

MARGALIT BEJARANO, EDNA AIZENBERG (EDS.): *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012

Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas aims at filling a lacuna in the historiography. As the editors note in the introduction, existing studies on Latin American Sephardim have tended to focus on individual communities, were mostly limited to the colonial period, were not comparative in nature and remained usually inaccessible to the English reading audience because of the languages of publication. The book, then, addresses these issues by bringing together chapters that place the modern history and culture of Sephardim in Latin America in the larger context of the Sephardic diaspora, including four articles that discuss Sephardim in the United States and in Canada as well.

The book is divided into three parts. The first one, titled “Sephardim in the Americas: Community and Culture” provides a historical account of the arrival of Sephardim and the construction of Sephardic communities on the continent. Both Margalit Bejarano’s and Jane Gerber’s chapters describe the conditions that sent Sephardim out of their hometowns into Latin America and the United States respectively, and their struggles to adjust to their new environment among the local societies, Ashkenazim and other Sephardic groups. They also both highlight the transnational connections maintained by Sephardim and the challenges they faced in order to maintain their identity. Edna Aizenberg’s succinct analysis of Sephardic literature in the Americas suggests a variety of reasons that explain why, in her words, Sephardic Latin American identity has been “marked by a *fruitful difference*” (31). In particular, she explores the themes of “belonging” (as Sephardim settled in lands that shared Hispanic-Luso characteristics) and of the “utopia dreamed and undone” (35) in the works of many contemporary Latin American writers. She ends her piece with some suggestions on how to build on that legacy.

The second part, “Ideological Divergence: Zionism, Religion, and Transnationalism,” includes chapters that illustrate the seemingly contradictory local and transnational forces that Sephardim faced in the Americas: a desire to assimilate into the societies where they settled, the Jewish nationalist project, strong religious leaders and traditions, and transnational identities. Raanan Rein and Mollie Lewis Nouwen open the section with a study of the Argentine Sephardic newspaper *Israel*, and they suggest that Zionism, as presented in the pages of this weekly, provided Jews in Argentina (both Sephardim and Ashkenazim) with a “common Jewish past” that helped them to solidify their position in Argentina like any other immigrant group. Zionism, then, was not necessarily about returning to the (new) Jewish nation, but about remaining in Argentina as a ‘unified’

community, without attention to distinctions of origin. Susana Brauner's chapter on Syrian Jews in Buenos Aires focuses on the path followed by these communities (descendants of those immigrants from the cities of Aleppo and Damascus who arrived in Buenos Aires in the early 20th century) as they moved towards ultra-orthodoxy. This, the largest group among Sephardim in Argentina, initially focused on bettering their economic situation and seemingly began to abandon traditional religious practices. After the 1950s, however, a slow process began in order to attract those Jews who had distanced themselves from orthodoxy, reaching its height in 1990, with a variety of Orthodox, and ultra-Orthodox manifestations, the popularity of rabbinical leadership, the clear religiousness of the new generations, and the material prosperity of some businessmen and institutions that were committed to the renewed zeal. Liz Hamui Halabe's chapter on the religious alternatives created by and for Sephardim in Mexico, ranging from traditionalism to ultra-orthodoxy, reminds us that even religious practice was not uniform among all the Sephardi groups that settled in Mexico City. As well, Hamui Halabe's piece highlights the transnational ties developed between Sephardim in Mexico and Ashkenazi, American, Argentine, and other Syrian groups around the world. The last two chapters of this section highlight the transnational ties that continue to exist and define Sephardic existence in South Florida. Henry A. Green discusses the varied origins of the Sephardim that settled in and around Miami, while Margalit Bejarano addresses the ways in which the Cuban Sephardim (those originally from Turkey) who arrived in the region after 1959 have served as a bridge between "the United States and Latin America, as well as between Ladino and Spanish speakers" (158).

The third section, "Culture in Transition: Language, Literature and Music," focuses on Ladino, its current use by singers and writers, as well as the Sephardic musical repertoire. Monique R. Balbuena writes on the growing production of texts in Ladino by Latin American authors of both Sephardic and non-Sephardic origin. Noting the disconnect between the often-heard assertion that "Judeo-Spanish is disappearing" and this renewed impetus in production, Balbuena examines the different roles that Ladino plays in these artists' works: those who are Sephardim use this language "as a gateway to their own culture" or to "maintain the legacy of their families ... and their connection to the great Sephardic nation" (183), while Ashkenazi artists find in Ladino (with its Luso-Hispanic connection) either a way to "claim a presence in the continent and a part in the national narrative," or to signal a detachment from the national identity, privileging, thus, a diasporic positioning (183). Yael Halevi-Wise's analysis of the use of Ladino in Mexican writer Rosa Nissán's novels continues exploring the ways in which the language signals choices of belonging and self-alienation and builds bridges between generations and the geographic, religious, ethnic and

linguistic identities that Sephardim inhabit. Judith R. Cohen's chapter closes the book and the section with an examination of the Judeo-Spanish repertoire collected among the Canadian Sephardim, noting the differences between Moroccan and Ottoman-area communities, but stressing, overall, the vitality of this cultural scene.

This book brings to an English audience a topic that had not been available. It succeeds, as well, in suggesting the benefits of mapping the Americas within the modern Sephardic diaspora in order to fully understand Sephardi contemporary identities.

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CLAUDIA KEDAR: *The International Monetary Fund and Latin America: The Argentine Puzzle in Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013

What accounts for the devastating Argentine crisis of 2001 that resulted in the largest sovereign debt default in world history? Claudia Kedar poses this question in the introduction to her study of the relationship between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Argentina. She seeks to answer it in terms of what she calls the "routine of dependency"—namely, the multifaceted array of interactions that take place between the IMF and debtor nations, including country reports, consultations, IMF missions, meetings in Washington, D.C., and other behind-the-scenes activities. The by-product is described as the creation of an epistemic community: a network of technocrats in the IMF and its borrower states that share a liberal economic ideology and thereby enhance IMF influence over domestic policy choice in Latin America. According to Professor Kedar, "The deep neoliberalization that Argentina—and other Latin American nations—experienced in the mid-1980s and especially in the 1990s was largely facilitated by decades of the routine of dependency" (p. 153).

Drawing heavily on recently released IMF archival materials as well as British, U.S., and Argentine government documents, the book provides a chronological account of the initiation, evolution, and institutionalization of Argentina's relationship to the IMF between 1942 and 2005. The bulk of the historical narrative consists of a detailed listing of names, dates, and places of official meetings, consultations, and negotiations, which provide a window into the waxing and waning of ties between the Fund and Argentina. The account highlights not only Argentine political instability and related discontinuities in policy choice