

# EXPLORING THE JEWISH ARCHIPELAGO IN LATIN AMERICA

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- JEWISH BUENOS AIRES, 1890–1930: IN SEARCH OF AN IDENTITY.* By Victor A. Mirelman. (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1990. Pp. 300. \$34.95 cloth.)
- TROPICAL DIASPORA: THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE IN CUBA.* By Robert M. Levine. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993. Pp. 398. \$34.95 cloth.)
- WELCOMING THE UNDESIRABLES: BRAZIL AND THE JEWISH QUESTION.* By Jeffrey Lesser. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. Pp. 269. \$42.00 cloth, \$18.00 paper.)
- LA VIDA ENTRE EL JUDAISMO Y EL CRISTIANISMO EN LA NUEVA ESPAÑA, 1580–1606.* By Eva Alexandra Uchmany. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993. Pp. 477.)
- LOS SEFARDIES EN LOS DOMINIOS HOLANDESES DE AMERICA DEL CARIBE, 1630–1750.* By Günter Böhm. (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1992. Pp. 243.)
- JEWS IN ANOTHER ENVIRONMENT: SURINAM IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.* By Robert Cohen. (New York: E. J. Brill, 1991. Pp. 350. \$85.75 cloth.)
- SEPHARDIM IN THE AMERICAS: STUDIES IN CULTURE AND HISTORY.* Edited by Martin A. Cohen and Abraham J. Peck. Cincinnati, Ohio, and Tuscaloosa, Ala.: American Jewish Archives and University of Alabama Press, 1993. Pp. 500. \$32.95 cloth.)
- GENERACIONES JUDIAS EN MEXICO: LA KEHILA ASHKENAZI (1922–1992).* 7 volumes. Coordinated by Alicia Gojman de Backal. (Mexico City: Comunidad Ashkenazí de México, 1993.)
- IMAGENES DE UN ENCUENTRO: LA PRESENCIA JUDIA EN MEXICO DURANTE LA PRIMERA MITAD DEL SIGLO XX.* Directed by Judit Bokser de Liverant. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, *Tribuna Israelita*, Comité Central Israelita de México, and Multibanco Mercantil Probusa, 1993. Pp. 383.)
- CAMINHOS DA ESPERANÇA: A PRESENÇA JUDAICA NO RIO GRANDE DO SUL.* By Moacyr Scliar. (Porto Alegre, R.G.: Pallotti, 1993. Pp. 117.)
- JUDAICA LATINOAMERICANA: ESTUDIOS HISTORICO-SOCIALES.* Volumes 1 and 2. Edited by Asociación Israeli de Investigadores del Judaísmo Latinoamericano (AMILAT). (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988, 1993. Pp. 266 and 295.)

The struggle by exotic ethnic minorities—Jews, Syrians, Lebanese, and Armenians—to gain acceptance as legitimate citizens in their countries of birth continues throughout Latin America. Research has only begun to reveal the tensions between the offspring of immigrants and the inheritors of the founding myths of supposedly monolithic societies. An obvious need exists for comparative research on ethnicity if we are to understand Latin America entirely.

With respect to the Jewish experience in Latin America, scholarly research originally focused on the colonial period. But in recent years, works on Jews and New Christians caught in the toils of the Spanish Inquisition have been supplemented by works focusing on contemporary history that document Latin American Jews as participants in the life of their native lands. In the process, the perception of Jews as victims is being replaced by that of Jews as creators of their own history. Although study of the colonial and early modern periods has by no means been neglected, the past dozen years have seen the publication of well-researched studies of Jewish communities as distinct from one another as those in Lima and San José.<sup>1</sup> These studies are adding new dimensions to scholarly understanding of the texture of Latin American societies.

### *Argentina, Cuba, Brazil*

Victor Mirelman, an Argentine-American on the faculty of Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago, was one of the first to develop a detailed history of the Jewish community of Buenos Aires based on scholarly research carried out in archives in that city. By the time his book reached print in 1990, the dissertation on which it was based had become the foundation stone for Argentine Jewish studies. *Jewish Buenos Aires, 1890–1930: In Search of an Identity* describes the attractiveness of Argentine immigration policy to Jews and others who were experiencing hard times in Eastern Europe, Morocco, and the Ottoman Empire. Mirelman goes on to analyze the accommodations that Jewish immigrants made to Argentine life, which in the early years of this century still contained traces of inquisitorial attitudes. These tendencies were subsequently reinforced by racist theories imported from France and intensified by fears aroused by

