Challenging Particularity

Jews as a Lens on Latin American Ethnicity

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Scholarly interest in Jews as a subject of Latin American Studies has grown markedly in the last two decades, especially when compared to research on other Latin Americans who trace their ancestry to the Middle East, Asia or Eastern Europe. In this context, we propose the use of the term ‘Jewish-Latin American’, rather than ‘Latin American Jewry’, in order to shift the dominant paradigm about ethnicity in Latin America by returning the ‘nation’ to a prominent position at a moment when the ‘trans-nation’, or perhaps no nation at all, is often an unquestioned assumption. After analyzing the historiography of the Jewish presence in Latin America as a means of understanding the state of the ‘field’, we advance a series of propositions that might be useful to all students of ethnicity in the region, particularly to scholars working on minorities whose ancestors were characterized religiously as non-Catholic.

Keywords: Jews; Diaspora; Nikkei; Israel; LAJSA; Jewish-Latin America; Latin American Jewry; Zionsim; Sephardim; Ashkenazim; Middle East; Asian; Europe; Yiddish; Hebrew

Ethnicity is a frequent area of study in 19th and 20th century Latin America. Among the most recurrent themes are the black/white continuum in places such as Brazil, the Caribbean and Venezuela; the indigenous/white continuum in Mexico, Central America and the Andes; and the hegemony of white Catholic Europeans over a number of subaltern groups in the Southern Cone (Appelbaum \textit{et al.}, 2003; Hanchard, 1999; Baily & Míguez, 2003). Academic production on ethnicity, however, rarely focuses on Latin Americans who trace their ancestry to the Middle East, Asia or Eastern Europe, or those whose ancestors were characterized religiously as non-Catholics. Today, people in these categories comprise at least ten million Latin Americans.

Jews are one group in which there has been a notable increase in scholarly interest (as distinct from communal based production discussed below). Most of this
academic research was conducted by scholars in the USA and Israel and was seen as ‘Jewish Studies’, a position replicated in those few Latin American universities with programs in that field. This position continues in much of the scholarship and teaching outside of the USA where students learn about Latin America without hearing about the Jewish (or Middle Eastern or Asian) presence. By contrast, in the USA the study of Jews has begun to be integrated into Latin American Studies, even though, ironically, Jewish Latin Americans continue to be marginalized or ignored as a sector of Jewish Studies.

A New Language

Critical to scholarship on ethnic groups, which can be defined most broadly as ‘a self conscious collection of people united, or closely related, by shared experiences’, is descriptive language (Cashmore, 1994, p 102). In many cases scholars use definitional language that is quite different from the parlance used by the groups they study or by majority national populations. This is certainly the case for ‘Latin American Jewry’. The term, frequently used in the academic literature, suggests a broad hemispheric identity, but the subjects define themselves in three competing ways: as Jews, without reference to nation; as nationals, without reference to Jewish ethnicity; and as hyphenated Jewish-(fill in the nation here). These self-definitions stand in marked contrast to the academic category of ‘Latin American Jewry’, which derives from two different sources. One is transnational Jewish social and political organizations, usually based in the USA and Israel, which categorize Jews in regional rather than national ways. The second emerges from scholars, mainly based outside of Latin America, whose Diasporic perspectives often lead them to presume similarity based on language (i.e. Spanish) and minority status (i.e. being Jews in predominantly Catholic societies) (Raffalovich, 1930; Cohen, 1941; Beller, 1969; Cohen, 1971; Schmelz & Dellapergola, 1974; Elkin, 1980; Elkin & Merkx, 1987; AMILAT).

The term ‘Latin American Jewry’, however, is neither neutral nor descriptive. Indeed, it imposes an answer to what should be an important research question: What is the relationship of minority group members to the national state and the supposed Diasporic homeland? This question is critical for understanding the multi-layered and fluid identities of individual and collectives of Jews, Asians, Middle Easterners and those of European descent as well as populations that preceded the European arrival. The term ‘Latin American Jewry’ may be accurate for those who consider themselves first and foremost Jews (and perhaps even question their Latin Americanness) but the research does not bear out that this is the case for all Jews.

