

Article

Maternal Practice and the *Chuetas* of Mallorca: The Inquisitorial Trials of Pedro Onofre Cortés

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Abstract: In the inquisitorial archive of Pedro Onofre Cortés, alias Moixina, we see fellow practitioner protesting his son’s marriage to Clara Sureda because she was an Old Christian. The poor match was blamed on the breast milk that was ingested as an infant, “andaba con cristianos porque había mamado leche de una mujer cristiana” (he went with Christians because of the milk drunk milk from a Christian woman) (Picazo y Muntaner). In early modern Spain, breastmilk was seen as responsible for transmitting virtues and vices, religious expressions of faith and moral traits. Following Galenic medical understanding equating milk with blood, it was women who were responsible for the transmission of purity, impurity (Alexandre-Bidon 175), for contamination and difference (Martínez 47). This brief citation reflects the hybrid environment and the dual practices that deeply informed the lives of the converso Jews. Moreover, the understanding of the hereditary nature of these traits, and the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, so often mixed in unique combinations are clearly demonstrated in the Inquisition trials of Cortés and his Chueta brethren. As regulation over the mother and the female body became increasingly important in controlling Iberian subjects and its empire, conversos complicate the feminization of impurity. This article explores how the conversos known as the Chuetas of Mallorca understood their religiosity and difference as seen through the lens of hybridity, breast milk and maternal care.

Keywords: conversos; Chuetas; maternal care; breastmilk; hybrid practices



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In the inquisitorial archive of Pedro Onofre Cortés, alias Moixina, we see a crypto-Jew protesting his son’s marriage to Clara Sureda because she was an Old Christian. The poor match was blamed on the breast milk that was ingested as an infant: “andaba con cristianos porque había mamado leche de una mujer cristiana” (he went with Christians because of the milk drunk from a Christian woman) (Picazo y Muntaner). In early modern Spain, breast milk was seen as responsible for transmitting virtues and vices, religious expressions of faith, and moral traits. Following the Galenic medical understanding of equating milk with blood, it was women who were responsible for the transmission of purity and impurity (Alexandre-Bidon and Closson 2008, p. 175) and for contamination and difference (Martínez 2008, p. 47). This brief citation from Onofre Cortés’s trial reflects the hybrid environment and the dual practices that deeply informed the lives of the *converso* Jews. Moreover, the conflicting understandings of how these moral traits were inherited and the unique combinations of the traditions of Judaism and Christianity are clearly demonstrated in the Inquisition trials of Cortés and his *Chueta* brethren.

A well-off shopkeeper by trade, Onofre Cortés was arrested for Judaizing by the Holy Office of Mallorca and would be tried three times by the Inquisition, first in 1679, when his possessions were confiscated, again in 1686, and, finally, in 1688 when he was condemned to death at the stake (Picazo y Muntaner 2018, p. 173). He was married twice, first to Margarita Martín and then to Juana Miró, and had five children. We read in the trial dated 1687–1690: “Pedro Onofre Cortés alias Moixina reconocido por este Santo Oficio, porque havia buuelto a observer la ley de Moyses” (Pedro Onofre Cortés alias Moixina came before this Holy Office because he had returned to observing the Law of Moses.” (AHN,

Inquisición, 1705, Exp.15 1687–1690, 36v). Onofre Cortés was accused of being a committed Judaizer and, therefore, a heretic in the context of Iberian Catholic orthodoxy.

As regulation over the mother and the female body became increasingly important in controlling Iberian subjects and its empire, *conversos* complicated the feminization of impurity. This article explores how the *conversos* known as the *Chuetas* of Mallorca understood their religiosity and difference as seen through the lens of hybridity, breast milk, and maternal care.¹ While mothers preserved religious differences, *Chuetas* lived in a world replete with Catholic paintings and sculptures of the Virgin Lactans. There is an obvious tension here; the model of the virgin couldn't help but inform their own understanding of motherhood. I explore how the *Chuetas* construct their religious identity through the bodies of women and breast milk and how this first food is related to the tasks that they performed surrounding food preparation through which they upheld secret Jewish practice. I argue that the belief that breast milk could transmit (im)purity was inherited from a Christian context in which the *Chuetas* lived and worshipped, reflecting that religious practices could not be differentiated into their Jewish and Christian components. In fact, Christian images of breastfeeding and the ideas surrounding breast milk represent a major source that informed *Chuetas'* understanding of how their own identity was transmitted through breast milk. As openly Jewish subjects no longer populated seventeenth-century Spain, the *Chuetas* give us a unique opportunity to understand how women embodied religious difference, discrimination, and the creation of identity based upon race and religious practice. Moreover, these trials allow us to understand *converso* identity after other communities of *conversos* had been eliminated at the hands of the Inquisition in both Spain and its colonial holdings.