1. León Trahtemberg S., *La inmigración judía al Perú, 1848–1948* (Lima: Asociación Judía de Beneficencia y Culto, 1987); Jacobo Schifter Sikora, Lowell Gudmundson, and Mario Solera Castro, *El judío en Costa Rica* (San José, C.R.: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 1979); Moshe Nes-El, *Historia de la comunidad israelita sefaradí en Chile* (Santiago: Nascimento, 1984); Alfredo M. Seiferheld, *Inmigración y presencia judías en el Paraguay: Los judíos en el Paraguay* (Asunción: Estudios Paraguayos, 1981); Círculo Israelita, *Medio siglo de vida judía en La Paz* (La Paz: Editorial Aeronáutica de la Fuerza Aérea Boliviana, 1987); and Eugene F. Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982). A book-length bibliography offers citations to these and other relevant titles. See *Latin American Jewish Studies: An Annotated Guide to the Literature*, compiled by Judith Laikin Elkin and Ana Lya Sater (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1990).

the Bolshevik Revolution, all of which were embedded in a liberal immigration policy. In this ambiguous context, some immigrants opted to retain and confirm their Jewish identity while others preferred to assimilate into the secular life of the cities, not necessarily by way of the baptismal font. Mirelman's primary concern is with the ways in which cultural conservators worked to develop Jewish community life, which they regarded as vital to their continued existence as Jews. He chronicles the founding of institutions—cemeteries, synagogues, schools, and social welfare organizations—as well as the formation of Jewish political parties, which quickly polarized between Zionists and Communists. The troubled issue of white slavery is taken up from the perspective of the organized community, which attempted to suppress Jewish traffickers by excluding them from communal life, measures that succeeded only after the Argentine polity developed the will to rid the country of the business, with its deep roots in *machista* society.

By 1930, with more than 120 Jewish institutions functioning in Buenos Aires, the time seemed right to centralize them in order to serve common needs and represent the community before Argentine officialdom. Mirelman chronicles the development of the social welfare institution Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) and the political representational body Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA) that brought coherence to the inchoate communities. He relates their rise to the emergence of Buenos Aires as home of the premier Jewish community on the South American continent. No single reference work exists on the Jewish community from the 1930s onward, although a number of monographs and scholarly articles cover specific aspects such as education, the labor movement, and relations with non-Jews. By the mid-1980s, this population had already begun to decline, with a birthrate insufficient to sustain its numbers (now reckoned at fewer than one-quarter million). By this time, emigration was being propelled by the dismal national economy, periodic repression, and explosive anti-Jewish actions. The latest of such acts was the July 1994 bombing of the AMIA-DAIA building, which killed nearly a hundred persons and destroyed the very archives on which Mirelman had based his work. The relevance of "Jewish" history to the history of Argentina was demonstrated by varying popular responses pro and contra the Jewish community following the attack.

In *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, Robert Levine records the rise and decline of another Jewish population in the Americas. Unlike the Argentine case, Jewish settlement in Cuba did not last long enough to permit formation of an organized community during its short existence from about 1898 to 1960. Most of the Jewish immigrants were Turkish nationals, but Poles also arrived in Cuba, along with Romanians, Moroccans, Belgians, and U.S.-born Jews. The resulting babel of

voices and cultures never coalesced into a unified identity. It can be argued that only in exile in Florida did ancient differences succumb to the all-encompassing identity of "Cuban Jew."

Unlike Mirelman, who is primarily concerned with the internal dynamics of the Argentine community, Levine writes as an external observer, integrating the story of Cuban Jews into general Cuban history and relating Jewish actions on issues like immigration, education, and occupation to the corresponding national policies and practices within whose context they occurred. The result is a multidimensional text that can readily take its place on a shelf of Cuban studies.

According to Levine, "Cuba was a relatively open society, not a place where xenophobia took root," and anti-Semitism never became a motive force of government policy regardless of what regime was in power (p. 287). Levine seems to argue that even the notorious *St. Louis* affair in June 1939, when a boatload of Jewish refugees was turned away from Havana harbor and dispatched to meet its fate in Europe, should not be viewed as evidence to the contrary. Although anti-Semitism aplenty was being expressed at the time in the Cuban press and congress, Levine faults generalized official corruption, the ineptitude of negotiators, and pressure by the U.S. Department of State for Cuban officials' failure to honor Cuban visas. Levine concludes, "In the context of the history of the efforts of Jews to flee from Hitler . . . , Cuba's overall record in permitting Jewish refugees to enter was among the best in the world" (p. 132).

