

**Crypto-Jewish Faith and Ritual in *Nueva España*:  
The Second Inquisitorial *Procesos* of Isabel de Carvajal**

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The Carvajal family holds a prominent place in the studies of the crypto-Jewish tradition in the Iberian world. This family of Portuguese *converso* origins moved from Spain to *Nueva España* in 1569, where they began to practice crypto-Jewish rituals. Historians have primarily been interested in one of the sons, Luis de Carvajal, who called himself a martyr in his second inquisitorial trial and in the autobiography that he wrote in prison. Almost all of the Carvajals residing in *Nueva España*, including the matriarch, Francisca, and her children; Isabel, Luis, Leonor, Mariana, and Catalina, were killed in the auto-da-fé in 1596. While previous studies of this family, including Alonso Toro's *La familia Carvajal*, Seymour Liebman's English translation of Luis's autobiography, and Martin Cohen's *The Martyr*, mainly focus on Luis and his role in crypto-Jewish faith, in this study I concentrate on another figure who I see as central to crypto-Judaism, Luis' elder sister, Isabel de Carvajal. The *Bancroft Library* in Berkeley, California acquired the unedited manuscript copy of Isabel's inquisition trial in 1995 and thus far it has only been studied by a handful of scholars.

Crypto-Jews existed as members of a close-knit community in the Iberian empire. Their religious practice was preserved by the strong kinship networks they maintained with other crypto-Jews in their local communities and the contact that male family members who worked as merchants had with Jews throughout the Sephardic Diaspora.<sup>1</sup> Antonio Cortijo Ocaño shows that in this period there was a strong “mercado cultural transatlántico” that connected both sides of the Atlantic (496). What we learn from Isabel's *proceso* and those of her siblings that have survived from that second fateful trial of 1595-96 is that the Carvajals, like other Iberian Jews and *conversos*, adopted a type of matriarchy as a response to the men of the community being absent. Isabel, like many others, took on the role previously held by the men—that of spiritual guide of the family. While labeled as Isabel's trial, like other inquisition trial manuscripts, only about fifty of the three hundred plus pages come from her personal testimony. The rest is a compilation of testimony acquired from the trials of her immediate family and other members of the crypto-Jewish community of *Nueva España* in which she is mentioned as is standard in Inquisition manuscripts.

When we read the inquisition documents and try to unpack the Jewish identity and practices of the accused we must take into account that the Inquisitors already had their own idea of what Judaizing meant. They in fact coined and criminalized this categorization. Judaizing was defined as belief in the Mosaic Law, a belief that diametrically opposed the Law of Jesus Christ. In accord with Miriam Bodain “the formulation that the Law of Moses was *the only faith in which one could obtain salvation* was unquestionably an appropriation of Catholic usage—one that became a cardinal tenet of Crypto-Jewish belief and rhetoric” (15). As the inquisition used a monolithic and bureaucratic perspective to invent a unified crypto-Judaism from a spectrum of Jewish practices, crypto-Jews reciprocated - both appropriating and being appropriated by the Catholic ideology and practice they were exposed to. This reciprocal contest for religious

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Israel shows in his ground-breaking text, *Diaspora within a Diaspora*, the major Sephardic trade networks that existed throughout the Mediterranean, Europe, and Africa.

identity and belief occurs within the liminal space of publicly living as Catholic and privately as crypto-Jews.<sup>2</sup>

Inquisition manuscripts reveal that crypto-Jewish cultural and textual traditions were very different from those of the church or synagogue, and became constructions of familial female power. In my research I have found that it is through feminine practice, or in the observance of rituals realized by women, that crypto-Jewish culture and religiosity were maintained by the crypto-Jews of 16<sup>th</sup>-century New Spain.<sup>3</sup> Crypto-Jewish women created identity and community through the purposeful use of food and their manipulation of the body to control their religious milieu. I examine Isabel's self-described use of these rituals through the lens of the work of such scholars as Caroline Bynum Walker and Mary Elizabeth Perry who have explored the symbolic use of fasting and food among Christian nuns and Moorish women in the Early Modern period. In accord with Janet Liebman Jacobs who contextualizes women in this time period "as bearers of culture." I will show throughout this article how Isabel de Carvajal used two intimate spaces, the home and the body, to both create identity and to resist Catholic hegemony in *Nueva España*.

