IN GEVEB A JOURNAL OF YIDDISH STUDIES

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In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies (November 2022)

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The Yiddish Columbus: Critical Counter-History and the Remapping of American Jewish Literature[1]

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Abstract: For Spanish readers, Jacobo Glantz may be most familiar as the protagonist of his daughter Margo Glantz's family memoir, *Las genealogías* (1981; translated as *The Family Tree*), in which she describes her parents' experiences of migration and her own coming of age as a Jewish woman in Mexico. But in the world of interwar Yiddish, Glantz was one of the most important poets of his day. His 1938 epic poem, *Kristobal Kolon,* retells the Americas' most iconic foundational myth using two unlikely guides: Luis de Torres, glancingly mentioned by Columbus as a Jew hired to serve as an interpreter, is at the center of Glantz's retelling, with substantial passages dedicated to the narrative of Guacanagari, a *cacique* also briefly described in Columbus's journals. In Glantz's poem, both De Torres and Guacanagari are traumatized survivors of the Inquisition and of conquest, whose imagined experiences of war and enslavement in the New World serve to connect disparate geographies, histories, and peoples in a powerful revisionist narrative. Written in a multilingual Yiddish with Spanish, Taino, Latin, and Hebrew borrowings, Glantz's masterwork offers a transnational vision of the Americas that insists—in Yiddish—on its Jewish, Muslim, indigenous and African origins, suggesting a new geography for American Jewish literature that exceeds the boundaries of what we understand the Americas and Jewishness to be, and challenging our expectations of what Yiddish literature can contain.

Introduction: Hidden Histories and Jewish Origin Stories

In 1933, Diego Rivera was commissioned to create a mural in Rockefeller Center by Rockefeller himself. Originally titled *Man At the Crossroads*, the mural was meant to

[1] Many thanks to Becky Rubinstein and Margo Glantz, David Mazower and Madeleine (Mindl) Cohen at the Yiddish Book Center, Tamara Gleason Freidberg, the archives at the Jewish National Library, audiences at Mount Holyoke College, Princeton University and University of Michigan, Sarah Philips Casteel, and the readers of *In geveb*, for their feedback to earlier forms of this essay.

celebrate contemporary social and scientific culture, but Rivera's celebration of communism in the mural — specifically, a portrait of Lenin holding hands with workers and a May Day parade — troubled his sponsors. The mural was destroyed in 1934, but Rivera reconstructed it soon afterwards in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City under the title *Man, Controller of the Universe*, adding portraits of Trotsky, Engels, and Marx to the new work.[2] Rivera would not actually meet Trotsky until 1937, well after the completion of his mural, but he reportedly had a live model: Jacobo Glantz, a fellow artist, and like Trotsky an exile, who at the time was indeed rather notorious in the close-knit Mexican Jewish community not only as a Yiddish poet, editor, and activist but for his uncanny physical resemblance to Trotsky.[3]

To contemporary Mexican readers, Glantz is likely more familiar as the protagonist of his daughter Margo Glantz's 1981 family memoir, *Las genealogías*, translated into English as *The Family Tree*, in which Margo Glantz recounts the episode of Rivera's mural and her father's role in it. The memoir has achieved classic status in contemporary Mexican literature for its modernist, non-linear storytelling and its complex meditations on family and memory, in which the narrator's parents' experiences of migration are interwoven with her coming of age as a Jewish woman in Mexico. Margo Glantz became one of Mexico's most significant writers and scholars of colonial Mexican literature, a "Sorjuanista" (a specialist on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz), whose work on La Malinche, Sor Juana, and others, as well as her significant body of creative fiction, have called attention to overlooked female and indigenous experiences in the history of contact and conquest. It is not an exaggeration to say that in the past fifty years Margo Glantz has transformed Mexico's historical memory through her revisionist work.

I use Margo Glantz's anecdote of Rivera's mural, in which Trotsky is revealed to be in fact her father the Yiddish poet, as a kind of palimpsest to introduce the idea of hidden or subterranean histories, thus linking *Kristobal Kolon*, Jacobo Glantz's epic, counter-canonical retelling of the Americas' most iconic foundational myth, to his daughter Margo Glantz's paradigm-shifting reexaminations of the colonial histories of Mexico. *Kristobal Kolon*, a long narrative Yiddish poem first published in the 1930s, while drawing upon the author's own memories of surviving a pogrom in his Ukrainian hometown and the fascism growing in Mexico and abroad in this period, works most critically and self-consciously as counter-history, exploring the ways in which the myth of Columbus can be mobilized to unearth multiple underground histories in the New World.[4]

Glantz re-centers the story of the Jews in the Americas through the imagined experiences of Luis De Torres, an Arabic-speaking Jew briefly mentioned in Columbus's account, who has been claimed by some as Columbus's "Moorish" or Arab navigator.[5] This Mexican-Jewish origin story expresses what Ella Shohat and

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[2] This historical episode is well-known; see https://www.diegorivera.org/man-at-the-crossroads.jsp

[3] That Glantz was famous for being a Trotsky look-alike is affirmed by my father, who grew up in Mexico City and whose parents were the same generation as Glantz and his wife. My father remembers vaguely that Glantz was a poet, but vividly remembers his restaurant and that he looked just like Trotsky. According to Margo Glantz's memoir, Glantz boasted that he was Rivera's model for the mural. See Margo Glantz, *Las genealogías* (Valencia: Pre-Textos Contemporánea, revised edition 2006), 117.

[4] Yaakov Glantz, *Kristobal Kolon*; originally published 1939; expanded edition Tel Aviv: Farlag Y.L. Peretz, 1980.

[5] See Muhammed Abdullah al-Ahari, "The Caribbean and Latin America," in Ingvar Svenberg and David Westerlund, eds. *Islam Outside the Arab World* (Routledge, 1999), 443. María Menocal

Robert Stam call "'the Sephardi-Moorish unconscious' of the Americas," which "proposes an interconnected account of Jews and Muslims in the historical formation of newly invented national identities in the Americas."[6] Further, Glantz links De Torres with African and indigenous actors in the tragedy of conquest, suggesting a new geography for American Jewish literature that exceeds the boundaries of what we understand "America" and "Jewishness" to be, and challenges our expectations of what Yiddish literature can contain.[7] *Kristobal Kolon* may be productively read as a *mestizo* text, meant to expand the formal, linguistic, and thematic capacities of both Yiddish and Mexican literatures, and, moreover, reminds us of the ways in which we might read acts of translation as foundational for all New World literatures.[8]

Jewishness and Mestizaje

Born in 1902 in a small town near Odessa, Jacobo (or Yaakov) Glantz saw his family dispersed by the wars of 1905, 1914, and 1918 and the pogroms that followed, as various members migrated to different parts of the Russian empire, until 1924, when they finally received visas to the United States. By this time Glantz was married and had launched a literary career in the Soviet Union. The family began their journey, but by the time they reached their destination in 1925 the Reed-Johnson Act had been passed and the immigration quotas had been enforced; they could not enter the United States. The Glantzes went to Mexico City instead, which in the 1920s had become a transnational hub of radicals, revolutionaries, and artists attracted to Mexico's post-revolutionary, progressive regime,[9] and whose growing Jewish population was diverse, multilingual, and multiethnic, composed of Sephardi immigrants from the former Ottoman Empire as well as Ashkenazi immigrants from Eastern Europe.

However, in a Latin American context, Jews were neither comfortably European nor clearly non-white. Jews, whose official presence was forbidden in New Spain, were excluded from the hierarchy of race-mixture between African, Indian, and Spaniard through which New Spain consolidated a distinct colonial identity, as

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likewise invokes Luis de Torres as a figure who links Jewish and Muslim Spain with the New World in her famous essay "The Horse Latitudes," in María Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (Duke U Press, 1994) 1-54.

[6] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Genealogies of Orientalism and Occidentalism: Sephardi Jews, Muslims, and the Americas (*Studies in American Jewish Literature*, Volume 35, Number 1, 2016) 14.

