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## Shifting Patterns of Antisemitism in Latin America: Xenophobia, Exclusion, and Inclusion

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### Abstract

This article analyzes several patterns of antisemitism in twentieth-century Latin America. It identifies historical moments when carriers of social and political ideas projected negative images of Jews, sometimes pushing anti-Jewish policies and at times leading violent actions against Jews. Thus, antisemitism served to mobilize in defense of national identity; as a reaction to Jewish peddlers perceived as a threat to national economies; as a basis for the generalized rejection of “undesirable refugees” during World War II and the Holocaust; and as a Cold War phenomenon, along with anticommunism and neo-Nazism. Like other forms of xenophobia, antisemitism was grounded in prejudice and the demonization of a supposed enemy rather than being based on verified evidence. Analysis suggests that antisemitism has been deeply rooted in Latin America and has manifested over time with changing historical and social constellations. At the same time, while Judeophobic prejudices and actions have been intimidating and have at times precluded the legal immigration of Jews, antisemitism has rarely become dominant or led to systemic social discrimination, massive expulsion, or mass genocide, unlike in Europe.

**Keywords:** antisemitism; xenophobia; conspiratorial narratives; nation-states; prejudice

### Resumen

Este artículo analiza la cambiante fisonomía del antisemitismo en América Latina. Identifica momentos históricos en que distintos actores sociales y políticos proyectaron imágenes negativas de los judíos, a veces promoviendo políticas antijudías o llevando a cabo acciones violentas contra judíos. A lo largo del siglo XX, el antisemitismo sirvió como bandera de movilización en defensa de identidades nacionales; como reacción a vendedores ambulantes judíos percibidos como una amenaza para la economía, como base para un amplio rechazo de “refugiados indeseables” durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial y el Holocausto, y como un fenómeno de la Guerra Fría paralelo al anti-comunismo y el neonazismo. Al igual que otras formas de xenofobia, el antisemitismo se basó en prejuicios y la demonización de un supuesto enemigo más que en hechos verificados. El análisis sugiere que el antisemitismo ha tenido raíces profundas en América Latina y se ha proyectado a lo largo del tiempo bajo constelaciones históricas y sociales cambiantes. Al mismo tiempo, propone que, si bien los prejuicios y las acciones judeofóbicas han sido intimidantes y en ocasiones han obstaculizado la inmigración legal de judíos, el antisemitismo rara vez se tornó dominante en la región, ni produjo una discriminación sistémica, una expulsión masiva o un genocidio, a diferencia de Europa.

**Palabras clave:** antisemitismo; xenofobia; narrativas conspirativas; estados-nación; prejuicio

This work suggests that antisemitism has deep roots in Latin America and has manifested over time in changing historical and social constellations. At the same time, while Judeophobic prejudices and actions have been intimidating and have at times precluded the legal immigration of Jews, antisemitism has rarely become dominant or led to systemic social discrimination, massive expulsion, or mass genocide, unlike in Europe. From the beginning of legal immigration to the Latin American republics, Jews have enjoyed emancipation, have become citizens with equal rights, and have been able to stand up in the face of antisemitism.

At the core of this article are issues of inclusion and exclusion that have also been at the core of human thought and experience since the Enlightenment and the advent of modernity. In the context of various forms of xenophobia and racism, modern antisemitism has risen and persisted as a cultural code, a by-product of political and socioeconomic struggles against modernist trends (Volkov 2006; Sternhell 2006). Although the term *antisemitism* is modern (Zimmerman 1986, 88–95; Bauer 1994), it incorporates older images, meanings, and forms of Judeophobia, some of them of religious origin.

In the Americas, antisemitism incorporated a legacy of traditional Catholic animosity toward Jews. The colonial Iberian empires in America were designed for three centuries to be *Judenrein* territories. Earlier stereotypes of the deicidal people foreshadowed later racism and xenophobia focusing on Jews. Like other forms of xenophobia, antisemitism is grounded in prejudice and the demonization of a supposed Jewish enemy. As discussed in sociology and anthropology, demonizing a certain group as evil outsider displaces evil from inside the community to beyond its moral borders (Befu 1999). The logic of antisemites fails to embrace a verification/discard methodology based on evidence (on verification/discard methodologies, see Popper 1963, 24–29; Barkun 2003, 27–29). Unlike the search for verified knowledge and justified knowledge, antisemitism comes closer to conspiracy theorizing and “make it happen” statements, or statements geared toward manipulating public opinion into believing a certain “truth” and acting upon it. That is, it involves consequential reasoning and the projection of what may be called a “convenient truth” in order to reach certain results (Roniger and Senkman 2019). In recent years, antisemitic narratives have spread mainly through the web and social media (Braylan 2018; Schwarz-Friesel 2019).

This article identifies several historical moments when different social and political carriers projected negative and even demonizing images onto Jews. Antisemitic tropes developed in various sociocultural and political circles, among them, those supporting Catholic and populist nationalism, economic liberalism, European fascism, right-wing sectors during the Cold War, and, finally, a coalition of antiglobalizing forces. For reasons of space, we limit our treatment here to some of these patterns, covering works inciting Judeophobia and acts of antisemitism. We also mention a recent constellation of forces advocating hate narratives on Israel that sometimes spills over to Latin American Jewish citizens and that we recognize deserves a separate, full-fledged analysis.

### Negative images of Jews as a threat to visions of collective identity

Negative images of Jews existed in Latin America even before there was a massive Jewish presence there. Some of that stigma originated in colonial times, when the once-traditional Catholic doctrine of Jewish treason and deicide influenced the worldview of New World populations. A later example of such attribution of negative images occurred in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Mexico. In his book *Antisemitismo y la ideología de la Revolución mexicana*, the anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz characterized that phenomenon as “antisemitism without Jews.” Jewish immigrants arrived only in the early twentieth century to Mexico, as the regime of Porfirio Díaz (1877–1910) disintegrated amid

social revolution. Nonetheless, even before their presence was massive, the opposition to Díaz and his circle of positivist advisers branded them “Jews.” To demonize those who were pushing modernization policies, the Catholic Church, the military, and some revolutionaries resignified the stereotype of Jews as traitors—exemplified in Captain Alfred Dreyfus’s case— to demonize the hated promoters of positivism (Lomnitz 2010).

