

María Nuñez: A Cuban Mulatto before the Mexican Inquisition and the Familial Ties of  
Dispersed Crypto Jews in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

By

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The history of Crypto-Jews, Conversos or Judaizers as seen by the Inquisition is a work in progress. The issue stems not from the lack of sources from which to extract information but from the difficulty of defining these terms. They exist in constant flux often being contradictory and complimentary. The mixing and overlapping of terminology makes definitive definition difficult when ascribing them to particular cases or persons. By providing simple, overlapping definitions and applying them towards particular practices, we can begin to address individual and complex cases. Thus, a Crypto-Jew could be defined as a descendant of Jews who in some way still retains some semblance of Judaic practices in their daily or communal life. These practices could be religious as well as cultural varying from case to case and in different loci. Crypto-Jews could be demarcated as descendants of converts who willingly chose Catholicism or other religion or were forced to do so. A Converso can be a descendant of those converts or a convert who has not relapsed unto Judaic practices. Judaizers are those who having either been a Converso or Crypto-Jew, actively lead others into practicing the old religion or do so themselves. This term is particularly useful since it is the legal phraseology used in Inquisitorial cases to label those accused of continuing to follow the Mosaic Law. Obviously, these definitions are not static. Accusations should be viewed and analyzed within the context of particular geographical areas where they occur. In the case to be discussed, María Nuñez, could be seen as a Crypto-Jew, a descendant of converts who stands accused of having Judaic practices. She is considered to be a Judaizer whether or not she actively involved herself in any outwardly or secret Jewish life herself. As it is to be seen, the above terms can be applied to her accusation as an illustration of the overlap of terminologies as ascribed to her by the tribunal.

Having discussed the layering definitions of different terms, the focus must shift towards the geographical setting as well as time period which concerns the above mentioned case. As

previously seen, there were many Inquisitorial cases in Cuba from the beginning of Spanish settlement well into its demise in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Many of the investigations heretofore cataloguing Inquisitorial cases in the Americas have concentrated on the continent, leaving the Circumcaribbean without much inquest. In *Mohínas de la Inquisición*, a short history of accusation and trials of the Cuban Commission of the Inquisition are tallied. There is mention of several instances in which Cuban men were accused of Judaizing. However, a majority of women were accused of practicing witchcraft. Thus, the problem is twofold. The Inquisition catalogues leave the Caribbean without much study and mostly concern themselves with witches and sorceresses. Never had a Mulatto woman been accused of Jewish practices coming before the Inquisition, even on the continent. Thus, Maria provides a unique opportunity to explore both the Caribbean connection as well as the non-European, non-White nexus of Inquisitorial cases.

In 1652, as her case was being concluded, Maria stated she was forty six years old. This would place her birth around 1606. Being Cuban makes her case unique in a number of circumstances. Unlike many Cuban women during the 17<sup>th</sup> century who were accused of witchcraft or heresy, Maria seems to be the only Judaizer. Most of the Cuban women accused during the time were of mixed race like her. It must be noted that during the same period, several men were accused of Judaic practices. Many were either Cuban or transient residents of the island. However, despite having full descriptions of their accusations, Judaizing women are not mentioned on any trials during the entire tenure of the Inquisition. Even the sensational case of Abraham Diaz Pimienta on the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century detailing his relapse and conversion to Judaism in Curacao never mentions any female family members who may have had been culpable of the same. Pimienta's case can be read in its entirety in the Archivo de Aguila in Seville, Spain. The lack of any Judaizing women on this or any other case brought before the

Inquisition in Havana, make Maria Nuñez's case unique and singular. Emphasis must be placed on the fact that she was non-white and a woman.