[7] For a challenge to the Ashkenazi-centric view of American Jewish literature, see Dalia Kandiyoti, "What is the "Jewish" in "Jewish American Literature"?" (*Studies in American Jewish Literature*, Volume 31, Number 1 2012), 48-60; as well as the special issue of *Studies in American Jewish Literature* edited by Dalia Kandiyoti and Dean Franco on "Jewish-Muslim Crossings in the United States and the Americas" (*Studies in American Jewish Literature*, Volume 35, Number 1 2016).

[8] Here I consider El Inca Garcilosa, son of a Spanish conquistador and Incan woman, sent to Spain for his education by his father, who became the Americas' first *mestizo* writer and historian of indigenous Peru, but his first important literary project was his translation into Spanish of the Italian Neoplatonic dialogue, *Dialoghi di amore* ("Dialogues of Love"), by the Jewish humanist Léon Hebreo (1588). For a discussion of Yiddish and New World literatures as similarly "translational," see Rubinstein, "Translating Cuba," 90.

[9] For biographical details of Glantz see *Las genealogías*, as well as Adina Cimet, *Ashkenazi Jews in Mexico: Ideologies in the Structuring of a Community* (SUNY Press, 1997); for an account of Mexico City in the 1920s see Barry Carr, "Radicals, Revolutionaries and Exiles: Mexico City in the 1920s (*Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies*, Fall 2010, https://clas.berkeley.edu/research/mexico-radicals-revolutionaries-and-exiles-mexico-city-1920s)

well as in the emergence of an independent Mexico, where *mestizaje* was valorized and celebrated as the new national model of identity and culture. Mexico contended with its substantial indigenous populations after independence by transforming the reality of racial hybridity into an ideology: the rhetorical and actual creation of a homogeneous "new race" through the mixing of European and Indian stock, as Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos advocated in *La Raza Cósmica* in 1925. This was accompanied by a romanticizing of indigenous peoples, folklore, and cultures, all in the service of nationalism; if everyone became a mestizo/a, usually configured as the child of the European father and the Indian mother, then everyone would be unified.[10] Relatedly, the post-revolutionary ideology of *indigenismo* aimed to emancipate and integrate Mexico's indigenous peoples into national culture. However, both *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* simultaneously elevated and appropriated indigeneity while marginalizing and stereotyping actual indigenous peoples. Moreover, there was little room in this new model of national identity for immigrant populations, as Rachelle Grossman notes. While in the 1920s and 30s, she writes, *mestizaje* was in notable contrast to other, contemporaneous national ideologies in which racial mixing was considered a threat to national identity, rather than its source, *mestizaje* "still imposed barriers to belonging, as it reinforced particular kinds of racial hierarchies that privileged "mixture" over the indigenous and excluded non-Latin American immigrants. This made it difficult for immigrants from Eastern Europe to find acceptance as Mexicans."[11]

Yiddish literary production in Mexico reveals complex and contradictory responses to these emergent ideologies. At times Jews positioned themselves outside the national model, as in M. Berger's history of the conquest of Mexico published in the Mexican-Yiddish newspaper *Der Weg*, featuring an illustration of the four "racial types" that had created the "Mexican:" the "Indian, Spaniard, Chinese and African."[12] In this Yiddish repetition of the Mexican national narrative of *mestizaje*, Jews are notably absent. On the other hand, a selection of titles of Yiddish literature published in Mexico seems to represent a desire for a hybridized Jewish-Mexican identity and Jewish rootedness in Mexico, perhaps spurred by Jacobo Glantz's *Kristobal Kolon*. Solomon Kahan published *Yidish-Meksikanish* (Yiddish-Mexican), and *Meksikaner Viderklangen* (Mexican Echoes) in 1945 and 1951; Avraham Vaysboim published *In Meksikaner Gan-Eyden* (In a Mexican Paradise) in 1959. As Adina Cimet argues in her history of the Ashkenazi community in Mexico, Jacobo Glantz consistently articulated an "ideology of integration" with Mexican society (78) and wanted to participate, in his words, as an "authentic actor" in Mexico's (and the Jews') new "chapter" (79).

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[10] See Tace Hedrick, *Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation and Identity in Latin American Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press) 2003. Hendrick treats Mexican "discourses of mestizaje" as in some way exemplary of Latin America as a whole, which I understand is not without its problems. Hedrick writes: "Whatever permutations the Latin American emphasis on the mestizo would take (and there were many), the concern with a sense of the ancient in combination with the modern – a mestizaje that called for race mixing but was simultaneously indigenist – would provide both motivation and paradox in public policy and artistic endeavor alike" (5).

[11] Rachelle Grossman, "Mexican Yiddish and Secular Jewish Identity in Mexico," *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* (https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/mexican-yiddish-and-secular-jewish-identity-in-mexico/).

[12] M. Berger, "Geshikhte fun Meksike," *Der Weg* (details unavailable). The text and illustrations from this article were reproduced as a mural that was featured on the walls of the Yiddish library in the *Nidje Yisroel* synagogue in Mexico City, now a cultural center called the Sinagoga Histórica.

Jacobo Glantz became one of the more well-known Yiddish literary figures in the Ashkenazi community in Mexico City. He and his wife operated a series of small businesses, including a shoe store and a restaurant famous for its traditional Eastern European Jewish food and for the Mexican artists and writers who frequented the establishment, including Rivera. Glantz was a visual artist as well as a poet, and particularly fond of self-portraits, many of which decorated the walls of his restaurant. Writers, intellectuals, and artists whom Glantz counted among his acquaintances included Jorge Cuesta and Jaime Torres Bodet, co-founders of the Mexican modernist group *Los Contemporáneos*; the artists Ignacio Rosas and Fernando Leal; and the poets Gonzalez Martinez and Octavio Paz. Glantz was important in the Yiddish literary world, and his home and restaurant were regular stops for Yiddish artists from the U.S. like Sholem Asch, Maurice Schwartz, and Shmuel (Niger) Charney.[13] Glantz's work emerged from and was in conversation with these distinct but occasionally overlapping literary networks, thus reconceiving *mestizaje* as linguistic and thematic hybridity

Glantz and Rivera became friends; they liked to speak in Russian with each other, and Glantz praised Rivera for his excellent, if accented, Russian.[14] Glantz introduced Rivera to fellow Yiddish poet Yitzkhok Berliner, whose 1933 poetry collection *Shtot fun Palatsn* (City of Palaces) Rivera illustrated, the artist's only collaboration with a Yiddish writer, and a text that can be read productively alongside Glantz's *Kristobal Kolon*. Rivera's thirteen line drawings accompany Berliner's poems, whose themes juxtapose Mexico City's majestic pre-Columbian history with the violence of Spanish conquest as well as its contemporary poverty and despair, embodied by Mexico's Indians. In the poem "Teotihuacan," for instance, scholar Beth Merfish argues that Berliner begins to articulate a Yiddish variation of Mexican *indigenismo*, as he imagines the blood of his ancestors buried beneath the Aztec pyramids: "Un efsher hot mayn elter-elter-zayde do af aykh getrotn/ un hot gelozn beyerushe in mayn blut a sod a vaytn, — — / un efsher ligt mayn urshprung unter shteyner ayere fartrotn/ in shvaygn aybikn durkh loyfn fun unendlekhe tsaytn? — — —"[15] (Perhaps you have the steps of my great great grandfather upon you/ and my blood bears the heritage of a secret from afar,-/ Do my origins lie buried beneath your stones/ in their endless, timeless silence?-).[16] Merfish writes: "[Berliner] elides the Jewish and Indian experiences and posits the existence of his roots in a mythologized Aztec site. That he continues by noting the persecution of both peoples by the Inquisition seems to be both an echo of [Rivera] and a signal that this oppression unites the two peoples and, by implication, the mestizo Mexican with the Mexican Jew."[17]