Similarly, even before Jewish immigrants had arrived en masse to Argentina, degrading images had become common there as early as the 1880s and 1890s. In one of the early works of Argentine literature, *La gran aldea* (1880), by Lucio V. López, the character Eleazar de la Cueva was portrayed with antisemitic stereotypes borrowed from the French repertoire (López 2010). A decade later, amid an economic and financial crisis, in his prejudiced novel *La bolsa* (1890), Julián Martel spread the traditional stigma of the Jewish usurer and financier through the words of his character Dr. Glow (Martel 2003; see also Viñas 2005).

The elites of the South American republics considered immigration a vector of national growth and modernization, yet they expected migrants to assimilate by adopting the vernacular language and culture. In 1908 and 1909, Argentine educational officials regretted the use of Hebrew (and Yiddish) in Jewish schools of Entre Ríos sponsored by the Jewish Colonization Association. The education reports soon triggered a public discussion on Jewish sectarianism as a threat to the homogeneity of the nation (Flier 2011, 220–223; Di Miro 2014). In *La restauración nacionalista* (The Nationalist Restoration), the leading journalist and writer Ricardo Rojas referred to such insularity as antithetical to national integration and claimed that a Jewish identity as shaped by the Hebrew schools would nip in the bud the adoption of an Argentine identity: “The danger of the Hebrew schools lies in the fact that by maintaining their fanaticism they bring us the germ of a Semitic question that happily did not exist here because the Jew was not here; but that will emerge as soon as the Creole son of the Semitic immigrant prefers to be Jewish, instead of being Argentine” (Rojas 1909, in Di Miro 2014, 188).

Although there was no official antisemitism in Argentina, considering Jews alien to the nation easily generated social antisemitism. The working-class activism of Jewish immigrants and the impact of the murder of the chief of police of Buenos Aires, Ramón Falcón, by a young Jewish Russian anarchist, Simón Radowitsky, in November 1909, shaped the conviction of local nationalist groups close to the seats of power that Jews conspired against social structures and the integrity of the nation. In May 1910, a gang of young nationalists attacked and vandalized a Jewish neighborhood as part of an attack on working-class militants, indicating a Judeophobic stereotypical identification of Jews with leftist activists. Those images further solidified following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. A general strike in January 1919 generated fear of revolutionary turmoil and led to massive repression. With widely publicized convictions, nationalist groups stormed the Jewish neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, conducting a pogrom against the so-called maximalist revolutionary sectors. Although the confrontation was class related, Jewish residents were attacked and victimized out of proportion to their actual participation in the socialist and anarcho-communist trade-union movements (Bilsky 1984; Moya 2004; Lvovich 2016, 21–41). These confrontations had repercussions in Montevideo, where Jewish institutions were occupied by the military and perhaps close to 80 percent of Jews were detained, with many facing deportation. Repression also took place in Chile (McGee Deutsch 1996, 161–181).

By the 1930s, the conspiratorial view of Jews intensified under the impact of the global financial and economic crisis and the rise of European fascism. The myth that the Jews conspired against the integrity of the nation was then projected into the public spheres by Thomist Catholic intellectuals and priests to challenge half a century of the secular hegemony of liberalism in Argentina (Lvovich 2006). The more prominent antisemites among them were the theologian priest Julio Meinvielle (1905–1973) and Gustavo Juan

Franceschi (1881–1957), a church spokesman and editor of the influential journal *Critério*. In the 1960s, Julio Meinvielle was the spiritual adviser to and ideological mentor of the violent anticommunist and antisemitic groups Tacuara and Guardia Restauradora Nacionalista (Padrón 2017). Meinvielle remained influential among antisemites such as Jordan Bruno Genta and Antonio Caponneto, whose publications were read by some officers and repressors under military rule in the 1970s and early 1980s, as detailed in later sections.

Brazil aspired to modernize as well, yet without discarding any eugenic prejudices. Paradigmatic was Brazilian elites' xenophobic approach to migration despite promoting their country's image abroad as a paradise of racial confluence. In the 1920s, this image aroused in black communities in the United States a desire to migrate to Brazil, as they imagined Brazil as a multiracial society that would be open to Afro-Americans. Researching this dynamic, historians Meade and Pirio (2012) found that once the Brazilian government became aware of such interest, it mobilized in conjunction with the United States to prevent any such relocation, even denying tourist visas to dark-skinned North Americans. This, notwithstanding the contradiction with the image of Brazil as a "racial democracy." In the atmosphere of the 1930s, Jews then became a target of demonization.

In 1936, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a conspiracy hoax first drafted in tsarist Russia in 1903 and supposedly revealing a Jewish plan to dominate the world, was published in a Portuguese translation with comments by Gustavo Barroso. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, anticommunist émigrés spread the libel throughout Europe, and it soon reached worldwide diffusion. Barroso was a renowned folklorist and antisemite integralist who in 1937 published *A sinagoga paulista* (The Paulist Synagogue) and *Judaísmo, maçonaria e comunismo* (Judaism, Masonry, and Communism) (Nobrega de Jesús 2011). Another virulent work was *A emigração israelita da Polônia para o Brasil: Considerações inatuais e observações atuais a propósito desse mal* (Jewish Migration from Poland to Brazil: General Considerations and Actual Observations on This Evil) by Jorge Latour, the chargé d'affaires of the Brazilian embassy in Warsaw: "The Jew is, as a rule, a Freemason, a lover of secret organizations, a born simulator, a proselyte of occult actions and influences, always thriving where there is no light, where there is no meridian clarity. That way, in short, shapes his predisposition to endemic revolutionary tactics, to demagoguery; he is a latent anti-social being" (Tucci Carneiro 2007, 316).

