

Incomplete Allowance: Jews as a Minority in Mexico

ADINA CIMET
Columbia-YIVO, New York

Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we
begin gathering our resources for a journey
of hope.

Raymond Williams

This essay presents two historical moments as examples of interrelations between minority and majority groups: the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the UN Racism-Zionism resolution in 1975. Both cases illustrate how key political moments can expose the qualitative nature of the relationship between the majority and the minority when these differ on the interpretation of the situation. The tensions and disagreements between the groups underscore the ground principles on which such relations are based and lay bare some of the political and philosophical consequences of their social arrangements.

As I see it, the most important determinant of the relations between Mexicans and Jews in this century was citizenship. The government of Mexico grappled with the problem of immigration, but, although the issue of the Jewish minority was given consideration, there was no agreement as to the numbers that should be allowed into the country. Since some Jews arrived in the absence of any clear government policy, it was their being allowed to become citizens that unexpectedly turned Mexico into a host country for a Jewish community.¹ And this is where the problem begins.

There is plenty of evidence to show that citizenship, while in theory an equalizing factor, may in fact reproduce other forms of inequality and repression.² When a society opens its doors to "others" but does not, in turn, allow them to maintain their otherness openly through political channels, some type of cultural violence is being perpetuated. While the minority may

well experience discomfort produced by this symbolic violence, it often mistakes it for unachieved equality, the imperfect functioning of the system or an internal malfunctioning, rather than as the consequence of not being given full usage of the political space offered. Although they define themselves as a minority and are likewise defined by the majority, in reality they are pushed into a situation of cultural and political atomization as citizens.³ This power structure conceals itself within the power relations that it underwrites, and becomes self-affirming and self-fulfilling. Attempts on the part of the minority to "perfect" the system rather than analyze its bases fail to call into question the premises of their interrelationship with the majority. The result for both groups is, at best, some awkwardness in their interrelations, though more often than not the result is anomie and a burgeoning identity crisis, all due to the misrepresentation of the expected political behavior of the self given the atomistic conditions imposed by that society. Current world events and the problem of the coexistence of diverse groups in different societies lend this issue not only legitimacy but renewed urgency.

Due to the significance that the idea of citizenship and political equality has acquired in the last century for various minorities, and especially for Jews, the offer of citizenship was perceived as a wonderful opportunity. In the case of Mexico, the offer was limited to a precious few. A certain ambivalence towards the Jewish population and their usefulness as a permanent immigration factor characterized most markedly that government's immigration policy. For the Jews entering the country, however, the option of citizenship was most welcome, all the more so in the absence of any other viable solution to their statelessness, and especially since it turned out that they were sufficiently ignored by the government's homogenizing policies as to be allowed to build a communal network to maintain their culture and religion. The structure within which Jews found themselves colored all their political intergroup as well as intragroup activity. The political space assigned to them did not acknowledge any possibility for official group behavior. The Constitution of 1917 did not provide for minority rights, neither was the slightest notion of pluralism given expression in any of the formal documents that articulate the structure of the Mexican State; yet, in spite of this, the principle of minority distinction was invoked in an *ad hoc* fashion by the government. By the same token, the Jewish response was always politically undetermined, bolstering the government's use of the unacknowledged political principle of minority.

What we have, then, is a structural political condition embodying an essential contradiction with regard to the possibilities for minority self-expression, an "incomplete allowance" –a concept devised to illustrate a specific type of political violence– of the rights of a minority to live out their

cultural difference fully, politically and philosophically. In other words, by being allowed to define themselves as "other" while officially treated as "equal" (citizens), and being persistently reminded of their otherness by the continual manipulation of the boundaries of political incorporation, the Jewish citizens of Mexico face a situation that is problematic at many levels. I use the term "incomplete allowance" in order to emphasize that this condition starts out imposed by the majority on the minority, but later takes on a life of its own, reproducing itself within the political identity of the minority members, as they struggle to conform to the political mold that has been assigned to them; consequently, they are never quite able to conceptualize the source of the particular violence they experience, nor are they willing, not even in principle, to challenge that situation. Incomplete allowance speaks of government action on the minority as much as of the political and philosophical incompleteness of the minority; it also affects the majority, in that by defining itself as an open, free society, it is in fact misrepresenting its own image to itself. Incomplete allowance, I will argue, refers to a condition structured into the political relationships of the society that exacerbates political anomie and stimulates group and intragroup alienation, effectively disrupting the sense of identity of all its members. In other words, what will be analyzed here is the nature of political misrepresentation as used and imposed in a society, and its consequences on a minority. Activating the mechanisms of otherness while purporting to be a society of autonomous individuals not only confounds the rights of citizens that act as an aggregate in that society, but erects internal political boundaries that, if nothing else, keep the question of inclusion or exclusion to the body politic from being answered. Matters of loyalty and legitimacy remain open to proof.