### Reconfiguration of the Home

The prohibition of public Jewish worship reconfigured the private realm of the home for crypto-Jews. Renée Levine Melammed problematizes this space, explaining that in Iberia *converso* men had to change almost all aspects of the way they practiced their faith post-conversion, as their practices were formerly public in scope. Conversely, the domestic sphere maintained continuity in its basic observances (32-3). The home became the only place in which to study and pray according to crypto-Jewish tradition. Melammed writes "The inquisitors realized the unusual importance of the home in crypto-Judaism and understood that the women willy-nilly became the carriers of the tradition that they viewed as inimical" (15). Although Melammed writes about the 15<sup>th</sup>-century peninsular inquisition, this idea holds true for the Carvajal family in *Nueva España*. Although women may have inherited, willy-nilly, a heightened importance of home they keenly recognized their new role, and knew how to exploit this sphere to the fullest as we will see shortly.

Whereas in Italian communities and other normative Jewish communities in the Diaspora men were the public faces of the religion, in crypto-Jewish colonial *Nueva España*, women supervised many of these practices. Spanish scholar and poet Jon Juarisiti theorizes that while Judaism is a patriarchal religion, crypto-Judaism is matriarchal, as the religion moves from public spaces, i.e. the synagogue, to the private realm of the home. As Melammed shows,

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<sup>2</sup> The debate over crypto-Judaism and if it is completely distinct from Normative Judaism or if it shares elements has long been under discussion. Yirumayahu Yovel succinctly describes the two traditional camps opposing Yitzhak Baer and Netanyahu, he writes that Baer celebrated crypto-Jews as Jewish while Netanyahu argued that crypto-Jews were not part of the Jewish faith (1). I will follow Graizbord, Melammed, Gitlitz and Bodian's who move away from the previous opposing viewpoints to one that acknowledges crypto-Judaism as neither the same as normative Judaism nor completely distinct and instead focuses on the shared characteristics that it had with both Jewish and Catholic traditions. For more on the syncretic development of the crypto-Jewish faith see Nathan Watchel in "Marrano Religiosity in Hispanic America in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century" *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West 1450-1800*.

<sup>3</sup> Recent scholarship by literary critics including Renée Levine Melammed, Miriam Bodian, and Janet Liebman Jacobs have shown how women maintained and preserved many aspects of crypto-Jewish faith. Specifically within *Nueva España*, Antonio Cortijo Ocaña and Silvia Hamui Sutton have demonstrated the central role that women played the community of crypto-Jews. Their scholarship analyzed the trials of women accused and tried as *judiazantes* in the second half of the seventeenth-century.

women were “never dependent on a center outside of the home” and so did not have to change completely the way they worshipped (32).

Although a formal structure of female worship did not exist, the Isabel, her mother and sisters fully internalized and understood their role in the preservation of crypto-Judaism. We can see this in the placement of Catholic images within the home. The Carvajal women carefully worked the space of the home to dissipate suspicions surrounding their faith, trying to trick both visitors and servants. Leonor describes that for these purposes they had a Christian altar and her mother had a rosary. She describes the main living space:

Tenía un altar en la sala principal de su cassa han algunas ymagenes a las quales tenia poniéndolos para engañar a los que entraban delante del qual algunas veces se hincaba de rodillas para dar a entender a la gente de su cassa que era española y mi madre tenía un rosario para traer en las manos y llevar a missa la qual jamás rezaba ni se encomendaba a de jesucristo su bendita madre ni los mentos a sino hera para paraser burla.” (MSS 95/96 v.4, 64r)

The rosary that Doña Francisca had was used to dissimulate Catholic worship as we read in Isabel’s trial: “si tenían rosarios para llevar a la iglesia pero en cassa nunca jamás rezaban en ellos” (59v). The Carvajal women played to their strengths, they identified themselves as members of the Spanish Republic because it permitted them to continue their secret Jewish observance and used faith-objects of this group to dissimulate other types of worship.<sup>4</sup> I follow Michel De Certeau’s characterization that everyday practices are tactical in character because Isabel de Carvajal carefully used the home to preserve her own faith and that of her family. We read in Isabel’s trial how they went to church on a regular basis to fake allegiance to the Republic of Spaniards:

