

# **NATIONAL UNIQUENESS AND TRANSNATIONAL PARALLELISM: REFLECTIONS ON THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN LATIN AMERICA**

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## **Resumen**

Paralelamente a importantes avances en la investigación sobre los judíos de América Latina, se ha desarrollado un animado debate sobre sus métodos y su contenido. Este artículo responde a una crítica según la cual la investigación realizada en el pasado ignoraba al sector de la población judía institucionalmente no afiliado, no enfocaba suficientemente los aspectos nacionales de la identificación judía dentro de los países estudiados, y no destacaba las comparaciones de los judíos con otras minorías y con comunidades judías de otros lugares. Basándose en un número de estudios panorámicos locales y datos cuantitativos recabados en varios países, este artículo analiza tres temas principales relevantes para el judaísmo latinoamericano: el desenvolvimiento de la emigración judía, la propensión hacia y la prevalencia de identidades nacionales o transnacionales, y el carácter nacional o transnacional de detallados paradigmas de identificación judía. Sustanciales pruebas empíricas muestran que la investigación social con criterios científicos ciertamente incluyó a los no afiliados. Los factores nacionales aparecen jugando un importante rol en la vida de los judíos en países de América Latina, pero las pautas transnacionales tendían a predominar en el desenvolvimiento de la migración internacional, en la elección de las identidades colectivas preponderantes y en la mayor complejidad de la estructura interna de la identificación judía. Antes de imaginar un enfrentamiento entre escuelas científicas, el autor sugiere que la investigación futura sobre

las comunidades judías latinoamericanas se realice en el marco de un esfuerzo genuinamente multidisciplinario.

### **Research paradigms: history, literature and the social sciences**

Along with significant advancements in the uncovering and interpreting of major facts and changes in the lives of Jews in Latin America,<sup>1</sup> studying the Jewish experience on the continent stands at the center of a lively historiographical and social science debate. Critical views about the main thrust of existing scholarship<sup>2</sup> have addressed five main issues worthy of elucidation, which are all related to the national or transnational character of our subject matter in one way or another:

1. Is there a preferred disciplinary approach to the study of Jews on the Latin American continent: historical, literary or social science; qualitative or quantitative?
2. Are there available works of literature capable of assessing the Jewish experience in Latin America broadly and neutrally, covering both the affiliated and the non-affiliated segments of the Jewish population?
3. Does Jewish regional particularity exist? How are the social-structural and cultural-identification patterns of Latin American Jews similar to or different from those of other ethno-religious groups on the continent?
4. How are the social-structural and cultural-identification patterns of Latin American Jewry similar to or different from those of other Jewish communities worldwide?
5. Is there a geographical analytic framework capable of providing the truer picture of Latin American Jews: *national* within a given country

- 1 Haim Avni, Judit Bokser Liwerant, Sergio DellaPergola, Margalit Bejarano, Leo Senkman (coords.) *Pertenencia y alteridad – Judíos en/de América Latina: cuarenta años de cambios*, Madrid-Frankfurt am Main-Orlando FL 2011.
- 2 See, e.g., Raanan Rein, *Argentina, Israel y los judíos: Encuentros y desencuentros, mitos y realidades*, Buenos Aires 2001; Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, “Challenging Particularity, Jews as a Lens on Latin American Ethnicity”, *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 1, 2 (September 2006): 249–263; Raanan Rein (coord.) *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica*, Sevilla 2008.

of residence, or *transnational* within a broader comparative context? Indeed, a high profile discussion on hyphenated identities has involved a comparison between two rival definitions of the subjects at stake: *Latin-American-Jews*, or *Jewish-Latin-Americans*?<sup>3</sup> This is not a trivial issue if we assume – as required by the standard rules of language – that nouns prevail over adjectives in determining the principal nature of a representation.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing of these queries concerns the alleged superiority of one investigative discipline over another. Such claims often elicit dissatisfaction with the substantive conclusions reached in studies using a given investigative method rather than with the method itself. This often masks a subtler claim that one particular narrative of the given events or situation is better than another. In light of these claims, it obviously appears that no truly satisfactory study of human society can rely exclusively on one investigative method or discipline to the exclusion of others. For example, the historical approach identifies and analyzes the main object of investigation with documentary evidence which is limited by the selective preservation of the evidence available. Despite good intentions, what has been included cannot be said to be strictly representative of all the possible events that actually occurred, and much of what has not left traces in archives or in other depositories cannot be demonstrably said not to have happened. Historians usually overcome some of these difficulties by using multiple sources of documentation and by cross-referencing their documentary evidence with other types of evidence. All in all, good historiography can claim a fair amount of objectivity, paradoxically because of the contradictory fact that the (partial) documentation available tends to be affected at one and the same time by systematic bias and by randomness. Thus, authors working seriously are not really in full command of their sources or therefore, of their findings.

3 Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein (eds.), *Rethinking Jewish Latin-Americans*, Albuquerque 2008; Raanan Rein, *Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines? Essays on Ethnicity, Identity and Diaspora*, Leiden and Boston 2010; Judit Bokser-Liwierant, Sergio DellaPergola, Haim Avni, Margalit Bejarano, Leo Senkman, «Cuarenta años de cambio: transiciones y paradigmas,» in Avni et al. *Pertenencia y alteridad* (see note 1), pp. 11-83.

4 The ordering of noun and adjective is reverse in Spanish and English.

Another relevant scholarly branch – literary studies – does not claim the objectivity of historiography. The advantage of literature possibly rests on the greater depth of its insight and introspection it allows itself, not necessarily based on real empirical observation of the society and the individuals it depicts. In ways different from but parallel to historiography, literary writings provide insights into society by focusing on notable persons who have either left traces across time, or whose uniquely imagined characteristics are deemed to be remarkable enough to be chosen for representation.

In contrast, social science relies primarily on repeatability of events and situations which it tends to reduce and to synthesize in the form of social theory. Social theory relies on the continuous mutual feedback of newly accrued empirical observations within the vast pool of accumulated wisdom. Social science, more than historiography and literature, claims some predictability of human events, but constantly and readily corrects its predictions in light of newly incorporated evidence. Inasmuch as it relies on vast collections of quantifiable data, social science tends to describe society by focusing on a neutral mass of individuals whose characteristics are neither known in advance nor considered worthy to be singled out or even documented. Societal patterns emerge from the modest contribution of each of many combined anonymous actors rather than from the notable features of a few protagonists. The disadvantage of such an approach is that only occasional large-scale systematic and usable databases exist concerning the past. Concerning the present, such databases can be created but they require costly investments which are not always feasible. Perhaps more notably, important dimensions of internal differences within the human collective are lost, namely character and leadership, or the more intimate individual linkages between personal background and measurable behaviors.