In a world that values and protects the individual to such a high degree yet mistreats groups so dramatically, it seems necessary to reassess our cognitive vocabulary as well as our social arrangements. All individuals must belong to a group in order to survive, while at the same time struggling to be themselves. This socializing process is not just a psychological platitude or an adolescent phenomenon, but a description of a structuralized force that profoundly affects individuals and groups seeking to define themselves in society. Within the same group context and as part of the same dynamics, man also defines himself as an individual, as different, as single. The forces that bind and separate work together on the same being. One becomes conscious of what one is in opposition to others, resisting one's relationships with the external physical and social world. It is this self-awareness that makes up the individual's identity, that is the "timber" –to use Kant's term—⁴ of which any group is made, and that is also the social process that makes possible the formation of individuals;⁵ we become aware that, in order to

survive, we need others, and that "a myriad of strands" connect us to these others.⁶ But men are never so good to each other as to form perfect groups, neither are they incapable of using a particular group to their own advantage. This basic tension allows us to understand, in the words of Berlin, "what my culture, my nation, my language, my historical tradition, my true home, have been and are."⁷

Citizenship: civil right and civil equality

It has been suggested that, historically, groups were first conceptualized as being in need of protection,⁸ and not the individual as such.⁹ From the 17th century, various treaties expressed the need to protect groups or individuals whose religion differed from that of the majority.¹⁰ With the Enlightenment, however, the notion of the group receded into the background and ideas and visions concerning the protection of the individual surfaced instead, that of "citizenship" perhaps offering the best example of what rights should be given to the individual within the State.¹¹

Throughout history, the whole question of rights and obligations within a group, or of one group towards another, has been articulated and implemented asymmetrically in society. For instance, in the feudal system, rights and obligations were a known normative component of group relations, but were not applied equally and universally to every member of the national polity. Likewise, political, civil, and social or economic rights were unequally articulated in the last two or three centuries.¹² With the rise of industrial capitalism in the 19th and 20th century, the struggles to extend rights to the working class, for example, can be interpreted, using Giddens's viewpoint, as efforts to secure rights –political or economic, or otherwise–, emphasizing precisely that *rights*,¹³ not concessions or special privileges, are essential components of social coexistence.¹⁴

Eventually, sovereignty, citizenship and nationalism all joined forces, each stressing a different aspect of the individual-group dynamics. However, it is the concept of individual that has achieved a more solid and fuller expression in society, both politically and legally, and even psychologically. Only in this century have groups as a category, not as states but as minorities within groups, been dealt with intellectually, albeit not successfully. Even within the platform of the United Nations, where the matter is for the most part legalistic,¹⁵ the effort falls short of the desired goal. Their documents always shift their focus to the rights of individuals.¹⁶ Since World War I, most intellectual attempts to recognize groups as problematic entities in society that cannot be subsumed by sovereign states have turned the issue again and again towards individual rights, as if language could only conceptualize ways

to protect the individual. Only lately, in the mid-'70s, have the collective human rights of a minority –cultural, religious, linguistic– gained clearer recognition¹⁷ through increasingly serious attempts to conceptualize them differently; still, for the most part, they avoid referring to minorities as national minorities. Such terminology immediately raises the political currency of the group and points to the desire of the minority to become the deciding force of its own destiny, even when it remains a group within an "other" society.

This problem of incorporating different political cultures and perspectives within the same social unit remains largely unresolved, evoking arguments about loyalty and unity between groups that must coexist within a larger, often hostile whole. When the majority associates cultural uniformity with citizenship, any displeasure over the minority's handling of one allows for questioning and even revoking the other. Incomplete allowance continues to impoverish our social ability to interrelate, as it resurfaces, rekindling cultural, economic and political discord among groups that are destined to live ever closer to each other.¹⁸

Mexico: Two Case Studies

The cases analyzed here –Mexico in 1948 and in 1975– show the subtle and complex arrangements that two groups devised in order to coexist politically. Working from the premise of civil equality (citizenship), while officially ignoring the group condition that is invariably activated whenever the government makes a point of establishing distance, the minority finds its own way to claim and exercise political action in difficult moments. Subtly calling into question citizens' loyalty to the State, or labelling them a minority, such policies make a case for political tolerance, but never for political rights, always undermined by their own philosophical incongruity.

Mexico, 1948: From Within a First "Difference of Opinion"

Jews always evinced signs of insecurity over their situation in Mexico.¹⁹ As with Jews everywhere –and in this respect the case of Mexico is no exception–, the problem of understanding their limitations in the face of the various contradictions and ambiguities that cropped up in each specific context, as well as redefining the boundaries between what was private and what was public, generated increased confusion with regard to their identity. When we hear statements like "México para los mexicanos" or "La France aux français", for instance, we hear one version of the conflict expressed as one between nation and state. Occasionally, however, statements made by

governments are not quite this transparent; often they hide the contending forces upon which they are grounded, as well as the symbolic violence lurking behind them.

There is no doubt that Jews in Mexico, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, joined together and regrouped in an attempt to create for themselves a meaningful social environment that might enable them to use their common experiences for their survival. For the most part, the government remained indifferent to the internal developments of the community. However, this left the Jewish community with an undefined and undetermined space in Mexican society.²⁰ And so, during the 1940s, Jews struggled with their integration. Their self-containment provided them with some basic economic and linguistic relief, as well as the possibility of incorporating religious, national and/or ethnic elements into their identity. Obviously some degree of insularity was required in order for them to affirm their identity; isolation, however, was never a desired goal, since it meant disconnection, separation and detachment. And although no formal isolation was ever imposed on Jews in Mexico, during critical moments their role, status and space there were publicly questioned by their hosts, giving rise to feelings of insecurity and the sensation of being set apart.

