

## BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

# The Western Sephardic Diaspora: Ancestral Birthplaces and Displacement, Diaspora Formation and Multiple Homelands

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This essay reviews the following works:

**Jews and Jewish Identities in Latin America: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Perspectives.** Edited by Margalit Bejarano, Yaron Harel, Marta Topel, and Margalit Yosifon. Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2017. Pp. xiv + 411. \$129.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781618116482.

**Sephardic, Jewish, Argentine: Community and National Identity, 1880–1960.** By Adriana M. Brodsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. Pp. xiv + 281. \$20.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780253023032.

**Contemporary Sephardic and Mizrahi Literature: A Diaspora.** Edited by Dario Miccoli. New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. ix + 163. \$150.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781138233836.

**Narratives from the Sephardic Atlantic: Blood and Faith.** By Ronnie Perelis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. Pp. xii + 178. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780253024015.

**The Lima Inquisition: The Plight of Crypto-Jews in Seventeenth-Century Peru.** By Ana E. Schaposchnik. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015. Pp. xi + 291. \$21.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780299313449.

**The Perils of Living the Good and True Law: Iberian Crypto-Jews in the Shadow of the Inquisition in Colonial Hispanic America.** By Matthew D. Warshawsky. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2016. Pp. 176. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781588712769.

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The history of the Jewish people is a history of displacement, diaspora formation, multiple homelands, and ancestral birthplaces. It is also a story of resilience, disengagement, and reconstruction of communal commitments; of multiple forms of constructing and negotiating boundaries of identity, religion, and civilization while interacting with other societies, cultures and civilizations.<sup>1</sup> The multiple waves of Jewish translocation generated varied forms of identity and sub-identities and several Jewish languages and dialects, in addition to the shared ancestral language, Hebrew. One of the umbrella Jewish identities is the Sephardic identity of those who trace their roots back to Spain (*Sepharad* in Hebrew), the land from which they were expelled in 1492. That collective identity was shaped across centuries by descendants of exiles who continued to speak Spanish in its late fifteenth-century modulation, incorporating terms and expressions from Hebrew, Turkish, and more recently French, Italian, and Balkan dialects, turning it into a distinctive Jewish language known as *ladino* or *djudeo-panyol* (*judeo-español*, Judeo-Spanish).

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<sup>1</sup> Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, *Jewish Civilization: The Jewish Historical Experience in a Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

As with other Jewish groups, defining who is a Sephardic Jew is a controversial endeavor, contested among researchers and blurred in contemporary discourse.<sup>2</sup> Following a restricted definition, Sephardim are those whose ancestry goes back to Spain and who spoke *djudeo-espanyol* at least until a generation ago. However, some of those expelled from Spain settled in Morocco and the Ottoman Empire, including Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, and the Balkans. Settling in the Middle East and North Africa, many adopted the Arabic language and became indistinguishable from those other Jews whose ancestors settled there centuries earlier, after ten of the twelve Biblical tribes were exiled following the fall of the Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. This raises the question of whether the Moroccan, Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, and perhaps even the Yemenite and Ethiopian Jews should also be considered Sephardic Jews and not just part of the Mizrahim (“Oriental” Jews), another umbrella category coined in modern Israel for non-Ashkenazim. That is, often the term *Sephardi* has become a residual category comprising all those who are not Ashkenazim.<sup>3</sup> Far-fetched and misleading? Not according to researchers such as Shmuel Trigano, who would consider any non-Ashkenazi Jews to be Sephardic based on religious practice rather than on ethnic, linguistic, or geographic characterizations. Indeed, most non-Ashkenazi communities consider Joseph Karo’s *Shulhan Aruch* the core guidebook of religious practice, setting them apart from the Ashkenazi Jews, who have followed the doctrinal exegesis of rabbi Moshe Iserlisch.<sup>4</sup>

