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#### **RESÚMEN / ABSTRACT:**

El capítulo aborda la construcción identitaria judía desde la confluencia de dos ejes y sus complejas interacciones. Mientras que el eje de lo nacional da cuenta del encuentro, inserción y desarrollo del grupo en el marco de la sociedad nacional, el transnacional apunta al impacto de los espacios culturales y sociales que fluyen más allá de las fronteras nacionales. Al tiempo que estudia los desafíos que el pensamiento nacional debió confrontar para conceptualizar la alteridad, explora el modo como la experiencia diaspórica y transnacional marcó pautas de desarrollo cultural y social que inciden sobre la vida del colectivo judío.

The chapter deals with the process of Jewish identity construction as a result of the confluence of two interacting dimensions: while the national dimension accounts for the encounter, through an inclusion-exclusion dialectic , and the development of the group within the context of the local society, the transnational dimension points out to the impact of cultural and social spaces that go beyond the national borders. While studying the challenges that national thought had to confront to conceptualize alterity, the chapter also explores how the diasporic and transnational experience established patterns of cultural and social development that shaped the life of the Jewish community.

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Edited by Mario Sznajder, Luis Roniger  
and Carlos A. Forment

# Shifting Frontiers of Citizenship: The Latin American Experience



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BRILL

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# BEING NATIONAL, BEING TRANSNATIONAL: SNAPSHOTS OF BELONGING AND CITIZENSHIP

JUDIT BOKSER LIWERANT

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: A BINOMIAL AND ITS PROBLEMATIC

The social construction of diversity set in motion in Latin America by global dynamics calls for a new analytical perspective that places the binomial being national-being transnational at its center. It allows explaining citizenship building and increasingly relevant trends that constitute the fulcrum of debates on democratization, globalization, transnationalism and ethnic and civic identities interacting in the public sphere's changing scope. Patterns of collective identities shape social boundaries and public spheres with far-reaching implications for the ongoing construction of national identities and the dynamics of social integration. The latter include, specifically, the formation and transformation of the criteria of membership within national communities (Eisenstadt 1998). These processes, then, point to challenges that emerge from collective identities across the State's national borders.

By bringing together both dimensions, the national and the transnational, this binomial provides a relevant angle for analyzing the past and the present condition of an ethno-national Jewish Diaspora amid the more general process of identity construction and its expression in the public sphere. This analytical framework aims to capture the interaction between the changing place of Jewish communities in the national dimension and their equally changing transnational historical condition. Its relevance to explain past and present processes is enhanced by our understanding of bordered and bounded social and communal units as transnationally constituted spaces with fluid interacting patterns.

The national component of this binomial includes not only shared identity referents for both individuals and communities, but also ways in which the recognition and legitimacy of Otherness have been elaborated and internalized; for the Other, such cultural referents may cross national frontiers. The absence or existence of encounters and alliances between individual and collective actors in the larger society stretch (out) or widen the public sphere.

The transnational component of the equation refers to previously existing but also presently expressed relations, connections, spaces, cultural referents and meanings for Diasporas and their homeland(s). Diasporas as social formations are mainly characterized by the triadic relationship between globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups, the present territorial states and contexts where such groups reside, and the homeland states and environments their forebears arrived from (Sheffer 1986; Safran 1991). Homeland(s) must be analyzed in light of changing territories and referents. Contemporary Jewish history is a web reflecting the unique dialectic between place/home of origin, the elected place of residence/voluntary home, and also the spiritual and/or ideological elected place that could act as a substitute for home. In the 21st century, it adds new spatial scopes in the framework of increased population movements and migration waves.

Transnational conditions marked the experience of Latin American Jewish life from its very beginnings. The founding immigration and colonization waves as well as their later development were defined by a constant process of being attached to shifting and overlapping external centers of Jewish life, both real and imaginary, concrete and symbolic. Latin American Jews shaped their communal life, and built their institutional profile and their collective consciousness as part of a broader feeling of peoplehood. By keeping the transnational moment at bay while at the same time interacting with it, the new national frameworks were called to play a central role in defining the character of the new Jewish communities (Bokser Liwerant 2008; Senkman 2008).

While national and transnational dimensions vary in importance across time and space, their present dynamics point to complex interactions that exclude reductionist conceptions that emphasize only one of the two components of the binomial. Both dimensions have undergone changes and can be viewed as different –yet interacting– facets of the individual citizenship/collective identity/belonging conditions. The challenges, opportunities and limits of these communities to be perceived and recognized as legitimate components of the national being and define their membership along the ethnic-civic criteria of citizenship, are basic concerns of this article.

Historically, the transnational links of Jewish communities in Latin America have been invisible in the public sphere where representation, recognition and social practices take shape, consequently limiting the scope and meaning of the 'public' as a suitable domain for expressing the particularity of an ethno-national Diaspora group. The recognition of

Jewish transnational links was conditioned by the State's homogeneous national conceptions, thus questioning dimensions that were meaningful from a Jewish collective perspective (Bokser Liwerant 2008, 2011). The public thought's foundational character that sought to build national identity/integration through homogeneity constrained the Jewish collective's public visibility while *de facto* it allowed to develop a rich communal Jewish life in a region where social inequality and ethno-cultural differences remained irreconcilable (Forment 2003).

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 1994; Fraser 2003); 'identity/difference movements' (Young 2007; 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, as other minorities, find new paths of recognition and collective expression in the public sphere and its wider scope.

Paralleling the efforts to build civic commonalities, ethnic affirmation acquires new impetus. This dynamic is closely related to contradictory 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 (Appadurai 1990, 1996).

Changes, however, are not linear. Citizenship building becomes a means 'to confront the existing boundaries of what is defined as the political arena—its participants, its institutions, its processes, its agenda, its scope' (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998). It takes place when legitimate inhabitants of the public sphere are recognized and/or empowered as such. Therefore, being national entails new interactions between social, ethnic, religious and civic identities along the axes of inclusion and expansion or its contrary, erosion and withdrawal (Kivisto and Faist 2007).

