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# Introduction

WHY DID NEW CHRISTIAN MERCHANTS, descendants of Jews forced to convert to Christianity in Iberia between 1391 and 1497, rise to play a pivotal role in intercontinental trade in the following two centuries only to decline and virtually disappear as an ethnic elite by the mid-eighteenth century? This question guides this book and links to issues of identity, religious allegiance, economic and social opportunities, political negotiation, and cultural innovation. It is a global study, since this New Christian elite moved between the kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal and between the Iberian empires; from Western Europe to Africa and the Ottoman Empire; from the Portuguese Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and East Asia; from Spanish America to Asia; and from Iberia to Italy, France, Flanders, the Netherlands, Germany, England, and Dutch and English America.

# 1. Object and Argument

One way into this world is the case of Duarte de Paz, and his son Tomé Pegado de Paz, who was born in the Portuguese city of Porto, allegedly around 1536. In 1552, Duarte, who had taken refuge in Constantinople, asked for Tomé to be sent to him. The boy's uncle, Diogo de Paz, a well-known New Christian merchant and farmer of the king's rents, organised the journey to Constantinople.¹ Tomé went first to Venice, where arrangements were made for him to travel with the mission of the new French Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Michel de Codignac.² The father had had a complicated life: having achieved the status of a wealthy merchant, contractor for royal rents, and member of the military order of Christ, he compromised this high financial and social position to become a New Christian agent (or procurator) in Rome, where he tried to block the negotiations of the Portuguese king for the establishment of the Inquisition.

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Duarte de Paz had some initial success in Rome but was then subjected to a murder attempt in which he was stabbed fifteen times on the street, probably by agents of the Portuguese king, John III. His efforts were eventually defeated by the financial and political power of John III, who in 1536 obtained the creation of the tribunal of faith. Protected by the pope but isolated from his New Christian sponsors, who accused him both of duplicity concerning the king and ludicrous promises to the papal curia, Duarte finally escaped to Constantinople via Venice. In Constantinople, he first converted to Judaism, and then became a Muslim, according to the testimony of his son before the Inquisition.<sup>3</sup> For the rest of his life, Duarte de Paz tried to revive his relationship with the Portuguese king by providing intelligence concerning Jewish and New Christian involvement in Ottoman policies, particularly in the Indian Ocean.

After the death of his father, Tomé Pegado de Paz served the celebrated Duke of Naxos, João Micas, who had become openly Jewish and changed his name to Joseph Nasi when he arrived at Constantinople in 1554. Tomé declared that the Duke of Naxos ordered his circumcision, following which he had married a Jewish young woman. The relationship between Tomé and the Duke of Naxos broke down after an initially successful trip to France to collect 150,000 écus owed by the French king to the Nasi family ended with a disastrous shipwreck. Tomé was saved, but the money disappeared. Later, he was detained in Aleppo and accused of owing more than 1,400 cruzados to the Duke of Naxos. He was released in return for converting to Islam, and finally decided to travel to Portugal to claim the money his father had left to the family in Porto.

Tomé started the journey as a Muslim, then dressed as a Jew, then as a Greek, and finally as a Catholic, in a telling reversal of his previous religious journey. During the trip, he asked for, and obtained, absolution from the archbishop of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and from the Jesuit Baltasar de Sousa in Rome. In Naples, he was received by the viceroy, who temporarily detained him following accusation from several Christians, former slaves of the Turks. In 1578, he was detained on the coast of Andalusia and brought to Lisbon, where he was interrogated by a secular judge who sent him to the Inquisition. He was liberated in May 1579, after denouncing a significant number of important Jews and New Christians in different parts of the Mediterranean.

This story from the archives reveals the extraordinary reach of a New Christian family in sixteenth-century Europe: the international networks family members built, the different religious allegiances they assumed, and the wide range of places where they could carry on their business activities (Tomé was also in Cyprus, Algiers, and Marseille). It is astonishing how many people recognised Tomé in Naples, having met him in Algiers or Constantinople, and how many people, called to testify before the Inquisition in Lisbon, had interacted with him in various Mediterranean locations. One of them had

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even been a captive in the same Ottoman galley that had been shipwrecked with Tomé on board. The trial of Tomé Pegado de Paz gives us a vision of the Mediterranean world as highly interconnected. This story offers a glimpse of the world of the New Christian merchant elite whose history has never been comprehensively written.

The history of the New Christians begins in Spain towards the end of the fourteenth century. Massive conversions of Jews into Christians occurred in 1391 in the wake of an anti-Jewish riot in Seville that spread through the urban networks of Castile and Aragon. Converting was the only way for these Jews to save their lives. The following decades saw renewed conflicts between Christians and Jews, with the remaining Jewish communities forced to attend sessions of Catholic preaching targeted at them. Over time, more Jews converted due to the oppressive atmosphere, and Jewish communities shrank, although the two ethnicities kept their ties. From the very beginning, converted Jews were targeted as strangers and as people who were only simulating conversion, and they were soon labelled as conversos, marranos, or cristãos novos. In 1449, an anti-New Christian riot in Toledo sealed the transfer of hatred of Jews to those who had been violently converted. The statutes of blood purity, which excluded New Christians from public offices, were then experimented with for the first time but were opposed by the king and the pope on the grounds that they violated the universalism of the Christian Church.

