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RESUMEN / ABSTRACT:

El capítulo examina el impacto de la Guerra de los Seis Días sobre la comunidad judía de México, a partir de dos ejes fundamentales:

- 1) su influencia sobre el ámbito organizativo e institucional de la comunidad, la redefinición de espacios, así como el lugar y el papel de viejos y nuevos actores políticos.
- 2) su impacto sobre las interacciones de la comunidad con la sociedad general en el ámbito de las representaciones sociales y las fuentes de legitimación.

Mientras que en el primero de los ámbitos, se demuestran las modificaciones sustantivas sobre los patrones de organización y acción, en el segundo se arroja luz sobre la mayor dificultad y lentitud de los cambios.

The chapter examines the impact of the Six-Day War on the Jewish community in Mexico based on two main factors:

- 1) Its impact on the organizational and institutional spheres of the community, the redefinition of spaces, as well as the place and role of old and new political actors.
- 2) Its impact on the interactions between the community and the general society in the context of social representations and sources of legitimacy.

While in the first of these factors, substantive changes in the patterns of organization and action are evinced, in the second one the greater difficulty and slowness of changes are explained.



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THE IMPACT OF THE SIX-DAY WAR ON THE MEXICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY*

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ON 10 JUNE 1968, the 27th World Zionist Congress met in Jerusalem. Arie Pincus, then head of the World Zionist Organization, presented an analysis of conditions that prevailed in the Jewish world twenty years after the creation of the State of Israel, and a year after the events of June 1967. He stated: "The Six-Day War is not an integral cure for all diseases."¹

It is evident that a statement of this nature sounds unusual. How can it have been meant, and when can warfare act as a remedy? What diseases was it expected to treat?

The war's immediate impact was a generalized Jewish awakening. It turned the routine into passion, fusing a new organic solidarity. Moreover, the Six-Day War seems to be the kind of event that is felt to be historic at the very time of its unfolding. Given the perception of a life-threatening situation, the rapidity of the developments, the magnitude of Israel's victory as well as the type and intensity of the responses it elicited, it was defined as a watershed while it was still happening. In this sense, the *response* evoked by the war was seen as a remedy, an everlasting renewal of Jewish life. Nevertheless, Pincus's statement may be seen as a harbinger of concerns shared by different sections of world Jewry wary of the difficulty involved in turning such a sudden arousal of enthusiasm into a permanent phenomenon. In other words, it reflects an effort to minimize the accidental nature of the situation, lest it should become impossible to discern in it any permanence.

In Mexico, the response of the Jewish community to the outbreak of hostilities was massive and enthusiastic both in human and material terms.²

* I would like to thank Haim Avni, Ignacio Klich, and Halina Rubinstein for their valuable comments as well as Katia Weissberg for her helpful collaboration.

¹ Arie Pincus, *The 27th Zionist Congress*, June 9–19, 1968, Jerusalem, World Zionist Organization.

² On 29 May the Jewish Central Committee, the Zionist Federation, and the Ash-

This effort involved the whole community, straining existing institutional limits. It included fund raising as well as the collection of clothing and medicines. The pressing need for identification turned blood donation into a symbolic act. Young people were willing to participate directly in combat, even though the number of volunteers to Israel was comparatively small—sixteen. The prevailing atmosphere registered by memory was that of solidarity and willingness to sacrifice.³ With the Jewish state's military victory, the feeling was one of sharing in Israel's euphoria. Various training frameworks for young people in Israel reached significant numbers.⁴ The financial contributions to Keren Hayesod were outstanding.⁵

These responses indicate the way in which a moment in history can act as a "founding event" where different dimensions converge: reality, symbolism, and the imaginary. Discourse and social action met, and together stretched the boundaries that define the scope and meaning of *us*. In the words of the actors themselves, each Jew was defined as a potential citizen of Israel and the menace to the state was a threat to the entire Jewish people: "The people of Israel is one undivided unit."⁶ Thus, the perception of the Six-Day War as a historical watershed was due not only to Israel's victory but also to the expression of solidarity and the cohesion it brought about in Jewish communities abroad.

Nevertheless, a year later, there were those who strove not to see the war as an instant cure-all. One has to ask about the "diseases" which gave rise to this sentiment. Were these afflictions related to the new conditions of Jewish life in general, or to the emerging situation that organized Zionism had to confront after the war? In the new situation of unity and increased mutual links between Israel and the Diaspora, the role each party

kenazi Kehila launched an Emergency Campaign and joined efforts in an Emergency Committee.

³ Gregorio Shapiro, President, Central Committee, *Minutes of the Executive of the Central Committee (MACC)*, Archives of the Central Committee (ACC) 4 July, 1967; Simón Feldman, President, Ashkenazi Kehila, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of the Ashkenazi Kehila (MAKA)*, Ashkenazi Kehila Archives (AKA), 19 June, 1967.

