

# *Past and Present of Latin American Jewry: A Conceptual Pathway*

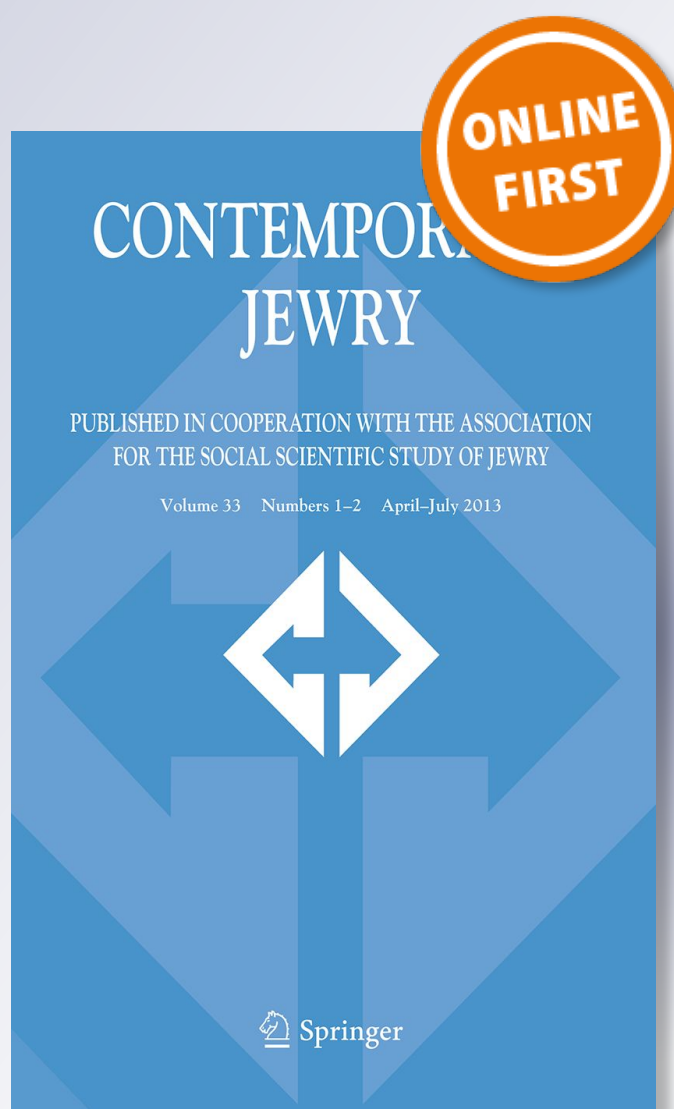
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**Contemporary Jewry**

ISSN 0147-1694

Cont Jewry

DOI 10.1007/s12397-018-9268-3



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# Past and Present of Latin American Jewry: A Conceptual Pathway

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Received: 11 June 2018 / Accepted: 6 August 2018  
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## Abstract

The article aims to analyze the conceptual pathway that the author followed along her research trajectory focused on past and present trends in contemporary Jewish life, as specifically expressed in Latin America. Along a systematic reflection on axioms, theories and findings, diverse conceptual elaborations are presented, as they entail a sustained encounter with previous scientific formulations and changing times and contexts. Thus the author reflects on theory and biography as they nourished her research questions, while simultaneously committed to the stricter canon of scientific conscientiousness. Political science, sociology and contemporary Jewish studies converge in the development of research axes that found their point of departure in the prefix “multiple,” covering the author’s multidisciplinary journey through Latin American multiple modernities; multiple collective identities; and multiple social and communal structures and praxis. Diverse thematic clues are displayed to account for the striking fact that over the course of two generations Latin American Jews have transformed from mostly immigrants and immigrant communities, to rooted communities of locally-born citizens and, simultaneously, of expatriates and emigrants. The richness of Jewish life in the region, its presence and relevance in the Jewish world, as well as in national and communal spheres, and simultaneously, its relocation in new geographies are part of their current reality marked by disjunctures and paradoxes. The research presented crosses disciplinary confines in order to reach a wider epistemic spectrum and become better equipped to deal with the complexity that characterizes Jewish life today, as well as to traverse the national borders where Jewish diasporas dwell, in an effort to understand the globality of the Jewish condition and grasp its current dynamics.

**Keywords** Latin America · Diaspora · Transnationalism · Jewish communities · Multiple identities

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Opening statement at the reception of the award:

It is particularly rewarding for me, as a Latin American scholar, to receive such a high recognition by this distinguished group of North American colleagues. With this award, we do affirm our shared conviction that crossing borders – both territorial and disciplinary – can expand research horizons and strengthen epistemic communities, namely social sciences and contemporary Jewry. I want to express to you my heartfelt thanks as I stand here, honored by the opportunity of sharing a dynamic of encounters, a trajectory committed to cognition and the privilege of recognition.

A conceptual pathway is necessarily built through permanent dialogue and systematic work with axioms, theories and findings, which entails a sustained encounter with previous scientific formulations both in terms of continuity and ruptures. A conversation with diverse levels of theoretical aggregation and empirical research has resulted.

A conceptual trajectory is also marked by time and context; biography and history meet. Bringing together these dimensions enhances the awareness that our conceptual pathway has been nourished by both academic and existential goals and projects, through a challenging equilibrium between passion and rigor, truth and relevance. Translating our own history into research questions has been part of our intellectual journey; an itinerary determined both by our being selves embedded in worldviews derived from our social belongings and identities, while simultaneously committed to the stricter canon of scientific conscientiousness (Alford 1998).

Thus, let me start by making explicit that I have been shaped by a diversity of contexts and disciplines and therefore it is not at all surprising that I have been a fervent supporter of theoretical proposals that start with the prefix *multiple*: multiple modernities, multiple identities, and as a conceptual and methodological wrap – multiple disciplines. In our fields of social science and contemporary Jewry – with their manifold theoretical and methodological traditions – different disciplines with diverse analytical logics converge. Disciplinary confines must be crossed in order to reach a wider epistemic spectrum and become better equipped to deal with the complexity that today characterizes social structures, as well as to traverse the national borders where Jewish diasporas dwell, in an effort to understand the globality of the Jewish condition and grasp its current dynamics.

The past and present of the Jewish experience and its diaspora pattern of simultaneous dispersion and interconnections called for trans-disciplinary explorations. My first research encounter with the field was propelled by an authentic interest in its dynamics and a desire to build bridges between sociology, political science and contemporary Jewry. This interest required me to adopt a perspective that implied moving from one discipline to another, such as, for example, political sociology of an ethno-religious-national minority and its interplay with migration and diaspora studies, in order to analyze the integration and construction of multiple identities in Jewish populations in simultaneous but diverse world scenarios, or to connect the communal and social dimensions of Jewish life when reconstructing the contours of the public sphere in the social worlds they inhabit.

This challenge has had different moments, defined by the complexity inherent to encounters between varying logics with specialized languages, diverse methodological resources, thematic foci and cognitive identities. When approached from both a spatial and temporal angle, several thought-provoking questions come to the forefront: how to transit from community to society, from homeland to diaspora and back, from individual to group, from community to nation and state, from country to region and from there, to new centers of existence? For Latin American Jews, these challenges have meant a transit from historical territories to new geographies and, therefore, questions related to the past and present changing and expanded frontiers of Jewish being become meaningful. Historical migration waves implied transmigration of worldviews and ideologies of individuals and groups carrying distinct communal organizing principles, models and logics of the collective. In their development, diverse transitions took place: from social territories to the current de-territorialization of culture; from the everyday existence inside communal orders to the reality outside the institutions; from secularization to de-privatization of religion and to new collective and personal forms of providing meaning and significance to belonging.

All of these questions are necessary to account for the striking fact that over the course of two generations Latin American Jews have transformed from being mostly immigrants and immigrant communities, to rooted communities of locally-born citizens and, simultaneously, of expatriates and emigrants. The richness of Jewish life in the region, its presence and relevance in the Jewish world, as well as in national and communal spheres, and simultaneously, its relocation in new geographies are part of their current reality marked by disjunctures and paradoxes.

In the light of these historical transformations, our research has drawn a conceptual road map that sought to address these social transitions through different analytical levels, analyzing how world Jewish and general processes interact with, and modify, specific local conditions: the national and the transnational; the regional and the global; the public spheres; the transition from a one-center model and its exemplary periphery to a new radial configuration of increased de-centered realities.

## **The Binomial National/Transnational**

The social construction of diversity in Latin America called for an analytical perspective that placed at its core the binomial national/transnational, explaining the relevant axes of ethnic and civic identities in the communal and national public spheres, as well as the various ways of belonging. By bringing together both dimensions as constitutive of transnationalism, this new approach allowed me to study the past and the present condition of an ethno-national diaspora, its transnational trajectory and current realities. It has thus aimed to grasp the interaction between the changing place of Latin American Jewish communities in the national arena and its equally changing global condition. Its capability for addressing past and present processes has been enhanced by our understanding of social and communal units as

transnationally constituted spaces, with fluid interacting patterns (Bokser Liwerant 2008, 2013a, b, 2015a, b, c).

The national component of this binomial refers to individuals and collective identities and the ways in which inclusion/exclusion, recognition and otherness have been built and internalized. Patterns of collective identities shape social boundaries and public spheres with far-reaching implications for the dynamics of social integration. The historical hegemonic notions of homogeneous national identity prevailing in the region only hardly could come up with inclusive membership criteria: ethnicity, national belonging, and the state's political project were closely interdependent. Moreover, the ethno-national identity aspired to homogenize different collective identities, thus becoming synonymous with the public sphere and its actors (Bokser Liwerant 1994, 2006a, b).

Regional contexts differed. Latin America – *les Amériques Latines*, as Braudel called them – has a variety of constellations of the national; this diversity, which comprises economic, political, and historical dimensions, has been also marked by differing ethnicities. In Euro-America, with countries such as Argentina or Uruguay, in which mass immigration changed the socio-ethnic profile of the populations, multi-ethnic societies were built with a *de facto* tolerance towards minorities, counterbalancing the primordial, territorial, and religiously homogeneous profile that the state aspired to achieve. Ethnic tolerance in a society of immigrants was the framework for community-building guidelines which sought to preserve their ethnic links to their different “homelands.” Such was the case with Spaniards, Italians and Jews, among others.

In Indo-America — Mexico, Peru or Ecuador — the original ethnic composition of the population enhanced the content of national identity in its unified and homogeneous profile. Countries such as Mexico rooted their conception of national identity in an ethnic-religious cultural model — *mestizaje* — based on fusion, assimilation and the merging of Spanish-Catholic and indigenous populations. As a resource for identity-building and national integration, this model became a central criterion for migration policies and in evaluating the full incorporation of minorities. Limited integration and autonomy to preserve cultural, religious, and social differences further reflected and reinforced social inequalities and the well-defined frontiers of Jewish life (Eisenstadt 1998; Avni 1988, 1992; Bokser Liwerant et al. 2008).

