

TRANSNATIONAL SEPHARDI ZIONISM IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: SALOMÓN GARAZI AND THE CUBAN CHAPTER OF FESELA IN MIAMI¹

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Abstract

El artículo analiza el desarrollo de una red transnacional sefaradí desde tres perspectivas: global, continental y local. En la global, describe la lucha de la Federación Sefaradí Mundial durante casi 50 años para legitimizar la representación sefaradí en base a su identidad étnica dentro la Organización Sionista Mundial, argumentando que la diversidad étnica no amenaza la unión del pueblo judío. El análisis a nivel continental demuestra la importancia de FESELA en la creación de medios de transmisión de la identidad sefaradí, así como para la inclusión de activistas sefaradíes en el liderazgo judío de sus respectivos países. En el caso particular de Miami, un líder prominente –Salomón Garazi– logró establecer lazos entre EE.UU. y América Latina, e incorporar a la pequeña comunidad de Miami a la red sefaradí global.

Palabras clave: sefaradíes, sionismo, Federación Sefaradí Mundial, FESELA

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Introduction

Since its early history, the World Zionist Organization (WZO) based affiliation on ideological and territorial divisions and ignored the demands of the Sephardim for a separate organization, or considered them as a threat to the unity of the Jewish people. The legitimacy of ethnic affiliation was finally recognized in 1972, with the establishment of the Department for Sephardi Communities in the WZO. In this framework FESELA – Federación Sefaradí Latinoamericana (Latin American Sephardi Federation) was founded as an umbrella organization of the Sephardi communities in Latin America.

The foundation assembly of FESELA took place in Lima in 1972 with communal representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. Ten years afterwards, the President of the Cuban-Sephardi community in Miami, Salomón Garazi, presented a petition to FESELA's president, Dr. Moisés Garzón Serfaty, to accept the Cuban Sephardi community living in Miami as a member. According to a document prepared by Garazi's widow, the petition was based on the following argument:

[...] que aunque residíamos en Miami Beach, Fl. E.U.A. debíamos ser aceptados ya que nos encontrábamos accidentalmente en Miami Beach, por los motivos que todos sabían, pero que cuando volviéramos a Cuba indiscutiblemente se volvería a abrir la rama de FESELA en la isla. Se alegaba que el idioma español y el conocimiento del ladino hacían imprescindible que esta comunidad mayormente de sefaraditas descendientes de Turquía estuviera unida a sus hermanos sefaraditas de Latinoamérica.²

Garazi presented the Cuban Jews living in Miami as part of the Cuban

2 Document prepared by Esther Garazi, widow of Salomón (2013). See also: Moisés Garzón Serfaty, "FESELA a los 40 AÑOS de su fundación: ideario, logros y retos", *Revista Maguén Escudo* 165 (octubre-diciembre 2012), <https://revistamaguenesعود.wordpress.com/fesela-a-los-40-anos-de-su-fundacion-ideario-logros-y-retos/> (accessed Feb. 17, 2016).

exile whose aspiration was to return to their Cuban homeland, but also as part of a transnational Sephardi diaspora that combines the use of modern Spanish with its ancestral Ladino.

The Plenary Assembly of FESELA that took place in Buenos Aires that year decided to incorporate the Cuban community of Miami as one of its members, creating a new chapter on the frontier between the United States and Latin America. The purpose of this article is to analyze the development of a transnational Sephardi Zionism from three different perspectives: (1) global Sephardi organization and its relationship with the WZO; (2) FESELA and its role on a continental level, and (3) the Miami Chapter of FESELA and its promoter – Salomón Garazi – on the crossroad between Cuban and Latino Sephardim.

The Global Dimension: The World Sephardi Federation

The first global Sephardi organization was founded in 1925 in an international convention that took place in Vienna. Its main objective was to unite all the Sephardi communities in the diaspora for the construction of Eretz Israel. It was initiated by members of the Sephardi elite in Jerusalem, who considered themselves responsible for the *Edot Hamizrach* (Eastern communities) – Jewish *olim* (immigrants) from Moslem countries – whom they pretended to represent.³

The major problems that motivated the foundation of the *Confederation Universelle des Juifs Sepharadim* (World Sephardi Confederation) were the low socio-economic status of the Mizrahim (Easterners), their poor education and their distance from Zionist ideology. The Sephardi activists criticized the Zionist institutions for discriminating against the Mizrahim in

3 Abraham Haim, *Yichud Vehishtalvut: Hanhagat hasefardim birushalayim bitkufat hashilton habriti 1917-1948* (Particularity and Integration: The Sephardi Leadership in Jerusalem Under British Rule, 1917-1948), Jerusalem 2000, p. 183; M. Atias, “clapei pnim” (looking inside), *Hed Hamizrach*, November 6, 1942, Jewish Historical Press (www.jpress.org.il) the National Library of Israel and Tel Aviv University (hereafter jpress).

their economic and educational projects. Their idea was to organize a global Sephardi framework that would represent the Sephardim in the WZO; they emphasized their interest to be an integral part of the WZO and to maintain the unity of the Jewish people.⁴

The foundation of the World Sephardi Confederation provoked opposition among leaders of the WZO who rejected the idea of ethnic separatism and feared that an autonomous institution might create “a Sephardi state within the Zionist State.”⁵ The conflict between the Sephardi Confederation and the WZO had an impact also on the history of Zionism among Sephardim in Latin America.

