

Peoplehood Papers 32

September 2023

Latin American Jewish Peoplehood

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Editors: Shlomi Ravid, Smadar Bar Akiva and Analucia Lopezvoredó

Design and Production: Anna Hacco

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publications@jpeoplehood.org

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From the Editor

Shlomi Ravid

Peoplehood Papers 32 is dedicated to the exploration of Latin American Jewish Peoplehood. We set out to un-pack the unique features of Latino American identity as compared to other Jewish communities, to reflect on the historical and sociological factors that influenced its development, and to analyze current trends.

Some of the questions we asked our writers to address were:

- How is Latin-American Jewish Peoplehood different than other expressions of Jewish Peoplehood (American, European, Israeli, etc.)?
- How is the difference manifested in the approach to the Jewish collective ethos, to the notion of Kol Yisrael Areivim Ze Laze, to religion, to community, to Israel and to Zionism?
- How are the above manifested in the Jewish Latin American communal and organizational landscape?
- What key historical and sociological factors shaped and are shaping Latin American Jewish collective identity?
- In what manner did the culture of the host communities influence the Jewish identity? How?
- What are the current trends relating to identity are taking place and what can be said regarding the future?
- How has living outside of Latin America influenced the way Latin-Jews identify as Latino?
- How does identifying as a mixed or multicultural person impact the way Latin-Jews connect with the larger Jewish and Latino communities?

Our Call for Papers yielded a rich and diverse set of articles that we are happy to share here with you. Upon assembling them together we decided to present them in two parts: Part One that discusses in general **Latin American Jewish Peoplehood - Characteristics, Unique Features and Trends**, and Part Two that focuses on the unique **Double Diasporic Perspective** – of the U.S. based Jewish Latinos. The combination of the two perspectives enriches not only our understanding of Latin American Jewish Peoplehood but of Peoplehood in general.

Special thanks to my two co-editors and partners in this project: **Smadar Bar-Akiva** from **JCC Global**, and **Analucía Lopezrevoredo** from **Jewtina y Co.** and to the writers of the articles. I am confident that our work here will inspire a rich and important conversation.

Finally, on a personal note, I have been dreaming on dedicating an issue to Latin American Jewish Peoplehood for years. Both because of the unique features of the communities in Latin America that are not always recognized, but also because the diversity of the Peoplehood perspectives caused by the unique environments in which they were developed, is often overlooked. As we celebrate our diversity in this rich collection of essays we can begin envisioning dedicating future publications to Mizrahi Peoplehood, Russian Jewish Peoplehood, Ethiopian Peoplehood, Israeli Peoplehood and more.

Shana Tova

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Part One:
Latin American Jewish Peoplehood -
Characteristics, Unique Features
and Trends



Is There a Common Thread that Unites the Jews of Latin America?

The findings of the study “**Being Jewish in Latin America: Leadership, Belongings, Practices, Beliefs.**”

Daniel Fainstein

“Being Jewish in Latin America: Leadership, Belongings, Practices, Beliefs” is the name of a study about the perceptions of Jewish peoplehood in Latin America. This study was organized and conducted by the initiative and generous support of the Metta Saade Foundation, and its President, Marcos Metta, and a consortium of institutions that included the Universidad Hebraica from Mexico, the JDC Latin America, JCC Global, and the JDC – International Centre for Community Development. This study had two fundamental aims. The first was an exploration and analysis of the concept of Jewish peoplehood in Latin America based on the voices of Latin American Jews. The second was to present recommendations that could enrich the performance of the Jewish institutions in the region, to help them improve their practices and impact positively in the life of their members and attract those Jews who are outside the communal framework.

The concept of Jewish peoplehood refers to the collective dimension of the Jewish identity and group belonging within Judaism. It includes both Israeli Jews as well as those across the diaspora and allows for a range of religious, cultural, and political stances to be integrated into a common denominator. As a fluid concept, it includes the “old-traditional” and the contemporary; it is descriptive as well as normative, and it allows for both essentialist and constructivist readings. Judaism is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be described using isolated indicators. To account for the individual and collective dimensions of being Jewish, diverse instruments and variables are needed.

Our blended study incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, questionnaires, and focus groups, to offer a broader vision of the phenomenon of Jewish peoplehood and its diverse languages, conceptions, and perceptions in Latin America.

The surveys were done in September and November 2020 and the focus groups finalized in November that same year. In January 2021, we completed the analysis of the leadership survey and in August, the processing of the focus groups.

Based on the data gathered at the qualitative research that included 27 focus groups, we can conclude that there is an answer to the question of **what unites the different sectors and groups that compose the Jewish collectivity in Latin America**. We did not include in our study the perceptions of those who are completely unaffiliated from Jewish life.

The Jewish dimension in all its variants (religious, traditional, village) constitutes a fundamental component in the self-understanding of the participants. And although there is a fluidity of concepts and borders and complex and dynamic interactions, Jewishness is part of the discourse of the participants, in its multiple meanings and connotations. Topics that make up the semantic field of Jewish peoplehood sparked lively and even passionate debates among participants. These included personal and collective identity, religion, diverse circles of belonging, ethnicity, Israel, diaspora, collective memory, and relationships to internal diversity among Jews and with society at large, among others.

Belonging, identifying, choosing to be a Jew, participating, and manifesting as a Jew in Latin America is not something that is defined solely by traditional religious Jewish categories.

We can say that the analysis of the discourse of the participants, allowed us to see a significant, multifaceted, and broad conception of a Jewish people, as a valuable category to understand the beliefs, actions and belonging relationships of the participants.

Beyond the diversity, we can see **points in common** among all the participants, despite their differences in age, country of origin, religious orientation, social sector to which they belong:

- The centrality and comfort that the sense of belonging to an ancient and changing people, which is local and global simultaneously, provides to their personal identities
- The Identification with the memory of the Shoah and with the State of Israel
- The value of the family as the primary space for socialization and construction of fundamental intellectual, emotional, and social capital.
- The value of community life with its various institutions and structures.
- The value of the intellectual and spiritual legacy of Judaism.
- The value of unity and solidarity and respect for diversity.
- The value of Jewish education both in formal school settings and non-formal (*Tnuot*, Youth movements).

- Feeling comfortable with the integration of their Jewish identity and their national identities.
- The importance to understand the various national settings and their history and characteristics, to appreciate the place that Jews have and how they integrate into it.
- The desire for an identity that combines “tribal” belonging with a universal frame of reference.
- The conception of Judaism as a daily and significant praxis, which is revealed in doing.
- The importance of certain liminal rituals such as circumcision and *kever Israel* (Jewish burial).
- The need to generate transformations in the organizational structure and leadership of the communities, to adapt to the new challenges and changes.
- The need to preserve a sense of *Clall Israel*, of a shared people, that respects and recognizes diversity, without falling into sterile polarizations.
- The responsibility to preserve and transmit a relevant Judaism committed to the great challenges of the contemporary world.
- •A concern for certain developments and trends in their own communities and in the global Jewish people, such as intolerance, closure, polarization, fundamentalism, lack of renewal, among others.
- A concern over the absence of “invisible” or unaffiliated Jews, who do not integrate for a wide range of reasons.
- The need to strengthen the representativeness and relevance of the leaderships and the institutions.
- The “community” appears as a plural and complex framework, with broad geographical and temporal dimensions: the local, the regional, the national, the global, the remote foundational past and the uncertain future.

One could speak of a **sociocultural ecology of identity**, in which, in the words of one of the participants, “the Kipa and the ball” converge; “the family, the *shule* (day school) and the *Tnuá*”.

There is a rich and diverse Jewish discourse among the Jews of Latin America, which draws on multiple sources such as family traditions and practices; the formal and non-formal Jewish training received; classical Jewish texts; the personal, community and

professional experience of each one; access to the Jewish cultural and spiritual tradition; interaction with the local, national, regional and global context; the trips and contacts with Israel and the memory of the Shoa.

Attached is the link for those interesting to read the executive summary in English and the complete report in Spanish.

<https://leatidlatam.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ESTUDIO-SER-JUDIO-2022-compressed.pdf>

Professor Daniel Fainstein completed his academic training with honors at the universities of Buenos Aires, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where he received a doctorate in Political and Social Sciences summa cum Laude. He also completed his rabbinical studies at the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary "M. T. Meyer" and his specialization in Jewish education and philosophy in the "Jerusalem Fellows Program" of the Mandel Center. Dr. Fainstein has been Dean of the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary "M.T. Meyer", Director of the Central Council of Jewish Education of the Argentine Republic and visiting lecturer and advisor in academic and educational institutions in Latin America, Europe, Israel and the United States.

Among his recent publications we mention the book *Judaism, Human Rights and Spirituality*, editorial Shalom, San Pablo, 2013; *Jews and Judaism in history* (anthology) 2017, articles and chapters: "A pluralism based on honesty and mutual understanding: Rabbi Marshall Meyer and the Judeo-Christian dialogue" in *The Second Vatican Council and the Jews*, Ed. Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano, Buenos Aires, 2016 and "Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer as a transnational expatriate and innovative religious entrepreneur: from USA to Argentina and back", *Contemporary Jewry*, vol 41,4, 2022. His last publication is *Being Jewish in Latin America. Leadership, Belongings, Practices, Beliefs*. México and Buenos Aires, 2022.



Miles Apart and Close at Heart: The Unique Flavor of JCCs in Latin America

Smadar Bar-Akiva

On a Sunday morning, the vast parking lot of a suburban area in nearly any Latin American capital or major city gradually fills with cars. Multigenerational families, spanning from grandparents to parents, teens, children, and grandchildren, prepare to spend the day together. The destination is lush and verdant grounds adorned with sports facilities, cafeterias, pools, picnic spots, communal halls, and even vacation homes. A notable Magen David, menorah, or other Jewish-themed sculpture stands at the entrance, extending a warm welcome. The excitement of reuniting with longtime family members and friends, who have shared years of memories, is palpable. The day unfolds rapidly, as laughter and conversation fill the air, accompanied by a plethora of activities like barbecues, folk dancing, singing, spirited participation in Maccabi sports tournaments, and more. Amidst this, discussions encompass their week's happenings, current news headlines, Israeli political affairs, and the intricacies of their local Jewish community. As the sun sets, families disperse, returning to their urban homes, invigorated for the week ahead, and eagerly awaiting the prospect of reliving this cherished experience in the coming week. This vignette, while simple, encapsulates the heart of the Latin American JCC experience—a true embodiment of Jewish Peoplehood.

World-wide, **Jewish Community Centers** are the heart of the Jewish community. They are grass root organizations, dedicated to the common purpose of Jewish continuity through educational, cultural, social welfare and recreational activities. While their vision is similar, in each part of the world, they reflect their locale. **In Latin America, the 140 strong Jewish Community Centers (often called Maccabi Clubs or Hebraica) are multi-generational institutions steeped in Jewish values that focus on culture, sports, and social responsibility as building blocks of a strong Jewish and Zionist identity.**

The Latin American JCCs are greatly influenced by Latin American culture and values: They place a strong emphasis on family and community, ethnicity and folklore are at the core of their identity, they embrace Latin music, dance and literature and they revel

at holiday celebrations and festivals. At the same time, they are politically and socially conscious. They take care of the poor and needy, not only in their Jewish communities but also in their neighborhoods and cities. They are fully independent without any support from governments and therefore rely on their own financial resources and a huge number of volunteers. Depending on the country they live in, some are more ethnocentric while others are well integrated into the larger society. While miles apart, Israel holds a strong place in their hearts and is paramount to their Jewish identity.

Two examples come to mind when trying to feature the unique characteristics of Latin American JCCs. The first is the ***Aviv Dance Festival*** of the CDI JCC in Mexico City. The second is the role that ***Hebraica JCC*** in Caracas plays in the tormented country of Venezuela.

The ***Carlos Halpert Aviv Dance Festival***, celebrating in 2024 fifty years of existence, is an embodiment of Jewish Peoplehood. At the beginning of each year, a Jewish theme is chosen and publicized to all the organizations in the Jewish community. In 2023, the theme was Hebrew words (*milim*), and all the Jewish schools, synagogues and the JCC took part. Each organization commissioned original choreography and prepared their dance troupes for months. This is what happens every year.

The weeklong Festival is a competition among all the dance troupes starting from younger children to teenagers, young adults, and adults. It reaches out to all denominations. In a community divided by Jewish ethnicity (country of origin) such as Ashkenazi, Syrian Jews from Aleppo, Syrian Jews from Damascus, Sephardi Jews, etc., the JCC and the Festival are an opportunity to come together in unity. In addition, dance troupes from the continent and the world are invited as well. Some can attend in person while others are featured online at a special International night. During the week, community wide programs take place with a grand state-of-the-art finale, with thousands of people cheering and celebrating Israeli folk dancing, original modern dance choreography on Jewish themes and singing together the *Hatikvah*.

Moving south to Venezuela; a country that once boasted a community of 20,000 Jews which dwindled down during the past fifteen years to a mere few thousand. A country that suffers from hyperinflation, a severe economic downturn, shortage of food, medicine and other essential goods, high rates of crime and a political turmoil which makes every day life perilous.

In this reality, ***Hebraica Caracas***, the JCC of Venezuela, situated in a campus that hosts a Jewish preschool, primary school, and high school, has become a haven. The schools provide formal general and Jewish education while the JCC continues through the

afternoon and evening with a wide array of activities such as sports, music, dance, a Maccabi Tzair Youth Movement, and leadership training. Parents drop their children in the morning and pick them up in the evening, knowing that they are safe and well taken care of. That close knit community also looks after the families that have suffered economic hardships and provides them with subsidies and additional material and social assistance. Within the confines of the campus walls, Judaism continues to thrive, despite the hardships. Essentially, Hebraica Caracas best exemplifies the notion of Jewish responsibility- *Kol Israel Arevim*.

One wonders how the vivid picture that I portrayed above will weather with time. The recently published seminal research project **Jewish Peoplehood Latino America** (featured in this publication of which JCC Global was an initiator and partner¹) points out that Latin American Jewish communities are not immune to future challenges: “The greatest threat identified was “political and economic instability in my country,” according to 75% of respondents. This was followed by “lack of economic sustainability to provide key community services” (68%), “lack of engagement in community affairs or activities” (68%), “alienation of Jews from Jewish community life” (66%) and “scant participation of women and youth in community leadership” (65%). The list reveals that Jewish lay leaders and community professionals in Latin America are as concerned about external factors as they are about internal ones... It is noteworthy that although issues perceived as serious threats by Jews in other places of the world like “antisemitism, terrorism, and violence against Jews” are not absent in Latin America, they simply do not top the ranking.

The JCCs in Latin America are not oblivious to these threats. While they preserve their long-time traditions, they constantly look for new and innovative ways to re-imagine their future. From programs that empower young adults, to expanding social services and helping children with disabilities, to elevating the role of women and opening doors to the LGBTQ community.

This is when the JCC Global movement comes into the fold. In today’s world, there is a recognition that a network centric approach can help achieve greater impact and solve problems. In an era of constant change, perpetual crisis, and limited resources, the JCC Global network assembles novel and flexible combinations of human talent that are difficult to pull together in a single organization. In this manner, the platform that JCC Global provides enables the senior leaders to connect regionally and globally with like

1 Fainstein D., Dimenstein M. *Being Jewish in Latin America: Leadership, Belongings, Practices and Belief- The Jewish Peoplehood Latino America Project Research Report*, Mexico City, Universidad Hebraica, 2022- a co project of the Saade Matte Foundation, JCC Global, JCD and Universidad Hebraica

minded peers. It offers the creation of long term meaningful global partnerships with other JCCs and opportunities for capacity building and training.