⁴ The same year, eleven doctors traveled to Israel as volunteers and more than twenty youngsters went to *hachshara* (training). An immediate increase in *aliyah* of 55 people was reported. Shraga Peri, *Report on Aliyah from Mexico and Latin-America during 1967*, AKA, México, 8 January, 1968.

⁵ In the framework of the rise in the world campaign which increased from \$14,476,515 in 1966–67 to \$51,676,520 in 1967–68, Latin America's contribution increased from \$2,382,622 to \$29,012,284. *Keren Hayesod Report, 1966–1993* (Jerusalem: 1993).

⁶ *MAKA*, 29 May 1967.

was called upon to play could be defined in different ways. Consequently, the perception and definition of the war as a “remedy” could mean different things under different circumstances, that is to say, as a remedy for different types of ills.

From the vantage point of the World Zionist Organization, Pincus’s message was geared toward the leaders of the State of Israel as well as to Israeli public opinion. It came as a response to the doubts expressed regarding the relevance of organized Zionism, aroused precisely by the intensity of the awakening caused by the war, which apparently rendered Zionism no longer necessary. This became evident when it was reported that of the 8,000 volunteers who arrived in Israel during the first year after the war, fifty percent had not had any previous contact with Jewish or Zionist organizations.⁷ In parallel, the absence of a massive *aliyah* from the non-Communist world after the war tended to reinforce the uncertainty surrounding the relevance of organized Zionism.

But precisely because of these arguments, for Pincus the Zionist movement had challenges to meet. Yet there were diseases for which the war was not a sufficient remedy. First, the immediate Jewish response to the war situation could be a temporary phenomenon and, therefore, the consolidation and expansion of Zionist activism had to continue. Second, the challenge of incorporating youth into Jewish life was still a task that Zionism had to confront; in this sense, Zionism defined itself once again as a means toward achieving continuity and as a tool against assimilation.

Organized Zionism in Mexico shared some of these concerns and had its own worries. Paradoxically, these challenges emerged simultaneously with the State of Israel’s new centrality among Diaspora Jews, both as an organizational axis and as a source of legitimization. While the first dimension finds its frame of reference in significant transformations within the Jewish community, the latter points to its interaction with the society at large. The situation that emerged eventually showed that while the war’s immediate impact was impressive, the concomitant changes it brought about were heterogeneous and even contradictory.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL AXIS: REDEFINITION OF SPACES

One of the main paradoxes brought about by the magnitude of the response to the war was that it inaugurated a process which diluted the

⁷ Ricardo Levy, representative of the Volunteers Organization in Israel, *27th Zionist Congress*, 54–55.

boundaries between Zionism and non-Zionism to the extent that a pro-Israeli attitude came to be equated with Zionism. As a result of the massive and spontaneous expressions of Jewish support during the conflict, Zionism's organizational boundaries and identity became diffuse. The organized movement had to confront new ideological and organizational definitions regarding its validity as well as its specificity and self-definition.

Certainly, the war demonstrated the heightened mutuality in the ties that bound the Mexican Jewish community with Israel. Through solidarity with Israel, the community also expressed the legitimacy of its own existence. In the words of one communal leader, "The events of 1967 changed dramatically the relationship between the Diaspora and the State of Israel. They showed their unity, changing the vision of those in Israel who claimed that every Jew must live there. Jews in the Diaspora and Jews in Israel are all members of a single and mutually dependent people."⁸

Solidarity meant responsibility and, by implication, Israel was called upon to legitimate the Diaspora's separate existence. Israel legitimated the Diaspora by attaching great importance to its support for the Jewish state. In this sense, the Diaspora's solidarity with Israel legitimized its place and the channeling of energy into reinforcing its communities.

However, insofar as the State of Israel posed *aliyah* as a central criterion to evaluate the success and limitations of the Zionist movement after the war, it confronted Zionism with different and sometimes contradictory historical objectives: its final goal and *Gegenwartsarbeit* (work in the present). After 1967, *aliyah* offered both the possibility of converting the Jewish ferment into a permanent phenomenon and of giving back to the Zionist idea its own specific profile. Paradoxically, for the organized movement, the absence of a massive *aliyah* demanded the reinforcement of its activities, not necessarily along new lines, thereby justifying its own permanence.

In this new context, Mexican Zionism found itself caught between two different perspectives: on the one hand were Israel's expectations of a massive increase of immigration; on the other, while Zionist identity appeared as a synonym of Jewish continuity, involvement in Jewish life in the Diaspora as such was validated. Thus, the challenge was how to transform the awakening into a stable form of participation in organized Jewish life in Mexico.

⁸ Horacio Jinich, *First Convention of Jewish Communities in Mexico*, Mexico, November 1973.