We propose that scholars consider using the term ‘Jewish-Latin American’ rather than ‘Latin American Jewry’. This formulation emphasizes national identity without denying the possibility of a Diasporic identity. In addition, the hyphen recalls the early days of Ethnic Studies in the 1960s when so many US citizens fought to be called Japanese-American rather than Japanese or Mexican-American rather than Mexican. Our use of the term Jewish-Latin American thus shifts the dominant paradigm about ethnicity in Latin America by returning the ‘nation’ to a prominent position just at a moment when the ‘trans-nation’, or perhaps no nation at all, is
often an unquestioned assumption. Another way of presenting our argument would be to offer a continuum, with an ideal type of Diasporic Latin American Jew at one end and an ideal type of national Jewish Latin American at the other. Such a ‘continuum’ would replace what appear to be the false binaries and dichotomies that have been imposed on the history of Jews since antiquity. Diaspora, after all, dominates the history and imagination of the Jewish people, and the historiography has tended to present the dilemma allegedly facing Diaspora Jews as having two options: either to assimilate to the surrounding culture by diluting their own traditions, or separate themselves from the world at large in order to preserve the purity of their faith and heritage. Erich S. Gruen has shown that, already in the ancient period, ‘for most Jews, retention of a Jewish identity and accommodation to the circumstances of Diaspora were joint goals and often successfully achieved’ (Gruen, 2002, p. vii).

Jews, of course, have no monopoly on Diaspora and the relationship between national and immigrant originated ethnic identity is not unique to Jews. On the contrary, Jewish experiences enable us to better understand the experiences of other ethnic groups in Latin America whose lives are often portrayed only within closed community circles. Our approach is two-pronged. First, the study of ethnicity must include people other than those affiliated with community institutions. Indeed, contemporary research suggests that most ethnic group members in Latin America are not affiliated with local ethnic associations and frameworks. Notions of ‘ethnic community’ are misleading when they include only those affiliated with organizations, places of worship, social clubs, youth movements, etc. Second, we see ethnicity as a piece within a broader identity mosaic. In this sense, identity might be analyzed as a coin in a pocket filled with coins of different values. Sometimes we need 25 cents and we pull out one ethnicity quarter. Other times we need 100 cents and the ethnicity coin is just a penny of the total.

Two notes of caution are needed here before we elaborate on these issues. First, it is critical that we shun essentialism. Most Jews in Latin America are ‘Jewish’ in the cultural sense – not the religious, ideological or communal ones – and define themselves as such. Furthermore, our comments do not focus on the immigrant generation. We are well aware that in detailed studies more attention should be given to the specific time and particular stage in the history of each minority group. It is clear that for immigrants the nationality of the ‘sending country’ carried more weight than that of the ‘receiving country’. For this first generation the fact that they represented a multi-ethnic national group was of extreme importance; in that sense, the Jewish case represents a complicated ‘multi-national ethnic group’.

**Scholarship on the Jewish Past**

Jews are one of the smallest of Latin American ethnic groups in demographic terms and, along with those of Asian and Middle Eastern descent, are highly visible socially and economically. Yet the volume of scholarly work on Jewish-Latin Americans exceeds that on the other groups. The literature falls into two broad categories. First, most ethnic communities in Latin America have significant internal production
that is often divorced from the national historiography. These publications are produced by community organizations or individuals linked to them and include institutional histories, oral histories, novels, short stories and hagiographies (Organización Sionista en el Uruguay, 1943; Tsentral farband fun Galitsyaner Yidn in Argentine, 1966; Nassi, 1981; Wolff, 1984; Anon., 1987; Trachtemberg, 1989; Backal, 1993). Much of the literature emphasizes uniqueness, or even cultural superiority, and is aimed at fostering communal cohesion, maintaining an ethno-national identity, and helping to mobilize resources.

Self-referential production, it is important to remember, is common among all Latin American ethnic groups. The tendency towards internal production is reinforced by the fact that many intellectuals in most of Latin America reject ethnicity as an important analytical category, even if they themselves are of ethnic backgrounds. This ambivalence helps to explain why there is relatively little academic scholarship on Latin American ethnicity.