Dixo que después que esta se passo a la ley de Moysén, de españoles a vezes quienes han tenido los sacramentos de la madre iglesia por de ninguno efecto, aunque no ha burlado de ellos, y si confessava y comulgava lo hazía por cumplirlo porque no tenía a Jesucristo autor de ello o por Dios y el altar que tenían su casa esta y las dichas su madre doña Francisca, y hermanas doña Catalina, doña Mariana, doña Leonor y Luis de Carvjal, *era por paraser españoles* y no ser sentidos, pero no porque creyesen en las ymagine que en el estaban ni en la ley de nuestro redemptor Jesus Christo.” (334v *emphasis mine*)

In this citation Isabel clearly makes the distinction, where official rhetoric does not, that she is *other* who does not fit into the dual-classification system of Spaniard or Indio. Isabel in her trial complicates notions of identity and faith. In this way, the Carvajal women utilized a hybrid-like system of worship in order to dissimulate religious practices and to trick the public about their crypto-Jewish worship. At the same time, in front of an Inquisitorial Tribunal, Isabel is careful to show that she respected Catholic principles and worship “aunque no ha burlado de ellos [los sacramentos].” The Carvajals’ employed within the home what anthropologist James Scott calls “weapons of the weak” or the everyday forms of resistance that include tactics that the Carvajal women utilized: dissimulation, false compliance, and feigned ignorance.

While the men in the Carvajal family travelled and participated in international trade routes, the women maintained the home as the center of Crypto-Jewish faith. bell hooks theorizes the home as a political site of “liberation struggle.” While women were restricted to the domestic realm, they imbued it with new meaning and resisted Catholic hegemony through this space.

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<sup>4</sup> Colonial *Nueva España* was divided into two legally sanctioned groups: *República de españoles* and *República de indios*. Although the Carvajals, hailing from Iberia, fit into the former group the categorization did not adjust for religious difference.

Jonathan Israel describes the Western Sephardim and their *converso* counterparts as simultaneously “agents and victims of empire” (1). We see this with the Carvajal family who were both colonizers of New Spain and victims of the Inquisition, tenuous members of the *República de Españoles*. Isabel’s brother-in-laws were involved in the slave trade with Angola and her uncle Luis el Viejo was governor of New León. In Mexico City Isabel lived with her sister Leonor and husband Jorge de Almeyda who was a central player in the transatlantic commercial networks. Cohen shows that since Leonor was only fifteen years old, Isabel took control of running the house. Almeyda was travelling very often and so the control of the home and the practices within this space remained almost entirely with the women in their families and in this case Isabel.

The home also became a meeting place for the family as well as other Judaizers including Manuel de Lucena, Justa Méndez, and Clara Enríquez: “Preguntada, cuanto tiempo passo al aver dormido el viernes que tiene la dicha Justa Mendéz en su casa de esta después de aver quitado los sambenitos a las dichas doña Catalina y doña Mariana hermanas de esta” (84v). Isabel, like the *morisca* women described by Mary Elizabeth Perry “transform the home into a space of resistance” (2005 5). Perry argues that women could use the home to protect against public discourse of dominant religions through story telling of cultural heroes, much as Isabel and the Carvajals sang songs and told stories about Old Testament figures. For example; “dona Ysabel y dona Mencia un cantico que comienza de esta manera:

Su conforto fundado cavia  
cantasemos loores al señor  
amo el tiene de darnos su alegría  
yento da má[s] cosas su favor... (51v)

In a Jewish religion void of its official leaders, the traditional Rabbi, women like Isabel take on some of their role, for instance in advising and instructing what does and does not constitute faith. Bonfil describes the role that widowed Rabbis’ wives in Renaissance Italy had, whereby upon their husbands’ deaths they become a type of spiritual leader and community advisor. Isabel’s husband brought her into the fold of crypto-Judaism, and upon his death Isabel continues his work of maintaining the Law of Moses within her family—her most immediate community:

Los dezia y rezava el sábado, y como el yba diciendo, esta y sus hermanas doña Ysabel y doña Mariana que los savían de memoria y van respondiendo y su madre de ellos doña Fransica de Carvajal aunque estaba presente y los oya no respondía porque no los savia de memoria, y las si mismo los sábados en honor dellos y alabando al dios el dicho Luis de Carvajal su hermano dezía en copla toda la ley de Moysén y estay los dichas doña Ysabel y doña Mariana sus hermanas yban respondiendo porque también los savían de memoria como los dichos nuevo canticos, y estaba presente así mismo la dicha doña Francisca a su madre que tampoco no respondía por no saberla y comienza de esta manera

