

IBEROAMERICA AND IBEROAMERICAN JEWS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF REGIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL STUDIES ¹

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Resumen

Este artículo analiza la relevancia de los estudios regionales y transnacionales en una aproximación a las realidades de los países latinoamericanos y los judíos latinoamericanos. Haciendo referencia a quienes critican la categoría de América Latina o Iberoamérica por su amplitud y generalidad, el artículo sugiere áreas de investigación en las cuales una mirada regional o aún continental es relevante. Una mirada tal ayudaría a superar la compartimentación académica, por ejemplo entre Brasil y América hispana; contribuiría al análisis de la conexión de procesos históricos regionales y destacaría el impacto de redes sociales, políticas y culturales, así como el movimiento y difusión de personas, ideas y prácticas transnacionales que han persistido a través de los siglos, proyectándose más allá de las fronteras particulares y la lógica institucional y sociológica de los diversos estados-nación.

Is the use of regional labels such as “Latin America” or “Iberoamerica” instrumental to understanding the sociological, political and cultural processes taking place in the states and societies of the Western hemisphere? With fluid and uncertain regional boundaries, which in some

1 This paper was presented in the XV World Congress of Jewish Sciences, held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2-6 August 2009. A preliminary version was published in Portuguese in the Revista do Núcleo Interdisciplinar de Estudos Judaicos published by the Universidade Federal de Rio de Janeiro, no. 2 (November 2009), pp. 12-15.

studies include 33 nations comprising many non-Iberian and non-Latin countries originally settled by the British or the Dutch in colonial times, the question becomes poignant. Even if restricted to ‘Latin’ societies, shouldn’t we, in addition to Haiti, also bring into the equation of Latin America (or rather *the* Latin Americas, in the plural) Quebec, parts of New Brunswick and several French enclaves in the American South? Overall, what do we gain by claiming the existence of a region to be analyzed within the framework of area studies and at least including under its umbrella the Spanish-speaking, Portuguese-speaking and French-speaking societies of the Americas? Likewise, how do studies of Jewish Latin America enter into this equation? What could be their contribution to this regional canvas?

Regions and area studies are highly contested analytical concepts and perspectives. On the one hand, area studies are beleaguered by the contested and shifting nature of boundaries and borders, particularly acute in an era of heterogeneous globalization and multiculturalism, reshaped by transnational migration, transfer of ideas, proliferation of Diasporas, multiple modernities and increasingly complex identities and commitments.² On the other hand, recent years have witnessed a renewal of interest in the constructivist analysis of regions, the crystallization of new regional frameworks, the redrafting of trans-state exchanges and the burgeoning analysis of transnational movements and networks, related to and either supporting or opposing globalization.³ All of these analytical trends have triggered a variety of debates on the constructed character and the multi-layered structure of regions.

A central axis of the debate distinguishes between analyses which adopt an institutional or structural perspective from those that follow constructivist perspectives. There are many studies stressing the widespread emergence of regional communities and alliances, driven by the interest and support of states and modeled by institutions and structural forces, primarily, though not solely, modeled after the European Union. At the same time there is

2 Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship. Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994; José Maurício Domingues, “Modernity and Modernizing Moves: Latin America in Comparative Perspective,” *Theory, Culture and Society*, 26 (2009): 208-227.

3 Michelle Pace, *Politics of Regional Identity*. London: Routledge, 2006; Donatella Della Porta, and Sidney Tarrow, eds. *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

a burgeoning corpus of theoretical approaches that suggest looking at regions as cultural constructs. According to the latter perspective, regions are collectively imagined and create their own narrative, based primarily on nations and peoples, and transforming mental maps into political projects. Like states, regions may thus become credible representations and as such we live with them as real objects.⁴ Neither of these approaches suggests that regions should be understood as ‘natural’ manifestations or interpreted in terms of just rational utilitarian motivations alone. Rather, as stressed by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, for social phenomena at large,⁵ regions may be seen as the product of historically specific constellations of forces, creating meaningful orientations and practices and shaping, in turn, purposeful frameworks of activity, interaction, and institutional formations.

