

RETHINKING LATIN AMERICAN JEWISH STUDIES

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The Catholic Church and the Jews: Argentina, 1933–1945. By Graciela Ben-Dror. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism; Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2008. Pp. xii + 266. \$55 cloth

Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism: Latin America in the Jewish World. Edited by Judit Bokser Liwerant, Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Yossi Gorny, and Raanan Rein. Leiden: Brill, 2008. Pp. xiv + 445. \$193 cloth.

Vida cotidiana de los judíos argentinos: Del gueto al country. By Ricardo Feierstein. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2007. Pp. 471. \$36.57 paper.

Dominican Haven: The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosúa, 1940–1945. By Marion A. Kaplan. New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2008. Pp. xiii + 255. \$19.95 paper.

Rethinking Jewish–Latin Americans. Edited by Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008. Pp. x + 294. \$27.95 paper.

Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosúa. By Allen Wells. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009. Pp. xxxi + 445. \$27.95 paper. \$99.95 cloth.

Latin American Jewish studies, a relative newcomer to the academic agenda, has undergone a series of metamorphoses that began with exploration of the intersection between two previously unrelated areas of scholarship, went on to develop new understandings of their linkage and is now taking on its own identity as it continues to evolve.

Dual problems of perception at first impeded the emergence of Latin American Jewish studies as a recognizable field. Students immersed in the millennia of Jewish history disregarded the mere one hundred plus years of Jewish settlement in Latin America, a brief span of time that

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seemed to leave open the question of Jewish permanence on the continent. Interest nevertheless arose among journalists, travelers, and observers of the contemporary Jewish diaspora, driven by curiosity, more than scholarly concern, to look in on these outliers at the periphery of the Jewish world. Their findings—many of the earliest written in Yiddish or Hebrew—appeared in journals of Jewish interest and were not listed in standard Latin American references. Volumes surveying Jewish communities around the world have more recently included chapters on Latin America, but these volumes, owing to space limitations, include only general observations. Almost none of this literary production has entered the cognitive sphere of Latin Americanists.

The first Latin American reference volume to include an entry for Jews, so far as I can determine, appeared in 1984.¹ Latin Americanists had not been attracted to the study of the Jewish immigrant population, which arrived adumbrated by centuries-old teachings of contempt. Before Vatican II and the dissemination of the declaration *Nostra aetate* (1965) on the relation of the church to non-Christian religions, Catholic doctrine did not provide a supportive context for researching the lives of the objects of that contempt.

If the notion of Latin American Jewish studies was slow to develop, practical obstacles also delayed linking the two fields. Scholars with an interest in melding the two were geographically and linguistically dispersed. The profusion of languages among researchers made initial contact difficult, and the need to work with cultures and languages previously exotic to many slowed access to the field. Although individual scholars published valuable and innovative studies, there was no organized forum in which to present this research for challenge and discussion. The need for such a forum became evident when 225 individuals and 90 institutions in 19 countries joined the Latin American Jewish Studies Association within a year of its formation in 1982. A series of international conferences followed at two-year intervals. The ensuing publication of research papers established a foundation for the field of Latin American Jewish studies and facilitated its integration into Latin American studies.² Curiously, the

1. Judith Laikin Elkin, "The Jewish Communities in 1982," *Latin America and Caribbean Contemporary Record* 2 (1982–1983): 163–172.

2. This research includes Judith Laikin Elkin and Gilbert W. Merx, *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Achim Schrader and Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, eds., *Europäische Juden in Lateinamerika* (Munster: Westfälische Wilhelmsuniversität Munster, 1989); *Ensayos sobre judaísmo latinoamericano* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Mila, 1990); AMILAT, *Judaica latinoamericana: Estudios históricos, sociales y literarios* (Jerusalem: Editorial Universitaria Magnes, 1988–2005); David Sheinin and Lois Baer Barr, *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America: New Studies on History and Literature* (New York: Garland, 1996); Judit Bokser Liwerant and Alicia Gojman de Backal, eds., *Encuentro y alteridad: Vida y cultura judía en América Latina* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1999). An in-

insertion of a Latin American component into Judaic studies is occurring at a slower pace. What is notable about both perspectives, however, is that pragmatism has guided the linking of the two fields, while a theoretical linkage remains elusive.