The Spanish Inquisition was established in 1478. This led to the massive persecution of New Christians, who were accused of returning to practicing Judaism in secrecy. These accusations reinforced the racial divide and contributed to the eventual acceptance of blood purity statutes by the pope and the king. The decision to expel Jewish communities from Spain in 1492 was justified by their supposed contamination of New Christians; many fled to Portugal, following in the steps of previous generations since 1391. In 1496, this decision to expel Jews was replicated and extended to Muslims by the Portuguese king, Manuel. The expulsion of the Jews was not really implemented; rather, they were forced to convert. The establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal in 1536 replicated the institutionalisation of persecution of New Christians in Spain. These harsh decisions completed a long process of exclusion; the segregation of Jewish people was replaced by discrimination against New Christians and their descendants. This new racial divide within Christianity, based on blood purity rules, would define Iberian societies in Europe for the early modern period.

By the end of the fifteenth century, many New Christian families had relatives in the three kingdoms, whilst those who sought to keep their Jewish allegiance migrated to North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. Family relationships were maintained in many cases, even between those who lived as Christians and those who returned to their Jewish faith, migrating to Sephardic communities. This is, by its nature, a connected and international history.

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The size of the New Christian ethnicity was very large by the end of the fifteenth century: at least 260,000 people in Iberia in a population estimated from 5 to 5.5 million, which means around 5 percent of the total population.9 But the members of this ethnicity were overwhelmingly located in urban areas, which in 1500 were home to around 400,000 to 440,000 people. 10 The New Christians would have represented 60 to 65 percent of this urban population and would certainly have been very visible in that dynamic setting. This demographic approach, curiously absent from most of the literature, should be extended to intermarriage, for the stereotype of endogamous New Christians needs to be scrutinised. Robert Rowland estimated 20 percent of intermarriage between Old and New Christians in each generation in the region of Lisbon based on sources from the 1630s. 11 Even if this intermarriage rate varied from region to region and time to time, it is obvious that the number of New Christians grew much faster than the rest of the population due to the rule of defining as New Christian anyone having one Jewish ancestor in several generations. This estimate exposes the fiction of blood purity.

The New Christian merchant elite must be studied taking into consideration this demographic background. They came out of this large ethnic group, mainly from small towns in the interior of Castile and Portugal. They maintained relationships with their places of origin, partly due to the patronage system ties that defined extended families. Rendering assistance to poor family members was an informal obligation, while a large kinship solved practical needs to renew families that did not have direct issue with heirs who could receive an inheritance.

A study of the New Christian merchant elite will need to include these relations, but also the ties this elite established both with Old Christians, in some cases even titled nobility, and Sephardic Jewish communities. This large set of relationships allows us to better understand their role as major players in intercontinental trade and finance, as bankers and lenders to kings, cardinals, bishops, and noblemen. This gave them the economic power to become involved (and interfere) with royal and papal policies, while some obtained aristocratic status as knights of military orders. But we also need to be attentive to the constraints this merchant elite suffered, mainly from inquisitorial persecution and permanent extortion by the royal and papal powers.

The argument of this book is necessarily complex, since it comprehends the rise and fall of the New Christian merchant elite. I summarise it here. The expansion of this elite was related to the inheritance of Jewish economic positions and to a radical enlargement of business opportunities during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. New Christians obtained royal contracts, such as those for tax farming and money lending, and expanded their dealings with the nobility and the dignitaries of the Church; and they combined these activities with investment in new intercontinental trade and distribution circuits in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The

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constant flow of migration to the Mediterranean, Northern Europe, and beyond, which partly absorbed the impact of inquisitorial persecution, the success of New Christians in education, liberal professions, and ecclesiastical careers, and the deft alliances made with Old Christians at all levels, contributed to this expansion. The precarious status of this merchant elite, positioned between royal and papal extortion for support on the one hand, and inquisitorial pressure on the other, stimulated the creation of multiple identities, including those that bypassed blood purity rules and claimed to be Old Christians. This status also triggered innovative behaviour in spiritual and religious quests, artistic and literary expression, and in legal and social thought. The decline of New Christians as a recognisable ethnicity between the mid-seventeenth and the mid-eighteenth centuries resulted from growing inquisitorial persecution, the backlash that followed the pope's suspension of the Portuguese Inquisition from 1674 to 1681, the War of Succession in Spain, and structural changes in international trade. The abolition of discrimination against New Christians in Portugal in 1773, legally implemented, preceded Spanish abolition by almost one century. It was not the cause of the disappearance of New Christians as a distinct ethnicity; it just accelerated a process of decline, while in Spain discrimination was pursued at the local level.

# ${f 2.}\ Conceptual\ Framework$

New Christians were shaped by labelling processes, inquisitorial prosecution, and blood purity statutes. Instead of integration after their forced conversion, they were confronted with new hurdles that imposed permanent suspicion, enquiries, and persecution. Even for those who managed to pass the barrier of blood purity through bribery or social alliances, their acquired status of Old Christian could be challenged at any time. It is a typical case of racism, understood as prejudices concerning ethnic descent coupled with discriminatory action. 12 Anti-Judaism can be interpreted as a useful fantasy that facilitated the construction of identity among the aggressors, but it had dire consequences for the people who were victims of the process. <sup>13</sup> The notions of lineage and blood in Iberia played a major role of identification and recognition. The Jewish community, politically subordinated and targeted at times of upheaval, became racialized as sharing the same blood and supposed attributes (or stereotypes) from generation to generation. The supposed attributes included dealing in falsehoods, dissimulation, greed, and destructive hate against Christians. 14 This racialisation, which included the fear of retribution by the persecutors, was then projected onto their descendants who were forced to convert to Christianity. They were accused of carrying with them the beliefs of their ancestors, transmitted by the same blood and mother's milk, another important lineage marker.<sup>15</sup>