In 1926 the World Sephardi Confederation started to establish branches in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, Chile and Cuba, using local Sephardi activists with whom they had personal contacts.⁶ The reaction of the WZO was to send a Spanish speaking Sephardi *shaliach* (emissary) with the mission of promoting Zionism among the Sephardim in Latin America and of establishing Sephardi organizations that would diminish the influence of the World Sephardi Confederation. The *shaliach*, Dr. Ariel Bension, travelled throughout Latin America and founded local branches of *Bené Kedem* (Descendants of the East) as frameworks for Sephardi Zionist identity, but not for a separate ethnic representation in the WZO:

Agrupar a los sefaradim bajo la bandera del sionismo; llevarlos como un único elemento, con una sola alma, una sola lengua, y una sola idea al Congreso Sionista es el propósito primario de los Bené Kedem, al Congreso Sionista, que simboliza la unión de todo Israel; [...] cuando los que representen a los Bené Kedem en el Congreso Sionista retornen a sus respectivas comunidades, llevarán a sus conciudadanos el mensaje de la unión del pueblo y del país, y esto influirá a fin de que se cumpla la unión de todo Israel en la Diáspora: el comienzo de la unión real que sobrevendrá en Palestina.⁷

4 Haim (see note 3), p. 183; *Doar Hayom*, June 29, 1926, 1, jpress.

5 Haim (see note 3), p. 193; *Doar Hayom*, August 4, 1929, 4, jpress.

6 In the case of Buenos Aires, the organizers of the local branch were immigrants from Jerusalem who had close relations with the leaders of the Sephardi Confederation. “Informe presentado por Maurice Alacid sobre los antecedentes y actividades de la institución patrocinadora,” *La Luz*, April 17, 1942, pp. 184-186.

7 Dr. Ariel Bension, *Los Sefaradim y el Sionismo*, Buenos Aires 1926, pp. 8-9.

The Sephardi Confederation responded by sending its own *shaliach*, Shabtai D'Jaen, chief rabbi of Monastir, who visited Latin America in the end of 1927. His visit to Cuba is recorded in a number of letters from 1927 on the establishment of the *Organización Pro-Confederación Universal Sefaradí de Cuba* that was to act under the guidance of the World Sephardi Confederation in Jerusalem.⁸ The founding members pointed out the tremendous impression of D'Jaen's lectures: "que nos hizo despertar de la letargía del GALOUTH que estábamos conviviendo [...y que] ha despertado el sentimiento de todos nosotros hacia nuestro sagrado deber nacional."⁹ They promised their allegiance to the Sephardi Confederation and its cause:

No dudéis, que aquí hay una vanguardia que está propuesta (sic) a laborar con todo el fervor del Judaísmo y dispuesta a colaborar en la restauración de nuestro santísimo hogar: SIÓN, y particularmente por la emancipación y unificación de nuestros hermanos Sefaradim.¹⁰

The World Sephardi Confederation sought the political support of the Sephardim in the diaspora, but also their financial donations for projects that were designated exclusively for Sephardim and Mizrahim in Eretz Israel. It tried to resolve the conflict with the WZO by reaching an agreement of coordination between the campaigns of *Keren Hayesod* and the Sephardi Confederation.¹¹ Rabbi Shabtai D'Jaen was sent again to Latin America with instructions to organize a common campaign on behalf of the two organizations among the Sephardim,¹² but his mission ended in failure:

8 I would like to thank Osvaldo Catarivas and Armando Franco for finding and sending these documents.

9 From Vitali Catarivas (Honorary President), Victor Mitrani (President) and José Cohen (Secretary) to the President of the Confederación Universal de los Sefaradim (Jerusalem), Havana, October 20, 1927.

10 Víctor Mitrani and José Cohen to the president of the Confederación Universal Sefaradí, Jerusalem, December 29, 1927.

11 *Doar Hayom*, February 21, 1929, 3, jpress.

12 "Agreement proposal on the participation of Rabbi D'Jaen in the campaign of Keren Hayesod among the Sephardim of South America" (in Hebrew), file Rabbi Shabtai D'Jaen, September 28, 1928, Archive of the Sephardi Council of Jerusalem (in the City Archive).

When I reached Argentina, and even when I passed Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo I realized that the agreement with *Keren Hayesod* made a good impression, but the truth is that the Confederation lost a lot and there is no possibility to start anything. [...] Ettinger¹³ is now in the country, the Zionist Organization is rather angry because since the stay of Dr. Bension the Sephardim didn't contribute, not even a cent, to any Zionist institution. The Zionist Organization believes that it's all my fault and they are ready for any battle.¹⁴

The conflict with the WZO was among the causes for the decline of the World Sephardi Confederation. According to the study of Abraham Haim, in the conventions that took place in the 1930s the initiative passed to the Sephardi activists in the diaspora, who were interested in improving the educational and cultural situation of the Jewish communities in the world, and not in political matters.¹⁵ In Latin America the presence of the World Sephardi Confederation practically disappeared.

The reappearance of the World Sephardi Confederation is recorded in an interview with its secretary, Eliahu Castel, published in *Hed Hamizrach* (Echo of the East) on February 1949.¹⁶ According to this article, the organization was founded in New York in 1944 by delegates from the Americas, Europe and North Africa as a Zionist organization that aims to raise the prestige of the Sephardim and Mizrahim, and to take care of the Jews in Arab countries.¹⁷

After the foundation of the State of Israel Castel visited the Sephardi communities in Latin America as part of the initiative of the the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem to re-establish the World Sephardi

13 Akiva Ettinger was sent to Latin America in 1928 as *shaliach* of *Keren Hayesod*.

14 Rabbi Shabtai D'Jaen to the World Sephardi Federation, 4 Shvat 5689 (January 15, 1929), file Rabbi Shabtai D'Jaen, Archive of the Sephardi Council of Jerusalem (in the City Archive). Author's translation.