Latin Americanists Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein propose a linkage that in one sense is obvious, as it has been there all along,³ and in another sense challenges the existing paradigm, which is certain to evolve under the influence of the authors represented in their collection *Rethinking Jewish Latin Americans*. The editors review the development of Latin American Jewish studies thus far and note the lack of methodological debate among its practitioners (23–29). Summarizing the origins and intellectual trajectory of Latin American Jewish studies, in which both editors have played a part, they point out that the existing literature assumes Jewishness to be the primary basis of identity, with less (and sometimes no) attention given to positioning Jews within their national societies as Argentines, Brazilians, and so forth. The resultant image of Jews as a discrete sect amid an alien population does not match the lived reality of Jewish Latin Americans. The proposed semantic shift from Latin American Jews to Jewish Latin Americans alters the balance between diasporic and national thinking, so as to position Jews not as fragments of world Jewry but as citizens of the nations in which they live, that is, as one among many Latin American ethnic groups. A theory of ethnicities that acknowledges permeable borders would develop a more realistic picture of Jewish Latin American life, one that includes the 50 percent of Jews with no formal affiliation to an organized community, who are integrated into general society, and whose presence has hitherto escaped researchers. The authors further propose that research on Jewish Latin Americans in their national contexts creates “contact zones” with other ethnic groups that could lead to new, comparative approaches to ethnic studies (30).

Lesser has propounded this idea in his prior work, first by comparing Arab and Jewish immigrants (both known as *turcos* in the Latin American context),⁴ and then in his study of Japanese, Assyrian, and other non-Latin immigrants to Brazil, in which he developed a concept of ethnic identity as negotiable.⁵ The volume’s coeditor Rein, a pioneer in teaching

creasing number of freestanding volumes of collected essays have also appeared, including Kristin Ruggiero, ed., *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean: Fragments of Memory* (Brighton, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2005); Marjorie Agosin, ed., *Memory, Oblivion and Jewish Culture in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

3. Judith Laikin Elkin, “Exploring the Jewish Archipelago in Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 30, no. 3 (1995): 225.

4. Ignacio Klich and Jeffrey Lesser, eds., *Arab and Jewish Immigrants in Latin America: Images and Realities* (London: F. Cass, 1998).

5. Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

Latin American studies at Israeli universities, is professor of Latin American and Spanish history at Tel Aviv University and edits *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*. By shifting weight to the Latin American side of the equation, Lesser and Rein propose a substantive change in the way that scholars should approach Latin American Jewish / Jewish Latin American studies.

An important articulation of this shift is found in José C. Moya's essay on Jewish anarchists in Argentina, a topic that has not been considered seriously since 1987.⁶ In a class analysis of anarchy in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century, Moya focuses on Jewish and Catalan immigrants who imported radical ideas from their European homelands. These ideas found fertile soil in the vibrant radicalism of Argentina. One such anarchist, Simón Radowsky, who assassinated the police chief of Buenos Aires in 1909, barely gains a mention in Jewish sources; the embarrassed Jewish community of the period contributed a plaque to the victim's tomb bearing a laudatory inscription. Instead, approaching the issue from the public square, Moya reports that when Radowsky was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment, Argentine labor unions called a general strike in support of the hero of the working class; activists dug a tunnel under the national penitentiary in an effort to free him, and in 1930 they led a public campaign that forced President Hipólito Irigoyen to free the "martyr of Ushaia" (78–79). Taking Jewish Latin American history beyond the boundaries of organized Jewish communities changes its valence and has the potential to resituate Jews outside and to the left of the traditionally conservative establishment.

Jewish women's activism in the public sphere is the subject of several essays, all contributed by female scholars, in Lesser and Rein's volume. Donna J. Guy recovers the efforts of Jewish women to establish orphanages, thereby earning the appreciation of public officials. Sandra McGee Deutsch finds that Jewish women took leadership roles in the Junta de la Victoria, which supported the Allied cause in World War II. The editorial board of *Revista Sur* included Jewish intellectuals with Republican sympathies, according to Rosalie Sitman. In the aftermath of the 1994 bombing of AMIA: Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, the Jewish community center, a Jewish choir established rapport with non-Jewish audiences through a repertoire of songs of social protest—in Yiddish, as Natalia Zaretsky records. Such activities established links between Jews and greater society over the bridge of civic action.