Women's central role in upholding and maintaining crypto-Jewish faith has been successfully argued by scholars, including Reneé Levine Melammed, Miriam Bodian, and Janet Liebman.² This approach has been focused primarily on female-led religiosity in terms of rituals, prayers, and the practices of the body that help maintain the faith. Women, especially widows, played an important role in furthering the faith; however, research into how maternity is addressed in the inquisitorial record is lacking. Scholarship by Mary Elizabeth Perry demonstrates that widows held significant economic and decision-making power in the early modern world,³ and we have seen this within crypto-Jewish families, including the role of widowed Isabel de Carvajal in the New Spanish Inquisition (1595–1596).⁴ Although Judaism is traditionally understood as being passed down matrilineally, women within traditional orthodox communities are segregated upon menstruation and are considered unclean and, therefore, are not able to read from the Torah. Within the crypto-Jewish community, the public-facing spaces of the synagogue that house the Torah were not in operation, so women's contact with the religion and their perceived bodily impurity occurred in different ways, one of these being practices related to milk sharing and breastfeeding. Baruch Braunstein demonstrates that in addition to laws of cleanliness around menstruation, "After the birth of a child, the mother was held by the Conversos to be incommunicable for two months" (Braunstein 1972, p. 105). Likewise, other religious practices, such as fasting, had to be curtailed due to breastfeeding, pregnancy, and childbirth. Although previous research has demonstrated that faith practices were transmitted through ingesting and regulating a mother's milk, this is the first study to explore the wider impact of maternal practice on the crypto-Jewish faith through both nursing and other daily practices carried out by women. In this essay, I analyze Onofre Cortés's trial, dated 1687–1690, alongside the contemporary 1691 publication *La fe Triunfante en quatro autos* [The Triumphant Faith in Four Trials] by ex officio member of the Inquisition Francisco Garau (1931) to understand the hybrid maternal context in which these *Chuetas* lived, worshipped, and raised their families. Reading the Inquisition trials of the *Chuetas* changes our understanding of crypto-Jewish practices with respect to nursing and the other activities carried out by women. Although the Inquisitors constructed Jewish belief and Christian belief as completely opposing practices, individuals blurred the distinctions between the two. Collectively, this idea is shown by how beliefs regarding breast milk came from

Christian iconography, while individual navigations of belief demonstrate a construction of a hybrid maternal context.

1. A Brief History of the *Chuetas*

The *Chuetas* are understood to be descendants of 15 different families who intermarried until the twentieth century. According to the Inquisitorial record, they lived in Mallorca on the *Calle Segell* and, as an endogamous group, maintained their religious practice. In the testimony that follows, *Chuerta* community member Raphael Cortés de Alfonso discusses how Cortés carefully selected a wife from within this community:

en estas también cassava ellos entre si unos con otros, y quedando una de las familias primeras cassava con otra de las familias inferiores dezian que había cassado mal, y esto lo sabe el testigo por haverlo comunicado varias veces antes de su reconcilacion ellos con diferentes personas de la observancia, y porque este [Cortés] se ha cassado despues de su reconciliacion con Margarita Martín que no ha sido reconcilada ni sus padres aunque es de los de la calle de Segell por una Puente y que por otra es . . . de Christianos viejos el dicho Pedre Onofre Cortés le gusto dezir que havia Casado mal porque no havia cassado con familia ygual a la suya, y porque haya cassado con persona que tenia quarto que era de los de la Calle del Segell y de los que no observaba la ley de Moyses. (21v)

[This community intermarried and even allowed the principal families to marry with those of inferior status, saying that they had made a lesser match, and the witness knows this from having, because [Cortés] had married Margarita Martín who was not reconciled nor were her parents, even though they are from those that were from Segell Street where they lived next to the bridge and for another reason . . . came from a family of Old Christians, the said Pedro Onofre Cortés liked to say he had married badly because this family was not equal with his own because she was only one quarter from those of Segell Street and was from those who didn't observe the Law of Moses].

The mass baptisms of 1391 throughout Castile and Aragón began in Sevilla and spread to Valencia, dividing families along confessional lines and, for the first time, converting the Jews (*conversos*) who lived alongside normative practicing Jews and Christians. In 1492, the expulsion meant that all openly practicing Jews were expelled from Iberia, whereas *conversos* continued to practice in secret for the next 200 years. After the sixteenth century, the number of Inquisitorial persecutions of Jews drastically reduced due to the successful campaigns known as the *Gran complicidad* [Great Complicity] to root out heterodoxy, except in the case of the specific group of *conversos* from Mallorca in the late seventeenth century known as the *Chuetas*. Even after the trials, this community continued to maintain its practices until the nineteenth century. These trials en masse were known as complicities because the process of questioning implicated the individual practitioner and their entire community. Other Great Complicities were waged throughout the Iberian world in places such as New Spain (today Mexico City) in 1598 and Peru (1635–1639). As a result of these complicities, the networks of crypto-Jewish practitioners (family, friends, and co-religionists) were eliminated. They were systematically questioned, tortured, and then burned at the stake as they were “complicit” in practicing a heretical faith; we see this language in the trial documents, as the *Chuetas* practitioners are described as “complices en la ley” [complicit in the law] of Moses.

There is significant scholarship on the community of *Chuetas* that explains why they were persecuted by the Inquisition in the seventeenth century. As Picazo y Muntaner argues, one group of scholars (Cortès Cortès 1985; Forteza 1972) demonstrates that the economic crisis between 1670 and 1680 badly affected the Holy Office, and targeting this merchant community would have resupplied its coffers. At the same time, ideologically, the *Chuetas* lived in a way that undermined the Inquisition's teachings (Selke, Braunstein). For scholars Picazo y Muntaner and Antonio Cortijo Ocaña (Cortijo Ocaña and Cogan

2011), the complicity and the trials against the *Chuetas* were the result of both economic and racial-religious discrimination. I follow this hybrid economic and ideological interpretation as I analyze Cortés's trial documents.