The contradictions and perplexities derived from global interconnectedness and regional transformations demand highly inclusive analytical perspectives. Ambiguities and divergences characterize processes of democratization and consolidation of inclusive public spheres. The region's changing reality reflects both the increasingly expansive force of democracy as well as its recessions, regressions, and reconfigurations (Bokser Liwerant 2008a). Latin America has incorporated global cycles of

political opportunities and social conflicts in contradictory ways, as evident in democratization and de-democratization; centralization; civic citizenship and ethnic allegiances; collective affirmation and individualization of rights. 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. Dilemmas and ambiguities run across a constructive path towards democratization and pluralism. While the scope for diversity broadens, Latin American societies also face serious risks of fragmentation and de-structuring processes (Keane 1997).

Historically, Latin American Jewry constituted a hub for immigration, but in the last decade, the direction of migration flows has changed, originating from Latin America to other destinations. It has become an exit region for wide social sectors. In parallel to processes of growing pluralism – political, institutional and cultural – and the ensuing affirmation of civic commonalities, constructive ambiguities include recurrent failures of modernization processes (Whithead 2000) followed by economic crises, political instability, high levels of public violence and lack of security. Jewish communities are exposed to multiple experiences of belonging and leaving, leaving and joining, constructing homeness and perceiving exile (Bokser Liwerant, DellaPergola and Senkman 2010).

Thus, particular realities and expressions of transnationalism take place in a more general fashion. Growing mobility, international migrations, and the diversification of internal and transnational movements have surfaced in the continent (Portes and DeWind 2008). Migrations involve the renewed expansion of spaces and places, both in the region and abroad, posing new dynamics to analyze by the binomial being national-being transnational. The increased speed and density of interactions, along with the pluralization of actors, evolve in changing spheres, which are enlarged and framed by global networks and transnational realms (Keohane and Nye 2000). Globalization processes have radically changed the relation between time and space, which no longer exerts the same influence on the structuring of social institutions, as evident in the de-territorialization of economic, social, and political arrangements that no longer depend on distance (Waters 1995; Robertson 1992), while transnationalism refers to the transcendence of borders (Vertovec 1999; Khagram 2008).

Therefore, Latin America witnesses today the emergence of a new transnational consciousness marked by multiple identifications and attachments. Transnationalism and Diaspora may be seen as categories of

social practices that imply a revision of the dialectics of home-identity-movement-return (Vertovec 2009; Shohat 2006; Clifford 1997). Jews in the region, among other Latin Americans, choose to leave the continent, create new Diasporas or become subject to re-diasporization processes, thus experiencing new national-transnational dynamics, both at home and abroad.

Being national/being transnational is, thus, a key binomial lens to explain communal life that is not reduced to the boundaries of the nation-state. The focus of this binomial on the cross-national-frontier accounts for trends that imply the construction of transnational social fields as places to dwell with membership and to build different senses of belongingness.

Latin American Jewish communities are characterized by commonalities as well as by stark contrasts in their experiences, reflecting the continent's heterogeneity. Significant differences have historically marked Indo-America, where countries such as Mexico, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, among others, experienced limited immigration that emphasized the indigenous highly hierarchical composition of their populations, and Euro-America, where countries such as Argentina and Uruguay attracted mass immigration in the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>1</sup>

The present article focuses on Mexico, a paradigmatic case of dynamic intermingling between ethnicity, national belonging and citizenship. The ethnic-religious-cultural model that was set in place to build and imagine national identity aimed fusion and assimilation as central criteria for evaluating full incorporation into the national scene. At present, an increasingly prominent and visible transnational dimension takes place along profound processes of political and social change that include constructive ambiguities. The transition from a historic attempt to build a Nation-State to the construction of Mexico as a State of Law, based on civil commonalities, took place, though, on a parallel track to the emergence of ethnic movements and public religious affirmations. Equally complex has been the reshaping of civil society's realm and scope vis-à-vis the State when competing projects confront conceptions of society either as a source of moral unity and natural convergences or as a space where mechanisms are created to overcome differences.

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<sup>1</sup> In both categories we may further differentiate between, for example, the homogeneous mestizo Chile and Colombia as opposed to Brazil, Cuba and some Caribbean areas where the complex multiracial societies have a pronounced Afro American element (Eisenstadt 1998; Avni 1999).

The Mexican case demonstrates that new processes and trends allow for recognition and legitimization of the two-fold nature of the binomial while they also expose a set of uncertainties and, therefore, sheds light on regional trends and global implications.

#### A CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORICAL JOURNEY: BEING NATIONAL AND ITS LIMITS IN MEXICO AND LATIN AMERICA

Collective identities interact with the public's sphere contours, thus entailing particular implications of representation, recognition and the shaping of social practices in the national being and its integration processes. Therefore, the public becomes a space where visibility, legitimacy and social agency may (or may not) be achieved.

Historical hegemonic conceptions of national identity defined membership criteria and conditions for collective action given the close interdependence between ethnicity, national belonging and the State's political project. National identity has aspired to encompass different collective identities, thus becoming synonymous to the public sphere and its actors. Hence, although national and civic referents coexist in the public thought, 'national history' has been more frequently used and remained more culturally significant than the citizenship code; that is, the nation-State has surpassed the State of Law and civil society (Aguilar 1989).

National thought defined the collective self-image and the conceptual margins of the Other. In the close interplay between identity and Otherness, the externally assigned image, the social representation, and the identity ascription of the Jew vis-à-vis the national community has not been one-dimensional. Like all imagined communities, a nation is not merely an extended web of relationships between people. It also involves a conception of membership that includes a definition of its ethnicity. A historical perspective reflects the various attempts to conceive a public sphere centering on national/ethnic identity and reveals the centrality of national narrative in the persistence of social representations and imaginaries.

