THE JEWISH DIASPORA IN LATIN AMERICA

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The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America
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THE JEWISH DIASPORA IN LATIN AMERICA
NEW STUDIES ON HISTORY AND LITERATURE

EDITED BY
DAVID SHEININ AND LOIS BAER BARR

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SERIES PREFACE

The monographs in Garland’s Latin American Studies series deal with significant aspects of literary writing, defined broadly and including general topics, groups of works, or treatments of specific authors and movements. Titles published have been selected on the basis of the originality of scholarship and the coherency of the theoretical underpinnings of the critical discourse. Cognizant of the fact that literary study is an ongoing dialogue between multiple voices, established topics and approaches complement attempts to revise the canon of Latin American literature and to propose new agendas for their analysis. Studies will also focus on interdisciplinary approaches, the bridging of national and linguistic divisions, subaltern studies, feminism, queer theory, popular culture, and minority topics. The series includes only studies written in English.

David William Foster
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PREFACE

David Sheinin and Lois Baer Barr

Although some Jews tend to look on the United States as a great twentieth-century haven and on Israel as their ancestral home, tens of thousands of Jewish migrants and refugees escaped to Latin America at three pivotal historical moments—after the late fifteenth-century expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian kingdoms, during the late nineteenth-century crisis of pogroms and famine in Eastern Europe, and at the time of the Holocaust. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jews also came to Latin America from Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere. This multidisciplinary collection of articles explores many elements of the Jewish diaspora in Latin America and the ways in which Jews have shaped and been shaped by Latin American societies.

Latin Americans across the hemisphere trace their heritage to Iberian Jews who fled the Inquisition. The small Mexican community of Ventas Prietas, for example, claims as its progenitors the Téllez Giron family, who fled the Inquisition in the sixteenth century. In colonial Brazil descendants of Iberian Jews enjoyed periods of toleration and acceptance under both Portuguese and Dutch rule; they practiced their religious beliefs openly, founded synagogues, and observed home rituals without fear of reprisals. All the same, colonial Latin America was generally not a safe haven. Jews were forced to convert to Christianity. Many Jews (and non-Jews) were prosecuted for "Judaizing." In one case in 1635 a libel of Jewish treachery was used to frighten the citizens of Lima when the entire community of converted Jews (conversos) was arrested. Prosecutions for the practice of Judaism followed. Ten of those convicted were burned at the stake in a 1639 auto-da-fé. Others died in jail cells during the long investigation process, while some were eventually released under order to wear the sanbenito, a hood and cloak that would mark individuals as repentant heretics.

Because the threat of indictment prompted many Jews to conceal their ethnic identities, the numbers of direct descendants of Jewish immigrants to Latin America during the colonial period is uncertain. In her essay "Colonial Origins of Contemporary Anti-Semitism in Latin America," Judith Laikin Elkin reasons that despite the chronological break between the brutalized Jews of the early colonial period and later generations of immigrants in this century, the ideology
and practice of the Inquisition continues to shape Jewish identities in Latin America. Drawing on colonial era documents, Elkin explains the origins and persistence of anti-Jewish sentiment in Latin America, and its endurance in other race-based hatreds that found their source in stereotypes of putative Jewish idolatry and treachery. Although many individual Jews and Jewish families "disappeared" in conversions and persecution, cultural survival has been strong. Even as many thought of migrating to the Holy Land, Jews viewed the Spanish kingdoms as a land of promise. The Spanish language gave birth to Jewish expression in its most creative forms, including the prayer and mysticism of the Kabbalists of the thirteenth century and later. In colonial Latin America, important themes of exile, messianism, and memory persisted in the works of Sephardic Jews who preserved their language and culture—as well as their early Spanish influences—into the twentieth century.

In contrast to the fate of persecuted Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many authors have written idyllically of the movement of Jews to Argentina and elsewhere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and their escape from the squalid and oppressive aspects of ghetto and shtetl life. In this collection, the historian Jeffrey Lesser charts this movement to Brazil as a combination of successes and failures ("Colonial Survival and Foreign Relations in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil: The Jewish Colonization Association Colony of Quatro Irmãos, 1904-1925"). He documents the role of Baron Hirsch, one of Europe's early railroad magnates, and the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) he founded in the struggle to establish Jewish agricultural colonies, frequently on the frontier of European settlement. In his "Canto de la Argentina" (1910), the Nicaraguan poet Ruben Darío was one of many to celebrate this migratory struggle in a context of the tortuous path of Jewish history: "Sing to the Pampas/illkempt youth, wide-eyed Rebeccas/long-haired Reubens/patriarchs with hair so white/and thick as horses' manes/Sing, sing/Old Sarahs and Benjamins still young/from the depths of our hearts/We have found Zion!"

Darío's vision characterized the hard work and accomplishment of the immigrant agricultural communities but neglected the fact that in Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and elsewhere government acceptance of Jews was lukewarm at best. Between 1880 and the Second World War, while some political leaders were pleased to receive Jews—as they were immigrants of diverse nationalities—others tried to block the arrival of Jewish migrants and invoked long-standing anti-Semitic vitriol to speculate openly on the negative impact Jews might have on their communities. This resistance to Jewish migration reached a tragic extreme in the 1930s and 1940s when refugee vessels from Nazi Europe, such as the St. Louis and the Conde Grande, were denied entry at tens of ports. In
"The Beirut Massacre and Jewish Identity in Brazil: A View from Porto Alegre," the anthropologist Sidney M. Greenfield offers a metaphor for the mixed reception of Jews to Latin America through his narrative of the Beirut massacre through Brazilian Jewish eyes. The historians Sandra McGee Deutsch ("Anti-Semitism and the Chilean Movimiento Nacional Socialista, 1932-1941") and Laura Pérez Rosales ("Anticardenismo and Anti-Semitism in Mexico, 1934-1940") contribute essays on varied aspects of the political culture of anti-Semitism in Chile and Mexico, and the centrality of anti-Jewish sentiment to the larger Latin American polity (Senkman, 70. See also Gerchunoff; Dickmann; Porzecanski, 29).