Let us hope that when we fast forward to 2033, cars will be solar, singers will perform via hologram, meat will be lab grown, but the sense of Jewish Peoplehood will continue to permeate the JCCs in Latin America.

Smadar Bar-Akiva is the Executive Director of JCC Global, a network that represents more than 1000 Jewish Community Centers worldwide and is a preeminent organization in Jewish Peoplehood education. In this capacity, she initiates, designs, and implements global Jewish leadership programs, global partnerships, and the facilitation of the professional and volunteer network of JCCs the world over.



Jewish Peoplehood and Education

Ethel Barylka

I find immense value in the term "peoplehood" as it liberates us from the overused and worn-out concept of 'identity' that has been subjected to wear and tear over generations. Liberating ourselves from shaping, molding, and fortifying Jewish education and identity as if they were malleable substances is truly a blessing.

The latest studies from Latin America all agree on the importance of education and the need to invest in it. "The strengthening of Jewish education is a priority for Jewish leaders in the continent," states the Latin American Survey of Jewish Community Leaders and Professionals¹.

I believe that part of this strengthening includes looking towards a horizon, allowing for comprehensive strategic planning that reaches beyond immediate resource allocation for course preparation, training initiatives, material development, and importing professionals.

These initiatives are important, but they are technical and methodological, and excessive focus on them often permanently postpones discussion of the core challenges – those of an ideological nature, of vision. It is easier to talk about technologies and methodologies, or take refuge in them. For example, it is easier to talk about the lack of Hebrew-language teaching hours than to seriously rethink the objectives of teaching Hebrew, and it is much easier to open a Jewish school to non-Jewish students in order to save costs, than to design a different type of educational model.

Let us be clear. Conversing about Jewish education does not automatically entail conversations centered solely on Jewish schools. These two realms, though intertwined, are distinct. Predominantly, the efforts and resources poured into Jewish comprehensive schools throughout the continent (excluding the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox sphere) are predominantly channeled towards achieving an

¹ See: *Encuesta Latinoamericana de Dirigentes y Profesionales Comunitarios Judíos en "Jewish Peoplehood Latam" Reporte de la investigación: "Ser judíola en Latinoamérica"*.

academic prowess that positions young Jews competitively within the global market, rather than prioritizing the profound journey of Jewish education. This inclination is not only understandable but can even be perceived as a manifestation of our cultural values: the aspiration for excellence and success.

The stark question looms: Why does the business realm gravitate towards a global outlook, while within the Jewish sphere, communities and educational institutions persist in framing their perspectives within the confines of the local, the specific, the traditional, and even the ethno-folkloric? Is this approach truly commendable?

Enter the concept of "peoplehood," or its antecedent form, "Judaism as civilization." This paradigm has the potential to shatter the constraints of reductionist thinking that often pigeonholes Jewish identity into a singular lens – whether ethnic, national, religious, or cultural. Civilization, as an encompassing construct, transcends these categories, incorporating and transcending their boundaries

The pervasive fracture within the discourse on identity, still prevailing across various sectors (including educators) within the continent, critically impedes the pursuit of a broader, deeper, and fundamentally alive connection with Judaism. To be part of a people is exactly that: to be part of it and to understand that there are other parts. Each of them is necessary for the configuration of the totality. To stop thinking that there is an ideal Jew, but in fact many real Jews, here and now. **Instead of typesetting and separating, perhaps it is appropriate, paraphrasing Bauman, to speak of "liquid Judaism" and to understand Jewish identity not as a sealed compartment but as a permanent one in change and transformation throughout individuals' lives. Against the backdrop of resistant traditional communal leadership, we are already witnessing the emergence of a liquid Jewish identity that defies binary constraints.**

To adopt the medium-term strategic view, we must unmask the farce of 'education for continuity' and talk about Jewish life (in fact and not in potential), lived by adults, young people, and children. We must steer clear of nostalgia (the past was not always better) and the consumption of Judaism in communal institutions. Instead, we must leave our communitarian shells and think in terms of people, amplitude, cooperation, and knowledge of the Jews in other latitudes. Globalizing the Jewish outlook in terms of Latin American Judaism means, on the one hand, recognizing our own Latin American Jewish contribution to the Jewish world as valuable and original, giving it proper due, sharing it, and communicating it. But this must be accompanied by the active search for, exploration, and adoption of developments of other communities and countries.

Globalization in and of itself is not enough. It is precisely in this global world that the need for community is becoming increasingly clear – not for institutionalized community, the Kehilah, or for the temples and synagogues, but for the community in its original sense of human encounter and relation. Here we encounter the longing to be, to belong and to transcend. This real human encounter brings us to the Buberian "You-self", to Bauman's "ethical community", and in short, to the basic idea of responsibility and human dignity. A longing for the search for meaning, in Frankl's terms. A Judaism that is life, that goes beyond gestures and fills our existence with meaning. Joining Levinas' cry "To live dangerously for twenty centuries as Jews or as Marranos, only to end up attending pretty ceremonies!"², or in ritual gestures.

We must transition from viewing Judaism as a mere body of knowledge, an academic subject, or an external entity detached from ourselves. Instead of skirting around the edges of Judaism, we should strive to master the language of Jewish expression, even if it requires effort. It's through this language that we can forge connections with the ongoing Jewish discourse, engaging with fellow Jews from diverse corners of the globe, regardless of their backgrounds.

Speaking Jewish is no simple task. Just like any language, it demands practice, particularly for those for whom it's a secondary tongue. Complicating matters is the existence of myriad Jewish languages. Some may be adept at the language of Torah and its codes, yet unfamiliar with the contemporary lexicon of Israeli authors. Others might excel in Talmudic scholarship but remain unfamiliar with the language of Jewish philosophy. Proficiency in Jewish history doesn't necessarily translate to fluency in the language of Halacha or the vocabulary of Jewish theology. There's a unique language for Jewish history and another for modern Jewish literature. A lexicon for tikkun olam exists alongside expressions in Jewish film, music, and dance. **What we cannot afford, in my perspective, is to be devoid of any Jewish language or confined to a vocabulary of mere nostalgia, cuisine, and traditions. While these facets are significant, they fall short as languages that encapsulate life, transcendence, and meaning.**

In the broad sense, education is the central tool to integrate individuals into the people.

The education of our era requires a heightened infusion of elements and avenues for engaging with the "other," for delving into the profound significance of existence, and for discovering potential responses rooted in our own texts and rich heritage. We urgently need tangible domains that foster both learning and life

2 Levinas. E. "How is Judaism Possible?" in *Difficult Freedom*, pg. 248. The Johns Hopkins University Press • Baltimore. 1990.

experiences, ones that contemplate the uncharted spiritual landscape that unfolds before us in this century. The reservoir of knowledge is readily accessible, awaiting our grasp. It's not just about equipping individuals with tools; the compass points, the essence, and the ethical obligations transcend mere words on pages or even within the confines of technology like GPT.

Institutionalized communities must take decisive action, carving out room and establishing "neutral meeting grounds," while furnishing platforms that empower individuals and collectives striving to engage with Judaism. This support should extend not only to those within the fold but also to those unaffiliated and unable to shoulder the financial burden. The essence of community-building must transcend mere physical structures, enveloping diverse expressions and accommodating a rich spectrum of perspectives. The crucible of Latin American ideological diversity faces a critical test in the discourse surrounding Judaism.

To be a Jew, I educate myself as a Jew. I do not school, I educate. I educate myself. It is the function of adults to rethink and live their own Jewish life. The rest will come on its own.

Ethel Barylka, an educator and author in Jewish education, resides in Israel. She holds a Master's degree from the Institute of Contemporary Judaism and lectures at HUJI's Melton Center for Jewish Education and the Hertzog Academic Center. She recently consulted for Jewish Colleges in Prague and Rome, and now contributes to the UnitEd Diaspora Ministry's team, focusing on Mexico. Ethel also founded and directs www.muJerryJudaismo.com.



Strengthening Jewish Peoplehood for Latino Jews Through Storytelling

Alexandra Corwin

Jewish peoplehood, a term with many layered definitions, is at its essence a relationship in viewing other Jews as part of an extended family. A family we share a collective history, identity, and spiritual destiny with. Jewish peoplehood at its best can engender belonging, purpose, and connection amongst Jews. It can bring about a sense of psychological and spiritual intimacy with ostensible strangers.

Collective Jewish peoplehood is made up of individuals who have constructed their own sense of Jewish identity. I argue that a lack of understanding of the racial and ethnic diversity of Jewish peoplehood negatively impacts both individual and collective Jewish identity development for Latino Jews. And that this can be at least partially inoculated through intentional storytelling and the weaving in of Latino identity within Jewish peoplehood.

I'll reflect on my own experiences growing up and how a lack of understanding of the racial and ethnic diversity of Jewish peoplehood amongst peers negatively contributed to a sense of belonging. I'll also illuminate my own journey as a young adult in creating frameworks that weaved together a Latina and Jewish identity, that not only complemented a deeper sense of Jewish peoplehood, but also personal Jewish identity development.

Although I grew up with a strong sense and understanding of what Jewish peoplehood meant to me, my family, and my community, there were moments when I felt farthest from belonging within Jewish peoplehood and moments that left me trying to make sense of my own personal Jewish identity. Often these moments overlapped with Jewish peers struggling to conceptualize the existence and origin of how a Latino person can be Jewish.

As a teenager, I remember a friend from Jewish youth group remarking to other friends who asked about my identity that I was 50% Jewish and 50% Latino. Yes, this is partially true, I remember thinking. I'm 50% Ashkenazi Jewish and

50% Peruvian, in terms of ethnicity. But in terms of my Jewishness in a religious sense and connection to Jewish peoplehood, I am 100%. This assertion that lacked nuance of who I was as a Jew, in a Jewish space, amongst Jewish peers, chipped away at a sense of belonging. When I shared this thinking with my peers, there was an immediate and sincere apology. As they too, were enculturated with the importance of Jewish peoplehood and aghast with the thought they personally contributed to making a Jewish peer feel outside the Jewish community. A sign of hope for me that changes in thinking and actions can come from dialogue rooted in relationships.

Comments in the series of compartmentalizing Jewish and Latino identity continued throughout my life. It caused me to think deeply about the negative impact when individuals feel as if their identities are sliced up within themselves without any cohesion or conversation with how their identities complement each other.

As I grew older and became more involved in Jewish professional life, it became important to me to use storytelling to showcase how my Latina and Jewish identities complement one another, the racial and ethnic diversity of Jewish peoplehood, and the peace of how these identities can co-exist in one person.

In activist speeches against unjust immigration practices that brought together the Jewish community, I used the speakerphone to share the similarities of immigration stories between the Ashkenazi and Peruvian sides of families. I drew direct comparisons and related to how many struggles of injustice in the world are connected. As well as the power of using our collective Jewish memory and history to bridge build, while tapping into empathy and action.

I went on podcasts sharing that I'm 100% Latina and 100% Jewish at the same time. I walked listeners through how my cultural and religious identities weaved in throughout my day. Whether by lighting a Havdalah candle to end Shabbat and immediately after cozying up on the couch to catch up on a Peruvian telenovela. Or by speaking to my Abuelita in Spanish in the morning and then organizing Yiddish classes in the evening.

The purpose of outwardly sharing examples of how being Latina and Jewish can be blended together and be made tangible through direct storytelling, encourages Jews who are not Latino to create new frameworks that move away from limited understandings of who is a Jew. But also serves to support other Latino Jews in taking ownership over their stories, identities, and to encourage them to think of their identities as blended and not compartmentalized.

I believe the work of this blending and intentional storytelling of what it means to be a Latino and a Jew is integral not only for Jewish Latinos to develop positive Jewish identity, but also ameliorate a lack of connection and belonging within Jewish peoplehood. I'm left confident with this hypothesis since over the years many Latino Jews have reached out to me sharing that this storytelling on identity has contributed to them feeling less broken in understanding their identities as compartmentalized. And instead left them feeling whole and confident in their multi-faceted Jewish identities and sense of Jewish belonging. I'm hopeful and excited for the various media in the coming years from Jewish Latinos that tell their respective blended stories, as it will positively contribute to strengthening Jewish peoplehood.

Alexandra Corwin (she/her) has a Bachelor's in Women's and Gender Studies and African Black Diaspora Studies from DePaul University. She has a Master's in Education from Harvard University. Alexandra has served in roles as nonprofit executive director, teacher, community organizer, leadership coach, and diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant. She enjoys ideating at the intersection of leadership, equity, and education.



How is Latin-American Jewish Peoplehood Different from Other Expressions of Jewish Peoplehood?

Andy Faur

The concept of Jewish Peoplehood, broad and flexible, adapts to different Jewish realities and forms of expression, both geographical and cultural. In Latin America it is a relatively new concept in sociological and anthropological jargon, to study the particular characteristics of Jews and Jewish communities in the area. To define these national and local particularities I will use, and try to spread, the more latinized term of "Pueblitud".

For nearly a century now, since Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan introduced the term "**Peoplehood**," this concept has served as a cornerstone for scholars and researchers in Judaism. It offers a dynamic platform for analyzing and defining the socio-historical uniqueness of the Jewish people. What sets **Peoplehood** apart is its remarkable adaptability across various contexts, extending beyond its original American conception.

Exploring the realm of **Peoplehood**, I will delve into the intricate nuances of "Latin American Peoplehood." To articulate this concept more vividly, I draw inspiration from my esteemed mentor and collaborator, Dr. Daniel Fainstein, who coined the term "**Pueblitud**." This term encapsulates the unique manner in which Latin American Jews express their amalgamation of ethnic, cultural, national, and religious identities, setting them apart from identity manifestations found in other global regions and communities.

In this comprehensive context, the concept of **Peoplehood** emerges as the paramount descriptor to encapsulate the distinctive ethno-cultural essence of the Jewish community. It encapsulates the profound and unparalleled sense of belonging, unwavering continuity, and resolute dedication that Jewish individuals hold towards the collective destiny of their people.

Encompassing a broad perspective, although it oversimplifies the intricate array of differences, it is possible to assert that Latin American Jews, while acknowledging their diversity, share a common ethnic identity that distinctly sets them apart. This identity is rooted in cultural richness, linguistic heritage, entrenched customs, collective unity, well-structured institutions, and a fervent embrace of Zionism—marked by a profound connection to the State of Israel. Remarkably, this emphasis on cultural and communal facets outweighs the primacy of religious or synagogue-related attributes.

Throughout history, the religious dimension, whether in ritual or ceremony, has held limited significance within the lives of subcontinental Jews. This unique aspect becomes evident upon observing their prolonged inclination, at least until the close of the 20th century, toward affiliating with socio-sporting clubs, cultural collectives, Zionist movements, and communal organizations—these far surpass their ties to religious establishments. **The distinct sociological and anthropological classification of Latin American Jewish communities is unequivocally intertwined through the axis of ethnicity, community, culture, and people.**

Undoubtedly, the diverse manifestations of this **Peoplehood** across global regions and communities are intricately tied to their historical roots and underpinnings. Equally influential are the social, political, economic, religious, and cultural contexts in which these manifestations took shape and evolved.

In a broader context, if we dare to make some generalizations, it becomes evident that the focus of **Peoplehood** varies across significant centers of Judaism worldwide. North America predominantly revolves around religious identification, Europe centers on the social-cultural facet, while Israel stands firmly as a national entity. Latin America, in contrast, presents an exceptional sociological amalgamation that incorporates all of these aspects.