While approaching this dilemma, the first expressions of an inter-generational clash emerged. In the framework of the Aliyah Congress that took place in Mexico in November 1967,⁹ youth movement spokespersons accused the Zionism of their parents of being “comfortable” and demanded a reinvigorated, *aliyah*-defined Zionism.¹⁰ For its part, the older generation justified a wider conception of the objectives of the movement based on the assumption that *aliyah* is always a *result* of Zionist activism and education.¹¹ In this sense, Zionism in Mexico pursued continuity rather than change, reinforcing the prevailing pattern initiated during the twenties, when it aspired to “conquer the community,” not only as a strategy to guarantee support for its cause but to ensure Jewish life in the new country.

From the point of view of Mexican Zionism’s internal dynamics, the new developments added two more problems to this first and essential dilemma: one, regarding the campaign for inner democratization of the movement, that took the form of demands for individual membership rather than the traditional affiliation through political parties; the other, related to the loss of institutional relevance of the Zionist movement within the community vis-à-vis the emergence of other organizational spaces. These inherent dilemmas were intertwined in the more basic question of whether Zionism and the communal influence of the Jewish state were necessarily related.

In order to adapt itself to the new conditions, the World Zionist Organization called for the creation of new and more representative Zionist federations organized not only along party lines but also based on individual membership.¹² The Zionist Federation of Mexico, in its aim to protect the interest it had in the maintenance of the status quo, challenged

⁹ As part of the call for a massive *aliyah* from the free world, the World Zionist Organization, the Government of Israel, and the Department of Aliyah and Absorption invited Latin American communities to hold congresses dedicated to the theme of *aliyah* in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro. *From the Department of Aliyah and Absorption to the Zionist Federation of Mexico*, AKA, 25 September 1967; Shraga Peri, *Report on Aliyah*.

¹⁰ *Youth Declaration*, MAKKA, November 1967.

¹¹ It was agreed to encourage study trips and a year of service, among other ideas. Shraga Peri, *Report on Aliyah*.

¹² The Action Committee agreed in July 1969 to carry out a vigorous campaign of individual membership. Zionist Federations were asked to declare 1970 as the year of Zionist Affiliation. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Zionist Federation*, *Archives of the Zionist Federation (MAZF)*, 7 October, 1970.

this recommendation.¹³ The generational clash showed itself again at the organizational level, with the breaking away of a group of young members who created the “Renewal Front” for the advancement of individual membership and who demanded that elections be held both for the federation as well as for the 28th Zionist Congress.¹⁴

Throughout the membership campaign, there were confrontations between the Zionist Federation and the Renewal Front.¹⁵ The struggle between both groups was resolved through an agreement to respect the two membership recruiting structures and to hold elections.¹⁶ However, even though both electoral processes took place, participation was low¹⁷ and the recruiting of new members was limited,¹⁸ pointing to the fact that it was difficult either to benefit from the Jewish awakening caused by the war or to regain a central role in community life. Hence, from the Zionist point of view, the effervescence related to the war failed to be translated into a permanent circumstance, either in terms of *aliyah* or in terms of communal participation. In this respect, one should remember that although 1967 brought about a growing demand for elections as a way toward democratization, they were never a customary pattern of political behavior in the history of organized Zionism in Mexico. Voting continued

¹³ Mexico’s Zionist Federation agreed to it on 5 February, 1969, even though it was initially opposed. By 1970 it was agreed to establish another committee in the Federation itself. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Zionist Federation*, 7 October 1970. On the struggle to establish a United Territorial Zionist Federation in Mexico following the resolutions of the 19th Zionist Congress, see Judit Bokser, *The Jewish National Movement. Zionism in México, 1922–1947* (in Spanish) (Ph.D. diss., UNAM, Mexico City, 1991), 193–201.

¹⁴ The emissary Simcha Genossar was in charge of the individual membership campaign and criticized both the Zionist movement and the community as a whole for their ineffectiveness in introducing democracy in their internal life. *MAZF*, 3 February 1971.

¹⁵ From the beginning of 1971 the Zionist Executive Committee in Jerusalem accepted the establishment of different organizational frames for this campaign. Two structures operated—the Zionist Federation (consisting of the General Zionists, the Labor Movement, *Mizrachi* and *Herut*) and the Renewal Front (consisting of Mapam, the Sephardic Zionist Federation, the General Zionist Confederation, the women organizations and the youth movements).

¹⁶ *MAZF*, 11 February, 3 and 17 March 1971.

¹⁷ In August 1971 participation was low in elections held by the Zionist Federation. Of 3,200 members, only 13% voted. *AZF*, 18 August 1971. Elections for the 28th Zionist Congress were held in November 1971.

¹⁸ The total number of those affiliated was 3 329, of which 2 469 were recruited by the Federación, and 860 by the Front. The final list, accepted by the Electoral Committee, numbered 3,113. *Report by the Department of Organization and Information, Archives of the Zionist Federation (AZF)*, 18 August 1972.

to be an irregular practice, for decisions taken at the top remained the common rule. In this sense, the impact of the war was historically structurally rather limited.