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This social construction of New Christians by dominant social groups to exclude them from competition for resources had a decisive impact: for the first time there was a division, eventually accepted by the Iberian kings and the Church, against the universalist tradition of the Christian Church. The creation of a new ethnicity of religious origin within Christianity by political interests raises problems of analysis and conceptualisation. It is difficult to talk about community, "a body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity." <sup>16</sup> New Christians can be defined instead by diaspora, frequent changes to their place of residence, and a split in (or multiple) cultural and ethnic identities.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, New Christians retained family ties across borders and religions, sharing a certain nostalgia for the lost past under duress.<sup>18</sup> They were more defined by others than by themselves, which complicates the analysis. Because of this reflection I decided to use the notion of ethnicity as a fluid set of features that contribute to identifying a social group with shared ancestry.<sup>19</sup> In this case, the New Christians were first labelled and aggregated by their competitors in the context of power relations within Iberian societies. Yet they developed internal dynamics of desire for affiliation and belonging, together with their own historical memory and perceptions of kinship.<sup>20</sup>

The focus of this book on the New Christian merchant elite requires understanding this background and the specific conceptual framework related to this group. The noun elite was part of the French early modern lexicon, but it only entered the English language in the late eighteenth century, with its meaning of the best, the selected members, of a group.<sup>21</sup> It did not enter the Portuguese and Spanish languages until the nineteenth century. The inquisitors never used it, even if they were well aware of the distinctive economic power of the main merchants, financiers, and bankers. The involvement of this elite in intercontinental trade helps us to think about the meaning of globalization, conceived of here as a phenomenon that goes beyond cumulative or interdependent national histories.<sup>22</sup> The notion of a network to identify interconnected systems of trade may be useful in this case if applied with caution;<sup>23</sup> most New Christian commerce was based on temporary partnerships, although the accumulation of associates and long-distance trade circuits may have configured intersecting lines. Study of the New Christian diaspora stimulates new reflection on the relationships between trading networks, access to capital, state formation, imperial practices, regulation of markets, and merchant cultures in different parts of the world.24

The opposition between the established and the outsiders, pointed out by Norbert Elias and John Scotson in their study of internal migration in post-war England, when tensions arose in specific communities outside the centre of Leicester, may be applied to situations of racial divide. New Christians were perceived by many Old Christians as outsiders, whose newly acquired equal rights following forced conversion enabled them to compete for

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positions within the hierarchies of State and Church. Old Christian resentment forced many New Christians to migrate to other regions of Iberia, which meant they were perceived as outsiders in a double way—as former Jews and as migrants.

The issue of values, as principles or moral standards held by a social group or by good part of the society, must be taken on board. New Christians contributed to merchant culture with its values of competence, merit, trust, saving for investment, and seriousness in fulfilling a contract; but they were also attracted by the aristocratic values of lineage, status, and conspicuous consumption. They occupied a liminal situation at different levels. In Iberia there was more: blood purity functioned as the cornerstone of a value system created from the mid-fifteenth century onwards.<sup>26</sup> The extreme disruption produced by blood purity statutes has been well studied, but the long-term impact needs further analysis. Blood purity is considered by several historians to be one among several criteria of social hierarchy, the others being a noble or hidalgo background versus that of pecheros (taxed plebeians), clean hands versus manual work, and legitimate versus illegitimate birth.<sup>27</sup> It is possible to establish a hierarchy among these criteria in which *limpieza de sangre* does not come at the top. However, blood purity is a specifically Iberian criterion in early modern Europe, imposing a blurred caste divide across the three  $orders.^{28}$ 

The difficulty here is to understand the exchange, transfer, or equivalence between the notion of religious purification, which developed in different parts of the world to protect communities from supposed impurity, and the notion of pure descent, which defined both external and internal social boundaries. Roberto Calasso showed how the notion of impurity pervaded Hindu tradition, explaining rituals of sacrifice, in which blood was overwhelmingly present, as a metonymy of life and atonement of the soul that guaranteed purification.<sup>29</sup> Mary Douglas called attention to the perception of impurity or pollution as matter out of place in different cultures. Contamination was a threat to life that linked to transitional states and interstitial positions. 30 This notion was internalised in Iberia to redefine hierarchies. The statutes of blood purity can be considered as rites of institution, which defined access to the main organisations.<sup>31</sup> The main issue was the rejection of mixed-race people, who were identified with degradation due to contamination by supposedly lower races. The notion of pure descent, by contrast, promoted even poor Old Christians.

The liminal condition of New Christians needs to be better conceptualised here. *Liminal* is understood as something transitional or intermediate between two states, on a boundary or threshold. New Christians were positioned as outsiders coming from inside, what Georg Simmel would call "the stranger within." Even if the majority accepted a normative behaviour as Christian—and many managed to pass the barrier to be considered Old

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Christians—their ancestry, which became an increasingly long shadow simply due to demographics, was a permanent threat. Liminality raised interesting identification, labelling, and self-perception problems. It meant permanent fear and abuse, but it could also open new venues for social and intellectual experiment. In my view, this condition does not fit the approach of rites of passage linked to a life cycle, as was suggested by van Gennep, because all New Christians were by default perpetually marginalised. Closer to the idea of subversive possibilities created by a liminal experience highlighted by Victor Turner, the New Christians' social and religious status offers new possibilities for theoretical development.<sup>33</sup>

