

55. The Changing Status of Zionism and Israel in Latin American Jewry

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Introduction

The Jewish people's condition develops today amid a world of diversified old and new diasporas. Similarly and possibly even more, Jews are experiencing changing models of interactions – along with confrontation and even cleavages – through continuous bonds of cohesion and solidarity. Whereas classical diasporas implied mainly a return to a real or an imagined homeland, contemporary realities supplement or replace return with dense onward migrations and continuous linkages across borders. Simultaneously, changing forms of mobility and links have serious impact on the interactions between distinctiveness and integration of groups as well as on inner dynamics. These new forms of interconnectedness draw novel ways of relations better understood through the lenses of diaspora amidst globalization processes and transnationalism. Indeed, in increasingly mobile settings, the singular Jewish experience provides new insights to approach the changing profile of an ethno-national-global diaspora entering a new transnational moment.

Diverse approaches conceive diaspora as a distinctive “community,” held together by a distinctive, active solidarity, as well as by relatively dense social relationships, that cut cross state boundaries and link members of the diaspora in different states into a single “transnational community.”¹ Both an ethno-national diaspora character and a transnational trajectory shaped the historic Jewish condition worldwide and specifically in Latin America: the region has experienced a historic process of being attached to different shifting and overlapping external centers that acted as both real/concrete and imaginary/symbolic homelands. These relations evinced strong transnational solidary connections and a dependent or peripheral diaspora character: political concepts, values, aspirations and organizational entities brought with by immigrants, transplanted from previous Jewish experiences in other parts of the world played a fundamental role in the process of cultural and institutional formation.

Gradually the Zionist idea and the new historical center conquered communities and built hegemony. Indeed, Jewish Latin American realities point to historical convergences and interactions between diverse institutional and identity conforma-

¹ Brubaker 2005, 6.

tions, amidst a singular common trait: a close nexus of an ethno-cultural identity and its national dimension in the mold of diaspora nationalism under Zionist supremacy. The Zionist idea, the State of Israel and its Center-Diaspora model acted as a focus of identification and a source of identity building, as an axis for the structuring process of communal life, and as a source of legitimacy.²

Today's radical transformations, linked to globalization processes and related changes in the Jewish world system gave birth to a complex array of trends where tacit disagreement and even disputes take place regarding the frontiers of identity, its collective expression and, certainly, the place of the State of Israel. The emergence of new models of relations between communities and the Center and even new processes of de-centralization and new radial configurations shed light onto common trends in the Jewish world and singular developments in Latin American Jewish communities.

New meanings of Center-Home (spiritual, symbolic, material) and transnational ideational motives develop drawing systems of relations among communities that keep differentiated, modified and strong links among them and with Israel.

Certainly, massive migration flows, transnational networks, as well as social, economic, political and cultural interconnectedness mark a new era of reordered territorial spaces and redefined ascriptions, belongings, and identities. The singularity of the Jewish case is manifest in the wide associational and institutional underpinning of collective life and it is precisely through its weight that we may explain the dialectics of boundary maintenance and the role played by Israel.³ From this perspective, the multi-functionality of the latter for Latin American communities as identity referent, organizational axis and energy catalyzer for building communal life has been determinant.

However, traditional pillars of the relation Israel-Diaspora, its institutional channels and the types of connection have changed. These transformations are analyzed along several dimensions: mobility patterns, the educational ecology and fundraising for the national funds. Diversity is displayed along religious, sub-ethnicity and political axes that may reinforce inner divides and overlap, thus redefining the foci of debates and the relations inside the Jewish world. Certainly, societies, countries and region act as influential contextual settings.

Past trends

The development of Latin American Jewish life has been strongly defined by its connection to external centers of Jewish life. Immigrants shaped their communal life,

² Bokser Liwerant 1991, 2007.

³ Brubaker 2005.

built their associational and institutional profile and their collective consciousness as part of a broader feeling of peoplehood and a sense of collective belonging that expressed itself as well through global political interactions. These relations were complex and simultaneously marked strong transnational solidarity connections and a dependent or peripheral character of new communities in the making.⁴ This twofold characteristic went through successive redefinitions and changing formulations. Transnationalism meant for Jewish life in the region a collective life oriented not only by external referents but also by their divergent expectations regarding the models to be developed on unequal terms of exchange.⁵ In the interwar period, Jews from Eastern Europe succeeded in establishing transnational relations between the original centers of Jewish life and the new periphery that powerfully influenced the construction of a new ethno-national-transnational diaspora. They gave birth to Jewish *kehilot* in the region as replicas of original experiences overseas.⁶ With diverse degrees of intensity, regions and countries of origin were the defining organizational criteria. While the Sephardic world in Latin America developed communities on the basis of different countries of origin, reflecting the fragmented character of this complex ethnic group that was textured by different sub-groups,⁷ Eastern European Jews as hegemonic community builders established the old/new communal structures. Contrary to what happened in the United States, the collective overshadowed the individual. In the United States the process of nation building implied the incorporation of separate components into a collective higher order, while the right to self-fulfillment saw normative support as part of the national ethos. Building communal structures both reflected and shaped collective Jewish life. Founded by secularists, but seeking to answer communal and religious needs, communities were forged in the cast of European modern diaspora nationalism emphasizing its inner ideological struggles, organized political parties and social and cultural movements. The dominant pattern was a continuous trend toward secularization and politicization inspired by a plural transnational cultural baggage. Varying ideological, cultural and political currents flowed energetically in the Jewish street: from communist to Zionist; from yiddishist to bundist; from liberal to assimilationist and from there to Orthodoxy; also from highly structured organizational options to non-affiliated and individual definitions. This gave way to an imported and original rich “Jewish street.” As in the Old Home both prophecy and politics intertwined.⁸ The communal domain, while prompting continuity, became the basic framework

⁴ Senkman 2008; Bokser Liwerant 2007, 2008.

⁵ Bokser Liwerant 1991; Schenkolewsky 2011.

⁶ Bokser Liwerant and Senkman 2013.

⁷ Bejarano 2011.

⁸ Frankel 1981.

for the permanent struggle between world visions, convictions, strategies and instrumental needs.

Indeed, local conditions and world Jewish developments directly influenced and gradually turned the Zionist idea and the State of Israel into central axes for communal life and identity. Links and interactions brought into the forefront both the feeling and objective reality of a renewed transnational shared mission and commitment to a new ideological, political and cultural-spiritual center. It represented a new chapter in solidarity efforts that also expressed the inherent tension between a project to renew Jewish national life in a Jewish Homeland and the idea to foster Jewish life in the new circumstances of the diaspora. Historically, Zionism sought to address a wide range of problems that deeply marked these inner tensions. Its global goals of generating an overall *aggiornamento* in Judaism led to the coexistence of both the denial of a diaspora condition and the aspiration of renewal of Jewish life as a whole.⁹ While an overall disenchantment with the diaspora condition was among the main causes for the emergence of Zionism in Europe, in the new communities Zionism committed itself both ideologically and institutionally to guarantee a new Jewish life. As any ideology in the process of being absorbed by other cultural and symbolic frames of reference, Zionism acquired novel sociological meanings without necessarily redefining or rephrasing its contents. Its organizational functionality was altered and, beyond its recognized goals, it fulfilled diverse new needs. Nowhere Jews created a communal public space with a proto-state structure so diversified as in Latin America.