Grossman, in her discussion of Yiddish literary production in 1930s Mexico, contrasts Berliner's *indigenismo* with Glantz's "Neo-Sephardism," both literary

[13] Cimet, 198 n18; as well as Margo Glantz, *Family Tree*, 74-75; *in Las genealogías*, 96-97.
[14] Cimet, 78; Margo Glantz, *Las genealogías,* 64.
[15] Yiddish text from Yitzkhok Berliner, "Teotihuacan," *Shtot fun Palatsn: lider un poeme* (Mexico: Farglag Der Veg, 1936), 28.
[16] English translation from Isaac Berliner, *City of Palaces: Poems by Isaac Berliner and Drawings by Diego Rivera*, trans. Mindy Rinkewich, (Basking Ridge: Jacoby Press, 1996), 10.
[17] Beth Merfish, "Striae Re-Negotiated: The Self-Definition of the Yiddish-Speaking Jewish Community in the Era of Mexico's Raza Cósmica." (2013) https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/laii_research/56, p. 22.

strategies deployed to facilitate a new form of "Jewish Mexicanidad."[18] If "Berliner's poetry engaged with the Jewish encounter between race and *indigenismo*, Jacobo Glantz rhetorically uncovered the Jewishness within Mexico's Spanish colonial history through a strategy of Neo-Sephardism….a narrative of Jewish continuity linking medieval Spanish Jewry and the *conversos* who sailed to the New World with Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants in present-day Mexico."[19] Rivera's illustration that accompanies Berliner's poem "Kloysters" later in the collection in fact links Berliner's *indigenismo* and Glantz's Sephardism. In this drawing, the accused Judaizer, recognizable because of his coned hat, is carried by priests to the pyre.[20] While the auto-de-fe became an iconic scene in modern Latin American visual discourse, its appearance in a Yiddish poetry collection exemplifies the ways in which this central trauma of Sephardic Jewish history became a significant trope in the *Yiddish* literature of Latin America.[21]

Representing the brutality of the Spanish was another way of participating in the post-revolutionary rhetoric of such new republics as Mexico, in which indigenous, enslaved African, *converso* (forcibly converted Jews) or *morisco* (forcibly converted Muslims) resistance against Spanish oppression could be recast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as metaphors for the modern fight for independence. But Yiddish writers could also mobilize the trope of the auto-de-fe to interpolate, all at once, their own experiences of Eastern European anti-Jewish violence, their idealistic commitment to the international Left's fight against fascism in 1930s Spain, and, particularly in Glantz's work, the representation of shared histories of indigenous, African, Jewish, and Muslim subjects under Spanish terror, as a modality for American belonging and a means of Jewish indigenization.[22] As Edna Aizenberg has observed, Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants to Latin America could create a "Sephardic mythology" for themselves to "link Judaism and Hispanism" and thus convince both themselves and their new host cultures that they indeed "belonged."[23]

This essay considers such acts of translation and adaptation as Berliner's and Glantz's, in other words, as strategies in racial, national, and historical revision and self-fashioning. As Yiddish writers migrated to the Americas and confronted the legacy of New World colonialism and settlement, translations and adaptations of these and other national narratives or mythologies were a way to assert *both* belonging and outsiderness, often, after Homi Bhabha's characterization of translation, as "a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense."[24] Glantz's re-imagining of the voyages of Christopher Columbus is continuous with similar

[18] Rachelle Grossman, "The Most Mexican of Us All: Yiddish Modernism and the Racial Politics of National Belonging," forthcoming in *Comparative Literary Studies* (read in manuscript).
[19] Grossman, "Most Mexican," 23-24 (ms).
[20] Berliner, "Kloysters," *Shtot fun Palatsn*, 72-74. Rivera, illustration, *Shtot fun Palatsn*, 75.
[21] See Alan Astro, ed. *Yiddish South of the Border: An Anthology of Latin American Yiddish Writing* (Albuquerque: U New Mexico Press) 2003. For an anthology that includes multilingual Jewish writing from Latin America, thus bringing together Sephardi and Ashkenazi Latin American Jewish authors in one volume, see Ilan Stavans, *The Scroll and the Cross: 1,000 Years of Jewish-Hispanic Literature* (New York: Routledge), 2003.
[22] My thanks to Sarah Casteel for this insight.
[23] Edna Aizenberg, "Sephardim and Neo-Sephardim in Latin American Literature," in Yael Halevi-Wise, ed. *Sephardism: Spanish Jewish History and the Modern Literary Imagination* (Stanford U Press, 2012), 132-33.
[24] Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space, Interview with Homi Bhabha" in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 210.

efforts across the Americas in the 1920s and 30s by Yiddish writers, such as those in the United States who translated *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Walt Whitman, and Native American chants;[25] and Asher Penn and Eliezer Aronowski in Cuba, who wrote epic poems about Afro-Cuban and indigenous revolutionary icons El Indio Hatuey and Antonio Maceo.[26]

America Discovers Columbus

As Molly Metherd writes, "Christopher Columbus has been, from the outset, a constructed icon."[27] Columbus has been represented as "bold adventurer," "keen negotiator," "intrepid sailor," "evangelist," and "pirate;" and most recently as an icon of "European hegemony and exploitation in the New World" (227). The Columbus archive's "complicated and mediated nature," its "history of transcription, manipulation, and appropriation" lends itself to such biographical re-readings of Columbus. Columbus himself seems to have produced multiple and variant versions of his own documents (as in the three versions of the same letter addressed to Ferdinand and Isabella, to Luis de Santángel, and to Rafaél Sánchez) that produce shifting readings of his voyages as, by turns, commercial, imperial, or religious in intent.

Columbus's journal itself only survives in highly mediated form. The original log was lost in his lifetime, and for centuries the only known versions of Columbus's logs were copies by his son Fernando Columbus and by Bartolomé de Las Casas, undertaken in preparation for writing his *Historia de las Indias*. In 1825, Martín Fernández de Navarrete published an edition of Columbus's diaries based on Las Casas's adaptation, but he omitted all of Las Casas' marginalia, presenting the text as if "it were a manuscript of Columbus's journal" (229). This version has served as the authoritative text for two centuries, a revision masquerading as an original. Glantz thus joined writers "from Washington Irving to Carlos Fuentes to Salman Rushdie" who have, writes Metherd, "taken advantage of these nebulous Columbian texts to create Columbus as an icon for their respective cultural contexts" (230).

In Glantz's case, the 1930s in Mexico saw a wave of critical and revisionist historiography that sought to reframe narratives of the conquest from a counter-colonial perspective. According to Victoria Campos, Mexican intellectuals in the 1930s were deeply engaged in debates about Mexican history and historiography. Mexican historians like Edmundo O'Gorman, along with refugee intellectuals from Civil War and post-Civil War Spain, represented a "new generation of intellectuals in

[25] For a discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Yiddish and the politics of translation, see Rachel Rubinstein, "'Strange Rendering:' *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Yiddish" *American Jewish History* (Spring, 2017), pp. For discussions of Whitman, Native chant, and other "indigenous" writers translated into Yiddish, also see Rubinstein, "Going Native, Becoming Modern" in *Members of the Tribe: Native America in the Jewish Imagination* (Wayne State, 2010), as well as Julian Levinson, "From Heine to Whitman: The Yiddish Poets Come to America," in *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literature Culture* (Indiana University Press, 2008).

[26] Rachel Rubinstein, "Translating Cuba: Language, Race and Homeland in Cuban-Yiddish Poetry of the 1930s," in Sarah Philips Casteel and Heidi Kaufman, eds. *Caribbean Jewish Crossings: Literary History and Creative Practice* (Charlottesville: U Virginia Press, 2019) 89-109.

[27] Molly Metherd, "The Americanization of Christopher Columbus in the Works of William Carlos Williams and Alejo Carpentier," in *A Twice-Told Tale*, 227.