The dissemination of publications like these bolstered the image of the Jew as a threat to national integrity, projecting the need to avoid an "infiltration" of social elements "unassimilable" into the country. The arrival of Jewish migrants was thought to be detrimental to the goal of "improving the race." By 1937, the Brazilian Foreign Ministry instructed its diplomatic representatives in Europe—albeit covertly—to deny visas of entry to people of "Semitic origins." However, in 1938, that policy was relaxed as Brazil tried to improve its international image as part of the anti-Nazi coalition. For the following three years, with the prior authorization of the Foreign Ministry, permanent visas were granted in the guise of family reunification to spouses or blood relatives of Jews (in a direct line up to the second degree) who were legally residing in Brazil. Then, reversing again in January 1941, a new order was sent to Brazilian consulates to suspend all visas, and authorities even denied admission to some whose visas had already been approved (Lesser 1995; Koifman 2012).

Jews had to face formidable obstacles in their requests to enter Brazil, and those who managed to do so, once settled, were watched by the Department of Political and Social Order and its state subsidiaries, and they were subject to arrest and deportation in the period 1936–1939 (Tucci Carneiro 2003). Moreover, the images of Jews as a menace were used as part of rightist political agendas. Thus, the discourse of an alleged Jewish communist plot threatening Brazil, a fabled narrative forged by the fascist leaders of the Ação

Integralista Brasileira movement and branded as the “Plan Cohen” (Senkman and Roniger 2018, 67–72), was used by President Getúlio Vargas to justify the establishment of the authoritarian Estado Novo in 1937.

### The image of Jews as a threat to national economies

Jews were also accused of being a menace to national economies. The world economic crisis of 1929 radicalized protectionism, and local forces started campaigns against the presence of Jewish peddlers. In the case of Mexico, Jews and Chinese were accused of unfair economic competition with Mexicans. Accordingly, the government of President Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930–1932) expelled 250 Jewish merchants from the La Merced supply market located in the center of the Federal District where the first Jewish immigrants had settled.

Protectionism and xenophobia went hand in hand. Those attitudes continued to reverberate during the 1930s, propelled from within civil society by anti-Jewish and anti-Chinese nationalist networks (Botton Beja 2008). These included the Acción Revolucionaria Mexicana, a fascist and antisemitic group that operated between 1933 and 1945. Its members—mostly veterans from the civil war—were known as the *golden shirts*, a term coined by legendary Pancho Villa for his supporters, who wore yellow shirts. Its leader, Brigadier General Nicolás Rodríguez Carrasco, set out to attack Jews and Chinese. He held those groups responsible for Mexico’s ills, accusing them of exploiting citizens with their retail businesses. His discourse against the Jews focused on the role of the *buhoneros*, or peddlers: “They come in great numbers and Mexicans cannot stand up to their competition. They open small workshops and factories where hygienic conditions are poor and exploit Mexicans with low wages and long hours. They introduce contraband merchandise and do not pay taxes. We must expel the Jews to rebuild our national trade on a small scale” (Gojman de Backal 2008).

In Colombia, many Jewish immigrants who arrived in the 1920s dedicated themselves to itinerant trade. The peddlers, mostly natives of Poland, were known as *klappers*. They carried briefcases of imported fabrics received on consignment to sell them on installment to the masses (Brainsky 1945, 20). Promoted by commercial competition, the antipeddler campaign used antisemitic motifs. Although the motivation was economic, the images used in it were drawn from the racist repository of European antisemitism of the 1930s. Moreover, antipeddler diatribes were expressed not only in the pro-fascist and nationalist press but also in the mainstream liberal press: “It is time to protect nationals and definitively stop entrance to peddler immigrants . . . the Jew of central Europe represents one of the lowest human types. It is the result of centuries of confinement in the ghettos, of famines, persecutions and miseries that weakened him physically, but sharpened cunning. It does not suit us” (*El Tiempo*, January 1, 1936; see also Simón Guberek 1993; Leal Villamizar 2015, 103). The Jews were not the only community of immigrants to suffer stigmatization on these grounds. The Syrian-Lebanese Maronite Christian merchants who had arrived decades earlier were also branded as undesirable and accused of spreading trachoma and diseases. That racist campaign dwindled in the late 1920s, when black Afro-Antillean laborers from Cuba, Jamaica, and Barbados began to enter Colombia’s Caribbean ports and became the new target of suspicion. By then, the Syrian and Lebanese were cleared (“whitened”) by the elites, who recognized those businessmen, some already prosperous, as integrated into the country (Rhenals Doria 2011; Rhenals and Flórez Bolívar 2013).

Antisemitic rhetoric and discourse spread against Jewish peddlers and street vendors in Costa Rica as well. The *polacos* (Polish), as Jewish peddlers became known, were accused of inflicting grave damage on local economies and municipalities and of being propagandists of foreign ideas. President Ricardo Jiménez was forced by public pressure to launch several

investigations between 1932 and 1934 and to announce in early 1934 a review of the immigration papers of resident Poles, with the idea of “purging the colony” of bad elements. In the last months of his presidency, Jiménez was accused of political corruption for having allowed Poles to enter the country. The inquiries continued under President León Cortés (1936–1940), who set up a commission of inquiry charged with checking whether Poles entered Costa Rica in accordance with state directives and procedures. The argument of commercial competition was used again in 1939, when authorities sought to cover up antisemitic prejudice by issuing an expulsion order against a group of German and Austrian Jews who had entered the country on tourist visas. Despite various international efforts, there were no positive results. The government ordered all Jewish refugees who remained in the country as tourists to leave. A group of refugees filed an appeal for habeas corpus with the Supreme Court of Justice, but the court confirmed the expulsion of the “Hebraic families.”

Antisemitic nationalist groups such as the Costa Rican Patriotic Union were behind the corrosive denunciation of the “Jewish problem.” As a result of such pressure, in May 1940, a new parliamentary commission of inquiry into the Polish peddlers was instituted. In its recommendations to Congress, the commission reiterated the argument that the peddlers harmed other merchants with their trade. While declaring that it lacked racial prejudice, the commission recommended the expulsion of all “Polish elements” residing in the country, stating that “the Poles are an undesirable race, and it does not seem natural that the country offers them hospitality, being as it is a race that absorbs all activities” (Soto-Quirós 2002, 189). However, the government of Rafael Calderón Guardia (1940–44) did not implement any measures based on those initiatives or on the recommendations of the commission’s report (Gudmundson 1979, 158, 162).

