

# Latin American Jews in the United States: Community and Belonging in Times of Transnationalism

Judit Bokser Liwerant

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**Abstract** Latin American Jews constitute an increasingly large presence in the United States, posing both new opportunities and challenges for American Jewish communal life. Not only do Latin American Jews represent a significant socio-demographic group, but their incorporation into the American Jewish community increases diversity. At the same time, their inclusion tests conventional boundaries and mutual perceptions of being similar and different. Through a broad assessment of globalization, diasporas, and transnationalism, this article sheds light on diverse models of integration by Latin American Jews into the American milieu while maintaining their socio-cultural distinctiveness. Multiple ways of belonging to American Jewish institutions and organizations imply boundary maintenance and continuity—as Jews, as Latin American Jews, as Latin Americans, as Americans—while mutual influence and the transfer of original models into more or less autonomous spaces allow the display of being Latin American through their Jewishness and their Jewishness via Latin American communal patterns. Education, communal and religious life are paramount fields to explore the mosaic of experiences by Latin American Jews in the United States. Permanence amid a mobile context characterizes the presence of Latin American Jews in US cities. Miami-Dade county in Southern Florida and San Diego in Southern California serve as the focus of analysis, while comparisons are drawn with the Northeast and Middle West.

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This article is related to a global research project that advances a transnational perspective to study Latin American Jewish life in the region and abroad: “Latin American Jews in a Transnational World: Redefining Experiences and Identities in Four Continents” outlined by Judit Bokser Liwerant, Sergio DellaPergola, and Leonardo Senkman (2010).

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J. B. Liwerant (✉)

Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México,  
Ciudad Universitaria, Circuito Mario de la Cueva, México, D.F. 04510, México  
e-mail: bokser@mail.politicas.unam.mx; judit@liwerant.com  
URL: <http://juditbokserliwerant-unam.mx>

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Latin American Jews constitute an increasingly large presence in the United States, posing both new opportunities and challenges for American Jewish communal life. Not only do Latin American Jews represent a significant socio-demographic group, but their incorporation into the American Jewish community increases diversity. At the same time, their inclusion tests conventional boundaries and mutual perceptions of being similar and different. Latin American Jews have integrated into the American milieu, while maintaining their socio-cultural distinctiveness—both with respect to the culture of origin and their Jewishness. Current demographic trends associated with their migration to the United States imply diverse models that partly reflect global trends and also the specificity of the region. These patterns have provided the foundation for the growth and socio-cultural characterization of American Jewry (Biale et al. 1998). Immigration led to a solid basis for the outgrowth of American Jewish communal life while diversity of origin shaped its character. The analysis that follows considers Latin American migration in terms of a broad assessment of globalization, diasporas, and transnationalism. The present paper aims to shed light on contemporary international and regional processes of migration, integration, and distinctiveness that account both for permanence and mobility and the new scaling of cities where collective Jewish life is relocated.

Outward mobility from Latin American countries to the United States is part of a larger globalization phenomenon of unexpected scope—from 75 million migrants in 1965 to 120 million in 1990 and 214 million in 2009. Diversified migration waves both reflect and create diverse experiential paths—territorial, cultural, sub-ethnic, and social (Held et al. 1999; Faist 2010; Robertson 1992; Sassen 2005; UNDP 2009; Zlotnik 1999). The broader globalization phenomenon has led to economic, social, political, and cultural changes that have upset geographic, territorial, and temporal referents. Globalization has fundamentally altered contemporary structures and institutions, social relations, and communal spaces. Among the changes that most perceptibly affect contemporary life are those centered in mass media, which intensify the density, speed, and frequency of cross-border connections (Robertson 1992; Scholte 1998; Waters 1995).<sup>1</sup> Increasingly dense and active relationships between individuals, groups, and communities develop within expanded social spheres and institutional arenas (Bokser Liwerant 2002, 2006).

The migration of Latin American Jews in the United States is part of these processes. Historically, Latin American Jewry grew out of large-scale immigration and established powerful and original patterns of Jewish life and community organization. During the last decades, however, the net direction of migration flows tended to be from Latin America to other destinations. It is estimated that in the past 40 years between 150,000 and 250,000 Jews emigrated from Latin American countries, both inside the region and outside of it, mainly to the United States, Israel, and to a lesser extent, countries in Western Europe (Spain) and Canada (DellaPergola 2009, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It includes diverse combinations between telecommunications, digital computers, audiovisual media, satellites, transportation technologies, as well as those brought by global corporations and supranational agencies that standardize economic, social, and cultural policy criteria.

<sup>2</sup> Estimates vary between 227,500 based on the core population definition and 303,000 using the enlarged population definition.

The region as a whole was directly influenced by the contradictory nature of globalization processes that created new opportunities and, at the same time, sharpened sectorial inequalities. Thus, positive and negative consequences coalesced: the incorporation of new economic models that brought achievements and cyclical crises, the increasingly expansive force of democracy, as well as its recessions, regressions, and reconfigurations. Parallel processes of growing pluralism and recurrent failures of modernization took place. Economic and political change, combined with social instability, led to increasing emigration fluxes reflecting both needs and windows of opportunity. As a result, in complex and interrelated ways, Latin American Jews have transitioned from communities of immigrants, to communities of citizens and, simultaneously, of emigrants.

Contemporary migration encompasses steady as well as repeated and circular, bi-local and multi-local movements. Expanded mobility, multiple relocations, sustained interactions and the emergence of transmigrants enhanced exchanges of economic and social resources, cultural narratives, practices, and symbols between communities and societies, thereby creating, recreating, and redefining associational structures (Castles and Davidson 2000; Glick Schiller et al. 1995). The nature of current migration influenced both receiving and sending societies. For Latin American Jews, and for their old and new receiving communities, primordial and elective, ethnic and civic aspects of belonging were explored and negotiated.

In a world characterized by multiple places of origin and destination, the United States has become the top choice of international migrants from different regions/countries, religious affiliations, and ethnicities. According to the US Census Bureau, there were 39,955,854 foreign-born people residing in the United States in 2010.<sup>3</sup> Those born in Latin America and the Caribbean, estimated at 21,224,087, represented an important share of this migratory mosaic.<sup>4</sup> Newcomers from the region joined veteran immigrants as well as their offspring, including the second and third generations.

Although we do not have precise figures for the number of Latin American Jews in the United States, estimates range between 100,000–133,000 (DellaPergola 2011—core and enlarged definitions) and 156,000 (Sheskin and Dashefsky 2011). Current estimates point to approximately 250,000 to 300,000 Israelis and 350,000 to 700,000 Jews from the Former Soviet Union. This wide variation is due to differences in data sources, defining who is a Jew, and assessing the share of Jews among total migrants to the United States (DellaPergola 1998; Gold and Phillips 1996; Rebhun and Lev Ari 2010; Remennick 2007; Saxe 2010; Tolts 2011).<sup>5</sup> In comparison to other Jewish migrant groups, the various Latin American flows feature steady growth, although differences prevail in each particular national context. Such immigration constitutes a significant

<sup>3</sup> According to the Pew Forum (2010) there are 42.8 million migrants, including unauthorized immigrants and people born in the US territories. While the United States has taken in more immigrants than any other country, the share of the US population that is foreign-born (13 %) is about average for Western industrial democracies (Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life 2010).

