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Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Community and National Identity, 1880–1960 by Adriana M. Brodsky, and: *Argentine Jews in the Age of Revolt: Between the New World and the Third World* by Beatrice D. Gurwitz (review)

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Review Essay

Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Community and National Identity, 1880–1960. By Adriana M. Brodsky. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016. vii + 280 pp.

Argentine Jews in the Age of Revolt: Between the New World and the Third World. By Beatrice D. Gurwitz. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016. vii + 231 pp.

A review essay on multiple books is not an easy task. Luckily for me, these two works cover the same overall subject matter, Argentine Jewry, albeit with vastly different perspectives. At first glance, these momentous books seem quite similar. Both are written by knowledgeable scholars, both deal with the Argentine Jewish community, and both mention the communal central institutions of the DAIA (Delegation of Argentine Jewish Organizations—the umbrella organization of Argentina’s Jewish community), the AMIA (Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association) and the OSA (Argentine Zionist Organization). Both books discuss Zionism, Jewish ethnicity, activism, the Argentine nation and Jewishness. However, there are also important differences worthy of discussion.

Without a doubt, the Jewish experience in Argentina is tied to the social and cultural development of the country. In Adriana M. Brodsky’s book *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Community and National Identity, 1880–1960*, a complex picture emerges of both cohesiveness and disjuncture as Sephardi Jews constructed their public Jewishness and evolved from being at the margins of society to leaders of the entire Jewish community. Brodsky recounts the settlement and acculturation periods when Sephardi Jews created organizations, founded synagogues, and built cemeteries. She elaborates on the interrelated processes that shaped the Sephardi identity in Argentina, both in Buenos Aires and the interior provinces, through shared experiences with other Argentines. These processes were often contested and debated from within the various Sephardi groups as well as from the outside. Brodsky highlights this transformation from non-entities to leaders as part of a much larger process of not only integrating into the Ashkenazi community but also of developing a sense of national belonging. She argues that the construction of a unified Sephardi identity was a choice and part and parcel of creating a hybrid identity as both Jewish and Argentine. Brodsky also discusses the cultural differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim and how they related to each other.

Brodsky's book is part of the *Sephardi and Mizrahi Studies* series published by Indiana University Press and is based on close readings of institutional documents, community publications, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, archives, and interviews. Her book is thematic and is divided into six chapters. Parts of several chapters appeared previously in other publications, both in Spanish and English.

In Chapter 1, "Burying the Dead: Cemeteries, Walls, and Jewish Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Argentina," Brodsky highlights how cemeteries serve as troves of information about community formation, debates on organization and demarcation of group boundaries. Chapter Two, "Helping the Living: Philanthropy and the Boundaries of Sephardi Communities in Argentina," discusses the geographic settlement patterns of different Sephardi groups in Buenos Aires and the provinces and the establishment of new ties or lack thereof. It also elaborates upon the role of philanthropy, the creation of the different religious and communal organizations. Chapter Three, "The Limits of Community: Unsuccessful Attempts at Creating Single Sephardi Organizations," focuses on the unsuccessful institutional attempts to create a comprehensive Sephardi identity based on cultural and religious practices and not necessarily on religious observance. The picture changed with the creation of the state of Israel, since Zionism did not clash with either Sephardi or Ashkenazi identities or desires for national belonging. Continuing in this vein, Chapter Four, "Working for the Homeland: Zionism and the Creation of an 'Argentine' Sephardi Community after 1920," emphasizes the role Zionism played in shaping a single group sub-ethnic identity as Sephardim in relation to the Ashkenazi majority, and to the nation as they became Jewish Argentines who were also Sephardi. Chapter Five, "Becoming Argentine, Becoming Jewish, Becoming and Remaining Sephardi: Jewish Women and Identity in Twentieth-Century Argentina," discusses the important roles played by Sephardi women in articulating, constructing and reconstructing identity and belonging in both the public and private spheres. Chapter Six, "Marriages and Schools: Living within Multiple Borders," explores educational institutions and marriage patterns and how these serve as important markers of belonging. They also help shape the processes of identity formation as Argentine, Jewish and Sephardi.