The notion of identity is also important. It emerged in the sixteenth century from the Latin *idem*, meaning "the same," and the late Latin *identitas*. It indicates the quality of sameness, the possibility of attributing to a person or a thing continuous and unchanging properties.<sup>34</sup> In the social sciences, the notion of identity was extended to sets of features (ideas, values, perceptions, behaviour) that define individuals, social groups, or political parties. Lévi-Strauss was sceptical about this notion, fearing it as a functionalist tool that would homogenise societies and erase differences and diversity.<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault derided the imposing of historical identities as pretentious.<sup>36</sup> However, Foucault acknowledged that individual identity was the result of power relations exercised on bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, and wills.<sup>37</sup> Judith Butler's sharp criticism of the top-down approach followed by Foucault in Surveiller et punir is relevant for our argument. Butler highlights the possibility of resistance being fuelled by the subconscious under constraint, which supports the idea of agency among the different individuals and groups involved, generating opposition and alternative behaviour.<sup>38</sup>

Henri Tajfel's focus on the relationship between the individual and the social group stressed the complexity of individuals' emotional feelings and attachment to the reference group. Tajfel showed that the dynamics of opposed perceptions are part of the definition of social hierarchies, which fuel discriminatory behaviour, show hostility towards other groups, and protect members of one's own group. Relationships of power are thus part of the processes of creating identity, processes that include defining the enemy, establishing forms of discrimination between and within groups, and ensuring the internalisation of upper-class values by the lower classes.<sup>39</sup>

Pierre Bourdieu considered that social identity was defined by and through difference. In his view, the mobilisation of values, religious allegiance, political participation, scholarly titles, and professional standing was always relational and played on antagonism and imitation to define an identity that was never static or singular but rather hung in the balance. <sup>40</sup> However, this vision is not entirely adequate for use with early modern Iberia, an area subject to situations of extreme violence in which members of minorities were under constant threat of detention and torture. New Christians struggled both with perceptions

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imposed on them and with self-perceptions, classifications, and identity crises, which partly explains the permanent flow of migration and reorganisation of life abroad within Sephardic communities. $^{41}$ 

To sum up, identities can change. They are ever fluid and unstable: they involve a desire for affiliation and recognition and a feeling of belonging, but at the same time there are split identities and multiple identities. 42 Identification as both a process of nomination and a process of constitution through power relationships is a related notion that addresses the fluidity of belonging.43 This set of observations, which refuses any essentialised vision of identity, can serve for the analysis of diversity among New Christians in time and space. Agency, meaning the actions and intentions of specific agents or groups of agents that reveal their positions, goals, and self-perceptions, is a part of these processes of identity formation and identification that need to be approached from below.<sup>44</sup> The formative role of events, suggested by Erik Erikson, can be relevant from a collective point of view, underlining the usefulness of this category in historical analysis. 45 Finally, the notion of acts of identity, suggested by Erving Goffman, contributes to defining individual and collective positions in everyday life. 46 This notion can be useful to our argument, because the transformative power of circumventing the blood purity barrier, meaning discretely changing status from New to Old Christian, was a common practice that provided some protection but did not prevent further enquiries down the line, even within the same generation.

# 3. Semantics

The field of semantics offers an insight into the historically pervasive labelling created by dominant social groups to undermine converted Jews and their descendants. This labelling has been used by historians with varying degrees of reflection on its origins. Take, for example, the use of the word marrano(a), widely used to denigrate New Christians in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Iberia. Its origin is the Arab noun muharram, which meant "declared anathema." In Castilian, marrano(a) was used to designate a converted Jew, all of whom were presumed to be persisting in their old religion. By extension, it also signified "damned," "dirty," "impure," and "rough." Furthermore, it was used as a synonym for pig, which represented a double insult to converted Jews, as both a filthy animal and a requirement to confront the traditional food interdictions of Judaism. <sup>48</sup> In France, marrano or marani was used as an insult against Spaniards in general, but it was also used to designate those of Jewish or Muslim origin who were pretending to be Christians. <sup>49</sup> New Christians rarely used this adjective to designate themselves.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the adjective marrano(a) had been modified to form the noun *marranism*, which signified the outward profession of Christianity by Jews under threat. The noun was adopted by many historians

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during the 1950s and 1960s and beyond, particularly by Benzion Netanyahu, I. S. Révah, and Jonathan Israel. It also appeared in encyclopaedias of Judaism, although in recent decades it has been less used. I find this acceptance of historical linguistic contamination by the politics of racialisation problematic, even if the use of marrano(a) and marranism became qualified and evolved over time.

The nouns converso(a) (converted) and  $crist\tilde{a}(o)$  novo(a) (New Christian) certainly served to underline recent conversion and define a caste of stigmatised outsiders with "stained blood," in contrast to the established Old Christians, who were supposed to have pure blood. These nouns ended up being used by the converted Jews themselves under constraint, but though they were used with derogatory intention, they were less offensive than marrano(a). <sup>50</sup> Because of the absence of other useful and identifiable linguistic taxonomy, I shall use the terms New Christians or conversos to indicate the population of converted Jews and their descendants.

It is difficult to find a balance, in historical research, between labels of identification thrust on minorities by dominant social groups, which certainly contributed to creating those minorities, and the self-perceptions of these minorities. In the case of New Christians, their designation as Jews was pervasive and used as a label to enforce a racial divide through the idea of perpetual religious beliefs maintained after conversion, which could lead to a formal accusation of apostasy. This labelling carried with it an explicit physical threat. The double accusation of *judío judaizante* (Judaizing Jew) that we find in so many trials meant that the accused were racially (or ethnically) Jews and had returned to their ancestral religion. But Jews they were in any case, produced by an historical fight for supremacy by Old Christians. It is this trap of repeating historical labels that historians, right up to the present day, have been unable to avoid in a consistent way. Even more difficult is to reconstitute self-perceptions among New Christians, although we find permanent protest to the king and pope against being labelled marranos or Jews.