<sup>4</sup> This figure contrasts with smaller migrant populations: 11,283,574 from Asia; 4,817,437 from Europe; and 1,606,914 from Africa. Source: US Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey.

<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that a similar amount migrated to Israel (115,000/150,000 core-enlarged definition) and 12,500/20,000 to other places.

factor of demographic support for American Jewry, as well as a challenging element of cultural enrichment and institutional renovation.

Migration waves from Latin America in the last forty years were of a different nature and scope: they encompassed forced migration and exiled individuals at high risk (such as politically involved activists and intellectuals); voluntary household mobility motivated by safety, security, and economic considerations; and movement of professionals prompted by opportunities and entrepreneurial expansion in the framework of increasingly interconnected markets. Indeed, there was a sustained movement of professionals in privileged occupations who started or operated businesses and sought education; Jews constituted a high proportion of these. Multi-localism and transmigration have become an increasingly important phenomena in our century. Circulation of people and knowledge, as well as the exchange of cultural remittances, also have become part of this mobile scenario. At present, education of Latin American students at US universities and their insertion into the disciplinary and professional spectrum is widespread (UNESCO 2010).<sup>6</sup>

The collective dimension implicit in the relocation of Jewish life and the new profile of communities in the making might be analyzed in light of the Latin American region's "migration crises." Migration crises refer to the emigration, dispersal, and regrouping of migrant communities shaped worldwide by macro-level forces of political and economic nature (Van Hear 1998). As stated, they reflect severe economic setbacks, political upheavals, the impact of economic globalization on commerce and industry, and the incorporation of peripheral societies into the global market economy.

Several migration crises affecting Jews took place during the second half of the 20th century. The first phase began with the Cuban revolution in 1959 and continued during the 1970s in Chile under Allende's socialist government and later with the authoritarian regime of Pinochet. In addition, migration continued under the military dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. The later phases (mid-1980s and the 1990s) were provoked by the combined effects of neo-liberal economic policies and globalization affecting Argentina twice and, in near synchrony, Uruguay. Colombian Jews emigrated due to generalized violence and more recently (since 2000) Jews of Venezuela emigrated under the impact of the revolutionary populist regime of Hugo Chávez. Although migration was stable in Mexico during the last decades of the 20th century, Jewish migration was associated with its own chronology of events.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In 2007, 229 Mexicans, 180 Brazilians, 141 Argentines, and 121 Colombians obtained their PhD in the United States; in 2003, naturalized individuals or non-residents constituted 19 % of those who had graduated with a PhD or were engineers employed in the United States.

<sup>7</sup> If these crises largely explain the migration of Latin American Jews, serious political turmoil, violence, and economic changes operate selectively. Thus, how migration streams change sheds light on moments of migration transition. Sharp Jewish population decreases since the mid-1980s in Central American countries are evident cases of relatively significant outflows. However, in the case of Guatemala, more than half of its population decided to stay in their homeland. Neighboring Costa Rica increased its Jewish population by two-thirds since 1967, while Panama became a relocation country for small groups of Jews fleeing from other Central American countries. The population of Jews from Venezuela shows both the increase of its population since the 1960s and the remaining of the majority of the Jewish community in the country. Argentina, which experienced sharp political and economic crises, still hosts the largest Jewish population in the continent (cf. Bokser Liwerant et al. 2010).

Latin American Jews are part of the cohort of qualified migrants with “red carpet” status who increasingly move to OECD countries. The United States, both because of its proximity to Latin America and its opportunities, attracts a significant number. Between 1990 and 2007, the number of migrants increased by 155 % (from 1.9 to 4.9 million). Out of the 4.9 million, a high number migrated to the United States—4.2 million, or 84.3 % of the total qualified migrants from the region (Lozano and Gandini 2012).<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of the 21st century there were 494,000 scientists of Latin American origin; this number represents 15 % of foreigners incorporated into the science and technology system (UNESCO 2010). Within a region that ranks as the third highest source of migrants in the world, bifurcation of migration takes place: the increased mobility of qualified migrants coexists with large marginal sectors of non-skilled workers and peasants lacking formal education who face restrictive policies (so-called “red card” migrants) (Faist 2010).<sup>9</sup>

The presence of Latin American Jews in the United States reflects regionalization patterns and unique features: a strong presence in trade, commerce, manufacturing, and the free professions generated group-specific—and yet variable—exposures to advantages or liabilities inherent in changing national scenarios and economic policies across the region. These patterns were also associated with the dynamics of their particular socio-economic profile: a fairly high level of education in the region, with numerous holders of MA and higher degrees, significantly active in the labor force (often employed with high salaries), home owners, and married.<sup>10</sup> But in contrast to “red card” migrants and to particular “red carpet” groups, scholarly understanding about Latin American Jews in the United States remains limited and fragmented and, therefore, in need of integrative research.

Latin American Jews move and stay, bring and host, interact and negotiate in a context of past and present trends of an interconnected Jewish world. Their migration has widened the spectrum of encounters between individuals and groups carrying distinct communal organizing principles, historical trajectories, models, and logics of the collective. The spatial and social extension of Latin American Jewish life beyond the territorial frontiers of the region entails its incorporation into the American Jewish scene through individual models of insertion, the reaffirmation of collective communal practices/configurations, and the building of new ones. Contemporary American Jewry and the encounters that take place at its heart can be better understood when considering the changing profile of collectives entering transnational dynamics and the challenges of integration they pose. Multiple dynamics of arriving/receiving, being/belonging of

<sup>8</sup> Latin America and the Caribbean showed the highest levels of relative growth of qualified migrants to OECD countries, while the latter’s migrant qualified population increased 111 %, from 12.3 to 25.9 million.

<sup>9</sup> These flows are mainly associated to the logic of labor markets and fluid migration chains linking sending-receiving cities/countries amid an asymmetrical regionalization that connect peripheral regions of world economy to core regions of capital accumulation and development.

<sup>10</sup> According to NJPS (2001), 35.9 % of Latin American Jews in the United States have an MA degree and above, 26.8 % have a BA, 20.5 % have some college education, and 16.8 % have high school or less. (Data provided to the author by Sergio DellaPergola and Uzi Rebhun). The profile of this group contrasts with lower levels of educational attainment for the majority of the foreign born from Latin America, although there is also a highly qualified stratum among Latin American non-Jewish migrants (cf. US Census Bureau, 2008–2010 American Community Service).

Jewish migrants, and their interactions with host communities/society point to a diversified reality not always internalized by prevailing self images and discourses.