Brodsky ends her book with a postscript which not only summarizes the key points of each chapter but also gives a brief account of the now infamous suicide bombing of the AMIA building in Buenos Aires 23 years ago. This brutal and senseless terrorist attack generated new debates about the place and presence of Jews in Argentina and how Sephardim should be perceived.

Argentine Jews in the Age of Revolt: Between the New World and the Third World by Beatrice D. Gurwitz focuses on how Argentine Jews constructed their notions of Jewishness, nation, ethnicity, belonging, and a hybrid Argentine Jewish identity between 1955 and 1983, especially through the revolutionary ferment of the 1960s and 1970s. Specifically, Gurwitz examines unaffiliated Jewish youth's activism between civil and military rule, massive labor unrest and social protests, escalating violence, dictatorship and intergenerational ideological clashes. Similarly to Brodsky, she examines the construction and reconstructions of a dual Jewish and Argentine identity. She also discusses how the Jewish margins became the center in Argentine society and culture. The book is part of Brill's *Jewish Latin America: Issues and Methods* series. Gurwitz uses institutional documents, community publications, personal papers, diplomatic cables, Jewish press publications, pamphlets, historical periodicals, archives, and interviews.

Unlike Brodsky, Gurwitz's book is not thematic but chronological. The book also consists of six chapters and an epilogue. Chapter One, "The New World: The Fall of Perón and the Triumph of Liberal Argentina, 1955–1960," opens the book with a discussion of how the Jewish community supported the overthrow of Juan Perón in 1955 and how Jewishness at that time was more attuned to the establishment of the State of Israel rather than on Argentine politics. Chapter Two, "Nationalism, Populism, and the Demise of the Liberal Nation, 1961–1966," focuses on the consequences of the antisemitism, labor unrest and political instability that led many Jewish activists to question notions of Jewish ethnicity and the articulation of nation.

Chapter Three, "Youth, Identity, and the Making of the Latin American Jew," covers the same period but concentrates on the perceived central challenges of assimilation among Argentine-born youth, changing ethnic values and the rearticulation of Jewishness in a local context. Chapter Four, "The Challenge of the New Left: Anti-Zionism and a Captivated Youth, 1967–1973," deals with the clashes of ideals as Jewish youth joined the forces of the New Left, which became anti-Zionist and anti-semitic, and in doing so abandoned their Jewishness and Zionism.

Chapter Five, "Third-World Zionism: National Liberation and the Revolutionary Vanguard, 1967–1973," attempts to reconcile Jewishness, Zionism and leftist ideals. In Chapter Six, "Jewish Radicalism Revised: Guerillas, Terrorism, and Dictatorship, 1973–1977," Gurwitz charts the escalation of violence between left-wing guerrillas and right-wing, state-sponsored paramilitary groups, and the ushering of a military dictatorship. She also discusses debates surrounding radicalized Jewish youth activism, radical Zionism, cultural pluralism, the articulations

of national belonging and constructions of Jewish ethnicity. Finally, in the epilogue Gurwitz ponders the emerging debates that questioned the involvement of the Jewish community in the human rights movement, as well as the ongoing debates about the importance of Jewishness and belonging, nation and diaspora in the making of an ethnic identity.

Both books are methodologically rigorous and offer a treasure trove of information, but they center around different aspects of ethnicity. Brodsky focuses on ethnicity and community vis-à-vis historical processes, while Gurwitz highlights the process of constructing ethnicity and radicalism. Both articulate what it has meant to be Jewish and Argentine. Gurwitz deals with the interplay between national, communal, and diasporic processes, while Brodsky concentrates on the centrality of a Sephardi diasporic identity and the boundaries that demarcated belonging. Gurwitz focuses more on activism, while Brodsky emphasizes community formation, belonging, and multiple Jewish identities within the Sephardi sector.

There are also a number of similarities between the books. Both are helpful in understanding the construction and use of diasporic identities juxtaposed with national identities. Both also deal with national elements that constructed, articulated, and rearticulated diasporic and Jewish identities—including Sephardi, Ashkenazi, radical, conservative, and pluralist—that were linked to notions of national and communal belonging. Both discuss how the Jewish margins became the center.

These works are carefully written and well documented. They are relevant not only to specialists in Latin American Jewish studies but also to interdisciplinary scholars and researchers of Sephardic Jewry, ethnic studies in Latin America, diaspora, and culture studies.

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