In time, most Jewish agricultural communities in Brazil and Argentina became ghost towns as residents abandoned the uncertainty and poverty of frontier agriculture for what many hoped would be an easier life in the city. Structural shells of houses, synagogues, theaters, libraries, and schools still stand in some of these former colonias as does the historical memory of a "rugged" and independent Jewish past "on the land" in Latin America. In "Theory in the Margin: Latin American Literature and the Jewish Subject," Edward H. Friedman finds that Latin American authors evoke this tenacious quality. The writers Szichman of Argentina, Goldemberg of Peru, and Chocrón of Venezuela strike defiant positions by challenging monolithic and oligarchical authority. Yet, unlike the certainty and strength of Duddy Kravitz and other Jewish protagonists in North American literature, the vitality of Jews in Latin American fiction tends to be tentative and transient, like the ardor of the Jewish communities themselves. In the last of Mario Szichman's novels, the Peekof clan—forced ultimately to sneak out of Buenos Aires one step ahead of the authorities—reflects the historical tenuousness of the Jewish presence in the face of authoritarianism and persecution. The solitary peddlers in Peruvian writer Isaac Goldemberg's novels form a web of characters who share the common fate of death and disappearance outside the closely knit Jewish community. And as Lois Baer Barr points out in "The Jonah Experience: The Jews of Brazil According to Scliar," while literary characters in the novels of Moacyr Scliar fancy themselves captains, architects, and adventurers, they are doomed to unreliability and failure.

Edna Aizenberg's "Lenta biografia: Chejfe 's Post-Holocaust, Postcolonial Had-Gadya" makes a more determined argument for Jewish roots in Latin America than either Barr or Friedman. While postcolonial criticism has frequently described Jewish writers as foreigners in Hispanic lands, Aizenberg maintains that writers have evoked what is essentially Latin American in their themes: a multiplicity of languages (some marginal, others dominant), the influence of subjugated languages on official idioms, territorial migration, and the persistence
of the fragmented. Sergio Chejfec, a young Argentine novelist, ends his novel of recollection and re-creation of family past with a reference to the Aramean song "Chad Gad Ya/An Only Kid," which comes at the end of the Passover ritual meal, the seder. Just as the song and the seder reiterate the series of destructions and redemptions which form the Jewish past, Chejfec’s novel commemorates those events in the framework of a painful and slow reworking of the fragments of family past. Ironically, in the tragedy of late twentieth-century authoritarian dictatorship—during which national armed forces became armies of occupation and torture—Aizenberg’s observations on Jews as "essentially" Latin American was never more apparent. The uncertainty and persecution of the larger Latin American community dovetailed with that of the Jewish collectivity as military leaders boasted the ideology, symbols, and terror of Nazi Germany to terrify Jews and non-Jews alike.

The "dominant other" is how Nelson H. Vieira conceives of the Jewish "enlightened perception" of the non-Jewish majority ("Outsiders and Insiders: Brazilian Jews and the Discourse of Alterity"). Nora Glickman’s "Discovering Self in History: Aida Bortnik and Gerardo Mario Goloboff" explores the theme of exile more specifically: both the film writer and playwright Bortnik and the novelist and poet Goloboff were forced into exile during the Argentine military dictatorship of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Glickman’s sad conception of Jewish exile is reminiscent of the writings of journalist Jacobo Timerman but also familiar to the Jewish experience beyond Latin America; while the ancestors of both Goloboff and Bortnik gave themselves heart and soul to their new homeland, that love was not requited. With implications for the sometimes precarious history of Argentine Jewry, Bortnik and Goloboff have created a spiritually strong and protective fiction. The strength of exile is also evident in "Esther Seligson and Angelina Muñiz-Huberman: Jewish Mexican Memory and the Exile to the Darkest Tunnels of the Past" by Daniela Schuvaks, which places the two Mexican novelists in the context of other women writers of the post-1968 generation.

That strength is apparent in an increasingly common interdisciplinary methodology that spans a range of fields of inquiry, the use of oral histories and testimonials. Naomi Lindstrom ("Oral Histories and the Literature of Reminiscence: Writing up the Jewish Argentine Past") maintains that in many contemporary historical and fictional studies the immigrant past is re-created and recovered. Lindstrom suggests that immigrants represent the generation most capable of illuminating the Jewish experience in Argentina not only because of their pioneering historical role, but because immigrants were marked culturally by their Eastern European formation—a life structured by Jewish tradition in ways later
generations of Jews had to struggle to imagine but at the root of how Jewish life is understood. Oral histories represent the most compelling means of understanding the immigrant community. In "Jews under the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1995," Robert M. Levine draws on testimonials as well as other sources to recount a comparatively grim chapter in Latin American Jewish life, the period under Fidel Castro's rule. As property owners under threat from the Communist regime, most Cuban Jews left their country after 1959.

Three historical works on Argentina chart new directions in the scholarly literature. "German Nazism and the Origins of Argentine Anti-Semitism," by Ronald C. Newton, adds to recent revisions in the historical literature on the role of Nazism in Argentina during the 1930s and 1940s. To attribute the rise of violent anti-Semitism in 1930s Argentina to German Nazis, as some scholars have done, is to underestimate the significance of a domestic Argentine tradition of anti-Semitic thought and action. While some German Nazis attempted to press Argentines to adopt anti-Jewish positions, anti-Semitism in Argentina can only be understood in the context of elite politics, right-wing social movements, and labor unrest after 1920. In "Equidistance and Gradualism in Argentine Foreign Policy Towards Israel and the Arab World, 1949-1955," Ignacio Klich asserts that in the aftermath of Israeli independence, Argentine diplomacy toward the Middle East was conditioned by Cold War politics, trade opportunities, the international position of the United States, and the need to maintain a policy balance between the Jewish state and the Arab world. In "Zionist Political Parties in Argentina from the Revolution of 1943 to the Establishment of the State of Israel," Silvia Schenkolewski Kroll concentrates more specifically on the politics of the Jewish community during the Perón period. There were a variety of political divisions within the Jewish community; no single agenda characterized the actions of the collectivity. Moreover, political conflict among Jewish Argentines frequently reflected political divisions at the national level.