Altísimo dios clamamos  
con voces y alaridos  
por vernos tan afligidos  
atiende a que desmayamos. (MSS. 95/96, v.3, 125v-126v-r)

Through the performance of songs and prayers crypto-Jews preserved their faith. One of these prayers found in Isabel’s trial include; “Cantemos con alegría/ alavancas al señor, etc” (MSS. 95/96 v.4, 344r). Michelle Hamilton explains: “Los procesos de Leonor e Isabel de Carvajal muestran que las mujeres de la familia sabían de memoria muchísimas composiciones poéticas

que se utilizaban en las ceremonias y rituales religiosos familiares (2000 78). Women transmitted the songs to other family members and members of the larger crypto-Jewish community, and Isabel and Leonor sang these songs with their family friends in order to preserve their faith. Social anthropologist Joëlle Bahloul theorizes the domestic realm as a repository for family memory and in this case crypto-Jewish ritual and tradition. She elaborates: “As we go through the house, memories not only describe physical space but also tell a social history. Domestic space serves as a metaphor for the human entity that inhabits it; domestic space is the space of memory” (10).

The home became Isabel’s synagogue, it was the place she realized the expressions of her faith and became one of the most fervent Judaizers and a leader in her family. She stands out as one of the most educated females in her family, a fact with Luis acknowledged with the letters he wrote to her while in prison. When Luis was questioned as to why he wrote a note to Isabel in particular he “dixo que porque entiende que es para la dicha doña Isabel, es porque sabe leer, porque las demás no saben leer letra tirada, y que aunque dize en el papel, que se embía a las demás, no save con que fin lo hiziesse porque como dicho tiene nos saben leer” (MSS. 95/96, v. 3, 187v). Isabel’s practice was permitted to grow; in part this is due to her status as a childless widow. Louise Mirrer’s suggestion that “widows could devote themselves to God in a way that they could not as married women” stands for Isabel (1). She arrived in *Nueva España* already widowed and devoted most of her time there to the crypto-Jewish education of the younger children. She becomes a sort of crypto-Jewish *beata*. Perry describes *beatas* as holy women who could be widows, adolescents, and live together or in family homes according to the ideas of *recogimiento* which expressed an emphasis on internal, spiritual experiences (1990). This emphasis on these internal and spiritual experiences clearly becomes centered on the body for Isabel de Carvajal. The body is another female-controlled space that stood out for its defiance to patriarchal Catholic order.

### **Bodily Inscription**

The body becomes a site of reaffirmation of Jewish identity and resistance to Church dogma for Isabel and the other crypto-Jewish women in her community. We read how Isabel and her family maintained the Law of Moses in her trial:

Guardar la ley de Moysén con quien ella sea de lado y guardado labados vistiéndose camisa limpia y hechando ropa limpia en la cama los viernes antes, ynado el día grande de señor y otros ayunos, degollado las aves que avía de comer por que se desangrassen, dexado de comer manteca, toçino, y cosas de puerco, cantado canticos oraçiones de la ley de Moysén, esperado al mesías prometido en ella. (MSS 95/96 v.4, 319r)

The Mosaic Law as stipulated in Isabel’s *procesos* is almost in its entirety defined by treatment of the body, what it consumes and how it is dressed, specifically wearing clean clothes, using clean bedclothes, fasting, and not eating pork.

The body emerged as a fundamental space for female worship. Ryan Giles furthers that with religious reform in the Early Modern period the body took on a central role in female spirituality especially in the context of mystics. As crypto-Jews lived within the environment of *beatas* and *alumbradas*, their religious worship became even more body-centric. Sherry Velasco furthers this idea:

The importance of the body and physicality as a form of expression in women’s writing cannot be de-emphasized. The manipulation of bodily experience seems to have been the

main vehicle avail to women for access to religion. Medieval women were consistently more apt to use bodily metaphors in their works than male writers. (85)