Mexico whose new approach to history was meant to confront Europe's anti-New World bias."[28]

The historian Ramón Iglesia, a fellow immigrant to Mexico whose 1930 revisionist essay "El Hombre Colon" ("The Man Columbus") was a significant source for Glantz,[29] observed in a 1940 lecture that the term "history" refers to both an event that happened in the past, and the *narration* of that event. We designate "by the same word," Iglesia says, "the events of the past and the narration of them."[30] History, he argues in response to the historiographical debates of the time, is about the present as much as the past, and every work of research can and should be accompanied "by mediation and interpretation" (121). Iglesia's activist idea of public history was conditioned, he writes, by the three years he spent fighting in the Spanish Civil War before coming to Mexico as a refugee. "Narrative history," he wrote at the height of WWII, "cannot be considered apart from the crisis of our time" (Preface, 3).

It was not only Iglesia's approach to narrative history that fueled Glantz's epic work, but Iglesia's interpretation of Columbus himself. In "El Hombre Colon," Iglesia systematically punctures the most cherished myths about Columbus — "castles of sand and cloud" he calls them — through an attention to the inconsistencies and contradictions in all the histories and accounts of the man and his voyages: [31] he was a "man of flesh and blood," Iglesia keeps reminding us, neither "learned" nor a "visionary" (10), proof of which, he adds, was the support of "merchants and Jews" for his voyages. He was a "business man" (22), "dry, unemotional, hard, egotistical…he sees the Indians as objects, as things that can be exploited for profit" (18). The "consistency of all his acts, his hardness, his lack of humanity, are exemplary" (24). He is driven by a singular goal: gold. He is not at all, Iglesias argues, a religious man. His piety is "fabricated, conscious, extroverted, ritualistic…self-interested and dependent on practical results" (26-7). Even in his apparent spiritual crisis and rededication to piety in the wake of his arrest, Iglesia, reversing an earlier argument in which he imagined Columbus's two personalities, the practical and the mystical, vying with one another, reads as Columbus seeking a "practical and immediate advantage, as he always did" (30).

Explaining the origin of her father's epic poem, Margo Glantz writes that "everyone who emigrates to America thinks he's another Columbus" (106). Her father collected Columbiana: he was deeply read not only in the many editions of Columbus's journals and other early modern accounts of his voyages, but also in the new, more critical histories of Columbus and of the conquest emerging in the 1930s. Glantz was also expert in the history of Jews and the Expulsion; in the words of the

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[28] Victoria E. Campos, "Toward a New History: Twentieth-Century Debates in Mexico on Narrating a National Past," in Santiago Juan-Navarro and Theodore Robert Young, eds, *A Twice Told Tale: Reinventing the Encounter in Iberian/Iberian-American Literature and Film* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 51. I note that this decade was also when Alfonso Toro was working on his monumental history of the Carvajal family, a sixteenth-century *converso* family persecuted by the Inquisition in Mexico City (Alfonso Toro, *La familia Carvajal* (Mexico: Editorial Patria) 1944). Throughout the 1930s Toro was publishing his research on the Carvajal family undertaken through the Mexican national archives; his descriptions of the torments suffered by the members of this family may very well have informed Glantz's poem.

[29] *Family Tree*, 137; *Las genealogías*, 162.

[30] Ramon Iglesia, "The Historian's Dilemma," *Columbus, Cortes: and Other Essays*, translated and edited by Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 101.

[31] Iglesia, "The Man Columbus," *Columbus, Cortes and Other Essays*, 18. Published in Spanish as *EL Hombre Colon y otros ensayos* (México: El Colegio de México, Centro de estudios históricos) 1944. "El Hombre Colon" was first published in *Revista de Occidente* (Madrid), 1930.

New York-based Yiddish literary critic Charney, "nobody else" knew more about that period than Glantz (108). Charney urged Glantz to write about that history, and according to Margo facilitated the publication of the first fifty pages of *Kristobal Kolon* in the New York journal *Zamlbikher* in 1938.[32]

Dedicated to Niger and subtitled "poeme in dray teyln" (poem in three parts), the poem is prefaced by an historical glossary of figures and terms and dated 1936-37. Glantz returned to his poem repeatedly over several decades. In 1939, Glantz published a much shorter fragment of his poem in the journal *Undzer Tog*, published in Vilna.[33] In 1941, several sections were published in the Mexican-Yiddish anthology *Der Kontinent*, alongside contributions from writers across the Americas.[34] Finally, in 1980, shortly before his death in 1982, Glantz published a 287-page, book-length version of his poem in Tel Aviv, that included several previously unpublished sections, including a new dedication to Columbus dated 1949; a prologue titled "Spain, a Prelude," dated 1934; and hundreds of pages of new narrative, dated 1938-9.[35] *Kristobal Kolon*'s publication geography — New York, Vilna, Mexico, Tel Aviv — suggests the transnational networks of twentieth-century Yiddish literary production. It wasn't until Becky Rubinstein translated a few sections of *Kristobal Kolon* into Spanish for *Tres Caminos: El Germen de la Literatura Judía en México* (1997), that the poem was published in Spanish in the country of its composition.[36] In another layer of complication and confusion, both Margo Glantz and Becky Rubinstein assert the existence of other *Kristobal Kolon* translations into Spanish — translations and translators that don't exist or cannot be found.[37] Like Columbus's diaries, Glantz's poem has its own history of fragmentation, translation, and mediation.

Jacobo Glantz Discovers America

Kristobal Kolon concentrates on Columbus's first two voyages, but moves back and forth in time, ending with Columbus's death.[38] The poem is written in a rich, archaic, deliberately multilingual Yiddish with Spanish, Latin, Taino, Hebrew, and Arabic borrowings, sometimes combining these into hybrid neologisms and portmanteaus (for instance, "mappamundim" (242) is a Latin word with a Hebrew

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[32] Yaakov Glantz, "Kristobal Kolon: poeme in dray teyln," *Zamlbikher* 3, eds. Y. Opatoshu and H. Leyvik (New York: Astoria Press, May 1938), 5-57; Margo Glantz, 108.
[33] Yaakov Glantz, "Kristobal Kolon: fragment fun der kolombus poeme," *Undzer tog* (January 6, 21:6, 1939) 5.
[34] The anthology, meant to be the first of a regular journal publication, evidenced a unique hemispheric and pan-American approach new to Yiddish letters. Melekh Ravitsh and Moyshe Rosenberg, "A Word from the Editors," translated by Tamara Gleason Freidberg and Arturo Kerbel (*In geveb*, May 2, 2021, https://ingeveb.org/texts-and-translations/kontinent). Also see Tamara Gleason Freidberg and Arturo Kerbel, "The Continent: Thoughts Toward the Space of Contemporary Yiddishism" *(In Geveb*, May 2, 2021; https://ingeveb.org/blog/the-continent-thoughts-toward-the-space-of-contemporary-yiddishism)
[35] Yaakov Glantz, *Kristobal Kolon* (Tel Aviv: Farlag Y. L. Peretz, 1980).
[36] Becky Rubinstein, editor and translator, *Tres Caminos: El Germen de la Literatura Judía en México* (México: Ediciones El Tucán de Virginia, 1997), 93-101.
[37] Becky Rubinstein asserts that *Kristobal Kolon* was translated into Spanish in 1980 (*Tres Caminos*, 73) and Margo Glantz likewise asserts that the poem was translated by Colombian poet "Leopoldo Rosas," who "changed the style" (*Las genealogías*, 162). Glantz could mean poet Leopoldo De La Rosa. I have not located this translation.
[38] All quotes in this section are from the 1980 edition of *Kristobal Kolon*.