Two further issues in Latin American Jewish studies should be addressed from the different disciplinary perspectives mentioned. The first is: Who is considered to be Jewish and what issues or institutions are to be included in Jewish research? A common thread of the various disciplines is the singling out of the peculiarity of Jewish minority status and its distance, if any, from the norms of the majority. But there are also disciplinary differences. Historiography will probably limit its focus to sources of documentation which are Jewish in nature and investigate persons or institutions which are known or alleged to be Jewish. Criteria for inclusion on these grounds

are not usually specified beforehand and they are often left to explicit self-reference, or to commonsense, or to the investigator's intuition. In literary creation and critique, criteria for inclusion tend to be even more subjective and elusive. Literature often tends to stress marginality of personae and situations, but this does not imply symmetric inclusion criteria. For example, a figure who simultaneously nurtures a Jewish and a Catholic identity will most likely be included as relevant in a review of Jewish literature, but is much less likely to be mentioned in a review of Catholic literature. In the social sciences the definition of who is Jewish will often be adjudicated on the basis of predetermined definitions, the definitions themselves being open to considerable normative or operational variation.

The second question is: Who is considered to be Latin American and what topics or institutions are to be included in Latin American research? Here perhaps there may be fewer differences among disciplines. Each of the major disciplines can, and indeed does address situations occurring primarily within the geographical boundaries of the continent and its constituent countries. However, extensions outside of the continent are possible as a consequence of emigration from Latin America and the follow-up of migrants in their new locations. The continuity or interruption and loss of Latin American culture and identity, the patterns of adaptation, the sense of being at home or in exile in a growingly transnational context constitute rich and increasingly important research themes.

One variable that cannot be ignored and tends to play a growing role in determining the *Jewishhood* or *Latinamericanhood* of a given analytic or imaginative essay, is the personal profile of authors and their degree of involvement with or detachment from the subject of the tale. In literary production, indeed, more than the plot or the central actors, the main Jewish clue may sometimes be the author. In history or social science, on the other hand, the birthplaces and the places of professional training and current employment in or outside Latin America may be less significant although not altogether negligible. For example, in a recent volume the aim of which is setting the pace of Latin American Jewish studies,<sup>5</sup> one of eleven contributing experts teaches at a University in Latin America. The other ten all live and work elsewhere and, consciously or not, share the collective

5 Lesser and Rein (see note 1).

experience of having left their Latin American countries of origin / training / inspiration at some point in their lives, which may be a significant factor in their approach to the continent and its Jewish personification. In another major collective work on Latin American Jewry,<sup>6</sup> out of thirty living authors at least ten currently live and work in Latin America which *prima facie* seems a more promising division of labor between insiders and outsiders, between direct and indirect witnesses, between national and transnational authors.

It naturally stems from these various considerations that in an ideal investigative scheme, multiple authors and multidisciplinary observations should be integrated, drawing from the inherent advantages of different personal experiences and different research angles. This would enable correcting any inherent methodological disadvantage inherent in a single approach incorporating internal and external observations of the Latin American Jewish experience. This approach also should apply to the debate about how to represent Jewish society in general, beyond the specific case of Jews in the Latin American context.

In this paper we explore three substantive questions and try to offer some empirical answers from the perspective of the social sciences. The fact that this paper primarily focuses on quantifiable observations should not be construed as a claim of disciplinary superiority but, more modestly, as exemplification of certain strengths and advantages, without denying the simultaneous presence of weaknesses and other disadvantages. Three topics that may reveal the existence of local uniqueness or diffused parallelism across Jewish communities in different Latin American countries are:<sup>7</sup>

6 Avni et al. (see note 1).

7 See Judit Bokser Liwerant, "Being National, Being Transnational: Snapshots of Belonging and Citizenship", in Mario Sznajder, Luis Roniger and Carlos Forment (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers of Citizenship: the Latin American Experience*, Leiden and Boston 2013, pp. 343-366; Leonardo Senkman, "Klal Ysrael at the Frontiers: The Transnational Jewish Experience in Argentina", in Judit Bokser Liwerant, Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Yossi Gorny and Raanan Rein (eds.) *Identities in an Era of Multiculturalism. Latin America in the Jewish World*, Leiden and Boston 2008, pp. 125-150; Luis Roniger, "Identidades colectivas: avances teóricos y desafíos políticos", in Judit Bokser Liwerant and Saúl Velasco Cruz (coords.), *Identidad, sociedad y política*, México, 2008, pp. 45-68. See also by this author: "Autonomy and Dependency: Latin American Jewry in Global Perspective," in Bokser Liwerant et al. (eds.), *Identities*

1. The presence of national or transnational patterns in the unfolding of international migration from selected Latin American countries of origin.
2. The prevalence of national or transnational perceptions of Jewish identification in light of the alternative options offered by general national (non-Jewish) identifications
3. The emerging national or transnational models of Jewish identification, examining more closely the multiple options that underlie one's own Jewish identity.

### **International migration**

Latin America has been notorious as a major destination of Jewish immigration.<sup>8</sup> Jews in Latin American countries created their unique patterns of community life through processes of integration that blended the multiple characteristics of their culture, identification and socio-demographic characteristics in the countries of origin with the opportunities, constraints and social norms offered by the absorbing societies in the respective countries of settlement. After a century of robust Jewish population growth from the second half 19<sup>th</sup> century and through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, in approximately the 1960s the main direction of the flow of Jewish migration reversed and Latin America became an area of net Jewish emigration. Migration reflected a complex interplay of “hold” and “push” factors in countries of residence, and of “pull” and “repel” factors in potential countries of resettlement. Observing the rhythm of emigration from the different Latin American countries provided extremely useful insights on the changing nature of the relationship between Jews and society (see Figure 1). As long as opportunities for mobility were not hindered by law or other political determinants at both ends of a possible migration route, more frequent emigration was

*in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism* (see above), pp. 47-80; “¿Cuántos somos hoy? Investigación y narrativa sobre población judía en América Latina,” in Avni et al. (coords.) *Pertenencia y alteridad* (see note 1), pp. 305-340.

8 Haim Avni, *Argentina and the Jews, A History of Jewish Migration*, Tuscaloosa, Alabama and London 1991.

generally associated with negative factors operating at home, while non-migration reflected more stable conditions.

The data available on Jewish immigration to and emigration from Latin America are far from complete. The single best and most systematic data set is provided by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics which records annual figures on immigrants from each country according to the population definitions established by the Law of Return. According to this law, persons eligible to migrate to Israel and receive immediate Israeli citizenship include Jews, children and grandchildren of Jews and their respective spouses, regardless of the personal Jewish status of the migrants. The law indeed provides a normative definition of who is a Jew but, as noted, it does not limit the right of immigration and citizenship to Jews only. Having thus determined the potential target population, a simple first reading of the data does not reveal the personal characteristics of the migrants, their degree of activism with the Jewish communities in the countries of origin, or their affiliation or non-affiliation with Jewish organizations before emigrating.