Velasco shows how Santa Teresa in her key text *Castillo interior* uses the body as a metaphor for a home which has many rooms and that houses her faith and her soul. Similarly, crypto-Jewish women imbued their body with new meaning as they interiorized crypto-Jewish law. This is the instance of an expression of hybrid faith practices that emerged in Early Modern *Nueva España*. In fact, Isabel transforms her own body into the most vital space that houses her faith practice in a similar way that Santa Teresa describes. Santa Teresa constructs that this journey or “movimiento interior procede del centro del alma y despierta las potencias” (195). Isabel in her testimony constructs a metaphor of her faith as being preserved in her heart: “lo guardaron en su corazón por que no se acuerdo si hizieron algún trabajo corporal porque de ordinario les dolián hazer por no ser sentidos aunque como dicho tiene los guardaban en su corazón” (94v).<sup>5</sup> In a way the body becomes an extension of the home that was carefully used to practice crypto-Jewish ritual. Isabel furthers the idea that her inner self could not be regulated or observed by others and therefore is a safe place to practice her faith. This expression of faith connects to contemporary “religious reform [that] emphasized interiorized Christianity over blind adherence to Church Ritual” (Bodian, 4). Her body becomes the ultimate space to carry out Jewish ritual and so crypto-Jewish women interiorized their faith and created their own system of worship that centered on their bodies.

Food in particular becomes a key device that Isabel uses to regulate and control her own body. Throughout the trial many references deal with what food can and cannot be eaten according to their interpretation of the laws of *kashrut*. Isabel’s deposition describes that the family “no ha comido manteca ni cosas de puerco por ser comida prohibida” (332v).<sup>6</sup> The Carvajal women resist colonial rule in the face of very real persecution by actively regulating what entered their bodies: “degollava las aves que avia de comer para que se dessangrase” (379v). It is another instance of a “weapon of the weak” that Isabel used to both control her religious practice and resist Catholic hegemony. Women also regulated how food was prepared “quatro vezes que las ollas las grujaban sin foano con azeite batido con guebos y desangraban la carne y la dessa varían quitandole la gordura y echando la carne en agua fría” (66r-67v). Isabel reveals that she maintained her faith through practices surrounding food preparation and the consumption of particular food items; tasks generally left to women in colonial Spanish society. Bynum Walker explains that in the late Middle Ages “Food-related behavior was central to women socially and religiously not only because food was a resource women controlled but also because by means of food women controlled themselves and their world” (193). When Isabel tells the Inquisitors that she didn’t eat ham or pork products she exemplifies Bynum Walker’s assertion that through food women controlled their lives.

The women learned to modify their behavior surrounding food depending who they were with, carefully navigating between their dual identities of Catholic in public and Jewish in

<sup>5</sup> Bodian shows that “believing in one’s heart” under the conditions that the *conversos* lived was acceptable to God and uses the apocryphal Letter of Baruch which justified “the outward practice of idolatry if one believed the truth in one’s heart” (33).

<sup>6</sup> In the second trial of Diego Díaz Nieto we read “se juntaban en casa del dicho Antonio Díaz de Cáceres, Ruy Díaz y Diego Díaz Nieto, que también vivían en ella con ésta, con los dichos Luis de Carvajal, doña Francisca, su madre, doña Catalina, doña Mariana, doña Leonor, a tratar de la ley de Moysén...y entre todos decía que la ley de Moysén era la buena y en la que se habían de salvar los hombres y que se habían de degollar las aves y que se había de echar la carne en agua para que se desangrase y no comer tocino, manteca ni cosas de puerco, ni animal de cuatro pies. (Uchmany 234).

private. They recognized others as Jews by their food practices and modified their behavior accordingly. We read in Isabel's trial: "otras personas comían tocino y cosas de puerco que le daban y otro quando comía el almuerzo en casa de la dicha cierta persona no comía tocino, manteca ni cosas de puerco ni se les daba por que sabían que era judío" (294v). Food was an important code that crypto-Jewish women operated and could either alert members of the in-group that they were among compatriots, but just as easily could be seen by the wrong people and be used as evidence in the Inquisition trials. Melammed recognizes the complicated position women were in: "A Crypto-Jewish woman would have to rely upon her wile and ingenuity in covering up her Judaizing" as they had servants who could observe their practice (12). In the following passage we see a similar idea through the celebration of the Sabbath and the weighty decision of whether or not to prepare food on this day:

Aunque sabían que era grandissimo pecado encender fuego y guisar la comida del mesmo sábado o ha decir *por no ser sentidas*. Aunque una de las dichas personas muy conjunta de la dicha dona Ysabel que de claro por mas devoción no quería comer aquel día cossa que ubiese llegado al fuego por aver les dicho altas la dicha cierta persona este precepto.