plural ending; Columbus's men discuss their "konkista-plener" (40), i.e. conquista-plans). When Columbus returns triumphantly to the Spanish court to present the riches of the New World, Glantz offers a lavishly polyglot catalog of New World flora and fauna: "*Hutyes* mit montshike eklekh vi hozn./ *Papugayen* vi paves, *sensantls*,/ Zun-royzn-purpur-kalirn/ Un mon-blumen ronde, vi zunen./ Lilyes vi lotosn vayse fun ganges,/ *Almasiga*; tsedern shvartse un royte,/ *Koyotn*, vi klavim vi shtume, kamalyonen,/ un katshkes, vi shvanen…." (*Hutyes* [Caribbean rabbits] with tiny tails like hares, *papagayos* [parrots] like peacocks, *zenzontles* [mockingbirds]/ Sun-rose-purple-colored/ And round poppies like suns./ Lilies like the white lotuses of the Ganges/ *Almaciga*, a black and red cedar tree/ *Coyotes*, like mute dogs; chameleons,/ And ducks, like swans…).[39]

Quotes and fragments translated directly from Columbus's journals feather the narrative: "S'iz harbst itst, oktober,/ In lender, in vayte./ Un do, iz "april in andalusiyer" (It is autumn now, October/ In far off lands./ And here, it is "April in Andalusia" (37)). A passage from Isaiah in the original Biblical Hebrew serves as the epigraph (6), reminding the reader that Columbus referred to the text of Isaiah in his journals.[40]

Luis De Torres is at the center of Glantz's retelling as much as, if not more than, Columbus. De Torres, mentioned only fleetingly by Columbus as a converted Jew who serves as a scout on one mission, in Glantz's elaboration is Columbus's confidante and advisor on the voyage, is left behind at La Navidad and survives the war, becomes a mystic and prophet in the wilderness, and returns to Columbus years later when he is the besieged governor of the colonies, castigating him for the horrors he has unleashed in the New World. In the original Columbus texts, De Torres is briefly mentioned in Columbus's journal as having "lived with the Adelantado of Murcia and had been a Jew, knowing Hebrew and Chaldee and even some Arabic."[41] De Torres would presumably serve as an interpreter when they reached the East. Luis De Torres makes another brief appearance when, after several weeks of exploring the small islands of the Bahamas, Columbus reached Cuba and sailed along its coast for a few days. Convinced that this was a large landmass and that the city of Cathay, with the Grand Khan, was to be found in the interior, Columbus sent a party of four men: two Indians whom he had kidnapped earlier, and two Spaniards: Rodrigo de Jerez and Luis de Torres. After four days the men came back and reported that they had not found gold, the Grand Khan, or Cathay but had found a settlement of perhaps fifty houses, where they were received with courtesy, and were introduced to the custom of smoking tobacco.[42]

Luis De Torres's brief appearance in the Columbus narrative flowered over the next centuries into a more elaborate mythology. Other historians would go on to claim that Luis De Torres was among the thirty-nine men who Columbus left at the settlement La Navidad, all of whom were dead by the time he returned on his second voyage a year later.[43] The local Indians reportedly told Columbus that there had been

[39] *Kolon*, 91-92.
[40] "For thus said the Lord, the Creator of heaven who alone is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who alone established it—He did not create it a waste, But formed it for habitation…." (Isaiah 45:18)
[41] Clements Markham, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus (during his first voyage 1492-3): And Documents Relating to the Voyages of John Cabot and Gaspar Corte Real* (Hakluyt Society, 1893, 2010), 66
[42] See Markham, 69-71.
[43] An important source for much Luis De Torres legend is Meyer Kayserling, *Christopher Columbus and the Participation of the Jews in the Spanish and Portuguese Discoveries*, translated from the

one Spaniard who had spoken disparagingly of Catholicism and dissuaded them from converting; that must have been, at least one historian speculates, De Torres.[44] There are more legends about De Torres: that he spoke to the Indians in Hebrew. That he was the one who discovered and named the turkey. That he became a wealthy landowner in Cuba and married a series of Taino women. That he brought tobacco back to Spain and was accused of witchcraft.[45] Glantz certainly knew all of these, as well as the theory that Columbus himself was from a converso family, an idea that seems to have emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. A 1934 article, published by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in the *Jewish Daily Bulletin* to coincide with Columbus Day of that year, could not have gone unnoticed by Glantz: "Christopher Columbus a Jew? New Evidence Supports Theory," trumpets the headline of H. Wishengrad's essay.[46] Among the key pieces of "evidence" that Columbus obscured his converso origins: "Documents say his name was really Cristobal Colon and He Was Born in Spanish Province, Son of Jewish Parents Forced to Embrace Christianity" (3).

While the myth of Columbus's Jewish origins has been, at this point, dismissed by most historians, as historians Bernardini and Fiering observe, "the very fact that the question is raised is worthy of reflection."[47] Calling Columbus a Jew, Bernardini and Fiering argue, is another way of calling him "modern:" that is, "individualistic, skeptical, willing to challenge the powers that be while at the same time pleasing them" (2). The Renaissance's "spirit of initiative" that he embodies, owes something, they write, to the "Jewish spirit of inquiry and skepticism" (2). Taking an alternative approach, such contemporary Native-authored novels as Gerald Vizenor's *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) and Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich's *The Crown of Columbus* (1991) have drawn upon Columbus-as-*converso* theories in order to, in trickster fashion, "defang" and domesticate Columbus and retell the story of America's native peoples as one of survivance, agency, and reclamation.[48]

But this is not Glantz's vision of Columbus or of the Renaissance. "Mentsh zukht veltn naye, di alte velt farnikhtet," he writes in *Kristobal Kolon*: "Man searches for new worlds, the old world collapses" (13).[49] Glantz's Renaissance, especially in

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author's manuscript by Charles Gross, New York, 1894; German ed., Berlin, 1894; Hebrew transl., Warsaw, 1895. Also see the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, which asserts that "it is known that the interpreter, Luis de Torres, the first European to set foot on American soil, was a former Jew who had been baptized the day before the expedition set sail" (Volume 2, p. 41). Also see the full entry: Torres, Luis de." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 20, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, p. 59. *Gale eBooks*, https://link-gale-com.proxy2.hampshire.edu/apps/doc/CX2587519962/GVRL?u=mlin_w_hampcol&sid=GVRL&xid=a39fc087. Accessed 19 Jan. 202.

[44] Alicia B. Gould y Quincy, "Nueva lista documentada de los tripulantes de Colón en 1492: Luis de Torres", *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 90 (1927), p. 541-552.

[45] See https://forward.com/culture/books/433044/how-columbus-brought-america-its-first-jew/

[46] H. Wishengrad, "Christopher Columbus a Jew? New Evidence Supports Theory," Jewish Daily Bulletin, Friday October 12 1934, 3 (https://www.jta.org/1934/10/12/archive/christopher-columbus-a-jew-new-evidence-supports-theory)

[47] Paolo Bernardini and Norman Fiering, eds, *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West 1450-1800* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 3.

[48] See Casteel, as well as Alan R. Velie, "The Indian Historical Novel," in Alan R. Velie, ed. *Native American Perspectives on Literature and History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 204-5.

[49] All English translations from *Kristobal Kolon* throughout the essay are my own.

the final edition of the poem, is identified entirely with the chaos, terror, and savagery of the Inquisition, the Christian military campaigns against Muslim states on the Iberian Peninsula that preceded it, and, later, violence and enslavement in the Americas. His Luis De Torres is a traumatized survivor of the Inquisition's horrors, who first dreams and ultimately despairs that the New World will bring a new world order of peace and equality. In Glantz's poem, De Torres is an interpreter in the most capacious sense – interpreting Columbus's visions and dreams, lamenting the Inquisition's violence in Spain, and prophesying the bloody conquests to come.