The Latin American Jewish Peoplehood, or "**Pueblitud**," stands apart distinctively and contrasts significantly with the narratives of other diasporic communities. Embracing the notion that Jewish communities often mirror the behavioral norms and attitudes of their broader societies, those of Latin America emerge with a unique tripartite composition, marking them unmistakably divergent.

Intriguingly, these communities mirror and embrace the social and cultural traits of their dominant host societies, while simultaneously preserving and adapting ancestral customs from their countries of origin, mainly Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Adding to this intricate dynamic is the concept of "Pan-Latin American Judaism," which intertwines local nuances with shared concerns like combating anti-Semitism, grappling

with assimilation and interfaith marriages, endorsing Zionism, and fostering a resolute affinity with Israel. Moreover, this amalgam encompasses the challenges posed by migration, the disconnect of younger generations from community involvement, and the comparatively low institutional engagement – all beneath the umbrella of the socio-cultural tapestry that defines them.

Notably, historical trends in community structure, ideological affiliation, and identity dynamics underwent significant shifts from the 1970s to 1980s. This period marked the rise of the Conservative Movement, particularly prevalent in Southern Cone countries and Brazil, leading to a notable spike in institutional adherence, albeit often from a secular or traditionalist audience. Similarly, the late 20th century witnessed the growth of ultra-Orthodox movements and communities in nations like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico.

Since the inception of the **Peoplehood** concept into sociological discourse, the Jewish people have navigated through monumental and unforeseen events – the Holocaust, the establishment of Israel, massive migration like the Aliyah from the former USSR – events that have etched a unique historical imprint, far beyond the initial creator's imagination. Amidst these shifts, various communities are transitioning from a phase that embraced modern identity paradigms to an enigmatic and formative era often dubbed as "post-Judaism."

Hence, in alignment with global Jewish communities, those of Latin America are undergoing profound metamorphoses at astonishing speeds, rendering predictions about their future trajectories a daunting task. Observing the evolution of the concept of **Peoplehood** in the coming years or decades will serve as a fascinating litmus test for its relevance as a sociological category, or whether new frameworks must be devised to encapsulate the essence of future Jewish identity.

Andy Faur is a sociologist, educator and lecturer. He has a degree in sociology from the U.B.A. (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina), an M.A. in contemporary Judaism from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Israel) and is currently doing his Doctorate in Education at the U.T.E.L. (Mexico). His areas of interest are Judaism as a culture, Jewish identity, non-formal education and the history of the Jewish people. He works and researches the influence of non-formal education on the meaningful learning of young people.

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Learning from Latino Jews: Preconceptions, Authenticity, and Paradox

Maia Ferdman

“You don’t look Latina. I thought you were White.”

“There are Jews in Latin America?”

“Do you at least have an Argentinian passport?”

“You shouldn’t care so much about the World Cup, you’re American.”

“Ashkenazi Jews are from Europe, so you can’t really be Latina.”

“But how do you speak such good Spanish if you were born in the US?”

Challenging Preconceptions

There is nothing inherently wrong with these questions and comments – all of which I have received multiple times from people of all ages and backgrounds. For the most part, they are curious, albeit misguided, questions born of built-in expectations and assumptions about race, nationality, religion, language, and culture. As an Ashkenazi Jew born in San Diego to Argentinian immigrant parents, I often face at best, confusion about, and at worst, denial of, my Latina Jewish identity.

But as much as they may come from an innocent place, these rigid assumptions (e.g., that Latinos are of one particular race, that ethnic identity is the same as national citizenship, that Latin America is purely Catholic or Christian, etc.) can be exhausting and alienating. Within each comment is an implication that I have somehow subverted an expectation: Whether by virtue of my ancestry, my bilingualism, my physical characteristics, my upbringing, my cultural cues, or some other factor, I have challenged a preconceived notion about “what it means to be” Jewish, Latina, or American. This constant sense of subversion is one reason why Argentine singer Facundo Cabral’s famous lyric, “*no soy de aquí, ni soy de allá*” (or “I’m not from here, nor am I from there”), rings true not just for me, but for so many Latino Jews.

As our world globalizes, and as the global Jewish community diversifies, Cabral’s lyric seems to resonate with more people. In other words, this experience – of existing outside

rigid ideas about identity, race, and religion – is becoming more common. To that end, **we can learn so much – particularly about building a strong sense of self and of community – from Latino Jewish experiences of challenging preconceptions, embodying multiplicity and complexity, searching for authenticity, and straddling paradox.**

Embodying Multiplicity

I developed a strong sense of individual Latina Jewish identity from an early age. My Ashkenazi Jewish parents immigrated from Buenos Aires to the United States at different ages – my father as a child (he later grew up in Puerto Rico), and my mother as an adult. I grew up in a home in San Diego that imbued me with a strong association with and affinity for Argentinianess and “Latinidad.” I learned to connote Jewish holiday gatherings with loud Spanish conversations, bar and bat mitzvahs with salsa and bachata music, and my Jewish heritage with tango music and Argentinian *asados* (barbecues). Inside our home, these associations were never in question – rather, they were intrinsic, part and parcel of how I and my two brothers grew up. But outside our home, I often found myself in conversation with non-Latino Jews (and non-Jewish Latinos) with different histories and heritage who felt at once very familiar and very foreign to me. They had both different and shared associations, different and shared values, different and shared ways of being and identifying. As a result, some of our shared spaces fostered a sense of belonging, while others fostered an alienating sense of otherness.

Indeed, Latino Jews often exist within an often-simultaneous state of dual belonging and non-belonging, of simultaneous similarity and difference. As a group, we are incredibly diverse, and we very rarely share our exact combination of cultural, racial, linguistic identities with others. Some of us have Jewish ancestors who immigrated to Latin America from Poland or Morocco or Spain, some recently and some a few generations (or even hundreds of years) ago. Some of us are the products of interfaith marriages between Jews and non-Jewish Latinos. Some of us converted to Judaism. Some of us speak only Spanish, some of us only English or another language. Some of us are perfectly bilingual, some of us struggle with a second or third language. Some of us hold multiple passports, some none. Some of us are religiously observant, some are not.

And yet, this lack of a totally shared heritage does not diminish my own strong sense of self, nor does it diminish Latino Jews’ part of a whole, cohesive community. Just as Latino Jews understand what it means to exist outside of a rigid and timeworn notion of identity, so too do we understand that the particular ways we each relate to our identities (our family histories, our foods or music or language, our practices or observance, etc.) is in constant conversation with a communal experience of Judaism.

Searching for Authenticity

Throughout the years, I have dug deeper into Jewish global diversity in general – and my family history in particular – in a personal search for authenticity. I started conversations about “mixed Jewish identity” in college. I worked across Europe and in Los Angeles on programming that explored and celebrated Jewish diversity and inclusion. I studied the Jewish experience in Argentina during my Master’s program in Latin American Studies, and found genuine comfort in placing my family’s experience within a larger arc of Jewish history.

I have now lived in Buenos Aires for about a year, in part to continue and deepen this same journey of discovery and self-definition. On the one hand, I have found profound comfort in exploring my family’s deep historical roots here: I found my great-great-great grandmother’s tombstone, among many other documents with family information and photos, in a Jewish museum in a small village in the Argentine countryside where thousands of Jews immigrated at the turn of the 20th century. I visited the Jewish community my paternal great-grandparents helped establish in the northern Argentine province of Tucuman, as well as the rural village where my maternal grandmother was born. I have connected with dozens of extended relatives, visited numerous synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, and conducted research in Jewish archives. Each of these experiences has made me feel more grounded in my own history and my strong affinity for the Argentinian people and culture.

Living in Argentina has also emphasized the ways in which I am both similar to, very different from, Argentinians. The culture, food, accent, and way people relate to each other is deeply familiar to me on many levels. I share deep roots with Jewish community here, as well. And yet, as much as I feel at home here, my education, friendships, political affiliations, values, career, and outlook, are born of a lifetime in the United States. My own Jewish upbringing was very different than people living in Argentina today. I am at once both of – and not of – this place. I am both of – and not of – these people.

Straddling Paradox

Latino Jews, especially those in the United States, are the product of multiple national, linguistic, or cultural “border crossings.” We embody the paradoxical fact that we can be both of a place, and not of a place, belonging to and not belonging to multiple overlapping peoples. Indeed, my paradoxical discoveries in Argentina and beyond do not diminish my sense of Latina Jewish identity. On the contrary, accepting that I embody these paradoxes makes me more whole. Further, accepting that I embody paradox makes me a more resilient community-builder: I am more likely to accept, understand, and connect with others who embody paradox.

What would it look like to build more opportunities for Jews and Latinos of all backgrounds to explore their own histories? To deconstruct and better understand the pillars of their identities? To challenge assumptions that are imposed onto them? What would it look like to build communities that allow Jews, Latinos, and Latino Jews to be wholly themselves, even and especially when that implies distinctiveness and paradox? **The more we learn from Latino Jewish experiences like mine, the more we can move from associating with Facundo Cabral's yearning lyric, and instead say unapologetically: we are from here, and from there.**

Maia Ferdman (she/her) is the founder and principal of [Bridges Intergroup Relations Consulting](#), which supports organizations and communities to build vibrant spaces of belonging – spaces celebrating our complex identities, proactively exploring our differences, and building resilient relationships between groups. Through this work Maia has developed numerous interfaith programs, trained government and nonprofit groups in cultural competency, and facilitated conversations across differences about policing, homelessness, Israel-Palestine, and more.



Latin-Jewish Duality as Reflected through La Malinche, Survivor and Cultural Bridge

Laura Hartmann-Villalta

On the Plaza de Santo Domingo in Mexico City, a faded red building overlooks the gray square. Each building of the plaza holds special significance to the history of Mexico from the days of colonial New Spain: the church of Santo Domingo, once a Dominican monastery); a Tuscan colonnade evoking the Old World, lined since colonial times with scribes willing to help the illiterate with letter-writing and bureaucratic paperwork; a fountain statue of a heroine of the Mexican War of Independence, Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, sitting on the edge of her seat; and at 97 República de Cuba, the faded red building, the former home of la Malinche.

La Malinche's is a sad tale of survival. She was born around 1500 to an aristocratic Aztec family who spoke Nahuatl. As a girl, she was sold or kidnapped into slavery, joining a group of Mayan indigenous people. With them, she learned Yucatec Maya and Chontal Maya. When the Mayas lost to Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés at Potonchán, they presented the conquistadores with gifts and enslaved women, including la Malinche. Once her language skills were discovered, Cortés claimed her as interpreter and she became his confidante and consort.

By now, she had several names: Malintzin (her Nahuatl name and honorific; also called Malinalli); doña Marina (her Spanish, Catholic name with the aristocratic "doña"); and later, la Malinche, a name evolved from Nahuatl. On the way to Tenochtitlan in 1519, it is said that la Malinche learned that the Cholulans were plotting with Moctezuma and the Aztecs against the Spaniards. La Malinche warned Cortés and the conquistadores preemptively struck the Cholulans, massacring their nobility and setting the city on fire. This perceived betrayal and its consequences earned la Malinche lasting notoriety in Mexican cultural history: in Mexican slang, "malinche" is synonymous with deceit and betrayal and "malinchista" means someone who is disloyal to their country.

This figure who bridges seemingly dissimilar cultures, and is misunderstood for centuries, reminds me of the Latinx Jew. Also located on Plaza de Santo Domingo, on the diagonal from la Malinche's red estate and across the street from the church, is a stone building

with giant wooden doors. The stone and red brick of the building dominates the intersection; crowning its entrance is a crest of a cross being planted on a globe by a disembodied hand. This building served as the headquarters for the Holy Inquisition in New Spain. As I stood on this plaza, I thought of how Judaism – crypto-Jews, conversos, converted Jews fleeing persecution from Spain and Portugal – was always already present in New Spain, so much so that the mere suspicion of their presence led to the construction of this magnificent building of torture as one of the first buildings in the new colonial capital. Today it is part of a medical school; Jewish Mexicans sit in lecture theaters learning anatomy in the same rooms where their ancestors were persecuted.

I often think of how la Malinche's story could be read Jewishly, how the sages would have discussed Malintzin in the midrash. The Torah provides us with illuminating examples of women making difficult decisions that could, from one vantage point, look like betrayal. I think, for example, of Moses's mother, Jochebed, putting her son in a basket and floating it away on the Nile, pushing down the motherly instinct to keep him and instead, hoping he survives. I think, in the same story, of Pharaoh's daughter, renamed Bithiah, who pulls Moses from the water, defying her father's decree and in turn, inadvertently starting events that lead to the suffering of her own people – certainly a painful betrayal – and the redemption of the Israelites. I think of Miriam, who never told Moses that she was his sister, hiding truth from him so he could grow into adulthood. Lastly, I think of Esther, who had little control over the circumstances of her life, but still managed to save her people and the king, and who has been by turns celebrated as a Jewish heroine and criticized for marrying outside of Jewish community and not observing kashrut. We have learned la Malinche's story as if Haman had told Esther's story.

More broadly, la Malinche's tale encourages me to do what the Torah demands of us: looking again at established narratives and finding the meaning for ourselves. La Malinche's many names, for example, are reminiscent of contemporary Jews with a secular name and a Hebrew name; or of the journey of reinvention many Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews made to evade persecution, renaming themselves along the way. Even Jacob, one of our patriarchs, was given the new name of Israel.

It is not so unusual in Jewish history for events and people to be given new consideration with the changing times or to revisit controversial figures. From 132-136 CE, for example, Simeon or Shimon Ben Koziba's charisma and self-declaration as "head of state" eventually persuaded the Jews of Judea to rebel for a third time against the Romans. He changed his name to Bar Kokhba, which means "son of a star," linking him to the

Torah's prediction for a messiah. The results of his revolt were disastrous, with the Jewish people banned from Jerusalem, to say nothing of the desolation endured in Judea. The Jews were almost wiped out. For centuries, we remembered Bar Kokhba in the Talmud by "Ben-Kusiba;" while close to his name, the sages mean for this to translate as "son of lies," for Bar Kokhba's false messiah-hood.

And yet, despite all this, because he declared himself monarch in Judea against the Romans, some Zionists of the early twentieth century adopted Bar Kokhba's revolt as a symbol of Jewish nationalism, with even David Ben-Gurion's name inspired by one of Bar Kokhba's generals.

David Green to David Ben-Gurion; Jacob to Israel; Pharoah's daughter to Bithiah; Malintzin to Doña Marina to la Malinche: what I trace in these stories is the messiness of nation- and people-building, a striving to honor origins while recognizing the need for change in changing circumstances. This boundary crossing and hybridity is integral to the Latinx-Jew's experience of being in the world. Our inheritance is our duality; our sense of belonging is derived from a two-ness, from a both/and, that is always rich, often contradictory, and difficult to parse.

In the late twentieth century into the early aughts, Latinx feminists recovered la Malinche, giving her a voice and imagining her through the lens of feminist agency. A detail that is often ignored in the traditional telling of la Malinche's story is that she was sold into slavery by her own people; she was not the first to betray. After centuries of silencing by critics who perceived her as another Eve, la Malinche is now viewed with the complexity and generosity that was always her due. To many, she is the mother of mestizaje, of the blended Spanish and Indigenous nation that is contemporary Mexico. After so long being seen villainously, la Malinche is being portrayed and remembered – at least by some audiences – as a type of archetypal bridge figure, much like Pocahontas or Sacagawea in the United States.