The relative absence of anti-Semitism allowed Jews to settle comfortably into an environment that was decidedly exotic for them. But within a generation of the immigrants' arrival, economic policies that were decided without reference to any conceivable "Jewish question" undercut their position on the island. When in the 1960s the revolutionary Cuban government opted for the socialist path, the involvement of Jewish immigrants in capitalist enterprise led them to flee the island along with other members of the entrepreneurial class. Fewer than one-tenth of the prerevolutionary population of twelve thousand Cuban Jews, motivated by socialist or communist ideals or constrained by family ties, chose to remain. The Cuban experience (like those in Chile and Nicaragua) emphasizes the fragility of Jewish settlement in societies that are subject to abrupt reversals in economic policy. As immigrants, Jews must adapt to the economic situation into which they come, utilizing the skills they have brought with them. Having made one major transition from country of origin to country of destination (which necessarily involves a change in economic circumstances), they may lack the physical energy and psychic vitality to undergo a second reversal of fortune under conditions of revolution.

Archives of the Cuban Jewish community disappeared after the Cuban Revolution, and government files are not open to researchers. Of

necessity, Levine worked from previously published sources and doctoral dissertations, the archives of Jewish international rescue organizations, and interviews with émigrés. Family photographs, many contributed by his interviewees, form an integral part of the text. As luck would have it, Levine was able to benefit from the work of colleagues who were already far along in their own research and generously shared their findings with him.<sup>2</sup> A Brazilianist whose reinterpretation of the Canudos rebellion may well revise scholarly understanding of that event, Levine performs a different sort of task in *Tropical Diaspora*. He has organized extant research on Cuban Jewry, rendering it comprehensible to those lacking familiarity with either Cuban or Jewish history, and prepared the ground for more analytic work that will surely follow when the relevant archives become accessible. Meanwhile, the best sources for Cuban Jewish history are represented in this study, which should be consulted by anyone interested in the social, economic, and political development of the island.

In choosing the title *Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question*, Jeff Lesser captures the ambivalence experienced by Brazilian government officials in the face of conflicting pressures: on the one hand, a desire to score points with the U.S. Department of State by admitting Jewish refugees from Nazism whom the United States was unwilling to accept; on the other, an almost visceral reaction against the notion of admitting members of the “Jewish race,” who were perceived as a non-European population incapable of contributing to the national aspiration of whitening the Brazilian people. Lesser’s title also expresses the resulting ambiguity of Brazilian immigration policy, which generally avoided any mention of the word *Jew* while effectively excluding all but a handful of Jewish refugees—most of the lucky ones being individuals who could pay a substantial price for the privilege. Despite the impression possibly conveyed by the title, Lesser clearly sympathizes with the Jews.

This study is based on research carried out in archives in the United States, Israel, England, and Brazil, including municipal and community archives in smaller cities like Porto Alegre and Rio Claro. Lesser has painstakingly assembled a detailed record of Brazilian immigration policy from the interwar period to the immediate postwar years, as expressed by officials in public forums, private memoranda, and the secret circulars that actually guided consular actions. Like Maria Luíza Tucci Carneiro in *O anti-semitismo na era Vargas: Fantasmas de uma geração (1930–1945)*, Lesser concludes that the generous reputation of Foreign Minister Oswaldo Aranha as a patron of refugees was a triumph of public rela-

2. The most significant source is Margalit Bejarano, “The Jewish Community of Cuba, 1898–1939: Communal Consolidation and Trends of Integration under the Impact of Changes in World Jewry and Cuban Society,” Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1992. The thesis is available only in Hebrew, but extracts from it have been published in English and Spanish.

tions over reality. The reality included dissemination by the Brazilian state department in 1937 of a secret circular banning the issuance of visas to all persons of "Semitic origin." Lesser's study describes the cultural context, political calculations, and practical result of conducting a policy that directly contravened the one that Brazil adopted publicly.

Not one for tunnel vision, Lesser also investigates attitudes toward other exotic immigrants. Japanese farmers, who were valued by Brazilian landowners, were deprecated by those for whom racial considerations mattered most. In this case, it apparently helped to have had a strong home government capable of watching over the interests of its sons and daughters overseas. In a particularly revealing chapter, Lesser examines the case of the German non-Aryan Catholics, for whom three thousand visas were promised to Pius XII by dictator Getúlio Vargas. The refugees' conversion to Catholicism, which was good enough for the Pope, was insufficient for the Brazilians, who regarded the applicants as Jews and withheld almost all of the promised visas. This case study brilliantly illuminates the Vargas strategy: Brazil managed to gain favor with the United States, Britain, and the Vatican without upsetting powerful nativist critics.

