to create antisemitism for Otto von Bismarck to discredit Jewish liberals obstructing his policies. As evidence, Reinach engaged the science of craniometry. Scholars mistakenly believe, he contended, that there exists a Semitic race with a long and narrow cranium in contrast to an Aryan race with a rounded cranium. “But this division is arbitrary,” he argued. “According to observations made by anthropologists, they encounter the same amount of rounded heads among Jews as those who are called Aryans, and there also exist among Aryans those with long and narrow heads.”¹⁴⁸ As further evidence, he declared that a singular Jewish race could not account for the “two kinds of Jews that exist: Asiatic and African Sephardim and European Ashkenazim.” He explained that, “They found a great resemblance between the Sephardim with black hair and Bedouin and conclude from this that they are anthropologically related” whereas “the four or five million Russian Jews do not resemble them physically in any of their characteristics.” As a result, “Mr. Reinach concludes that there was never a Jewish race and never will be.”¹⁴⁹ Instead, he advocated for Jews as a religious group. In renouncing race, Reinach was fiercely attacked by the antisemitic and Catholic presses, but also by other Jews, particularly the more traditional Jewish establishment and Zionists.¹⁵⁰

One editorial from the Zionist newspaper, *The Echo*, which was reprinted in the Salonican *Journal de Salonique*, lambasted Reinach as “the latest and strongest effort taken by assimilators to finally erase all burdens between them and the non-Jewish world.”¹⁵¹ Accusing Reinach of wanting to disappear completely into French society, it bemoaned,

¹⁴⁷ “The So-Called Jewish Race,” *El tyempo*, December 18, 1903, 248.

¹⁴⁸ “The So-Called Jewish Race,” *El tyempo*, December 18, 1903, 248.

¹⁴⁹ “The So-Called Jewish Race,” *El tyempo*, December 18, 1903, 249.

¹⁵⁰ Rodrigue, “Totems, Taboos, and Jews,” 15–16.

¹⁵¹ “The Jewish Race,” *Journal de Salonique*, December 28, 1903, 2.

“Poor Reinach!...He must wait for future generations who will not suffer from the same shame to be seen as Jews.”¹⁵² Race played a key role in intra-Jewish politics, particularly between Zionists and so-called assimilationists.¹⁵³ The existence of a Jewish race enabled Zionists to hold that Jews constituted not just a religious group with a shared faith, but a people, an anthropological race, united not by labels but by bones and blood.¹⁵⁴ Zionists saw Jewish nationalism and re-sequestering Jews in their own state as the means to guarantee the continuity of the Jewish people while also enabling Jews to take their rightful, autonomous place alongside other nations of the world. Race provided Zionists with a conceptual and linguistic vocabulary to define Jewish existence as an ontological fact, a matter of physiognomy and history.¹⁵⁵ And by embracing the language of race, Zionists aligned themselves with scientific discourse and the unassailable logic of objectivity.

The politics and polemics around race that appeared in the Ottoman Sephardic press reflected a decades-long debate about “the Jewish race.”¹⁵⁶ Although it was largely non-Jewish scholars and scientists who set the terms of the debate, Jewish thinkers and writers brought to it their own political agendas and visions of reform that they articulated largely in response to antisemitism. This context diverged from the experiences of Jews in the Ottoman Empire, where there were no emancipation debates focused on Jews nor rampant state and popular antisemitism. Yet Ottoman Sephardic journalists were still tuned into the discourse on race and circulated these debates among its readers throughout the empire. They were particularly keen to print articles by non-Jews like Boudin and Raynal affirming the positive characteristics of the Jewish race as adaptable and cosmopolitan, strong and courageous, and poised to take its rightful place among the other white races of the world. Race thus became a

¹⁵² “The Jewish Race,” *Journal de Salonique*, December 28, 1903, 2.

¹⁵³ Hart, *Jews & Race*, xxviii.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵⁵ Hart, *Jews & Race*, xix.

¹⁵⁶ Hart, xvi.

way to scientifically prove the eminence of Jews at a time when the rise of European antisemitism seemed to suggest otherwise. Yet these debates were not confined to the scholarly and scientific realms, but notions of race became popular in public discourse, particularly in relation to physiognomy and the body.

Reading the Human Body

Throughout the nineteenth century, anthropologists developed a range of racializing theories and methods for reading the body to discern the character of an individual or racial group based on the size and shape of different corporeal characteristics. Anthropometry entailed the scientific study of the measurements and proportions of the body, while craniometry specialized in the measurement of the cranium. Phrenology examined the shape and size of the cranium as an indicator of a mental and moral character, and physiognomy focused on a person's facial features and expressions as indicators of one's character or racial group. Photographic methods also developed at this time in step with anthropology, widely regarded as a tool to create reliable, objective representations of the body for the ongoing scientific investigation and classification of all humanity into discrete racial types.¹⁵⁷



“Peoples of the Congo,” *El telegrafo*, March 8, 1894, 97.

¹⁵⁷ Christopher Pinney examines how the Daguerreotype emerged in 1839, the same year that the *Société ethnologique de Paris* was established, with the Ethnological Society of London soon after in 1843. Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology*, Exposures (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 17–21; Eleanor M Hight and Gary D Sampson, *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (London; New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2004); David MacDougall, “The Visual in Anthropology,” in *Rethinking*

Anthropological photography transformed bodies into somatic specimen and examples of racial types, which scholars arranged hierarchically into a vast system of comparison.¹⁵⁸ But anthropological images also quickly became immensely popular and circulated not only in professional societies and studies, but also in tourist postcards and cartes-de-visites, in public exhibitions and periodicals, as in the image of the Ashantis that appeared in the pages of *La nature* in 1887.¹⁵⁹ Images enabled viewers to visualize the racial constructions they read about, depicting people in line drawings and photographs complete with bodily decorations, dress, jewelry, head coverings, props, and architectural details.¹⁶⁰ Wearing animal skins or feathers, depicted alongside unfamiliar trees or animals, images often presented people as timeless, stuck within its evolutionary stage in the past, and more closely connected to nature. In the wake of Darwin, images served as a means to position people along the evolutionary trajectory between animals and civilized humanity.¹⁶¹ These ethnological images served romantic and imaginative ends, unlike their counterpart of anthropological photographs of racial types, which claimed scientific objectivity. These photographs followed the standard convention of depicting a person's body both facing front and to the side, to better capture the details of a person's physiognomy and particularly the contours of their face and of the cranium. We can see this convention in the photographs of the Ashantis above, as well as these image of people from the Congo that appeared in *El*

Visual Anthropology, ed. Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 276–95.

¹⁵⁸ This was not unique to French anthropologists, but was also a shared interest with the Berlin *Gesellschaft für Anthropologie*, which published the *Anthropologisch-Ethnologisches Album* containing photographs of racial types collected by expatriate Germans. In 1879, The U.S. Congress established the Bureau of American Ethnology as part of the Smithsonian Institution to conduct anthropological investigations among Native American populations. Under its aegis, anthropologists like Franz Boas and James Mooney used photography beginning in the 1880s to photograph Native Americans.

¹⁵⁹ Nineteenth century anthropological photographs developed from similar visual classifications of flora and fauna in natural history that then extended to the human world. These circulated especially in a host of new nineteenth-century illustrated journals as production technologies allowed for cheaper and mass publication of images, such as *La Nature*, *Pictorial Times*, and *the Illustrated London News* (Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 158).

¹⁶⁰ Max Carocci and Stephanie Pratt, *Art, Observation, and an Anthropology of Illustration* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).

¹⁶¹ MacDougall, “The Visual in Anthropology,” 279.

telegrafo alongside an article on the origins of cocoa. Yet this was also a convention of photography that many today recognize from the mug shot, which was developed at the same time and based on similar ideas about race and linking the physical characteristics of a person with their mental and moral character, and particularly their predisposition to criminality.¹⁶²

The promise of physiognomy—or, the potential to deduce a person’s mental and moral character from their facial features—appealed not only to anthropologists seeking to map out all racial types within a global racial hierarchy or law enforcement officials working to identify criminals, but also to the general public.¹⁶³ The concept of physiognomy stretched back to antiquity with Aristotle, through the early modern period with Charles Le Brun and Giovanni Battista della Porta, and into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with Johann Caspar Lavater and Charles Darwin.¹⁶⁴ Lavater’s work at the close of the eighteenth century constructed a system based on descriptions of human types that existed in the natural world; in the nineteenth century, it would dovetail with the language and investigation of race and the translation of physical characteristics into inferior and superior kinds of individuals.¹⁶⁵ After publishing his work in the 1770s, Lavater’s scholarship led to the accelerated

¹⁶² Susan Slyomovics, “Visual Ethnography, Stereotypes, and Photographing Algeria,” in *Orientalism Revisited: Art, Land and Voyage*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (London: Routledge, 2012); Josh Ellenbogen, *Reasoned and Unreasoned Images: The Photography of Bertillon, Galton, and Marey*. (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); Zeynep Devrim Gürsel, “Bertillon, Ravachol and the Explosive Potential of Police Portraiture,” *History of Photography* 45, no. 3–4 (2021): 245–63.

¹⁶³ Melissa Percival, *The Appearance of Character: Physiognomy and Facial Expression in Eighteenth-Century France* (Leeds: W.S. Maney for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 1999); Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 29 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Melissa Percival and Graeme Tytler, eds., *Physiognomy in Profile: Lavater’s Impact on European Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

¹⁶⁴ Lucy Hartley, “A Science of Beauty? Femininity, Fitness and the Nineteenth-Century Physiognomic Tradition,” *Women (Oxford, England)* 12, no. 1 (2001). Johann Caspar Lavater’s *Essays on Physiognomy* Lavater defined physiognomy as “the science of knowledge of the correspondence between the external and internal man, the visible superficies and the invisible contents” (*Physiognomy*, vol. I, 19). He popularized the idea that human nature was based on essential characteristics of the mind and of character, which were mapped onto a person’s physical characteristics and could be discerned by studying them. See Johann Caspar Lavater, *Physiognomy, Or the Corresponding Analogy between the Conformation of the Features and the Ruling Passions of the Mind* (London: T. Tegg, 1827). It was originally published in German as *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, 4 vol. (1775–78), then translated into French and English.

¹⁶⁵ Hartley, *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture*, 38.

production of works on physiognomy in the nineteenth century. This popular revival of physiognomy across Europe reflected its alleged potential to instruct and improve people's knowledge of themselves and of others, leading to the creation of social guides based on physiognomy.¹⁶⁶

In 1894, *El telegrafo* printed a front-page feature on "Physiognomy, or the art of knowing a person by their face."¹⁶⁷ It explained to readers that, "To know a person's character from first sight before getting to know them is a problem of the greatest importance in terms of social relations; however, it is one of the most difficult to solve."¹⁶⁸ As a result, "It is therefore evident that everything written that leads us to a solution must be the object of our most serious attention." *El telegrafo* printed a guide on the different parts of the face and what they indicated about a person in attempts to address this "problem of the greatest importance." It explained the primary tenet of physiognomy, suggesting that, "It appears that a small correspondence exists between the face of a person and his character." Yet this was just an extension of an already well-known idea: "Do they not say that the eyes are the mirror to one's feelings? Then why would physiognomy not be the mirror to a person's character?" This had numerous and profound implications. Imagine, it asked readers, what it might be like to avoid a disgraced marriage before it happened or evade a deceptive or fraudulent business partner before signing contracts. To prevent such disastrous consequences, it urged readers that "knowing and recognizing the character of a person from the face is an art that all must study."¹⁶⁹ This was echoed in a later feature on physiognomy in the *Journal de Salonique*, which touted physiognomy as "of great importance in all circumstances of life,

¹⁶⁶ Percival, *The Appearance of Character*, 4.

¹⁶⁷ "Physiognomy, or the art of knowing a person by their face," *El telegrafo* February 1, 1894, pp. 37-38; February 15, 1894, pp. 63-64; March 15, 1894, pp. 111-112.

¹⁶⁸ "Physiognomy, or the art of knowing a person by their face," *El telegrafo* February 1, 1894, 37.

¹⁶⁹ "Physiognomy, or the art of knowing a person by their face," *El telegrafo* February 1, 1894, 37.

from the most serious to the most trivial” as a way “to know your neighbor, either out of curiosity or necessity, in order to love them, to get away from them, or to use them.”¹⁷⁰

This guide to reading faces popularized racial ideas linking a person’s physical characteristics with their mental and moral character in order to create hierarchies of inferior and superior people. Just by looking at a person’s forehead, it claimed, one could infer whether they were lazy (a narrow forehead) or particularly intelligent (a large and round forehead), whether they were courageous and had good judgement (a square forehead) or cruel (a large forehead together with a large face and small chin). It revealed whether one was deceptive (eyebrows join together) or easily deceived (thick eyebrows). By reading a person’s forehead and eyebrows, nose and eyes, mouth and chin, people could identify and avoid those who were “lazy, lying and given to intrigues” (eyes that bulge out) or “intelligent but with a mania for theft” (a large nose whose end is shaped like a downward hook), characteristics that were informed by the physiognomic frenzy among criminologists.¹⁷¹

Physiognomic guides also inscribed notions of beauty. It was often facial characteristics seen as being perfectly average, neither too large nor too small, too narrow nor too broad, that marked the most positive inner characteristics. “Well-formed eyebrows that are not thick or thin are a marker of a good character,” *El telegrafo* stated.¹⁷² This promoted idealized beauty based on symmetry and proportion. Prescriptions of beauty particularly concerned women. “A light dimple in the chin is one of the new conditions of beauty of a woman,” *El telegrafo* informed readers.¹⁷³ The physiognomic guide in the *Journal de Salonique* explicitly highlighted physical features deemed best for women: “A woman with eyes the color of hazelnuts is calm, neither talking too much nor too little. She is intelligent and pleasant. She gives comfort to her husband and will be as attached to him in bad times as

¹⁷⁰ “Physiognomy: the art of judging people based on their appearance,” *Journal de Salonique*, May 28, 1903, 3.

¹⁷¹ “Physiognomy, or the art of knowing a person by their face,” *El telegrafo* February 15, 1894, 63.

¹⁷² “Physiognomy, or the art of knowing a person by their face,” *El telegrafo* February 1, 1894, 37.

¹⁷³ “Physiognomy, or the art of knowing a person by their face,” *El telegrafo* March 15, 1894, 111.

much as the good.”¹⁷⁴ Women with gray eyes are astute, but are “more of the head than the heart” and one should “keep away from those with the most impenetrable gray eyes...” It further warned that women with Black eyes are “vindictive” and should not be excited, in contrast to those with blue eyes, which “signify sweetness and affability, but sometimes also weakness and egoism when they lean towards gray.” Descriptions like these prescribed beauty standards under the guise of science and linked them to notions of virtue. Construing physical appearance as an index of mental and moral development not only prescribed certain idealized forms of beauty, but in works on physiognomy by Lavater and Herbert Spencer, they inscribed notions of masculinity and femininity and constructed a hierarchy that positioned men above women.¹⁷⁵

But prescriptions of beauty and the association of ugliness with stupidity, and of beauty with intelligence held as much for the sexes as for races. Herbert Spencer’s nineteenth-century works demonstrate how physiognomy associated different facial features with ugliness, and therefore, characterized inferior races. “It will be admitted,” he wrote, “that the projecting jaw, characteristic of negroes and, indeed, of all the human races, is a defect in the face...At the same time it is an ascertained fact that prominence of jaw is associated in the mammalia generally with comparative lack of intelligence.”¹⁷⁶ This stands as one example among many, but it demonstrates how physiognomy was used at the time to distinguish between beautiful races and ugly races, between superior and inferior races. This interest in physiognomy was part of a larger conversation about Darwinian evolution, anthropology, race science, and social progress.¹⁷⁷ Within an evolutionary world, Spencer

¹⁷⁴ “Physiognomy: the art of judging people based on their appearance,” *Journal de Salonique*, May 28, 1903, 3.

¹⁷⁵ Hartley, “A Science of Beauty?,” 24.

¹⁷⁶ Herbert Spencer, “The Haythorne Papers No. VIII. Personal Beauty,” *Leader* 5 (April 1854), 356-7, quoted in Hartley, 27.

¹⁷⁷ Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was a prominent English anthropologist, biologist, philosopher, and sociologist, known for extending Darwin’s theory of evolution into sociology and coining the expression “survival of the fittest.” For more on Spencer’s work, see Michael Taylor, *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer*, (London: Continuum, 2007).

claimed, notions of good looks and mental capacity became inextricably linked to the fitness of women to reproduce a healthy race.¹⁷⁸ Although physiognomy was largely popularized as a significant, but also leisurely endeavor, this belied its more sinister uses among physical anthropologists of the time who marshalled it in favor of racial hierarchies and social evolution.

This scholarly and popular interest in physiognomy and tracing the bodily contours of beauty and ugliness, normativity and deviance in relation to race and gender also manifested in an obsession with bodily freakery.¹⁷⁹ Paraded alongside racialized groups like the Ashantis at fairs, parks, and shows were “living curiosities,” people and animals ranging from limbless people to dancing monkeys who were presented as spectacles to a gaping public.¹⁸⁰ Such spectacles were also presented in the Ladino press. In 1864, *El lunar* recounted the lives of conjoined twins Eng and Chang born in Siam in 1811 who “were one body from the stomach to the chest, but beyond that, little by little, their bodies divided so that they could sit alongside one another. And in this way, they grew.”¹⁸¹ According to the article, the writer reflected, “I said in my heart, who is he who can understand the secrets of the Master of nature who changes his creations when He wants without us being able to explain these marvels?...What marvels are made by the Creator!”¹⁸² Conjoined twins like Eng and Chang were thus seen not as pathological deviants as scholars increasingly painted them in the

¹⁷⁸ Hartley, “A Science of Beauty?,” 29.

¹⁷⁹ Leslie A. Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Garland-Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*.

¹⁸⁰ Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*.

¹⁸¹ “Deformed Creatures,” *El lunar* 3, 119. Sections of this article were reprinted from *Ha-Magid* 43, November 9, 1864. The term “Siamese twins” was coined based on Eng and Chang, who were brought by the merchant Robert Hunter to the United States and Europe in 1824 to be displayed, first before doctors and then to the general public. See Elizabeth Grosz, “Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York: University Press, 1996), 61-62.

¹⁸² “Deformed Creatures,” *El lunar* 3, 120.

nineteenth century, but as an attestation to the power of God over all creations, to produce and change them as he saw fit.¹⁸³

Ideas about physiognomy lay side-by-side with accounts of human bodily deviance. On the same front page as its guide to physiognomy, in 1894 *El telegrafo* printed an image of Annie Jones Elliot, the famous bearded woman of America, that “object of the strange capriciousness of nature.”¹⁸⁴ In an exposition on her life, the paper explained that although “from the age of thirteen or fourteen she began to grow a beard and moustache, which nature bestowed upon her,” it noted that she “is overall a beautiful young woman, tall and elegant” and that “her voice is among the most delicate.”¹⁸⁵ Reporting on her trips to Paris and Berlin, *El telegrafo* fretted that, “We fear that she may not come to our region, and we hope that our sensible readers will see the body of this strange women with their own eyes!” The report on Annie Jones was not so dissimilar to the newspaper coverage of a Burmese man, Shwe-Maong, who was publicly displayed in Paris and whose “body was entirely covered in hair, and who appeared a bit like a dog so much so that they named him the ‘man-dog.’”¹⁸⁶ An account of his family appeared in an article in *El sol* entitled



Annie Jones Elliot, or “A woman with a beard,” *El telegrafo* February 1, 1894, 37.

“Anthropology: The Hairy Family of Burma,” signifying how the nascent field of

¹⁸³ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York: University Press, 1996), 1–19.

¹⁸⁴ “The Woman with a Beard,” *El telegrafo*, February 8, 1894, 58. Anna (Annie) Hones Elliot (1865–1902), also sometimes referred to as the Esau Lady, was one of the most photographed women of the late nineteenth century. She toured the United States and Europe as a key attraction in the Barnum and Baily Circus, and her photo was widely distributed, appearing in newspapers worldwide.

¹⁸⁵ “The Woman with a Beard,” *El telegrafo*, February 8, 1894, 58.

¹⁸⁶ “Anthropology: The Hairy Family of Burma,” *El sol* 8, 114. For a medical explication of Shwe-Maong and his family, see J. Bondeson and A. E. W. Miles, “The Hairy Family of Burma: A Four Generation Pedigree of Congenital Hypertrichosis Lanuginosa,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 89, no. 7 (1996): 403–8.



Left: original photograph of Shwe-Maong's descendants including Maphoon, his granddaughter; Moungh-Phoset; and Mah-Mé (L-R), taken in 1875. Center: line engraving that appeared in *La nature* 3 (79), December 5, 1878, 121. Right: image of Maphoon in *El sol* 8 (1878), 114.

anthropology encompassed a wide ranging investigation of the human body. It included an image of Shwe-Maong's granddaughter, Maphoon, who had the same condition, for readers to visualize her body. And yet, *El sol* claimed of Shwe-Maong, "With all the marvels reported by travelers, they did not fail to believe upon seeing his speech and his intelligence that he was completely human."¹⁸⁷ For scientists and scholars, audiences and readers, people like Eng and Chang, Annie Jones, and Shwe-Maong toed the limits of human subjectivity, a question that resonated throughout the debates over evolution and the relationship between man and primate; over race science and which races most resembled closer to animals; and over the existence of one human species or different human species.

It was borderline cases of human anomalies that helped draw the corporeal limits of humanity, and, consistent with its stance on monogenesis, the Ladino press again asserted their humanity. In reporting on Shwe-Maong, *El sol* declared that, "Other curious deformities are found in the books of scholars and sometimes a deformity that is found in a man passes from father to son for many centuries. A similar curious deformity is known today to scholars of nature in a family in Burma that for three centuries are all born covered with long hair on

¹⁸⁷ "Anthropology: The Hairy Family of Burma," *El sol* 8, 114.

their faces and all over their bodies like wild animals, but they have consciousness, intelligence, and behave morally like the rest of the inhabitants of their country.”¹⁸⁸ The laws of genetics being deciphered at this time enabled scholars to trace the inheritance of such deviations across generations. In this way, families like this, as *El sol* explained, were “a thorn in the side of those scholars who maintain the idea that humans took another form in their first days because the changes in their bodies over time do not remove them from being human or part of their race.” Despite such changes, “The composition of the head and brain, which contain the conscience or the soul, are only virtues of the human species, with which the Creator of all things separated us from other animals. The consciousness is that of the Creator’s and this clearly shows us that humans were created in the image of God and that deformities that sometimes appear in humans come from the outside and are none other than some natural occurrences.” The idea of humanity created “in the image of God” invokes Genesis 1:27: “And God created humanity in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” This meant that not only were those with bodies deemed exceptional part of humanity, but that they too were a reflection of the divine image.

Even while asserting their humanity, however, journalists promoted a type of humanity that failed to give human subjects an identity independent of their body morphology, emphasizing and sensationalizing their somatic difference in the press.¹⁸⁹ As they circumscribed more inclusive limits of humanity, they turned people with exceptional bodies into spectacles that compelled explanation and representation, depicted in illustrations and later photographs in the press. Their bodies sat at the intersection of racial and gendered discourses of the time that represented difference as deviance.¹⁹⁰ This brings us back to the Ashantis in the *Jardin zoologique* in Paris and other racialized groups, whose bodies

¹⁸⁸ “Anthropology: The Hairy Family of Burma,” *El sol* 8, 114.

¹⁸⁹ Grosz, “Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit,” 63.

¹⁹⁰ Garland-Thomson, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity,” 10-13.

showmen often displayed for both scholars and the gawking public alongside those like Shwe-Maong, Annie Jones, and Eng and Chang.¹⁹¹ By drawing boundaries around the curious, strange, and abnormal, exhibitions like these cast racialized groups as bodily anomalous in ways that were analogous to physical deformation.¹⁹² This reflected new ideas about the body among scholars and scientists engaging in anthropology, anthropometry, and phrenology, but it also was a time in which a wider public was newly attuned to bodily issues of hygiene and illness, to new clothing trends and hairstyles, and new norms circumscribing the body. As ideas about the human body were quickly changing, viewing such exceptional bodies both reinscribed race and gender norms and made viewers feel comfortably normal and safely within the bounds of the civilized world.

Conclusion

This chapter examines notions of race and anthropology that circulated in the Ladino press in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth. In moving from translating ideas such as science in the 1860s and 1870s, to laying out racial taxonomies and accounting for racial difference through climate and culture in the 1870s and 1880s, to sharing debates on the racialization of Jews and the practice of physiognomy in the 1890s and early 1900s, the Ladino press participated in the production and circulation of a new kind of knowledge about anthropology, race, and the human body. This was knowledge forged largely by forces such as colonialism and nationalism, and newspapers invited readers to become “literary colonialists,” as Sarah Abrevaya Stein has noted in her study of the Jewish press, poised to tour the many groups deemed to be the savage races of the world.¹⁹³ This

¹⁹¹ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson traces how “Before the freak show broke off from respectable society around the turn of the century, it was a central element in our collective cultural project of representing the body...The equally elite discourses of anthropology and ethnology, as well as museum culture and taxidermy, were inseparable from the display of freaks in the early nineteenth century” (Garland-Thomson, 13).

¹⁹² Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 8.

¹⁹³ Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*, 136–42.

demonstrates that not only did race matter to Jews in the Ottoman Empire, but it mattered in ways that extended far beyond the so-called Orient. This was a global story, one that included people in Africa, Australia, and Alaska and it is a way of racializing Others that Orientalism as a lens cannot fully capture.

In telling this story, the Ladino press picked up preexisting racial scripts and repositioned them within an Ottoman Sephardic web of meanings. They translated and recontextualized them in relation to other points of reference, including language, conceptual categories, and genealogical constructions.¹⁹⁴ The Ladino terms *adelantado* and *atrazado*, for example, were repurposed to explain the concept of racial progress. Religious texts, including biblical verses from Genesis and Psalms and rabbinic commentaries such as *Bereishit Rabbah*, became a framework for new scientific knowledge, demonstrating how Ottoman Sephardic journalists positioned science as fitting with older discursive traditions rather than an epistemological rupture. Adam and Eve became an argument for monogenesis and the Tower of Babel explained linguistic and racial diversity, stances that were hardly unique to Jews but that became increasingly resonant for them in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a time when European Orientalists portrayed Judaism as inflexible, archaic, and an obstacle to progress, by foregrounding continuity between Jewish texts and science, including evolution, they suggested that Judaism was not in conflict with science. By providing prooftexts for evolution, they portrayed Judaism as a more rational religion than Christianity. This perhaps became a way to defend Judaism against racialized accusations of superstitious ignorance leveled doubly against Ottoman Sephardic Jews, both as Jews and as those deemed Orientals.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Elshakry, "When Science Became Western," 104.

¹⁹⁵ Marwa Elshakry explores this in relation to Islam and Darwinian evolution. See *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*.

Race traveled then, partly because of its prominence as an intellectual trend within the sciences, and partly because it became a way to advance different political agendas, ranging from colonialism to antisemitism, from Jewish integrationism and Zionism. But for Ottoman Sephardic Jews, it also did the cultural work of producing Others against whom they could reaffirm their own positionality within an emergent and expanding global racial hierarchy. Ottoman Jews themselves were often racialized as objects of the ethnographic gaze by Europeans and Ashkenazi Jews alike, portrayed as irrational and superstitious, as explored in depth in chapter three. Textual and pictorial representations of groups like the Ashantis functioned as benchmarks against which they could feel reassured of their own normalcy and racial positionality above indigenous groups around the world, and could visualize their own racial progress. In picking up these preexisting racial scripts, Ottoman Sephardic reformers distinguished between those who were still deemed primitive and those who were more susceptible to progress, like themselves. And they urged for progressive, regenerative change at the collective level by encouraging readers to identify with anthropologists as they scrutinized those they considered the savage races of the world. But at the same time, they advocated staunchly for monogenesis and the potential of all races to progress as a single human species. This tension—between inscribing racial difference and defending racial progress—highlights how Ottoman Sephardic reformers struggled to position themselves within a global racial hierarchy. The following chapter turns to ethnographic travel accounts penned by Sephardic Jews in Ottoman Palestine to examine how they picked up these racial ideas that circulated at the global level and translated them into practices of racialization in applying them to other Ottoman subjects within the empire, including Other Jews.

Chapter 2: Mapping Race, Space, and Capital in Travel Literature

Increasingly in the nineteenth century, Sephardic travelers boarded ships in port cities of the Ottoman Empire, from Izmir and Istanbul, Salonica, Beirut, and Jaffa, and set sail across the Mediterranean. As the empire lay miles of railroad tracks, they embarked on train journeys that carried them through the largest cities and smallest villages of the empire. They learned to read schedules and maps, and purchased guidebooks to learn about destinations both near and far. Those at home followed their journeys through letters and travel accounts, which soon became a regular feature in the press. Such technological, infrastructural, and cultural developments created new modes of conceptualizing and experiencing both space and time. These new modes and the imagery they produced disseminated ethnographic and racialized depictions of faraway peoples and places. In travelogues, journalistic dispatches, and letters that they wrote and read, Ottoman Sephardic Jews engaged interlocking discourses of space and place, savagery and civilization, race and class.

While the previous chapter of this study focused on racial scripts that circulated internationally, this chapter brings us from the global level down to the imperial provinces with a focus on Ottoman Palestine, to see how Ottoman Sephardic writers projected notions of savagery and civilization as they traveled within the empire.¹ In examining ethnographic Sephardic travel writing, this chapter hinges on three entwined arguments. In the mid-nineteenth century, I argue, Ottoman Sephardic travel writers began to create new imagined geographies of race.² Drawing on scholars from Edward Said to Sylvia Wynter, we can see

¹ Of the many regions of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine was among the most visited, described, illustrated, and photographed during the second half of the nineteenth century and travelogues of Palestine abound, including from Ottoman Sephardic writers. As several scholars have noted, there was no official administrative or geopolitical unit called Palestine in the Ottoman period. At the time, it was part of the Ottoman province (*vilayet*) of Syria and largely corresponded to the borders of three districts of Acre, Nablus, and the independent *mutasarrıflık* of Jerusalem (Yuval Ben-Bassat and Eyal Ginio, eds., *Late Ottoman Palestine: the Period of Young Turk Rule* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2011), 5). Despite this, it has still remained the conventional term within scholarship.

² Said, *Orientalism*. See especially the section “Imaginative Geography and its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental,” 49-73. For an incisive application of this, see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

how figurations of space and place have been marshalled to amplify distance and difference so that it is in part through geographic borders that “they” become “they” who are separate from “us,” or Wynter’s *propter nos*, creating a “cartography of identities.”³ Scholars have mapped out how social hierarchies spatialize difference, unevenly placing the world within an ideological order that specifies where different groups “naturally” belong.⁴ I am interested here in how Ottoman Sephardic travelers, from the second half of the nineteenth century through the early twentieth, racialized certain spaces and their inhabitants as civilized or savage through various means, including group terminology, cultural descriptions, and conceptions of space and time. To draw this out, I focus on Abraham Rosanes’s, *Masaot he-ḥakham ha-Abir* (*Travels of Rabbi Abraham ben Israel Rosanes*), published in Hebrew from 1866-1867, to trace how he constructed an imagined geography of race in his travel account of Ottoman Palestine.⁵

Second, I argue that this imagined racial geography reflected the imperial landscape as it was changing with the expansion of global capitalism.⁶ As part of the Tanzimat reforms, the Ottoman state began to spatially transform the empire through city planning, adapting European architectural styles, and promoting urban design principles that upheld European ideals of order, efficiency, and uniformity. Largely backed by European investors, the spatial transformation of the urban landscape—its streets, buildings, harbors, railway and telegraph

³ Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex M. Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 5–52; Richard G. Fox, “East of Said,” in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford, UK; Blackwell, 1992), 144–56; Said, 54.

⁴ Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake, “Unnatural Discourse. ‘Race’ and Gender in Geography,” *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 1, no. 2 (1994): 227; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xv; George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 6.

⁵ Abraham Rosanes, *Masa’ot he-ḥakham ha-Abir*, ed. Abraham Meir Habermann (Yerushalayim: Sinai, 1953), 30. It was first printed serially from 1866-1867 in the Prussian Hebrew journal *Ha-Magid*, and later collected in 1953 by A.M. Haberman. The full title translates to “The Travels of the Haham Ha’Abir to the Holy Land: The Necessary Things to know about the Holy Land and the Conditions of our Jewish Brothers There.”

⁶ Said, *Orientalism*. See especially the section “Imaginative Geography and its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental,” 49-73. For an incisive application of this, see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

networks— reflected the influx of global capital and European commercial interests, which worked to remake imperial cities and open them to new markets. Foreign loans and rising Ottoman debt resulted in economic pressures to stimulate production, which led the Ottoman state to adopt policies that sought to civilize the landscape and raise imperial revenues. Ottoman policies that prepared the ground for the spread of capitalism thus reshaped both ideas about the land and the land itself.

This points to how discursive imagined geographies and representations of space overlap with the physical and material dimensions of space.⁷ In her scholarship on Black feminist geographies, Katherine McKittrick writes that, “The language and concreteness of geography...must be conceptualized as always bringing into view material referents, external, three-dimensional spaces, and the actions taking place in space, as they overlap with subjectivities, imaginations, and stories.”⁸ Representations of geographically and racially Othered space and its peoples are therefore bound together with the physical landscape and its infrastructure; the stuff that makes places like houses and streets; the bodily experiences of travelers on trains or steamboats; cultural practices of eating at an inn or donning local clothing; and social relations when hiring guides or meeting local residents. Ottoman Sephardic travel writing traces the contours of these entwined material, social, cultural, and racial landscapes, inscribing places with moral meanings that racialized spaces differentially as capital was transforming the imperial landscape. Following my analysis of Rosanes’s 1866-1867 account, I provide a close reading of Jacob Shaul’s Ladino *Impresiones de Viaže en Palastina (Impressions of Travel in Palestine)*, published from 1896-1897, alongside other contemporary writers from the close of the century. Written thirty years later, these accounts

⁷ This has been articulated perhaps most famously by Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

⁸ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xiii, building on Kathleen M. Kirby, *Indifferent Boundaries: Spatial Concepts of Human Subjectivity*, (New York: Guilford Press, 1996).

racialized spaces and their inhabitants in ways that reflected the changing economic and physical landscape of the empire.⁹

These geographies, both imagined and material, illustrated the official vision of social progress that linked and promoted technology and capitalism as metrics of civilization.¹⁰ It was through technology and infrastructure like improved roads and steamships, railway and telegraph lines, that Ottoman bureaucrats believed the empire would transform from a backward land into a space of modern production and consumption and become an economically viable node in the global flow of capital.¹¹ This association between technology and capital also manifested at the more popular level as travel and travel writing, particularly by steamship and railway, became markers of class for those who considered themselves to be more civilized people. Travel writing therefore brings out the imbrications of race and class and how capital was perceived as foundational both for individuals and for the Ottoman state to “regenerate” and move from savagery to civilization. Yet, even as Ottoman Sephardic travel accounts upheld these connections between technology, capital, class, and civilization, I argue that as the century progressed, travel writing increasingly opened up a space of critique that challenged this set of associations. Following my reading of travelogues from Ottoman Palestine, I turn to the Ottoman press to demonstrate how travel accounts not only circulated procapitalist notions, but as the century drew to a close, also served as a tool to critique these prevailing notions that trumpeted technological capitalism as a marker of civilization and racial progress.

⁹ Jacob Shaul, “Impresiones de Viaže En Palastina,” *La Buena Esperansa*, July 3, 1896, 1238 edition-1897.

¹⁰ Two monographs that deftly explore these connections in Palestine include Fredrik Meiton, *Electrical Palestine: Capital and Technology from Empire to Nation*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019); Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016).

¹¹ In his study of the politicization of electrical power in Palestine from 1917-1948, Fredrik Meiton writes of “technocapitalism” to call attention to the social networks and discursive and material practices that capitalism and technology sustain and are sustained by in turn (Fredrik Meiton, *Electrical Palestine: Capital and Technology from Empire to Nation*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 9).

This discussion of the intersections of race, space, and capital draws on the extensive scholarship on racial capitalism.¹² In his seminal work, *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson argued that race was not incidental to capitalism but integral to its origin and operation, contending that, “The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions.”¹³ As such, racial capitalism is not a variety of capitalism; rather, in demonstrating how capitalism developed and operates within racial regimes, all capitalism is racial capitalism.¹⁴ In Robinson’s wake, scholars have demonstrated how the central dynamics of capitalism—accumulation/dispossession, credit/debt, production/surplus, developed/underdeveloped, and others—become articulated through race.¹⁵ In *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy clarify how this process functions in two

¹² Scholars have traced the genealogy of the term “racial capitalism” to the anti-apartheid movement of 1970s South Africa and to Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism*, which conceptualized the history of racial capitalism expansively as a global phenomenon, though one that speaks through local and regional registers (Peter Hudson, “Racial Capitalism and the Dark Proletariat,” *Boston Review*, February 20, 2018, https://bostonreview.net/forum_response/peter-james-hudson-racial-capitalism-and/). Increasingly, scholars have called for renewed attention to the global contexts of racial capitalism and a turn towards its transnational histories, seen in the 2017 conference “Race and Capitalism: Global Territories, Transnational Histories,” convened by the Institute on Inequality and Democracy at UCLA in partnership with the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at the University of Chicago.

¹³ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism with a New Foreword by Robin D. G. Kelley and a New Preface by Damien Sojoyner and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard*, third edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 2.

¹⁴ Ruth Wilson Gilmore succinctly states: “Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it.” She poignantly states: “Capitalism: never not racial, including in rural England, or anywhere in Europe for that matter, where, as Cedric Robinson teaches us, hierarchies among people whose descendants might all have become white depended for their structure on group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death, exploited by elites, as part of all equally exploitable nature-as-other, to justify inequality at the end of the day, and the next morning as well” (“Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence,” in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London: Verso, 2017), chapter 14).

¹⁵ In its drive to accumulate ever-greater capital, capitalism produces difference that values and devalues forms of humanity differentially to extract value. As Jodi Melamed explains, “The term ‘racial capitalism’ requires its users to recognize that capitalism *is* racial capitalism. Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups—capitalists with the means of production/workers without the means of subsistence, creditors/debtors, conquerors of land made property/the dispossessed and removed. These antinomies of accumulation require loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism that enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires. Most obviously, it does this by displacing the uneven life chances that are inescapably part of capitalist social relations onto fictions of differing human capacities, historically race” (“Racial Capitalism,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 77). Stated differently, “Racism is fundamental for the production and reproduction of violence, and that violence is necessary for creating and maintaining capitalism” (Robin D. G. Kelley, “What Is Racial Capitalism and Why Does It Matter?” (Scholars for Social Justice, University of Washington, November 7, 2017), <https://scholarsforsocialjustice.com/what-is-racial-capitalism-and-why-does-it-matter/>).

ways. First, the dispossession inherent to capital accumulation leverages, intensifies, and creates racial distinctions. Second, race serves to naturalize the inequalities produced by capitalism and to rationalize the unequal distribution of resources, social power, rights, and privileges.¹⁶ Holding these twinned insights that capitalism produces racialized difference and that racial difference is used to naturalize and rationalize inequality, this chapter seeks to understand the historical relationship between capitalism within the Ottoman Empire and the racial terms through which the inequalities it produced were expressed and justified—terms that emerge in official discourse and policy as well as popular travel writing.

Two further insights from the scholarship stand out for this discussion. Although histories of racial capitalism are overwhelmingly of slavery, colonialism, genocide, and incarceration regimes, scholars such as Iyko Day and Pedro Regalado have demonstrated how the malleability of racial capitalism is also shaped by the participation of racially marked groups themselves, including Asians and Puerto Ricans, respectively.¹⁷ Regalado points to how, in New York City in the 1960s, Latinx businessmen promoted procapitalist conceptions of social progress, underscoring racial modes of accumulation distinct from black capitalism, but still constitutive of the history of racial capitalism. This helps us to see how racialized groups, including here Sephardic Jews, may also fit into larger histories of racial capitalism. Additionally, those recounting these histories call our attention to what Ruth Wilson Gilmore refers to as “racial capitalism’s dramatically scaled cycles of place-making,” including “resource extraction, infrastructural coordination, urban industrialization, regional development, and the financialization of everything.”¹⁸ Racial capitalism not only wrenches racialized populations into capitalist modes of production and accumulation that reshape the

¹⁶ Jenkins and Leroy, *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, 3.

¹⁷ Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Pedro A. Regalado, “‘They Speak Our Language...Business’: Latinx Businesspeople and the Pursuit of Wealth in New York City,” in *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, ed. Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 231–50.

¹⁸ Gilmore, “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence.”

landscape, but also relies on exclusion from these same modes through abandonment and underdevelopment. Ottoman Sephardic travel writing that racialized the land and its inhabitants as civilized or savage, productive or useless, entailed forms of place-making that changed over time within the evolving economic and material landscape of the empire.

This emphasis on racial capitalism distinguishes this work from the extensive scholarship on travel literature, ethnography, and empire, which often focuses on how the accounts of European travelers both expressed and facilitated imperial agendas.¹⁹ Scholars of Jewish Studies have also tended to examine travel literature penned and translated in Europe by Ashkenazi writers.²⁰ Yet, at a time when travel literature found mass audiences across both Europe and the Ottoman Empire, Sephardic Jews also wrote their own travel literature.

Though often appearing in travelogues as ethnographic objects of the European and

¹⁹ Examples from this extensive literature include Caroline B. Brettell, "Introduction: Travel Literature, Ethnography, and Ethnohistory," *Ethnohistory* 33, no. 2 (1986): 127–38; George W. Jr. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); James Duncan and Derek Gregory, eds., *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 1998); S. H. Clark, *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (London: Zed Books, 1999); Jaś. Elsner and Joan-Pau. Rubiés, *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); Laura Franey, "Ethnographic Collecting and Travel: Blurring Boundaries, Forming a Discipline," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29, no. 1 (2001): 219–; Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: University Press, 2002); Peter Hulme and Russell McDougall, eds., *Writing, Travel and Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, 2007); Ali Behdad, "'The Politics of Adventure: Theories of Travel, Discourses of Power,'" in *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, ed. Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 80–94; Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, eds., *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

²⁰ The great exception is Benjamin of Tudela's classic medieval travelogue and the works of Olga Borovaya listed in footnote 23. Otherwise, see Elkan Nathan Adler, ed., *Jewish Travellers*, Broadway Travellers (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1930); Moshe Pelli, "The Literary Genre of the Travelogue in Hebrew Haskalah Literature: Shmuel Romanelli's Masa Ba'rav," *Modern Judaism* 11, no. 2 (May 1, 1991): 241–60; Martin Jacobs, *Reorienting the East: Jewish Travelers to the Medieval Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Iris Idelson-Shein, *Difference of a Different Kind: Jewish Constructions of Race during the Long Eighteenth Century*, Jewish Culture and Contexts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Eli Rosenblatt, "Enlightening the Skin: Travel, Racial Language, and Rabbinic Intertextuality in Modern Yiddish Literature" (University of California, 2017); Alan Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen: The Travels of a European Orientalist and His Native Guide* (Stanford University Press, 2018); Joshua Levinson and Orit Bashkin, eds., *Jews and Journeys: Travel and the Performance of Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); Elliott Horowitz, "Prophecy and Peregrination: Curious Encounters with Biblical Lands and Biblical Texts in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *Jews and Journeys: Travel and the Performance of Jewish Identity*, ed. Joshua Levinson and Orit Bashkin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 63–92.

Ashkenazi gaze, this chapter explores Ottoman Sephardic subjectivities and works as travelers in their own right.²¹ Writing these accounts offered Ottoman Sephardic Jews the opportunity to move between different positionalities and project their own identities in ways that undermined the racialized representations of their communities that appeared in travel accounts by European and Ashkenazi travelers.²² In doing so, they challenged the stereotypical conception of Sephardic and Ottoman communities as backwards, ignorant, and miserable, beset by physical and historical stasis in contrast to ideas of European mobility, science, and progress—largely by racializing others through these same terms.²³

Context

Ottoman Sephardic travel accounts began to appear with increasing frequency in the mid-nineteenth century. The creation of the Ottoman Ministry of Post in 1840 and the connection of Ottoman postal services with European ones, followed by the establishment of the telegraph network in the 1850s, allowed for easier and more rapid circulation of travel accounts.²⁴ Further, with the inception of the Ottoman Sephardic press in the 1840s, newspapers became a primary purveyor of travel literature.²⁵ Editors considered it of utmost importance to inform readers about the world in general, and the status of Jewish

²¹ Ludwig August Frankl, *The Jews in the East*, trans. Patrick Beaton (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975 [1859]); I. J. (Israel Joseph) Benjamin, *Eight years in Asia and Africa from 1846-1855*, trans. Berthold Seemann (Hannover Germany, 1859); Jacob Saphir, *Even Sapir* (Lyck, Poland: Schnellpressendruck von Rudolph Siebert, 1866); David Delpuget, *Les Juifs d’Alexandrie, de Jaffa et de Jérusalem en 1865* (Bordeaux, France: Imprimerie Générale d’Émile Crugy, 1866); Abraham Moses Luncz, ed., *Jerusalem Yearbook for the Diffusion of an Accurate Knowledge of Ancient and Modern Palestine* (Vienna: Buchdruckerei von Georg Brög, 1882).

²² For a similar argument about Black Americans engaging in Orientalist travel writing, see Bryan K. Roby, “How Race Travels: Navigating Global Blackness in J. Ida Jiggetts’s Study of Afro-Asian Israeli Jewry,” *Jewish Social Studies* 27, no. 1 (2022): 1–42.

²³ Khazzoom, “The Great Chain of Orientalism.”

²⁴ The Ottoman state designed the Ministry of Post based on the European system. It began in 1840 between Istanbul and Edirne and later expended throughout the empire, paralleling advances in road and carriage technology (Ilhan Tekeli and Selim Ilkin, “The Public Works Program and the Development of Technology in the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” *Turcica* 28 (1996), 217).