When I think of Latin-Jewish peoplehood, I think of a people who did what was necessary to survive, proving themselves valuable to those in power through their wit and skills, like la Malinche. Latinx-Jews like me carry both identities – we are Latinx and we are Jewish – and at times we find ourselves at odds or outsiders in both communities, like la Malinche. Although she is not a Jewish matriarch, as a Jewish woman of Latin American heritage, la Malinche gives me model of survival, adaptability, and yes, power. She shows me that the ability to move between worlds and to be of two cultures is a beautiful gift, and I embrace it.

Laura Hartmann-Villalta, Ph.D. (she/her) is a feminist, Jewish-Latina scholar whose research lies at the intersection between women's lives, visual culture, human rights, and war. She is currently revising a book manuscript entitled *She, Too, Went to Spain: Women Witnessing the Spanish Civil War in Photography and Writing*. While based in Washington, DC., Hartmann-Villalta teaches at Johns Hopkins University. An activist and a writer, she cares deeply about changing the narrative of established history through feminist biography -- all driven by Jewish values and her Latinx heritage.



Survival of the Fluidist

Lillian Horin

It is a known biological principle that diversity is crucial to the long-term success of a population. Let us imagine a hypothetical species, *Defensor rubricolor*, that is typically a brilliant red. With this color, they can easily evade their natural predator, who cannot see in red. It may seem like an optimal survival strategy to have every member of the species be red. However, once a predator capable of seeing red arrives, the species will quickly go extinct. Nature addresses this challenge by employing biodiversity as a strategy. To survive, the members of *Defensor rubricolor* possess a cascade of colors -- vibrant oranges and different shades alongside the usual bright red -- such that the population is ready to adapt when circumstances change.

This principle also applies to humans. People have developed diverse traits to survive many environments and have banded together as a collective to put all these traits to use. Paradoxically, assimilation and rigidity are intertwined with the human survival instincts, putting us at risk. **In challenging times, we should use biological principles to guide us by acknowledging that differences make us a formidable collective.** A *fluid* community, one that unites by embracing differences, is one that both survives and thrives long-term.

History of fluidity in Jewish + Latine communities

When a community embraces fluidity, it welcomes members who may differ from the norm. Jewish and Latine culture have benefited from fluid perspectives.

Jews span different regions and phenotypes and encourage a multitude of interpretations of religious text. The Talmud, an artistic record that chronicles 300 years' worth of rabbinical discussions about *halakha*, is used as a primary source of religious text today. This form of direct response across centuries is a testament to fluidity and diverse ideas in the Jewish community.

Latine communities also embraced fluidity to survive and find purpose, especially during colonialism. A prime example is *capoeira*, an Afro-Brazilian practice that fuses African,

Indigenous Brazilian, and Portuguese influences into a rhythmic and graceful cultural expression that is both a martial art and dance.

These two cultures have intertwined, forming a unique minority within a minority. There are many ways to be both Latine and Jewish, whether through migration, adoption, conversion, or mixed heritage. As Latine and Jewish identities become more fluid and diasporic, so too does the global Latine-Jewish community. This expansive community is unified by how individual experiences create an endless mosaic of diversity, much like the infinite combinations that can arise from the blending of two individuals' DNA.

History of assimilation in Jewish + Latine communities

In contrast, the shared struggle for survival has also driven the Jewish and Latine communities towards assimilation, particularly in the face of colonialism and genocide. When a group becomes the target of a hegemonic force, there is a natural inclination to take pride in a community's strength. However, rigid assimilation becomes maladaptive, begetting nationalism, racism, and disconnection from the land.

Rigid assimilation claims that fluidity leads to a loss of collective identity and is thus a threat to survival. It enforces a singular way to be Jewish or Latine, seeking to control the collective experience in the name of liberation.

For example, many Latines identify with *mestizaje*, a colonial framework that seeks to *mejorar la sangre* (strengthen the blood) by regarding individuals of European and Indigenous descent as superior, as they are believed to embody the strengths of both groups. However, this viewpoint promotes white supremacy, marginalizing those who strive to maintain Indigenous cultural tradition as regressive and endangering their communities.

A similar dynamic exists in the Jewish community. Varying degrees of belief and religious practice give rise to exclusionary debates about the authenticity as a Jew. Jews who critique the State of Israel or express reservations towards Zionism are labeled "self-hating Jews" who are jeopardizing the safety of the Jewish people.

Latine Jews get caught in the crossfire, and potentially perpetuate division in their own communities. Assimilation-focused spaces often isolate those with mixed identities who do not encapsulate one viewpoint. As a result, Latine Jews may disengage from these spaces or suppress the full breadth of their identities, weakening their communities. Moreover, many Jewish communities in Latin America are insular, limiting their interactions within broader society. In Mexico, Jewish communities are so distant that marrying into a different Jewish community is considered intermarriage.

Confronting assimilation and pushing to fluidity

This year, I had the privilege of participating in the PUENTES Fellowship, a program aimed to empower Latine Jews to be agents of change in their communities.

The fellowship highlighted the importance of embracing fluidity. The opening retreat in San Francisco brought together thirteen fellows, each with different relationships to Judaism and Latine identity. It was remarkable to witness how quickly people could become a community - not despite their differences, but because they wholeheartedly celebrated them. **Joy and laughter filled the rooms because people were their authentic selves, rather than as ambassadors for their community groups.**

This spirit continued in our closing retreat in *La Ciudad de México*. We connected with Mexican Jews who felt pressures to forsake their authentic selves to assimilate to their communities. We learned about how they almost left Judaism entirely until they created their own communities that embraced fluidity. Despite our diverse nationalities, communities, and vastly disparate experiences, the power of fluidity enabled us to coalesce into a whole.

Latine and Jewish people share a history of expanding cultural boundaries even amidst persecution. Embracing fluidity to oppose hegemonic ideologies is baked into our people's history. In an era where fascism is gaining traction worldwide, we must remember that assimilation will not secure our survival. We have survived because we are fluid, a fundamental aspect woven into the fabric of every person's DNA.

Lillian Horin (she/her) is a 2023 PUENTES Fellow. She was raised in Los Angeles, where she witnessed firsthand how health and education disparities harm marginalized communities. She is currently a PhD Candidate in Biological and Biomedical Sciences at Harvard Medical School where she studies how a specific class of cancer therapies causes disease in non-cancer cells, with the goal of making chemotherapy more tolerable for patients. She also runs a YouTube channel to demystify PhD admissions and experiences. After her PhD, she hopes to continue working to make science, health, and education more accessible to everyone.



My Jewtina Legacy

Rabbi Claudia Kreiman

This past year, the United States, more specifically Boston, became the place where I have lived the most years of my life. I was born in Santiago, Chile and lived there until I was seventeen years old. Then I moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina, the country where my parents were born. After four years I moved to Israel, where I lived for almost ten years. Which brings us to my move to Boston 18 years ago this summer. You can do the math to know how old I am.

I am often asked where I am from. My answer is never short. As a Jewish person I am also asked if I am, and often assumed to be, from Sephardic tradition. Spanish is my first language, so many people assume that my Jewish ancestors came from Spain. But no, I am an Ashkenazi Jew. I am also often asked or assumed to identify myself as a Jew of color, because I come from South America. But I do not identify as a Jew of Color. Many people are surprised and want to label me in one of these categories. *So what am I?*

I am a Jew, I am a Latina, I am Israeli, I am a woman, I am Ashkenazi, I am an immigrant, I am a mom, I am a spouse, I am a rabbi: I am all of these, not in order of importance. Some would say these are all part of my identities (plural). I would say, this is my only identity (singular). I am all of it. All of the time. Lately the term that I have been using, coined by Analucía Lopezrevoredo, the Founder and Executive Director of Jewtina & Co., is "Jewtina." I am a Jewtina. Since hearing this term for the first time, I realized that my journey in life is one that holds, almost inseparably, my being Jewish, my being a woman, and my being from South America.

I am the first Chilean woman to be ordained as a rabbi and I am the daughter of one of the first two Latin American rabbis, ordained in the first Latin American seminary in Buenos Aires, [Seminario Latinoamericano Marshall T. Meyer](#), Rabbi Angel Kreiman-Brill. I was born and raised in Santiago, Chile, to Argentinean parents. From my paternal grandparents, I am the 5th generation of Latin Americans. My paternal great-grandfather came to Argentina in the 1890s, known as the [Jewish Gauchos](#). My paternal grandmother's family came from Russia. And my maternal grandparents came from

Poland just before the Holocaust, one to Montevideo, Uruguay and one to Buenos Aires, Argentina.

As I think of my legacy as a Jew from South America, I feel proud to have teachers and mentors who have shaped Latin American Jewry both at home and as we've moved around the world. We have brought the gifts of our Latin American Jewish communities to the Northern Hemisphere, sharing both vibrancy and a commitment to the work of social justice, rooted in our own experiences in our countries of origin.

There is so much I can say about Latin American Jewry, but at this time I will focus on the legacy of working for justice and human rights.

[Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer](#), of blessed memory, is known by many in North America as the rabbi who revived one of the most soulful and socially active congregations in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, [B'nai Jeshurun](#). For Latin American Jews, however, Rabbi Meyer is much more than that. He was a student of [Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, z"l](#), and the teacher and founder of liberal, progressive Judaism in Argentina and Latin America. He was the teacher of my teachers, Rabbi Rolando Matalon and Marcelo Bronstein, and of my father, Rabbi Angel Kreiman-Brill, z"l. In Argentina, Rabbi Meyer became one of the few outspoken critics of the repressive Argentinean military junta that took over in 1976. At great personal risk, he became an important national voice for human rights in Argentina. When the dictatorship ended, he was the only non-Argentinian appointed to the [National Commission of the Investigation of the Disappeared](#).

I grew up under the [dictatorship of Pinochet](#) in Chile. My strongest memories as a child were that we were not allowed to speak up. Speaking up was a daring act, a dangerous one. Yet I knew that my father was doing precisely that. Faced with the imperative to protect the lives of thousands of Chileans in the dire situation of repression following the coup of 1973, the Chilean churches quickly organized an ecumenical service to protect people in distress. This effort was attended by some Christian churches, such as the Baptist, Methodist, and Orthodox churches and also by the Jewish community, which my father represented. Thus was born the [Cooperation Committee for Peace in Chile](#). This Committee was the first step in the defense of human rights during the military regime. It was created through the Archbishop's Decree, signed by [Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez](#) on October 4, 1973, less than a month after the coup. The memory of my father's voice, raised in resistance alongside Christian clergy, is one of the most fundamental building blocks of my rabbinate, my Judaism, and my whole identity.

And then there is another part of my family's story. One that has shaped Argentinean Jewry and my own life in the last twenty-nine years. I am the daughter of one of the victims of the [AMIA \(Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina\) Bombing in Buenos Aires](#).

I woke up on July 18, 1994, as the phone rang and a friend who lived on Pasteur Street, in Buenos Aires, just a couple of blocks from the [AMIA](#) building where my mom worked, called: "*Claudia, volaron la Amia. Claudia, volaron la Amia.*" Those words mean, "Claudia, they blew up the AMIA. They bombed the AMIA." I can still hear her voice, 29 years later. I still remember standing, holding the phone, not sure what all that meant. That moment was the beginning of the most horrific week of my life. It took a week until my mother's body was found. We buried my mom 7 days after the bombing. My mom, Julia Susana Wolynski de Kreiman, worked in the social services of the AMIA. She helped people find jobs so they could lift themselves out of poverty and have a dignified life. The first year after the AMIA bombing, I joined the weekly demonstration in front of the Argentinean Supreme Court to ask for justice. We would stand there every Monday at 9:53 AM, the day and time of the blast, and cry out "*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof*" - "Justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20). I recall asking myself on one of those Mondays if I could continue standing there, asking for justice for the rest of my life. I decided to take a different journey and move to Israel. I became an educator, and later a rabbi, bringing the values that my parents taught me to life. This too, is part of my legacy as a South American Jew.

Though I cannot speak for all Latin American Jews, I know that the experience of growing up under dictatorship (not just in Chile) and the AMIA bombing has shaped us – not just personally, in our own stories, but in our collective understanding of what it means to be Jewish and Latino. I know that this has shaped the ways I show up in the world, the ways I work for justice and dignity for all, the ways that I try to heal this world. That is part of my legacy, as a Jewtina.

Rabbi Claudia Kreiman (she/her) is the Senior Rabbi at Temple Beth Zion (TBZ) in Brookline, MA. Originally from Santiago, Chile, she's the first Chilean-born woman ordained as a rabbi. She obtained rabbinic ordination from Shechter Institute of Jewish Studies in 2002 and served as the inaugural Rabbi of Noam and Camp Ramah Noam in Israel. Since moving to the US in 2004, she's led TBZ, focusing on its social justice ethos and meaningful prayer experiences. She's an active participant in local and national Jewish communities, serving on T'ruah's board, co-convening the Brookline Interfaith Clergy Association, and supporting GBIO. Additionally, she's a Brookline Fire Department chaplain and a former Boston JCRC board member. Married to Rabbi Ebn Leader, they have two daughters, Alma and Ariel.



The Emergence and Influence of Latin-Jewish Identity: An Examination of Intersectionality, Multiculturalism, and Jewish Diasporic Demographics

Analucía Lopezvoredodo

As we venture into the complex matrix of cultural intersectionality, multiculturalism, and the extensive spectrum of Jewish diaspora, we dive deep into the compelling exploration of Latin-Jewish identity. This article offers a comprehensive overview of the shaping process of this identity, enriched by the confluence of historical incidents, migratory trends, and the meeting of Jewish and Latin American cultures. Notably, Latin-Jews constitute either the second or third largest diasporic community globally, when considering their collective populations in Latin America (between 300,000-500,000) and the United States (approximately 230,000) (AJC Survey of Latino Jews in United States 2016; DellaPergola, 2016).

As a sociologist immersed in the study of Jewish diaspora and identity, I've come to understand that the narrative of Jewish migration to Latin America is intricately woven, akin to a complex historical tapestry. Its threads stretch back to the troubled times of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition in the 15th and 16th centuries. Confronted with the specter of religious persecution, crypto-Jews (also referred to as marranos, Jews who maintained their religious practices clandestinely while publicly professing Christianity) and conversos (or New Christians, Jews who converted to Christianity to avoid expulsion or persecution) braved the expanse of the Atlantic seeking sanctuary (Gerber, 2018; Lavrin, 2018). The discovery of a mikveh in Taxsco, Mexico, a recent archaeological find, lends credence to these accounts of secret Jewish life (Lavrin, 2018). These early settlers laid the foundation for what would become a rich and vibrant Jewish presence across the continent.

The canvas of this diaspora broadened considerably in the late 19th century with the advent of the rubber boom. The lure of economic prospects led Moroccan Jews to the Amazon region of Brazil and Peru, where their significant contributions fueled the

rubber export industry. This vibrant community has since sustained its unique Maghrebi traditions, making its mark especially in cities like Manaus and Belém in Brazil and Iquitos in Peru (Aizenberg, 2012). Similarly, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a significant influx of European Jewish immigrants—motivated by various factors like promising economic prospects, political turmoil, and religious liberty. This era marked the establishment of Jewish colonies in regions such as Argentina, made possible by the foresighted endeavors of influential businessman and philanthropist, Baron Maurice de Hirsch (Elkin, 1998).