The real and symbolic meaning of the founding project of *mestizaje* expressed the nation's ethnic and political dimensions. While it called for an ethnic-socio-cultural encounter between the indigenous and the Hispanic-Christian components, its primordial features had limiting effects on the social construction of diversity. Thus, not every group and culture was a foundational layer of the nation, or perceived as such, and,



at the same time, the Jewish collective sought integration into the nation without ethnic assimilation.

The dilemmatic construction of the Other/Foreign accompanied the intellectual *Criollo* who, on the one hand, in his quest for autonomy from Spain identified with the indigenous population, but on the other hand, remained reluctant to lose his ancestors' privileges (Brading 1973; Villoro 1986). The *Criollo* faced this dilemma through the successive reformulations of the national project until the Revolution. *Indigenismo* was articulated as a native claim and benefited from the new socio-ethnic category: the *mestizo*. At the same time, the latter became the rising political actor in the national scene. Paradoxically, its producer, the *Criollo*, was disqualified as a foreigner.

In the latter half of the 19th century, the complex relationship between liberalism and the political national project resulted from their divergent ideological and political premises. Liberalism sought to found a nation based on a rupture with its colonial and indigenous past and, therefore, the conceived 'Other' acquired a new meaning. The debates on religious freedom reflected the premises of liberal thought on tolerance as an incentive to promote European immigration (Hale 1972). Yet, for reasons external to the domestic philosophical debates, Mexico did not become a country of immigration. Its structural social and economic profile could not compete with other immigrants' destinations, both in the North of the continent and in the Southern Cone. Although liberalism denounced fanaticism and the sequel of religious intolerance as a legacy of the Inquisition, those encouraged to immigrate to Mexico were the Protestant Europeans, not the Jews (Bokser 1991).

By laying the grounds for Republican institutionalization, positivism subsequently enhanced existing difficulties in relating to the 'Other'. The unfulfilled efforts of Porfirio Díaz's regime to attract European immigration to Mexico reinforced socio-ethnic splits in the public sphere.<sup>2</sup> The foreigner, however, continued to operate as a permanent referent in ambiguous ways. While it remained a central theoretical concern, it also constituted a difficult relational praxis. The criteria for being national remained selective, and the construction of a transnational identity was not yet seriously considered.

While most of the conceptual—philosophical and political—exploration by the Mexican Revolution came after the actual violent event, it was

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<sup>2</sup> For a classical analysis of the different scientific conceptions around the racial configuration of the national population, see González Navarro 1988: 565–583.



preceded by the search for the Mexican self as a requisite to build a new political and social order. From Justo Sierra to Molina Enríquez, from Antonio Caso to José Vasconcelos, the 'We' was configured in terms of ethnicity and race. The *mestizo* became the emblematic protagonist of the national endeavor. He who had 'the unity of origin, the unity of religion, the unity of type, the unity of language, and the unity of desires, purposes, and aspirations' was required to build the new cohesive national and socio-political order (Molina Enríquez 1985). The revolutionary critique of Porfirismo repudiated the existence of a system where foreigners, as a privileged group, 'enjoyed greater guarantees and liberties than those theoretically allowed and formally regulated, contrary to the majority of the nation and the proletarian classes, which lacked the guarantee and the rights granted by the law' (Cabrera 1960: 121–122). The ethnic and socio-economic dimensions overlapped with far-reaching restrictive implications towards the 'Other.'

The Revolution prioritized social over individual rights. The legitimacy of the new regime rested *de facto* on its ability to fulfill its social justice program, rather than on the formal democratic proceedings prescribed in the Constitution (Olvera 2003). The recovery, discovery, and creation of the meaning of being national stood at the center of a 'mysticism' called 'the crux of contemporary Mexican nationalism' (Cline 1972: 89–90). The conception of the Other/foreign expanded; alien was both the newcomer and the different. Immigration policies of the post-revolutionary regimes, as well as the parameters to evaluate the integration of immigrants were guided by criteria of similarity and affinity (Salazar 2006). These theoretical margins also encompassed pragmatic considerations that called for immigration in order to overcome the sequels of the revolutionary upheaval.

Ethnic similarity was the underlying conception that defined the national being and the national interest. It was also the criteria to evaluate and grant legitimate national belonging.

#### PUBLIC SPHERE, PRIVATE SPACES: TRANSNATIONAL LINKS IN MEXICO AND LATIN AMERICA

The legitimate inhabitants of the public sphere were defined by the 'post-revolutionary State-people' strong axis, while the 'bourgeoisie, middle class elites, and Church' were displaced to the weaker private realm (Aziz Nassif 1990: 3–11). Jews were not part of the social sectors the regime

organized and represented but they benefited from the regime's secular character and its anti-clerical position insofar as it acted as a countervailing factor to the exclusionary potential inherent in the narrative of revolutionary nationalism.

In contrast to countries such as Argentina, where mass migration was the building basis of a *de facto* multi-ethnic civil society, in Mexico Jews developed their communal life as a social enclave. Therefore, the challenge to build a Jewish community with strong transnational ties was an even greater driving force for its members. Impelling collective energy to provide for material, spiritual and cultural needs was at the core of the process of structuring Jewish life. Simultaneously, the communal domain ensured continuity and became a substitute for limited participation in national life (Avni 2011).

Being transnational implied a cultural, symbolic, ethnic, and collective shared space, as well as bonds and links with external centers of Jewish life. As a shared cultural space, it reflected the inner diversity of Jewish life including divergent symbols of identification and the meanings ascribed to them, enduring dialogues and debates that unfolded within changing perimeters of the Jewish world.<sup>3</sup> As a web of bonds and links, the Mexican Jewish community, like other Latin American ones, remained in connection and dynamic interaction with the Jewish world, represented by external collective endeavors—organized Jewish agencies, immigration support, social activism—and political nexus.