In the case of the Americas, the very existence of a region defined as Latin America (in the spirit of mid-19th century Paris) or Iberoamerica (in the spirit of an Iberian rapprochement with other parts of Europe) can be shown to highlight some traits while downplaying and ignoring others. The notion can easily be deconstructed by stressing the huge differences that separate the various regions from one another, both in terms of demographic composition and the distinct institutional and historical development of the various countries. Students of the area repeatedly emphasize the huge distance that separates the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Brazilian areas from the Indo-American mountain ranges and valleys covering the Andes from South to North; the Euro-American complex of much of the Southern Cone and Mestizo-America as constructed in Mexico, parts of Central America, Venezuela, etc. Similarly, from an institutional perspective, the area has experienced a multiplicity of political and institutional events, in a spectrum that varies enormously as one goes for instance, from Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia through Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Mexico, to Colombia and most of Central America.⁶

4 Emanuel Adler, “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics”. *European Journal of International Relations*, 3, 3 (1997): 319-363; James D. Sidaway, *Imagined Regional Communities. Integration and Sovereignty in the Global South*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

5 S. N. Eisenstadt, 1995. *Power, Trust and Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 328-389.

6 See e.g. Laurence Whitehead, “Alternative Models of Democracy in Latin America”,

From a complementary perspective, transnational migration into North America has recreated the meaning of being Latino or Chicano and the boundaries of the region in novel ways. In addition to early approaches to Latin America, which in the past stressed distinctive cultural traditions, often romanticized (as opposed to the materialistic perspective of the US); geopolitical standing at the margins of the West, and critical defiance of capitalism, recently there is a new type of transnational, diasporic and post-cultural Latinamericanism linked to the aftermath of the Latino diasporas in the United States and the emergence of a critical consciousness dating back to the 1960s and fully articulated in recent decades.⁷ These trends have already redrawn the scope of Latin American area studies and border studies. Yet, we should ask whether by limiting our attention to one society or micro-region we are about to gain or lose perspective.

I would like to claim that, beyond the question of the appropriate focus of analysis of empirical work, we should to retain a regional perspective and look for shared processes and trends beyond the variance, in trying to understand local or micro-regional trends in the region defined as Latin America. This thesis will be developed by drawing attention to three dimensions of analysis in which a regional perspective may be important, in addition to case studies which focus on specific countries and sub-national arenas. These dimensions relate to:

- The bridging of scholarly compartmentalization
- The transnational dimension that has existed in the region since colonial times but was largely ignored in the heyday of interest in the nation-state
- The connectedness between historical processes affecting a region and its political trends, cultural visions and economic ideas extending beyond the boundaries of single states and societies

The core question is whether or not and in what way a regional perspective

forthcoming in Mario Sznajder, Luis Roniger and Carlos Forment, eds. *Shifting Frontiers of Citizenship in Latin America*, 2012, in preparation.

7 Eduardo Mendieta, "Remapping Latin American Studies: Postcolonialism, subaltern studies, post-Occidentalism and Globalization Theory", in Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jáuregui eds., *Coloniality at Large. Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, pp. 287-306.

may be more valuable to the analyses of societies and politics in the Americas. This discussion will be based on the findings of several recent studies. I will address this question by focusing on the findings of several recent studies.

First, a regional perspective may be instrumental in bridging existing gaps separating the societies of Latin America in terms of their separate languages, e.g. separating Brazil from Spanish America. Some years ago, historian Barbara Weinstein called attention to the ongoing tension in the field of Latin American history between Spanish America and Portuguese America, asking to what extent they together constitute a coherent subject of study.⁸ In spite of Brazil being the largest, most populous, wealthiest and most highly industrialized country, Weinstein indicated that at least among historians, Brazilianists often bemoan the reluctance of most Spanish Americanists to fully integrate Brazil into their analyses. Several factors have contributed to this. Among them is the rather idiosyncratic character of the post-colonial experience in Brazil, revealed by its relative lack of territorial fragmentation; the intensification of plantation economies and slavery (Brazil was the last nation in the Americas to end slavery in 1888); and the structure of Imperial Brazil which differed from that of the Republican Spanish-speaking countries.