The poem's original first section, "Plus Ultra" — the title written in English characters — begins with a promise of liberty and redemption in the wilderness. As the sailors wait and watch for land, Columbus calls De Torres his "vogl-bruder" (wander-brother) and compares the Jews' wandering in the desert with their own modern voyage of discovery. Columbus declares: "Vi di lukhes fun barg sinay/Halt ikh heylik mayne lukhes/Fun mayn rabin fun Lizboa/ Avraham Zakuta/Hot onfartroyt mir zayne tovlen…" ("Like the tablets from Mount Sinai/I hold my holy tablets/From my rabbi from Lisbon/Abraham Zacuto/ has entrusted me with his tablets…" (21)). Columbus is not a *converso* in Glantz's retelling, but as the son of a Genoese fisherman, he feels solidarity with De Torres as a fellow outsider, whom he calls his "persecuted brother." De Torres, in turn, calls Columbus a latter day Moses: "Vayl bashert iz dir tsu zayn der goyl/fun mayn folk, vos iz in plogn./ Vi Moyshe/ Hot mayn folk gefirt fun goshn/ in erets kanoen,/ vestu mayn folk fun flamen/ brengn im durkh yamen/ in *guanahani*" ("Because you are fated to be the redeemer/ Of my people, who are in torment./ Like Moshe/ who brought my people from Goshen to the Land of Canaan,/ You will bring my people from the flames through the seas to *Guanahani*." (45-6).

Glantz's Columbus may not be Jewish, but his voyage is built, Glantz intimates, on the backs of Jews and Muslims. In the passages above, Columbus refers to the interventions and investments of the Sephardim Luis de Santángel and Don Isaac Abravanel, and the inventions and innovations of the astronomer and mathematician Abraham Zacuto. But behind Zacuto are the Muslim scientists who produced the "the great astronomical and mathematical traditions of the golden age of Arabic science" (74), and taught and collaborated with such Jewish scientists as Zacuto throughout the Iberian Peninsula before the Christian Conquest.[50] Alongside Santángel and Abravanel, who enriched the kingdom's coffers with their family fortunes, Glantz makes sure later in the poem to remind us of the defeated and dispossessed Muslim prince of Granada, who throws himself at Queen Isabella's feet and pleads for his life, swearing by Allah and Muhammed that she can have Alhambra and its riches if she lets him live. In a shocking display of brutality, Glantz writes, "Un zi tret un zi plindert/ dem guf zaynem toytn,/ zi flukht un farshelt im/ oyf eybik un eybik" ("She trampled and pillaged his dead body, she cursed and damned him for ever and ever" (99)).

[50] See Patricia Seed, "Jewish Scientists and the Origin of Modern Navigation," in *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West 1450-1800*. She writes that in the Muslim world, "Islamic leaders encouraged cooperation between Jews and Muslims in scientific inquiry" (75). Thus, "the knowledge, data and the manuals that provided the launching pad for modern nautical science were composed in Arabic and Hebrew (77). In sum, the "instruments and calculations [used by Iberian 15th century navigators] came from Jewish scientists on the Iberian peninsula, heirs to (and innovators in) the great astronomical and mathematical traditions of the golden age of Arabic Science" (74).

By the poem's 1980 incarnation, Glantz had added a prelude to the poem, titled "Shpanye" (Spain), which makes explicit the juxtaposition between the achievements and promises of Spain's multicultural golden age with the terror of the Inquisition: "Alt Kastilye! In dayne bloye taykhn/ yidishe blut nokh flist a shnirl" (Old Castille! In your blue rivers a trickle of Jewish blood still flows (8)). This persistent duality in Glantz's narrative can also be understood as a form of hybridity, or *mestizaje*: "Because Latin American writers are the children of both colonizer and colonized," writes Kimberle Lopez, "their efforts to rewrite the conquest are themselves products of a mestizo consciousness."[51] For Glantz, the figure of the *converso* embodies the "mestizo consciousness" of both colonizer and colonized. Amid the artisans, laborers and priests populating the growing New World colony and participating in the imperial project, are "those with little siddurim/ and psalms in Hebrew/ and with crucifixes on their breasts – the children of Israel – /new believers in the holy son of God./ Stooped from generations of calamity/they search for respite/ from the bonfires/in this new Godblessed land" ("Un tsvishn dem zikh drengenden hamoyn,/ mit sidurimlekh/ un psalmen in hebreish,/ un mit tslomim oyf di brist - / di kinder fun yisroel, -/ naygloybike in oysderveyltn zun/ fun el-tsvaos. / Zey horbn zikh in doresdikn brokh/ un zukhn ruikeyt/ un shuts fun fayern/ in nayem gotgebentshn land").[52] Jews, Glantz suggests, anticipating Jonathan Israel's oft-quoted observation, were "both agents and victims of empire."[53]

It is central to Glantz's project that we understand the story of Luis De Torres and of Sephardi Jews to be imbricated with that of others for whom the year 1492 also changed their worlds irrevocably. As Sarah Casteel writes, "1492 inherently draws apparently disparate histories of Jewish and indigenous displacement into profound and complex relation by virtue of its double resonance as the date of both the Sephardic expulsion and Columbus's first voyage to the New World. 1492 offers a way out of the impasse created by competitive memory by pointing to the overlapping nature of Jewish and indigenous histories."[54] Glantz links Jewish and indigenous experience through the encounters and parallelisms between De Torres and another character, the *cacique* Guacanagari, who represents the history of indigenous dispossession, decimation, and bondage.

Guacanagari is mentioned briefly in Columbus's journal as the *cacique* who came to Columbus and his sailors' aid when his ship ran aground in Haiti. Guacanagari and his people helped the sailors build the fort of La Navidad, and promised to protect the 39 Spaniards until reinforcements return. When Columbus returned on his second voyage, he found the fort burned and the sailors massacred. Guacanagari reported that the Caribs from a neighboring island had invaded and attacked the Spaniards and their Native allies.[55] Other accounts suggest that

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[51] Lopez, 24. Also consider her observation that the "largest subcategory of new historical novels that represent the first contact between Old and New Worlds is composed of the fictionalized biographies and autobiographies of Christopher Columbus, nearly all of which represent him as marginalized due to his status as a foreigner and potentially as a *converso*" (15).
[52] Glantz, 139.
[53] See Jonathan Israel, *Diasporas Within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World of Maritime Empires, 1540–1740* (Leyden: Brill 2002), 1.
[54] Casteel, "Sephardism and Marranism," 63.
[55] For an account of Columbus's second voyage that Glantz might have read, see Samuel Eliot Morison, *The second voyage of Christopher Columbus from Cadiz to Hispaniola and the discovery of the Lesser Antilles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1939.

Guacanagari himself was responsible for the destruction of the colony in retaliation for the Spanish sailors raping and pillaging his people.[56]

In Glantz's version, Guacanagari tries to protect the men of La Navidad, even though the Indians have become their forced laborers, mining for gold and erecting the first church in the New World. He is gravely wounded in battle with the Caribs and is his tribe's only survivor. Meanwhile, De Torres, left at La Navidad, has a vision in which God speaks to him, showing him at once that while his people will find sanctuary on the new continent, the Indians will be hunted and persecuted. Despairing, De Torres abandons the outpost, becoming a mystic and wanderer in the wilderness, considered a holy man by the local tribes.

Upon Columbus's return, Guacanagari provides his testimony to Columbus and his retinue: "Er hot di vundn zayne/ oyfgedekt/ un biter-veynendik/ dertseylt/fun umglik groysn,/ vos nekome-tsorndike geter/ geshikt hobn/ oyf kinde vayse fun der zun" (He exposed/ his wounds/ and weeping bitterly/ told/ in great mourning/ of the wrathful vengeance the gods/ had visited upon the white children of the sun (144)). His eloquent account of the battle and of his people's suffering fail to move Columbus, who has the *cacique* arrested, enslaved, and sent to Spain, foreshadowing what will happen to Luis De Torres later in the poem.[57] Then Columbus and his men move from island to island, leaving destruction in their wake: "Di nakete bindn,/ vos hobn gevert zikh,/ zey shikn als tsindzn/ un makhn far knekht zey" (shackling the survivors, stripping them naked, they make of them slaves and send them all as tributes (153)).