### **The rejection of “undesirable refugees” on the eve of World War II and during the Holocaust**

The negative images of Jews converged to the point that even under liberal or socialist governments, asylum was refused to European Jews in desperate need of finding a place to relocate. This generalized rejection of Jews as undesirable refugees occurred concomitantly with Nazi policies of marginalization, repression, and the massacre of Jews. With a few exceptions, notably the Dominican Republic (Wells 2009) and Bolivia (Avni 2003), countries closed their doors to Jewish refugees escaping European Nazism. It should be noted, however, that while most Latin American nations refused to welcome Jewish refugees by the late 1930s, the United States started closing its doors on massive migration from East, Central, and Southern Europe in 1924, including to hundreds of thousands of Jews looking for a refuge. In contrast, Cuban diplomats stationed in Europe were issuing visas to Jewish refugees as late as a few weeks before the German liner *St. Louis* attempted to land at the island. It was only then, in June 1939, that the *St. Louis*, with 937 passengers on board, was unable to land in Cuba and other American countries and was forced to return to Europe. Its case became emblematic of the widespread indifference to the fate of Jewish refugees fleeing for their lives at the time (Ogilvie and Miller 2006), much like that of the results of the July 1938 Evian conference on finding sites of asylum for Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. The number of European Jewish refugees settling in all South American countries in the 1930s and 1940s was close to 100,000—slightly less than the 113,260 refugees who settled in the United States during that period (Milgram 2003, 10).

Latin American states did not attempt to replicate the policies of confinement, decimation, and extermination of the Nazis and their collaborators in Europe. By aligning themselves with the Allied countries and conceiving of themselves as part of the civilized,

antifascist Western world, elites, as a rule, respected the citizens and residents of the Jewish faith in their countries. Nonetheless, with a few exceptions, and much like the United States and Canada, they refused to welcome massive numbers of Jews persecuted in Europe, considering them rather “inassimilable” refugees. The resistance to the entry of Jewish refugees has been studied in investigations on consular and administrative practices and on the antisemitic attitudes of state agencies in Latin American countries, some of them countries that previously had welcomed Jewish immigration, for example, those of the Southern Cone (Bejarano 1996; Milgram 2003; Yankelevich 2009; Kersfeld 2018; Senkman and Milgram 2020, 27–78, 111–154, 433–486), and the paradigmatic case of Mexico, in which the reluctance to accept Jewish refugees was notable, as it contrasted sharply with the welcoming reception of Spanish Republican refugees (Bokser Liwerant 2003; Gleizer 2014; Yankelevich 2019).

The antifascist and pro-Allied positions of numerous socialists and liberal democrats in Mexico, Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, Chile, and Argentina were not translated into solidarity with European Jews, toward whom there was indifference, ambiguity, complicity, or silence. The propaganda arsenal of the Falange, fascism, and National Socialism affected Latin American movements and elites, whether tangentially as in the case of the leaders of the Brazilian integralism and authoritarian ministers of the Estado Novo of Getúlio Vargas in Brazil, or more assertively in the case of Chilean vernacular fascism (Sznajder 1993). In Chile, during the presidency of Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1938–1941), who had been elected with the support of the antifascist Popular Front, a presidential and parliamentary commission on Jewish immigration was also set up. Unlike the Costa Rican commission, the initiative of the legislators stemmed from their desire to prevent kickbacks by monitoring officials and consuls who processed visas for the Jews. The result was, however, the same. It served as an excuse to interrupt “the avalanche of Semitic refugees.” The government officials were exempted, and blame was fastened to the refugees (Wojak 2003; Avni 2004). In Mexico, virulent antisemitism went hand in hand with anticommunism in those years, and many considered Nazism reasonable. Nor were artists and intellectuals spared this fallacy. Among others, Gerardo Murillo (1942), an initiator of Mexican muralism and a former revolutionary militant, under the alias of Dr. Atl, affirmed the veracity of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and defined President Roosevelt’s declaration of war on Hitler as a “Jewish conspiracy.” Even an intellectual and hero of Mexican education like José Vasconcelos, who coined the idea of a “cosmic race,” was director of the philo-fascist magazine *Timón*, which in 1940 defended conservative Hispanism and was critical of Jews and indigenous people (Gleizer 2014; Yankelevich 2019).

The cases of the Dominican Republic and Bolivia merit special attention. Initially, they differed from the general trend, yet eventually, they fit the pattern. At the Evian conference in July 1938, convened to find countries of refuge for Jews that the Nazi government was about to expel from Germany and Austria, the Dominican Republic stood out by offering to receive up to one hundred thousand Jews. Although the irruption of the war determined that only about eight hundred actually arrived to settle in the agricultural colonies of Sosúa, the case—studied by Allen Wells and others—is significant for two reasons: the motivation of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo in making such an offer: to ingratiate himself with the United States and clean up his international image, which had been affected by the 1937 massacre of about fifteen thousand resident Dominicans of Haitian origin. To this was added Trujillo’s desire to receive white immigrants who would “improve the race” of the Dominican nation, in the vision of its elites (Wells 2009; Zazo 2012).

Bolivia also chose to open its doors to Jews seeking to escape Nazi repression in Europe, perhaps because it had suffered from the devastating Chaco War (1932–1935). Immediately after suffering the impact of the world economic crisis, Bolivia announced its willingness to receive “men healthy in body and spirit from all over the world who want to come and

work the lush lands that we give them for free.” The provision explicitly indicated that Bolivia would not reproduce European hatred and that Jews were also included in the migration opening (Klein 1968, 357–358). Between seven thousand and ten thousand Jews took advantage of this policy and arrived in Bolivia between 1938 and 1940 (see testimonies by Gay 1998, 149–154; Spitzer 1998; on the contrast between Bolivia and Peru, see Avni 2003). Their visas stipulated that an appreciable majority had to work in agricultural work. However, most settled in cities, where the middle and popular classes assumed them to embody the stereotype of the Jewish merchant as usurer and fraudster, dishonest and parasitic (Bieber 2020, 532). The Bolivian Socialist Falange, created in 1937, and the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR), founded in 1941 by leftists and fascists with unconcealed antisemitic prejudices, both pushed a clear antisemitic agenda. These groups, as well as the *Auslandsorganisation*, a daughter organization abroad of the Nazi Party, donned swastikas and anti-Jewish slogans, harassed Jews in the city of La Paz during the 1940s, published antisemitic essays and notes, and pressured the government to expel those Jews already residing in Bolivia. Ultramontane sectors of the Catholic Church added hatred. Such antisemitism was absent in other locations, such as Sucre and Santa Cruz de la Sierra, where professionals had settled, among them doctors as well as various academics, musicians, and—to a much lesser extent—lawyers (Bieber 2020, 550).