One way in which the scholarship on Jewish-Latin America stands out is the recent boom in research published outside of the region, notably in the USA. A brief glance at the holdings of any college or university library reveals more books on Jewish-Latin Americans than on those of Asian or Middle Eastern descent combined. This quantity stems from a particular set of historical circumstances that have transformed studies of Jewish-Latin America into an accepted ‘field’ of inquiry in disciplines like history, literature, and cultural studies.

The history of the ‘field’ known most commonly as Latin American Jewish Studies began with the centering of Israeli university education within a broader international context in the mid 1960s. In 1966 the Hebrew University of Jerusalem created the Latin American section of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, a unit itself formed in 1960. The Israeli based scholars conducting research on Latin America produced two contradictory trends. One placed Israeli academics comfortably within a worldwide community of scholars of Latin American Studies, as Haim Avni and Yoram Shapira insisted in a 1974 article on Latin American Studies in Israel in the Latin American Research Review (Avni & Shapira, 1974, pp. 39–51). Yet a new line of research that developed in Israel was the study of Jews in Latin America. Scholars working on these topics, notably Haim Avni and his many students and affiliates, emphasized the growth of Zionism in Latin America, anti-Semitism, the movement of Jews to Israel and Israeli-Latin American relations.

The approach generated from the Institute for Contemporary Jewry provoked a reaction among some Latin Americanists, for whom the ‘nation’ was pre-eminent. David Rock’s review of the 1991 English edition of Avni’s classic Argentina and the Jews: A History of Jewish Immigration (first published in Hebrew in 1982 and soon thereafter published in Spanish by the AMIA, an organization representing the formal Jewish community of Argentina), made this clear: ‘...if the author may be well versed in the modern history of the Jewish people, his knowledge of Argentina is at best rudimentary’ (Rock 1994, pp. 172–183; Avni, 1991). Rock’s critique revealed what has continued to be a tension among scholars of ethnicity in Latin America. The first generation of scholars studying Jewish-Latin Americans at the Institute of Contemporary Jewry made a foundational contribution but one that was barely
noticed outside of Israel. One of the first non-Israeli academic publications on Latin American Jewry was by Martin H. Sable, a ‘Latin Americanist of the Jewish faith specializing in bibliography’ at the University of Wisconsin (Madison). His massive collection of over 5000 citations does not mention Avni and Shapira’s 1974 article in the *Latin American Research Review* although it does mention some of Avni’s other work. More important is Sable’s recollection that he realized the need for a bibliography on Latin American Jewish topics while returning home from Sabbath prayers. For Sable, this classic religious-ethnic memory led to a community-ethnic inspiration based on reading about Latin American Jewry in Boston’s *The Jewish Advocate* (Sable, 1978, p. xi). What is notably absent is a relationship to Israeli scholarship, or for that matter any academic work, on the topic.

The re-centering of the study of Latin American Jewry out of Israel came in 1982 when a group of scholars met at the Latin American Studies Association conference to discuss the ‘the intersection of Latin American studies and Jewish studies’ (Elkin, 1982). Later that year the First Conference on Latin American Jewish Studies was held at the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (Cincinnati). At that meeting, which linked studies of Jewry in the USA and Latin America via the wide holding of the American Jewish Archives, the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA) was established. Judith L. Elkin, perhaps the first US scholar to write on Jews from a Latin Americanist background and to publish her work with a press known for its Latin American series, became the organization’s president (Elkin, 1980). The following year a second conference was held at the University of New Mexico, not coincidentally the home of the *Latin American Research Review* and one of the most active Latin American Studies programs in the US. Together these meetings suggested the wide ranging interests of LAJSA as both an ethnic studies and area studies organization.

The establishment of LAJSA changed the study of Latin American ethnicity in the USA. Today, many modern Latin American Studies courses in the USA include discussions of Jews (although Middle Easterners and Asians still go unmentioned). Academic conferences devoted to Latin America frequently have papers relating to Jews, increasingly on panels whose themes are not Jewish-Latin Americans.