Despite their contact with other Jewish organizations such as Landmanschaftn, the American B'nai B'rith, HAIAS, and the World Zionist organizations, it is their relationship with the World Jewish Congress that best illustrates local communal goals, especially their efforts to maintain their self-sufficiency. This organization, headed in the 1940s by Dr. Nahum Goldman and Stephen Wise, was actively interested in establishing links with other Jewish communities since Europe was being closed off as a source of support; therefore, it sought to make a connection with whatever umbrella organization a community had. For the Congress, this meant an extension of their much-needed support base, increased revenue, and some sense of control over certain Diaspora Jews. For Jews in Mexico, the purpose of the relationship was less clear.²¹

Until then, the only organization in the country that had presumed to call itself a central representative body of Jews in Mexico was the Tzentral Komitet (Central Committee), formed in 1938. Although its bid for centrality failed, it was the closest the community came in the 1940s to having a central body. It consisted of representatives of all the subcommunities (both Sephardi and Ashkenazi): Bundists, Communists, and Zionists alike shared this forum. While the Zionists felt comfortable with the links to the World Jewish Congress, and were not unwilling to allow this institution to manage the communal economic resources, the Bundists felt otherwise.²² To them, such cooperation was really a way of losing autonomy in the internal affairs of the

community to an external body, even though it was a Jewish institution. Jews in Mexico had amply demonstrated their ability to govern themselves since the 1920s, so tensions were neither new nor worrisome, and the confrontations with the World Jewish Congress over communal politics became part of the dynamics between the two organizations for nearly a decade. Given the lack of a central authority, no organization –according to the Bundists, at least– had any right to claim centrality.

From the letters written by Kate Knopfmacher, the representative in Mexico of the World Jewish Congress, a clear picture of the variegated disputes emerges. Nevertheless, the relationship was not severed and survived in spite of these tensions, largely through Knopfmacher's repeated attempts to shift the balance of sympathy and cooperation towards the Congress and away from the "localism that seemed to strongly guide those Jews."²³ While respectful of such personalities as Tuvia Maizel, Felipe Lisker and Leon Behar, to name a few, she regarded all Bundists, Communists or other less fervent Zionists in positions of power within the community with distrust.

There is some evidence that the Congress attempted to be more than just the recipient of Mexican Jewish sympathy and support. They succeeded in recruiting a larger share of the sums raised within the community for Israel, and they were also busy promoting local non-Jewish sympathy and activity on behalf of a Jewish State, helping to create local Pro-Palestine organizations and then subsidizing them if necessary.²⁴ The whole idea of local activity looked different from the perspective of the Congress or of the Jews in Mexico. For the Congress, it meant creating local contacts in order to increase support for the Zionist cause within both Jewish and non-Jewish circles. For the Jews in Mexico, local activity meant concentrating on the local needs of the Jews. It is ironic that, for the American Jewish Congress, Jews in Mexico were not local enough; whereas for the Jews in Mexico, the events of 1948 –the establishment of the State of Israel– awoke in them a desire to be strongly "connected" internationally, yet at the same time confronted them with their limitations in managing local affairs, over whose jurisdiction they so fiercely fought. The Congress found itself "surprised" at the lack of contacts, connections, and lobbying mechanisms of Jews in Mexico:

"It is absolutely necessary that the Jewish community in Mexico, or important parts of it, get in touch with outstanding non-Jewish personalities. So far they have no relations at all with influential Mexican personalities in politics, culture or science. Imagine, for instance, that, in order to be received by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lic. Ezequiel Padilla, it was me,

who, through my connections, was able to introduce Mr. Behar and Dr. Adolfo Fastlich as representatives of the Jewish community in Mexico to the Foreign Minister."²⁵

This constitutes a crucial piece of evidence. The failure to fulfil Zionist goals by forging links to the community and society in general was not simply the result of communal disorganization, as Knopfmacher suggested, but also a consequence of the constraints of consenting to be atomistic citizens in the country. Unable to become an official minority, Jews in Mexico were not interested in being seen as a group linked to an outside entity, for this interest in a "foreign political body" might prompt others to label them as disloyal to the Mexican State. From their standpoint, this kind of activity or lobbying, in the context of a government that did not recognize the minority condition as a feature of the political life of the group, would have been unwise.

The World Zionist leadership strove to persuade world opinion to sympathize with the need for a Jewish state, but the Mexican government remained undecided. A campaign was launched in an attempt to secure its vote,²⁶ and although no promises were made, Jews were confident of the outcome.²⁷ Much of this activity was instigated and directed by the central international Zionist body. However, the government abstained in the UN vote on the partition of Palestine and proffered parallel statements about the Arabs and the Jews in Mexico. While the government had not taken a negative stand with regard to the State of Israel, Jews in Mexico viewed its position as an affront and were indignant. The government representatives had made their sympathies quite clear:

"...let me offer a warm tribute of sympathy to the Jewish people. The atrocious persecutions of which they have been victim fill us with indignation and horror. The Holocaust of about six million Jews in Europe is, without doubt, one of the most heinous crimes that history has registered. Mexico raised its voice against such barbaric behavior and, at the same time, opened its doors to thousands of refugees... I want also to declare that Mexico has become a second homeland for thousands of Syrian and Lebanese, who with their effort, their initiative, dedication to work and their love for the land in which they have formed their homes, have earned the admiration and love of the Mexicans."²⁸

In explaining his government's position, Ambassador de la Colina's allusions to specific minorities revealed less the purported neutrality of the

government than the thoughts it harbored towards Jews, for he spoke quite differently about the two minorities. When referring to the Jews, he highlighted the efforts made by his country to help that particular minority after the Nazi extermination of the Second World War. It is Mexico he praises for helping the Jewish refugees; never mind that the details are exaggerated and the figures unfounded.²⁹ On the other hand, when referring to the Arab population, de la Colina makes a point of praising their adaptation, work and achievements, legitimizing their political presence and status by offering them the "admiration and love" of the Mexican people.