These factors, among others, have led observers of Brazil to view the study of that country differently from the studies of Spanish-speaking Americas. Yet, as Weinstein showed, we lose much in limiting the discussion in colonial/postcolonial studies to specific subaltern groups – mostly the indigenous populations in most of Spanish America – rather than addressing broader frameworks and the often blurred categories and conventional boundaries. The dilemmas implied in the construction of national identities and their implications for the marginalization of subaltern groups have been shared across the continental divide between Brazil and Spanish America and beyond specificities due to the demographic composition of the countries. Weinstein discusses, for instance, parallels in the negotiation of inclusion and exclusion that in early post-colonial times followed the

8 Barbara Weinstein, "Erecting and Erasing Boundaries: Can We Combine the "Indo" and the "Afro" in Latin American Studies?" *Estudios interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, 19, 1 (2008): 129-144.

same logic in Portuguese-speaking and Spanish-speaking territories. In Brazil, for example, free persons of color asserted their rights as citizens and resisted the racialization of political status while acquiescing to the limits of citizenship in the form of slavery, much like mestizo and Ladino populations in the Andes or Central America resisted policies that would reduce them to the same status as indigenous populations. By approaching the two situations with a shared analytical framework, new understandings of state and nation-building can be achieved. Historically, there have been periods of intense interaction and, at least between 1580-1640, a generation-long period of unification and connected histories.⁹ By the 18th and 19th centuries, Brazil and Hispanic America seemed to be moving in contrasting directions, but even then there were shared challenges and problems, such as the issues of unity and fragmentation, of regional rebellions and established order.¹⁰ By the late 19th century, Brazil renewed the century-long tradition of cross-national gazes and dialogues with Hispanic America. As analyzed by Ori Preuss in a recent book, the end of slavery and the fall of the empire led Brazilians to rediscover, reflect and reconstruct sameness and difference with their neighbors.¹¹ Later on, waves of democratic expansion and political closure and repression ensued. This was followed by confrontations with authoritarian rule and the return of democracy, which took place concurrently with transnational occurrences as illustrated by the involvement of both Brazil and its neighbors in the Operation Condor from 1975 to the 1980s; the networks of exiles and advocacy networks of solidarity, or the endorsement of human rights and constitutional reforms after re-democratization.¹²

9 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Holding the World in Balance: The Connected Histories of the Iberian Overseas Empires, 1500–1640." *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 112, 5 (2007): 1359-1385

10 Manuel Correia de Andrade, *As raízes do separatismo no Brasil*. Sao Paulo: Editora UNESP and Editora da Universidade do Sagrado Coração, 1998.

11 Ori Preuss, *Bridging the Island. Brazilians' Views of Spanish America and Themselves, 1865-1912*. Orlando: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2011.

12 See among others, Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder, *The Legacy of Human Rights Violations in the Southern Cone: Argentina, Chile and Uruguay*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 and Portuguese edition by Editora Perspectiva of Brazil in 2004; Vania Markarian, *Left in Transformation: Uruguayan exiles and the Latin American Human Rights Networks, 1967-1984*. New York: Routledge, 2005; and

Second, a regional perspective may consider transnational dimensions more than a secluded country-by-country approach. These dimensions are often crucial in defining the realm of the national in ways that do not endorse essentialism but rather reconstruct the evolving meanings of being national as connected to the transnational. A classic example, based on a study published recently,¹³ is that of Central America. From a geopolitical perspective, the Isthmus is a region composed of small republics standing in relative proximity to one another and thus prone to influences of political processes in the neighboring societies and polities. Moreover, the core states of Central America trace their origins back to the disintegration of a single state, established in the early 19th century, on the basis of a previous colonial jurisdiction. Accordingly, research can trace the parallel processes of construction of separate nation-state identities and the intricate transnational connections with the other states in the region. This is crucial for understanding past developments and envisioning the future of that region. In transnational terms, Central America stands out since most of the states in the region were born out of a shared colonial administrative jurisdiction and a short-lived attempt at unification following independence, with long lasting effects on the ways these countries have strived to construct their national identities and idiosyncrasies and develop their distinctiveness, while at the same time being unable to completely disengage themselves from the sister republics of the Isthmus.