Nation, as a noun applied to New Christians, is also problematic. <sup>51</sup> It was used in late medieval and early modern Europe to convey the idea of a shared, collective, inherited language and culture located in a precise territory. <sup>52</sup> New Christians were designated as a nation without having a distinct language (few of them retained any acquaintance with Hebrew) or being located in a specific territory. Portugal functioned as a main reference location after 1497 because of the massive forced conversion at that one date and in that one place, but larger communities existed in Castile, while New Christians eventually became scattered around the world. Historical memory, networks of kinship, and transfer of prejudices might explain the identification. The difficulty is increased because the noun nation could designate either New Christians or Portuguese, and often both together. <sup>53</sup>

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Northern Europeans, especially in the seventeenth century, equated Portuguese with Jews. In doing so, they ironically confounded Old Christians and New Christians, persecutors and persecuted, blurring the dividing line fuelled by many Old Christians, while accepting inquisitorial propaganda that New Christians were Jews. Historiography has not yet solved this difficulty.<sup>54</sup> We shall try to keep the waters clear and focus on the New Christians, but sometimes identification is not easy. New Christians intersected with Old Christians as merchants, but they also intersected with Jews and New Jews, as Yosef Kaplan named the Sephardic communities created in Northern Europe by New Christians.<sup>55</sup>

## 4. Method

Biographies of New Christian businessmen have been drawn on by Caro Baroja, Domínguez Ortiz, I. S. Révah, James Boyajian, Carmen Sanz Ayán, Jonathan Israel, Herman Salomon, Claude Stuczynski, Fernanda Olival, and many other authors. <sup>56</sup> I have selected diversified and representative cases to overcome an essentialist approach based on the assumption that all New Christians were crypto-Jews. Because I am working across three centuries in different countries and continents, a key strategy is to reconstitute the story of several generations of the same family, or particular cases that help us understand changes at specific historical conjunctures or the conditions offered by specific locations. The cases must be relevant for the study of group assertion, external and internal rivalry, and exchange and interdependence with both Old Christians and Jewish communities.

Economic, political, and social significance are not the only criteria for the selection of cases; some cases have been chosen for their relevance to the study of gender, kinship, and strategies of reproduction. Forced conversion changed the gender dynamics within families, while the Iberian tradition of equitable inheritance had an impact on Sephardic communities, but these features must be better studied. Inequality within New Christian extended families also needs to be tackled if we are to understand mutual assistance and pooling of resources in cases of infertility. Relationships between New Christians and the Catholic Church also need to be addressed through the pursuit of spiritual search; participation in confraternities; membership of third orders and convents; access to ecclesiastical benefices and ecclesiastical career paths; and pious bequests and chapel endowments. These Church dealings are important if we are to understand the clusters of social positions achieved by New Christians. By the same token, relationships between New Christians and Jewish communities in different parts of the world must be taken on board.

The trials of the Inquisition are important sources in this research, because they give us information on kinship, business relations, property, behaviour, and decision-making. I am more interested in genealogical enquiries, inventories

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of property, testimonies, and declarations of the accused than in sentences. This information needs to be weighed against that from other sources, particularly wills, inventories of property established after death to enable partition among heirs, contracts, royal records of tax farming, *asientos* (royal contracts), attribution of pensions, and investment in state bonds. Records of access to noble status, military orders, knighthood, or *hidalguia* promoted by the king, religious orders, cathedral chapters, or benefices are also significant for understanding social mobility.

Material culture has naturally been included in the study of New Christians merchants, but more can be done to reconstitute their lifestyle. The involvement of this group with long-distance trade meant familiarity with luxury commodities from different continents. The development of a sharp eye to recognise the quality of gem stones or gold and silver; a tactile sensitivity for Asian textiles; a capacity to discern the scent of perfumes, woods, and dyes; and a subtle recognition of new flavours would arguably inform a refined cosmopolitan taste. I shall pay attention to the clothing, food habits, and interior decor enjoyed by major New Christian merchants, as revealed by inventories of their property, which included maps, paintings, tapestries, exotic furniture, cutlery, glass, linen, textiles, and porcelain. What is at stake here is the shaping of taste by intercontinental trade, in which New Christians directly participated as a result of time spent in Asia, Africa, and the New World as young partners and merchant associates.<sup>57</sup>

Paintings and literary texts have been studied on their own, but these cultural products can be better integrated into historical analysis. Literary and artistic sources are specific, defined by genre and tradition, but they can shed new light when placed in context and set against other historical sources. The purpose is to use these sources to catch New Christians (and New Jews) in the act of reflecting on exile, or the liminal situation in which they had been placed. These sources can illuminate the cultural environment of New Christian merchants, the sensibility this created, and how it reflected these merchants' social condition.

Understanding the legal and economic cultures in which New Christian merchants operated is crucial to analysing the context of their activities. The early modern period stimulated a notable production of treatises on contracts, exchange, and usury that reflected extensively on the practices of trade and shaped, to a certain degree, the legal framework. The most significant treatises are analysed in this book. Commercial culture, as exemplified in contracts, bills of exchange, business correspondence, documents granting powers of agent, accounting books and other records involving merchant associations, joint investment groups, temporary companies, customs houses, and the royal courts, is also important, and sources produced by this environment are used. The context of financial fluctuations over time and in various locations is important, because royal bankruptcies, for instance, could mean either losses or opportunities for New Christians.<sup>58</sup>

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Political action through legislation, consultation, petitions, regulation of the markets, and royal contracts will be scrutinised. *Arbítrios*, or written pieces of advice to kings—many of them in manuscript but also in printed form—are relevant if we are to understand the political debate in certain periods, mainly in the first half of the seventeenth century. <sup>59</sup> Through arbítrios, we can see how New Christian agency and Old Christian opposition worked, but we need to complement this source with pamphlets from the period to grasp the decisive moments of intense public debate on political, social, and economic reform.