In "Postwar Latin American Jewry: An Agenda for the Study of the Last Five Decades," Haim Avni assesses the topics scholars of Latin American Jewish studies have tended to address in the past fifty years, with special attention to themes investigated and countries of choice. Avni explains why scholars have placed emphasis on some regions at the expense of others; Argentina, for example, has represented the focus of a majority of studies on Latin American Jewry—an imbalance reflected in the present volume. He also highlights an array of themes yet to be addressed, areas in which scholars might reasonably expect to find important new information on Latin American Jewry. Avni castigates authors for not building sufficiently solid bridges between Jewish communal life and the remainder of Latin America. He derides historians for ignoring commu-
nal histories. More work is needed on the institutions that provided the framework for Jewish life over the past centuries, including hospitals, synagogues, and sports centers. All the same, through fiction, literary analysis, historical study and other methodologies, this compilation represents the current burgeoning interest in the Jewish diaspora in Latin America.

**Works Cited**


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THE JEWISH DIASPORA IN LATIN AMERICA
In quantitative and qualitative terms, the years of World War II and the early Cold War period represent a time of growth and consolidation for Latin American Jewry.¹ Recent Jewish arrivals, primarily German-speaking refugees from central Europe, settled in countries where no Jews had lived before, creating new communities in such typically Indo-American states as Ecuador and Bolivia. They also strengthened the Jewish presence in countries like Paraguay and Colombia. In the older Jewish settlements of Euro-America—Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil—the communities acquired a new, important stratum that broadened communal organization. Now there was a central European Jewish population alongside the Sephardi and eastern European Ashkenazi communities. German joined Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), and Arabic as languages of Jewish life. Latin American Jewry’s uniquely pluralistic character among diaspora communities grew even stronger.

Unlike other Jewish communities, Latin American Jewry did not suffer from wartime upheaval. For this reason, and thanks to other factors, it made impressive economic progress. This led to the "discovery" of the Jewish communities by representatives of world Jewish organizations such as the World Jewish Congress, the American Joint Distribution Committee, the American Jewish Committee, and especially the financial institutions of the World Zionist Organization: the Jewish National Fund and Keren Hayesod. "Ironically the Holocaust era, which saw the virtual destruction of European Jewry, marked Latin American Jewry’s coming of age" (Avni 1985, 125).

¹This article is an expanded version of the keynote address to the Sixth Conference of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (1991).
After the war ended, Latin American states occupied a key position in the international arena, representing the largest bloc in the newly established United Nations Organization. Latin America played a key role when the U.N. and took it upon itself to determine the future of the Jewish people and actually cast the deciding ballots in the vote of November 29, 1947, supporting the partition of Palestine into two sovereign, although economically united, Jewish and Arab states. The importance of the Jewish communities in the region also increased correspondingly. It is therefore only natural that the period from the creation of the first Latin American communities to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948—a period that, for many communities, only spans some forty years—has produced a plethora of research, memoirs, and published sources.

II

More than forty years have elapsed since then. The Latin American continent has undergone major demographic, economic, social, and political change, which could not but affect its Jewish communities. To what extent have these developments attracted scholarly attention? A number of bibliographic publications define the range of research on this subject. In 1978, Martin Howard Sable published an extensive bibliography, *Latin American Jewry: A Research Guide*, containing over 4,800 entries of books, articles, and other works, including published and archival primary sources. Sable covers all the material he was able to find up to the early 1970s in the principal libraries of Israel and the United States as well as some findings from Spain, France, and England. The bibliographic entries are arranged alphabetically by subject and country without annotation. Twelve years later, Judith Laikin Elkin and Ana Lya Sater published a second bibliography: *Latin American Jewish Studies, An Annotated Guide to the Literature*. This collection covers all research, memoirs, essays, polemical works, and books and articles that constitute primary source material published between the *terminus ad quem* of Martin Sable's bibliography and the year 1986. Special credit is due to *Latin American Jewish Studies* for appending a list of 217 daily newspapers, weeklies, and other journals to its 773 extensive and very precise entries of books and articles; together they provide the scholar with an outstanding research aid. Indeed, one project discussed at the first conference of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA), held in Cincinnati in 1982, was the creation of such research aids. The publication in 1990 of *Latin American Jewish Studies* represents an extremely important achievement in this field.

What place is given to the post-1948 period in this proliferation of research?

III

We shall focus here on publications that appeared after Martin Sable closed his findings, that is, during approximately the last twenty years. Of the 745 works of research, memoirs, treatises, and documentation listed and described by Judith Laikin Elkin and Ana Lya Sater, no fewer than 312 deal with the period under examination. This number appears quite substantial, but a closer look reveals a relative paucity of scholarly research and an unequal distribution when it comes to the subjects and geographical areas discussed. Of the 65 titles that are defined as relating to anti-Semitism, only 27 may be considered works of research. There is an imbalance of subject matter: more than twenty percent of the 312 entries describe anti-Semitism, providing clear evidence of the topic's attractiveness. More than ten percent of the 65 works in this category—seven entries—are devoted to the former community of Nicaragua, considered by its chroniclers to be terribly important. This emphasis indicates the casual nature of documentary scholarly activity in Latin American Jewish studies. Had the United States administration not raised claims of Nicaraguan anti-Semitism—apparently in order to induce the American public to support its policy there—this marginal and extinguished Jewish center would have received far less attention, or none at all. Nine of the 65 entries referring to anti-Semitism (including six research-based studies) deal with more than one country and therefore fall into the general category of "Latin America." Fully 47 works focus on Argentina. In contrast, Peru and Brazil merit only one entry each, and no other countries are on this list. The geographic disproportion produced by the incidental vagaries of scholarly
attempts to describe and analyze anti-Semitism in Latin America thus becomes quite evident.