²⁵ See Olga Borovaia, “Jews of Three Colors: The Path to Modernity in the Ladino Press at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 110–30; Borovaya, “Shmuel Saadi Halevy/Sam Lévy Between Ladino and French: Reconstructing a Writer’s Social Identity,” 99.

communities globally in particular. They often dispatched newspaper correspondents to visit Jewish communities and report on local developments. The global spread of Jewish communities meant that travel writing was a necessary precondition for writing about these populations, whether by Ottoman Sephardic correspondents or others. Editors tended to translate ethnographic travelogues from other writers and languages or merged together excerpts from various accounts to explicate Jewish life in Ethiopia, China, and other faraway locales. These efforts to ascertain the state of global Jewry dovetailed with the rise of travel writing in both Europe and the Ottoman Empire, seen in the surge in colonial travel reports but also the embrace of fictional literature like *Around the World in Eighty Days* or *Gulliver's Travels*.²⁶

Not just travel, but travel writing itself as both a practice and as reading material were considered useful and educational. Some writers directly equated travel with education, such as Eliyahu Shemtov Arditi, who explained to readers that,

The trip from Salonica to Izmir, especially when done by steamboat with the companies Haji Daud and Pandaleon, is the true voyage called "instruction." The passenger has the occasion to visit different places, one after the other in a relatively short period of time in order to observe the practices, customs, the language, etc. I collected a very thick folder of notes about the inhabitants of Kavala, Dedeagaç, Lemnos, Metelino, and Izmir in general, and about Jews in particular. These notes will be the focus of a series of articles...²⁷

By teaching readers about the wider world, travel writing was seen as a hallmark of and contribution to civilization.²⁸ Readers could follow explorers around the world, learning about Jewish communities civilized and savage, near and far. Able to acclimate to a range of

²⁶ Borovaia, "Translation and Westernization."

²⁷ *La epoka*, 9/18/1903, 2. In turn, education was seen as travel, as in *Journal de Salonique*, which depicted the educator as "the real guide, the faithful companion, the compass of these young travelers without experience who walk through the deserts of ignorance..." (*Journal de Salonique* 11/1/1900, 3).

²⁸ Palabıyık notes how, for example, Ahmed Hamdi Efendi wrote in his memoir during a diplomatic visit to Afghanistan in 1877 that the genre of travelogue was a "laudable work that serves civilizing purposes to the benefit of the whole mankind" (Palabıyık, "Travel, Civilization And The East," 106). Ottoman elites argued that a traveler was a civilized man, and conversely, a civilized man was one who would enjoy traveling.

environments and landscapes, some scholars considered Jews a key population in their efforts to account for racial diversity.²⁹

Other travel accounts, written more in the mold of adventure stories, served to entertain.³⁰ Travelogues were so popular in the empire that newspapers distributed them to subscribers in efforts to help boost their sales.³¹ Newspapers often serialized these accounts, such as “Travel in Nubia,” translated from French and printed in the Ladino newspaper *El instruktor*, which recounted a French scientific expedition to the Nubian desert in 1876.³² The unnamed writer described in harrowing detail his many brushes with death with the glaring sun, violent winds, lack of water, steep mountains, snakes and lions, pain and fatigue. He illustrated for readers how, as they trekked deeper into the desert, “Signs [of life] began to disappear until they vanished completely when the afternoon arrived. A sadness of death seized all the men of the caravan. The night covered this devastated place with its black wings. An unbroken silence, like the silence of cemeteries, reigned throughout this plain.”³³ More literary travelogues such as this captivated readers with their accounts of the many dangers travelers encountered, the mirages and oases. Yet in doing so, they frequently used racializing language in depicting different groups travelers encountered. In this account, the writer contrasted the Arab guides, “who are very courageous in their nature” and “who fought against the difficulties and dangers with great energy and did not give up hope” with “negro nomads” who “are the terror of travelers and merchants because they are evildoers and savages with no feeling for humanity. They throw themselves at poor travelers like ferocious,

²⁹ Hart, *Jews & Race*; Fishberg, *The Jews*. Jews and the question of environmental determinism is explored more in chapter 1 of this study.

³⁰ Ottoman readers were familiar with adventure writing, such as *Gulliver's Travels* and *Around the World in 80 Days*, which were adapted in the Ottoman and Sephardic presses. Olga Borovaia, “Translation and Westernization: ‘Gulliver’s Travels’ in Ladino,” *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 2 (2001): 149–68; Johann Strauss, “Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th Centuries)?,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 6, no. 1 (2003): 39–76.

³¹ Palabıyık, “Travel, Civilization And The East,” 121.

³² “Travel in Nubia,” *El Instrukor* (1888), issue 8, 65-67; 9, 78-80; 10, 87-89; 11, 96-98.

³³ *El instruktor* 8, 67.

wild animals, take their goods, and kill them.”³⁴ The writer created a hierarchy of civilization and savagery, with the French scientists at the top, followed by courageous Arab guides, and nomadic Nubians at the bottom as “ferocious, wild animals” who appear natural within the savage landscape of the desert. Such works circulated racial sensibilities and scripts that entered popular Ottoman discourse, but whose articulations shifted during the nineteenth century in relation to the changing imperial landscape.

1860s Palestine: Imagined Geographies of Race

When Abraham Rosanes arrived in Palestine in 1867, he recorded early changes in the spatial transformation of the region resulting from the Tanzimat reforms in land privatization, land cultivation, and the creation of infrastructure. Alongside the political, religious, and social policies that comprised the Tanzimat reforms, Ottoman bureaucrats also pursued a liberal economic policy that emphasized private property, free trade, foreign investment, and privatization of land, which was considered the primary economic resource of the empire.³⁵ This culminated in the 1858 Land Code, which sought to tighten state control over its vast territories and to encourage cultivation and thereby increase tax revenues.³⁶ In

³⁴ *El instruktur* 9, 78; 8, 65-66.

³⁵ The 1839 *Hatt-ı Şerif* of *Gülhane*, a legislative cornerstone of the Tanzimat, propagated liberal ideas of the “age of property,” and explicitly highlighted the need for security and freedom of ownership of property. According to the edict, such an assurance was necessary for Ottoman subjects to feel a sense of political belonging and to use their property productively. The *Hatt-ı Şerif* states: “If there is an absence of security for property, everyone remains indifferent to his state and his community; no one interests himself in the prosperity of the country, absorbed as he is in his own troubles and worries. If, on the contrary, the individual feels complete security about his possessions, then he will become preoccupied with his own affairs, which he will seek to expand, and his devotion and love for his state and his community will steadily grow and will undoubtedly spur him into becoming a useful member of society” (Translated in James L Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, Fourth Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 168). Beshara Doumani notes how the process of commoditization of land began prior to the Tanzimat era in *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). However, this process accelerated as the legal framework to guarantee private, individual discretionary power over real estate was created in three waves of legislation in the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, partly under either direct or indirect pressure from European powers. See Huri Islamoglu, “Property as a Contested Domain: A Reevaluation of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858,” in *New Perspectives on Property and Land in the Middle East*, ed. Roger Owen, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3–62.

³⁶ Nadav Solomonovich and Ruth Kark explain how the 1858 Land Code was important for two reasons: first, much of the state’s tax revenue was generated by agriculture, and second, land attracted the attention of foreign

addition to placing non-cultivated land under state control, the Land Code also replaced the tradition system of collective landholding with individual ownership and imposed taxes on each individual plot.³⁷ The turn to land privatization was an attempt by the state to ensure its tax base; given that much of the state's revenue was generated by agriculture, the central government was concerned with expanding cultivation and the accompanying taxes.

Although commercialized agriculture predated the Tanzimat, this period saw an increasing shift from subsistence cultivation to the growth of cash crops for regional and international markets.³⁸ In 1846, in attempts to increase the amount of cultivable land and further stimulate agricultural production, the Sublime Porte established the Ministry of Agriculture, organized training and education in new technologies, and established schools for specialized forms of farming.³⁹ These attempts to spur agricultural production intensified as the financial situation of the Ottoman state deteriorated with the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the contraction of its first foreign loans from British and French banks that facilitated their interests and

states and individuals attempting to gain a political and economic foothold in the empire. The state felt that improved control over land would also help to prevent or monitor foreign activity within the empire (Nadav Solomonovich and Ruth Kark, "Land Privatization in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Palestine," *Islamic Law and Society* 22, no. 3 (2015): 221–52). For a detailed analysis of the 1858 Land Code, see Huri Islamoglu, "Property as a Contested Domain: A Reevaluation of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858," in *New Perspectives on Property and Land in the Middle East*, ed. Roger Owen, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3–62.

³⁷ Huri Islamoglu explains how prior to this moment, the Ottoman state used a "distributive-accommodative" system in which definitions and classifications of property rights represented the differentiated and particularistic claims to a share of the tax revenues by different groups. But in the nineteenth century, the administration sought to establish its own, singular claim to tax revenues. As a result, this legislation released rural land from a "web" of revenue claims, making it a legally recognized object and property to be improved by its individual owner, who was now directly responsible for paying taxes to the state (Islamoglu, "Property as a Contested Domain: A Reevaluation of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858," 2000). See also Nahla Zu'bi, "The Development of Capitalism in Palestine: The Expropriation of the Palestinian Direct Producers," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 4 (1984): 88–109.

³⁸ Beshara Doumani notes how commercial agricultural, a monetized economy, differentiation within the peasantry, commoditization of land, and ties to the world market—features generally associated with "modernization"—existed in Jabal Nablus before Jewish colonies, the Tanzimat, or the Egyptian occupation when they were supposedly introduced. He illustrates this through the eighteenth-century trade in cotton that undergirded Palestine's integration into the world capitalist economy (Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*).

³⁹ Ilhan Tekeli and Selim Ilkin, "The Public Works Program and the Development of Technology in the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Turcica* 28 (1996): 201. As the Ministry's purview shifted and expanded, it was successively renamed throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Later in 1846, the Ministry of Agriculture was renamed the Ministry of Commerce and Agriculture. It was renamed once again in 1850 to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works, and again in 1894 to the Ministry of Forestry, Mining, and Agriculture. The state opened agricultural schools modeled off of French agricultural schools in Istanbul in 1848, in Edirne in 1881, and Salonica in 1889, including schools for viniculture, gardening, dairy production, and silkworm raising.

influence in the empire.⁴⁰ The second legislative cornerstone of the Tanzimat, the 1856 *Islahat Fermani*, further stated that, “Everything that can impede commerce or agriculture shall be abolished. To accomplish these objects, means shall be sought to profit by the science, the art, and the funds of Europe, and thus gradually to execute them.”⁴¹

To ensure this economic development, however, Tanzimat bureaucrats saw the need for communication and transportation infrastructure, which they also considered critical for military mobilization and political centralization.⁴² The *Islahat Fermani* proclaimed that, “Works of public utility shall receive a suitable endowment, part of which shall be raised from private and special taxes levied in the provinces, which shall have the benefit of the advantage arising from the establishment of ways of communication by land and sea.”⁴³ Ottoman and European statesmen alike claimed that roads and canals, and increasingly harbors and railways, would stimulate the economy by reducing the cost of transportation and linking the agricultural sector, particularly in the interior, with foreign markets via Ottoman port cities.⁴⁴ The *Islahat Fermani* declared that, “Steps shall also be taken for the formation

⁴⁰ Edhem Eldem, “Ottoman Financial Integration with Europe: Foreign Loans, the Ottoman Bank and the Ottoman Public Debt,” *European Review (Chichester, England)* 13, no. 3 (2005): 434. Yet the door was already open to foreign capital, most notably following the 1838 Anglo-Turkish Treaty, which forbade monopolies in Turkish territories and set low import tariffs on foreign goods, assuring the continued European economic penetration of the Ottoman Empire, particularly for the British.

⁴¹ Translated in Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, 172. This was in addition to numerous other clauses in the *Islahat Fermani* that promised equal rights for all non-Muslims and freedom of worship; the protection of their persons and property; judicial and penal reforms; and others.

⁴² Mehmed Sadık Rifat Pasha (1807–1858), a high official in the civil bureaucracy, was one of the earliest advocates of this idea. In his 1837 *Avrupa’nın Ahvaline Dair Risale (Treatise About the Conditions of Europe)*, he sketched the country’s future economic and infrastructural development. He advised paving urban streets and building macadamized highways with gravel surfaces. As part of the Tanzimat, two institutions worked to build Ottoman transport infrastructure. The first was the Ministry of Public Works, Trade, and Agriculture, which undertook an infrastructure policy of repairing, constructing, and regulating bridges and roads, clearing rivers, constructing ports, extracting mineral resources, and training engineers to undertake such work. The second was the Supreme Council led by Sadık Rifat, which in the 1840s began to formulate detailed plans for particular projects (Florian Riedler, “Building Modern Infrastructures on Ancient Roads: Road and Rail Development in 19th-Century Edirne,” in *The Heritage of Edirne in Ottoman and Turkish Times: Continuities, Disruptions and Reconnections*, ed. Birgit Krawietz and Florian Riedler (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 440–443).

⁴³ Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, 172. Although as part of the Tanzimat reforms, the Ministry of Public Works had been established in 1838, it had made little progress. See Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁴⁴ Two of the most prominent statesmen of the mid-nineteenth century, Fuat Pasha (1815–1869) and Ali Pasha (1815–1871), are often noted for their enthusiasm for the importance of transportation infrastructure, particularly railways. Railways, they believed, would ensure the provisioning of the capital with food from the

of roads and canals to increase the facilities of communication and increase the sources of the wealth of the country.”⁴⁵ The state began constructing intercity roads that enabled the use of carriages for transport, which was cheaper and involved simpler technology, before more actively promoting the introduction of railways in the 1850s.⁴⁶ By more closely linking the empire with world markets and global capital, for Ottoman reformers, such infrastructure represented an indispensable tool of civilization, critical for a developing nation.

Each of these three changes in the landscape—land privatization, land cultivation, and infrastructure—were evident in Ottoman Palestine when Abraham Rosanes made his trip in 1866-1867. With the end of the Crimean War in 1856, the empire saw the beginning of large-scale commercial and agricultural activity, and Palestine in particular experienced an economic upswing.⁴⁷ The trade and agricultural sectors grew with the expansion of arable land, and Palestine became more export-oriented as agricultural surpluses of wheat, barley, sesame, oranges, olive oil, soap, and cotton were sold in regional and European markets.⁴⁸ The profitability of agricultural exports and possibility of increasing cultivable land were tied to the new legal conditions of the 1858 Land Code granting private ownership and individual economic discretionary power over the land.⁴⁹ Landowners profited doubly and triply from

countryside and increase the amount of taxes that could be collected from the provinces, alongside the increase in trade and customs duties. See Bülent Bilmez, “European Investments in the Ottoman Railways, 1850–1914,” in *Across the Borders: Financing the World’s Railways in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Günter Dinhl and Ralf Roth (Routledge, 2008), 183–206; Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987), 120.

⁴⁵ Translated in Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, 172.

⁴⁶ Ottoman roads before this period were rarely paved and turned to muddy streams when it rained. They were also often used as sewage drains or garbage dumps, resulting in foul-smelling and unhygienic conditions. See Tekeli and Ilkin, “The Public Works Program and the Development of Technology in the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” 221; Tetsuya Sahara, “The Ottoman City Council and the Beginning of the Modernisation of Urban Space in the Balkans,” in *The City in the Ottoman Empire: Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity*, ed. Nora Lafi et al. (Routledge, 2011), 26–50; Riedler, “Building Modern Infrastructures on Ancient Roads: Road and Rail Development in 19th-Century Edirne,” 456.

⁴⁷ Alexander Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882: Studies in Social, Economic, and Political Development* (Washington, D.C: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993).

⁴⁸ Schölch has demonstrated how these exports not only reflected the rise in European demand, but also exceeded the import of European machine-manufactured goods, so that Palestine helped the rest of Greater Syria to offset the trade imbalance with Europe.

⁴⁹ Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882*, 286.

the economic boom through engaging and investing in land ownership and agricultural production. This also applied to the Ottoman state itself; at the end of the 1860s and early 1870s, the government conducted sales campaigns of uncultivated land, which under the Land Code had reverted to state ownership.⁵⁰ Although Palestine saw very little by way of public works in the 1860s, the economic growth in the region benefited from early infrastructure projects, including its first telegraph lines that linked Jerusalem with Jaffa in 1864 and that extended to Istanbul in 1865.⁵¹ By the time Abraham Rosanes arrived in Palestine in 1866, it was already a critical node in the regional economy, and was increasingly integrated into the global flows of capital, yet it remained—like much of the empire—without major public works projects, including paved roads or railways.

Abraham Rosanes' Hebrew travelogue, *Masaot he-ḥakham ha-Abir* (*Travels of Rabbi Abraham ben Israel Rosanes*), depicts Ottoman Palestine during the beginning of this transition.⁵² Abraham ben Israel Rosanes (1838-1878) was born and raised in Rusçuk in Ottoman Bulgaria (current-day Ruse), a city that the Ottoman government had chosen in 1864 as a model for local administrative reforms for other imperial towns and cities.⁵³ The first Ottoman city council was established there, and it was entrusted with various public service duties, such as supervising land transactions, public sanitation, and infrastructure construction. This included the creation and repair of paved roads and sidewalks; the construction and maintenance of a water supply system and drainage canals; the

⁵⁰ Schölch, 111.

⁵¹ Schölch, 15.

⁵² Abraham Rosanes, *Masa'ot he-ḥakham ha-Abir*, ed. Abraham Meir Habermann (Yerushalayim: Sinai, 1953), 30. It was first printed serially from 1866-1867 in the Prussian Hebrew journal *Ha-Magid*, and later collected in 1953 by A.M. Haberman. The full title translates to “The Travels of the Haham Ha’Abir to the Holy Land: The Necessary Things to know about the Holy Land and the Conditions of our Jewish Brothers There.”

⁵³ Tetsuya Sahara explains how the city council merged functions previously held by traditional urban organizations—such as Islamic judges, city officials, and religious communities and guilds—like street cleaning, firefighting, and water service with new works modeled on European urban life, including city lighting, paving roads, and traffic control. In this way, the municipal reforms sought to integrate old and new functions into a single administrative body to create a unified urban space (Sahara, “The Ottoman City Council and the Beginning of the Modernisation of Urban Space in the Balkans,” 32).

implementation of regular garbage collection and sewage disposal; and the installation of street lighting.⁵⁴ In the 1860s, towns and cities across the empire rapidly began furnishing their streets with gas lamps. Rusçuk enthusiastically set up fifty gas lamps in 1865, which tripled to 150 gas lamps by 1886, and climbed to 350 by 1867.⁵⁵ Following the template set by Rusçuk, under the guidance of city councils, many Ottoman cities transformed their public spaces. As a resident of Rusçuk, Abraham Rosanes would have witnessed these early changes in the imperial urban landscape, bringing certain expectations of what space should look like, feel like, and smell like.

Rosanes was part of a pioneering generation of intellectuals who moved in Jewish enlightenment circles both locally and internationally.⁵⁶ He belonged to a wealthy and well-connected Jewish family, which helped make it possible for him to undertake the long and expensive journey to Palestine.⁵⁷ Rosanes received a traditional Jewish education and attended a local Bulgarian school to learn Greek. He later founded a “general” Jewish school. In addition to his extensive knowledge of Jewish texts—his account teems with biblical and rabbinic references—he is said to have known Greek, Italian, German, Turkish, and Spanish.⁵⁸ He indicated his privilege when he noted in his account that he chose to undertake the long and expensive journey to Palestine to fulfill a religious obligation of visiting the holyland (*aliyah*), to see his mother who lived in Jerusalem, and to decide whether or not to relocate his family to settle there.⁵⁹ His account itself traversed different forms: his original travel notes, written in Ladino, were sent as letters to his friend, Menahem Farhi, who translated them into Hebrew, and sent them on to be published serially in the Prussian Hebrew journal, *Ha-Magid*, which were then later collected into a travelogue. In describing

⁵⁴ Sahara, 31.

⁵⁵ Sahara, 39-40.

⁵⁶ Cohen and Stein, “Sephardic Scholarly Worlds,” 352.

⁵⁷ Cohen and Stein, “Sephardic Scholarly Worlds.”

⁵⁸ Cohen and Stein.

⁵⁹ *Ha-Magid* 1866/1867, 106.

his experiences in the four holy cities of Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias, Rosanes considered religious practice, daily life, occupations, clothing, holidays, and relations with neighboring groups, both Jewish and non-Jewish—the stuff of ethnography.

Thirty years after Rosanes made his trip, in 1896, Jacob Shaul set off from Izmir to Ottoman Palestine and his account of his travels was serially printed in the Izmir-based Ladino newspaper, *La buena esperansa*.⁶⁰ While little is known of Jacob Shaul, similar to Rosanes, his ability to take an extended trip from Izmir to Palestine and publish his account reflects their higher socioeconomic status and intellectual capital as writers. Although they wrote thirty years and hundreds of kilometers apart, both shared a similar positionality as Ottoman subjects and Sephardic Jews but outsiders to the region, highlighted in their inability to speak Arabic and reliance on translators and guides to navigate the land and their interpersonal encounters. This is especially apparent in the absence of the voices of those living in Palestine in their accounts, leaving us wondering how they may have represented the same encounters.

Having a sense of the dynamics of power in which these writers were enmeshed helps us to better understand their use of racializing discourses. Nineteenth-century travel writers employed various strategies in claiming authoritativeness in how they perceived, represented, and evaluated Others. Some emphatically held up first-person observation as evidence of the veracity of their accounts—the same claim to authority in anthropological texts—as Rosanes does here:

...I have informed you of all that my eyes have seen, and not what I heard nor what I have assumed, for I have only offered to you what I have verified very, very well. And I put my trust in God, for no one could say a single thing I have said is not so because I have abundantly investigated everything, and only after have offered it to you, and I have not fabricated it.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *La buena esperansa* (“The Good Hope”), the longest-lived Ladino newspaper in Izmir, was published in Izmir from 1874-1917.

⁶¹ Rosanes, *Masa ‘ot he-ḥakham ha-Abir*, 30.

Rosanes appealed to participant observation and divine inspiration to buttress his claims to truth and to establish his legitimacy in the eyes of his readers. This sense of authority that Rosanes and Shaul felt led them to transgress both physically vis-à-vis holy places and objects and intellectually with holy knowledge. At multiple points in his travelogue, Shaul claimed to have snuck into holy sites, including the Al Aqsa mosque, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Cave of the Patriarchs.⁶² Rosanes also entered holy sites that were off-limits for him, but he further contravened Samaritan tradition in pressuring a translator to teach him the Samaritan alphabet, “which it is said is forbidden among them to teach foreigners.”⁶³ These transgressions were made not only in relation to Christian, Muslim, and Samaritan communities, but also in regards to Jewish practice. In Safed, Rosanes bribed a student and rabbi to show him a special Torah scroll that was only displayed “a few times each year because of its great holiness”—a request that had been denied to many travelers and pilgrims—doing it under the cover of night, “lest the people of the town find out.”⁶⁴ Their sense of entitlement to holy sites, knowledge, and objects, that all should be open to them, reflects imperial attitudes common among male travelers, who depicted themselves as crossing forbidden boundaries and penetrating forbidden spaces.⁶⁵

Yet a closer reading of these accounts reveals their vulnerability and their dependence on the service and expertise of others. Rosanes admitted that, “The Arabic language was unknown to me,” and so he relied on translators in addition to guides.⁶⁶ This dependence surfaces at various points in his narrative, perhaps most definitively at a scene that unfolded

⁶² As he writes about the Cave of the Patriarchs, “The most important thing there is in Hebron is a large mosque that is in the possession of the Muslims. No one who is not Muslim is allowed to enter there. They call the mosque *Halil al-Rahman*. According to our Jews, this place is the ‘Maarat ha-Makhpelah.’ I had the luck of visiting this ancient monument” (Shaul, *Impresiones de viaje en Palastina*, 13).

⁶³ Rosanes, *Masa ‘ot he-ḥakham ha-Abir*, 6-7.

⁶⁴ Rosanes, 26, 28.

⁶⁵ Clark, *Travel Writing and Empire*, 1999.

⁶⁶ Rosanes, *Masa ‘ot he-ḥakham ha-Abir*, 6.

in a bathhouse. “In arriving there,” Rosanes wrote, “no one wanted to wash because the waters were very, very hot, and just one Ashkenazi and I went in.”⁶⁷ But, as he recalled,

I did not know that it is harmful to stay in the waters for too long...and so when I came out, I fainted and fell to the ground. My soul was no longer in me! Right away, we went outside and my companions rushed to help me, one to bring cold water and one lemon water, and so on, until two hours later, I returned to myself and cooled, and I almost pledged in my heart not to go back in at all. But I could not leave without bathing in the new bathhouse...⁶⁸

Unaware of and unaccustomed to the hazards of the high temperatures, Rosanes put himself in danger, only to be saved by the retinue of travel companions who rushed to his aid. Within their accounts, Rosanes and Shaul emerge as outsiders to the region who claim the authority to interpret, represent, and evaluate the land and people they encounter in ways that reveal a sense of superiority, even while relying on them not only for their language skills or knowledge of the terrain, but also for their lives.

We can begin to see how race operates in Rosanes’s account through terminology, cultural descriptions, and spatial representations. In terms of racial terminology, Rosanes held a tripartite schema of Jews—Sephardic Jews, “our Ashkenazi brothers,” and Arabic-speaking Jews. But even when representing Sephardic Jews specifically, Rosanes held them at a distance by emphasizing cultural difference in language and clothing: “Most of the Sephardim are from there and so there are few who speak ‘nuestro jargon Espanyol,’” he noted.⁶⁹ Yet although he is critical of Jews’ dress, eating habits, and schooling, they remain part of what Rosanes perceived to be a shared community based on religion.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Rosanes, 13-14.

⁶⁸ Rosanes, 14.

⁶⁹ Rosanes, 41.

⁷⁰ This appears most distinctly in his description of the *hilula* pilgrimage to the town of Meron in honor of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. He exhorts his readers to imagine “Three thousand Jewish souls, Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Arabic-speaking, not separate from one another, but a person glued to his brother, voices loud, flag raised, singing, some drinking and others clapping their hands, skipping and dancing with joy...I don’t know to what I can compare to you the great joy I felt within my heart! I imagined that the messiah had already come to Israel” (Rosanes, 24).

This is in contrast to those Rosanes designated as “the people of the land.”⁷¹ Rosanes racialized Arabs in Palestine in demeaning terms, as “heretic souls,” robbers, and “savages living in tents.”⁷² For Rosanes, Arabs—replete with these stereotypes—may be Muslims or Christians, but never Jews. Given the boundary that he drew between Jews and Arabs, the civilized and uncivilized, Rosanes’s account highlighted his anxiety at the idea of crossing this boundary. Perturbed, he wrote of adopting Arab practices one night at dinner: “I fed myself rice from my hand, according to the customs of the Arabs, and I was like one of them to my dismay.”⁷³ Here cultural practice becomes a marker of racialized distinction.

This anxiety also surfaced in Rosanes’s concerns about the Jews of Nablus. He urged readers to “have mercy on a city like this and poor people like these...that they should have the peace and blessing to go every Sabbath to pray, and to teach their sons Torah and how to write. Because without this, they will grow up like savages in the desert.”⁷⁴ He feared that, without taking the proper measures, the Jews of Nablus would become savages, a racialized category that illustrated the depths to which humans could degenerate or be uncivilized.⁷⁵ For Rosanes, prayer, literacy and Torah learning served as benchmarks of civilization for Jewish men that separated *us* from *them* and were required to sustain that difference. He forcefully advocated for schools such as the German-supported Lemel School in Jerusalem, which taught Torah, its commentaries, Mishna, and Talmud, in addition to more secular subjects.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Rosanes, 6

⁷² Rosanes, 7, 10.

⁷³ Rosanes, 18.

⁷⁴ Rosanes, *Masa ‘ot he-hakham ha-Abir*, 5.

⁷⁵ For a parallel example from European maskilic literature, see Iris Idelson-Shein, “No Place Like Home: The Uses of Travel in Early Maskilic Translations,” in *Jews and Journeys: Travel and the Performance of Jewish Identity*, ed. Joshua Levinson and Orit Bashkin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021). This equation of savagery and wilderness and the need to overcome both is hardly unique to this context, but typical of imperial discourse more broadly. See, for example, Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); Yael Zerubavel, *Desert in the Promised Land*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁷⁶ Rosanes praised the Lemel School, established in Jerusalem in 1856 and underwritten by Jewish philanthropic organizations in Germany. See Yeshayahu Peres, *The History of the Lemel School in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Eretz Yisrael Press, 1936). Ludwig August Frankl, sent from Vienna to establish the Lemel School, recorded his experience in his two-volume *The Jews in the East*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975 [1859]).

He recounted how he “visited the school four or five times and derived much joy from the activities of the teachers and the diligence of the students, and especially from the cleanliness and their ethical behavior, which we do not see like other boys in the holyland who grow up like savages in the desert...”⁷⁷ For a rabbi and teacher like Rosanes, a Jewish education was the antidote to savagery, a marker of civilization, just as contemporary accounts from Ottoman Muslim intellectuals envisioned Islam as a civilizing force.⁷⁸

One group in particular troubled the racialized binary of Arab savagery and Jewish civilization for Rosanes: Samaritans.⁷⁹ After meeting with them, visiting their homes, attending their prayer services, and even ascending Mount Gerizim, Rosanes asserted that Samaritans “keep their distance from the Jews and are closer to the nation of the land... Their clothing is like the clothing of the Arabs and they are only recognizable by the red conical hats on their heads.”⁸⁰ Unlike Arabs, however, he determined that they are literate and successful in trade and commerce.⁸¹ Despite this, he argued that they remained uncomprehending: “All of them are taught to write in their alphabet and to read their holy tongue, but they understand almost nothing. And even their high priest does not understand what is happening in the Torah and in the holy language.”⁸² Given the competing claims of Jews and Samaritans as the rightful inheritors of the Torah, Rosanes painted the Samaritans as ignorant and misguided. This is the inverse of his judgment of Jews in Palestine, who understand religious law even if they are illiterate. Rosanes further recounted how a guide took him up to Mount Gerizim where, “Another Samaritan book states that in this place was a

⁷⁷ Rosanes, 33.

⁷⁸ Christoph Herzog and Motika, “Orientalism Alla Turca.”

⁷⁹ On the Samaritans in Ottoman Palestine, see Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans: A Profile* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016); Steven Fine, ed., *The Samaritans: A Biblical People* (Boston: Brill, 2022), especially Reuven Gafni, “Two Minorities on the Brink: Jews and Samaritans in Nineteenth-Century Nablus,” 129–36.

⁸⁰ Rosanes, 6.

⁸¹ Rosanes, 7.

⁸² Rosanes, 6.

city, and he showed me the foundations of ancient buildings. But according to what I observed in these foundations excavated by archaeologists from Europe, there were no buildings like this from when the Israelites lived in the land..."⁸³ Invoking the modern science of archaeology to underscore their lack of knowledge and understanding, Rosanes not only highlighted Jews as the true inheritors of the Torah, but also sought to reinforce the cartographic boundaries of identity separating savage Arabs from civilized Jews.

The associations of savagery with tents and the lack of settlement, and correspondingly cities with civilization, were also hallmarks of what scholars have termed "Ottoman Orientalism:" the equating of Europe and Istanbul with progress and the present, while identifying the imperial provinces, particularly unsettled and rural areas, with savagery and the past.⁸⁴ As Reşat Kasaba has demonstrated, nineteenth-century Ottoman statesmen assumed their own civilizing mission that manifested in both official discourse and state policy.⁸⁵ As they grew increasingly concerned and frustrated by the persistence of nomadic populations, like the Bedouin, who remained spatially unfixed, unlocatable, and untaxable, they described tribes as savage and ignorant and crafted racialized policies of forced sedentarization.⁸⁶ The use of *savage* as a racial signifier was thus part of larger Ottoman political discourse of the time, one tied to state efforts to integrate the imperial periphery,

⁸³ Rosanes, 8.

⁸⁴ Christoph Herzog and Motika, "Orientalism Alla Turca"; Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 768–796; Selim Deringil, "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (April 2003): 311–342; Palabıyık, "Ottoman Travelers' Perceptions of Africa in the Late Ottoman Empire (1860-1922)"; Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing About the Orient: A Critical Discourse from the East (1872-1932)*.

⁸⁵ Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire*.

⁸⁶ Christoph Herzog and Raoul Motika, "Orientalism Alla Turca: Late 19th/Early 20th Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim 'Outback'" *Die Welt des Islams* 40, no. 2 (2000): 139–195; Kasaba. Additionally, Mary Blain Campbell notes that a preoccupation with nomadic peoples was one of the most basic forms of cultural otherness in Western ethnographic writing more broadly. See Mary Baine Campbell, "Travel Writing and Its Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 261–78.

secure control over its vast territories, and increase conscription, taxation, and agricultural production.⁸⁷

In a similar way, Rosanes's imagined geography of race was further projected onto the land itself as a space of negation, one that was unruly, unhygienic, and unproductive. He emphasized the unruliness of the terrain with its steep hills that "are full of thorns, thistles, thorny plants, brambles, and nettles. In general, all the species that the first man did not deign to name, all were on this path."⁸⁸ By his account, the inefficiency of the roads was also true for the guides who led him. "We can never walk more than eight hours in one day," Rosanes grumbled.⁸⁹ He explained: "There they lead with their animals slowly and do not prod or hit them to move faster."⁹⁰ He bemoaned the state of the roads, the slow pace of travel, and the inefficiency of both the guides and the routes between cities. This unruliness also extended to the urban environment. In Hebron, Rosanes described the "crooked and narrow streets with no order to them," the houses haphazardly stacked, "one on top of another, two or three, a house of one next to his brother or friend, front and back, so that every stranger who goes into the yard cannot for the world find where he came from and where he's going. And with all this, they still find room to build again on the roofs and chimneys of others."⁹¹ At a time when the Ottoman state sought to restructure space along the principles of order, efficiency, and access, these travelers represented the cities of Palestine as a space of alterity.⁹²

Rosanes's spatial representations also circulated new discourses of hygiene at a time when urban standards of cleanliness were changing in the empire with the introduction of

⁸⁷ Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire*, 117. The state sought to settle nomadic populations for conscription and taxation as well as agricultural cultivation

⁸⁸ Rosanes, *Masa 'ot he-ḥakham ha-Abir*, 10. He refers here to the Biblical story of Adam naming the plants and animals in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:20).

⁸⁹ Rosanes, 10.

⁹⁰ Rosanes, 10.

⁹¹ Rosanes, 18 but see also 12, 19, 41.

⁹² Mary Louise Pratt sees such descriptions as the "estheticization" of the landscape, which may be positive (portraying beauty, order, the sublime) or negative (ugliness, disorder, triviality). See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 213.

municipal services such as street cleaning and garbage disposal.⁹³ Rosanes depicted Safed as a city where “the markets and streets are full of slime and mud and all kinds of trash...”⁹⁴ In the market, “there is a slaughterhouse where they kill sheep and goats and they spill lots of blood and clean the animals from dung and their internal organs and based on this you can judge the cleanliness of the city.”⁹⁵ Similarly, in Tiberias, he decried: “City cleaners are not known here, adding to the trash and garbage that covers all outside areas since everyone sweeps their houses and sends all their trash outside without thinking anything of it.”⁹⁶ Relatedly, Rosanes deplored the lack of a hospital to treat Jews or even a doctor in Tiberias or Safed, both of which were without those “from Europe who were trained with medical knowledge, nor from Turkey, whose medical knowledge was passed down from their fathers.”⁹⁷ Having only “healers who use incantations and amulets, who are numerous in these cities,” he lamented, “when a person from these cities falls ill, God help him!”⁹⁸ This demonstrates new standards of hygiene and medicine to differentiate between civilized and uncivilized spaces.

Civilization meant efficient road infrastructure and hygienic cities, but also a sense of security. Rosanes attributed the slow pace of travel not only to the roads and the guides, but to the constant threat of theft: “The road is more dangerous because of robberies since the whole path is settled by Ishmaelites sitting in their tents...”⁹⁹ He further asserted that, “The land is not civilized and orderly like the lands of Europe because of the many savage robbers who disturb our Jewish brothers and who disrupt our brothers from their dealings, and they

⁹³ Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, 45; Sahara, “The Ottoman City Council and the Beginning of the Modernisation of Urban Space in the Balkans.”

⁹⁴ Rosanes, *Masa ‘ot he-ḥakham ha-Abir*, 18.

⁹⁵ Rosanes, 19.

⁹⁶ Rosanes, *Masa ‘ot he-ḥakham ha-Abir*, 12.

⁹⁷ Rosanes, 11.

⁹⁸ Rosanes, 11.

⁹⁹ Rosanes, 10.

will never sit peacefully under the vine and fig tree.”¹⁰⁰ For Rosanes, Muslims were uncivilized robbers waiting to prey on Jewish travelers, which not only disrupted a sense of peace and order, but stalled economic productivity.

Throughout his account, Rosanes constructed a racial hierarchy that spans from himself as a civilized outsider, to his “Jewish brethren,” misguided Samaritans, and Arab savages. He worked to substantiate and naturalize this hierarchy through his spatial representations of the land. He projected this imagined geography of race onto the land itself, depicting Palestine as a space of alterity, governed not by the principles of order, hygiene, efficiency, and security introduced elsewhere in the empire through the Tanzimat reforms, but one where the land and its inhabitants appear to be disorderly and unhygienic, unsafe and inefficient in ways that inhibited productivity. Yet these racial distinctions belie Rosanes’s own anxieties about the porousness of such boundaries; given the uncivilized nature of the land, he felt that Jews in Palestine had a tenuous hold on civilization and contended with the looming threat of regressing backwards into savagery, one that Rosanes sought to stave off by exhorting readers to financially support the Jewish communities of Palestine to ensure their religious education and observance.

1890s Palestine: Racial Cartographies of Capital

During the thirty years between the publication of Rosanes’s account and Jacob Shaul’s trip to Palestine, major economic, technological, and infrastructural developments led to profound spatial changes in Palestine. After the Crimean War, the contraction of the empire’s first European loans opened the floodgates for foreign borrowing. As the financial

¹⁰⁰ Rosanes, 36. At multiple points in his account, Rosanes invokes the Biblical phrase “under the vine and fig tree” (Micah 4:4, 1 Kings 4:25, and Zachariah 3:10) to affirm the ability of Jews to safely inhabit the land, where “Each man shall sit under his vine and fig-tree and none shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4). This biblical image also had resonance for George Washington in his vision of settlement in the United States. See Daniel L. Dreisbach, “The ‘Vine and Fig Tree’ in George Washington’s Letters: Reflections on a Biblical Motif in the Literature of the American Founding Era,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 76, no. 3 (2007): 299–326.

needs of the empire continued to soar with ongoing wars and the expansion of the bureaucracy, it contracted more and larger loans from European bankers, tumbling deeper into debt, which effectively drew it more forcefully into the global capitalist economy.¹⁰¹ Unable to pay its international debts, the Ottoman state declared bankruptcy in 1875. Negotiations with European creditors led to the establishment in 1881 of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, a consortium of creditor who oversaw part of the Ottoman economy, directed its revenues to the repayment of debts, and sought to expand agricultural cultivation to further raise revenues.¹⁰²

In efforts to stave off ever-encroaching European interests and expand its tax base, particularly with the loss of the economic boon of the Balkans, the Tanzimat state sought to more closely integrate its many provinces.¹⁰³ It established a new provincial administration in Palestine in the 1860s that worked to impose direct Ottoman rule, stimulate agricultural production, settle Bedouin communities, and secure the borders against potential foreign incursions.¹⁰⁴ The Ottoman state slowly consolidated its grip on Palestine as the region underwent an intense process of change with construction, infrastructure development, and

¹⁰¹ As Matthias Lehmann points out, this increasing debt was also the result of inefficiencies of revenue collection, outdated policies such as traditional tax exemptions for Istanbul, and the privileges granted to European traders and those with European protection under the capitulations treaties (*The Baron: Maurice de Hirsch and the Jewish Nineteenth Century* (Stanford University Press, 2022)).

¹⁰² Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 72; Tekeli and Ilkin, "The Public Works Program and the Development of Technology in the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," 199.

¹⁰³ Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁴ For the implementation of *Tanzimat* reforms in Palestine, see Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840-1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Ruth Kark, "The Contribution of the Ottoman Regime to the Development of Jerusalem and Jaffa, 1840-1917," in *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, ed. David Kushner (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1986), 45-58; Haim Gerber, "A New Look at the Tanzimat: The Case of the Province of Jerusalem," in *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, ed. David Kushner (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1986), 30-45; Donna Robinson Divine, *Politics and Society in Ottoman Palestine: The Arab Struggle for Survival and Power* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994); Rogan, *Frontiers of State in the Late Ottoman Empire*.

agricultural production transforming the region—and with it, ideas about civilized and savage space.¹⁰⁵

Construction

Starting in the 1870s, Palestine saw rapid population growth, both naturally and from immigration. Although estimates vary, the population rose from approximately 315,000 in the 1870s to 462,000 in the 1881, and 600,000 by 1900.¹⁰⁶ As the population pushed beyond old city walls in the 1860s, it expanded cities like Nablus; Haifa; Jerusalem, which transformed from a religious city to a major political-administrative center; and Jaffa, which grew from a small town to the main port of Palestine.¹⁰⁷ The landscape saw rapid construction to house the growing number of residents, particularly those emigrating from Europe.¹⁰⁸ Construction of housing, but also government offices, consulates, religious sites, schools, and hospitals, was financed by private investors, the Ottoman state, *waqf*, and local and foreign communal organization and institutions.

The massive construction changed the landscape of Palestine, particularly as a European style of construction appeared in the 1880s that reshaped the architecture, interior

¹⁰⁵ Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*.

¹⁰⁶ These statistics are derived from Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882*, 285; Ami Ayalon, *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900-1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 4; and Jonathan Marc Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race, and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter*, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 32.

¹⁰⁷ Yasemin Avcı, “Jerusalem and Jaffa in the Late Ottoman Period: The Concession-Hunting Struggle for Public Works Projects,” in *Late Ottoman Palestine*, ed. Yuval Ben-Bassat and Eyal Ginio (London: I.B. Taurus, 2011). The built-up area outside of the old city of Jaffa, for example, grew from 14 metric dunhams in 1842 to 1,447 metric dunams by 1914 as the city’s population swelled from 5,000 in the 1840s to 30,000 by 1899 (Solomonovich and Kark, “Land Privatization in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Palestine,” 252). In Jerusalem, nine new neighborhoods were established outside the Old City in the 1870s, partly as a result of the cholera epidemic of 1865-1866 that encouraged residents to leave the poor housing conditions of the Old City and construct new houses beyond the walls (Solomonovich and Kark, “Land Privatization in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Palestine,” 265).

¹⁰⁸ According to Ruth Kark, between 1860 and 1914, approximately 100 new neighborhoods were built for primarily European inhabitants in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa (Kark, “The Contribution of the Ottoman Regime to the Development of Jerusalem and Jaffa, 1840-1917,” 379).

design, and layout of buildings.¹⁰⁹ Shaul noted the rapidity of this change, writing how, “Since five years, Haifa has completely changed. You can only see some old houses and a few made of stone, but now there are many large houses in the European style.”¹¹⁰ He similarly observed that in Jaffa, “alongside the many old houses, they have already begun to build new ones in a more fashionable style.”¹¹¹ Within Jerusalem, Shaul discursively constructed space by contrasting the old and new cities. He emphasized the Old City’s “many dark and narrow streets in the old custom of the Arabs,” but how beyond the Old City walls, “The majority of the population and the progress and advances in Jerusalem are found.”¹¹² Departing through the *Bab el-halil*, the western gate into the Old City, “leads to a wide street that takes more than half an hour to travel by carriage. On the right and on the left of this street are found some beautiful palaces, stores, hotels, cafes, and other buildings richly constructed.”¹¹³ Through such juxtapositions, Shaul depicted the ongoing process of civilizing the landscape through new houses built in a European style, railways, paved roads for carriages, and plans for a tramway.¹¹⁴

Infrastructure Development

As hinted at above in Shaul’s enthusiasm for paved roads, tramways, and railways, infrastructure remained one of the greatest benchmarks of civilized space. With the ascendancy of Sultan Abdülhamid II, infrastructure policy gained momentum in the Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁵ The 1880s saw a phase of rapid road construction and the state began to grant

¹⁰⁹ With improved safety outside the old city walls, the walls of new buildings were less massive, the rooms were reinforced with wooden beams and board floors, and iron girders and flagstones, the roofs covered in tiles (Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882*, 123).

¹¹⁰ Shaul, 1.

¹¹¹ Shaul, 15.

¹¹² Shaul, 7.

¹¹³ Shaul, 7.

¹¹⁴ Shaul 1, 7, 12-13, 15.

¹¹⁵ It benefited from state investment in building a broader professional base within the empire rather than bringing in engineers from abroad. The state established a school for civil engineering, the *Hendese-i Mülkiye Mekteb*, in 1883 and the Ministry of Public Works began to publish a professional journal, *Mecmua-i Umur-ı*

railway concessions that led to the construction of local, interregional, and transnational lines linking Istanbul to Sofia in 1874, backed by the Jewish banker Baron Maurice de Hirsch, and from Istanbul to Vienna in 1888.¹¹⁶ Yet the compounding debt of the empire led to slow progress. In 1881, the year that the Public Debt Administration was institutionalized, the Tanzimat statesman Hasan Fehmi Paşa outlined a comprehensive engineering program in his *Proposal on General Production in Anatolia*, which he believed would “get the empire out of the difficult position in which it currently finds itself.”¹¹⁷ He argued that, “In order to ensure the empire’s future, develop its resources, increase its riches, grow its revenues, in short for it to regain its power and prestige, there is only one pathway open before us: to undertake without delay and in the most serious way, the construction of public works.”¹¹⁸ He asserted that the prosperity of the country “depends absolutely on the facilities provided by major public works” for “without public works there is neither wealth nor prosperity, but only embarrassment and poverty.”¹¹⁹ Duly aware of the empire’s bankruptcy, Hasan Fehmi Paşa insisted that, “the only means we possess is recourse to foreign capital” in order “to participate in the benefits of modern civilization.”¹²⁰

Nafia, (Journal of Public Works) in 1884—both of which point to the growing culture of and interest in engineering and infrastructure (Riedler, “Building Modern Infrastructures on Ancient Roads: Road and Rail Development in 19th-Century Edirne”).