The various time-series in Figure 1<sup>9</sup> portray the yearly variation in the number of new immigrants to Israel from around the world including from seven Latin American countries. The numerical scale of the various graphs is different; the goal here being to provide a quick visual impression of the pace of change in each country and to document similarities and differences across countries. Clearly, if the driving force behind emigration was the changing dynamics over time of social forces that operated in Israel, the country graphs would all look more or less similar. It appears, however, that years of the highest or lowest immigration to Israel were quite different for each country. For total immigration to Israel, the peak year was 1949, the time of the first major immigration wave immediately after independence of the State, followed by a secondary peak in 1990 in the aftermath of the opening of the former Soviet Union to nearly unlimited emigration. Regarding each of the Latin American countries of origin, for Chile the dominant peak year was 1970; for Brazil, too, the peak year was 1970, but it was preceded by a secondary peak in 1964; for Uruguay, 1983 with secondary peaks in 1963, 1973, and 2002; for Mexico, 1983 with secondary

9 Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, Jerusalem, yearly.

peaks in 1969-71, 1996, and 2010; for Argentina 2002, preceded by an early peak in 1963 and secondary peaks in 1973, 1977, and 1990; for Venezuela, 2006 preceded by secondary peaks in 1971, 1983, 1996, 2000 and followed by one in 2010; and for Colombia, 2007.

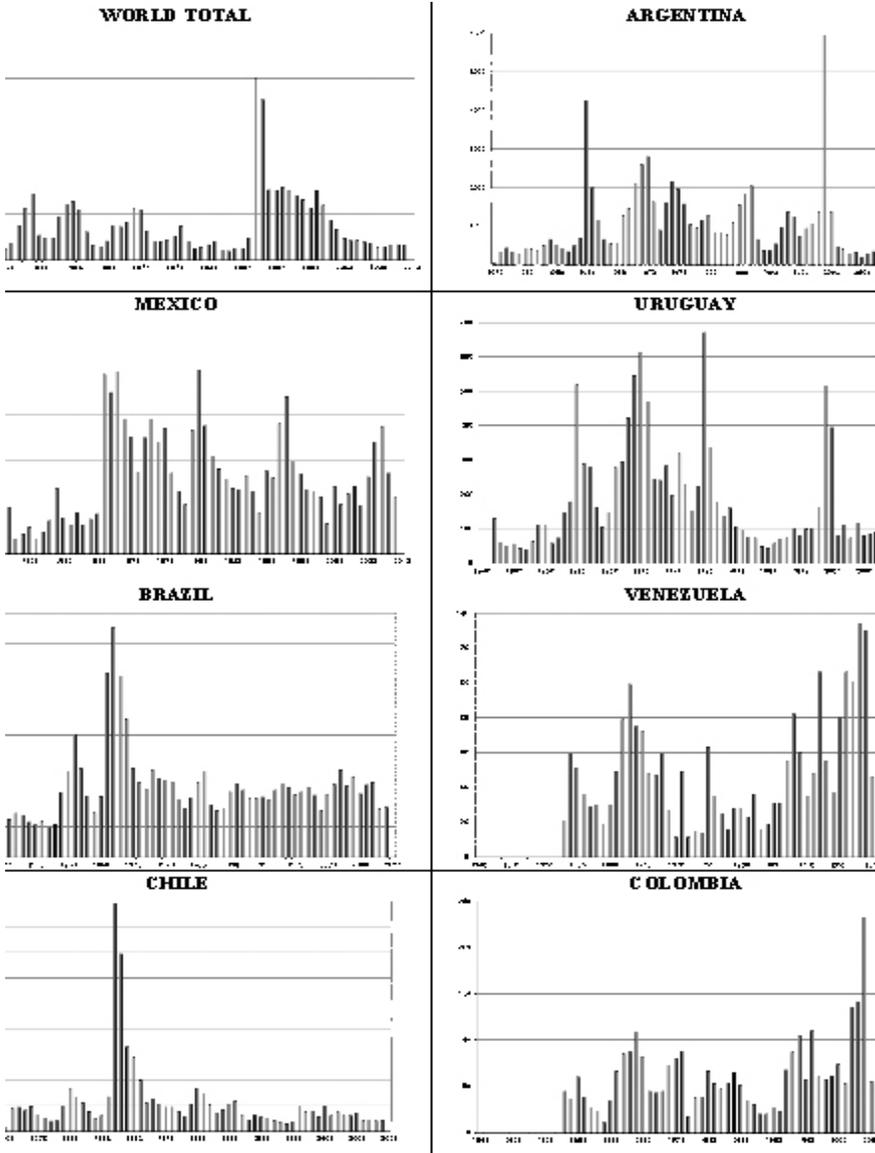
Each country's migration profile very closely represents the succession of years of economic and political stability and instability. In the case of Argentina and Uruguay, some temporal co-variation emerged, but in general each national case was independent and featured its own peculiarities. There is no need here to describe in detail the socioeconomic and political history of the seven countries reported - the country-specific financial crises and military *coups d'état*.

What clearly appeared in each case was the prompt reaction of Jewish migrants facing the variation of periods of relative societal stability and periods of disruption of the existing societal order. The latter coincided with times of sharp downturns in the national economy and, closely related to those, sudden and often violent changes in government, including repeated transitions from the civilian to the military, and vice versa. In two countries, Brazil and especially Chile, these major upheavals visibly occurred only once and produced very significant short-term increases in Jewish emigration that were preceded and followed by relatively low levels of emigration. In other countries, such disturbances occurred repeatedly and generated a wavelike profile of Jewish emigration.

Beyond the diversity between the countries, a basic common thread of migration experiences emerged, namely the dependence of Jewish communities on broad, societal patterns and events shared with the majority of their compatriots in each country, and on which they had very limited influence. Other data not reported here may provide additional insights into the selectivity patterns of Jewish emigration. These include the tendency of the upper socioeconomic strata to be less mobile, or to choose alternatives to Israel – especially the United States or other countries within Latin America such as Venezuela in the past, and more recently, Panama.<sup>10</sup> A better and

10 See Judit Bokser Liwerant, "Latin American Jews in the United States: community and belonging in times of transnationalism," *Contemporary Jewry*, 33, 1 (2013); Batia Siebzehner, "Religión y etnia en la comunidad judía de Panamá," Jerusalem, Liwerant Center, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013, unpublished paper.