Lesser's theories will have the greatest impact on Brazilian studies because of his own extensive research on that country. In "How the Jews Became Japanese," Lesser argues that cross-ethnic comparison will am-

6. Edgardo Bilsky, *El movimiento obrero judío en la Argentina*. (Buenos Aires: Centro de Documentación e Información sobre Judaísmo Argentino "Marc Turkow," 1987).

plify our understanding of ethnicity in the Americas making it less likely that we approach race and ethnicity in ways that do not match the lived reality. Roney Cytrynowicz follows through on this theme in his own essay on Brazil, challenging the trope that “anti-Semitism, prejudice, and persecution were dominant in the lives of Jewish immigrants.” The fault, he writes, lies with the tendency of Brazilian historiography to focus on state policies rather than on people’s actual experiences. In fact, he asserts, “the semi-Fascist ideology of the state appears to have had little effect on the social and daily life of Brazilian-Jewish communities from 1937 to 1945, even as repression and violence against other immigrant groups, for example those of Japanese descent, appeared to increase” (99). Comparative ethnic studies would seem to have a long and productive future.

In a contrarian concluding essay, Judah Cohen, an ethnomusicologist and historian of the Jewish community of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, challenges the basic premise of the book: “The concept of ethnicity is a slippery, slithery form of identification, which people can treat as either fixed or constantly in flux depending upon the situation.” Where, he asks, does “the designation of Judaism end and the physical presence of the Jew begin?” (268–271). Cohen brings to the surface numerous issues that underlie definitions of Jewishness. Ultimately, he proposes “trolling the borders of Judaism” to reveal the most interesting sites of negotiation for Jewish ethnicity (278).

Two books on Sosúa, published almost simultaneously, illustrate ways in which the field of Latin American Jewish studies can be reconceptualized without dismantling the findings of previous researchers. The known facts about this short-lived Jewish settlement on the north coast of the Dominican Republic are set out in a twenty-page prologue to Allen Wells’s *Tropical Zion*. During World War II, Sosúa harbored 757 Jewish refugees, few of whom remained on the island after the war. What, then, remains to be said? Quite a lot, as two historians demonstrate, drawing on the same sources but approaching the subject from different, complementary directions. Marion Kaplan, a historian of German Jewry, presents a definitive account of the lives of German and Austrian refugees in their Dominican haven. Wells, a Latin Americanist and a child of the colony, uses the same transient episode at Sosúa for a case study in international relations.⁷

Both historians use, among other sources, original documents saved by the settlers and recently conserved by an archivist employed by the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. Kaplan focuses on individuals who, in 1940, escaped the concentration camps by being selected to become farmers in the Dominican Republic, which was then under the

7. I read Kaplan’s manuscript and served with both Kaplan and Wells on the consultants’ committee for an exhibit on Sosúa mounted in 2008 by the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

domination of the dictator Rafael Trujillo. Expelled from their homelands supposedly for their religious affiliation, the settlers' primary concerns were not about religion but about adjusting to the administrative regime of the colony, frictions between Eastern and Western Europeans in their group, and the lack of women for marriage partners. With the assistance and goodwill of their Dominican neighbors, the settlers were able to construct modestly comfortable lives that ultimately included elements of German and Austrian culture: music, theater, a coffeehouse. Finding that the land the dictator allocated to them was not suited to agriculture, some settlers started a dairy industry that continues to produce and sell milk and cheeses throughout the Dominican Republic. The end of the war brought the end of Sosúa as a Jewish enclave, as the inhabitants, with mixed feelings of gratitude and repulsion toward Trujillo, left Sosúa for the United States.