Fifty-four of the entries in Elkin and Sater are classified under another topic of central interest to scholars: the reciprocal relationship between Israel and Latin America's states and Jewish communities. A further 32 deal with the question of Jewish identity, particularly as reflected in the writings and personalities of Jewish authors. Thus, approximately half the 312 entries pertaining to this period concern three favored categories, leaving the remaining half for a wide array of other subjects. Most prominent among these are education (25 items) and demography (ten items), for which almost all the listings are works of scholarship based on original research. The same cannot be said for the only eight items to touch upon the immensely important subject of the economic activities of Jews in Latin America over the last forty years. This brings us to the remaining few items—particularly few in number when scholarly works are considered—dealing with countries other than Argentina. Even important communities such as Uruguay, Chile, Mexico, and Colombia remain relatively unrepresented in the work of the last twenty years.

Geographic and subject imbalance is also evident in the papers and panel discussions of scholarly conferences held after the years covered by Elkin and Sater, as may be seen from the following table:

Papers on the Post-1948 Period Delivered at International Meetings of LAJSA

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++ 30 papers in the Latin American Jewish Studies section and one more each in sections on Jewish demography and Jewish music.

The fact that 82 papers are dedicated to the post-1948 period is indeed a remarkable quantitative achievement. Without entering into a discussion of their quality, we must nevertheless note the obvious thematic problems presented by these papers. The preponderance of literary and cultural subjects will be examined below. We might also wonder if the heavy concentration on Argentina has anything to do with the fact that so many scholars are of Argentine origin; is this focus really due entirely to the community’s overwhelming importance? At the same time, it is evident that academic treatment of many important communities has been lacking in these international gatherings.

Let us turn to a closer examination of certain subjects that have not been covered as yet and others that have already attracted a great deal of consideration.

IV

The processes of growth and flowering, and sometimes of upheaval and decline, in certain Latin American communities since 1948 have merited very little attention. Bolivia and Ecuador, two Andean, typically Indo-American states, hosted considerable communities by the end of World War II but lost most of their Jewish population soon after the war. They provide good examples of these processes. The drama of central European Jewish refugees establishing themselves among these semi-colonial societies might have provided a challenging field of interest not only for historians and sociologists, but also for writers of fiction. Yet neither the establishment and maintenance of a multifaceted, extensive Jewish network—including (in the case of Bolivia) a prestigious elementary and secondary school system—nor the communities’ subsequent decline has attracted any appreciable amount of scholarly work. Of the 82 papers presented at international conferences, only one dealt with Ecuador, and none with Bolivia; no study concerning the post-1948 period in either of these communities was listed by Elkin and Sater. Colombian Jewry provides another striking example of this deficiency.

A number of reports (not all of which have been published) describe the history of Colombia’s Jews in the 1930s and early 1940s. In 1936, HICEM sent Benjamin Mellibowski, a senior employee of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) and later the director of HICEM in Buenos Aires, to investigate the possi-
bility of Jewish emigration to Colombia. He produced an extensive, detailed report on the condition of the country and of the communities he visited. In March 1937, the Jewish Central Information Office in Amsterdam (which eventually became London's Wiener Library) published a detailed study on "The Position of Jews in Colombia." In this document, the structure of every community is described along with a summary of its history up to the present. In 1943, a collection summing up the last ten years of central European immigration to Latin America appeared; it included a comprehensive article on German Jewish immigrants to Colombia. A short article on the economic absorption of the immigration, particularly in the capital city of Bogotá, rounds off the available information on the period, and its data were later used elsewhere. All these reports indicate that at the end of the Holocaust and during the period when survivors began to arrive, the Colombian Jewish community had not as yet defined its organizational structure ("Zehn Jahre juedische," 250-74; Neumann, 387-98; Shatzky, 93-94).

For the years after 1948, one source of information comes from the graphic but chronologically vague descriptions provided by the Jewish American journalist Jacob Beller in 1953 (Beller, 92-112). We also have precise studies on a single Colombian community—Barranquilla—at a specific moment and from a specific angle, that of education. These do not constitute an overview of the history of the community as a whole (Rosenthal, 262-74; Smith 1973, 239-54; Smith 1972; de Dajes, 307-22). Nor can the eloquent memoirs written by an active member of Colombian Jewry serve as a substitute for a research-based inquiry into this important subject (Guberek). The Colombian community's history could contribute greatly to our understanding of Latin American Jewry over the last forty-five years—not so much because of its centrality and organizational achievements but precisely because of the difficulties encountered by the community during the process of consolidation. Both archival material and periodically-published sources at the scholar's disposal point in this direction.

Bulletin and periodical publications, such as Bogotá's Boletin comunitario, Nuestra tribuna (in its second series), and Menorah, as well as Ecos, published in Barranquilla (Elkin and Sater, 202-203) are available to the researcher. There are two kinds of archival sources: the local communal archives, which may at least have been partially preserved, and the archives of international organizations whose emissaries maintained regular or ad hoc contact with Colombian Jewry, reports of which remain in orderly, established archives. Detailed reports on Colombian Jewry from late 1953 preserved in the World Jewish Congress Archives (kept by the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati) are an example of the second type of material. In November-December of 1953, the W.J.C.'s
emissary, American Jewish journalist Isaac Gotlib stayed in Colombia as part of a visit to a number of Latin American countries. His tour was intended to assist in the communities' consolidation and to strengthen their ties with the world organization. Gotlib recorded his impressions in a series of articles published in New York by World Jewish Congress's organ, *Folk un Welt*, and later in a book entitled *Yidn in Latayn Amerike* (*Jews in Latin America*). However, Gotlib's original reports paint a much more detailed, complex picture than was published—a portrait fraught with contradiction.