Before delving into the particulars of Maria Nuñez's case, we must review Cuba's economy and demography during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Geographically, Havana possessed a natural harbor which was the basis of its economic life. It had the distinction of having a varied and highly mobile female population. By reviewing the works of Levi Marrero, Hortensia Pichardo Viñals or Maria Teresa de Rojas, one can gather a sense of the economic role of women during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Women were land owners, farmers and businesspeople fully participating in the economic life of the city. They were mostly tied economically to the «Flota» that would assemble there before sailing on to Spain carrying goods and raw materials from the colonies. The service industry that flourished around the gathering of the ships gave rise to a population of entrepreneurial women. This is evidenced by the fact that in 1570, the «Cabildo» of the city partially lifted a ban against women owning taverns and serving wine to seamen that seasonally gathered in the city. Under Caceres's «Ordenanzas», no tavern owner was allowed to serve wine to Blacks or Indians residents of the city. Many of the women were owners of «estancos» where wine was served to the local Black and Indian populations of men. Black and mestizo women owned, financed businesses as well as grew vegetables with the aid of Indian and Black slaves owned by them or rented from others. Since serving seamen was an itinerant only business occurring during certain times of the year, these women were forced to diversify their economic activities. These sanctioned activities were enumerated in 1674 but for four years the city's women had already engaged in business and the publication on the «Ordenanzas» did not deter them from continuing. This being further evidence of the economic liberties of women enjoyed.

According to Levi Marrero, Governor Gabriel de Montalvo tried to halt the influx of soldiers and transient foreigners that cohabited with locals. Cohabiting seems to have been both economic and personal. Indistinctly of class, many women engaged in business during this period. Gabriel de Luxan's wife participated in the mercantile exchange that took place as the Flota gathered in the harbor. The governor's wife would buy massive amounts of wine when available, storing it to sell during periods when the merchant ships would not dock in the city. On January of 1604, Captain Simon de Valdes, «procurador» of Havana requested a Commissioner of the Inquisition for Havana arguing: «This, being a large island with Havana and its port where the ships, galleons and the commercial fleet gather bringing relations with many foreigners including the English, Flemish and French all the way to Bayamo, Santiago de Cuba, Sancti Spiritus and Trinidad or anywhere else on this territory which brings heresy and laxity in morals». He probably requested to remedy the situation of business exchanges in his city or was truly concerned about the spiritual condition of its citizens. Soldiers had been in close contact with the local women for a while. Despite his request and protest, the exchange, illicit or not between the sailors of the Flota and the inhabitants of Havana continued uninterrupted.

During the time of the Procurador's request, Cuban Inquisitorial matters were either overseen by local Bishops or the Mexican Tribunal until 1610. During the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, there were accusations of Judaizing leveled against important individuals. In 1580, Gabriel de Lujan (Luxan) wrote a letter to the King accusing Francisco Gutierrez de Cuellar of being a Jew. He directed a mob against de Cuellar on that year, making him flee for his life. Lujan is the same governor whose wife had been engaged in the wine business with the Flota. On February eleventh of that year, the Inquisitor General of Spain sent a letter to the tribunals of Mexico, Peru and Cartagena mentioning Cuba was to be subject to Cartagena de Indias in Colombia rather

than Mexico. Nevertheless, there were still cases handled by the Mexican tribunal. In Maria Nuñez's particular case, it was transferred from Cartagena since she had been living in Veracruz and Mexico City for some time and jurisdictionally not a case subject to Cartagena's influence as she did not reside in Havana during her arrest.

Thus, we can ascertain a socio-economic backdrop against which to analyze Maria Nuñez's case. The economic openness of the city as well as the mobility of women is the backdrop against which to explain aspects of the case. Maria is described in the «legajo» as being a Cuban mulatto born in Havana in 1605/1606. She was a merchant of pineapples cooked in syrup having lived in Veracruz and Mexico City for a few years at the time of her arrest. Sixteen witnesses had been called to testify in her audiences. In her own testimony, she assured to be married to Diego Nuñez, her uncle and a resident of Veracruz. Maria had come to Mexico as a relative of Antonio Rodriguez Arias and his daughters. A witness attested that he (Diego) was a Jew and «Mariquita», as she was referred to, had given her hand to Antonio in the Jewish manner of matrimony. She testified (the witness=Violante Suarez) Maria had pronounced: «A fulano yo haré a mi mano». The witness said she knew Antonio was a Jew and came from a cast of Jews. On a second testimony, Violante Suarez added that while living in her house, Doña Ana Enriquez had been visited by said Diego Nuñez and his wife Maria affirming Maria observed the Law of Moses.