Inquisitors gathered evidence against the accused through interrogations of entire networks: friends, family, and community members. Scholars, including Irene Silverblatt and Richard Greenleaf, have addressed the role of reading Inquisition testimony as mediated voices through both the inquisitors who were asking specific and leading questions and the scribe who transcribed the oral testimony.⁵ Many scholars recognize the importance of inquisitorial documentation. The analysis of this archive provides a window into the complicated and intense polemics of the early modern period, but the reader need be mindful of the many dynamics and power struggles involved between the written word and oral testimony. The following citation provides an example of the role of mediated language and thought that is in operation in the trial documents. Cortés explains within the trial how he constructed his religious worship to be in opposition to the law of the land, the Law of Christ, and how the *Chuetas* were “oprimidos por la Inquisición para dejar la crehencia de la ley de moyses” (AHN, *Inquisición*, 1705, Exp.15 1687–1690, 22v) [oppressed by the Inquisition to leave behind the belief in the Law of Moses]. Inquisitors used the terms Law of Christ and the Law of Moses in the trials, and these terms, coupled with a belief in personal salvation, were adopted by the populations of crypto-Jews throughout Iberia (Gitlitz 1996, p. 110). His (and many other crypto-Jews) self-identification was formed by Inquisitorial oppression; in this way, *converso* identity cannot be neatly untangled from Catholic worship. As shown, the Inquisition trials set out the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ as conflicting practices. However, the distinctions between the two sets of beliefs were blurred by individuals, especially in their ideas regarding milk as a means of transmitting religious identity.

Onofre Cortés would further bring Margarita Martín into the fold of Judaizing practice, and she became a devout follower of the Law of Moses. Even having one-quarter of a Jewish bloodline was enough to establish a match, which, for Onofre Cortés, allowed him to further his religious practices. According to Selke, an inferior match in economic terms could be made because Cortés knew that Martín's mother was a believer in the Law of Moses and would have instructed her daughter accordingly (Selke 1972, p. 39). Martín herself had five children to whom she would pass teachings of faith. Crucially, this community was informed by a hybrid religious context. While Martín was a strong practitioner of crypto-Judaism, the Inquisition testimony of Juana Miró, Cortés's second wife, blames her crypto-Jewish associations purely on her husband and states that she came from a long line of Old Christians (Picazo y Muntaner 2018, p. 179). Even amongst such a principal family of practitioners as the Cortés, we see how families were split along confessional lines.

Long after other groups of *conversos* disappeared as such from Iberia, their more isolated status on the island of Mallorca afforded this group both an opportunity to intermarry and maintain crypto-Jewish practices. Simultaneously, in the seventeenth century, they became targets for discrimination and prejudice within the larger population of Mallorca, as they were considered racially impure.⁶ After this period, in the other parts of the Hispanic world, the larger communities of Judaizers were, in fact, made to disappear, yet the *Chuetas* remained.⁷ The specific trials waged against the *Chuetas* in their own time gained a good amount of interest., thanks to the Jesuit priest Francisco Garau, who was an ex officio witness for the Inquisition and published his book *La fe Triunfante en quatro autos* [The Triumphant Faith in Four Trials] in 1691; it became a bestseller within Mallorca and continued to be published for 300 years until 1931. The strong readership of this book demonstrates the continuing infamy of the *conversos* in the Iberian world and explains the compelling role that religious identity had in shaping the lives of subjects in the early modern period.

2. Visual Impact of Christian Imagery on Crypto-Jewish Women

The *Chuetas* lived between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ, a hybrid existence that is particularly well demonstrated through visual culture. The trials of Onofre Cortés detail the use of *sanbenitos* [penitential garments] to punish those burned at the stake and also the *lienzos* [canvases] that were hung on the church walls to display the likeness of the prisoners. In the Claustro of Santo Domingo in Mallorca, we encounter portraits of prisoners from 1691 with the names of the 15 *Chueta* lineages. These images were powerful because they reached the entire population, and in this period, literacy rates were low; as Charlene Villaseñor Black states, “paintings were preachers” (Villaseñor Black 2010, p. 184). At the same time, images of Christian figures, particularly those of the Virgin Lactans (breastfeeding virgin) were very popular and were imposed by Old Christians. Indeed, the Cult of the Virgin Mary—a ubiquitous part of visual culture⁸—impacted not only Catholic adherents but also the *Chuetas*.⁹

Throughout the late medieval period and growing into the early modern period, the Cult of Mary was centrally important to Catholic worshippers; her figure was upheld throughout continental Iberia and the Balearic Islands. Palma de Mallorca’s thirteenth-century *La Seu* Cathedral was dedicated to the *Mare de Déu de la Salut* [Virgin Mary of Health] and features a prominent sculpture of the Virgin Mother with a child. Likewise, the paintings that represented the Virgin Lactans were found throughout the land; as a breastfeeding mother, she was humanized for her subjects and could connect with mothers universally (Miles). Within the city limits of Palma de Mallorca, where the *Chuetas* lived and worshipped, there is a street dedicated to the Virgin Lactans called *Calle de la Mare de Déu de la Mamella* [The Lactating Mother of God] (today it has been renamed Calle Savellà). This street was most likely dedicated to the altarpiece depicting the Virgin Lactans found in the adjacent Sant Francesc Basilica (Riera 2005). All subjects, including Christians, *conversos*, and *Chuetas*, would have been exposed to these images in their daily life.