Thus, after a brief initial period in which the links with the Jewish community of the United States defined the main direction of these interactions, regions/countries of origin and sub-ethnicity shaped the organized Jewish communities. Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews developed their own institutions. Sephardic Jews developed communities around the various countries of origin, reflecting the fragmented character of this complex 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

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<sup>3</sup> Religion coexists with secularization processes; peoplehood develops hand in hand with national existence; ethnicity and civic commonalities reaffirm one another, and collective belongingness interacts with assimilation trends, while new forms of cohesiveness find their way into the private and public realms 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 a-historical contents, they stretch and reshape themselves beyond their original definitions (BokserLiwerant and Ben Rafael 2011).

Egypt and small groups of *Sephardim* from Italy and other countries in Europe (Bejarano 2005). Eastern European Jews established 'replicas' of the European *kehilot*. These Jewish communities were casted after modern Diaspora nationalism with an emphasis on secularism, while they also reflected a continuous struggle to address communal and religious needs, thus having internal ideological splits, organized political parties and various socio-cultural movements.

The permanent struggle between world visions, convictions, strategies and instrumental needs made the Zionist idea and the State of Israel central axes around which Jewish identity was built and communal life further developed. Objective conditions of transnational links and political interactions brought to the forefront a renovated shared commitment to a new ideological, political and cultural external center. This new transnational phase represented an unknown chapter of solidarities and ambiguities regarding the meaning of an evolving relationship between an ideological-political-public center and a peripheral Latin American Jewish community. It expressed an inherent tension between the notion of a national project that would renew Jewish life in a homeland and the intention to build Jewish life in the Diaspora. Thus, a one center-periphery model was expressed in the particular but collectively shared conceptual substratum Exile-Dispersion-Diaspora (Gilman 2003).

Being national – being transnational was expressed through a complex process of identity formation, and the latter swayed between an ideal-spiritual home that substituted the place of origin for the new concrete place of residence. Considering existing differences within the region and its Jewish communities, one can point to new links to Israel as part of a transnational shared space that provided Jews with the possibility to have a *madre patria*, either as a place of immigration or as an imaginary substitute to the original home that excluded them.

Ethno-national belongingness interacted with the limited nature of citizenship. The recurrence of immigrant origins as a trope for Jewish ascription and self-ascription reinforced externality and alterity: the 'Other' was conceived a permanent foreigner. One paradigmatic and enduring aspect of this trope was expressed in both immigration policies and the mainstream perceptions and attitudes towards Jewish refugees during the Second World War. Social representations of Jews led to successive evaluations of the group's character in terms of its religious and racial differences and, thus, its distanced status from the national population; both were the main criteria for social inclusion and for the particular definition of immigration and exile policies. Jewish otherness, which was also based on prejudices dominant in international agencies and bodies, took

precedence domestically over humanitarian considerations. Thus, new elements were added to the representation of the Jewish group as non-assimilable.<sup>4</sup>

In the public sphere, where interpretations intersect, where hermeneutics takes place and where hegemonic and subordinated/subaltern vocabularies get constructed, the model of center-periphery faced its limits. In one sense, different Jewish communities progressively experienced growing public legitimacy of their ethnic assertiveness that consequently reinforced their collective identity's cultural referents. In contrast, the Mexican Jewish community was directly and publicly exposed to the equation Zionism = Racism. The regime's anti-Zionist position and the nationalist discourse evinced and strengthened the political-cultural marginality of the Jewish community and its limited citizenship status, its lack of spaces and channels of expression in a Mexican society that was largely non-participatory and in a State that failed to meet the demands for participation. In this period, the Mexican Jewish community was publicly questioned, mainly regarding its complex national citizenship – transnational networks. Without ignoring the pragmatic dimension of the 1975 Mexican vote, the critique of the links with the State of Israel and with the American Jewish community was in turn projected onto the embarrassing realms of national loyalty. The dynamics of the vote/boycott conduct of the American Jewish community and the clarifications offered by the Mexican government to the United States and Israel fostered a domestic vision of disloyalty, lack of patriotism, and the noxious impact of those who 'constitute a powerful group within the country's economy and politics'. The main argument advanced by various sectors of civil society juxtaposed being national and being transnational as mutually exclusive terms (Bokser Liwerant 1997).

#### BUILDING DEMOCRACY: CURRENT REDEFINITIONS AND THEIR REGIONAL AND GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

Collective identity construction unfolds in different institutional arenas—territorial, communal or religious, in various political-ecological settings—local, regional, national, and in a global context wherein such

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<sup>4</sup> The interpretation of Jewish otherness drawing on European developments would come to the fore not only in the domain specifically defined as of the right and the extreme right, but would also feature amply—though in a substantively different ideological articulation—in broad sectors of the national political spectrum. (See Avni, 1986; Pozo, 1999; Bokser Liwerant, 1999).

identities interact, intersect, and overlap, and their components become re-linked (Eisenstadt 1998).

Expectations of increased recognition and legitimacy were progressively conceived by the Jewish collective in the form of a required commitment by the Mexican State and the majority society to the respect of diversity. A minority that was highly aware of its historical vulnerability, the non-participatory character of the political system and the multiplication of claims, interests and actors, advanced diffuse but sustained claims of institutional and political pluralism.

Constructive ambiguities have characterized the tense oscillation between the weakening of politics, derived from a generalized loss of public credibility, and its increasing strength, resulting from new social efforts to affirm it. The expansion of the public sphere implied that its boundaries transcended the limits of the political to include civil society as an equally demanding realm for civic action. Changes unfolded in the context of citizens' dissatisfaction with the performance of public institutions and governmental actors, persistent historical gaps, the detachment of politics from other social and cultural dimensions, and a serious democratic deficit (extending to both themes and participants) in the processes of collective reflection and deliberation (Przeworsky 1998; Putnam 2002; Turner 2001).