Lesser explains the Brazilian perception of Jews as a race as stemming from confusion of the concept of "race" with culture, religion, and ethnicity. He suggests that employing the terms *nonwhite* and *nonblack* clarifies the operational connections between ethnic and racial labels. *Welcoming the Undesirables* sustains this interpretation, despite an introductory chapter that does not clarify the use that Lesser planned to make of these terms. Jews already living in Brazil were accepted as "nonblack," but nativists were able to block the admission of additional Jews to the country by labeling them as "nonwhite." As Lesser correctly points out, in relying on modern social scientific definitions of race, Latin Americanists have omitted Jews from studies of race. Perhaps for this reason, the phenomenon so skillfully anatomized by Lesser has not been adequately studied before.

### *The Colonial Period*

No history of the Jews in colonial Latin America has been written because Jews and their descendants were prohibited from entering the Iberian domains in the Americas. One finds only the history of state and church policy along with practices aimed at extirpating real or imaginary Jews from the territory by means of investigations into the consciences of New Christians (*conversos*) by the Holy Office of the Inquisition. In *La vida entre el judaísmo y el cristianismo en la Nueva España*, Eva Alexandra Uchmany, a history professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, examines the life and times of Diego Díaz Nieto, who was tried

for Judaizing in a trial that lasted from 1601 to 1606. Uchmany utilizes an impressive range of inquisition records and published documents to draw a portrait of the life of New Christians of Portuguese origin living in New Spain between 1580 and 1606, from the start of Spanish rule over Portugal (and the extension of inquisitorial control over the forcibly baptized Portuguese New Christians) until the papal pardon granted to survivors by Clement VIII. After reviewing the *procesos* of all persons punished for Judaism in New Spain during this period, Uchmany reconstructed the social, family, and religious life of Mexican crypto-Jews and their relationship to the society that engulfed them. Important sections of the book deal with prison life under perpetual sentence, a condition that comes alive in Uchmany's description. Eschewing bathos, Uchmany delivers multidimensional portraits of the prisoners by emphasizing not their victimization or even their martyrdom but their behavior as human beings under continuous threat of torture and incineration.

The second half of *La vida entre el judaísmo y el cristianismo* presents a transcript of the criminal trial carefully reassembled from several archives and private libraries where the original documents have been scattered.<sup>3</sup> Because the defendant was born and educated in the ghetto of Ferrara, his testimony also provides a wealth of information concerning Jewish life in that Italian area, where a liberal polity favored the flowering of Hebrew culture. The true measure of Díaz Nieto is that despite knowing that conversion was the only way to save his own life, he continued to press his doubts about the validity of Christian theology while in prison. Uchmany distinguishes clearly between New Christians who were sincere in their conversion and those who accepted their new religion under duress but continued to practice Judaism secretly as *cripto-judíos*. Uchmany claims that the latter accounted for the majority, not a surprising finding considering that the Portuguese Jews included those who had fled Spain in 1492 rather than convert and that their conversion to Christianity was particularly brutal. Unlike earlier historians who felt called upon to attack or defend the actions of the Catholic Church, Uchmany distills and refines scholarly understanding of the complexities of religious belief in a transitional age. In this light, it is significant that the book was published under the imprimatur of the Archivo General de la Nación—an apparent acknowledgment of Mexico's ambiguous history.

In *Los sefardíes en los dominios holandeses*, historian Günter Böhm continues his lifelong effort to resurrect the ghosts of Jewish communities

3. Similar service has been provided by Günter Böhm, who transcribed the proceedings of the trial of Francisco Maldonado de Silva in *Historia de los judíos en Chile*, vol. 1, *Período colonial* (Santiago: Andrés Bello, 1984); by Clara Cohen de Cohenca, who assembled and transcribed *procesos de portugueses* in sixteenth-century Asunción in *Los marranos en el Paraguay colonial* (Asunción: Intercontinental, 1992); and by Anita Novinsky in her numerous articles on the Inquisition and New Christians in Brazil.

past. Educated in Germany but a longtime citizen of Chile, Böhm turns his attention in this book to the evanescent Dutch enclaves in Bahia, Recife, and Pernambuco. Continuing the revision of Brazilian Jewish history begun by Anita Novinsky, Böhm proceeds with the dismantling of Arnold Wiznitzer's *Jews of Colonial Brazil*, formerly the standard reference on the subject. Shorter sections of *Los sefardíes* are devoted to the Jews of the Wilde Cust, Surinam, Cayenne, and Tobago. The book concludes with a section on Curaçao, the most heavily researched of these areas due to its role as the mother community of Caribbean Jews.

Böhm brings to light the biographies of various individuals who made their homes in the areas examined and discusses their occupations briefly. He identifies Jewish individuals in tax collection and agriculture (cotton and sugar), medicine, and the law, and he credits Jews with having introduced the processing of sugar to the Caribbean from their earlier homeland in Madeira.