15 Haim, see note 3, p. 194. See also: Elie Eliachar, *Lichiot im Yehudim (To Live with Jews)*, Jerusalem 1980, p. 459 n.

16 "Toward a World Convention of Sephardi Jews in Jerusalem" (Hebrew), *Hed Hamizrach*, February 4, 1949, jpress.

17 I did not find other evidence on this organization.

Confederation.¹⁸ At the same time the old Sephardi leadership in Jerusalem aspired to legitimize the representation of the Sephardim in the Knesset by creating an ethnic-political party. A delegation of Sephardim from Argentina that visited Israel at the time participated in the inauguration of the new party – “The National Unity List of Sephardim and Eastern Communities.”¹⁹

Elie (Eliahu) Eliachar, President of the Sephardi Council of Jerusalem, who was elected to the first and second Knesset on behalf of the Sephardi Party,²⁰ was confronted by a strong opposition. The prevailing ideology at that time was of *mizug-galuyot* (merging of diasporas/melting pot), and Eliachar and his colleagues were seen as inciting ethnic divisions. In his autobiography, *To Live with Jews*, Eliachar describes the negative attitude toward the Sephardi agenda that he represented, and argues that the short sightedness of those who claimed that there was no ethnic problem resulted in the deepening of the socio-economic breach in Israeli society.²¹

Due to the general opposition to the organization of a Sephardi convention in Israel, the founding congress of the World Sephardi Federation (WSF) was moved to Paris, taking place in November, 1951. Its decisions stressed the unity of the Jewish people, the assistance to the State of Israel, the preservation of the Jewish legacy and the non-political character of the WSF,²² blurring the specific needs of the Sephardim and Mizrahim. The influence of Eliachar and the Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem declined, and their pretense to represent the Mizrahim lost its relevance.

Following the 1951 convention, the central office of the WSF was based in London with no structural engagement with the Israeli government or the Jewish Agency. The new leaders belonged to the Spanish-Portuguese

18 “Toward a World Convention of Sephardi Jews in Jerusalem” (Hebrew), *Hed Hamizrach*, February 4, 1949, jpress; Eliachar (see note 15), p. 285.

19 *Hed Hamizrach*, January 21, 1949, p. 15, February 11, 1949, jpress.

20 In the second Knesset (1951) the Sephardi party merged into the General Zionists, and the party disappeared. <http://www.knesset.gov.il/faction/heb/FactionPage.asp?PG=89> (accessed June 29, 2016).

21 Eliachar, see note 15, pp. 459-461.

22 *Ibid.*, 462.

Congregation of London, and were more concerned with the cultural Sephardi heritage and with local problems than in the social and economic problems of Jews from Arab countries in Israel.²³

The orientation of WSF started to change around 1967 due to conflicts between the elitist Sephardi British leadership, and young leaders who were more oriented toward Zionism and considered as their primary mission to raise the educational level of young Sephardim/Mizrahim in Israel. A letter from Director General Gad Ben Meir, sent in 1968 to Haham Solomon Gaon in London, reflects the divergence of opinion between the old and new leadership. It criticizes the WSF as parochial, conducted by a limited group of friends in London, who fail “to touch the heart or the pocket of the Sephardim.”²⁴ The letter points out the need to expand the horizons of the WSF by choosing a dynamic president who, in addition to English, would speak French and Spanish. Emphasizing the centrality of Israel, Ben Meir referred to his contacts with Arye Pincus, president of the Jewish Agency and of the Executive Committee of the WZO, that provoked the opposition of the old British leadership.²⁵

The election of Nessim D. Gaon as president of the WSF (1973) marks a turning point in the history of the organization. Gaon was born in 1922 in Khartoum (Sudan), becoming a successful businessman and leader of the Sudanese Jewish community. In 1957 he relocated to Geneva (Switzerland), where he gained international reputation as a prominent businessman and as a Jewish philanthropist, who supported the major educational institutions in Israel, and was particularly interested in improving the educational level among Sephardim and Mizrahim.²⁶

The election of Gaon coincided with a new alliance between the WSF and the WZO, that for the first time in its history recognized the legitimacy

23 Ibid., 465; “Historical Note,” Guide to the Records of the WSF 1975-1997, ASF, AR-6, <http://findingaids.cjh.org/?pID=92150> (accessed Feb. 17, 2016).

24 Gad Ben Meir to Haham S. Gaon, April 5, 1968, Central Zionist Archive [CZA] S134/1517.

25 Ibid.

26 Walker Robins, “Gaon, Nessim D.,” in: Norman A. Stillman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, Leiden 2010, online ed.

of a Sephardi representation. Under the impact of demonstrations and riots against the discrimination of Mizrahim, organized by the Israeli Black Panthers movement, the 28th World Zionist Congress incorporated the WSF, as stated in its resolutions:

In accordance with Art. 5, Sec. 4 of the Constitution of the World Zionist Organization, Congress resolves to admit the World Federation of Sephardic Communities to membership of the W.Z.O. and in accordance with Art. 15 of the Constitution, authorizes the Executive to determine the conditions for the participation of the World Federation of Sephardic Communities in the Congress, the General Council and other bodies of the W.Z.O., including the nature of its representation and the number of its representatives.²⁷

The resolution of the 28th Zionist Congress with respect to the Sephardi communities was part of a new policy of recognizing Zionist Territorial Organizations in the diaspora who subscribe to the Jerusalem Program as active members of the Zionist Movement, “so as to make the Zionist Movement a central force in the life of the Jewish people as a whole and in the life of every Jewish community.”²⁸

In order to carry out its resolution, the Zionist Congress established the Department for Sephardi Communities that was to play an important role in the history of FESELA. The representation of Sephardi activists from Latin America in Zionist institutions had an impact also on their participation in Jewish and national politics in their respective countries. After almost 50 years of conflict, the WSF came to terms with the WZO to accept the principle of ethnic identity as a basis for representation.