Juana Fortaleza, a practitioner named in Cortés’s trial, was described as a poor Judaizer by the *Chueta* community due to her affinity for images. She was called a “moza de su afición a las imágenes santas” (Selke 1972, p. 61) [a young woman with an inclination for holy images], which set her as someone who had lapsed into Catholic devotions. For Fortaleza’s son, this heartfelt respect for images was a Christian practice that reflected both the hybrid context in which she lived and also demonstrated that she was not a faithful practitioner of the Law of Moses: “Para que mi Madre, siempre Imágenes, Imágenes, y dais el dinero a essas cossas” (268) [For my Mother, always Images, Images, and she gave money for these things]. On the other hand, we read in Cortés’s trial a more orthodox Jewish understanding of the role of images representing human figures as being prohibited, “dicen que nosotros haviamos tomado el corazon de aquel por reliquias y todo es falso que nosotros no podemos tener reliquias que son unos barbaros, que no se puede adorar sino aún solo Dios, que es cosa tan clara como dice el Deuteronomia” (AHN, Inquisición, 1705, Exp.15 1687–1690, 16r). [This is false. We cannot have relics, and they [people who worship relics] are barbarians. One can only adore and pray to God, which is clearly stated in Deuteronomy].¹⁰ In contrast, this statement by Onofre Cortés rejects Christian influences in his religious practice. Fortaleza stands out in the Inquisitorial record as a woman who did not faithfully fulfill the Jewish practice of the Law of Moses according to members of her own family and community. She is a woman whose beliefs mixed with Catholic ones despite prohibitions, destroying her purity of identity in the eyes of other community members.

Crypto-Jews understood the importance and power of images throughout the Iberian world. For example, Isabel and Leonor de Carvajal in New Spain, who were brought up on Inquisitorial charges (1595–96), utilized images to protect their secret religious practice. These women and their mother Francisca had an altar with religious images to dissimulate their crypto-Jewish practice to any visitors in their household, including the servants who lived and worked among them.¹¹ Although different in intent from the images that Fortaleza’s son recounts, these images played a central role in the religiosity of

these *conversa* women. We don't know from the trial documents which specific paintings Fortaleza may have had in her possession, but given the popularity of the Virgin, it stands to reason that one of the images she held dear could have been one of the Virgin herself.

3. The Feminization of Impurity and Miracles of the Virgin's Milk

As we saw in the beginning of this essay with Old Christian Clara Sureda, it was believed that religious identity and practice were based upon the milk that the child ingested from the mother or wet nurse. Milk had the power to transmit both purity and impurity. The concept of "mamar en la leche" [suckled in the milk] is seen throughout medieval and early modern Spain. We encounter examples of this turn of phrase in many texts, including the thirteenth-century *Cantigas de Santa María* and the *Milagros de Santa María* that upheld the virgin's breast milk as key in not only causing religious conversion but also healing maladies and curing disease.¹² In the sixteenth-century Inquisition archive, we read in Isabel de Baeza's trial (1573) how the milk she ingested as an infant is responsible for her Jewishness, "que estaba todavía en la ley de Moisés, que como la mamó en la leche" (Larrea Palacín 1953, p. 135) [she was already following the Law of Moses, which she drank through breast milk].¹³ This type of expression involving milk and religious practices parallels the testimony that we see in the *Chuetas* cases. The Sephardic ballad *La Nodriza del Rey* [The Royal Wet Nurse] blames the untimely death of the prince on the corrupted milk of his wet nurse. Although this ballad predates the Inquisition, it gained importance upon its circulation within Iberian communities throughout the peninsula, France, and Northern Africa post-expulsion (Charo Moreno). In this period, milk was considered blood; it was the conduit that transmitted moral, physical, and religious qualities between parents and their children.

Similarly, the ballad from the oral tradition of the *romancero* entitled *La toca de la virgen y el alma pecadora* (Galmés de Fuentes 1976) The Virgin's Veil and the Sinning Soul) credits the Virgin with healing a sick soul through her milk. We read the following in the ballad:

Dime, alma pecadora, ¿qué me respondes a esto?
 --Soy una oveja perdida, y a vuestro rabaño vuelvo.—
 Hincóse de rodillas, la Virgen del Buen Suceso.
 --¡Oh, mi hijo Redentor, oh, mi hijo Rey supremo!
 Por la leche que mamaste de estos virginales pechos,
 me perdones aquesta alma, mira que se va perdiendo.
 (lines 14–18)

[Tell me, sinning soul, how do you respond to this?/I am a lost sheep and I have come back to your flock./Kneel before the Holy Virgin of Good Event./Oh my son the redeemer, oh my son the supreme king!/For the milk that you drank at those virginal breasts/will you pardon this soul, look how he is lost.] These verses demonstrate the primacy of the Virgin Mary for subjects in early modern Spain, as drinking the Virgin's milk allows this offender's sins to be pardoned. It was circulated widely in the oral tradition throughout Iberia; variants have been traced throughout from León, Ávila, Albacete, Huelva, Valencia, Cádiz, and Galicia.¹⁴ Jeneze Riquer (2019) reproduced variants from Segovia and Asturias.