In the 1980s, the activity of a wide variety of civic associations that promoted democracy, elections, and human rights expanded. Such autonomous initiatives represented a turning point vis-à-vis a century's tradition of top-bottom organization. The growth of civic associations had major implications for democratization, opening up new scenarios in which political participation and national belongingness were tested and re-examined. Even though Jews had developed an extensive network of associations in the framework of a community that was voluntarily organized, they continued to perceive civil society as an unknown territory. By the majority society, Jews were equally perceived in distant terms. While the theoretical nexus between ethnicity and national identity has always been clear, that is not the case for the nexus between citizenship and national identity (Poole 2003).

The distancing of the regime from revolutionary nationalism and its adherence to social liberalism resulted in a redefinition of the active actors in the public sphere. The new economic strategies of liberalization and openness assumed a central role not only as a resource for socio-economic development but also as a source of political legitimacy. In a changing socio-political and economic context, the Jewish community

was called upon to join in the new national effort. The Salinas de Gortari period (1988–1994) clearly represents a neo-liberal model led by a regime that aimed self-correction and the successful regulation of the level and path of change.

The Mexican government imagined and valued the Jewish community's transnational networks and its potential support during the rapprochement with the Northern neighbor. This implied overcoming the cultural code of Otherness and the representation of alienated loyalty that had been underscored by the 1975 vote. The community was viewed and defined itself as a 'bridge of friendship and understanding' between Mexico and the 'most dynamic sectors of American society'. It further connected other meaningful public expressions of collective identity: the open condemnation of anti-Semitic pronouncements, such as those occasioned by the Gulf War. The argumentative code and endurance of these anti-Semitic/anti-Zionist expressions reflected the permanent and complex relationship between the ideological discourse/symbolic representations and the political conflicts. It also shows how symbolic violence can transpose a social conflict and crucially affect the interaction of public and private spaces for the construction and expression of a group's identity. The transcendence of symbolic violence and its impact on newly created conditions mobilized the Jewish community to collectively affirm transnational solidarities. The Salinas government promoted the initiative to revoke the Zionism-Racism equation.

Other changes interacted with the pluralistic harbingers of a new era such as the transformations affecting Church-State relations: judicial recognition of the Church opened up new scenarios (Blancarte 2008). Secularism continued to be the referent for the Jewish community as an inclusive symbol woven into the texture of a shared national identity. At the same time, this community also expected that the new place of religion in the public sphere could become an important source of legitimacy for a religious minority (Bokser Liwerant 2006). Thus, the binomial being national/being transnational faced the public religious content of the national being as well as the interplay of inclusion/exclusion between ethnicity and religion.

Varied links developed between the new Church-State relations – discursively defined as modernization – and the role of the Church in democratization processes. The Church certainly played a visible and relevant role in the claims of electoral transparency and thus increased its negotiation capacity *vis-a-vis* the government. The political transition in 2000 witnessed an increasing public legitimacy of the religious factor.

The unprecedented public space that was granted to previously private expressions of religion facilitated the adscription of the Jewish group in religious-communitarian terms, thereby minimizing the tensions deriving from the place of this source of diversity in defining national belongingness. Thus, we have witnessed a complex interaction between primordial and civic referents in the expansion of the public sphere and the ongoing process of citizenship building.

Simultaneously, reconfigured State-Society relationships and newly legitimized social collective actors have modified the interactions between national identity, cultural-ethnic groups, and citizenship amid a broader changing process of redefining the nexus between diversity, civility and institutionalization. Citizenship processes guide the new intertwining of civil society, political spaces and the Jewish community.

The Jewish community's visibility derived not only from these processes, which allowed for communal representation, but also from the government's strategic considerations such as the need to diversify the mediation structures that were built and signed by a seventy years dominance of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Such was the case of commercial, industrial and entrepreneurs' bodies (Coparmex, Concanaco, Canacintra). Thus, new links were sought directly through community structures of Jews (as well as Lebanese). The result was a new overlap between ethnic minorities, organizational spaces and social conditions. Direct and public interactions relied both on the socio-economic and the religious-ethnic dimensions of the Jewish collective. In addition to a shift towards new forms of incorporation made available to ethnic groups in the process of national construction, changes also emerged in the deliberate exploration of civic presence in official domains.

In the early 1990s, the Zapatista insurgence in the southeastern state of Chiapas opened up a diversified scenario that was preceded and paralleled by new trends. Its claims for recognition and its emphasis on cultural diversity broadened an ongoing discussion on the nexus between culture, society, and politics, a discussion from which minority groups could gain legitimacy. Theoretical and practical divergences spilled over into the logic of assimilationist integration, which was profoundly questioned. Mexico as 'a nation of nations' confronted the need to consider itself through a perspective of diversity that would encompass local and regional perspectives, its indigenous peoples and its various ethnic groups.

By challenging the State as the core that produced symbolic resources and cultural identities, an increasingly differentiating nation sought an opportunity to become publicly visible given the changing coordinates

between the civic, the State, and the society. Zapatistas have engaged in a struggle over the definition of the public good, both national and transnational, in a call for the creation of a new civil society. The idea of many cultures draws away from the recurrent search for an essentialist 'soul' or national character and, instead, moves to reconfigure the national as a legitimating myth (Menendez Carrion 2001; Lomnitz 1992).

However, the ethnic revival enhanced an essentialist idea of culture as the property of an ethnic group, overemphasizing the internal homogeneity: the *Manifiesto Zapatista* affirmed that democracy will come when 'the culture of the nation is refashioned from the perspective of indigenous people', thus, although the Jewish community identified with the multicultural demand, it was alienated from that specific discourse and channeled its own demands to the goals of enhancing Mexico as a State of Law.<sup>5</sup>

One must underscore that in the affirmation of collective identities, a visible Mexican Diaspora acquired new relevance. In the context of globalization, of massive and diverse migration flows, the Diaspora condition gets universalized, and the links between transnational dispersions and their homelands are reinforced. Under this logic, while Jewish history underscores its unique global dimension, increasing migration waves directly and indirectly reinforce the Jewish consciousness of a universal people. Paradoxically, however, by endowing it with a general character, these trends bolster the particularism of the Jewish experience.