The early 20th century marked a significant shift in Jewish migration patterns as the fall of the Ottoman Empire uprooted Turkish and Syrian Jews from their homes. The socio-political turmoil that ensued led to a mass exodus of these communities, and Latin America became a beacon of refuge. Countries like Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela opened their doors, absorbing these diasporic communities and subsequently enriching their cultural tapestry (Stillman, 2003). The Turkish Jewish community, in particular, carved out a distinctive cultural niche within their new surroundings. In Mexico City, for example, they upheld their unique Sephardic traditions and contributed significantly to the local soundscape with their vibrant music (Angel, 2017). Syrian Jews, on the other hand, created vibrant communities in cities like Buenos Aires, Argentina and São Paulo, Brazil (Sharkey, 2008).

Finally, the cataclysm of the Second World War prompted an unprecedented surge of Jewish migration to Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. In response to the unfolding crisis, countries like the Dominican Republic, presented an offer of resettlement during the 1938 Evian Conference, which resulted in the formation of the agricultural community of Sosúa (Levine, 1999). Meanwhile, Bolivia and Paraguay facilitated the escape of thousands of Jews from Europe by providing visa allowances and issuing passports (Glickman, 2019). Estimates suggest that over 20,000 Jewish refugees found refuge in Latin America during the Second World War (Zimmerman, 1996), and each wave of migration brought with them unique cultural practices, languages, culinary traditions, and communal customs. These influences integrated with the local cultures of Latin America, resulted in a distinct Latin-Jewish fusion that continues to flourish across Latin America today.

The migratory saga of Latin-Jews, however, did not stop at the shores of Latin America. In recent decades, escalating economic and political instability within various Latin American countries has pushed a significant number of Latin-Jews to seek stability elsewhere (DellaPergola, 2013). The United States and Israel have emerged as popular destinations, resulting in a dynamic shift of the Latin-Jewish population. This new diasporic movement, combined with the growth in interfaith marriages between non-

Jewish Latinos and Jews, transracial adoption within Jewish families, and conversion to Judaism by non-Jewish Latinos have contributed to the rise of a multi-faceted Latin-Jewish identity and further enriched the diversity of our community (Rojzman, 2017).

The rich, cultural mosaic of the Latin-Jewish community in the United States is indeed a celebration of diversity and pluralism. It mirrors the evolving nature of societal relationships and interactions, embodying the dynamic blending of traditions, languages, and belief systems. Each strand of this diverse community brings with it unique narratives and experiences that contribute to the broader mosaic of Jewish society. Preserving the Latin-Jewish identity, therefore, is not merely an exercise in cultural preservation; it's a testament to the multicultural and global story of the Jewish people. This identity serves as a vital bridge between diverse communities, fostering intercommunity dialogue, inclusivity, and multiculturalism. It paints a vivid picture of the adaptability, resilience, and contributions of Jews across diverse societies and historical epochs. As we step into an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, the narrative of the Latin-Jewish diaspora underscores the shared human experience of migration, adaptation, and the ceaseless search for belonging (Scheindlin, 2022).

Dr. Analucía Lopezvoredó (she/her) is a Peruvian-Chilean-American sociologist, born in Peru and raised in Spain and the United States. A scholar of human migration, Analucía's research background lies in immigrant integration into global cities and immigrant identity development. A proud Jewtina, she founded Jewtina y Co. in 2019 to offer Latin Jews from around the world a community in which to celebrate and explore Latin-Jewish multiculturalism. A thought leader on multicultural identity development, Analucía invites audiences to transcend binary perspectives and foster culturally-responsive approaches to nurturing intersectional identity. A passionate global citizen, she has traveled to over 135 countries, all seven continents, and speaks five languages pretty well.

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Soy de aquí y soy de allá (*I Am From Here and From There*)

Rubén Rais

I don't have any memory of this, but my mother says that I was three years old when she first told me about Israel. Apparently, upon hearing that there was a place where all the Jews lived I started crying. I couldn't understand why we didn't pick up and go there immediately.

Ten years later we did just that. We moved to Israel as a family. Again, I cried. But not out of joy. I was pissed. I was thirteen years old; I had a crush on a girl in my school and did not understand why we were going to the other side of the world when all our friends and family were in Bogota. I remember spending the first few months of school in Ra'anana, writing the word Colombia on all the classroom desks and waking up at weird hours to listen to Colombian soccer on the radio.

Our stay in Israel as a family was short lived. After two years, we ended up in Miami, where I finished high school. In Miami, most everyone around me spoke Spanish and was Jewish. In many ways I felt right at home. That said, I never quite felt comfortable in the United States. Not sure what it was, but something there always felt sterile to me. I blame capitalism. So after completing my university studies in Washington and New York, I went back to Tel Aviv.

I spent 5 glorious years living by the beach in Jaffa. I had two parallel lives during this time. By day I was a Jewish educator. By night I co-owned and managed a bar. Looking back on those years, I'm amazed at how effortlessly those lives intertwined, and also at how effortlessly the different parts of my identity blended together. I remember there was one week where I found myself teaching in four different languages and then also throwing a Radio Colombia party at the bar. Somehow both of those things seemed like an authentic expression of my Torah.

And yet, though I seemingly lived in a dream, being so far from my family took its toll on me. By that time, they had made their way back to Colombia. And so, four years ago, twenty years after my original departure, I came back to Bogota.

Looking back on this journey, I am reminded of a song I love by an Argentinean poet named Facundo Cabral. He writes “No soy de aqui, ni soy de alla”. I am not from here, nor am I from there. At times this sentence rings incredibly and depressingly true for me. And yet, I’ve recently come to realize that the opposite is the case. *Soy de aqui y soy de alla*. I am from here and I am from there.

Colombia was always in me during all those years abroad. It was with me in the way I spoke, in the way I danced, in the songs I knew. And as soon as I got back to Bogota and saw all that green again, there came a beautiful awareness: “soy de la montaña”. I was born on these mountains. On the flip side, my whole being and understanding of the world is framed and nourished by my relationship to God and the Jewish people. Through all this back and forth, from Colombia, to America, to Israel, Judaism has always been my rock. My body may have been born on these Andes mountains, but my soul was present at Sinai when as a people, we received God’s Torah.

The more I think about it, the more I realize that this sentiment is not just mine, but rather descriptive of the broader historical experience of the Jewish people. We are from here and from there. Our peoplehood is unique in that it blends the particular and the universal. In other words, our identity has been sculpted not just by a religious and national attachment to the land of Israel, but by a continuous dialogue with other peoples and cultures. My identity as a Colombian Jew living in the 21st century contains within it the Talmudic wisdom of ancient Babylon, the Arab philosophy of the middle ages, and the Yiddish humor of the shtetl. Any exploration of Jewish life and thought is almost by default a window into other peoples’ cultures and wisdom.

That said, we do find ourselves in a unique point in Jewish history. Many of those mythical Jewish communities around the world have all but vanished, and a lot of the diversity which characterized the Jewish people can nowadays be found only in Israel. Indeed, that is precisely what makes the experience of living and visiting in the Jewish State so exciting. In Israel we get tastes of Morocco, Iran, and Yemen. We are witnesses to the vast diversity of Jewish culture and expression coming together for the first time. It is an indescribable blessing.

Tragically though, this diversity has not always been prized by the Israeli establishment. In fact, one of the great tragedies of the Zionist enterprise has been the suppression, often violent, of that rich tapestry of diaspora Judaism. Even today, when Zionism’s attitude to the diaspora is no longer quite as radical, Jewish communal education rarely ventures into an appreciation and recognition of our long history around the world. To

that extent, and perhaps paradoxically, my time in Israel actually ignited a desire in me to strengthen Judaism in the diaspora.

That is going to be a tall challenge here in Colombia. The community here is small and fading. Most young people seem totally disengaged and uninterested. But it is a challenge I am excited to take on. **I believe the Jewish future will not be played out solely in the halls and chambers of the Israeli Knesset, but as it always has, learning from the streets of the world, in pursuit of the just and the divine, wherever it may take us. Latin America is at an exciting moment. There is music in the air and talk of love, art, and revolution. Soy de aqui y soy de alla. That's enough for now. Hopefully everything else will flow.**

Rubén Rais (he/him) is a Colombian born, Israel and U.S. raised, Jewish educator currently residing in the vibrant heart of Bogotá, Colombia. His current work revolves around the meticulous renovation and redevelopment of two striking colonial houses centrally located in the an old Jewish neighborhood of La Candelaria. Before his return to Bogotá in 2019, Rubén spent several years in Tel Aviv as the co-owner and manager of the legendary Anna Loulou bar in the Jaffa district. Parallel to his career in hospitality, Rubén also delved into the world of Jewish education, crafting and delivering programs aimed at engaging young adults in their Jewish identities and heritage. His passion for teaching and fostering connections to Judaism shone through in his work. Today, though Rubén's professional journey has shifted back to Colombia, his commitment to Jewish education remains strong. He continues to enlighten and inspire small groups of friends and community members by teaching Torah, preserving his bond to his roots and nurturing the spirit of Jewish learning in his community.



Identity in Latin American Jewish Communities: Comparative Analysis

Deborah Roitman and Paulette Schuster

The Jewish communities of Latin America as a whole can be described as an ethnic minority, inserted in the context of the larger society in which they live.

However, they are by no means a homogenous group but should be seen and recognized for their differences, their pluralism, diversity, heterogeneity, and hybridity. We explore some of the similarities they share and highlight the many differences as well. We compare them to the Jewish communities in the United States. Their Jewishness refers not only to the religious denominations but also to cultural aspects (Caro, 2005). All of this is what we understand as Jewish Peoplehood.

The Jewish communities of Latin America have contributed to the cultural diversity and multiculturalism of each country that they integrate.

External Features: The Latin America Region

Each community is unique, even though they belong to the same continent. The differences of each country or region shape the character of each community.

When the Jews first arrived in Latin America at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century there were no existing Jews¹, and it was difficult for the majority population to accept a minority group that was not Catholic or belonged to the national landscape. **The most important difference could be the ethnocultural composition of these diverse populations.**

In Latin America, the Jewish communities could be divided into two spheres: Indo-America which comprises such countries as Mexico, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, in which the limited immigration reinforced the highly hierarchical composition of the original populations (Avni, 1988). The second region is Euro-America that includes countries like

1 There were the crypto-Jews that came escaping from the Inquisition in Spain, but they assimilated completely to the local population.

Argentina and Uruguay, which received massive immigrations, particularly from Spain and Italy, according to the national ideology of the time of Jewish migration (early 20th century) (Bokser and Senkman, 2013; Avni, 1988).

Internal Features: Preserving Jewishness

In Latin America, Jewish communities are centered around sub-ethnic groups of geographical origin. Ethno-national identity is forged in social, communal and cultural spaces around the historical divisions between Ashkenazim, Sephardim and Eastern Jews (North Africa and from Syria, particularly from Damascus and Aleppo). There are several models of identity, which in turn make up a community structure; sometimes intertwined and overlapping with each other without being mutually exclusive. **Some of these communities find common ground over ethnic, cultural, secular and linguistic cultural aspects, while others highlight religious denominations and levels of religiosity (Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Mizrachim and Orthodox, Conservative, Reform) coupled with new constructions of identities.** It would be relevant to point out that in the last decades, all over the Jewish world, and Latin America is not an exception, there is a trend from secularization to rising religiosity. The aforementioned Jewish experiences differed from North America, where Jewish immigrants more easily integrated themselves into diverse communities.

In Latin America, communal life was preserved by maintaining their Jewish uniqueness in the face of a new set of cultural circumstances. For this purpose, various community institutions were created and most of them are maintained until today: *chevra kadisha* and synagogues (which were part of the communities), Jewish schools and the board of education, charitable organizations, trade and labor organizations, youth movements, sports organizations, Zionist and international Jewish organizations (Caro, 2005).

In Latin America, priority was given to Jewish education as a factor for continuity.

In almost all of the Jewish communities in Latin America, the Jewish day schools (even if there is only one school in a small community) are comprehensive and integrate children from kindergarten all the way to high school and are based on ideological or religious inclinations (Zadoff, 1988). In the US, you have day schools that are geared toward Hebrew instruction and based on religious affiliation to a certain movement. Children attend Sunday school or the Jewish Community Center (JCC) as supplemental Jewish education. In Latin America, these schools are concentrated in capital cities and other major metropolitan areas, and within specific residential areas. In the US, communities are more dispersed.

Commitment to Zionism in many Latin American Jewish communities stemmed from the political clout of the Zionist parties and the World Zionist movement ideology (Avni, 1988) that was exported from the old continent in the interwar period by the Ashkenazi Jewish migration. **It built hegemony and brought people together to engage in collective action.** It expressed itself in the idea of immigration to Israel (*aliyah*), fundraising for the nascent state and, from 1948, by sending emissaries and the centrality of Israel in the life of the Jewish people as a focal point of identification. Zionism is being imparted via formal education, through the Hebrew schools and informal education, through the youth movements (*tnuot noar*).

In many communities, where *aliyah* was not paramount, there is what is called diasporic and/or philanthropic Zionism. In the US, Zionism is imparted via the congregation. Summer camps play an important role in the formation of American Jewish identity. It is in these spaces where children learn about history, ritual and belonging and how to be Jewish (Fox, 2023).

In Sum

Many Latin American Jews, despite being relatively well-off, due to the region's political, economic, and social instability and insecurity, choose to emigrate, most often in search of better living conditions.

Similar to trends observed in the United States, certain challenges have impacted the vitality of these communities, including intermarriage, lower fertility rates, increasing secularism, and the attrition of more traditionally-oriented members due to aging and passing. It's important to highlight that the Mexican Jewish community stands as an exception, boasting a close-knit structure where most young members receive formal Jewish education and interfaith marriages are infrequent.

In the contemporary landscape, both Jewish communities at large and those in Latin America specifically, are presented with the opportunity to reimagine their approaches. This includes strategies to preserve their Jewish identity and enhance the sense of Jewish Peoplehood as a central element of continuity and pride among their members.

Deborah Roitman has a bachelors in sociology and political science from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and a PhD in sociology from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Her area of expertise is Jewish identity in Latin America. She has taught at several academic centers in Mexico, Israel and Chile. Roitman was an education coordinator and curator at the Jewish Museum of Chile and collaborator at

the Foundation for the Memory and Preservation of Chilean Judaism. Deby is a member of AMILAT (Israeli Association of Latin American Judaism) and works as a guide at the ANU Museum, the Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv.

Paulette Schuster received her PhD and completed a post-doctorate in Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research focuses on gender roles and feminist activism, food and identity, and Jewish Latin America. During the last few years, she has conducted pioneering research on contemporary Sephardi (Syrian Jews) feminist narratives and history in Mexico and food research in Israel. Schuster is an Academic Coordinator at Reichman University and is a member of AMILAT (Israeli Association of Researchers of Latin American Judaism). She is currently working on a new book on the history of the Carmel Market in Tel Aviv.

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Meaningful Trajectories and an Expansive Impact: Jewish Communities of the Americas

Dalia Wassner

Despite its size and importance, Latin American Jewry has been relatively under-examined. Estimated to number over 750,000 individuals, the Latin American Jewish community is diverse and includes Ashkenazi, Mizrachi and Sephardi Jews, nearly half of whom live in the United States. Many are then double immigrants, whose families came to Latin America from Europe, the Levant and Middle East; and, then, after a few generations in Latin America, a significant proportion emigrated once again.