The responsibility in this ballad is placed on the practitioner, underscoring the hybrid context in which the *Chuetas* lived and worshipped. The individual must comply with religious practice in order to effect change and lead the path to salvation. We see the circulation of the centrally important concepts of sin and repentance and heaven and hell in the following line: "Una noche muy oscura, en el rigor del invierno,/murió un alma pecadora, sin recibir sacramento" (lines 1–2) [A very dark night, in the height of winter,/a sinning soul died without receiving the sacrament]. The ultimate role of heaven and hell is also accounted for: "El infierno es para los malos, y es Cielo para los buenos" (Galmés de Fuentes 1976, line 21). [Hell is for those who are bad, and heaven for the good]. These

Christian concepts would have been prominently featured in the *Chueta* community. This is what *conversos* did daily; they constructed their religiosity in terms of correctness to uphold the Law of Moses, in contradistinction to the Catholic law of the land. By fulfilling Jewish practice within the Law of Moses, the *Chuetas* brought salvation to the community. The accommodation to the normative culture is reflective of the concept of personal salvation found within Catholicism. In this way, individually adhering to the Law of Moses also preserves the Jewishness of the entire community.

Fasting is a ritual that became centrally important to *converso* practice and identification and was informed by a Catholic context, as seen in the ballad: “yo te mandaba ayunar, siempre te encontré comiendo” [I sent you to fast, and I found you eating]. A faithful practitioner upheld fasts in their worship. We see how, especially for *conversa* women, fasting takes on a critical role that is less observable than overt practice (Gitlitz 1996, p. 137).¹⁵ In his text documents, Garau noted some of the most important practices for crypto-Jews, including those of the fast of Esther, which was practiced widely as the second most important observance for crypto-Jews throughout the Iberian empire.

A otras engañaban, como me consta, con ciertas supersticiones, a fin de verdadera codicia. Decíanlas que para que les salieran bien los negocios y ganaran mucho, habían de ayunar los ayunos de la Reina Ester y otras supercherías, con que las hacían judaizar materialmente, para inducir las después al judaísmo formal. Y en todo caso las encargaban sumamente, que no confesaran estos delitos a Sacerdote alguno, añadiendo blasfemos, que para estos crímenes contra la fe no había sigilo de confesión . . . (Auto Cuatro)

[Other women were tricked, as is shown with certain superstitions, with the ultimate goal being greed; they were told that in order for their business to do well and make a large profit, they would have to observe the fast of Queen Esther and other fraudulent activities, which would later lead them to formal Judaism. And in any case, they directed them, above all, not to confess these sins to any priest, adding additional blasphemies, for these sins against the faith, there is no possible confession (Fourth Act)].

Although it is important to note that in many ways, Garau’s text reflect Catholic anxieties surrounding Judaizing regarding the use of fasting, it does accurately demonstrate the increased importance of fasting amongst the *Chueta* community, which is consistent with other crypto-Jewish communities. *Conversos* upheld the three-day biblical fast when many traditionally practicing Jewish communities would fast for one day.

Garau’s anti-semitic prose links business acumen with Jewish practice, and, for women, it addresses fasting as the gateway to a full complement of Judaizing practices. He discusses fasting within a Catholic worldview that understands repentance in order to redress sin. Although the intention of Garau’s text was to condemn crypto-Jewish traditions, given how he carefully documented practices, it also could have helped this community to retain Judaizing traditions.¹⁶ As stated, given its status as a bestseller, it was widely circulated and had a strong readership.

Returning to the ballad, the Virgin’s milk is used to achieve miracles. Milk in the ballad parallels the role of breastfeeding in the trial of Cortés, as it was one of the daily bodily practices that *conversos* used to maintain (or not) their religiosity and a type of purity of faith. As shown, the cult of the Virgin saw that she was celebrated as a model for female practitioners and especially for mothers. Her milk not only feeds the baby Jesus but also nourishes the souls of her followers. Milk is powerful; it not only corrects individual vices but has the ability to undo a lifetime of wrongdoings. Breast milk can also undo spiritual encounters; we see this in the case of employing Jewish wet nurses to undo baptism for *converso* babies. An example of this comes from the Inquisitorial records of fifteenth-century Zaragoza, demonstrating how Constanza de Perpiñan (1436–1465) sought a *conversa* wet nurse to redress the baptisms of her children: “despues de volver sus hijos los de ser bautizados en la iglesia y hechos cristianos, al serle entregados, los hacía lavar con

agua, y a lavados, tenía dispuesta una judía para que los alimentase con su leche” (Marín Padilla 1981, p. 280) [after her children were baptized in a church and became Christians and were then returned to her, she washed them with water and found a willing Jewish woman to nurse the baby with her milk]. Again, this documentation is indicative of the dual context in which this *conversa* subject lived. Perpiñan’s children were baptized to avoid public recrimination and discrimination, but she was still able to observe Jewish religious practice by seeking a Jewish wet nurse because it was during pre-expulsion, and she lived alongside normative Jewish practicing families in addition to Catholic families. Perpiñan was part of the Inquisitorial record; because she received baptism, she was considered a false practitioner of the Catholic faith. Although this example does not come from within the *Chuerta* community, it does demonstrate a common practice that was found throughout the Iberian empire. In a similar way, a practitioner from Onofre Cortés’s endogamous group blamed his son’s failure to uphold Jewish practice on the corrupted milk he ingested because “andaba con cristianos porque había mamado leche de una mujer cristiana” (Picazo y Muntaner 2018). A mother’s milk had the power to shape a lifetime of practice, and the mother had a centrally important role in passing down the crypto-Jewish faith.