Contesting the broad definition are those who would like to restrict the *Sephardi* label to the descendants of Iberian Jews, while other researchers—such as Yaron Harel or Harvey Goldberg—suggest dismissing the controversial umbrella categorizations in favor of prioritizing the idiosyncrasy of each distinct Jewish community.<sup>5</sup> Yet, even if the umbrella categories can be easily deconstructed, the dominant approach in the literature—reflected in most writings reviewed here—has been to follow the broadest denotation. That is, to consider *Sephardi* an umbrella term comprising the varied sets of non-Ashkenazi groups, thus including (a) the Hispanic and Portuguese Jews settling in the Americas during colonial times; (b) the descendants of Iberian Jews who preserved the Ladino language and settled in Europe and the Ottoman Empire, spreading from there; and also (c) the Jews from the Middle East and North Africa, notwithstanding that *some* of the latter trace their roots to communities settling in those lands many hundreds of years before the Iberian edicts of expulsion.

Sephardic Jews have been part of the demographic mosaic of the Americas since the beginning of Iberian colonization. The heterogeneous character of Sephardic communities has prevailed in Spanish and Portuguese America, where *conversos* and crypto-Jews settled already in colonial times. During the union of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns (1580–1640), Sephardim from Portugal and Holland reached Pernambuco and from there moved to the Spanish territories. Others settled in territories under English and Dutch control such as Curaçao, Jamaica, and the Guyanas, where they could practice their religion freely. Following independence, Sephardim settled in the Caribbean port cities of Venezuela and Colombia, marrying Christians and assimilating within their surroundings. Moroccan Jews from Tétouan and Tangier arrived later in the Brazilian Amazonas, attracted by the rubber boom, moving to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo following the decline of that industry, yet leaving behind locals of Moroccan descent who started reclaiming their Jewish identity recently. In the early twentieth century, the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of Turkey as a nation-state, on the one hand, and on the other, the Moslem unrest in Syria and Lebanon under the French mandate, created new waves of Sephardi and Oriental Jews leaving those countries and the Balkans. As many in those centuries-old communities started to migrate and settle elsewhere, the complexities of identity and identification in the New World became once again evident. A huge inner diversity unfolded between *turcos*, self-identified as Moroccans, Damascenes or *shamis*, Alepines or *halebis*, and Ladino-speaking Sephardim. All these groups interacted also with each other in the diaspora as well as with the Russian, Polish, German, and Austrian Jews and other immigrant newcomers and longtime residents in the Americas.<sup>6</sup> Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg have called attention to the singular position of the Sephardic Jews in the Americas:

<sup>2</sup> Itzhak Bezalel, “Categorizando a las comunidades judías: Métodos, cambios y características,” *Pe’amim* [in Hebrew], 111–112 (2007): 5–34.

<sup>3</sup> Ashkenazim are European Jews, and many of them and their descendants spoke Yiddish, a distinctive language evolving from German in medieval times.

<sup>4</sup> Margalit Bejarano, “Comunidad y religiosidad: Cambios en la identidad colectiva de los sefardíes en América Latina,” in *Pertenencia y alteridad: Judíos en/de América Latina*, ed. Haim Avni, Judit Bokser Liwerant, et al. (Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuert/Bonilla Artigas, 2011), 603–620.

<sup>5</sup> Harvey E. Goldberg, “From Sephardi to Mizrahi and Back Again: Changing Meaning of ‘Sephardi’ in Its Social Environment,” *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s., 15, no. 1 (2008): 165–188.

<sup>6</sup> The most synthetic systematic analysis of Sephardic Jews remains that of Margalit Bejarano in “The Sephardic Communities of Latin America: A Puzzle of Sub-Ethnic Fragments,” in *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 3–30.