The radicalization of the youth movements exposed the Zionist Federation to severe criticism. As a result of the war, the youth organizations became stronger: the existing ones increased their membership and new ones appeared, especially within the Sephardic groups. This was the case of *Lochamei Herut* among the Syrian Jews' *Maguen David* community and of *Hatikwa* among other Sephardic groups. Due to this growth, youth movements claimed a more active role in organized Zionism as well as economic independence.¹⁹ Their ideological commitment, however, did not prevent them from encountering difficulties in advancing their own program. For example, in 1972 their ranks consisted of 1,100 members and *aliyah* was almost nil. Nevertheless, they acquired a significant presence within the community, which would increase throughout the decade. The Yom Kippur War would act as a catalyst in this process: while in 1967 Mexico recruited only 16 volunteers for Israel, during 1974 Mexico sent 120 volunteers for a period of between six months and a year.²⁰ This should indicate to us the importance of the cumulative and dynamic effects of historical events.

Simultaneously, regarding its institutional role within the Jewish community, the Zionist Federation based its actions on the awareness of its displacement in communal life and its loss of prestige and authority. It tried by different means to reverse this trend, with its attempts varying in orientation and intensity during the early seventies.²¹ The Zionist leadership explained the self-perceived loss of influence by way of contradictory arguments. They continued to refer, above all, to the lack of economic support for local Zionist activities and the excessive importance given to fund raising—an activity that did not translate into membership—as the main reasons behind their functional shrinkage.²² They were increasingly critical of the apathetic attitude prevailing among the Zionist rank-and-file and could not come to terms with the fact that Israel's centrality would no longer be reflected only through traditional institutional frameworks.

¹⁹ *Correspondence between the Latin American Section of the Organization and Information Department and the Mexican Zionist Federation, 1972–1973, AZF.*

²⁰ A. Hazan to Rafael Rafalín, 11 June 1975, *AZF*.

²¹ *AZF*, 23 February 1972; *Annual Reports of the Zionist Federation, 1972–1973.*

²² Letter to A. Schenker, 21 September 1972, *AZF*; *MAZF* 1 December 1971. Throughout the 1970s, the Zionist Federation continued operating with lack of funds; letter to A. Schenker, 29 March 1973.

The fact is that as a result both of the 1967 experience as well as the institutional differentiation and functional specialization prevailing, the community tended to a redefinition of the channels through which the links with Israel would take place. The once-predominant role of mediator that organized Zionism historically had played was questioned, and other existing institutions began to play an increasing role in the community's relationship with Israel.

One of those institutions was the Central Committee, the umbrella organization of Mexican Jewry. Although this body defined itself as an apolitical organization, after the Six-Day War it expressed an increasing solidarity and identification with the State of Israel and urged the diverse community sectors it represented to adopt a more active stance in Israel-related matters.²³ Simultaneously, it tried to maintain a balance between solidarity of this sort and its own organizational autonomy, thus reflecting the changes in the community's dynamics as well as those taking place within the World Jewish Congress, with which it was affiliated.

Another institution which gained a recognized space for direct links between the community and Israel was Mexico's Ashkenazi Kehila Nidje Israel, which already during the war became the center for the collection of material aid and the enlistment of human resources for Israel. Even though Zionists had "conquered" the Kehila at the outset, remnants of rival political parties and movements could still be found. These ideological vestiges were marginalized by the 1967 War.²⁴ At the same time, the Kehila had to confront the fact that the relationship with Israel and Zionism did not belong solely to the Ashkenazi community. While the Sephardic community had established close bonds with Zionism in the past, now other communities were attracted to the cause, like the Arabic-speaking communities of Alianza Monte Sinaí and Maguen David. While an analysis of the impact of the war on these two sectors would require a special study, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that their engagement with Israel and Zionism was complex. Their growing identification with Israel was interwoven with a process of secularization which also included a generational clash: Israel offered the new generation the opportunity to move away

²³ *MACC*, 5 March 1968 and 3 February 1970.

²⁴ For T. Maizel of the Bund, Jewish life continued to be focused on the Diaspora, especially in education. Nevertheless, after the Six-Day War, he understood that education had become an instrument of support for Israel. This belief was reinforced by the Kehila leadership, which considered that the youth response to the Six-Day War should be seen as part of the achievements of Jewish education. *MAKA*, 19 June and 10 July 1967.

from religion as the only focus of identity and to stress Israeli statehood as a complement of ethnicity.