27 Resolutions of the 28th Zionist Congress with A Summary of the Proceedings and the Composition of the Congress Jerusalem, January 18-28, 1972, The Organization and Information Department of the Zionist Executive: Jerusalem, 1972, p. 27. <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=17945> (accessed April 4, 2016).

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

The Continental Dimension: The Latin American Sephardi Federation

The main causes for the incorporation of the WSF into the WZO, and hence for the foundation of FESELA (Federación Sefaradí de Latino-América) were the growing protests among Jews from the Middle East and North Africa against their discrimination by the hegemonic Ashkenazi Israeli leadership that were manifested in the riots of the Black Panthers in 1971.²⁹ Though short lived as a movement, the Black Panthers had a long term influence on the consolidation of identities among Mizrahim, and inspired the recruitment of Sephardim in the diaspora for the struggle against the socio-economic gaps, for political representation in the WZO and in local Jewish institutions, as well as for the recovery of their cultural heritage.

The collaboration between the WSF and the WZO gave the first impulse for the foundation of FESELA. In 1970-71 *shlichim* of the Zionist Movement visited the Latin American countries and established contacts with young members of the local Zionist Federations, preparing the ground for the Foundation Assembly of FESELA that took place in Lima on October 27, 1972.³⁰

Rubén Beraja, then a promising young leader of the Aleppan community in Buenos Aires and the President of the Banco Mayo, was chosen as the first President of FESELA (1972-75). In an interview conducted in 1973 he

29 Moisés Garzon Serfaty, "FESELA a los 40 años de su fundación: ideario, logros y retos," *Maguén Escudo* 165 (octubre-diciembre 2012), <https://revistamaguenesucdo.wordpress.com/fe sela-a-los-40-anos-de-su-fundacion-ideario-logros-y-retos/> (accessed Feb. 17, 2016). On the Black Panthers movement see: Joseph Massad, "Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, 4 (Summer, 1996): 53-68. Published by: University of California Press on behalf of the Institute for Palestine Studies. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2538006> (accessed May 15, 2016); Kziah Avieli Tavivian, "Social protest on the background of ethnic discrimination" (in Hebrew), <http://lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=20495> (accessed May 15, 2016).

30 Garzón Serfaty, see note 29; Interview with Elías Salem, Jerusalem, October 10, 2008, Oral History Division, Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry (hence ICJ).

admitted that FESELA was founded thanks to the initiative of the Jewish Agency, but he said that its members rejected the attempt of the Jewish Agency to dictate their agenda by giving precedence to the problems of Israel over those of the local Sephardi communities.³¹ The objectives of FESELA, formulated in the Statutes, reflect the interest of the founders in their own problems:

- a) Representar a las Colectividades Sefardíes Latinoamericanas.
- b) Integrar a los sefardíes que viven en Latinoamérica a la actividad del judaísmo y del sionismo.
- c) Contribuir y promover el desarrollo de la vida espiritual, social y cultural judía en todo el continente latinoamericano.
- d) Participar y/o colaborar con todos los organismos que dirigen la vida comunitaria judía y sionista a nivel latinoamericano y mundial.
- e) Coordinar y fomentar la colaboración entre las instituciones sefardíes del continente.³²

The Statutes did not refer explicitly to the ethnic gap in Israeli society and stressed local problems. The agenda formulated in the Statutes includes the promotion of Jewish education and culture, the transmission of the Sephardi values and heritage to the future generations and the preparation of a young communal leadership.³³

The Statutes manifest the aspiration of FESELA “de integrar a los judíos sefardíes que viven en Latinoamérica a la actividad del judaísmo y del sionismo” and to maintain “la UNIDAD DEL PUEBLO JUDÍO que tiene como centro espiritual al Estado de Israel.”³⁴ These ideas are reflected in the hymn of FESELA that points out the spiritual revival of the Sephardim,

31 Interview (handwritten) of author with Rubén Beraja, February 14, 1973.

32 Estatutos de la Federación Sefaradi Latinoamericana (FESELA), Art. 2.

33 Estatutos de FESELA, Art. 2 A-I. Most of the sessions in the conference in Lima were dedicated to the situation of the communities in Latin America, Anteproyecto de la agenda de la Via conferencia de comunidades judías en América Latina, 26-27 de octubre de 1972, FESELA, Archivo Histórico Judaico Brasileiro (hence AHJB)

34 Estatutos de FESELA, Preamble, Art. 2; interview with Moisés Garzón Serfaty by Leonardo Senkman, Caracas 1990, ICJ.

their commitment to the unity of the Jewish people and the religious content of their Zionism:

Del profundo soñar de letargos siglos
la conciencia sefaradí despertó:
como chispa que el viento hace hoguera
la consigna de unidad se expandió. ...

Por un pueblo unido
como un solo cuerpo en acción.
Por un pueblo unido
palpitando como un solo corazón. ...

Saciando nuestra sed
en viejos manantiales,
Torá y Shejiná
son nuestros dos caudales. ...