The section that follows this, titled "Di shklafenshif" (The Slave Ship), gestures simultaneously to the Native people taken into captivity by Columbus, and kidnapped Africans brought to the New World barely a decade later. In this brief interlude, Glantz meditates on the "first slave ship…to cut through the salty sea foam" (Ven ershte shif mit knekht/ Hot yam-shoym zaltsikn geshnitn), setting into motion centuries of persecution:

> Der mastboym,
> Mit a finger shrekendik,
> Farshpitzt,
> Gevornt hot mit untergang.
> Oyf beyner nakete –
> Di zeglen shoyn tserisene,
> Un s'hot der kompas
> Der tseshrokener
> Fun almirant
> Nisht gevizn mer
> Di rikhtung
> Fun der shif.
> (154-55)

[56] See, for instance, Francesco Tarducci, *The Life of Christopher Columbus* (H.F. Brownson, 1891), 276-289.

[57] As Sarah Casteel observed in her reading of this essay in draft, for Caribbeanists this inclusion of a reference to Haiti would be significant (proleptically) since Haiti is so strongly associated with emancipatory revolution and breaking down the colonial structures/slavery system introduced by Columbus.

The mast
Like a ghastly finger
Points, warning
Of naked bones –
Torn sails
The admiral's terrorized compass
No longer knows the
ship's direction.

With these passages Glantz illuminates the history of Indigenous bondage, an under-discussed dimension of the history of slavery even today. "Columbus's very first business venture in the New World," writes Andrés Reséndez, "consisted of sending four caravels loaded to capacity with 550 Natives back to Europe, to be auctioned off in the markets of the Mediterranean."[58] Indian slavery, though made illegal in the sixteenth century by the Spanish monarchy, "never went away, but rather co-existed with African slavery from the sixteenth all the way through the late nineteenth century" (4). Glantz's slave ship, with its "terrorized compass" that "no longer knows the ship's direction," invokes the multi-directional, cross-Atlantic exchanges of enslaved people that fueled the imperial project, while the mast, like a "ghastly finger," foreshadows the horrors to come.

The poem's later passages detailing the enslavement of Guacanagari and the imprisonment and execution of De Torres, as well as the death of Columbus, take place in the sections of the poem written in 1938 and 1939,[59] a version informed, I suggest, by an assault Glantz experienced on the street at the hands of Mexican fascists in January of 1939. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency covered the attack, writing that "an estimated 5,000 Golden Shirts, under the alleged leadership of Nazis, attacked Jews in the streets, plundered Jewish shops and launched a mass assault on the headquarters of the Jewish Chamber of Commerce while a meeting of a literary club was in progress… Among the many Jews beaten up in the street attacks was Jacob Glantz, a poet and literary editor of Der Weg, local Jewish newspaper."[60] Margo Glantz writes about this experience in *Las genealogías*, alternatively suggesting that the assault happened because Glantz was a Jew, because he was a well-known radical, or because he so closely resembled Trotsky.[61] What is certain is that the attack was a significant trauma for Glantz, who, like his character De Torres, may very well have despaired that Mexico's promising post-revolutionary republic had become a fascist regime in the making, while, across the Atlantic, Europe burned.

For Glantz, the tragedy of Columbus is that he reproduced in the New World the sins of the old. The promise of a new world with new freedoms that De Torres

[58] Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (New York: Harcourt Mifflin, 2017), 3-4.
[59] Some of which were first published in *Der Continent* in 1941, and were then included in the 1980 edition of the poem.
[60] *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Vol. V No. 48 (January 29 1939) 1 (https://www.jta.org/1939/01/29/archive/anti-jewish-violence-flares-in-mexico-city-rioters-use-police-vans-to-stir-mob
[61] *Las genealogías*, 112-113.

dreams of is betrayed by Columbus, and the terror of the Inquisition becomes the terror of conquest. Gold enslaves Indians and Spaniards alike: a Marxist critique from an avowed communist. Columbus is enslaved by his monomaniacal quest for it, for glory, for immortality. Columbus suffers too, from the visions and voices of those whose torment he is responsible for, but when the mystic De Torres confronts him in La Isabela, Columbus is resolutely cynical and unrepentant. He arrests De Torres, further enforcing the imbrication of Indigenous, African, and Jewish persecution and enslavement when De Torres is sent back to Spain in chains, to be burned alive in Toledo's public square as a heretic:

> Nayert, itster traybt
> Di mara-shkhoredike shif
> Nisht tsum oysgetroymtn land
> Oyf mapamundim
> A fartseykhntn
> Gaonesdik un blind, --
> Es traybt der vint
> Di shif mit di gefangene
> Geyen mer nisht oyf.
> Es traybt di shif
> Dem vays-kenig
> Kolombusn
> Tsurik
> In keniglikhn hoyf.
>
> Un oyfn dek fun shif
> Der fintsterer
> In a vinkl a fargrateter
> Mit harts
> On fentsterlekh tsu likht
> Ligt De-Torres
> Oyf zayn nare
> In keytn ayngeshmidt.
>
> Un der vint,
> Der vint,
> Mit shoym
> Fun eybike yeloles
> Bagleyt dem yid
> Tsurik aheym in goles.
> (241-243)

> Now the bitter-black ship sails
> Not towards the dreamlands recorded in those brilliant,
> Blind *mappamundi*
> The wind drives the ship with its captives
> And Columbus, the white king
> Away from the setting sun

Back to the royal court.

And on the ship's deck
In a corner
His heart windowless and dark
Lies De Torres on a plank
Shackled by chains

And the wind, the wind
Frothing with unending lamentation
Carries the Jew back home into exile.

In excavating these overlapping histories of enslavement, *Kristobal Kolon* anticipates the strategies of the neo-slave narrative, a capacious category in which I include novels like Maryse Conde's *I, Tituba* (1986) and Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account* (2014). More than historical fiction, these are imaginative expansions of an archival trace, which are meant to re-dress master narratives and re-orient and shift our national imaginary by giving voice and agency to the silenced subjects of earlier accounts.

In the poem's final scene, as Columbus lies on his deathbed questioning his legacy, it is the reproachful voice of De Torres that he hears: "Un s'hot vi a vintl shtil in oyer, fun zokn,/geflistert dos kol fun De-Tores: / **-- nisht ikh un du, -- /nor eyvik iz di tsayt./undzer shif vet untergeyn,/ nor blaybn vet dos nay-antdekte land!**" (and like a small breeze in his ear, as from an old man/ whispers the voice of De-Tores:/ *Only time – not you nor I – is eternal./ Our ship will sink beneath the ocean/ only the new land will remain!* (bolded type in the original, 285)). The figure of Columbus's ship, which evolves throughout the poem from harbinger of liberation and redemption to that of horror and death, now "sinking beneath the ocean," serves to signal, via De Torres, the displacing and overwriting of dominant versions of history: efforts aimed at nothing less, echoing Spaulding, than the "reformation of the historiography" of conquest and slavery.[62]

Conclusion: Whose America?

Sarah Phillips Casteel asks: "What would it mean to reimagine the study of Jewish American literature as the study of Jewish literatures of the Americas? What kinds of conceptual as well as geographical and linguistic shifts would a hemispheric reframing of the field entail?"[63] Foundational to this effort is a temporal reframing of Jewish immigration to the Americas as a history that exceeds the time period circumscribed as 1880-1930 as well as the boundaries of the present-day United States and the English language. To be sure, Jewish American literary history and historiography has been down this road before. As Michael Kramer has demonstrated, nineteenth-century chroniclers of American Jewish experience were in fact very attentive to the long Jewish presence in Latin America and the

[62] A. Timothy Spaulding, *Re-forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Post-Modern Slave Narrative* (Ohio State U Press, 2005) 25.
[63] Sarah Philips Casteel, "Landscapes: America and the Americas" in Hana Wirth-Nesher, ed, *Cambridge History of Jewish-American Literature* (Cambridge U Press, 2015) 413.