Finally, the educational sphere would especially reflect Israel's rising profile as well as the redefinition of spaces for its expression. This sphere would be of increasing importance, notwithstanding the fact that the schools rejected the notion of inviting the youth movements into their framework immediately after the war.²⁵ Certainly, the impact of the 1967 hostilities brought to the fore a profound ambivalence regarding the place of the Diaspora in messages projected by the schools. As far as *aliyah* was concerned, they were focused around the old-new polemics regarding the affirmation or rejection of the *Golah* (Diaspora). Progressively, the State of Israel became active in different realms of educational life.²⁶ In order to coordinate educational efforts, the creation of a pedagogical center was recommended by the Zionist General Council in 1971, an idea which would not reach fruition before 1974.²⁷ From then on, Israel would strengthen its role as axis of joint educational efforts with regard to human resources as well as educational projects. This renewed function also responded to the continuing growth of the student body in Jewish schools after the war.²⁸

Throughout this process of institutional change and redefinition, the Zionist Organization of Mexico was not able to achieve a proper equilibrium between autonomy and collaboration at the organizational level, precisely when it was most required. While ideologically Israel became a focus of identity for growing circles within the community, organized Zionism experienced profound misgivings regarding the challenge to join efforts with other organizations without giving up its own specificity. This may be seen in different attempts which, while offering organized Zionism the possibility of widening its range of action, brought to the fore its dilemma regarding the dilution of its function. Such was the case, among others, of the attempt to establish an Aliyah Committee formed by representatives of different institutions in the community, immediately after the

²⁵ *MAZF*, 8 September 1971. This was not the case of the Tarbut school, whose director N. Syrkin took on the role of supporting the activities of youth movements. The New Israelite School, under the direction of Mr. Blachinsky, also took a positive attitude. Ezra Shabot, interview by author, 16 November 1994.

²⁶ *MAKA* during this period; also: *First Convention of Jewish Communities in Mexico, 1973* (*passim*).

²⁷ *MAZF*, 5 July 1972.

²⁸ In 1970, 4,400 pupils attended the six schools, while in 1973 the number reached 5,370. *First Convention of Jewish Communities*.

war. This experiment in collaboration between Zionist and other community leaders preceded other attempts both at the local and worldwide levels.²⁹

It is essential to point out that there was another still side to these phenomena. As a result of the war, Israel also went through transformations which, in turn, modified how it related to the Diaspora. Looking at it from a wide perspective, after the Six-Day War, its ideological and political spectrum was redefined. Left and Right were gradually emptied of their ideological contents and would concentrate almost exclusively on topics such as the occupied territories and the Palestinian question.³⁰ This political trend would remove the subject of its links with the Diaspora from the center of the Israeli agenda. Thus, it reduced and weakened the Zionist dimension of the political parties in Israel and made them less relevant in the Diaspora precisely when the Six-Day War brought Israel to the center of the community's agenda.

AN INTERACTIONAL AXIS: SOURCE OF LEGITIMACY

Since social and political life cannot develop without a system of acknowledgments and rationalizations, it becomes an arena of legitimization efforts. Individuals and groups must exchange symbolic goods, not only inside but outside the group as well. In this process, in which discourse has a central role to play, mutual recognition and legitimacy are shaped and nourished.³¹

While Israel's transformation as an organizational axis shed light on the community's changing institutional patterns, its changed image influenced its role as a source of legitimization for Mexican Jewry vis-à-vis society at large.

The short- and long-term alteration of Israel's image would confront the community with new tasks. The way in which they were undertaken expressed and defined some of the profound dilemmas that accompany the reconstruction of Mexican Jewish identity.

²⁹ A paradigmatic example of the latter would be the reorganization of the Jewish Agency that maintained a trend inaugurated by the war by bringing together Zionist and community leaders. Daniel Elazar, *People and Polity. The Organizational Dynamics of World Jewry* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1989), chapter 6.

³⁰ S. N. Eisenstadt, "Changes in Israel's Society Since the Yom Kippur War," paper presented at the colloquium "From War to Peace: 1973-1993," Jerusalem, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 24 October 1993.

³¹ Pierre Ansart, *Ideología, Conflictos y Poder* (México: Premia, 1983), 12-14.

Identities may be seen as fluent junctures at which the past, the present and the future coalesce in such a complex way that they never become fixed images. Identities are also defined by boundaries and interaction: both are crucial to ascription and self-ascription.³²

With the war, an image of a triumphant Israel emerged; its accomplishments reinforced Jewish pride. The Jewish state became a source of self-respect and a compensatory factor for the historical image (reinforced by the Zionist diagnosis of Diaspora life) of weakness. Israel's accomplishments and triumphs became those of the Mexican Jewish community.³³

Insofar as self-perception is nourished by the "other's" discourse, the way in which, generally speaking, the press covered the conflict was consonant with the community's perception of Israel's achievements.³⁴ The Mexican press was favorably disposed toward Israel.³⁵ In the main, Israel was depicted as displaying defensive behavior both before and during the war,³⁶ and second—in addition to Israel's technical and military proficiency—Israeli society and its army were seen as morally superior.³⁷

With the unfolding of the conflict, the Mexican government's positive stance toward Israel seemed to reinforce the open and public identification of the Jewish community with Israel.³⁸ The community's comfortable

³² Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (The Social Organization of Culture Difference)*, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1970).