Con ellos transitamos
hacia la redención.
la senda del Eterno
que conduce a Sión.³⁵

As a transnational organization that aims to incorporate all the Sephardi communities in Latin America on an equal basis, the seat of FESELA and its senior officials move every two years to a different country: “Los cargos de Presidente y Secretario serán ejercidos por delegados del mismo país en el que radicará la sede.”³⁶ The bi-annual assemblies became fora for the exposure of the problems of the Sephardi communities in Latin America, their ideologies, agendas and activities. The frequent encounters between the leaders of the Sephardi Zionist organizations in their respective countries created a network of friendship and solidarity.³⁷

35 Himno de FESELA, FESELA, AHJB.

36 Estatutos, art. 6; interview with Elías Salem; for a list of the presidents and their respective countries see: <http://www.fesela.com/expresidentes.php> (accessed May 30, 2016).

37 Interview with Isaac Aspani and Alblerto Levy, Mexico, September 4, 2008; interview with Sabeto Garazi, Miami 2014, ICJ.

In 1981-84 the seat of FESELA moved to Venezuela, under the presidency of Moisés Garzón Serfaty. The financial report of FESELA's treasurer for that period showed that the WSF donated 65% of FESELA's budget, the Dept. of Sephardi Communities in the WZO covered 28%, and the local communities – particularly Venezuela – contributed only 7%.³⁸ The expenses were divided between administration (35%), flight tickets (29%) and unused cash.³⁹ In 1984-86 FESELA's president was Elías Salem from Argentina. The financial report of the treasurer showed similar incomes: 66% from the WSF, 20% from the Dept. for Sephardi Communities of the WZO – 20%, and 14% from different local sources. The expenses included participation in congresses (38%) and cultural activities: the *Semana Sefaradí* (11%), the publication of the journal *Séfaradica* and the activities of CIDICSEF – the *Centro de Investigación y Difusión Sefaradí* (19%).⁴⁰

The cultural expenses of the seat in Buenos Aires illustrate the efforts of FESELA to promote the study and the diffusion of the Sephardi culture among Jews and non-Jews. In this framework *CIDICSEF – Centro de Investigación y Difusión de la Cultura Sefaradí in Buenos Aires*, and *CESC – Centro de Estudios Sefaradíes* – in Caracas were founded. The former published *Séfaradica* and the latter *Maguén Escudo*.⁴¹ The “Sephardi Week” (*Semana Sefaradí*), first celebrated in Caracas, became annual festivals of Sephardi cultural events that took place in different cities throughout the continent, attracting Jewish and non-Jewish audience.

The cultural activities of FESELA, that include publications, exhibitions, lectures, concerts, as well as courses in Ladino and history, transformed the Sephardi heritage into a universal patrimony that is shared in the public sphere, based on the common Iberian past of Sephardim and Latin

38 FESELA, Relación de ingresos y egresos acumulados desde 1 de noviembre de 1981 al 29 de febrero de 1984.

39 Ibid.

40 “Informe de la tesorería,” *Asamblea Plenaria Bienal y Bar Mitsva de FESELA*, Buenos Aires, 28 de mayo al 1 de junio de 1986, pp. 23-25.

41 The journal *Séfaradica* has been published until now in 21 volumes, <http://www.cidicsef.org.ar/catalogo.php?pag=11346>; *Maguén Escudo* published 176 issues, and can be read online: <https://revistamaguenesescudo.wordpress.com/> (accessed Feb. 17, 2016).

Americans. An example of this phenomenon was the celebration of the 850 anniversary of the birth of Maimonides in 1985. Thanks to the efforts of FESELA, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Santiago de Chile, Mexico City, Lima and Miami Beach named streets and public places after the great Sephardi philosopher.⁴² Elías Salem, who acted as President in 1984-86 pointed out the role of FESELA as a mediator between Spain and Israel in the political sphere:

La Federación Sefaradí Mundial y en especial FESELA, su rama latinoamericana, a través de diversas actividades culturales han contribuido y aportado activamente para [...] la derogación del Edicto de Expulsión y el restablecimiento de la relación con Israel.⁴³

The activities of FESELA supplied a political space for Sephardi activists who wished to be integrated into the Zionist and Jewish leadership that were traditionally dominated by the Ashkenazim. In an interview conducted in Mexico, Isaac Aspani and Alberto Levy traced their trajectory in Zionist politics from a beginning in which “no teníamos un espacio en el mundo sionista, y nosotros peleábamos para un espacio” until they obtained important posts in the Zionist movement in the local, continental and global levels.⁴⁴ Arie Konik from Mexico, who was elected president of FESELA in 1986, summarized his political belief:

En el aspecto político FESELA debe tener representatividad dentro del contexto judío como del no judío [...] Tomando como base el sefardismo aspiramos al bienestar de todo el pueblo judío. Queremos que nuestros hijos sepan quiénes somos, de lo contrario no tendremos futuro. Con respecto a mi elección como presidente de FESELA [...] siento un gran orgullo en poder servir de esta forma a todo el pueblo judío y al Estado de Israel.⁴⁵

42 “Semana Sefaradí: Homenaje a Maimónides,” *Asamblea Plenaria Bienal y Bar Mitsva de FESELA*, Buenos Aires, 28 de mayo al 1 de junio de 1986, pp. 24, 51-56; “El ejecutivo pleno se reúne en Miami,” *La Luz*, 13 de septiembre de 1985.