The links between the new homeland and Jewish communities distanced from a one-fold uncontested dynamics. The dominant interpretation of those links in terms of bonds that connected one-directionally a periphery to a center was initially manifest within the organized Zionist movement. One has to underscore that Latin American distinctiveness and specificity were never fully understood by the organized Zionist world. The region was alternatively seen as an undefined and not a clearly visible part of the West or as part of periphery region. Latin American Jews were viewed as a substitute for vanishing European Jewry and were therefore identified as a source for *aliyah*: a shared perception of a *sui generis* diaspora, temporary in its time span, called to play a central role in the changing Jewish dispersion, and as a bridge between a vanishing old world and the new one to be built. Zionist sectors invigorated the center with both the “national home” and “refuge” qualities that simultaneously nourished and reinforced their own diaspora profile.¹⁰

Through successive phases, Zionism found itself caught between two different perspectives: on the one hand, Israel’s expectations of massive immigration were high, and on the other hand, by equating Zionist identity with Jewish continuity, its

⁹ Almog 1982; Vital 1978, 1998.

¹⁰ Avni 1976; Bokser Liwerant 1991, 2007.

involvement in Jewish life in the diaspora was validated. At this level an interesting paradox was revealed: the awareness of the centrality of the State of Israel did not cause the realization of the Zionist dream “to come true,” but in fact perpetuated activities and obligations in the life of the community. A “substantive centrality” of Zionism and Israel developed in Latin America and in time became circumstantial.¹¹ Thus, the Zionist idea and the State of Israel were functional to the goal of Jewish continuity in a region seen differentially both as home and exile. The discrepancies around the changing boundaries of Jewish dispersion coexisted with specific strategies aimed to recreate, to lead and even to strengthen life in the diaspora, even without being explicitly recognized. For Zionism, hegemony building meant institutional insertion into central communal instances that acted as channels for the development of links with the global Jewish world.¹² Its communal centrality was expressed both in the contour of educational systems, youth movements and national funds as a domain where to express solidarity with the Zionist building.

Changing patterns

The place and role of the national center evolved through different stages, expressing both the changing pattern of communal and national conditions as well as the ideological, normative and practical transformations that took place in Israel. The one-center model's vicissitudes affected the dependent and even periphery perception of Latin American communities amidst a scenario that led toward increased interdependency. A relevant chapter in this new pattern and dynamics was defined by the Six-Day War. The war was a turning point experienced as a founding event in which reality, symbolism, and the imaginary converged. Discourse and social action met and they stretched the boundaries of the relation. The perception of the war as a historical watershed in the domain of solidarity and cohesion was fostered at the very time of its unfolding, given the growing perception of a life-threatening situation, the rapidity of the developments, the magnitude of Israel's victory as well as the type and intensity of the responses it elicited.¹³

One of the main paradoxes brought about by the large scale response to the war was that it further propelled a process which diluted the boundaries between Zionists and non-Zionists to the extent that a wide pro-Israeli attitude surpassed and came to be equated with Zionism. So, as a result of the massive and spontaneous expressions of support during the conflict, Zionism's organizational boundaries and specificity became diffused. Thus, while the organized movement had to confront

¹¹ Shimoni 1987.

¹² Senkman 2007.

¹³ Bokser Liwerant 2000.

new ideological and organizational definitions regarding its validity as well as its specificity and self-definition, identification patterns themselves took on new directions. The ties that bound Latin American Jewish communities with Israel moved to an increased mutual legitimation: through solidarity with Israel, communities expressed an implicit message regarding the legitimacy of their own existence. Solidarity meant responsibility and, consequently, the latter sought to legitimate the diaspora's separate existence. For its part, the Jewish state, unwittingly, legitimated the diaspora by attaching great importance to its support. In this sense, diaspora's solidarity legitimized its place and the channeling of energy into reinforcing its communities, mediated by the centrality of the State of Israel.¹⁴ A change in the asymmetry and periphery perception of these diasporas took place.

However, insofar as the State of Israel proposed aliyah as the central criteria to evaluate the success and limitations of the Zionist movement after the war, it led to a debated climate and confronted Zionists with new modalities of expression of their diverse goals. After 1967, aliyah offered both the possibility of converting the Jewish ferment into a permanent phenomenon and of returning its own specific profile to the Zionist idea. Paradoxically, for the organized movement, the absence of a massive immigration demanded the reinforcement of its activities, thereby justifying its permanence. On the one hand, Israel's expectations of massive immigration were higher; on the other hand, while Zionist identity appeared as synonymous with Jewish continuity, involvement in Jewish life in the diaspora was further validated. We may define it as a sort of singular diaspora condition that reinforced the one-center model and simultaneously led to redefine the channels through which the links with it would be established. The predominant role of mediator that organized Zionism historically held started to be questioned, by bringing other existing institutions to play an increasing role in the communities' relationship with Israel. While Israel became a focus of identity for growing circles, Zionism experienced a profound contradiction regarding the challenge to join efforts with other organizations without giving up its own specificity. The Zionist leadership was unaware of the structural changes that were taking place; they could not come to terms with the fact that Israel's centrality would not be reflected through its traditional institutional framework. The diaspora-homeland links and bonds gradually shifted from the Zionist organizations and partisan efforts and debates to the communal and the central representative organizations. Harsh disputes on the organizational level expressed other social processes that were taking place.¹⁵

A new type of interaction between ethnicity, religion and nationality that would inaugurate and thereafter reverse its path conditioned the main changing patterns of identification. The scope of action of Zionist activities was widened to non-Ashke-

¹⁴ Lederhendler 2000; Avni 2000.

¹⁵ Lederhendler 2000; Bokser Liwerant 2000.

nazi sectors; whereas the Sephardic community had established close bonds with Zionism in the past, 1967 attracted other communities to the cause, like the *Halebi* and *Shami* Syrian communities. Their rapprochement with Israel was complex. The growing identification with the State was interwoven with a growing process of secularization related to generational change. Israel offered the new generations the opportunity to move away from religion as the exclusive focus of identity and to stress political sovereignty as a complement of ethnicity. Mexico and Argentina represent two paradigmatic cases.

However, this defining turning point that marked a new dynamic in the Jewish-Zionist camp was radically reverted, when the opposite process of de-secularization developed worldwide and specifically in Latin American Jewish communities. The Six-Day War almost “miraculous” experience enhanced the connection of the Jewish people with the land and the renewed and reborn link was recovered and channeled by the Orthodox world.¹⁶ Religious Zionism and the *mitnahalim* were also nourished by this experience that led to strengthen believes and symbols brought from the biblical legacy, connecting the past to the present *Jehudah* and *Shomron*.¹⁷

Israel went through further transformations which, in turn, modified how it related to the diaspora. Looking at it from a wide perspective, Israel’s ideological and political spectrum was redefined. Left and right were gradually emptied of their ideological contents and would concentrate almost exclusively on topics such as the occupied territories and the Palestinian question. This political trend would remove the subject of its links with the diaspora from the center of the Israeli agenda. Thus, it reduced and weakened this dimension of the political parties in Israel and made them less relevant to address challenges that brought Israel to the center of the Jewish agenda.

Israel’s post-war modifying image set new items and questions concerning its role as a source of identity and legitimacy for Latin American Jews and simultaneously confronted the communities with new tasks. The way in which these tasks were undertaken defined the alternating relevance of the public and the private spheres as terrains for identity building and affirmation of collective life.

The questioning of Israel and Zionism increased. The Left, the communist camp and the increasing pro-Castro Third World were already influenced by Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda.¹⁸ Within the Jewish communities in Latin America there was a growing concern that the change in Israel’s image could affect their own. Therefore, the need to engage in the building up of the former became not only a constant demand from the Zionist instances in Israel, but also a common pressing concern. However, difficulties arose and even failed to create the appropriate institutional

¹⁶ Danzger 1989, 79.