Despite dissimilarities, we can still talk about Latin America as an entity sharing both an ideological discourse of unity and a common geopolitical, social, and economic reality; and so regarding the commonalities and diversity of Jewish life in the region. As such, it requires a regional research perspective focused on the convergences and divergences that Jewish life in this area — characterized by unique and complex dynamics between social integration and group autonomy — encompasses.

As for the transnational component of the binomial, it refers to the Jewish global system incorporating relations, connections, spaces, cultural referents and shared meanings. The links relating individuals, groups and communities have been triggered by social processes, political movements and cultural networks extending beyond national and state borders. Such interconnectivity developed along organizational lines and it became equally visible in cultural bonds, historical memories and cross-border migration flows. Diaspora networks and its institutional underpinnings constitute a major substratum for such dynamics.

I refer to transnationalism as an analytical perspective challenging the “methodological nationalism” of prevailing social theories that equate society or communities with the boundaries of particular nation-states (Beck 2007). As a fruitful analytical tool, it has contributed both to the analysis of ongoing changes and of yet uncertain developments, as well as to the understanding of past trends with a fresh perspective.

Being transnational reflects symbolic and ethnic shared traits and inner diversity, including divergent identifications and enduring dialogues and debates that unfolded within changing perimeters of the Jewish world. Religion coexists with secularization processes; peoplehood develops along with national existence; ethnicity and civic commonalities reaffirm one another, and collective belonging interacts with individualization trends, while new forms of cohesiveness are part of a diversified Jewish existence. Jewish life and identity(ies), then, are built, internalized, created, and transformed within a context of diversity. Rather than homogeneous totalities expressing essentialist ahistorical contents, they stretch and reshape themselves beyond their original definitions (Ben Rafael et al. 2009; Bokser Liwerant 2009a, b; Bokser Liwerant and Ben Rafael 2010).

Belonging and otherness as an equally relevant conceptual binomial refers to a dual and contradictory condition that crosses a wide spectrum of existing options that run from one extreme of total autonomy of Jewish life *vis-à-vis* the general society to another extreme of total dependency; from the search for legitimacy of diversity to the pursuit of commonalities; from the sociability of individual citizens to gregariousness inside the organized communal frameworks; from sociocultural identities in total affinity with the different national ethos to collective identities whose symbolic and intellectual center lies elsewhere, being part of the global *KlalYsrael* (Fig. 1).

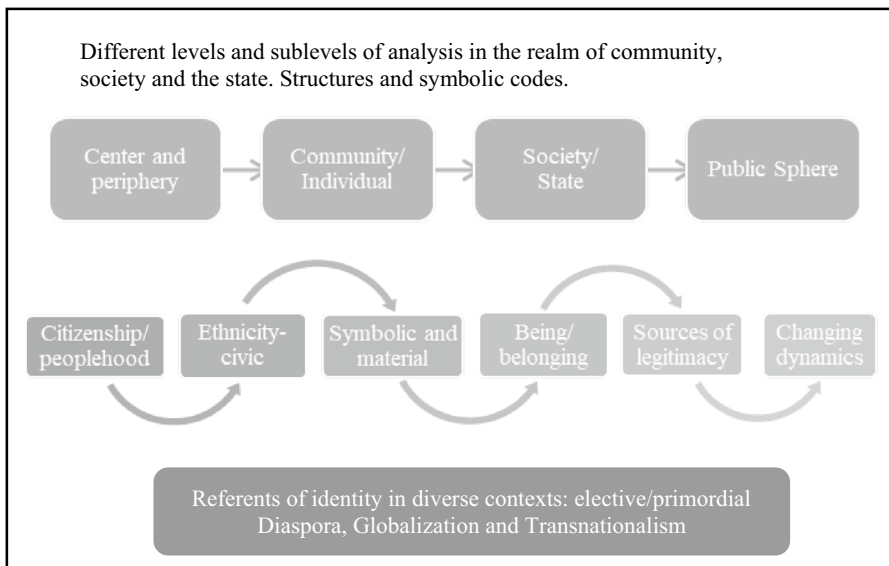


Fig. 1 Analytical levels, tensions, paradoxes

Transnationalism, thus, can be seen as a conceptual tool with implications for social morphology, as expressed in the significant changing character of the social/communal formations in the Latin American Jewish world. By keeping the transnational moment at bay while at the same time interacting with it, the national frameworks were called to play a central role in defining the character of the Jewish communities they encompassed. A complex interplay between Jewish structures and identities simultaneously intertwined at local and global levels.

Indeed, transnational conditions determined the experience of Latin American Jews. Through the historic process of being attached to different shifting and overlapping external centers – real and concrete, imaginary and symbolic – Latin American Jews have continuously experienced this condition. The founding immigration and colonization of Russian Jews in Argentina was led by the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) with headquarters in Paris; transnational bonds were also established through international institutions for educational welfare, such as the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the joint immigration partnership HICEM, formed by the HIAS, based in the US, the JCA and the German Vereinigte Komitee für Jüdische Auswanderung-Emigdirekt with headquarters in Berlin; collective external support from overseas and from the established North American Jewish community to Mexico, as well as their later developments were defined by a process of being attached to the Jewish world. These relations evinced strong transnational solidary connections and a dependent or peripheral diaspora character: political concepts, values, aspirations, and organizational entities brought by immigrants from other parts of the world played a fundamental role in the process of cultural and institutional formation. Latin American Jews shaped their dense communal life, built their associational and institutional profile and their collective consciousness as part of a broader feeling of peoplehood.

Today, under the impact of globalization, profound changes in the region and in the Jewish world are taking place. Globalization processes are not uniform, as they develop in a differentiated manner in time and place, with territorial and sectorial inequalities. They also exhibit a multifaceted and contradictory nature; multifaceted, insofar as they bring together economic, political and cultural aspects, as well as an evident interdependence between these planes; and contradictory, because these processes can be intentional and reflexive, and at the same time not intentional, and of international as well as regional, national or local scope. All these planes of expression of globalization processes put traditional and modern forms of social and political organization to the test, which has compelled social theory to discuss the very foundations on which these systems have been built. Their diverse and contradictory nature is also expressed by the simultaneous emergence of elective global and primordial identities, which develop and interact (Scholte 1996; Waters 1995; Bokser Liwerant 2002; Bokser Liwerant 2014; Bokser Liwerant, Pozo and Waldman 2010).

In a context of changing national milieux, Jewish communities are exposed to opposing trends that act as push factors leading to both a vital, rooted life and emigration from the continent. Notwithstanding its fluctuation through time and space, the interacting dynamics of the dyad national–transnational still point to a complexity that excludes reductionist conceptions that emphasize only one of the two elements that conform it (Fig. 2).



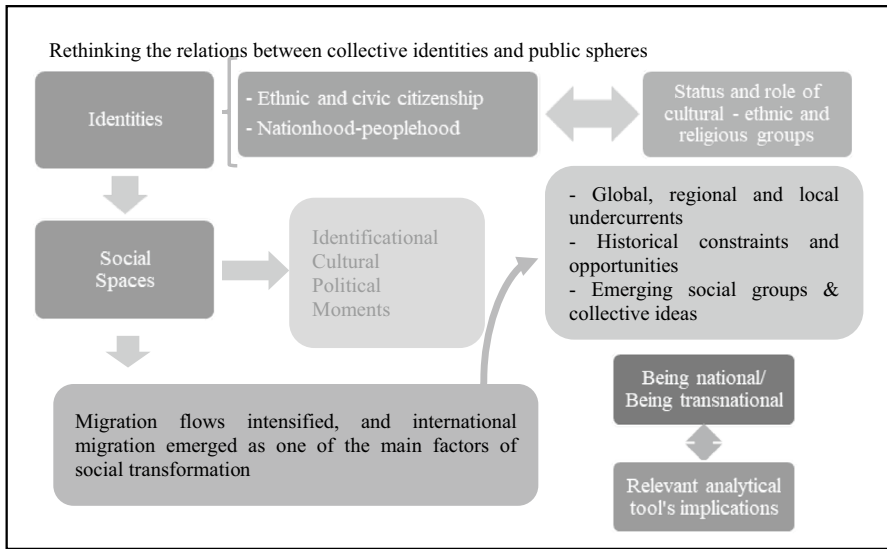


Fig. 2 Globalization and transnationalism

## When Biography and Scientific Research Meet

A conceptual trajectory is also shaped by a personal route. Knowledge is not free-floating: it is nourished by our interactions with institutions, epistemic communities, and schools of thought.

Indeed, I first entered the world of Jewish culture both in Yiddish and Hebrew in Buenos Aires, following a circuit that started with a supplementary (daily) Jewish education, while attending the Argentine public school, as mandated by the liberal assumption prevalent in a society of immigrants that public education is the space of encounter, wherein to build “a nation.” Liberal secularism — not the civil religion model — defined a neutral sphere in the Argentine society where Jews could be newly citizens while at the same time Jewish.

Additional significant steps into the Jewish culture took place at the Hebrew Seminar for Educators, the AMIA Seminar at the sadly famous community building, bombed in 1995. It was there where the Jews from Eastern Europe, especially Poland, succeeded in establishing during the interwar period transnational center-periphery relations that powerfully influenced the construction of a new ethno-national-diaspora in Buenos Aires, which would crystallize, after the Shoah, as *Kehilá* Ashkenazí. During the coming years and waves of immigration, this diasporic matrix with its changing centers and collateral axes reproduced itself in its traditional models and practices.

European-born writers and journalists, publicists, and teachers with divergent ideological stands built a vibrant old-new space. As in the Old Home *Prophecy and Politics* intertwined (Frankel 1984). A veritable culture of circulation with

diverse national tones crossed the continent all the way up to Mexico: seeds of the secular, cultural, traditionalist modern Jewish world.

An important group of those of us gravitating towards these routes reconvened in Jerusalem: “Diasporas, as simultaneous mobility and fixity, closeness and distance, only exist through circulation,” as James Clifford (1994) would affirm. However, differing from his conception, there were not only lateral axes but also a center. Jerusalem was the space where Moshe Davis and Mordechai Kaplan’s conception of Jewish Civilization took shape in different institutional projects - the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University and the International Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization – initiatives that brought together minds, energies, and the presence of a dispersed people. There, a transnational epistemic community of social scientists took shape. At the Institute of Contemporary Jewry leading Shoah scholars such as Yehuda Bauer, Israel Guttman and my dear friend, the late David Bankier concurred; Demography led by Roberto Bachi and his successor, my dear colleague and friend Sergio DellaPergola, who projected to Latin America the relevance of a global perspective in identifying factors influencing the major ever-changing characteristics defining the Jewish population; Jonathan Frankel, the late Seymour Fox and many more...