The abstention of the government and the justification given spoke loudly and affected Jews more than they realized. Analyzing the situation, a Jew wrote in the Jewish press:

"... It hurts me as a *Mexican Jewish citizen*. What hurts me is not so much the abstention from voting, as the added flattery that was dispensed in the declaration, when the Mexican representative de la Colina had so much to say in this world forum about the goodness of the Syrian-Lebanese citizens and only a few, cold statements about his *Mexican Jewish citizens*. We, *Mexican Jewish citizens*, believe and know that we have contributed very much to the local economic development of the last 25-30 years..."³⁰

The insistence on their being "Mexican Jewish citizens" (italics mine) would appear to refute the government's attempt to nullify the feeling of belonging that the Jews feel they have rightfully earned. The contradictions and complexity of the situation deepen further. On the one hand, we have Jews in Mexico zealously defending their autonomy from any Jewish international organization and claiming jurisdiction over their local affairs. On the other hand, we see a minority being treated as a detached minority by the government, but acting as individual citizens unable to open channels of communication with the local government. In that respect, outside Jewish organizations seemed to be more effective. Furthermore, the disagreement within the Mexican government over the State of Israel hurt the Jews, but it also forced them to concentrate and focus on themselves, their condition, their situation, and their political space. However, lacking the cognitive tools with which to analyze the situation, the commentary in the Jewish press concluded: "... We, Mexican Jewish citizens, believe and know that we have contributed very much to the local economic development... It is *our* fault that we did not disseminate more information about our community."³¹ They were unable to see that their situation was such largely because their political

space was defined solely in terms of citizenship, and that if other minorities fared differently, it was only due to momentary whims of individual Mexican representatives.

Within these structural complexities, an identity crisis brewed. An internal incident took place that highlighted the community's perceived need to prove an exaggerated and compensatory loyalty, that could not be effectively expressed through official government channels. When the State of Israel was declared, celebratory activities were organized. Fundraising within the community on behalf of the young state continued as before, only this time events took a revealing turn. There were some Jews for whom the group pressure on this occasion seemed excessive; about eleven members of the community, headed by Dr. Abraham King, a territorialist, and Jacob Abrams, an anarchist,³² formed a Defence Committee, in an attempt to ward off the pressure of communal leaders. They sent a letter of protest to the World Jewish Congress in New York suggesting that WJC representatives in Mexico were engaged in what they considered to be "illegal practices." By way of explanation, they pointed out that money in support of the Jewish State had already been sent, and they protested the fact that intimidation and the use of coercive methods had characterized the last fund drive. The Jewish press in Mexico, they said, had announced that those who "refused to contribute" or failed to do so in "large sums," "would be judged at an open trial." Dated 23 June 1948, their letter reported and condemned the fact that such a trial had indeed taken place on the 16th of the month, and that a hand-picked jury was "imposing pre-arranged sanctions." Backstage negotiations were conducted with those "willing to pay" at the last minute in order to avoid public denunciation. Some Jewish Communists had also expressed support for this procedure. There was a "lynch spirit," the paper *Di Shtime* had reported, and seven sanctions (*kheirem*) were to be imposed. The pressure to comply was intensified by a threat that hinted that the list would later be passed on to the Government of Israel, and that any "guilty" party would not be able to publish any articles in their defence in the local Jewish papers. The protesters deemed these actions illegal under Mexican law, as well as a moral violation of basic religious Jewish principles. In turn, they threatened to resort to the Mexican and the American press in order to achieve their goals.

It is the story of the imposition of what was defined as acceptable political and economic behavior; it is also the story of group rules being applied by a dominant sector afraid at the prospect of being displaced by individuals they would prefer to see in the periphery. Most of all, it is the story of an exaggerated display of solidarity and loyalty, professing allegiance to the ethnic group at a time when other connections remain loose. It could be argued that the internal violence experienced by the community when its

legitimacy was shaken by the government's abstention precipitated retaliatory actions within the community itself. Thus, the minority searches for ways to legitimize its condition as a minority, while at the same time affirming this other relationship with the majority. In the process, they do not question the majority but themselves, and so they hamper their capacity to fully grasp and comprehend their political condition. Hurt when perceived as being "not so loyal," they turn inwards in order "to prove" their loyalty.

Mexico, 1975: A Second "Difference of Opinion"

The position of the Mexican government on the Racism-Zionism issue may well be judged as passive, but opportunistic. What is important for the purpose of this study are the various exchanges that took place because of it between Jewish communal representatives and the government. While in theory citizenship meant unconditional membership in society, in reality, as the behavior of both groups repeatedly demonstrated, it was interpreted as a highly conditional offer. Jews saw their opportunities for political action circumscribed by their compulsory dependence on others, and a sense of debt and obligation pervaded their thinking and largely determined their subsequent actions.³³

The Tzentral Komitet continued to define itself as an apolitical organization. Despite its history of collaboration and support for the Zionist agenda, its relationship with international Zionist organizations was never very close or coherent; in fact, they often worried about the amount of solidarity or degree of commitment they should exhibit towards the Zionists, while remaining an independent body. Such ambivalence was a familiar pattern that characterized the behavior of the institution through its history.