Caribbean, but this was a way of demonstrating Jews' belonging in America in the face of the Eastern-European, Yiddish-speaking masses igniting such racial panic in the U.S.[64]

The centering of Sephardi and Mizrahi migrations, contacts, and crossings in the Americas in the work of such contemporary scholars as Ella Shohat, Dalia Kandiyoti, and others, is likewise fueled by a resistance to the reflexive and uncritical identification in the United States—– and, more specifically, in the Northeast — of Jewishness with Europeanness. As Aviva Ben-Ur writes:

> The equation of Jewishness with *ashkenaziut* avoids raising uncomfortable questions regarding the place of Jews in the world and their relations with some of their gentile neighbors. A consideration of Eastern Sephardic ties with gentile Hispanics, or Mizrahi connections with non-Jewish Arabs, for example, might dislodge many American Jews from their comfortable niche as white ethnics whose Jewishness is generally confined to religion. It might also force examination of the "Germanness" or "Eastern Europeanness" of an identity widely presumed to be simply "Jewish."[65]

It is possible to read Glantz's *Kristobal Kolon* as an instance of assimilative Sephardism, as Edna Aizenberg postulates, or even as appropriative Sephardism, a form of politicized literary discourse in which Sephardic history serves as a "useful model" for the consideration of a (non-Sephardic) author's own "national preoccupations at times of heightened political consciousness."[66] Kandiyoti and Franco likewise caution against historiographical approaches in which the "synchronic" specificities of Sephardi, Mizrachi, and Ashkenazi experiences in time and place are assimilated into an overarching, "diachronic" narrative of essentialized Jewish identity or suffering throughout history.[67]

But the heteroglossic quality of the poem — its multiple languages, voices, and intertexts — militates, I argue, against such readings. Glantz's epic is a presciently transnational and translational vision of America that insists — in Yiddish — upon its Jewish, Muslim, indigenous, and African origins.[68] In dismantling Christopher Columbus as the continent's mythic point of origin, *Kristobal Kolon* reconceptualizes Jewish-American literary history and historiography as foundationally and imaginatively engaged, not just with race and religion but with colonialism and empire.

Glantz's *Kristobal Kolon* can be understood to be emerging from *two* significant revisionist periods in twentieth century Mexican history: the 1930s and the 1970s. While the 1980 book publication of the poem does not purport to contain

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[64] Michael Kramer, "Against the Tide: Re-discovering Early Jewish American Literary History," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (33:1, 2014), 1-12.
[65] Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 190; quoted in Kandiyoti and Franco, 5.
[66] Yael Halevi Wise, "Introduction: Through the Prism of Sepharad: Modern Nationalism, Literary History, and the Impact of the Sephardic Experience," in Yael Halevi Wise, ed. *Sephardism: Spanish Jewish History and the Modern Literary Imagination* (Stanford U Press, 2012), 1-2.
[67] See Kandiyoti and Franco, 2-3.
[68] Thus anticipating Ella Shohat's imagining of a "Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic." Ella Shohat, "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism," in *Between the Middle East and the Americas: the Cultural Politics of Diaspora*, Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat, eds. (UMichigan Press, 2013), 42-64.

newly written material, Glantz's decision to re-publish an expanded version of his poem can be read as a response to a new wave of Latin American critical historiography and, significantly, literature, that developed "sophisticated, multivalent critical perspectives on the conquest through the use of narrative techniques associated with postmodern historiographic metafiction such as irony, parody, intertextuality, the dialogic, and self-conscious narration."[69] In her memoir, Margo Glantz compares *Kristobal Kolon* to Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier's 1979 novel *El arpa y la sombra* (*The Harp and the Shadow*) in its eerily similar imagining of Columbus at the end of his life. The convergences of these two texts are, perhaps, not accidental, in that Glantz may very well have read Carpentier's novel before publishing the expanded 1980 edition of *Kristobal Kolon*

Margo Glantz herself, meanwhile, can be understood to be participating in the phenomenon of the new Latin American historical novel, or what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction,"[70] with her 1984 work *Síndrome de naufragios* (Shipwreck Syndrome). In the words of critic Carmen Perilli, this collection of microfiction "vampirizes" the Bible, *1001 Nights*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the *Chilam Balam*, the stories of Thomas de Quincey, Edgar Allen Poe, Jules Verne, the poetry of Henri Michaux and Pablo Neruda, and the novels of Ivan A. Goncharov.[71] Interwoven are fragments from classical Spanish and Hispano-American literature: Francisco de Quevedo and Miguel Hernández, Sor Juana Inés, Alejo Carpentier, Juan Rulfo, the hagiographies and chronicles of Columbus, Magellan, Alvar Núñez, Lope de Aguirre, and López de Gómara (187): "Esta enciclopedia engendra un texto bizarro, con astillas de escrituras a las que alude de modo parcial: tratados, cartas, epopeyas, relaciones, confesiones y, sobre todo, profecías, sueños y mitologías" ("This encyclopedia produces a bizarre text, with splinters of writing alluded to in fragments: treaties, letters, epics, narratives, confessions, and above all prophecies, dreams and mythologies").[72] Perillo observes that this is representative of Margo Glantz's entire aesthetic project: "La escritura de Margo Glantz formula un proyecto estético que enlaza ficción, historia y poética. Desde su primer ensayo… hasta su última novela… la autora trabaja continuidades y rupturas entre fábula e historia" ("The writing of Margo Glantz forms an aesthetic project that binds fiction, history and poetry. From her first essay… to her most recent novel…the author creates continuations and ruptures between the fabulous and the historical").[73]

Even Margo Glantz's memoir, like the Columbus archives and her father's epic work, consists of a proliferating series of variant versions, resulting in no authoritative text. As Maria Eugenia Mudrovcic notes, there are three distinct editions of *Las genealogías*: the first, from 1981, was followed by a second edition by another press in 1987 that included three supplementary "genealogies;" the third, in 1998, added an addendum and a postscript dated 1997. The inclusion of photographs varies from edition to edition; in the first two images are interwoven with the text

[69] Kimberle S. López, *Latin American Novels of the Conquest: Reinventing the New World* (Columbia: UMissouri Press), 3-4. Also see Seymour Menton, *Latin America's New Historical Novel* (Austin: UTexas Press) 1993, and Viviana Plotnik, "Postmodernity, Orphanhood, and the Contemporary Spanish-American Historical Novel," in *A Twice-Told Tale*, 36-46.
[70] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Cambridge, 1990) quoted in Plotnik, 37.
[71] Carmen Perilli, "La Escritura Como Arca: *Síndrome de Naufragios* de Margo Glantz," Revista de Critica Literaria Latinoamericana, 23:57 (Lima-Hanover, 2003), 187.
[72] 187, my translation.
[73] 185, my translation.

and in the third they are published as a group at the end of the volume.[74] A fuller and more detailed comparison between Jacobo's work and Margo's, that is to say, has yet to be written

Margo Glantz writes in *Las genealogías* that her father wanted her to translate *Kristobal Kolon* into Spanish, but she never learned Yiddish and so could not do it.[75] But her work is clearly animated — or haunted — by *Kristobal Kolon*'s modernist, poetic, and syncretic historical revisionism. As Glantz writes in his 1949 dedication, "Tsu Kristobal Kolon," "un in tifer nakht ot do/nokh itster her ikh shrayen/ di shtim fun orgevald vos tsayt fargest./ Nor mir iz do geven itster bashert/ di ayngeshtumte shtim funsnay antdekn" ("And in the dark of night even now/ I still hear screams/ the voices of violence that time forgets/ Now it has become my fate/ to discover anew the silenced voices" (5)). Little did Glantz know how much these lines would describe his daughter's interventions into Mexican historiography and literature, or that nearly a century later, his would be the silenced voice waiting to be discovered anew.

[74] Maria Eugenia Mudrovcic, "'Que diferencia es entre fue y era?': Exilio, fotografia y memoria en "Las genealogies" de Margo Glantz (Hispamerica, 32:96 (December 2003), 49.
[75] *Las genealogías*, 162.