³³ O. Gorodzinsky, interview by author, 28 October 1994; Ezra Shabot, interview by author, November 1994.

³⁴ Editorial "Report on U. Thant"; Ramón de Ertze Garamendi, "Danger of War"; and Miguel Guardia, "Victimizers or Victims?," *Excelsior*, 29 May 1967; Editorial, "The Development of the Crisis," *Excelsior*, 31 May 1967; "Russia and Palestine," *Excelsior*, 31 May 1967; Sergio Veraza, "Danger in the Middle East," *El Día*, 30 May 1967; Editorial, *El Día*, 22 June 1967; Octavio González Cárdenas, "Mexico and the Middle East," *Ovaciones*, 24 June 1967; José Alvarado, "Intentions and Chronicles. The Middle East: crisis in the UN," *Excelsior*, 8 June 1967; Editorial, *El Universal*, 30 May 1967.

³⁵ *MACC*, 4 July 1967.

³⁶ While we consulted various Mexican newspapers, we concentrated on *Excelsior*, a progressive journal that is a forum for diverse political opinions. This allowed us to discern changing patterns of public opinion throughout the period. Ramón de Ertze Garamendi, "Ten Against One"; and Pedro Gringoire, "Israel Fights for its Existence Three Times in 19 Years," *Excelsior*, 6 June 1967; Raúl Carrancá y Trujillo, "Johnson's Five Points," *Excelsior*, 24 June 1967.

³⁷ Ricardo Garibay, "Israel: Fiction and Reality," *Excelsior*, 9 June 1967; Arturo García Formenti, "Arabs and Jews," *El Universal*, 24 June 1967.

³⁸ The government manifested its interest in finding solutions for a conflict that equally threatened two cultures and two peoples who had greatly contributed to human development. *Excelsior*, 6 June 1967.

feelings during 1967 were obvious as they requested President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz to mediate in the conflict. Thus, the war provided the Jewish community an unequalled opportunity for expressing its identification with Israel openly.

However, already during the war, some parts of the Mexican press expressed certain negative themes that would become reinforced in the coming years. Among these were prejudices related to Jewish economic power.³⁹ Besides, while throughout the conflict criticism against the Arab world was focused on its leadership—its self-interest, its ambitions, its errors⁴⁰—as distinct from their people's behavior, Israel was perceived as a monolithic entity. This tended to promote the exoneration of the Arab people as the prisoner of the mistakes of its leaders, on the one hand, and the condemnation of Israel in undifferentiated terms, on the other. Similarly, Israel was perceived as a persevering, dynamic, modern, and Western country, while the Arab world was characterized by social gaps, traditionalism, and resistance to change. Eventually, due to Mexico's alignment with the Third World, this dichotomy would have a negative impact on Israel's image.⁴¹ Whereas Mexico would not join the Non-Aligned Movement, its foreign policy, especially during the term of office of Luis Echeverría Alvarez (1970–1976), tended to support a degree of opposition to the Western world and support for what was considered then part of the socialist bloc.

The growing complexity of the Palestinian question would play a central role in this process. Black September (1970) was a turning point. Solidarity with the Palestinians became intertwined with anti-imperialist discourse that justified terrorism as a legitimate means of expression.⁴² As highlighted in the writings of Jorge García Granados, in the past this had benefited the Zionists⁴³; in the 1970s, however, it worked in favor of the

³⁹ Prejudice was evident in some of the commentary, along with pointing out the interest of the super-powers in the zone. Thus: "the Israelis do not need any help since they receive enormous amounts of money from Jews all over the world..." Editorial, "Crisis in the Middle East," *Excelsior*, 20 May 1967. Another argument stressed that U.S. support for Israel resulted from the strength of the "Jewish vote" in that country. Armando Camacho, "Mexicans Point of View," *Excelsior*, 24 May 1967.

⁴⁰ *Excelsior*, 1 and 2 June 1967.

⁴¹ Editorial "Mao in Egypt," *Excelsior*, 24 May 1967; Cartoons by Abel Quezada, *Excelsior*, 27 and 31 May 1967.

⁴² Froylan Lopez Narvaez, "Palestinians and Others. Battles of Today," *Excelsior*, 9 September 1970.

⁴³ Jorge García Granados, *The Birth of Israel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949).