The Sephardic population in the Americas is formed by many small groups, divided according to communities of origin in the Iberian Peninsula, the Middle East, and North Africa, and dispersed among English-, Spanish-, Portuguese-, and French-speaking societies. From a local perspective, the presence of the Sephardim in each Jewish community was overshadowed by the presence of dominant groups of Ashkenazim from Eastern Europe, creating the Sephardic image as “a minority within a minority.” Seen from a global perspective, however, we may view the Sephardic diaspora as a mosaic of identities that together form the largest concentration of Sephardim outside the State of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

The research interest on the Western Sephardic diaspora has developed in multiple directions. In part, it has flourished in works on the Inquisition by authors such as José Toribio Medina, Boleslao Lewin, Henry Kamen, Martin A. Cohen, Arnold Wiznitzer, John Chuchiak, and Irene Silverblatt. These were paralleled by historical studies of Latin American Sephardic Jews by researchers such as Nissim Elnecavé, Zvi Loker, Mordechai Arbell, and Margalit Bejarano; panoramic works and collections devoted fully or partly to Sephardic Jews by Martin A. Cohen and Abraham Peck, Haim Avni, Daniel Elazar, Judith Laikin Elkin, Judit Bokser Liwerant, Raanan Rein, Ignacio Klich, and Jeffrey Lesser; language and cultural studies by Haim Vidal Sephiha, Monique Balbuena, Judith Cohen, Edna Aizenberg, and Yael Halevi-Wise; demography studies by Sergio Della Pergola and his associates. In parallel, new historical-sociological and ethnographic studies have burgeoned in recent decades, spearheaded among others by the work of Margalit Bejarano, Harvey E. Goldberg, Susana Brauner, and Liz Hamui de Hálabe, leading to a nuanced reading of the experience of Sephardic Jews in Latin America.

The works reviewed in this article follow this wide interest in the Western Sephardic diaspora, adding important building blocks to a research domain that has reached maturity in recent decades. Let me start with Ronnie Perelis’s analysis of post-expulsion Sephardic society and culture in the Atlantic world. In the 1640s, the Portuguese merchant Antonio de Montezinos, aka Aharón Levi (1604–1647) arrived in Amsterdam after spending time in Nueva Granada and being arrested on suspicion of Judaizing. In his meetings with leaders of the local Portuguese Jewish community, he reported having encountered the lost Hebrew tribe of Reuben in the northern Andes. Shortly after giving testimony, he returned to the New World and settled in Pernambuco, still under Dutch control, where he passed away a few years later. The account or *relación* by Levi, which found its way into Menasseh ben Israel’s *Mikveh Israel/Esperanza de Israel* (1650), is one of three texts at the basis of Perelis’s analysis. Montezinos’s account suggested that he had met descendants of one of the ten lost tribes dispersed in the eighth century BCE, with just two other tribes still remaining autonomous in the neighboring Kingdom of Judah. The claim may sound far-fetched, but it reflects the vestigial presence of Judaism in remote places of the Americas, Central Asia, or Africa. Such tales of encounters with some of the lost ten tribes of Israel ignited the “magical realistic” imagination of many, including the Puritans in New England, and their effect was not so dissimilar from the stories of El Dorado. Yet, beyond them lies the permeation of the Americas by the scions of Jews forced to convert in 1391 and 1492 in Spain and in 1497 in Portugal, an intrinsic part of Latin American evolving cultural hybridity and fluid identities.

The books by Ana Schaposchnik and by Matthew Warshawsky trace the story of New Christians detained on charges of crypto-Judaism by the Inquisition in seventeenth-century Hispanic America. Both authors focus on selected cases of detainees. Through a meticulous analysis of extensive archive documentation and secondary sources, they trace the workings of the Inquisition: the trials and torture mechanisms applied on those suspected of heresy, leading to confessions, repentance, reconciliation, or harsher punishments, including burning of some on the *quemadero*, as part of a public ceremony, the auto-da-fé.