Indeed, in Central America as elsewhere in Spanish America, most states emerged as a consequence of imperial disintegration, which in the great majority of the cases had initially been structured on previous colonial administrative jurisdictions. As such, states were destined to eventually create nations, attempting to “render them real” through the use of official accounts and rituals, the elaboration of hegemonic material and symbolic practices, and the structuring of images of peoplehood, connected to spatial and temporal boundaries. Such strategies of nation building involved the partitioning of territories that once belonged to the same political entity; the

James N. Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

13 Luis Roniger, *Transnational Politics in Central America*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011.

formation of limited membership, and the delineation of borders organized according to principles of national sovereignty.¹⁴ The creation of nations also implicated systems of cultural representation which legitimized or delegitimized the access of different sectors and people to the resources of the nation-state.¹⁵

Once separate, the 19th century republics faced the dual task of consolidating their territorial control and domination, while constructing a sense of collective identity through their policies, practices and ceremonies. They had to define and create national membership and boundaries, which implied recognizing certain categories of citizenship as paramount, while replacing, ignoring or denying – without fully eradicating – earlier forms of identification, including the pan-isthmian identity, and subsuming more localized and ethnic identities. This process of nation-building, shared in its generic traits by many states worldwide, became convoluted and protracted in Central America, as the new states could hardly elicit a sense of being part of an ‘imagined community’ in the population. For decades after their independence, the states of Central America could not consolidate their boundaries and avoid a dynamic of regional intervention. The interference came from quasi-private armies driven by the prospects of taking power in their own home region or another region, disregarding borders and state jurisdictions. Rebels in one area were supported by allies in the neighboring states, willing to topple those in power and facilitate the rise to power of political forces sympathetic to their own regional designs.

What could be interpreted as “invasions” from a contemporary perspective were at that time considered as mere advances of forces willing to change constellations of power and in some cases, define state boundaries anew. The wars that ensued were not seen as “national” wars or “anti-imperialist” wars. All political forces shared the understanding that these were internal, fratricidal wars. It would take external threats and interventions to generate a ‘national’ interpretation of the struggle for independence. Yet, initially, even the sense of national struggle was in

14 Ana María Alonso, “The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism, and Ethnicity”. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23 (1994): 379-405.

15 Anupama Mande, “Subaltern Studies and the Historiography of the Sandinista-Miskitu Conflict in Nicaragua, 1979–1990.” Paper presented at LASA 2000 Congress [lasa.international.pitt.edu/Lasa2000/Mande.PDF] (11 July 2008)

fact embedded in the transnational resistance to external intervention and threats. Overshadowing the construction of sovereign realms and separate identities were common origins, which left a legacy of cross-national networks of kinship, economic, social and political ties and an image of an alternative project of regional nation-building. Individuals could rely on such an image when relocating to sister-countries or challenging current institutional arrangements and political divisions. From the perspective of the symbolic enactment of separate national identities, primordiality – in the form of ethnicity or race – was secondary to the political and civic strategies adopted while constructing nationhood. From early on, elites were fully aware that local identification existed, but there were no strong dividing lines separating republics from one another or portraying others as unalterably different. Moreover, the way in which these states declared independence implied that they could not envision their collective identity as naturally given, but rather as a civic accomplishment. In the case of the republics of the Isthmus, this process of nation-building was complicated because of their shared origins, the complex process of promulgation of independence, and the protracted mutual involvement of each state in the affairs of its neighbors.

The case of Central America analyzed here draws attention to the importance of keeping a regional perspective as a basis for the analysis of specific countries. The above case reveals the impact of a transnational set of factors, which made it hard to even promulgate clear-cut, joint or separate independence dates. Time and again – and the case of William Walker in the mid-19th century is the first of a series of such critical junctures in the history of the region – the national became embedded in the transnational dimension. The transnational realm supported and superseded the meaning of being part of a nation in the Isthmus. Thus, for instance, Walker's intervention led to a war that was fought by what today we would define as a "transnational" alliance of nationals of all Isthmian countries against Walker, while paradoxically – or perhaps not, since it fitted the logic of state claims – this war became known in Isthmian historiography as "the National War." The transnational dimension of the struggle was so evident that it was symbolically appropriated by several of these emerging nations in a way that individual states could not completely obliterate the transnational angle as an underlining current of narrative and symbolic representation.

Consequently, the fight only rekindled the tension-ridden process of disengagement of the states and crystallizing nations with the persistence of the transnational dimension of their existence in the Isthmus.