From a Latin American perspective, the Zapatista uprising (1994) has been defined as an 'emblematic event of the awakening of a new cycle': rural movements based on indigenous identities; claims for democracy and autonomy; both the questioning and reaffirmation of corporativism. Uprisings of this kind can be seen as part of new expressions of social conflicts and as new political claims nourished by primordial core identities.

The State-civil society equation becomes the prominent venue for continuous interactions between individuals and their communities, between national and particular identities, between inclusion and exclusion processes that constitute the most significant ambiguities around contemporary democratization. Persistent trends of material and symbolic exclusion parallel the search for inclusive political forms, thus hindering democracy itself (Álvarez, San Juan and Sánchez Mejorada 2006). The public sphere

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<sup>5</sup> See speeches by directors of the *Comité Central* before Mexican Presidents, Archivo de Comité Central Israelita de México, 1992–2000.



becomes the main arena for tendencies that oscillate between formal inclusion and actual exclusion.

Furthermore, the relationship between collective identities, citizenship, and democracy brings to the surface interesting conceptual dimensions with global implications. Primordial identities become increasingly influential in the shaping of geopolitical spaces. Appadurai (1992), following Lash and Urry (1987), attributes this new visibility to the disorganization of capitalism: the speed and intensity of global flows alter and aggravate increasingly profound disjunctions between the ethnic, ideological, financial, technological, and media landscapes, whereas class differences take second place. However, these deep disjunctions also splinter the homogenizing bases of the integrating paradigm. This primordial revival has also been ascribed to the fragmentation of the discourses of Modernity, precisely in the context of a global order. Globalization produces conditions of radicalized Modernity. Social relationships and communication worldwide may be among the causes of weakened nationalist sentiments, resulting in other types of regional or ethnic identifications that may lead to the emergence of conflicts with local tinges. The expansion of social relations, then, results in the strengthening of processes of local autonomy and regional cultural identity (Giddens 1994).

#### A NEW PHASE OF THE TRANSNATIONAL MOMENT

Mexico, Latin America and their Jewish communities have been exposed to increasing migration waves and, thus, to new extended transnational experiences. During the 1970s, violence and authoritarianism determined regional and international emigration and political exile, especially in the Southern Cone; a decade later re-democratization was a pull factor for exiles and Jews among them to return to their homelands. But in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the combination of economic crises, political uncertainties and security problems again pushed Jews into a global international migration pattern. This tendency has expanded, though intermittently, since the 1990s.

The last phases of accelerated globalization processes have witnessed significant increases in the number of Latin American migrants. Migration results from the integration of local communities and national economies into global relationships (Castles 2000). The expansion of globalization processes has brought, consequently, population movements and migration waves to unexpected levels of intensity, dynamism and scope.

According to UNDP (2009) the total world population of migrants reaches approximately 214 millions.<sup>6</sup> Latin America is a relevant case of the global scenario of international migration. From the 29.5 million estimated Latin American migrants, the vast majority is concentrated in the American continent. During the last decades, migration has become more massive and diversified (Durand 2010).

Following the 'new economics of labor migration' (Stark 1991), population movements cannot simply be explained by income differences between two countries, but also by factors such as secure employment, availability of capital for entrepreneurial activities and the need to manage risk over long periods. However, the reality of segmented labor markets seems to better describe the bifurcation of migration today. The twofold pattern points to an increasing migration of marginal sectors—mainly non skilled workers and peasants that lack formal education—whose movement is mainly associated to the logic of labor markets and to the fluidity of the migration chains that connect sending and receiving cities and countries. These sectors face the impact of restrictive policies that respond and lead to an increase in undocumented migrants (Faist 2005). At the same time, there is a sustained increment in the population of qualified labor, including professionals, scientists and entrepreneurial sectors. From 1990 to 2007, the migrant qualified population of OECD countries increased 111%, moving from 12.3 to 25.9 million. Latin America and the Caribbean showed the highest levels of relative growth of qualified migrants to OECD countries. Between 1990 and 2007 this population increased 155%—from 1.9 to 4.9 million. Out of the 4.9 million, a high number (4.2 million) migrated to the United States, thus reaching 84.3% of the total qualified migrants from the region (Lozano and Gandini 2011). In the Mexican case, approximately 9% of migrants with primary education reside in the US. In contrast, 20% of Mexican migrants have high school education and 36% of total Mexican migrants in the US have done graduate work (Lowell, Perdezini and Passel 2008: 57).

Amid these regional trends, Mexico is characterized by exceptional high migration fluxes; close to 10.5% of its total population live outside the country. It is estimated that 11.7 million of migrants born in Mexico live in the United States. According to US sources, by the end of the 1990s, the yearly average migration rate of Mexicans was higher than 500,000

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<sup>6</sup> *Human Development Report 2009. Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development*, United Nations Development Programme. [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2009\\_EN\\_Complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Complete.pdf).

individuals. Out of the total Hispanic population of 46.822.000 who live in the US, 30.746.000 are of Mexican origin.<sup>7</sup> From the approximately 11.5 undocumented migrants in the US, 6.5 million are Mexican, representing 57% of the total. Undocumented migrants from other Latin American countries represent an additional 24–26% (Durand 2010; Lowell, Perdezini and Passel 2008).

In the 20th century, the majority of Mexican migrants originated from a few rural communities in central Mexico and settled in Texas, California and Chicago. However, in the last two decades there has been a diversification of place of origin and destination, signaling a possible new pattern of dispersion. In the 21st century (2000–2006), the population born outside the US increased 12% in six traditional states of destination and 36% in ‘new settlement states’ –such as New England, Washington, the south of Florida (Lowell, Perdezini and Passel 2008). In turn, migrants have additional labor opportunities, broader immigration networks and more locations to establish a new life.