Because LAJSA emerged in part out of Latin American Studies, subsequent scholarship might have been expected to take the position that Jews were one of many components of a pluralistic Latin American society. The research produced since 1982, however, is much like the earlier studies that emerged from the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, often embedded with the idea of Diasporic primacy rather than nation based identity. What in 1982 appeared to be an intellectual shift now seems more like a repositioning from Israel to the USA and away from a seemingly Zionist outlook towards a seemingly ethnic perspective.

Examining the post-1982 publications on Jewish-Latin America, we see two main intellectual positions. The first is the notion that Jewishness is the primary (and at times exclusive) basis of identity. Jewish life in any one Latin American country is often presented as similar to Jewish life in any other specific country. Research frequently focuses on commonality, with data being mined from formal community institutions. The classic example is Judith Laikin Elkin’s foundational *The Jews of the*
Latin American Republics (Elkin, 1980), which compared Jewish life across the region. The production that followed her groundbreaking book was often similar. Edited collections have titles such as The Jewish Presence in Latin America, The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America or The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean (Elkin & Merkx, 1987; Sheinin & Barr, 1996; Ruggiero, 2005; Agosín, 2005; Liwerant & Backal, 1999). Surprisingly, nationally based volumes (i.e. Jews of Argentina or Jews of Brazil) have taken the same approach, rarely making national comparisons of Jews with other national ethnic minorities (Grin & Vieira, 2004; Feierstein and Sadow, 2002; Liwerant, 1992). Monographs about Jews in Latin America, although about specific countries and often focusing on specific topics, are similar to edited volumes in their Diasporic approaches and comparative references to Jews (Lesser, 1994; Cimet, 1997; Morris, 1996; Levine, 1993).

A second dominant presumption is that Jews live in closed communities. This has emerged in part because much primary documentation about Jewish-Latin Americans was written in Yiddish or Hebrew, languages not considered normative in Latin American studies. This issue led to decades of scholarly invisibility for Jewish-Latin Americans, a point Judith Elkin made more than 25 years ago in the preface to her Jews of the Latin American Republics. Yiddish and Hebrew sources often create the impression that Jews lived unconnected to general society, a phenomenon we see in research on other ethnic groups as well (Elkin, 1980; Toker, 2003). The closed community approach also created a lack of methodological debate, and we have never seen a publication or heard a lecture that proposes that studying Jews, or any other ethnic group in Latin America, demands a specific approach. In this sense the establishment of the Latin American and Iberian section of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry and the Latin American Jewish Studies Association never achieved their implicit goals of creating a ‘field’ in the classic academic sense of the word.

The study of Jewish-Latin America has advanced in terms of quality and quantity of production in the last two decades, particularly in the fields of Latin American literature, anthropology, cultural studies, and history. Scholarly work on Jews is often placed within a broader societal perspective and major academic publishers and journals regularly publish on these topics. Much innovative research on Jews is found in second or third books written by those trained as scholars of Latin America (Vieira, 2001; Aizenberg, 2002; Rein, 2004a). They see Latin Americans of Jewish origins as part of the ethnic and cultural mosaics that constitute Latin American societies, with their hybrid and complex identities. Many of these authors focus on the dynamic relations between Jews and non-Jews in economic, social, cultural and political life. Furthermore, a growing number of scholars are asking what the experiences of Jews reveals about other immigrant and ethnic groups and about the overall character of Latin American societies.

Challenging Assumptions: New Research Propositions

This essay calls for a balance between an analysis of ethnic minorities as either Diasporic or national. This tension, and the rejection of the ‘or’ in favor of the ‘and’, is relevant to the study of ethnicity in Latin America in the broadest sense. We thus
believe the study of Jewish-Latin Americans can help to articulate new approaches to Ethnic Studies. Each of the interrelated comments below begins with a reference to a commonly held assumption that we challenge by bringing forth new research propositions:

(1) **Most studies of ethnicity emphasize exceptionalism.** The assumption of uniqueness as an a priori category of analysis manifests itself in scholarship where historiographical points of reference are to the experiences of members of the same group in different countries. This suggests that Jews, for example, are a minority unlike others and therefore when studying Argentine-Jews or Brazilian-Jews, one should only be familiar with the experiences of Jews in South Africa or Australia (Elazar & Medding, 1983). Exceptionalism suggests that ethnicity is a non-national phenomenon and that ethnic group members are either separate from, or victims of, national culture. This tendency is not exclusive to scholarship on Jews. Research on Latin Americans of Japanese, Chinese, and Lebanese descent, for example, usually presented the group first and foremost in their Diasporic condition (Hourani & Shehadi, 1992; Klich & Lesser, 1996; Lesser, 2003; Anderson & Lee, 2005).