Several paradigmatic fields and patterns can be identified in locations with a strong collective Latin American Jewish presence, where agency and structure interact in a differentiated scenario of places and actors. The relocation of Jewish life takes place in existing and reconfigured spaces of American Jewry. It occurs largely because unique and shared Jewish dimensions allow for socio-cultural embeddedness while exposing its inner diversity. Within a context of different historical trajectories and contemporary convergences enhanced by world Jewish trends, the presence of these communities leads to an expanded and more diverse American Jewish life.

### **Relocation of Latin American Jewish Life in a Mobile American Environment**

Permanence amid mobility characterize the presence of Jews and the relocation of Jewish life in the United States. Differentiated scenarios can be approached through exemplary cases where new centers of Jewish life have developed while diverse transnational processes concur: out-migration, translocation, re-location, return, short-term, and temporary experiences. Miami-Dade county and Southern Florida, San Diego and Southern California, and the Northeast and Middle West will serve as the focus of analysis.

Latin American Jews live in “stacked social spaces” characterized by high levels of foreign-born populations. In Miami Dade, 51.1 % of the population was born outside the United States. Smaller but nonetheless significant percentages of foreign born characterize Los Angeles (39.6 %), NYC (36.8 %), Broward County (30.9 %), Boston (27.2 %), and San Diego (23.1 %). These spaces, which share socio-demographic and ethnic-racial contexts (see Table 1), extend over the non-contiguous geographic territory of US society, hence questioning what Ludger Pries (2008a, p. 5) calls the past predominance of “mutual embeddedness of social practices, symbols and artifacts in uni-local geographic containers” and the “complete conjunction of the social and the spatial.”

Cities and regions in the United States where Latin Americans (Jews and non-Jews) settle constitute key urban frameworks and scales that define the pathways of migrants’ incorporation. At the same time, the non-homogenous character of American Jewish life stands out (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011). It is worthwhile to underscore the potential contribution of the study of migrants’ arrival to diverse contexts and communities to “a better, richer, more nuanced and finely-grained portrait of American Judaism” whose differences have usually been subsumed in the prevailing homogenized representation of American life (Sarna 2005, p. 419).

In increasingly mobile and diverse settings, Jewish life becomes a magnet for Latin American Jews. Convergent settlement patterns shape encounters between Latin and American Jews. Indeed, great numbers of Latin American Jews have relocated in areas with significant Jewish populations such as the Northeast-Midwest, Southern California, and Southern Florida. While the number of Jews in NYC reaches almost 1.5 million, the Jewish communities in Washington, DC;

**Table 1** Social spatialities in the United States: Southern Florida, Southern California, and the Northeast-Middle West

Spatiality	Population (2010)	% Foreign born (2006–2010)	% Latin American population: Hispanic/Latino	Jewish population: # of persons	% Diversity: White majority, Black and Asian minorities
a. Southern Florida					
Miami Dade	2,496,435	51.1	65	113,300 (2004)	W: 73.8 B: 18.9 A: 1.5
Broward	1,748,066	30.9	25.1	185,800 (2008)	W: 63.1 B: 26.7 A: 3.2
b. Southern California					
San Diego	3,095,313	23.1	32	89,000 (2003)	W: 64.0 B: 5.1 A: 10.9
Los Angeles (city)	3,792,621	39.6	48.5	519,200 (1997)	W: 49.8 B: 9.6 A: 11.3
c. Northeast-Midwest triangle					
Chicago (city)	2,695,598	21.1	28.9	291,800 (2010) <sup>a</sup>	W: 45.0 B: 32.9 A: 5.5
NYC (city)	8,175,133	36.8	28.6	Over 1.4 million (2002) <sup>b</sup>	W: 44.0 B: 25.5 A: 12.7
Boston (city)	617,594	27.2	17.5	208,500 (2005)	W: 53.9 B: 24.4 A: 8.9
Washington, DC (District of Columbia)	601,723	13	9.1	215,600 (2003)	W: 38.5 B: 50.7 A: 3.5

Sources: On the foreign born, Hispanic population and majority/minorities. cf. US Census Bureau 2010, American Community Survey and State & County QuickFacts. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/>. Jewish demographics are found in community studies at North American Jewish Data Bank. [www.jewishdatabank.org](http://www.jewishdatabank.org)

<sup>a</sup> Data on Metropolitan Chicago

<sup>b</sup> Metropolitan New York includes five boroughs of NYC and three contiguous New York State suburban counties: Nassau, Westchester, and Suffolk

Boston; and Chicago (200–300,000) only closely approach the traditionally largest Jewish community of Argentina—282,000 in 1970/182,300 in 2011, core definition (DellaPergola 2011), 85 % of whom live in Buenos Aires. San Diego's Jewish

population of 89,000 is still larger than the Mexican Jewish community (estimated at 40,000) (Ukeles and Miller 2003). The Jewish community in Miami-Dade, combined with the neighboring Ft. Lauderdale and Palm Beach areas (Southeast Florida), represent the third most populous in the country.<sup>11</sup> The number of Latin American Jews is estimated at 16,000 individuals in Miami-Dade (Sheskin 2004)<sup>12</sup> and 600–700 Mexican Jewish families or 2,400 Jews in San Diego (private estimates). For both of the latter locations, more accurate and updated data needs to be collected.

When evaluating mobile populations, we need to consider temporary residents. In Miami, their number has increased: 7 % of Jewish households live in the area for 3–7 months of the year (considered part-year households); 2 %, for 8–9 months; 4 %, for 10–11 months of the year; and 87 %, for 12 months (full-year households). Most recent estimates point to 7 % compared to 6 % in 1994 (Sheskin 2004). Migratory waves to Miami from Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, and Mexico also draw convergent scenarios of trans-located status. Mexican Jews in San Diego travel to Tijuana/Mexico City; Venezuelans and Mexicans do so from Miami to Caracas and Mexico City. The well-established connections of Venezuelan and Mexican Jewish businessmen in Florida highlight the way current economic changes create favorable conditions for a transitory migration that, as will be seen, does not exclude permanence and incorporation into American Jewish communities/society.

San Diego has become an important destination-translocation and second home abroad for Mexican Jews. It is a border city and, partially as a consequence, overlapping migratory and social networks (family, ethnic, and increasingly professional, business, and generationally younger) have developed. The close societal context has resulted in the percentage of total population born in Mexico reaching more than 40 %.<sup>13</sup> San Diego is part of a larger American reality in which Mexico stands out as having exceptionally high migration fluxes: close to 30 million Hispanics are of Mexican origin.<sup>14</sup>

At the US-Mexican border, complex interactions between Mexico's underdevelopment and globalization call into question the traditional equivalence between territorial bonds and a sense of belonging. The new reality is shaped by transnationalism but needs to be seen in light of the interplay between social stratification and ethnicity (Vertovec 2009). The border area ambitiously becomes both a region where culture, society, and different levels of development intersect,

<sup>11</sup> Looked at individually, the numbers in Miami (113,300) and Broward (185,800) are smaller than those of other cities in the country.