Schaposchnik’s work stresses how New Christians of Portuguese descent who sailed across the Atlantic lived in a marginal situation, as even those who had reached the upper layers of colonial society and the Atlantic trade faced limits due to possibly becoming targets of suspicion and accusations. Once the enforcers of orthodoxy started the machinery of Inquisition in 1570, a loss of freedom and resources, deteriorating health and even a loss of life could be the lot of those under its review. Building on the records of the Lima Inquisition, Schaposchnik traces the agenda and modus operandi of inquisitors leading to the public ceremonies of penance and execution in 1639, a case known as the *complicidad grande* or Great Conspiracy. She reconstructs the experiences of prisoners, including the inner world and mundane operation of the prisons and the limited agency prisoners still possessed as they tried to stall trials or mitigate the most

<sup>7</sup> Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg, eds., *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), xiii.

extreme punishments. Particularly of interest is the analysis of the state of the art included in the book's introduction and the discussion of heresy in the Iberian world in chapter 1. Chapter 2 recounts the procedure of the trial of faith, predicated on the presumption of guilt, and the regulations for applying torture and the secrecy of the process, accounting for gaps between theory and practice. Subsequent chapters analyze the workings of the Inquisition within the wider colonial expansion; the trials of 1635–1639 in Lima and the profile of the prisoners and their wider networks; the inner dynamics of the Lima prisons and, finally, the Auto General de Fé of 1639.

Likewise, Warshawsky traces the plight of selected crypto-Jews persecuted by the Inquisition in colonial Peru and Mexico in the 1600s, describing family dynamics, social and communal networks of the accused, and providing a rich contextual, historical background. Warshawsky also analyzes the political and social factors conditioning the precarious position of the New Christians in the Spanish realm. At the dawn of modernity, the edicts banning Judaism and forcing Jews' mass conversion recreated the boundaries of the faith within Christianity, leading to conceptions of purity of blood and the suspicion of Judaization. As he indicates: "Even though the 'Jewishness' of crypto-Jews became increasingly vestigial, anti-Jewish sentiment in the absence of Jews persisted throughout Iberia post-1492, encouraging the belief that purity of blood was related to purity of faith" (30). Likewise, philosopher Yirmiyahu Yovel stressed that the betwixt-and-between position of New Christians prompted reflexivity and shaped a basic ambivalence toward orthodoxy,<sup>8</sup> a situation that historical anthropologist Nathan Wachtel termed "syncretic hybridization,"<sup>9</sup> which was replicated in the surrounding society, leading to complex accommodations and emerging clashes. Illustrating the latter was the massacre of about two thousand *cristãos-novos* in Lisbon in 1506, partly at the instigation of Dominican friars who made them a scapegoat for the drought, famine, and plague affecting society. Moreover, after Spain annexed Portugal in 1580–1640, Portuguese *conversos* began to move into the Spanish realm in large numbers, motivated by the economic prospects for entrepreneurial individuals with far-reaching social and trade networks across continents. The Dutch conquest of Northeastern Brazil (1630–1654), with its center in Recife, added appeal, as many conversos returned there to their ancestral faith openly. Under such conditions, the Portuguese New Christians could be easily suspected to conspire with the Dutch in planning to undermine the structure of the Spanish empire. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the influx of New Christians to Iberoamérica led Old Christians to increasingly conflate the terms "Portuguese," "Jew," and "New Christian," creating a "converso-phobia," which combined with the social and economic rivalry of those who felt threatened by the competition of the Portuguese.

Such contextualization leads Warshawsky to astutely conclude that "ironically, the prosecution of the *Complicidad Grande* [in Peru] also demonstrates how an ideology meant to strengthen the Spanish empire, at least religiously, impoverished it for reasons unconnected to religion: the efforts of the Inquisition in Peru during the 1630s eliminated some of the very individuals who could have most strengthened Spain's imperial project through their ambition, resources, and worldwide trade networks" (62). The author uses the same methodology of investigating the conflation of politics, economics, ethnicity, and religion as he traces prosecutions in New Spain during the 1640s (chapters 2–4). Additionally, in chapter 5 he analyzes the unusual story of María de Zárate, who married a converso whom the Inquisition subsequently executed as a relapsed Judaizer, and who herself suffered a trial due to many of the beliefs and practices she adopted while married. Overall, Warshawsky concludes that those baptized Catholics who were very knowledgeable of the prayers and rites of Catholicism and had only irregular access to fragments of Judaism still developed syncretistic practices in secrecy trying to give meaning to their lives, finding purpose and identity through faith (153–158).