4. Maternal Care and Female-Led Practices

There was a cost to all the daily life decisions, which could lead to the path of salvation and also discovery by the inquisitors. Everyday practices, including kosher food preparation, i.e., the separation of milk and meat, and observing the Sabbath, had significance, and it was women who realized these practices. Celebrating the Sabbath involved the material practices of washing and wearing clean clothes. In addition to the rules of cleanliness, women were responsible for food practices and food preparation in the home, which was needed to celebrate holidays, including the Sabbath “de ninguna manera guissan los Sábados, y comen alguna cossa que dexan guizada el Viernes, y quando otra cossa no tienen, comen pan y azeytunas” (Selke 1972, p. 95). [they were not allowed to cook at all on Saturdays, so they ate what they cooked on Fridays, and when they didn’t have anything else, they ate bread and olives]. Many stews were eaten over the Shabbat period because they could be prepared beforehand and left to cook on the fire. Similarly, women were the ones who assured that the food they ate fit within the bounds of *kashrut* (Selke 1972, pp. 119, 123); there were fasts on Mondays and Thursdays (Selke 1972, p. 103), and they cooked with oil and not lard (Selke 1972, p. 96). Onofre Cortés’s community “cenava de lentejas con un huebo” (AHN, Inquisición, 1705, Exp.15 1687–1690, 10v) [they ate dinner composed of lentils and egg]. Many of these practices are consistent with the trials found of crypto-Jews in Iberia and the New World; however, one food item stands out uniquely from this trial. According to Onofre Cortés’s testimony, the *Chuetas* would break the Jewish laws of *kashrut* by eating lobster.¹⁷ Given the island location in which the *Chuetas* lived, this detail is appropriate and clearly fits contextually. By living and observing the daily practices that upheld Jewish law, this community reflected that it was a collective task and a responsibility to which the ultimate burden fell onto the mother and female members of the family. These food practices relate to the concept of a mother’s milk being the first food that served a religious purpose in inculcating children into religious traditions.

Breastfeeding and other bodily practices often defined women’s religiosity. As stated, women were responsible for the transmission of religious practice and virtue. In the trial documentation, Cortés upholds his second wife for being a good woman thanks to her Judaizing practice: “Juana Miró su mujer era observante. Tambien de dicha ley de moyses, y que el se le havia enseñado, lo qual tiene declarado el confessante en este santa oficio” (29r) [His wife, Juana Miró was very observant. She observed the Law of Moses, and Cortés taught it to her, as he has confessed to this Holy Office]. This testimony offered by Cortés contradicts Miró’s own testimony about her system of beliefs and stands out as evidence of the complicated relationships that individuals and families had with the hybrid faith system in which they lived. Complicity in faith was not always clearly differentiated, especially when testifying while incarcerated and facing torture.

Throughout the trial (1687–1690), a network that involved many female practitioners is elaborated, including Isabel Bonnin and Anna Cortés. Isabel Bonnin, who was married to Raphael Valls, explains in her testimony that “diziendo que no era ley verdadera para salvarse y que solo lo era la de Moyses, y la confessante con mucha facilidad se apartó de la crehencia de la ley Jesucristo” (44r) [she was told [by her husband] that it wasn’t the true law that led to salvation, that only the Law of Moses was the true faith, and she confessed that it was very easy to leave the law of Jesus Christ].¹⁸ Similarly, Anna Cortés (wife of Juanot Sureda Platero) is shown as one of the prime practitioners amongst a network of other crypto-Jews, principal among those who helped teach Jewish practices within the Inquisitorial jail: “vio y oyó que esta red, y muy conjuntas de conjunta . . . todos estos en ciertas carceles de esta Inquisicion que señalo se comunicaron como creyentes este la ley de Moyses muchos fieles” (45v) [She saw in this network that was very close . . . that those who were in different jail cells of the Inquisition were able to communicate with each other that they were believers and faithful practitioners of the Law of Moses].

Throughout the majority of Inquisitorial archives of crypto-Jews, it is common for more women to be brought up on charges than their male counterparts.¹⁹ One explanation for this is that throughout the Sephardic Diaspora, women maintained home-based practices while men traveled due to trade.²⁰ Crypto-Judaism became more female-led as public practices of faith were outlawed; the home became a space for covert practice. This reality is acknowledged in Garau’s misogynistic prose, but he, of course, does not credit women for maintaining faith practices and instead undermines women’s ability to critically reason, saying they only followed the Law of Moses because they were tricked:

Solo me queda que ponderar brevemente, lo que no puede dejar de hacer reparo y es como en materias de Fe hubo más mujeres engañadas, que hombres? Pues de ochenta y ocho personas que salieron en todas, ya en persona, ya en estátua, en los cuatro Autos, las cincuenta fueron mujeres y si quitamos las cuatro que salieron por otros crímenes de los ochenta y cuatro que quedan, mujeres fueron las cuarenta y seis y solo treinta y ocho los hombres. *De esto se infiere con evidencia, que el seguirse tan obstinadamente esta Secta, ni es por razón, ni por estudio, ni por saber: pues no puede sospecharse en ellas que se entienden solo de aliñarse, hilar, coser y vender, sinó puramente por engaño, error, tema y pasión ciega y torpe, que todo es tan connatural en este sexo. Engañábanlas sus maridos, o parientes, a unas con especie de piedad, a otras de codicia . . .* (Auto cuarto)