Migratory trends reflect ongoing global, regional and local undercurrents, as well as longer-term historical constraints and opportunities. New and complex patterns of network building, as well as emerging social groups and collective identities, underscore the complex dynamics of encounters that transcend national frontiers. The binomial being national-being transnational causes that the expansion of the public sphere. As seen from a conceptual perspective, this analytical tool’s implications are relevant for social morphology seen in the changing character of social formations and their historical trajectory (Vertovec 2009).

Migration causes social transformations in both migrant-sending and receiving countries (Castles 2000). The significance of migration as a major factor in societal change must also be seen in light of a new emerging migration system that encompasses a network of people living in different countries linked by migration flows. Migrants from Mexico or other Latin American countries may form a network that links the places of relocation and their countries and or cities and villages of origin (Portes 1999). In our times, a unified mental and relational space emerges – a sort of sub-Diaspora –that tends to minimize the impact of physical dispersal. The shared traits and specificity of our case are relevant.

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<sup>7</sup> According to data provided by the Pew Hispanic Center (2009), 48, 348,000 Hispanics live in the US. Of this total, 31, 674,000 are Mexican (based on self-described family ancestry or place of birth). <http://pewhispanic.org/>

Latin American Jews have moved and are moving to different locations, including new centers of destination in the United States, but also in Canada, Europe (mostly Spain), and Israel. Jewish migrants also show patterns of regional/metropolitan concentration. In contrast to Mexican non-Jewish migrants, Jews continue to settle mainly in a few American states and metropolitan areas (such as Los Angeles, San Diego, Miami, NYC, Chicago, Boston), which may strengthen their transnational links.

The migratory movement to various places generate new dynamics that affect the triadic founding model, in its objective conditions and the subjective criteria of membership, belonging and citizenship, defined by processes of *Diaspora making* and *Diaspora un-making* provoked at the same time by a redefinition of the original communal/national framework and a complex re-socialization (reconnecting to the communal and the national) in the new country.

A new dynamic of the binomial being national-being transnational develops. De-diasporization with respect to citizenship and membership in Mexico, and the subsequent processes of re-grouping as a migrant community in new places of destination, acquire new relevance. As other migrant communities, they move and maintain a thick package of 'old country' cultural norms and personal relations and original cultures. However, the communal and ethno national and cultural dimensions have both a singular and a changing weight. Thus, while in Mexico the public discourse still maintains the topos of the migratory origin of Jews as an identity marker, Mexico itself becomes for the migrants a country of origin. The Mexican Jewish community has shown a migratory pattern of recreating communal life abroad, as is the case of the recently established communities in the US. In the exemplary case of the both stable and fluid Mexico-San Diego connection, different networks develop by which customs, identities and communal patterns are built, transported and transformed.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, new interactions have resulted between ethnic, religious and national belonging. This community, as an exemplary case, has been constituted by different temporal waves and while initial organizational patterns constitute a replica of their former setting, they are now rebuilt in the new context. Thus, the inner sector sub-ethnic differences that historically marked the Mexican Jewish community tended to blur.

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<sup>8</sup> The current estimation for the Mexican Jewish community in San Diego approaches 600 families. Regarding the total population of Latin American Jews in the United States, which has a central pole of concentration in the Greater Miami area, the differing estimations point to 25,000 to 30,000 families.

Being Ashkenazi, Sephardic or Mizrahi was subsumed under a national Mexican/ Jewish identity. One may argue that the size of the new community has acted as a structural constraint to inner differentiation. However, recently, due mainly to religious identity, a separate Orthodox Oriental community- Beth Tora Bet Eliahu- has been founded, providing an alternative to the otherwise Conservative hegemony.

While commuting appears as a frequent pattern, the concept can be expanded to a wider realm in which narratives, ideas, and interpersonal spaces and roots are developed, redefining the boundaries between homeland and place of residence. One may venture the concept of secondary Diaspora to encapsulate inter-generational differences and common traits.

A significantly old-new identity construct has developed through the affirmation of belongingness and the new interaction between national/transnational dimensions. Both Mexican-Jewish belongingness as part of the Latino (Hispanic) world and the transnational dimension of the Jewish condition interact in a highly mobile milieu. Transnationalism, thus, gains an even wider dimension that is both complex and problematic given the non-symmetric nature of encounters and interactions. The essential interplay between difference vis-à-vis the Latino/Hispanic migratory world and Otherness vis-à-vis other Jewish groups of immigrants, marks a new reality.

The presence of the so-called Hispanic population and its impact on questions of identity and international relations poses a challenge to the Jewish community. The Hispanic communities in the United States are fast approaching the size of a critical mass of significant importance: they constitute the largest minority group; they have increased 61% since 1990, numbering in 2008 close to 47 millions and it is estimated they will comprise 25% of the US population by the year 2020. This burgeoning sector is rewriting some of the old ground-rules in American life concerning ethno-national identity and transnational affinities. They have increased their visibility and their capability of influencing particular/national agendas.

Hence, the widespread view that Latin American Jews may play an important role in building transcultural connections in the framework of the Latino-Jewish-Americans trilogy. Diverse efforts and narratives have emerged, emphasizing parallelisms between Hispanics and Jews in general in terms of a common past, common challenges, as well as common interests and shared commitments to values of inclusion and pluralism. Moreover, the sense of connectedness and responsibility that Latino immigrants retain towards their place of origin has been compared to the

relationship that American Jews have developed towards Israel as their spiritual home (Siegel 2006). Implications touch upon the construction, resilience, transformation, competition, and reconstitution of identities under the impact of relocation, migration, dual residency, emergence or decline of nation-state imaginaries, and the emergence or decline of new ones.