Rabbi Ronnie Perelis's book focuses on the autobiographical accounts of three individuals who followed an unorthodox path in their search for spiritual definition. In addition to Montezinos, Perelis also analyzes the account of Luis Rodríguez de Carvajal (1567–1596), burned at the stake in the 1596 auto-da-fé in Mexico City, and the spiritual autobiography of Manuel Cardoso de Macedo (1585–1652), an Azorean Old Christian who transited into Calvinism and, following a stay at an inquisitorial prison in Lisbon, moved together with New Christians from Lisbon into Northern Europe, where he converted to Judaism. Perelis retrieves from those texts the subjectivity of their authors, analyzing the literary genres they used and focusing on the interplay between their self-image and the audience they attempted to reach.

<sup>8</sup> Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Nathan Wachtel, *The Faith of Remembrance: Marrano Labyrinths*, translated by Nikki Halpern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

Claiming that there are parallels between transatlantic passages and internal discovery, Perelis's book delves into these narratives of religious enlightenment, showing nonetheless how fractured and multidirectional was the reflection of those life circumstances. Perelis stresses the sense of collective identity and latent solidarity that New Christians seemed to share by the very fact that they were referred to and identified themselves as the *gente da nação* or "people of the nation," a distinct social category. Based on that observation, the author claims that the New World crypto-Jews "were connected through a complex web of familial, economic and cultural ties to a global network of fellow conversos and openly professing Jews living throughout Europe and the Americas" (1). Yet, he also notes that for some, it was the brutal encounter with the Inquisition that inspired a discovery of Judaism or catalyzed a latent Jewishness. It was the very fluidity of the New World that attracted those willing to escape the either/or hierarchical categorization that they met in the Old World (5–6). Not unlike in postmodern societies, the authors of these autobiographical accounts negotiated their place in the world as they crossed the Atlantic and discovered identities that were deeply tied to their most intimate human connections (124).

Many New Christians did not fall prey to the pursuit of the Inquisition. Disengaging themselves from any Jewish practices or memories, they assimilated. Others escaped by settling in Europe, the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, or the non-Iberian islands of the Caribbean such as Jamaica or Curaçao. Well known is the case of Modechay Ricardo, a local Sephardic Jew, scion of families expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth century and cousin of the renowned British economist David Ricardo, who in Jamaica helped Simón Bolívar survive his forced exile from Venezuela in 1812. Arriving in Curaçao, Bolívar had suffered the seizure of all his belongings by the British authorities who controlled the island in 1801–1815. Ricardo's background as the scion of Sephardic Jews forced to leave their ancestral land likely shaped his decision to help Bolívar and his two sisters and children survive while escaping repression by Spanish commander José Tomás Boves.<sup>10</sup>

Curaçao was a pole of attraction for many willing to practice their ancestral faith freely in the western hemisphere. At one point, the island had over fifteen hundred families of Sephardic Jews. During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with its economic decline, many of those families left the island for other locations, such as Coro (Venezuela), Barranquilla (Colombia), St. Thomas (Virgin Islands), Santo Domingo, and Panama. There, many of them rapidly assimilated. In 2009, Josette Capriles Goldish published a fascinating book, *Once Jews*, which traced the whereabouts of some of those dispersed networks, assessing the factors that determined the pace of assimilation in the places of relocation. Goldish singled out as significant a community's welcome for those relocating and the community's institutional strength. Such communal strength was itself conditioned by the presence of a significant number of individuals and a balanced gender distribution, determining the likelihood of communal marriage or intermarriage.<sup>11</sup>