At the time, Colombian Jewry had recently undergone a period of demographic consolidation, and a process of organizational development was at its height. The 5,800 Jews of Bogotá formed three separate circles: eastern Europeans, Germans, and Sephardim. Those from eastern Europe made up the vast majority (some 4,000, according to Gotlib's report), while Jews from Germany were a sizeable minority (approximately 1,200) and the Sephardim a small minority (about 600). This split also appears in smaller communities such as Cali, Barranquilla, and Medellin. In addition to these central communities, a long list of towns and villages had Jewish populations: one hundred Jews each in Pereira and Palmira, 75 in Manizales, and a few dozen each in a number of other small locales. These Jews found themselves at various stages of communal consolidation, trying to maintain Jewish life to whatever extent they could. In subsequent years, as their economic situation improved, the small concentrations of Jews disappeared completely. The reports record the turbulent internal relations within the Yiddish-speaking population as well as the failure of every effort to establish a common umbrella organization for the community as a whole. They also describe in detail the occupational and economic make-up of the Sephardi, eastern European Ashkenazi, and central European groups. Colombian Jewry comprises a medium-sized community—Bogotá—and three small communities. Living for the last four and a half decades in a politically-turbulent host society, it has nevertheless achieved appreciable economic progress. That it has done so is not unique to the Jews of Colombia, nor are the community's ethnic mosaic and class differences or its concern for religious life and Jewish education unique. Were we to follow the way in which these various issues developed in the context of Jewish legal and social standing within the Colombian majority, as well as the context of Colombia's general economic and political development, the result might be a sort of catalogue of the fundamental problems of Jewish existence in Latin America.

One particular point raised in Gotlib's reports merits special emphasis, since it might apply to every other community in which German Jews settled: the effect created by the recovery of West Germany and its policy towards the Ger-
man diaspora in Latin America. Gotlib reports from Bogotá, and later from Cali, on a crisis that erupted in the Asociación Israelita Montefiore and the Unión Cultural Israelita (organizations of German-speaking Jews in the two cities) when some of their members showed an interest in a German embassy proposal for full co-operation between the embassy and Jews of German origin. The proposal split the communities when a substantial number of Jews not only requested and received German citizenship (acquiring Colombian citizenship was extremely difficult) and supported a German welfare fund but sought to join the local German club—an episode that ended in their resignation from Jewish communal organizations. Gotlib also reports on efforts to claim personal restitution from Germany and on requests made to the Claims Conference for funds to promote the communal life of Jews from Germany. Research might reveal the extent to which the public funds that were received helped preserve the Jewish affiliation of Colombia’s German-speaking Jews and the ways in which individual and communal monetary compensation affected Jewish life in these communities.

V

The application of the Colombian "catalogue" of problems to other communities—for example, Venezuela—would fill a serious gap: the lack of comparative studies on Latin American Jewry. Indeed, none of the 82 papers presented at international conferences provided a systematic comparison of the history or structure of Latin American Jewish communities. Tzvi Schechnner and Efraim Zadoff have written works comparing, respectively, the Ashkenazi communal organizations and the education systems of two communities, Argentina and Mexico, but such studies are very rare in Elkin and Sater (Schechnner, 115-28; Zadoff, 129-48). Although analysis of some basic issues of Jewish life throughout Latin America can be found in the works of Sergio Della Pergola and Judith Elkin, the analytical juxtaposition of two or more communities still needs developing as a field of research (Elkin, 156-90; Della Pergola, 85-134; Schers and Singer, 241-58). The mere presentation side-by-side of findings relating to two communities would make a valuable contribution to comparative history. However, particular attention should be paid to another, hitherto untried, method of more specific comparison: the comparative appraisal of the vitality and strength of Jewish public life in two given communities.

Communal history addresses the growth of institutions and the events played out in them. We suggest that an attempt be made to measure the institutions’ "output"—their daily contribution to Jewish education, culture, religion,
and social interaction. In these aspects of communal life, researchers may find unique opportunities for analysis and quantification. Observation and systematic recording of data, whether in communal journals or via testimony from archival and oral sources, may enable us to assess the nature and intensity of Jewish "street life." Subjects for observation and quantitative analysis include the day-to-day activities and services offered by religious, educational, cultural, and welfare facilities; economic institutions; organizations for self-defense against discrimination and anti-Semitic aggression; and agencies connected to or supporting Israel or other Jewish communities. Written sources from the past and oral testimony could serve as important tools for two types of research: synchronic comparisons of various communities and diachronic studies within each community.

The intensity of Jewish religious life in Santiago de Chile, Montevideo, and Mexico City at any given time, as expressed in the quantification of relevant data collected in each of these communities, could offer substantial insight into their individual and comparative religious character. The same applies to any other aspect of their public life—relations with Israel, education, recreation, social welfare, and so on. When extended from the synchronic to the diachronic, this method might provide answers to the question of whether Jewish life has really weakened between the immigrants' generation and the generations of their children and grandchildren or whether only the patterns have changed. Those who observe the educational and religious life in various Latin American Jewish communities today can only feel that the communities have undergone positive changes—but should they feel this way (Della Pergola and Schmelz, 43-68)? If their feeling is indeed based in reality, how strong are the perceived changes? Comparative, quantitative historical studies of the developments since 1948 could provide vital information. They might also reveal the importance of world Jewish support (for example, in the area of education) when it comes to the strength of a Jewish community.

VI

One of the most striking lacunae in basic research on Latin American Jewry is the lack of economic discussion. A small handful of the 82 international conference papers, and very few of the items in Elkin and Sater touch upon this theme (for important exceptions see Elkin and Sater; Gudmunson, 219-31; Schiffter Sikora, Gudmundson, and Solera Castro; Rattner 1987, 187-200; Rattner 1977; Syrkin, 115-34). Yet even a superficial comparison of Jewish public facilities and buildings in 1948 with those existing today will reveal tremendous changes. These changes are undoubtedly related to the communities' altered...
economic and occupational patterns and stratification. Jews must have enjoyed continuous income growth in order to formulate the new demands and expectations that took root in their communities. Sports and recreational centers were built or refurnished, more was expected from the educational networks, and many charities, along with small co-operatives and credit institutions, disappeared. The frequent crises that plagued Latin American states must have slowed this process at times, causing many Jews to lose their economic standing. Indications in this direction were brought out in a panel discussion devoted to the topic at the fifth LAJSA meeting in Buenos Aires in 1988, as well as in one publication dealing with "identified" poverty in Jewish Buenos Aires (Kneit, Rofman, and Lichtensztejn, 152-56; Gutmann and Lew, 6-10). Nevertheless, Jewish poverty was clearly on the decline as the continent's communities became more prosperous over the last four decades. Thus, economic progress was extremely important in shaping Jewish communities in the region, and yet "Jewish economics" in Latin America and the Jewish role in the continent's economy have yet to be explored.