All who have studied the Sosúa phenomenon have parsed Trujillo's motivations in welcoming Jews to the island, alighting on his massacre of Haitians the year earlier and his desire to restore his reputation internationally while also adding to the number of whites on his side of the island of Hispaniola. Wells fastens the history of the colony to world history by revealing the complex events surrounding Sosúa and the concatenation of circumstances that brought them about: the Tolstoyan credo of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Agency at that date, and of Jewish philanthropists who backed its efforts in the restorative benefit inherent in transforming urban Jews into rural peasants; the rise of Nazism and the urgent need for places to resettle refugees; the determination of elements in the Roosevelt administration to deflect any possible stream of Jewish immigrants away from the United States; and the U.S. initiative at the Evian conference in 1938 to persuade other countries to admit refugees (*Jewish* was the unspoken modifier). The Dominicans were the only ones to volunteer.

Wells wraps these elements in the friendship that developed between the racist Trujillo and the director of the Sosúa operation, who arrived hot from his dealings with the Soviets over Jewish agricultural settlement in the Ukraine. Wells tracks the factional disputes within the U.S. Department of State between those wanting to give substance to the Evian conference and those who expressed concern that refugees anywhere in the hemisphere would pose an unacceptable threat to national security. Wells also takes into account the policies of Vichy France, which, while deploring the presence of hundreds of thousands of refugees within its borders, withheld the exit visas that refugees needed to leave the country. Many of these refugees had been destined for Sosúa and would presumably have added to the colony's vitality and longevity. Wells also brings into the story fratricidal debates within the American Jewish community. The backers of Sosúa included some of the most generous philanthropists

in America. But Zionists opposed the Sosúa project, objecting to the diversion of funds and energies to an agricultural experiment when all efforts should have been directed toward the national project of gaining the admittance of Jews to Palestine. Wells vigorously explores the web of international politics that first brought Sosúa into existence and then choked off its oxygen. The story of one effort to resettle refugees thus becomes a major study in the politics of international relations.

In contrast to the transient presence of Jews in the Dominican Republic, Argentina has been a home to Jews for more than one hundred years. The context for this life was initially determined by the Catholic Church, which kept the region *judenrein* (free of Jews) and the Catholic descendants of Jews while it was under Spanish rule. Ecclesiastical strictures continued to shape the relationship between Catholics and Jews, though with decreasing force as society became more secular. This relationship, crucial for the admittance of Jews into civil society, has been a constant theme in Latin American Jewish studies but until now had not been examined with the microscopic intensity that Graciela Ben-Dror brings to the task. The present book grew out of her doctoral dissertation; its detailed endnotes fortify her interpretations. Addressing the period leading up to and including World War II, Ben-Dror finds that the Argentine church hierarchy adhered closely to Vatican policy, which condemned liberalism, fascism, and communism but avoided pronouncing on the situation of Jews, then under mortal attack by the Nazis. At the same time, extreme anti-Semitism permeated the Argentine public sphere through the sermons of parish priests and Catholic-sponsored newspapers such as *Crisol*, *El Criterio*, and *El Pueblo*. Publicists and lower-echelon clerics freely supplemented Vatican strictures by adding Jews to the list of condemned classes, often conflating them entirely. Erin Graff Zivin (in Lesser and Rein) lends resonance to this area of Ben-Dror's more traditional analysis by proposing that the notion of Jewishness can be "manipulated to fit the rhetorical needs of the text" (126).

Ben-Dror distinguishes between pronouncements by the Argentine church hierarchy and the sermons and writings of lower-ranking clergy and publicists, who turned the term *Jew* into a code word for conspirators against the Catholic religion, and thus subversives of the Argentine nation. Anti-Semitism did not issue directly from the church hierarchy, she maintains, but neither did the hierarchy restrain it. This conclusion seems to need refinement in light of other facts she brings to the table. The anti-Semitic writings of priests such as Julio Meinville and Virgilio Filippo, who operated directly on the consciousness of their congregants, were published with the nihil obstat of hierarchical approval. The infamously fraudulent *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was reprinted under the official seal of the archbishop of Córdoba. The catechism authorized by the Argentine church, which until then had contained no mention of a Jewish

“problem,” was revised in 1936 to introduce the medieval blood libel (long rejected by the popes) into the nation’s classrooms.