¹⁷ Sprinzak 1991; Aran 1994; Dieckhoff 2003.

¹⁸ Bokser Liwerant and Siman 2016; Kacowitz 2011; Senkman 2014.

tools and to develop a discourse oriented to satisfy the community's inner needs while surpassing its boundaries and addressing society at large. Even though communal institutions were conscious of the need to modify the existing dialogical structures, the task was never successfully undertaken. The inability to find in the public sphere a domain for visibility and its expression reinforced previous patterns of expression of collective identity. The identification with the State of Israel stopped at the threshold of national societies; the impact of the external constraints regarding the public manifestation of differences and the collective nature of Jewish life lies behind this situation. One certainly has to differentiate between the specificity of the different national contexts; however this was a common trend in the region: the one-center model and the centrality of Israel had to face its own public limits.

Ulterior developments have been complex: while part of the Jewish world started to experience emerging legitimacy of ethnic assertiveness, which reinforced cultural terms of collective identities – paradoxically minimizing Israel as a focus – the other side, Latin American Jewish communities were further exposed to the impact of the equation Zionism=Racism. Mexico represents a paradigmatic case where the national circumstances and the international changing scenarios influenced the Jewish community and its relation with Israel. The fact that the country was the scenario of the World Conference for the International Woman's Year (in June and July 1975) had important national and international implications for the new offensive on Zionism. The conference's declaration, known as the Declaration of Mexico, would be a significant precedent of Resolution 3379 by incorporating a condemnation of Zionism together with the fight against colonialism, the support of nationalist movements and the opposition to every foreign occupation, thus equating Zionism with Apartheid and other forms of racial discrimination. This condemnation was followed by Resolution 77-XII – adopted by heads of State and Government of the Organization for African Unity also in 1975 – and the Declaration of Politics and Strategy to Strengthen Solidarity and Mutual Aid between Non-Aligned Countries in Lima (which was promulgated during the same month).

Following the vote that equated Zionism and racism, the US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger declared on November 12, 1975 that the US would take reprisals “on an individual basis” against those countries that voted in favor of the resolution. In this context, the American Jewish community announced the cancelation of tourism trips to Mexico as a punitive measure given that “Americans do more business and tourism trips than any other of the 71 nations that voted against Zionism.” Thus, the so-called “boycott” was framed to create pressure and it unleashed a chain of actions and reactions that included the government's objective to “clarify” first, and then “correct” its vote.

Without ignoring the pragmatic dimension of the 1975 Mexican vote, the critique of the links with the State of Israel and with the American Jewish community was projected onto the embarrassing realms of national loyalty. The dynamics of

the vote/boycott conduct of the American Jewish community and the clarifications offered by the Mexican government to the United States and Israel fostered a domestic vision of disloyalty, lack of patriotism, and the noxious impact of those who “constitute a powerful group within the country’s economy and politics.” The main argument advanced by various sectors of civil society juxtaposed being national and being transnational as mutually exclusive terms.¹⁹ One may point to the reinforced argumentative chain that related Zionism, racism, imperialism, expansionism and militarism to the State of Israel with permanent strangeness.

The interplay between adscription and self-adscription, while reinforcing the collective identification with the State, reduced its expression to the communal space, so that Israel’s centrality was reaffirmed and simultaneously endogenously constrained. In addition to Mexico, the UN Resolution 3379 also received the supportive vote of Brazil.

Contextual parameters

In the coming years, due to the increasing pro-Palestine stance among Latin American countries – Chile and Brazil included, both under military anti-communist dictatorships – the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) gained political and diplomatic acceptance in the continent. It opened liaison and information offices in Brazil and Mexico City (1976), Lima (1979), Managua (1980), La Paz (1982), and Buenos Aires (1985). More than a decade later, immediately after the proclamation by the PLO in Algiers of an independent Palestine state, the UN General Assembly voted Resolution 43/177 (December 1988), which was approved by 10 out of 19 Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru). However, only Nicaragua and Cuba gave their formal recognition to the Palestine state, together with the Arab countries, and other nations from Africa and East Europe.²⁰ The anti-American prevailing ideological mood and political hostility of the Left over-determined the synonymy Israel-United States. Both intellectuals and social movements progressively radicalized their view of Israel as a “proxy of the US.”

Among them, Jewish intellectuals and activists took part, thus enhancing the relevance the political axes were gaining. The singular cultural/ideological code that characterizes wide sectors of intellectuals, public figures and the media developed: anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism incorporate and overlap with anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism and connect with antisemitism.²¹ It started amidst varying

¹⁹ Bokser Liwerant 2013a, 2013b.

²⁰ Senkman 2014; Bokser Liwerant and Siman 2016.

²¹ Volkov 1978, 2007.

national configurations and became transnational. Already in the 1960s and 1970s, anti-Zionist discourse served in the United States and Western Europe as a cultural code among the New Left that suggested belonging to the wide camp of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and a new sort of anti-capitalism. In North and South America, anti-Zionist charges – with their frequent anti-Jewish twists – initially were not an independent issue among the prevalent political and social views of the Left, but rather a code for more important matters other than the Israel-Palestine conflict. The cultural contours of this code displayed its struggle against the overall set of values and norms typical of the imperialist West, such as authoritarianism, paternalism, machismo (male-pride) and the legacy of colonialist conceit vis-à-vis the Third World.

Nevertheless, following many years of an unsettled Israel-Palestine conflict, today's opposition to Israel can hardly be regarded only as a code for some other evil. Together with a more open antisemitism by right-wing xenophobic groups, but not only by them, the subculture of the Left, even of the center-Left, cannot be seen in its position toward Israel as a side-issue, ripe to serve as a cultural code.²² Increased hostility toward Israel became globally coordinated transcending the national boundaries of countries. Thus it became an expanded “transnational ideological package” that symbolizes and codifies the struggle against globalization and US hegemony, so dominant in Latin America.

The anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli discourse gained argumentative weight, as it was essentially connected to the ups and downs of the peace process in the Middle East. As such, it reflected the First Intifada (from the end of 1987 to the beginning of 1988), the Gulf War in 1991, the outburst of the Second Intifada in September 2000, Operation “Cast Lead” or the Gaza War in 2008–2009, the Gaza Flotilla incident in 2010, Southern Israel cross-border attacks by Egyptian and Palestinian militants in 2011, Operation “Pillar of Defense” in 2012 and so on. Zionism became an implicit and dependent argument of the major focus – the State of Israel portrayed as a belligerent and war-prone state, oppressive and genocidal. The axis of human rights violation gained presence among the critical arguments. Insofar as the State of Israel became the main focus of argumentation, the fluid interconnections established between anti-Israelism and historical antisemitism, or between anti-Israelism and dilution of the Holocaust, the former became the radicalized argumentative point of departure.²³

On an overall perspective, following a profound polarization toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the 1970s–1980s, the end of the Cold War and bipolarity had a positive effect on the region thus leading to the normalization of relations with both the Palestinians and the Zionist state, although founded on an equidis-

²² Volkov 2007.