[I can only briefly ponder as to why, in terms of faith, more women were deceived than men? Out of eighty-eight people who were put on trial, in the four autos da fe, in person or in effigy, fifty were women, and if we take away the four who were brought up on charges for different crimes, then forty-six women and only thirty-eight men. From this evidence, one can infer that they follow this sect obstinately, not because of reason, nor study, nor because of knowledge: one can only suspect that they only know how to weave, sew, and sell, only because of pure error and trickery, blind passion, and stubbornness, which is what characterizes their sex. Some were tricked by their husbands or their family members through a type of misguided piety, others were tricked by greed. (Fourth Act)].

In this passage, Garau does not give women any credit for their ability to reason and clearly does not understand the important role that they had in maintaining a set of faith-based practices. He undermines the choice that women had in their lives and the active role that they played in their faith, as these practices were thoughtful, intentional, and highly personal. He calls women inferior, saying that they were “tricked” by their husbands and family members into the Jewish faith and could not have possibly taken on religious practice of their own accord. Instead of acknowledging that they were led along the path they believed would result in salvation, a belief deeply informed by the hybrid context in which they lived, Garau characterized the *conversa* women as being deceitful and, thus, impure by nature. However, the fact remains that women did uphold centrally

important practices that maintained crypto-Jewish practice. Giving particular attention to topics related to women's work and belief serves to underscore some of the most intimate details of their lives.

Because *converso* households were unable to practice public acts that demonstrated their Judaism, practices of abstinence, especially fasting, took on even greater importance than amongst normative practicing Jews. At the same time, the strong desire to fast to uphold religious practices was particularly challenged by moments of gestation and "mal de madre" [postpartum or other uterine distress]. In the trial, we see how exemptions were made and described in the Inquisitorial record about those women who could not fast because of pregnancy and lactation. For example, in the case of Cortés's 25-year-old wife, Juana Miró, she was not expected to fast, as she was nursing a seven-month-old baby. She "no hacía cosa alguna o ayunos en observancia, ni que él quería que lo hiziese por quanto estava muy achacosa y que siempre criava hijos o estava preñada o estava enferma de mal de madre" (Selke 1972, p. 190) [didn't do any type of observance regarding fasting, he was very fastidious about not wanting her to engage in this type of practice when she was nursing, pregnant, or recovering from postpartum]. As fasting became increasingly common for both men and women during the celebrations of important holidays, including Purim²¹ and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), not being able to engage in this practice would be particularly challenging for dedicated *Chuetas*. How would they have expressed their religious observance? Bernice Hausman conceptualizes motherhood as a shared political body between mother and child.²² This type of embodied citizenship and embodied religious practice leads us to question how their identity was challenged when pregnant women could not fulfill the significant aspects of their traditions. How could they perform and experience identity in these instances? One of the responses was a continual self-denial. In this penitential context that rewarded bodily sacrifice, some women would favor spiritual practice over physical well-being. We see this in the case of Ana Cortés, who maintained fasts even when nursing and pregnant. She fasted on Mondays and Thursdays throughout most of the year "no come ni bebe hasta otro día a la misma hora . . . con tanta fortaleza que aunque cría una niña y está en duda de estar preñada, sin embargo haze los mismos ayunos" (Canavés 105, nota 16) [she didn't eat or drink until the next day at the same time . . . with such strength that although she was nursing a child and could have been pregnant she upheld the same fasts]. By putting faith before her personal well-being, she sacrificed her body for spiritual objectives. On the one hand, the embodied experience of pregnancy and lactation informs her religious role as being able to pass on the faith; however, it also limits her ability to participate in the community and sense of belonging.

Pregnancy and the promise of a new life contrasts painfully within the Inquisitorial record, as pregnant and lactating women were incarcerated by the Inquisition. In the following passage, Cortés relates his fears associated with his first wife's capture. His concerns are especially poignant since she was carrying a new life:

leydo muy despacio la acusación tenía nuevamente que confessar para descargo de su conciencia, y es que por temor que no prendiessen á su muger, que al presente (dijo entonces) se hallara preñada que se llamara Margarita Theresa Martín y Cortés no havia declarado enteramente la verdad por el reselo de que no perdiessen la criatura, y dijo que antes de se casase ya empessava á guardar la ley de moyses para salvar su anima".

(AHN, Inquisición, 1705, Exp.15 1687–1690, 5v)

[The accusation was read back [and Cortés] confesses once more, in order to clear his conscience because of his deep fear that his pregnant wife Margarita Theresa Martín y Cortés would be apprehended, he had not provided the whole truth out of fear of losing the child, he said that before marrying, he had begun to uphold the law of Moses to save his soul]. Cortés agonizingly worried about his wife's well-being, the horrifying possibility of her losing the child in the inhospitable jail

cells, and, by extension, the promise of the future generation of the practitioners of his *Chuerta* community. Tragically, Cortés's first wife did die in the jail of the Inquisition after having given birth there (Selke 1972, p. 38). If the essential goal for any parent is to ensure a safe future for their children, the context of persecution and incarceration would have been utterly terrifying realities. The experiences of carrying children and childbirth did not stop in these moments of crisis, and these documents show how deeply entwined matters of life and death were for the *Chuetas*. The fear of mistreatment and losing a child at the hands of the Inquisition are palpable in these records.