<sup>12</sup> Private estimates point to 40,000 Latin American Jews in the state of Florida. According to the US Census, 1,097,524 Hispanic adults lived in Miami as of 2003, and 0.9 % (about 9,000) of Hispanic adults in Miami were Jewish at the time (Sheskin 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Other Latin Americans also have a presence in this city but with far lower percentages (cf. <http://www.census.gov/popfinder/>).

<sup>14</sup> According to data provided by the Pew Hispanic Center (2009), 48,348,000 Hispanics live in the United States. Of this total, 31,674,000 are Mexican (based on self-described family ancestry or place of birth). From the approximately 11.5 undocumented migrants in the United States, 6.5 million are Mexican, representing 57 % of the total (Lowell et al. 2009).



and a zone where space, capital, and meaning are disputed (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Kearny 1995, p. 117).<sup>15</sup>

Encounters between Latin American Jews and other Jewish migrant groups exemplify a Jewish world on the move. In Miami, it is estimated that 31 % of adults in Jewish households are foreign born. In addition to the 7 % who were born in South America, 5 % were born respectively in Middle America (generally including Mexico, the countries of Central America, and the Caribbean), the Middle East, and Eastern Europe (non-FSU). A similar percentage (4.3 %) was born in the FSU and 3 % in Western Europe (Sheskin 2004).<sup>16</sup> Also in San Diego (2003), a significant share of Jews (19 %) were born outside the United States, including sizeable groups from the FSU (3 %), Israel (2 %), and South Africa (2 %), compared to 1 % from Mexico. Thus, both places become diverse scenarios that reflect not only individual and group aspirations to integrate into the host society but also potential links with other Jews who at the same time expect to retain their distinctiveness.

The mobility and diversity of the American urban landscapes are also revealed by the intersecting settlement patterns of Latin American Jews and non-Jews, which are part of a broader national scenario of Hispanic/Latino presence as the largest minority in the United States, reaching about 50 million. While Miami has a particularly large Hispanic/Latino population (65 %), other places also have significant numbers. The Hispanic/Latino population of Broward is smaller than in Miami-Dade (25.1 %), but its Jewish population is larger, thus reflecting the movement by Latin American Jews northward to Broward County and Palm Beach, outside the borders of Dade County (Bejarano 1997).<sup>17</sup>

These changing settlement patterns point to collective gathering and social mobility, illustrated also by Mexican Jews in San Diego, where the first waves arrived in the 1970–80s<sup>18</sup> and established their neighborhoods (Chulavista and Bonita) near the border with Tijuana, but years later began to move to other residential areas (La Jolla and more recently Del Mar). Identification of the particular settlement trends of Latin American Jews further sheds light on their differentiated migratory chains and networks, namely, convergences and divergences between Pilsen in Chicago as an entry point for Mexicans and Aventura/Hollywood in north Miami-Dade/Broward counties for Latin American Jews. Even if they settle in these places, Latino/Hispanic populations constitute socio-cultural (and political) containers that may represent their “being” but not necessarily their “belonging,” a concept implying identification (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004).

<sup>15</sup> It points to inequalities and marginality that lie behind the new migratory movements, as well as the avenues by which transnational and trans-local experiences become ways to empowerment (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002).

<sup>16</sup> The majority of Hispanic Jews born in South American countries, including Colombia, Venezuela, and Argentina live in North Dade (10 %), in contrast to Hispanic Jews born in Cuba who are more concentrated in the Beaches (7.1 % compared to 3.9 % in South Dade and 1.5 % in North Dade). In North Dade, other countries of origin include: Poland, Germany, Romania, Canada, Israel and Russia.

<sup>17</sup> In percentage terms, San Diego (32 %) has a larger Hispanic/Latino population than Broward, Chicago (28.9 %), and NYC (28.6 %) while this population is far larger in Los Angeles (48.5 %).

<sup>18</sup> Since the second half of the 20th century when some individuals and their families moved to the Northern border city of Tijuana where a new Jewish community consolidated.

Being Hispanic/Latino may be seen as an external category that indicates group visibility in the legal, social, educational, and political realms, thereby motivating strategic self-adscription, and yet it may also blur the inner feelings. These categories also reflect—although in less visible ways—diverse patterns of insertion, national origin, and citizenship status, among other factors.

At the historical-political and also at the hermeneutics level, the categories of Hispanic/Latino have largely excluded Jews and Jewish uniqueness. Although some of the literary corpus overlaps Hispanic with Sephardic Jews, as part of a larger cultural recovery of an alleged historical continuity, most social science research on Hispanic/Latino in the United States largely ignores the Jewish case. It remains to be researched whether a “pan-ethnic” Latin American identification can be constructed and what the implications of such an identity might be. The trends of highly mobile and diversified settings and patterns of relocation, and the building of new spaces together with sustained migratory movements—either moving back home or relocating to other US locations where a Latin American Jewish presence is relevant—widen the mosaic of experiences and means of integration.

### **New Cultural Encounters: The Different and the Similar**

An examination of American Jewry and Latin American Jewish communities reveals contrasting models of Jewish collective life. The Jewish congregational model developed in the United States on the basis of denominationalism and as part of a society in which religion was constitutionally separated from state. Jewish life was based on local, regional, and national federations interwoven with the denominational dimension and attuned to the American scene (Phillips 2005; Waxman 1983). The United States was long imagined and defined as a “three-religion country” consisting of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Religion was assumed to be the primary axis of distinction and yet the singular dynamics between religion and ethnicity led to the acceptance of the former as a way of expressing the latter. Individualized Jewish religiosity developed around the synagogue-congregation, marked by the suburban frontier experience; it was gradually embedded in a public Jewish “civil religion,” understood either as a set of civic tenets or as a Jewish ethno-national solidarity that became sacralized (Fisher and Stone 2012; Woocher 1986, 2005).

For their part, Latin American Jews adopted and recreated the *kehillah* (community) model of corporate experience: an ethno-religious-national, secularized, institutionalized, and cohesive Jewish community. The crystallization of a shared and distinctive Latin American culture interacting with national contexts and the unique patterns of collective Jewish life strongly affected the social integration of Latin American Jews. Territorial, national, cultural, and political arenas explained the region’s diversity as well as the varied social stratification and consequent insertion and profile of Jewish life in each of more than 20 countries.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In multi-ethnic societies such as Argentina and Uruguay where immigration changed the profile of the population, minorities faced a *de facto* tolerance that counterbalanced the primordial, territorial, and

The highly differentiated evolutionary process of communal structures reflected and shaped the growth of Jewish communities. Within hierarchical worldviews that underlined national membership criteria in the region, ethnicity and social stratification interacted and intersected.<sup>20</sup> Although religion was embedded in the Latin American region's social constructs, the internalization of Catholicism also implied its conversion into a civic culture that simultaneously set the limits and scope of secularization processes. The central place and role of the Catholic Church as well as European corporate traditions led to difficulties dealing with religious and ethnic diversity. In Argentina, liberal secularism—not the civil religion model—constituted a neutral sphere that allowed Jews to become full citizens, while in Mexico a strong ethnic component of national belonging prevailed.