²³ Bokser Liwerant 2011.

tance basis. In the 1990s, and motivated by the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords (1993), formal diplomatic missions of the new Palestine Authority opened in Chile (1992), Brazil (1993), Mexico (1995), Argentina and Colombia (1996), and Peru (1998). A few years after the signing of the Chilean-Palestine Memorandum for Scientific Technical, Cultural and Educative Cooperation (June 1995), Chile opened in Ramallah the first diplomatic Latin American representation (April 1998). But we should recall that simultaneously anti-Zionism, as an ideological stance among the diplomacy of Latin American countries, lost its virulence as a resource to rhetorically attack Israel and was replaced instead by pragmatic considerations in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Nicaragua. Meaningfully, all Latin American countries, except Cuba, voted on December 16, 1991 in favor of UN Resolution 46/86 revoking the resolution that equated Zionism with racism.²⁴ However, along the coming years, the main ALBA countries (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Cuba) cut off their diplomatic relations with Israel. They were first led by Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales in January 2009 to protest over the military offensive in Gaza. In June 2010, Daniel Ortega, President of Nicaragua, followed such move. They all voiced harsh anti-Zionist and anti-Israel criticism. Unlike the other ALBA members, Rafael Correa (Ecuador's President) did not break up diplomatic ties with Israel, although he intensified his country's economic and political relations with Iran. In a reconfigured world system, the Venezuelan regime under Hugo Chávez (1998–2013) and currently under Maduro became a Latin American proxy of the Iranian state and its hatred of Jews. Geopolitical considerations played an important part in making both Zionism and Israel Venezuela's enemies. Thus, part of the government's animosity toward Jews might have responded to his aim to win favor from Teheran. This explanation also seems to hold when analyzing the anti-Zionist position of the ALBA countries, the anti-US bloc led by Chavismo.²⁵ As seen, the process involving the problematic social representation of Israel has become a new shared pattern in Latin America, although with regional variations. It certainly represents a difficult challenge for Jewish communities and their recurrent need to oscillate between the private and public spheres as realms of expression of solidarity. The capacity to coordinate efforts with Israel to influence regional diplomacy has been subject to ups and downs, a much required strategy in the always determining trilogy Latin American governments-Jewish communities-Israel.²⁶ Both autonomy and heteronomy explain the pathways of a permanent search for new equilibrium in the changing relation Israel-Diaspora.

²⁴ Senkman 2014; Baeza 2012; Barrata 1989; Baeza and Brun 2012.

²⁵ Roniger 2010.

²⁶ Kacowicz 2011.

Redefining centers in a globalized world: the territorial referent

For Latin American Jews, besides its condition of national sovereign and creative cultural center, Israel has historically been a vital space for those who are in need. Necessity and ideology interacted in particularly interesting ways, as expressed through migration waves and selected places of destination. Regional and national trends point to dependency of aliyah (and Jewish migration in general) on the unfolding of specific local circumstances, varying recurring economic crises, political unrests and returns to normalcy; in some cases, these factors tend to form repeated cycles.²⁷

There also emerge some sub-regional similarities. The situation in the country of origin was by far the most powerful determinant of aliyah, although one cannot neglect the intervention of successful absorption in the country of destination as a further explanatory factor. Jewish migration and Israel population growth was hence tributary, in some measure, of the general crises and of their interferences with the orderly life of Jewish communities on the Latin American continent.²⁸ As DellaPergola further underscores, the fact that Jewish migrants preferred Israel to other available alternatives indicates that “cultural and symbolic” factors continued to play an important role among the determinants of existential choices concerning the preferred place of residence. But the fact that Israel is ranked significantly above every Latin American society, according to the Human Development Index, is certainly compatible with making that choice consonant with the routine preference of most international migrants to move from poorer to better environments. More than 100,000 Jews have made aliyah and the different moments and profiles point to the weight of their ideational motive.

For Argentine Jews, Israel has been a central spot. However, when asked today about their country of preference in case of emigration, 27% declare Spain, only 24% opt for Israel, followed by 14% that point to the US.²⁹ The emigration preferences of Mexican Jews show as well a reduction of Israel’s importance, even though 84% have visited it at least once.³⁰ Among Jews in Caracas in 1998–1999 – before the significant change of political regime of the last years – who were asked about

²⁷ DellaPergola 2009.

²⁸ Chile and Brazil share a pattern dominated by one central political event in the early 1970s, and so would be Cuba in the early 1960s. Argentina and Uruguay appear somewhat similar in the sequence of some of their disrupting changes throughout the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Venezuela and Colombia share a pattern of more recent destabilization. Occasional economic crises underlie the Mexican experience of the 1980s and 1990s. These data quite clearly throw light on the underlying hierarchy of general political and socioeconomic circumstances in the countries of origin vis-à-vis the changing socioeconomic and security circumstances in Israel. *Ibid.*

²⁹ Bokser Liwerant 2009.

³⁰ CCIM 2006.

their moves facing a crisis, 14% stated they would go to Israel, the same percent would prefer the US, 9% would chose another country, and yet 63% would remain in Venezuela.³¹ Data on Jews living in Mexico and Argentina show that both age (generation) and country of origin influence the place of Israel in people's lives and their attachment to it. Mexico has exceptionally high rates of visits to Israel while lower rates characterize Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela.

A survey by the Comité Central Israelita de México (2008) shows that while 97% of the older members (individuals of 70 years old, for instance) of the Mexican Jewish community express that Israel is of uttermost importance, only 77% of the young population (18–19 years old) make the same statement. These percentages are far higher if we compare them with opinions expressed by members of other Latin American communities. In Argentina, the percentage of those who express that Israel is of uttermost importance diminishes to 57%. Erdei points to the age cohort effect when referring to self-definition by younger and older Jews to Judaism.³²

We may further look into this variation through the angle of educational trips to Israel, an indicator that reveals the unique convergence of modern nationalism and postmodern transnationalism in the Jewish world and the region or, in other terms, the changing role of the Center or national homeland to guarantee the continuity of the diaspora. Seen from the perspective of interactions and circulation, trips oscillate between links and bonds to the nation-state and diaspora building.³³ However, the latter must be seen from a regional lens that focuses on the process of becoming an ethno-transnational diaspora. Ethnic diasporas – the “exemplary communities of the transnational moment” – are today engaged in a renewed geography of dispersion.³⁴ These trips and their function – based on a complex logic of interdependence, disjuncture and convergences between Israel and the diaspora – are closely related to the institutional density, the social capital and the communal legacy of the diverse communities. Accordingly, Israel plays a central role. And, yet, the specific characteristics of Jewish life point to different scenarios in the region. For example, day attendance school in Mexico reaches over 90% while Brazil and Argentina are close to 50%. Affiliation rates differ from 85% in Mexico and between 45–50% in Brazil and Argentina. Out-marriage rates are 10% in Mexico while in both Brazil and Argentina they reach 50%. These parameters reflect and shape the scope and inner differentiation of the place and role of the trips to Israel: total attendance in the Mexican case reaches 70% vis-à-vis 45% and 50% in Brazil and Argentina.

Jewish educational ecology and communal institutional density act as central variables. While Mexican youth has visited Israel in the framework of the school

³¹ DellaPergola, Benzaquén, and Beker de Weinraub 2000.

³² Erdei 2001.

³³ Kelner 2010.

³⁴ Tololyan 1996.

system, they also have a subsequent stronger presence in long-term programs and therefore a reduced one in the framework of Taglit.³⁵ Concomitantly, it explains the latter's success in Argentina and Brazil – in larger Jewish communities with lower levels of Jewish education attendance and similar rates of intermarriage. Jewish education still explains why in spite of lower affiliation rates there is a strong cultural component. Families of participants are engaged and related to the Jewish community. While in Argentina 86% feel very connected to Israel, in Brazil this percentage reaches 20%.³⁶

Tab. 1: Latin American Israel trips, 2009–2010

	MASA	TAGLIT	MOTL	TEEN	TOTAL
Brazil	224	428	158	400*	1210
Argentina	294	967	200	600*	2061
Mexico	261	29	272	350*	912
TOTAL	779	1424	630	1350	

Source: Table elaborated by the author based on data provided by the Jewish Agency.