Böhm worked largely from published sources, especially the work of the late Isaac and Suzanne Emmanuel.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on a lifetime of his own archival research throughout Latin America, Germany, Spain, and Holland, Böhm integrates these sources into a useful compendium. Because his sources range in date from 1647 to 1988, he touches on most of the bases to be covered (or uncovered), with the exception of the final work by the late Robert Cohen, also under review here.

*Jews in Another Environment: Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* is the first serious monograph since 1788 devoted to this community, once the most buoyant in the Western Hemisphere. Robert Cohen's study alters the traditional view of Surinamese Jewry as prosperous and well-accepted, which had been conveyed in historian David Nassy's *Essai historique sur la colonie de Surinam*, by advancing the narrative only slightly forward in time. Nassy, a merchant, physician, apothecary, and planter, participated in Surinam's golden age—his library shows him to have been as well-read as any Parisian intellectual of his day. But times change. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the plantation economy had declined and Jewish fortunes with it. Moreover, Ashkenazi merchants arriving from Europe upset the internal power arrangements within the Jewish community, threatening the social status of the entrenched Sephardim. Surinam ceased to be a challenging frontier offering the prospect of riches to those brave enough to go there, becoming instead a dumping ground for the poor of Amsterdam.

4. *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, 2 vols. (Assen, the Netherlands, and Cincinnati, Ohio: Royal van Gorcum and American Jewish Archives, 1970). See also the essays in honor of the 250th anniversary of Mikve Israel-Emanuel Synagogue of Curaçao, which were published in the December 1982 issue of *American Jewish History*. For the Caribbean as a trading area, consult Stephen Alexander Fortune, *Merchants and Jews: The Struggle for British West Indian Commerce, 1650–1750* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1984).

Cohen's analysis encompasses five aspects: immigration, climate, relations between the Sephardim and their mulatto children, the national economy, and high culture. Utilizing sophisticated statistical methods, he succeeded in teasing out differing impacts of these events on Jewish and non-Jewish populations. For example, he availed himself of the more complete Jewish mortality statistics to disprove the contemporary belief that women generally enjoyed greater natural immunity to epidemics than did men.

When considered together with his earlier edited volume, *The Jewish Nation in Surinam* (published in Amsterdam in 1983), Cohen's research provides Latin Americanists with a broader view of his subject than did the more inwardly focused Emmanuels. The latter were employed by their congregation to record the inner life of the community, whereas Cohen took his subjects out into the larger world where Jews lived in daily contact with their non-Jewish neighbors, business partners, and rivals. Thus the complexities of Surinamese social structure provide the context for his carefully researched studies. Cohen's major finding—that Sephardim did not quite belong to the elite class of white planters topping the social pyramid built on slavery but that they were not totally excluded either—offers a new paradigm for the meaning of marginality.

### *Sephardim*

Sephardic and Latin American Jewish studies overlap but are far from coterminous. Sephardic studies focus on the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula prior to their expulsion in 1492 and in their subsequent diasporas—mainly in the Mediterranean Basin and the Ottoman Empire but also including Latin America.<sup>5</sup> The Sephardim who emigrated to the region starting in the last quarter of the nineteenth century are a minority among the half-million Jews who presently reside in Latin America.

Although Sephardim had been excluded from Spanish-ruled areas since the fifteenth century, the fact that they conserved Iberian cultural patterns within their families over the intervening centuries eased their subsequent adaptation to life in the independent republics of Latin America. The case was more complicated for Jewish ethnic groups who are also considered Sephardim but were stamped by Arabic culture during their centuries of sojourning in the Moslem Near East.<sup>6</sup> In Latin America, these groups are outnumbered by Ashkenazim, who originated in Central and

5. For newcomers to the subject, the best introduction to this heavily researched subject is *Spain and the Jews: The Sephardi Experience 1492 and After*, edited by Elie Kedourie (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

6. A recent study of one such community is *Los judíos de Alepo en México* (Mexico City: Maguen David, 1989), a project of the Mexican Aleppo Jewish community coordinated by Liz Hamui de Halabe.

Eastern Europe. Descended from Yiddish-speaking folk, Ashkenazim are recent entrants into Spanish and Portuguese cultures.<sup>7</sup>

*Sephardim in the Americas: Studies in Culture and History*, edited by Martin Cohen and Abraham Peck, includes important essays on the meaning of Sephardism in history and culture. As might be expected in describing a community that has lacked a polity or a geographic base for five hundred years, the expression of Sephardic culture is largely confined to the arts. Music, poetry, sculpture, and literature all receive their due at the hands of experts in the field. Two essays focus on Latin America specifically. Librarian Allan Metz offers an overview of the Sephardic experience in the colonial period, compiled from secondary sources, as well as a useful bibliography. Victor Mirelman contributes a survey of Sephardic immigration to Latin America in the years following independence. Martin Cohen's essay interpreting the Sephardic phenomenon contains material that is vital for understanding the cultural baggage that Sephardim brought with them to the New World.