Assimilation and vanishing attachment to Judaism due to low numbers was not a foregone conclusion. Inspired by the experience of Jews of St. Thomas, Judah M. Cohen discussed how surprisingly high rates of intermarriage did not lead to the decline of the local Jewish community but instead prompted strategies of broadening the networks identified with Judaism. Based on that experience, replicated with some variation among the descendants of North African Jews who settled in the Brazilian Amazonas in the early twentieth century, and among descendants of Sephardic Jews in the Andean area, Cohen suggested that minority groups have constantly redefined the terms of their multiple identities as situations change. He reminded us that ethnicity can imply different things for different people, ranging from imposed definitions to self-identification and a meeting point for individuals striving to maintain a sense of equilibrium in changing environments.<sup>12</sup>

That hindsight is reflected in *Sephardic, Jewish, Argentine*, Adriana M. Brodsky's detailed historical analysis of the Jews from the Middle East and North Africa settling in Argentina. Being distinct from the Ashkenazim (often popularly referred to as *rusos*), the Sephardim were popularly known as the *turcos*, since many of their early arrivals came from Ottoman lands. Brodsky traces the history of their arrival and how they created immigrant organizations, synagogues, and cemeteries. At first, they maintained discrete collective identities by cities of origin and only progressively converged on a shared Sephardic identity, predicated on both Zionist identification and national feelings for Argentina. According to Brodsky, the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews broadened the boundaries of their self-identification in the process of becoming Argentines.

<sup>10</sup> Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, *The Politics of Exile in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52.

<sup>11</sup> Josette Capriles Goldish, *Once Jews: Stories of Caribbean Sephardim* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Judah M. Cohen, "The Ethnic Dilemmas of Latin American Jewry," in *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans*, edited by Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 266–284.

Brodsky's analysis shows that the boundaries that Sephardim chose in defining themselves depended on variables of time, location, and issues. Thus, in chapter 1 she argues that depending on the location, these groups founded distinct cemeteries by place of origin, that is, Moroccans, Ottomans, Syrians from Aleppo, and Syrians from Damascus; pooled their resources to have a common cemetery; or even joined Ashkenazim. Chapter 2 follows philanthropic contributions by Sephardim, showing how their goals again varied across time and locations. Chapter 3 traces the failure of the Sephardic Rabbinical Consistory in the 1930s to become the umbrella religious authority of the Sephardic communities, and chapter 4 shows that it was only after World War II and with the establishment of the State of Israel that Sephardim developed a more inclusive collective identity, premised by the 1960s on being Jewish Argentines of Sephardic background, distinguishing themselves from Ashkenazim. Chapter 5 explores the roles of Sephardic women in articulating identity and projecting it to the next generations through public philanthropy and the transmission of food traditions. Finally, chapter 6 discusses educational institutions and marriage patterns, reflecting both integration and the emergence of a Jewish Argentine identity that did not prioritize the geographical origins of earlier generations. The historical variations reflect a myriad of accommodations, leading Brodsky to conclude that diaspora identifications and identities are made up of flexible, changing, and overlapping ties and commitments, maintaining "connections to their multiple pasts and diverse presents" (211). The image of Argentine Moroccan Jews, celebrating the birthdays of the Moroccan king, sending children to state schools, frequenting a synagogue with Jews from other origins, drinking *mate* every morning while serving Moroccan Jewish delicacies to their families captures one among many local constellations of these multiple layers of overlapping identities.