For a Latin America researcher interested in a world perspective, the center had a strong presence in my development. While largely based on a prevailing paradigm of middle-range theories of modernization, several of the pioneering contributions of comparative studies developed there, characterized by the quest to understand the global character of the Jewish world through systematic contrasts of parallel processes in different milieus. Unquestionable contributions of comparative Jewish studies epitomized by Daniel Elazar and Peter Medding in their analysis of Frontier society; the search for interconnections between societies and their Jewish communities which operated as the organizing principle of the new historical studies, led by my teacher, Haim Avni in the 1970s became fundamental. Avni’s studies focused on an analysis of integration patterns that regulated the visibility and legitimacy of Jewish life in Latin America.

As for the International Center for the Study of Jewish Civilization, its summer workshops gathered colleagues of international contexts such as Jonathan Sarna, Arnold Aisen, the late Paula Hymann, Deborah Lipstadt, and Steven Cohen. Additionally, the International Center was the kernel of the pioneering Jewish Studies Program we established in Mexico, based on the collaboration of visiting professors coming from Jerusalem.

From the lateral axis, back to the center: in Jerusalem, at the Hebrew University, an academic center specifically dedicated to the study of Jewish life in Latin America was established. At a moment when migration processes, narratives, and parameters of Jewish identities in the region were being built – and re-conformed – in a shifting context of revival, negotiation and transformation, transnationalism as the analytical perspective acquired particular relevance in important research projects.

Jerusalem was for me not only the core of contemporary Jewry, but also of social sciences, and humanities. Jacob Talmon, Shlomo Avineri, Binyamin Akzin and certainly, Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt. were key thinkers that contributed to enrich the field. The latter introduced me to the “multiple” inspiring referent: Jewish

civilization, the Israeli experience and Latin America as challenges of building a modern society within cultures in which tradition had a central role conditioned the valorization of periphery and variability, as central axes to the theorization of “multiple modernities.” Latin America was construed as a sub-set model. Eisenstadt’s studies on Jewish civilization introduced me to the tensions ingrained in Weber’s understanding of civilization and secularization processes and the contradictory understanding of Jews in modern times. Weber believed that the cultural program of modernity, as it developed in modern Europe – together with the basic institutional constellations that evolved in its wake – would ultimately predominate in all modernizing and modern societies and, with the expansion of modernity, would prevail throughout the world. Contrary to this homogeneous conception, the idea of multiple modernities suggested that the best way to understand contemporary society – and to explain the historical development of modernity – is to consider it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs (Eisenstadt 2000, 2002, 2007; Bokser Liwerant 2015a, b, c, 2016a). These conceptualizations contributed to many theoretic insights which were essential to explain and understand the complex aggregate of experiences that defined the parameters of Latin American Jewish life. Profound tensions and paradoxes arising from globally interconnected realities became key venues for this academic undertaking.

Particularly useful for the comprehension of Latin American modernities were the necessity to distinguish analytically between their structural and cultural dimensions; the conception of modernities in terms of discontinuities, breakdowns, disjunctures, tensions, paradoxes and contradictions; and tradition as a creative and integral element of the evolving civilization of modernity and the particularity conceptions of civil society, collective identities and the public sphere (Eisenstadt 1993).

My academic life and research path would be shaped by a double circuit: at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico (UNAM), political science and sociology led me to disciplinary and interdisciplinary theoretical enquiry; sustained explorations of modernity, its promises and its pitfalls, as well as Mexican national identity, immigration policies and mediation processes in this national context. Structuring research axes crystalized in citizenship building, civil society, globalization and collective identities.

The contemporary Jewry axis would be developed interactively, mainly following the prevailing pattern of social sciences, which, while attaining a growing level of specialization, enhanced cross-disciplinary interactions.

In many thematic lines, bringing together the allegedly “universal” and the “particular” was innovative. I paralleled and interacted with the development of a new field: Latin American Jewish Social Studies.

A brief reflection on the field reveals a fruitful yet unequal rhythm of development. Many reasons lie behind this course. Latin American culture stressed “universal” concerns and homogeneous national identity rather than promoting the study of particular and collective belonging, with liberals and nationalists alike seeking to downplay minority cultures and legacies; this attitude permeated the academic milieu as well. However, social and political as well as cultural and theoretical pluralism were relevant incentives to its future development.

While the transnational character of Jewish life acted as an initial stimulus to the field - through elaborations coming from abroad - the growing visibility and legitimacy of the Jewish presence in the region provided a new impulse for its growth, precisely as a consequence of the new transnationalism that was taking hold among Latin American Jews.

## Snapshots of a Road

Alongside my trajectory, transnationalism implied a paradigm shift capable of grasping both the ethno-national diaspora character and the transnational trajectory that shaped the Jewish condition in Latin America. Thus, I followed a conceptual-diachronic pathway to its different phases.

Individual and collective needs and ideologies lay behind Latin American founding migrations. Studying the social and ideological responses to the impact of modernity on the Jewish existence allowed me to initially focus on migration and Zionism as ideological and social processes that shaped the organizational profile and the referents of identification in the new Latin American world (Bokser Liwerant 1991). The wide and ambivalent umbrella of modernity which fostered both a running away from its consequences and a searching after it, was the horizon for mass migration from the Old to the New World in its multiple ways of being modern.

While Latin America today has been directly impacted by the contradictory nature of globalization processes - facing both new horizons of opportunity and sectorial inequalities - this region has been historically globally constituted and incorporated into the world configuration by an extension of the European experience to the Americas. Nevertheless, the latter became not just “fragments of Europe” (Hartz) nor replicas of each other, but civilizations and societies in their own right and thus the earliest case of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000). Whereas the Western program of modernity constituted a crucial and critical referent for Latin American societies, these developed distinctly modern and singular models and paths related to their specific cultural premises, traditions and historical experiences. Sustained global dynamics developed in the region through its connection to external centers, which constituted ambivalent reference points that remained crucial. Alternative Western centers acted as a project to follow or to contest (Eisenstadt 2000, 2002; Roniger 2002; Bokser Liwerant 2016a, b).<sup>1</sup>

Latin American Jews have as well experienced this condition of being attached to diverse fluctuating and overlapping external centers, mainly related to the changing foci of Jewish diaspora. Sephardic Jews built communities around their various countries or regions of origin, reflecting the fragmented character of this complex

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<sup>1</sup> Shifting centers and global foci of identity need to be recognized: Spain and Portugal in the foundational encounter defined by asymmetry; France and England, later, as the Imperial balance of power changed; the United States, and the still current tensions and ambivalences. There were (and still are) certainly profound tensions between the external centers of reference and the inner composition of the populations.

ethnic group that was textured by different sub-groups: Sephardim from Turkey and the Balkan countries, Middle Eastern Jews from Aleppo, Damascus, Lebanon and Palestine, North Africans from Morocco and Egypt and small groups of Sephardim from Italy and other countries in Europe (Bejarano 2008; Brauner 2005).

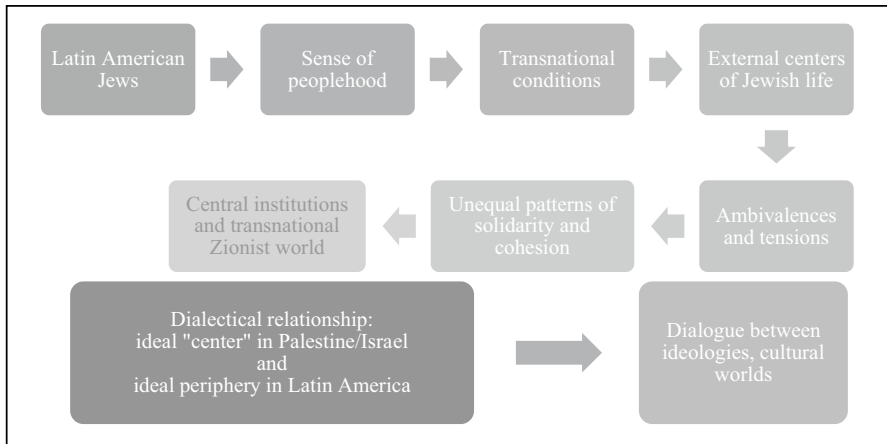
Eastern European Jews established 'replicas' of the European *kehilot*. The Ashkenazi Jews from Russia, Rumania, and Poland would mark their ethnic imprint, their peoplehood, through the new diaspora they recreated. Despite associational fragmentation and sociocultural heterogeneity, an ethnic diasporic matrix was shared by Jews ideologically identified with a variety of political orientations: Bundists, communists, Zionists, or religious Orthodox.

The new communities were cast after modern diaspora nationalism with an emphasis on secularism, while also reflecting a continuous struggle to address communal and religious needs. Exhibiting internal ideological splits and organized political parties, a permanent dialogue and struggle between world visions, convictions, strategies and instrumental logics flowed energetically in the Latin American "Jewish street."

Organized Jewish life was based on historical convergences and interactions between diverse institutional and identity conformations, with a singular common trait: the close nexus of an ethno-cultural identity and its national dimension in the mold of diaspora nationalism under Zionist supremacy. Thus, my research focused the ideology and the organization that "conquered the communities" and built hegemony (Bokser Liwerant 1990, 1991). If initially Gramsci's approach was helpful to explain hegemony building, the voluntary character of Jewish communities led me to other theoretical referents. For Zionism, hegemony building meant institutional insertion while incorporating non- and anti-Zionist contents; central institutions played an active role in cultivating the spirit of peoplehood, with transnational links mediating and even tensely coordinating with the transnational Zionist world. A high density of transnational spaces and strong communal organizations provided a sphere where public energy could be displayed. Nowhere did Jews create a communal public space with a proto-state structure as diversified as in Latin America.

There were indeed tensions and paradoxes: while an overall disenchantment with the diaspora condition was among the main reasons for the emergence of Zionism in Europe, in the new communities it committed to provide the essential elements for constructing new Jewish life: inherent oscillation between a project to renew Jewish national life in a Jewish homeland and the idea to foster community, education and links between this new diaspora and the Jewish world. The historical tension between *hiuhb* and *shililat hagolah* (affirmation and negation of the diaspora) was reoriented, becoming a prevailing strategy to affirm peoplehood while negotiating the challenges of integration. Like any ideology in the process of being absorbed by new cultural and symbolic frames of reference, Zionism acquired novel sociological meanings without redefining or rephrasing its contents. Its organizational functionality was altered in such a way that it came to fulfill diverse new needs beyond its original, recognized goals (Fig. 3).