The institution of the Inquisition directly impacted this community in very significant ways, and their reactions through the expression of fear and powerlessness shaped their daily lives and, critically, how they related to their own society. Affect theory, as established by Silvan Tompkins, can help us understand the consequences of individual responses of fear and horror to larger social and political situations and the gendered roles in the trials.²³ Although many of the references that we have must be read between the lines and carefully understood within the context from which they emerge (since those inquisitors who were writing and questioning were all male), the records do give us glimmers not only into maternal practice but also regarding the concerns of what mothers could do and what their practices afforded their community.

Reading these trial records reveals women's issues and maternity, depicting an alternative understanding of this community of *conversos* from the Balearic Islands of Mallorca, adding to what we know about crypto-Jewish communities. As we have seen, there are commonalities between the official culture of the land, Catholicism, and the one that was opposed to it: crypto-Judaism. Although Inquisitors were unlikely interested solely in female practices, and especially those related to children and maternity, it is not possible to discuss the continuation of a system of faith-related practices—such as those of the *conversos*—without understanding the fundamental and complex roles that mothers play. Studying the trials of the *Chuetas* related to their maternal practice clearly demonstrates how hybridity was fundamental to their religious identity and informed their daily behavior. Further study utilizing affect theory and the political possibilities and limits of biopolitical production would be fruitful avenues through which to explore the maternal legacies of the *Chuerta* community. There remains much to be uncovered and deciphered, but the trials themselves, the ballads from the period, and the interpretive text by Garau allow us to understand what ideas (across and through a porous religious divide) a few hundred years ago were held as most dear.

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Notes

¹ For more on breastfeeding practices see (Fildes 1986).

² See (Bodian 2007; Melammed 1999; Liebman Jacobs 2002).

³ See (Perry 1990).

⁴ See (Colbert Cairns 2017).

⁵ For further on the role of the mediated text see (Silverblatt 2004; Greenleaf 1991).

⁶ Miguel Segura Aguiló in his text *Raíces Chuetas, alas Judías* tells the story of his family in Mallorca in the twentieth century (Segura Aguiló 2008). Although scholars have agreed that by the nineteenth century only specific rituals survived, members of this community still were discriminated against and individuals with a *Chuerta* last name continued to intermarry until the 1980s.

⁷ Another crypto-Jewish group survived until the twentieth century thanks to their isolated status in the mountains of Portugal, the community of Belmonte thought themselves to be the last remaining Jews. Liebman explores in *Hidden Heritage* the legacy of crypto-Jews in what is today New Mexico.

- 8 See (Miles 1992; Villaseñor Black 2010; Alexandre-Bidon and Closson 2008).
- 9 Cortés in the trial undermines the figure of the Virgin for Catholic adherents saying “aquella muger Maria fue una muger que tuvo dos hijos, el uno se llama Juan, y el otro Jesus” (16v). [This woman Maria was a woman who had two children, one named John and the other Jesus]. According to Gitlitz statements like this one lead to his being denounced to the Inquisition.
- 10 *Conversos* relied on the Old Testament as they did not have access to other types of Jewish liturgy (Talmud and Mishnah).
- 11 See (Colbert Cairns 2017, p. 157).
- 12 See (Colbert Cairns 2020).
- 13 Cited in (Gracia Boix 1983), see also (Colbert Cairns 2022). See also (Bergmann 2013; Moreno 1999).
- 14 See *Corpus de Literatura Oral (Universidad de Jaén)* (2019) (<https://corpusdeliteraturaoral.ujaen.es/archivo/1460r-la-toca-de-la-virgen-y-el-alma-pecadora>, accessed on 1 May 2023).
- 15 Miriam Bodian shows that crypto-Jews favored a biblical three day fast which is a deviation from rabbinic practice (Bodian 2007, p. 10).
- 16 In posting central tenets of Judaism in publicly viewable spaces in an effort to warn the masses about corrupt practices, Gitlitz demonstrates how the Inquisition itself ended up serving as a teaching tool for *conversos* in matters of the Law of Moses as the Edicts of Grace provided a “detailed source of knowledge about many Jewish customs” (Gitlitz 1996, p. 233).
- 17 (AHN, Inquisición, 1705, Exp.15 1687–1690, 25v.
- 18 Bonnín also describes in her testimony how she and her husband were seeking to escape to England in order to live as openly practicing Jews (44r).
- 19 For example, women comprised two-thirds of the trials within the Inquisition of Córdoba between 1482–1722 (Gracia Boix 1983).
- 20 On the maritime empire in which the Sephardim participated see (Israel 2002).
- 21 Purim is widely celebrated throughout traditional Judaism by fasting, however for crypto-Jews where overt celebrations were replaced by interior practices including fasting, the fast of Esther took on a very significant role (Colbert Cairns 2017, p. 163; Gitlitz 1996, p. 137).
- 22 See (Hausman 2003).
- 23 For further see (Frank and Wilson 2020).

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