43 “Alocución del Sr. Elías Salem, Presidente de FESELA,” *Asamblea Plenaria Bienal y Bar Mitsva de FESELA*, Buenos Aires, 28 de mayo al 1 de junio de 1986, p. 14

44 Interview with Isaac Aspani and Alberto Levy, Mexico City, 2008, ICJ.

45 “Arie Konik: Nuevo presidente de FESELA” (extractado de revista *La Luz* de Buenos

FESELA was a stepping stone for the inclusion of the Sephardim into the representative organs of the Jewish communities. In a letter from 1993 to Nessim Gaon, President of the WSF, Salomón Garazi referred to the presence of Sephardi leaders in the highest roles in the communities of Latin America, mentioning the names of Rubén Beraja in Argentina, Alberto Nasser in Brazil, Moisés Garzón in Venezuela and Simón Nissan in Mexico, elected as presidents of the umbrella Jewish organizations in their respective countries. He concluded: “Sephardim are not behind any more in Latin America.”⁴⁶

Garazi himself became an important protagonist in the history of FESELA by expanding its limits beyond the official border of Latin America. Thanks to his efforts the Cuban Sephardi Congregation of Miami Beach became one of the most dynamic chapters of FESELA, particularly during his presidency.

Salomón Garazi and the Miami Chapter of FESELA

The Miami Chapter of FESELA was established in 1982 thanks to the initiative of Salomón Garazi who considered the Cuban Jews living in South Florida as victims of Castro’s Communist regime that was hostile toward Zionism. While other Sephardi federations were affiliated with FESELA on a territorial basis, as umbrella Sephardi organizations in their respective countries, the Miami Chapter represented only the Cuban Sephardim, and was structured as a Committee of the Sephardi Congregation of Florida. According to Sabeto Garazi, FESELA had to change its Statutes in order to accept a member situated in the United States. Since other Sephardi congregations in Miami were affiliated to the American Sephardi Federation, it was decided that FESELA would be part of Temple Moses – the Congregation of Cuban Jews.⁴⁷

Aires), *Asamblea Plenaria Bienal y Bar Mitsva de FESELA*, Buenos Aires, 28 de mayo al 1 de junio de 1986, p. 69.

46 Garazi to Nessim Gaon, June 7, 1993, S134/203, CZA.

47 Interview with Sabeto Garazi, Miami, 2014, ICJ. Sabeto is Salomon’s brother, and was President of FESELA when he was interviewed.

Prior to their emigration, the Sephardim in Cuba belonged to a united community, were devoted to Zionism and were tolerant towards religion. Most of them came from two regions in Turkey, preserving family ties and traditional social patterns.⁴⁸ The Sephardi institutions in Havana were centralized around the community *Shevet Ahim*, that maintained a constant contact also with the communities in the provincial towns. While the institutional framework of the Ashkenazim in Cuba was decentralized, all the Sephardi organizations were part of *Shevet Ahim*: the synagogue, the school, the cemetery, the charity *Bikur Holim*, the social club, the sisterhood *Buena Voluntad*, the Maccabi youth movement and the *Consejo Pro Israel*. The centralized structure was preserved even when the affluent members of the community decided to establish their own synagogue and social center in the elegant Vedado neighborhood – a building that was ironically inaugurated after the Castro revolution.⁴⁹

After their traumatic exodus, the Jews – like other Cuban exiles – had to adapt to a new reality, but tried to reconstruct a familiar social environment, to recreate their former institutions and to preserve their Cuban-Jewish identity. They founded the *Círculo Cubano Hebreo* as a common social framework for Ashkenazim and Sephardim, but each ethnic group built its own synagogue. Temple Moses – the Sephardi Congregation of Florida – was considered the successor of Havana’s *Shevet Ahim*. While many of the Sephardim emigrated directly to Dade County, others were relocated by HIAS to other parts of the United States and Latin America. Gradually, however, they found their way to Miami Beach, that was converted into the center of the “Jewbans” (Jewish Cubans), forming a new transnational diaspora.⁵⁰

48 Margalit Bejarano, “Sephardic Jews in Cuba,” *Judaism* 51, 1, Winter 2002.

49 Margalit Bejarano, “Estambul – La Habana – Miami: continuidad y transición en la herencia sefaradí,” in: Norbert Rehrmann (comp.), *El legado de Sefarad*, Salamanca 2003; “From Havana to Miami, The Cuban Jewish Community,” *Judaica Latinoamericana* III, Jerusalem 1997, pp. 113-130.

50 Margalit Bejarano, *ibid.*, “From Turkey to the United States: The Trajectory of the Cuban Sephardim in Miami,” in: Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg (eds.): *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas: A Collection of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Syracuse NY 2012, pp. 141-158.

Many of the Sephardim who were born in Cuba – including Salomón Garazi – passed through a similar trajectory: They were children of immigrants who grew up in Old Havana, studied in the Zionist-Sephardi school *Teodoro Herzl*, practiced sport in Maccabi, studied at the University of Havana and integrated into the communal life.⁵¹ One of the most painful experiences of this generation was the death of Daniel Levy and David Mitrani – two Sephardi youngsters who were killed on board of the ship *Altalena*. They were part of a group of Sephardi Cubans who volunteered to fight in Israel’s War of Independence, possibly without being conscious of the differences between the Irgun and the Hagana.⁵² Their deaths from bullets shot by fellow Jews had a profound effect on the Cuban Sephardim, and the community in Miami Beach continues to preserve their memory to this day. In an interview conducted 40 years after the incident, Garazi said:

Sabemos que Menajem Begin siempre ha sido afectado por esa situación del *Altalena*, al extremo que nunca olvidó a nuestros queridos amigos.... Ha sido siempre una cosa muy sentimental de nuestra parte: la participación que tuvimos en esa parte de la independencia del Estado de Israel con [estos] muchachos.⁵³

In 1951 Menahem Begin visited Havana, and while the Unión Sionista was critical of his visit, the Sephardim welcomed him as “el héroe de Israel.” Their admiration had an impact on their future relations with the Israeli *Likud* Party, particularly since Begin’s election as Prime Minister (1977). Their political tendency coincides with the preference of the American Republican Party, considered as more friendly towards Israel and more uncompromising towards Fidel Castro’s regime.⁵⁴

51 See for example interviews with Veronica Maya (Miami, 2014), Jacobo and Alberto Forma (Miami, 1991), Juan and Rebeca Matalon (Miami, 1991), Salomón Garazi (Miami, 1987), ICJ.