The perception of the dialectical relationship between an ideal "center" in Israel, and Latin America as a paradigmatic expression of an ideal "periphery," was probably more diffused and acute in the region than elsewhere across world Jewry. Indeed,



**Fig. 3** Latin American Jewish commonalities

Zionist sectors invigorated the center as an identity referent with both “national home” and “refuge” qualities (Avni 2005; Goldstein 1994; Shenkolewsky 1992).

I studied the ways in which the links between the center and Jewish communities would develop distant from a one-fold or uncontested dynamics, defined by the dominant interpretation for those links; phases of dependency and interdependency that became a marker of strong and variable relations. These dynamics preceded the transformations of other regions of the Jewish world *vis-à-vis* the state: while, above all, crucial events that took place in Israel – namely wars and massive immigration – were factors that served as major catalysts for its affirmation as the center of the Jewish world, Latin America evinced a different quality and temporal logic - based mainly in the center multi-functionality for guaranteeing Jewish life: as identity referent, axis of organization, praxis of community belonging and transnational solidarity. Changes partly followed transformation in Israel and partly reflected the specificity of Latin American communities through a sequence of critical conjunctures. I closely analyzed and compared several conjunctures assuming that they condense and rearticulate contradictory communal, national, regional and global trends: the Partition of Palestine and the role of Latin America in this process (1999); the Six Day War (2000); the Zionism equals Racism 1975 UN vote (2001); diverse stages of the peace process and the public discourse developed as well as their impact on the interconnectedness at the meaning-making level between antisemitism, anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism (Bokser Liwerant 1995, 2003, 2009b, 2011, 2017).

Gradually, from a diaspora perspective, the triad of building emerging legitimacy of ethnic assertiveness, reinforcing collective identities and the affirmation of Israel gave birth to new meaning constellations. Thus, both a growing interdependency between Israel and the diaspora communities and new ways of evaluation, criticism, and divergences developed. Basic institutional differences generated paradoxes and disjunctures: significant elements of the critique of Israel encompassed tension inside the alleged binomial universalism-particularism. A comparative analysis of the North American and Latin American matrix of diaspora-Israel relations points

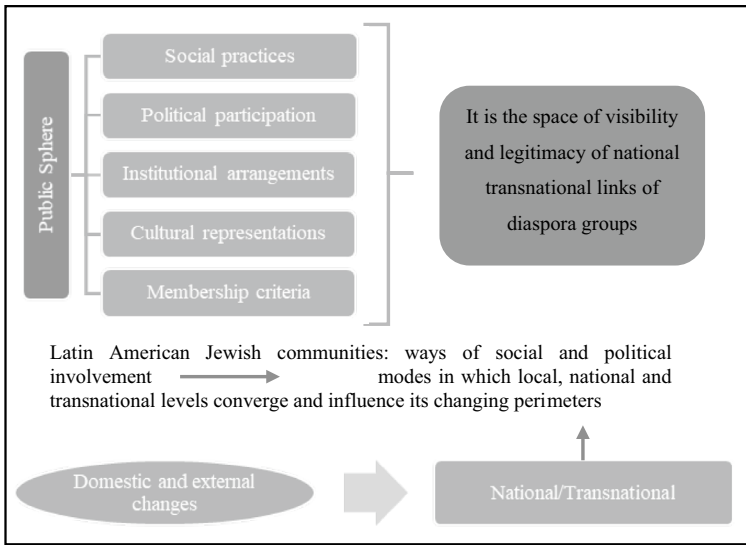


Fig. 4 The public sphere: Jewish communities and individuals in Latin America

to a convergent transition from the mobilized model to a participatory one (Sasson 2015) while divergences are related to the strategic (and ideological) specificities of the national institutions (Bokser Liwerant 2016b).

### Terrains of Encounters

The interplay between the local, national, regional and global dimensions – on one hand – and the way it intermingles with the different realities, alliances and actors of the Jewish world – on the other – has been a fruitful terrain of analysis. It has entailed examining the way in which social practices and political participation were impacted by cultural representations and membership criteria, in the space where structural patterns and agency took shape. Thus, the public sphere, in its broader sense, may be seen as the place where social practices, political participation, cultural representation and membership criteria converge.

Historically, the transnational links of Latin American Jewish communities have been invisible in the public sphere, limiting the scope and meaning of the “public” as a suitable domain for expressing the particularity of an ethno-national diaspora group (Fig. 4). Our studies on the conception and the representation of the Other’s legitimacy as dwellers of the public sphere have highlighted both discourse and policies. In the public sphere, where discourses and interpretations meet and intersect, where hermeneutics takes place and where hegemonic and subordinated/subaltern vocabularies get constructed, the model of one center-periphery faced its limits. On the one hand, various Jewish communities progressively experienced growing public legitimacy of their ethnic assertiveness that

consequently reinforced their collective identity's cultural referents. Thus, while the Jewish collective's public visibility was constrained, *de facto* development of a rich communal Jewish life was allowed; simultaneously, we should highlight that this dynamics took place in a region where social inequality and ethno-cultural differences remained irreconcilable, (Forment 2003).

My individual and collective research projects challenged scholarly work that privileges the national dimension as the exclusive framework for analyzing ethnic identity; a strain of thought which is centered on the processes of integration by ethnic groups into the nation, defining thus the local/national borders as the main referents of Jewish collective identity. By questioning the global character of the Jewish condition the dynamics and tensions between national and transnational identities are downplayed in the otherwise challenging world of Latin American Jews' hyphenated identities (Avni, Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al. 2011). Such arguments, which underscore the national realm as the main domain, seem to replicate the traditional theoretical assumptions of liberalism, with its expectation that all attributes of citizenship are to be subsumed in a national identity, with the public sphere (the universal) prevailing over the private (the particular) or the communal. These stances do not properly comprehend collective membership, specifically with regards to the Jews – which include ethnic, civic, and national layers of belonging–; collective belonging that has been informed by shared and unique interplay between being national/being transnational; being equal/being different.

Since liberalism's underlying conception of universalism and individualism hinders the recognition of diversity and inasmuch as this perspective finds it quite difficult to transact with people whose self-understanding and moral commitments reject liberal principles, contemporary debate has looked into the liberal tradition, pointing alternatively to John Stuart Mill or to Locke, stressing the difficulties of liberalism to deal with groups and cultures that reject its principles. In the new scenarios posed by globalization, where liberalism has become a meta-ideology, building a plural liberalism – considered in Berlin's terms as “a balanced commitment between the ideals of rationality and rights understood in an intrinsic and Kantian sense to apply universally irrespective of cultural and geographical variations and a more than grudging recognition of the communal, religious, ethnic and national ties that are vital to the human impulses of belonging, recognition and self-definition” (Katznelson 1998:167) – is certainly a profound challenge.

Whereas, as stated, a comparative perspective of the Latin American Jewish world guided the first studies in the field, transnationalism provides a more current conceptual framework to explore theoretical and methodological venues related to the dyad universal-particular, while throwing light on the changing profiles and borders of Latin American Jewish communities. A transnational approach interacts with new understandings of the concept of diaspora and its underlying assumptions. A dual condition that involves both dispersion and national belonging is highlighted, influencing the ways in which identities and communal membership might be modified. The transnational framework is particularly relevant for Latin America, both past and present, in which migration processes, narratives, and parameters of Jewish identities are built in a shifting context of revival, transformation, and negotiation



(Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola and Senkman 2010; Bokser Liwerant and Senkman 2013).

Indeed, national and transnational dimensions vary in importance across time and space. Both dimensions have undergone changes and could be viewed as different – yet interacting – facets of the individual/citizenship/collective/identity/belonging conditions.

In Latin America today, socio-cultural-political parameters and limits to diversity are subject to transformations. Recognition of difference, a new identity politics and the emphasis on heterogeneity act as a substratum that enhances and reinforces pluralism. “Struggles for recognition” (Taylor and Gutmann 1994; Fraser and Honneth 2003); and “identity/difference movements” (Connolly 2008), signal a new political imaginary that propels cultural identity issues to the forefront of the public political discourse in the broadest sense. Thus, in light of the general processes, Jews - like other minorities - find new paths of recognition and collective expression in the public sphere and its wider scope.

Growing social interactions have also led to an expansion of studies that cover non-Jewish groups. Such research, variously characterized by valuable insights and reductive analyses, often highlights the singularity of historical connections between ethnicity and dispersion, as expressed, for instance, in the concept of “archetypal diasporas” (generally referring to that of Jews but also to that of the Armenians) or the functional formulation shared by various ethnic collectives falling into the category of “middle ground” groups (Zenner 1991). Cultural attributes, internal cohesion, and organizational patterns, as well as objective visibility, have played a crucial role in the differential impact of external conditions on minorities, and specifically on Jews.

## New Challenges

Conversely, paralleling the efforts to build civic commonalities, ethnic affirmation acquired new impetus. This dynamic is closely related to the trends of globalization processes, in which identities oscillate between the primordial and the elective, the local and the global, the known territory and the de-territorialized space. Elective and civic bonds coexist with ethnic and/or religious affiliations, linking individuals, communities and larger societies in unprecedented ways.

Transformations in the nature of the public sphere, in the criteria for social inclusion as well as in the dynamics of exclusion are part of the current scenarios. An increasingly expansive force of democracy takes place amidst global cycles of economic crises, social conflicts and public violence. Neoliberal and increasingly institutionalized regimes coexist with corporatist political forms, popular mobilization and plebiscitary democracy. The region has incorporated global sequences of political opportunities and social conflicts in contradictory ways; civic citizenship and ethnic allegiances coexist; collective affirmation and individualization of rights coexist. Multiculturalism and new claims for recognition of primordial identities seek inclusion based on essentialism, previously dominant at the national level, even though they reinforce exclusion on ethnic grounds. While the scope for diversity

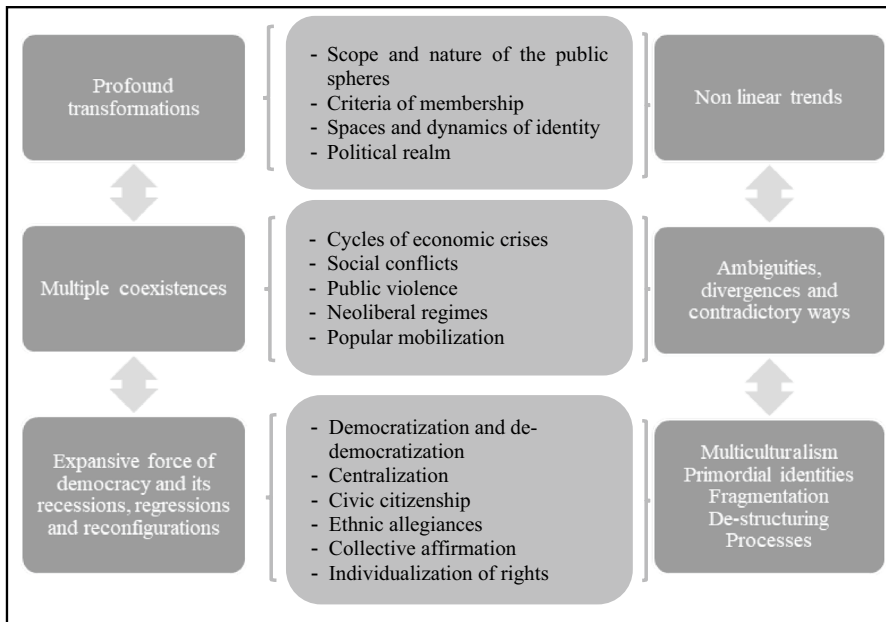


Fig. 5 Transformations, ambiguities and divergences in contemporary Latin America

broadens, Latin American societies also face serious risks of fragmentation and even de-structuring processes. The region's changing reality reflects both the welcoming of democracy as well as the emergence of recessions, regressions, and reconfigurations of this process (Fig. 5).