**Figure 1**  
**Migration to Israel from Selected Countries**  
**in Latin America Yearly Profiles, 1948-2012**



fuller picture of Jewish international migration could indeed be obtained by creating a full matrix of countries of origin and destination, which is not readily available.<sup>11</sup>

For the purpose of the present discussion, migration data provided powerful evidence of a centrally important phenomenon that operated devoid of any prerequisites regarding the migrants' previous levels of Jewish commitment even though the choice of Israel as the country of destination, in contrast to the existing alternatives, pointed to some pre-constituted ideological propensity among migrants, hence by implication some self-selection bias related to previous patterns of Jewish community involvement. These hypotheses need to be validated but the fact remains that observed migration flows drew from a broad cross-section of the whole Jewish population in Latin American countries.<sup>12</sup> It can be reasonably hypothesized that periods of extreme crisis in the countries of origin increased migration and involved much higher proportions of the non-affiliated than during calmer times. In the latter case, low – and even lower than average – migration from Latin American countries reflected the contextual incentives enjoyed by the better established sections of the Jewish population.<sup>13</sup>

At the macro-social level, patterns of international migration provided good evidence of the uniqueness of individual country experiences. Even so, the impact of the different country profiles can be generalized: since the

- 11 For detailed data on countries of emigration of Jews from Latin America, see Refael Porzecanski, *El Uruguay judío: demografía e identidad*, Montevideo 2005. For data on countries of origin of Jews from Latin America in the United States, see Sergio DellaPergola, *Review of Relevant Demographic Information on World Jewry*. Report submitted to The International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, Jerusalem 2003 (based on special data processing from the United States National Jewish Population Survey 2001).
- 12 Systematic work on Jews in Uruguay and on Jewish migrants from Uruguay in Israel and in other countries worldwide is currently being undertaken by Maya Shorer Kaplan at the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, and at the Liwerant Center for the Study of Latin America, Spain and Portugal and their Jewish Communities at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- 13 Sergio DellaPergola, "International migration of Jews," in Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg (eds.) *Transnationalism: Diasporas and the advent of a new (dis)order*, Leiden and Boston 2009, pp. 213-236.

end of World War II, occasional negative national developments – more than personal motives acted as the main engine to Jewish emigration from Latin American countries – which overall were remarkably more unstable than other western countries with a significant Jewish presence. Such negative forces were common across Latin American countries, starting with internal economic inequality among the highest in the world, with the corollary of very large and diffused economic deprivation, frequently recurring involvement of the military in civil society, a fragile balance between totalitarian and democratically determined governments, Catholic majorities in a religious context witnessing the rapid growth of alternative streams of religious expression and allegiance, and several shared linguistic and cultural traits. Likewise, the societal position of Jewish minorities in the general Latin American context featured important parallelisms: higher than average education and income, specialization in tertiary occupations, concentration in capital cities and other major metropolitan areas, and within these, in specific residential areas, as well as specific patterns of Jewish identification (discussed later in this paper). The exposure of Jews to changing societal conditions conducive to migration tended to be more socially concentrated and uniquely sensitive than among the more diverse total population.

### **National and transnational identification perceptions**

Jewish communities in Latin America all have their roots in a distant past of immigration to the continent. However, having been involved with long-term absorption processes in the socioeconomic and cultural issues of their countries of residence, international migrants, and Jews among them, tended to identify less with this past, and gradually became an integral part of the surrounding society. Without forgetting important inter-country differences, this trend, variously defined in the literature as the absorption of immigrants, acculturation, assimilation, or joining the mainstream, was generally shared by all countries and by all avenues of society.<sup>14</sup> The

14 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “Latin America and the problem of Multiple Modernities”, in Sznajder, Roniger and Forment (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers of Citizenship* (see note 7), pp. 43-54; Lawrence Whitehead, “Latin America as a Mausoleum of Modernities”,

beginning, the peak, and completion (if it occurred) – of such processes were highly variable and depended on the local circumstances of each country and to the specific characteristics of different sub-groups of former migrants or descendants of migrants within a given designated component of society. In the case of Jews in Latin America, unlike the experience in other countries of immigration, no real pressure was exerted to suppress Jewish corporate identities. One important intervening factor in the acculturation process was Jewish community affiliation in general, and the affiliation with specific Jewish organizations often of a sub-ethnic character.<sup>15</sup> It remains to be seen to what extent identification with the national identity of the new country of residence tended to prevail over identification with the primordial identity provided by being Jewish. We can posit that the shared historical background and the similar contemporary socioeconomic position held by Jews in different countries created affinities of perceptions, behaviors, social networks, interests, and inter-ethnic conflicts that enhanced the sense of belonging with a *transnational* Jewish collective, beyond the specific *national* location of each given community. The relative strength of these *national* and *transnational* identities can be explored by asking a representative cross-section of Jews in a given country to express their particular propensities.

Results of such an enquiry in two countries, Mexico and Venezuela, are reported in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Data on Mexico are derived from a representative survey of 866 Jewish households with 2,896 individuals undertaken in Mexico City in 1991.<sup>16</sup> Data on Venezuela are derived from a representative survey of 697 Jewish households with 2,135 individuals undertaken in Caracas in 1998-1999.<sup>17</sup>

in Luis Roniger and Carlos H. Waisman (eds.), *Globality and Multiple Modernities. Comparative North American and Latin American Perspectives*, Eastbourne 2002, pp. 29-65; Luis Roniger, "Citizenship in Latin America: New Works and Debates", *Citizenship Studies*, 10-4 (2006): 489-502.

- 15 Sergio DellaPergola, Georges Sabagh, Mehdi Bozorgmehr, Claudia Der-Martirosian, and Susana Lerner, "Hierarchic Levels of Subethnicity: Near Eastern Jews in the U.S., France and Mexico", in Ernest Krausz and Gitta Tulea (eds.) *Sociological Papers*, Ramat Gan, Bar Ilan University, 5, 2 (1996): 1-42.
- 16 Sergio DellaPergola and Susana Lerner, *La población judía de México: Perfil demográfico, social y cultural*. Mexico-Jerusalén 1995.
- 17 Based on: Sergio DellaPergola, Salomon Benzaquen, Tony Beker de Wintraub, *Encuesta de perfil comunitario, Caracas 1998-1999*, Jerusalem 2000 (mimeo).

Table 1 compares ethnic identity propensities among Jews in Mexico City in 1991, by community of affiliation. Such communities can be divided into three groups: the first is the ethno-cultural nature reflecting the past origins of affiliates – Ashkenazi, Sepharadi, Maguen David (Aleppo), and Monte Sinai (Damascus); the second is the ideational nature reflecting different non-Orthodox religious movements – Bet El and Bet Israel; and the third reflects cultural-leisure oriented activity – the Centro Deportivo Israelita (CDI). As in several cases, multiple memberships may be allowed. The data reported below refer to one primary affiliation only for each person. It should be stressed that there exists a certain extent of non-affiliation and consequently the characteristics of the non-affiliated need to be assessed as a separate group. In Mexico as well as in Venezuela, non-affiliation was preferred by a minority of the total Jewish population. Nonetheless, the comparison is not only possible but significant for the purpose of the present discussion.