We propose that trans-national ethnicity is not necessarily a more dominant identity component than national identity. Research on Jewish-Latin Americans might focus on engagement in the national context in order to create comparison, and perhaps contact zones, with other ethnic minorities such as those of Polish, Japanese, Chinese, Syrian and Lebanese descent. We know of no research project that has ever tested the interrelated and fluid relationship between national identity and the presumed primacy of Diasporic solidarity among Jews. As Jorge Luis Borges once wrote about a Jewish-Argentine author, one might say that Argentine Jews have always struggled to be ‘unmistakably Argentine’ and we wonder if the tension between ethnicity and nation that his comment reveals might be a starting point for research (Borges, 1940). It seems that anthropologists rather than historians are beginning to adopt this path.

(2) **Research on ethnicity in Latin America often presumes that the children and grandchildren of immigrants express a special relationship to their ancestors’ place of birth or imagined homeland.** Implicit in this assumption is the idea that ethnic minorities do not play a significant role in a national identity formation. Studies of Jewish-Latin Americans, for example, often assume that rank and file support of Zionist organizations has been first and foremost about the state of Israel.

We propose that research ask whether participation in Zionist activity is necessarily about the presumed homeland of Israel. Put differently, to what homeland does Zionist activity in Latin America actually relate? Furthermore, does support for Israel constitute a main ingredient of the identity of Latin American Jews? – a position often advanced but hardly tested (Avni, 2005, pp. 145–168; Schenkolewsky-Kroll, 1996; Bokser, 1991; Friesel, 1956). Some recent research suggests that ‘Zionist activity’ in Argentina, for example, is a strategy that allows Jewish-Argentines to have a motherland (*Madre Patria*) similar to that of Italo-Argentines (Italy) and Spanish-Argentines (Spain). In this formulation, supporting Zionism is the Jewish way of being typically Argentine (Rein, 2004b; Lewis, 2004). Arnd Schneider’s recent
sociological work on Argentine citizens who have gained Italian passports suggests that holding a foreign passport is critical to contemporary middle class Argentine identity (Schneider, 2000).

(3) Many scholars suggest that the ethnic ‘homeland’ has a commitment to its Diasporic communities. This results from the often-untested assumption that the center of ethnic collective identity must be outside the nation of residence. It also reflects a relative lack of debate about the location of the Diasporic center and periphery. Scholars often presume that Israel has an exceptionally deep commitment to Jewish-Latin Americans and that its interests are similar or complementary to theirs.

Recent scholarship challenges this assumption and suggests that the bond between the Jewish Diaspora and the State of Israel is similar to other Diasporic/national links. In fact, many Israelis regard the Jewish Diaspora with a certain disdain, and Israeli policy-makers often show little sensitivity towards the needs and sensibilities of individual Jewish communities in Latin America. This attitude was reflected, for example, in the Israeli government’s decision to limit the help extended to Jewish-Argentine victims of the Argentine dictatorship in order to maintain good relations with the ruling junta. This realpolitik attitude combines foundational Zionism’s ‘negation of the Diaspora’ attitude with a contemporary belief in Israel that Diaspora Jews should maintain a one-way connection that includes loyalty, political and moral support, and financial assistance.