Pluralism and ethnic politics, minorities' recognition, legitimation and collective affirmation have enhanced, paradoxically, a diasporization process: the recognition of the Jewish collective transnational dimension as diaspora (just as the national societies recognized their own diasporas and exiles). The new nexus between culture, society and politics and diverse expressions of multiculturalism shed light both on the trans-frontier ties of the Jewish world and on its revitalization that mark differing patterns of action in public spheres and civil society. Thus, a continuous process of construction, fragmentation and diversification of identities develops, leading to new expression that do not necessarily imply erosion and decline. In this line of thought, not only continuity but also diversity becomes cultural and normative characteristics that define Jewish collective being and the multiple ways in which they relate to structural and institutional arrangements. On the light of the emerging Latin American democratized civil society, the ethnic foundations of collective identity are challenged among the divided and competing religious/national and liberal/universalistic camps of Latin American Jews.

The concern of Jews with democratic political culture and with becoming full citizens in order to participate in the public sphere, while maintaining their ethnic difference, has influenced these developments. Democratization in Argentina has involved a subtle but significant transformation: a shift from an overwhelming focus

on persisting differences of a one center-linked diaspora to a broader focus that encompasses emerging civic commonalities and transnational links as well. Normatively, it has produced a move from the automatic valorization of cultural and ethnic differences to a renewed concern with civic integration into the civil society and the public sphere. The concept of integration into the country has been transformed from complete assimilation to a process of becoming 'similar' to other citizens as well as similar to those Jews fully integrated into plural Western democracies (Goldstein 2005; Senkman 2007).

One can't dismiss paradoxes and contradictions: the bombing of the communal AMIA building in Buenos Aires brought to the forefront a mixture of old and new expressions of antisemitism which impacted the promissory notes of a changing reality and at the same time highlighted the transnationalization of the Middle East conflict. This event simultaneously became the focus and mirror of the national constellation. Claims for justice; analogies between Argentinean repression camps and Nazi concentration camps; and claims for democracy were all apparent in this scenario. During the military's *Proceso de reorganización nacional* (1976–1983), the Argentine government fought political dissent through the forced disappearance of thousands of citizens. In this process, the military targeted Jews disproportionately to the general population. The way this fact pervaded the national narrative redefined the place of the Jewish community as a national referent.

In the more traditional Mexico, a new concern with civil society and the public sphere also became a claim of both intellectual sectors and leadership. Community arrangements, actors, flows, and narratives of the binomial being national/being transnational also point to the new interaction between ascription and self-ascription: a collective affirmation of being, firstly, Mexican citizens and thus sharing civic commonalities and the national interest, while being perceived as bearers of transnational links and loyal to a transnational center.

Inner Latin American Jewish life has undergone substantive changes; it has been transformed by general social patterns with distinct implications for continued collective communal life: transitions from individualization to collective affirmation and their subsequent reversal; from congregational to communal models, albeit simultaneously witnessing a growing role for synagogues; from secularization to rising expressions of some forms of religiosity, even as secularism continues to gain ground; from privatization to communal revival. These trends are not linear but rather reflective of changing moments, fluctuations and interacting paths (Fig. 6).

## New Snapshots of the Changing Reality and Conceptual Paths

Further conceptual challenges derived from the contrasting reality of shrinking communities and revitalized Jewish life; my analytical interest was oriented towards the simultaneity of these trends in the region and abroad as epitomized by three interacting main spheres that shaped transnationalism: religion, education and emigration.

Historically, religion has played a minor role in Latin America. In the 1960s the Conservative movement spread to South America providing the first congregational model that was brought from the US, and not from Europe, thereby

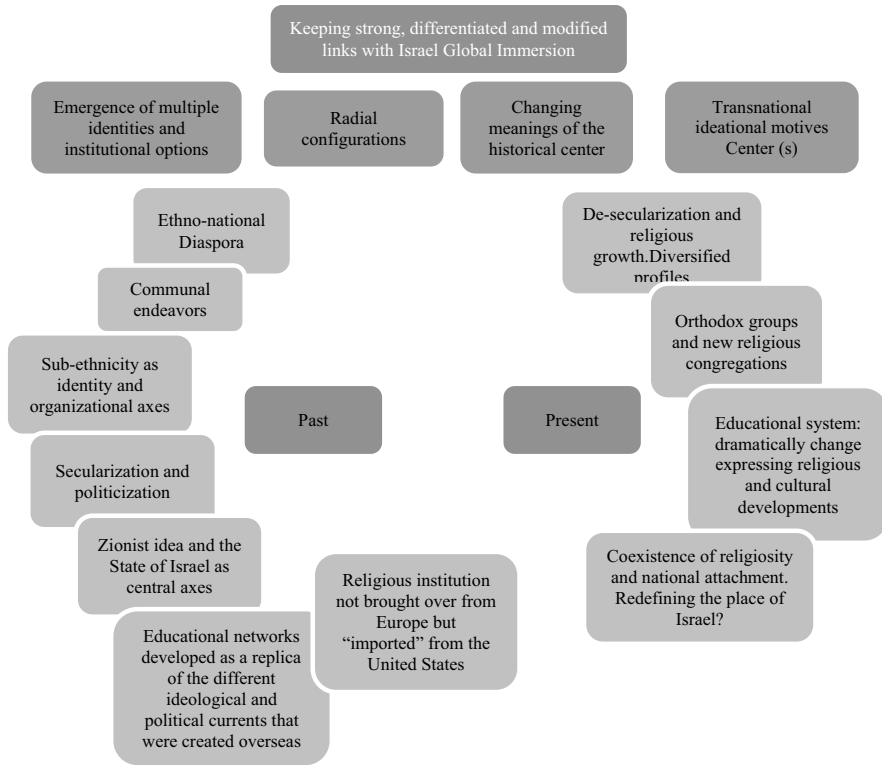


Fig. 6 Past and present of Jewish communities

setting what may be considered a new phase of the “old transnationalism.” The movement brought the synagogue to the forefront of communal and societal life by mobilizing thousands of otherwise non-affiliated Jews. It adapted to local conditions (communal over congregational model) that dated back to the days when a low synagogue profile prevailed. In a regional context of scarce religious functionaries, the *Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano* adopted a pivotal role in the Conservative religious movement that is currently sweeping through Latin America from south to north.

In recent years, in tandem with changing trends in world Jewish life, Orthodox groups have formed new religious congregations. Today, there is a marked spread of the Chabad movement and an increase in the establishment of centers in large and well-established communities as well as in smaller ones. The interplay between the historical ethnic components of identity and the new religious flows show a differential behavior throughout the region. Thus, South American communities paradigmatically epitomize how Chabad took an upsurge, amid changing socio-economic and cultural conditions.

Religious developments responded both to the need for reconstitution of the social fabric and to cultural and spiritual transformation. Religious identification

serves as an anchor for support, belonging and social order and, at the same time, as a moral code articulating a sense of uneasiness with prevailing patterns of organized communal life. New terrains of intimate and private spheres, as expressed in emerging forms of spirituality, are interacting with the public dimension. In spite of the fact that communal loyalties and the prevailing structural density and norms are still powerful in shaping identity, the search for new bridges between individual intimate realms and communal terrains is showing a growing relevance (Fainstein Jelin 2006; Levy 2015). Certainly, these fluxes of interaction refer to diverse external centers; simultaneously, one cannot disregard the way religion has gained a central place in Israeli society.

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. In fact, there has been a redefinition of identification components such as place of origin, the dilution of political ideologies — formerly the source of “hard-core” values — and the consequent emergence of calls for spirituality. Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo and Miami display similarities in the transnationally constituted religious sphere.

The trend towards religious observance and “haredization” may be seen paradigmatically in a realm that has played a central role in shaping Latin American Jewish life – the educational ecology. While the centrality of Israel cannot be denied, and main aspects of the educational system are interwoven with it, historical, political and ideological trends that differentiated schools in Latin America have been replaced by religious and communitarian (sub-ethnic) criteria, in consonance with world Jewish trends. The educational system has been undergoing transformations, simultaneously expressing and shaping general developments that have strong connections with regional transnational cultural practices. The highest rate of population growth takes place at the religious schools. While acknowledging the fact that this trend is related to the incidence of community social policies on communal cultural profiles – as expressed in the massive support offered through scholarships by religious schools – it also reflects the increase in religiosity and religious observance. The changing dynamics differ in the diverse communities of the region.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, these transformations have had a determinant impact on the centrality of Israel. They can be reformulated both in terms of the changing meanings of its centrality as well as being an expression of decentralization and the pluralizing of centers.

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<sup>2</sup> Argentina is characterized by its comprehensive community school system, which has grown in spite of the various crises it has suffered since the 1990s. The highest rate of population growth also takes place at the Orthodox-Haredi religious schools. In total numbers, the Orthodox schools have experienced an increase of almost 49% in the last ten years. In Mexico, close to 93% of Jewish children attend Jewish schools. A strong organizational structure of 16 (15 in Mexico City and 1 in Monterrey) day schools has developed; one school for each 2,500 Jews in Mexico City. Close to 25% of the student population benefit from scholarships, while more than 40% do so in the Haredi schools. The latter, serving 26% of the student population show the highest population growth: 55% in the last eight years.

In the far-reaching study we carried out among Latin American Jewish educators,<sup>3</sup> considering the ideological orientation of educators, the main cleavage appears between those of Haredi institutions and all the others. This religious axis, in any case, acts as the true divide within the Jewish educational system. While it is interesting to point to the boundary maintenance role of education, it is important to highlight that it is the transnational pertaining to Jewish identification which unifies not only educators within a given country but also across countries. This is not necessarily an Israel-diaspora perception, characterized by a center and a periphery, but rather a widespread and far-reaching identification network of global relevance. Among the preferences expressed by educators regarding possible available options aimed at developing relations with Israel, which they otherwise highly value, there is broad agreement that the main options include educational trips to Israel, encouraging identification and solidarity with Israel among pupils; and the teaching of contents related to Israel.