Part of the complexity of making sense of the so-called Western Sephardic diaspora is related to the multiple sets of communities pooled together under the label of Sephardic Jews. Such complexity is further evidenced in the two collective volumes, edited by Margalit Bejarano, Yaron Harel, Marta Topel, and Margalit Yosifon and by Dario Miccoli, which include several studies on Sephardic communities in the Americas. In these two volumes we find lines of research into the diversity and multiplicity of identifications of the descendants of the Jews who once lived in the Iberian Peninsula and/or who lived for centuries in the Middle East and North Africa. This complexity can be traced among those who settled in Morocco, maintaining customs and skills (e.g., in architecture) from Al-Andalus. While there, Jews increasingly developed their own language, known as Hakitía. Yet, then, some continued to move across North African and Middle Eastern locations, where they met other Jewish communities formed by those who had arrived hundreds of years earlier, following the destruction of the First or Second Jerusalem Temples. Those Middle Eastern Jews shifted with the passing of time to the vernacular Arabic, blending it with Hebrew and other elements, developing various strains of Judeo-Arabic languages. In modern times, in Israel they became known as the Oriental or Mizrahi Jews (*edoth hamizrah*), calling further attention to the need to re-examine the distinction between Sephardi, Oriental and Ashkenazi Jews. Approaching Sephardic and Mizrahi literature, Miccoli's book claims that the texts produced by the Jews who migrated from the Middle East and North Africa starting in the 1950s "bring about entangled processes of memorialization and heritagisation" of [their] past and present history" (1). The book mainly focuses on Jewish Maghrebi authors who relocated to France and Israel, yet among the contributions is a study by Silvina Schammah Gesser and Susana Brauner on the complexities of Arab-Jewish identities in authoritarian Argentina. As is well known, Argentina went through a period of political violence, instability, and massive repression following the short democratic spring of 1973, leading to what became known as the Dirty War of 1974–1983. Close to eight hundred individuals of Jewish background were among the victims of state terrorism. Among them were some individuals of Arab-Jewish descent who had participated in study groups, political acts, or street protest and thus became targets of military and paramilitary repression. The authors draw attention to the character of those Jews of Middle Eastern background, who represented a minority within two other minorities: the Jewish population of Argentina and the migrants of other faiths coming from Arab territories. Further complicating the analysis was the fact that the group was comprised of Hakitía-speaking Moroccans; various Ladino-speaking Jews, including Turks, Greeks and peoples from the Balkans; Syrians of Aleppo, together with others whose mother tongue was Arabic, generally from Egypt and Jerusalem; and Syrians of Damascus, together with those coming from Lebanon (Schammah Gesser and Brauner in Miccoli, 46). All of them eventually integrated into the melting pot of Argentina and referred to themselves as Sephardic or Arab Jews, while the term *turcos* was generically applied to them by others.

While many authors, including Brodsky, focus on the dynamic of Sephardic institution building, Schammah Gesser and Brauner call attention to the processes of disengagement and disaffiliation of young people from those communities under the pull of secular society and the rampant politicization of the

1960s and early 1970s. Those processes drew many young people at the secondary school or the university to become involved in the circles of the Left. Out of this pool of young people, the authors focus on the varied trajectories and work of playwright Ricardo Halac in the line of “reflexive realism”; painter Diana Dowek, an early promoter of “committed art”; and writer Susana Romano Sued, addressing postdictatorial literature and memory. While Halac remained connected to the Jewish community, Dowek and Romano Sued distanced themselves from Jewish institutions and networks, while maintaining close contacts and cultural affinities with coethnic fellows. And whereas Dowek is critical of Israel over the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and does not emphasize her ethnic origins, Romano Sued celebrates her Syrian Jewish identity and her Sephardic traits as key to her identity.

*Jews and Jewish Identities in Latin America* does not focus exclusively on Sephardic Jews but on the experience of all the Jewish communities of Latin America. Following the analytical perspective of studies of globalization, transnationalism, and diaspora studies, the volume is thematically divided. After a theoretical chapter by Judit Bokser Liwerant on the processes of expansion and interconnectedness of Jewish life, the book addresses Jewish education, the emergence of new religious trends and interactions between Jews and non-Jews, multiple aspects of Zionist movements among Jews, Latin American Jewish writers, and the impact of Latin America on contemporary Israeli literature. The chapters devoted to the Sephardic subset complement the volume *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas*, edited by Bejarano and Aizenberg in 2012. Particularly of interest in this context are the chapters by Margalit Bejarano, Susana Brauner, Daniela Susana Segre Guertzenstein, and Michel Gherman.