This transnational perspective is also important in contemplating the role of states and societies in contemporary sociological and political studies of recent processes of globalization and trans-state migration, human trafficking, and criminal networks. A case in point is the study of transnational criminal networks illustrated by the immigration of the *maras* to the US during the period of the civil wars in the Isthmus. After being socialized into crime in the US, the *maras* returned to the Isthmian societies to utilize their new knowledge and their transnational contacts for the establishment of networks crossing nation-state boundaries. Combating this effort required a transnational approach on the part of the states in order to control their social and political impact. Central American countries entered into agreements to carry out transnational practices of containment and regulation. In January 2004, officials of Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic began to construct a criminal database to better track the movements of the criminal organizations within the region. In June 2004, at a Summit of Presidents, the Salvadoran president proposed a Central American Security Plan (the “Plan Centro América Segura”), to be conceived as part of the Integration System of Central America (SICA) and aimed at combating the perils of terrorism, narco-trafficking and related crimes. In April 2005 an “Anti-Mara Summit” was held at SICA, attended also by the United States and Mexico. Countries agreed to joint actions to be performed within countries, pooling of resources and overcoming limitations imposed by each country’s internal laws and limited resources. The ability of the Central American states to cooperate beyond the economic realm, where they carried out a lifting of custom regulations is dependent upon long term memories, suspicions and commitments none of which can be reduced to economic processes, despite their importance. Social orientations, political culture in a broad sense – which includes narrative constructions, discourse and practices – and institutional design are also central to such an inquiry of transnationalism, in Central America and elsewhere.¹⁶

16 For a broader analysis, see Roniger, *Transnational Politics in Central America* (footnote 13).

A third important aspect in suggesting the relevance of a regional approach to Iberoamerica – including the Jewish communities – is the connection between historical processes affecting a region and the character of political trends, cultural visions, economic ideas, etc. beyond the boundaries of single states and societies. The study of political exiles shows that individuals forced to relocate in the region have made important contributions to the redrafting of national and continental visions. By being forced to leave the territory of a national state and claiming they were the true representatives of the national spirit, they have repeatedly redefined what it meant to be a national of the country of origin, and at times have pushed the conception of the national beyond established borders – as in the cases of Martí, Betances and Eugenio María de Hostos in the Caribbean – or even created the image of Latin America, as seen from Europe, as in the case of Tomás Caicedo and the Parisian exile community.¹⁷ From this perspective, research may also follow the relevance of studying processes taking place in macro-regions within the Americas, such as the Andean or the Caribbean regions to mention two examples. For instance, historian Barry Carr has recently suggested the relevance of studying the activities of radical activists and insurgent intellectual exiles in the 1920s-1940s on a regional span he defines as the Circum-Caribbean. He defines that region as “a space that crosses not only national but also language boundaries embracing all of Central America not just the Caribbean coastal countries such as Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama and Nicaragua. This involves developing a new cartography that gives sufficient weight to contestation and resistance and challenges the positivist logic of previous mapping frameworks.” Carr indicates that the major challenge derives from the question of how to map cultural, social, and economic movements over time. In his study, he justifies the spatial boundaries he established on the grounds that throughout their travels in that region, the revolutionaries and activists constructed networks not grounded in nation states, and that many of them held internationalist world-views and created transnational commitments. On the one hand, the revolutionaries and intellectuals were driven by a wide range of anti-capitalist ideas including socialism, communism, anarchism

17 Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, *The Politics of Exile in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

and even spiritualism resisting what they saw as the oppressive nation-states. At the same time, however, they decided to be active and construct transnational commitment *in* that region, as clearly shown in the cases of Augusto César Sandino or Farabundo Martí, to mention only two known figures (Carr 2012). While questioning the tendency to fixate borders, Carr reaffirms the relevance of pursuing a regional perspective as determined by his object of study:

The insular Caribbean is certainly at the center of the region, but the Caribbean also borders on Central America along southeastern Mexico (especially the state of Yucatán and the territory of Quintana Roo), while the ocean spaces also include the Gulf of Mexico (note the importance of port cities like Tampico and Veracruz), as well as parts of the western Atlantic; Havana is not a Caribbean city after all. While a very large part of this space lies in close proximity to the ocean, it also includes areas such as Mexico City located far away from the sea but is engaged in constant dialog with Caribbean social, political and economic networks. Is Circum-Caribbean, then, an appropriate descriptor of the region? There is, of course, a long tradition of seeing the Circum-Caribbean as a zone of rich transnational cultural interaction where several European powers have been colonial masters. The region is characterized by a huge, diverse African diaspora in addition to the impact of colonialism and imperialism. It is a pioneer site of transnational capital in the banana, tropical fruit and sugar sectors, and in their associated enclave societies. All of these factors shaped the political, economic and cultural forms that would eventually transpire in transnational resistance and exile networking.¹⁸