While analyzing the changing patterns of relations, educational trips to Israel became an important focus of research; an indicator that reveals the unique convergence of modern nationalism and post-modern transnationalism in the Jewish world and the region or, in other terms, the changing role of the center or national homeland in guaranteeing the continuity of the diaspora (Kelner 2010). Seen from the perspective of interactions and circulation, these trips oscillate between links and bonds to the nation-state and diaspora-building. However, the latter must be seen through a regional lens that focuses on the process of becoming an ethno-transnational diaspora (Bokser Liwerant 2015b). Different approaches are expressed in various spiritual-national-cultural representations of the center; connectedness develops alongside a diversified world of identities and it is implied in the existential and cognitive dimensions, thus underscoring Israel as a territorial and symbolic referent while strong and durable diasporic life develops (Fig. 7).

The trips and their function – based on a complex logic of interdependence, disjuncture and convergences between Israel and diaspora – are closely related to the institutional density, the social capital and the communal legacy of the diverse communities - and its singular expression in Latin America. As the data shows, Jewish educational ecology, in-group sociability patterns and communal affiliation act as central factors behind the close relation between modes of Jewish life and types of educational trips.

Accordingly, Israel plays a central role. And, yet, the specific characteristics of Jewish life point to different scenarios in the region.

For example, day school attendance in Mexico reaches over 90%, while in Brazil and Argentina it is close to 50%. Affiliation rates differ from 85% in Mexico to between 45–50% in Brazil and Argentina. Out-marriage rates are 10% in Mexico

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<sup>3</sup> Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola, et al., *The Latin American Jewish Educator in a Transnational World* (2015). The study comprised 1,379 Jewish respondents mostly reached through an Internet survey. The study covered 606 educators in Argentina (out of 1,497 identified there, a response rate of 40.5%), and 636 educators in Mexico (out of 1,074, a response rate of 59.2%). Another 137 respondents originating from Latin America were interviewed in other countries; 70 in Israel (a response rate of 33.3%) and 67 elsewhere in Latin America, North America and Europe (a response rate of 27.2%).

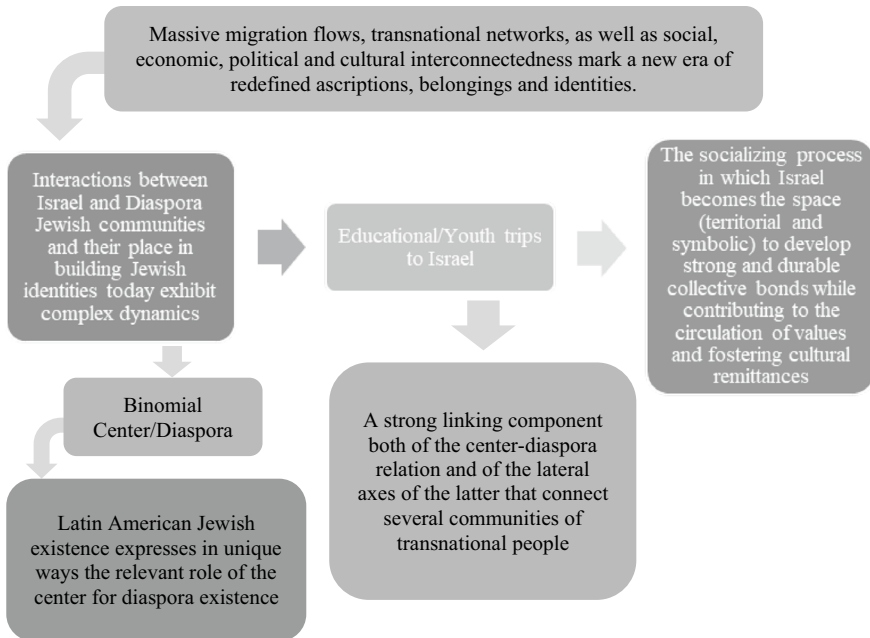


Fig. 7 The interactive context of educational/youth trips to Israel

while in both Brazil and Argentina they reach 50%. These parameters reflect and shape the scope and inner differentiation of the place and role of the trips to Israel: total attendance in the Mexican case reaches 70% *vis-à-vis* 45% and 50% in Brazil and Argentina, respectively. Jewish educational ecology and communal institutional density act as central variables. While Mexican youth have visited Israel in the framework of the school system, they also have a subsequent stronger presence in long-term programs and therefore a reduced one in the framework of Taglit. Concomitantly, it explains the latter's success in Argentina and Brazil – that is, in larger Jewish communities with lower levels of Jewish education attendance and similar rates of intermarriage. Jewish education still explains why in spite of lower affiliation rates there is a strong cultural component. Families of participants are engaged with and related to the Jewish community. While in Argentina 86% feel very connected to Israel, in Brazil this percentage is just 20% (Shain, Hecht, and Saxe 2012; Cohen 2014).

The explicit correlation between indicators of Jewish education (as measured by Jewish day school attendance), institutional density (as indicated by affiliation rates) and the rate of participation in the different types of trips to Israel, rather than reflecting a lineal or causal approach, underscores a matrix of Jewish life that extends to in-group interactions such as social ties and marriage, ritual and cultural practices and communal membership (Bokser Liwerant 2015a, b, c). Our emphasis is on spaces of belonging, which certainly are not far distant from circuits of identity as expressed by the diverse indicators that have aimed to measure the importance of being Jewish (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola et al. 2015).

Different approaches are expressed in various spiritual-national-cultural representations of the center; connectedness develops alongside a diversified world of identities and it is implied by the existential and cognitive dimensions, thus underscoring Israel as a territorial and symbolic referent while strong and durable diasporic life develops (Bokser Liwerant 2015a, b, c).

## Emigration: Source and Corpus of Transnationalism: Its Field and Beyond

Latin America, which constituted a hub of immigration, has become an exit region for broad social sectors. During recent decades, the net direction of migration has been from Latin America outward, to other destinations. Recurrent economic crises, political instability, high levels of public violence and lack of security have been the main reasons for this exit, though Latin America has also responded to opportunities offered by a global connected world.

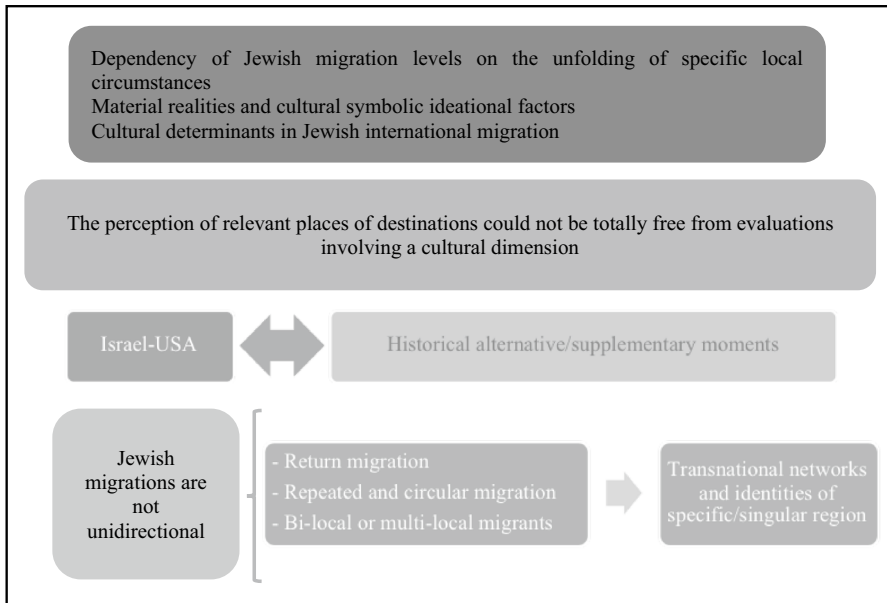
Over the past 40 years, between 150,000 and 250,000 Jews from Latin American countries have undertaken cross-border migrations. They have emigrated to different regions, specifically to those that have acted as poles of attraction — as substantially indicated by the cases of Mexico, Panama and Costa Rica in the continent (thus maintaining or increasing the population) — and have oriented their relocation across the United States; in centers of learning and high technology for young professionals, scientists, and academics, and in cities that have become emblematic of the collective and differentiated character of these flows, such as San Diego, Los Angeles, and Miami. A similar trend can be found in Canada, Australia, Europe (above all in Spain and therein, Barcelona) and, of course, Israel. In this last case, a singular interaction between necessity and ideology has guided the immigration (*alyiá*) of more than one hundred thousand Jews since its creation in 1948 through a process of “de-diasporization” (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola and Senkman 2010).

Given the global figures, it appears that close to 36% or 37% of Latin American Jews now live outside the region (DellaPergola 2008, 2009, 2011).

The size, timing, and social profile of these population movements may be explained in terms of “waves” of migration, which in turn can be grouped under the heading of the Latin American region’s “migration crises.” These refer to the emigration, dispersal, and regrouping of migrant communities shaped worldwide by macro-level forces, both political and economic, as originally formulated by Van Hear (1998). Successive migration crises affecting Latin Americans took place during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as is the case for other transnational groups: Jews migrating across and out of Latin America are in the process of becoming both dispersed and regrouped (Bokser Liwerant 2015a).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The first phase began with the Cuban revolution in 1959 and continued intermittently, chiefly during the 1970s in Chile under Allende’s socialist government and later under the authoritarian regime of Pinochet (1973–1990): during military dictatorships in Brazil (1964–1985), Argentina (1976–1983), and Uruguay (1973–1985). In the later phases of the “migration crisis” (mid-1980s and the 1990s) neoliberal economic policies and globalization affected Argentina twice, as well as Uruguay. Colombian Jews emigrated during that period due to a generalized atmosphere of internal violence. More recently (mainly





**Fig. 8** Migration crises and Jewish migration

Among general population trends, Jewish emigration certainly exhibits singular aspects (Fig. 8).

In the case of the Jewish communities established in the United States, this migratory phenomenon is conjoined with trans-local experiences characterized by the establishment and reconstitution of community life with original patterns that structure and govern a dual process: the integration in new surroundings, re-signifying the place of origin, and/or the constant circulation between recent places of residence and the ancient homeland. This takes place, above all, in sectors that have succeeded in incorporating themselves into highly dynamic transnational networks of commerce and technology, while constituting the nucleus of a broader phenomenon of trans-localism of people who live simultaneously and alternatively in new locations and places of origin, in an ongoing movement of coming and going, of being “here and there.” This “multilocalism” likewise signals convergences in the Jewish world: Venezuelans, to Florida and back; Mexicans, between San Diego and Mexico; French and US Americans, to and from Israel. This re-composition of collective borders takes place in various circuits: with other Jewish groups and with other co-nationals/non-Jewish Latin Americans (Bokser Liwerant and Senkman 2013).