**Table 1. Ethnic Identity Propensities of Jews,  
by Jewish Community Affiliation – Mexico City, 1991**

Propensity	Total	Ashkenazi	Sefaradi	Maguén David	Monte Sinai	Bet El, Bet Israel	CDI only	Not affiliated
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
1. Jewish only	16	16	14	15	15	16	<u><b>17</b></u>	16
2. Mexican Jew	40	44	45	<u><b>46</b></u>	29	40	38	19
3. Undecided	12	14	12	9	11	13	15	13
4. Jewish Mexican	29	23	29	26	<u><b>42</b></u>	29	26	36
5. Mexican only	3	3	1	4	3	3	4	<u><b>16</b></u>
<b>Subtotal</b>								
Transnational (1+2)	56	60	59	<u><b>61</b></u>	44	56	55	35
National (4+5)	32	26	30	30	45	32	30	<u><b>52</b></u>

Note: Outlined in grey is the highest percent value in each column; underlined in bold italics the highest value in each row.

In the alternative between being Jewish and being a citizen of one's own country, we can define *national* the preference for the local identity, and *transnational* the preference for Jewish identity. A clear majority of Mexican Jews in 1991 (56% to 32%) preferred the *transnational* option (the sum of Jewish only and Mexican Jew) over the *national* option (the sum of Mexican only and Jewish Mexican). With slight shades of intensity the same pattern occurred across all the Jewish community affiliations with one notable exception: the Monte Sinai community whose members more strongly stressed their Mexican over their Jewish identity. More remarkable, was the result for the non-affiliated whose significant majority valued their Mexican identity (52%) much more than their Jewish identity (35%). Clearly preference for one ethnic identification option does not mean rejection of another. A strong propensity existed toward incorporating both components, the Jewish and the Mexican, which illustrates the complexity of social integration processes and the relevance of the specific context within which they take place. *Mexican Jew* was the dominant option (40% for the whole sample) chosen all across the different Jewish communities, aside from the exceptions mentioned.

Table 2 replicates the same comparison regarding to the Jewish population in Caracas in 1998/99, at a time when the community was not yet experiencing the duress incurred under the Chavez regime.

**Table 2. Ethnic Identity Propensities of Jews,  
by Age – Caracas, 1998/1999**

Propensity	Total	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-64	65+
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
1. Jewish only	7	<u><b>10</b></u>	6	7	8	5
2. Venezuelan Jew	60	61	56	55	60	<u><b>72</b></u>
3. Undecided	3	3	<u><b>5</b></u>	2	2	2
4. Jewish Venezuelan	29	25	30	<u><b>34</b></u>	28	19
5. Venezuelan only	2	1	<b>3</b>	2	2	1
<b>Subtotal</b>						
Transnational (1+2)	67	71	62	62	68	<u><b>77</b></u>
National (4+5)	31	26	33	<u><b>36</b></u>	30	20

Note: Outlined in grey is the highest percent value in each column; underlined in bold italics the highest value in each row.

Here again the Jewish *transnational* identification option clearly predominated over the Venezuelan *national* option (67% to 31%). Ethnic identity propensities were nearly the same across every age group, from elderly to child, although the Jewish *transnational* choice was the most predominant among the oldest age group and tended to weaken in younger groups. However, among children, it tended to increase again, probably as a consequence of intensive Jewish socialization efforts. As in Mexico, in Venezuela the composite *Venezuelan Jew* option highly predominated (60% for the whole sample) over all other possibilities.

The data reported in Table 2 do not distinguish between the affiliated Jewish majority and the non-affiliated minority however the data in Table 3 do make that distinction. Ethnic identity options are analyzed according to residential neighborhoods which constitute an important facet of socioeconomic and cultural stratification. In short schematization, the ordering of neighborhoods as displayed in Table 3 from left to right, reflects how long urban Jewish settlement have existed and the ensuing dynamics of immigration, social mobility and resettlement from central urban areas to suburbs. Downtown Caracas (Center) had an early Jewish presence which gradually became marginal, while San Bernardino became the core of the Ashkenazi community and the primary concentration of central Jewish institutions. La Florida became the main locus of the Sepharadi community, La Castellana and Sebucán represented secondary areas of settlement related to progressively rising social status, and more distant suburban areas tended to attract segments of the Jewish community somewhat less involved with and less attached to the daily practice of Jewish community life.

The prevalence of the *transnational* identification option (Jewish only plus Venezuelan Jew) over the *national* one (Venezuelan only plus Jewish Venezuelan) was confirmed all across the spectrum of Jewish residential locations. A visible diminishing gradient of Jewish identification appeared along with upward social mobility, suburbanization, and diminished Jewish community participation and affiliation. The minority of those preferring the *national* over the *transnational* option rose from a low of 19% in the La Florida area to 41% in the suburban areas, and 36% in the central downtown area.

**Table 3. Ethnic Identity Propensities of Jews,  
By Neighborhood – Caracas, 1998/1999**

Propensity	Total	Center	San Bernardino	La Florida	La Castellana	Sebucán	Suburban
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
1. Jewish only	7	7	<u><b>10</b></u>	8	5	3	8
2. Venezuelan Jew	60	56	56	<u><b>71</b></u>	66	62	46
3. Undecided	2	1	2	2	1	3	<u><b>5</b></u>
4. Jewish Venezuelan	29	29	29	18	28	30	<u><b>38</b></u>
5. Venezuelan only	2	<u><b>7</b></u>	3	1	-	2	3
<b>Subtotal</b>							
Transnational (1+2)	67	63	66	<u><b>79</b></u>	71	65	54
National (4+5)	31	36	32	19	28	32	<u><b>41</b></u>

Note: Outlined in grey is the highest percent value in each column; underlined in bold italics the highest value in each row.

It is important to stress that in both Mexico and Venezuela – at least at the time of these observations – affiliated *and* non-affiliated Jews were investigated, and displayed significant differences regarding their propensity toward a Jewish transnational versus a local national identification. In light of these empirical realities, it is plausible to suggest that whenever a process of detachment from Jewish identity and community affiliation occurred, quite naturally the local *national* identification tended to prevail. In other words, the pre-existing *transnational* default option gradually disappeared and was replaced by the identification options offered by one's place of residence.<sup>18</sup> The extent of this acculturative trend was admittedly different

18 See also Sergio DellaPergola, "Jewish Out-Marriage: Mexico and Venezuela", in Shulamit Reinharz and Sergio DellaPergola, (eds.) *Jewish Inter-marriage around the World*, New Brunswick-London 2009, pp. 153-170.

in different Latin American countries; the two examples we have provided possibly corresponding with the stronger modes of Jewish identification across the continental range.<sup>19</sup> One cannot avoid the conclusion that the primary broader transnational character of Jewish identification maintained its edge over the alternative – the adoption by Jews of their country of residence’s national identification.