¹¹⁶ Tekeli and Ilkin, “The Public Works Program and the Development of Technology in the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” 224. For a detailed account of Maurice de Hirsch’s railway concession in the Ottoman Empire, see Lehmann, *The Baron*. The Ottoman Empire enticed foreign investment by offering attractive contracts that included benefits like the yearly payment of kilometric guarantees for the time of the concession, which could run for up to 99 years before the line would eventually be taken over by the Ottoman state (Riedler, 456).

¹¹⁷ The report by Hasan Fehmi Paşa was published bilingually in Ottoman Turkish as *Anadolu’da İmalut-ı Umumiyyeye Dair* and in French as *Rapport adressé à S. A. Le Premier Ministre par S. Exc. Le Ministre des Travaux Publics sur les Travaux Publics à exécuter dans la Turquie d’Asie*, 1881. Hasan Fehmi Paşa, *Anadolu’da İmalut-ı Umumiyyeye Dair*, 6.

¹¹⁸ Hasan Fehmi Paşa, *Anadolu’da İmalut-ı Umumiyyeye Dair*, 6-7.

¹¹⁹ Hasan Fehmi Paşa, *Anadolu’da İmalut-ı Umumiyyeye Dair*, 4. He emphasizes that “the advantages and profits from the rise and development of agriculture, commerce, and industry that would result from the construction of such works, and of the likely measure in which the public wealth would grow beyond the figures attained by the current production of the country” (1).

¹²⁰ Hasan Fehmi Paşa, *Anadolu’da İmalut-ı Umumiyyeye Dair*, 13. He identifies foreign capital as the only “eminently practical” option, with all others being “neither patriotic nor rational” (10) and “contrary to the most elementary principles of governmental science” (11).

Despite its growing debts, the sense of security that the Public Debt Administration gave foreign investors attracted additional European capital, primarily to invest in public works, which the Ottoman state could not afford itself.¹²¹ European capital increasingly flowed into the Ottoman market in ways that entailed greater control over the Ottoman economy; from the 1890s on, Ottoman integration into the global economy increasingly looked like economic vassalage to its foreign creditors.¹²² Investors were not only lured by the profits they anticipated, but were also motivated by the possibilities that would arise from bringing the Ottoman economy more closely into the European-dominated world economy.

In Palestine, individuals as well as Ottoman and foreign governments increasingly invested in the region's infrastructure.¹²³ "I cannot make you understand enough," one Sephardic traveler wrote to readers back home in Salonica, "that Palestine is a poor land, where commerce, industry, and means of communication is very little..."¹²⁴ Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, roads were paved along major commercial routes and passenger carriages became more widespread.¹²⁵ Improved roads facilitated the circulation not only of travelers and tourists, but also goods in Palestine's growing export economy. Both the Ottoman state and foreign investors were particularly focused on constructing railways in the region. Railways, they knew, would help to open the empire up economically by facilitating easier transportation of raw materials out of the empire and European goods in.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Eldem, "Ottoman Financial Integration with Europe."

¹²² Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*; Eldem, "Ottoman Financial Integration with Europe," 443; Avcı, "Jerusalem and Jaffa in the Late Ottoman Period," 83.

¹²³ The Ottoman state did this primarily through the establishment of municipalities, as discussed above in the case of Rusçuk. With the promulgation of the Provincial Municipality Law in 1877, local governments expanded their activities (Avcı, "Jerusalem and Jaffa in the Late Ottoman Period," 86). The second half of the nineteenth century saw both private and public investment in developing technology infrastructure, including wind and water mills, steam engines and internal combustion engines that enabled deeper water wells to irrigate agriculture (Gilbar, "The Growing Economic Involvement of Palestine with the West, 1865-1914," 203). In the late 1860s, construction of a telegraph network began linking Beirut, Istanbul, and Europe.

¹²⁴ *La epoka* 11/27/1896, 3-4.

¹²⁵ Gilbar, "The Growing Economic Involvement of Palestine with the West, 1865-1914," 203.

¹²⁶ Bilmez, "European Investments in the Ottoman Railways, 1850-1914," 185.

A sense of the development of transportation infrastructure emerges in temporal comparisons. Describing his travel from Hebron to Jerusalem, Shaul explained that, “Ten years ago, twelve hours was not enough to do this journey because of the mountains of Hebron, which make the roads impractical. But today, thanks to the beautiful carriage road that was newly built, you can go and return in the same day without tiring yourself out.”¹²⁷ He similarly praised the railroad between Jaffa and Jerusalem: “Three years ago, twelve hours by carriage would not be enough to make this dangerous journey. There were always fatal accidents because of the roads, but today, thanks to the railroad newly built, people can travel without danger or exhaustion.”¹²⁸ Not only did this mean greater efficiency, but “Thanks to the good organization and to the oversight of the servicemen,” he enthused, “the security and the relaxation of travelers leaves nothing to be desired.”

Yet, according to both Shaul and contemporary writers, not everyone was riding the rail line when it opened in 1892. “There are very few Christian or Arab travelers,” one writer observed. “For the most part, they are Jews who pile up on the benches, and it is they who are most of the clientele of the line, that is to say, who belong to French Society.”¹²⁹ Just as the train represented technological progress and modernity to those who rode it, accounts depicted those who did not use it as ignorant and uncivilized. As the train passed through Arab villages between Jaffa and Jerusalem, Shaul described the fellahin’s fear of trains, writing how, “It’s curious to see, even still, how the fellahin run away when they see the train. They believe that it is a large animal that screams and, when breathing, emits a large amount of smoke from its mouth. This proves the level of ignorance of the rural Arabs.”¹³⁰ In representing them as being at odds with the railroad, a symbol of civilization, Shaul marked them as premodern and decidedly uncivilized.

¹²⁷ Shaul, 12-13.

¹²⁸ Shaul, 14.

¹²⁹ *Journal de Salonique*, 2/2/1903, 2.

¹³⁰ Shaul, 15.

Ottoman Muslim bureaucrats and intellectuals also perceived Arabs in the provinces as inferior and in need of being civilized, and they were especially disparaging of the *fellahin*. And just like Shaul, travelogues by Ottoman Muslims also emphasized difference through technology. Just as Shaul's claimed that rural Arabs are afraid of trains, they too pointed out incidents in which people were puzzled by new technology or afraid of it, including trains and cameras. As just one example of convergence with Ottoman discourses, these incidents across Ottoman accounts by both Sephardic and Muslim writers became opportunities for writers to document what made them culturally superior to Others they encountered.

In addition to the train, the other infrastructural development that drew considerable attention was the Jaffa port, which, despite serving as the main commercial port in Palestine, was notoriously inaccessible to large boats and ships.¹³¹ Because of its shallow depth and long reef beds that ran the length of the coast, larger boats were forced to anchor in the open sea and use smaller boats to bring cargo and passengers ashore. A contemporary traveler described his experience, exclaiming, "Jaffa! The port of Palestine! Slowly, our liner advanced on the tranquil waters, spread out like a mirror under the dazzling light of the sun's rays."¹³² But upon approaching closer, the writer related how, "Even in the best weather, the water of the sea breaks furiously against the rocks, but in the winter, during severe weather and storms, the enormous waves collide on this rocky enclosure and the port of Jaffa becomes almost inaccessible." As the ship neared the port, after the customs officer authorized the passengers and merchandise to disembark,

This authorization barely obtained, a whole flotilla of small ships of all sizes come towards us and in fifteen minutes, the board of our ship, usually so tranquil, is suddenly invaded by a mass of Arabs, of boatmen and porters, who cry and clamor in a way that would wake the dead. Like madmen, they

¹³¹ The Ottoman state made small improvements to the port in the 1860s, but larger attempts to expand the port failed because of lack of funding. These small renovations included the construction of a lighthouse and landing and the repair of the customs house. Various companies and engineers proposed plans for a new port in 1878, 1880, and 1892, but invariably failed (Avcı, "Jerusalem and Jaffa in the Late Ottoman Period," 94).

¹³² "Travel Impressions in Jaffa," *Journal de Salonique*, 1/29/1903, 2.

throw themselves at you, pick up your bags, push you towards their boats, each one pulling from his side and making a hellish din.¹³³

The writer presented a scene of chaos in contrast to the earlier tranquility of the ship. This invading “mass of Arabs,” yelling loudly “like madmen,” disrupted the travelers with their “hellish din,” but they also invaded their personal space as they “throw themselves at you,” pushing and pulling people in all directions. Within this depiction, the undeveloped harbor with the waves colliding and breaking “furiously against the rocks,” and the Arabs associated with it embodied disorder and aggression.

Triumphalist narratives that deemed infrastructure as a metric of civilization invested roads, railways, and harbors with the ability to transform the empire into a thoroughly modern space of production and consumption by facilitating flows of capital. Depictions of Arabs as opposed to new infrastructure like the railways or associated with undeveloped infrastructure like the Jaffa port racialized Arabs as counter to civilized space and the Ottoman project of modernity more broadly. In this way, travel through geographic space maps corresponding temporal terrains. Both Shaul and Rosanes evoked an evolutionary chronology, in which signifiers like *savage* emerged as a temporally-based racial classification. Such temporal logics emerge in what Charles W. Mills has called racial chronopolitics—a temporal counterpart to geopolitics, a global politics of time that shapes the temporal representations and material relations between groups and with the world.¹³⁴ Through evolutionary time, travelers at the close of the century engaged in a racial chronopolitics that temporally located the land and its Arab inhabitants in the past, living in an earlier era, opposed to the many benefits of the modern world.

¹³³ “Travel Impressions in Jaffa,” *Journal de Salonique*, 1/29/1903, 2.

¹³⁴ Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism;” Mills, “The Chronopolitics of Racial Time.”

Agricultural Production

Ottoman bureaucrats saw these infrastructural developments as key to economic growth in the region by more closely linking the local economy to the wider regional and global economies. The cultivation of cash crops across the region rose rapidly with the expansion of arable land and creation of new fields and orange and olive plantations, yielding surpluses that were exported regionally and to Europe.¹³⁵ This agricultural growth, in turn, resulted in increased commercial activity with a rise in the number of large importers and exporters and of wholesale and retail merchants, particularly those engaged in foreign trade.¹³⁶

Ottoman Sephardic travelers noted and praised the growth of fertile farmlands and orchards, particularly around Jaffa. “In moving forward near Jaffa,” Shaul wrote, “there are vast lands planted with many thousands of orange trees. These trees, despite their small size, produce a large and pleasant fruit that is one of the principal agricultural riches of the country. This produce of the land provides a living for a large part of the population.”¹³⁷ A contemporary traveler similarly noted the “large gardens of lemon trees, oranges, and other fruit trees that produce annually more than three million fruits exported to Egypt and Europe. It is thanks to these gardens that Jaffa finds itself almost surrounded by a belt of greenery...”¹³⁸ It was this citrus production, travelers explained, that brought considerable traffic to the port of Jaffa and transformed it into a major economic entrepôt.

¹³⁵ The second half of the nineteenth century saw the rapid expansion of crops, including citrus, grapes, sesame, olives, and production of tobacco, wine, soap, and oil (Gad G. Gilbar, “The Growing Economic Involvement of Palestine with the West, 1865-1914,” in *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, ed. David Kushner (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1986), 188–210; Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882*). According to Schölch, the orange plantations and vegetable gardens outside Jaffa quadrupled between 1850-1880, and the wheat cultivation of southern Palestine increased in the 1870s from 150,000-200,000 acres, particularly in Gaza and Jaffa (*Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882*, 285).

¹³⁶ Specialization in commercial activity began and trading firms started to emerge among the larger Arab merchant families. See Gilbar, “The Growing Economic Involvement of Palestine with the West, 1865-1914,” 203; Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*.

¹³⁷ Shaul, 15.

¹³⁸ *Journal de Salonique*, 1/29/1903, p. 2.

In efforts to stimulate Jewish productivization, in 1870 the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* established an agricultural school in Palestine, *Mikve Israel*, with an eye towards export-oriented agriculture.¹³⁹ Shaul explained to readers how this school was established “for the study of agriculture for many young Jews who are sent there from different schools in Turkey belonging to this association.”¹⁴⁰ He lauded the wine produced there, “that contains a universal reputation,” and concluded that, “In general the lands of Palestine are very fertile, and this supports the verse that the ‘land flows with milk and honey.’”¹⁴¹ Shaul praised the AIU’s commitment to Jewish regeneration through agricultural productivization.

The founding of *Mikve Israel* occurred alongside the establishment of European agricultural settlements. The 1867 land law promulgated by the Ottoman state conceded to foreigners the right to private land ownership, opening the door to European settlement. Sephardic travelers were particularly impressed by the German Templar colonies. One described the Templar colony at the base of Mount Carmel where “new residents developed the agriculture extraordinarily.”¹⁴² He explained how, “In little time the land around Haifa was completely transformed. In place of the large rocks, there are now cedar and hawthorn trees growing, beautiful fruit gardens, and in the middle of the lush greenery, happy and smiling houses.” Another traveler praised the colony of Sarona, where despite their struggle against malaria, “nothing has discouraged the first colonists; with the tenacity and spirit of method that characterizes the Germans, they were able little by little to surmount the

¹³⁹ Spearheaded by Charles Netter, who is discussed at more length in chapter 4, the school began to cultivate luxury crops such as strawberries, asparagus, citrus, perfume flowers, and grapes for wine by 1873. By the mid-1880s, the school began to play an important role in training technicians and administrators to manage the colonies of Baron Edmond de Rothschild (Derek Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy: The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870-1918*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 17).

¹⁴⁰ Shaul, 16.

¹⁴¹ Shaul, 16. The Biblical verse Shaul cites here is Deuteronomy 31:20.

¹⁴² “Three Weeks in Palestine,” *La epoka*, 12/18/1896, 5.

obstacles that lay in their path and today their colony prospers.”¹⁴³ He admired how “the Germans progress by leaps and bounds and rapidly develop the commerce of this region.”

By the first World War, approximately fifty new agricultural settlements had been founded by Europeans, especially Ashkenazi Jews from eastern Europe who arrived in a wave of immigration beginning in 1882.¹⁴⁴ These settlers of the first Aliyah established agricultural colonies based on private farming organized according to European models of settlement.¹⁴⁵ Driven by a firm belief in productivization and agricultural work as a core part of Jewish regeneration, Zionist settlers followed the script of a barren “wasteland” and the creation of a Jewish, civilized space.¹⁴⁶

The Ottoman Sephardic press was particularly keen to print agricultural success stories of these Jewish communities. Travelers were impressed by settlements like Zikhron Yaakov, which Shaul noted, “Everyone calls little Paris.”¹⁴⁷ One contemporary traveler sketched for readers the layout of the settlement:

Imagine a great boulevard, very long, stretching for many hundreds of meters, bypassed in the middle by another boulevard. Throughout these boulevards are seventy to eighty houses, some of which are small palaces, one barracks, one school, one magnificent synagogue, one pharmacy, and countless gardens with fruitful yields. Further in front are herds of cows, sheep, all kinds of birds, and work tools. Finally, a huge European farm brought to Palestine and you have an idea of what is Zikhron Yaakov.¹⁴⁸

There the houses were “built in stone, covered with tiles from Europe, and painted in happy colors.”¹⁴⁹ The traveler gushed: “For us, it was a true joy, a real pleasure to see each morning the Jewish colonists go to work, some with pickaxes over their shoulders, some arriving in

¹⁴³ *Journal de Salonique*, 2/2/1903, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Kark, 379; Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy*; Yuval Ben-Bassat, “The Challenges Facing the First Aliyah Sephardic Ottoman Colonists,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 35, no. 1 (2016): 3–15; Liora R. Halperin, *The Oldest Guard: Forging the Zionist Settler Past*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2021).

¹⁴⁵ Zionist settlers of the First Aliya established agricultural settlements throughout the 1880s and 1890s including Petah Tikva and Rosh Pinna, Rishon Le Zion, Ness Ziona, Gedera, Zichron Ya’aqov, Yesud HaMa’ala, Mishmar ha-Yarden, Rehovot, Hadera, Metulla, Kfar Saba, and Hartuv (Halperin, *The Oldest Guard*, 11).

¹⁴⁶ Zerubavel, *Desert in the Promised Land*; Halperin, *The Oldest Guard*, 35.

¹⁴⁷ Shaul, 4.

¹⁴⁸ “Three Weeks in Palestine,” *La epoka*, 12/25/1896, 5.

¹⁴⁹ “Three Weeks in Palestine,” *La epoka*, 12/25/1896, 5.

the wagon, some digging up the earth, some watching the cows and the calves, some giving the sheep water.”

Other depictions of Jewish colonies explicitly juxtaposed the agricultural settlements with adjacent Arab neighborhoods. Shaul depicted Rosh Pina, with its “elegantly built synagogue and school for girls and boys” and “homes built under the supervision of a European engineer in a European way.”¹⁵⁰ He praised its “vast lands cultivated by all the colonists who are energetic people and active laborers of the land...The colonists supply all that they need for the comforts of life, and they also work to enlarge the place.”¹⁵¹ Shaul professed: “I felt a real pleasure in seeing a beautiful village of Jews who live from the produce of their land and in an independent manner.” This lies in contrast to the neighboring Arab village, where “the houses are built with clay and mud and they look very miserable.”¹⁵² Another writer contrasted “the houses of the village Gayon and the settlement of Rosh Pina. The houses of Gayon are built with clay, mud, and adobe and they look very miserable. The inhabitants are fellahin and they continually suffer from fevers.”¹⁵³ In contrast, “The houses of Rosh Pina are built of stone, whitewashed within and without, and some appear to be small palaces facing those of the peasants.” Such descriptions juxtaposed the agricultural settlements of Jews as productive land settled by productive people alongside Arabs who were constantly ill, lived in small homes, and “look very miserable.”

Writers not only contrasted these agriculturalist Jews with neighboring Arabs, but also other Jews who did not cultivate the land. In Tiberias, Shaul wrote, “The inhabitants have great difficulty securing their existence. They do not do any commerce. They all study

¹⁵⁰ Shaul, “Impresiones de Viaže En Palastina,” 5.

¹⁵¹ Shaul, 4–5.

¹⁵² “Three Weeks in Palestine,” *La epoka*, 12/11/1896, 4.

¹⁵³ “Three weeks in Palestine, *La epoka* 12/11/1896, 4-5.

Talmud. There are rabbinic sages. They all marry at a very young age.”¹⁵⁴ Because of their devotion to text study, according to Shaul, they do not engage in productive work. Another traveler claimed that, “The Jewish community of Safed was never able to flourish. The Israelites of the place, never having the occasion to enrich themselves with commerce or industry, do not have the same influence that wealth has given to some Jews of Turkey.”¹⁵⁵ Instead, he explained that the Jews of Safed lived off of financial support collected from Jewish communities worldwide, called *halukah*.¹⁵⁶ Bringing his readers with him, he explained how,

We walked through all the squares to see up close the life of these Israelites who live off of *halukah*. Because they are not concerned about obtaining bread by the sweat of their brow, they pass from store to store, from house to house, speaking ill of one, sowing intrigues with another. Besides laziness and vagrancy, halukah carries some disastrous consequences like early marriage, divorce, and taking many wives.¹⁵⁷

Writers stigmatized religious Jews by not only equating them with poverty and unproductivity, but also with customs deemed uncivilized such as young marriage and polygamy.

As allegedly uncivilized Jews, they lived in allegedly uncivilized spaces, particularly regarding hygiene. In Tiberias, Shaul commented on the lack of hygiene in the Sea of Galilee, where people drank the water, swam, laundered their dirty clothes, and washed the dead.¹⁵⁸ Another Ottoman Sephardic traveler explained to readers that, “From afar, Safed

¹⁵⁴ Shaul, 2. Shaul decried “religious fanaticism” in general, which he saw as a plague of the land for Jews and Muslims alike. Thus he described Muslims, whose “fanaticism is very impassioned,” in similar ways as the “Jewish fanatics” at the Western Wall, “with books in their hands, crying, hitting themselves” (Shaul, 13, 10).

¹⁵⁵ “Three Weeks in Palestine,” *La epoka*, 12/11/1896, 4.

¹⁵⁶ The writer explains that different Jewish communities in Palestine derive their contributions from different places: “The aid that is sent from abroad for the Jews of Safed amounts to 250 thousand francs. The halukah of the Ashkenazim comes from Russia and from Austro-Hungary. The halukah of the Sephardim comes from Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, from the Indies. Apart from this, there are the holies of the cities of Amsterdam, London, from the passed Sir Moses Montefiore.” For more on *halukah*, see Matthias B. Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land: The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

¹⁵⁷ “Three weeks in Palestine, *La epoka* 12/11/1896, 4-5.

¹⁵⁸ Shaul, “Impresiones de Viaje En Palastina,” 1.

appears to be a very clean city, but upon entering it, the impression changes entirely.”¹⁵⁹ He vividly described how,

The streets are slippery from things tossed carelessly, rags, rotten fruit, dead and stinking animals. From all of this garbage comes some noxious smells that infest the air and cause a thousand ills...It is not understood that types of microbes come out of these piles of dirty things during the strong heat of summer. The buildings have humid cellars, nests of rheumatism and strange illnesses. The residents are always pale and emaciated. It is unfortunate to see the children. Deformed bodies, eyes inward, and always sick.¹⁶⁰

Nascent discourses of hygiene reflected new scientific and medical ideas about the human body and the bacteria and germs that caused disease. As a result, travelers used standards of hygiene to differentiate between civilized and uncivilized spaces.

Given the rapid agricultural development of the region, writers depicted the uncultivated landscape as threatening, describing mountains where “stone boulders seem to want to fall on our heads” and “at our feet, terrible, dangerous abysses, ready to swallow the miserable traveler who missteps when looking at the view.”¹⁶¹ But, one writer noted, “From time to time, on the same mountain, we encounter some beautiful gardens that give an idea of how fertile the land is, a bunch of smiling trees growing in the middle of some fruit gardens.”¹⁶² Another writer employed a similar study of contrasts in depicting his train ride from Jaffa to Jerusalem, beginning with the plains outside the city where “luxuriant vegetation covers the ground. On the freshly worked earth are vines folding under the weight of their grapes, oranges whose fruits of gold are not yet ripe, olives with their short stems and pale foliage.”¹⁶³ But as the train advanced, the landscape began to transform:

We abandon the rich and fertile valley of Saron...The landscape has completely changed. No more greenery or herds. The villages have disappeared and the train rolls through a completely deserted country. The mountains are not very high, but they are very close together, one beside another, separated by narrow ravines lined with a thin granite, ravines that transform in the winter into tumultuous torrents.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ “Three Weeks in Palestine,” *La epoka*, 12/11/1896, 4-5.

¹⁶⁰ “Three Weeks in Palestine,” *La epoka*, 12/18/1896, 5.

¹⁶¹ *La epoka*, 12/18/1896, 5.

¹⁶² “Three Weeks in Palestine,” *La epoka*, 12/11/1896, 5.

¹⁶³ *Journal de Salonique*, 2/2/1903, 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Journal de Salonique*, 2/2/1903, 2.

In the ominous mountain passes, the railway becomes precarious and “in slowing down, passes like it is clinging to the massive rock on which it remains suspended like a swallow’s nest. And while on one side the train is almost touching the mountain, from the other, the gaze plunges deep into the abyss in which it seems that we will fall.”¹⁶⁵ As the terrain moves from lush plains to impending mountains, the train, a symbol of civilization, struggles to pass through the land.

It is there, in the hills between Jaffa and Jerusalem that, “The last European buildings have disappeared and here and there are seen in the distance small Arab villages with their earthen huts, in a conical form with neither door nor windows, pierced with a low hole that allows them to enter.”¹⁶⁶ The writer proceeded to describe how, “Beside the village or sometimes in the center, there are wells, a source of life and fertility, generally dug not far from the small dome of the sacred tomb that keeps the remains of the holy protector of the village.” Following the gaze of the traveler to the well, we see that,

Around it are seated Arabs wrapped in their hooded cloaks. Motionless and indifferent, their gaze vague, as though lost in the space around them. Sometimes, one of them lifts his head, quickly looks at the herds grazing around, gives a guttural cry from his throat that frightens the little black sheep, and soon everything falls back into silence. The passing of the train makes them lift their heads again, their eyes wide open, watching in astonishment these poor people who are always in a hurry, without a moment of rest, carried into the distance by a machine that spits fire.¹⁶⁷

The writer portrayed Arab villages as following a prototype with mud huts, wells, grazing animals, and a saintly tomb. Each of these racializes the space as distinct from the imagined geography of civilization with its European-style houses made of stone, paved and cleaned streets, and productive citizens. Instead, the people of the village appear as stock ethnographic specimen who are part of the scenery, passively lying around, lost in thought, “motionless and indifferent” in a silence pierced only by the “guttural cry” that racializes and naturalizes these villagers as savage within a savage landscape.

¹⁶⁵ “Travel Impressions in Palestine,” *Journal de Salonique* 2/5/1903, 2.

¹⁶⁶ “Travel Impressions in Palestine,” *Journal de Salonique* 2/5/1903, 2.

¹⁶⁷ “Travel Impressions in Palestine,” *Journal de Salonique* 2/5/1903, 2.

Such depictions appeared at a time when, as a result of Ottoman land policies and the influx of foreign capital, Arab peasants found themselves increasingly in debt and dispossessed of their claims to the land. Sherene Seikaly explains that most Arabs in Palestine worked as small farmers and sharecroppers until 1948, but the formation of large estates and the growing power of merchant capital at the end of the nineteenth century caused increasing indebtedness and displacement that came to characterize rural life in Palestine.¹⁶⁸ By undermining collective landholding and imposing private ownership, the 1858 Land Code shouldered individuals with heavy taxes, taxes that the *fellahin* who share-cropped the land often found themselves unable to contend with, particularly during bad harvest seasons.¹⁶⁹ Many needed to borrow money from moneylenders, who were the heads of wealthier *hamulas* or urban merchants and charged high interest rates. Barely able to cultivate enough to support their families, many eventually sold their land to Arab estate owners or Zionists, and while some were able to continue working the land as tenant farmers, others were forced to go.¹⁷⁰ Notably, the Arab residents of Yazur whose land was transferred to the founders of the AIU's *Mikve Israel* agricultural school protested against their dispossession.¹⁷¹ The macro debt of the empire thus played itself out on a micro scale.

Dispossessed from their land, many *fellahin* worked as wage laborers for the new landowners or on neighboring lands, which were increasingly Arab estates or Zionist settlements. Jewish colonists hired poor Jewish immigrants and landless Muslim Arabs for their labor, preferring the latter for their greater experience as agriculturalists and the lower wages they justified paying them in spite of it.¹⁷² Contemporary observers noted the harsh treatment of the *fellahin* by Jewish employers and the hostility that these changes in land

¹⁶⁸ Seikaly, *Men of Capital*, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Islamoglu, "Property as a Contested Domain: A Reevaluation of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858;" Nahla Zu'bi, "The Development of Capitalism in Palestine," 94-95."

¹⁷⁰ Zu'bi, 94.

¹⁷¹ Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856-1882*, 117.

¹⁷² Halperin, *The Oldest Guard*, 13.

ownership created among Palestinian peasants.¹⁷³ Thus, even as Palestine enjoyed an economic boon with the opening of the region to flows of global capital, the distribution of capital and income did not benefit all equally. Those strata of society able to invest capital in agriculture and trade, such as businessmen and landowners, won out at the expense of others, and the *fellahin* in particular. This points to what Iyko Day has called, in the context of Asian laborers in North America, “the economic modalities of Asian racialization that are tied to capitalism.”¹⁷⁴ That is, we can see here at work practices of racialization that are shaped by the evolving capitalist landscape of a region that was increasingly oriented towards a global economy. This reflects the changes in the Ottoman context, the rise of debt, the reshaping of the landscape, and new standards of production—and the racial upshot of all this included new benchmarks of race that Sephardic reformers were participating in.

Exploring Sephardic travel literature of Ottoman Palestine with attention to racial capitalism demonstrates how ideas of race were tied to the development of capitalism in the empire. Writers created imagined geographies of race that equated civilized spaces and people with productivity and industriousness, technological advances, capital investment and production, while they represented Arab villages and urban Jewish neighborhoods—and more importantly, their inhabitants—as unproductive and uncivilized. Anxieties about productivization fueled not only the Tanzimat policies of Ottoman bureaucrats, but Zionists who established agricultural settlements—both of whom sought to prove themselves as productive and to civilize the allegedly backwards lands of the Ottoman periphery. The growing debts of the Ottoman state pulled it closer into the global economy as it contracted European loans, fell under the control of its creditors, and opened the door to foreign investment and land ownership. The exigencies of capital accumulation and the need for

¹⁷³ Halperin, 14.

¹⁷⁴ Day, *Alien Capital*, 35.

greater state revenues to repay its debts led to dispossession, notably of the *fellahin* in the context of Palestine. This dispossession leveraged and intensified racial distinctions; to rephrase Rosanes, they live in tents because they are savages.¹⁷⁵ As Allan E.S. Lumba has explained, race determines who is wholly autonomous within a capitalist system, who can possess, who can be possessed, and who can be dispossessed.¹⁷⁶

Capitalism not only produces racial distinctions, but race serves to naturalize and rationalize the inequalities produced by capitalism; because they are savages, they live in tents.¹⁷⁷ Rosanes, Shaul, and other Sephardic writers from the second half of the nineteenth century depicted Ottoman Palestine as a space of alterity, one in which racialized Others—other Jews, Samaritans, and especially the *fellahin*—were made to appear natural. Racial capitalism not only wrenches racialized populations into capitalist modes of production and accumulation, but also relies on exclusion from these same modes through abandonment and underdevelopment. The underdevelopment of some spaces and dispossession of the *fellahin* was rationalized and reified through narratives of their inferiority, dangerousness, ignorance, and laziness and through the need for stability, security, and development not only in Palestine but in other racialized spaces and places globally as well.¹⁷⁸ Examining the interplay between racialization and capitalism in Sephardic travel literature therefore elucidates how writers leveraged racial difference to rationalize inequality in the context of late Ottoman Palestine. But, as explored in the following section, travel literature not only trumpeted procapitalist narratives of economic and infrastructural development, but increasingly served as a vehicle of critique.

¹⁷⁵ Jenkins and Leroy, *Histories of Racial Capitalism*.

¹⁷⁶ Alan E.S. Lumba, “Imperialism and its Limits,” The Institute on Inequality and Democracy, UCLA in partnership with the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at the University of Chicago, “Race and Capitalism: Global Territories, Transnational Histories.”

¹⁷⁷ These inequalities may include the unequal distribution of resources, social power, rights, and privileges (Jenkins and Leroy, *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, 3).

¹⁷⁸ Charisse Burden-Stelly, “On Bankers and Empire: Racial Capitalism, Antiblackness, and Antiradicalism,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 24, no. 2 (62) (July 1, 2020): 175–86.

Travelogue as Critique

Scholars have noted how nineteenth-century journalists and newspaper editors in the Ottoman Empire printed ethnographic travel literature to both educate and entertain readers by instructing them about the strange and curious customs of their coreligionists abroad.¹⁷⁹ With the improvement of transportation infrastructure, travel itself, which was once perceived as cumbersome and arduous, was now considered a useful way to learn about the world, a means of education, and a bourgeois indicator of civilization.¹⁸⁰ Yet, I argue that Ottoman Sephardic travel accounts published at the turn of the century also served a third purpose—to critique—in challenging the popular discourses that linked technology, capital, class, and civilization.

As Ottoman travelers adopted a European orientation towards travel, they also adopted their methods of travel; they enlisted European travel agencies to plan their travel to Europe and beyond, and they used European travel guides such as the French *Guide Joanne* and German *Baedeker*.¹⁸¹ Discussions of these guides appeared in the Ottoman Sephardic press alongside advertisements for travel agencies and steamship companies.¹⁸² In the pages of *Journal de Salonique* in 1903, Sam Levy introduced readers to the *Baedeker*, “a work that gives you all of the useful information about any part of the world.”¹⁸³ It could provide information not only about sites like Niagara Falls, Levy informed his readers, but “the whole

¹⁷⁹ Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*; Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Borovaya has demonstrated how Ottoman Sephardic ethnographic reports could serve ideological agendas, be they integrationist or Zionist, but these critiques also extended beyond different political movements. See Borovaya, “Jews of Three Colors.”

¹⁸⁰ The spatial transformation of the Ottoman Empire and particularly its investment in infrastructure standardized space and time in ways that facilitated travel, making it more predictable and easier to plan. See Mark Mazower, “Travellers and the Oriental City, c. 1840–1920,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002): 59–111; Palabıyık, “Ottoman Travelers’ Perceptions of Africa in the Late Ottoman Empire (1860–1922),” 195.

¹⁸¹ Palabıyık, “Travel, Civilization And The East,” 103.

¹⁸² See, for example, *La epoka*, 2/9/1900, 5; *Journal de Salonique*, 6/13/1901, 4.

¹⁸³ *Journal de Salonique*, 2/12/1903, 2.

world in general and each part, each region, each city, large or small, in particular.” Yet, he cautioned:

While you are sitting at the Olympia Theater, or playing cards, or smoking nargileh, you believe yourself to be the happiest in the world, that is, you forget about the whole world, safe from any concern, plunged in the bath of nirvana! Well, think again, mortal. The objective of the guide has bitten you in your state of abandon, and you have become of normal worth, that is, worthless. When I say ‘you,’ it is a manner of speech. By ‘you,’ I mean Salonica, Izmir, Volo, or any other city.¹⁸⁴

Levy highlighted how guides like *Baedeker* brought to Ottoman subjects a new geographic awareness that devalued the cities of the empire in comparison to the great sites of the world. These guidebooks scripted and circulated the practices and performances of travel writers, who fanned a growing sense of Ottoman inferiority vis-à-vis Western Europe, one that was encoded within these new ideas of travel, space, and civilization.

A growing critique of travel emerged in travelogues that disparaged both travel and travelers. We can see this, as just one example, in accounts that centered on the train as a trope and symbol of technological progress. In “A Humorous Voyage from Salonica to Paris,” as the writer heard the whistle to board the train, he recalled,

What joyous images this signal of departure suddenly evokes in your mind. The travelers: that’s to say a bunch of cute little outfits, of soft and various hats, of bags with shoulder straps, cardboard boxes, trunks, suitcases, and other accessories as cumbersome as they are useless, but perfectly elegant, without which the international idle crowd would believe itself dishonored to board a train.¹⁸⁵

By mocking those who ride the train for their elegant but useless clothing and accessories, he offered a class critique of the “international idle crowd” who perceived the train as a marker of class status and civilization.

But other writers critiqued the train itself. In “En Route from Salonica to Istanbul,” Alexander Benghiat opened his account of train travel by lamenting, “What a terrible time, my god! And what an unrepentant sinner I must be to have suffered so much!”¹⁸⁶ He vividly described the violent winds that shook the train, the snowstorm that blockaded it, and the

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ *Journal de Salonique*, 10/10/1901, 2.

¹⁸⁶ *Journal de Salonique*, 1/18/1900, 2.

freezing temperatures, recounting how, “The steam of the train, intended to heat the train cars, froze and we were freezing, shivering. Our teeth chattered and the cat-howl of the wind moaned and made us shudder.”¹⁸⁷ Rather than hewing to the prevalent discourse of the train as a symbol of technological progress, efficiency, and civilization, these accounts offer a counter-discourse, one that depicts the train as inefficient, unable to progress, and its riders as idle and frivolous in their fashions.

The critique also extended to how travel recast ethnographic galleries. Within travel accounts, the representation of different populations was encapsulated in ethnographic galleries that echoed Edward William Lane’s canonical work, *The Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* (1836). Lane depicted Cairo as a colorful gallery of human types, and many travel writers followed suit.¹⁸⁸ Trains and steamships in particular emerged as racializing spaces of encounter. One Ottoman Sephardic writer presented readers with a gallery of types on the steamboat sailing from Istanbul to Izmir:

Around twenty Russians returning from a pilgrimage to Mount Athos are in a corner; they each have half a dozen salted herrings in their trunks and three or four fish in their hands. While the herrings disappear starting with the head, the eternal samovar smokes and soon receives the aromatic plant that is a delicacy of those living in the Tsar’s empire. On the right there is a group of Muslim pilgrims going to Arabia. On the left, about ten Greeks destined for Alexandria; Montenegrins, Albanians—in short, each corner of the room has its travelers of a very different nature than those travelers in the corner across the way.¹⁸⁹

Here the writer differentiated between groups primarily by way of nationality and religion, though also by distinctive food practices. A similar scene, though surveying Jewish types, played out aboard a train ride from Jaffa to Jerusalem, with an emphasis on dress:

Among our traveling companions, we could recognize almost all the specimens of our race that is so scattered: on one side a Jew from Jerusalem, with his side curls and white small cap. There stands a Sephardi dressed in the Oriental style with a red fez surrounded by a turban. Not far from them, on the small train platform stand two young men whose white hue and careful dress betray them as newly landed Europeans in the country; there are two Russian Jews who every moment ask questions to their companion with a face burnt by the sun, a Romanian Jew wearing a straw hat, a colonist at Zikhron Yaakov.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Derek Gregory, “Scripting Egypt: Orientalism and the Cultures of Travel,” in *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, ed. James Duncan and Derek Gregory, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), 114–50.

¹⁸⁹ *Journal de Salonique*, 2/1/1900, 2.

¹⁹⁰ *Journal de Salonique*, 2/2/1903, 2.

In describing each of their appearances, the writer presents us with an ethnographic gallery of Jewish types in Ottoman Palestine. Dress, a key signifier here, was one of the most identifiable criterion used to evaluate the character of different groups.¹⁹¹ While narratively displaying different types of Jews like this may have been a novelty to readers, it would have resonated in an age of World's Fairs, human zoos, and photographs and postcards of racial types.

But travel was perceived not only as a way to observe the differences depicted across ethnographic types, but also as threatening their extinction. One writer described his fellow travel companion aboard a train as “a true Jew of Salonica, correctly dressed, too dressed even, in a European outfit. He does not have the sense of feeling absolutely at ease in these clothes. Yesterday he still wore, without a doubt, the ample *antari*.”¹⁹² The *antari* was a standard part of Ottoman dress, a collarless tunic, open in the middle, with long sleeves and deep slits along both side seams. But abandoning the comfort of his *antari* for European clothing, his travel companion explained, “‘Do you see,’ he sighs melancholically, ‘this will kill that.’ This is the railroad; that is the *antari*.”¹⁹³ By the early twentieth century, a local scholar in Salonica observed that, “The old dress has completely disappeared. The Greeks were the first to adopt the European style. The Jews were quick to follow their example. The Donmehs and Turks imitated the Jews...”¹⁹⁴ The train thus emerged as a trope through which Ottoman Sephardic writers could critique the new technologies that were changing the landscape of the empire, and the notions of civilization they were said to bring.¹⁹⁵ The spatial

¹⁹¹ Mazower, “Travellers and the Oriental City, c. 1840–1920,” 97.

¹⁹² “Voyage humoristique,” *Journal de Salonique*, 10/10/1901, 2.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430-1950* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 209.

¹⁹⁵ For similar critiques in Ottoman Turkish literature, see Beyza Lorenz, “Novel Anxieties: An Ottoman Counter-Discourse on Time and Space,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 40, no. 2 (2020): 387–400.

transformation of the empire, its train and steamboats, provided new spaces of encounter, but in doing so, they also heralded cultural change. As the world was fossilizing racial types in photographs and scientific works, journalistic articles and literary descriptions, those types themselves were beginning to disappear with the spread of new technologies that were seen to threaten local identities and traditions.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the profound economic and infrastructural changes of the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century, Sephardic writers racialized land and the people living on it based on entwined notions of civilization and capital. As the Ottoman state fell deeper into debt, courted foreign capital, and sought to civilize its landscape and thereby raise revenues, space increasingly became racialized as a vector of civilization and savagery. These accounts demonstrate how the civilizing of space was both discursive, enacted through imaginary geographies of race, and material, seen in the streets, buildings, and miles of train track that altered the imperial landscape. Capitalism reshaped both ideas about the land and the land itself in ways that equated civilized spaces and people with capital production, while land such as deserts and mountains, but also Jewish neighborhoods and Arab villages and their inhabitants, were seen as unproductive and therefore uncivilized. These changes shifted the many ways people imagined and wrote about the spaces where they lived and traveled, and as a result, their accounts help us to better understand how people perceived these transformations.

By writing a cultural history of Ottoman Sephardic travel writing, we can map out how these transformations in the physical landscape of the empire unfolded together with

¹⁹⁶ Ali Behded writes how the networks that made travel possible ensured that tourism was constantly haunted by the sense of belatedness, that travelers were arriving just as the world they intended to see was fast disappearing. See *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1994).

changes in the racial self-perceptions of Ottoman Sephardic Jews. These travelers created racial hierarchies that enabled them to map their own cartography of identities in which they—and their readers—could assume a position of superiority. Often represented in the travel accounts of others as ethnographic objects, moving neither physically nor historically, stuck in time and in place, Ottoman Sephardic travelers picked up preexisting racial scripts, applying them to Muslim and Christian Arabs, but also to Other Jews. They did so in ways that emphasized their own mobility and progress, and claimed superiority vis-à-vis those they represented, predicated on their geographic and cultural distance. Exploring racializing discourses and practices within Ottoman Sephardic travel literature reveals how writers positioned themselves as more civilized based on the geographic distance they traveled out into the imperial provinces that corresponded to the racial and cultural distance they constructed.

By exploring the entwined spatialities of race and capital, I have traced how capitalism was perceived as a civilizing force, but one that came with a cost. Sephardic writers deemed backward those groups that they saw as standing in the way of capital accumulation, including Arabs and religious Jews, while praising forces that facilitated it, such as infrastructural development, the production of cash crops, and European and Zionist settlement. But as the century progressed, writers increasingly used travel literature as a space of critique to mock the classism of travelers and to challenge its associations with progress by lamenting the homogenization and loss of regional variation that were the price paid for civilization. This points to the politics of representation in these works that both reproduced—and eventually challenged—the logics of civilizing capital.

Those in Ottoman Studies have produced extensive literature on political economy and world systems theory that examines the integration of the Ottoman Empire into the world

economy.¹⁹⁷ But scholars of racial capitalism have pointed out how world systems theory fails to account for race. As Adom Getachew put it, racial hierarchy arranges people in the international economic order and designates and rationalizes the “processes of integration and interaction that produce unevenly distributed rights, obligations, and burdens.”¹⁹⁸ The ways in which European bankers ensnared the Ottoman state in debt thus emerges as part of a more global history of racial capitalism in which, for example, the imposition of “odious debt” was considered to be particularly suited for allegedly backward and savage nations and groups.¹⁹⁹ But in turn, the Ottoman state, together with European and Zionist settlers, engaged in “accumulation by dispossession,” most notably of the *fellahin*. By highlighting these connections between capital accumulation, racial hierarchy, and space, the historical study of travel literature reveals how these economic inequalities were produced and rationalized through racializing discourses in response to the shifting economic and material terrains of the late Ottoman Empire. Yet in the last half of the nineteenth century, Sephardic reformers not only projected racial ideas onto those further afield in the imperial provinces, but they also produced autoethnographic texts about their own communities in the urban centers of the empire, the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁹⁷ Classics include Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*; Reşat Kasaba, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy: The Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

¹⁹⁸ Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 32-33.

¹⁹⁹ Peter James Hudson explores this in relation to nations such as Haiti, Cuba, and Panama in *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Chapter 3: Studying Superstition and the Haunting of Sephardic Modernity

At a séance in the spring of 1901, ten-year-old Olga Modiano summoned the spirit of the long-deceased Dante Alighieri. “You can imagine the shock of all those attending the séance,” reported the local Salonican newspaper, as audience members watched the possessed body of a young Sephardic girl recite thirteenth-century Italian verse.¹ But Olga’s performance as a medium channeling a supernatural spirit was not an isolated occurrence; that year, séances swept through living rooms and theaters across Salonica. “Would you have believed it?” asked the *Journal de Salonique*. “Spiritism is flourishing in Salonica and—I ask you to believe it—those who are engaged with it are obtaining surprising results.”²

Ottoman Sephardic Jews at the turn of the century lived in a world teeming with spirits, both old age and new age. But as audiences packed into rooms to witness new spirits descend, filling houses and selling out performances, Sephardic reformers consigned old spirits to the realm of superstition, even as some embraced spiritism and the occult. This tension surfaces in ethnographic studies and newspaper editorials on superstition penned by Sephardic reformers in the late Ottoman Empire, as spiritism and the occult were on the rise.³ This chapter traces how these Sephardic reformers constructed and instrumentalized superstition as a category of knowledge and seeks to understand what it signified to them as they navigated the borders dividing the licit from the illicit within the supernatural realm.

While the previous chapter viewed practices of racialization from the imperial periphery, this chapter pivots to explore how Ottoman Sephardic Jews engaged with race within their own communities in the urban centers of the empire. In their works, these writers deployed superstition as part of a political project that called for the creation and maintenance

¹ *Journal de Salonique*, April 15, 1901, 1.

² Ibid.

³ According to Jason Ānanda Josephson-Storm, by the 1890s, the theosophic and spiritualist movements had already gained over eight million followers in America and Europe, and was continuing to spread. See *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 151.

of new social boundaries as a means of asserting their newfound authority. This included stigmatizing certain groups—including women, the poor, and the traditional rabbis—as superstitious. But it also entailed a racialized view of superstition that relegated the superstitious to the premodern past, as less developed within the stadial scale of savagery, barbarism, and civilization, what Charles Mills has referred to as “racialized rungs on the time ladder” that positioned white Europeans as the most racially advanced. Situating Ottoman Sephardic discourses about superstition within relations of race, gender, and class illustrates how these writers translated specific notions about social identity into claims of intellectual authority and knowledge. In this way, a study of superstition offers insight into how the process of knowledge production among Sephardic communities was not only tied to the reinvention of social boundaries, but was predicated on it.