Latin American Jews are noteworthy in that they embody transnational identities that are reinforced through ongoing relations with their communities of origin. Their multiple migrations have produced a layered expression of Jewish life that, particularly in the U.S., stands out in contrast to other more established communities of Jews. Latin American Jews who have emigrated to the U.S. have brought with them cultural exuberance and expressions of Judaism and community which are having profound impact on U.S. Jewry, including Jewish education, synagogue life, and social justice.

Latin American Jews are distinguished by their strong sense of Jewish identity and peoplehood. A majority have meaningful relationships with Israel that are central to their personal and communal identities. Latin American Jewish emigres to Israel in turn comprise an important segment within modern Israeli society, often with retained ties to the Americas writ large. **Elucidating the interplay between the multi-faceted Jewish communities of the Americas is thus not only essential to better understanding U.S.-Israel relations but also to more effectively engage with the reality and potential of Israel-diaspora relations.**

The evolving fields of World History, like that of Diaspora Studies and Maritime Studies, share a focus on transnational connections—be they intellectual, material, political or cultural in kind. **When we broaden conceptions of peoplehood to include identity along with trajectory, the path becomes not simply a vehicle of transit, but rather informs the multifaceted histories and identities that emerge. Consequently,**

contemporary notions of Jewish peoplehood are enriched while serving as a point of intersection with other diaspora communities, their respective nation-states and their broader networks.

In this same vein, early Jewish communities of the Americas can be best understood within a context where the Sephardic legacy diverged on the one hand as a Jewish Diaspora and on the other as CryptoJews, at the intersection of which the Americas became inserted in modern iterations of Port Jewries. The legacies of such historical realities are of great interest to contemporary audiences, as much as the Sephardic legacy in Latin America has served many a modern Jew (Sephardic and otherwise) a ready proof of authentic belonging in the New World.

Academic associations, community organizations and NGO's in the last generation have reflected this very evolution in perspective on Jewish Peoplehood and its multifaceted Latin American salience. The Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry, Latin American Jewish Studies Association, Jewtina y Co., Fuente Latina, BILLA, and of course the Jewish Peoplehood LatAm study led by the Hebraica, JCC Global, the Joint and community partners, reflect an acknowledged need to more fully appreciate the dynamic communities of Latin American Jews within the Americas, within Israel-Diaspora relations and within a broader framework of global Jewish peoplehood.

In this same vein, the Brandeis Initiative on the Jews of the Americas (JOTA) has been established as a university hub for scholarship and creativity, designed to help broaden understanding of Latin American Jewry and to promote appreciation of these communities' myriad contributions to world Jewry. JOTA's mission is to **understand, preserve, and promote Latin American Jewish history, culture, and contributions to the mosaic of Jewish life and to societies throughout the Americas and the world.**

Dalia Wassner, Ph.D. is Director of the Brandeis Initiative on the Jews of the Americas. Dr. Wassner is the author of *Harbinger of Modernity: Marcos Aguinis and the Democratization of Argentina* (Boston: Brill, 2014), is guest-editor of the inaugural issue of *Latin American Jewish Studies* (2022), and has published her scholarship in numerous academic journals including *Contemporary Jewry*, *Iberian and Latin American Studies*, *Latin American Jewish Studies*, *Latin American Research Review*, and *Modern Jewish Studies*. Dr. Wassner serves on the Boards of Directors of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association and the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry, as well as the Editorial Board of the The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women in the field of Latin America.



**Part Two:
The Double Diasporic Perspective -
Through a US lens**



On the Composition of Joy

Violeta Castro Stolpen

In geology, the law of uniformitarianism states that all of Earth's processes that happen now, also happened in the historical past. The rock cycle starts with minerals that are brought together to form rocks through deposition that then undergo weathering and perhaps even find themselves in fault zones being metamorphosed and erupted. All this over the course of millions of years. These grounding principles – that elements become part of a whole in continual, dynamic cycles – may also be applied to Jewish tradition and customs. While the ways we as Jews celebrate or honor holy days changed following the destruction of the Temples, the foundational ideas remained, and the community adapted and overcame. If anything, Jewish tradition has been about persevering. The exterior may look different over time, like changing surfaces exposed to weather, but the elements that make up the Jewish way of life remain.

To classify rocks, geologists arrange them by type, composition, texture, physical attributes and much more. They investigate the context of their formation to create a full story. Not simply focusing on why one rock is different from another, geologists investigate the processes that occurred to create the unique circumstance surrounding the rock formation origin. The manifold community of Latin Jews are more than their differences from non-Latin Jews. What is most striking are the similarities between *la latinidad* and Judaism: the inextricable elements that have come together to create the Latin-Jew.

As humans, our presentations are different; our experiences mold us and shape us, leave etches on us, weather us in spots, but our composition remains the same. Our values, compositions, as Jews and as Latinos do not change. We cannot be split into one person for one space and another for another space. At the same time, we are not a monolith; our origins are impacted by our environment and externalities. Among U.S.-born or U.S.-raised Latin Americans the viewpoints on honoring or following typical ancestral country traditions are as diverse as there are people. There are those who, for their own safety, have had to try to assimilate as much as possible. There are also those who simply choose to no longer identify with their ancestral culture. And still yet, there are those who are only just beginning to discover the richness in their background: a richness

that includes layers and centuries – *una mezcla* – a mix of flavors, plants, temperatures, sounds, feelings, and people.

Exploring the crossover elements that have helped form our present sense of Latin-Jewish community provides grounding. In Judaism, we approach *chai* with zeal and *simchah*. The path we walk is holy, meaningful, and joyful. When we see a friend we have not seen in a while or we share a new experience with our community, we recite Shehecheyanu and praise the One who has granted us life. In Latin culture, there is a palpable sense of *alegría* or joy. In Costa Rica, our Tico brethren greet each other with a joyful chant of *pura vida* - not just a literal translation of “simple life”, but a *way of life*, a celebration of life. In Mexican culture, it is not uncommon to hold space for joy amongst sorrow; we share *cuentos* of our family members that have passed to bring us comfort in the grieving process. In areas in Mexico, the Day of the Dead is observed and death is welcomed like an old friend, a part of life, much like a *yahrtzeit* anniversary reminds us and calls us back to our lost loved ones. While we all may use different words, details, and languages, at our core, our composition is the same.

Like one rock, the fundamental “minerals” of who we are as Latin Jews are those of non-Latin Jews: joy, life, family, and community. But just like the rock cycle, we keep moving and shifting with the earth. In the U.S., first, second, and third generations of Latin Jews are finding their source rock and their connection to the larger Jewish community. In the same way geologists explore the past to paint a vivid picture of bygone ages, we too should continue exploring how our ancestral Latin and Jewish pasts actually create a beautiful, harmonious, and synchronized present picture.

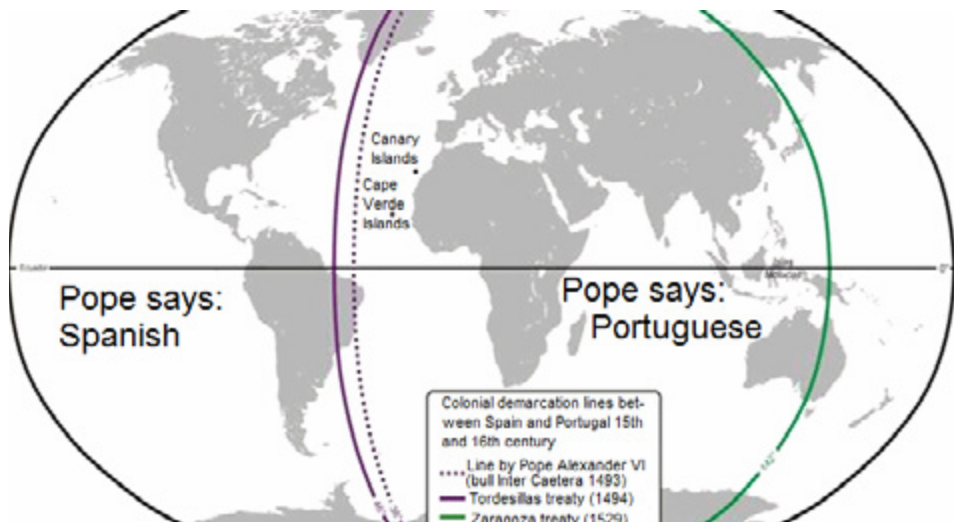
Violeta Castro Stolpen (she/her) is a Jewish, Mexican-American immigrant based in Pennsylvania on Lenapehoking (Lenni-Lenape) Land. She enjoys exploring the connections from seemingly disparate parts of her identities. She is a leader in the nonprofit space helping historically marginalized individuals access affordable capital and equitable opportunities.



Look, Language, Laughter and Love: An Afrolatin Jewish Experience in the US

Imani Romney-Rosa Chapman

While the Papal Bulls of Alexander VI originally assigned half of the world, as shown below, to Spain (Epic World History, 2012), Spain ended up with holdings in both hemispheres, including colonies in Asia, Africa, North America, and South America. In a video from Bustle distinguishing Spanish, Hispanic, and Latino, host Kat Lazo differentiates that Hispanic consists of “a sense of community through a connection with Spain” and Latin[x] consists of a “a sense of community through a history of colonization from Spain.”

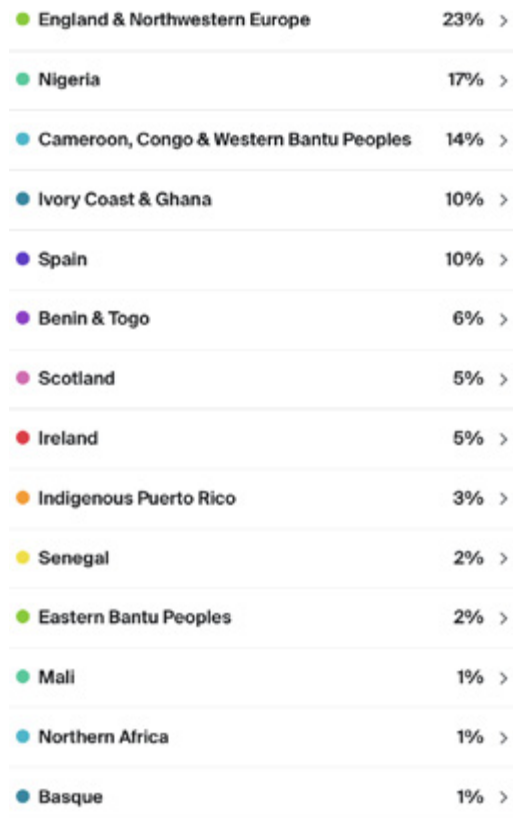


Source: Epic World History, 2012

Lazo’s assessment seems accurate to me, though incomplete; there are two thoughts I would add. Firstly, recent headlines have proclaimed that Latinos are divided in contemporary politics. To the point of this distinction, I’ve often wondered whether Latinos are primarily voting one way and Hispanics are voting nother. This is to say that

while popular media often uses Hispanics and Latinos interchangeably, there may be a different political and electoral orientation. Secondly, the historic orientation to the above differentiation is sound, but missing from the definition of Latinidad, for me, is certain assessment around values; what else binds Latinos together? My most immediate association with the word “Latino” is “family”. This is not because other groups don’t value family or that all latines value family or value them equally, but rather in my travels and conversations with other latines everyone I’ve met experiences this nearly instant association.

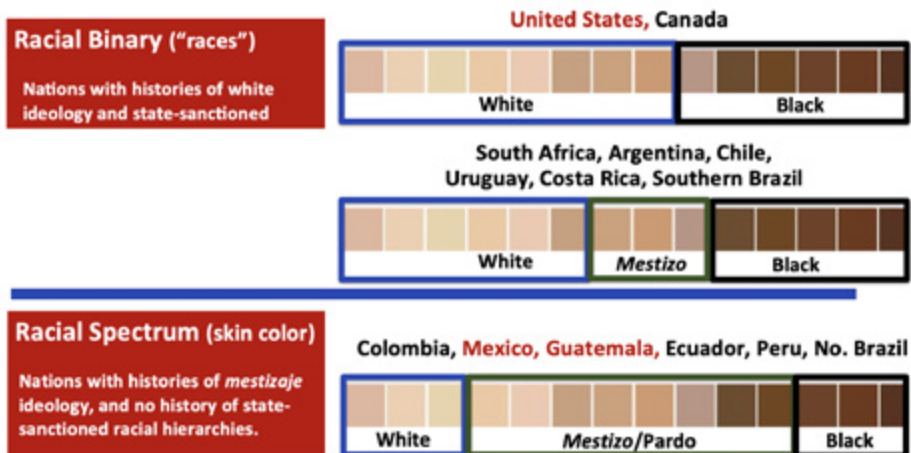
In my own early racial and ethnic development, I identified as “Black Puerto Rican” and over the last several decades, the language I’ve chosen to describe myself has become more internationally connected. Now I use the term afrolatina (neither italicized nor capitalized) to describe my identity. This was a word that was not part of popular lexicon when I was child and is a result of my cultural upbringing and the role of racialization in the United States rather than my complete cultural heritage (below), which shows that I’m 44% European (Ancestry, 2022).



Source: Ancestry, 2022

I am a Puerto Rican who was born in the United States. This means that my family was advantaged by citizenship that many other latines don't enjoy, thanks to the Jones-Shafroth Act signed by President Wilson in 1917 (*Research Guides: A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States: 1917: Jones-Shafroth Act*, 2023). Though born here, my identity has been principally rooted in my ethnic identity and the racial identity to which I've been assigned rather than my national identity. Another way to say this is that I experienced a greater sense of affinity, belonging, and pride in my marginalized identity rather than my privileged identity. Throughout my upbringing, my mother, who is of [Black] West Indian and [white] Scottish heritage, and my father, who was born in Puerto Rico, prioritized our Puerto Rican identity development through immersive cultural and linguistic experiences—sometimes in Puerto Rico and sometimes in “the States”.

I don't know when I received messages about Blackness, for example why didn't I simply identify as Puerto Rican, or even Caribbean? Perhaps if I had been born in Puerto Rico this would have been confusing or ambiguous, or perhaps I would have had resistance or resentment about it. As illustrated by Ayo Magwood, many Latin American countries have a dominant identity of mestizaje (mixed-ness), primarily those that required multiracial solidarity to become independent from Spain (2022). So the arrival of families to the US often provokes confusion about self-labeling while simultaneously crystalizing education about pigmentocracy within the US' racial binary.



 Ayo Magwood of Uprooting Inequality LLC, based on McNamee, V. *Colonial Legacies and Comparative Social Identification in the Americas*, *American Journal of Sociology* 126 (2), 318-351, 2020, 1st, 2020. Tallon, Edward and Rene Flores, *“Not Just Color: Whiteness, Nation and Walling in Latin America”*, *Hispanic American Historical Review* (2013) 93 (2): 412-460. Maria, Anthony W. 1998. *Mixing Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil*. *World Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Jan. 1998) 180-208. © 2022 Uprooting Inequality LLC

Source: Magwood, 2022

Now, rather than Black Puerto Rican, I tend to identify as afrolatina, a word that was not part of the popular lexicon during my upbringing. In fact, being raised partially in New York City, where we would boast “there are more Puerto Ricans in NY than on the island” (driven by the mainland’s destruction of land and exploitation of its resources), identifying as Black Puerto Rican always puffed up my chest. In these later years, the term and concept of afrolatinidad has reminded me that I am connected to people in 22 other countries on four continents, where they also share Spanish as a primary language. This sense of connection is powerful and empowering. It is also bittersweet as the colonizing language, Spanish, was overlaid upon the indigenous languages of each nation, eclipsing, existing alongside, and combining with them, and the Spaniards, with their newly minted national identity, used the Bible as a primary tool of linguistic, ideological, and political dominance. The evidence of their success can be seen by the predominance of Catholicism throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean.