### **Models of Jewish identification**

Jewish identification is one of several competing poles of reference in everyone’s own personal identity. Jewish identification consists of multiple layers of complementary options, including religion, ethnicity, shared historical memory, community, culture and folklore, and cannot be reduced to any single linear scale of intensity. This multivariate nature of Jewish identification has often been defined and debated, but less frequently measured, namely by comparing patterns of identification among Jews in different countries.<sup>20</sup> Two primary issues for discussion in this respect are the following: is Jewish identification fundamentally the product of local *national* conditions or rather the result of long term trends that operate with a similar underlying logic *transnationally*? And having already mentioned the multidimensionality of Jewish identification, how can these dimensions be operationally defined and what are their major factors of convergence and divergence?

Before answering these questions, definitions of Jewish identification must be provided. In a systematic social scientific approach the basic assumptions about who is a Jew should be separated from the narrator’s perspective. Definitional criteria used in the works quoted here follow the concept of the “core Jewish population”:<sup>21</sup> self-definition as Jewish among

19 Judit Bokser Liwerant, “Latin American Jewish Identities: Past and Present Challenges. The Mexican Case in a Comparative Perspective”, in Bokser Liwerant et al., *Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism* (see note 7), pp. 81-108.

20 Shimon Herman, *Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective*, Beverly Hills 1977.

21 Sergio DellaPergola, “World Jewish Population 2012,” *American Jewish Year Book*, 109-112, Dordrecht, Springer, 2012, 213-283.

a sub-population randomly chosen from a broader population context, corrected with the inclusion of eligible persons who are direct descendants of Jews, those whose personally stated identification is uncertain or marginal, and who do not claim to have another competing identification (such as Catholic). For example in a survey of the Jewish population in the Greater Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area<sup>22</sup> the investigated sample included 161,000 persons who affirmed to be Jewish (of which 29,000 with a non-Jewish mother), plus another 83,000 persons of recent Jewish origin who denied being Jewish, and another 68,000 household members who lacked any Jewish ancestry. The latter two categories cannot be included in the “core Jewish population” but are pertinent in the broader concept of an “enlarged Jewish population” – in itself a worthy target of study because of its strict interconnections with the Jewish population more cogently defined.

Figure 2 portrays Jewish identification in Mexico<sup>23</sup> through the simultaneous processing of 39 different indicators (see full list in the Legend). The relationships that exist between several identificational variables can be mapped out with the help of multivariate data processing based on Facet Theory’s Smallest Space Analysis (SSA).<sup>24</sup> For each question respondents are asked to provide a measure of intensity, from “most important” to “not important at all”. The answers provided can be synthesized in a wide matrix of statistical correlations between each of the indicators. The whole complex of these statistical correlations can be graphically expressed on a map in which each variable is represented by a point. Proximity and distance between points on the map express the similarity or dissonance between different existing options to express one’s own identification, as well as their centrality or marginality in collective perceptions. Points at the center of the map represent variables that attract a larger consensus among respondents, while points at the periphery of the map represent variables

22 Adrián Jmelniczky and Ezequiel Erdei, *Estudio de población judía en Ciudad de Buenos Aires y Gran Buenos Aires (AMBA)*, Buenos Aires 2005.

23 Source of data: adjusted from DellaPergola, Lerner (see note 15).

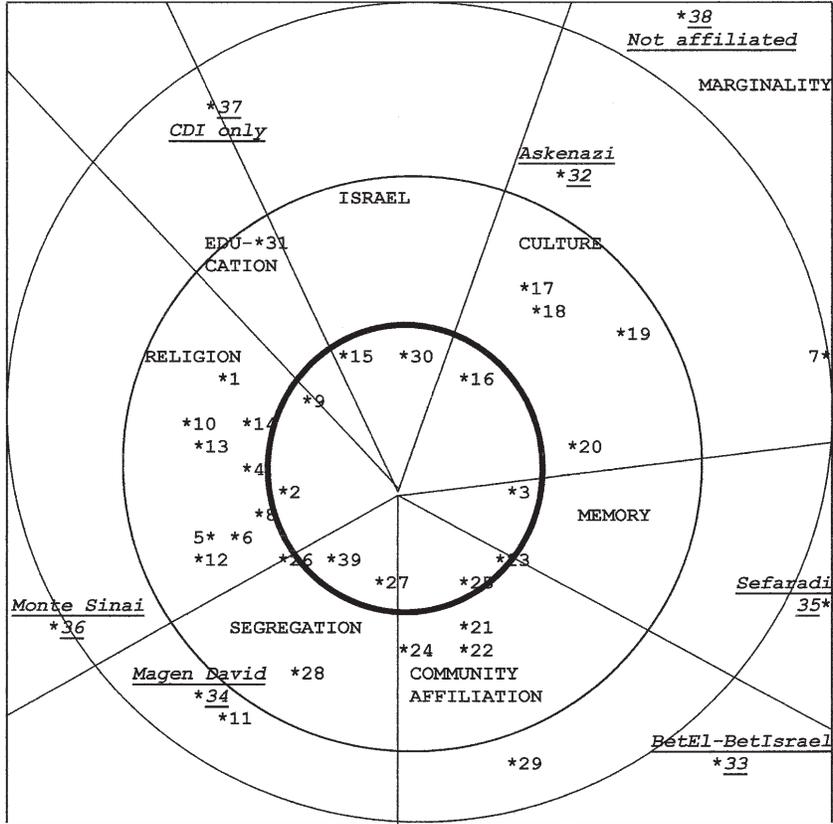
24 Shlomit Levy, “Lawful Roles of Facets in Social Theories,” in David Canter (ed.), *Facet Theory: Approaches to Social Research*, New York 1985, pp. 59-96; Shlomit Levy, “Facet Theory in Cumulative Social Science,” in Shlomit Levy and Dov Elizur (eds.) *Facet Theory: Towards Cumulative Social Science*, Ljubljana 2003, pp. 5-15.

possibly much appreciated by some of the respondents but of very scarce interest to some of the others – hence a subject of disagreement and in some cases even of polarization. The procedure also allows the partition of the whole identificational space into computer-generated main regions each of which relates to a particular form of content.

The map consists of several concentric circles and several sectors which all radiate from the center of the map. In a circular pattern, the main areas of content of Jewish identification are religion, Jewish education, Israel, Jewish culture, memory, community activism, and self-segregated social networks. Also represented on the map are the main communities of belonging to Mexico's Jewish population. The positions on the map of the respective markers of specific Jewish communities (including a marker for the non-affiliated) outline the peculiarly stronger affinities that exist between the members of each community group and a certain set of variables of Jewish identification. Interestingly, the two Syrian-origin communities, Maguen David and Monte Sinai, appear to be more strongly related to religion and self-segregation, the Ashkenazi community is relatively closer to Jewish culture, Sefaradi to memory, Bet El and Bet Israel are relatively closer to Jewish community activism, and members only of the Centro Deportivo Israelita are closer to Israel and Jewish education. Finally, and quite expectedly, the non-affiliated occupy a very marginal position in their correlation with major indicators of Jewish identification.