Masa programs take place between 5–12 months, and include Youth Movements, experiential, Academic, Specialization and Orthodox programs. Its target population is young adults. Taglit lasts 10 days, and participants are young adults of 18–26 years. March of the Living lasts 15 days, and is designed for high school students and young adults. Teen Trips take place between 5–6 weeks, and they are designed for 9th graders.

Indeed, different approaches are expressed in various spiritual-national-cultural representations of the Center; connectedness develops along a diversified world of identities and it is implied by the existential and cognitive dimensions, thus underscoring Israel as a territorial and symbolic referent while strong and durable diasporic life develops. Moreover, in light of the fluctuating place of national homeland/diaspora as identification referents, it is also interesting to see the complex widening and intensification of the framework in which the March of the Living is conveyed as an expression of the convergent/divergent place of the *Shoah* in public discourse and social practices.³⁷ The Shoah has become an increasingly relevant axis of identification and points to a global trend in the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds, which may be interpreted as a reevaluation of the diaspora as a fundamental value and element in the formation of Jewish history and memory. *Vis-à-vis* the identification with Israel as the main center, one may ponder whether current narratives in which the present is subdued to the moment of destruction express – mainly for post-Zionist sectors – an “unexplainable uneasiness” with state power while being more consonant with patterns of postmodern times.³⁸

³⁵ Bokser Liwerant 2013a.

³⁶ Shain, Hecht, and Saxe 2012; Cohen 2014.

³⁷ Bokser Liwerant 2013a; Cohen 2014.

Israel and the changing educational ecology

From an integrative perspective of Jewish dispersion and the place of Israel, education has played a central role in the shaping of Latin American Jewish life. Indeed, the schooling of children and young adults in comprehensive Jewish educational institutions took priority over other collective needs. Jewish education has been a fundamental basis for continuity; the main channel to transmit and project their cultural profile while creating differences among local communities and between the latter and their host societies. Historical, political and ideological currents marked the original differentiation of schools. Thus, it reflected the gamut of secularized political and ideological currents that shaped Jewish communities, with a central place given to the Zionist idea and the State of Israel. The latter's role became central in communities that while being traditionalists gravitated around debates and secular political motives.

While the centrality of Israel can not be denied, and main aspects of the educational system are interwoven with it, today, historical, political and ideological currents that differentiated schools in Latin America have been replaced by religious and communitarian (sub-ethnic) criteria, in consonance with world Jewish trends. The educational system has been changing both expressing general developments while acting as an arena where they are shaped. Historically, religion played a minor role in what were basically secular communities. This trend was reinforced by the scarcity of religious functionaries, dating back to the earliest days of Latin American Jewry.³⁹ Thus one may affirm that important changes have taken place that may be also seen as part of the general public relevance religion has gained as a result of its claims to a new interaction between private and public morality, in a sort of so-called "de-privatization" process.⁴⁰

In the 1960s the Conservative movement began its spread to South America. As it adjusted to local conditions, the synagogue began to play a more prominent role both in community life and in society in general. In recent years, in tandem with changing trends in world Jewish life, Orthodox groups have formed new religious congregations. Today, the spread of the Chabad movement and the establishment of Chabad centers, both in the large, well-established communities as well as in the smaller ones, are striking. While in Mexico the presence of Chabad is marginal at best, there are well over 50 synagogues, study houses, *kollelim* and *yeshivot*, more than 30 of which were established in the last 30 years by Shas, Aish HaTorah and other Haredi movements.

³⁸ Wolf 2002; Levy and Sznajder 2002.

³⁹ Elazar 1989.

⁴⁰ Casanova 1994; Bokser Liwerant 2008.

Looking at the educational ecology, the highest rate of population growth takes place at the religious schools. While acknowledging the fact that this trend is related to the incidence of community social policies on communal cultural profiles – as expressed in the massive support offered through scholarships by religious schools – it also must be noted that this process reflects an increase in religiosity and observance. The changing dynamics differ in the diverse communities of the region. The profile of Jewish educators and the challenges derived from the current needs define the importance of their training, both structures and contents.⁴¹

Argentina is characterized by its comprehensive community school system, which has grown in spite of the various crises it has suffered from the decade of the 1990s. The highest rate of population growth takes also place at the Orthodox-Haredi religious schools. In total numbers the Orthodox schools experienced an increase of almost 49% in the last ten years.⁴²

In Mexico, close to 93% of Jewish children attend Jewish schools. A strong organizational structure of 16 (15 in Mexico City and one in Monterrey) day schools has developed; one school for each 2,500 Jews in Mexico City. Close to 25% of the student population benefit from scholarships, while more than 40% do so in the Haredi schools. The latter, serving 26% of the student population, show the highest population growth: 55% in the last eight years.⁴³

The increase in the number of attendants of religious schools reflect both the demographic changes in the composition of the community, the arrival of educators coming from intensively Orthodox communities from South America as well as the overall trend in education.

In a recent study we carried among Latin American Jewish educators,⁴⁴ a clear majority in each country strongly supports the Zionist identification option; 80% of the respondents overall stand behind and asides Israel. The higher contingent of non-Zionist educators (15%) comes from Mexico, where the Haredi population was reached. Anti-Zionist and post-Zionist, or even indifferent options appear at the very margins of the system. However, considering the ideological orientation of educators the main cleavage appears between educators in Haredi institutions and all the others.⁴⁵ However, less than 20% declare the high importance of self-definition as

⁴¹ Avni, Bokser Liwerant, and Fainstein 2011.

⁴² Vaad Hajinuj Argentina 2014.

⁴³ Vaad Hajinuj Mexico 2014.

⁴⁴ The study comprised 1,379 Jewish respondents mostly reached through an Internet survey. The study covered 606 educators in Argentina (out of 1,497 identified there, a response rate of 40.5%), and 636 educators in Mexico (out of 1,074, a response rate of 59.2%). Another 137 respondents originating from Latin America were interviewed in other countries, of which 70 in Israel (a response rate of 33.3%) and 67 elsewhere in Latin America, North America and Europe (a response rate of 27.2%).

⁴⁵ DellaPergola et al. 2014; Bokser Liwerant et al. 2015.

Zionist, versus the majority to two thirds in all other educational orientations. The largest group declares to be non-Zionist (36.5%), with another 14% critical pro-Israeli. This low declared involvement with Zionism is also indicated by about 12% indifferent, and 14% "Other." Whether such ostentatious detachment from Israel is truly felt individually or rather the product of institutional constraints is worth further investigation, in view of answers provided to other issues which demonstrated *far stronger and positive involvement with Israeli destiny and values*. This religious axis, in any case, appears to be the true divide within the Jewish educational system.

Simultaneously, vis-à-vis Israel, preoccupation with its security and the importance of strengthening its relations with the Latin American diaspora stands on top. Interestingly, the Law of Return does not attract total support among a majority of educators. On other accounts, wide gaps characterize the opinions of educators according to countries. Those Latin American educators that live in Israel and in other countries stand up much more in favor of principles like civic pluralism, and with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict, recognizing two states for two peoples, expressing preoccupation for the situation in Judea and Samaria, allowing for critique of Israel in the presence of Jews, and especially of non-Jews. It seems that the positions of educators in Argentina and in Mexico tend much more to align with a support for Israel that does not seek to question the mode of operation of Israel's government, or to tackle the more controversial issues on the table.