Moreover, antisemitic prejudices gained momentum in the breeding ground of the Bolivian Revolution of early April 1952. Popular urban sectors frustrated by the cost of living and inflation believed that the victory of the MNR could legitimize popular antisemitism against immigrant Jews. The MNR leaders supported the Third Reich, and their first program of 1941 was almost a copy of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Gumucio 2002, 117–122). Flyers were distributed in La Paz, printed by one Committee for the Defense of the Bolivian People, blaming Jews for the shortage and hoarding of consumer products, and prompting the looting of their businesses. In Cochabamba, the National Industrial and Commercial Association launched a massive campaign calling on the government to eliminate Jews from all commercial activity. In 1952, Sherry Mangan (102), an Italian American antifascist and Trotskyist journalist, noted in Cochabamba that antisemitism in Bolivia was not limited to “psychopaths and hysterics, or to a few middle-class groups who feel harmed by mercantile competition, but was firmly rooted among the popular classes”: “Grimly typical was the incident during President Víctor Paz Estenssoro’s speech to twenty thousand supporters welcoming him back from exile. When he stated that the new government would take the severest measures against tradesmen who hoarded goods and unjustifiably raised prices, a roar went up: ‘The Jews!’”

### **The Cold War breeding ground for neo-Nazism, anticommunism, and antisemitism**

The outbreak of the Cold War opened a space for neo-Nazi and fascist groups to propagate antisemitic rhetoric and iconography in the fight against communism. The Cold War was not fought merely on strategic military fronts; it also led to the politicization of daily life and allowed former foes to be tolerated as allies while old conspiratorial suspicions were re-created in new forms (Grandin 2006; Calandra and Franco 2012).

This scenario contributed to a persistence of antisemitism in the region, partly because of structural conditions and partly due to the influence of some European and Latin American voices espousing Judeophobic narratives. Among the contributing conditions the crisis of the model of development that prevailed since the late nineteenth century stands out. Such crisis was precipitated by the mounting pressure of populist and union forces, of university students and intellectuals, and of extraparliamentary and revolutionary groups willing to emulate the Cuban Revolution. Some of these groups also



prioritized bringing about radical change through violence, which in turn exacerbated the conviction of military officers and right-wing political actors to use equally violent actions of state terrorism. Those polarizing scenarios led to the breakdown of civil and political regimes and the onset of authoritarian and military dictatorships, some of which allowed for leeway in state agents' extreme rightism and antisemitism to be tolerated as part of their repressive policies.

The atmosphere of the period nurtured the rhetoric of antiparliamentary and ideological groups, some of them embedding the local legacy of xenophobia, racism, and antisemitic prejudice. Particularly in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, such groups reflected domestic trends as much as the impact of former Nazis and fascists who had sought refuge in those countries (Klich and Buchrucker 2009; Bertonha and Bohoslavsky 2016). We know, for example, that some who took refuge in Argentina influenced antisemitic nationalist groups and right-wing sectors of Peronism. A salient case was Jacques Marie (Jaime María) de Mahieu (1915–1990), a French intellectual collaborator of the Vichy regime in 1944. Taking refuge in Argentina, Mahieu was hired as a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the National University of Cuyo between 1948 and 1955. During that period, he collaborated in *Dinámica Social*, a publication that, under the direction of fugitive fascist Carlo Scorza, became the most important intellectual neo-fascist magazine of Latin America. After the anti-Peronist coup of 1955, Mahieu continued to publish and was an ideological mentor of right-wing Peronist political and labor-union circles. The theories contained in his book *El Estado comunitario* (1962) particularly influenced violent antisemitic groups such as Tacuara.

The impact of *Dinámica Social* on the right and neo-fascism in other Latin American countries that spread neo-fascist and antisemitic tropes is unknown. However, the neo-Nazi magazine *Der Weg*, published in German in Buenos Aires, together with the Dürer publishing house in the decade from 1947 to 1957, reached a transnational network of subscribers and readers in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, in addition to having subscribers in West Germany, the United States, and Canada. *Der Weg* became one of the most important organs of global neo-fascism in the first decade of the Cold War. It celebrated the resurrection of antisemitism under the call to defend the West from communism (Buchrucker 2002).

During the Cold War, those nostalgic for fascism and Nazism maintained relations with the transnational European neo-fascist network. Neo-fascism was fed ideologically by intellectuals and the hierarchy of European fascism and by new ideologues from the European and Latin American radical right (Fella and Ruzza 2009, 13–16). In the framework of the Cold War, the new Latin American right presented itself as working to restore the “true” national identity and positioned itself as an alternative in the international arena under the motto of “neither Yankees nor reds.” In that scenario, the overrepresentation of Jews in university leftist organizations and revolutionary movements contributed to resurrecting long-standing conspiracy mythemes, resignified by post-fascist and authoritarian groups that added antisemitic stigmas. Simultaneously, and contradictorily, in the eyes of the new right, the Jews became emblems of both hated Yankee capitalism and abhorred communism.

In the shadows of fears of the Cuban Revolution projecting into the Americas, even democratic civilian administrations turned a blind eye to the activities of neo-fascist and post-fascist nationalist groups. Political instability, economic crises, and the fear of a social explosion seemed a greater threat than the radical right to those in power. Nationalist ideologies with Catholic and Hispanic cultural roots were revitalized, along with popular narratives that identified Jews with Bolsheviks, and vice versa.

There were differences in the unfolding of the crises and their outcome. In Argentina during the 1960s and 1970s, violence became widespread on the margins of the political spectrum. Both the radical right and radical left wings operated under the premise of an

internal war, spreading violence, personal courage, and machismo. The Tacuara movement on the Right and the Communist Youth Federation and other groups on the Left resorted to political violence and direct confrontation inside and outside universities (e.g., Bergstein 2003).