En la copla siguiente;

En todas unas moradas  
fuego no ençendáis  
en el sábado que holgáis  
porque serán condenadas  
las almas sital obráis. (289v, *emphasis mine*)

There are several important points to unpack from this quote; firstly, much of the crypto-Jewish feminine practice was guided by trying to hide their faith "por no ser sentidas." Secondly, and expressing a hybrid religious identification, the God that is being prayed to through this *copla* is a God informed by the penitentiary context of Catholic *Nueva España* who would condemn the family and their souls. This penitentiary context informs the other side of food practices: ritualized fasting.

Ritualized fasting or *ayunos* is another central aspect that the Carvajal women used to regulate the body. Although the one-day *ayuno* is part of the normative Jewish calendar for Yom Kippur and is associated with penitence, the Carvajals like many other crypto-Jews go beyond normative fasting observance in order to control both their bodies and their beliefs in the face of religious domination. David Gitliz shows that fasting was used primarily because it is harder to punish "abstinence than it was to observe overt celebration of festivals" (351). Isabel reveals the type of fasts in which she participated and the community such fasts helped create:

Ayunado los días grandes del señor, que llaman los judíos días de penitencia, no comiendo hasta la noche salida las estrellas. El primer ayuno de estos ayuno y guarda en compañía de las estas su madre, doña Francisca, y hermana doña Catalina, doña Mariana, y doña Leonor y Luis de Carvajal de este septiembre de que vendrá lo qual todo hizieron por guarda de la ley de Moysén, y el segundo ayuno fue este Septiembre. (333r)

This quote shows that a feminine community was created around the material practice of religious observance through fasting (Obregón 302).<sup>7</sup> Bynum explores the medieval tradition of fasting among Christian women, which sounds very similar to that followed by the Carvajals: "As it had been for the ancient Hebrews, food abstention was an expression of grief and repentance, a plea for deliverance from some test or chastisement, a sign of confidence in God's

<sup>7</sup>Obregón's publication of Luis's trial shows this communitarian aspect. Here is one such example; "en compañía de este y de las dichas su madre, doña Isabel, Mariana y Leonor" (302).

mercy, an intercession and a preparation for meeting God” (35). Thanks to the letters we have between Luis and his sisters, and the testimony that Isabel and Leonor give, we know that the family used fasting to commemorate other persecuted groups and to connect with God. Isabel in her trial highlights the communitarian aspect of this fast: “ayunaba en compañía de este por guardar la ley de moysen” (112r). We also see in Luis's trial a frequent repetition of the fact that the community was involved in maintaining the fasts. All of the participants were women, namely, Francisca, Catalina, Isabel, Leonor, Mariana and sometimes Justa Mendéz (Obregón 302). Silvia Hamui Sutton shows that in the context of early 17<sup>th</sup> -century New Spain, female crypto-Jews were paid to realize fasts for wealthy male and female Judaizers in the same way that penance was achieved via an intermediary in Catholicism. Isabel also followed a penance system in her worship as we will see in the following passage. Here, Leonor describes the modified penance system that her sister Isabel followed:

Dixo que la perdona que dize al testigo, ayunava y hazia todo lo que la preguntada contiene es su hermana de esta dona Ysabel, porque guardava la ley de Moysén con tanta perfección que de los tres años a esta parte que ha volvieron a ella, y antes que las reconciliaba en el dicho este santo oficio, ayunava la dicha dona Ysabel todas las semanas después Domingo a medio día llevando esta orden que comía el Domingo a medio día, y ayunava hasta el lunes en la noche que çenava y luego ayunava el martes no comían hasta la noche, y luego ayunava el miércoles sin comer vocado hasta el viernes en la noche que era el ayuno de tres días el qual llamava la dicha dona Ysabel el ayuno del traspasso, lo qual hazía por hazer mas penitencia, y del dicho ayuno le empeçó a ayunar la dicha dona Ysabel en contemplación del ayuno de la Reyna Ester, en todos los quales dichos tres días la Reyna Esther no avía comido sino un guevo con çeniza, y el sábado solo no ayunava la dicha dona Ysabel por ser día de fiesta, y luego empeçava el domingo a medio día como esta dicho a continuar sus ayunos, y que la dicha dona Ysabel trae silicio y se acota todos los días que ayuna por guarda de la dicha ley de Moysén. La confesando la que no haga tanta penitencia y que mixe por su salud, respondía que no podía hazer menos porque lo avía prometido assí a Dios. (229v-r)

Here Isabel describes a direct connection that she has to God through the promise “avía prometido assí a Dios” appropriating and internalizing the mystics direct religious connection. Like the women who replaced the Rabbi's as spiritual leaders, we can see through Isabel's trial that crypto-Judaism acquired a more personal relationship between God and the individual subject. Isabel's modified penance system includes extended fasting, self-flagellation, and a strong expression that through pain and suffering she could reach God: “La confesando la que no haga tanta penitencia y que mixe por su salud” (229r).