Palestinians. Progressively, the concept of guerrilla would substitute that of terrorism, as opposed to that of Zionism.⁴⁴ This new situation was congruent with a worldwide tendency developed during this period.⁴⁵

The change in Israel's international position and its newly emerging negative image were built up in the Mexican press during the seventies. The questioning around Israel and Zionism gradually focused on the division between "good" and "bad" Jews, between the anti-Fascists of the pre-state period and the imperialists and militarists of the present.⁴⁶ Progressively, Israel's repositioning modified the meaning of the hero's role in history, which is always related to the binomial interaction strength/weakness, good/evil, etc. In other terms, within a short period of time, Israel went from hero to pariah.⁴⁷

In fact, right after the Six-Day War there was a growing awareness of what was defined as the attempt to distort Israel's and Zionism's image. The 27th Zionist Congress of 1968 rejected the "antagonistic enemy's propaganda from the Arab camp, neo-Nazi groups and certain Communist movements."⁴⁸ At the same time, it denounced the differentiation between Zionism and Judaism as a criminal attempt aimed at promoting a negative public opinion of Israel while hiding anti-Jewish elements. Among other things, it was suggested that in its public-relations work, Israel try to restore its image as a seeker of peace, progress, and international cooperation, and of Zionism as a national liberation movement. For that purpose, Zionist institutions which were dealing with public opinion had to be strengthened, and training of activists in public relations had to be developed. The push to update Israel's public relations was aimed at reaching Jewish youth.⁴⁹

The resolutions of the Zionist General Council of June–July 1971 continued this strategy and added new ones. It reiterated the need of Zionist Federations to strengthen the existing information committees or,

⁴⁴ Jacobo Mondlack and Hamdi Abouzeid, Ambassador of Egypt, Letters to the Editor, *Excelsior*, 21 September 1972.

⁴⁵ Robert Wistrich, ed., *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (London: MacMillan, 1990).

⁴⁶ Fernando Carmona Nenclares, "Nasser. The Arab Heart Passed Away," *Excelsior*, 29 September 1970.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Irving Louis Horowitz, "From Pariah People to Pariah Nation: Jews, Israelis and the Third World," in *Israel in the Third World*, eds. Michael Curtis and Susan A. Gitelson (New Brunswick, N.J.: 1976), 361–91.

⁴⁸ *The 27th Zionist Congress*, 506–507.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

if needed, to create new ones, and stressed the need to cooperate with other communal institutions. This time, however, the focus of attention was also directed to the need to work with international non-official institutions and with students and intellectuals, Jews and non-Jews alike. Based on the awareness of the possibility that through the campaign against Israel the whole of the Jewish people was also under attack, other institutions within the Jewish world joined efforts to counteract the anti-Zionist propaganda.⁵⁰

Within the Mexican Jewish community there was a growing concern that the change in Israel's image could affect its own and would have a negative impact on Jewish life in Mexico.⁵¹ Therefore, the need to engage in the building up of Israel's image became not only a constant demand from Zionist central authorities but a common pressing concern.

However, confronted with this new task, the Mexican Jewish community was unable to fulfill its role either ideologically or organizationally. Paralysis as well as confusion characterized its lack of response. It failed to create the appropriate institutional tools and to develop a discourse oriented to satisfy the community's inner needs and to transcend its boundaries. This condition implied serious risks regarding the realm of legitimacy.

Even though communal institutions were conscious of the need to modify the existing dialogical structures,⁵² the task was never successfully undertaken. With respect to Israel's persistent calls for a more active stand that was expected to act as a countervailing power, the recurrent answer coming from the local Zionist movement was that unless funds and guidelines were provided, there was no alternative but inaction.⁵³

Unable to carry out this task alone, and following the suggestions from the central authorities, the Zionist Federation sought cooperation with other institutions. Together with the Central Committee it agreed on the need to act jointly to counteract the growing impact of damaging propaganda. Once again, the discourse emphasized Israel's need to provide the appropriate economic support for this purpose. After a long and difficult process of negotiation, both institutions decided on the publication of a bulletin, *Forum*, first printed in December 1974. In April 1975 sugges-

⁵⁰ *Resolutions of the World Jewish Congress*, January 1970, AKA.

⁵¹ *MACC*, 19 September 1972.

⁵² See, for example, *MACC*, 29 April 1969; 15 July 1969; 27 August 1970.

⁵³ See, for example, *MAZF*, August–September 1970; *MACC*, 8 and 15 June 1971.

tions were made for improving its quality as well as to involve the Israeli Embassy and the Institute of Mexican-Israeli Cultural Relations in order to widen its reach.⁵⁴ Only five issues were published. Surely, this brief effort was neither sufficient to counteract anti-Zionist propaganda, nor capable of transcending the boundaries of the Jewish community itself.

Time and again, the idea to create a public relations office remained only a blueprint.⁵⁵ The idea was broached again in May 1975, and it was agreed that the project would be financed by the Central Committee, the Zionist Federation, and the Israeli Embassy, but nothing came of it.⁵⁶

The slow pace and unclear nature of the community's response led Israel to become the main force behind the public relations task. This was evident in the Diaspora Convention held in Jerusalem, on April 1974.⁵⁷ The World Zionist Organization was forced to play an increasingly active role in this function.⁵⁸ However, its recommendations regarding political strategy derived from its own perception and assessment of the conditions prevailing in Latin America, which did not necessarily correspond to reality.⁵⁹

The overall lack of success in this sphere may be measured by the internal as well as external impact of propaganda work. The community was incapable of providing valid arguments and resources to be consumed by those sectors that were directly exposed to the questioning of Israeli legitimacy, as was the case with Jewish intellectuals and university students.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ MAZF, 9 April 1975.