Similarly, one can look for historical connectedness beyond the boundaries of an Iberian, Latin or Anglo-Saxon America. It is not by chance that major shifts in the history of Latin America can be understood in terms of the ambiguous policies led by the US, especially in the century after its rise to hegemonic status in the Western hemisphere in the 1890s, and until the challenges which have been launched to its status since the late 1990s.¹⁹

18 Barry Carr, “‘Across Seas and Borders’: Charting the Webs of Radical Internationalism in the Circum-Caribbean”, forthcoming in Luis Roniger, James N. Green and Pablo Yankelevich, eds *Exile and the Politics of Exclusion in the Americas*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2011, pp. 222-226.

19 Luis Roniger, “U.S. Hemispheric Hegemony and the Descent into Genocidal Practices

One unfortunate part of this interconnectedness was the role of the US in the training and indoctrination of Latin American officers in the Doctrine(s) of National Security, which resulted in the repression of citizens led by military regimes in South and Central America in the 1970s and 1980s and resulted in a legacy of human rights violations in the reconstructed democracies of the region.²⁰

The above mentioned factors also have clear implications for the study of Iberoamerican Jewish communities.

First, these factors contribute to an understanding of the processes that Latin American Jewry has experienced as part of historic connections and strategic bridges established beyond state borders as well as between and within communities and sub-communities. An example of this is the construction of varied notions of community which Jews have experienced reflecting the changing character of their orientations within the different contexts of their life. The work of Margalit Bejerano illustrates the importance of this broader framework of analysis. In her work, Bejerano made important contributions to the reconstruction of the Sephardic Diaspora in Latin America. An interesting dimension that needs to be explored in a trans-state context is whether or not and in what way these Jews bridged the multiplicity of religious rites and communal framework that carried on the heritage of multiple communities of origin in the Middle East and North Africa. If, indeed, their patterns of communal organization differed from that of Ashkenazim in that they remained more centrifugal and may be defined not by one hyphen but by two (e.g. as Moroccan-Venezuelan-Jewish, or Damascene-Mexican-Jewish), this dynamic cuts across the borders of specific countries, to constitute a focus of analysis of wider characteristics and implications. Similarly, a perspective beyond specific countries may be necessary to understand why the most orthodox communities of Syrian or North African descent have been strongly identified with the town or city of origin of their founders, while the Ladino-speakers have been more

in Latin America”, in Marcia Esparza, Daniel Feierstein and Henry Huttenbach eds. *State Violence and Genocide in Latin America: The Cold War Years*. New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 23-43.

20 Roniger and Sznajder, *The Legacy of Human Rights Violations* (note 12); Cecilia Menjivar, and Nestor Rodríguez, eds. *When States Kill. Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.

lax in their religious behavior and more open to intermingle with other communal groups.²¹ Was it a matter of size, being the number of Ladino-speakers smaller than that of Arabic-speakers? Was it a matter of structural conditions and interaction with other Jewish and non-Jewish minorities and non-minority groups? Was it a matter of transference of the millet structure from the Ottoman Empire, as Bejerano herself suggested in another paper?²² These are issues that can be discussed through an analysis of historic connections and strategic bridges established beyond state borders as well as between and within communities and sub-communities.

Another fruitful avenue of research could emphasize the evolving meanings of being national as connected to the transnational. One such illustration can be found in the recent study of Raanan Rein and Mollie Lewis which appeared in the journal “Israel” published by Moroccan Jews in Argentina in the early 20th century showing that through a publication in Spanish – that projected the symbolic value of Israel through an instrumental use of the Zionist imagery –, the editors who were a minority within a minority were creating bridges across sub-communal lines (e.g. between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews); integrating into Argentina, a society of immigrants; and reaching out to Jewish communities throughout Latin America.²³

The work of Judit Bokser Liwerant on the Jewish community of Mexico and the impact of successive changes on its political environment is another good example of the heuristic value of this approach. In her work, she shows how being national and being transnational affect one another in changing ways. The multiplicity of layers of identity is constantly reconstructed as at least some Mexican Jews perceive themselves and are perceived by others as part of a Jewish transnational world and, at the same time, constantly