In 1975 several incidents occurred concerning Mexico and Israel that had a direct impact on the Jewish community in Mexico, which, as usual, found itself caught in the middle. First, the world conference of the International Women's Year, held in Mexico City,³⁴ denounced Zionism and called Israel a racist regime occupying Palestine.³⁵ Another blow came with the Declaration of the Non-Aligned Countries at a second conference in Lima, Peru,³⁶ during which Zionism was also condemned as a "racist and imperialist ideology."³⁷ The third disturbing event in 1975, that further strained the relationship between the Mexican government and the Jews in the country, was President Luis Echeverría's planned trip to 14 Arab countries. Unofficial information about this trip was published in April, 1975.³⁸ Mexico and Israel enjoyed good bilateral and multilateral relations, so that this decision came as an unexpected and startling surprise. While nothing could be done about the conferences, Jews felt that some action had to be taken about Echeverría's

intended trip and immediate attempts were made to contact him. Eventually, following careful negotiations, a diplomatic invitation was forwarded through Sergio Nudelstejer, then General Secretary of the Central Committee, and Echeverría became the first Mexican president to visit Israel. However, the trip left many people nervous and uneasy all the same. Just before his arrival in Israel, while in Egypt, Echeverría met unexpectedly with Yasir Arafat, an encounter hardly calculated to convey a positive message to the Jewish community.³⁹

That Echeverría used the presidency in a very personal way is well known.⁴⁰ He courted the Arab countries because of their potential influence as Third World leaders and it was no secret that he harbored high hopes of becoming General Secretary of the UN once he retired as President in 1976. The passing of the UN vote of 3 November 1975 on the Racism-Zionism issue was almost a sure thing. The least that Jews could hope for, perhaps, was that the Mexican government would abstain. However, the Mexican vote was affirmative.⁴¹ Once Mexico (and Brazil) voted in favor, all the campaigning for the President's trip to Israel seemed futile to communal leaders. Again, Central Committee representatives sought out the Private Secretary of the President, Juan José Bremen, in order to explain to him "what Zionism stood for" and to suggest the possibility of organizing a breakfast meeting with the President, so that these issues could be conveyed to him too. The breakfast took place with the attendance of seventeen members of the Jewish community. At the same time, within the community, there was much speculation as to who in the government had suggested taking the position against Zionism, to what extent that sentiment reflected the views of a limited group within the government or maybe it represented a general feeling in the country, and how much it would influence the country's opinion of Jews. There was general consensus within the Central Committee concerning the need for "caution" and against making "rushed decisions," which in practical terms meant doing almost nothing until something indicated otherwise. There were even some who wondered whether the mood was so anti-Jewish that it might not warrant making preparations to leave the country.

In the United States, however, the vote provoked a strong reaction. American Jewish organizations imposed the famous tourism boycott on Mexico in protest of the position taken by the Mexican government on the Zionism issue. Hotel bookings were noticeably down in December, one of the most profitable times of the year for this industry. In a move, at whose instigation it remains unclear, communal leaders in Mexico spoke to leaders of American Jewish organizations and tried to persuade them to negotiate with the Mexican government. In Jewish circles, the action taken

by the American organizations was interpreted as a proud expression of solidarity. With regard to the government, communal leaders acted as a go-between, more as an intermediary than on behalf of American Jews. Ten Jewish leaders from the United States, including representatives of the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Difamation League, and B'nai B'rith were invited to try to smooth out the differences.⁴² The fact that they were granted an interview with the President was interpreted by the Central Committee as recognition on the part of the government of the increased importance of the Central Committee and were naturally also taken as indication of added "respect" towards the organization and the community. The flipside of this interpretation thinly disguised the desire, emphasized both by Nudelstejer and Torenberg, to highlight the difference in style between the older communal leadership and the more modern, more assertive, and more successful one. Never mind that the actual position of the government did not change,⁴³ nor was the counterposition of the community widely publicized, if at all.

Far more revealing was the reaction of Jews in Mexico towards the government when the meeting with the American Jews took place. Both parties wanted the local Jews to participate as negotiators, as intermediaries, or as pawns who could be pressured. Nudelstejer, however, made it clear to the President that they would not attend; they would help with the coordination, they would put the parties in touch, they could even bring the parties to the actual meeting. But they would not be present at the discussions because, as Nudelstejer said, "we as Mexicans have nothing to do there; we are not the protesters." On the one hand, these leaders found solace in the American protest, because it spoke "loud and clear," with concrete actions that they could not afford to take; yet, at the same time, the local Jewish leadership was making sure that no issue of loyalty could later be raised by the government by firmly presenting themselves as "Mexicans" and not officially adopting a confrontational stand vis a vis the government. From within the situation of incomplete allowance in which the community found itself, the contradictory nature of their position was not understood by the leaders, not even today.

Another poignant example that illustrates this ambiguity at a personal level is the case of the Mexican Ambassador to Israel in 1975, Benito Berlín, who was a Jew (the first and only Jewish ambassador). He found himself, both as a Jew and in his capacity as Ambassador to Israel from Mexico, quite uncomfortable at having to represent a government that accepted the "Racism equals Zionism" formula. His eldest daughter,⁴⁴ then a schoolgirl of fifteen attending high-school in Israel, was incensed by the Mexican position

and argued heatedly at home. Her father, she reports, agreed with her on the moral inconsistencies of the Mexican position, but felt powerless to protest lest it be said that he was using a double identity as an ambassador. She, on the other hand, felt herself entitled to protest as a Mexican citizen to the Mexican government, and pleaded to be allowed to go to a student demonstration against Mexico and Brazil that was staged at the Tel Aviv Town Hall in 1975. She was made to promise that she would keep a low profile, so as not to compromise her father's position. Unfortunately, she was spotted by a journalist and her picture taken; but, with the help of another friendly journalist who managed to intercept the photograph, much to her father's relief, the issue ended there.

Another action taken by the government that greatly disturbed the Jews in Mexico, and was a source of much uneasiness, was the decision to allow the PLO to open an office in Mexico. These were opened in May 1976, just before Echeverría was to leave office and in the midst of his campaign to obtain the position of General Secretary of the UN. The community was so shaken that several meetings were called to determine what steps should be taken to protect themselves.⁴⁵ Shimshon Feldman, head of the Ashkenazi *Kehillah*, suggested that Jews exploit whatever influence they might have in literary and political circles; Tuvia Maizel, a Bundist activist in the *Kehillah* and in the Central Committee, proposed contacting labor movement representatives in the United States, specifically friends of Fidel Velázquez, leader of the CTM, the Mexican Workers' Confederation, who was known to be sympathetic to Jews and their cause, in the hope of gaining support. But mostly, the main message of the communal leadership was to be very "prudent" and use "absolute reserve" in any further move.⁴⁶ After all, everything seemed under control.