While it is interesting to point to the boundary maintenance role of education, it is important to highlight that it is the transnational pertaining to Jewish identification which unifies not only educators within a given country but also across countries. This is not necessarily an Israel-diaspora perception, characterized by a center and a periphery, rather a widespread and far-reaching identification network of global relevance. Among the preferences expressed by educators regarding possible available options aimed at developing relations with Israel, there is broad agreement that the main options include educational trips to Israel; encouraging identification and solidarity with Israel among pupils, and teaching of contents related to Israel. Financial support to Israel is accepted in Mexico and in other countries, but less in Argentina and among Latin Americans educators who live in Israel. Participation in general public activities aimed at providing political support to Israel attracts a much lower support.

Argentina has ceased its dependence on *shlichim*, educational personnel sent from Israel, ~~altogether~~, the working assumption being that the necessary educational personnel are being trained locally. Mexico was the Jewish community that gathered the highest number of *shlichim*, a trend that has recently decreased and reflects new ways of understanding the role of educational personnel coming from Israel. Instead of approaching it either as an affirmation of Israel's role in irradiating cultural influences or as an interactional sphere in which encounters nourish a shared experience, emphasis has been put in autonomy and more pragmatic considera-

tions. Simultaneously, the ideological and organizational changes in Israeli instances such as the closure of the Department of Education of the Jewish Agency marked the reduction of its engagement in formal Jewish education through these classical patterns of *shlichut*. However, funds have been channeled to educational enterprises in the communities. Thus, in Argentina, *Bamah* was established, a teachers training institute for the school network and for informal education (youth movements) and recently strengthened. In Mexico, the support agreement known as *Heskem Mexico* helps funding various educational activities such as the Hebraica University and youth movements. These projects, which have achieved considerable success are supported jointly by Keren Hayesod, the Jewish Agency and the State of Israel. These initiatives were the outcome of intense debates regarding the nature of the relation and the changing meaning of material support, as we will now address.

The national funds: solidarity, pragmatism, and more

Fundraising for the national funds has always played a meaningful role among Latin American Jewish communities. It has been a terrain where to manifest priorities, preferences and political conceptions; a realm for expressing and building empathy and support and therefore relevant debates took and take place. We may certainly affirm that spiritual motives are not the only ones behind the mobilization of resources; ideology and needs interact. Different factors concur, such as the economic condition of Jewish communities; their organizational characteristics and the scope and meaning of affiliation; the leadership's ability to mobilize resources, as well as the profile of Jewish identity. The links between Israel and world Jewry through resources and lately partnership to attain shared objectives may be seen as a source to build social capital and reaffirm the volunteer character of Jewish collective life.

Let us address the dynamics and changes in the framework of one of the national funds, Keren Hayesod (K. H.).⁴⁶ With the establishment of the State, it became the main Jewish organization in charge of fundraising to “encourage, assist, and promote Jewish immigration to Israel and to establish, manage and conserve institutions responsible for this.”⁴⁷ Further, it committed to strengthen the State of Israel and ensure the “unity of the people of Israel.”

Fundraising has known different stages – starting with a highly ideologically oriented one, in which contributions were motivated both by Zionist ideals as well as by feelings of peoplehood and Jewish identification. These motives, though redefined, are still present today. A second stage – of recognition and increased appreci-

⁴⁶ For an overall and detailed analysis, see Liwerant 2011.

⁴⁷ Article 2, Sections C and E of the Keren Hayesod laws 5716-1956 (February 3), in Keren Hayesod-United Israel Appeal (KH-UIA), <http://www.kh-uia.org.il/EN/AboutUs/History/Pages/Keren-Hayesod%E2%80%93memorandum.asp>, accessed April 15, 2015.

ation – was characterized by a diversification of mechanisms and means for economic flows. Once Jewish communities realized that they could lend money to Israel due to its solvency and funding guarantees, new parallel forms of financial aid developed, such as the acquisition of guaranteed loan bonds (Israel Bonds). Thus, an economic logic lay behind this act and a new channel was opened to world Jewry in order to take part in the “national endeavor.” Association and partnership would be the third stage, which was defined by equity investment, that until today develops along different options.⁴⁸

Changes have been related to the perception of the vulnerability of Israel, the hostility of its neighbors and its wars.⁴⁹ The aliyah of Jews from the Former Soviet Union and Ethiopia also acted as stimulus. The binomial emigration or aliyah was a meaningful axis of debates; the support for communities in distress vis-à-vis aliyah too.

Jewish communities in Latin America, with 392,000 members, make up currently approximately 15.8% of all Jews living in the area where K. H. operates, which includes Jewish communities around the world with exception of the United States. This ratio is in turn maintained in the region’s share in total proceeds. The comparative analysis of the contributions sheds light on the multiplicity of factors that explain such variations.

Magbiot, i.e., campaigns of fundraising headed by K. H. aimed to mobilize resources for national causes, have suffered a drastic reduction in recent decades. It is relevant therefore to ask if this decrease is exclusively the result of changes that took place in the economic life of the region or if other factors and trends have influenced it.⁵⁰ This question is even more important when we observe the fluctuation in

48 Dovrat in Liwerant 2011.

49 If until 1967 annual collection in Keren Hayesod campaigns had risen to the sum of \$15 million, of which \$2.5 million came from Latin America, the amount would grow tenfold to \$150 million. Latin America’s share that year grew even more, up to 12 times and totaled \$30 million, becoming 20% of the total. The following year and through 1973, there would be a considerable fall in worldwide revenue, to about \$60 million a year but without reaching the \$15 million that were collected prior to 1967. The contribution of Latin America ranged from \$12 to \$15 million, constituting between 20% and 25% of the total. An increase of such magnitude would only occur during the next armed conflict: the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. The fear and anguish provoked – as in the previous conflict – a dramatic increase in the campaigns. On this occasion, Keren Hayesod managed to raise \$160 million worldwide, of which Latin America accounted for 20%. Liwerant 2011.

50 The correlation between demographic and economic trends has to be highlighted. Although in the past four decades the Jewish population in Latin America has experienced a decline of 20–25%, the campaigns’ figures in nominal dollar values have not experienced the same proportional decline, remaining relatively stable. However, if one considers inflation and the reduction in the value of purchasing power of the dollar from the 1960s to the present, contributions have decreased substantially. Liwerant 2011.

the number of donors, which has decreased significantly and differentially in the region.⁵¹

Indeed, new ideas and novel views of the relationship between Jewish communities and Israel have developed. They reflect changing ideological visions as well as pragmatic considerations as expressed in unfolding debates in which hard-core conceptions of the Israel-Diaspora relation are at stake. One of them worth to approach is the Beilin proposal, initially manifested in 1992 to the leaders of the United Jewish Appeal that the relations between the Jewish world and the State of Israel should change.⁵² Israel ceased to need economic aid from Jews around the world; its considerable economic growth placed it above many of the nations where Jews were living.⁵³ Instead, Beilin proposed that the money raised in campaigns for Israel should be channeled to address the internal needs of the communities. He further claimed that by canceling the image of Israel as a country in need, in addition to supporting the improvement of the condition of many diaspora communities in crisis, it could even improve the chances of immigration of many young Jews to the State.⁵⁴ This position resulted in intense debates that last until today, in which the ideological and pragmatic dimensions crossed. The disagreement on the nature of the links and the meaning of fundraising were both approached in terms of the challenge to transcend material needs. With time, the political ascriptions and their influence on dissent emerged with strong profile and one may see it reflected in further diversification of projects and institutional arrangements.⁵⁵

Fundraising and philanthropy in general and in the Jewish world in particular have changed in the last four decades. The support to Israel is maintained as a key activity, even though the centralized fundraising and allocation system has transferred its dominion and has given rise to more direct and diversified ways to contribute. In more general terms, these patterns are part of current privatization trends and of the political and social changes that Israel itself is going through while approaching neo-liberal trends. The gradual and sustained distancing from the Zionist and socialist ideology require from the national funds to address the changing trends while maintaining the premises of the Jewish collective project. However it has to be underscored that partisan divides and certainly the religious-secular axis

⁵¹ Thus, from available data, in 1989 the total number of contributors was 27,000 whereas by 2008 that number went down to 20,000. This decrease has been extreme in the case of Argentina, where the drop was about 70%, from 9,000 to 3,000. In the other communities the decline has been less sensible, as, for example, in Mexico, that has been around 15%, while only 7% in Brazil.