In order to understand the web of accusations and complexity of familial ties in Maria Nuñez' case, some historical background and examination of the witnesses themselves is warranted. In 1640, Portugal gained independence from Spain. Many Portuguese Conversos participated in either financing the split or worked for the Portuguese on Spanish colonial lands. Many had taken advantage of the unification of the crowns to relocate to Spanish colonial

domains. The mere mention of «Portugues de Nación» was synonymous with being a Jew in Spanish lore during the period. Some of those brought before the Inquisition in Mexico during the great Autos da Fe of 1640 to 1649 were referred to as Portuguese. Several witnesses in Maria's case were of Portuguese descent or were married to one. In 1642, Blanca Enriquez, who is mentioned in Maria's case, was burned in Effigy for having lived as a Jewess. On the third Auto da Fe of 1647, several members of the Enriquez's extended family were accused or burned as Jews along with their spouses. Among those accused were Simon Vaez and Isabel de la Huerta, also known as Isabel Enriquez. The Enriquez family is further connected to a Sevillian named Bazan as well as to the famous Judaizing Carvajal family and the secret synagogue of Puebla, Mexico. Many Sevillian bankers were Portuguese Jews who had relocated there. For a further discussion of the subject of the connections between the Carvajal family and the Enriquez's, consult Jose Toribio Medina's book on the Inquisition in Mexico. Those intricate and overlapping family ties are beyond the scope of Maria's case. A detailed revision of the Autos would yield the names of many other Judaizers beyond her «family» members. It is mentioned to emphasize Maria's accusers belonged to a much larger group of Judaizers.

In 1648, Micaela and Rafaela Enriquez were accused of being Jewesses. Manuel Mella and Violante Juarez or Suarez were subsequently accused. Violante was one Maria's accusers. Violante was married to Tomas Nunez Peralta who engaged in the sugarcane business as well. She was the sister of Ana and Blanca who were accused during the last great auto of 1647. These women were identified as her extended family during Maria's trial as well as Blanca's trial wherein they were identified as sisters. As the trials are compiled in chronological order, one can see the interfamily accusations between various branches of the Enriquez family. Most of the above were referred to as Portuguese or had a high degree of intermarriage and commercial

relations with the Portuguese scattered throughout the Spanish colonial empire. Many of the men accused of Judaizing in Cuba during this century were also Portuguese. Their trials and accusations can be obtained from the Archivo Historico Nacional. They are only mentioned to illustrate a broader phenomenon far more extended than the referenced accusations of the Enriquez clan. It is worth noting the presence of a certain Portuguese merchant resident on the island had dealing with the Enriquez family who was also present accused of Judaizing in Angola. Time again, several of the accusers and their spouses came to be accused.

During a third testimony in 1649, Doña Isabel de Silva, wife of Antonio Carvallo, indicated Maria was the niece of Blanca Enriquez. Blanca was the mother of Micaela and Rafaela as well as the grandmother of several people accused and relaxed on the previous autos da Fé of 1647 and 1648. She furthered related Maria had visited her eleven years prior (Blanca) speaking about the Law of Moses in her presence. She claimed Blanca had given her pineapples in syrup brought by her niece (Maria) from Cuba. Blanca Enriquez had told Isabel de Silva that Maria had been living in her home with her nephew Antonio Rodriguez, who was Maria's father. Blanca had said Maria was his only daughter and that she was a mulatto whose mother had remained in Havana since she did not observe the Law of Moses. Maria had been sent from Havana to Mexico for Blanca to induct her into the observance of the Law. It must be mentioned again that this is the same Blanca who was burned in effigy for having been a Jewess with several children and grandchildren burned as well. She (Isabel) had known Maria in Blanca's house in Mexico City and during that time, a brother of Antonio Rodriguez had come from Peru. Isabel also mentioned the accused had a child with said uncle. Isabel contended Antonio had been Maria's father and that she (Maria) had married Diego Nuñez assuring both had being Jews at the time she had known them and their aunt Blanca Enriquez.

Subsequently, Maria was arrested and was to remain in jail between 1651 and 1652 having her wealth confiscated by the Tribunal. Testifying on her own behalf, she confirmed her name to be Maria Correa and Diego Nuñez to be her husband. She acknowledged she was born in Havana where she kept a store, to be of forty six years of age and a merchant of pineapples in syrup. This seems to be true as under Philip III's laws, as women were considered heads of households and thus, able to open and keep stores. Maria testified her father to be Manuel Correa from the island of San Miguel in the Canary Islands. Her mother had married a third time with Antonio Rodriguez Nuñez, brother of Diego Nuñez. Diego, her own husband, had gone to Rio de La Hacha where he died. She cannot recount any of her maternal or paternal ancestors but held steadfast to her testimony of being an Old Christian. Maria testified she had several children. Recounted in her testimony that while in Mexico City, she met Antonio Rodriguez Arias and Blanca Enriquez but affirmed they were her husband's kin rather than her own. During her stay there, she heard of a number of children and many family members of Blanca who had been brought before the Tribunal for being Jews, some having worn «Sambenitos» for Judaizing.