If nothing else, these episodes in Mexico repeatedly demonstrate the condition of exiles of the Jewish minority and their fragile status as members of Mexican society. It is in the interplay of discourse and power between groups that we see most clearly the nature of the political space given to others, in this specific case, to the Jews in Mexico. As citizens, Jews did not relinquish their right to be different; this was implicit in their understanding of their identity, although there were no available political channels through which they could exercise or assert it. Minority distinction was maintained by the majority as a conventional tool that was invoked, or not, at the convenience of each group. This symbolic exclusion, to borrow from Bourdieu, imposed upon Jews by their being unable to participate in the political definitions of the country while supposedly getting on with their normal lives as "citizens," is merely the "reverse of the effort to impose a definition of legitimate practice";⁴⁷ they are not allowed –and Jews

contribute to their marginalization by not asking to be allowed— to elaborate or legitimize their own perspective. In a way, it would appear that Jews, as minorities, have refrained from using the power of actually calling things by their name, of questioning that which represses them, choosing, instead, to live in a permanent state of ambiguity, while the majority does not even recognize the fact that it silences them.⁴⁸ To develop an awareness of these facts is no small task. Again, this particular form of violence can only be practised on subjects who know, who feel, but who endorse the form of domination through their own actions.⁴⁹

This is not to suggest that conflict among cultural groups can disappear. We cannot expect the ultimate ends of different groups to be compatible all the time; there will always be conflict. What is being proposed here is the possibility of avoiding the enforcement of seemingly "morally intolerable" actions without at least offering some possible alternatives.⁵⁰ I am not advocating nationalisms in a world that has to unite and not divide, but I am trying to protect nationalities within the state. This does not imply an infinite variety of values and goals that can be pursued by society; it suggests a pluralistic approach, and a move away from either one single perspective or the relativism that separates groups into unbridgeable positions without the possibility of negotiation, leaving the dominant doctrine with no objective correlates to judge and be judged. If pluralism⁵¹ is rejected within a group and between groups, we are condemning people to live with a fragmented internal existence that hides behind the dangerous delusion, projected since Plato, of a totalizing society with but one truth.

The increasing moral dilemma that Jews in Mexico faced, forced to juggle their loyalties and balance cultural affinities in such an *ad hoc* fashion, has not been solved, as the leaders of the community would like to believe, by the levels of courage or intellectual strength they claim to have shown. When it came to dealing with the government, they did not seem so different from the immigrant leaders; neither was their complex identity so different from the complex identity of the immigrant Jews. The fact that "acceptable" Jews exist today—using acceptable as a definition imposed by the other—, and that they are occasionally received by the government, is a factor of time, adaptation, and language assimilation, among other things. The structural condition of incomplete allowance into which Jews find themselves thrown forces them to be confused as to "who they are:" Jews, Mexicans, Jews of Mexico, Mexican-Jews, etc. Each of these labels becomes representative of a momentary state of identity, which gives guidance on how to act in any given situation but does not contribute to a coherent identity. This is not a matter of linguistic agreement. Jews, as a minority, should be able to justify their own conduct when challenged by others through channels that do not cast doubt on their

qualifications for inclusion in society. The questions and fear that arise from "Is she or he one of us?"/"Are we one of them?" are of crucial importance and good evidence of the crisis; as John Shotter says in his recent article:⁵²

"... To live under terms set only by others is always to feel not just different but inadequate in relation to these others. It is, I think, a sickness or a tiredness in having continually to live a life not of one's own, [with] a desire to have a voice and to be listened to seriously as of *right*..."⁵³

The incomplete allowance of citizenship that we often encounter is, then, but a form of conditional membership. To suggest that "that's the way it is" in society precludes the possibility of change. With reference to the social world, this kind of statement is far from neutral. If the political context of Jews in Mexico, as that of other minorities in most societies, is left without the possibility of participation in the real political construction of that society by right but just as a benevolent gesture of the government, minority groups will remain in a country, when at war, in the most precarious circumstances, with membership withdrawal looming over them all the time; during peacetime, minorities will remain within their given space as people living in a room, but one without a view nonetheless.

NOTES

1. We know that since the presidency of Porfirio Díaz, in the latter part of the last century, attempts were made to invite Jews to settle in Mexico. These never materialized, however. The government hesitated and invitations were often accompanied by a list of qualifications, mostly economic prerequisites, that inhibited poor East European Jews from going to Mexico. Also, the government was not interested in attracting large urban populations; only agricultural immigration was encouraged, and Jews were city people by history and experience. See Cimet de Singer, Adina, *The Ashkenazi Jewish Community in Mexico, A Dialogue among Ideologies*, Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1992, Ch. 2; Krauze, Corine, *The Jews of Mexico*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1970. For a comparison with Jewish immigration patterns to the United States, see Gartner, Lloyd, "Jewish immigrants en route from Europe to North America," in Rischin, M., *The Jews of North America* (Detroit, 1987), pp. 29-31.
2. Held, David, *Political Theory and the Modern State* (California, 1989), p. 190.
3. Shotter, John, "Psychology and Citizenship: Identity and Belonging," in Turner, B., *Citizenship and Social Theory* (California, 1993), pp. 130-31. The challenge, according to Shotter, is to recognize differences rather than similarities in society, and he sees the task as being "[to] demand for a unique individuality rather than the atomistic individualism afforded by liberal individualism or state socialism."
4. In Berlin, Isaiah, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, Vintage (New York, 1992), see the quote from Kant (1784), that he paraphrases in the title of the book: "[A]us so krummen Holze, als

woraus der Mensch gemacht is, kann nicht ganz Gerades gezimmert werden" (Out of timber so crooked as that from which man is made, nothing entirely straight can be built). A very similar idea is found in Ecclesiastes.