Tacuara incited hatred and launched attacks against Jews, particularly after Adolf Eichmann's capture in 1960 and his smuggling out of the country to stand trial in Jerusalem for his role in the Holocaust. Alberto Ezcurra Uriburu, one of Tacuara's leaders, warned of a supposed world Jewish conspiracy, citing the plot of the *Protocolos de los Sabios de Sión*, a libel widely circulated in newsstands and bookstores in the country. In the imaginary of Tacuara militants, hatred of Jews converged with hatred of Yankee imperialism and Muscovite communism (Bardini 2002; Galván 2013; Campos 2019). In *Ofensiva*, the internal publication designed to train Tacuara cadres, Ezcurra Uriburu wrote a summary of his reasons guiding "the fight against that triad" (Gutman 2003, 80–81; see also DAIA 1975).

Tacuara's demonology depicted the Jewish "enemy" as embodying the Janus face of a subversive revolutionary and an avaricious capitalist, imagining Jews as sinister stateless characters who abused Argentina and were guilty of double loyalty given the ethnic link with the State of Israel. In the document *El caso Sirota y el problema judío en Argentina*, Tacuara condensed its prejudices and conspiracy narratives, denouncing Jews as forming part of an ancient, worldwide rapacious corporation whose ethnonational history was incompatible with Argentine nationality. The core of Tacuara's ideology and imaginary was rooted in its reaction to the process of modernization that took place during the 1960s in popular culture, universities, science, journalism, the arts, and the publishing industry. Tacuara members considered such trends as contrary to the tradition and "organic values" of the Argentine nation. Blaming the situation on the "anti-national, transnational Judaism," they resorted to violence against Jews in what they considered a defense of nationality and the Christian faith (Senkman 1989, 45). Unsurprisingly, due to the persistent and at times close transnational links between Latin American nations (Roniger 2022), antisemitic ideas and practices circulated transnationally. In the early 1960s, extreme right-wing organizations were also active in Uruguay. The Montonera and the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement were nationalist youth groups that were ideologically and organizationally related to Argentine ones that spread antisemitic propaganda and violence. Magdalena Broquetas has described the existence of transnational links of the antisemitic right on both shores of the Río de la Plata with neo-Nazi organizations in Spain and Latin America. Between 1963 and 1964, both Uruguayan nationalist movements were part of the Joven América movement, whose coordination functioned in Buenos Aires. Immediately after Eichmann's abduction, far-right activists carried out antisemitic attacks not only in Argentina but also in Uruguay (Broquetas 2010; Broquetas 2016, 222).

Two weeks after Jewish student Graciela Sirota was kidnapped in Buenos Aires and had a swastika tattooed on her chest, the young Paraguayan exile Soledad Barrett, a member of the Frente Unido de Liberación Nacional (United National Liberation Front) that defied the Stroessner dictatorship, was kidnapped and similarly assaulted in Montevideo (Sánchez and Roniger 2010, 148–149). Likewise, the assassination in Uruguay of war criminal Herberts Cukurs by an Israeli Mossad commando in 1965 generated a new wave of actions against Jews involving members of extreme right-wing organizations on both sides of Río de la Plata (Rein 2020, 332; Pastor de Carvalho 2022). These attacks prompted organizing networks of Jewish self-defense in the Southern Cone (Rein 2022). In contrast, Chilean rightists showed mainly indifference following the detention and possible extradition to Germany of Nazi criminal Walther Rauff in 1962 (Guzmán 2022).

Local neo-Nazi groups seem to have participated in the repression during the Argentine and Chilean dictatorship, while European neo-fascist networks in operations aided the

actions orchestrated under Operation Condor during the 1970s, such as the attempted assassination of exiled Chilean politician Bernardo Leighton in Rome in October 1975 (Nilson 1998; Dinges 2004). Even so, differences existed. Unlike the antisemitism of the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina—known as the Triple A—and the Argentine magazine *El Caudillo*, antisemitism was absent from the anti-Marxist discourse and actions of the radical right and paramilitary groups in Chile, such as Patria y Libertad in the early 1970s. None of the Chilean neo-fascist groups incorporated antisemitism into its main discourse or violent actions (Besoky 2010; Various Authors 2020; Gomes 2016, 59; Guzmán 2022).

In the early 1960s, anticommunist civilian-military groups also emerged in Brazil, the main ones being the Movimento Anticomunista and the Comando de Caça a os Comunistas. These groups conducted acts of terrorism under the government of João Goulart in 1961–1964, attacking communist and other leftist militants who dreamed of emulating the Cuban Revolution. In addition, they attacked progressive intellectuals and popular circles that demanded agrarian and political reforms. But unlike in Argentina or Uruguay, Brazilian Jews were not the target of physical attacks, nor were they vilified by the radical right.

The military responsible for the 1964 coup d'état that implanted the Brazilian dictatorship had anticommunist and antisemitic integralists among its leading officers. Among them was the integralist Newton de Andrade Cavalcanti, whose anticommunism was inextricably contaminated with antisemitism, a position he did not attempt to conceal (Silva 1980, 111).

During Brazil's military repression in 1968–1975 and at the beginning of the relaxation of the dictatorship in 1975, Jewish students and intellectuals participated in the guerrilla armed struggle and were among the activists who disappeared and were killed by the dictatorship (Lemle 2014), yet without reaching the magnitude of forced disappearance of Jewish detainees in 1976–1983 Argentina and without registering antisemitism as an important ideological component of the development of the fight against communism (Patto Sá Motta 2002). No indications of antisemitism were found in well-known cases of assassination (as that of revolutionary activist Iara Iavelberg, in 1971) and of detention, torture, and death (as that of journalist Vladimir Herzog, in 1975). In contrast, because of his position against Minister José López Rega, the Argentine journalist Heriberto Khan suffered death threats from Felipe Romeo, director of *El Caudillo* and an antisemite spokesman for the Peronist extreme right wing. Antisemitism might also have played a role in the kidnapping and disappearance of other Jewish journalists and artists, such as the filmmaker and journalist Enrique Raab, a native of Austria naturalized in Argentina, and in the arbitrary long detention and abuse of the journalist Jacobo Timerman. Among the factors differentiating the two countries was the early liquidation of the Brazilian guerrilla, but also crucial was the depth of latent popular antisemitism in Argentina. The lengthy process of Brazilian political transition occurred without full relinquishing of killings, mass incarceration, and torture of political prisoners. Such violence was carried out by officers of the radical right who resisted a relaxed dictatorship and continued using violence against progressive politicians, priests, and bishops between 1975 and 1981 (Roniger and Sznajder 2004, xiii–xxxix; Serra Padrós et al. 2011; Maud 2012).