Thus, partly following and partly preceding the transformation of other diasporas into transnational communities, Jews on the continent transit toward modalities of re-diasporization (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola

Footnote 4 (continued)

since 2000), Jews of Venezuela have emigrated under the impact of the populist regime initiated by Hugo Chávez. Emigration from Mexico was rather stable during those decades.

and Senkman 2010). In fact, we are witnessing the conjunction of two nutrients: the recovery of a historic trajectory of ethnic and ethno-national diasporas, and the pluralization of new migrant populations. While the very nature of the Jewish experience underlines the singular nature of its global dimension, migratory flows contribute directly and indirectly to reinforcing the Jewish consciousness of a universal people. Counter to this, the particularist character of the Jewish experience is, paradoxically, reinforced. This process goes back to the spread of the very concept of diaspora as a more flexible one for the analysis of the contemporary itinerary of dispersion: the “new global ethnic landscape,” as Appadurai terms it. However, simultaneously, there is a growing self-affirmation and visibility in the national public sphere of their original countries and region. Analyzing these novel processes propelled a conceptual shift toward transnationalism.

As new spatial interactions have modified their influence on the final shaping of social relations and identities, while an interconnected world demands rethinking the relations between territory, culture, communal life and identity, transnationalism concerns both the construction and reconstruction of social spaces and the concrete reality of a new place. Thus, different identificational/cultural/geographical *moments* of the transnational world can be located among Latin American Jews and their communities. Transnational trends have a relevant influence on restructuring life in the region and in the new centers that have grown out of it.

Latin American Jews move and stay, interact, and negotiate in a multi-level context of past and present trends. Compared to other Jewish migrant groups to the United States, the various Latin American flows feature steady growth since the 1970s, although differences prevail in each particular national context.

Redefining and reconnecting their attachments, these migrants are thus involved in processes of *diaspora making* and *diaspora un-making*. Diverse scenarios have been available to them as they experience de-socialization from their countries and communities of origin, and re-socialization in the country and community of destination. The variance of these dynamics is grounded in patterns that are particular to each national group but are also generalized across larger populations. These, in turn, depend upon the particular intensity and time-span of each group’s out-migration and the weight that group members attach to their previous identity markers, influencing the diverse modes by which Latin American Jews integrate into American Jewish settings while maintaining their distinctiveness and continuity (Bokser Liwerant 2013a, b, 2015c).

Regrouping and communal life as well as narratives of Jewish identities may take place in a context of identity revival, transformation, or even fading away and loss. Culture is deeply implicated in the dialectic of de-territorialization and re-territorialization. In diversified constellations, central questions have concerned the conditions under which old identities prevail, new symbolic ones emerge, borders expand or contract and boundaries are redefined. These questions became crucial in our analysis.

As stated, while diaspora and transnationalism are central concepts, their boundaries blur and often overlap. Our research aimed to contribute to clarifying their convergences and divergences, similarities and differences. Following Faist, the two concepts cannot be separated in any meaningful way and overcoming formal

definitions, their meaning can be inferred from the way they are used. Thus, diaspora is an old concept whose uses and meanings have undergone radical changes. For example, while older notions imply a return to a real or an imagined homeland, newer uses replace return with dense and continuous linkages across borders (Faist 2010). Moreover, these uses overcome the binomial origin-destination and include countries of onward migration, bringing into account lateral ties. Even wider uses speak of a diasporic experience of all mobile persons as trans-nation (Appadurai 1990; Bokser Liwerant 2014). While the dimensions of continuity, distinctiveness and boundary maintenance acquire different meanings in old and new uses of the term, the Jewish experience represents a meaningful case in light of the wide spectrum of distinctiveness/innovation. The interplay between historical ethno-national components of identity and new expressions enhanced differential behavior throughout the region and abroad. Homeland and the elected new places of residence widen the scope of Jewish life and their reciprocal influence. The current changes seem to shed light on the suggested reading of current Jewish history as a frontier experience, understood as a space of accommodation and confrontation – the frontier not as a periphery but as a conceptual and physical space where groups in motion meet, confront, alter, destroy, and build (Gilman 2003).

Spatial and scale dimensions have been analyzed. Jews in the United States live in “stacked social spaces” characterized by high levels of foreign-born residents. In Miami Dade, 51.1% were born outside the US. Smaller but nonetheless significant percentages characterize Los Angeles (39.6%), NYC (36.8%), Broward (30.9%), Boston (27.2%) and San Diego (23.1%). These spaces, which share socio-demographic and ethnic-racial contexts extend over the non-contiguous geographic territory of American society, hence questioning what Ludger Pries (2008) 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.” We can thus conceive of these communities as the territorialization of a differential net of *diaspora spaces* (Brah 2011) which are conformed by a large number of multiple realities, intertwined with its local, national, and regional circumstances, and still maintain the communication thread through the experience of diaspora in itself.

Cities and regions in the US where Latin Americans (Jews and non-Jews) settle constitute key scales that define the pathways of migrants into urban settings. At the same time, the non-homogenous character of American Jewish life stands out (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 been subsumed in the prevailing homogenized representation of American life (Sarna 2005).

My research covered mainly the regions of Florida-Greater Miami and California which mirror the cycles of migration crises in the region; these regions became host locations (particularly South Miami Beach) to the first Jewish Cuban collective migratory/exiled wave that included the majority of Cuban Jews and their leadership. Successive migration crises in the region led to the thinning-out 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. Multiple ways of retaining connections with their communities of origin and with their countries of origin have developed. In San Diego, an ethno-national enclave with a transnational character took shape among Mexican Jews, leading to what may be termed a secondary diaspora. In contrast, the Latin American Jewish community of Miami has a multi-national composition.<sup>5</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 based on their common origins (Bokser Liwerant 2013a, b; 2015c). From a comparative perspective, one cannot ignore Latin American experiences and encounters with American Jewry in Los Angeles. These are unique and, in particular, differ 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 metropolitan ethno-religious community’s image as “Jewish” rather than “Latin American.”

Of particular interest is the comparison that can be made between the migrant experience in the Northeast-Midwest triangle and its counterpart in 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 connections. Thus an ulterior question arises related to a potential scenario of de-diasporization that could lead either to individual integration or new prevailing criteria and axes of regrouping.

Consequently, mobility and relocation have set the stage for the potential reconstitution of an enlarged, redefined ethno-religious transnational diaspora. Latin Americans Jews do not simply replicate social relations transferred from their country of origin to the destination society; rather, their subjective and socially expressed experiences are quite diverse. Boundary maintenance between origin-groups may be complicated (undercut, refracted, blurred) by interactions and by the plausibility of multiple identities: a sense of being Latin American coexists simultaneously with a sense of being Jewish, Colombian, Mexican, Venezuelan, or Latino/Hispanic, or perhaps a more general awareness of being immigrant Jews on the way to becoming Americans. My own multiple identities and a shared history of migration created an empathetic substratum while interviewing selected members of the diverse national, religious and sub-ethnic sectors; though it is important to underscore that the different religious ascriptions — specifically in the Orthodox sectors — and sub-ethnic belonging became hard cores of identity *vis-à-vis* the national-country of origin one.

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<sup>5</sup> Of the Jewish adults who consider themselves 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%).

Current literature on transnationalism questions whether the newer transnational diasporas will have a multi-generational effect. It is argued that the fact that some “classical” diaspora models did have long-term features does not guarantee that this is a constant or necessary attribute of all diasporized groups (Brubaker 2006; Cohen 1997). I addressed case-generated data that relate to the hypothesis of *longue-durée*. Further research may reveal various permutations, including reaffirmation, intermingling, and disentanglement, as variegated sub-groups deploy in and around concurrent ethno-cultural-national (country of origin) boundaries in common spaces, inter-generationally, and communally.

Incorporation into a new society entails mutual “objective” and “subjective” ways of being similar/being different that relate to the particular place and the relative weight of changing national, sub-ethnic, and social collective belongings. At stake are the criteria by which migrant groups are classified, and the underlying assumption of Jewish communal life – either as a mosaic of experiences or as a homogeneous and uniform collective entity. Thus we face an extremely interesting question: how does a thick package of old-country cultural norms and intense/enduring links across national borders influence social spatialities in specific ways, such that both integration and reshaping of communal, educational, and religious models takes place? To what extent does the singular trajectory of being Latin American Jews point to new convergences and divergences between the instrumental and ideational connectedness with home(s) – including countries and communities – and their way of building their ethno/religious/national/Jewish identity(ies) in the new settings?

An examination of American Jewry and Latin American Jewish communities reveals contrasting and interacting models of Jewish collective life in view of the differing background characteristics, differences as well as commonalities that shaped the migrants’ individual, family, and group paths of incorporation into American Jewish communities. The *kehila* model encountered the Jewish congregational model developed in the United States on the basis of denominational pluralism and as part of a society in which religion was constitutionally separated from the state. Jewish organizational life outside the synagogue is based largely on local, regional, and national membership associations and social-welfare federations, interwoven with the Jews’ other associational habits and social connections in a pluralistic and individualized manner (Phillips 2005; Waxman 1983). Until recently, religion was assumed to be the primary axis of distinction among North Americans; yet the singular dynamics between religion and ethnicity frequently led to the acceptance of the former as a way of expressing the latter. Individualized Jewish religiosity developed around the synagogue-congregation, and 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, in the view of some observers, attained quasi-sacralized status (Fischer and Last Stone 2012; Woocher 2005).

Contrasting trends, convergences and divergences in religion, education and communal structuring develop, witnessing transformations and transnational trends in the new settings and in the building of previously uncharted transnational social spaces. Thus, one may see the widening of transnational spheres in the cultural exchange fostered under the aegis of the Conservative Jewish synagogue movement in both North and South America, in a feedback loop that ends up in the North.

More than two dozen rabbis arrived in the United States due to the evolving possibilities associated with regional migration. Latin American rabbis and their participation in new settings in the United States enhance the community model over the congregational one and, simultaneously, they maintain transnational practices by traveling back and forth to their communities of origin to lead services. As mobile agents of change across national borders, they recreate a congregational-communitarian matrix.