The central portion of the map includes ten identification indicators most highly correlated with all other indicators, and therefore constituting the basic canon of shared Jewish identification in Mexico (see Legend). These inner circle canonic variables pertain to each of the major sectorial regions of contents outlined in the general map. The unsolved question – which retrospectively points to omission by the investigators in the original study – is whether there exists a variable that would occupy the central point of the whole identificational configuration, thus expressing the highest point of consensus within and beyond heterogeneity in the community.

**Figure 2. Smallest space analysis of selected indicators of Jewish identification, Mexico, 1991**



**LEGEND:**

NORMATIVE/ TRADITIONAL	RELATION/ SEGREGATION	COMMUNITY ACTIVISM	JEWISH COMMUNITY OF AFFILIATION
1 Pray Shabbat	11 Kasher at home only	21 Cultural organization	32 Ashkenazi
2 Pray main Holidays	26 Jewish friends	22 Welfare philanthropy	33 Bet El-Bet Israel
4 Shabbat candles	27 Jewish work associates	23 C. Deportivo Israelita	34 Magen David
5 Kabbalat Shabbat	28 Jewish neighbors	24 Religious congregation	35 Sefaradi
6 Only Matzah on Pesach	39 Milah male children	25 Israel institution	36 Monte Sinai
8 Hanukah lights	JEWISH CULTURE	29 Israel visits	37 CDI only
9 Hanukah with family	7 Matzah+bread on Pesach	MEMORY	38 Not affiliated
10 Kasher at home+out	16 Jewish books	3 Izkor	
12 Kasher meat	17 Jewish music	JEWISH IDENTITY INNER CIRCLE	
13 Separate dishes meat/milk	18 Jewish dance	2 Pray main Holidays	3 Izkor
14 Other holidays	19 Jewish films	9 Hanukah with family	23 C. Deportivo Israelita
ISRAEL	20 Other	15 Yom Ha'Atzmaut	25 Israel institution
15 Yom Ha'Atzmaut	EDUCATION	30 Israel proximity	27 Work associates
30 Israel proximity	31 Jewish education attained	16 Jewish books	39 Milah male children

Figure 3<sup>25</sup> replicates a similar analysis based on data collected in Caracas. The range of variables displayed here is simplified to only 13, selected to represent the broader array of questions actually investigated.

The emerging regions of Jewish identification are again the normative/traditional complex of Jewish rituals and beliefs, the family, civic society, community activism, Israel, Jewish education, and social network self-segregation. All in all, the Venezuelan map is very similar to the Mexican, but its additional value is that it provides an answer to the unsolved question of the Jewish identification map in Mexico. At the center of the configuration we find a question that was omitted in the Mexican survey: how important is it to feel part of the Jewish people? This highly transnational Jewish variable appears to constitute the shared bridge between, the more particularistic, traditionally transmitted and inwardly oriented and the more secular, civic and outwardly oriented manifestations of Jewish identification. It should be stressed again that the center-periphery and the sectorial configurations of Jewish identification indicators do not imply that choosing one means to reject another. Rather, they mean that having considered all of the possible combinations of answers provided by a random sample of the Jewish public, the emerging map offers the optimal representation of the latent shared understanding of what Jewish identification is all about.

The notable similarity of the two preceding illustrations of the structure of Jewish identification in different Latin American countries quite significantly reappears in research conducted in other Latin American countries such as Uruguay,<sup>26</sup> in European countries such as France,<sup>27</sup> in the United States,<sup>28</sup>

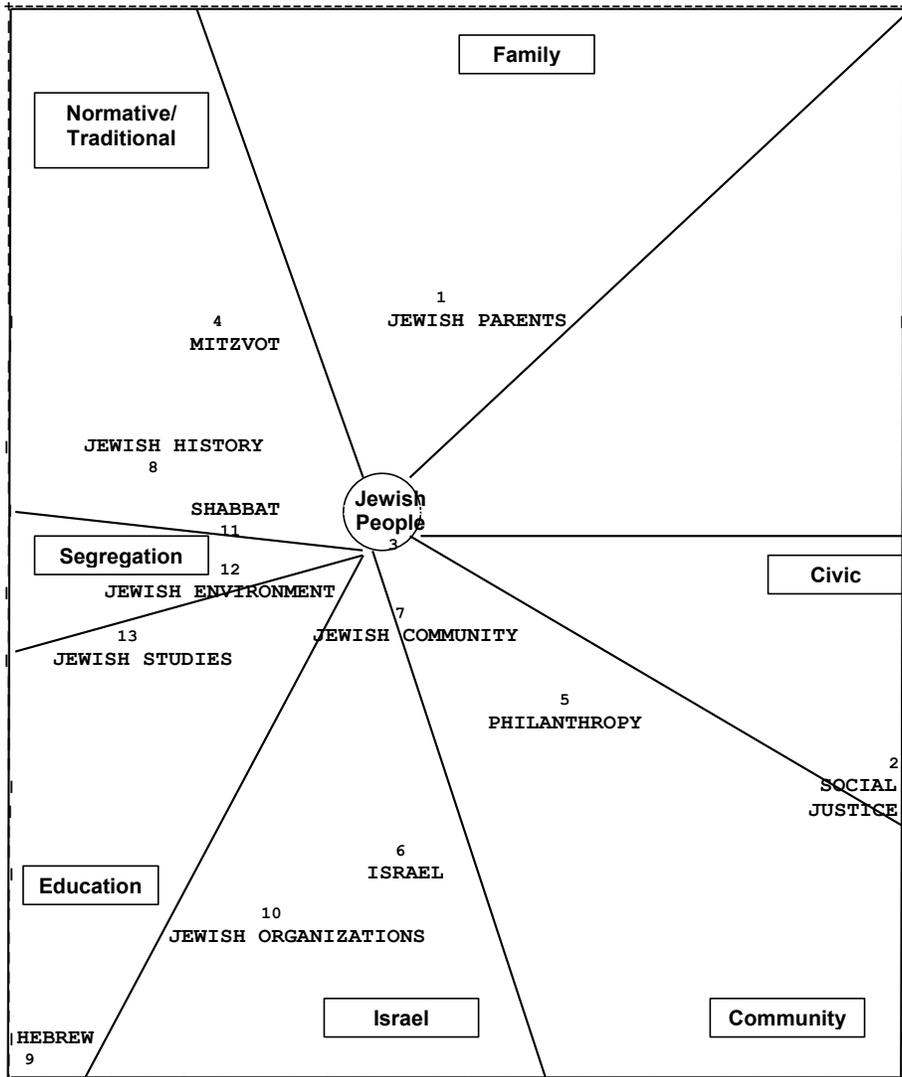
25 Source of data: DellaPergola, Benzaquen, Beker de Wintraub (see note 17).