5. The content of the individuality that people exhibit is itself a historical process. We will not address this complexity, but one can refer to the work of Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, and Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, to mention but two.
6. Berlin, I., *The Crooked Timber...*, p. 225.
7. *Ibidem*. Whether from the perspective of psychology or of politics, sociology or philosophy, this very tense dialectics is essential to our modern thinking and conduct. In fact, to regroup became the *sine qua non* for the achievement of civil rights and paved the way for the formation of new groups: women, ethnic, religious, student, consumer, etc. These became the categories of the citizens' rights, which pointed also to new areas of struggle. In other words, this awareness of I/We and Other/You has yielded two of the most central and dynamic concepts of our time –individual and group–, which have been used to explain, develop, argue, implement and impose different social arrangements. See Giddens, Anthony, *The Nation State and Violence*, University of California Press (California, 1987), pp. 310, 318, 320.
8. See Luini del Russo, Alessandra, "International Protection of Human Rights," p. 14, as presented by Lerner, Nathan, *Minorías y grupos en el Derecho Internacional. Derechos y discriminación*, Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, Serie Folletos, 17, 1991, p. 19.
9. Since the political philosophy of Hobbes that deduced political rights and obligations from what he saw to be dissociated individuals, individualism has remained the most outstanding characteristic in liberal tradition. See Macpherson, C.B., *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford University Press (London, 1979), who suggests that the problem with the individualism of modern liberal-democratic theory lies in the possessive quality whereby an individual sees himself as "essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them," p. 3.
10. To mention a few examples: 1648, Westphalia, in Germany; 1660, Oliva, in Livonia; 1678, Nimeguen, between France and Spain. See Lerner, N., *Minorías y grupos...*, p. 20.
11. Some have called these rights "Bourgeois rights", which, although presented by their proponents as universal, the Marxists claim have been used to legitimize the dominance of the capitalist class. See Giddens, A., *The Nation State...*, Ch. 8.
12. Giddens (*The Nation State...*, p. 203) follows here the presentation given by Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development*, Greenwood Press (Westport, 1973).
13. We leave aside, due to lack of space, the formulation that establishes –correctly– a link between state formation and these rights within the modern state as the novel forms available for ordering the power contained in that State. Citizenship, of course, is tightly related to this view.
14. It is important to understand that, although we have had political authorities in all societies, the modern idea of sovereignty has not always been found. The Greek world did not have it. The *polis* (city-State) did not differentiate between State and society. The people (*demos*) were engaged in the legislative, judicial functions and participated directly. The definitions of public and private arenas were intertwined. Later, the Roman Empire constituted a society ruled by a single central authority, with the "lex regia" as the law-making power. Christianity shifted authority from this world to the other world, integrating the Papacy and the Holy Roman Emperor into one. In the sixteenth century, the limits of political authority, of the law, rights and obedience began to be clarified with the Protestant Reformation, which attempted to separate between rulers and faiths. See Held, D., *Political Theory...*, pp. 215-18.
15. For more specific references of the treaties and pacts before the Second World War, see Lerner, N., *Minorías y grupos...*, Ch. 1, pp. 19-37.
16. Lerner, Nathan, "From Protection of Minorities to Group Rights," in 20 IYHR (1990), pp. 101-120.

17. Lerner cites Dinstein, Yoram, "Freedom of Religion and the Promotion of Religious Minorities," 20 IYHR (1990); Robinson, J., Karbach, O., Laserson, M., Robinson, N. and Vichniak, M., *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?* (1943); Lerner, N., *Minorías y grupos...*, pp. 25, 31. It must be added that Yugoslavia, in what today may appear as a tragic and pathetic prediction of its civil war, has figured prominently in this discussion since 1978; see Lerner, N., *ibid.*, p. 30.
18. The homogenizing trends of the European Economic Community and the North American Treaty do not negate the heterogeneity and plurality that we describe; they only stress the need to resolve these issues.
19. *Der Veg*, *Yubilei Oisgabe*, Mexico, 1930-1940, p. 98.
20. Glantz, Jacobo, *Hilf*, Mexico, 1950, pp. 22-25.
21. See World Jewish Congress Archive (WJCA), Box No. 230, Folder No. 67.
22. The Mexican liaison of the World Jewish Congress was Kate Knopmacher. Born in Berlin, in 1890, she became acquainted and collaborated with Dr. Goldman in the Zionist movement in the '20s. She arrived in Mexico in February, 1941. See WJCA, Box No. H 226, H 227, Folder No. Various.
23. See, for example, the letter of the Central Committee sent to the World Jewish Congress in 1942: "... para suplicarles se sirvan relevarnos de la representación oficial del Congreso Judío Mundial ... el Comité Central ... es un organismo netamente local, y por motivos de política local, en defensa de los intereses israelitas, no conviene que esta institución sea representada de otras Instituciones del extranjero". WJCA, Box No. H 228, Folder No. México, Comité Central. See also H 227; H 233. These tensions persisted throughout the forties.
24. This refers specifically to the bulletin that the Pro-Palestine Committee could publish as part of the monthly *Mundo Libre*. In charge was Mr. Fabela, and it was understood that it was to be subsidized by the World Jewish Congress. See letter to Baruch Tzuckerman from K. Knopmacher, WJCA, Box No. H 231, Folder No. 23.
25. *Ibid.*, Box No. 231, Folder No. 23.
26. Bokser, Judith, *El Movimiento Sionista*, Tesis de Doctorado, UNAM, Mexico, 1991, Ch. 4.
27. *Der Veg*, Mexico, 7/10/1947, p. 1; see also the entire month of November.
28. De la Colina, Rafael, "Declaración de Abstención en torno al problema de Palestina," Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano, México, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1981, No. 10, p. 192.
29. This same paradox will repeat itself in the second case analyzed (1975), with the exacerbation of tensions between the parties instead of the gesture of gratitude that Mexico sought. In *Generaciones Judías en México*, ed. Backal, A. (Mexico, 1993), there is some indication that the number of Jewish refugees to Mexico in the years 1940-50 was very small. No data is given.
30. *Forois*, Dec., 1947, p. 17.
31. *Ibid.*
32. The complete list is: Dr. A. King, Jacob Abrams, Mary Abrams, Martin Temple, Isaac Leventhal, Walter Gruen, Clara Gruen, Ira Lernaer, Virginia Mishnun, Roman Waisfeld, and Dr. H. Jacob. See copy of letter sent to the World Jewish Congress in WJCA, Box No. H 229, Folder No. 49-A.
33. If, as we have argued here, citizenship must be a matter of right, our analysis can be read as a criticism of communal politics as well as a criticism of society in general. What is intended is the achievement of an understanding of what it means to be, as Shotter calls it, "Citizens of right." See Shotter, J., "Psychology and Citizenship...", p. 130.
34. The conference took place between June 19-July 2, 1975.
35. Although the voting pattern of Mexico in the UN was almost identical to Cuba's and the Soviet Union's in the latter part of the '80s, it should be pointed out that it was a Mexican representative who was instrumental in blocking anti-Zionist language in the final