These reformist writers comprised a diverse group of Sephardic men hailing primarily from the Ottoman Jewish centers of Salonica, Istanbul, Izmir, and Edirne.⁴ Europe often served as their point of reference; many had spent time there and spoke and wrote in French, in addition to Ladino and a host of other languages. Their pursuit of knowledge transcended the instruction provided in the *meldar* and *Talmud Torah*, and many were autodidacts when it came to higher learning, working without institutional training or affiliation. Almost all were connected to the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in some way, as former students, founders of schools, or as teachers and school administrators, like Abraham Danon and Moïse Franco. Others, like David Fresco, Alexander Benghiat, and Sa’adi a-Levi worked as journalists and newspaper editors, and most published in the Ladino press. Oftentimes, their newspapers lambasted the rabbinic elite, and both a-Levi and Fresco were excommunicated in response. They sought to forge a new type of rabbi who was “enlightened” and “progressive,” so they

⁴ For a discussion of the lives of Ottoman Sephardic intellectuals and writers, see Cohen and Stein, “Sephardic Scholarly Worlds.”

marshalled superstition not in efforts to do away with religion altogether, but to delineate new arrangements of power and leadership in their communities.⁵

This was a time of restructuring for the empire more broadly. As explored in the last chapter, its urban landscape transformed with the expansion of infrastructure as cities enlarged the harbors and narrow streets, now lit into the night with gas lamps. Ottoman planners built suburbs and tramway lines that brought residents to shop in new departments stores, and railway tracks that connected Ottoman cities to one another and to European destinations, carrying scores of European residents and travelers into the empire.⁶ These developments in urban planning were mirrored by the adoption of European values, ideas, tastes, and practices, which became further entrenched in the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition to fashion and hairstyles, new technologies and inventions, and ideas about hygiene, civilization, and science, the spiritist movement spread from Europe to the cities of the Ottoman Empire in the 1860s. There were seances, lodges, and circles of practitioners in cities across the Empire and a journal, *Spiritism (İspirtizme)*.⁷ Spiritist and occult practices from Europe were sometimes seen as similar to rituals performed by older practitioners who evoked *cins*, leading one Istanbul intellectual, Ahmed Naim, to assert that spiritists were an *alafranga cinci*, an “exorcist in the European style.”⁸ Claims of overlap or

⁵ New rabbinic seminaries were established in Salonica, and, under the leadership of Abraham Danon, in Edirne, later relocating to Istanbul to expand its reach. These fledgling seminaries strove to create a new generation of “modern” rabbis who could speak French and Ottoman Turkish, who would serve as public-facing representatives, and advance the progress of their communities. Devin Naar explores the push for a new rabbinic elite in *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), especially 89-137.

⁶ For an account of urban transformations in Salonica and Istanbul, see Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430-1950* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005); Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁷ Thierry Zarcone, “Occultism in an Islamic Context: The Case of Modern Turkey from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Time,” in *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 165.

⁸ Çakan, 2003 quoted in Türesay, 161. These similarities led to overlay and shifted preexisting Ottoman practices, especially among some Sufi orders. See Zarcone, “Occultism in an Islamic Context.” Pre-19th c. sciences as “*ulum-i hafîye*” (secret sciences) or “*ulum-i garîbe*” (strange sciences) in the Muslim world comprised in general three types of sciences: (1) alchemy; (2) the making of amulets/talismans, and several arts of divination like astrology, geomancy, art of the Arabic letters, interpretation of dreams; and (3) magic or the

differentiation between the old and new reverberate through later Ottoman Sephardic texts. Indeed, as spiritism gained traction in the 1890s, Jews across the empire found themselves hosting, attending, and debating the nature of séances, itself a performance of modernity.⁹

Reformist writings on superstition reveal an array of anxieties that resulted from these major religious, social, and cultural transformations. Their works reflect anxieties concerning the changing alignments of power in Ottoman Jewish communities and the desire of lay elites to assert their newfound leadership. The writing speaks to leaders' insecurities about their ability to join the forward march of civilizational progress and worries about being left behind. Yet they also point to concerns about the price of progress and the disappearance of old ways of thinking and believing in the face of the changes coming from Europe. This is heightened by fears about the passing of the elderly and concerns about the knowledge and practices that would die with them. Further, this was a time when women in the empire were starting to see new opportunities. They were attending schools, joining the workforce, and reading more. They took newly built trams across the city, enjoyed new establishments like theaters and cafes, and strolled the recently illuminated streets after dark, provoking anxieties about women's mobility, both physical and socioeconomic, and the many possibilities this opened up for them. These concerns that resulted from the changing world around them all rise to the fore in Ottoman Sephardic ethnographic writing on superstition.

This chapter begins by tracing the shifting meanings of superstition into the nineteenth century to contextualize Ottoman Sephardic writings. It then considers the types of

evocation of spirits. Among the Ottomans, the expressions "secret sciences" (*ulum-i hafiye*) and "strange sciences" (*ulum-i garibe*) were still in use in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries along with that of "occult sciences", borrowed from Europe (Zarcone, "Occult in an Islamic Context," 157). Astrology, fortune-telling with the Quran, *Mathnavi* and Arabic letters, talisman-making, geomancy and also alchemy were welcomed by the Ottoman Palace and the Ottoman society. These sciences were accepted by the representatives of orthodox Islam up to the end of the Empire, though criticized by radical Islam. Yet some "occult sciences" fiercely condemned by Islamic Orthodoxy were cultivated in Sufi circles, such as evoking spirits to heal the sick, which was linked to pre-Islamic and animistic practices. See Zarcone, "Occultism in an Islamic Context," 158.

⁹ Modern spiritism originated in the United States in 1848, made its way to Europe in 1852, and spread to the Ottoman Empire in the 1860s. See Özgür Türesay, "Between Science and Religion: Spiritism in the Ottoman Empire (1850s-1910s)," *Studia Islamica* 113, no. 2 (2018).

social boundaries reformers sought to draw before turning to popular reportage on superstition in the Sephardic press, followed by two ethnographic treatises: Abraham Danon's "The Superstitions of Ottoman Jews" (1897) and "The Mystical Sciences Among the Jews of the Orient" (1900) by Moise Franco. Although both Danon and Franco are known primarily for their historical works, scholars have yet to consider these rich ethnographic writings. Ultimately, we can read these texts on superstition as a commentary on modernity, that these reformers deployed the category of superstition to set social and intellectual boundaries to assert their authority in attempts to dictate both which kinds of knowledge, and therefore which kinds of people, were appropriate for the modern era.

Situating Superstition

Scholars have noted how the term superstition is an unstable designation, a flexible category that changes across contexts but remains consistent in signifying practices or beliefs deemed inappropriate and unacceptable by different authorities, be they religious, legal, intellectual, or cultural.¹⁰ Increasingly, those in colonial, postcolonial, and subaltern studies have explored how superstition became a key component of reformist and imperial ideology as a way to designate those considered primitive, uncivilized, irrational, and savage, both domestically and abroad.¹¹ My use of the term superstition is informed by this history as an animating axis of both religion and culture within matrices of civilizing missions.

In this way—and in others—this study of superstition diverges from preexisting scholarship. Previous writing on Ottoman Jewish superstition has taken the form of surveys

¹⁰ Michael D. Bailey, "The Meanings of Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1, no. 1 (2006): 1–23; Nachman Ben-Yehuda, "Witchcraft and the Occult as Boundary Maintenance Devices," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 229–60.

¹¹ Bailey, "The Meanings of Magic," 14; Josephson Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 61. For examples of French reformist efforts to extirpate superstitious beliefs among the peasants, see Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

or social histories of practitioners and practices that provide important descriptive overviews.¹² Rather than such a catalogue or an argument for or against certain beliefs or practices as superstitious, by analyzing Ottoman Sephardic discourses about superstition, I attempt to tell the story of the creation and utilization of the idea of superstition, rather than the story of superstition itself.¹³ Further, when approached by historians, including those in both Jewish history and Ottoman history, research on superstition and the supernatural is often confined to the medieval or early modern periods, reinforcing the notion of the supernatural as antithetical to modernity.¹⁴ Research that does consider the modern period has almost exclusively been done by anthropologists and folklorists and frequently takes an ahistorical perspective that collapses differences across time and place.¹⁵ By situating this study of Sephardic superstition in its historical context and attending to the popular and scholarly discourses surrounding superstition, we can deconstruct it as a category in ways that allow us to ask critical questions about power and social control as part of the project of modernity.

This approach to superstition involves a number of challenges. Superstitious worldviews are defined by those who do not hold them; those who held such views did not

¹² Tamar Alexander and Eliezer Papo, “El Enkanto de La Majia: Research into Sephardic Magic: History, Trends and Topics,” *El Prezente*, no. 5 (2012): 8–31; Yaron Ben-Naeh, “A Tried and Tested Spell: Magic Beliefs and Act among Ottoman Jews” (Hebrew), *Pe’amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry*, no. 85 (2000): 89–111 and “The Belief in Astrology Amongst Salonican Jews in the 19th Century” (Hebrew), *Mahanayim* 14 (2002): 135–44; Gideon Bohak, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Jewish Magical Tradition,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 8, no. 1 (2009): 107–50; Michael Molho, *Usos y costumbres de los sefardíes de Salónica*, Biblioteca hebráicoespañola, v. 3 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Arias Montano, 1950); Shalom Sabar, “Childbirth and Magic: Jewish Folklore and Material Culture,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale, 1st ed (New York: Schocken Books, 2006), 670–722.

¹³ Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250-1750* (Oxford U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

¹⁴ Two notable exceptions from Ottoman historiography, both of which focus on spiritism and the occult, are Zarcone, “Occultism in an Islamic Context: The Case of Modern Turkey from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Time”; Türesay, “Between Science and Religion.”

¹⁵ Notable in this regard are those works that explore superstitious practices since the fifteenth century using oral histories from the twentieth. See, for example, Susan Starr Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem*, Publications of the American Folklore Society. New Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Isaac Jack Lévy and Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, *Ritual Medical Lore of Sephardic Women: Sweetening the Spirits, Healing the Sick* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

consider their actions to be superstitious or deviations from religious practice. In privileging the accounts of Sephardic reformers, I preclude a reading of superstition that brings forth those who held such beliefs and engaged in such practices as subjects of their own history—a history that still remains to be written. Rather, my hope is that demonstrating how Ottoman Sephardic writers mobilized superstition as a form of boundary creation and maintenance will speak to questions of power in other ways. A second challenge that emerges is the possibility of providing further fodder for orientalist stereotypes of the Ottoman Empire as superstitious and thus primitive, uncivilized, and culturally stagnant. Yet rather than avoiding this history—which may partly explain this lacuna in modern Sephardic historiography—I seek to pull apart the category of superstition, to show its constructed nature.

This genealogy of superstition traces both the long history of European polemics among Enlightenment *philosophes*, colonial officers, and anthropologists, all of which inform the works of Sephardic reformers, as well as points where these reformers diverged, reflecting circumstances and dynamics unique to their Ottoman Jewish communities. After being used for centuries in ancient Rome and Christian medieval Europe as a religious term to denounce and police improper forms of worship, superstition shifted to denote beliefs that opposed newly emerging philosophical and then scientific worldviews.¹⁶ Within Enlightenment debates, superstition and reason emerged as animating poles for theorists who sought to delineate the proper place of religion in society. In his *Philosophical Dictionary*, Voltaire disseminated the old idea that superstition derived from the religions of the ancient Middle East based on a nebulous blending of Egyptian, Chaldean, and Persian lore and

¹⁶ In these ancient and medieval contexts, the concept of superstition defined what was considered legitimate in the sphere of religion by means of negation, labelling as superstitious vying religious practices and beliefs that were considered dangerous or diabolical. Superstition, derived from the Latin word *superstitio*, meaning “to stand above,” was first used by the Romans to refer to Christianity in contrast to religion, *religio*. It was later used to designate improper belief and practice by Protestants denouncing Catholicism and Paganism. See Bailey, “The Meanings of Magic,” 8; Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 303; Josephson Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 309.

practices, and that “Superstition, born in paganism, adopted by Judaism, infected the Christian Church from the very first ages.”¹⁷ Moreover, for Voltaire, Jews embodied superstition as “an ignorant and barbarous people who have long united the most sordid avarice with the most detestable superstition and the most invincible hatred for every people by whom they are tolerated and enriched.”¹⁸ By tethering superstition to ignorance and deceit, Voltaire identified superstition, Jews, and the Middle East as the antitheses of reason and of modernity. Moreover, the *philosophes* believed that superstition defined their medieval past, and that, with the advent of modernity, it would disappear as rationalization and secularization spread throughout society. Ottoman Jewish reformers also embraced a polemical use of superstition to assert their authority, and they too subscribed to the belief that superstition belonged to their past, unfit for the modern world.

This Enlightenment view of superstition as the antithesis of modernity was seized on by nineteenth-century anthropologists to distinguish the primitive from the civilized, a savage logic from a modern one.¹⁹ Following the work of the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in the early 1870s, anthropologists adopted “scientific” methods of researching religion based on what were perceived to be universal laws of progressive mental cultivation and human development.²⁰ According to Tylor’s theory, human societies progressed from superstition to polytheism and culminated in monotheistic belief in a rational Supreme Being,

¹⁷ Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 309. He also associated the term with clerical corruption, and he labeled as superstitious those who required priests to encounter the divine.

¹⁸ Quoted in Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 6.

¹⁹ Peter Pels, “Introduction,” in *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 5-6.

²⁰ Michel Despland, “Sciences of Religion in France During the July Monarchy (1830-1848),” in *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion*, ed. Arie L. Molendijk and Peter Pels (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 36-37; Hans G. Kippenberg, “Survivals: Conceiving of Religious History in an Age of Development,” in *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion*, ed. Arie L. Molendijk and Peter Pels (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 297; Josephson Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 98. See especially Edward B. Tylor, “The Philosophy of Religion among the Lower Races of Mankind,” *The Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* 2, no. 4 (1870): 369-81; *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London: J. Murray, 1871).

not so unlike Tylor's own Quaker faith.²¹ In his racialized schema, superstition marked "the lower races" at the "the lowest known stages of civilization," including Africans, Aborigines, and Native Americans, allegedly incapable of abstraction and the spiritual awareness found in more advanced religions.²² They represented "human thought at a comparatively rudimentary stage," through which white Europeans had already progressed on their path to monotheistic Christianity.²³ The notion of "disenchantment," or the loss of belief in spirits and magic—a concept most closely associated with Max Weber—thus became a defining feature of modern European civilization, and the idea of superstition worked to demarcate Europe from both its own medieval past and from its colonized Others.²⁴ In carrying out a campaign against superstitious beliefs and practices among Jews, deeming them premodern and less civilized, these reformers carried imperial discourses into their own communities.

Tylor also believed that superstition would fade with the spread of modern civilization, but it was not such a straightforward trajectory. To explain its persistence in Europe, Tylor created the notion of survivals. He asserted that humans retain cultural traces from earlier stages that should vanish as they progress through the stages of evolutionary development.²⁵ "Three times out of four," Tylor posited, "superstition is a case of

²¹ Unlike his colleagues who interpreted the thinking of savages as madness, Tylor posited primitive animism as a rational form of religion. He believed that the experience of savages with death and dreams led to an idea of spirits and ghosts that are believed to fill the natural world and then serve as the foundation for primitive religion. See Josephson Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 99.

²² Tylor, "The Philosophy of Religion among the Lower Races of Mankind," 379; David Murray, *Matter, Magic, and Spirit: Representing Indian and African American Belief* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

²³ Murray, 6.

²⁴ As Weber famously stated in his lecture "Science as a Vocation," delivered in 1917, "The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'" (Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 155. See also Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, chapter 10. Bailey explains how disenchantment emerged in Europe and was framed within European categories of magic, religion, and science, categories which continue to shape the conceptualization of religion and magic around the world. See Bailey, "The Meanings of Magic."

²⁵ Tylor writes that survivals "are processes, customs, opinions and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had original home and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved" (*Primitive Culture*, 1:16.). Tylor borrowed this notion of survivals from other fields that had already established this concept, including philology, archaeology, and biology. Within each of these fields, the concept of survivals

survival...Some old belief belonging to a low level of culture is carried on into the midst of a higher civilization which practically disowns it...”²⁶ Not so dissimilar from the *philosophes*, Tylor understood anthropology as “a reformer’s science,” whose task was to “expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction.”²⁷ His work was both an assault on superstition and an attempt to discover the earliest forms of religion, believing that superstition harbored a universal mythopoetic consciousness, whose loss he somewhat regretted. These anthropological ideas—a racialized evolutionary approach to anthropology, the connection between psychology and anthropology, the concept of survivals, and the tension between the scholar’s nostalgic regret and reformist aspirations—all appear within Ottoman Sephardic ethnographic texts on superstition.

The campaign against superstition also unfolded among Jews in Europe, waged by scholars and reformers alike. Enlightenment thinkers, or *maskilim*, the scholars of the nineteenth-century German *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, and the founders of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, all denounced superstition among Jewish communities across Europe and the Ottoman Empire.²⁸ Racialized portrayals of superstitious Others and their survivals appeared not only in colonial reports and anthropological studies, but also circulated in the Jewish press. In the mid-nineteenth century, articles on Ottoman Jewry written by Ashkenazi

was premised on a comparative method that sought to acquire new knowledge about human prehistory. See Kippenberg, “Survivals: Conceiving of Religious History in an Age of Development,” 300.

²⁶ Edward B. Tylor, “On the Survival of Savage Thought in Modern Civilization,” *Proceedings of the Royal Institution of Great Britain* 5 (1869): 523.

²⁷ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2:539.

²⁸ *Wissenschaft* scholars promoted a critical examination of Jewish history and culture, and in doing so, condemned the superstitious and irrational as illegitimate subjects of study, which included the Kabbalah, mysticism, and messianic movements, such as that of Shabbetai Zevi. The scholar best known for his efforts to overcome this bias of the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* was Gershom Scholem. See Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676*, trans. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973) and *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Third revised edition (New York: Schocken Books, 1954). For an account of this scholarly turn, see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Master of the Kabbalah*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

Jews appeared in newspapers and journals such as the *Jewish Chronicle*, *L'Univers Israélite*, *Archives Israélite*, and *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*.²⁹ In early 1840, prior to the Damascus Affair, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* published an article entitled “The Jews in Turkey,” which was translated and reprinted in the *Archives Israélites* that same year.³⁰ It characterized Ottoman Jews as “ignorant, superstitious, and intolerant.”³¹ The article determined that, “The Turkish Jews could not escape the Manichean superstitions that penetrated before in the religious beliefs of the Orient,” rooting superstition both in earlier times and other peoples. “All of these prejudices,” it determined, “seem to have been brought by the Jewish captives in Babylon, and the books that speak of this are written in the Chaldean language.”³² In ascribing superstition to the Chaldeans, notorious for the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE, *philosophes*, orientalist, and others uncritically reproduced the value judgments of the bible in seeing the Chaldeans as perennial outsiders and a threat to the Jewish people. The article then outlined the Ottoman Jews’ belief in a “world of demons and that of angels,” the air, which “is full of spirits” and “the firm conviction that all majority of illnesses that attach their children are caused by evil spirits that penetrate their bodies.”³³ Finally, it conveyed the many means by which Ottoman Jews avoided, assailed, and appeased demons.

Such portrayals also spread through Ashkenazi travel literature. In his 1858 travelogue, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa, 1846-1855*, Israel Joseph Benjamin, or Benjamin II, highlighted superstition as a defining feature of the Middle East: “The belief in miracles, and superstition, of which the east has ever been the cradle, finds more followers here than in

²⁹ Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, 1990.

³⁰ “Les Juifs en Turquie,” *Archives israélites de France* 1 (1840): 198–201, 249–51.

³¹ *Archives Israélites*, 1840, 199.

³² “Les Juifs en Turquie,” 200–201.

³³ “Les Juifs en Turquie,” 200.

any other place.”³⁴ As he regaled readers with stories from his journeys across North Africa and the Middle East, Benjamin highlighted the superstitious beliefs of those he encountered. A nineteenth-century travelogue, Ludwig Frankl’s *The Jews in the East* (1859), devoted an entire section to “Superstitions of the Oriental Jews.” It began: “We are about to enter a realm of mysteries, in which spirits and demons, which delight in hovering around graves, spend the night like shadows and enter into strange communion with men.”³⁵ Shrouding his narrative in a mist of exoticism, Frankl reproduced familiar orientalist tropes of mystery and curiosity, rhetorically distancing readers from the dark places and peoples of the Orient. He then accounted for such distance by invoking evolutionary development:

Superstition marks the different steps on the progress of civilization among a people; points out the delusive paths into which the imagination is led by its connection with their religion and their manners; and expresses that longing which all men feel for another—an eternal world. A spectre is often the outward expression of the inward conscience of the people; the terror excited by supernatural tales is the reflex act of the soul, caused by the moral repugnance which it feels to a bloody deed. He that knows the superstitions, the legends, and the traditions of a people, knows more about them than the most industrious collector of dry records.³⁶

Frankl drew on the anthropological schema of evolutionary stages of progress through which human societies pass. He saw Ottoman Jews’ superstition as a delusion, but one that reflected both a universal human yearning and their particular inner “conscience.” As such, Frankl claimed that superstitious beliefs and practices revealed more to the observant ethnographer than any archive. More popular genres, such as the press and travel literature, further disseminated an image of Ottoman Jews as superstitious and thus premodern to wider audiences.

It was images like these that helped to spur the activities of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU) in the Ottoman Empire. The Alliance sought to extirpate all traces of local

³⁴ Benjamin, *Eight years in Asia and Africa from 1846-1855*, 107. This was an expanded version of his original travelogue, *Five Years of Travel in the Orient, 1846-1851*. Received with much acclaim, it was soon expanded, republished as *Eight years in Asia and Africa from 1846-1855*, and translated into German, English, French, and Hebrew. The appellation “Benjamin II” is a reference to the first Benjamin of Tudela (1130-1173), the renowned medieval traveler.

³⁵ Frankl, *The Jews in the East*, 160–61.

³⁶ Frankl, 161.

practices, including what it saw as superstition, to render Ottoman Jews compatible with Enlightenment ideals of reason and civilization and a Franco-Jewish model of Judaism.³⁷ In the *Instructions générales pour les professeurs*, Jacques Bigart, the Secretary General of the Alliance, stated that the AIU mission sought “by opening the spirit to Western ideas, to destroy certain outdated prejudices and superstitions which are paralyzing the activities and development of communities.”³⁸ Many AIU teachers, themselves often from Ottoman lands, inveighed against the superstitious nature of the communities in which they lived and worked. In Bursa, one teacher reported that the local population maintained “with a jealous intransigence their prejudices and superstitions belonging to another age.”³⁹ In labeling superstitions as outdated, these Alliance educators cast them as survivals from an earlier era that held back Jewish communities from progressing into modernity.

These ideas and discourses that filtered through the Enlightenment into European imperial discourse and anthropology down to Ashkenazi conceptualizations and the work of the AIU deeply shaped the self-perceptions and writings of Ottoman Jews. They too posited superstitions as survivals from a premodern era, and by marking certain social groups as superstitious, they advanced imperial discourses delineating those more and less civilized within their own societies. But unlike the *philosophes*, colonial officers, anthropologists, and Ashkenazi Jews, they wrote autoethnographically as those who were construed as ethnographic objects themselves, labeled doubly superstitious as both Jewish and those deemed “Oriental.” In this way and others, they undermine both of the binary oppositions between superstition-religion and imperial-indigenous that emerge in this genealogy. Within the Ottoman Jewish context, even reformists decrying superstition often adhered to a degree

³⁷ Aron Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2003), 106.

³⁸ Jacques Bigart 1896 letter reprinted in *Instructions générales pour les professeurs*, 1903 p. 94-95

³⁹ AAIU, France XVI. F. 27, Albala, annual report, Bursa, 1898-1899. Quoted in Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, 1990, 73.

of Jewish observance. Moreover, the line between establishment religion and spiritual practices considered superstitious itself was blurred; traditional rabbis could be called on to heal the sick, interpret dreams, and write protective amulets, or *keme'ot*. Thus, for Ottoman Jewish reformers, the notion of superstition was about envisioning a different kind of leader, one who advanced new ideas about science and religion that would abolish the remaining survivals from the realm of old age spirits that hindered their progress.

Superstition as Social Identity

Ottoman Sephardic reformers marshalled superstition as part of their efforts to redraw social boundaries along the lines of race, class, and gender; by associating it with specific identities, they marked their own as the ideal modern subject.⁴⁰ Their writings invoked the racialized paradigm of evolutionist development in which superstition characterized the primitive mind of “lower races,” while disenchantment emerged as a defining feature of the allegedly more civilized races of white Europe. This is clearly seen in the Sephardic press, which juxtaposed superstitions of earlier eras—associated with mental states of ignorance—with science and civilization of a more advanced Europe.⁴¹ This racialized evolutionary paradigm is also evident in the ethnographic treatises penned by Abraham Danon and Moïse Franco. Further, by denouncing superstition, they not only marked certain groups as less civilized, but they reveal their own anxieties about their place vis-à-vis European civilization and fitting into the idea of a white Europe.

⁴⁰ For an interesting contemporary study, see Taylor Moore’s forthcoming book, *Superstitious Women: Race, Magic, and Medicine in Egypt*. Moore argues that the occult sciences in Egypt became gendered and racialized during the turn of the twentieth century as European anthropologists, colonial officials, and the Egyptian authorities came to stigmatize and legislate against women healers from Sudan and Upper Egypt.

⁴¹ In the Ottoman Sephardic press, belief in the supernatural was consigned to the medieval era and was defined in opposition to both scientific knowledge, such as an understanding of bacteria and germs, as well as rational religion. It also explains the cautionary note to parents not to teach their children about spirits, which will prevent them from becoming “reasonable and productive men, able to respond to the demands of progress and civilization” (El sol, 21:317).

If the racialization of superstition was embedded in temporal discourses about evolutionary development, the gendering of superstition was much more explicit. “Do we not know that Jewish, Turkish, and Arab women, even gypsies, have exercised sorcery in the Orient since time immemorial?” Moïse Franco asked in his ethnographic treatise on superstition, “The Mystical Sciences among the Jews of the Orient.”⁴² The superstitious practices outlined by Abraham Danon and Franco related especially to weddings, marital life, and childbirth, women who were sterile or miscarried, those unable to produce breastmilk or in domestic disputes, with sick infants or jealous husbands.⁴³ Moreover, there were some practices that were considered the exclusive domain of women, such as *indulko* and *prekantes*.⁴⁴ This is reflected in the Ladino terms denoting the practitioners, which exist only in the feminine as *indulkadera* and *prekantadera*. Elderly women were especially marked as superstitious, seen in warnings in the Ladino press. The Istanbul-based scientific and literary Ladino journal *El sol* cautioned against children spending too much time with “old, ignorant women who believe in foolish things and fear demons and other things.”⁴⁵ Further, in her Ladino memoir, *Mi Akordro de Rhodes*, Rebecca Amato Levy recalled in writing her chapter

⁴² Moïse Franco, “Les Sciences Mystiques Chez Les Juifs d’Orient,” *L’initiation: Revue Philosophique Des Hautes Études* 47, no. 13 (n.d.): 7.

⁴³ Danon proposed to turn his ethnographic treatise on superstition into a book, much of which reflected women’s superstitions in its chapters, entitled “Wedding, Spouses, Pregnancy, Sterility, Childbirth, Abortion, The Child, Loss of children, and Breastfeeding” (Danon, “Superstitions Des Juifs Ottomans,” 1897, 270). Yaron Ben-Nach writes that, “Women were the most prominent in different magic occupations... Women filled the important role of popular healers, using false remedies and spells, and there is the assumption that they were responsible for passing on the medical tradition from generation to generation” (Ben-Nach, “A Tried and Tested Spell,” 99).

⁴⁴ *Prekantes* refer to Ladino healing formulas recited by women healers. According to Alexander and Papo, *indulko* was said to be practiced only by women (Alexander and Papo, “On the Power of the Word: Healing Incantations of Bosnian Sephardic Women,” 71). Of all practices identified as part of Ottoman Sephardic superstition, *indulko* garnered the most interest and opprobrium by scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alike. While other practices entailed measures to avoid or attack evil spirits, *indulko*, from the Ladino word for ‘sweet,’ called for propitiating them. *Indulko* refers to a range of healing rights, all of which involved placating the spirits for different lengths of time, in various places, and with a range of means. At its most involved, this ritual required shutting up the ill in a house for multiple days, removing all sacred objects, and cooking a feast for the evil spirits to sweeten them up and release their hold on the patient. See Moshe Gaon, “The Battle of Sephardim and Ashkenazim against Indulko,” *Edot* 1945/1946: 104–7; Raphael Patai, “Indulco and Mumia,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 77, no. 303 (1964): 3–11; Alexander and Papo, “El Enkanto de La Majia: Research into Sephardic Magic: History, Trends and Topics”; Molho, *Usos y costumbres de los sefardíes de Salónica*.

⁴⁵ *El sol* 21:316.

on “home remedies and superstitions” that, “Healers were most common among elderly women.”⁴⁶ Finally, in his account, *Usos y Costumbres de Los Sefardies de Salonica*, Michael Molho describes the *prekantadera* as “generally an old hunchbacked woman who mumbles with her toothless mouth the magic formulas.”⁴⁷ This association with elderly women further reinforced the temporal discourse of superstitions as survivals belonging to an earlier era.

The gendering of superstition applied both to old age superstition and the new age occult. One editorial in *Journal de Salonique* proclaimed that, as a result of their preoccupation with divining the future, “women stagnate in the hope of a future that they do not take the trouble to prepare.”⁴⁸ Instead, they “strive to interpret the flight of birds or flies, and the blowing of the wind; they spend their existence translating fortuitous or ominous omens, the smallest phenomena of nature, as though the universe has as its main goal the eventual realization of their petty dreams.” But, the editorialist claims, the greatest concern is that these women, “stung by the fly of proselytism, propagate nonsense traditions, and adding to the absurdity of their beliefs, they orate, prophesy, conjure, evoke, affirm, recant.”⁴⁹ Superstitious beliefs and practices were so closely associated with women that superstition itself was gendered female. As one editorial remarked, “Superstition reigns as the mistress of the civilized world, the surrounding stupidity that paralyzes us from the cradle.”⁵⁰ As the mistress, her existence is illicit, and within this gender binary, if she is the mistress, then civilization—replete with rational religion, science, and reason—is decidedly male.

To remedy this, another article claimed, women must embrace feminism and its concomitant fight against superstition. In the article “Feminism,” A. Levy Oulmann lamented that women remained “given to outdated prejudices and superstitions. Women are too

⁴⁶ Rebecca Amato Levy, *I Remember Rhodes* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press for Sephardic House at Congregation Shearith Israel, 1987), 69.

⁴⁷ Molho, *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*, 277.

⁴⁸ *Journal de Salonique* 9/27/1900, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

submissive to traditions of the past.”⁵¹ Instead, he enjoined female readers: “You must march with the times, with progress, with civilization. Ideas march forward and you must march with them...I beg you to not have delusive theories, do not hold superstitions of another age.”⁵² Oulmann framed feminism as a fight against superstition as he beseeched women to join the progressive march of civilization into modernity. This gendering of superstition reflects particular anxieties about women—though there were certainly men who held the same beliefs—anxieties about women perpetuating superstition, moving around the city and interacting with new people, negotiating the ideas and trends flooding in from Europe.

Yet there was one notable exception. Ottoman Sephardic reformers also denounced traditional rabbis as superstitious fanatics and charlatans. Rabbis not only took part in superstitious acts themselves as healers, dream interpreters, and scribes for amulets, but often acknowledged the authority of elderly women healers; those who did oppose their practices did so not because they did not believe in evil spirits, but because they believed certain practices violated Jewish law.⁵³ Both Sa’adi a-Levi and his son Sam, who published the Ladino newspaper *La epoka* and the French *Journal de Salonique*, condemned the rabbis for their superstitious practices and for spreading fear among the masses, and both were excommunicated.⁵⁴ Abraham Danon’s own founding of a rabbinic seminary in Edirne in 1897, which was backed by the AIU, sought to create an alternative rabbinic system and reform the local rabbinate to adopt a more French bourgeois mode of Judaism.⁵⁵ By

⁵¹ A. Levy Oulmann, “Feminism” in *Journal de Salonique*, 10/14/1901, p. 2.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Alexander and Papo, “On the Power of the Word: Healing Incantations of Bosnian Sephardic Women.”

⁵⁴ Olga Borovaya, “Shmuel Saadi Halevy/Sam Lévy Between Ladino and French: Reconstructing a Writer’s Social Identity,” in *Modern Jewish Literatures : Intersections and Boundaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 83–103; Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi, “The Memoir of Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi,” in *A Jewish Voice from Ottoman Salonica: The Ladino Memoir of Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi.*, ed. Aron Rodrigue and Sarah Stein, trans. Isaac Jerusalmi (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁵ The one exception to this was *indulko*, which the rabbinic elite vigorously opposed, not because they did not believe in its efficacy, but because they saw appeasement of demons as contravention of Jewish law. See Danon, “Superstitions Des Juifs Ottomans,” 1897, 262; Gaon, “The Battle of Sephardim and Ashkenazim against Indulko”; Ben-Naeh, “A Tried and Trusted Spell.”

stigmatizing rabbis as superstitious, Ottoman Sephardic reformers associated them with the premodern era, with toothless and vapid women. Bolstered by the Ottoman political reforms that increasingly divested the traditional rabbinic establishment of power, these lay leaders aligned themselves with the Ottoman regime's message that the erstwhile religious elites lay outside the project of modernity.

In disparaging rabbis as superstitious, reformers associated modernity with a specific vision of education and knowledge. They rejected the instruction provided at the traditional Jewish schools, the *meldar* or *Talmud Tora*, as seen in a number of reformers' Ladino memoirs that instead championed the Alliance's rationalist form of Judaism, reason, and science as alternative forms of knowledge and ways of knowing.⁵⁶ Yet just as the gendering of superstition reflected more a rhetorical move and less a demographic reality, so superstition was identified with the uneducated and the poor. This surfaces in the imagery of "the masses," "the blindness of the crowds" and the association of superstition with low-wage jobs, such as domestics and cooks.⁵⁷ This paralleled the accusations levied against Ladino as a language of the uneducated lower classes who, some reformers maintained, were responsible for perpetuating superstitions and Ladino. As a medieval language without standardized grammar or orthography, Ladino was not only responsible for preserving lower-class superstitions, but was itself also premodern and uncivilized.

The construction of superstition as a social identity thus acted as an identitarian foil for these Ottoman Sephardic writers as they constructed their ideal vision of the modern subject. Through interlocking discourses of race, gender, and class, a lay new elite racialized certain groups as less civilized and, in doing so, asserted its own newfound authority. Their

⁵⁶ See, for example, the Ladino memoirs of a-Levi, "The Memoir of Sa'adi Besalel a-Levi" and Alexander Bengiat, "Memories of the Meldar: A Real Account of What Used to Happen Once Upon a Time." An excerpt is translated in *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950*, ed. Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Stein, trans. Olga Borovaya (Palo Alto, CA, USA: Stanford University Press, 2014);

⁵⁷ *Journal de Salonique*, 9/27/1900, p. 2.

writings sought to create social boundaries that labeled women, the elderly, the poor, traditional rabbis, and those they educated as outside of and hindering modernity by passing on survivals in Ladino from one generation to the next into a period where they no longer belonged and needed to be eradicated. Johannes Fabian writes that anthropological temporal discourse is political, shaped by historically imperial relations of power that defined the modern as disenchanted. And indeed, the push for Ottoman Sephardic disenchantment was a distinctly political project directed against those who reformers feared were holding back the forward march of progress.⁵⁸ By stigmatizing their knowledge and subjectivities as superstitious, reformers marked these people themselves as survivals of the ancient Orient unfit for the modern era.

Superstition in the Ottoman Sephardic Press

“Modernity is as much a project as a periodization,” Jason Josephson Storm writes in his study of the myth of European disenchantment.⁵⁹ The project of disenchantment among Ottoman Sephardic reformers emerged as an elite endeavor to reform Jewish practice and eradicate belief in old age spirits, and for some reformers, new age spirits as well.⁶⁰ Like so many other elite initiatives, the campaign against superstition was mounted in the Sephardic press. Accounts appeared in both Ladino- and French-language periodicals. The primary French publication examined here, the *Journal de Salonique*, was one of the most influential French-language Jewish organs in the empire. As Sarah Abrevaya Stein notes in her

⁵⁸ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), xxxviii.

⁵⁹ Josephson Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*.

⁶⁰ Paula Hyman differentiated between the sociological process and project of assimilation, a framing productively applied in the Ottoman context by Julia Phillips Cohen as she examines the Ottoman Jewish political project of Ottomanism as one largely undertaken by communal elites. See Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

comparative study of the Ladino and Yiddish presses, the *Journal* “was confidante, pedagogue, and status symbol rolled into one: a text that could make as much as mark Salonica’s young Jewish bourgeoisie.”⁶¹ As the perceived language of trade, science, culture, and civilization, French became the hallmark of upper-class Sephardic culture, especially following the establishment of Alliance schools. In contrast, Ladino remained the language of the lower-class masses and of the popular newspapers that catered to them, including those cited here: *La Epoka*, *El Sol*, and *El Tiempo*. Yet most Ottoman Ladino newspapers were supported by the AIU, created by its protégés, or both; Sephardic journalists, whether writing in French or in Ladino, concurred in their derision of Ladino and the superstitions it harbored.⁶²

Collectively, the articles that condemned superstition in newspapers in Salonica, Istanbul, and Izmir drew on Enlightenment ideas, anthropological theories, and new scientific discoveries that shaped their simultaneous production and rejection of superstition as a form of knowledge. Changes in belief in superstition in part reflected the rise of new scientific and medical knowledge that offered explanations for crises that had been previously accounted for by the supernatural. As scientists revealed new understandings of human anatomy, of bacteria and germs, they supplanted older ideas about illness and healing predicated on divine disfavor and belief in spirits.⁶³ A narrative of this transformation appears in the Ladino journal, *El sol*. As an 1879 article entitled “Hygiene: The Air and Diseases” explained:

⁶¹ Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*, 235.

⁶² For more on the language hierarchy among Ottoman Sephardic Jews, see David M. Bunis, “Modernization and the Language Question among Judezmo-Speaking Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire,” in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 226–39; Aron Rodrigue, “The Ottoman Diaspora: The Rise and Fall of Ladino Literary Culture,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 863–85; Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*; Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire*.

⁶³ Yaron Ben-Naeh writes that, “Demonic creatures and forces were considered actual entities by those of the time, and their existence was part of the daily existence of an individual. Belief in them answered basic human feelings, such as passion and fear, and helped to contend with phenomena and situations of poverty and disease” (Ben-Naeh, “A Tried and Tested Spell”, 92. Translation from Hebrew is my own). See also Lévy and Zumwalt, *Ritual Medical Lore of Sephardic Women*, 11.

During the medieval period, in the time of belief in demons in the world, the air was very suspicious. People said that it contained evil spirits who could harm a person at any moment... After this foolish time ended, the clouds that covered the light of human conscience disappeared, and they began to see the shining light of the sun and of natural conscience. As the light increased, the shadows left—the shadows of stupidity and ignorance—and those who believed in evil spirits and other foolish things disappeared from the world. The air that was suspected as a dwelling place of spirits and sorcery and all kinds of harm for humans, and when it came before the court of conscience, this air emerged as free and without sin.

This narrative encapsulates the story of disenchantment, the supposedly complete transformation from the medieval period to modernity, from a belief in spirits to knowledge of science, from a world of stupidity and ignorance to one of light and conscience. Accounts such as this placed the supernatural and science in opposition, and as the boundaries of science became further defined over the course of the nineteenth century with the rise of new scientific knowledge and the professionalization of medicine, so too did those of superstition.⁶⁴

Yet this declaration of disenchantment was not as settled as many reformers would have liked. In 1885, the Salonican Ladino newspaper, *La epoka*, printed a letter to the editor from Istanbul railing against superstitions, especially the practice of *indulko*, a series of healing rites that sought to propitiate spirits. Practiced primarily by women, *indulko* was the most condemned of all Ottoman Sephardic superstitious practices.⁶⁵ The writer lamented that, “It is true that nowadays, there are not many nonsense healing incantations because a ray of civilization has begun to grow among our families, but unfortunately, even at this time, there are some who believe in these ugly and abominable practices.”⁶⁶ The writer attributed these “dark and horrible customs” that are “remains from past centuries” to the surrounding pagan

⁶⁴ Interestingly, spiritualists also often opposed the medical profession and what they saw as its pretensions to authority. This was also very much in line with their opposition to anthropology, which was dominated at the time by physical anthropology and medical professionals. See Pels, “Spirits of Modernity: Alfred Wallace, Edward Tylor, and the Visual Politics of Fact,” 253. For an account of medical professionalization in the Ottoman Empire, see Gülhan Balsoy, *The Politics of Reproduction in Ottoman Society, 1838-1900* (Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

⁶⁵ For a more detailed description of *indulko*, see footnote 45 above.

⁶⁶ *La epoka*, 2/27/1885, p. 2.

nations.⁶⁷ According to the author, superstitions were survivals from past generations when non-Jewish nations introduced “a pure idolatry” that contravened not only Mosaic law, but morality and civilization itself. The editor of *La epoka*, Sa’adi a-Levi, appended a concluding note: “As you can see from the preceding correspondence, there are still found in the capital some practices whose fashion is over and that only serve to elicit a big laugh. Similar practices, thank God, no longer exist at all in our city.”⁶⁸ Additionally, a-Levi expressed that, “We also hope and want to believe that the men of leadership will hasten to see that such practices are soon annulled so that there is no point in mocking the foolishness that still exists among some residents of the capital.”⁶⁹ This emphasizes the fight against superstition as a reformist project of male elites.

But editorials in the Salonican press conveyed a different image of the city than that offered by a-Levi. “The times have not changed in over 900 years in our city,” sighed the *Journal de Salonique*. “The same superstitions, the same errors persist, resulting from the same causes: weakness and ignorance.”⁷⁰ The propagation of superstition among the Salonican masses, the writer argued, is a result of the abandonment of religious beliefs, noting that, “Superstition is very different from piety. Pascal said, ‘To sustain piety up to superstition is to destroy it.’ The holy scriptures also condemn superstitions.”⁷¹ A second editorial, signed Victorin, bemoaned: “Superstition is a corruption of religious feeling, altered by ignorance; it is faith without reason...”⁷² The editorialist asked readers, “What must we

⁶⁷ *La epoka*, 2/27/1885, p. 2-3.

⁶⁸ *La epoka*, 2/27/1885, p. 3. For more on Sa’adi a-Levi, see Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi, “The Memoir of Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi,” in *A Jewish Voice from Ottoman Salonica: The Ladino Memoir of Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi*, ed. Aron Rodrigue and Sarah Stein, trans. Isaac Jerusalmi (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁶⁹ *La epoka*, 2/27/1885, p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Journal de Salonique*, 6/28/1900, p. 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Journal de Salonique*, 2/22/1900 p. 2.

conclude, if not that we must fight this scourge in whatever forms it takes? On whom is this duty incumbent?”⁷³

Such articles concluded that the answer lay in the education of children by their parents, teachers, and caretakers. Parents and teachers, Victorin claims, “must prevent the impregnation of false ideas and prejudices that will not leave [a child] in life. But, oh misfortune! One of the first things that one teaches to a little being is the existence of evil spirits, always disposed to harm the inhabitants of this earth!”⁷⁴ Moreover, the warning in *El sol* against leaving children with “domestic servants, old, ignorant women who believe in foolish things and fear demons” voiced concern that they would “delude children with strange stories like those of evil spirits, of demons, and other scary things, [which] is very damaging for the child.”⁷⁵ The gendered calls for more judicious parenting and education of impressionable, young children against superstition was deemed necessary for children to cultivate reason and to contribute productively to society.

As part of the fight against superstition, the Ladino press also included literature from eastern European maskilim—Jewish Enlightenment thinkers and reformers—who were engaged in a similar battle.⁷⁶ In their fight against superstition, maskilic reformers focused especially on Hasidic Jews, denouncing them as the embodiment of superstition, and a number of their writings were translated and reprinted in the Ladino press.⁷⁷ *El sol* translated into Ladino Yaakov Sabel’s “Hasidism and Kabbalah,” which rendered maskilim as modern-

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Journal de Salonique*, 2/22/1900 p. 3.

⁷⁵ *El sol*, 12/7/1877, issue 21, 316.

⁷⁶ Following the lead of the European Enlightenment, maskilim in both central and eastern Europe declared war on superstition. Immanuel Etkes, “Magic and Miracle-Workers in the Literature of the Haskalah,” in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, ed. Shmuel Feiner and David Jan Sorkin, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 113. On perception of *Ostjuden* as superstitious, see Steven E. Ascheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923*; Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany*; Khazzoom, “THE GREAT CHAIN OF ORIENTALISM.”

⁷⁷ According to Etkes, their focus on Hasidism was in part because maskilim felt threatened by its rapid spread as well as by its rigid opposition to the Haskalah. See Etkes, “Magic and Miracle-Workers in the Literature of the Haskalah,” 114.

day prophets saving people from idolatrous practices and paganism, as well as a number of satires, which mocked the legends of the Baal Shem Tov, and the belief in miracle workers, angels, and demons.⁷⁸ *El sol* also published the short story, “Transmigration of the Soul,” by the Galician maskil and satirist Yitshak Erter (1791-1851), in which a naked spirit recently freed from a corpse recounts all of the sins it committed in the various animal and human bodies it assumed.⁷⁹ While living in the body of a Hasidic rebbe, he tricked followers into believing that he could perform miracles and made money from their naivete. Erter ridiculed them for their fear, “the fruit of ancient traditions” and their narrow-minded gullibility at the hands of charlatans. Mendele Mokher Sforim’s *Father and Sons* (1868), which was also reprinted serially in *El sol*, features a Hasidic *tsadik* who claims to be a wonderworker and heal his follower’s ills. Though less polemical in tone, as Immanuel Etkes notes, Mendele did contribute to the Haskalah trope of “ignorant masses steeped in magical beliefs. Moreover, he reveals the non-Jewish roots of the magical practices common to Jews.”⁸⁰ Despite the divergences between the maskilic fight against Hasidic superstition in eastern Europe and that of Sephardic reformers in the Ottoman Empire, the maskilic literature decrying superstition both resonated with readers and entertained them enough to make multiple appearances in the Sephardic press.

⁷⁸ *El sol*, 7/2/1878, issue 12, 174-179. As Euan Cameron points out, satire entered Enlightenment debates on superstition already in the late seventeenth century, and never really left it. See Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 299. Maskilic satire included the works such as *Megaleh temirin* (1819) by Joseph Perl (1773-1839); *Kinat ha’emet* (1828) by Judah Lieb Mises (1798-1831); and *Emek refa’im* (1830) by Isaac Baer Levinsohn. For more on maskilic satire, see Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, “Problems in the Early History of Jewish Folkloristics,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 10 (1989): 21–31; Shmuel Verses, “Magical and demonological Phenomena as Treated Satirically by the Maskilim of Galicia,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* (Heb.) 17 (1995): 33–62.