Jewish economic development is closely tied to issues of a community's importance and position in society at large and to the potential for Jewish political influence. In economics, as in demography, location is of vital significance. It would be a mistake to describe the numerical strength of a Jewish community in statistical demographic terms only without taking proper account of its geographic distribution. In light of the evident concentration of Jewish communities in the center of capital cities, the fact that the Jews make up less than a tenth of one percent of the total population of Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, or Peru seems meaningless; more pertinent is their daily presence at the heart of their countries' commercial and political life. Their prominence contributes to popular perceptions of Jewish numbers and influence far more than do the actual figures. Likewise, we cannot limit our economic research to Jewish property and income, and how they changed, without examining how Jewish activities fit into the general socio-economic picture. Research on how a Jewish economic presence developed is most important, since the Jews' location may create real economic power and, as a result, political influence. On the other hand, it may be that Jews have moved into new but marginal fields of activity over the last four decades, taking them outside the hub of economic life and lessening their importance. This question calls for investigation.

New economic studies might also shed light on another neglected aspect of research on Jewish life, the role of women in communal activity. As soon as communal organizations were established, charity and welfare projects became the preserve of women's committees. They included the Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas of the Jewish congregation in Buenos Aires (Congregación
Israelitade la República Argentina) established in 1908; the Sociedad Filantrópica Femenina la Bienhechora of the Ashkenazi community and the Liga Femenina Caridad of the congregation of central European Jews, Bnei Isroel, both in Santiago, Chile; the Comité de Damas Sedaka y Marpe, of the community of Alepo Jews in Mexico City, and others (Mirelman, 89-90; Senderey, 128, 275; Roman de Cohen, 202-12). In addition to these committees, the Zionist women’s organization WIZO was prominent in almost every community. Economic changes meant increased family comfort and therefore leisure time—especially for women. The new ease meant that second-generation women could acquire university educations and join the liberal professions to an increasing degree. This in turn led to a decrease in leisure time, but by this point the woman’s position in society had changed. These obvious facts may be noted by any observer of Jewish life in Latin America. Nevertheless, their impact on the scope and character of the long-established women’s organizations and on the eventual creation of women’s associations in new spheres has yet to be analyzed. Furthermore, we lack any research-based idea of whether the leadership of central communal organizations, both old and new, has changed, with women taking on prominent roles. Let us hope that the now-popular academic and research field of women’s studies will lead to new initiatives in this important area of study.

VII

From underdeveloped fields of research to the overdeveloped focus of research energy: anti-Semitism.

Dozens of works on anti-Semitism are listed in *Latin American Jewish Studies*, and many lectures on the subject have been delivered at various scholarly conferences. This reflects a high degree of sensitivity to Jewish security, as well as the many communal resources allocated to the battle against anti-Semitism in its various forms. However, researchers have ignored one extremely important aspect of the study of anti-Semitism: the processes by which anti-Semitism has been reduced, inhibited, or, in some cases, completely extinguished where once it was widespread. Why has anti-Semitism not appeared as a powerful, even violent, factor in situations and places where it might have been expected? Several events come to mind in this context; two of them have been researched but demand further clarification.

In January 1959, the victorious rebels led by Fidel Castro stormed Havana and rooted out supporters of the Fulgencio Batista regime. Cuban Jews were not active political supporters of Batista, but they had certainly been among the
many beneficiaries of his regime. The Jewish community had frequently been honored by Batista himself and by his highest officials during the years 1955 to 1958, the very years of Castro’s guerilla uprising. Moreover, the community’s close ties with the United States and American Jewry were no secret. Yet there were no anti-Semitic outbursts during the violent overthrow of Batista or later in the Castro regime—not even at the time of the 1962 missile crisis, when any connection with or sympathy towards the U.S. might have been regarded as a crime.

There is ample documentation of the lack of official or popular expressions of Jew-hatred during these years. Anti-Semitism had prevailed in Cuba during the Holocaust era, between 1933 and 1945, but it later disappeared. Castro and his followers did not distinguish between members of different races or religions; although they suppressed the Catholic Church, they showered favors on Jewish religious institutions. These are proven facts (Bejarano, 172-84). Yet the questions for further research remain. What mechanisms operated in Cuba to make these facts possible? How deep did the openness—or indifference—to the Jewish presence go? What relevance might the Cuban experience have for other societies, and what lessons does it teach us about anti-Semitism in general?

Similar questions have been raised in relation to other situations: the non-appearance of violent anti-Semitism in Chile during the barbarous coup d’état of General Augusto Pinochet and the military Junta in September 1973, for example, or the position of Argentine Jewry following Argentina’s shameful defeat in the Malvinas Islands in June of 1982. Generals known for their anti-Semitism were in desperate need of a scapegoat to carry some blame for their failures, and yet no significant increase in anti-Semitic attacks was recorded (Avni 1986). Serious study of these events is still needed. Our second case in point, Costa Rican anti-Semitism, has already been the subject of research but also calls for further investigation.

Hostility to east European Jewish immigrants attended their settlement in Costa Rica almost from the first arrivals in 1929. Jews were designated polacos, which became a derogatory epithet along the lines of judío. And yet only some six hundred Jews settled in Costa Rica—mainly in the capital, San José—between 1929 and 1939. In 1938, Costa Rica was invited to attend the Evian Conference along with the other Latin American countries; its foreign ministry claimed that because of popular anti-Semitic sentiment, Costa Rica—precisely because it was a democratic state—could not commit itself in any way to relieving the refugee problem. Urban middle class circles (and commercial competitors in particular) were constantly demanding that the Jews be expelled, arguing that the latter had received entry permits as farmers but had flocked to petty trade in
the capital. As a result, a parliamentary investigation of the subject was conducted even before World War II began. In 1948 and 1949, even though the events of the Holocaust were known to all, similar claims were supported by the highest echelons. Moreover, in 1951 and 1952, anti-Jewish incitement and violence led by a Junta Patriótica reached a peak, with the full support and protection of the authorities. Costa Rica came closer than any other Latin American country to state-sponsored, open, and brutal anti-Semitism (Gudmundson, 219-31; Memos and Correspondence).