Several indicators point to important differences and commonalities that shaped the migrants' individual, family, and group paths of incorporation into American Jewish communities. Overall, affiliation rates in Latin America are higher than in the United States. While the gap between Mexico City and San Diego is striking (85 and 30 %, respectively), cities in Brazil and Argentina have far lower affiliation rates (45–50 %), closer to the US national average. Intermarriage rates rose among American Jews during the second half of the 20th century, eventually reaching about 50 % (DellaPergola 2011; Katz 2010). Whereas this rate (more strikingly high in the Western states) contrasts with much lower rates in Mexico and Venezuela (less than or just above 10 %), it is similar to those prevailing in Argentina and Brazil (surpassing 45 %) (Reinharz and DellaPergola 2009).

Both North and Latin American Jewish communities have been radically transformed by global patterns with convergent and divergent trends: transitions from individualization to collective affirmation, and its reversal; from congregational to communal axes while simultaneously witnessing a growing role of synagogues; from secularization to rising religiosity while the former gains recognition; a move from privatization to communal revival. These trends are not linear but rather reflect changing moments, fluctuations, and the crossing of paths.

### **Integration, Distinctiveness, and Continuity**

Both integration and socio-cultural distinctiveness characterize the insertion of Latin American Jews into the new milieus in the United States. Multiple ways of belonging to American Jewish institutions and organizations imply continuity—as Jews, as Latin American Jews, as Latin Americans—while mutual influence and the

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Footnote 19 continued

religiously homogeneous profile that the State aspired to achieve. In countries such as Mexico, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, where immigration did not change the original ethnic profile, the weight of ethnic differences radicalized the aspirations and national narratives of a unified nation (Avni 1998; Eisenstadt 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Latin American citizens were the first ones in the modern West to have failed in their attempt to reconcile social equality with cultural differences, thereby contributing the socio-ethnically fissured nature of public life in the continent (Forment 2003). In turn, many values and institutional arrangements were cultural hybrids.

transfer of original models into more or less autonomous spaces allow the display of being Latin American through their Jewishness and their Jewishness via Latin American communal patterns. Among other fields, education and communal life are paramount to explore the full range of experiences by Latin American Jews in the United States.

Education had a central role in the shaping of Latin American Jewish life. Jewish education was historically prioritized over other collective needs in the region and was characterized by integral education in day schools. Although the ecology of Jewish education initially reflected the gamut of political and ideological currents that shaped the Latin American communities, in recent decades, the educational system has changed following global Jewish trends: new defining criteria, mainly the religious and the communitarian, are revealed by the highest rates of growth in religious and Haredi schools.<sup>21</sup>

In the United States, education has to be understood in light of changing trends in the Jewish world. We observe today a differentiated increase in the number of children educated in Jewish day schools.<sup>22</sup> Day schools in the United States primarily serve the Orthodox population.<sup>23</sup> Less than 15 % of the schools are non-Orthodox, 20 % are Modern Orthodox, and 60 % are Haredi.

A mosaic of experiences encompasses educational choices: the relative density of Latin American Jewish populations, socio-economic stratification, and the availability of high-quality public education are among the factors that influence enrollment. Both in Miami and San Diego, a growing number of Latin American Jews (of non-Orthodox background) have been admitted into Orthodox schools (such as Hillel, Soille San Diego Jewish Day School, Chabad) through strategies of adopting religious practices (e.g., modest dress codes, kashrut, and candle-lighting on Shabbat). Stable Jewish settings and warm, caring, and cohesive social environments attract Latin American Jews into schools with greater religiosity levels than those they attended in their home country.

In Jewish day schools, integration and mutual influence are related to the ratio of migrants. At both Hillel and Sinai schools in Miami, it is estimated that the majority

<sup>21</sup> In Mexico, the Haredi schools, serving 26 % of the student population, show the highest population growth: 55 % in the last eight years. The Ashkenazi schools show the greatest percentage of decrease (28 %) and the Maguen David schools (Aleppo community schools) the highest growth rate, with 46 % of the total student population. Of this group, 40 % attend Haredi schools. Also in Argentina, the highest population growth is registered among the religious schools and in Sao Paulo, five religious schools were founded in the last years while there is a growing incorporation of Orthodox teachers into secular schools (Topel 2005; Vaad Hajinuj 2005).

<sup>22</sup> It is estimated that there were 60,000 students in Jewish day schools in 1962 while by 1982–83 the student population had increased to 104,000 (10 % of the Jewish school-age population), and in 2000, it reached approximately 200,000; that is, nearly one-quarter of all Jewish school-age children attended day school. Recent studies show that today's total enrollment nationwide is 242,000.

<sup>23</sup> In 1998, the numbers were 20 % non-Orthodox, 26 % Modern Orthodox and 47 % Haredi. The growth in ultra-Orthodox or Haredi school enrollment, including both Hasidic and non-Hasidic schools, reflects high birthrates and contrasts with Modern Orthodox schools, which are essentially holding their own. At the same time, there has been a severe drop (35 %) in Solomon Schechter (Conservative movement) school enrollment. In 1998, the first year AVI CHAI foundation examined student enrollments, the Schechter attendance totaled 17,563 students in 63 schools nationwide. This year, their school enrollment is just 11,338 students in 43 schools (cf. Goldberg 2011).

or a great number of students are of Latin American origin. In the first case, according to one interviewee, the growing presence of Latin American Jews has gradually led to the loosening of the school's religious environment. In the second case, Spanish has been incorporated into the curriculum. In San Diego, a bilingual setting characterizes the Jewish Academy where more than a third of the population is Mexican. By way of Spanish—widely spoken at school events—community is built. American democratic values (such as tolerance) underline the school's practices (e.g., class conversations on national and global issues) while linguistic proficiency in English is a key factor of integration in all of these institutions. On a wider perspective, English constitutes an important element for attaining citizenship and for participating in the labor market and society at large (Chiswick and Miller 1998; Kritz and Gurak 2005; Remennick 2007). Under transnational logics, one thus finds interesting interactions and intersections between being American/Latin American in the field of education. Social integration and encounters between the different and the similar often entail new cultural trade-offs.