According to some historians, antisemitism culminated in Argentina in the period of the Cold War, when many Argentine Jewish citizens fell victim to the repressive practices of military state terrorism (Finchelstein 2014, 33–64, Kahan 2011). In several files and reports of the Intelligence Directorate of the Police of the Province of Buenos Aires (DIPBA), stereotypical accusations existed that doubted Jewish citizens' loyalty to the nation and equated Jews with Communist subversion of national values (Kahan 2010). While repressive practices cannot be inferred from such intelligence assessments, as state repression unfolded in the 1970s, Jews were vastly over-represented among the

*desaparecidos*, i.e., those detainees murdered covertly by the repressive state agencies and whose remains have only rarely been traced (Kaufman 1989; Lipis 2010). Another issue was whether antisemitic suspicion toward Jews also existed in the ranks of revolutionary leftist circles in Argentina. Based on oral testimonies, some analysts deny its existence (Goldfarb 2021), and others assert it (Böckmann 2021, 201–221).

During the years of state terrorism in Argentina, the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (the representative umbrella Jewish organization, known by its acronym, DAIA) denied official antisemitism. The DAIA denied the denunciations of international Jewish organizations and of the Argentine political exiles. Only many years after the transition to democracy did the DAIA openly denounce the antisemitic undertone of military repression. In 2007, it published a report by its Center of Social Studies, in which it explicitly adopted the framework of genocide and the Shoah to refer to the experience of state repression in the country: “It is frankly surprising to check the methodology of genocide deployed by Nazism against the methodology of genocide in Argentina . . . The appropriation of Nazi practices is not only observed in the implicit characteristics of the operations but also in the verbal or symbolic explanation of this appropriation” (316). Thus, the DAIA came around a full cycle to stand close to what, already in 1984, the Jewish Movement for Human Rights (JMHR) had claimed as it commemorated the 41st anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Already then, the JMHR compared “both genocides” (*Nueva Presencia*, June 1, 1984, 2; and see also Feierstein 2011).

This contrasts with the Chilean situation. A study by Gustavo Guzmán reveals that despite the salience of Jewish Chileans within the Left and in the Unidad Popular administration of Salvador Allende, the mainstream rightist forces rarely contested them on racist grounds, and the violent far-right never attacked Jews. Moreover, under Pinochet’s rule, the government and the Chilean right were remarkably friendly toward Jews, whose economic contribution to Chile and international connections they valued (Guzmán 2022).

Nonetheless, anti-Jewish discourse spread both in Argentina and in Chile, often with total impunity, before, during, and after the military dictatorships. In Argentina, Walter Beveraggi Allende stand out, a nationalist professor of economics whose citizenship was taken away by the Perón government in 1951 for sponsoring economic and political sanctions against Argentina from his exile in the United States. While in exile, he taught at the Latin American Program of Boston University, criticizing Peronism and its policies as part of his principled critique of those nationalists and leftists who did not welcome foreign investments. Twenty years later, in a public letter addressed to José Ignacio Rucci, the secretary-general of the Peronist-controlled Confederación General del Trabajo labor federation, Beveraggi Allende denounced a mythical Andinia Plan in prominent newspapers. Entitled *Autodefensa Argentina ante la agresión sionista* (Argentine Self-Defense against the Zionist Aggression), it was published on November 1, 1971. In it, Beveraggi Allende denounced a plot that was supposedly woven to dismember Argentina and Chile, taking over Patagonia, with the intention of creating a second Jewish state (Beveraggi Allende 1956; Carta pública 1971).

A similar narrative had been developed in Chile by writer and former post-fascist diplomat Miguel Serrano (1913–2009), who forged a body of National Socialist doctrine concocted for Chile (Caro 2007, 190–191). Among other writings, the former diplomat added a prologue to a classic fabricated anti-Jewish text, which he published under the title of *Los Protocolos de los Sabios de Sión y su aplicación en Chile* (Serrano 1981). In that text, Serrano acknowledges his debt to Beveraggi Allende, recognizing that his own publication was the result of collaboration between Chilean and Argentine nationalists. Aware that the *Plan Andinia* affects both countries, he dedicates the book to “the nationalist youth of South America, to free men, to the civil and military patriots, not yet instrumentalized by Freemasonry and the churches at the service of Zionist Imperialism” (Serrano 1981, 7–11). In Serrano’s (1981, 11) interpretation, both the Argentine and Chilean military

dictatorships “jeopardized the plans of the secret Jewish government to seize Patagonia to build a second Jewish state there.” He developed this mytheme of the Jewish conspiracy in other libels. In 1988 he published *The New Transnational Order and Patagonia*, a furious interpellation of intertwined antisemitism and anti-Zionism by which the old hatred of Nazism against the Jews is amalgamated with the post-fascist hatred of the new transnational and globalized order. He dedicated the work as a funerary homage to Rudolph Hess and Chile’s Naci (Nazi) heroes, and he closed it with an appeal to Chileans to stop an imminent plot hatched by Israel to seize Patagonia and settle one million Jews recently emigrated from the Soviet Union there (Serrano n.d.). At that time, the Andinia fantasy started circulating in Chile.