Events in Costa Rica became a subject of concern for Jewish organizations in the United States: the Costa Rican files of the World Jewish Congress Archives are filled with documentation on repeated demands from Costa Rican Jewry for support and assistance. Rabbi Maurice Perlzweig, head of the WJC Department for International Affairs, travelled to San José, and a forceful campaign was launched in the North American press. The incitement subsided and later ceased, and Costa Rica withdrew from the anti-Semitic stage. Yet it is precisely this stage of development that warrants our attention: how is it that a country in which anti-Semitism won extensive, continued support—both popular and official—moved far away from anti-Semitism in the sixties, seventies, and eighties and actually became a loyal friend of Israel and the Jewish people? What social processes made it possible for Jews to integrate, even to the point of serving in senior governmental positions—for example, as deputy ministers? What led the Church, the political parties, and their leaders to take such a positive view of those who until very recently had been presented as aliens and enemies of the people? Can this process be reversed at some time in the future? What factors would prevent the past from returning?

It would seem that serious research on these questions concerning the lack of anti-Semitism in Cuba and Costa Rica could greatly enrich our understanding of anti-Semitism and the fight against it in other countries, both in and beyond Latin America.

VIII

Literature represents, as we have seen, the other overploughed field of research. There have been many studies devoted to Jewish authors, their specific works, Jewish motifs in non-Jewish literature, and questions of Jewish identity as reflected in the work and personality of the Jewish artist. This reality contradicts the pessimistic pronouncement—made only ten short years ago in 1982—that the subject would never take hold in the teaching of Latin American
literature. In fact, it was the interest of scholars and university lecturers in Latin American and general literature that turned the balance and produced an abundance of research. The creation of the International Association of Jewish Writers in Spanish and Portuguese with its center in Jerusalem, the publication, since 1987, of its literary review, Noaj, and the international meetings of the members of this association—all of these developments have fostered even more the literary activity of Jewish authors in Latin American languages.

In spite of this abundance, at least one central question remains to be examined. Does literature written in Spanish and Portuguese by Jewish and non-Jewish authors truly reflect the experience of the Jewish community and transform that experience—with its negative and positive aspects—into a legitimate, accepted topic in Latin American literature? Or does this literature essentially express the Jewish identity problems of the authors, who cannot serve and do not wish to serve as the community’s representatives because they tend to remain on its periphery? In other words: what do these Jewish writers contribute towards building a stable bridge between being Jewish and being Latin American?

IX

We have looked at the state of research on certain aspects of the period since 1948. Other subjects, such as Jewish migration within the continent and emigration from Latin America, the Jewish leadership and its image, and changes in internal Jewish as well as universal ideological relations, demand more extensive consideration at a future occasion. And yet, from the perspective of 1992, five hundred years after Columbus reached America and the Jews were expelled from Spain, the last forty-five years hold many contradictions for Latin American Jewry. On the one hand, Latin American Jews are leaving: they are leaving the continent physically—whether for Israel, the United States, Spain, or other countries—and leaving the Jewish family through intermarriage, which in itself indicates a detachment from Jewish identity and considerable assimilation to one’s surroundings. On the other hand, they are settling in—as an organized, particular community on the local scene and, not infrequently, as individuals within the higher political and administrative echelons of the countries in which they live. Most of all, Jewish authors and artists are settling into every area of Latin American culture.

This second type of movement, by which the second and third generations of Latin American Jewry are settling in, constitutes a sort of renewed encounter—a real reencuentro—between the Jewish people and Iberian culture.
After centuries that saw no direct and mutual exchange between bearers of Jewish and Iberian culture, the meeting is now taking place—in Latin America. And when it comes to studying that encounter, an encounter focused on the future, there is no finer year than 1992.

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movement, and it did much to advance knowledge and awareness of national liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. (14-15)

He argues, nonetheless, that

the legacy of the New Left remains preponderantly negative. It shepherded many good activists straight into the academy, where, like pieces of museum Dada, they quickly went from radical to radical chic. Forget the patient organizing, the rallies, and the marches; forget the economy and revolutionary politics as well. All that would follow effortlessly in the wake of "signifying practice." After the intellectuals had published enough books and essays on "Althusser-Lacan-Barthes-Derrida-Foucault-Irigaray-Cixous-Deleuze-Kristeva Thought," the masses would rise up on cue and seize the television stations! And, of course, leadership would belong to the intellectuals and the new professional-managerial class who understood différence and high-tech. (15)

Sheltered in the academy, we need to be reminded that complacency—even in the critical act—is out of place. Through the courage of their convictions, those who write of the Latin American Jewish experience make history: recording it, revising it, redeeming it, combining theory and practice, and flaunting the ironies of survival.

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news of my murder arrived, it took its place in a long series—one more in a chain of horrors, all the deaths flowing into the slow and endless death of Chile itself. I am contaminated. ("Reports of My Death," 374)

Moreover, despite his success in Europe and the United States with Death and the Maiden, a play about the tortured and the torturers and about the Chilean attempt to both find the truth and reconcile the past, this work seems to be as much a British drawing room mystery as a work authentically about his native land. Teresa Porzecanski also had to leave Uruguay with small children for a brief period during the military dictatorship of the seventies. She returned to reap the benefit of being something of a celebrity in her small country, but she is also the target of strange acts of anti-Semitism.

It can also be a sacrifice to stay in one's own country. There are scornful reprisals from those who have left as Luis Gregorich reports: "...se sostiene que la literatura argentina que se produce en el país está muerta, y que únicamente los escritores exiliados mantienen viva la llama de la tradición creadora." [. . . it is maintained that Argentine literature produced within the country is dead and that only the writers in exile keep the flame of creative tradition alive] (Gregorich, 121). For Argentine novelist Alicia Steimberg choosing to stay in Buenos Aires during the years of the Proceso meant sending her two teenaged children off to Italy when it became clear that they were in danger of being disappeared. She and along with countless other writers must face the guilt of having survived when others have not, and later, the accusations from others who were or felt they were compelled to leave (Sarlo, 96-107). The condition of the Jewish writer in Latin America is not the condition of the writer in the United States. In Latin America the writer plays the dangerous role of Jonah, to be exposed and expelled, to speak ambiguously about an uncertain truth. Prophets in the wilderness, they often choose the margins and marginal discourse to cry out for social justice. Like Jonah, they are aware of just how powerful that truth can be. We as their readers are unaware what their future will bring just as we will never know what ultimately became of Jonah.