Isabel stands out as a figure strictly dedicated to her faith through personal fasts, the ultimate regulation of the body; according to Luis “su hermana Doña Ysabel no solo los días de ayuno pero oftros días ayunaba y hazía tanta penitencia que comía en todo el día ni la noche y se ponía la messa a comer con este y su madre y hermanas hazía que comía” (112r).<sup>8</sup> Isabel would sometimes fast for three days at a time (Adler 46).<sup>9</sup> We read in the trial:

<sup>8</sup> We can see throughout the text multiple instances where Isabel identifies herself and is identified by others by this gesture of self-denial; “no se acuerda quantos ayunos esta dos días a veces sin comer vocado ni beber” (334r). Isabel “no quiso subir a comer” (366v).

<sup>9</sup> Adler references that the Fast of Queen Esther is three days and Mariana observed them for “purposes of penance” (46).

La dicha dona Ysabel todas las semanas, ayunado el domingo hasta día llenado este orden que comía el domingo a medio día y ayunava hasta el lunes en la noche que çenaba y luego ayunaba el martes no comiendo hasta la noche y luego ayunava el miércoles sin comer bocado hasta el viernes en el anoche que era ayuna de tres días el qual llamava la dicha dona Ysabel. El ayuno del tras el qual había por haber mucha penitencia y el dicho ayuno un peso a ayunar la dicha dona Ysabel en contemplación del ayuno de la Reyna Ester en todos los quales dichos tres días la Reyna Ester no avía comida sino un huebo con ceniça. (262r-263v)

As Bynum shows, fasting in the Old Testament is one of the only religious acts that allows women to be models of piety (192). This expression of faith also connects to ascetic practices of Catholic women and especially mystic nuns and priests. According to Catherine Swietlicki who describes the path designated by mystic San Juan de la Cruz in his poem *Noche oscura* “lo místico es la culminación momentánea de todo un proceso ascético que se realice a lo largo de la vida” (31). Asceticism was the path of mystical worship. Similarly, ritualized denial of food was practiced by female mystics Santa Teresa de la Cruz and her discalced followers. Further influenced by the penitentiary context, Isabel self-flagellates to further the impact of her self-denial: “que la dicha dona Ysabel trae silicio y se acota todos los días que ayuna por guarda de la dicha ley de Moysén.”

Self-inflicted corporal punishment is another faith-based practice that the Carvajal family borrowed from Catholicism. Luis’ testimony reveals that Isabel and her sister Catalina wore hair shirts, garments with bristles used to cause pain, six fingerbreadths wide to mortify their flesh on these fast days (Cohen 209). We read in Isabel’s trial the community of women who participated in these punishments and how they realized them:

Tenían a cilicios de cerdas sobre los lomos a raíz de la carne excepto a cierta persona que se la muy conjunta de la dicha doña Leonor que no tenía cilicio sino quitada la camisa y los cilicios de açiertas personas que nombre también muy conjuntas de la dicha doña Leonor heran ancho o de una faja de seis dedos... (97r-98v)

The insistence on a penitentiary faith system developed in concert with the Catholic faith that the Carvajals practiced in their public lives. As shown, crypto-Jewish both women used their bodies to maintain traditions and resist Catholic hegemony.

The body was imbued with meaning and power working in two directions, internally by the Carvajals, and externally by the Inquisitors. From within, the Carvajals utilized their own bodies as constructions of their faith. The Inquisitors tortured the bodies of the crypto-Jews to receive confessions and later displayed the bodies to publically punish heretical figures and show society the outcome of wrongdoing. Foucault shows that the process of torture was simultaneously a highly regulated practice and a public spectacle and a theatrical representation of pain (40). We read on the very last pages of Isabel’s trial about the spectacle that was the *auto-da-fé*:

Que sea llevada por las calles publicas desta ciudad caballera en una bestia de albazda y una voz de pregonero que manifieste su delito sea llevada ante un juez...[y sea traído al] lugar que esta seria lado se leda garrote hasta que muera nutra muerte y luego sea quemada en vivas llamas de fuego hasta que se convierte en çenica y a ella no haia ni quede memoria y por esta mi sentencia definitiva juzgando. (382v)