⁷⁹ “Gilgul Nefesh” (“Transmigration of the Soul”) first appeared in 1845 as part of Erter’s satirical series *Hatzofeh L’beit Yisrael*. For the complete series, see Friedlander (ed), [*ha-Tsofeh le-vet Yiśra’el: hehedir ve-hosif mavo ve-he’arot*](#). “Transmigration of the Soul” was serially reprinted in *El sol* 14, 211-213; 15, 229-230; 16, 243-245; 17, 258-260; 18, 274-276. For more on this story, see Verses, “Magical and demonological Phenomena as Treated Satirically by the Maskilim of Galicia.”

⁸⁰ Etkes, “Magic and Miracle-Workers in the Literature of the Haskalah,” 119.

Together, these articles, editorials, and fictional literature from the Sephardic press disseminated a number of discourses surrounding Jewish superstition: that it originated in a somewhat nebulous vision of antiquity, that it originally derived from non-Jewish peoples, and that, as a result, it reflected pagan practices that went against Jewish law. Blaming a host of others for Jewish superstitious beliefs and practices both authorized reformers to articulate a more rationalist, superstition-free version of Judaism compatible with the spirit of European modernity, and it enabled them to separate their Jewish communities from the surrounding peoples. These discourses echoed throughout the ethnographic literature on Ottoman Jewish superstition. But these texts also highlight the myth of disenchantment among Ottoman Jews, the paradox of narratives of the transformation into a thoroughly modern people shorn of its superstitious beliefs that sat alongside calls for parents and teachers to instill a firm sense of reason to hold strong against the superstitious beliefs that continued to suffuse Ottoman Jewish society.

The ongoing struggle against tenacious age-old superstitions belied the claim of Ottoman Sephardic disenchantment, as did the rise of the new age spiritism and the occult. Though framed by the notion of scientific discovery, such occultic “experiments” received a mixed response in the press. This came to a head in February of 1901 as audiences in Salonica flocked to see the celebrated Dr. Étienne Wandohobb, originally from the French Caribbean colony of Guadaloupe, who had stunned audiences in Parisian salons and séances.⁸¹ “These days, we have in our city a famous medium, an authentic mind reader who has shaken up the spirits by experiments that the greatest scientists have not yet managed to explain,” proclaimed the *Journal de Salonique*.⁸² With people turned away at the door, “There was madness everywhere. Such was the strong will of the public to see the Dr. Noir

⁸¹ For more biographical reportage, see *Journal de Salonique*, 2/14/1901 p. 2.

⁸² *Journal de Salonique*, 2/7/1901 p. 2.

(Black). Those who saw him and those who did not talked only of him and of his devilry, marking themselves as superstitious.”⁸³ Here superstition is reserved for those who witnessed science and took it as devilry, for “more than one superstitious person mistook Dr. Noir for the devil himself.”⁸⁴ Oftentimes referred to as Dr. Noir and sometimes confused for the devil, the reporting language racialized Wandohobb as a potentially dangerous being with mysterious and threatening powers.

Just a few months later, Olga Modiano would channel Dante Alighieri and her older brother, 17-year-old Ugo Modiano, would emerge as “a white Wandohobb, a Wandohobb stronger than the black Wandohobb himself. And it is not a joke—the Salonican mind-reader has already done a series of astounding, amazing experiments, overturning all the givens of science.”⁸⁵ Steadily during the summer of 1901, Ugo gained his own following, including “civil and military functionaries, doctors, and individuals who attended his intimate séances.”⁸⁶ The racialization of supernatural powers continued in the reportage of Ugo Modiano’s successes. One editorial in the *Journal de Salonique* scoffed, “He will become black, without a doubt, if he continues, but for now he is as white as you and me—we hear as white as one could be in a country where the sun bronzes you.”⁸⁷ Wandohobb’s racialization was satirized not only as biological, but extended to his supernatural abilities and threatened both as a form of devilry and as racial contamination that could turn others black. Despite such snubs, Ugo’s abilities and “potential for revolutionizing the scientific world” soon brought him to a meeting at the Psycho-Physiological Institute of Paris, where he performed demonstrations and was examined by professors of the Institute’s school of psychology.⁸⁸

⁸³ *Journal de Salonique*, 2/11/1901, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *Journal de Salonique*, 8/1/1901, p. 3.

⁸⁵ *Journal de Salonique*, 7/25/1901, p. 1.

⁸⁶ *Journal de Salonique*, 8/1/1901, p. 3.

⁸⁷ *Journal de Salonique*, 8/19/1901, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Journal de Salonique*. 10/10/1901, p. 1; *Journal de Salonique*. 10/14/1901, p. 1; *Revue de l’hypnotisme et de la psychologie physiologique*, 1901/1902, p. 228.

Though Salonica may have been a focal point for these developments, it was not the only place under the sway of spiritism. On a Saturday morning in October of 1905, 200 people in Izmir squeezed into an auditorium of the Alliance boys' school for a conference on the occult. The event, which was hosted by Alexander Benghiat, the editor of the Ladino newspaper *El Meseret*, was put on for the school's Alumni Association.⁸⁹ There the audience heard speakers lecture on magnetism and spiritism, mind-reading and hypnosis. The lectures were followed by a number of demonstrations, "which greatly interested the audience."⁹⁰

Such events— Wandohobb's performances, the séance of Olga Modiano, the demonstrations of Ugo Modiano, and Benghiat's conference on the occult—caused a hullabaloo among Ottoman Sephardic communities. Believers and skeptics debated in cafes, salons, and dinner tables as family members and friends found themselves on opposite sides. The press printed both narratives of transformation from skeptic to believer, as well as editorials decrying the occult. In the *Journal de Salonique*, one bewailed: "All the false ideas of certain practices to which one attaches themselves with so much credulity, all the nonsense invented by sickly minds, amplified in every way by charlatans, find a vast field of culture in the imagination of certain beings who they encircle in their vicious beliefs."⁹¹ French-language editorials mocked Paris as "possessing a new divining woman, the plaything of the day" channeling archangels, medieval figures, and dead siblings.⁹² They chided the press for reproducing details of such divinations, and they condemned adults who "sow superstition at their pleasure, overexcite the imagination, break brains and are the true purveyors of wonderful pharmacies, where they turn out, at different prices, the carto-, chiro-, necro- and

⁸⁹ *Journal de Salonique*. 10/23/1905, p. 1.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Journal de Salonique*, 6/28/1900, p. 3; 8/19/1901, p. 3; 2/22/1900 p. 2.

⁹² *Journal de Salonique*, 6/28/1900, p. 3; 9/27/1900 p. 2.

other pernicious -mancies.”⁹³ These editorialists blamed old age superstitions for the new age boom in the occult, condemning both in one sweep.

The varying stances on superstition in the press demonstrate how Ottoman Sephardic Jews sought to negotiate Europe’s own contradictions of the myth of disenchantment with its Enlightenment and anthropological stigmatization of superstition and the concomitant surge of the occult. Wherever such writers drew their lines across the supernatural world—either including the occult in the realm of the licit or excluding both old and new age spirits—these texts sought to create and maintain boundaries. These boundaries were intellectual, setting the categories of religion and science in contradistinction to superstition. But they were also profoundly social, labeling certain groups—women, rabbis, and those without European-style education or “the masses”—as outside of and hindering modernity. This would take on a more authoritative aura in the ethnographic writings of Ottoman Jewish scholars, who transformed Ottoman Jewish superstition from a body of knowledge into a subject of research.

The Ethnography of Superstition

Given the nineteenth-century anthropological fixation on religious development and the supernatural, it is not surprising that superstition occupied a prominent place within ethnographic writing by Ottoman Sephardic Jews. This section considers two French-language studies: Abraham Danon’s “The Superstitions of Ottoman Jews” (1897) and “The Mystical Sciences Among the Jews of the Orient” (1900) by Moïse Franco. Both Danon and Franco were prominent Alliance educators and scholars on the forefront of Ottoman Jewish historiography. While their historical works have drawn scholarly attention, their

⁹³ Claude Hargel, “Superstition and Cretinism,” *Journal de Salonique*, 9/27/1900, p. 2.

ethnographic writing on superstition remains entirely unexplored.⁹⁴ Both approached their studies with a European perspective on their Ottoman Jewish communities, drawn to the very beliefs that they denounced as superstitious, and both produced works in French that further publicized those beliefs within European scholarly circles. Yet their works reveal a mix of motivations, including a devotion to vigorous, scholarly research and a mission rooted in salvage ethnography to rescue what they saw as rapidly disappearing beliefs and practices.

Scholars have noted how ethnography, and the temporal discourses on which it relies, are relational; the referent of anthropology is not an object, but a relationship between an anthropologist's society and the one they study.⁹⁵ As Johannes Fabian claims, a precondition for ethnography is a denial of coevalness between the ethnographer and subject, temporally distancing subjects by relegating them to an earlier era. But if the present of the research subject is located in the ethnographer's past, and the facticity believed to be the cornerstone of scientific thought is autobiographical, what might this mean when the ethnographer and subject are one and the same?⁹⁶ These reformers saw themselves as part of the world they studied, but the dictates of ethnography fostered a form of distancing. They remained rooted in their own communities, but considered themselves more advanced, more rational. This tension helps us to understand the mixed motivations in their writings on superstition that ranged from violent censure to nostalgic elegy, as they both demanded and lamented the disappearance of superstitions. Construing superstitions as survivals, as remnants from the past, perhaps enabled these reformers to enact a similar act of distancing that allowed them to separate themselves from their societies and to salvage what could still be redeemed.

⁹⁴ Danon began the historical journal *Yosef Daat*. For an excerpt of Danon's introduction to the journal, see Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *Sephardi Lives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 392–93. In 1897, Franco published his most popular work, *Essai sur l'histoire des Israélites de l'Empire ottoman depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Librairie A. Durlacher, 1897).

⁹⁵ Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, 28.

⁹⁶ Fabian, 89.

On September 9, 1897, Abraham Danon took the stage at the eleventh annual International Congress of Orientalists in Paris to present his research on Ottoman Jewish superstitions.⁹⁷ According to the Ladino newspaper *El Tyempo*, there Danon joined approximately 350 prominent Egyptologists, semiticists, philologists, historians, geographers, folklorists, explorers, and others—including his old friend and teacher, Joseph Halévy.⁹⁸ “There was never such a great exchange of ideas between people as in our days,” proclaimed *La epoka*.⁹⁹ Both newspapers covered Danon’s presentation on superstition, translating his work for the Ladino-reading public. His research on their own communities and presence among such preeminent scholars brought great pride to the many Ottoman Jews who studiously followed his travels and publications in the press. As *La epoka* reported, his return to Edirne “caused a great joy to the many friends of the great scholar who rushed to congratulate him on the great success of the studies that he presented to the Congress of Orientalists in Paris.”¹⁰⁰

Abraham Danon (1857-1925) was a maskilic scholar, rabbi, educator, linguist, and poet.¹⁰¹ Born in Edirne to a family of notable rabbis, he received a traditional Jewish education from his father that included Hebrew and Aramaic, though he was largely an

⁹⁷ Danon actually presented twice at this conference: he first presented on the Dönme on September 7th and then on Ottoman Jewish superstition two days later. See add program info, and *El Tyempo*, 10/4/1897, p. 22.

⁹⁸ *El Tyempo*, 10/4/1897, p. 22. At the Congress, Halévy gave a presentation on biblical criticism and the Essenes. See *Archives israélites de France* 58 (1897): 303. For more on Halévy, see the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

⁹⁹ *La epoka*, 10/10/1897, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ *La epoka* 11/19/1897, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ For scholarly treatment of Danon, see Albert Navon, *Abraham Danon, 1857-1925: sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris: Impr. H. Elias, 1925); Joseph Niego, “Abraham Danon,” *Hamenora* 3 (1925): 127–30; Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries*, 1st California pbk. ed., Jewish Communities in the Modern World ; 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); İ. İzzet Bahar, *Jewish Historiography on the Ottoman Empire and Its Jewry from the Late Fifteenth Century to the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2008), 147; Dina Danon, “Abraham Danon, la vie d’un maskil ottoman, 1857-1925,” in *Itinéraires sépharades: complexité et diversité des identités*, ed. Esther Benbassa, Cahiers Alberto-Benveniste (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2010), 181–92; Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, “Sephardic Scholarly Worlds: Toward a Novel Geography of Modern Jewish History,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 100, no. 3 (2010): 349–84; Tamir Karkason, “The Ottoman-Jewish Haskalah (Enlightenment), 1839-1908: A Transformation in the Jewish Communities of Western Anatolia, the Southern Balkans and Jerusalem” (Jerusalem, Hebrew University, 2018).

autodidact and is said to have taught himself Ottoman Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Latin, Greek, German, and French.¹⁰² In Edirne, Danon was mentored by Joseph Halévy, who introduced him to maskilic ideas.¹⁰³ Although Danon was never technically his student, “his entire education, all of his thoughts and reflections, and even his Hebrew style, and his manner of writing in Hebrew and French were heavily influenced by this great teacher.”¹⁰⁴ Halévy spent evenings at their table, delighting Danon’s family with Hebrew poetry, Talmudic explication, and biblical verse. Halévy would remain Danon’s mentor throughout his life.¹⁰⁵

Although Danon’s family was middle class, his scholarly pedigree enabled him to marry into the upper class in 1876, which allowed him to devote time to his research. In the late 1870s, he co-founded *Akedat Yitzhak*, a European-style school where he taught, and in 1879 he helped to establish the Society of the Friends of Practical Wisdom (*Hevrat Shohare Tushiyah*), also called Seekers of the Enlightenment (*Dorshe Haskalah*).¹⁰⁶ In 1881, Danon went to Paris for several months, where he spent time with Joseph Halévy, but soon returned to Edirne. There he established the journal *El Progreso/Yosef Da’at* in 1888, the only publication focused specifically on Ottoman Jewish history.¹⁰⁷ Through it, he sought to

¹⁰² Cohen and Stein, “Sephardic Scholarly Worlds,” 356). According to the sources, it seems as though Danon did not attend school, but was primarily home schooled. See, for example, Navon, *Abraham Danon, 1857-1925: sa vie et ses oeuvres*.

¹⁰³ For an in-depth discussion of Joseph Halévy, see chapter four.

¹⁰⁴ Abraham Elmaleh, “The ‘Student’ and His ‘Rabbi’: The Friendship between the Learned Sage, Rabbi Abraham Danon and the Famous Orientalist, Prof. Joseph Halevy” (Hebrew), *Otsar Yehude Sefarad* 7 (1964): 43.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 43–48; Bahar, *Jewish Historiography on the Ottoman Empire and Its Jewry from the Late Fifteenth Century to the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century*, 149; Karkason, “The Ottoman-Jewish Haskalah (Enlightenment), 1839-1908: A Transformation in the Jewish Communities of Western Anatolia, the Southern Balkans and Jerusalem” (Hebrew), dissertation at the Hebrew University, 108.

¹⁰⁶ Together with his peers, including Mordechai Ben-Yosef, Nissim Ovadia, Shlomo HaCohen and others, Danon helped to establish Seekers of the Enlightenment in 1879, considered by some to be the largest and most influential Ottoman Jewish learned society. The society was committed to the study of Ottoman Jewish history, the Ladino press, Hebrew literature, and the intellectual and moral growth of its members. Karkason, “The Ottoman-Jewish Haskalah (Enlightenment), 1839-1908: A Transformation in the Jewish Communities of Western Anatolia, the Southern Balkans and Jerusalem” (Hebrew), 108.; Cohen and Stein, “Sephardic Scholarly Worlds.”

¹⁰⁷ The journal published in Hebrew, Ladino, and Ottoman Turkish, but the Ottoman authorities suspended it after only nine months of publication. For an English translation of the introduction to the first issue, see Stein and Cohen, *Sephardi Lives*, 392–93.

collect, preserve, and publicize historical documents from Ottoman Sephardic communities.¹⁰⁸ It was during this time that Danon cultivated his interest in folklore and ethnography, particularly of Ottoman Sephardic Jews. After the closing of *El Progreso* by Ottoman censors in 1889, Danon founded a rabbinic seminary in Edirne that, backed by the Alliance, sought to train rabbis in the French mode for Jewish communities in the empire. To broaden its impact, Danon and the seminary moved to Istanbul in 1897. Following the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, Danon was almost chosen to be Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire, though lost to his son-in-law, Haim Nahum, and Danon continued to lead the seminary until its closure in 1917 during the First World War.¹⁰⁹ He then relocated to Paris, where he taught Hebrew at the Alliance's teacher-training institute, the *École Normale Israélite Orientale*, until his death in 1925. Throughout his life, Danon published a wide range of books and articles, including a number of ethnographic works on Ladino proverbs and folk ballads, as well as studies of sects such as the Sabbateans and Dönme.¹¹⁰

As an educator and director for the AIU, Danon had internalized many of its dictates, which themselves stemmed from Enlightenment and maskilic ideas of reason and progress, including its rejection of superstition and the dismal image it held of Ottoman Jewry. His scholarship also reflected the approach of the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*. But although historians have argued that, as a maskil with a *Wissenschaft* perspective, Danon minimized or ignored the mystical and abhorred the “irrational,” this fails to account for his ethnographic

¹⁰⁸ This was not so unlike later calls issued by Yiddish-speaking Jews in eastern Europe. See Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement*; Safran and Zipperstein, *The Worlds of S. An-Sky*; Safran, *Wandering Soul*; Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture*.

¹⁰⁹ This is the same Haim Nahum who undertook the second mission to Ethiopia in 1904 for the Alliance Israélite Universelle and wrote the scathing “Rapport sur les Falashas” discussed in Chapter 4. See also Haim Nahum and Esther Benbassa, *Haim Nahum: A Sephardic Chief Rabbi in Politics, 1892-1923* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995).

¹¹⁰ These works include *Recueil des romances Jud'eo-Espagnoles chant'ees en Turquie, avec la traduction française, une introduction et des notes* (Paris: A la librairie A. Durlacher, 1896); *Une secte judéo-musulmane en Turquie* (Paris: A. Durlacher, 1898); “Proverbes Judéo-Espagnoles En Turquie,” *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 27, no. 1 (1903): 72–96; *Études sabbatiennes: recueil d'une communication faite au Congrès des Orientalistes (XIe session, Paris, septembre 1897) et d'une série d'articles publiés dans la “Revue des études juives”* (Paris: A. Durlacher, 1910); *Amulettes sabbatiennes* (Paris: Impr. nationale, 1910).

writing on superstition.¹¹¹ Rooting his work only in the Enlightenment and the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* disregards the extent to which Danon exhibited romantic tendencies and sometimes felt a nostalgic connection to the irrational. Bringing his work on superstition into the historiography thus gives a more complex picture of this towering figure of Sephardic history.

In 1896, the year before his lecture at the International Congress of Orientalists in Paris, Danon published an article on Ladino ballads, “which were transmitted as relics from generation to generation.”¹¹² He pronounced the need to preserve them before they disappeared, noting with regret that, “a large part was already lost since my youth, when I used to listen to my grandmother recite these sweet songs from the old homeland,” referring here to Spain.¹¹³ He visioned for his readers the image of his grandmother, swept up in song: “I still see her, dreamy, absorbed by distant visions, seeking the voice, gaze, and even the gesture to recapture half-effaced harmonies.”¹¹⁴ Given his own nostalgia for these moments of his youth, Danon wondered: “Is it the memory of my childhood that gives these songs such penetrating charm, many of which are, in reality, very mediocre?” Despite their dubious aesthetic value, he affirmed that, “I considered it as a duty to try and save what still remains from oblivion.”¹¹⁵ This nostalgia, his romantic inclination, and sense of duty to salvage what remains of these “relics” resound throughout his ethnographic scholarship.

The following year, Danon delivered his lecture “The Superstitions of Ottoman Jews” at the International Congress of Orientalists in 1897.¹¹⁶ Danon began by stating that, “If the

¹¹¹ Dina Danon, “Abraham Danon, la vie d’un maskil ottoman, 1857-1925.”

¹¹² Danon, “Recueil des romances Judéo-Espagnoles chantées en Turquie, avec la traduction française, une introduction et des notes,” 102.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Abraham Danon, “Superstitions Des Juifs Ottomans,” in *Actes Du Onzième Congrès International Des Orientalistes*, ed. E. Leroux (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1897), 259–70; reprinted in *Mélusine: A Collection of Mythology, Popular Literature, Traditions, and Customs* 8, no. 12 Nov-Dec (1897): 265–81. All translations are my own.

study of the customs and superstitions of a country or a nation contributes to knowledge of their psychology, I believe that the present collection will help to understand a corner of the intellectual domain of the Jews of the Orient, and will elucidate their innermost thought as it used to be.”¹¹⁷ This reflects the anthropological tendency towards psychologization and Taylor’s schema of evolutionary stages of mental development. Further, Danon’s use of the third person “their” proves an act of distancing as he removes himself from this collective, which grants him the scholarly objectivity to elucidate Ottoman Jews’ “innermost thought,” the collective psychological essence of a people not in the present, but through survivals that revealed it “as it used to be.”

Danon declared that he began to collect superstitions “one by one from the mouths of our grandparents,” that he endeavored to gather these “fossils” and “relics of the civilization of our ancestors.” He evoked Tylor’s concept of survivals to explain the continuous presence of superstitions as holdovers from a distant age, but he also switched to the first-person “our” in referring to “our ancestors,” emphasizing his shared belonging in this collectivity. Danon explained that he took up this work with a sense of urgency “at the risk of seeing these fossils disappear little by little under the dissolving impact of science.”¹¹⁸ Akin to his early calls for the gathering of historical sources, his work thus entails a form of salvage ethnography, an attempt to rescue “these fanciful ideas and bizarre practices of yesteryear, which are disappearing more and more in the Orient” with the spread of science.¹¹⁹ Out of his nostalgia and “deep respect for this debris from the past of the Jews of Spain,” he wrote that he “considered it as a duty to try and save from oblivion what still remains.”¹²⁰ This duty may help explain his oscillation between distance and intimacy, between third-person “their” and

¹¹⁷ Danon, “Les Superstitions Des Juifs Ottomans,” 1897, 259.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Danon, “Les Superstitions Des Juifs Ottomans,” 1897, 262.

¹²⁰ Abraham Danon, “Recueil de romances judéo-espagnoles chantées en Turquie.” *Revue des Études Juives* 32 (1896-97), 102.

first-person “our” that occurs throughout his study. In effect, Danon sought to capture this crucial, if supposedly tainted, piece of Ottoman Jewish history before losing access to Ottoman Jews’ collective psychology and essentialized “innermost thought”, even if—or perhaps because—as a reformer, he understood that he directly contributed to its decline.

Following his preface, Danon’s lecture laid out a rationalist genealogy that provided an alternative history to that proffered by irrational superstitious survivals among Jewish communities. This genealogy moved from the bible, through the Talmud, to medieval and early modern rabbis and philosophers such as Maimonides and Saadia Gaon. Rather than rooting superstition in Jewish tradition, he attributed it to Christian and Islamic influences. He then turned to enumerating superstitious beliefs and practices organized into the following sections: places, such as bathhouses, cemeteries, holy shrines and tombs, and cisterns; animals; plants; minerals; miscellaneous, including objects such as brooms, shirts, bread, and rubber resin; and days, detailing which days are auspicious for specific activities. He concluded by announcing his plans for a more complete volume on superstition, an aspiration that remained unfulfilled.

A few years after Danon’s lecture, Moïse Franco published his study, “The Mystical Sciences among the Jews of the Orient.”¹²¹ Danon’s contemporary, Franco (1864-1910) was also a longtime educator and school director for the Alliance.¹²² Born in Istanbul to parents who were Austrian subjects, Franco inherited their legal status.¹²³ After completing his primary and secondary education, Franco attended the *École Normale Israélite Orientale* in Paris to train as an Alliance teacher. After graduating, he returned to serve as a teacher in

¹²¹ Moïse Franco, “Les Sciences Mystiques Chez Les Juifs d’Orient,” *L’initiation: Revue Philosophique Des Hautes Études* 47, no. 13, April 1900, 5-33; May 1900, 125-154; republished as a standalone book as *Les sciences mystiques chez les Juifs d’Orient* (Paris: Edition de l’Initiation, 1900).

¹²² For more on Franco, see Cohen and Stein, “Sephardic Scholarly Worlds”; Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington, IN, US: Indiana University Press, 2011); Bahar, *Jewish Historiography on the Ottoman Empire and Its Jewry from the Late Fifteenth Century to the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century*.

¹²³ Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, 1990, 158.

Edirne. In 1897, he established the Alliance school in Safed before working as the director of the Alliance school first in Shumla, Bulgaria and later in Demotica and Gallipoli. He was forced to resign, however, as a result of Ottoman policies that made it increasingly difficult for non-Ottoman subjects to teach in the empire.¹²⁴ A devout Francophile, Franco collaborated with Colonel Rushdi Bey in compiling three French textbooks used in Turkish schools throughout the Empire and contributed to various periodicals and books.¹²⁵ His most popular book was *Essai sur l'histoire des Israélites de l'Empire Ottoman depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours* (1897), but he also published *Histoire et littérature des juifs, pays par pays* (1905), and wrote on the Jews of Edirne and Safed.¹²⁶

Franco's study, "The Mystical Sciences among the Jews of the Orient," synthesized three seventeenth-century manuscripts on the supernatural—two versions of *Sefer Segulot* and an expanded version, *Sefer Segulot ve Refuot*—and offered his own running commentary throughout.¹²⁷ The study is organized by different phenomena, including "occultism, the effect of astral bodies, astrology, the influence of celestial bodies on human destiny, the reading of thought, the power of talismanic signs and amulets, chiromancy, suggestion by the laying on of hands, spiritism or evolution of spirits."¹²⁸ In outlining the contours of the Ottoman Jewish supernatural realm, Franco hoped that, "For the historian in particular, the report and analysis of the mystical sciences will be like a glimpse taken from the heart of the customs of the Orient,"¹²⁹ which he later noted are "customs that the progress of education

¹²⁴ Aksel Erbahar, "Franco, Moïse," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* (Brill, 2010).

¹²⁵ Such publications include *Stamboul, Le Moniteur Oriental, Revue des études juives, Journal de Salonique*, and *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. Perhaps most notably for us, Franco authored the entry on Abraham Danon (Cohen and Stein, "Sephardic Scholarly Worlds," 377).

¹²⁶ Franco, *Essai sur l'histoire des Israélites de l'Empire ottoman depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*. His study on Edirne remains unpublished but is held in the AIU archives (AAIU Turquie VII.E. received in Paris on 1/10/1897). His study on Safed was published as "Les Juifs de l'Empire ottoman au dix-neuvième siècle" in *Revue des études juives* 16 (1883): 111-30.

¹²⁷ According to Franco, the first two versions, both in Hebrew written in rashi script, are attributed to Rabbi Isaac ben Saal. The third, attributed to Rabbi Yehuda Graziani, is a translation of the first two manuscripts into Ladino, which he rearranged and then expanded by adding new sections.

¹²⁸ Franco, "Les Sciences Mystiques Chez Les Juifs d'Orient," 6.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

tends to make disappear.”¹³⁰ His primary aim, then, is similar to Danon’s in seeking to salvage superstitions that offered insight into the internal consciousness of a people before these beliefs and practices withered away. But secondarily, Franco’s work sought to block the incursions of occultists. “In the interest of science in general,” he wrote, “and possibly in the interest of believers themselves convinced of occultism, or if only to thwart the schemes of soothsayers and astrologers, there would be some utility in studying this subject, at least summarily.”¹³¹

Notably, unlike other writings on Ottoman Jewish superstition, Franco claimed that all of these superstitious practices “were exercised during centuries by the Orientals in general and the Jews in particular.”¹³² He underscored superstition as a particularly Jewish domain, writing of “mysticism, of which the Jews of the Orient have long had a monopoly.”¹³³ This may have been tied to his argument that the roots of modern occultism lay in practices of Ottoman Jews. “I maintain nonetheless,” he declared, “that the rudiments of all these occult beliefs today were known by ancient and modern Orientals, and were especially studied by Jews.”¹³⁴ To prove his point, Franco repositioned the sixteenth-century kabbalists Isaac Luria and Haim Vital as the original predecessors of Parisian mediums.¹³⁵ He asserted that, “Today Paris has clairvoyants and chiromancers, but the diviners of the Orient—*endivino*, *faldji*, or *fal-bakan*, and among them, Jewish diviners who are more famous than the others—practice nowadays this lucrative and honored profession and have practiced it for centuries.”¹³⁶ According to Franco, it was Ottoman Jews who, hundreds of years ago, began the trends now sweeping the salons of Paris.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 131.

¹³¹ Ibid., 8.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 7.

But despite being à la mode, Franco continuously denounced such trends. He repeated throughout his study that he does not believe in the efficacy of superstitious practices, referring to astrology as “a deceitful art,” and rejecting chiromancy because “I do not conceive either of the relation that could exist between certain lines on one’s hand and the character or destiny of a human being. Common sense refuses to admit the deductions drawn by chiromancers from the arrangement of these veins.”¹³⁷ In his section on *prekantes*, or women’s Ladino healing incantations, Franco informed readers that they “contain many inconsistencies, ideas without the slightest connection between them.”¹³⁸ Franco’s rejection demonstrates opposing logics at play. As Tamar Alexander and Eliezer Papo have noted in their work on Sephardic magical practices, *prekantes* were enigmatic, perhaps intentionally, as a means of enhancing the magic powers of the words.¹³⁹ While Franco failed to find a certain Enlightenment rationality or “common sense” within supernatural practices and beliefs, their practitioners abided by an alternative logic in which relationality with spirits was necessary to maintaining balance in the world and resolving crises of illness, plague, or tragedy.

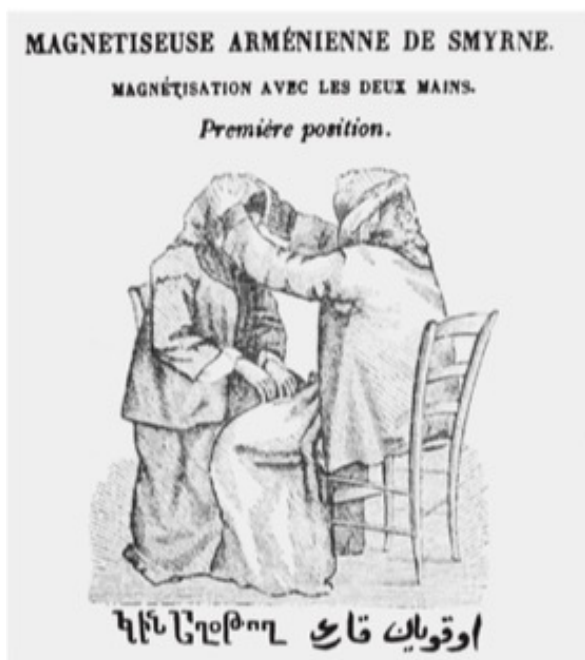
Notably, the phenomenon of autoethnographic writing regarding superstition was not unique to Ottoman Sephardic Jews. Just to briefly consider one Armenian counterpart to Danon and Franco, Calouste Constant, also known as Kalousd Gostantian, was a Christian Armenian from Izmir. Educated in France, he was an active member of the French Society of Magnetism and of the Asiatic Society of Paris. In the 1860s, he published articles in the French press on amulets, traditional medicine, mesmerism, and magnetism. His 1862 article published in the Geneva-based journal, *Le Magnétiseur*, included a number of drawings that illustrate the technique of a female Armenian healer. Similarly to Franco, Constant began by

¹³⁷ Ibid., 127, 32.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹³⁹ Alexander and Papo, “On the Power of the Word: Healing Incantations of Bosnian Sephardic Women,” 78.

noting that, “The European practitioners of magnetism will be surprised to learn that the Orientals practice magnetism in almost the same way,” and that they practiced such forms of healing since time immemorial.¹⁴⁰ Like Sephardic discourses, Constant identified practitioners among both Christians and Muslims alike as belonging to the “common people” and wrote that, “In the Orient, men and women both practice magnetism equally, but women, especially elderly women, are preferable,” particularly those who pass down magnetic healing practices from one generation to the next, though they are often illiterate and ignorant.¹⁴¹ Yet he diverged in blaming modern biomedicine for “considering magnetizing women as stupid sorcerers and magnetism as pure superstition” and concluded that soon the upper classes and doctors will see that magnetism is “the most beautiful and most useful of sciences.”¹⁴²



Calouste Constant, “Le Magnétisme en Turquie,” *Le Magnétiseur*, Geneva 11 (4), February 15, 1863, pp. 162-171.

¹⁴⁰ Calouste Constant, “Le Magnétisme En Turquie,” *Magnétiseur* 4, no. 11 (February 15, 1863): 162.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 171.

In diverging from Constant and ultimately condemning such practices, Danon and Franco took a European view of their Ottoman Jewish culture, interpreting superstitions as Ladino relics of ancient epochs for their orientalist audiences. But while Franco seemed less perturbed by the disappearance of superstitions, Danon's writing reveals a sense of nostalgia, an anxiety about the loss of such survivals, not only as a glimpse into the internal consciousness of Ottoman Jews, but also the fading of his affective attachment to the Ladino words and songs of his grandparents. Beyond moving superstition from popular polemics in the press to an object of research, these autoethnographic texts also helped to root disenchantment as a disciplinary norm within the scientific study of Ottoman Jews. They sought to demarcate forms of knowledge deemed superstitious in efforts to exclude such ways of thinking from receiving any kind of legitimacy as a scholarly mode of thought. In doing so, they not only marked such knowledge as beyond the scholarly pale, but those who held it as well.

Conclusion

Through reading autoethnographic texts, this chapter has sought to understand how Sephardic reformers of the late nineteenth century picked up racial scripts and adopted and adapted them to their own communities in the urban centers of the empire. Reformers constructed and marshalled superstition to set intellectual, social, and linguistic boundaries during a moment of great transformation across the empire. Although they drew on Enlightenment, imperial, and anthropological ideas, their experiences differed in that they inherited the centuries-long double racialization both as "Orientals" from the cradle of superstition and as Jews contending with antisemitic polemics denouncing them as superstitious. We can thus see how a larger narrative of disenchantment—and the counter surge in the occult—played out in the local context of Ottoman Sephardic life.

Situating Ottoman Sephardic prescriptions against superstition, including both old age spirits and new age spiritism, within relations of race, gender, and class demonstrates how these reformers idealized the modern subject as one like themselves, a civilized and elite educated, French-speaking man, freed from the fetters of premodern superstitious survivals, including both superstition and Ladino. For them, Ladino-speaking women, the elderly, the poor, and traditional rabbis were responsible for perpetuating the premodern, for passing on relics, fossils, debris that continued the haunt Sephardic reformers into the modern era. Ladino itself, the sole language that made it possible to recite Ladino *prekantes* or carry out the *indulko* healing ritual, was responsible for maintaining superstitions long after they should have faded as survivals from an earlier age. In this way, reformers translated these ideas about social identity and language into claims of intellectual authority, signaled by the translation of Ladino superstitions from oral communal practice into written Orientalist French scholarship. The production of scholarly knowledge by ethnographers like Danon and Franco was thus not only connected to the creation and maintenance of social boundaries, but predicated on it. In this way, superstition served as a regime of truth that circumscribed knowledge production and laid the foundation for the social sciences.¹⁴³ This demonstrates how reformers drew hierarchies that encompassed the social, intellectual, and linguistic by demarcating which kinds of people, knowledge, and language belonged in the modern, scientific world.

Yet their writings are beset by multifarious contradictions and tensions. Their world was filled with the aura of new age spirits that sold out packed theaters alongside the obstinate persistence of old age spirits, who despite belonging to ancient times and peoples, continued to haunt their present. They navigated the terrain of racialized evolutionary anthropology, marking certain segments of their own communities, including their

¹⁴³ Josephson Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 309–10.

grandparents, as premodern, even as they mourned their disappearance. They were driven by both Enlightenment and Romantic ideals, as well as nostalgic and reformist anxieties.

Their attempts to reconcile these contradictions point to the violence of imperial discourses that played out at the more personal level as scholars found themselves torn between their affective relations to the past and nostalgia for earlier times and the distance imposed by the dictates of ethnography. How figures such as Danon and Franco reckoned with superstition was crucial for their self-formation as scholars in providing both an adversary and a foil for them to prove how they had advanced beyond the supernatural beliefs of their own childhoods, their neighborhoods, and their grandparents, all experienced through Ladino. Their ability to include autobiographical reflections is predicated on their transformation, their act of distancing from the irrational to the rational, from the premodern to the modern, from Ladino to French.

This historical moment—the twilight of the Ottoman Empire—illustrates how superstition peaked as a discourse at a time of political transformation and anxiety as new leaders, concerned about being racialized as uncivilized themselves, sought to assert their authority, delineating—somewhat arbitrarily—the good spirits from the bad, as new ideas and fashions swept through their communities. Superstition was thus summoned in service of a disciplining project in both of its senses, social and intellectual, as a regime of truth that delimited knowledge production, but that also sought to disabuse others of superstitious thought and enact forms of social control. The last chapter turns to the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* to draw connections between the ethnographic knowledge and racial discourses examined in these first three chapters and those circulated by the AIU, which played a key role in shaping the racial and ethnographic texts reformers produced in the many communities in which the AIU worked across the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Iran.

Chapter 4: Rethinking the Racial Politics of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*



Cah. Daniel. 18-year-old Abyssinian. Born in Addé Gemma on the MaiChirini, student of the Oriental Preparatory school in Paris. Height 1m63, thin frizzy and woolly hair, black eyes. July 1869. Presented by d'Abbadie.¹

Daniel Adhanan sits upright in his seat, his shoulders squared, his hands in his lap. He looks straight ahead, but his eyes remain slightly unfocused, avoiding the gaze of the camera. He wears a smart European-style waistcoat, string tie, and stiff collared shirt, the lapels neatly pressed—a performance of bourgeois respectability. Adhanan's clothing reflects his social status as a student enrolled at the teacher training school of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU), a Franco-Jewish organization established in 1860 to uplift and “regenerate” Jews around the world through political advocacy and French-style education. While the photo on

¹ “Album n 5. Afrique Du Nord: Maroc, Algérie, Tunisie, Tripolitaine, Egypte, Nubie, Ethiopie” (Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle), 105, accessed March 5, 2021.

the left resembles a middle-class portrait declaring Adhanan's rising social status, it appears beside a second photograph on the right that shifts the tenor.

This second photograph captures Adhanan's profile, designed to show more clearly his physiognomy. This racialization carries over from the images into the text of the caption, which identifies him as "Abyssinian," with "thin frizzy and woolly hair, black eyes." In depicting the grammar of the ethnographic gaze, these photos perform a familiar script of nineteenth-century anthropological photography of racial types that reduce subjectivities to living specimen and racial categories. These ethnographic photographs capture Adhanan's stoical expression and his frontal and profile poses, designed to display more clearly his physiognomic contours.

Inscribed with the civilizing stamp of the French *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, Adhanan's photographs depict him as a racialized type of the Beta Israel from Ethiopia. They appear on the last page of an album of anthropological portraits, "Album No. 5: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Tripolitania, Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia," held in the archives of the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* in Paris. The pages of the album are replete with racial types, a genre that reduces subjectivities to living specimen and racialized cultural categories. The repressive genre of the anthropological photograph with its characteristic poses was used to document and classify colonial Others, as well as criminals and those with disabilities, all linked by their supposed physiognomic and moral deviancy.²

Reprising Tina Campt's *Listening to Images*, we can consider the unspoken relations that structure these photographs.³ Zooming out, we can read Adhanan's stillness through the scene that stands just outside of the frame of the photographs, hidden from the viewer, but

² Colonial anthropological racial types preceded, influenced, and dovetailed with the classification and anthropometric identification system developed for criminals by Alphonse Bertillon. For more on the connections between colonial ethnographic photography and mug shots, see also chapter 1, footnote 165.

³ Tina Campt's work applies a Black feminist lens to interpret photographs of Black diasporic subjects. This reading of Adhanan's photographs follows her example. See Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

directly facing Adhanan: Jacques-Philippe Potteau, the French anthropologist and photographer taking his portrait; Antoine d'Abbadie, the French ethnographer who arranged it; and Joseph Halévy, the Jewish orientalist who brought Adhanan to Paris.⁴ Together they instantiate colonial anthropology and its use of photography as a pernicious means of knowledge production predicated on the subjection of bodies. Did Adhanan tacitly consent or was he compelled or coerced to walk into the photography studio, to wear this clothing, to sit straight, to look forward, to remain still, to not smile, to turn to the side?

Such photographs were intended to only register forms of racialized knowledge and scientific accounting. But these photographs concurrently evidence Adhanan's refusal to remain in Ethiopia, his desire to see the Parisian metropole, his search for new places and unbounded possibilities. They capture what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten have termed the "refusal to be refused," to submit to the terms that have limited and reduced the lived experience of Blackness.⁵ The photographs testify to his striving for what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has expressed as "the possibility to live unbounded lives."⁶ In the summer of 1869, when these photographs were taken, Adhanan's refusal took the form of his enrollment at the AIU's teacher training school, the *École Normale Israélite Orientale* (ENIO) in Paris, thousands of miles from his home in Ethiopia.⁷

Yet his photographs also register a tension that lies at the heart of the AIU's project. It is the interplay between these two photographs, between Adhanan as aspiring AIU teacher on

⁴ Potteau, was a member of the anthropology department of the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle*, and took a series of ethnographic portraits for the museum from 1860-1869 (Getty Research Institute Special Collections, "Potteau (Jacques-Philippe) Collection Anthropologique," Online Archive of California, accessed March 30, 2021).

⁵ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 96 quoted in Campt, *Listening to Images*, 32.

⁶ Gilmore, roundtable comments, "In the Wake of the Black Atlantic: Pedagogy and Practice," The Black Atlantic @ 50 Conference, Center for the Humanities, cuny-Graduate Center, October 24, 2013, quoted in Campt, *ibid.*

⁷ ENIO was established in 1867 in Paris to train teachers for its schools across North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. Its students were typically recruited from among the highest achieving of those who attended AIU schools themselves. At the ENIO during this time, students trained for two years in both Jewish and secular subjects before the AIU assigned them to a position in its network of schools. See Abraham-Haim Navon, *Les 70 Ans de l'École Normale Israélite Orientale (1865-1935)*, 1937, 17–18.

the left and Adhanan as racialized subject on the right, that opens up a reframe of the Alliance. Through his training at ENIO, the AIU strove to produce a Franco-Jewish instructor and Adhanan sought to ascend to the status of a teacher endorsed by the Parisian Jews at the helm of the Alliance. Yet his existence as a racialized subject remained inescapable. His Blackness shaped all of his experiences with the AIU, from the moment of first encounter, to his arrival in Paris, his appearance at AIU meetings, and his eventual departure. These photographs highlight the tension of the Alliance in proclaiming its steadfast solidarity with Jews worldwide while seeking to remake them in its own image, even as it called for the production of ethnographic and racialized knowledge that inscribed a profound sense of difference in the communities in which it worked across the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Iran.

This chapter explores this tension through one Alliance-sponsored ethnographic expedition to the Beta Israel in Ethiopia, through which Adhanan encountered the AIU, which was undertaken from 1867-1868 by Joseph Halévy, an orientalist and educator from Edirne. Although the term *Abyssinia* appears in nineteenth-century texts, this discussion uses *Ethiopia* throughout, only reproducing *Abyssinia* when quoting sources. Historically, the term *Abyssinia* emerged as a European colonial conceptualization of the northern Ethiopian highlands associated with a more pure form of Christianity that had been preserved in the mountainous region.⁸ Colonial ethnographers and scholars portrayed the inhabitants of the region, known as the *Habasha*, from which *Abyssinia* derived, as Christian and light-skinned,

⁸ According to Tsehai Berhane-Selassie, sixteenth-century Portuguese missionaries "discovered" *Abyssinia* and brought back Ge'ez literature that they claimed as "evidence" of a true and more "pristine" form of Christianity that had been preserved intact in the "isolated" region. This firmly marked Abyssinia as a singularly Christian land. The term itself derives from the Arabic *Habash*, meaning "a mixture," denoting those of "mixed ethnic origin, partly black, partly brown." In European languages, *Habasha* became *Abyssinia* and the term which originally referred to people became one for the land that Portuguese missionaries and travelers reported as Christian. See "Where or What Is 'Abyssinia'? –An Investigation," *Ethiopianorama*, accessed August 4, 2021, http://ethiopianorama.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Where-or-What-is-Abyssinia-an-investigation.pdf2_.pdf.

whose ancient Semitic civilization originated from the Arabian Peninsula and southwest Asia, in contrast to all other groups, whom they deemed African, uncivilized, and dark-skinned.⁹ As a result, this discussion uses the term *Ethiopia*, which was preferred by local rulers and reflects a more multiethnic picture of the region. Additionally, the term *Beta Israel* appears throughout, rather than *Falashas*. Although the latter was not intended to be derogatory, it originated as a pejorative label, and Ethiopian Jews today prefer the term *Beta Israel*.¹⁰

Adhanan's story reframes the AIU by bringing to light the racial politics of knowledge production that emerge in Alliance ethnographic writing. This marks a significant divergence from extant scholarship on the Alliance. In much of the literature on Jews in the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Iran, historians have focused on the role of Alliance schools in precipitating major cultural, political, and economic transformations during the turn of the century; its presence is often seen as heralding the very advent of modernity for Jews in the region. Moreover, the Alliance's extensive archives documenting these Jewish communities have provided abundant and indispensable sources for research, facilitating the growth of the field of Jewish history. Given the AIU's centrality to the history and historiography of these regions, much scholarship has examined the work of the Alliance, focusing especially on its political activities and the vast network of schools that it established across North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and Iran.¹¹ Shifting our gaze away from

⁹ These groups deemed Abyssinian included primarily the Amhara, Tigrinya, and sometimes the Agaw, who were seen as the only groups civilized enough to rule effectively or deemed worthy of historical study. The Oromo in particular were marked as more barbaric and primarily southern. The work of Brian J. Yates has challenged these views that have continued to pervade the historiography in *The Other Abyssinians: The Northern Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1913* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020). For literature specifically on the Beta Israel in Ethiopia, see footnote 79.