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American literary criticism. On a comparative level, this criticism, supposedly "Third-World" or "liberationist," demonstrates an almost total ignorance of the literature of the so-called "Third World." On a continental and national level, this criticism is often reluctant to liberate Jewish writing, more than once relegating it to the Cinderella corner of parochial literature. The study of Latin American Jewish texts within a postcolonial framework would serve as an antidote to narrowness.

The exemplariness of the Jewish authors in the matters of language and territoriality would link Latin American and international concerns, expanding critical horizons beyond Europe and North America. Despite cries of "thirdworld-ism" France and the United States have largely served as the models for Latin American criticism. The exemplariness of the Jewish in matters of language and territoriality would likewise allow for a more penetrating representation of Argentina and Latin America. Jewishness is not foreign to Latin America; it represents what is most Latin American, encapsulated in the lessons of the Had Gadya. Persistence and change: change of territory, of language, and of fortune; persistence in the face of adversity and in the hope that history can be altered.

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El Pibe the real cause of the uncle's fatal accident: The mare El Negro was riding could have thrown him off because it was dazzled by some lights or frightened by hearing a gunshot. Other possible motives for the accident: vengeance, jealousy, aneurism, vary in credibility depending on the personal perspective of the informant.

Goloboff’s novel ends on a somber note. After many days of ceaseless rain, a heavy flood is expected. Everybody abandons the country, except El Soñador, who insists on sending away his own woman and El Pibe, and stubbornly stays behind to brave the storm alone, as an old gaucho, faithful to the land to his last breath. The consequences of the rain are ominous. It may be, says the narrator, "el principio de una buena inundación, o los restos de un naufragio—ambos amagos de catastrofe" (167) [The beginning of a hard flood. . . or . . . the remains of a shipwreck—both signs of a catastrophe].

In Bortnik’s plays, as in Goloboff’s novels, both the love their ancestors gave to Argentina, and their own love for that land, is far from being requited. Each generation has been put to the test. As Jewish writers, they sense the precarious conditions more acutely, perhaps because Jews do not have generations of ancestors buried in one place. Forced to mistrust the past invented for them, Goloboff’s and Bortnik’s characters seek to reconstruct it and delve into the past in order to find the spiritual strength to continue. For Bortnik’s protagonist, Clara, the search leads to annihilation; for Goloboff’s Pibe, the novel ends on a path that may lead to destruction, albeit, with a certain amount of ambiguity. What they have in common is the consciousness of the fragility of each experience they go through. But precisely that consciousness of physical and material precariousness is what arms them with a spiritual strength that is instinctively creative and protective.

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And we are alone and lost; small, insignificant beings of Creation. A drop of water, a grain of sand, dust that floats in the sun's transparent rays. And we are turned upside down—our feet where our head should be and our head where our feet. We die a thousand deaths and are not even aware of it. A death of violence, a death of torture, a death of surprise, a death of pain. . . . (73)

A few lines later Muñiz-Huberman interrupts her narrative in time to add the following:

Here is a prophecy for the coming centuries: death is like an eight-year old boy that, while crossing the street one day, is run over by a truck. His body is ripped into a thousand bloody shreds; veins are emptied, his face disfigured, bones are crushed and muscles burst; the light of his eyes is extinguished and his heart stops. And this is all—nothing more. A buried boy in the Montrouge Cemetery, Division 46, Line 2, Year 1938 (73).

Speaking about her first novel in De cuerpo entero (1991) [The Real Self], Muñiz-Huberman states that "Santa Teresa (or more correctly Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada) converted me into a contemporary self, without roots, without faith, in search of identity" (34). The character Rafael is a victim of the same situation. Indeed, Muñiz-Huberman seems to find in her characters the strength for self-definition of the Jewish people and their land. All of them find their way through a faith in God. While Muñiz-Huberman proclaims the suffering-in-exile theme, all of her characters continue believing in God, and from this stems the optimistic ending in Tierra adentro. When Rafael arrives in Safed, a city in the Promised Land, he and his beloved Míriam can finally live in freedom: "We live a moment of peace. The memories have faded. Our sorrows have lost their briny taste. . ." (176).

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A number of other Argentine literary works could well be examined for the same concern with documenting the Jewish Argentine past, and particularly the immigrant experience. The corrosively satirical novels of Mario Szichman offer perhaps one of the most obvious examples. In the 1971 *Los judíos del Mar Dulce*, the hapless protagonist Bernardo/Berele embarks on an ill-fated quest for his family’s history in Argentina. The semi-documentary film that results from his mission brings him no greater sense of connection or order. His version of the past arouses the indignation and contempt of his family, whose principal interest in the past is to rewrite it according to a more prestigious design.

Sergio Chejfec in his 1990 *Lenta biografía* presents another variant. In this novel, the search must be taken back beyond the Jewish Argentine experience to an era before immigration. Knowledge of a father’s experience in Europe becomes a key his son must obtain to begin to make sense of the present. *Lenta biografía* varies from the pattern of the above-discussed works in that the portion of the past the narrator most needs to recuperate is the European Holocaust, the experience of only one generation back. But it is like the others in the narrator-protagonist’s needily obsessive search back into family and Jewish history. It is telling that both Szichman’s and Chejfec’s novels feature similar cover art, showing a photograph of Eastern European Jews still dressed as if taken directly from their shtetl.

A motive behind these texts, as behind the documentary texts they at times mimic, is a belief in the worth of acquiring and assembling information about the past. In most instances, the generation that left Europe for Argentina is targeted as the most promising guardian of the past and its charge of significance. The immigrant generation is seen as the one most capable of illuminating the Jewish experience in Argentina, not only because of its pioneering role in that history, but also because it was still thoroughly marked by its formation in Eastern European Jewish community life, a life structured by specifically Jewish tradition in a way that the second and third generation can only struggle to imagine.

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