- 21 Margalit Bejerano, “Sephardic Communities in Latin America – Past and Present”. *Judaica Latinoamericana*, No. V. Jerusalem: AMILAT and Magnes Press, 2005, pp. 9-26.
- 22 Margalit Bejerano, “Los turcos en Iberoamérica: El legado del *millet*.” In Raanan Rein ed. *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica. Similitudes, diferencias y tensiones*. Sevilla: Fundación Tres Culturas, 2008, pp. 39-58.
- 23 Raanan Rein and Mollie Lewis, “Judíos, árabes, sefardies, sionistas y argentinos: el caso del periódico *Israel*.” In Raanan Rein ed. *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica. Similitudes, diferencias y tensiones*. Sevilla: Fundación Tres Culturas, 2008, pp. 83-116.

search for sources of legitimacy as full residents and citizens of Mexico. Bokser shows that at times the tense interplay between such layers of identity has acted as a subtext of antagonistic and hostile expressions against Israel and the Jews, thus limiting the scope of participation of Jews in the national public sphere. Such was the situation when Mexico under President Echeverria supported the binomial coupling of Zionism and Racism at the UN in 1975. Furthermore, in the early 1990s the image of Israel was further smeared as an expansionist and militarist force supposedly responsible for the wars and conflicts in the Middle East. Bokser shows that the long term impact of this dynamic of de-legitimization of a core identity linked to Israel, connected to changes in the legal status and legitimacy of religion in the national public sphere, were reflected in shifts in the centrality of religiosity and observance as markers of identity of Jews in Mexico.²⁴ The extent to which these shifts, which have been replicated across the Jewish world, are the result of communal, national, and transnational forces is a fascinating topic that needs to be addressed in a complementary way, of synergy, leaving either-or approaches behind.

The same direction of research can and should be replicated within the study of specific local situations. For instance, in a recent study, Mauricio Dimant has shown that in Patagonia, Jews were part of a much larger group of “turcos,” sharing certain patterns of regional insertion and contributing in much the same way as the Christian Arabs and the Moslem Arabs to the development and the public spheres of the region. Rather than ‘being’ Jews, Chaim Darmun, Bernardo Goldzveig, Jacobo Eddi, Abraham Breider or Simon Arazi were as much part of a transnational group of *turcos* as they were Patagonians and Argentineans, similarly to non-Jews as the Sapag or the Saade families.²⁵

24 Judit Bokser Liwerant, “Fuentes de legitimación de la presencia judía en México: El voto positivo de México a la ecuación sionismo=racismo y su impacto sobre la comunidad judía”. *Judaica Latinoamericana*, No. III. Jerusalem: AMILAT and Magnes Press, 1997, pp. 319-349; and Judit Bokser Liwerant, “Latin American Jewish Identities: Past and Present Challenges. The Mexican Case in Comparative Perspective”, in Judit Bokser Liwerant, Eliezer Ben Rafael, Yossef Gorni and Raanan Rein, eds. *Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism*. Boston: Brill, 2008, pp. 81-108.

25 Mauricio Dimant, “Participación política e identidad: árabes cristianos, árabes

It is important to be aware that trends such as these need to be analyzed in a comparative framework, which may reveal various patterns of construction of identities. This will enable us to make sense of Dimant's study when looking at another study by Leonardo Senkman, in which he shows that elsewhere in Argentina, Jews and Arabs maintained different patterns of communal organization, which with the passing of time and the impact of transnational events – primarily the conflict in the Middle East – would lead to greater separation. . . Senkman shows that since the 1970s the descendants of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants have undergone a process of pan-Arab re-“ethnicitization.” This process also occurred on a different scale among Jews, where gradually the descendants of immigrants from Aleppo, Syria, have become “Sephardic”.²⁶

Within such perspective bridging and connecting multiple layers of identity and benefitting from cross-group comparisons (as suggested almost a decade ago by Jeff Lesser²⁷) and transnational approaches, the process of reconstitution of ethnic identities promises to remain an important focus of analysis in years to come.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the need to reinforce and combine comparative-historical and transnational research. Elsewhere, I have analyzed in greater detail the growing analytical relevance of these perspectives.²⁸ As indicated there, these perspectives stem from the move to world history and the criticism such a move has generated by supporters of historical distinctiveness, which dialectically opened the way for bringing comparative analysis and transfer studies closer to the analysis of transnational interactions.

musulmanes y judíos de países árabes en la Patagonia (1930-1942)”. In Raanan Rein ed. *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica. Similitudes, diferencias y tensiones*. Sevilla: Fundación Tres Culturas, 2008, pp. 159-180.