Ben-Dror finds that such myths were placed in service to Integral Catholicism, the ideology that sought to encompass all human activity—economic, political, cultural, sexual, civic, and recreational—within the church. Anything outside these bounds was presented as alien and suspect. Central to the concept of *argentinidad*—itself a blend of religious and nationalist compulsions—*integralismo* excluded Jews by definition, not only from God’s faithful but also from the Argentine nation. Joined to a triumphalist military, *argentinidad* powered the political and religious right in this period. According to Ben-Dror, each of the military coups from 1930 to 1943 could legitimately be called civilian-military-religious coups (31). This same ideology, hostile to communism and consequently more favorable to Nazism, blinded the church hierarchy to the situation of European Jews and was partially responsible, Ben-Dror believes, for Argentina’s maintaining neutrality during the war. Ben-Dror also examines the space occupied in Argentina by the much smaller cohort of Christian Democrats, who kept alive the equally authentic liberal tradition, accepted Jews as neighbors and marriage partners, and favored the Allied side in the war.

This liberal tradition is the context for Ricardo Feierstein’s almanac of the daily life of Argentine Jews. Written from within the community, the noted novelist begins at the beginning, asking what it means to be a Jew today (“¿Qué significa ser judío hoy?”), and proceeds through the life cycle of events that punctuate Jewish Argentines’ lives from birth (circumcision) to burial. His descriptions of family life, food, communal institutions, occupations, clothing, and children’s games demystify for non-Jews what it means to be Jewish: he depicts normal people living normal lives. At the same time, he pictures the ways in which Jewish and Argentine identities merge in the workplace, in the theater, in home kitchens, in sports clubs (the “country” of the title), and in cafés. Enlivening the text with photographs, song lyrics, anecdotes, excerpts from novels, and observations from contemporaneous Argentine writers such as Manuel Gálvez, Pedro Orgambide, and Samuel Eichelbaum, Feierstein evokes the atmosphere of Jewish Argentina from the early immigrant years until the present. He also describes changes that occurred as the immigrant generation tried to transmit old traditions to offspring who were busy adopting new ones. As an example, his childhood memories come back to him in languages that are no longer used in daily life—Yiddish, judezmo—but remain enshrined in folk idioms. By the time this book appears in Spanish, only Castilian remains.

In this anatomy of normalcy, the subject of anti-Semitism, that *doppelgänger* of Jewish history, receives six pages of treatment out of 470.

The account of hooligan attacks on Jewish neighborhoods begins with the pogrom of 1919 and ends with the more recent response by young Jewish men armed with sticks to repel attackers. The bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina Jewish community center must be recorded; the caption beneath a photograph of the ruins that entombed eighty-five people informs readers, laconically, that Jews live with this type of anti-Semitism all the time. This, too, is part of Jewish Argentine life. "But enough of that!" Feierstein seems to say, moving on in the same chapter to describe famous Jewish theatrical personages. And did you know that Jewish composers and lyricists wrote many of the tangos danced in the music halls of Buenos Aires? Songs, comic and bathetic, blend Yiddish with criollo sensibilities, as in this refrain:

Tango Shmango, bien peinado, haciendo facha;
En Varsovia y Suipacha que hacen esquina en mí.

Vida cotidiana situates Jewish life firmly in its Argentine context as both Jewish and Argentine, confuting charges that the otherness of Jews renders them unassimilable and subversive of the nation, as *integralistas* claimed. Jews stayed and made Argentina their home because they fell in love with the life and felt themselves to be Argentine. So strong is their attachment that many who took refuge in Israel or elsewhere during the bad times have since returned to their homeland.

Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism bridges traditional research methodologies and the revisions that Lesser and Rein propose. The opening and closing chapters focus on the Jewish experience in the worldwide diaspora. Aiming to be as comprehensive as possible, the first chapters reprise nothing less than the history of the Jewish people as a whole. There follow assessments of the contemporary, world-spanning Jewish "commonwealth," whose national sectors, as the demographer Sergio Della Pergola shows, are diminishing in size relative to the total population, a finding that holds for all nations of Latin America (57). The volume closes with consideration of existential questions of universal Jewish concern as viewed from non-Latin American countries: Jewish identity, anti-Semitism, and opposing views of the desired nature of Israel as a secular or sacred Jewish state. These questions are relevant for Latin America as well, for they animate intellectual life everywhere.