# 5. Scope

The defining features of this book are its focus on the New Christian merchant elite, its long-term approach, and its intercontinental scope. It spans a period from the fifteenth century, when the New Christian merchants emerged from massive, forced conversion in Iberia, to the decline of this ethnicity in the eighteenth century. It includes the intersection between New Christians and Jewish communities, as well as integration, persecution, and resistance within the Christian world. The research encompasses Spain, Portugal, Italy, Northern Europe, North Africa, West Africa, the Americas, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia, since the New Christian merchants were a global elite. The analysis is based on the extensive and excellent bibliography available and on intensive research in eighteen archives and manuscript sections of public and private libraries in Portugal, Spain, the Vatican, Italy, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Peru.

The book is structured both in a chronological and a thematic way. The purpose of this is to understand distinctive features in certain periods of time, particularly royal policies, business patterns, destinations for migration, and cultural and religious expression. There are bridges between these parts, and these are provided either by focusing on continuities in policies or by looking at successive generations of the same families. Temporal divisions are always arbitrary, so I have tried to find clusters of events that can function as markers rather than turning points, because there are always continuities and discontinuities, although new economic, political, and social configurations can be identified.

Part I is titled "Transitions" because I am seeking to understand transfers of capital and kinship between Jewish and New Christian elites in the fifteenth century and first half of the sixteenth century. Continuities in royal advisers and royal contracts are visible, while the arrival of New Christians in municipal and ecclesiastic offices was a novelty and arguably unleashed retribution from Old Christian elites. The impact of Jewish expulsion and inquisitorial prosecution of New Christians is analysed. The activity of New Christian merchants from Castile and Aragon is integrated into our story, while information from new archival research on Portuguese merchants is introduced. Continuities of overseas trade leading to new business developments in the Atlantic, the Indian,

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and the Pacific Ocean is contrasted with breaks in continuity related to racial division and political events that created disruptions and encouraged emigration, primarily to Italy, North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and Antwerp. Patterns of behaviour are followed through precise case studies. Important events with consequences, such as the riot of Toledo in 1449, the first wave of inquisitorial persecution in Spain, the Lisbon riot of 1506, and the voyage of David Reubeni to Portugal, are analysed. Part I is completed by a consideration of creativity, which includes a look at New Christian engagement with literary and artistic expression, and this is followed by an examination of the power struggle for the establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal, with a renewal of arguments from the fifteenth-century Castilian debate in favour and against New Christians.

Part II addresses the expansion of New Christian merchant networks in the Iberian world and in other parts of Europe, the Ottoman Empire, South Asia, and East Asia from the mid-sixteenth century to the 1600s, which includes consideration of the impact of the Iberian Union of Crowns in 1580. I start with a case study of contraband trade with Morocco in the mid-sixteenth century, followed by selected cases of the banker Simón Ruiz's associates, to understand interregional links and those operations of New Christian entangled with the interests of Old Christian merchants and financiers. New Christian migration, particularly to Northern Europe (Amsterdam and Hamburg), triggered by a new wave of inquisitorial persecution and new international conditions of acceptance of Jewish communities, is studied in its complexity. The different strategies of investment and social mobility, including noble status, pursued by New Christians are analysed in the chapter on property, which reflects on local conditions. Merchant cultures, literary and spiritual searches, and the debate around blood purity are analysed in the chapter on values, a notion comprising moral standards and social beliefs that is seldom used in historical analysis but is crucial to an understanding of conflicted views. This part concludes with the general pardon obtained by New Christian financiers in 1604-1605, an important historical event that had consequences.

Part III covers the period from the 1600s to the mid-seventeenth century, a period in which New Christian merchants asserted their presence as bankers in Madrid, created and developed Sephardic communities in Northern Europe, expanded their interests in the Spanish Empire and in Asia, and saw an exemption from property confiscation imposed by King John IV on the Inquisition in Portugal in 1649. "Resistance" is an obvious title for this part, which opens with a chapter on conflict exacerbated by the Inquisition, which required negotiation by the New Christian elite both in Madrid and in Rome. Periods of political transition, defined by the accession of new kings and new popes, unleashed requests from both sides of the dispute. The chapter on politics tackles a larger picture in which international war, Dutch competition in the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans, the decline of the Spanish Crown, and

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the disruption of New Christian networks provoked by the restoration of the independence of Portugal in 1640 are addressed. The business strategies of New Christians in different parts of the world are analysed region by region, including the major issue of the slave trade in the Atlantic, the reinforcement of links to foreign merchants, and the backlash from Old Christian merchants installed as familiars of the Inquisition. This part is completed by a chapter on identities that tackles religious and political allegiances but also literary and artistic forms of expression.