In 2013, I formalized my relationship with Judaism, which, looking back now, I can see was lifelong – and not due to my father’s result of “1% Ashkenazi” when he recently did genetic testing. Judaism is my religion and my ethos and not my ethnicity. It is, now more so than ever, my racialized grouping; however, it is not my race. While my identities as Black and Jewish are inextricable, my identities as latina and Jewish are braided, like challah before you put it in the oven... and maybe even before you spread the egg on top. Unlike with my latina Jewish identity, this is undoubtedly due to both my exposure to and my integration with other Black Jews. And this immersion in Black Jewish community is most assuredly a result of the ways Blackness is a marked identity within both Latin and Jewish communities. **As I consider my Latin-Jewish identity, there are, however, four places in which my Jewishness and my latinidad embrace: look, language, laughter, and love.**

Look

Like many people living in the United States post- decision in Loving vs. Virginia, which outlawed all remaining state-level antimiscegenation laws, by which I mean those who were not Jews of Color themselves, I grew up thinking of Jews as white. In my experience, my step-brother and Sammy Davis Jr. were the anomalies. Even before the metastudy by the Jews of Color Initiative, which indicated there are approximately 1 million Jews of Color in the US alone (Kelman, Ari Y, et al., 2019), I realized that we had internalized a story, fueled by Nazism and white supremacy, of a monoracial Jewry. This felt so familiar to me, falling in line with Jesus “being white” and Latinos belonging to the “middle” race between Black and white. I recognize myself in both stories.

Language

Growing up, my understanding was that Jews spoke Hebrew and Latinos spoke Spanish. The truth, of course, is more complex and more diverse. For example there are: Jews who don't communicate in Hebrew and Latinos who don't communicate in Spanish; people coming from Latin America who speak Quechua or Nahuatl, and Jews who speak Ladino or Yiddish. And it is also true that among my people, there is a language common to many of us across time and across geography that serves as a powerful connector.

Laughter

A 2013 study by the Pew Research Institute found that 42% of American Jews consider humor an important part of their Jewish identity compared with, for example, the 28% who said living as part of a Jewish community has meaning for them (A Portrait of Jewish Americans | Pew Research Center, 2013). Laughter is an essential component of my latina identity. While the focus and form of "Jewish" and "Latino" humor are different, I wonder if the purposes, the celebration of survival, the knitting of community, overlap.

What Does It Mean To Be Jewish?

<i>% saying ___ is an essential part of what being Jewish means to them</i>	NET Jewish
	%
Remembering Holocaust	73
Leading ethical/moral life	69
Working for justice/equality	56
Being intellectually curious	49
Caring about Israel	43
Having good sense of humor	42
Being part of a Jewish community	28
Observing Jewish law	19
Eating traditional Jewish foods	14

Source: Pew Research Center 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews, Feb. 20-June 13, 2013.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: A Portrait of Jewish Americans | Pew Research Center, 2013

Love

I was living in Spain in 2001 when Colombian singer Carlos Vives released his song on the album, “Amor Latino”, which begins:

Hay maneras de amar diferentes
Te quiero contar
Que mi pueblo latino se quiere mi gente
Que no tiene igual (Vives, 2001)

Essentially, he says, today I’m going to speak to you about the incomparable way that Latin people love one another. Hearing the opening bars to the song, everything in me comes alive. That sense of connection, of joy, of peace, and of pride, is what I have found among Jewish latines in the United States.

Through history, values, geography, and love, I appreciate most that I am finding my way among and alongside so many other Jewtines.

Dr. Imani Romney-Rosa Chapman, the founder and director of imani strategies, llc, is a powerful, dynamic, faith-filled, compassionate, change leader for equity. She has more than 30 years of experience organizing, educating and developing curriculum for social justice. Imani works for a world in which her children and the young people in your lives can live wholly and safely into their full humanity in an equitable world where race is not a major determinant in health, wealth, legal, and educational outcomes. She is an alumna of Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion where she earned a Doctor of Ministry degree in Interfaith Clinical Education for Pastoral Care and was a UJA Graduate Fellow.

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Memories and Futures

Elizabeth Martínez-Podolsky

As a Chicana Jewish woman, I think a lot about the differences and intersections of my traditions. As a Chicana woman, I am connected to land, spirit, people, and other living beings. As a Jewish person, I am connected to land, spirit, people, and other living beings.

How do you decouple universal truths?

Today, there is enough statistical evidence to know that Latine population numbers have been increasing in North America and in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2020). *So what does it mean to be Jewish and Latine?* American Civil Rights advocate and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1990) introduced the term *intersectionality* into the legal lexicon and while some people may interpret intersectionality as holding two or more identities, Crenshaw used this term to explain how a marginalized person with two or more identities were actually place points where disenfranchisement, dehumanization, or systemic/personal violence occurred.

Imagine how bodies can be place points and recipients of infliction.

Latine people in the United States have a long history. Some of this history is Indigenous, colonial, and some of this history converges with the Jewish diaspora. I want to introduce my Latine history as a location to explain an aspect of Latine identity and Jewishness. I grew up in borderlands, South Texas. My history to this country is Indigenous and settler-colonial, Native and imperialist. When people learn about me being Chicana and Jewish, I get many questions about how this is possible. Most of the time, I just say that *I am* and other moments, I provide answers using history.

As the Spanish empire forced conversion or expulsion in the early 1400's through the Alhambra Decree (Beinart et al., 2002), Jews were forced to leave and many ended up in new Spanish territories, including Mexico, Nueva España. As Jews fled, the Spanish crown followed and held additional inquisitions in New Spain (Hordes, 1982). During some point in these histories, my De La Fuente, Saldaña and Saldivar ancestors settled in

northern Mexico and later established small settlements and towns such as Saltillo and La Fuente in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. I guess with the persistence of so many of my family generations in Northern Mexico and South Texas (once all Mexico but that is another history lesson), it can be easy to just forget and assimilate.

I refuse.

Being Jewish means not forgetting (Wiesel, 1995). An acknowledgement of our history means we learn to acknowledge our place in this world, our family and community's settlements and resettlements, and our mistakes and perseverance. Being Jewish means understanding that memory is not just cognitive, but it is held in our bones, our instincts. Memory is *yahrzeit*, memory means coming back.

Other histories are important to note that affected Chicanos in the Southwest. In the early 1900s, similar to Jim Crow Laws, *Juan Crow Laws* extended unjust Jim Crow sentiments towards Native American and Mexican communities in the Southwest (Casey & Watkins, 2021). These racial caste systems had multiple undercurrents, placing Latine communities in inhospitable agriculture work and labor. Juan Crow extended segregation by spreading the wrongful notion that Latine workers were disease-spreading and dirty (Casey & Watkins, 2021). These harmful stereotypes encouraged immigration officials to spray Mexican agricultural workers with toxic pesticide chemicals at U.S. entry points. These same chemical recipes would later be replicated and used by Nazis in concentration camps (Galanis, 2020). Racist slurs and stereotypes were encouraged towards Latine communities and terms such as *greasers* and *gangsters* were used to cause distrust, fear, and civilian policing. Consequently, the memory of these slurs and stereotypes still affect Latine people through American institutional legal systems and policies (Bender, 2003). In more recent history, transnational Central American refugees are coming to U.S. borderlands, asking for sanctuary and instead are being met with forceful separation from their children and denied asylum into the United States (Hernández, 2019).

The Jewish community is becoming more racially diverse (Jews of Color Initiative Report, 2021). This means you will be meeting more Jewish people who have unique histories and stories like mine. I feel the most Jewish when I am seen as my whole self. Recently, I completed a fellowship through an organization called [Jewtina y Co.](#) There Jewtinos from many histories and Jewish communities came together to unpack Jewish identity and merge our truths to envision the future.

Who are we?

We are Jewish people with Jewish histories, diverse intersectional identities, and have a deep commitment to ensure a Jewish future. *Juntos caminamos, haciendo puentes al*

andar. (Anzaldúa, 1987). Together we walk, bringing our full selves, creating bridges to memories and futures.

Elizabeth Martínez-Podolsky (she/her) is a Chicana Jewish mom, wife, educator, and scholar. Originally from South Texas, she moved to the Midwest and is a mom to three lively kids, wife to Joseph, and educator and scholar in Higher Education, specially looking at the intersections between Latinx communities and agriculture work. She works full time as a college administrator and is a member of Mt. Zion temple in St. Paul, Minnesota and a new board member at the St. Paul Jewish Federation.

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Which Would You Choose? A Study on Identity, Assimilation and Intercultural Womanhood

Mackenzie Sara Martínez

The experience of Latin American Judaism is greatly shaped by our societal and familial context. Those who are raised in areas with more Jewish influence may feel more strongly connected to their Jewish identity than those who have only their family experience to draw upon. Although to those outside the communities, Judaism and Latinidad may seem like completely separate and distinct cultures, they share a multitude of values and blend seamlessly when given the opportunity.

When I was an undergraduate student at Elon University, this question of peoplehood and identity is one that I struggled with personally and chose to investigate from an academic perspective. Instead of comparing the two cultures in their entirety, I chose to focus on female coming of age ceremonies that hold huge significance in both cultures: Bat Mitzvahs and Quinceañeras. Each of these events framed coming of age in a unique and culturally relevant perspective, and as a child I was asked to choose which one I would participate in. At the time, this choice did not feel incredibly noteworthy and I chose to honor the identity that I was most connected with during that time of my life: my Judaism. Years later, I began to reflect on the subconscious meaning that my Bat Mitzvah had and I wondered, how would I view myself and my womanhood differently if I had chosen a Quincenera? Thus my thesis, "The Rituals of Womanhood: Coming of Age Ceremonies in Jewish and Latinx Cultures" was born.

My study was autoethnographic, meaning I drew upon my own experiences as well as the experiences of other young women to develop my conclusions. I conducted interviews at various places of worship in central North Carolina. Through the connections I made with community members, I was introduced to nine exemplary young women who became the participants in my study. Their experiences and insights were vital to the project and contributed directly to my conclusions about peoplehood, identity, and culture.

Overall, my study identified four main themes related to the continued celebration of Bat Mitzvahs and Quinceañeras:

- The distinction of a transitional moment
- Perceptions of womanhood
- The importance of family
- Resistance to assimilation

Transitional Moment

This refers to the different ways that Bat Mitzvahs and Quinceañeras define the moment that one goes from a girl to a young woman. Both ceremonies had a distinct “moment” that was shaped by various societal and cultural values. For Jewish girls, this comes at the end of the service that they lead which is the culmination of many months of studying. For Latinx girls, it happens during their party through a few specific rituals (the last doll, changing of the shoe, etc.) that mark the end of her childhood and celebrate her accomplishments. This distinction between spiritual and social adulthood draws upon the history and customs of both cultures and has the opportunity to blend seamlessly as the Latinx-Jewish community grows and changes.

Perceptions of Womanhood

All but one of my participants cited female family members as role models for the kind of woman that they wanted to be. They described these women with positive adjectives such as: strong, independent, beautiful, and kind. Between the two groups, there were no significant differences in words they used to describe the qualities they wanted to embody as women. This shows us that despite differences in language, food, and history, both cultures share similar values and dreams for the young women coming of age.

Importance of Family

Central to all of my participants was their families and their role encouraging their daughters to have a Bat Mitzvah or Quinceañera. Many girls cited the fact that their elder siblings, parents, and grandparents had all had a ceremony and wanted to continue the family tradition by having one themselves. Another key motivation in having a ceremony was the fact that it gave family members who live in another state or country an excuse to all get together and celebrate. Family is an essential part of both Jewish and Latinx cultures and plays an important role in shaping the future of our communities through the way we place significance on the development of our young women.

Resistance to Assimilation

Both Jewish and Latinx people have faced decades of discrimination within the United States which can make it difficult to have pride in one’s identity. These ceremonies

work to combat that by providing girls with a positive relationship to their culture and resist the societal pressure to distance themselves from it for fear of being called “different”. By encouraging girls to take part in these rituals, it ensures that they will retain a connection to their culture and pass it on to their own children. This means that the traditions will carry on for future generations. This sense of preservation and pride is only amplified in Latin-American Jews who hold the history of both and remain dedicated to celebrating their identities.

Through my research and my own lived experience, I found that being a Latin-American Jew was not an experience that fit perfectly into one culture or another. It is a perfect blend of both. To grow up with both cultures in American society, which is notorious for alienating and demonizing those who are “different”, requires a strength of self and a loving community that I have been fortunate to create for myself. It is my hope that through efforts on individual and collective levels, we can begin to embrace those who are “both/and” instead of asking them to choose.

Mackenzie Sara Martínez (she/her/ella) is a proud chicana, Jew, and “Jexican with a tree” who embraces her interracial, multifaith family background. She was raised in Richmond, VA and currently resides in San Diego where she works with the International Rescue Committee supporting asylees and survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence. She is a recent graduate of Elon University where she studied anthropology, Spanish, and gender studies. Mackenzie is honored to have been featured in the most recent season of VOCES by Jewtina y Co. podcast where she discusses her undergraduate research and her own identity journey.



Reflections on the Adoptee's Place in Latino Jewish Peoplehood

David McCarty-Caplan

For Latino adopted Jews, the question of Latin American Jewish peoplehood is fraught with complexity and tension. Our lives began with profound loss. We were separated from our first mothers, disconnected from our cultures of origin, untethered from the heritage of our ancestors. We were given new homes and new families. We were raised within American Jewish communities, with a new culture and religion. And yet we remain Latino. Many of us have had our Jewishness questioned by others, because we were (most likely) not born into Judaism, or don't 'look' Jewish. And yet we remain Jewish. So then, where do Latino adoptees fit in explorations of Latino American Jewish collective identity, when we are part of these two worlds but often do not feel fully grounded or seen in either?

Jewish American communities have a particularly significant connection to adoption. While approximately 2.5% of American families with children have an adopted child, estimates suggest this number is more than 5% among American Jewish families with children¹. Jewish Americans also pursue adoption from other countries at a greater rate than the U.S. overall. Between 2000-2009 it is estimated that 66% of adoptions to Jewish American parents were transnational, compared to 15% of all adoptions in the U.S. at this time². There is also evidence that the percentage of nonwhite children adopted into Jewish families has increased over time, up to approximately 76% of adoptions by the 2010's³. Comparatively, approximately 40% of all adoptions in the U.S. are transracial. Among these adoptions within Jewish families, 17% are estimated to be adoptions of Latino children. These estimates suggest the intersections of adoption, race and

1 Kreider, R. M. (2003). Adopted children and stepchildren, 2000. Census 2000, special reports. Washington, DC: US Department of Commerce.

2 Sartori, J. (2016). Modern families: multifaceted identities in the Jewish adoptive family. *Mishpachah: the Jewish family in tradition and in transition*. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette IN, 197-218.

3 It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of adoptive parents in the U.S. historically have been, and continue to be, white.

communal Jewish identity are particularly salient issues to address within American, and Latino American Jewish communities.