Two hundred pages at the center of the volume deal with Jewish Latin America, a change in nomenclature that signals the shift in balance that these studies intend. Raanan Rein outlines no fewer than ten assumptions of current Latin American Jewish studies that he considers false; primary among these is the idea of "Jewish uniqueness and exceptionality as an *a priori* category of analysis." Rather than comparing Jews in Latin America to Jews on other continents, he avers, researchers should examine "Arabs,

Poles or Asians in the Southern Cone" (120). The national identity of Jews as Argentines, Brazilians, and so on, clearly articulated in their literature, should not be subordinated to a transnational identity.

The primary transnational identity attributed to Jews is, of course, that of Zionism, the movement dedicated to creation of a Jewish national homeland in the biblical Land of Israel. In Latin America, Zionism became a driving force and a unifying element of contemporary organized communities. Several contributors to *Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism* present the Zionist movement as a strategy for bringing coherence to an ethnic minority that had no structured authority, was not particularly religious, and needed a focus as its members acculturated to societies whose attitude toward them was ambiguous. Within this schema, Israel became the virtual *madre patria* for Latin American Jews, enabling them to become more like the Poles, Italians, and other immigrants fortunate enough to have actual mother countries that nurtured them. Rein lists as a false assumption the idea that "Zionism in Latin America has been first and foremost about the State of Israel. . . . [T]here is continued misunderstanding of the nature of Zionism in Latin America. . . . Being Zionist in Argentina, for example, often had little to do with the State of Israel. More often, it was part of the strategies espoused by Jews in order to become Argentines" (120).

Some researchers, myself included, have found the relationship of Israel—inheritor of the Zionist program—to organized Latin American Jewish communities to be more colonial than maternal in character. Israeli diplomats, educators, and youth group leaders play a central role in the life of these communities, a fact not unrelated to the exodus from the organized communities by non-Zionists, whose ranks span the left wing of Jewish political opinion. Although financial support and emigration (*al-iyā*) flow to Israel from diasporic communities, Israel has not been inclined to view these either as their offspring whose well-being they should foster or as partners to be consulted in the formulation of Israeli policy. Israeli national interests, not the interests of Jewish communities in Argentina or elsewhere have determined Israel's actions.

Currently, the role of Israel as *madre patria* is decreasing, as Judit Bokser Liwerant reports and examines in her chapter on Mexico. Mexican Jews' dependence on Israel was preempted by the emergence of the United States as guarantor of Mexican Jews' position during the trying times that followed Mexico's acceptance of the United Nations' 1975 resolution on Zionism and racism. The changing image of Israel from a progressive force to an imperialist power, stamped on the consciousness of the Latin American left by the UN vote, moved Jews rightward, encouraging them to seek other sources of legitimacy. From different precincts of the continent, there arrive similar reports of the waning of Israel as the center of Jewish consciousness. This development is attributed to political differences with

the Jewish state and the demurrals of established Jewish communities to be considered any longer as diasporic. Globalism's flattening effect has destroyed the center, and the diasporas are rejecting colonial status.

Another example of the way in which Zionism weaves in and out of Jewish Latin America comes from Cuba. Maritza Corrales Capestany, a participant in the "long process of national liberation" begun by the revolution of 1959, states quite correctly that Cuba has never had a culture of religious, political, or social anti-Semitism. Revolutionary Cuba recognized an affinity with the Israel of 1948: both were small states founded on progressive principles; both were beset by hostile neighbors; and both were dependent on distant, powerful patrons—the United States and the Soviet Union—that were, in turn, hostile to each other. Despite these areas of congruence, the Cuban government began to reassess its policy of friendship with Israel at the Tricontinental Conference of January 1966, where it supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization. A year later, Fidel Castro's government condemned Israel as an aggressor in the Six-Day War but maintained relations, blaming the United States for the hostilities. Corrales identifies 1968 as the "point of no return in Cuba-Israel relations." In the context of economic disaster, the island was forced into greater dependence on the Soviet Union just at the time that Israel was increasing its counterrevolutionary activities in Central America. Arab countries were not slow to apply oil and financial pressures as Cuba aspired to gain leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement, for which the support of the Arab States was essential. Israel became the focus of the Cuban campaign against imperialism, and Cuba became the "supreme defender of Palestinian rights," promoting and signing the 1975 UN resolution. Corrales adds that, in seeking support from other progressive Latin American governments, Cuba had to be mindful of the "profoundly anti-Israel Latin American left." Throughout this difficult period, the Cuban government, as we know from other sources, not only treated Jewish Cubans equitably but in some respects privileged them. Complications besetting Cuba-Israel relations "coincided with" but did not determine, the deterioration of the Cuban Jewish community, writes Corrales; their well-being was tied to that of the island's overall economy (211–213).