Simultaneously, associational and organized communal settings constitute porous containers of primordial and elective belonging. Such bordered spaces provide alternative/complementary pathways into maintaining distinctiveness. Both the Ken (San Diego) and Hebraica/JCC (Miami) may be conceived as ethno-national/transnational autonomous magnets. They reproduced Latin American Jewish social practices (including language, food, frequent social gatherings, and a Zionist identification). The Maccabi games at the JCC in Miami represent a Jewish-Israeli arena of interaction, intersection, and differentiation between Latin American Jews, and between Venezuelans, Mexicans, Argentinians, Colombians, and Cubans, among other nationalities. Worthwhile to underscore is the transfer of the Hebraica/Latin American communal model worldwide, including to Central and Western Europe, mainly through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and highly mobile individuals with key community roles. Both organizations (Ken and Hebraica/JCC) mirror transformations that run along the generational axis, socio-economic development, settlement patterns, and the particular milieus in which Latin American Jews insert themselves.

As part of Jewish transnationalism today, the incorporation of teachers, administrators, university professors, and board members/presidents into the educational ecology coexists with the connectedness of an increasing number of Latin American Jewish educators with their countries of origin. An emergent pattern may be seen in the circulation of knowledge through these key agents who are both dispersed and closely connected to Israel as a historical center for Latin American Jewish education. The work of *shlichim* (emissaries) points to past and present transnational trends that express a strong Zionist legacy. Nevertheless, the cultural-ideational relation with Israel is defined in new terms and spaces; it implies the re-signification of attachments and the coexistence of multiple centers.

Finally, among the patterns of integration-distinctiveness of Latin American Jews it is worthwhile to mention their participation, leadership, and activism in American Jewish organizations as well as in national institutions and the media. In Miami, Latin American Jews are represented on local councils and university boards, in the Jewish Federation, and Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. Latin

American Jews also exercise political activism in the non-partisan Florida Congressional Committee (FCC), which financially supports pro-Israel US senators and congress members. In Miami and San Diego there is increased participation of this group in the local Federations, including the Women Division.<sup>24</sup> In the Federation of Miami, the Latin American leadership explicitly seeks to guarantee simultaneous commitments bridged through the American institutional structure.<sup>25</sup> Associations such as Friends of Tel Aviv University or the Hebrew University also find particularly active support among Latin American Jews.<sup>26</sup>

## Jewish Transnationalism in the 21st Century

Transnational studies have typically focused on individuals, their links, and networks of social relations as the principal units of analysis (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Khagram and Levitt 2008; Portes et al. 1999; Pries 2008b). According to these studies, only a small percentage of individual migrants (about 10 %) are transnational; that is, they maintain frequent and sustained links/contacts with their origin country. The present focus is on the collective, not the individual and our emphasis is on the institutional underpinnings of transnationalism and its structural effects. The individual and communal levels interact through dense and stable Jewish associational and institutional channels that enhance informal ethnic threads and family links and networks. Networks are key to current transnational migration flows because they connect the migrants and set a solid base for social organization (Massey 1987; Shoham and Kaufman Strauss 2008). At the collective level, however, associative resources that were created to handle original needs tend to re-elaborate and re-orient organized Jewish life (Bokser Liwerant 2009; Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988). Whereas social networks of individuals engaged in migration and settlement represent one central dimension of their social relations and social capital, the degree of formalization or institutionalization in our case acquires the strength of the collective historical experience.

Throughout the migratory process of Latin American Jews to the United States, the ethnic axis shapes the strong connectedness among migrants even across global cities. Both San Diego and Miami-Dade and Broward counties are perceived as ethnic enclaves, although characterized by inner diversity. In the North-Eastern corridor, links among co-nationals and migrants of Jewish Latin American origin also take place but are expressed in more individualized ways of incorporation, given the largely professional type of migration. Individual biographies point to numerous professionals in Jewish American organizations, university and college professors, scientists, media analysts, dentists, and physicians. One also finds young

<sup>24</sup> Interviews with Sergio Jinich and Leslie Fastlich, July 2012, San Diego; Wizo in San Diego is headed by a Mexican woman.

<sup>25</sup> In Miami, a Peruvian Jew was president of the Federation and former community leaders of Venezuela are today active members of it. Interviews with Sabi Behar, David Bassan and Paul Harriton, October, 2011, Miami.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Janche Galicot, August 2012, San Diego.

professionals who have created wide virtual networks with a Latin American Jewish epicenter in the East.<sup>27</sup> Axes of networks thus overlap.

Paradigmatic situations of Latin American Jewish individuals and their families underscore this singular subset in the larger migrant universe.<sup>28</sup> Biography and structural characteristics intersect: families whose intense transnational links cross borders and communities in the United States; networks that shape the direction of flows from the East (single professionals or young couples) to consolidated regrouped Jewish communities; students at local universities. The steady and significant connection with home—through media, sports, and social networks—becomes a basis of routine and intense transnational practice aimed at guaranteeing continuity while, at the same time, offering a bridge with new communities in the United States. Such dynamics deeply carry the simultaneity of worlds that allows for multiple attachments. We do not fully understand these mechanisms, in particular the interaction between boundary maintenance and the transnational character of a migrant group in relationship to the length of stay abroad (Levitt and Waters 2002).

An important perspective from which to analyze border crossing is the broad influence on American religious practices and the fostering of cultural remittances by the Conservative religious movement. Connections between North and South play a prominent role in North American Jewish life. Religious influence constitutes a route to enter the new communities and encounters between communal and congregational models. In the 1960s the Conservative movement spread to South America providing the first congregational model that was imported from the United States (instead of Europe), thereby setting what may be considered a new phase of “old transnationalism.” In a regional context of scarce religious functionaries, the *Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano* adopted a pivotal role in the Conservative religious leadership. The Conservative movement adapted to local conditions (communal over congregational model) that dated back to the earliest days when a low synagogue profile prevailed in mainly secular communities. This movement brought the synagogue to the forefront of communal and societal life by mobilizing thousands of otherwise non-affiliated Jews (Elazar 1989).

In Argentina, the movement trained the rabbinical personnel that presently serves throughout Latin America and in the United States (close to 22 rabbis), and who circulated to the North due to the new possibilities associated with regional migration. Four of these rabbis were first ordained in New York (Jewish Theological Seminary of America). They currently serve in cities such as Forrest Hills and Jamaica Estates, New York; Hartford, Connecticut; River Forest and Deerfield,

<sup>27</sup> One example is *Judíos Latinos*, based in NYC, which was created by two young Mexican and Uruguayan Jews in an attempt to “renew the Latino Jewish community.” Their main instruments are Facebook and Twitter (Sobel n.d.).

<sup>28</sup> Families as archetypes of an expanded transnational Jewish space: a person who lives in San Diego, is Honorary Consul of Israel in Tijuana and holds intense links with Mexico (Goldstein); or a diplomat representing Ecuador in Europe (Klein), whose family lives in Israel and England, developing intense transnational economic and professional activities; a family of El Salvador (Freund) participating in the American Jewish world in Miami, educated in Israeli universities and actively supporting the local community.