Educational patterns are also a relevant subject of analysis. In the United States, until recent decades, education in private communal institutions was the exception rather than the rule, as most Jewish families sent their children to public schools. Today, the somewhat heightened levels of Jewish education have to be understood in light of changing trends in the Jewish world, including the demographic growth of the Orthodox sector, which tends to favor comprehensive private day school education. Less than 15% of the schools are non-Orthodox, 20% are modern Orthodox, and 60% are Haredi.<sup>6</sup>

The relative density of Latin American Jewish populations, socio-economic stratification, and the general 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 selective religious practices. Cohesive social environments attract Latin American Jewish parents to schools espousing greater levels of religiosity than those they attended in their home countries, though there, as seen, the levels of religiosity have increased.

Social boundaries are maintained through bifurcation and overlapping; transnationalism means integration via American Jewish schools even as cross-border connections are maintained. At the same time, incorporation into specifically Jewish spaces allows for the maintenance of a generalized Latin American or a particularized communal tie, legitimizing multiple identities.

The role of Israel in individual and collective Jewish perceptions is one central item in comparative perspective. Differing patterns are related to the peculiar salience of Israel in the perceptions and identities of Latin American Jews when compared to the prevailing concerns in the United States *vis-à-vis* Israel. At this point, we also addressed the strength and centrality of Israel's role for Latin American Jews in the US through the youth that participate both in the framework of US trips and in

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<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that there were sixty thousand students in Jewish day schools in 1962, while by 1982–83 the student population increased to 104,000 (10% of the Jewish school-age population). In 2000, it reached approximately two hundred thousand; 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. In 1998, the figures were 20% non-Orthodox, 26% Modern Orthodox, and 47% Haredi. The growth in ultra-Orthodox or Haredi school enrollment, including both Chasidic and non-Chasidic schools, reflects high birth rates 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 the AVI CHAI foundation examined student enrollments, the Schechter attendance totalled 17,563 students in 63 schools nationwide. This year, their school enrollment is just 11,338 students in 43 schools (AVI CHAI 2012–2014).

the options offered by their country of origin, mainly Mexico. Indeed, being Jewish in a school or extracurricular program in the new environment tends to promote a revised articulation of social and cultural markers, not only or mainly in the case of family unity, but specifically in the ideational connectedness with the State of Israel. These values — once perceived as flowing from the Latin American Jewish experience — may now come to be regarded as more “universally” Jewish, as formulated in their new frameworks (Bokser Liwerant 2015b). Latin American youth in the US increasingly participate in Taglit, which has become an alternative to the study trips common in their countries of origin. These trends still need to be tested in light of the hypothesis of American Jewish self-distancing from Israel, which has elicited much recent debate. Discussion has highlighted the increased complexity of Israel-diaspora relations and the lack of conclusive evidence regarding the current changes, which shows the need to consider both the changing circumstances of American Jewish life and Israel’s social and political scenario.

Indeed, Latin American Jewish migration to the United States sheds light on recurring cycles of integration and distinctiveness, as new populations take part in the wider dynamics of (trans)migration, cultural pluralization and communal re-conformation. It therefore implies a redefined connection to Israel.

A geographically extended transnationalism replaces older binary connections between Latin American Jews and Israel. That does not necessarily imply the weakening of attachments but rather their re-signification. There is some departure from the previous dominant pattern of almost exclusive interaction with Israel or Israel-Zionist based organizations, as North American Jewish institutions have become an important source of direct political support and a model for collective organization.

Migration movements and diasporas and their transnational links involve 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). Thus, building Jewish life consists not only of rootedness but also of exchanges of dynamic cultural practices.

## Final Remarks

We live in a time of multiple and accelerated transformation. Culture and sciences are equally subject to radical transformations; given their complex nature, social sciences have begun to decipher these processes from new analytical angles. The transformation and polysemy of concepts from diverse theoretical traditions express the continuous need to search for new meaning. Multiple spatial, social, and cultural displacements imply a change in analytical lenses that lead to diverse research perspectives. I have elaborated on transnationalism as a paradigm shift and on globalization processes, diaspora and transnationalism as key concepts for approaching the past and present Latin American Jewish condition. The borders of Latin American Jewish life have changed - founded in the past, expanded today beyond the region - and ideational and population movements have acquired great significance as factors of social transformation.

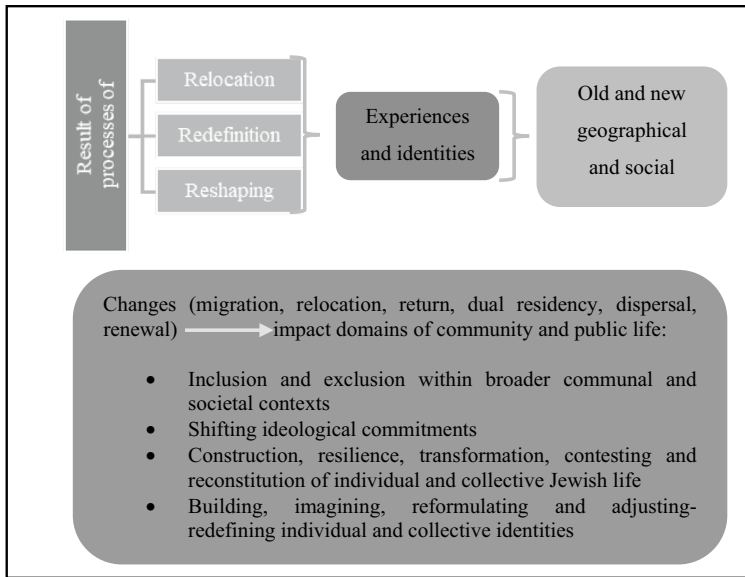


Fig. 9 Changing social territories and identities

Latin America's configuration as the first multiple modernities and its founding immersion in globality provided a wide substratum for understanding the interactions between Zionism as a national movement and the redefinition of the Jewish condition in the new map of dispersion.

Building Jewish life in Latin America necessarily implied social transitions that must be approached at different analytical levels. Ours were defined by binomials such as the national and the transnational; the regional and the global; the public spheres and communal life; the building of a one-centered model of diaspora; its new radial configuration of increased multi-centered and de-centered realities. This was followed by the pluralization of homes – concrete and imagined; material and spiritual; different historical ways of being here and there.

Past and present tensions and paradoxes have led to a reality in which a rich Jewish life and a legitimate public presence in the region coexist with emigration waves that define new contours of Latin American Jews.

Indeed, processes of migration and relocation to new geographical and social territories reshape experiences and identities (Fig. 9).

The potentiality of these conceptual axes points to common grounds and specificities of the Latin American Jewish case as well as to other equally relevant configurations of Jewish life; the latter concern complex patterns of continuity and change in communal/national/transnational spaces.

Basic theoretical and methodological challenges stand before us (Bokser Liwerant 2011, 2014, 2015a, b, c). In Diaspora Studies, the Jewish case has been attenuated and has lost centrality, whereas Transnational Studies tend to lose sight of boundary maintenance and the diasporic density present in contemporary migratory



movements. On the contrary, the latter is subsumed under the critique of the “ethnic lens” (Schiller et al. 1995). Transnational studies have typically focused on individuals, their links and networks of social relations being the principal units of analysis.

The Jewish case, while individualization processes take place, is grounded in the collective dimension - in the institutional underpinnings of globality and its structural effects. The individual and communal levels interact through dense Jewish associational and institutional channels that enhance informal ethnic ties, and also family links and networks. At the collective level, however, associative resources re-elaborate and re-orient organized Jewish life. The degree of formalization or institutionalization is characterized as well by a collective historical experience that brings together time dimensions as expressed by *longue durée* trends.

On the other hand, significant work in social research on contemporary Jewry tends to leave out the global dimension of Jewish life, focusing on national cases and thus underscoring exceptionalism. Therefore, while the historical Jewish experience does not equate social processes with national or state frontiers, it has contributed to overcoming the limitations of methodological individualism that focuses on the migrants and their networks as the exclusive unit of analysis.

The concepts of diaspora and transnationalism were re-examined, revealing the remarkable partnership of “awkward partners,” as Bauböck and Faist (2010) defined them. In particular, the dialectics of boundary maintenance/boundary erosion complements the analysis of practices of émigré ethnic communities centered only in otherwise important processes of cultural hybridization, fluidity, and Creolization, as well as religious syncretism. Roger Brubaker warns about such ambivalence found in the literature on transnationalism, for which the predominant orientation toward hybridism resists diasporic practices that have highlighted the principle of boundary maintenance. It is worthwhile underlining the fact that a major theorist of diaspora and immigrant assimilation is aware of the need to maintain the perspective of boundary maintenance as a resource that explains interaction with society as a whole. Practices that are subject to changes and transformations enable us to speak of a diaspora as a singular community with distinctive active solidarity, dense social relationships that cross state boundaries and link members of the diaspora in different states into a single “transnational community” (Brubaker 2006).

Valuable achievements can be found in current sociological work aiming to develop and benefit from the transnational analytical paradigm. As part of the conceptual shift suggested, an important line of inquiry relates to the interaction between integration, innovation, and continuity. De-territorialization and porous borders geographically detach communities, and thus social sectors, transnational networks, spaces and social circles are created and bolstered. In this sense, diasporas and transnational social formations are both cause and effect of global and multicultural macro social contexts.

The complex tensions and conflictive nature of relations between ethnicity and nation as well as the interactions between communal and social, global and local, national and transnational levels should approach the imperative to think globally (Wieviorka 2010; Bokser Liwerant 2015a). These dimensions - global, regional, national and local - can be analyzed through transnational lenses; contrasting traditional perspectives which view transnationality as a dynamic that takes place only

between the national and the global levels, the option that emerges as the most fruitful is to perceive diasporic communities as social units, with borders that are defined on multiple levels, as social arenas that are deeply rooted and interacting. Thus, it distances from the proposal of a homogenizing globalization and an undifferentiated diaspora, in order to avoid neglecting the importance of place, space and specificity and reinforces the need to attend, both in disciplinary and trans-disciplinary terms, today's radical transformations.

I do consider that the Latin American case exhibits traits that may help to redefine the inter-dependent character and significance of changing Jewish culture and life, as well as of transnational ethnicities in a broader sense. Jewish collective life is built in multiple institutional arenas – territorial, communal, religious, national, cultural – and political-ecological settings – local, regional, national – within a global world in which identities intersect and overlap, and their components become re-linked. Therefore, our subject calls for conceptual lenses of the multiple, meaning by that the need to understand the continuous process of construction and diversification of communal orders and identities.

Through migration waves and beyond, by crossing material and symbolic borders, Latin American Jewish life transcends the region's frames of reference, encounters the culture(s) of other contexts and through diversified interactions and exchanges widens the experience of being Jewish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The prevalence of manifold scenarios and their differential impact explains the increasing complexity of experiences; but they also point to broadly shared trends that bring together different worlds. The interrelated moments of transnationalism in Latin American Jewry, both in the region and abroad allowed us to analyze the changing constellations of Jewish communities and their involvement in the public and cultural arenas within their respective societies – old and new.

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