¹⁰ Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 9–10. For a thorough discussion of terminology, see James Arthur Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 11–15.

¹¹ Among others, see Elizabeth Antébi, *Les missionnaires juifs de la France, 1860-1939* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1999); André Chouraqui, *Cent ans d'histoire: L'alliance israélite universelle et la renaissance juive contemporaine (1860-1960)* (Paris: PUF, 1965); Michael Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France: From*

these well-known centers of AIU activities towards Ethiopia and opening up this history enables new approaches. Despite the expansive body of scholarship that features or draws on the AIU, scholars have yet to make race an explicit analytic in considering the racial politics that shaped its work, from its production of racialized subjects in need of aid, to the racial anxieties and aspirations that drove its work, and how race has structured its archives.

These three aspects of the AIU's racial politics come to the fore in analyzing Halévy's expedition to Ethiopia. First, this case study demonstrates how the AIU produced, circulated, and marshalled racialized knowledge of the Beta Israel. I follow Geraldine Heng, who calls attention to historically specific moments and instances in which race is constructed by asserting and assigning "strategic essentialisms" to create a hierarchy of people for differential treatment and domination.¹² I argue that the AIU racialized the Beta Israel as subjects in need of aid through overtly physiognomic descriptions, notions of time and space, and ethnographic descriptions of cultural practices that rest on underlying racial logics.¹³

the French Revolution to the Alliance Israélite Universelle, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); André Kaspi, ed., *Histoire de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle de 1860 à Nos Jours* (Paris: A. Colin, 2010); Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862-1962*, (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1983); Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006); Frances Malino, "Women Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1872-1940," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, Second Edition (Wayne State University Press, 1998), 248-69; Aron Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003) and *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Georges Weill, *Emancipation et Progress: L'Alliance Israélite Universelle et Les Droits de l'homme* (Paris: Editions de Nadir, 2000).

¹² Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

¹³ Some anthropologists and historians have argued that notions of cultural difference have long been racialized. They contend that the postwar move in anthropology away from notions of race and racial determinism in favor of culture, particularly with the work of Franz Boas, shifted only the language while maintaining its underlying racial logic. They further maintain that our ideas about "culture" and "ethnicity" today rest on an underlying racial logic. See Heng, 26; Jemima Pierre, "Anthropology and the Race of/for Africa," in *The Study of Africa*, ed. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, vol. 1 (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA, 2006), 39-61; Ann Laura Stoler, "Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth," *Political Power and Social Theory* 2 (1997): 183-206; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 1991); Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

These same forms of racialization would carry through the AIU's work also into the many other communities in which it worked across the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Iran.

Second, race was fundamental to the project of the AIU, I argue, not only in how it produced racialized subjects in need of their aid, but in how the AIU was driven by racial notions, anxieties, and aspirations around whiteness. Jews' precarious emancipation and ongoing antisemitism in France led to ongoing insecurities regarding their place both within the French social and political body, but also within white Europe more broadly.

Emancipation in France more closely linked Jewish citizens to the state and its ideological project; as the French state engaged in imperial expansion, the Jews at the helm of the Alliance expressed their support for republican imperialism by carrying out their own Jewish variant of the French civilizing mission. In doing so, French Jews performed their Frenchness and asserted their whiteness.¹⁴

Third, I argue that foregrounding race demonstrates how the AIU archives, though extensive in some ways, remain limited in others, structured by privileges of race.¹⁵ This chapter traces Adhanan's story through fragments pieced together from the archives of the AIU, sources produced by Halévy, the international Jewish press, and the records of the *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*.¹⁶ In combing these archives for fragments and crafting them into a narrative, this chapter follows the methodology of scholars working at the cross-section of African-American studies and women's history whose accounts of enslaved

¹⁴ Regarding the Jewish background of the members of the AIU, the work of Phyllis Cohen Albert, Jay Berkovitz, and Michael Graetz has argued that the French consistory system united Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and *avignonnais* Jewish communities and generated a primarily French Jewish identity based on the framework of revolutionary ideology. See Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity*, 17.

¹⁵ Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 4.

¹⁶ See, for example, Joseph J. Williams, *Hebrewisms of West Africa: From Nile to Niger with the Jews* (New York: Lincoln MacVeagh, The Dial Press, 1930); Edith Bruder, *The Black Jews of Africa: History, Religion, Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Aomar Boum, "Saharan Jewry: History, Memory and Imagined Identity," *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, no. 3 (2011): 325–41; Tudor Parfitt, *Black Jews in Africa and the Americas, Black Jews in Africa and the Americas* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

women have contended with meager sources from the perspective of the enslaved.¹⁷ The violence of the archive partly lies in this silencing, the relegation of Adhanan to archival scraps that offer no entry to his thoughts, no sense of his experience of the major journey he would undertake or the major ways in which his life would irrevocably change in pursuit of an unbounded futurity. It only yields representations of him by Alliance members, anthropologists, and journalists, crafted and distorted for their own purposes. This points to the simultaneous fascination with Adhanan and the Beta Israel that swept across Jewish communities in Europe and the disappearance of their presence and the Alliance work with them from their archives. Reading these fragments critically demands attention to the politics of historical production, to who narrates history and to what ends.¹⁸ Reframing the AIU through the story of Adhanan highlights the racial structures and logics that produced these representations and that govern what we can know about him.¹⁹

Halévy's expedition to Ethiopia and its aftershocks stand as a key moment of racialization for the AIU and the wider Jewish world. Geraldine Heng calls attention to historical "moments of racialization," or specific events and instances in which race is constructed that reveal larger discursive patterns, tendencies, and strategies of broader historical and historiographic significance.²⁰ This first extended ethnographic expedition was an early moment in which the French Jews leading the AIU enacted their civilizing mission and forged racialized representations of Jew elsewhere to assert their whiteness. But it was also a moment of racialization for the wider Jewish public; during the 1860s, racialized depictions of the Beta Israel and debates over whether they were really Jews appeared in the

¹⁷ Here I follow especially the work of Marisa J. Fuentes and Saidiya Hartman. See Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism*, 2008.

¹⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot examines power in the production of historical narratives and how it involves the uneven contributions of individuals and groups with unequal access to the means for such production. See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, 5.

²⁰ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 4.

Jewish press in Europe, the United States, and Jerusalem. These debates reveal epistemic anxieties among Jews in these regions over where to draw the boundaries of Jewishness and what the existence of Black Jews might mean for them during a time of expanding empires, the rise of anthropology, and shifting notions of race.

Yet an understanding of AIU ethnography also proves significant in other ways. Halévy's expedition was part of a larger ethnographic impulse on the part of the AIU. In the decades following its establishment in 1860, the AIU sought to find, study, assess, and assimilate Jewish communities across the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Iran.²¹ As a means of knowledge production about Jewish communities, ethnography helped to provide the foundation on which the AIU based its policy decisions. Through ethnographic writing, the Alliance determined which communities it would bring into its network, where it would establish schools, who it would advocate for and educate. This process—an essential part of how the AIU began and how it played out on the ground—remains another underexplored facet of AIU history. Further, this expedition highlights the racializing discourses and ideas about Jewish cultural difference that pervade the later ethnographic writing produced by AIU teachers and administrators in its extensive network of schools. AIU ethnography fed into a loop of knowledge production, by which racial ideas championed by the AIU and its representatives were passed on to AIU students and staff, who in turn shared them with their families and communities. In some cases, AIU students became teachers themselves, perpetuating the loop still further. Many of the reformers discussed in the previous chapters were in different ways affiliated with the AIU as school founders and directors, as teachers

²¹ Before building schools, the AIU sponsored ethnographic expeditions to remote Jewish populations to assess whether locales would be suitable for new schools, such as the one to Ethiopia through which Adhanan first encountered the Alliance. Once schools had been founded, administrators and teachers sent annual reports to Paris on the communities in which they were working. The Alliance's Central Committee urged its personnel to gather information about the demographics, education, professions, and customs of the Jewish communities. In seeking to capture the "exotic" nature of these communities on the brink of change, the reports of AIU employees constitute a distinct ethnographic genre. See Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims*.

and committee members. As a result, the racial politics of AIU ethnography, which come to the fore through Adhanan's story, spread beyond the reports and classrooms of the AIU and contributed to changes in how different Jewish communities across the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Iran saw their communities, their Judaism, and themselves. This case study proves critical, therefore, to understand the ethnographic works of Ottoman Sephardic reformers, who later adopted and adapted these racial ideas and discourses in their ethnographic works.

The Alliance was shaped by the French Jewish experience of emancipation, dominant theories of race, and imperialism. Scholars have demonstrated how, by the late eighteenth century, Jews in France had long been vilified as backwards and corrupt, making them a test case in debates over the limits of French citizenship and belonging.²² Jews were considered different enough to test Enlightenment principles, yet not so different as Blacks in the colonies and women—two groups deemed unassimilable to a French model of citizenship that was decidedly white and male. Jewish men became an ideal object for drawing the boundaries of Frenchness, their difference seen as contingent and mutable, holding the promise of attaining whiteness.²³ Yet even after emancipation in 1790-1791, the status of Jews in France remained uncertain.²⁴ The state was slow to place Jews on par with Christians, and anti-Jewish writings, campaigns, and rioting occurred into the nineteenth century.²⁵

²² Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley, Ca., 2003).

²³ This was perceived to be especially the case for Ashkenazi men in Alsace and Lorraine with their distinct Yiddish language, dress, and religious observance (Maurice Samuels, *The Right to Difference: French Universalism and the Jews* (Chicago, Il., 2016), 13).

²⁴ Fifteen years after granting emancipation, ongoing charges of usury led Napoleon to reconsider Jews' citizenship. He convened the Grand Sanhedrin in 1807 to interrogate Jewish communal leaders about their suitability for French citizenship. They painted Judaism as compatible with French law and society, and Napoleon consented to let Jews keep their citizenship. See Joshua Schreier, "Napoléon's Long Shadow," *French Historical Studies* 30—1 (2007): 77-102; Michael Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*.

²⁵ As just a handful of examples, rabbis only began to receive state salaries in 1831, years after their Christian counterparts. Jews were required to take a special oath while testifying in courts until 1846, and had to pay off communal debts. The revolution of 1848 saw anti-Jewish rioting in Alsace, anti-Jewish diatribes appeared in the French press both on the left and right, and in 1850 a campaign against Jewish teachers in public schools led to

While the first generation of emancipated Jews endured a prolonged struggle for acceptance and kept a low profile, beginning in the 1830s, a new generation of Jews, born as French citizens and educated in Parisian lycées, began their social, political, and economic ascent.²⁶ As they entered the mainstream of French national life and the liberal professions, they developed their own brand of Judaism compatible with whiteness in France, one deemed rational, enlightened, and decorous, entwined with French republicanism and premised on the adoption of bourgeois French manners and language. It was this generation that would establish the Alliance in 1860.

Ongoing debates over the place of Jews in the French body politic reflected contemporary notions of race. Perhaps the most significant works promoting racial ideology in France in the years leading up to the founding of the Alliance were Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853-1855) and Ernest Renan's *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* (1855). Despite their differences, Gobineau and Renan both divided the world into a hierarchy of races, each with its own defining characteristics and abilities. Racial theorists believed that all human societies moved along the same linear trajectory of development from "savage tribes" to "civilized nations," with white Europe at the pinnacle of civilization. These ideas acquired a greater scientific veneer through the nascent discipline of anthropology, which institutionalized this view of civilization predicated on white supremacy.²⁷ Beginning in the 1860s, as physical anthropology became the mainstay of French anthropology, racial hierarchies were increasingly seen as biologically determined and immutable, which, I argue, would have

the firing of a number of Jews (Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, 1990; Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*; Samuels, *The Right to Difference*).

²⁶ Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*, chapter two; Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity*, 83; Samuels, *The Right to Difference*, 51.

²⁷ Patricia Lorcín, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Race in Colonial Algeria*, (London, 1995); Alice Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, Ny., 2013).

consequences for AIU policy. The concept of racial hierarchy had been introduced into French national discourse through colonization in Algeria, and in the second half of the nineteenth century, racial ideas further spread through anthropological societies and courses, scholarly publications and the media, museums, world's fairs, and ethnographic exhibitions.²⁸

The French state marshalled these racialized notions to claim French superiority and to legitimate imperial conquest and its civilizing mission. As Lisa Moses Leff has noted, one result of emancipation was that Jewish citizens felt more closely tied to the expanding imperial state and its ideological project. As the first emancipated Jews in Europe, and perceiving themselves as more civilized and thus more racially advanced than their coreligionists, they felt it their duty to guide Jews worldwide away from what they considered outdated customs and vices, and towards civilization and emancipation. This moral imperative surfaced in the 1840s following the French conquest of Algeria, and the blood libels in Damascus and Rhodes with the interventions of Jewish leaders such as Moses Montefiore, Adolphe Crémieux, and Baron Edmond de Rothschild, whose work presaged the internationalism of the AIU.²⁹ French Jews argued that despite the profound abjection of Jews throughout the Middle East and North Africa, they too were capable of change and could serve as allies of French colonization, unlike Muslims, whom they deemed racially less amenable to civilization.³⁰ Through a paradigm of race rather than Orientalism, we can see how this reproduces a similar racial logic that granted French Jews citizenship while denying it to Blacks—that Jews held the promise of regeneration into whiteness while other races

²⁸ William H. Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870-1900*, (Westport, Ct., 1982); Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*; James Smalls, "'Race' As Spectacle in Late-Nineteenth-Century French Art and Popular Culture," *French Historical Studies* 26--2 (2003), 351–82; Pascal Blanchard, *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool, 2008); Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Chicago, Il., 2011).

²⁹ Crémieux not only participated in the Damascus Affair, but also the founding of the AIU and the extension of French citizenship to northern Algerian Jews.

³⁰ See the 1842 Altaras-Cohen report from Algeria discussed in Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria*, (New Brunswick, Nj., 2010).

remained irredeemable. Yet these public performances of solidarity were also self-defensive; the new status achieved by this second generation of Jews remained unstable. With reports in the French press maligning Jews in North Africa and the Middle East, Jewish elites sought to protect their reputation.³¹ In declaring their own civilizing mission, French Jews proclaimed their commitment to French imperialism and civilization, and in doing so performed their whiteness and French national belonging.³²

Notions of race circulated among French Jewry in part through the press. In addition to reporting on different races around the world, the press featured studies by non-Jewish scholars that detailed positive aspects of Jewish racial difference. Extensive excerpts from *De la vitalité de la race Juive en Europe* (1865) by the government statistician Alfred Legoyt appeared in both *Univers Israélite* and *Archives Israélites*.³³ Legoyt sought to account for “the cosmopolitan character of the Jewish race” and its unique ability to maintain population growth wherever Jews settled. He attributed Jewish continuity to a sturdy racial constitution well-suited for life struggle that enabled Jews to withstand centuries of persecution and climatic influences. The use of race science to prove positive aspects of Jewish racial difference garnered praise among French Jewish elites. After Legoyt republished his findings as *Immunités biostatistiques de la race Juive* (1868), a prominent member of the AIU, Jules Carvallo, presented Legoyt’s work to the AIU Central Committee.³⁴ Carvallo built on Legoyt’s study, arguing that Jews have a stronger biological constitution, but also moral advantages derived from their religious and spiritual qualities. French Jewry not only accepted the notion of Jews as a separate race, but reframed it as a positive in endowing Jews

³¹ Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity*, 117.

³² i

³³ Alfred Legoyt, *De la vitalité de la race Juive en Europe*, (Paris, 1865), reprinted in *Univers Israélite* 21—2 (1865): 75-82; *Archives Israélites* 26 (1865): 693-695, 718-724.

³⁴ The AIU praised Legoyt’s study, ordered 300 copies, and awarded him a prize of 1,000 francs (“*De certains immunités biostatistiques de la race Juive par M. Legoyt, rapport au Comité Central de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle par M. J. Carvallo*” (Bureau des Archives Israélites, Paris, 1868).

with a unique physical, mental, and spiritual vitality.³⁵ It was these entwined currents of emancipation, racial theory, and imperialism that informed the Alliance's civilizing mission and set the stage for Joseph Halévy's encounter with the Beta Israel in Ethiopia.

The Making of a Mission

When Halévy embarked on his mission in 1867, the Beta Israel had endured centuries of political, economic, and social disenfranchisement in a Christian Ethiopia with a centuries-old and well-established national church. Unable to own land, they labored as tenant farmers for Christian landlords, who almost exclusively held all land rights and their attendant economic prestige and political power. The paltry income they earned led many to work additionally as soldiers or artisans and craftsmen, known particularly for their work as weavers, potters, and smiths. These low-status professions were disparaged by the surrounding populations, who ostracized the Beta Israel and associated them with *buda*, or the evil eye.³⁶ In turn, the Beta Israel denigrated Christians as dirty apostates given to superstition and polytheism.

The Era of Princes (1769-1855) leading up to Halévy's journey exacerbated these economic, political, and social inequalities for the Beta Israel. In the face of significant imperial decline, local governors and military leaders vied for territories and power, plunging the country into a constant state of civil war.³⁷ It proved a time of severe hardship for all, but especially for the Beta Israel, who already lived in a state of economic precarity as tenant farmers, and who had lost royal patronage in employment as soldiers and artisans on imperial construction projects. This left them particularly vulnerable, and they experienced abject

³⁵ Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*, 242; John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, (New Haven, Ct., 1994); Mitchell Hart, *Jews & Race: Writings on Identity and Difference, 1880-1940* (Waltham, Mass., 2011).

³⁶ Christians accused the Beta Israel of being magicians and of transforming themselves into hyenas at night and drawing out their victims' blood or life force. See Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, 111.

³⁷ Kaplan, 115.

poverty and steady depopulation. During this time, the Beta Israel's religion also came under attack, and they passed through a religious crisis during the 1840s that saw a wave of conversions to Christianity, both forced and voluntary. The pressure to convert only intensified after the coronation of King Tewodros II in 1855. Having emerged victorious from decades of civil wars, Tewodros both admitted Christian missionaries from Europe into the region, and he undertook his own Christian imperial project to unite and centralize the various regions of Ethiopia under his rule and the hegemony of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian church.

The AIU's expedition to Ethiopia was prompted by growing concerns over Christian missionizing among Beta Israel communities like Adhanan's. In the wake of a new wave of British millenarian expectations, missions to Jews around the world reached a pinnacle in nineteenth-century England as churches and evangelizing organizations felt an urgent need for Jews' conversion and poured funding and energy into missions.³⁸ Missionaries saw Tewodros's firm rule as bringing more political stability for their activities.³⁹ Soon thereafter, the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews ("The Society") launched its first mission to Ethiopia focused specifically on the Beta Israel, under the leadership Henry Aaron Stern, a converted German Jew.⁴⁰ The Society believed that converted Jewish

³⁸ See Agnieszka Jagodzińska, "'For Zion's Sake I Will Not Rest': The London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews and Its Nineteenth-Century Missionary Periodicals.," *Church History* 82, no. 2 (2013); Mel Scult, "English Missions to the Jews: Conversion in the Age of Emancipation," *Jewish Social Studies* 35, no. 1 (1973): 3–17.

³⁹ Tewodros granted official sanction to missionaries to convert all non-Christians provided they abide by two conditions: he prohibited them from establishing a Protestant Church and required that all converts be baptized into the Ethiopian Church. See Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews*, 155.

⁴⁰ Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, 138. This mission, launched in 1859, came on the heels of the work of Samuel Gobat, a Swiss Protestant missionary who first arrived in Abyssinia in 1830 under the auspices of the British Church Missionary Society. During the time he spent there from 1829-1832 and 1836-1837, Gobat worked periodically among the Beta Israel and published descriptions of his experiences in his account, *Journal of a Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia*. In 1838, Gobat urged the London Society to begin a mission specifically dedicated to the Beta Israel. According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, as a result of Gobat's low success rate gaining converts, "In despair the right rev. prelate [Gobat] says, 'I will lift mine eyes up to the mountains,' and he turns to Abyssinia. He tells us that he sent a letter to the king of that country 'for permission to send them to begin a mission in his country' (*Jewish Chronicle*, September 12, 1856, 726). The quote attributed here to Gobat references Psalm 121: "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains from whence comes my help", likely referring to the famous mountain fastnesses of Ethiopia. The London Society not only sought to convert the

missionaries like Stern might have greater success among the Beta Israel as a result of what the Society saw as their shared “racial affinity.”⁴¹

The agents of the London Society were the first to consistently treat the Beta Israel in Ethiopia as Jews, and in doing so, Jews in Europe and the U.S. began to actively scrutinize their missionizing in the press.⁴² The London-based *Jewish Chronicle* lamented: “We have had several times the grief to refer to a mission by the conversion society to the ancient Jewish colony in Abyssinia, known by the name of Felashas. We have stated that the mission is headed by a baptized Jew, named Stern, and expressed our fears lest these simple-minded brethren in faith be made to believe that Christianity and Judaism are identical.”⁴³

Disparagement aside, their concern was not entirely unwarranted. In 1861, Stern introduced himself to the Beta Israel as their racial kin. In a letter to London, he crowed that, “The announcement that we were Felashas afforded them ineffable delight, and with their dark eyes riveted on me they gazed and gazed, till at last their silent amazement vented itself in the ejaculation, ‘He looks indeed like a son of Israel, like a true child of Jacob!’”⁴⁴ Over the following years, the missionaries printed and distributed copies of the Christian bible in Amharic and established a school at the former imperial capital of Gondar, which the *Jewish Chronicle* bewailed, was “attended by 25 Jewish children who, of course, by the teaching

Beta Israel, but to use them to revive the Ethiopian Church, which it viewed as unenlightened and morally destitute. If they could also bring the gospel to the Muslims living there, it was seen as an additional godsend. See David Kessler, *The Falashas: The Forgotten Jews of Ethiopia*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 108; Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews*, 179.

⁴¹ Don Seeman, *One People, One Blood: Ethiopian-Israelis and the Return to Judaism*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 47.

⁴² Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, 138.

⁴³ *Jewish Chronicle*, April 19, 1861, 6.

⁴⁴ *Jewish Intelligence*, July 1, 1861, 174. Stern reported optimistically that, “I feel fully persuaded that if our agents diligently in faith and prayer prosecute the work, they will ere long be able to collect around them a congregation of believing Falashas” (*Jewish Chronicle* April 19, 1861, 6).

imparted to them, are being estranged from the God of their fathers. Separated as this Jewish colony is from all sister settlements, we fear the consequences of these attempts.”⁴⁵

With the 1862 publication of Stern’s account, *Wanderings among the Falashas in Abyssinia*, the Jewish press’ scrutiny of Stern increased as did its vitriol. The *Jewish Chronicle* referred to him as “a money-bought agent of a Society whose life and soul is filthy lucre,” a “restless apostate, who has made his dupes of the Conversion Society believe that there was a field for activity in distant Abyssinia.”⁴⁶ In the same breath as condemning him, they published excerpts from his account, which spanned from travelogue to memoir to ethnography, and offered lengthy descriptions of the Beta Israel’s origins, history, religion, and practices.⁴⁷ Stern paid particular attention to questions of religious and racial distinctiveness, which had been a preoccupation of the London Society for decades. He situated the Beta Israel as Semitic, racially intermediate between other Ethiopians and white Europe:

In physiognomy, most of the *Falashas* bear striking traces of their Semitic origin. Among the first group we saw at Gondar, there were some whose Jewish features no one could have mistaken, who had ever seen the descendants of Abraham either in London or Berlin. Their complexion is a shade paler than that of the Abyssinians, and their eyes, although black and sparkling, are not so disproportionately large as those which characteristically mark the occupants of the land.⁴⁸

Stern marked the Beta Israel as racially distinct—and lighter—than their African neighbors as a result of their “Semitic origin” and their paler complexion. Given that Stern himself was a “descendant of Abraham,” he was claiming racial affinity with the Beta Israel, a claim that

⁴⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, January 27, 1860, 7. See Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, 33. Gondar was constructed as the imperial capital in 1636, and developed from a small village into a flourishing city that boasted numerous castles and churches, most of them built with the help of Beta Israel artisans and craftsmen. See Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, 108.

⁴⁶ *Jewish Chronicle*, June 22, 1866, 5; June 8, 1865. It further denounced him for the harm he has caused the Beta Israel knowing that any converts would have to join the Ethiopian Church and not Protestantism. One editorial opined: “He knows that all Jewish converts must sooner or later have embraced the national church...yet despite this knowledge, or perhaps because thereof, counting for nothing the imminent peril to which he exposed his deserted coreligionists, and the unutterable woe and misery that he might have brought upon them, he ruthlessly proceeded in his work” (*Jewish Chronicle*, September 1, 1865, 4).

⁴⁷ Excerpts from Stern’s letters and account were printed serially in the *Jewish Chronicle*, August 16–September 20, 1861; May 29, 1863, 7; May 20–June 3, 1864.

⁴⁸ Henry Aaron Stern, *Wanderings among the Falashas in Abyssinia*, (London: Cass, 1862), 197.

sought to incorporate the Beta Israel into the project of empire. Throughout, his account strategically oscillates between these claims of shared Jewish race and emphasizing his own whiteness for his white, Christian audience. Stern's recognition of racial affinity was not mutual; the Beta Israel highlighted their racial difference by referring to Stern and his coterie as "white Christian Felasha from beyond Jerusalem."⁴⁹ During his years proselytizing to the Beta Israel, Stern's activities were viewed with increasing suspicion by the Ethiopian Church. As a result of this tension and Tewodros' wrath at unfulfilled promises of British aid, the emperor imprisoned Stern and his party in the fall of 1863.⁵⁰

The surge of missionizing activities in the 1850s and 1860s prompted a renewed interest in the lives of the Beta Israel on the part of Jews in Europe and the United States. This interest had waxed and waned since at least the early modern period, but reached new heights in the years leading up to Halévy's expedition and encounter with Adhanan.⁵¹ During this time, the Jewish press printed excerpts about Beta Israel communities from works by the famed explorers Charles Tiltone Beke (1800-1874) and Antoine d'Abbadie (1810-1897), as well as an extensive report about Beta Israel cultural and religious practices.⁵² This report was based on a questionnaire produced by Philoxène Luzzatto, a young Jewish scholar from

⁴⁹ *Jewish Intelligence*, July 1, 1861, 174. The discussion of racial discourses prevalent in Stern's account does not appear in other missionary accounts, and it may be that this focus on race resonated particularly with missionaries of Jewish birth (Seeman, *One People, One Blood*, 55). Stern's account diverges in this way from Samuel Gobat, *Journal of Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia* (London: Hatchard & Son, 1834) and J. M. Flad, *The Falashas (Jews) of Abyssinia* (London: W. Macintosh, 1869).

⁵⁰ *Jewish Chronicle*, June 3, 1864, 3; June 10, 1864, 2.

⁵¹ In a sixteenth-century rabbinic responsum, the Egyptian scholar Rabbi David ben Zimri (RaDBaZ) proclaimed the Beta Israel as the Jewish lost tribe of Dan. This pronouncement was prompted by an inquiry about whether Jewish law applies to Beta Israel who were brought to Egypt as slaves. Echoes of this connection between the Beta Israel and slaves would later resound in debates surrounding Halévy's expedition. See Michael Corinaldi, *Jewish Identity: The Case of Ethiopian Jewry* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1998), 103–7.

⁵² The *Jewish Chronicle* printed parts of Beke's report to the Royal Geographical Society as well as d'Abbadie's "Notice sur les Falashas," which initially appeared in the *Journal des Débats* and the *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*. D'Abbadie spent eleven years in Ethiopia from 1837-1848 and contributed extensively to the field of Ethiopian studies. He was the first foreign traveler to write a detailed analysis of the Beta Israel. See *Jewish Chronicle*, July 6, 1845 and November 16, 1849.

Padua, that was completed by one of the Beta Israel communities that d'Abbadie encountered on his expedition.⁵³

In addition to printing such works, the Jewish press covered an incident in 1855 that further brought the Beta Israel to the attention of European Jewry. As the Berlin newspaper, *Jeschurun*, reported, "Some time ago we had here [in Jerusalem] some extraordinary visitors in the persons of an Abyssinian Jew named Daniel ben Haninah and his son Moshe, aged twelve years. The former communicated to us many remarkable and interesting particulars relative to our Abyssinian brethren, of whom so little is known."⁵⁴ Ben Haninah had brought his son to study Jewish law in Jerusalem and shortly thereafter returned home with a letter from prominent Jerusalemite rabbis. These rabbis voiced their concerns that because the Beta Israel did not know Hebrew, they were practicing Judaism improperly. The rabbis proposed that the Beta Israel send three or four promising young men to Jerusalem to study Hebrew and Jewish law so that they might return to their communities and teach them.⁵⁵ The Beta Israel sent a firm counter-proposal: "Send us educated men from among you that we might teach them the principles of the religion of Israel which are accepted by us."⁵⁶ Ben Haninah's son Moshe remained in Jerusalem to study there, but he soon disappeared, only to resurface alongside Samuel Gobat, a former missionary in Ethiopia who had since become the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem. Years later, it was one of these prominent Jerusalemite rabbis,

⁵³ After reading d'Abbadie's reports, Philoxene Luzzatto wrote to d'Abbadie in Ethiopia and through him, managed to establish contact with one Beta Israel community (*Jewish Chronicle*, September 26, 1851, 404). Luzzatto created the questionnaire to learn about their lives "with a view of discovering whether they are in reality of Jewish origin, or how they may be connected with the house of Israel." Luzzatto's questions concerned their population size, language, calendar, holidays, political rights, liturgy, biblical canon, messianic beliefs, and marriage practices. After two years, Luzzatto received a reply and the answers to the questionnaire were printed serially in the *Archives Israélites* and provided the basis for his *Memoire sur les Juifs d'Abyssinie*. Philoxene Luzzatto (1829-1845) was the son of the famous Rabbi Samuel David Luzzatto, and he took an active interest in the Beta Israel from an early age. His work was printed until his untimely death at the age of 25.

⁵⁴ *Jeschurun* 2 (1855), 247-248, reprinted in *Educatore Israelitica* 3 (1855), 570-571 and *Jewish Chronicle* March 21, 1856.

⁵⁵ The letter was signed by Hayyim David Hazan, Elias Deichas, Joseph Schwartz, S. Hawusdorf, and I. Perez of Jerusalem.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Menahem Waldman, *The Jews of Ethiopia: The Beta Israel Community* (Jerusalem: Ami-Shav, 1985), 127.

Joseph Schwartz, who, despite his initial support of teaching the Beta Israel, later felt betrayed by both ben Haninah and Moshe and would subsequently argue in debates that raged in the Jewish press that the Beta Israel were not, in fact, Jews.⁵⁷

This may have been because Jewish communal and rabbinic elites in Europe and Jerusalem felt that the question of the Beta Israel's religious, racial, and genealogical kinship was not entirely resolved. Even as calls for intervention were published in newspapers from Ottoman Palestine, the Russian Empire, western Europe, and the United States, doubts surfaced about whether the Beta Israel were Jews and thus worth "rescuing." Some were unsure of how to reckon with their Blackness, and their religious practices differed from the forms of Judaism practiced across Europe and the SWANA region. This was particularly apparent in the Beta Israel's retention of certain biblical laws and customs, including sacrifices, and their unawareness of rabbinic law.⁵⁸ In an editorial in *Der Israelit*, the Jerusalemite rabbi, Joseph Schwartz, withdrew his initial support of the Beta Israel and declared that based on his personal experience meeting Daniel ben Haninah and his son, the Beta Israel were not "real Jews."⁵⁹ In response, another rabbi from Jerusalem, Selig Hausdorff countered,

I cannot agree in the opinion of R. Schwartz respecting the Falashas. The Falasha referred to by him and his son often dined at my table and he told me that in his country there were also white Jews—nay, that the color of most of the Jews of Abyssinia was white. According to him, they all rigidly observe the Sabbaths and festivals, do not eat anything leavened on Passover, and blow the shofar on New Year. In general, they keep all our laws. For this reason, I must request all my brethren in faith to send a mission to them.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, 139.

⁵⁸ The issue of kinship manifested as a near-obsession with the origins of the Beta Israel and writers debated whether they were Jews originally from Egypt, Arabia, or some other place; lapsed Christians; or if they practiced a hybrid of Judaism and Christianity. For a thorough discussion of the various theories regarding their origins, see Joseph J. Williams, *Hebrewisms of West Africa: From Nile to Niger with the Jews* (New York: Lincoln MacVeagh, The Dial Press, 1930), chapter 7; Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews*, 7–27. For discussions of the origins of the Beta Israel in the Jewish press, see the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* reprinted in *The Asmonean*, June 23, 1854, 78; July 7, 1854, 94.

⁵⁹ *Der Israelit*, September 26, 1864.

⁶⁰ *Der Israelit* reprinted in *Jewish Chronicle*, September 23, 1864, 5.

At the outset, Hausdorff used hearsay that the Beta Israel are racially white to argue for their status as Jews. Not only does skin color here precede all other criteria for determining Jewishness, but Hausdorff affirmed an assumption of a Jewish somatic norm based in whiteness. Only after asserting this does he refer to shared religious and legal practices. This public dispute that unfolded in the pages of the press would, some years later, resound once again in the halls of the Alliance upon Halévy's return from Ethiopia with Adhanan.

Despite—or perhaps because of—these doubts, calls for a mission to determine whether such white Jews existed in Africa appeared with a growing sense of urgency in the Jewish press. Throughout the early 1860s, numerous appeals were published in the *Jewish Chronicle*, *L'Univers Israélite*, *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, *Ha-Magid*, *Ha-Levanon*, and *The Occident*.⁶¹ But one appeal proved more consequential. In October of 1864, Azriel Hildesheimer, the Rabbi of Eisenstadt, circulated a call to the leading newspapers of the time entitled “Very Urgent Appeal to all my Fellow Believers.”⁶² He affirmed the Beta Israel as Jews, invoking the writings of early modern rabbis, Luzzatto, and the opinions of Christian leaders and missionaries in Jerusalem. “Everyone of my brethren will certainly by these accounts be convinced that the question about the descent of the Falashas is answered,”

⁶¹ *Jewish Chronicle*, March 16, 1860, 4; *The Occident*, April 11, 1860, 18 and October 1, 1861, 335 reprinted in *Jewish Chronicle*, November 15, 1861, 7; *Der Israelit* 5/44 (1864), 575-578 and 5/49 (1864), 641-642; *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* reprinted in *Jewish Chronicle*, June 17, 1864, 3; *Ha-Magid*, January 4, 1865, 2-3; *Jornal Israelit* quoted in *Jewish Chronicle*, December 1, 1865. Some particularly appealed to Jews in Syria, Egypt, and Yemen to establish contact with the Beta Israel given their greater geographic and perhaps racial proximity. One editorial inquired, “Could our co-religionists in Egypt or Syria not send a missionary to them that might counteract the influence exercised on them by the inculcation of non-Jewish doctrines?” (*Jewish Chronicle*, November 18, 1859, 7). Another asked whether rabbinic emissaries could be rallied for the cause: “Cannot our co-religionists in Egypt communicate with them, and could not those bold, ubiquitous messengers from Jerusalem, sent out to collect alms, reach these brethren?” (*The Occident*, December 20, 1860, 237). Further, “Will no rabbi from the Holy Land go forth to them in order to warn them against the wiles and snares of these destroyers of souls?” (*Jewish Chronicle*, November 20, 1863, 2).

⁶² Urging readers to take an example from Christian missionaries, Hildesheimer proposed the establishment of committees to raise funds and collect donations of books and ritual objects; sending “three competent men” fluent in Amharic, academic scholarship, and diplomacy; and obtaining letters of recommendation and political protection. His appeal appeared in *L'Univers Israélite* (3) 1864, 120-125; *Jewish Chronicle*, November 4, 1864; *Ha-Magid* (8) 1865, 47; *Ha-Mevasser* 4 (44).

Hildesheimer claimed, “and that we dare not delay to prove our active interest in their fate.”⁶³ His appeal met with a large and overwhelmingly positive response unlike any that had come before.⁶⁴ Prominent rabbis and community leaders lent their support, including Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, Rabbi Meir Leibush (MaLBiM), and Rabbi Yakir Giron, Istanbul’s Chief Rabbi.

Numerous editorials called for the Alliance, whose mission appeared aligned with causes exactly like this, to support such an expedition. One asked, “Could the Israelitish Alliance of Paris not try to open communication with the poor Falashas, isolated as they are and cut off from all fellowship with the rest of their brethren?”⁶⁵ Despite the public urging to undertake such an expedition, the AIU concluded that, “This mission is one such mission that we would like to promote when our resources will be sufficient.”⁶⁶ But the case was not closed for the AIU. After years of watching the debates and discussion about the Beta Israel unfolding in the press, Joseph Halévy burst onto the scene. In an editorial in the Prussian Hebrew weekly *Ha-Magid*, Halévy volunteered himself for the mission, proclaiming, “Here I am (*hineni*). Send me!”⁶⁷ He recounted that,

I have been a traveler since my youth. I have roamed the northern glaciers, and, for many years endured the scorching heat of African summer, hunger and thirst awakened in me, and I counted many difficult nights and on an arduous day (in the year 1850) I made a vow to the God of my fathers to

⁶³ David Ellenson, “‘Our Brothers and Our Flesh’: Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Jews of Ethiopia,” *Judaism* 35, no. 1 (1986).

⁶⁴ This is evidenced by the many letters of support that soon followed in the press. See *Jewish Chronicle*, November 11, 1864, 2, 5 and February 10, 1865, 3; *L’Univers Israélite* 12/1864 (4), 179-181 and 2/1865 (6), 269-271; *Der Israelit* referenced in *Jewish Chronicle* May 19, 1865, 9; *Jeschurun* XI (1865, 203-218; *Ha-Magid* 9 (43) 1866, 335-340.

⁶⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, July 4, 1862, 2.

⁶⁶ The *Jewish Chronicle* stated that “...the Alliance—and this is wisely so—shuns distant expeditions, which are at all times most expensive, and which, by reason of the distance, can be but rarely efficiently supported, and still more rarely yield results adequate to the cost and labour” (May 26, 1865, 4). But in fact, the AIU had already begun to gather “statistical information” about the Beta Israel: “Informed that the French government prepared a mission in Abyssinia, we asked [the French Consul] Mr. LeJean, who is charged with it, to kindly give us any information about the situation of the Abyssinian Jews, about their culture and their religion. To this end, Mr. LeJean must ask them a certain number of questions we have sent him” (*Jewish Chronicle*, July 4, 1862, 2). LeJean promised to furnish the AIU with information on “their history and social state, every information which patient and persevering observations could succeed in obtaining” (Report of the General Assembly Meeting of the Alliance Israélite Universelle held on May 31, 1864,” *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July, 1, 1864, 9). For the AIU, when possible, working through contacts on the ground was preferable, given the expenses required for a full expedition.

⁶⁷ *Ha-Magid*, February 8, 1865, 6.

travel to the land of Kush when God wills it time to learn the state of my brothers and to improve their nation as much as I am able.⁶⁸

Although he had no formal training, Halévy detailed his many other qualifications. He had studied numerous languages, including Aramean, Arabic, Mongolian, Persian, Turkish, Hungarian, and the Ethiopic languages of Ge'ez and Amharic. He had knowledge of the bible, Talmud, midrash, as well as science, math, geography, world history, and Jewish history. He declared that he was also familiar with Christian texts and had experience in polemics with Christians. Without university affiliation, degrees, or those in the Jewish community able to vouch for their language skills, explorers like Halévy commonly announced their credentials in the press, which served as a key means of identifying candidates for such missions.

Halévy was not unknown to the Alliance. A distinguished orientalist, philologist, and Hebraist, Halévy had already worked as a school teacher and director in Edirne.⁶⁹ Though scholarship on Halévy has mixed theories of his origins and intellectual background, I follow those who argue that he was likely an Ashkenazi Jew born in Hungary, who fled the

⁶⁸ *Ha-Magid*, February 8, 1865, 6. Halévy's reference to *Kush* conflates biblical Kush with modern-day Ethiopia and invokes the Hamitic myth as the place of the sons of Ham. For more on the Hamitic myth, Blackness, and how the myth has been mobilized in racialized ways across time and religions, see David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Sylvester A. Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Robin Law, "The 'Hamitic Hypothesis' in Indigenous West African Historical Thought," *History in Africa* 36 (2009): 293–314; Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*, African Studies (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2013); John O. Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell, *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam*, (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2002). Sylvia Wynter demonstrates how mobile classificatory categories inherited from earlier periods, such as *kush*, became useable in later racialized contexts. See Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View," in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex M. Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 5–52.

⁶⁹ A biography of Halévy remains to be written, but pieces may be found in Y. Kantorovitz, "Rabbi Joseph Halévy: Biographical Material" *Ha-Mevasser* 49 (Kislev 21, 1911), 707 (Hebrew); Salomon Reinach, "Joseph Halévy," *Revue Archéologique* 5 (1917); Albert Navon, "La foundation de l'école de l'Alliance à Adrinople," *Paix et Droit* (April 1, 1923), 14; Nahum Sokolow, "Professor Joseph Halévy" in *Personalities* (Jerusalem, Ha-Sifriyah Ha-Tsiyonit, 1958) 2, 350 (Hebrew); Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, 1990; Alan. Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen: The Travels of a European Orientalist and His Native Guide* (Stanford University Press, 2018); .

nationalist insurrection of 1848 and settled in Edirne in his twenties.⁷⁰ Those who hold this view point to reports recounting that when Halévy arrived in Edirne, he did not know Ladino or Ottoman Turkish, and that his letters to the AIU are in Ashkenazic Hebrew cursive rather than Sephardic cursive. The lack of clarity may reflect Halévy's appropriation of various identities throughout his life—a phenomenon not altogether unknown among nineteenth-century explorers.⁷¹ Halévy presented himself as European when in Edirne and as an Ottoman Jew when in Europe, even in government documents.⁷² Scholars have noted that he subscribed to a notion of mutable ethnic and racial identity, a characteristic that would shape his encounter with the Beta Israel.

According to reports, when Halévy arrived in Edirne, he could only communicate in Hebrew rather than Ladino, and his clothing resembled that of a Bulgarian Christian peasant.⁷³ But having impressed communal and rabbinic leaders with his mastery of Hebrew and Talmud, he soon obtained a teaching position at the *meldar* of the Portuguese congregation in Edirne.⁷⁴ There he introduced educational reforms, adding classes in French

⁷⁰ See Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, 183; Alan Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen: The Travels of a European Orientalist and His Native Guide* (Stanford University Press, 2018), 13.

⁷¹ The Jewish traveler, archaeologist, and historian Nahum Slouschz was also known for appropriating various identities on his travels: "This important journey, facilitated by the presence of a Turkish soldier, was carried out in various costumes. Mr. Slousch was sometimes a Jewish rabbi, sometimes a Turkish effendi, with a fez on his head, or even a simple European depending on the state of the country" (Nahum Slouschz, "Les senoussiya en Tripolitaine," *Revue du monde musulman* 1 (1906): 170). Of course this phenomenon was not limited to Jewish explorers, but also includes many other prominent nineteenth-century travelling scholars. See also the case of Ignatius Timothy Trebitsch-Lincoln (1879-1943), a Jewish Hungarian adventurer and convicted con artist who throughout his life worked as a Protestant missionary, an British member of Parliament, a German politician and spy, a Nazi collaborator, and a Buddhist monk, surveyed in Bernard Wasserstein, *The Secret Lives of Trebitsch Lincoln* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁷² As Verskin writes, "Halévy took full advantage of being an Ashkenazi when in Sephardic society and a Sephardi when in Ashkenazic society. He seems to have believed that his identity as an outsider allowed him to act as a bridge between the Ashkenazic and Sephardic worlds. He composed Hebrew poems in the Andalusian meter for an Ashkenazic audience and taught a generation of teachers how to give a European-style education to Jewish children in the Muslim world" (*A Vision of Yemen*, 15). Hungary itself remains an understudied terrain on the European geographic and cultural borderlands, marked by a mélange of political and intellectual currents.

⁷³ Albert Navon, "La Fondation de l'École de l'Alliance à Adrinople," *Paix et Droit*, April 1923, 14. Verskin notes that when Halévy first arrived in France, one source correctly identified him as Hungarian: "Procès-verbal du 22 janvier 1869," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 17 (1869), 95 (Verskin, 218).

⁷⁴ Aron Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition: The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860-1939* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 45.

and Hebrew and an emphasis on European-style hygiene.⁷⁵ Within a few years, he had merged all of the thirteen Jewish schools in Edirne under his leadership. Halévy was later described as “a man of voracious activity, of a fighting spirit which, not for a day, was denied in the course of a life that was long. He was aggressive, biting, sarcastic; he was brave, daring, fearless. This is an understatement; he carried within him the flame of a revolutionary, the indomitable faith of an apostle.”⁷⁶ But the European-style reforms that Halévy instituted and that he called for not only in education but also in religious practice, upset the local rabbinic elite and led to an opposition movement. When he attempted to prevent a local exorcism, he was excommunicated by the leading rabbis of Edirne and driven from the city.

During his time leading the Jewish schools of Edirne, Halévy had forged ties with the Alliance. In 1861, the AIU sent him to Morocco to report on the communities there, which laid the foundation for the establishment of the AIU’s network of schools in Morocco.⁷⁷ But his work for the AIU was sporadic, and after leaving Edirne, he wandered throughout Europe in search of employment. And so, in 1865, when Halévy volunteered himself for the mission to Ethiopia, he had gained a reputation as a scholar, had experience working with the AIU, and was eager for work.

After identifying himself in *Ha-Magid* as the man for the mission, Halévy began to lobby Jewish individuals, prominent rabbis, organizations, and the wider public for their support.⁷⁸ In 1865, he stated in the *Jornal Israelith*: “...as the idea of riches does not make a man rich, so also the desire of many to have a Jew missionary in Abyssinia will not transport him quickly thither, for there is necessary for the purpose, wagons, steamers, camels, etc. for

⁷⁵ Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen*, 14.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Chouraqui, *Cent ans d'histoire*, 111; Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen*, 16.