52 Alberto Forma, “*Altalena*”: Memorias de Israel, Author’s edition, Miami, 1998; Margalit Bejarano, *The Jewish Community of Cuba: Memory and History*, Jerusalem 2014, pp. 205-207, 226-239.

53 Interview with Salomón Garazi, Miami, 1987, ICJ.

54 Abraham D. Lavender, “Sephardic Political Identity: Jewish and Cuban Interaction in Miami Beach.” *Contemporary Jewry* 14 (1993):116-132.

The role of Cuban Jews in Miami as intermediaries between the Cuban-American exile and the Israeli diplomatic representatives has yet to be studied, but it is evident that Garazi, as president of FESELA, enjoyed the collaboration of Consul General Dr. Moshe Liba. As an intellectual of Sephardi origin (he was born in Libya), Liba understood the importance of Miami as a bridge between Hispanics and Jews and had great interest in Sephardi culture.⁵⁵

Garazi maintained friendly relations with Cuban American politicians, such as the brothers Lincoln and Mario Diaz Balart. He had particularly close relations with Congresswoman Ileana Ros Lehtinen, whose mother, Amanda Adato, grew up in a Sephardi neighborhood in Havana before she converted to Catholicism. Her grandfather, Jacobo Adato, was a prominent activist in the Havana's *Shevet Ahim*.⁵⁶ In a study of the Sephardim in Miami, Henry Green reaches the conclusion that: "Jewish Hispanic/Sephardim have served as a bridge into the non-Jewish Hispanic community, and have repeatedly used their political capital to gain support for Israel and American Jewish causes."⁵⁷

In addition to his political contacts with the Cuban American exile, Garazi started to cultivate relations between the Cuban Sephardim in Miami and the American Sephardi Federation in New York.⁵⁸ As President of FESELA he developed close relations with Leon Levy, President of the American Sephardi Federation (1982-2001), expanding the scope of Sephardi presence throughout the Western Hemisphere: "Los sefaradim de

55 One of their joint activities was an international conference of Jewish writers in Spanish and Portuguese that took part in Miami in 1991.

56 <http://www.miaminewtimes.com/news/rip-amanda-ros-mother-of-rep-ileana-ros-lehtinen-6557746> (accessed June 6, 2016). See also interviews with Veronica Maya and Armando Franco, Miami, 2014, ICJ.

57 Henry A. Green, "Transnational Identity and Miami Sephardim," in Bejarano and Aizenberg, *Contemporary Sephardic Identity...* (see note 50), p. 140.

58 Garazi to Gary Schaer, December 17, 1979, Garazi Family Archive; "FESELA: El ejecutivo pleno se reunió en Miami", *La Luz*, 13 de septiembre de 1985; Octava presidencia, Salomon Garazi, Miami, 1988-1991. Archive of Garazi family. Salomón Garazi to Shimon Dery, September 9, 1992, Amram Cohen Pariente to Garazi, January 8, 1993, CZA S134/205.

Norte y sur América representan una gran fuerza entre los sefaradim de la Diáspora. Es muy importante que nuestros hermanos ashkenazis nos vean a nosotros como una fuerza importante en el mundo judío.”⁵⁹

Both the American Sephardi Federation and FESELA are branches of the WSF, that during Garazi’s term was at its height. Nessim Gaon, who served as its President for more than forty years, increased the influence of the Israeli delegates in the WSF, granting them 50% of the seats in each of its institutions. He devoted most of the budget for affirmative action in Israel, donating thousands of scholarships to young Mizrahim and contributing generously to the Neighborhood Rehabilitation Project.⁶⁰ At the same time the WSF continued to cover more than 60% of the budget of FESELA.⁶¹

Garazi manifested FESELA’s support of the WSF’s activities in Israel and its engagement in the promotion of *aliya* from Latin America, but he invested most of his efforts in the solution of local problems and was particularly interested in the formation of a young Sephardi leadership through a series of conventions and seminars in different Latin American countries.⁶² The analysis of his speeches in the assemblies of FESELA shows that his major concern was to guarantee continuity through Jewish education, the training of a new generation of communal leaders and the transmission of Sephardi heritage.⁶³ One of his initiatives was to support the program of Sephardi Studies, headed by Prof. Henry Green, at the

59 “Alocución del Sr. Leon Levy Presidente de la American Sephardi Federation,” *Memoria de la VIII Asamblea Bienal y Reunión de Presidentes de Comunidades Sefardíes de América Latina*, Miami, 14 al 18 de Agosto de 1991, p. 26.

60 Old WSF website, saved from <http://www.wsf.co.il/>, accessed via <http://archive.is/EQRnD> (accessed Feb. 17, 2016).

61 Sabeto Garazi, “Informe de la Tesorería” (Abril 1, 1898-enero 1, 1991), *Memoria de la VIII Asamblea Bienal y Reunión de Presidentes de Comunidades Sefardíes de América Latina*, Miami, 14 al 18 de agosto de 1991, pp. 56-59.

62 The first convention for the formation of young leadership during Garazi’s term took part in Buenos Aires with 200 participants, the second in Caracas with 150 and the third in Miami.