⁵² Yossi Beilin is one of the political leaders of the Israeli Zionist Left and was deputy foreign minister during the last mandate of Yitzhak Rabin (1992–1995).

⁵³ See Bayme 2000, 2002; Waxman 2000; Carmon 2000.

⁵⁴ See Beilin, "United Jewish Appeal," http://www.beilin.org.il/lexicon/lexicon_main.asp?topic_id=7&sub_topic_id=54, accessed April 14, 2015.

⁵⁵ See Liwerant 2011.

point to further implications both in fundraising and in the allocation of resources. Therefore, while ideology reduces its scope, politization has been increased.

Going global: faces of an ethno-transnational diaspora

Historically, Latin American Jewry constituted a hub of immigration, but in the last decades the direction of migration flows has changed, originating from Latin America to other destinations. It has become an exit region for wide social sectors. In parallel to processes of growing pluralism – political, institutional and cultural – and the ensuing affirmation of civic commonalities, recurrent economic crises, political instability, high levels of public violence and lack of security have acted as main processes that lead to exit. Simultaneously, a global and interconnected world opens opportunities to move and benefit from professional opportunities and entrepreneurial expansion in increasingly interconnected markets. Thus, growing mobility, international migrations, and the diversification of internal and transnational displacements involve the renewed expansion of spaces and places. At the same time, the increased speed and density of interactions evolve in changing spheres, enlarged and framed by global networks and transnational realms. Contemporary migration encompasses steady as well as repeated and circular, bi-local and multi-local movements. Indeed, migration today exhibits very particular characteristics, including the multi-directionality of migratory flows, which presupposes reversible trajectories; frequency of movement; volume of migrants; and living across borders, which suggests a simultaneity of involvements “here” and “there.”⁵⁶

During the past 40 years, more than 150,000 Jews emigrated from Latin American countries to different regions; specifically, to those that have acted as poles of attraction – Israel and the United States. The United States has become the top choice of international migrants from different regions/countries, religious affiliations, and ethnicities.⁵⁷

Partly following and partly preceding the becoming of transnational communities by other diasporas, Jewish communities in the continent transit toward unprecedented modalities of re-diasporization. In fact, we are witnessing the conjunction of two nutrients: the recovery of a historic trajectory of ethnic and ethno-national diasporas, and the pluralization of new migrant populations. Migratory flows enhance the Jewish global character while also reinforcing the particular aspect of the Jewish experience. This implies incorporating diaspora and transnationalism as re-

⁵⁶ Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004.

⁵⁷ Although we do not have precise figures of Latin American Jews in the United States, estimates range between 100,000/133,000 (DellaPergola 2011, core and enlarged definitions) and 156,000 (Sheskin and Dashefsky 2011). For an extended analysis of the relocation and transnational dynamics of Latin American Jews in the US, see Bokser Liwerant 2013b.

lated concepts to approach the contemporary itinerary of dispersion; that is, the new global ethnic landscape.⁵⁸

Latin American Jews move and stay, bring and host, interact and negotiate in a context of past and present trends of an interconnected Jewish world. The reaffirmation and changes of collective communal practices/configurations affect the traditional Diaspora-Center relation. Thus, the basic triadic relationship between globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups, the present territorial states and contexts where such groups reside, and the homeland states and environments their forebears arrived from is altered.⁵⁹ Homeland(s) must be analyzed in light of changing territories and referents that add new spatial scopes and exchanges.

Redefining and reconnecting belongings are related to processes of *diaspora making* and *diaspora un-making* provoked by migration crises, de-socialization from the country and community of origin, and re-socialization in the country and community of destination.⁶⁰ Diverse scenarios have developed along the US: de-diasporization with respect to belonging to an ethno-national Jewish diaspora in the country of origin – and the subsequent processes of a different migrant re-grouping in the new place of destination; re-diasporization of migrant communities which maintain a thick package of old-country cultural norms and personal relations, hold intense and enduring links, as well as effective mechanisms with the country of origin, and sustain a transnational ideational nexus with home. Under these conditions a unified mental and relational space – a sort of sub-diaspora – emerged vis-à-vis physical dispersal and pluralization of “homelands”; de-diasporization by having moved to Israel and developing a full sense of participation in the Israeli mainstream, or continuing to nurture a form of diasporic identity – somewhat disconnected from new (putative) core country – while residing in the State of Israel and the possibility of re-diasporization upon return to their countries of origin, or to a third country.⁶¹

Indeed, in these processes of constructing homeness and perceiving exile the role of Home-Center is reframed. The markers that define the transnational links have evolved, concurrently expressing and shaping the overlapping domains of Jewish life, its local, regional and global interactions and a plurality of collective realities. It is interesting to focus on the associational and organized communal settings that constitute porous containers of primordial and elective belonging. Such bordered spaces provide alternative/complementary pathways into maintaining distinctiveness while reaffirming/redefining bonds and links with Israel, for which it is a key referent. Both the *Ken* (San Diego) and *Hebraica/JCC* (Miami) may be conceived as ethno-national/transnational autonomous magnets. They reproduced Lat-

⁵⁸ Appadurai 1990; Ben Rafael 2009, 2013.

⁵⁹ Sheffer 1986; Safran 1991.

⁶⁰ Van Hear 1998.

⁶¹ Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola, and Senkman 2010; Bokser Liwerant 2015.

in American Jewish social practices – including language, food, frequent social gatherings, and a Zionist identification. The Maccabi games at the JCC in Miami represent a Jewish-Israeli arena of interaction, intersection, and differentiation between Latin American Jews, and between Venezuelans, Mexicans, Argentinians, Colombians, and Cubans, among other nationalities.⁶²

Nevertheless, the cultural-ideational relationship with Israel is also defined in new terms and spaces; it implies the re-signification of attachments and the coexistence of multiple centers. It has a peculiar salience as a target of economic support and political advocacy. Social practices such as donations to Israel are in need of further study in order to evaluate the interaction between awareness of participation in a national enterprise and philanthropy. In Miami and San Diego old (pre-migration) and new patterns coexist. Direct individual-family donations and financial support are channeled through American Jewish organizations with a strong pro-Israel agenda (e.g., the Jewish National Fund, Friends of Israel Defense Forces, the United Jewish Federation, NACPAC – Pro Israel National Action Committee – and SunPac – Florida Hispanic Outreach). However, migrants also sustain regular links with their original communities, partly expressed through the maintenance of affiliation to Jewish institutions (mainly among Mexican and Venezuelan families); therefore, resources intended for Israel-related and other overseas assistance continue to be transferred through Latin American institutional channels.

Political advocacy for Israel is conducted mainly in the framework of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), illustrated by the leading roles played by Latin American Jews in this organization, their wide representation in its annual events and the creation of local groups through the Latino and Latin American Jewish Institute.⁶³

Additional channels for inter-regional Jewish activism include the American Jewish Committee, which has played a mediating role between Latinos, Jewish communities in the US and Jewish communities in the Latin American region. This has led to the mobilization of additional social capital for American Jewry, and to the organization's increased presence in Latin America.