Bejarano’s chapter addresses the changing identities of Latin American Jews in Miami. She indicates that while the Latin American Jews may seem to be a homogenous group in the eyes of some observers, in fact they have been divided into different communities, maintaining different relations with their homelands, their conationals in Miami, and the Jewish communities in the countries of origin. Bejarano notes that while other Jews from Latin America joined Anglo-Jews in Miami, Latin American Sephardim—clinging to Spanish—joined the Cuban Jewish Spanish-speaking congregation, becoming identified as parts of the “Jewbans,” a separate transnational community distinguished from other “Latino Jews,” at least until they became Americanized and created new synagogues with appeal to their various ethnic traditions and degrees of religious observance. Beyond diversity, Bejarano added that “for Jewbans and Latino Jews alike, it is evident that their Jewish identity is much more profound than their other identities, and that their national identity, as Cubans, Colombians, Argentines, and Venezuelans, is deeply connected with their hyphenated identity as Jews in their homeland. With respect to Israel, there is consensus in its centrality among all the Spanish-speaking groups” (Bejarano et al., 51). This finding clearly contrasts with the variety of attitudes that Schammah Gesser and Brauner found among the Argentine Sephardic individuals they analyzed, as indicated above.

Susana Brauner’s contribution focuses on the religious practices of Jews of Syrian and Moroccan origins who migrated to Argentina from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, stressing the flexible reconstruction of the identities of “the Jews of Arabic origin” after settling in the new land. Contrasting with the essentialized images that prevail regarding their identities, Brauner highlights a wide range of practices, from traditionalism to secularization, adopted among both the ultra-Orthodox and the religious Orthodox. Argentines of Moroccan and Syrian origins integrated into Jewish and non-Jewish environments, including ultra-Orthodox groups, Liberal Jewish groups, secular Jewish leftists and national leftists. She also found that, in addition to their places of origin and beyond their diverse orientations, the Jewish state became an overseas reference point for many of them. In parallel, Syrian Jews were increasingly preoccupied with the fate of the remaining Jews of Syria and mobilized along with major sectors of the Jewish diaspora, while Moroccan Jews remained both loyal both to the Moroccan culture and king and to the Jewish world in its entirety. Daniela Susana Segre Guertzenstein addressed the question of Sephardic Orthodox Jewish education and registered that the drive of these groups to create their own educational system stemmed from the experiences discrimination on the part of European Jews with Ashkenazi traditions (Bejarano et al., 173–189). Another interesting chapter is Michel Gherman’s study of the beginnings of Brazilian Zionism in Rio de Janeiro between the 1910s and the 1920s. Gherman traced the case of David José Perez, a Moroccan Jew whose family had initially settled in northern Brazil, joining forces with Alvaro Castilho, a non-Jewish sympathizer of early Zionism, to launch a Zionist newspaper, *A Columna*, published fully in Portuguese during 1916–1917. This was a collaborative effort that reflected the deeper sense of integration of that Moroccan Jew to Brazil as well as his expanded cooperation beyond the boundaries of well-defined Jewish ethnicity (Bejarano et al., 190–207).

Taken together, these studies call attention to the inner diversity of the Sephardic and Oriental diaspora networks across different continents in expressing themselves and writing in many languages and dialects. Even if, from a distance, observers are tempted to pull all that diversity into comprehensive categories of collective identity, the new studies reviewed here bring up a fine gradation and stress the dynamics of constant redefinition of collective identities in the Western Sephardic diaspora. They address Sephardic and pan-Sephardic identities in their interplay with each other, with pan-Jewish networks, with their diasporic connections, and with the pull of the different surrounding societies, and trace also the transformation of their conceptions of ancestral lands, imagined homelands, birthplaces, and actual citizenship. The complexity of the processes covered in these works further indicates that pursuing systematically such transformation of Sephardic and pan-Sephardic identities in wave after wave of transnational displacement remains a major challenge in this fascinating domain of Latin American research.

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