63 “Palabras del Sr. Salomón Garazi, Presidente de FESELA (Jornadas Sefardíes 1989, Montevideo), FESELA, AHJB; “Mensaje del Presidente: Se realizó la convención de liderazgo joven en Buenos Aires,” Garazi Family Archive; “Remarks from our President Salomón Garazi,” Garazi Family Archive.

University of Miami. A list of 94 activities during his term of office⁶⁴ shows that half of them were cultural activities that included Sephardi Weeks in Chile, Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina and Miami, and events related to “Sefarad 92” – the commemoration of the 500 years of the expulsion from Spain.

When he concluded his presidency, in 1991, Garazi mentioned among his achievements the appointment of Prof. Isaac Benharroch as Executive Director of FESELA. A native of Morocco who had lived in Venezuela, Benharroch was not only a good manager, but a scholar whose erudition contributed to the quality of the cultural activities of FESELA in Miami.⁶⁵

The most significant event in Garazi’s presidency was his participation in the ceremony in Oviedo, in which the Spanish Heir to the Throne granted the prestigious prize “Príncipe de Asturias” to “the Sephardi Communities in the diaspora”:

El momento más emocionante de mi vida durante la presidencia, fue cuando fuimos señalados para recibir el Príncipe de Asturias de la Concordia, el premio concedido por España a las comunidades sefardíes en la Diáspora. [...] Escuchar al Príncipe de Asturias decir: *“Como herederos de aquellos que los expulsaron hace 500 años, los recibo con los brazos abiertos y con gran emoción.”*⁶⁶

The delegates of the World Sephardi Federation and FESELA who participated in the moving ceremony in which the Prince of Asturias (now King Felipe VI) welcomed their return to the country that had expelled

64 Jaime Mitrani, “Informe de la Secretaría: Actividades del Ejecutivo de FESELA, julio 1988 a junio 1991, *Memoria de la VIII Asamblea Bienal y Reunión de Presidentes de Comunidades Sefardíes de América Latina*, Miami, 14 al 18 de Agosto de 1991, pp. 50-53.

65 Amram Cohen Pariente to Garazi, January 8, 1993, Shimon Dery to Garazi December 21, 1992, Garazi to Dery February 17, 1993, CZA S134/205; “Octava presidencia, Salomon Garazi, Miami 1988-1991,” Garazi Family Archive; personal observance of author. Veronica Maya mentions in her interview Benharroch’s contacts with the King of Morocco.

66 “Palabras del Sr. Salomón Garazi, Presidente Saliente,” *Memoria de la VIII Asamblea Bienal y Reunión de Presidentes de Comunidades Sefardíes de América Latina*, Miami, 14 al 18 de Agosto de 1991, p. 94.

their ancestors and shaped their identity considered themselves as official representatives of a transnational Sephardi diaspora on a global, continental and local levels.

Conclusion

The story of FESELA's Miami Chapter is a case study of a small community, situated on an important crossroad between Latin America and the United States with links to the central organizations and leaders of world Jewry as well as to non-Jewish politicians. It shows the central role of outstanding leaders, in this case Salomón Garazi, remembered by his successors as “mentor, icono y padre... el patriarca de la comunidad” or “un hombre muy dedicado, muy generoso, muy inteligente que tenía el don que sabía cómo manejar las personas.”⁶⁷

It shows the important influence that a global ethnic network can have on an isolated community, as described by Garazi in his last address as FESELA's president:

Al salir de Cuba habíamos perdido todo el contacto, sí, éramos judíos, estábamos en Miami y asistíamos a la congregación, pero estábamos aislados, era un recomienzo de lo que hicieron nuestros padres al salir de Turquía, o de Siria, que llegaron a Cuba. [...] Señores, si nosotros hubiéramos quedado como comunidad pequeña, refugiados cubanos que llegamos aquí, hoy no estarían ustedes con nosotros [...] los brazos de ustedes, feselistas, se abrieron y entramos a formar parte del mundo sefaradí, del mundo judío.⁶⁸

Garazi brings up the story of his parents' generation as an example of an uprooted community, but the history of the conflicts between the first WSF and the WZO that started in the 1920s shows that the communities of Latin

67 Interviews with Veronica Maya and Armando Franco.

68 “Palabras del Sr. Salomón Garazi, Presidente Saliente,” Memoria de la VIII Asamblea Bienal y Reunión de Presidentes de Comunidades Sefardíes de América Latina, Miami, 14 al 18 de agosto de 1991, p. 93.

America – including the Cuban – were part of a global Sephardi network. For over fifty years the leaders of this network attempted to convince the WZO that ethnic diversity was not a threat to the unity of the Jewish people, until they were able to legitimize the Sephardi representation in the Zionist Movement. The analysis of the relations between the WSF and the WZO needs further study, but the documents analyzed for this study reflect a tension between the necessities of the Sephardim/Mizrahim in Israel and those of the Sephardim in Latin America. While the banner of the former is the struggle against the socio-economic gap, the Sephardim in Latin America point out their demand for equal representation in the local and global Jewish leadership as well as the transmission of the Sephardi identity.

The current situation of the Miami Chapter is very different from its heyday during Garazi's presidency. The WZO closed the Department of Sephardi Communities, and the WSF is not able to support the Sephardi federations around the world. Nevertheless, FESELA continues to be active, using local sources to finance its activities. The Miami Chapter has to adapt itself to the demographic changes in the Jewish population of Dade County: on the one hand, the arrival of Sephardi immigrants from different Latin American countries, and on the other, the decline of the Sephardim who were born in Cuba and the loss of Cuban identity among their children and grandchildren.