Narratives and parameters of old/new collective identities may unfold in a context of identity revival, transformation, negotiation, diffusion/dilution and loss. Insofar as culture is deeply implicated in the dialectic of de-territorialization and re-territorialization, this may entail 'the loss of the natural relation of culture to geographical and social territories and, at the same time, a certain relative, partial territorial relocation of old and new symbolic productions' (García Canclini 1995).

Even when the national society remains the accustomed universe still claiming to be the frame of reference for daily life, this experience is not completely understood within its boundaries. Both the territory of the nation and its symbolic horizons have progressively loosened their hold under the strain exerted by the multiplication of new shared cognitive and normative maps. New interpretive spaces and internalized globalizing tendencies recombine in the national sphere with opposite individualization processes that point to the emergence of normative referents and competing interpretative models, which actually hinder the construction of a single shared collective framework. In this complex scenario, the idea of cultural diversity has certainly drifted away from the claims for assimilation derived from a foundational thought in search of a national soul.

The binomial being national-being transnational defines new paradigms. Among Mexican Jewish immigrants, the complex awareness of convergences and divergences with the Jewish world on the one hand, and with the Latino non-Jewish world, on the other hand, has been recurrently referred to as part of a new transnational consciousness. Both organizational and individual behaviors point to differences in the scope and meaning of crossing the border as well as to the central component of remittances in one case, vis-à-vis the channeling of support for the State of Israel, in the other.

The interplay between the various understandings of the concept of homeland still resembles and projects old-new meanings. Whereas for Jews the Northern Mexican border has acted as a facilitator for exploring conditions and for analyzing opportunities even during moments of crises, for Hispanic workers and undocumented immigrants it has acted as a

challenging wall. Borders can create reasons to cross them, and may act both as barriers and opportunities. Kearny (1995) describes how *Mixtecs* from Oaxaca move to the North, looking for a higher standard of living, risking their life and liberty when crossing illegally. The border area ambitiously becomes both a region where culture, society and different levels of development intersect, as well as a zone in which space, capital, and meaning are disputed (Glick Schiller et al. 1995). It certainly points to the dynamics of inequality and marginality underlying these new migratory movements, and to the form in which transnational and trans-local experiences may become a way to empowerment (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002). Appadurai (2006) argues that transnational civil society may be seen simultaneously as a project, a process, and a space. Its principal role in local-global engagements by citizens is to provide them with a 'voice'; its main challenge is to ensure the latter's legitimacy.

Thus, not only the symbolic but also the political and economic dimensions in the US-Mexican borders are fundamental, with the complex interactions between underdevelopment, globalization, and transnationalism calling into question the traditional equivalence between territorial bonds and the sense of belongingness (Álvarez 1995).

The transnational border area reflects diverse processes of identity building. Jewish Mexican migration to the North is evidently still in need of in-depth research. The transnational character of this migrant population and the ethno-national Diaspora identity in formation involves the pluralization of homeland(s) and a complex dynamics among the original, the symbolic or ideologically elected, and the new places of residence (when the new place could be either fixed or part of a translocation).<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, sources of national identity allow to negotiate the markers of this identity vis-à-vis the Jewish American and the global world, and the Latin American/Hispanic one.

The porosity of borders—not only territorial ones—and the revival of primordial identities draw diversified transnational scenarios. In this context, the religious dimension also reaffirms itself. For the Jewish migratory experience, it unfolds through the inner diversification and the interplay between sub-ethnicities and religious streams. It combines the singularity of its interconnected primordial referents and the general trends. During transnational migrations, religion appears to provide a key field for the

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<sup>9</sup> Guarnizo and Portes (2008) argue that the main difficulty with conceptualization in the field of transnationalism as developed so far lies in the fact that its empirical base relies almost exclusively on case studies.

development of new notions, practices, and spatial scales that facilitate the development of new subjectivities and identities (Vazquez 2008; Vertovec 1999). Religion also affords new elected affiliations within existing nation states and creates new bonds with authorities and centers of religious diffusion beyond the nation state (Butler 2001; Eisenstadt 2008; Shepher 2006). These new multidimensional dynamics are part of the challenges that the continent is facing when seeking to strengthen the bonds between diversity and civic culture, pluralism and citizenship.

Following James Clifford (1997), we need to approach the role of mobility in the construction of culture and cultural identity, which consists of rootedness, just as it consists of exchanges between cultural practices. Cultural identity emerges within a dynamic of 'roots' and 'routes', an interchange between embeddedness and mobility. Thus, practices of displacement should be seen as 'constitutive of cultural meanings, rather than their simple transfer or extension' (Clifford 1997: 3).

Conversely, one has to address/research the extent to which pre-migration ethno-national and trans-state notions of Diaspora and identity affect two parallel but contradictory processes: on the one hand, identification and attachment as citizens to the new host country, and on the other hand, the new post-modern climax of strong hybridist and de-territorialized Diasporas with an outlook of global pluralism *vis-à-vis* territorial/local nationalism.

Evolving patterns of ethnic citizenship, ethnic-civic conceptions of nationhood in a transnational world and of migration in the context of emerging global processes affect the status and the role of minority groups in Latin America. The incorporation of immigrants into a new state and the permanence and further cultivation of transnational attachments and commitments are not mutually exclusive (Moraswaka 2003). The focus on the cross-national-frontier accounts for new trends, in which transnational social fields are constructed as places for building and dwelling with different senses of belongingness. Current questioning of the methodological nationalism that has constrained social theory, thereby limiting the study of social processes to national societies and states, leads to new perspectives on current and emerging national-transnational phenomena in the 21st century (Beck 2000). Among others, formulations of citizenship building cover a wider spectrum that includes global, dual, multiple, multicultural and transnational citizenship (Heater 2002; Johnston 1995; Held 1995). Accompanying the debate on juridical and political status, this article has emphasized the close links between citizenship, national belonging and civil society as overlapping realms in a fluid binomial.