In order to address where Latino adoptees fit in conversations of Latin Jewish peoplehood, let us first consider a few hard truths about adoption. It is my belief that adoption, regardless of context or outcome, should be recognized as a traumatic experience for any child. This is often a challenging concept for adoptive parents or the general public to understand, as the narrative around adoption in the U.S. broadly, and within Judaism specifically, has for generations mostly characterized adoption as a righteous, or benevolent act of charity; a mitzvah that benefits everyone. A nuanced understanding of adoption, however, reveals this narrative as an overly cheerful simplification of an extremely complex situation. While many adoptees have gained loving families and wonderful opportunities that they may not have experienced if not for their adoption, finding a new family also necessitated the loss of another.

The loss of our first families is often ignored or denied, yet is known to be associated with significant struggles through life. For example, adoptees experience disproportionate rates of mental health challenges, attachment and relationship issues, and troubling addictive behaviors. Many of these problems arise from identity development experiences that are uniquely challenging for adoptees due to being separated from our families of origin. For transracial and/or transnational Latinos adopted into Jewish families, these challenges are exacerbated by the fact that we have lost connections to our own racial and cultural identities, and often have been harmed by experiences with racism (both subtle and explicit) or made to feel unwelcome within our own Jewish communities. Many of our white adoptive parents, even when well-intentioned, are ill-prepared to support us through these issues due to lack of lived experience and/or a hesitancy to directly and consistently address racism that is all-to-common among white Jewish communities.

On the other side, many Latino adoptees struggle to find solace or belonging in Latino, or Latino Jewish communities. We commonly feel self-conscious about our capacity with the Spanish language, knowledge of our homelands, or understanding of cultural norms we were not raised with. We are keenly aware of how we are perceived by other Latinos and what language they choose to engage us with. We are profoundly sensitive to how they respond if we disclose our adoptee or Jewish identities. We did not choose to be separated from our families and our homelands, yet we bear the burden of how these disconnections impact how we are received in Latino and Latino Jewish spaces. Many of us ask ourselves: Are we Latino enough? Are we Jewish enough? The answer to these questions often leaves us wanting. The Spanish phrase, '*ni de aqui, ni de alla*' – neither from here, nor from there – captures this feeling beautifully.

It is my deep wish that both Latino and white Jewish communities will consider the experiences of Latino adopted Jews as described briefly above, and recognize a connection to the notion of 'Kol Yisrael Areivim Ze La Ze' Meaning all of Israel are responsible for each other. This reflects the Jewish notion of communal responsibility, and the Jewish value of caring for the wounds of others in our community. There is so much that can be done to help Latino adopted Jews heal our wounds. White Jewish communities could work actively to deconstruct the false notion that equates American Jewishness with whiteness. They could embrace an understanding that inherent in our adoption comes a responsibility to stand by our side as we go through the hard work of exploring our identities and finding ourselves. Even when it is not what you expected. Even when it hurts. Show us that your choice to bring us into Judaism includes a willingness to fight to ensure we find a sense of belonging, affirmation and love in Jewish community. Latino Jewish communities could turn towards us with warmth, and offer gently to teach us of our lost cultures and languages. See us as Latino, without need for qualification. Listen to our stories, and help us find connections to bind us together as a people. Open your arms wide, welcome us home.

It is immensely encouraging that the affirmation of Latino adopted Jews that I seek does exist in pockets of the Jewish organizational landscape. For example, Bend the Arc's Selah fellowship connects and supports Jewish leaders of color in a way that allows for specific examination of the complexities of Jewish adoptee identity. Jewtina y .co is dedicated to exploring the intersections of Latinidad and Jewishness, that has created community that warmly welcomes Latino adopted Jews. Camp Tawonga applies concepts of radical inclusivity and racial justice to provide transformative experiences for Jewish youth, adults and families, including a 'families of color' weekend that offers workshops on adoption issues within Judaism. Jewish Youth for Community Action launched Jews Against Marginalization, an affinity space for Jews of color, Sephardic, and Mizrahi youth that includes Jewish adoptees. And the Jews of Color Initiative, dedicated to supporting initiatives that benefit Jews of Color, has provided funding for research on experiences of Jewish adoptees (among many other projects). These are examples of what ideal Latino Jewish community could look like for Latino adoptees; inclusive, expansive, innovative, inquisitive, loving, and bold. May we all work together to expand on these efforts, and build a Latino Jewish peoplehood that truly exemplifies the spirit of *Kol Yisrael Areivim Ze La Ze* by welcoming all Latino adopted Jews with open arms.

Dr. David McCarty-Caplan was born in Bogota, Colombia but adopted and raised in a Jewish family in the United States. This lived experience has profoundly shaped his

personal and professional interest in the complexities of identity development and social justice. David earned a PhD in Social Work, and is a researcher, educator, author, and consultant who specializes in organizational analysis and evaluation, and support of adoptee and other marginalized and underserved populations.



A Person of Many Peoples

Ariela Ronay-Jinich

One day, there was so much wildfire smoke that the sky was dark all day, except for a strange orange ball in the sky that might have been the sun. For some reason, the Jewish organization where I worked thought it was such an obvious environmental hazard, that all employees should avoid the outdoors. Except the contract laborers laying cement. I voiced my concern through the institutional chain of command only to be told to talk with the contractor myself. “These boys need to work” – I couldn’t even convince the contractor to provide n95 masks for them. I was so disgusted by the rampant apathy in an organization whose mission included justice and, sustainability. Repeated incidents of institutional disregard and bias against Latino folk became unbearable to me. These are my people too. What my nonprofit colleagues didn’t know is that it was the Latino laborers who actually made me smile during my workday, who inquired how my family was doing, who I could joke around with and feel a sense of lightness and ease.

When I tried to include or engage my identity and my “other” people in the work I was doing, it was seen as “not having broad enough appeal” and other ways of saying “it’s not who we are” It is very hard to be a leader when one is told that.

Having to displace a central part of who I am became too big a compromise, especially as a builder of community. I wondered to myself, “why is it I am working so hard to build a community that I don’t truly feel a part of? The music I like doesn’t play, I get told I’m communicating too directly, I’m told that wanting to have more art around our site is because I come from “one of those colorful cultures.” Or those days were days when I saw racism against Latinos where I worked, in more or less blatant ways, and it was both unbearable, and invisible to everyone else. **Those are my people too, and that is a basic aspect of how I need to do my work in the world.**

Now that my sister and I are raising kids, all of them biracial and a multicultural joy parade -- Black, Mexican, American, Jewish, Persian -- I find that all those years, I did not build the kind of Jewish community that I want for them, and for myself, as a parent. And so, I completely shifted my professional life to become the executive director and founder of Olamim, a Bay Area community initiative focused on Latin Jewish families.

Our work is to accompany these families in their multiple identities through high-quality educational programming and community-building. **Our work challenges the narrative about who Latinos are, and also who Jews are – first of all, that Latinos are not a “race” but a people of many heritages, and that Jews are also a people of many heritages.**

As a mother raising a multilingual, multicultural child in the United States, I have made many intentional choices about how to expose and immerse my daughter in diverse Jewish and Latin environments. It’s always a dance.

I have chosen to raise my daughter with Spanish as her first and dominant language so that she can have a strong sense of Latinidad in a society that regards bilingualism as a cognitive and social advantage to the well-resourced, but often disregards it (and in some places criminalizes it) for whom it is part of their cultural heritage. I have also chosen to surround her with Latin and multiethnic Jewish families who reflect this kind of cultural multiplicity that she navigates. Otherwise, finding cultural relevance and commonality would be relegated to relationships with service staff in Jewish events.

I have wondered if by giving her two minority identities, I am giving her the gift not only of two very rich and synergistic cultures, but also the feeling of being different. Why do I want my daughter to feel that she is at the margin of her people, either as a Jew in Latino spaces, or as Mexican in Jewish spaces? Wouldn’t I prefer her belonging to be unquestioned, by her or others, if possible?

The truth is that belonging to many worlds means you don’t belong entirely to one. That is, except your family, which might be the most important place to feel at home, because it can travel, change, and grow along with you. Family is not affixed to racial, religious or any other categories – it is the ultimate place of adaptation and integration in each generation.

I recognize the many pathways to Jewish family and that many folks do not recognize the pieces of who they are in their family or have access to the places where their identities are rooted. The truth is that whether we have that or not, **the world sorts us into such smaller parts of who we are, such that we all lose some sense of wholeness along the way. We need to have those spaces of wholeness.**

Given the way Jewish communal life is complexifying and diversifying, our future as a Jewish people depends more than ever on relevance and belonging. Our continuity depends on our experience of wholeness in Jewish communal settings. And it is not the continuity of what came before us, but a continual process of cultural regeneration, adaptation, and transformation. **We must continue to build the life we need – as**

Jews, we're masters at diasporic living, creating the social settings that embrace who we are around the globe. Our sense of peoplehood has never been static, and as it continues to evolve, so should our cultural and institutional frameworks.

Ariela Ronay-Jinich, MA.Ed is an educational leader and cultural activist in the Bay Area, California, where she has founded and directed a number of innovative Jewish educational initiatives that center on community-building, language learning, [nature connection for youth and families](#). She is a 3rd generation Mexico City Jew and immigrated to the United States as a teenager. She is the Founder and Executive Director of [Olamim](#), a family engagement program for Latin Jewish families.



El Mal De Ojo: Convergence of Jewish Latinx (Jewtinx) Rituals and Beliefs About the Evil Eye

Ramona Tenorio

In Latinx¹ and Jewtinx households, especially ones with little children, one might occasionally hear the words, “*Sana, sana, colita de rana, si no sanas hoy, te sanarás mañana.*” (Heal, heal, little frog tail; if you don’t heal today, you will heal tomorrow) (Tenorio, 2012). These words of comfort are spoken with *cariño* (care) over someone to invoke healing for an ailment or injury, as a mother may say while rubbing the bruised knee of her child. I can still feel my grandmother’s soft and tortilla-fragrant hands caress me as I recall her speaking these words. They were magic—healing and bringing a smile to child-me instantly. As a mother, this tradition continues in my home, as do other Jewish, Latinx traditions meant to heal and protect. **In this article, I share the convergence of folk healing traditions from various Jewish, Latinx, and Jewtinx cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the diversity of Jewish Peoplehood by sharing how Jewish Latinx navigate beliefs regarding the body, health, and healing.**

In Mexico, when a child is born, it is common to clothe them in red-colored clothing. The scarlet cloth is a way of protecting the child from *el mal de ojo* (evil eye) (Tenorio, 2013). The evil eye can be transmitted unbeknownst by the giver, through their attentive eyes and complementary words. It is thought that if you want to say how beautiful a child is and look at them fondly, you must also touch the child as you speak so as not to pass on the evil eye unwittingly (Merson, Black, & Mills, 2012). Another way to protect against the evil eye is to wear a red string around the wrist, ankle, or forehead secured with honey in a small, tightly wound dot between the eyes. A similar red string חוט השני

1 At times, I use the “x” in place of the gendered “o” or “a” like Latinx or Jewtinx in order to be more inclusive and intentional of the way we describe people and to better represent a world that is fluid and dynamic in its gender diversity. The “x” is not perfect, and I contend that as a Spanish Speaker, it is problematic because it replaces Spanish-sounding vowels with the hard English language consonant “x”. In spoken language, I often prefer to use the Spanish “e” sound instead. Since this article is written primarily in English, I chose the “x”, as it will be most recognized and pronounceable.

and *hamsa*, the hand-shaped amulet, are just some contemporary protections worn by some Jews against the עין הרע, *Ayin Ha'ra*, the evil eye (Teman, 2008; Tenorio, 2013). More ancient Jewish protections included *Kameyot* (amulets) as written prayers in Hebrew or Kabbalistic texts to ward off the evil eye (Molina, 2006; Samuel, 2007).

The cultural, ritual use, and significance of the color red and string or fabric to ward off bad energies can be found throughout Iberian-American region. In Spain during the Middle Ages, *el mal de ojo* was considered a medical illness connected with humoral medicine, based on the theory that the human body was composed of four humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile) competing for a constant state of equilibrium (Molina & Gancedo, 2014)

Adults can also receive *el mal de ojo*, though it is often through the vehicle of conscious or unconscious *envidia* (jealousy). A person suffering from such bad energies may seek the assistance of a *curanderx* (healer) for treatment (Baer & Bustillo, 1993). These lay healers can be found across the United States and throughout Latin America. U.S. Latinos continue to seek their care alongside mainstream healthcare, a phenomenon referred to as medical pluralism (Tenorio, 2012).

As a Jewtina, I have sought the guidance and treatment of healers for *el mal de ojo*, and other bad energies from both my intersectional traditions, one a *curandera* and another a *Kohenet* (Jewish Priestess). While each prescribed a different approach to cure the ailment, there are also some overlapping commonalities including the use of prayer, water, fire, and connection to the earth.

The *curandera* treated my ailment by praying and rubbing whole raw eggs over my body to absorb and remove the bad energies. The use of chicken eggs to draw out the *ojo* (eye) is a common remedy among curanderas (Loren, 2015). After my treatment, I was handed the eggs and instructed to go to a heavily wooded area or forest to cast them away one by one behind my back. I was also provided a few camphor tablets to use to ritually cleanse my home. I went home and boiled them in water on my stove. Camphor and water as a treatment for *el mal de ojo* has been reported in other urban locations and among Latinos who are not of Mexican descent (Viladrich, 2009). Another way to remove bad energies from the body and home is to burn *copal*, a ritually important aromatic resin for many pre-Colombian cultures.

During a particularly difficult time suffering from *el mal de ojo*, I sought the guidance and support of a *Kohenet*. As a Jewtina, the approach to healing was deeply moving for me and involved me symbolically cutting ties with not only the bad energies but the people wishing me harm. The ritual cleanse also took place outside, in a wooded area. I

was directed to walk around a fire several times and ultimately cut a string to release my connection to the bad energies. Like the wisdom of the *curandera*, I was also instructed by the *Kohenet* to cleanse my home as well. The most important thing was to ensure my home had kosher קַזְזוֹת *mezuzot* on my doorposts. I also sprinkled water and salt around my home and hung reflective mirrors around my home to diffract and deflect the bad energies away.

As Jews, we have always engaged in folk healing traditions. They are part of our collective identity, which can manifest in matzo ball soup or *caldo de pollo* as a cure for the common cold. These are our Peoplehood stories, part of our cultural repertoire passed down through the generations. At times our ways of doing things seem uniquely Jewish, like reciting *mi sheberach* to evoke healing for a loved one, and at other times they reveal our complex historical, linguistic, and geographic milieu, such as wearing an amulet for protection from עין הרע, *Ayin Ha'ra*, the evil eye.

As a Jewish Latinx (Jewtinx), engaging in cross-cultural medical pluralism is part of my identity and custom that connects me to Jewish Peoplehood. These lay healing traditions speak to my body and spirit in a way that feels natural and comforting. As my network with other Jewtinx grows, I am finding that I am not alone in believing in and engaging in these practices and am grateful that some in our community are gifted healers, priestesses, and *curanderas* themselves. These healing modalities are part of our vibrant Jewish and Latinx history and tradition, reflecting an interwoven tapestry of Jewish collective identity.

Dr. Ramona Tenorio is a Jewish Latina (Jewtina) with Mexican/Indigenous and Dutch ancestry. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee in Anthropology, focusing on Latino lay healing practices in the United States and Mexico. She is the President and Owner of Broader Impact, LLC, a national research and evaluation firm, and Executive Director and Co-Founder of טייב טיגוּב, a non-profit organization for culturally responsive evaluation in Jewish social and racial justice spaces.

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