Another essay in this collection is also especially relevant for Latin Americanists: that by Frances Hernández on the secret Jews of the American Southwest. The crypto-Judaism that survives in the farthest reaches of the old Spanish Empire (Arizona and New Mexico) appears to be a residue of life suspended between Judaism and Christianity as lived in seventeenth-century New Spain. Hernández, as well as earlier researchers such as Stanley Hordes, identified families who continue to regard themselves as Jews while living outwardly as Catholics for fear of ostracism by their "Old Christian" neighbors.

### *Mexican and Brazilian Community Studies*

Understanding this fear enables readers to empathize with the enclosed Jewish community of Mexico, which did not allow researchers access to its archives until recently. Although most Mexican Jews are of Ashkenazic descent, the experience of inquisition penetrated deeply into their consciousness, particularly in Mexico, where history is reinforced by inquisitorial stereotypes still embedded in folk religion. In addition, the organized community (the *kehilah*) suffered from the phenomenon of aging autocrats who stayed in positions of influence long after they had outlived their times, a phenomenon not unknown in other sectors of Latin American society. Only recently did the organized community permit an Israeli demographer to penetrate its defenses by allowing him to conduct a census (the Jewish population of Mexico is now estimated at approximately forty thousand). Emergence of a new generation of leaders inclined to support scholarship reflects confidence that Jews have

7. Because of their adoption of Latin culture, Ashkenazim who reemigrate to Israel become known there as "Sephardim."

nothing to fear in contemporary Mexico and that the country is ready to receive them into full membership despite their not being *raza*. Within a period of only three years, researchers belonging to these previously closed communities have published an entire library of books on their own history.<sup>8</sup>

*Generaciones judías en México: La Kehilá Ashkenazí (1922–1992)* runs to an astonishing seven volumes, handsomely produced as a boxed set. The work of a team of Mexican historians, archivists, photographers, and consultants (Jewish and non-Jewish), it was assembled with the patronage of the kehilah and coordinated by Alicia Gojman de Backal, a history professor at UNAM. Each volume was compiled by a different author on a specific chronological period or sector of the lives of Mexican Ashkenazim: immigration, organization of the community, issues of identity, religion, education, the kehilah, and integration of Jews into the Mexican nation. The text consists of memoirs, correspondence, poetry, narrative, graphs derived from government and community sources, and photographs collected from families or discovered in archives. A unified and attractive graphic design lends coherence to the complex assemblage. Despite the multiplicity of authors and the varied nature of sources, the editor achieved a smoothly flowing narrative that goes far in opening up this previously closed community. The new acceptability of a Jewish presence in Mexico was the theme of remarks made at the presentation of these volumes in October 1993 by Miguel León Portilla. He recommended that other ethnic groups undertake similar projects so that Mexicans could get to know better “su rico ser pluriétnico, plurilingüístico, y cultural.”

*Imágenes de un encuentro: La presencia judía en México durante la primera mitad del siglo XX* is a nonpareil work among community studies. A large volume weighing eight pounds, it reproduces an astonishing variety of historic documents and photographs, many of them previously unpublished. The lucid text was written by Judit Bokser de Liwerant, professor of political science at the Universidad Iberoamericana, who also edited the work. It provides a history of the Jewish communities of New Spain and Mexico from conquest to the present, based on a copious

8. In addition to the titles reviewed here, these works include *Testimonios de historia oral: Judíos en México*, edited by Alicia Gojman de Backal (Jerusalem: University of Jerusalem, 1990); and a Spanish translation of Corinne A. Krause's 1970 doctoral dissertation, *Los judíos en México: Una historia con énfasis especial en el período de 1857 a 1930*, translated by Ariela Katz de Gugenheim and published by the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City in 1987. Several ethnographic works have been sponsored by government agencies, including María Eugenia Módena, *Pasaporte de culturas: Viaje por la vida de un judío ruso en México* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1982); Guadalupe Zárate Miguel, *México y la diáspora judía* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1986); and Luz María Martínez Montiel, *La gota de oro* (Veracruz: Instituto Veracruzano de Cultura, 1988), which considers Jews among other ethnic groups in Mexico.

bibliography citing works by historians, anthropologists, social scientists, and literati. *Imágenes de un encuentro* distinguishes itself from other community studies in its astute and sensitive awareness of the humanity of its subjects. For example, the photo of a popular theater is complemented by a snapshot of the eager theatergoers who thronged there. A picture of a funeral cortege is accompanied by a letter containing the deceased young man's touching words of farewell. The obligatory photos of all-male boards of directors are humanized by inclusion of the verses they wrote to commemorate the occasion being photographed. An especially insightful chapter addresses the ways in which women re-created themselves as they moved from European or Near Eastern societies to Mexico. Lesser-known Jewish communities outside Mexico City also receive attention. The superb production values underlying this volume make it a valuable reference tool and a work of art.