⁷⁸ Halévy’s candidacy was supported by several rabbis, including Camondo, Alphonsa, and S. Danon. See *Jewish Chronicle*, December 1, 1865, 6; Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen*, 18.

which is required the most practical thing in the world—money.”⁷⁹ In January of 1867, he appeared at an AIU meeting: “[M. Halévy] solicits the support of the society for this mission [to Abyssinia], which he hopes for the best results for civilization of these coreligionists, which history and the present state have enveloped in great obscurity, and which appear ignorant of Jews in other parts of the world, as much as they are ignored.”⁸⁰ The AIU voted to allocate 5,000 francs to the mission and, unwilling to sponsor the mission independently, “decided that he will also seek support from the geographical societies of France and England, and the cooperation of the English Jews for the mission.”⁸¹

Into the spring of 1867, Halévy lobbied the Board of Deputies of British Jews. In the *Jewish Chronicle*, he contended that,

It would be an honorable task for the English Jews to complete the magnanimous initiative taken by our French coreligionists. I may say that the English Jews owe some consideration to the poor Falashahs, who were so sadly betrayed by the false brethren coming in the name of England, with the view of promoting apostasy among them...It would come with particular grace from the English Jews were they to contribute their share towards teaching their Abyssinian brethren to distinguish the true brother from the false one, and the pure monotheism from a spurious imitation...⁸²

Halévy’s efforts proved successful and the Board of Deputies provided the additional funding needed for the journey. In its wake, the Board of Delegates of American Israelites adopted a parallel resolution to support Halévy’s mission, explaining that, “It is nothing rare among our people for learning to be restored by a few chosen ones, and therefore we would urge this plan to bring over, if possible, to North Africa or Europe good and vigorous intellects who could be taught to become teachers in their turn.”⁸³ Though this was not Halévy’s intention from the outset, after meeting Adhanan, he would do just that. This episode illustrates how in some aspects, the Alliance functioned less as a free-standing institution, and operated more in concert with other organizations as part of a much larger Jewish institutional network.

⁷⁹ *Jornal Israelith*, July 21, 1865 reprinted in *Jewish Chronicle*, December 1, 1865.

⁸⁰ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January 1, 1867, 3.

⁸¹ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January 1, 1867, 9.

⁸² *Jewish Chronicle*, May 3, 1867.

⁸³ *The Occident*, June 1, 1867, 150; *The Occident*, August 1, 1867, 266.

The international debates that unfolded in the Jewish press over whether the Beta Israel were Jewish and thus worth “rescuing” reveal racial anxieties among Jews in Europe, the United States, and Jerusalem. They sought to resolve not only whether the Beta Israel were Jews, but also whether there were truly white Jews in Africa as Hausdorf contended. This desire to determine the Beta Israel’s racial and religious kinship became increasingly urgent as Christian missionizing activities mounted throughout the 1850s and 1860s. After years of watching calls for a Jewish mission proliferate in the press, and months of lobbying this network of Jewish institutions for support, with funding finally secured, Halévy embarked on his journey.

Mission to Ethiopia

A detailed picture of Halévy’s expedition emerges from the letters he sent from Ethiopia to the Alliance, the report he would later give to the AIU upon his return, and his manuscript notes that were published shortly thereafter. Reconstructing Halévy’s encounter with Adhanan and the Beta Israel relies entirely on Halévy’s words and his translated dialogue in Amharic, although it remains unclear how well he knew the language. Yet these moments of encounter demonstrate the many ways in which Halévy racialized both the Beta Israel and himself. This racialization did not originate with this particular encounter; as an agent of the AIU and its Jewish civilizing mission, which itself stemmed from a much longer imperial project, Halévy’s whiteness prefigured Adhanan and the Beta Israel. But these accounts of his mission clearly instantiate such forms of racialization, which range from physical descriptions and notions of space and time, to discussions of cultural differences. In

reading his expedition through the lens of race, this analysis of his ethnographic work diverges markedly from earlier scholarship on the Beta Israel in Ethiopia.⁸⁴

“[M. Joseph] is intrepid, enthusiastic, he has a faith in the success of his journey that fears no obstacle. He has now set out on his journey,” proclaimed the Alliance Bulletin.⁸⁵ In the summer of 1867, Halévy left Paris, making his way through Anatolia, Jerusalem, and Massawa, in present-day Eritrea, before arriving in Ethiopia.⁸⁶ Halévy’s letters, dispatched to the Alliance from the field, circulated in the international Jewish press as readers followed him on his journey. In Massawa, Halévy made the acquaintance of Werner Munzinger, the French consul and an explorer and ethnographer in his own right, and had his first encounter with the Beta Israel, meeting two young men who had converted to Christianity.⁸⁷ Halévy observed that one “had a bronzed complexion, and possessed features slightly resembling the Jewish cast of countenance. The other...was altogether black, and presented a less prepossessing appearance.”⁸⁸ Yet he noted that, “Despite their very dark color, the Jewish

⁸⁴ An extensive body of scholarship on the Beta Israel largely focuses on their experiences in Israel, especially their migration, settlement, and absorption, often from a Zionist and exoticizing perspective. Those works that do mention Halévy’s expedition came in a wave of publications on the Beta Israel during the 1980s and 1990s and do not engage critically with questions of race, as do the few from the early twentieth century, which fail to acknowledge the many forms of racialization in Halévy’s accounts. For other works that mention Halévy in Abyssinia, see Corinaldi, *Jewish Identity*; Mordechai Eliav, “The Awakening of West-European Jewry to the Assistance of the Falashas / ההתעוררות בין יהודי המערב לעזרת הפלאשים,” *Tarbiz* / *תרביץ* לה, no. 76–61 : (1965); Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*; Kessler, *The Falashas*; Tudor Parfitt and Emanuela Trevisan Semi, eds., *The Beta Israel in Ethiopia and Israel: Studies on the Ethiopian Jews* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999); Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews*; Seeman, *One People, One Blood*; Daniel Summerfield, *From Falashas to Ethiopian Jews: The External Influences for Change, c. 1860-1960* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Waldman, *The Jews of Ethiopia*.

⁸⁵ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1867, 18.

⁸⁶ He traveled through Jerusalem rather than via Egypt to “meet here with many natives of Abyssinia who could provide him with everything requisite for a journey in that country. His stay here, moreover, has proved advantageous to the Alliance, since through his exertions several Jews have joined this association” (Excerpt from *Ha-Lebanon* reprinted in *Jewish Chronicle*, October 11, 1867, 7). On his way, Halévy stopped and sermonized about the importance of the AIU and its mission in synagogues along his route. See Halévy’s memoir, *Travels in Abyssinia*. (London: Society of Hebrew Literature, 1877), 181–89.

⁸⁷ Examples of Munzinger’s work include *Ueber die Sitten und das Recht der Bogos*, Winterthur, J. Wurster & comp., 1859; *Ostafrikanische Studien*, Schaffhausen, 1864; “Narrative of a Journey through the Afar Country,” *The Journal of Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 39 (1869), 188–232; “Account of an Excursion into the Interior of Southern Arabia,” *The Journal of Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 41 (1871), 210–245.

⁸⁸ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 196.

type is easily recognized.”⁸⁹ Through explicit physically racializing language, which appears throughout his accounts, Halévy both distanced himself from the converts and acknowledged a shared Jewish type, a tension that reverberates throughout his ethnography.

After stopping in Massawa, Halévy made his way to Ethiopia, where he set up camp with the Anglo-Indian army on a campaign to free Stern and his fellow missionaries from imprisonment. Halévy decided to travel with the English because the country was torn by civil wars, and Tewodros had been imprisoning all foreigners he found suspicious. While waiting in the Anglo-Indian camp, Halévy wasted no time. He wrote that he spent his days “learning Hindustani, and even Chinese” for prospective expeditions to Asia, which, he believed, in true colonial style, “offers a vast and fertile field, which it would be glorious to cultivate.”⁹⁰ But given the slow pace of the army, Halévy decided to ride out independently. With his own retinue of indigenous servants, astride a camel and wielding a rifle, Halévy passed himself off as a rhinoceros dealer. This disguise, deemed inconspicuous in the imperial landscape, points to the violence of outsiders coming in to poach and to extract different forms of information, plant and animal species, and human “specimen.” This was done both explicitly by traders, explorers, and colonial officers and more insidiously by ethnographers like Halévy.

In his first letter to the Alliance, Halévy presented a geographical landscape beset with markers of difference. “I am writing you this letter near the ruins of ancient Adulis, situated five hours more from the south of Massouah,” he began. “I am living in a hut in the middle of a desert plain...”⁹¹ With mention of ruins, a hut, and desert, he conjured a vision of

⁸⁹ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1867, 18. This first letter to the Alliance was printed in the *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1867, 17-19 and reprinted in *Jewish Chronicle*, November 29, 1867, 5; *L'Univers Israélite* December 1867, 179-181.

⁹⁰ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January 1, 1868, 57. His second letter to the Alliance was printed in *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January 1, 1868, 57-60 and reprinted in *Jewish Chronicle*, January 17, 1868, 5; *L'Univers Israélite* 2/1868 (6), 278-280.

⁹¹ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1867, 18.

Africa, an isolated location in which a racialized “tribe” like the Beta Israel appeared natural. Halévy further described how he traversed hundreds of miles of “wild regions” and “savage land” by camel, hearing the howls of lions and leopards, contending with wild beasts and “barbarous tribes.”⁹² Through the shared racialized signifiers of savage, wild, and barbarous, Halévy conflated the land and those living on it.

Despite the difficulties he encountered, Halévy persisted in his mission. He concluded one letter, “You see, gentlemen, that I do everything man can do in order to fulfill my mission; neither mountains, barbarous tribes, nor a thousand deprivations and perils will stop my desire to seek out my Abyssinian brethren...”⁹³ And so, after traveling for several weeks, he first encountered a Beta Israel community. Approaching an area where they were said to live, Halévy reported:

Men and women cried out with astonishment at the sight of my complexion and of my dress...[several men] surrounded me, though at a considerable distance. They appeared uncomfortable, and when I wished to go near them, they drew back...this cold reception was beginning to be unpleasant to me; I could not understand their strange ways, but I determined to be patient.⁹⁴

Halévy remained resolute: “‘Oh, my brethren,’ I replied, ‘I am not only a European; I am, like you, an Israelite. I come, not to trade in Abyssinia, but to inquire into the state of my co-religionists, in conformity with the desire of a great Jewish Association existing in my country. You must know, my dear brethren, that I also am a Falasha!’”⁹⁵ According to his account, they scoffed: “What! You a Falasha! A white Falasha! You are laughing at us! Are there any white Falashas?”⁹⁶ In producing the phrase “white Falasha,” the Beta Israel remove

⁹² Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 230, 206. As Halévy wrote in a letter to the AIU: “Thank God, no harm has come to me, if not the attack of a hyena near the well; it was enormous, but it was not long before it was hit with several bullets from my gun and finished with spears by my companions” (*Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January 1, 1868, 60). See also Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 199.

⁹³ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January 1, 1868, 58.

⁹⁴ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 214.

⁹⁵ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 215. Interestingly, this claim of shared kinship came just prior to a point when Jews and non-Jews began to racially distinguish between Jewish racial types. See Maurice Fishberg, *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment*. (London, New York: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd., 1911); John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Mitchell Hart, *Jews & Race: Writings on Identity and Difference, 1880-1940* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2011).

⁹⁶ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 215.

skin color from the term “Falasha.” This speaks to the ambiguities lodged within these terms which oscillate between denoting intimacy and distance in different ways, both religious and racial. Their incredulity at the existence of a “white Falasha” was further reinforced by the fact that Christian missionaries like Stern had identified themselves as “white Falashas” to gain access for their missions. Only mention of his recent visit to Jerusalem transformed their disbelief into curiosity. “I must confess,” Halévy wrote, “I was deeply moved on seeing those black faces light up at the memory of our glorious history.”⁹⁷ Curiosity soon became congeniality and the Beta Israel welcomed him into their community.

From this initial encounter, Halévy would go on to visit a number of different Beta Israel communities. He spoke with community leaders and elders and he collected ethnographic information about the Beta Israel whom he visited and stayed with, he ate with and prayed with. His ethnographic writing describes their clothing, hair styles, eating practices; it illustrates the organization of villages, and the interiors of their homes. It delves into their language use and “the Falasha tongue,” which “contains many guttural sounds and nasal consonants, which are very difficult to express by the Latin or Semitic alphabet.”⁹⁸ Through each of these aspects, Halévy emphasized differences that mark the Beta Israel as Other.

Halévy paid particular attention to their religious life. He determined that the Beta Israel form a distinct faction of Judaism in following a more biblical Judaism, rather than rabbinic Judaism prevalent throughout most Jewish communities.⁹⁹ He featured these religious differences in his ethnographic writing, explaining that the house of worship, complete with a Holy of Holies “appears more like that of an ancient sanctuary than that of

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Halévy writes: “Having no knowledge of the oral law, their conduct is regulated by customs derived from a peculiar system of interpreting the sacred text which is not in accordance with the explication of other Jewish sects” (*Travels in Abyssinia*, 231).

⁹⁹ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 231.

our modern synagogues.”¹⁰⁰ He described the roles of priests and Nazarites, the altars for animal sacrifices, and adherence to purity laws, including ablutions, the receiving of impure money in a vessel of water, the seclusion of the ritually impure, and the rejection of articles of consumption made by unclean hands.¹⁰¹ Particularly annoyed by this last set of practices, Halévy noted that, “I was obliged to throw away my water skin, which I had purchased from the Arabs...”¹⁰²

Through a focus on adherence to biblical practices and purity laws, even those like hand-washing that originated later, Halévy cast the Beta Israel as a biblical relic from another era, untouched by time. He conveyed his sense of wonder, writing that, “I was surprised to find these ancient Mosaic observances still in full force in Abyssinia...”¹⁰³ and that “Their usages and ceremonies are the marvel of the theologian.”¹⁰⁴ Halévy racializes the Beta Israel by temporally relocating them in the past and distinguishing himself and Europeans more generally as being more developmentally advanced.¹⁰⁵ Despite his claims of shared religion, he nevertheless explicitly acknowledged his distance from them, emphasized by the discourse of wonder.¹⁰⁶ Here cultural differentiation reinforces Beta Israel racial distinction.¹⁰⁷

Despite these religious divergences, Halévy insisted on Judaism as the base of their kinship. He wrote that, “The Falashas worship the one God, and see him as the God of their

¹⁰⁰ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 93.

¹⁰¹ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 92; Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 217; .

¹⁰² Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 222.

¹⁰³ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 217.

¹⁰⁴ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 96. Notably, Halévy writes: “They were much surprised to learn that the laws of sacrifice and purification had fallen into disuse among the rest of the Jews in the world...They persisted in believing that we were not going the right way, and said that if they were placed as we are, they would act differently” (*Travels in Abyssinia*, 222-223). This echoes the reply given to the letter written by the prominent Jerusalemite rabbis and carried to Abyssinia by Daniel ben Haninah in which the Beta Israel countered their presumption of authentic Judaism with conviction in their own practices.

¹⁰⁵ Pierre, “Anthropology and the Race of/for Africa.”

¹⁰⁶ In another instance, the Beta Israel attempt give Halévy “an amulet, which they assured me would prove efficacious against the perils of the journey. I refused it...” (Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 217). He highlights his distance from them by depicting them as superstitious in contrast to his allegedly more rational form of Judaism.

¹⁰⁷ Pierre, “Anthropology and the Race of/for Africa,” 50.

ancestors, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They believe that they belong to this ancient nation.”¹⁰⁸ Yet validating their Jewish identity required reckoning with their race.

Halévy distanced the Beta Israel from the Blackness of other Africans, reporting that they have “skin more or less black, without being the negro type.”¹⁰⁹ He further asserted that, “The very African color of their complexion seems to protest against such pretention [that they are Jewish]; but the wonderful finesse of their features and the lively intelligence that shines on these black faces silences all doubts and objections.”¹¹⁰ What made the Beta Israel racially Jewish, according to Halévy, was not their skin, which worked against a presumed Jewish somatic norm rooted in whiteness, but their “lively intelligence” that distinguished them from their neighbors. Further, he emphasized that, “They are Jews by their ardent faith, by their study of the law and the prophets, which they read in the temples and they teach to their children. If their complexion distinguishes them from us who are born under a clearer sky, their beautiful feelings and their virtues must make us proud of our kinship with them.”¹¹¹ For Halévy, in spite of their skin color, a racialized notion of their intellect and their religious conviction formed the basis of their kinship and marked them as capable of uplift and progress. Through this emphasis on kinship, Halévy sought to incorporate the Beta Israel into the AIU’s civilizing mission.

After eight months of ethnographic study and travel, Halévy decided to return to France. But before leaving, “A young Falasha, named Daniel, who was a native of Balagueb, in Dambia, and a near kinsman of Abba Jeremiah, manifested his desire to follow me to France.”¹¹² According to Halévy, Adhanan implored him, “‘Sir,’ he says to me, ‘bring me to France. I will gladly endure the fatigue of the trip, I will ask for neither gold nor silver, I ask

¹⁰⁸ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 90.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 90.

¹¹¹ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 101.

¹¹² Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 250.

only for knowledge.’”¹¹³ Halévy later explained that as a weaver, Adhanan earned his own livelihood; rather than remuneration, he was primarily interested in learning Hebrew.¹¹⁴

Though we may never know the accuracy of this account, this may have been a moment of refusal, in which Adhanan refused to be left behind to live a known life, but saw in Halévy a pathway to new possibilities, unbounded by the economic, political, and social constraints that the Beta Israel lived in Ethiopia.

Halévy noted that he was unwilling to bring Adhanan with him without the consent of his parents and community, but that the community leaders and members cried out,

Praise be to God who inspired our brothers in Europe to take interest in us! We know little how to read and even less how to write, but our ignorance is not willful, it is imposed on us by poverty. Teach us if you love us; set up schools in our villages, and we will send our children there with joy. In waiting, we send you one of ours; raise him up in the law and in science. We will need him in the future.¹¹⁵

Whether apocryphal or not, Halévy portrayed the Beta Israel as imploring him to save them from their own ignorance and poverty by educating Adhanan and establishing schools.

Halévy recalled that they were “begging me to take him to Europe, that he might be instructed in languages and science, and be enabled, on his return among them, to acquaint them accurately with what he had seen and learnt.”¹¹⁶ Halévy observed that the young man was “intelligent” and “appeared very willing and ready to receive the benefits of education.”¹¹⁷ Acquiescing to his request, Halévy soon set off together with Adhanan on the long and arduous journey from Ethiopia to Paris.

They had not traveled far before they first found themselves in conflict with one another. As Halévy recounted, “On leaving Matamma, I had bought some gourds to carry water for my Falasha, who refused to drink from skins which he considered impure.”¹¹⁸

¹¹³ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 102.

¹¹⁴ Halévy writes that “before leaving, he sold a shamma he had just completed, and sent its produce to his parents” (*Travels in Abyssinia*, 251).

¹¹⁵ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 102.

¹¹⁶ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 250.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 252.

Already from the outset, Halévy asserted possession of Adhanan, “my Falasha,” claiming him as his own. But after carrying water in gourds on camelback, they had broken, and “my Falasha, who was overcome by an unendurable thirst, became at length so irritable that my patience was put to a very severe test.”¹¹⁹ Finally, “It was only at a last extremity that he determined to break through the rigorous custom of his sect, and to use the most indispensable articles of food although prepared by Mussulmans.”¹²⁰ Not only does Halévy repeatedly assert his possession of “my Falasha”, but he also showed irritation with Adhanan’s adherence to purity laws while traveling rather than any empathy with his predicament. Here Halévy claims both the primacy of his interpretation of Judaism and his own personal authority over Adhanan.

After trekking miles along circuitous routes, they made it to Massawa, where they caught a steamship to Egypt. After they had sailed from Egypt to Marseilles, on July 21, 1868, Halévy dispatched a telegram to the Alliance, alerting his benefactors of his imminent return: “Trip to Abyssinia successful. Satisfactory results. Documents collected. Relations established with our brethren. Accompanied by a young falasha -Joseph Halévy.”¹²¹

Throughout his expedition, Halévy strategically claimed shared racial kinship with the Beta Israel in order to advance the work of the AIU in Ethiopia and to incorporate the Beta Israel into its civilizing mission. But Halévy’s claims were not always mutual; the Beta Israel highlighted their racial difference by referring to Halévy as “white Felasha.” His claims were further complicated by his own racializing accounts of the Beta Israel. In these accounts, Halévy marshalled various racializing discourses that distanced the Beta Israel as darker-skinned, belonging to a savage landscape and earlier era, a biblical relic with bizarre and

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ AIU FR XI A 79, 23. Reprinted in *Jewish Chronicle*, July 24, 1868, 5; *The Occident*, September 1, 1868, 285.

wondrous customs. In portraying the Beta Israel as imploring him to save them from their own ignorance, Halévy constructs them as racialized subjects in need of aid. It was his oscillation between intimacy and distance and a precarious sense of kinship that would continue to gird debates about the true identity of the Beta Israel.

Fallout from the Expedition: Aftershocks and Accusations

Their arrival in Paris caused a flurry in the international Jewish press. Newspapers celebrating Halévy's return highlighted Adhanan's "moving and expressive features."¹²² They reported that, "Halévy has returned accompanied by a very young Falasha susceptible to instruction. He has completely black skin like a negro, but his features are normal and he has traces of Jewish beauty. His nose is straight and his lips are shapely."¹²³ Racialized depictions such as these circulated in newspapers from Jerusalem to Prussia, London to New York and San Francisco.

From the beginning, the press had generated widespread public interest in the Beta Israel across the Jewish world. In tracking and printing reports on missionary activities, appeals and volunteers for an expedition, and updates on Halévy's journey and his return with Adhanan, newspapers served as a catalyst for action, a means of locating qualified professionals, a place to publicly support or denounce, and a forum for debate. By reporting the details of Halévy's expedition in the press, the papers amplified the story into a matter of public concern. In documenting Halévy's return with Adhanan, the press circulated highly racialized descriptions of Adhanan's nose, his lips, eyes, hair, and skin, that, entangled with debates over whether the Beta Israel were Jews, appeared in papers across the Ottoman

¹²² *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 86.

¹²³ *Archives Israélites*, September 1, 1868, 809, reprinted in *The Occident*, October 1, 1868, 333.

Empire, Russian Empire, France, Germany, England, and the United States. These descriptions further reinforced the assumption of a white Jewish body.

Days after his return, Halévy attended an AIU meeting on July 30, 1868 to give an in-depth report of his expedition and to present Adhanan to the Central Committee.¹²⁴ Halévy opened his address to the Committee by proclaiming:

Gentlemen, a new path is opening itself up to your activity. The ancient land of Ethiopia at last reveals to you the secret of that population which remained unknown other than the name of the Falashas, who, faithful to the sublime truths of the Code of Sinai, have traversed the most diverse phases of social life, and, notwithstanding their disasters, have lost nothing of the vigor necessary to raise them to the height of the new spirit which animates our modern society.¹²⁵

Here he invoked the racializing trope of Ethiopia as an “ancient land”, untouched by time, unknown and mysterious in its secrets. He then affirmed the ability of the Beta Israel to be raised up along the evolutionary hierarchy of peoples. By opening the “new path” to Ethiopia and revealing “the secret” of the Beta Israel, Halévy positioned himself as their savior bringing them into the ken of the AIU and thus up the developmental spectrum and into modernity.

Halévy then proceeded to deliver a detailed ethnographic report of the Beta Israel. He spoke of “A considerable population, more or less black, but not of the negro type, scattered over the vast plain which extends from the southern bank of the Facazzé to the banks of the Blue river, [that] boasts of belonging to the same stock of our men of God and our prophets.”¹²⁶ Halévy estimated the Beta Israel population at 100,00-250,000 people, and listed the regions in which they lived.¹²⁷ In starting his report with a review of the topography

¹²⁴ Halévy’s report first appeared in the *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 85-102. It was reprinted soon after in *Archives Israelites*, October 15, 1868, 936-944; *Jewish Chronicle*, October 16, 1868, 3; *The Occident*, November 1, 1868, 369-381; *Ha-Carmel*, August 24, 1868, 154; *Ha-Levanon*, September 23, 1868, 590-592 and October 7, 1868, 599-608; *Ha-Magid*, November 11, 1868, 356, November 18, 1868, 356, and December 2, 1868, 372. It even appeared in the *London Times*. See *Jewish Chronicle*, September 3, 1869, 10.

¹²⁵ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 85.

¹²⁶ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 90.

¹²⁷ Though Halévy acknowledges that, “The figure of the Falasha population appears to be rather considerable: but given the great expanse of the country and the isolated situation of their establishments, it is impossible to establish a complete statistic of inhabitants” (*Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 98).

of Ethiopia and demographics of the Beta Israel, he reproduced the tone and content of French military ethnography. He then proceeded to essentialize the Beta Israel as “artless and worthy people,” “warm-hearted and noble-minded.”¹²⁸ In suggesting that their backwardness was a result of their environment in Ethiopia, “where the difficulties of life tend to degrade all the faculties of man,” Halévy echoed a common tenet of the Enlightenment and the AIU and emphasized the Beta Israel’s capacity for regeneration.¹²⁹

In contrast to the potential of the Beta Israel, Halévy diagnosed the “Ethiopic race” with “evident symptoms of decay” and declared that overcoming their “indifference and thorough debasement” was a hopeless task.¹³⁰ Perhaps with Adhanan in mind, he wrote that, “While the Abyssinian pretends to know everything and considers it a loss of dignity to learn from a European, the Falashah avows his ignorance and evinces a great desire to be instructed. Less indolent and more insightful than their neighbors, the Falashahs can change in a short time, so as to assume the manners of civilized nations.”¹³¹ In attributing their backwardness to their years among non-Jewish neighbors and noting their unique capacity for regeneration, Halévy’s evaluation reflected the same logic as his racial assessment of the Beta Israel. They are black, but not as dark as their neighbors; they are uncivilized, but not so uncivilized that they cannot be regenerated, unlike their neighbors, who—like Blacks in the colonies or Muslims in Algeria, both undeserving of citizenship—are fundamentally irredeemable. Even when presenting the Beta Israel in a more positive light, Halévy overtly racialized them by placing them along the hierarchy of racial development.

After providing the complete account of his journey and ethnographic report on the Beta Israel’s “moral and material state” and their “ways of living,” Halévy concluded with an

¹²⁸ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 220.

¹²⁹ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 226. See also chapter one for a discussion of environmental determinism.

¹³⁰ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 201. Halévy also stresses this in his description of the Beta Israel justice system, in which “Each person defends his cause with great eloquence” rather than violence, unlike the surrounding population (*Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 95).

¹³¹ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 97.

impassioned plea for European Jewry to intervene, reiterating that the Beta Israel “show a great desire to be regenerated” and pointing to Adhanan as proof:¹³²

These men who have never been outside their homeland and were rocked in inveterate prejudices against white people, decided to send one of theirs to a distant country, under the guarantee of this Jewish traveler who spoke to them of instruction. No, gentlemen, such a nation only hopes to draw close to us and to share with us the benefits of civilization.¹³³

He proposed that the AIU establish a school in Matamma near the Sudanese border as a central point of AIU activity for the region, and especially underscored the need to teach Hebrew “in order to purify the religious ideas of this sect.”¹³⁴

According to minutes from the AIU meeting, Halévy then placed Adhanan center stage. Halévy declared that, “He comes to you to implore the Alliance to give him a religious and scientific education, so that he may one day be a teacher and civilizer of myriads of men eager for enlightenment. I will leave it to him to express to you his aspirations and gratitude. He speaks Amharic, his mother tongue; I will represent in French the exact sense of his words.”¹³⁵ In the meeting minutes, Adhanan’s speech as translated by Halévy is recorded only in summary notes rather than verbatim:

Mr. Daniel, young Falasha, declared to be the interpreter of his brothers, presents to the meeting their gratitude to the Alliance for the interest that they have shown. He was sent to Europe to learn the holy language and sciences, and to return capable of one day himself undertaking instruction among his compatriots. He is entrusted to the hands of the Alliance. He asks for its protection, and the Committee welcomes him with the hope of finding in him an intermediary to establish relations between the Alliance and the Falashas.¹³⁶

Adhanan’s words, ostensibly translated and abstracted, are doubly removed from the record.

Halévy concluded by proposing that the AIU establish a school in Matamma near the Sudanese border as a central point of AIU activity for the region.

Adhanan’s appearance at the Central Committee meeting led the AIU to conclude that the Beta Israel “belong to the great Israelite family, and we do not want them to remain

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 102.

¹³⁴ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 235, 227.

¹³⁵ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 86.

¹³⁶ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 73.

faraway.”¹³⁷ To achieve this, Adhanan was enrolled in the Alliance’s recently-established teacher training school, the *École Normale Israélite Orientale*.¹³⁸ Following his appearance at the Central Committee meeting, soon thereafter Adhanan attended a much larger AIU General Assembly meeting, open to all of its members, where he “was shown to the public, and he was given an ovation.”¹³⁹ Adhanan appeared before these Alliance audiences as concrete evidence of their work and achievement in seeking out and raising up their brethren in need.

Yet not everyone at the AIU believed Halévy’s report of his expedition. According to Halévy, Charles Netter, an Alsatian businessman and prominent member of the Central Committee, “formally accused me in front of the Commission of never having been in Abyssinia and even refused to have faith in the young Falasha I brought from Dembeya with me, to be placed in the *École Orientale* of the Alliance, in asserting that he was a negro who I had bought in a slave market in Sudan.”¹⁴⁰ For Netter, the young man’s race was physical proof of the impossibility of his Jewishness. In fact, Netter explained Adhanan’s Blackness by asserting that, since he could not possibly be a Jew, he must be a slave purchased from a Sudanese slave market. There is perhaps a bit of irony here. When Halévy first met the Beta-Israel, they cried in disbelief: “What! You a Falasha! A White Falasha! You are laughing at us! Are there any white Falashas?”¹⁴¹ While they did not trust that Halévy was Jewish

¹³⁷ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 28.

¹³⁸ *Jewish Chronicle*, February 19, 1869, 6. There he joined students from Poland, Hungary, Turkey, Palestine, and Morocco whose studies lasted one or two years and were comprised of Hebrew language and literature, European languages, history, math, physics, chemistry, world history. According to an AIU report, the students “derive great benefit from the lessons they receive, instruct themselves further by everything they see or hear, and seem to be inspired by that marvelous ardor which had led to so many wonderful discoveries in science, arts, and all spheres of human activity. Some of our pupils will soon be able to take the place of masters in the schools they have left; and the example they will give to their fellow-pupils will be a great incentive to work and a great benefit to the schools” (*Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January 11, 1869, 26). For more on ENIO, see footnote 7 above.

¹³⁹ *L’Univers Israélite*, February 2, 1869, 299.

¹⁴⁰ Halévy recounts the incident decades later in a footnote to an article on the Beta Israel. See Joseph Halévy, “Une Lettre Amharique Des Falachas Ou Juifs d’Abyssinie,” *Revue Sémitique d’Épigraphie et d’histoire Ancienne* 14 (1906): 94–95.

¹⁴¹ Halévy, *Travels in Abyssinia*, 215.

because of his white skin, Netter did not trust that Adhanan was Jewish because of his black skin. Given Netter's prominent place in the AIU—he was one of the six founding members of the AIU and his home served as its first meeting place—these accusations carried extra weight.¹⁴² Netter was a stalwart defender of the founding vision of the AIU, a vision that, in his mind, repudiated both Joseph Halévy as a fraudulent upstart, and Adhanan as a Sudanese slave.

Jolted by these allegations against him, Halévy leapt to defend himself. In November of 1868, Halévy sent a letter to the Alliance regarding the “many serious accusations that cast a shadow on my character and undermine the truth of my report.”¹⁴³ In order to clear his name, Halévy wrote that, “I take the liberty of begging you in the name of holy personal right; in the name of the esteem that you have granted me up to this moment; finally, in the name of the dignity of your society, which is that of Judaism as a whole. 1) Agree to immediately summon an assembly, in which Mr. Netter and I can give the necessary explanations to judge which side is right 2) Create a commission as soon as possible to examine the veracity and the merit of my report on the Falashas.”¹⁴⁴ The Alliance did confer with Werner Munzinger, the consul of France, who had met with Halévy in Massawa and attested to his presence there. The Alliance also enlisted the help of French explorer and ethnographer Antoine d’Abbadie, who had made extensive trips to Ethiopia. After arranging a meeting between Halévy and d’Abaddie, according to AIU meeting minutes, “Mr.

¹⁴² For an account of the AIU's founding, see Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews : The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Netter was a businessman originally from Alsace who would later establish the AIU's agricultural school, *Mikve Israel*, in Palestine in 1870. For more details, see Derek Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy: The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870-1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

¹⁴³ Halévy letter to the AIU, November 15, 1868, France XI A 79, 20.

¹⁴⁴ Halévy letter to the AIU, November 15, 1868, France XI A 79, 21.

d'Abbadie sees Mr. Halévy as one of the most honest and most intelligent travelers he has met in his long career.”¹⁴⁵

But the veracity of Halévy's report and the true identity of Adhanan had become questions of public concern and spurred a series of editorials in the Jewish press. The editor of *L'Univers Israélite* lamented that Halévy had not brought more proof of such a significant expedition: “When taking on an enterprise of such seriousness, which moreover requires considerable material sacrifices, and which must then fix in the most clear way the history of a modern and ancient branch of Judaism, no proof, no verification is neither too much nor indispensable.”¹⁴⁶ Halévy had argued that he had not brought a letter from the Beta Israel because knowledge of writing was not widespread and foreigners carrying letters were seen as particularly suspicious. Yet the editor challenged these explanations, arguing that literacy need not be widespread to find someone able to write, and that surely a letter with professions of brotherhood would not arouse suspicion.¹⁴⁷

The editor of *L'Univers Israélite* further took offense that the Beta Israel sent Adhanan. “What!” he exclaimed, “200,000 Falashas chose a child of fifteen years to represent them in France and Europe!” Given Adhanan's inability to speak French, the editor also did not trust Halévy's supposed translation of Adhanan's address to the Alliance.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January 1, 1869, 3-4. The report further states that, “The large amount of information, both new and precise, collected by Mr. Halévy about the country that he traversed has allowed Mr. d'Abbadie to note in the traveler such a degree of energy, of devotion, and scientific aptitude that he will bring himself to get a mission of the French government.”

¹⁴⁶ *L'Univers Israélite* 11/1868 no. 3 p. 102-104

¹⁴⁷ “We ask him: does the art of writing need to be *widespread* to find, among a population estimated by Mr. Halévy himself to be 150,000 or 200,000 peoples, the heads of communities, priests, scholars who know how to address a letter of gratitude or request to the Alliance Israelite from whom they expect, according to the traveler, so many services and benefits? Truly, we cannot accept it. But is there danger for the carrier of a non-commercial letter? We ask how a letter read by the police or the authorities in the country and containing a greeting, thanks, and fraternal sentiments expressed by the Israelites of Abyssinia for their coreligionists in France, how such a letter could make the carrier seem to be a spy” (*L'Univers Israélite*, November 1868 (3), 103).

¹⁴⁸ The editor wrote: “The author of the report [Halévy] adds: ‘I will let he himself express to you his aspirations and thanks himself. He speaks Amharic, his mother tongue. *I will translate for you in French the exact meaning of his words.*’ Here what Mr. Halévy calls ‘let he *himself* express to you his thoughts!’” (*L'Univers Israélite*, November 1868 (3), 104).

Years later, *L'Univers Israélite* dismissed both Adhanan and Halévy's work completely, arguing that, "Despite the expensive mission sent by the Alliance to the country where the wild Theodoros rules, we still know almost nothing about the Abyssinian Jews. The sight of a young man of black color and frizzy hair that we possess is not enough to satisfy our curiosity."¹⁴⁹

In response, Joseph Derenbourg, an orientalist and member of the AIU's Central Committee, penned an editorial in support of Halévy. He invoked the expertise of d'Abbadie, who had reported that "Mr. Halévy spoke to him of a large number of details that could not have learned except by being in the country, and that the knowledge of Mr. Halévy on the language, beliefs, and customs of the Falashas had to have been the fruit of an extended stay among them."¹⁵⁰ Despite the controversy, the AIU sided with Derenbourg and committed to supporting Halévy as he worked on a book manuscript about the Beta Israel.¹⁵¹

Halévy explained that his proposed publication of *Essay on the Falachas* would "attempt to throw some light on the problems of history, of ethnography, and of theology relative to Jews and to other inhabitants of Abyssinia. It will make known domestic and social life, the degree of culture and morality attained by the Falashahs."¹⁵² After years of preparing the manuscript for publication, it was ready at the printer's office when the AIU reported that it was lost in the fires and turmoil of the Paris Commune of 1871: "During the siege of that city by the Germans and the general troubles and confusion which the calamity brought over the whole population, it was lost, and has not been recovered since."¹⁵³ Halévy attributed this loss to Netter's "wanton accusation" that was denied, "But the deplorable

¹⁴⁹ *L'Univers Israélite*, January 15, 1870, 297.

¹⁵⁰ *L'Univers Israélite*, April 15, 1869, 459-460.

¹⁵¹ The AIU reported that, "Mr. Halévy collected precious information about their history, their social state, their religion, their liturgy; they will be the object of a book that we will soon publish" (*Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 28).

¹⁵² *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, July 1, 1868, 86.

¹⁵³ *Jewish Chronicle*, November 16, 1877, 6.

impression remained among the Committee and would cause the loss of an extended memoir of my trip that I submitted to the Bureau of the Alliance before leaving for Southern Arabia. I was told that it fell prey to flames during the troubles of the Commune.”¹⁵⁴ It is true that although the Alliance supported Halévy’s work on his manuscript and allocated money to send copies of the bible to the Beta Israel, the accusations levied against Halévy cast a pall over the expedition and the AIU took no further action.¹⁵⁵ Embittered and demoralized by his experience, Halévy abandoned a proposed Jewish mission to “discover” Jews in China and instead undertook an expedition from the famed Semiticist and philologist Ernest Renan to travel to Yemen to gather inscriptions on behalf of the Parisian *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*.¹⁵⁶

But before setting off on his next journey to Yemen, Halévy toured the circuit of Parisian learned societies. In January 1869, he spoke of his mission at the *Société Philologique* and the *Société Française de Numismatique*. That same month, d’Abbadie introduced Halévy to the *Société de Géographie* and brought him to the *Société d’Anthropologie*, which he attended with Adhanan in tow.¹⁵⁷ At the meeting of the *Société d’Anthropologie*, Paul Broca, the founder of the society, thanked d’Abbadie for bringing Adhanan, for “it is very precious for the society to be able to observe a living subject today.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Halévy, “Une Letter Amharique Des Falachas Ou Juifs d’Abyssinie,” 95.

¹⁵⁵ *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, January 1, 1869, 7. He would later publish prolifically on philology, archaeology, and Semitics, and become a professor of Ethiopic at the *École pratique des hautes études* and the librarian for the *Société Asiatique*.

¹⁵⁶ For a detailed and insightful examination of this expedition, see Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen*.

¹⁵⁷ For references to his appearances at the first two societies, see *Jewish Chronicle*, February 5, 1869. His lecture at the *Société de Géographie* was printed together with ethnographic maps in the *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 1869 no. 17, 270-294. Halévy, Adhanan, and d’Abbadie attended the meeting of the *Société d’Anthropologie* on January 21, 1869. For a complete report, see the *Bulletin de la Société d’Anthropologie* 1/1869, 64-76.

¹⁵⁸ *Bulletin de la Société d’Anthropologie* 1/1869, 65. This figure of the “living subject” appeared in nineteenth-century world fairs, colonial exhibitions, museums, and zoological gardens across Europe in ways that claimed the incommensurable difference between Europeans and those on display. When travelling exhibits of peoples from faraway places visited the *Jardin zoologique d’acclimatation*, anthropologists, including those of the *Société d’Anthropologie*, studied them as “living specimen.” While there is a large body of scholarship on the

Based on his observations of Adhanan, Broca diverged from Halévy in his racial assessment of the Beta Israel. He observed to all present that, “the Jews of Abyssinia have nothing in common with the Semitic type,” but neither are they “truly negroes.”¹⁵⁹ Rather, “their complexion is in general less dark” and their hair is “usually curly or frizzy, they are often woolly.” He added that though their features are “generally rather regular, sometimes even beautiful,” they have thicker lips and higher cheekbones. But their most distinguishing feature, Broca highlighted, is their “long and straight nose, sometimes even aquiline, which is neither flattened at the bottom nor in the nostrils.” He then turned towards Adhanan as “living subject”, pronouncing:

But even this is not constant, because the young Falasha presented to us by Mr. D’Abaddie has less flattened nostrils and his nose is a little short although quite salient. You will further notice that his mouth is very large; his lips, fat and protruding, are a little rolled up. His facial angle is as sharp as that of the negroes. His hair, without being completely woolly, is as woolly as that of many racially pure negroes. Finally, his complexion, without being completely black, is darker than that of first-blood mulattos, and it is incontestable that this young man, *we can say it in front of him, since he cannot understand us*, is a mestizo/crossbreed closer to the negro type than the Caucasian type.¹⁶⁰

Broca concluded that “there is no doubt, from the example that is before our eyes, that they descend from an autochthonous negro race, mitigated by its crossing with one or more races with straight hair.”¹⁶¹ Broca justified the discussion of downgrading Adhanan from Semitic to mulatto in front of him because of the language barrier, but also, perhaps, because he is merely a “living subject,” “an example that is before our eyes.” Standing before an audience of anthropologists, geographers, and colonial officers, Adhanan faced those who scrutinized his hair, his eyes, his nose and lips, and passed judgment. This moment captures the violence

exhibition of humans, some sources that focus particularly on Europe include Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David, and Dominic Richard David Thomas, *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations*, Routledge Studies in Cultural History 28 (New York: Routledge, 2014); Pascal Blanchard, *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: University Press, 2008); Pascal Blanchard et al., *Human Zoos: The Invention of the Savage* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2011); Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); James Smalls, “‘Race’ As Spectacle in Late-Nineteenth-Century French Art and Popular Culture,” *French Historical Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003): 351–82.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid; *Bulletin de la Société d’Anthropologie* 1/1869, 67.

¹⁶⁰ Italics added. *Bulletin de la Société d’Anthropologie* 1/1869, 67-68.

¹⁶¹ *Bulletin de la Société d’Anthropologie* 1/1869, 71.

of nineteenth-century French anthropology, a violence predicted on race as an organizing principle grounded in the subjection of bodies and shrouded in the language and methods of science.

It is this attitude that we see crystallized in the ethnographic photographs of Adhanan that appear in “Album No. 5: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Tripolitania, Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia.” Taken in July 1869, these photographs depict Adhanan midway through the two-year program at the AIU’s *École Normale Israélite Orientale*. The following year, he would leave Paris, though historical accounts that mention Adhanan are unclear on the circumstances surrounding his departure. Some note that Adhanan left Paris immediately because he “could not withstand the climate of France” and was “unable to adjust to the alien environment.”¹⁶² Another writes that, “The Alliance, having lost their early enthusiasm, instead of keeping the young man in France sent him to Cairo.”¹⁶³ Yet Adhanan spent two years in Paris, possibly completing the two-year teacher training at the *École Orientale*.

In the spring of 1870, Adhanan set off on his journey back to Ethiopia. He reached Massawa, where, miles from his home, he took ill and died in a local hospital. Franz Hassen, the consular agent of France in Massawa, dispatched a telegram to the AIU, stating that, “To satisfy my obligation, I inform you that the student named Adhanan who arrived here from Paris around April died on November 3 in the local hospital of phthisis. I ask you to notify Mr. Antoine d’Abbadie and Mr. Joseph Halévy of the death of the deceased.”¹⁶⁴ Adhanan would never make it home to rejoin his family or community. Nor would he see his twin brother, Barok, who had stayed in Ethiopia and became the priest and head of his religious

¹⁶² Antébi, *Les missionnaires juifs de la France, 1860-1939*, 114; Waldman, *The Jews of Ethiopia*, 55.

¹⁶³ Kessler, *The Falashas*, 122.

¹⁶⁴ AIU France IV L 6.054.

community.¹⁶⁵ Barok presents us with the subjunctive, the question of what might have been that casts the violence of Adhanan's story in a glaring light.¹⁶⁶

It would be decades until the AIU took an active interest in the Beta Israel again. In 1904, a mission to the Beta Israel sponsored by Baron Edmond de Rothschild and led by Halévy's student, Jacques Faitlovitch, prompted the AIU to undertake its own counter-mission. In the wake of the second AIU mission, headed by Rabbi Haim Nahum, the future Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire in 1909, the AIU maintained its position of noninvolvement.¹⁶⁷ In his "Rapport sur les Falashas," Nahum concluded that the Beta Israel had primitive mental and moral capacities and would not benefit from the sophisticated schooling of the Alliance.¹⁶⁸ "We should not for a moment think of creating any educational programme in Abyssinia or Eritrea," he wrote. "We should not create dangerous illusions: we are dealing with a people whose intellectual capacity is not generally very highly developed...Any different behavior would mean destroying the mental equilibrium of the Falasha race."¹⁶⁹ Once again, the AIU decided against working with the Beta Israel, claiming they were an inferior race.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Jacques Faitlovitch, *Quer durch Abessinien: meine zweite reise zu den Falaschas* (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1910), 77.

¹⁶⁶ Lisa Lowe writes that, "The past conditional temporality of 'what could have been' symbolizes aptly the space of a different kind of thinking, a space of productive attention to the scene of loss, a thinking with twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science and the matters absent, entangled, and unavailable by its methods" (Lowe, "The Intimacies of Four Continents," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 208). See also Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism*, 2008; Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁶⁷ According to Nahum Goldmann's autobiography, Faitlovitch originally sought the AIU's support for his work with the Beta Israel. He writes that Salomon Reinach, the vice president of the AIU, allegedly refused, stating that, "There are too many Jews in the world already. We don't need the new problems new Jews will bring" (Nahum Goldmann, *The Autobiography of Nahum Goldmann: Sixty Years of Jewish Life*, trans. Helen Sebba (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 28).

¹⁶⁸ *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 37 (1909), 5-35.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Emanuela Trevisan Semi, *Jacques Faitlovitch and the Jews of Ethiopia* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), 34-35.