26 Maya Shorer Kaplan, *A Look at Contemporary Jewish Identity: Integrative Review of the Case Study of the Jewish Community of Uruguay*, MA thesis, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 2010 (Hebrew).

27 Eric H. Cohen, *The Jews of France Today: Identity and Values*, Leiden and Boston 2011.

28 Sergio DellaPergola, Shlomit Levy, Uzi Rebhun, Dalia Sagi, "Patterns of Jewish Identification in the United States, 2001," in Dov Elizur and Eyal Yaniv (eds.) *Theory Construction and Multivariate Analysis: Applications of Facet Approach*. Tel Aviv 2009, pp. 305-318. See also Uzi Rebhun, "Recent Developments in Jewish Identification in the United States: A Cohort Follow-Up and Facet Analysis," in Sergio DellaPergola and Judit Even (eds.) *Papers in Jewish Demography 1997*, Jerusalem 2001, pp. 261-279.

**Figure 3. Smallest space analysis of selected indicators of Jewish identification, heads of households – Caracas, 1998/1999**



and in Israel.<sup>29</sup> Figure 4 offers a schematic synthesis of these findings.<sup>30</sup> The remarkable feature is the persisting consistency in the underlying logic of available Jewish options of identification and in the ordering of their mutual relationships of proximity and distance, in spite of very different frequencies obtained by the various indicators in each country, and in spite of the deep cultural differences that exist across countries at both the personal and the institutional level. At the center of the configuration stands a generic notion of Jewish peoplehood. Around it, several more specific areas of Jewish identification specialization appear in radial pattern: family cycle, normative-ritual, learning-educational, philanthropy-organization, cultural-civic-political, and mutual solidarity including responsibility for Israel. The accumulated evidence strongly favors the persistence of common threads in the self-perceptions of Jewish identification. Transnational elements appear to overcome more specific national identification options. Transformational and distancing trends are at work across global Jewry, but the inherent logic of the Jewish symbolic and normative system does not yet seem to have been substantially affected.

### Concluding remarks

The notion of place – be it a continent, a country, a city, or a *barrio* – constitutes a central prerequisite and constraint in all historiographical, literary or social science research. Reference to particular places certainly plays an important role when studying the Jewish experience in Latin America and its transnational extensions outside of the continent. The context of place must contribute to determining the character both of

29 Shlomit Levy, “Identity of Jews in Israel,” Jerusalem, The Hebrew University, 2001 (unpublished paper); Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinson, Elihu Katz, *Beliefs, Observances and Values of Jews in Israel 2000*, Jerusalem 2002. See also Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yochanan Peres, *Is Israel One? Religion, Nationalism, and Multiculturalism Confounded*, Leiden and Boston 2005.

30 Sergio DellaPergola, “Distancing, yet One,” *Contemporary Jewry*, 30, 2-3 (2010): 183-190. See also Uzi Rebhun and Shlomit Levy, “Unity and Diversity: Jewish Identification in America and in Israel 1990-2000,” *Sociology of Religion*, 67, 4 (2005): 391-414.

**Figure 4. general representation of Jewish identification options and relationships among contemporary diaspora Jewish populations**



individual Jews and of the Jewish community and its connections to society as a whole. Investigation cannot ignore more complex ramifications that relate one personal history to another, and one Jewish community to another. These interconnections stem from shared history and shared culture, extend over ages and continents, and tend to display singular resilience facing both conflicts of a political, ethnic, or socioeconomic nature to society at large, and at the same time society's captivating mode of incorporation and acculturation. Understanding parallel Jewish experiences in various communities is equally as important as appraising the uniqueness of local experiences. These principles apply equally to the study of dominant elites in Jewish communities as well as to the lesser known rank and file members of the communities. The study of anomy and marginality is not more or less legitimate than the study of commitment and continuity.

The empirical evidence that we have reviewed in this paper strongly indicates that contrary to some critical contentions:

- Jews not affiliated with any Jewish community organization who were studied, quite expectedly displayed characteristics significantly different from the affiliated.
- The respective national contexts were of great importance in determining international migration patterns of Jews, but the overall logic determining the choice between moving and staying was evidently parallel in different countries – hence transnational.
- In different Latin American countries studied at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, self-perceptions among Jews of being part of a Jewish transnational entity emerged more clearly and powerfully than the concomitant perceptions of being part of a country's national identity.
- Similar patterns in the detailed definition of options of Jewish identification options prevailed among Jewish populations in different countries showing the underlying logic of Jewish identification to be fundamentally transnational.
- The transnationally shared and recognizable content of Jewish identification were quite specific and could hardly be confused or exchanged with those of other ethno-religious groups in Latin America.
- In the presence of the two simultaneous forces of change – national acculturation in the countries of residence, and transnational patterns operating in parallel across space – Jewish communities in Latin America were deeply affected by both. In any case the *national* could not be said to have superseded the *transnational*.

Old paradigms can be proven wrong and new paradigms may prove enlightening. The burden of proof always rests with the innovators who should produce persuasive new evidence to support their claim. From the perspective of social science, argumentation should be informed by theory, but the final proof should come from empirical validation. To declare principles – such as the alleged primacy of local, national visions of Jewish history and society, or the presumed past neglect of the anonymous non-members of a Jewish community, or the supposed fallacy of essentialism

versus constructivism – before producing the necessary evidence, or while ignoring existing evidence to the contrary, reflects a deductive logic fitting normative doctrine more than social science or historiography. Researchers are part of the universe they research, and their own diverse narrative choices are part of the game. Research creates ample space for all possible methodological approaches, and Latin American Jewry offers a particularly rich ground for discovery and theory validation. Narratives, however, should not prevail over the free flow of empirical evidence.

Declarative propositions about the superiority of one versus another school's research paradigms and strategies<sup>31</sup> can be a sophisticated mode to promote the narrative propensities of a narrator, but in the final analysis researchers should assemble the broadest possible documentation, be ready to listen to, and acknowledge what individuals belonging to a Jewish collective have to testify about themselves.

Discussion should continue from here, not on the basis of imagined rival epistemic schools, but rather from a systematic comparison and integration of all possible themes touching upon the varieties of Jewish experience in Latin America and its transnational extensions, relying on different sources, and on a genuine multidisciplinary perspective.

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31 Raanan Rein, "Waning Essentialism: Latin American Jewish Studies in Israel", in Bokser Liwerant et al., *Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism* (see note 7), pp. 109-124. See an answer in Judit Bokser Liwerant et al., "Cuarenta años de cambios", in Avni et al., *Pertenencia y Alteridad* (see note 1), pp. 13-83.

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