*Caminhos da esperança: A presença judaica no Rio Grande do Sul* offers a history of Jewish settlement in Rio Grande do Sul, which began with the agricultural colonization scheme of Baron Maurice de Hirsch. This history is revealed in the words of the colonists themselves and in the photographs that they took of one another. The volume stands midway between a scholarly study and an engaging memoir. It is included in this review for two reasons: because the text was written by Brazilian novelist Moacyr Scliar, author of *The Centaur in the Garden* and *The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes*, and because the book draws its content from one of the finest archives of its kind in Latin America (possibly the best since the destruction of the AMIA archive in Buenos Aires). The Instituto Cultural Judaico Marc Chagall in Porto Alegre has recorded, transcribed, and catalogued hundreds of interviews with Jewish Brazilians. Photographs, passports, and documents of all kinds can be found in the collection, which is open to all bona fide researchers for use in pleasant surroundings, guided by professional staff. The two volumes of *Histórias de vida* already published by the institute contain the names and vital statistics of interviewees together with précis of their interviews. Scliar has only skimmed the surface of this unusual resource for researchers.

In recent years, the interviewing of immigrants and senior citizens in order to salvage their personal histories for inclusion in the global history of Jewish life has become a significant cottage industry in the Jewish communities of Latin America. Most of these interviews have been carried out in Argentina, but examples can also be found of similar publications in Uruguay, in addition to those already mentioned for Brazil and Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

9. Perhaps the earliest of these was *Pioneros de la Argentina: Los inmigrantes judíos*, compiled by a team headed by Manrique Zago (Buenos Aires: Zago, 1982). This study was followed by *Integración y marginalidad: Historias de vidas de inmigrantes judíos en la Argentina*,

Collected Essays

The effort to establish a coherent presence for Latin American Jewish studies in academia began in 1982, with formation of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association by interested colleagues attending the meetings of the Latin American Studies Association in Washington, D.C.<sup>10</sup> Two years later, the subject gained recognition as part of Jewish studies when the World Congress of Jewish Studies, meeting in Jerusalem for its quadrennial conference, created a section devoted to Latin America. The scholars who organized this section, Latin Americans who have settled in Israel, subsequently published the revised conference papers under the title *Judaica latinoamericana: Estudios histórico-sociales* as a work of joint editorship under the acronym AMILAT (Asociación Israeli de Investigadores del Judaísmo Latinoamericano). Volume 1 contains essays on the colonial era, immigration, community organization, Zionism, anti-Semitism, literature, and Jewish identity in various countries of Latin America. Some unexpected treasures can be mined here: David Bankier's essay on exiled Germans in Mexico during World War II; Marta Kowalska's analysis of Jewish migration to Argentina based on Polish archives; Silvia Schenkolewski's revealing treatise on the relationship between the World Zionist Organization and Argentine Jewry. The collection also includes essays of substantial but parochial interest, such as Efraim Zadoff's comparison of Jewish school systems in Mexico and Argentina. The collection is prefaced by a description of Israel state archives as a source for research on Latin America, written by P. A. Alsberg, the Israel State Archivist.

AMILAT continued its organizing and editing work during the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, held in Jerusalem in 1988. The topical arrangement of the second volume of *Judaica Latinoamericana* is similar to the first, with some authors appearing again and others for the first time. Zvi Loker continues his work on Jews in the Francophone islands of the Caribbean; Margalit Bejarano expands her ongoing work on Cuban Jewry; Leonardo Senkman views Peronism from the standpoint of the Israeli legation in Buenos Aires; and Maria Luíza Tucci Carneiro examines the immigration policy of Brazilian minister Oswaldo Aranha.

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edited by a group headed by Sara Itzigsohn (Buenos Aires: Pardes, 1985); see also *Vidas en las colonias*, a collection of memoirs coordinated and edited by Hélène Gutkowski (Buenos Aires: Contexto, 1991). From Montevideo comes *Historias de vida de inmigrantes judíos al Uruguay*, compiled and introduced by Teresa Porzecanski (Montevideo: Kehila-Comunidad Israelita del Uruguay, 1986).