Both crypto-Jews and Inquisitors understood the power that the body had to express meaning. While crypto-Jewish women used their own bodies in order to observe Jewish ritual (performing Jewishness in Butler’s terms), Inquisitors used the bodies of worshippers as an example for

colonial *Nueva España*, punishing it publically in the center of Mexico City. Foucault describes all the mechanisms surrounding the body as the “body politic.” For him these “as a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge” (28). The body politic of crypto-Jews under trial is a supreme example of resistance under extreme pressure to conform. The body as shown functioned as a powerful symbol of resistance to heterodox Catholic social order.

While the home and the body stand out as spaces that the Carvajal women utilized to negotiate and practice their faith the family did not stop worshipping upon incarceration. Within the walls of the Inquisitorial jail in Mexico City, the Carvajal family continued to practice of their faith. They passed notes to each other hidden in avocado pits and banana peels. In the following quote the jail cells of the inquisition are compared to the captivity that the crypto-Jews faced in Egypt:

El verdadero messías que habría de venir y era el ante español que dicen los españoles el qual habría de congrega el pueblo de ysrael que estaba de esparcito y fallo de cautiverio y cárceles y llevado al monte de Sinay a donde lee palabra de psalms y coronas por saber guardado la ley de Moysén y en guarda de la dicha ley para guardado la dicha cierta persona. (48v)

In accord with Yerushalami, the Carvajals collapsed biblical and liturgical time in order to place themselves within the larger context of Jewish history. They incorporate themselves in the stories of Jewish historiography that had been told throughout generations to comfort themselves in a moment of pointed hardship.

Isabel de Carvajal confessed to Judaizing on July 13, 1596 after being tried by the New Spanish branch of the Inquisition for a year and a half, and suffering multiple sessions of torture. The following is her confession:

Dixo que es verdad que ella está enferma y de manera que no puede subir al tribunal y assí ha pedido esta audiencia para descargar su conciencia y salvar su alma que este que pretende y aunque ha muchos días que estaba con esta determinación el demonia le engañava, diziendole y trayendole al ymaginacion que no confessasse porque no le aprovecharía y que es verdad todo lo que los testigos dizen y de ponen contra ella porque esta ha guardado y ver y de la ley de Moysén después que fue reconciliada en este santo oficio. (332v-r)

Isabel confirmed that she was sick and had difficulty approaching the bench where the tribunal deliberated because of the wounds she suffered at the hands of the Inquisitors. After a year and half of denying her involvement in the crypto-Jewish faith, she confessed after a session of torture. She asked that her soul be saved. While the rapidness of her confession upon facing torture might suggest that she did not actively resist inquisitors, the year and a half prolonged equivocation in terms of her religious belief would see that she be punished more severely than if she had immediately confessed to heretical practice as someone facing her second Inquisitorial trial.<sup>10 11</sup> This quote gives us further insight how she constructed her identity and religious worship. Appropriating some of the hybrid religious practice found in the environment of colonial and officially Catholic *Nueva España*, Isabel formulates that the devil tricked her into following the Mosaic Law. Like the numerous Reformation period female mystics who were

<sup>10</sup> Mary Elizabeth Perry shows that equivocation in Inquisitorial trials lead to more severe punishments and sentencing in the case of *moriscas* who faced Inquisition charges (84).

<sup>11</sup> The first inquisition trial occurred in 1590 according to Uchmany (1992 53).

discredited by those claiming that they were tricked into their beliefs or visions by the devil, Isabel appropriates this terminology to lessen the intensity of her wrongdoing (Perry 2005 8). As we have seen before, she appropriates the language of Catholic subjects into her own identity and rituals.

Isabel de Carvajal is a resistance figure. While Melammed locates women on the periphery of Judaism, and New Spain certainly is a geographical margin, in terms of belief, the Carvajal women become central figures to crypto-Jewish faith and ritual. Through the tradition of songs and prayers that the women knew and sung, and the practices that they passed down through the space of the home we know that crypto-Jewish women created identity. By imbuing spaces of everyday life with new meaning they influenced the development of a new religion in which they themselves were central figures. We can refute the inquisitors' final statement about the fate of Isabel being erased from history's memory: "a ella no haia ni quede memoria" (383r).

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