26 Leonardo Senkman, “Identidad y asociacionismo de sirios, libaneses y ‘jálabes’ en Argentina”, in Raanan Rein ed. *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica. Similitudes, diferencias y tensiones*. Sevilla: Fundación Tres Culturas, 2008, pp. 181-221.

27 Jeffrey Lesser, “Jewish Brazilians or Brazilian Jews? A reflection on Brazilian Ethnicity”. *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 19, 3 (2001): 65-72.

28 Luis Roniger, “Connected Histories, Power and Meaning: Transnational Forces in the Construction of Collective Identities”. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 11, 3 (2011): 251-268.

Such a change was suggested by scholars such as Sanjay Subrahmanyam, who focused on the study of connected histories, primarily but not exclusively in imperial colonial times,²⁹ or what Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann have called *histoire croisée*.³⁰ Such a turn is neither fully determined by the whims and primacy of developed countries' geopolitical priorities and visions, nor driven fully by globalization.

Social constructivism has also been instrumental in drawing attention to transnational practices as analyzed by Craig Calhoun and Emanuel Adler³¹, among others, and those feminist works such as those led a generation ago by Adrienne Rich³² around the seminal notion of a 'politics of location'.

Such a transnational turn has also been shaped by anti-colonial and post-colonial scholarship, contributing to the analysis of "units that spill over and seep through national borders, units both greater and smaller than the nation-state."³³

For the reasons mentioned above a call to broaden our perspective toward the regional and transnational might sound superfluous at this time. The study of Iberoamerica has long been established as a multi-disciplinary domain, as reflected in academic positions, research and publications, professional associations and meetings.³⁴ Likewise, the increase in the

- 29 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia" *Modern Asian Studies*, 31, 3 (1997):735-762; and Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- 30 Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity." *History and Theory*, 45 (2006): 30-50.
- 31 Craig Calhoun, "Social Theory and the Politics of Identity", in idem, ed. *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, pp. 9-36; and Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground" (note 4).
- 32 Adrienne Rich (1986) Rich, Adrienne. 1986. "Notes towards a Politics of Location", in *Blood, Bread and Poetry*. New York: Norton, pp. 210-231.
- 33 Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method and the Transnational Turn". *Radical History Review*, 91 (2005): 62-92. See also: "The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History." Special Issue of the *Journal of American History*, 86, 3 (1999): 948-1307, especially pp. 965-975.
- 34 For a historical contextualization of the emergence of Latin American Studies in the USA, see Mark Berger, "Civilizing the South: The US Rise to Hegemony in the Americas and the Root of 'Latin American Studies' 1898-1945". *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 12, 1 (1993): 1-48.

number of international and transnational associations – which may be seen as a way to confront increasingly challenging global issues – also reflect a partial move away from excessive attention to frameworks of analysis demarcated by the borders of nation-states. Moreover, in the global era in which we live there is increasing awareness both of our complex and multilayered personal identities as well as the interdependence of societies and nations, and of the growing centrality of transnational trends. So, is this call superfluous?

In revising the first six volumes of *Judaica Latinoamericana*, ranging from 1988 to 2009, I discovered that the first volume contained far more essays attempting to conduct analyses beyond a single case study than we find in later years, regardless of the specific focus of study. This is not to underestimate the relevance of in depth case studies, and *volume VI* (2009) presents some fascinating historical, sociological and literary case studies. Yet, I contend that Latin American Jewish studies will be able to assume a position of relevance at the forefront of contributions to Iberoamerican and Jewish research once they connect to the larger canvass: that of regional, comparative and transnational perspectives. It is from those perspectives that we as researchers may be best suited to analyze many of the challenges, connected histories and diffusion of networks, movements and ideas – those of Jews included – that often move across and beyond state borders and supersede time and again, without obliterating, the discrete conception of national citizenship in Iberoamerica. Much of this analysis still lies ahead. The preceding analysis, however, may provide some preliminary indications of the relevance of moving in that direction.