In analyzing the strength and centrality of Israel's role for Latin American Jews in the US, we ought to take account of the hypothesis of American Jewish self-distancing from Israel and the debate this has elicited.⁶⁴ An interesting discussion regarding the "distancing hypothesis" has developed. While some researchers claim that there is a growing distance from Israel by the younger American Jewish cohort, with the exception of Orthodox youth, and this trend will likely lead to a general distancing of American Jews from Israel,⁶⁵ others do not find a dramatic change in

⁶² Bokser Liwerant 2015.

⁶³ Siegel 2011.

⁶⁴ Cohen and Kelman 2009; Sasson, Kadushin, and Saxe 2010.

the attachment. The weakened bonds among the young is not the result of a distancing pattern but a characteristic of the Jewish life cycle.⁶⁶ Further discussion has highlighted the increased complexity of Israel-Diaspora relations and the lack of conclusive evidence regarding the above mentioned erosion, which shows the need to consider both the changing circumstances of American Jewish life and Israel's social and political scenario. Data on Jews living in Mexico and Argentina show that both age and country of origin influence the place of Israel in people's lives and their attachment to it. As seen, Mexico has exceptionally high rates of visits to Israel while lower rates characterize Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela. Past tendencies in the US show that just over one third of all American Jewish adults have been to Israel (35%), almost two thirds (63%) of American Jews say they are emotionally attached to Israel and nearly three quarters (72%) say US and Israeli Jews share a common destiny. Ties to Israel vary by affiliation and age. The affiliated are uniformly more connected to Israel than the unaffiliated.

Indeed, Latin American Jewish migration to the United States implies an altered posture vis-à-vis the connection to Israel. A geographically diverse transnationalism replaces older binary connections between Latin American Jews and Israel. That does not necessarily imply the weakening of attachments but rather their re-signification. There is some departure from the previous dominant pattern of almost exclusive interaction with Israel or Israel-Zionist based organizations, as North American Jewish institutions become an important source of direct political support and a model for collective organization. Paradigmatic of this trend has been the support and advocacy Argentine Jews received not only from Israel or Israel based organizations such as the Jewish Agency (JAFI) but from numerous North-American Federations, the Joint Distribution Committee and the American Jewish Committee when facing recurrent economic crises and the attack on the Jewish community – AMIA (1994) and its aftermath; or the vulnerability of Venezuela's Jewish community and its interests under the Chávez and the Maduro regimes. The debates surrounding this topic have to be seen in the light of a multi-centered pattern that has taken shape and prevails in the Jewish world. The last four decades point to a progressive renewed code in the discussion in which polarized options are gradually substituted by a more radial conception regarding center(s) and diaspora communities.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cohen and Kelman 2009.

⁶⁶ Sasson, Kadushin, and Saxe 2010.

⁶⁷ Bokser Liwerant 2015; Della Pergola 2015.

Religious and transnational flows

A modified interplay between historic ethno-national patterns and religious and transnational flows takes shape today. One example may be seen in the current debates and source of ongoing conflict: the place of Conservative Judaism in Israel and its non-recognition by hegemonic Orthodoxy. The relevance of the former in the region and the place of Latin American rabbis in the new settings in the United States contributed to the expansion of communal practices. Simultaneously, transnational practices have enhanced their connection with Israel. As mobile agents of change across national borders, they recreate a Zionist congregational-communitarian-transnational matrix. The discussion around the definition of who is a Jew and the rejection to recognize Conservative conversions have added complexity to this circuit.

However, the transnational flows in the region have now spread to Orthodoxy as well. Reflecting global trends in the Jewish world and in Israel, Orthodox groups have gained new impetus founding new religious congregations and supplying communities with rabbinical leadership. Ultra-Orthodoxy has expanded too through the region. As expressed in the world of education and educators, Israel is *Eretz Yisrael* and not the national Center. They are strictly bound to normative traditional Judaism together with a refusal (partial or total) of civil modernity, and maintaining toward Israel as a spiritual rather than a national or civil orientation. These developments take place also (and interactively) in Israel.

Israeli Orthodox Jews are divided into two major sectors – a religious Zionist sector and an ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) one. Both have acquired a new saliency and increased interactions outside Israel, though in different ways.

One has to take into consideration that the Israeli religious scene has singular traits associated to its national milieu that includes the pervading phenomenon of vicarious religion of belonging without believing and delegated functions.⁶⁸

Parallel trends of individualization, privatization and autonomous expressions of the religious experience are displayed both in Israel and the diaspora. However the disjuncture between religion-ethnicity-nation context has serious differential impact. Thus, the historic blending of religious and ethnic identity among Latin American Jewish communities explains membership in organizations that seem to be religious (such as synagogues) but in fact provide the space for expressing or fulfilling ethno-national identity.⁶⁹

Religious transnational networks cross communities and the State of Israel surpassing and erasing the traditional spaces and mechanisms of interaction defined by borders between voluntary communities and the sovereign State. An exemplary

⁶⁸ Fischer 2010; Davie 2006.

⁶⁹ Fischer 2010.

episode in which religion and sub-ethnicity challenged the prevailing official channels was the organizational arrangements of the trip to Israel of the current Mexican President Peña Nieto when he was governor of the state of Mexico. Both *Mizrachi* and Orthodox belonging provided the networks through which the community arranged encounters and meetings overcoming the natural limits of the diplomatic official normative. Mexico City, New York, Buenos Aires, Brussels, and Jerusalem operated as nodes and fluent borderless spaces that defined religious and sub-ethnic networks.

Another significant trend that has redefined the relations refers to the pluralization of actors and links, of circuits of presence by the organized transnational Jewish world. It may be seen in the concrete case of Argentina, as expressed in past dilemmas (and current crisis) that originated in the Foreign Affairs Minister Hector Timerman's encounter in Aleppo seeking to advance a deal with Iran regarding the clarification of the bombing of the Jewish community center AMIA. The cancellation of the invitation of the minister's visit to Israel and its subsequent re-schedule brought into the scene diverse channels and actors.⁷⁰ Political and sub-ethnic circuits crossed the critical stand of a divided community.

While communal political behavior related to transnational links and support for Israel and the capacity to influence decision making processes has increased as a consequence of globalization and transnationalism, the latter generate new constraints derived from the regionalization, the inner differentiation and the geopolitical positions of Latin American countries. In this respect, it reflects the complex interplay between a wider public sphere, the prevalence of traditional mechanisms for negotiation, the internationalization of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the presence of splits within the Jewish communities and geo-political/regional considerations.

Thus, diaspora communities and Israel have ceased to be homogeneous units and need to be seen in their inner and cross-border diversification. In a global Jewish world, the relation diaspora community-Israel cannot be seen as binary ties but as part of a matrix or network of relationships, a radial configuration.

Diasporas connect among them and with the Center and interact through circulation. Latin American Jewish communities follow multiple pathways of belonging, thereby moving and fixing old-new definition and membership criteria in the process of becoming transnational and expanding its connections. In a highly mobile and changing context, the challenge of boundary maintenance, integration, intel-

70 In his visit to Buenos Aires to explore the convenience of holding the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency in this city, Sharansky committed Timerman to officially endorse it. This move limited the critique that important sectors of the Jewish community were publicly advancing regarding Argentina's recognition and positive vote on a Palestine state, as well as its presence in the Durban conference (NYC).

lectual creativity and communal innovation acquire new meanings and certainly widen the challenges and strengthen the role of Israel for the diaspora's enlarged lateral axes.

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