Illinois; Vineland, New Jersey; La Jolla, San Diego, California; Boca Raton, North Miami Beach and Plantation, Florida; Pittsburgh and Narberth, Pennsylvania; Omaha, Nebraska; Fort Worth, Texas; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; and Roanoke, Virginia. An exemplary case of the presence and wide influence of the Argentine model that integrates Conservative Judaism and social issues-human rights is B'nai-Jeshurun in NYC, which was turned into a vibrant religious and social space of nearly 2,000 households by Rabbi Marshall Meyer.<sup>29</sup>

Latin American rabbis and their participation in the new settings in the United States contribute to the expansion of communal practices. Simultaneously, they maintain transnational practices by moving back to their region of origin to lead services. As mobile agents of change across national borders, they recreate a congregational-communitarian matrix.<sup>30</sup> The current offer of religious leadership and its importance for religious development, therefore, cannot be underestimated. A new trend of rapprochement that attempts to bridge the gap between the first waves of immigrants and American Jewish communities can be seen in the search for a new balance between Latin and American Conservative rabbis. One example is the decision by congregation Bet El in San Diego to have a religious American leadership (Rabbi Phil Grobbart). In Greater Miami, Latin American Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform rabbis do not necessarily address Latin American audiences: many of them are not “Latin rabbis” but “rabbis of the community.”<sup>31</sup> Paralleling these processes, Latin American and North American rabbis of the Conservative movement collaborate in religious settings, thus symbolizing the bringing together of Latin and English-speaking American Jewish publics.

A new interplay between religious, sub-ethnic, and national belonging developed in congregational spaces in the United States. In San Diego, amid migrants of the same national origin, inner sectorial differences that historically marked the community in Mexico tended to blur.<sup>32</sup> Differences derived from being Ashkenazi, Sephardic, or Mizrahi were subsumed under a national Mexican/Jewish identity. The limited size of a community may act as a constraint to inner differentiation. More recently, however,

<sup>29</sup> In 2001, Rabbi Felicia Sol (first woman rabbi) joined the congregation. See <http://www.seminariorabinico.org.ar/nuevoSite/website/contenido.asp?sys=1&id=50> (last updated November 2010).

<sup>30</sup> During the late 1970s, the emigration to San Diego of Rabbi Aharon Kopikis (born in Argentina and trained in the Conservative movement) had meaningful consequences given that he was a respected representative of the Bet El community in Mexico City who supported and legitimized the “migration era.” His presence became a sign of permanence in a new place where a few Mexican families shared the synagogue services with South Africans and some Americans.

<sup>31</sup> Such rabbis include: Conservative rabbis Mario Rojzman (Beth Torah), Marcelo Bater (Temple Beth Israel) and Hector Epelbaum (Beth David); Orthodox rabbis Shea Rubinstein (The Shul at Barl Harbour) (Chabad), Shloime Halsband (California Club Chabad), Yossi Srugo (Aventura Chabad); Reform rabbi Arturo Kalfus (Beth Am). Sources: Interview with Juan Dierce. October 28th, 2011, Miami, and “Find a Rabbi.” Greater Miami Jewish Federation. [http://jewishmiami.org/resources/find\\_rabbi/](http://jewishmiami.org/resources/find_rabbi/).

<sup>32</sup> In Mexico, ethnic origins conditioned the evolutionary process of communal organizations. Its inner composition also shows radical changes. Sephardic communities, which include Sephardic and Syrian Jews from Aleppo (Halab) and Damascus (Shamis), reach today 73 % of the total Jewish population, while the Ashkenazi community constitutes only 27 %, compared to 65 % during the 1960s.



and given the sustained expansion of the migration flows, a separate Orthodox Sephardic community of about 80 families—Beth Torah Bet Eliahu—was founded and is headed by an Argentine rabbi, providing an alternative to the otherwise Conservative hegemony. In spite of these differences, the communal frameworks that have developed combine religious and sub-ethnic streams (Bokser Liwerant 2008).

The previous transnational circuit of predominantly Conservative rabbis from Buenos Aires has now spread to Orthodoxy as well. This means that in a new transnational moment we may witness the end of a traditional Conservative-Latin American symbiosis that had strongly influenced the religious space. Orthodox groups have gained new impetus, founding new religious congregations and supplying communities with rabbinical leadership. The spread of Chabad, and the establishment of their centers in large and small cities in the United States, is striking as shown by the fact that thousands of shlichim are currently working around the world, and close to 80 centers have developed in Latin America.<sup>33</sup> The increased presence and influence of transnational Chabad is evident in California and Florida where they reach members by creating educational networks, social welfare services, and intricate religious campaigns and provide legal assistance and job finding support (Topel 2005).<sup>34</sup>

Although extreme religious and self-segregation strategies are still marginal to Jewish life in Latin America, their growing presence corresponds to ongoing world Jewish patterns. Amid the global de-secularization process marked by the return of religion into the public sphere, the role of organized Jewish life in identity-building processes faces new challenges. In fact, there has been a redefinition of identification components such as place of origin, the dilution of ideologies—formerly the source of “hard-core” values—and the consequent emergence of new expressions of spirituality. In recent years, both in the United States and in Latin America, new forms of religious sociability have emerged. In certain ways, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, and Miami express similarities along the transnationally constituted religious sphere.

Approaching religious practices as a way of assimilation into the host communities, it is important to note that Latin American Jewish life is marked by religious-secularization dynamics that may lead to diverse potential scenarios. It is worthwhile to relate these trends to the increased importance of new religious constellations brought by contemporary movements of migrant groups in the framework of current globalization processes (Eisenstadt 2010). Therefore, one may ask in what ways are

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<sup>33</sup> While in Mexico the presence of Chabad is marginal at best, there are more than fifty synagogues, study houses, *kollelim* and *yeshivot*, more than thirty of which were established in the last twenty-five years. Fourteen of the twenty four existing *kollelim* belong to the Syrian *halabi* community. In Brazil—where liberal Judaism, secularity, and the syncretism of the society had a strong influence—fifteen Orthodox synagogues, three *yeshivot*, two *kollelim*, and five religious schools were established in the last fifteen years (Topel 2005).

<sup>34</sup> In the case of Israelis, joining Chabad in Miami, New York, and Los Angeles may be a way of belonging to a more familiar home setting, in part because the Conservative and Reform movements are still small in Israel (Gold and Phillips 1996). In Miami, Chabad also has a Venezuelan “nucleus.”