Another author who diffused an antisemite narrative transnationally in the Americas was Norberto Ceresole. An Argentine nationalist sociologist, Ceresole became a close adviser to Hugo Chávez between 1994 and 1999, that is, mostly before Chávez managed to reach power. Ceresole helped Chávez rethink the idea of a Latin American “Great Fatherland” in a transnational key, according to his geopolitical interpretation of the Bolivarian Revolution. But along with Third World and revisionist thought, he was antisemitic, denied the Holocaust, and expressed a conspiratorial view of the July 1994 terrorist attack on the Asociación Mutua Israelita Argentina Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, which he spread in writings and several books that undoubtedly influenced some Chavista circles that combined Judeophobia with a fervent anti-Zionism. At a critical juncture of Chávez’s rule, amid growing internal polarization and international tension, such narratives affected the sense of security of Venezuelan Jewish citizens (Roniger 2009).

Strikingly, the experience under Castro in Cuba was highly different. In Cuba, Jews obtained positions of trust in the state, the Communist Party, the diplomatic service, and the army. Even after Cuba broke diplomatic ties with Israel after the October War of 1973, the country’s role in the Non-Aligned Movement and the international revolutionary camp, and its alignment with the Soviet Union and open confrontation with Israel’s ally, the United States, did not affect the attitude of the regime toward the Cuban Jews. Due to ideological and pragmatic reasons, both Cuba and Israel understood that they held opposing interests and strategic alliances, but this did not radically change the attitude toward the Jews on the island. Maritza Corrales Capestany (2008) attributes the lack of an anti-Jewish overflow like the one that took over sectors of Chavismo in Venezuela to several historical factors. Among them was the early cooperation of Jews in the ranks of the Cuban revolutionaries throughout the island’s history, even in the early nineteenth century; Jews being part of the forces that supported José Martí in the 1890s, the Jewish participation in the foundation of the Communist Party in 1925, their presence among who suffered martyrdom fighting the dictatorship of Machado and those who were part of the 26th of July movement led by Fidel Castro. Accordingly, Jews such as Fabio Grobart and Ricardo Subirana Lobo maintained a good relationship with old-time communists such as Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and Alfredo Guevara, who were aware of the Jewish contribution to the revolution. Their common background shaped a special relationship that endured even the breakdown of diplomatic relationships at the interstate level: “Neither critical attitudes nor the rupture with Israel translated into negative treatment of the Jewish community, though it did complicate the return to the bosom of part of the residual [i.e., nominal] Jews, and took away from them a certain legitimization as an ethnic organization” (Corrales Capestany 2008, 218).

Cuban Jewish communitarian life was restored by 1995 with the help of foreign Jewish organizations and the solidarity of other groups. Commercial and cultural relations were established with Jews abroad and culminated in a friendly visit by Fidel Castro to the Jewish community in 1998, marking a sharp contrast with the Venezuelan case (Bejarano 2009).

## Antisemitism and the Jewish experience in Latin America

The experience of Jews in the Americas south of the Rio Grande is a story of contradictory developments of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, looking back on the past half century, the native-born Jewish generations have excelled in science, academia, culture, literature, and economics, and they participated in public spheres, including in politics, where individuals of a Jewish background reached top positions as ministers, governors and even heads of state (Lvovich and Bohoslavsky 2007; Senkman 2011; Bokser Liwerant 2011). On the other hand, as reflected in this analysis, at various historical moments, Jews were targeted as suspicious, the result of prejudice and conspiratorial perspectives. The holders of such perspectives changed over time and across countries, as reflected in this inquiry. At some point, Catholic nationalists figured prominently among Judeophobic voices. At other points, mistrust of Jews was also voiced by liberals, who resisted welcoming “Semitic” refugees during the 1930s, imagining them as foreigners unlikely to assimilate into the nation. In turn, European fascist ideas provided another major antisemitic breeding ground for local nationalist forces. During the Cold War, a confluence of military and civilian right-wing sectors, Catholic populists, and nostalgic fascists and neo-fascists tolerated antisemitism in their anticommunist crusade.

Paradoxically, as Latin American countries embraced democracy after the end of authoritarian rule, for the first time an act of terrorism unfolded against the Argentine Jewish community center in Buenos Aires; its headquarters were destroyed in an explosion carried out by foreign terrorists with the assistance of local forces in July 1994. This major act of terrorism killed eighty-five people, Jews and non-Jews, wounded hundreds, and destroyed the primary Jewish center of Argentina. The perpetrators have not been brought to justice, leading to persistent protests and recurrent demands for accountability (Levine and Zaretsky 2015). This massacre occurred under a democratic administration, something that had never occurred previously, even under authoritarian governments.

In parallel, democracy brought about a major shift as antidefamation state agencies and nonstate networks were created, designed to confront and curtail acts of racial and ethnic discrimination. Among them were the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI), established in July 1995 within the Argentine Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, and in Mexico, a national commission for the prevention of discrimination monitors the situation following the enactment of a 2003 federal law banning all forms of discrimination. As for nongovernmental organizations, since 1998 DAIA has published annual reports on acts of antisemitism in Argentina (see, e.g., DAIA 2021), and in Brazil, the *Confederação Israelita do Brasil* and other organizations have made use of a 1989 law protecting ethnicity, origin, and race to characterize and seek prosecution of acts of discrimination against Jews. In addition, since 2019 the *Observatório Judaico dos Direitos Humanos no Brasil*, located in São Paulo, tracks cases of antisemitism as part of a defense of human rights in Brazil (Observatório 2019).

More recently, some antiglobalizing forces on the Left converged with radical Islamist forces to censure and demonize the State of Israel for its policies toward Palestinians. Although one should not conflate criticisms of Israeli policies with antisemitism, parts of that coalition of strange bedfellows have embedded hate speech and conspiratorial arguments, recycling old stereotypes that saw in Jews a threat to nations and the global order. Parts of that coalition of forces have problematically conflated antisemitic expressions with criticisms of Israeli policies and Zionism. We have mentioned already one of the reverberations of such attitudes in Argentina and Chile, where some writers, officials, and office holders have given credence to the fabled story of an Israeli plan to take over parts of Patagonia. Similarly, in Venezuela, such demonization reached and pervaded high levels of power, nongovernmental organizations, and social movements, yet elsewhere it fueled several political and intellectual networks. This newest configuration as a reaction to the

ongoing crisis in the Middle East merits a separate, full-fledged analysis and has already generated academic and practical controversy on how to define both the scope and boundaries of antisemitism today.

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