On this audience, she declared Antonio Rodriguez Nuñez had left his estate to Maria even though he had several male heirs to inherit his wealth. Diego had personally travelled to Rio de La Hacha in Colombia in order to collect the inheritance. In Pimienta's case, this was a place of refuge for Jews fleeing the Inquisition. It merits further exploration as to whether this location was a haven for those who relapsed unto the old religion. During this audience, it was reported Diego had perished on the endeavor to retrieve the wealth. Concomitant to Maria's accusation, we find a significant case before the Tribunal of Canary Islands. In 1653, Francisco Vicente had accompanied his master Diego Rodriguez Arias from Havana to Tenerife. Vicente denounced him for taking a crucifix every night from his chest and flogging it. This could very

well be the same person mentioned in Maria's case as he had businesses in the incipient sugar cane industry and bore the family name and came from in the same locale as her kin. Diego Arias seems to be a relative of Antonio Rodriguez whom Maria mentions as her father. The connections between her and Conversos who later resurface in other areas a full fledged Jew is furthered evidenced by reading into Diego's case. Maria was involved in the sugar syrup business and Diego had holdings in the same industry. His trial and conclusion can be found in the Archivo Historico Nacional with a description of his escape to London. He is mentioned as one of the Jews involved in the return of Jews there. This makes her family connection to the eventual return of Jews to England an extraordinary and hereto previously unknown fact. The connection between the Canaries and of Jews has been amply investigated by Lucien Wolf in his studies of Crypto-Jews.

On July sixth 1652, Maria was once again accused of being a Judaizer and of having participated in its rites and ceremonies. She was charged for not being married to Diego according to church law and instructed to bring the last will and testament of Antonio to which she refused, naming a lawyer for her defense. Maria refused to testify any further on her own behalf. From August to October of the same year, the prosecution and defense tried to re-examine witnesses and testimonies in Mexico and Havana. There aren't any firsthand accounts of such testimonies in Havana. It can only be inferred from what is mentioned in the relation of her cause. This Inquest seems unable to prove her Judaizing. The evidence was scant, nonexistent, or unable to prove it. Perhaps the laxity in Havana's way of life made it impossible. During the course of 1654, she produced a new baptismal certificate to prove Manuel Correa of the Canary Islands was her legitimate father. It was accepted by the Tribunal having found no fault with it. Furthermore, after examining the will as well as proofs of paternity by Manuel, the

accusations against Maria were suspended on May 1654 wherein all her wealth and estates were re-instated. There would not be any further actions against her on Inquisitorial matters considering it complete and closed.

Maria seems to be an odd and isolated remnant of a web of Jews and Judaizers as can be seen through her many accusers. The great persecutions had come to a climax in the great Autos of the 1640s and 1650s. Her accusers were ultimately charged with the similar crimes, perishing or dispersing after their Autos. She was one but a handful who managed to escape without being burned or having her wealth expropriated. Despite extensive connections to Spain, Portugal, Peru or elsewhere, she fared well. However, many of the connections between Maria, Judaizers, Conversos and Cuba and a possible network of people with similar backgrounds and circumstances still remain to be examined. The accusation does not go into details nor does it make that leap to make connections between her and other Judaizers. Her maternal family, the lives of her children and her extended family in different parts of the world merit to be investigated within the context of a much broader history. Peering through the remarkable accusation of a mulatto like Maria, a web of international trade, family ties and religious heterodoxy can be explored. Remarkably, she is one example of at least a dozen other Judaizers connecting Cuba to traditional hotspots of religious persecution. The current investigation is only the beginning of what can become a corpus of studies on the matter. As further documents are discovered and ties established, the history of Jews, Judaizers and Conversos in Cuba, the Circumcaribbean and their interconnections will become more evident. Maria represents a group of people, a hidden history begging further elucidation. Archives filled with such stories await exploration. Hopefully, the current paper can contribute to the understanding and reconstruction of an unknown history of Inquisitorial cases in Cuba.

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