Latin American Jews part of a religious world on the move that has a majority migrant stock of Christians and Muslims<sup>35</sup> and a relatively large percentage of Jews?<sup>36</sup>

Still, from a perspective that sees transnationalism as a connecting process that implies social transformation, one may observe the fluxes and influences from American life into Latin America. Thus Hillel unknown as an organization in the region, has been established in Argentina and Uruguay. Enthusiasm for Hillel was aided by its success in North America, while in the new milieu it developed a more religious tone, mainly due to the individuals behind the support, who were simultaneously connected to Taglit-Birthright Israel.<sup>37</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

The concurrent past and present relevance of the concept of transnationalism is enhanced by our perception of bordered and bounded communal units as transnationally constituted spaces interacting with one another (Vertovec 2009). However, its new forms and meanings are strengthened by the nature, scope, and intensity of the contemporary relocation processes in new geographic and social spaces in the United States and other countries. Indeed, the intense migratory movements of Latin American Jews—individuals and communities—renew their dispersion across space, thus bringing an unprecedented reality to an ethno-religious-national diaspora in the process of becoming transnational. In this changing context, the challenge of boundary maintenance emerges (Cohen 1997; Safran 1991; Sheffer 1986; Tölölyan 1996) along several ways of regrouping in communal spaces to guarantee continuity. Customs, identities, and communal patterns are built, transported, and transformed while nourished and enhanced by the host American Jewish community. Today, however, there is an overlapping and interplay of boundaries expressed in the pluralization of identity markers: as Latin American Jews and/or Colombian, Mexican or Venezuelan Jews; Latin Americans or Latino and/or Hispanic; Jews becoming American.<sup>38</sup> Crucial questions concern both the receiving communities and the incoming migrant groups as regards the changing territories of Jewish life and the transformations of their profiles. They are linked, among other processes and trends, to *diaspora making* and *diaspora un-making* provoked by de-socialization from the Latin American countries and

<sup>35</sup> According to *Faith on the Move* (figures as of 2010), Christians comprise nearly half—an estimated 106 million, or 49 %—of the world's international migrants. Muslims make up the second-largest group—almost 60 million, or 27 %. The remaining share is a mix of Hindus (11 million or 5 %), Buddhists (7 million or 3 %), Jews (more than 3.6 million or 2 %), adherents of other faiths (9 million or 4 %) and the religiously unaffiliated (19 million or 9 %) (Pew Forum 2012).

<sup>36</sup> According to a recent study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2012), Jews are the most mobile if compared to other religious minorities. Even given the limitations of religious allegiance as an exclusive indicator, it is worth considering that about one-quarter of Jews alive today (25 %) have left the country in which they were born and live somewhere else. By contrast, just 5 % of Christians, 4 % of Muslims, and 3 % of the global average have migrated.

<sup>37</sup> In Argentina, Mr. Ellstein is the main sponsor of these initiatives and is also a well-known supporter of Chabad.

<sup>38</sup> Interviews with Paul Harriton, October, 2011, Miami, and Fanny Herman, April, 2012, Chicago.

communities of origin, and re-socialization in the United States, in the cities and communities where they arrived (Bokser Liwerant et al. 2010).

Different scenarios are identified in Florida and California. Greater Miami mirrors the cycles of migration crises in the region; it became a host location (particularly South Miami Beach) to the first Jewish Cuban collective migratory/exiled wave that included the majority of Cuban Jews and their leadership. The case of Cuban Jewish and Cuban out-migration awaiting long-term return to the home country shows some important features of a transnational diaspora in the making. Migration crises in the region led to the unmaking of an ethno-national diaspora under stress (e.g., Venezuela) and the expansion of a transnational community in new frontier areas such as Caribbean Florida or the American Southwest. Plural ways of connectedness with their communities and societies in their countries of origin and lateral networks created by cultural match and trust developed between the trans-local entrepreneurs from Colombia, Venezuela, and Mexico.

In San Diego, an ethno-national enclave with a transnational character took shape among Mexican Jews leading to a possible scenario of a secondary diaspora. In contrast, the Latin American Jewish community of Miami has a multi-national composition.<sup>39</sup> In this case, a shared sense of living in community with other Latin Americans, the existence of communal organized spaces that represent group continuity and the presence of a critical mass enhance new social regrouping by allowing migrants to establish and bolster formal and informal networks on the basis of common (ethnic, national, religious) origin.

From a comparative perspective, one cannot ignore Latin American experiences and encounters with American Jewry in Los Angeles. It is unique and, in particular, differs from the experience in San Diego because of the more diversified national origin of the migrants, the arrival of family clusters and professionals, its “cosmopolitanism,” and the city’s image as “Jewish” rather than “Latin American.” Particularly interesting to contrast are the North East-Midwest triangle and Texas because they represent individual-professional (e.g., medical students, interns, and doctors) cases, rather than collective migration patterns. Age, gender, and household composition—selectively younger and nuclear—provide interesting doors of entry and mapping routes into associational trends. We may thus further question and analyze a scenario of de-diasporization that could lead either to individual integration or new prevailing criteria and axes of regrouping.

This article has focused on collective spaces and multiple identities and points to the need to consider new forms of material and symbolic transnationalism (Nonini 2005). Large and instantaneous flows of technologically transmitted information and images as well as postmodern ideas have recently tended to dismantle the *delimitative function* of culture in a global world. Its role has been gradually redefined: new horizons of shared cultural goods have opened, rather than concrete and symbolic national boundaries and hierarchies between the “inside” and the “outside.”

<sup>39</sup> Of the Jewish adults who consider themselves to be Hispanic, the majority (29 %) come from Cuba; 18 %, from Argentina; 16 %, from Colombia; and 15 %, from Venezuela. Other countries from Latin America and the Caribbean with smaller percentages include Mexico (4 %), Uruguay (2.2 %), Peru (1.4 %), Brazil (1.3 %), Dominican Republic (0.7 %), Guatemala: (0.7 %), Chile (0.5 %), Ecuador (0.3 %), Jamaica (0.3 %), Nicaragua (0.3 %), Panama (0.3 %) and Bolivia (0.2 %) (Sheskin 2004).

Jewish cultural life, too, has been undergoing the general process of dismantling and transformation of what George Yúdice (2003) defined as traditional “behavioral genres” that kept the social world “in its place” during the past years (Bokser Liwerant 2007; Senkman 2008). Thus, through migration waves and beyond, by crossing borders, Latin American Jewish culture transcends the region’s frames of reference, encounters the culture(s) of the United States and through diversified interactions and exchanges widens the experience of being Jewish in the 21st century.

In transnational contexts, migration movements and diasporas involve dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home, and building new ones. Diasporas may be conceived simultaneously in terms of “mobility and fixity, closeness and distance,” they “connect the Jewish world” and exist “only through circulation” (Clifford 1994, p. 388; see also Brubaker 2005). Thus, building Jewish life consists not only of rootedness but also of exchanges of dynamic cultural practices. At present, while committed to relocating and redefining their sense of being, Latin American ethno-religious (national-transnational) Jewish communities follow multiple pathways of belonging, thereby moving and fixing old-new definition and membership criteria for themselves, as well as for the American Jewish community and larger society.

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## Author Biography

**Judit Bokser Liwerant** is Senior Full-Time Professor of Political Science at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. She is a Distinguished Fellow of the National Research System and member of the Mexican Academy of Science. She has authored numerous books and scientific articles in the fields of Political Sociology and Contemporary Jewry.