Part IV spans a long period, from the 1650s to the 1770s, which moved from renewed persecution by the Portuguese Inquisition, leading to the tribunal's suspension by the pope from 1674 to 1681, successive conflicts in Spain, and the abolition of the distinction between New and Old Christians by the government of Pombal in 1773. The decline and disappearance of the New Christians as a recognisable ethnic group is the subject of this part. The new heights of inquisitorial persecution and their impact on merchants in the Iberian world and beyond are analysed through precise case studies, which show the development of strategies of evasion but also of ennoblement, both in Iberia and abroad. At the core of this part is the suspension of the Portuguese Inquisition, which played a major role in this story. The New Christian merchants, who had been heavily persecuted during the late 1650s, 1660s, and early 1670s, were confronted with the restoration of the tribunal without any breathing space being conceded. The Portuguese king's change of attitude concerning contracts and privileges is included in this analysis. The consequences for emigration are tackled by the chapter on the breakdown of the New Christian merchant families, largely pushed by relentless inquisitorial persecution both in Spain and Portugal from the 1700s to the 1740s, while foreign merchants became favoured by the Iberian kings. The decline of Sephardic communities in Northern Europe occurred at the same time as the assimilation of New Christians in Italy, while the assumption of Jewish status emerged in France. The last chapter addresses the persistence of some level of New Christian identity until the mid-eighteenth century, but the main phenomenon is this group's immersion in global society, followed by the ideological turn against blood purity, surprisingly more successful in Portugal than in Spain, favoured by a decisive shift in the state's assertion of its political and jurisdictional powers.

# 6. Historiography

In 1817, Juan Antonio Llorente, the first historian of the Spanish Inquisition, considered that the economic and social success of the New Christians had transferred to them the hatred previously directed against the Jews. In his view, the Inquisition had been created for political and financial reasons and was driven by a desire for extortion. Formal accusations of Judaism

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targeted Jewish food and hygiene habits, not just religious beliefs. <sup>60</sup> Llorente was a former secretary of the Inquisition of Madrid who had extensive access to the archives, served the French government, and went into exile with the restoration of the Spanish monarchy. His arguments resonated with the thinking of the time. One generation later, Alexandre Herculano thoroughly researched the establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal, focusing on the negotiations in Rome on behalf of the Portuguese king, John III, which the New Christians opposed. The wealth of material Herculano uncovered remains fundamental; he proved there had been pervasive corruption in the Eternal City that led to an increased use of extortion against New Christians. <sup>61</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Henry Charles Lea agreed, in general, with Llorente and Herculano, but his method was different: whereas the previous historians had analysed the main inquisitorial decisions in their social and political context, and the diplomatic clashes of the different interests at play, Lea engaged with individual trials. Rich detail emerged, but limited analysis reproduced the tribunal's racial prejudices that underlined the accusation of Judaism against New Christian victims. <sup>62</sup> In the early 1920s, João Lúcio de Azevedo offered a comprehensive history of the New Christians in Portugal, from the late fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century. Despite anti-Jewish prejudices, this history suggested a critical vision of the Inquisition and established a solid institutional and historical narrative based on archival research. It was weakened by the virtual absence of life stories, but the analysis of the main events, including the suspension of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1674–1681, set an excellent basis for future research. <sup>63</sup>

The subsequent decades saw new approaches that enlarged understanding of New Christians as a minority with their own agency. In 1937, Marcel Bataillon published an important book on Erasmus and Spain, a model of carefully nuanced religious and intellectual history in which he showed the overwhelming presence of New Christians among Erasmians, mystics, and early spiritual movements—namely, the *alumbrados* (literally, the "enlightened"), who sought direct contact with God.<sup>64</sup> The information he collected on the participation of New Christians in the first generations of Jesuits was, in due course, extended.<sup>65</sup> More recently, this line of research inspired another important book by Stefania Pastore, who analysed the complexity of fluid and innovative spiritual quest among New Christians, whose ideas cannot be neatly mapped onto specific religious movements.<sup>66</sup>

Bataillon's study was the first to integrate the story of discrimination against converted people of Jewish descent into the mainstream of Spanish history. The second historiographical move in this direction came in the 1940s and 1950s, from Américo Castro, who departed from the traditional view that Hispanic culture was characterised by a purely Christian background. Instead, he included Jewish and Muslim contributions. <sup>67</sup> Although Castro considered New Christians to be crypto-Jews, he opened an exciting area of research

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concerning the literary developments of this ethnicity, a line pursued later by other scholars, particularly Stephen Gilman and Francisco Márquez Villanueva. This perspective was reinforced by a powerful parallel vein of research done by the historian Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, who contributed to recognition of the historical importance of conversos as a social group. This historian's work addressed the economic and financial New Christian intervention in Spain, particularly during the reign of Philip IV, but he also included an investigation of the literary output of these people. <sup>69</sup>

Julio Caro Baroja contributed work of the highest quality to this field with his substantial research on Jews in Spain from the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. It was marred by its title, which suggests that the author subscribed to the idea that all New Christians were crypto-Jews. However, Caro Baroja made an extraordinary effort to integrate both the Spanish and the Portuguese sides of this story, to engage with life stories, and to use a wide variety of archival sources, mainly trials. His is probably the most comprehensive history of New Christians in the Iberian world. <sup>70</sup>

It should be said that Caro Baroja's problematic equating of New Christians with Jews was shared by most historians from the 1930s onwards, particularly by Cecil Roth, Yitzhak Baer, and Haim Beinart. More recently, Jonathan Israel unveiled an extraordinary set of case studies in Iberia, Northern Europe, Italy, and Iberian America relating New Christians to Sephardic communities, although accepting a New Christian plural religious identity. The flourishing of studies on Sephardic communities in the past fifty years, for example, those by Aron de Leone Leoni, Cristina Galasso, Yosef Kaplan, Miriam Bodian, Daniel Swetschinski, Michael Studemund-Halevy, Jorun Poettering, Edgar Samuel, Gérard Nahon, Evelyne Oliel-Grausz, Lionel Levy, José Alberto Tavim, Hugo Martins, and Francesca Trivellato, is crucial not only for Jewish history but also for the history of New Christians.