(4) Many scholars studying ethnicity in Latin America presume that heritage makes one a member of an ethnic community. The scholarship thus mirrors the position of many Latin Americans who believe the same thing. Yet when one examines exogamy, the rates are often above fifty percent and many individuals do not see themselves (or wish to be seen as) members of a formally constituted ethnic community. There are many studies of ethnic community leaders and institutions, but few about what might be termed ‘unaffiliated ethnics’ (Hirabayashi, Kikumura & A. Hirabayashi, 2002; Comissão de Elaboração da História dos 80 Anos da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil, 1992; Bjerg & Otero, 1995; Hourani & Shehadi, 1992; Moya, 1998). This broad tendency is repeated in studies of Jewish-Latin Americans. Research has ignored the 50 per cent (or more in many places) of Jews who were or are not affiliated with Jewish institutions. The frequently used term ‘Jewish community’ is misleading if it refers only to those affiliated with Jewish organizations, synagogues, social clubs, or youth movements. Documenting life stories and reclaiming the memories of unaffiliated Jews will provide important lessons on the nature of national and ethnic identity. Studies might be conducted of Jews married to non-Jews, individuals who express Jewish identity based on culture rather than on religion or ethnicity, and authors who do not explicitly express their Jewishness (the Jewish-Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector comes to mind). Traditional studies, for example, would ignore people like the Oscar winning songwriter Jorge Drexler (‘The Motorcycle Diaries’). Drexler, born in Uruguay to a German-Jewish refugee from Nazism, does not speak German and holds a German passport. He lived for a year in Israel but moved to Spain for professional reasons. While his first songs were written in Hebrew, he is known for his works in Spanish, including a few with Jewish themes.
like ‘Milonga del moro judío’ or ‘El pianista del gueto de Varsovia’. Recently, Drexler was interviewed in *The New York Times* and he characterized himself as a Jew and ‘a lot of other things too’, since he is not affiliated with religious institutions and is married to a Catholic (Rohter, 2005). People like Drexler, with strong but non-exclusive Jewish identities, should not be ignored.

(5) Much scholarship on Latin American ethnicity correctly notes that dominant majority discourses are frequently racist. Yet there is often a gap between rhetoric and social practice. Indeed, racist expressions have not prevented many Latin American ethnic groups from entering into the dominant political, cultural, economic and social sectors. Yet scholars focusing on discourse tend to find victims, often suggesting that racism represents an absolutely hegemonic structure (Klich & Rapoport, 1997; Dreher *et al.*, 2004). Thus, ethnic identity formation appears based primarily on the struggle against discrimination and exclusion. Scholars examining social status, however, come to a different conclusion. They suggest that success among Asian, Middle Eastern and Jewish-Latin American places them in the ‘white’ category (Andrews, 1991; Stam, 1998; Reina, 1973).

The scholarship on Jewish-Latin Americans is a case in point. The literature is almost uniform in suggesting that anti-Semitism in Latin America is stronger than in other regions of the world. One might get the impression that life for Jews on the continent is unbearable, a continued nightmare (Carneiro, 1988; Ben-Dror, 2003; Rosales, 1996, pp. 183–197; Bejarano 1990, pp. 32–46; Adrighi 2000). Yet even Haim Avni, whose own work often focuses on anti-Semitism, has correctly noted the ‘overdeveloped focus of research energy [on] anti-Semitism’.13

(6) Much of the literature gives the mistaken impression of homogenous and unstratified immigrant descended ethnic communities. Latin Americans of Asian and Middle Eastern descent seem uniformly in the middle class or higher, a position emphasized by a scholarly focus on ethnic success stories like Alberto Fujimori (Peru), Celso Lafer (Brazil), or Carlos Saúl Menem (Argentina). This image is even more accentuated with regard to Jewish-Latin Americans, who are presented in the scholarship as having rapidly and exclusively moved into middle to upper-middle class status. This erroneous assumption leads many scholars to not even consider research on the Jewish working class or Jewish poor.14

There are, however, other approaches. First, we might learn a lesson from cinema scholars who have correctly noted that in Hollywood, for example, people with ‘non-Jewish’ names are not necessarily non-Jews. Who knows what the biography of the Argentine labor leader Emilio Perrina, born Moisés Konstantinovsky, would teach us about ethnicity? Second, discourses of anti-Semitism, even when emerging from powerful centers of political power, do not always translate into absolute oppression. Discussing racist discourses together with individual and group mobility may well change our understanding of the nature of both oppression and success. Third, we question whether minority group identity is primarily a reaction to societal bigotry. Stereotypes often function because of their positive presumptions and there is a distinction between Judeophobes (those who hate all Jews) and anti-Semites (those who hold some or many group negative stereotypical notions about Jews).
Furthermore, those who express negative stereotypes about Jews (or any other ethnic group) may hold positive stereotypes about them as well.