10. Published proceedings of LAJSA conferences offer useful essays for Latin Americanists. Collections include *The Jewish Presence in Latin America*, edited by Judith Laikin Elkin and Gilbert W. Merckx (Boston, Mass.: Allen and Unwin, 1987); *Ensayos sobre judaísmo latinoamericano* (Buenos Aires: Milá, 1990); and *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America*, edited by Lois Baer Barr and David Sheinin (forthcoming). See also *Euopäische Juden in Lateinamerika*, edited by Achim Schrader and Karl Heinrich Rengstorff (Münster: Röhrig, 1989).

Astute analysis of relations between Argentina and Israel by Ignacio Klich can be found in both volumes. A substantial literary section includes essays by Regina Igel, Naomi Lindstrom, and Sabine Horl Groenewold.

Taken together, these two volumes of conference papers illustrate the broad range of ideas and topics embraced by Latin American Jewish studies. They also reveal gaps in the research, most conspicuously in the field of economics. Statistical data are lacking as well as information on occupation, income level, and residential patterns.<sup>11</sup> Statistics on persons working within their national economies are not easily broken out by religion or ethnic group, however. And as is usual for conference proceedings, the editors were dependent on the choices made by scholars to present or withhold their papers. These collections cover a wide range of Latin American Jewish topics, but much remains uncharted.

### *Conclusion*

In a 1985 essay for this journal, I wrote, "Jews' lack of political power is the central fact of their existence in countries that have not wholly accommodated to their presence. This political marginality is reflected in their invisibility in scholarship relating to Latin America."<sup>12</sup> In the intervening ten years, much has changed, much has remained the same. The liberal ideals that drew immigrants to Latin America in the nineteenth century have borne fruit in widespread acceptance of Jews as marriage partners, the increasing frequency of appointment or election of Jewish individuals to public office, and the recognition of a positive Jewish presence in national life. With a speed deplored by leaders of the Jewish community, the children and grandchildren of Jewish immigrants are becoming integrated into their national societies culturally and biologically, especially in the countries of the Southern Cone.

This *apertura* reverberates within the Jewish communities and is reflected in scholarship about them. Several hundred scholars in two dozen countries of Latin America, Europe, Israel, and the United States are now actively researching Latin American Jewish populations. Their articles and books exhibit increased sophistication in using modern research techniques, and their combined efforts have resulted in significant contributions to Latin American studies.

At the far right of the Latin American political spectrum, Jews continue to be defined pretty much as they were during the great immigration debates of the nineteenth century, when these societies were strug-

11. The best recent resources are U. O. Schmelz and Sergio DellaPergola, "The Demography of Latin American Jewry," *American Jewish Year Book* 85 (1985):51-102; and Sergio DellaPergola and Susana Lerner, *La población judía de México: Perfil demográfico, social y cultural* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1995).

12. Judith Laikin Elkin, "Latin America's Jews: A Review of Sources," *LARR* 20, no. 2 (1985):124-41.

gling to create their national identities. The anticipated “civilizing effect” of potential immigrants was based on racial stereotypes (Northern Europeans preferred, despite all evidence that Northern Europeans were not interested in coming) as well as on implied acceptance of Latin American inferiority (“We Latin Americans need to be civilized”) and the abdication of personal and national responsibility for that process. Deprecation of Jews along with Arabs and other “*turcos*” was based on the perception of them as aliens engaged in unpleasant occupations like commerce and industry that were ascribed to them as racial characteristics.

Discrimination seeks occasions to escalate into violence, as it did during the Argentine “Proceso” (1976–1983) and again in July of 1994. Stereotypes can be molded to suit new circumstances, ready to be activated when politically expedient: the Syrian is no longer viewed as just a peddler but a peddler of drugs, a *narcotraficante*. The Jew is no longer viewed as just a white slaver, a trafficker in women, but a black slaver, a trafficker in men. For nativists, racist thinking shaped the acceptance or rejection of immigrants and thereafter an inability to believe that the immigrants’ children could ever become “real” Argentines or “real” Mexicans.

One way that Jews reacted to such rebuffs was to organize institutions to provide the social, economic, and religious support that their members could not obtain elsewhere. The downside to this defensive reaction has been that the *kehilahs* appear to hostile observers as tight little islands isolated within prevailing national currents. But whether Latin American Jews are inside or outside the *kehilah*, they live their lives within areas of tolerance that lie somewhere between liberals’ acceptance of immigrants and nativists’ rejection of them as foreigners. Vulnerable to the resulting tensions and to unstable economies, this tiny ethnic minority and its future depend on the way in which the struggle between these major forces plays itself out.