The research presented in *Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism* relates for the most part to Ashkenazim, members of the largest ethnic group among Jews, who emigrated to the Western Hemisphere from Central and Eastern Europe and Russia. In general, the lives of Sephardim, the descendants of Iberian Jews, have been far less researched and written about, for reasons that extend beyond the parameters of this article. Margalit Bejarano attempts heroically to describe and distinguish among the many ethnic groups that comprise the fifty-eight thousand Sephardim estimated to live in Central and South America. They include Spanish and Ladino speakers from Turkey, Bulgaria, and the Balkans (the

old Ottoman Empire); Moroccans of Portuguese ancestry; Arabic speakers from Aleppo, Damascus, Lebanon, and Palestine; and Italian Sephardim. Clearly, it is hard to sustain generalizations about all these ethnic groups, which are textured by their varied historical experiences, and to roll them into one category labeled "sefardí." Like other observers, Bejarano reports cultural barriers among the groups, whose life in their countries of origin deeply inflects their languages, customs, and relationship to Israel. She finds a high degree of secularization among Spanish speakers, who tend to privilege their cultural heritage over religiosity. Arabic speakers, particularly those from Aleppo but also Jews from Damascus, have hardened their religious defenses against secularization.

Two researchers in *Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism* offer to guide us through Brazilian ethnicities. Brazilians' traditionally positive view of miscegenation was favorable to the presence of heterogeneous immigrants, including Jews, but, as Bernardo Sorj points out, the country's "ideology of racial integration served to mask profound disparities of power" (153). Monica Grin explores what happened when the state intervened in an effort to overcome social inequality. Brazil's 1988 constitution made racism a crime and for the first time categorized the population by color, assigning Jews to the white group by phenotype. Jews who had supported a multicultural vision of society found themselves on opposite sides of a color line from blacks, and the alliance they had formed to resist racist attacks, from which both populations suffered, split apart under pressure from American concepts of racial politics and the impact of anti-Semitism set loose by the 2001 UN Durban conference on race (172–173).

Demonstrating further the wide range of themes that can be explored through a Jewish Latin American lens, other essays in this volume address topics such as ethnicity at the Argentine frontier; the culture of Latino immigrants to Israel; and the ethnicity of *conversos* in New Spain. Linguistic analysis, a recent entrant into the field via literary criticism, begins by questioning the assignment of "Jewishness" to unpleasant characters in Latin American literature. The genre is growing so quickly that it warrants a survey review of its own. Two recently published volumes illustrate how the subjection of Jewish Latin Americans to the deconstructive lens of contemporary literary criticism dissolves both traditional and innovative categories into a new entity, a phantasm of the Latin American imaginary, with the concomitant replacement of Jews by "Jews."⁸

Two complementary trends emerge from the varied works under consideration here. On the one hand, the perspective generated by global Jew-

8. Erin Graff Zivin, *The Wandering Signifier: Rhetoric of Jewishness in the Latin American Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); David William Foster, ed., *Latin American Jewish Cultural Production* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009).

ish history enhances understanding of the ways in which Latin American Jews adapted to life in an area generally considered to be peripheral to world Jewry, and just beginning to be introduced into Judaic studies. On the other hand, approaching the subject from the perspective of Latin American ethnic studies resituates Jews as citizens of their respective countries, reinterprets and de-emphathizes their connections to global Jewish history. This change in the focus of research—from Latin American Jews to Jewish Latin Americans encourages exploration of the engagement of this (and all) ethnic minority groups with their national societies. Whether this focus will displace or even eliminate the concept of Jewish exceptionalism remains to be seen.