¹⁷⁰ Esther Benbassa, *Haim Nahum: A Sephardic Chief Rabbi in Politics, 1892-1923* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995); Tudor Parfitt, "Rabbi Nahoum's Anthropological Mission to Ethiopia," in *The Beta Israel in Ethiopia and Israel: Studies on Ethiopian Jews*, ed. Tudor Parfitt and Emanuela Trevisan Semi (Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 1-14; Emanuela Trevisan Semi, *Jacques Faitlovitch and the Jews of Ethiopia* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007); Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen*, 19.

Conclusion

Narrating the encounter between Adhanan and the Alliance brings to the fore the AIU's racial politics of knowledge production, and specifically its practice of ethnography, which proved critical to its work, yet has largely remained a lacuna in the extensive scholarship on the AIU. Ethnography played a key role in the AIU's imperial approach in seeking to "discover," study, assess, and rank all Jewish communities along a racial hierarchy and developmental spectrum that determined where the AIU would work and with whom. A focus on ethnography highlights the AIU's racial politics, which emerge in relation to blackness and the AIU's racialization of the Beta Israel, whiteness and its civilizing mission, and how race has structured its archives.

Throughout this story, Halévy blurred different understandings of race. He strategically embraced an earlier conceptualization of race in claiming his genealogical kinship with the Beta Israel. Yet he also racialized the Beta Israel in ways that asserted his own domination and that of European Jewry more broadly. Halévy and the AIU mobilized multiple concepts—including physiognomy, culture, and notions of space and time—in order to produce Adhanan and the Beta Israel as racialized subjects in need of their aid. In this way, Halévy breaks down the distinction that some scholars have drawn between racist projects and racist projects.¹⁷¹ Were we to follow this distinction, we could easily map a racial position onto Halévy claiming the Beta Israel as racial kin and a more racist position onto Netter and Nahum. Although this defense of Halévy portrays his work as more benevolent, we see how he upholds racial inequality in his racialization of the Beta Israel and in his interpersonal relations with Adhanan. As a result, the fine line that scholars have drawn

¹⁷¹ Scholars have often delineated a racial view of the world where humanity is divided into different races but without presuming that it shapes how society is structured. In contrast, within a racist view, society does or should reflect these notions of hierarchy and domination. See, for example, Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*.

between racial and racist projects becomes unhelpful in this context, and even obfuscates Halévy's commitment and contribution to inequalities based on race.

The AIU encounter with the Beta Israel reveals how race arises not only in connection with the blackness of the Beta Israel, but how notions of whiteness were crucial to the AIU's work more broadly. Even as distinct actors within the AIU like Halévy and Netter staked out distinct positions, and "the AIU" comprised disparate voices rather than a monolithic whole, its fundamental orientation remained coherent in its embrace of a version of the French imperial project grounded in white supremacist logics, discourses, and structures. This is part of what renders this story — of Halévy's expedition to Ethiopia, the racial discourses surrounding the Beta Israel, and the accusations of fraud — as a key moment of racialization, not only for the Alliance but for the Jewish world more broadly. The debates over whether the Beta Israel were Jews revealed anxieties among French Jews over their own precarious emancipation and aspirations of belonging within France and white Europe more broadly. The French Jews of the AIU performed their French belonging and their whiteness by asserting themselves as gatekeepers of civilization, marshalling the same imperial mechanisms of racialization — scientific, anthropological, and otherwise — within the Jewish world to delineate boundaries, to bolster insiders and repudiate outsiders. It is in part through non-state actors such as the AIU that the same racializing discourses have carried across religions, time periods, and geographic spaces.

In this way, the AIU's racial politics shaped its policy decisions regarding which Jewish populations it considered worth investing in, and which it deemed undeserving of its attention, aid, and schooling. Netter's allegations reveal the limits of the AIU's discourse of solidarity and fraternity that it so strongly and consistently championed, demonstrating how it was circumscribed by racial logics rooted in white supremacy. Even if Netter's accusations were wrong, they were enough to halt action on behalf of the Beta Israel. Perhaps the AIU

decided that the Beta Israel were not Jewish or Jewish enough based on racializing logics, or that there was not enough public support. But the lack of action substantiated the accusations levied against the Beta Israel and Halévy, undoing his work and prestige. Framing this moment through the lens of race thus further highlights continuities with debates around white gatekeeping in the Jewish community and the intersection of Jewishness and Blackness that were reprised throughout the twentieth century and are still unfolding today.

A focus on Adhanan also reveals how the AIU archives remain structured by privileges of race and helps us to consider what a narrative of the Alliance might look like that takes into account power in the production of history.¹⁷² How did AIU members' interests shape how they saw and documented their world, and how do these documents continue to perpetuate historical silences?¹⁷³ Reading these archives critically underscores how we only hear the voice of Adhanan as ventriloquized by Halévy, translated and abstracted, distorted for a European audience. This highlights the productive tension of centering Adhanan; there is the need to tell his story knowing the inevitable inability of any attempt to fully represent him.¹⁷⁴

Further, attention to race helps to explain the dynamic of fascination with the Beta Israel, a desire to know their origins and their status as Jews, concurrent with their simultaneous disappearing, their exclusion from the AIU's network, from its history, and from its archives. This demonstrates how our traditional geographical associations of the AIU with North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and Iran is not incidental; rather, it reflects an act of disappearing in which its history in other regions of Africa was excluded. Attention to the role of race in the production of archives and historiography is key for a field that has centered the work of the AIU prominently, and which continues to rely so heavily on its

¹⁷² Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, 4.

¹⁷³ Fuentes, 5.

¹⁷⁴ Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 4.

archives. Failing to acknowledge how foundational race was to the work of the AIU, failing to trace these racializing discourses and to grapple with how indelibly they have shaped its archives, we run the risk of reifying them.

How can we hear those who only appear as “living subjects,” as anthropological specimens presented before audiences in travelogues, meeting minutes, and ethnographic portrait albums? What happens when “living subjects” become ethnographers themselves? As explored in the first three chapters of this study, many of those cast in need of the civilizing mission and living in the orbit of the Alliance in the Ottoman Empire followed in the footsteps of Halévy and went on to produce their own ethnographic works during the second half of the nineteenth century. As the AIU built its vast network of schools, Ottoman Sephardic Jews joined its ranks as administrators and teachers and enrolled their children. At its height, the Alliance network included 183 schools educating 43,700 students.¹⁷⁵ These AIU personnel and students drew on and spread the ideas and discourses of cultural and racial difference championed by the AIU that come to the fore in this account of Adhanan and the Alliance’s encounter with the Beta Israel. Applying race as an explicit analytic through this case study thus reframes the work of the AIU, helping us more broadly to rethink the Jewish history and historiography of the many communities in which the the AIU operated across Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Iran.

The racializing discourses and politics of knowledge production that emerged in this historical moment reverberated in the ethnographic writing produced by Ottoman Sephardic scholars, journalists, newspaper editors, and rabbis associated with the Alliance. Their ethnographic works illustrate how they transformed from “living subjects” in need of AIU aid and objects of the ethnographic gaze to producers of ethnographic knowledge in their own right. In examining their ethnographic works, as discussed in the previous chapters, Ottoman

¹⁷⁵ Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims*, 15.

Sephardic AIU students, teachers, and administrators internalized and projected such racializing discourses in writing about other Jewish communities across the Ottoman Empire, and sometimes autoethnographically about their own.

Conclusion: Tracing Ethnographic Afterlives

This study has examined how Ottoman Sephardic reformers first engaged with ideas about race and ethnography that were circulating globally; zoomed in to look how they applied them to provincial Ottoman subjects, including Other Jews; and then how they enacted them within their own communities in the urban centers of the empire. Finally, in re-examining the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* through the lens of race, it explored the racial ideas and discourses that shaped the many Sephardic reformers associated with the Alliance as students, teachers, and administrators. While the first chapter laid the foundation by taking a descriptive approach to race that sought to understand what it meant to Sephardic reformers as they racialized groups around the world, the following three chapters apply race as an explicit analytic in probing how they engaged in practices of racialization vis-à-vis Arab villagers and religious Jews in Ottoman Palestine, the Beta Israel in Ethiopia, or those in their own communities. They did so by levying the same racial scripts marshalled by non-Jews, invoking terminology, physiognomy and depictions of the body, descriptions of culture, and notions of space and time. Through these means, they distinguished between those they deemed more susceptible to progress, like themselves, and those who remained irredeemable. It was particularly through temporal discourses and relegating certain cultural practices to the past that reformers marked out the uncivilized for regeneration—including their own past selves, weighed down by the relics, fossils, and debris of yesteryear.

The many ambiguities and tensions that arise within these ethnographic works reflect the difficulty Sephardic Jews experienced as they worked to position themselves within an emergent and expanding global racial hierarchy. I demonstrate how race is key to understanding this era of reform by showing how Ottoman Sephardic Jews perceived their encounter with modernity as fraught, in part because it was shaped by racial ideas, aspirations, and anxieties. Doubly racialized as both Jews and those deemed “Orientals,”

Ottoman Sephardic Jews struggled against their own relegation to yesteryear. For them, ethnography, as a genre of knowledge production, and particularly one of race-making, became a key means to articulate their visions of reform that would yield a productive and educated, civilized and self-consciously modern population. Throughout, they took a range of stances, some wholeheartedly championing the reform of cultural practices, while others wavered or waxed nostalgic and lamented their disappearance, a sense of loss that would only intensify with the waves of emigration, the destruction of war, the dissolution of the Ottoman Sephardic heartland, and the devastation of the Holocaust. This contributes to the growing literature on how groups who were racialized themselves in the nineteenth century contended with racial ideas, how they internalized them, how they refracted or challenged them, or projected them onto others.

In focusing on ethnography, this study has examined the history and politics of knowledge production and representation among Ottoman Sephardic communities. Under the general rubric of knowledge production, we can identify new ideas, new contexts, and new knowledge technologies, and identify transformations within each. By the turn of the twentieth century, Ottoman Sephardic Jews looked very different than they had just fifty years ago. Children began to receive French-style educations in the many schools of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, and French became a Sephardic lingua franca. The preoccupation with productivity led to vocational schools, while a small number Jews enrolled in imperial academies and joined the Ottoman civil service, and the AIU prompted a socioeconomic upswing and the creation of a new middle class. Sephardic newspapers that rapidly sputtered and folded before the 1850s flourished in cities across the empire. These were just some of the many ways that these ideas about progress and civilization translated within Ottoman Sephardic communities.

As explored at various points in this study, this interest in ethnographic knowledge production and the desire for reform was shared by other Ottoman communities. If we take a step back, we can see this was part of a larger epistemological shift across the empire about what was considered good knowledge, true knowledge, what was scientific and authoritative and what was not. This same drawing of boundaries played out not only among Sephardic Jews, but also among both other religious communities in the empire, as well as Ottoman Muslim elites and bureaucrats working at the state level. New Ottoman state schools trained young men in new kinds of knowledge to prepare them for service as good, patriotic subjects. Historians who have focused on single communities—Jewish, Armenian, Muslim—have all noted this same pattern of change and we can put together these pieces to get a better sense of Ottoman intellectual history. Thus the engagement with science, ethnography, and race was not unique to Jews, but we cannot exclude Ottoman Jews and still understand the story of racial production in the empire.

These ethnographic and racial discourses would carry into Ottoman successor states and into the global Sephardic diaspora, traveling and transforming throughout the twentieth century. With the compounding wars and violence of the early twentieth century, from the Italo-Turkish War of 1911, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, and the World Wars, Ottoman Jews increasingly emigrated to new and old nodes within the global Sephardic diaspora. The remainder of the conclusion presents three short vignettes tracing just three of these ethnographic afterlives. They move between the 1920s on the island of Rhodes, once part of the Ottoman domain until it was occupied by Italy in 1912; the 1940s-1960s in British Mandate Palestine and the nascent state of Israel; and the 1980s in Los Angeles. Tracing these afterlives evinces the persistence of the ethnographic and racial ideas and discourses charted in this study, while also demonstrating how they transformed as they carried across decades and continents.

*

Ethnographic Types, Revisited

In 1928, fifteen-year-old Aron Amateau walked through the cobblestone streets of Rhodes with his new Leica camera, stopping to snap ethnographic photographs of the people he encountered.¹ “The Lupini bean seller,” an elderly man, squints in the bright sun, holding out a basket of beans that were a popular street snack. “The Greek Beggar” in stained and well-worn clothing, a bag tied with rope around his chest, waves at the camera. “A type, a pipe smoker,” a middle-aged man in full safari regalia complete with a white jacket and pants, tucked cravat, straw hat, and pipe, eyes the camera somewhat smugly, his head cocked to the side. These ethnographic “types” were the familiar cast of characters who colored life on the island of Rhodes.

Aron would soon leave them behind. Joining the rising tide of émigrés, he would embark on a series of peregrinations that took him to communities across the Ottoman Sephardic diaspora in central Africa, Turkey, and eventually New York City, where he



Left to right: “Rhodes: Lupini bean seller;” “Rhodes: Greek Begger”; “Rhodes: A type, a pipe smoker.”
Photographs courtesy of Micaela Amato Amateau.

¹ The Leica 1(A) was the first commercially available Leica 35mm camera, and even though it went for a hefty price when it was first publicly retailed in 1925, it was immediately successful.

settled in 1933. These ethnographic images appear in a family photo album that he brought with him on his journey, tucked between photographs of friends and family swimming at the beach and sipping coffee in cafes, taking day trips and boat rides, listening to the phonograph and celebrating Jewish holidays of sukkot and Passover. The album depicts Sephardic life on the island on the cusp of change, preserving a sense of their neighborhood and houses, the people who enlivened the streets, the foods they ate, the clothes they wore, the lives they lived. Created to capture his community in his moment of departure, he perhaps unknowingly preserved for posterity a world soon lost to waves of emigration, devastations of war, and the destruction of the Holocaust. Yet the photographs would live on, carried across continents and generations.

Although created after the Rhodes was no longer part of the Ottoman Empire and was under Italian control, Aron's images evoke the many visual and verbal images of ethnographic types that run through this study of Ottoman Sephardic ethnography.² Illustrations of racial and ethnographic types surfaced in the pages of the Ladino press in chapter one. Descriptions of ethnographic galleries comprised of many types—Jewish and otherwise—in train cars and ship holds appear in chapter two. Photographs of Daniel Adhanan produced by the *Société d'anthropologie de Paris* and housed in the archives of the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle*, designed to display his physiognomic contours as a racial type of Beta Israel from Abyssinia, bookend chapter four. Aron thus drew on a long history of ethnographic photographs of types in creating, curating, and preserving these images.

² Rhodes, the largest of the Dodecanese Island, lies less than twenty kilometers off the coast of Turkey. It was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1522 until 1912, when it was occupied by Italy. Amateau was born in 1913, just as it moved from the Ottoman domain to Italy.

Anthropologists initially began using ethnographic photographs in the 1860s, developing the notion of photographs of types as a scientific tool in 1885.³ These types presented individuals as distilled representations considered typical of their cultures in physical appearance or occupation. Images were a key means of collecting, comparing, and classifying cultures and races, a way to order and arrange knowledge of human diversity. In the documentation of indigenous populations globally, anthropologists assembled whole archives of photographs and produced photographic atlases that sought to definitively map cultural and racial variation worldwide. These images rendered the body into a visual text on which histories of racial differentiation were inscribed and used to develop racial theories and hierarchies.⁴



Left: “The Type of an Israelite Woman;” right: “Fez – Types of Jewish Women.”
Photographs courtesy of the *Musée d’Art Juif Marocain*.

³ In 1885, the French anthropologist Paul Topinard defined a “type” as “the average of characters which a human race supposed to be pure presents”(quoted in Ayshe Erdogdu, “The Victorian Market for Ottoman Types.,” *History of Photography* 23, no. 3 (1999): 269–73; Eleanor M Hight and Gary D Sampson, *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (London; New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 122).

⁴ Jayna Brown, “Body,” in *Keywords for African American Studies*, ed. Erica R. Edwards, Roderick A. Ferguson, and Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbarr (New York: University Press, 2018), 29–33.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, ethnographic and racial types increasingly moved from scholarship and science into the popular realm, circulating in commercial photographs and postcards tourists mailed back home from their trips to North Africa, the Middle East, and Ottoman Empire. Within the empire, Ottoman studios and photographers sprung up to serve the demand for photographic depictions of the region, including the popular category of “*scènes et types*” in sales catalogues of major studios in nineteenth-century Istanbul.⁵ Travelers often bought these ethnographic images and mailed them back to Europe, where they were collected and mounted in albums, not so unlike the ethnographic section of Aron Amateau’s photo album. Yet it was not uncommon for such photographs to include depictions of Jews, as seen in these postcards from North Africa, pictured above, and photographs produced in an Istanbul studio, pictured below.⁶ This album page brings together ethnographic images of various types, from Turkish and Jewish women (in the uppermost corners) to an itinerant peddler, mosque caretaker, and camel handler. Orientalist photography has drawn much scholarly attention.⁷ So too has photography produced by the

⁵ Engin Cizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1919*, 1987; Erdogdu, “The Victorian Market for Ottoman Types” Rebecca J. DeRoo, “Colonial Collecting: French Women and Algerian *Cartes Postales*,” in *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*, ed. Eleanor M Hight and Gary D Sampson (London; New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 159–71.

⁶ These photographs were produced between 1860-1890 by unknown photographers but is part of a collection housing images created by the most eminent Ottoman studios of the day, including Pascal Sébah, Sebah & Joaillier, Abdullah Frères, Guillaume Berggren, Christian Paier, and L. Fiorillo. Pascal Sébah et al., *Turquie, photographs taken 1868-1890; album bound circa 1890*, Box 65, Getty Research Institute Special Collections.

⁷ Malek Alloula et al., *The Colonial Harem*, 1986; Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860-1950*, 1988; Michelle L Woodward, “Between Orientalist Cliches and Images of Modernization: Photographic Practice in the Late Ottoman Era,” *History of Photography* 27, no. 4 (2003): 375–78; Ken Jacobson, *Odaliques & Arabesques: Orientalist Photography 1839-1925* (London: Quaritch, 2007); Sophie Gordon, “Orientalism and Photography,” *History of Photography* 32, no. 1 (2008): 99–100; Susan Slyomovics, “Visual Ethnography, Stereotypes, and Photographing Algeria,” in *Orientalism Revisited: Art, Land and Voyage*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (London: Routledge, 2012); Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, *Photography’s Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*, 2013; Ali Behdad, *Camera Orientalis: Reflections on Photography of the Middle East*, 2016.

Ottoman state itself and by studios run by Ottoman subjects within the empire.⁸ But comparatively little work has looked at vernacular photography from the region, the genre of



Photographs courtesy of the Getty Collections.

⁸ On Ottoman studios and photographers, see Zeynep Çelik, “Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse,” in *Orientalism’s Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography*, ed. Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); William Allen, “The Abdul Hamid II Collection,” *History of Photography* 8, no. 2 (1984): 119–45; Cizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1919*; Nissan Perez, *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East (1839-1885)* (New York: Abrams, 1988); Erdogdu, “The Victorian Market for Ottoman Types”; Engin Özendes, *From Sébah & Joaillier to Foto Sabah: Orientalism in Photography*, 1999; Woodward, “Between Orientalist Cliches and Images of Modernization”; Bahattin Öztuncay, *The Photographers of Constantinople: Pioneers, Studios and Artists from 19th Century Istanbul* (Istanbul: Aygaz, 2006); Issam Nassar, “Early Local Photography in Palestine: The Legacy of Karimeh Abbud,” *Jerusalem Quarterly File*, no. 46 (2011); Zeynep Çelik and Edhem Eldem, *Camera Ottomana: Photography and Modernity in the Ottoman Empire, 1840-1914* (Istanbul: Koç University Publications, 2015); Ahmet A Ersoy, “Ottomans and the Kodak Galaxy: Archiving Everyday Life and Historical Space in Ottoman Illustrated Journals,” *History of Photography* 40, no. 3 (2016): 330–57; Erin Hyde Nolan, “You Are What You Wear: Ottoman Costume Portraits in the Elbise-i Osmaniyye,” *Ars Orientalis* 47, no. 20181025 (2017); Erin Hyde Nolan, “Ottomans Abroad: The Circulation and Translation of Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Portrait Photographs” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2017).

everyday image-making by amateur photographers, intended as documents of personal history and kept by family and friends.⁹

Aron Amateau's album exemplifies this genre. Though once part of the Ottoman Empire, the Rhodes where Amato grew up was controlled by Italy. The Jewish population of Rhodes—hovering around 4,300 people—were primarily Sephardic Ladino-speakers, though by the time Aron was taking photographs in 1927, many of them had Italianized, speaking fluent Italian and dressing in Italian vogue.¹⁰ Aron and his siblings had attended the local schools of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* before they all set off for different nodes within the global Ottoman Sephardic diaspora, to France, central Africa, Egypt, the United States, and beyond.¹¹ Aron had recently graduated from the AIU lycée at the time when he took these photographs. “My father began taking photographs as a teenager and continued throughout most of his life,” recalled his daughter, Micaela Amato Amateau.¹² “He was our family chronicler.” Traveling across the Mediterranean, to Turkey, Greece, Spain, and later in the Caribbean and South America, he would document Jewish communities and cultures through films and photographs that he developed in his darkroom. It was a lifelong interest that began with this album, with these photographs he took on Rhodes.

The images situate Aron and his friends and family in the houses and cobblestone streets of the Jewish quarter, in the old market and beaches, scenes populated by the ethnographic types found on Rhodes. As *scènes et types*, these images echo earlier nineteenth-century ethnographic photography. The figures of the bean seller and the Greek beggar in his photographs reproduce stock types within Orientalist photography throughout

⁹ Nassar, “Early Local Photography in Palestine.” On vernacular photography, see Geoffrey Batchen, “Vernacular Photographies,” *History of Photography* 24, no. 3 (2000): 262–71; Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001); Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters* (Duke University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Sarah Abrevaya Stein, “Botánica Sephardica,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 64, no. 3 (2022): 617, 620.

¹¹ Stein, 621.

¹² Personal correspondence, March 22, 2023.



Left: “Rhodes, Greek beggar,” courtesy of Micaela Amato Amateau.
Right: “Turkish beggar,” Getty Collections.



Left and middle: “Rhodes, Lupini bean seller,” courtesy of Micaela Amato Amateau.
Right: “Apple merchant,” Getty Collections.

the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. In comparing Aron’s photographs and those produced by Ottoman photographers two or three decades earlier, all portray subjects practicing their trades. Props were crucial here in documenting these professions—or lack thereof—often seen as manual trades of a bygone era, of “yesteryear.” They were trades of an underclass that evinced an underdevelopment that would disappear with the onset of the modern era.¹³

¹³ Erdogan, “The Victorian Market for Ottoman Types,” 119.

The class disparity is apparent between those pictured here and Aron, looking at them from behind his expensive Leica camera. It is further emphasized in the photograph of the bean seller, dressed in shabby clothes, in the process of selling to a buyer, who dons a suit similar to the one Aron wears in many of the photos in his album.

Yet beside these photos are two that seem to subvert the idea of these photographs as simply reproducing Orientalist tropes. The first is that of “*un type, fumeur de pipe*.” Beside the beggar and the bean seller, the pipe smoker appears immaculately dressed in a beige or off-white safari suit with a tucked cravat, rugged boots, a straw hat and pipe. This figure may represent the uptick in emigration from Rhodes to central Africa, where young men left to seek economic opportunity, primarily by setting up shops within colonial frontier zones. Those who sought their fortunes abroad largely left behind those unable or unwilling to travel or to shoulder the cost. Aron repurposes the language of the ethnographic type, yet applied it here to one not intended to invoke Orientalist fantasies about a society fixed in a timeless Orient, but seems to present the figure of a colonial explorer.

Standing beside the Greek beggar, the other striking photograph on this page devoted to ethnographic types is a wedding portrait with the caption “*Rhodes: mariage*.” The betrothed couple stands on the street in front of a large stone building, lightly holding hands. The groom wears a three-piece suit, shining shoes, and fedora, while the bride appears in a white dress, lace veil, stockings and heeled shoes. Depictions of life cycle events loom large in ethnography, yet here Aron has inscribed in Hebrew letters the names of the couple, “Rosa



Left: "Rhodes: a type, a pipe smoker." Right: "Rhodes: wedding."
Photographs courtesy of Micaela Amato Amateau.

– Samuel.” In documenting this cultural event, Aron presents them not as ethnographic objects, but he names them as his friends. This merges the ethnographic and personal in preserving the images that he chose to create of the characters in the street who lent color to his community, but also his friends and family. This wedding portrait, in the context of these ethnographic photographs, stages the ambiguity lodged in Sephardic Jews as both ethnographic object and subject.

Why did Aron choose to produce these ethnographic images? Perhaps he was consciously participating in an intellectual current that reflected shared cultural practices of visualizing and staging difference. It is also likely that he took these photographs to remember, that he knew he might later rely on these images to later form Rhodes in his memory. Sephardic Jews across former Ottoman lands understood that their cultural practices were in flux, that they might disappear in the upheavals of emigration, acculturation, and war. These photographs, including the ethnographic images, sought to document a culture, yet

they also convey a sense of nostalgia that positions subjects in the past.¹⁴ But by taking these photographs, Aron aligned himself with past generations of ethnographers and anthropologists of Ottoman Sephardic Jews who created autoethnographic works to articulate their own sense of subjectivity and social status. Aron did so in ways that preserved it in the moment when he took these photographs, but also for future generations.¹⁵ This was a sense of subjectivity that did not always square with the images of Jews from the Ottoman Empire and North Africa that circulated in commercial photographs and postcards. Through these photographs, then, Aron produced what Tina Campt has referred to as a “counterimage” of who Mediterranean Sephardic Jews were or might become.¹⁶ Family photo albums like Aron Amateau’s stand as an important counterpoint to Orientalist photography that catered to European audiences. In contrast, it provides a glimpse into how Sephardic Jews in the years following the collapse of the empire continued to participate in ethnographic production by creating and curating their own ethnographic photography, but did so vested with the forces of memory and nostalgia as they came to document lost communities and cultures.

Superstition and State Policy in Palestine/Israel

The nineteenth-century association of superstition with Ottoman Jews discussed in chapter three became so entrenched and clung to them so tenaciously that it followed them into the twentieth century, where it continued to surface in social discourse and scholarship in ways that had concrete effects on Sephardic lives. Scholarly works continued to both promote the idea that superstitious beliefs were foolish and inane and to circulate popular and anthropological discourses of superstition—that superstition derived from ancient times and

¹⁴ Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 56.

¹⁵ Campt, *Image Matters*, 7.

¹⁶ Campt, 5.

foreign peoples and were survivals that revealed a primitive mentality.¹⁷ In *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica* (1947), the Sephardic writer Michael Molho attributed superstition to “the original inhabitants of the East,” while lamenting that, “As in the old days, there are still some Jews who believe in the existence of evil spirits, of demons who are everywhere...”¹⁸ Decades after the topic of superstition first emerged in the Sephardic press, writers continued to lament its stubborn persistence.

The twentieth-century denunciation of Ottoman Jewish superstition took a violent turn in Palestine and the nascent Israeli state from the 1940s–1960s.¹⁹ Leaders of the Yishuv and the Israeli state sought to articulate a new Zionist identity, one that would secure its place among the nations of Europe. In efforts to articulate and enforce these boundaries, representatives of the Israeli establishment censured emigrants from the former Ottoman Empire and North Africa as superstitious and premodern.²⁰ During these decades, scholars, doctors, and educators articulated a racialized “Oriental type” marked by a primitive mentality, evidenced by their superstitious beliefs and practices, which they sought to

¹⁷ See Hans Henry Spoer, *Notes on Jewish Amulets*. (Jerusalem, 1904); Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition. A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Behrman’s Jewish Book House, 1939); Michael Molho, *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*, ed. Robert Bedford (New York: Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, 2006), 265, 279; Theodore Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets: Their Decipherment and Interpretation* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1966).

¹⁸ Molho, *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*, 280. Michael Molho, a rabbi born, raised, and educated in Salonica, sought to “fix in writing the outlines of the principal ceremonies, to describe the Jewish festivals, the superstitions and the religious beliefs, the family and individual life—in a word, to bring out all of the distinguished life of a Salonica Jew in the past era” (*Usos y costumbres de los sefardíes de Salónica*, 4).

¹⁹ For a discussion of earlier efforts undertaken by Arab Jewish maskilim in Ottoman Palestine to fight superstition, see Lital Levy, “Jewish Writers in the Arab East: Literature, History, and the Politics of Enlightenment, 1863–1914” (University of California, Berkeley, 2007), especially pp. 357–372. Here she discusses the satirical short story *Emek ha-Shedim* by Sliman Menahem Mani, printed serially in 1885 the newspaper *Ha-Tsvi* by Eliezer ben Yehuda.

²⁰ See, for example, Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (1988): 1–35; Ella Shohat, “Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews,” *Social Text* 21, no. 2 (2003): 49–74; Hagit Matras, “Jewish Folk Medicine in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” in *Jews and Medicine: Religion, Culture, Science*, ed. Natalia Berger (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1995); Yehuda Sharim, “The Struggle for Sephardic-Mizrahi Autonomy: Racial Identities in Palestine-Israel, 1918–1948” (Los Angeles, University of California, Los Angeles, 2013).

eradicate.²¹ Some émigrés recalled that, as they arrived, Israeli officials forcibly removed the amulets that they wore around their necks or carried in their pockets.²² This perception of as superstitious, almost by definition, was buttressed by academic research that lent these claims scholarly authority. Medical studies denounced their notions of health and healing as “shameful” and “born of ignorance,” while ethnographic studies in anthropological and folkloric journals such as *Edot* and *Yeda Am* examined what *Edot*’s editor, Raphael Patai, called “the customs and beliefs of the population of backward countries and savages.”²³ Patai believed that these communities demonstrated atavistic backwardness that prevented them from adapting to modernity, although he was fully devoted to documenting these practices as part of the panoply of Jewish cultures.²⁴

One Sephardic Jew who contributed to ethnographic research on Ottoman Jewish superstitions, following in the footsteps of Abraham Danon and Moise Franco, was Moshe Gaon (1895-1942), who emigrated from Ottoman Bosnia to Palestine in 1908.²⁵ Gaon published articles in both *Edot* and *Yeda Am* that denounced Ottoman Jewish superstitions as afflictions and “abhorrent practices” of Jews “who degenerated in the Eastern diaspora and

²¹ Yehuda Sharim, “The Struggle for Sephardic-Mizrahi Autonomy: Racial Identities in Palestine-Israel, 1918-1948” [diss.] (Los Angeles, University of California, Los Angeles, 2013).

²² Hagit Matras, “Jewish Folk Medicine in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” in *Jews and Medicine: Religion, Culture, Science*, ed. Natalia Berger (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1995), 129. Not so far away, British and American nurses in Egypt confiscated amulets from those who found themselves in need of medical care (Taylor Moore, “Amuletic Archives: Writing Magico-Material Histories of the Middle East” (UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies, January 26, 2021), <https://www.international.ucla.edu/cnes/article/235014>).

²³ Matras, “Jewish Folk Medicine in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” 115–16; Raphael Patai, “Jewish Folklore and Ethnology: Problems and Tasks”. *Edot*, Vol. 1, No.1, 1945– 1946: 25. Patai established *Hamachon ha-eretzyisraeli l’folklore v’etnologia* (Palestine Institute for Folklore and Ethnology) and its journal, *Edot*, in Jerusalem in 1944. *Hevra ha’Ivrit l’Yeda Am* (Hebrew Society for Folk Knowledge) was founded in the 1940s in Tel Aviv. For a discussion of their contrasting ideologies and methods, see Dani Schrire, *Collecting the Pieces of the Jewish Diaspora: Zionist Folkloristics Facing the Shoah (Heb.)* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2018).

²⁴ Sharim, “The Struggle for Sephardic-Mizrahi Autonomy,” 271.

²⁵ Gaon studied at the University of Vienna, which “endowed him with the values of a European *fin-de-siècle* intellectual, educator, poet, and scholar who was also attracted to the emerging Zionist project in Palestine” (Sharim, 106).

Turkey” under the “influence of other faiths of the communities of the East.”²⁶ Gaon described the Sephardic families who immigrated and brought these practices with them, writing that, “Still today we find among us at the beginning of 1946, here in the holy city of Jerusalem, men and women who have abandoned themselves to soothsayers and diviners.” These men and women belonged to “the uncultured classes of the oriental Jews,” for whom “the redeeming light of culture has still not penetrated into the darkness.”²⁷ As a result, Gaon championed education so that “all the sons of the chosen people will be freed from this net of evil customs, in which they are caught not of their own accord.”²⁸ Fifty years after Danon and Franco, Gaon, also writing as an Ottoman Sephardic Jew, reproduced many of the same claims in his writing: the degeneracy of Ottoman Jews, the contamination of Jewish culture by other peoples, and the same narrative of transformation from light to darkness and the need for education.

Gaon also emphasized the autoethnographic nature of his writings by drawing on his own childhood experiences with superstition. Taught to fear evil spirits from an early age, Gaon recounted that, “When I was a boy, they instructed me that wherever I turn, I must be careful, because ‘they’ are lying in wait for my steps, and being very sensitive to bad occurrences, I did not stop thinking about them night and day, lest I fall in their trap and go astray in the ways of the deceitful and am led to downfall.”²⁹ In fact, he explained, since his childhood, “I felt as if I were caught in the net of some evil spirit who incessantly dogged my steps, despite my desire and attempts to stand on my own and escape from it. I was drawn to these foolish beliefs, which circulated among our people over many generations, and which

²⁶ Moshe Gaon, “The Battle of Sephardim and Ashkenazim against Indulko (Heb.),” *Edot* 1945/1946 (n.d.): 104; Moshe Gaon, “The Fetters of Indulko: Memories and Revelations of Iniquities (Heb.),” *Yeda Am* 1958/1959 (n.d.): 29.

²⁷ Gaon, “The Battle of Sephardim and Ashkenazim against Indulko (Heb.),” 107.

²⁸ *Ibid*; Gaon, “The Fetters of Indulko: Memories and Revelations of Iniquities (Heb.),” 29.

²⁹ *Ibid*.

still dominated, destroying and cursing all good things...”³⁰ Within these anthropological journals, Gaon, like Danon, recalled his own struggle against superstition as an Ottoman Sephardic Jew, revealing the painful reckoning of imperial dynamics around superstition that played out on the personal level for him as a scholar.

Although these twentieth-century scholars shared the desire to eradicate such beliefs and practices with earlier reformers, the Israeli state was able to deploy state power in attempts to do so. The work of scholars like Patai and Gaon, which lent authority to assessments of Ottoman Jews as superstitious and thus irrational and premodern, buttressed Israel’s state policies that enacted discrimination based on race.³¹ Historians have explored how “Oriental Jewry” was racialized through social scientific discourse based on biological notions of race, but a closer look at superstition demonstrates how racialization also occurred through ideas about culture and ethnographic writing that drew on nineteenth-century discourses of superstition. Gaon himself played an instrumental role in establishing “Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews” as a standard category within state bureaucracy as the government set policies that sought to eradicate beliefs and practices deemed superstitious and primitive, and that denied equal access to resources and services, including healthcare, education, and housing.³² The state enforced policies of social stratification and marginalization, housing émigrés from North Africa and the erstwhile Ottoman lands in transit camps, where they commonly spent years, while the state decided where to settle them permanently. The state further circumscribed the jobs available to them, largely by denying educational opportunities beyond vocational training that ensured a lower social status.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ For an in-depth examination of this, see Sharim, “The Struggle for Sephardic-Mizrahi Autonomy.”

³² Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel”; Bryan K Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel’s Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle, 1948-1966*, 2015; Roby; Orit Bashkin, *Impossible Exodus: Iraqi Jews in Israel*, 2017; Sharim, “The Struggle for Sephardic-Mizrahi Autonomy.”

In discursively constructing Sephardic Jews from the former Ottoman Empire as backwards and from primitive lands, the nineteenth-century labeling of Sephardic Jews as superstitious carried through into the twentieth century, where it continued to shape the lives of Sephardic Jews decades after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The attempts at social control on the part of Ottoman Sephardic reformers writing a century earlier continued to play out, but backed by the force of the Israeli state. Haunted by associations drawn between superstitions and the primitive past, government officials sought to eradicate the superstitions of emigrants from the former Ottoman Empire and across the Islamic world. This points to how the violence of discursive hierarchies, though constructed and illusory, had real effects on peoples' everyday lives decades later.

A New Salvage Ethnography

Six older women sit on a living room sofa and on the floor, needles and thread in hand, embroidering cloth. They are Sephardic émigrés from the island of Rhodes living in Los Angeles. It is 1982 and they are recreating, on film, a traditional scene from Rhodes of young girls gathered together after school, preparing their dowries for their weddings. These women move between Los Angeles in the 1980s and performing Rhodes in the 1920s, collapsing their worlds in front of the camera. This is one of many scenes from a series of videos they created to showcase their culture for future generations.

The participants in these videos and their families were among the 400 Sephardic Jews who emigrated from Rhodes and settled in Los Angeles in the first decades of the twentieth century.³³ Many left to evade compulsory Ottoman military service and to seek greater economic opportunity abroad. In his study of Sephardic Los Angeles, Max Daniel

³³ The island of Rhodes lies less than twenty miles off the coast of Turkey. It was part of the Ottoman Empire for about 400 years, from 1522 until it was taken by the Italians in 1912.

describes the process by which Sephardic Jews from erstwhile Ottoman lands acquired a foothold in white, middle-class Los Angeles. He charts how, despite discrimination in housing and employment experienced through the 1930s, by the 1940s, Sephardic Jews in Los Angeles differed little from their white peers.³⁴ They quickly moved out of downtown, where Black and Mexican residents were increasingly settling, and purchased homes in mostly white neighborhoods. They rose socioeconomically from working as street peddlers to middle-class retailers and wholesalers.³⁵ By the 1960s, he asserts, Sephardic Jews had cemented their place in white Los Angeles.

These videos were created in the wake of the ethnic revival of the 1970s as Sephardic Jews joined other groups in their retreat from whiteness, including Italian, Irish, and Ashkenazi Americans.³⁶ Some Sephardic Jews in the United States voiced concerns that their community and culture would soon disappear, particularly as the immigrant generation of culture-bearers began to pass away and as second- and third-generation Sephardic Jews seemed to become increasingly indistinguishable from their Ashkenazi counterparts.³⁷ The latter half of the twentieth century saw the steep decline in Ladino as a result of assimilation into the surrounding society, reduced domains of usage, loss of prestige, and the decrease in the number of speakers, especially following World War II and the Holocaust.³⁸ While the children of this generation had limited speaking abilities and a passive knowledge of the language, their grandchildren rarely understand any Ladino. Galvanized by the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the rise of neoliberal multiculturalism and diversity, some Sephardic Jews

³⁴ Max Daniel, "The Sephardi Century: A Relational History of a Los Angeles Community, 1893-1992" / by Max Daniel." (Los Angeles, Calif, University of California, Los Angeles, 2022), 9, 104.

³⁵ Daniel, 113.

³⁶ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

³⁷ Daniel, "The Sephardi Century," 181-186. Daniel notes how articles with titles such as "The Vanishing Sephardim" and "The Sephardim: A Problem of Survival" appeared in the 1960s and 1970s. See Denah Lida, "The Vanishing Sephardim," *Le Judaïsme Sephardi*, July 1962; Abraham Levy, *The Sephardim: A Problem of Survival* (London, 1972).

³⁸ Tracy K Harris, *Death of a Language: The History of Judeo-Spanish* (Newark; London: University of Delaware Press ; Associated University Presses, 1994).

urged their communities to claim their ancestral roots and cultural pride, to assert their ethnic distinctiveness.³⁹ Older Sephardic Jews, the last generation of native Ladino speakers, spent their leisure time and disposable income to preserve their culture—which had once been unwritten, and transmitted orally and interpersonally—through recordings and publications of cookbooks, films, and music.⁴⁰ As Daniel points out, women particularly spearheaded the efforts, not unlike middle class white women empowered by second-wave feminism.⁴¹

These videos, created in the early 1980s, work to document Sephardic language and culture from the island of Rhodes. The video opens with an introduction by Rachel Amato Levy, a 70-year old woman born in 1912, the same year that Rhodes, long part of the Ottoman Empire since 1522, was occupied by Italy. In her retirement, she would go on to publish a bilingual Ladino-English memoir, *I Remember Rhodes*, which would be the basis of a documentary film produced by her grandson.⁴² Her efforts at cultural preservation, then, included these videos, in which she appears to be the driver and facilitator.

The videos begin with a voice off-screen thanking “our gracious host and hostess Selma and Jack Mizrahi, with the help of Arthur Benveniste, we are here today, the purpose of our reunion to record for all generations to follow the songs, the *romanzas*, the music of our people, the Sephardim of the island of Rhodes.”⁴³ By recognizing the hosts and person filming the “reunion,” the video acknowledges the performative nature of the gathering. It positions the participants as historical agents self-consciously staging an event for a particular mission: to document their culture for future generations, who they anticipate may be

³⁹ Daniel, 182.

⁴⁰ Daniel, “The Sephardi Century,” 165, 187.

⁴¹ Daniel, 187.

⁴² Rebecca Amato Levy, *I Remember Rhodes* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press for Sephardic House at Congregation Shearith Israel, 1987); *Island of roses: the Jews of Rhodes in Los Angeles*, Gregori Viens (dir.), (The National Center for Jewish Film, 2006).

⁴³ *Ladino BANYO DE NOVIA (Bridal Shower) from the Island of Rhodes Part 1*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9JWFHoSerM>.

unfamiliar with their roots.⁴⁴ The video then proceeds to set the stage for their reenactment.⁴⁵ “As we open, we are recreating a scene from Rhodes,” it announces. Panning over the six elderly women sitting on the sofa and on the floor, it imagines “The young girls, coming home from school, would congregate in one person’s home to do their *lavor*, their handwork, and prepare their *ashuar*, their trousseau.” After a brief pause, Rachel Amato Levy urges the group, “Okay, let’s start one song,” and the group breaks into a Ladino *romanza*, or traditional Ladino ballad. Throughout the series of videos, they weave together reenactments and lessons as they sing *romanzas*; share coffee, food, and *dulces*, or desserts; dance; introduce healing herbs and plants; tell Ladino jokes; and teach Ladino words and adages.⁴⁶ Yet rather than just preserving and showcasing a static form and idea of culture, momentary lapses in strict reenactment—a reminder to keep sewing, an English exclamation—they reveal a culture in movement, open and transforming.

In reading these videos as cultural texts, they emerge as a form of salvage autoethnography, working to document a culture threatened with extinction. Within their attempts to try and save their culture, to stage and film it, they emerge as both archive and historical interpreter, as both ethnographic subject and object, not unlike their Ottoman ancestors a century earlier. Yet in some ways, their mission represents the opposite project as

⁴⁴ Following the historian Greg Denning, Vanessa Agnew discusses this aspect of historical reenactment in Agnew, “Introduction,” 84.

⁴⁵ The affective turn in history led to the burgeoning of scholarship on reenactment in the beginning of the twenty-first century. This scholarship explores a wide range of forms and practices, including literature, film, photography, television shows, video games, parades, groups devoted to historical performance, and what are called living history museums. See Vanessa Agnew, “History’s Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present,” *Rethinking History* 11, no. 3 (2007).

⁴⁶ Sephardic Jewry has a long tradition of oral literature that, in addition to prayers and medicinal charms, riddles (*endevinas*), proverbs (*refranes*), and folktales (*consejas*), includes a huge amount of narrative ballads (*romanzas*) and lyrical songs (*cantigas*). The series of videos, filmed and uploaded to YouTube by Arthur Benveniste, include Ladino BANYO DE NOVIA (Bridal Shower) from the Island of Rhodes Part 1, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9JWFHoSerM>; Ladino BANYO DE NOVIA Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNQE62GeNBQ&t=808s>; Sephardic Women from Rhodes demonstrate their culture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-BTAG2PCgw&t=9s>; “Rhodesli Ladies Demonstrate Sephardic Culture Part 2,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSD-IQS-1o4&t=7s>; “Rhodisli Ladies demonstrate, Aruda, Cooking, Songs, 4,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pj29Nd48yiY>; “Rhodisli, Sephardic Jewish Women from Rhodes part 5,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncM4zT_X1A.

that carried out by Ottoman Sephardic reformers. While nineteenth-century reformers sought to “regenerate” Jews, to purge the practices they felt hindered their progress and marked them as uncivilized, they imagined the sacrifice of their “bizarre beliefs and practices of yesteryear”—the ballads, healing rituals, belief in spirits, and Ladino language itself—as they sought to join the ranks of modern, civilized society. This was an impulse that, a century later, their descendants would mourn as they experienced anxiety over transmission. Reenactment highlights this loss, and in some ways, we can read these videos as a lament. But scholars of reenactment also claim its emancipatory potential.⁴⁷ Reenactment allows participants to choose a version of their past to perform in reaction to a conflicted present. In insists that the present might have been different and so allows them to imagine a different future. The whole act of making these videos celebrates their culture and stands as an act of optimism, of believing that things can change and that this decline in language and culture might be reversed.

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Tracing the history of ethnography begs the question of how the history and politics of representation shape the perceptions and life trajectories of groups when they are mediated and known primarily through ethnography. This study has focused primarily on racial discursive constructions, what Geraldine Heng has called “extralegal and informal rehearsals of power,” with attention to the temporal discourses that suffused them.⁴⁸ In situating race as a profoundly temporal construction tied to civilization, progress, and modernity, these discourses engage in a racial chronopolitics, which Charles W. Mills conceptualizes as a temporal counterpart to geopolitics. He defines racial chronopolitics as a global politics of time that shapes both the representations and material relations between groups and with the

⁴⁷ See, for example, Robert Blackson, “Once More ... with Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture,” *Art Journal* 66, no. 1 (2007): 28–40.

⁴⁸ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York, NY ; Cambridge University Press, 2018), 30.

world.⁴⁹ Mills highlights how racial discourses are not merely social constructs, but create political realities. Ottoman Sephardic reformers' calls for intervention and regeneration, in the myriad forms they took, moved beyond the discursive; their ethnographic and racialized representations created political realities and had material consequences as they carried into the twentieth century and into the Sephardic global diaspora, long after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

⁴⁹ Charles W. Mills, "The Chronopolitics of Racial Time," *Time & Society* 29, no. 2 (2020): 307.

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