The convergence of Catholic and Jewish historiographies concerning the idea of New Christians as crypto-Jews was challenged in the 1950s and 1960s by António José Saraiva and Benzion Netanyahu. These two historians shared the view that the Inquisition fabricated Jews, an idea that replicated a plausible argument originally formulated by the New Christians themselves. However, Saraiva considered the Inquisition to have been an instrument of feudal social retribution against the New Christians as an emergent bourgeoisie, a hardly convincing Marxist approach belied by the fact that common interests between merchants or bankers and noblemen are easy to prove. Although Saraiva's refusal to work with the inquisitorial sources is unacceptable, his critique of a positivist reading of the trials that had been accepted at face value must be taken on board.

Benzion Netanyahu approached the subject from an entirely different angle: he too rejected the idea of a continuing Jewish allegiance among New Christians, considering them as true Christians, who in many cases decided

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on conversion without constraint. Netanyahu's theory of racism as an explanation for the persecution suffered by the New Christians became more convincing in time, due to the progress of historical studies on that issue; however, the idea of pure Christians, many of them converted of their own will, based on Jewish sources, is problematic. Criticism of exclusive use of Jewish sources related to inheritance and divorce matters lodged outside Iberia has already been levelled at Netanyahu's ideas. The argument of racism is sustainable, but it needs to be better explained in its variable historical context.

I. S. Révah rightly rejected António José Saraiva's denial of the religious dimension of New Christian history. The two had a lively debate, in which Révah did not convincingly address Saraiva's criticism of a positivist approach to the sources, but he acknowledged plural identities among New Christians. This line of research was developed by Nathan Wachtel, who systematically studied whole inquisitorial trials in context. Wachtel contributed to the creation of a much more nuanced image of New Christians, who were certainly constrained by the Catholic Church but could end up choosing a variety of religious behaviour, from orthodox to heterodox: at the margins of heresy, engaged in innovative spiritual quest, returning to Judaism, or even, at times, experimenting with Protestantism. Nathan Wachtel talked about a faith of remembrance, about efforts to retrieve lost doctrine and ritual, obscured by an inquisitorial focus on food habits and hygienic customs. This important approach stimulated a new reflection on conditions and consequences of conversion.

A critique of the imaginary Jewish underground religion created by the Inquisition has been developed by David Graizbord, who points to the traditional absence of separation between the secular and religious spheres and between individual duties and a collective stance among Jews. By the same token, inquisitorial expressions such as the "religion of Moses" or "individual salvation under Judaism," which were integrated into daily life, need to be scrutinised. This critique feeds into an old question: What were the possibilities of recovering Judaism within a strict Christian society, without rabbis or the Talmud? Graizbord focuses on split and problematic New Christian identities, showing constant processes of change from one religion to the other, hesitations, returns, and doubts that verged on agnosticism or atheism. This approach calls our attention to a much more flexible early modern world than we might envisage—a flexibility in which religious allegiance was not always set for life, manifested in a community submitted to forced conversion.

A legal and institutional framework based on blood purity defined boundaries, but it would be a colossal misjudgment to build an interpretation based on norms during the early modern period. How did the New Christians deal with rules of exclusion? How did they circumvent these adverse conditions? Under what circumstances could these norms be infringed? The work of

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Enrique Soria and Ruth Pike, among other authors, has called attention to the significant number of New Christians bribing genealogists and subverting the testimonies of the enquiries into blood purity so that they could become Old Christians. <sup>80</sup> We also know, from the *libros verdes* of malicious genealogy, that many noble families were accused of being "contaminated" by Jewish blood. It is exactly this New Christian elite capacity for social promotion that needs to be properly assessed. But we cannot forget the opposite possible outcomes: failure to gain acceptance, fear of the consequences of exposure, loss of reputation, and ejection from previous positions in this atmosphere of systematic downgrading.

New Christian migration, mainly to the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, South Asia, and East Asia, has been one of the main issues tackled by historiography. The major periods of migration are becoming more clear, and although the number of people involved is still difficult to estimate, we have some overall figures for those who settled. The impact of New Christian migration on the creation and development of Sephardic communities is probably the most productive area, as I indicated earlier. Although there is significant work on the relationships between New Christians and Jewish communities, this topic needs to be better addressed for the eighteenth century. It is important to better understand this relationship, because common decline might be explained by common causes.

Finally, the merchant and financial activities of New Christians have been under scrutiny since the 1950s, with much of this study based on the correspondence of the banker Simón Ruiz.<sup>82</sup> There is also good information on New Christian merchants in monographs on district tribunals and national histories of the Inquisition.<sup>83</sup> The importance of partnerships between New Christians and Old Christians has already been pointed out by David Grant Smith in the case of Brazil, and this kind of approach has been extended.<sup>84</sup> The crucial role of New Christian merchants in Asia has been studied by James Boyajian, who has reconstituted the links back to Lisbon and Madrid.85 The financial investments of New Christians in Spain and Portugal have also been researched, as well as the communities' commercial activities in specific periods of time.86 Relationships of New Christians with foreign merchants have been tackled, but it is an area that requires more research.<sup>87</sup> The excellent work by Francesca Trivellato on the cross-cultural trade of the Sephardic community in Livorno should inspire new research on New Christians.88 Trivellato refused, for instance, the automatic vision of intra-ethnic exclusive trust, calling attention to internal conflict and external links.

In general, it is necessary to draw together all these threads, including the important contexts of legal and economic thought, social and political practice, and intellectual and artistic expression, to build a more comprehensive history of the New Christian merchant elite, its rise, and its fall.

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