- Declaration of the Nairobi End-of-Decade Women's Conference. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Year Book 86/87, p. 347.
36. The conference took place on August 25-30, 1975, and pronounced itself against Zionism as a threat to world peace.
 37. See General Assembly Records, UN- A/10320, Draft Resolution, A/C.3/L. 2159, Oct. 16, p. 13.
 38. In-depth interviews were conducted with the head of the Central Committee between 1974-78, Sergio Nudelstejer, and his successor, Julio Torenberg, in addition to research in their archives.
 39. At Yad Va'Shem, the Holocaust Memorial in Israel, upon being told that "the world was silent," President Echeverría, eager to remind the others of Mexican hospitality to the refugees, tried to find out the exact number of refugees in question from the people in his entourage, a party of 200. After the question was put to the Mexican Ambassador in Israel, then to Mexican journalist Jacobo Zabludovsky and to Nudelstejer, the figure that came back to the President was of "about 5000" people. The numbers, probably inflated by the hundreds, were rejected by the Holocaust survivors who were listening. What is interesting for us is the effort made by the Jews from Mexico to "ease" the situation of the President.
 40. Woldenberg, José and Huacuja, Mario, "El sexenio de Luis Echeverría," in *Evolución del Estado Mexicano*, Vol. III (Mexico, 1993).
 41. Brazil also voted negatively. The Brazilian Foreign Minister, Antonio Azevedo da Silveira, said that the vote was "a vote of love towards Brazilian Jews," "what we want, is that the Jews born in Brazil should be Brazilian," a very telling statement indeed. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Year Book 77/78, p. 306.
 42. See Central Committee Archive, Libro de Actas 12, 1975, pp. 357-8.
 43. As a concession to pressure from the leadership, Minister Emilio O. Rabasa was sent to Israel to try to smooth things out. Although offended, the Israeli government eventually accepted, and Yigal Alon was appointed to receive him. Upon his arrival, Rabasa expressed the desire to make a fresh start in the relationship between the two countries, and the visit did seem to achieve some kind of stability. The press, however, referred to Rabasa's attempt as a "Forgive and Forget" maneuver. To everyone's surprise, he was recalled immediately, with the President explaining that Mexico did not need to be "forgiven" and did not ask for anything. Rabasa was soon dismissed from his political position.
 44. Interview with Miriam Berlin, now living in Canada. Ambassador Berlín committed suicide in Mexico, on 27 October 1984. No reason is given for the tragedy.
 45. Central Committee Archive, *ibidem*, pp. 308-311.
 46. In May of 1976, a representative of the B'nai B'rith in the United States, David M. Blumberg, arrived in Mexico for negotiations with the President.
 47. Bourdieu, Pierre, *In Other Words. Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, 1990), p. 143.
 48. In 1976, in an attempt to relieve the tension between the community and the government, the new President, López Portillo, signed decrees granting citizenship to a group of Jewish residents. Since before the Second World War, citizenship was hardly ever conferred to Jews, some of whom were allowed to stay in the country, but with no papers and the status of stateless person (*apátrida*).
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
 50. See the book of essays by Berlin, I., *The Crooked Timber...*, p. 235. He strongly argues that many of the social monsters that men have constructed are the result of the fallacious attachment to an aesthetic model of politics which suggests that society can be made into a perfect work of art.
 51. See the issue of *Tikkun* devoted to the topic, "Nationalism and Ethnic Particularism," Nov./Dec., 1992.
 52. Shotter, J., "Psychology and Citizenship...".

53. Another quest for pluralism and multiculturalism is found in Tilly's article, "Future of European States," *Social Research*, Vol. 59, No. 4, 1992. He claims that diversity must be "benign pluralism" and not "malign segmentation," p. 717.