(7) There are a number of other areas that have been under-researched in Latin American Ethnic Studies generally and Jewish-Latin American Studies specifically. Notable among them is gender. Studies of Jewish women in Latin America too often focus on prostitutes or novelists, although Jewish women have played fundamental roles in all aspects of society (Bra, 1982; Mirelman, 1988; Guy, 1991; Glickman, 2000; Vincent, 2005; Kushnir, 1996). As Sandra McGee Deutsch has emphasized in the Argentine case, ‘Jewish women are virtually absent from the secondary historical sources. Studying them is vital for its own sake, to recover the voices and tell the untold stories of the unheard half of the Jewish population’ (Deutsch, 2004, pp. 49–73). The same holds true for children and sexual minorities.

(8) Another issue relates to the presentation of homogenous ethnic communities (i.e. ‘Jewish’ community, ‘Arab’ community, ‘Asian’ community). While the distinctions are occasionally more refined (Japanese and Chinese and Indians; Syrians and Lebanese and Palestinians), the literature is primarily monolithic and community focused. Examining ethnic groups *grosso modo* ignores intra ethnic divisions that are often replicated over many generations. The numbers of Okinawans among Latin American Nikkei is very large, as are the numbers of Muslims among Middle Easterners who are often presented in the scholarship only as Christians. Among Jewish-Latin Americans there is a lack of research on Sephardic Jews, themselves divided (like Ashkenazim) by nation and by city of origin. Yet smaller numerical communities and sub communities can teach us much about ethnic relations, just as Leo Spitzer’s study of Jews in the virtually ignored nation of Bolivia has become a model for the study of ethnicity, Diaspora and memory (Spitzer, 1998).

**Conclusion**

This essay has proposed a ‘New Ethnic Studies’ for Latin America and suggests that the study Jewish-Latin Americans is an example of how that might be implemented. Yet our eagerness for change is put forward with the understanding that our own trajectory is based deeply in that which we have criticized. Indeed, we have contributed to many of the volumes mentioned and our own scholarship might at times represent an example of the limitations of the ‘Old Ethnic Studies’.

Caveats and self-denunciations aside, we hope that this essay will not be intellectually ghettoized and read only by those with an interest in Jewish-Latin Americans. Ethnic Studies, as this new journal makes clear, is not only about single ethnic communities (although such research is critical) but also about comparing multiple ethnic groups in a national context. From this comparative standpoint, many issues that might appear unique to Jews are in fact of general applicability. Perhaps in Latin America the commutative property holds true: if Jews are like Asians and Asians are like Arabs then Arabs and Jews, in some respects, are indeed one.
Notes

[1] A modified version of this article will appear as the introduction to a volume in progress entitled Latin American Jews or Jewish Latin Americans? New Approaches to Jewish Latin American Studies. The authors thank the following contributors to that volume for their comments: Edna Aizenberg, Sandra McGree Deutsch, José Moya, Judah Cohen, Rosalie Sitman, and Erin Graff Zivin.

[2] Most research on Brazilian Jewry, for example, emerges from the Centro de Estudos Judaicos at the Universidade de São Paulo and the Programa de Estudos Judaicos at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.

[3] See, for example, the annual volumes of Singer & Grossman (various years).

[4] Some recent works on other ethnic communities include Hirabayashi et al. (2002), Karam (2003), and Siu (2005). For earlier works, see Levine (1980).


[9] For early examples of this effort to explore the relations between Jews, other European immigrants, and local populations, see Jacobson (1999), Klein (2002), Freidenberg (2005), and Porzecanski (2005)

[10] In a recent essay Sheffer (2005) questions the assumption of Jewish exceptionalism. See also Rein (2003).


[12] Among the few studies that include unaffiliated Jews are Rattner (1977) and Sofer (1982).


[14] Rafael Kogan and David Diskin, for example, both of whom became supporters of Perón, were key figures and in Argentine trade unions in the 1940s but have received little scholarly attention so far.


[16] Bejarano (2005) examines the modest production on Sephardic Jewry in Latin America. See also Halabe (1977) and Brodsky (2004).

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