⁵⁵ MAZF, August–September 1970. *First Convention of Jewish Communities in Mexico, 1973.*

⁵⁶ MAZF, 21 and 28 May 1975.

⁵⁷ *Report of the Diaspora Convention*, Jerusalem, April 1974, AZF.

⁵⁸ Thus, for example, Israel asked for a list of non-Jewish intellectuals to whom informational material could be sent. AZF, 16 January 1974. The Latin American Section of the Organization and Information Department sent information about Arab activities on the Continent. 13 February 1974, 27 March 1974, AZF.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Isaac Goldenberg, Herzl Inbal, and Abraham Argov, *Report on Latin America*, AZF, Jerusalem 1975. This evaluation, by overemphasizing economic motivations for anti-Zionist attitudes and downplaying its political dimension, could not provide an adequate strategy to face the problem.

⁶⁰ Mexican universities were the main sphere of action for the Mexican Left, which was divided vis-à-vis the war. A minority, despite their identification with the Socialist world, expressed support for Israel. Many others perceived the conflict as an escape valve for super-power rivalries and tried to maintain balanced arguments. The majority saw Israel as an alien state in the region and defined the war as a conquest, with echoes of colonialism. See, among others, Francisco López Cámara, "The Middle East War and the Political Technocracy," *El Día*, 12 June 1967; idem, "The Middle East: neither conquests nor genocide," *El Día*, 27 June 1967; Leopoldo Zea, "The Middle East and the Cold War," *Novedades*, 27

Notwithstanding the fact that after 1967 the topic of youth was at the forefront of the community's agenda, the scope of efforts in this regard did not extend to non-Jewish society.

Public opinion was not influenced; links were not established with political and social organisms; proper channels of interaction and communication were never developed. This inability to create spaces of convergence with other social sectors that could act as allies to counteract the effects of the delegitimation of Zionism and its negative impact on Jewish identity had its utmost expression in 1975, when Mexico voted in favor of the U.N. resolution equating Zionism with racism.

Therefore, a complex set of interrelated questions emerge: was the loss of legitimacy of Israel and, consequently, of the Jewish linkage with it, related to the failure in information management? Was the Mexican Jewish community's negligence in developing appropriate institutional tools and in developing a discourse for inner and external purposes a consequence of its leadership's errors, or was it due to a more substantive lack of ideological resources? Finally, was this deficiency a product of the increasingly active role of the central authorities in Jerusalem that inhibited local action?

As the identification with Israel—the transition from the feeling of interdependence to that of unity—grew within the community, so did the inability to use both the private and the public spheres as realms for expressing a legitimate collective identity. The difficulty lay in the lack of public collective visibility for the Jewish community in Mexico.

The euphoria that accompanied identification with the State of Israel could not cross the threshold of Mexican society's expectation of national homogeneity as a *sine qua non* for national belonging. These external constraints regarding the public manifestation of national-cultural differences and the collective nature of Jewish life lie behind this situation. Confronted with the complexity of this situation, the case might be made that it was easier for the community's leadership to blame other causes for the paralysis rather than to recognize this fact.

In the final analysis, the community's legitimacy depended heavily on the conditions set by the society at large. The conception of Mexican national identity, defined as a terrain where diversity is seen as a challenge to national integration, made the acceptance of otherness difficult.⁶¹ The

June 1967; Froylan Lopez Narvaez, "Palestinians and Others. Battles of Today," *Excelsior*, 9 September 1970.

⁶¹ Judit Bokser-Liwerant, *Jewish National Movement*.

Jewish collective condition as an enclave within the national society was especially difficult. The public sphere never came to be an adequate space for the Jewish community to manifest its collective identity. The inability to modify the discourse of the public sphere reduced the community's ability to bring to the public realm subjects or values such as collective identity or autonomy, which could have acted as ulterior sources of legitimacy.

The events of 1967, then, modified the internal structure of Zionism and Jewish life in Mexico, and of its links with the State of Israel, but it did not modify the patterns of interaction between the Jewish community and Mexican society. One is tempted to ask if indeed those events could have had a more significant impact on the conflicting understanding of individuality, community, and public identity.

The answer has to do not only with volition and social action but also with historical structures. Surely, the war did not help to minimize the polar tensions that articulate the collective identity of the Mexican Jewish community. Therefore, this problem may also be approached in terms of the difficulties inherent in building the links between claims concerning individuality and arguments concerning the value of community.

It is evident that the formulation of this question requires a different spatial, temporal, and circumstantial perspective, largely unavailable to the participants themselves, for whom the possibility of a question such as this was limited by the contextual constraints. Nevertheless, its omission was of enormous consequence.